

THE EFFECT OF INTERPERSONAL-BASED THERAPEUTIC GROUP THERAPY ON IMPROVING SELF-IDENTITY AMONG ADOLESCENTS AS A BULLYING PREVENTION STRATEGY

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ABSTRACT

Bullying remains a prevalent issue among adolescents and has detrimental effects on mental health, self-esteem, and social functioning. A positive self-identity is considered an important protective factor against involvement in bullying. Adolescents with a strong sense of self-identity tend to exhibit greater self-confidence, better emotional regulation, and healthier interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal-Based Therapeutic Group Therapy is a psychosocial intervention designed to facilitate self-exploration, peer support, and positive interpersonal interactions, thereby promoting the development of self-identity. To examine the effect of Interpersonal-Based Therapeutic Group Therapy on improving self-identity among adolescents in Sorong City as a bullying prevention strategy. This study employed a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest control group design. The sample consisted of 74 junior high school students in Sorong City, who were assigned to either an intervention group (n = 37) or a control group (n = 37). Self-identity was assessed using a self-identity questionnaire. Data were analyzed using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test and the Mann–Whitney U Test. A significant improvement in self-identity was observed among adolescents who received Interpersonal-Based Therapeutic Group Therapy (p = 0.000). Furthermore, the intervention group demonstrated significantly higher post-test self-identity scores than the control group (p = 0.000). Interpersonal-Based Therapeutic Group Therapy effectively enhances self-identity among adolescents in Sorong City and may serve as a promising strategy for bullying prevention

Keywords: adolescence; bullying prevention; interpersonal-based therapeutic group therapy; self identity

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by significant physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), adolescence encompasses individuals aged 10–19 years and represents a crucial period for establishing a foundation for lifelong health and well-being. During this stage, adolescents are expected to achieve various developmental tasks, one of the most important being the formation of self-identity (WHO, 2025). Self-identity refers to an individual's understanding of who they are, including their values, beliefs, goals, and social roles. The successful development of self-identity contributes to self-confidence, emotional stability, and positive interpersonal relationships. Conversely, identity confusion may lead to psychosocial difficulties, poor decision-making, and increased susceptibility to negative social influences (Maree, 2022). Adolescents with a weak sense of self are more likely to experience difficulties in coping with social pressures and challenges encountered in their daily lives (Song et al., 2026).

One of the major psychosocial challenges faced by adolescents is bullying (Bhatia, 2023). Bullying is a form of aggressive behavior directed toward individuals perceived as vulnerable and has become a significant public health concern worldwide. Research has shown that bullying negatively affects adolescents' mental health, leading to anxiety, depression, social isolation, low

self-esteem, and, in severe cases, suicidal behavior (Febrianti et al., 2024; Man et al., 2022). The World Health Organization (2025) reported that 10-19 year old adolescents experiences a mental disorder, accounting for 15% of the global burden of disease in this age group globally experiences a mental health disorder, highlighting the need for preventive interventions that promote psychosocial well-being (WHO, 2025).

In Indonesia, bullying remains a persistent problem within educational settings. Data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) recorded approximately 3,800 bullying cases in 2023, with nearly half occurring in schools and other educational institutions (KPAI, 2024). In Southwest Papua Province, a bullying-related incident resulted in the death of a junior high school student following severe depression. Although bullying cases have been reported in Sorong City, the actual prevalence remains difficult to determine due to underreporting and limited surveillance systems.

A growing body of evidence suggests that self-identity serves as an important protective factor against bullying involvement. Adolescents with a positive self-identity tend to demonstrate greater self-confidence, better emotional regulation, stronger resilience, and healthier interpersonal relationships, reducing their vulnerability to becoming either perpetrators or victims of bullying (Moody & Stahel, 2025; Purba & Septiyan, 2024). Therefore, strengthening self-identity is considered a promising strategy for bullying prevention.

One intervention that may facilitate the development of adolescent self-identity is Interpersonal-Based Therapeutic Group Therapy. This therapeutic approach emphasizes self-exploration, peer support, interpersonal communication, and positive social interactions. Through structured group activities, adolescents are encouraged to express their thoughts and feelings, gain insight into themselves, and develop adaptive coping strategies (Mekeama et al., 2022). Previous studies have demonstrated that Therapeutic Group Therapy significantly improves adolescent self-identity and psychosocial functioning (Amanda et al., 2023).

A preliminary study conducted among 165 junior high school students in Sorong City revealed that 44.8% were categorized as normal, 36.4% as victims, 10.3% as perpetrators, and 8.5% as witnesses of bullying. These findings indicate that bullying remains a significant concern among adolescents in Sorong City and highlight the need for effective preventive interventions. Given the important role of self-identity in promoting positive adolescent behavior, this study aimed to examine the effect of Interpersonal-Based Therapeutic Group Therapy on improving self-identity among adolescents in Sorong City as a bullying prevention strategy.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest control group design. The study aimed to examine the effect of Interpersonal-Based Therapeutic Group Therapy on improving self-identity among adolescents in Sorong City as a bullying prevention strategy. The study involved two groups: an intervention group and a control group.

Participants

This study was conducted as the second year of a longitudinal research project between April and October 2024 in six junior high schools in Sorong City. The first-year study, conducted in 2023,

focused on bullying screening among junior high school students to identify students eligible for preventive interventions.

The first-year study involved 165 students in Grades VII and VIII who were selected using cluster random sampling. Based on the screening results, 74 students categorized as "normal" were recruited for the second-year study. These participants were selected using purposive sampling and assigned to either the intervention group ($n = 37$) or the control group ($n = 37$).

The inclusion criteria were: junior high school students in Grades VII and VIII, aged 12–14 years, categorized as normal in the bullying screening, not experiencing severe psychological disorders requiring specialized intervention, and willing to participate in the study. Exclusion criteria included students younger than 12 years or older than 14 years, those identified as bullies, victims, or witnesses during bullying screening, students with severe psychological disorders, and those unwilling to participate.

Intervention

Participants in the intervention group received Interpersonal-Based Therapeutic Group Therapy for seven consecutive weeks, with one 60-minute session conducted each week. The therapy focused on self-exploration, interpersonal communication, self-awareness, emotional expression, peer support, and self-identity development. Through structured group activities, participants were encouraged to recognize their strengths and weaknesses, explore personal values and goals, develop self-confidence, and establish positive interpersonal relationships. The control group did not receive the intervention and was observed during the same period.

Instrument

Self-identity was assessed using the Therapeutic Group Therapy Self-Identity Questionnaire adapted from Dayat Trihadi, Psychiatric Nursing Specialist Program, Faculty of Nursing, Universitas Indonesia. The instrument consisted of 20 items measuring adolescents' self-identity.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using univariate and bivariate analyses and presented in numerical and tabular formats. Univariate analysis was used to examine the characteristics of each variable, while bivariate analysis was conducted to determine the effect of Interpersonal-Based Therapeutic Group Therapy on self-identity using the Wilcoxon test and Mann-Whitney test, with a significance level of $p\text{-value} < 0.05$.

Ethical Considerations

This study obtained ethical approval from Politeknik Kesehatan Kementerian Kesehatan Sorong, West Papua Province, Indonesia with a reference number DM.03.05/8/044/2023.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1.
Frequency Distribution of Respondent Characteristics Based on Age, Gender, and Grade Level in the Intervention and Control Groups

Characteristics	Intervention Group (n=37)		Control Groups (n=37)	
	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age				
12 years	4	10,8	6	16,2
13 years	30	81,8	28	75,7
14 years	3	8,1	3	8,1
Gender				
Male	18	48,6	17	45,9
Female	19	51,4	20	54,1
Grade				
VII	19	51,4	19	51,4
VIII	18	48,6	18	48,6

Based on Table 1, the frequency distribution of respondents' characteristics in the intervention group shows that the majority of respondents were 13 years old, totaling 30 respondents (81.8%). The most common gender was female, with 19 respondents (51.4%), and the majority were in Grade VII, also totaling 19 respondents (51.4%). Similarly, in the control group, the majority of respondents were 13 years old, with 28 respondents (75.7%). The predominant gender was female, comprising 20 respondents (54.1%), and the highest number of respondents were in Grade VII, with 19 respondents (51.4%).

Table 2.
Frequency Distribution of Respondent Characteristics Based on Adolescent Self-Identity Before and After in the Intervention and Control Groups

Adolescent Self-Identity	Intervention Group (n=37)				Control Groups (n=37)			
	Pre Test		Post Test		Pre Test		Post Test	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Low	28	75.7	0	0	24	64.9	23	62.2
Moderate	6	16.2	22	59.5	9	24.3	10	27.0
High	3	8.1	15	40.5	4	10.8	4	10.8
Total	37	100,0	37	100,0	37	100.0	37	100.0

Based on Table 2, the frequency distribution of respondents' characteristics regarding adolescent self-identity in the pre-test and post-test phases is presented. In the intervention group, before receiving the Interpersonal-Based Therapeutic Group Therapy (pre-test), the majority of respondents had self-identity scores in the Low category, with 28 respondents (75.7%). However, after the intervention (post-test), the majority of respondents shifted to the Moderate category, with 22 respondents (59.5%). In contrast, in the control group, before the intervention (pre-test), the majority of respondents had self-identity scores in the Low category, with 24 respondents (64.9%). After the study period (post-test), the majority of respondents remained in the Low category, with 23 respondents (62.2%).

Table 3.

Effect of Interpersonal-Based Therapeutic Group Therapy on Self-Identity Among Adolescents in Sorong City

Group	Test	Normality Test (P)	Rata-rata (SD)	Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test		Mann-Whitney Test	
				Z	P	Z	P
Treatment	Pre Test	0.000	46.51 (8.990)	-5.305	0.000		
	Post Test	0.001	73.92 (8.867)				
Control	Pre Test	0.000	47.78 (10.523)	-2.527	0.051		
	Post Test	0.002	48.51 (10.257)				
Difference of Each Group	Treatment Group Post Test	0.001	73.92 (8.867)			-6.454	0.000
	Control Group Post Test	0.002	48.51 (10.257)				

The effect of Interpersonal-Based Therapeutic Group Therapy on adolescent self-identity was assessed using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test and the Mann–Whitney U Test. The Wilcoxon test showed a significant increase in self-identity scores in the intervention group following the therapy ($Z = -5.305$; $p = 0.000$), indicating that Interpersonal-Based Therapeutic Group Therapy effectively improved adolescents' self-identity. In contrast, no significant change was observed in the control group ($Z = -2.527$; $p = 0.051$).

The Mann–Whitney U Test demonstrated a significant difference in post-test self-identity scores between the intervention and control groups ($Z = -6.454$; $p = 0.000$). The intervention group achieved a substantially higher mean self-identity score (73.92 ± 8.867) than the control group (48.51 ± 10.257). These findings indicate that adolescents who participated in Interpersonal-Based Therapeutic Group Therapy experienced greater improvements in self-identity compared with those who did not receive the intervention.

The results suggest that Interpersonal-Based Therapeutic Group Therapy is effective in strengthening self-identity among adolescents in Sorong City. Enhanced self-identity may contribute to increased self-confidence, healthier interpersonal relationships, and greater resilience to negative peer influences, supporting its potential role as a bullying prevention strategy.

The findings of this study demonstrated that Interpersonal-Based Therapeutic Group Therapy significantly improved self-identity among adolescents in Sorong City. Adolescents who participated in the intervention showed a significant increase in self-identity scores after the therapy, while no significant changes were observed in the control group. These results indicate that Interpersonal-Based Therapeutic Group Therapy is an effective intervention for strengthening adolescents' sense of self.

Self-identity is one of the most important developmental tasks during adolescence (Afriyanti, 2024). At this stage, adolescents actively explore their values, beliefs, goals, and social roles to develop a coherent sense of self. A strong self-identity enables adolescents to make independent decisions, build self-confidence, and establish healthy interpersonal relationships (Zhou et al., 2023). Conversely, identity confusion may increase vulnerability to emotional problems and negative social influences (Branje, 2022). The significant improvement observed in this study suggests that structured therapeutic interventions can facilitate adolescents' identity development. The effectiveness of Interpersonal-Based Therapeutic Group Therapy may be attributed to its emphasis on self-exploration, peer interaction, and interpersonal communication (Agustarika et al., 2024). Through group discussions and supportive interactions, adolescents are encouraged to express their thoughts and feelings, receive constructive feedback, and gain insight into their strengths and weaknesses (Swasti, Mulyaningrat, et al., 2023; Wahyuni et al., 2024). These experiences promote self-awareness and self-acceptance, which are essential components of self-identity development (Sari et al., 2023). This finding is consistent with Amanda et al. (2023), who reported that Therapeutic Group Therapy significantly improved adolescent self-identity and facilitated positive identity formation (Amanda et al., 2023).

The findings can also be explained through Erikson's psychosocial development theory, which identifies adolescence as the stage of identity versus role confusion. During this developmental period, adolescents strive to establish a clear and stable sense of self. Successful resolution of this developmental task results in a strong identity, whereas failure may lead to uncertainty, confusion, and vulnerability to external influences (de Carvalho & Veiga, 2022). Interpersonal-Based Therapeutic Group Therapy provides opportunities for adolescents to explore personal values, share experiences, and receive social validation from peers, thereby supporting the successful achievement of identity formation (Jumaini et al., 2024; Swasti, Susanti, et al., 2023).

In addition, the interpersonal approach embedded in the therapy is consistent with Peplau's Interpersonal Relations Theory, which emphasizes the importance of therapeutic relationships in promoting personal growth and psychological well-being. Through structured interactions with peers and facilitators, adolescents learn effective communication skills, emotional expression, and adaptive coping mechanisms. These interpersonal experiences contribute to greater self-awareness and self-confidence, which are fundamental elements of a positive self-identity (Joan & Carroll, 2025). The substantial increase in self-identity scores observed in the intervention group may also be related to the supportive group environment created during therapy sessions. Adolescents often rely heavily on peer acceptance and social feedback when forming their identities. Group-based interventions provide a safe environment where participants can discuss personal experiences without fear of judgment. Positive feedback from peers may strengthen self-esteem and encourage adolescents to develop a more positive perception of themselves. This process is particularly important during adolescence, when peer influence plays a central role in psychosocial development.

Furthermore, strengthening self-identity may contribute to bullying prevention. Adolescents with a positive sense of self tend to possess greater self-confidence, emotional regulation, and resilience when facing peer pressure. They are more likely to engage in positive social interactions and less likely to become involved in bullying, either as perpetrators or victims (Hong & Lee, 2026). Research has shown that adolescents with low self-esteem and poor self-concept are more

vulnerable to negative peer influences and maladaptive behaviors, including aggressive conduct and bullying involvement (Oktafia & Rahayu, 2024; Putra & Dewi, 2025). Therefore, interventions that strengthen self-identity may indirectly reduce adolescents' susceptibility to bullying-related behaviors (Galán-Arroyo et al., 2023).

This study has several implications for nursing practice and school-based mental health programs. School nurses, mental health nurses, teachers, and counselors may incorporate Interpersonal-Based Therapeutic Group Therapy into adolescent health promotion programs to strengthen self-identity and support psychosocial well-being. Early interventions targeting self-identity development may help adolescents develop adaptive coping skills and healthier interpersonal relationships. Overall, the findings indicate that Interpersonal-Based Therapeutic Group Therapy is effective in enhancing self-identity among adolescents in Sorong City and may serve as a promising approach to promoting positive psychosocial development and preventing bullying.

CONCLUSIONS

Interpersonal-Based Therapeutic Group Therapy was found to be effective in improving self-identity among adolescents in Sorong City. Adolescents who participated in the intervention demonstrated significantly higher self-identity scores compared to those in the control group. The therapy facilitated self-exploration, interpersonal communication, and peer support, which contributed to the development of a more positive sense of self. Strengthening self-identity may enhance adolescents' self-confidence, emotional regulation, and resilience to negative peer influences. Therefore, Interpersonal-Based Therapeutic Group Therapy has the potential to serve as a valuable bullying prevention strategy and may be integrated into school-based adolescent mental health promotion programs.

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