THE APPLICATION OF PEER COUNSELING IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AS AGENTS OF CHANGE IN IMPROVING ASSERTIVENESS IN VICTIMS OF BULLYING AT SMP NEGERI 1 SUNGGUMINASA

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Abstract
The application of peer counseling through the Change Agent extracurricular program in increasing assertiveness among bullying victims at SMP Negeri 1 Sungguminasa. The background of this research is based on the rising cases of bullying in school environments, which negatively impact students' mental health and social development. The method used is a quasi-experimental approach with a pretest-posttest control group design. The research sample consists of 30 students identified as bullying victims, divided into experimental and control groups. The results show that the assertiveness level of students before the implementation of peer counseling was in the low category; however, after the intervention, there was a significant increase in the experimental group. Hypothesis testing using a t-test revealed a significance value ($p < 0.05$), indicating that peer counseling effectively enhances students' assertiveness. This study concludes that the implementation of peer counseling in the Change Agent extracurricular program can be an effective alternative to address bullying issues and improve students' self-confidence in schools. It is hoped that the findings of this research can contribute to the development of guidance and counseling programs in schools and raise awareness of the importance of assertiveness among students.
Keywords: Peer Counseling, Assertiveness, Bullying, Extracurricular, Change Agent

Abstrak
Penerapan konseling sebaya melalui ekstrakurikuler Agen Perubahan dalam meningkatkan asertivitas pada korban bullying di SMP Negeri 1 Sungguminasa. Latar belakang penelitian ini didasari oleh meningkatnya kasus bullying di lingkungan sekolah yang berdampak negatif terhadap kesehatan mental dan perkembangan sosial siswa. Metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan eksperimen semu dengan desain pretest-posttest control group. Sampel penelitian terdiri dari 30 siswa yang terindikasi sebagai korban bullying, dibagi menjadi kelompok eksperimen dan kontrol. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tingkat asertivitas siswa sebelum penerapan konseling sebaya berada pada kategori rendah, namun setelah perlakuan, terjadi peningkatan signifikan pada kelompok eksperimen. Uji hipotesis menggunakan t-test menunjukkan nilai signifikansi (p < 0,05), yang mengindikasikan bahwa konseling sebaya efektif dalam meningkatkan asertivitas siswa. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa penerapan konseling sebaya dalam ekstrakurikuler Agen Perubahan dapat menjadi alternatif yang efektif untuk mengatasi masalah bullying dan meningkatkan kepercayaan diri siswa di

sekolah. Diharapkan hasil penelitian ini dapat memberikan kontribusi bagi pengembangan program bimbingan dan konseling di sekolah serta meningkatkan kesadaran akan pentingnya asertivitas di kalangan siswa.
Kata kunci*: Konseling Sebaya, Asertivitas, Bullying, Ekstrakurikuler, Agen Perubahan*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information and communication technology over the past two decades has brought significant changes to various aspects of human life, including education. Digital transformation has facilitated the learning process, access to information, and communication between teachers and students. However, behind this progress, new and complex problems have emerged, one of which is the phenomenon of school bullying, which has taken on various forms and dimensions. In the past, bullying mostly occurred face to face, but now it has also spread to the digital space in the form of cyberbullying. This condition shows that technological advances do not always go hand in hand with improved quality of social interaction in the school environment. In fact, in some cases, they have expanded the space for violence (Listiani et al., 2024).

School bullying encompasses various forms of aggressive acts that are carried out deliberately and repeatedly by individuals or groups against other individuals who are considered weaker. These forms include physical threats, verbal abuse, insults, spreading rumors, social exclusion, and psychological abuse that has a serious impact on the mental health of the victim. In the context of education, bullying is not just a normal conflict between students, but a pattern of systematic aggressive behavior involving a power imbalance between the perpetrator and the victim (Olweus, 1993). It is this power imbalance that distinguishes bullying from normal fighting, as victims often lack the ability to defend themselves effectively. Globally, various studies show that cases of bullying have increased significantly in recent decades. UNESCO (2019) reports that about one in three students worldwide have experienced bullying at school. This data shows that bullying is a universal problem that does not only occur in certain countries but is a cross-cultural and cross-educational system phenomenon. In Indonesia itself, a report by the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) shows that cases of violence in schools, including bullying, still rank high in the complaints received each year (KPAI, 2023). This indicates that the problem of bullying has not been comprehensively addressed.

Schools, as formal educational institutions, have a strategic role in shaping students' personalities and characters. Coloroso (2003) states that schools are one of the main factors that determine the moral development, mindset, and social attitudes of students. Ideally, the school environment should be a safe space for children to learn, develop, and build healthy social relationships. However, reality shows that the school environment is not yet completely free from violent practices. The phenomenon of bullying in schools reflects a failure to build an inclusive school culture oriented towards values of empathy and respect for differences. According to Wiyani (in Bu'ulolo et al., 2022), bullying is a hostile act carried out by one person or a group of people with the aim of frightening,

hurting, or intimidating others. These acts can be physical, such as hitting and kicking; verbal, such as mocking and insulting; or relational, such as ostracizing or spreading rumors. In addition, the development of information technology has given rise to a new form of bullying, namely cyberbullying, where perpetrators use social media, instant messaging, or other digital platforms to attack victims. Cyberbullying has a wider impact because it can occur without space and time limitations and spread quickly to a larger audience (Kowalski et al., 2014).

The impact of bullying on victims is very serious, both in the short and long term. Psychologically, victims of bullying are at risk of experiencing anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, sleep disorders, and even suicidal thoughts (Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Academically, victims tend to experience a decline in academic achievement, loss of motivation, and high absenteeism because they feel unsafe at school. In the long term, the experience of being a victim of bullying can affect an individual's social and emotional development into adulthood. Not only victims, but perpetrators of bullying also have the potential to experience behavioral problems in the future, including a tendency to commit crimes if they do not receive appropriate intervention (Olweus, 1993).

The causes of bullying are very complex and involve various aspects, including the individual, family, school, and social environment. From an individual perspective, characteristics such as low empathy, a need for dominance, and previous experiences of being a victim of violence can trigger a person to become a bully. From a family perspective, authoritarian or overly permissive parenting styles can contribute to the development of aggressive behavior in children (Coloroso, 2003). Meanwhile, a school culture that is not strict in punishing perpetrators and a lack of supervision are also factors that contribute to bullying. The Indonesian government has actually shown its commitment to handling bullying cases through various regulations. One of the relevant laws is Law Number 35 of 2014 concerning Amendments to Law Number 23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection. Article 9 Paragraph (1) states that every child has the right to protection in educational institutions from sexual crimes and violence committed by educators, educational staff, fellow students, and/or other parties. This provision emphasizes that the state has a responsibility to ensure a safe and violence-free educational environment.

However, the implementation of this law has not been optimal. Rita et al. (2020) argue that there are still various obstacles in the implementation of child protection policies in schools, including a lack of policy dissemination, a lack of child-friendly reporting mechanisms, and a culture of silence that makes victims reluctant to report cases they have experienced. In many cases, bullying is considered "normal mischief" or part of the maturing process, so it is not taken seriously. In fact, tolerating bullying actually reinforces the cycle of violence in the school environment. Efforts to prevent and deal with bullying require a comprehensive and collaborative approach. Schools need to develop clear anti-bullying policies, including reporting procedures and strict sanctions for perpetrators. Character education programs that emphasize the values of empathy,

tolerance, and respect for differences also need to be integrated into the curriculum. In addition, the role of teachers as authority figures in the classroom is very important in creating a conducive learning environment that is responsive to indications of bullying.

Parents also have a responsibility to shape their children's character from an early age. Open communication between parents and children can help detect signs of bullying early on, whether as victims or perpetrators. On the other hand, the government needs to strengthen supervision and provide counseling and rehabilitation services for both victims and perpetrators. A restorative approach that emphasizes relationship restoration and social responsibility can be an alternative in resolving bullying cases without solely focusing on punishment. Thus, the phenomenon of school bullying is a serious problem that cannot be taken lightly. The development of information technology has indeed had a positive impact on education, but it has also opened up new opportunities for more complex forms of violence. Therefore, synergy between schools, families, communities, and the government is needed to create a safe, inclusive, and equitable educational environment. Without a shared commitment, efforts to protect children as mandated by the Child Protection Law will be difficult to optimize.

METHOD

This study uses a quantitative experimental research method to directly test the effect of one variable on another. The research approach used is a quasi-experimental design. This approach was chosen because it aims to determine the effect of peer counseling in the "Change Agent" extracurricular activity on increasing the assertiveness of bullying victims. The research design used is a pretest-posttest control group design. In this design, the research subjects are divided into two groups, namely the experimental group that is given peer counseling in extracurricular activities and the control group that is not given peer counseling intervention. Both groups are given a pretest before the treatment and a posttest after the treatment to see if there is a difference in the level of assertiveness.

This study consisted of two variables, namely peer counseling in the "Change Agent" extracurricular activity as the independent variable and the level of assertiveness in bullying victims as the dependent variable. In order to measure the research variables and to standardize perceptions of both variables, operational definitions of the two variables were established. Peer counseling is a counseling program conducted by peers (peer counselors) who have been trained in advance, and assertiveness is the ability of a person to express their thoughts, feelings, and desires honestly, openly, and directly, while still respecting the rights of others.

The population in this study was 246 students at SMP 1 Sungguminasa who were indicated to be victims of bullying. The sampling technique used was random sampling, where the samples selected were students who met the criteria as victims of bullying and were willing to participate in the "Change Agent" extracurricular activity. The number of samples used in this study was 30 students, with 15 students in the experimental group and 15 students in the control group. The data collection methods used to obtain the data

used in this study were questionnaires (scale method), observation, and interviews. Questionnaires were used to measure students' assertiveness levels, observation was used to observe student behavior, and interviews were used to obtain more in-depth information about the influence of peer counseling on student assertiveness.

The data obtained was analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis techniques to describe the characteristics of the data, as well as a t-test to see significant differences between the pretest and posttest in the experimental and control groups. The t-test was used to test the hypothesis of whether peer counseling had a significant effect on increasing assertiveness in bullying victims. The instruments used in this study will first be tested for validity and reliability. Validity will be determined through construct and content validity tests in consultation with experts, while reliability will be tested using Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient to ensure the internal consistency of the instruments used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of peer counseling in improving the assertiveness of bullying victims at SMP Negeri 1 Sungguminasa through the Change Agent extracurricular activity. Based on the results of descriptive analysis, it was found that the level of assertiveness of bullying victims before the treatment was in the moderate category with a percentage of 53.3%. This moderate category indicates that most students who are victims of bullying have the ability to express their opinions, feelings, and needs adequately, but are not yet consistent and are still vulnerable to social pressure and peer domination. Assertiveness is an individual's ability to express their thoughts, feelings, and rights honestly and openly without violating the rights of others (Alberti & Emmons, 2017). Assertive individuals are able to say "no" to unpleasant treatment, defend themselves from social pressure, and express their disagreement constructively. In the context of bullying, low assertiveness often makes it difficult for victims to defend themselves or report the violence they experience, thereby prolonging the cycle of victimization (Olweus, 1993). Therefore, strengthening assertiveness is an important preventive and curative strategy in dealing with bullying in schools.

The finding that assertiveness levels were in the moderate category was influenced by several factors. First, the developmental age of junior high school students, who are in early adolescence. According to Erikson (1968), adolescents are in the stage of identity versus role confusion, where individuals begin to search for their identity and are greatly influenced by their social environment. At this stage, sensitivity to peer acceptance is very high, so students tend to avoid conflict and choose to remain silent when faced with unpleasant treatment. This may explain why some victims of bullying are not yet able to demonstrate optimal assertive behavior. Second, the social conditions of SMP Negeri 1 Sungguminasa, located in the center of Gowa Regency, also provide their own dynamics. School environments in urban areas generally have a high degree of heterogeneity in the social, economic, and cultural backgrounds of students. This diversity can be a positive potential in social learning, but it also has the potential to cause interpersonal friction if

not managed properly. The social context of the school also influences the patterns of interaction between students, including the emergence of dominant groups that have the potential to bully students who are considered different or weaker (Coloroso, 2003).

Third, environmental support factors also play a role in shaping students' assertiveness levels. Positive support from teachers, parents, and peers can increase students' confidence and courage in expressing their opinions. Conversely, an environment that is unresponsive to victims' complaints can reinforce feelings of helplessness (learned helplessness) in students who experience bullying (Seligman, 1975). The personal experiences of previous bullying victims also influence their response patterns. Students who are repeatedly victimized tend to develop passive coping patterns as a form of self-protection. The implementation of peer counseling services through the Change Agent extracurricular program showed encouraging results. Based on descriptive analysis, the experimental group after receiving treatment was in the moderate category with a percentage of 53.33%, but experienced an increase in average scores compared to the initial condition. Although still classified as moderate, there was a statistically significant increase that showed the effectiveness of the intervention.

Peer counseling in this study was carried out through a series of sessions that focused on assertive communication skills training, self-confidence building, role-playing, and guided group discussions. Peer counseling is a guidance service approach that involves students as facilitators or counselors for their peers under the supervision of guidance counselors. This approach is based on the assumption that adolescents tend to be more open and comfortable sharing experiences with their peers than with adults (Tindall, 2015). Equal and non-hierarchical relationships enable effective mutual support and emotional validation. In the context of bullying, peer counseling can help victims feel heard and understood, as well as provide them with strategies for dealing with stressful situations.

The results of the hypothesis test using the gainscore test showed a significant difference between the control group and the experimental group in the pretest and posttest scores. A significance value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05, indicates that the hypothesis stating that the application of peer counseling has an effect on increasing the assertiveness of bullying victims can be accepted. Statistically, these findings indicate that the change in assertiveness scores in the experimental group did not occur by chance, but was a result of the intervention provided. The increase in assertiveness through peer counseling can be explained by social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). In peer counseling sessions, students have the opportunity to observe models of assertive behavior from facilitators and other friends. This modeling process allows students to imitate and internalize more adaptive communication patterns. In addition, the experience of success in assertive communication simulations increases students' self-efficacy, namely the belief that they are able to deal with challenging situations effectively.

The findings of this study are in line with the results of Hanifah's (2025) study, which states that peer conformity is one of the external factors that encourage verbal bullying. Adolescents often follow group behavior in order to gain social acceptance, even when that behavior is negative. Low self-confidence as an internal factor also contributes to the emergence of bullying behavior and the victim's inability to fight back. In this context, peer counseling serves as a medium for building a more positive self-identity and strengthening students' self-confidence.

The results of this study are also consistent with the findings of Zhang et al. (2023), which show that peer counseling programs significantly improve the assertiveness and psychological well-being of students who are victims of bullying. Zhang et al. found that peer-based interventions are effective in reducing social anxiety and improving interpersonal communication skills. The similarity of these results reinforces the argument that peer counseling is a relevant and contextual intervention strategy in dealing with bullying problems in junior high school environments. Practically, the success of peer counseling in increasing assertiveness demonstrates the importance of empowering students as agents of change in the school environment. The Change Agent extracurricular program not only serves as a forum for developing interests and talents, but also as a space for constructive social learning. Through this program, students are trained to be active listeners, provide emotional support, and instill values of empathy and social responsibility.

This approach is in line with the character education paradigm that emphasizes the formation of soft skills and social intelligence. However, this study also has limitations, including a limited sample size and a relatively short intervention period. Therefore, further research with a broader experimental design and a longer intervention period is needed to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the long-term effectiveness of peer counseling. In addition, integrating peer counseling programs with broader school policies related to bullying prevention will strengthen the impact of the intervention. Overall, the results of this study confirm that peer counseling in the Change Agent extracurricular program has a significant effect on increasing the assertiveness of bullying victims at SMP Negeri 1 Sungguminasa. Increased assertiveness is expected to help students who are victims of bullying to be more courageous in voicing their rights, rejecting unfair treatment, and building healthier social relationships. Thus, peer counseling can be an effective strategy in creating a safe, inclusive school environment that supports students' psychosocial development.

DISCUSSION

Peer counseling has been proven to increase the assertiveness of bullying victims at Sungguminasa 1 Public Junior High School. This finding has a strong theoretical basis, especially when linked to the concept of assertiveness proposed by Alberti and Emmons (2017), which states that assertive behavior is an individual's ability to express their thoughts, feelings, and desires honestly and directly, without violating the rights of others and while maintaining respect for themselves and others. In the context of bullying

victims, this ability is very important because victims are often in a position of powerlessness, tend to remain silent, or choose to avoid conflict in order to reduce the risk of repeated aggressive treatment. Through peer counseling, victims gain a safe space to learn and practice assertive skills in a supportive and non-judgmental atmosphere.

Assertiveness is not an innate trait, but rather a social skill that can be learned and practiced through experience and constructive social interaction. Teenagers who are victims of bullying often experience a decline in self-confidence, social anxiety, and feelings of worthlessness that hinder their ability to speak up and defend themselves. In situations like this, a peer counseling approach is relevant because it utilizes the dynamics of relatively equal relationships between friends. Teenagers are generally more open and comfortable sharing experiences with peers than with adults, so the process of emotional exploration and self-reflection can take place more naturally.

The increase in assertiveness among victims of bullying at SMP Negeri 1 Sungguminasa can be explained by several psychological and social factors involved in the peer counseling process. One of the main factors is the ability of peer counseling to help victims deal with difficult situations in a more adaptive manner. Victims of bullying often experience confusion in determining the appropriate response when faced with ridicule, intimidation, or exclusion. Some choose to remain silent for fear that the situation will worsen, while others may show aggressive reactions as a form of self-defense. Both responses are essentially ineffective in resolving the problem. Through peer counseling, victims are encouraged to understand that there are more constructive alternatives, namely assertive communication that is firm but still respectful of others.

In peer counseling sessions, victims are usually trained to recognize the emotions that arise when experiencing bullying, such as anger, sadness, fear, or shame. This process of recognizing emotions is important because many victims are unable to clearly identify and express their feelings. With the help of peer facilitators, victims learn to construct sentences that reflect their feelings and needs, for example by using statements such as "I feel..." rather than direct accusations that have the potential to trigger conflict. This technique helps victims convey their messages more effectively and increases the chances of being heard by others.

The second factor that explains the increase in assertiveness is the strengthening of victims' self-confidence and self-esteem. The experience of being bullied often erodes positive perceptions of oneself. Victims may begin to believe the negative labels given to them by the perpetrators, leading to feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness. In this context, peer counseling serves as a space for social validation. When victims receive support, empathy, and recognition from their peers, they begin to rebuild a more positive self-image. Social support has been shown to play a significant role in improving the psychological well-being of adolescents and reducing the negative effects of bullying. Bandura's concept of self-efficacy explains that an individual's belief in their abilities influences their behavior. In peer counseling, victims are given the opportunity to practice

assertive behavior through simulations or role-playing. Successful experiences in these practice situations increase their confidence that they can handle similar situations in the real world. This increase in self-efficacy contributes directly to increased assertiveness because individuals who are confident in their abilities tend to be more courageous in expressing themselves. The third factor is improved interpersonal communication skills.

Many victims of bullying have difficulty expressing their thoughts and feelings in a structured manner. They may feel nervous, afraid of saying the wrong thing, or worried about being rejected. Peer counseling provides an opportunity to practice communication skills gradually. This process includes practicing active listening, giving constructive feedback, and expressing opinions with appropriate body language. With repeated practice, victims become more accustomed to speaking clearly and assertively. The results of this study are also in line with the findings of Hanifah (2025), who states that peer conformity is one of the external factors that encourage verbal bullying. Teenagers tend to conform to group norms in order to gain social acceptance. In groups with a negative culture, the pressure to join in mocking or belittling others can be very strong. On the other hand, low self-confidence as an internal factor makes individuals more vulnerable to becoming victims. Peer counseling can break this cycle by building groups with positive and supportive norms. When students are involved as agents of change, they not only help victims but also shape a more empathetic school culture.

In the dynamics of peer counseling groups, a process of social modeling occurs in which students observe and imitate the assertive behavior displayed by facilitators and other friends. This process accelerates the internalization of healthy communication values. In addition, an egalitarian atmosphere allows victims to feel equal and not judged. The psychological sense of security created within the group is an important foundation for the success of the intervention. More broadly, increased assertiveness through peer counseling also has an impact on other aspects of students' lives. More assertive students tend to have healthier social relationships, are able to set personal boundaries, and are more courageous in seeking help when facing problems. This is not only beneficial in the context of bullying, but also in the overall social and emotional development of adolescents. Assertiveness helps students build a stronger sense of identity and not be easily swayed by social pressure.

The success of peer counseling in increasing assertiveness demonstrates the importance of a student-participation-based approach in guidance and counseling programs. Adolescents are not only the objects of intervention, but also subjects who have the potential to become agents of change. With proper training and supervision, students can play an active role in creating a safer and more supportive school environment. This approach is in line with the modern educational paradigm that emphasizes empowerment and collaboration. Ultimately, the increase in assertiveness among bullying victims at SMP Negeri 1 Sungguminasa through peer counseling confirms that interventions based on social relationships and peer support have significant effectiveness. When victims are given the opportunity to understand themselves, build self-confidence, and practice

communication skills, they are no longer in a passive position. They become more empowered individuals, able to voice their rights and actively participate in creating healthy social relationships. Thus, peer counseling not only increases assertiveness but also contributes to the creation of a more inclusive and bullying-free school culture.

CONCLUSION

The aspects to be examined in this program include several important indicators directly related to efforts to prevent and address bullying at SMP Negeri 1 Sungguminasa. First, the study will examine changes in students' attitudes and behaviors toward bullying, whether as victims, perpetrators, or witnesses. These changes can be seen from the increased courage of students to reject bullying, the reduced tendency to support negative peer behavior, and the growth of empathy and concern for friends who are victims. A more positive attitude towards the values of mutual respect is an important indicator of the program's success. Second, the frequency of reported bullying cases is also a major focus of the study. A decrease in the number of cases or an increase in constructive reporting indicates a change in school culture towards a more open and responsive environment. This data can be obtained through guidance counselor records, student reports, and observations during the program.

Third, the study will assess students' awareness and understanding of bullying, including its forms, impacts, and how to deal with it. Improved understanding is expected to encourage students to no longer consider bullying as normal or just a joke. The education provided in peer counseling plays an important role in shaping a more critical perspective on this behavior. In addition, teachers' and parents' perceptions of the program's effectiveness will also be analyzed. Support from these two parties is crucial to the program's sustainability in schools. If teachers and parents see positive changes in students, peer counseling can be considered a sustainable program. Thus, peer counseling can be a strategic alternative in dealing with students who experience bullying. Through a participatory and supportive approach, peer counseling has the potential to be an effective strategy in increasing the assertiveness of victims and creating a safer and more inclusive school environment.

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