

## The Effectiveness of Solution Focused Brief Therapy Group Counseling to Reduce Social Anxiety for Vulnerable Children

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### Abstract

Social and family attention influences children development, including vulnerable children. The vulnerable children who lack of those attention will experience difficulties in adapting to environment, such as having low self-esteem, being ostracized, and being vulnerable to violate existing norms. Regarding the previous explanation, this study strived for examining the effectiveness of a group counseling service with solution focused brief therapy to reduce vulnerable children social anxiety. It used an experimental method with one group pretest-posttest design by involving 7 vulnerable children in SOS Children's Village Semarang as the subjects. Findings indicated that the group counseling with solution focused brief therapy has been effective to reduce the social anxiety of the vulnerable children. Further, this treatment can be an alternative method for counselors or caregivers to reduce the vulnerable children social anxiety.

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## INTRODUCTION

Humans have diverse life stories and ways of responding situations and conditions. One of which is anxiety, a normal reaction against life pressure. Each individual has different social anxiety symptoms. It can happen because every single individual tends to be critical to social skills and performs self-evaluation in interacting with others (APA, 2013).

Family is a place to form adolescents positive experience and skills in society (Tricahyani & Widadiasavitri, 2016). However, those who live in orphanage will not feel it because they are separated from families. According to Maslow in hierarchy of needs, affection takes place in the third hierarchy after physiological and safety needs (Muhibbin & Marfuatun, 2020). These needs are also applied in daily life, in which everyone has a need to be accepted in a society without considering physical appearance, race, and different social life. One who has this need will tend to have self-confidence and be away from the feeling of social anxiety, especially anxious about getting negative judgment from others.

The World Health Organization predicts 20% of the world's population experiences anxiety and 48% of which are adolescents (Saifudin & Tubagus, 2014). Sari (2020) further explains adolescents' social anxiety are categorized high, indicating by the feeling of nervous when meeting people, avoidance, being shy, having no ability which alter decrease their social functions and career development. This statement implies that Indonesian children social anxiety is high, including vulnerable children who live in orphanage or boarding institutions.

Vulnerable children who have no social skills can impact to their adaptability to environment so that they may feel inferior, ostracized, and act less normative. Generally, vulnerable children face psychological issues such as low assertiveness, anxiety, and low problem solving skills (Varcarolis, 2010).

Individuals who undergo social anxiety will have different symptoms. It is because they

tend to be critical of social skills and do self-evaluation towards their performance when interacting with others (APA, 2013). The symptoms are such as feeling tremble, sweating intensely, having faster heartbeat, being unable to relax in facing situations, and so on. Butler in Pratiwi, et al (2019) mention several anxiety symptoms, namely (1) effects contained in thinking, namely anxiety about what others think, (2) effects contained in behavior, namely speaking quickly or slowly, avoiding eye gaze, doing something quietly to avoid attention, avoiding pretty difficult social situations, (3) effects contained in emotion or feeling, namely feeling nervous, afraid, anxious, insecure, irritable, sad, and hopeless with changes.

People who encounter anxiety will show less coping, such as being moody, silent, avoiding, and being alone (Martina, 2017). Before these happen, the anticipated symptoms are frequent complaints of anxiety, rapid emotional changes, avoiding social interactions and difficulty sleeping. Those with social anxiety are ashamed and afraid of negative judgments from others, such as afraid other people see the anxiety symptoms, such as hands tremors, blushing, or excessive sweating.

Extreme anxiety will give impact to physical condition to become lack of or even loss of consciousness and be sensitive to disasters and sad news. Other impacts are lack of concentration, depression, guilty, and lack of appreciation for themselves. Those who are anxious much tend to have low life quality and difficulties in improving it (Shacham, 2012). Further, individuals express anxiety in recognizable ways, such as being moody, nervous, irritable, sleeping issues, and extraordinarily sensitive to the words and actions of others.

A counseling approach can be a solution for facilitating vulnerable children to reduce their social anxiety. Basically, it is aimed at individuals who encounter difficulties in education, career, and social, in which all these conditions cannot be chosen and determined (Prayitno, 2013).

SFBC (Solution Focused Brief Counseling) approach is a postmodern counseling intervention which solve problems other than the main problem. It is focused on the future solutions orienting towards goals (Rusandi & Rachman, 2014). This approach can also be implemented to those who have issues in emotion, depression, and anxiety (Mulawarman, 2019).

Techniques used in SFBC are exceptions questions, miracle questions, scaling questions, formula first sessions task or FFST, feedback, and pre-session change questions (Mulawarman, 2019). These all are directed towards future and aimed at goals (Rusandi & Rachman, 2014). Of all various counseling approaches, SFBC can be implemented to individuals who suffer from emotional, depression, and anxiety issues (Mulawarman, 2019).

Counselors can use one or more SFBC techniques based on counsees needs. One possible technique for vulnerable children is miracle questions. These questions force clients to consider what they want so that counsees' perspectives which initially focus on problems change to a solution perspective (Erford, 2020).

The previous study by Bond, et al., (2013) proves that the implementation of SFBC approach with miracle questions technique is effective for children, adolescents, and families. Further, Lestari & Astuti (2021) examined the effectiveness of a short therapy approach that focuses on solutions to reduce anxiety experienced by Generation Z in the era of disruption. The results show that the anxiety experienced by the counselee could be reduced from very high to very low.

Miracle questions technique is the main technique in SFBC developed by de Shazer in Corey (2017). It helps and supports counsees to think of their future by giving questions leading to hopes in the future or specifically asking miraculous questions.

Vulnerable children who have high anxiety need help to control their anxiety, especially in the three aspects of social anxiety, namely anxiety in general situations, anxiety in

new situations and negative judgments from others. Therefore, this study aimed to determine the level of effectiveness of group counseling using a solution focused brief therapy approach to reduce the anxiety level of foster children with the category of vulnerable children in SOS Children's Village Semarang.

## METHODS

The subjects of this study were the vulnerable children in SOS Children's Village Semarang as many as 7 aged between 14-17 years. They were chosen using purposive sampling technique based on the high social anxiety criterion.

Social anxiety instruments developed by the researchers were used to examine the level of social anxiety, namely Fear of Negative Evaluation (8 items), Social Avoidance and Distress in New Situation (9 items), and Social Avoidance and Distress-General (9 items) which have four scaling options (1=strongly agree, 4=strongly disagree). Based on validity test, the 26 items of those instruments were declared valid ( $r_{xy} = 0.307-0.586$ ) with the alpha reliability coefficient of 0.839.

This study used an experimental method with one group pretest-posttest design implemented in three stages. First, the researchers assessed the children social anxiety to select the ones with high level. Seven children were chosen in this stage and given a pretest.

Second, an intervention of solution focused brief therapy was given in the form of group counseling to reduce the anxiety level of the vulnerable children. This intervention took place for six times with 60 minutes time allotment for each session. In the first session, each group member introduced himself to build a collaborative relationship. In the second session, the researchers identified kinds of changes needed to determine the specific counseling goals to be observable and assessable. The third session was focused on reviewing goals, assessment, and developing plans to solve problems. Fourth, there was the identification of personal strengths and possible strategies to

solve the problems. Fifth, the counsees were encouraged to gain solutions through miracle questions, and exception questions. Sixth, the group members were invited to explore alternative solutions from the miracle or magical questions, while the counselors gave scaling questions to reveal what the members felt.

Third, a posttest was given to all group members to measure the level of social anxiety by using a social anxiety instrument.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the pretest results, the initial social anxiety level of the vulnerable children was high ( $M = 79.14$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ). Table 1 shows the results of the analysis of Mean, SD, and Wilcoxon test results.

**Tabel.1** Data Analysis Results

Measurement	Eksperimental	
Pretest	M	79.14
	SD	1.46
Posttes	M	45.71
	SD	1.70
Z	-2.38 <sup>b</sup>	
P	<0.05	

The SFBT group counseling contributed to the reduction of social anxiety proved the results of pretest ( $M = 79.14$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ) compared to the posttest ( $M = 45.71$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ ;  $z = -2.38$   $p < 0.05$ ). It has confirmed that this intervention has been able to reduce the social anxiety of vulnerable children.

This study attempted to reveal the level of effectiveness of a group counseling service using miracle questions to reduce the social anxiety of vulnerable children in SOS Children's Village Semarang. Based on the collected data from the instrument, the initial social anxiety condition of the children was high. After that, they were given six times treatment. Once the treatment was done, they were asked to do posttest to measure the final condition of their anxiety.

Regarding the findings, the vulnerable children who received the group counseling with

miracle questions technique got their social anxiety reduced. Due to the reduction, the children voluntarily helped others to deal with its symptoms. Apart from that, reducing social anxiety somehow boosts their performance in daily activities and makes them confidence in meeting new people and carrying out social activities.

A previous study by Suranata (2020) shows that website-based SFBC program is effective to reduce Senior High School students' academic anxiety; based on their perception, this program has good acceptance and feasibility. This study results in the implications of the use of counseling method-based website for students. It also implies that an applicable solution for students who have high anxiety is using an SFBC approach.

Another study by Lestari & Astuti (2021) aims to determine the effectiveness of a solution-focused short therapy approach to reduce anxiety experienced by Generation Z in the era of disruption. Individual counseling was conducted over two sessions using a variety of techniques in short solution-focused therapy, including scaling questions and magic questions. The results show that the anxiety experienced by the counsees could be reduced from very high to very low. Counseling with a solution-focused short therapy approach has proved to be effective in reducing the anxiety experienced by the counselee because it offers a more concise and constructive counseling session, in accordance with the characteristics of Generation Z.

Miracle question is a technique by giving questions to the counsees so that they are able to imagine what if a miracle comes to them and all problems can be solved. The purpose of this technique is to expand and broaden the counselee's view of all the possibilities that can occur by helping the counselee build a problem-solving scheme. The miracle question technique is suitable for use in individual, family, couple or group settings. The answers obtained in the counseling process can be used as the goal of the therapy itself (Shazer & Dolan, 2017).

The findings of this study are in accordance with several studies related to the use of group counseling with miracle questions to reduce the social anxiety of vulnerable children. It is because miracle questions are ways to build problem solving schemes obtained from the counsees' answers during counseling sessions. This technique is based on an assumption that counselee is the only expert in overcoming his own problem (Corey, 2017). In this technique, vulnerable children are asked to do more discussion because it will help counsees talk their problems more intense and gain new perspectives with the aim of finding solutions. The findings, therefore, has proved that miracle questions have been able to reduce social anxiety. Apart from findings solutions from counsees, counselors need to help counsees find the most suitable solution for them.

Widayanti, Sugiyo, & Murtadho (2020) state that the use of an SFBC approach with exception technique can increase group A self-control, while the SFBC approach with miracle question can increase group B self-control. Then, the combination of both SFBC techniques is also effective to increase group C self-control. Further, Apriyanti, et al's study (2020) investigated the effectiveness of group counseling with miracle question to minimize cyber bullying by the eleventh graders of SMA BPS & K 1 Jakarta.

One alternative solution to reduce the social anxiety of vulnerable children is to give SFBC approach with miracle questions technique. In counseling, this approach helps counsees to find solutions for the present and future situations. Similarly, the implementation of solution-focused brief counseling is also seen as useful in school settings because school counselors are responsible for many student burdens, but do not have sufficient time to conduct counseling in the long term (Sklare, 2014). This counseling is better known to have a shorter time, but does not reduce the essence of the counseling process.

Solution-focused brief counseling is a counseling model that has differences with other

counseling models. Generally, counseling models focus on counselee's problems, but SFBC focuses on helping counsees to find solutions for the present and future conditions. It can be used in school setting and recommended since the implementation gives more efficient and effective time constraint (Corey, 2017). In addition, it has been proved to minimize individuals' social anxiety (Bajjesh A.R., 2015).

The findings imply that counselors can use a solution focused brief therapy approach to reduce the social anxiety of vulnerable children. In this way, counsees can clarify and imagine how life would be different if the problem were suddenly solved. Commitment in the counseling process invites counsees to make commitments by referring to what they feel and share in the dynamics of group counseling. Moreover, the future studies can refer to these findings in the way they attempt to reduce the social anxiety of vulnerable children. It is in line with the assumption of SFBT that an individual has control over himself to become a person who can overcome his problems so that he is able to view change as something normal in the process of developing.

## CONCLUSION

This study was done to examine the level of effectiveness of group counseling with SFBT approach to reduce the social anxiety of vulnerable children. According to the findings, this intervention is effective to be applied, especially for the vulnerable children in SOS Children's Village Semarang.

Counselors or caregivers can implement this group counseling intervention to cope with issues related to social anxiety. Meanwhile, the future researchers can provide more comprehensive research design and add other variables to support children well-being, such as self-efficacy and self-esteem.

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