



The Effectiveness of Cognitive Behaviour Group Counseling with Cognitive Restructuring Techniques to Reduce Stress and Anxiety in Cyberbullying Victims at School

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| ABSTRACT | |
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| <p>ARTICLE INFO: Received October 27, 2025</p> <p>Revised November 01, 2025</p> <p>Accepted November 19, 2025</p> <p>KEYWORDS: Anxiety, Cognitive Behaviour, Cognitive Restructuring, Cyberbullying, Group Counseling, Stress</p> | <p>The purpose of this study was to confirm the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral group counseling with cognitive restructuring techniques in reducing stress and anxiety caused by cyberbullying in students. This study was a true experiment with a two-factorial design. The subjects in this study were 20 students of Senior High School 3 Mataram, Indonesia. Data were collected using the Adaptive Personality Scale (APS) from the Acculturative Stress Scale and the Social Anxiety Scale. Data were analyzed using one-way ANOVA statistics. The results of this study suggest that cognitive-behavioral group counseling, incorporating cognitive restructuring techniques, is effective in reducing stress and anxiety. Furthermore, the results showed that cognitive-behavioral group counseling with restructuring techniques was more effective in reducing anxiety than stress.</p> |

INTRODUCTION

This study highlights the negative effects of uncontrolled internet use, particularly on social media. Cyberbullying is a common problem that often makes people feel uncomfortable or anxious due to social media use (Moreno & Radovic, 2018). Technology, in this case, is a vehicle for irresponsible individuals to engage in cyberbullying, a highly concerning issue for most people involved in social media use. Cyberbullying can negatively impact students' academic performance (Shariff & Strong-Wilson, 2005) and lead to a range of negative emotional effects such as stress, anxiety, depression, sadness, and hopelessness (Kowalski & Limber, 2013). Most victims of cyberbullying experience stress (Navarro, Yubero, Larranaga & Martinez, 2012) and anxiety, characterized by excessive fear (Storch & Masia-Warmer, 2004). Research conducted by Sartana & Afriyeni (2017) revealed that victims of cyberbullying often experience higher levels of stress and anxiety than other symptoms. Stress is positively correlated with anxiety because both stem from stressful situations, causing individuals to become worried, afraid, depressed, and hopeless (Siddiqui & Sing, 2016). Recent reports also indicate a growing number of cyberbullying cases among adolescents in Indonesia, especially with the increased use of smartphones and online learning platforms. Many students are unable to manage online interactions safely, making them more vulnerable to harassment. This situation highlights the urgent need for effective strategies to reduce cyberbullying and strengthen students' emotional resilience (Gianesini, 2015).

Stress and anxiety triggered by cyberbullying are urgent issues that require immediate intervention, as they constitute part of the critical educational problems prioritized by the government for prompt resolution. Individuals experience stress in response to unpleasant events, characterized by confusion and fear (Alhujaili, 2020). Furthermore, stress can be threatening and dangerous for individuals experiencing it, as they are unable to appropriately assess the physiological,

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emotional, cognitive, and behavioral symptoms (Prasetya, Gunawan, & Majdi, 2021). Furthermore, stress can be correlated with anxiety, irritability, and frustration (Nuraeni & Gunawan, 2023). Anxiety, in this context, is an emotional state associated with a sense of threat, characterized by worry, concern, and fear (Martínez-Monteagudoa, Delgadob, Díaz-Herreroc, & García-Fernándezd, 2020; Pekrun, Goetz, Perry, Kramer, Hochstadt & Molfenter, 2004). Factors influencing individual anxiety include low self-confidence, lack of social support, and negative modeling (Garaigordobil & Machimbarrena, 2019). Furthermore, anxiety can also impact individuals' self-actualization due to an inability to manage emotions, low cognitive abilities that lead to an inability to think clearly, and low psychological abilities that impede responsiveness in decision-making (Albikawi, 2023).

One effort that can be made to reduce stress and anxiety caused by cyberbullying is through counseling using a cognitive and behavioral approach. The problem-solving approach used in this study is based on the results of a meta-analysis conducted by Hoffman, Asnaani, Vonk, Sawyer, & Fang (2012), which revealed that the Cognitive Behavioral approach is effective in addressing various psychological problems, especially those related to general stress and anxiety. The reason for using the Cognitive Behavioral approach in this study is that it combines psychotherapy approaches, specifically Cognitive Therapy and Behavioral Therapy (Adi, Prasetya, & Gunawan, 2022). Essentially, this approach focuses on perceptions, beliefs, and thoughts, which are determining factors in explaining how individuals think, feel, and act. Meanwhile, the behavioristic approach emphasizes the learning process, so researchers consider the Cognitive Behavioral approach more adequate for addressing stress and anxiety caused by cyberbullying. Furthermore, the choice of the Cognitive Restructuring technique as an intervention to reduce stress and anxiety stems from its emphasis on cognitive learning principles (Beck, 2011; Erford, 2015). Furthermore, this technique is designed to help individuals achieve more positive emotional responses by changing habitual judgments, thereby reducing bias.

Furthermore, the Cognitive Behavior approach will be implemented through group counseling. Group counseling is a dynamic interpersonal process that emphasizes awareness of thinking and behavior, involving therapeutic functions with an orientation toward comfort, mutual trust, and understanding that serve to prevent and improve (Gunawan, Sukarni, Zulaifi, & Mustakim, 2023). In addition, group counseling is described as a planned and systematic intervention designed to help individuals become more aware and independent (Jacobs, Harvill, & Masson, 2012; James & Galliland, 2003). The purpose of group counseling is to meet needs and provide valuable experiences (Gunawan, Mungin, Purwanto & Sunawan, 2019), develop potential (Gladding, 2009), and increase awareness and self-knowledge as a unique individual, thereby becoming an independent person in group situations (Corey, 2012).

In this study, the implementation of group counseling will be aligned with the regulations in force at the school. The implementation of Cognitive Behavior group counseling with the Cognitive Restructuring technique includes several stages, namely: (1) orientation stage, (2) transition stage, (3) work stage, and (4) termination stage. Specifically, in this study, the Cognitive Restructuring technique will be implemented at the work stage as a treatment to reduce stress and anxiety, thereby accelerating the onset of more adaptive behavioral changes. Furthermore, previous studies on how to reduce stress and anxiety often use the Cognitive Behavior approach without applying specific techniques (Muris, Mayer, Adel, Roos & Wamelen, 2009; Bryant, Moulds & Nixon, 2003) so this study tries to look at the problem of stress and anxiety due to cyberbullying from a cognitive perspective and to overcome it, the Cognitive Restructuring technique is applied as an alternative solution. This is what is new about this study. In addition to applying a cognitive-process-based approach, this research also incorporates positive values obtained from group counseling, which can foster a better understanding and lead to new, more adaptive behaviors.

METHODS

Design

The research method used was a true experiment with a two-factorial design model. The reason for using this research design was to more accurately assess the causal relationship between Cognitive Restructuring techniques and stress, and between Cognitive Restructuring techniques and anxiety. Furthermore, this factorial experimental design is a modification of the between-groups design in which researchers examine two or more categorical independent variables, each at two or more levels (Creswell, 2007).

This design aims to study the effects of independent variables and interactions between dependent variables (Heppner, Wampold & Kivlighan, 2007). The design used in this study was a 2 x 2 factorial experiment. Furthermore, what is meant by this type is the presence of two factors: treatment and problem. The treatment factor consists of two levels: Cognitive Behavior group counseling using Cognitive Restructuring techniques and regular Cognitive Behavior group counseling. As for the problem factor, it is seen from the problems of stress and anxiety resulting from cyberbullying. Systematically, the 2 x 2 factorial design in this study is presented in the form of Figure 1.

| Cognitive Behavior Group Counseling (A) | Cognitive Restructuring Techniques (1) Common Counseling Techniques (2) | |
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| | A1 | A2 |
| Stress B1 | A1B1 | A2B1 |
| Anxiety B2 | A1B2 | A2B2 |

Figure 1. Factorial Research Design

This experimental design shows that the placement of samples in the experimental group was random, ensuring that researchers obtained samples suitable for research purposes. Random assignment is the process of randomly assigning individuals to different groups in a single experiment (Purwanto, 2016).

Participant and Procedure

The participants in this study were students in grades X, XI, and XII at Public Senior High School 3 Mataram during the 2024/2025 academic year. A pretest screening using adapted versions of the Acculturative Stress Scale and the Social Anxiety Scale was administered to identify students with high levels of stress and anxiety related to cyberbullying. Based on the classification results, 20 students (10 males and 10 females) who met the criteria were selected and randomly assigned to four equal-sized experimental groups.

The research procedure consisted of three main stages: pretest, intervention, and posttest. After the pretest, each experimental group received eight sessions of 90-minute Cognitive-Behavioral Group Counseling (CBGC). Two groups (one male, one female) received CBGC with Cognitive Restructuring techniques, while the remaining two groups received CBGC using regular counseling techniques. At the end of the intervention, all participants completed the same posttest instruments to measure changes in stress and anxiety levels. The data obtained were analyzed using SPSS 21 with ANOVA to determine the effectiveness of the intervention.

Instruments

The instruments used in this study were adapted versions of the Acculturative Stress Scale (ASS) and the Social Anxiety Scale (SAS). The adaptation process followed the procedures outlined by Lenz, Soler, Dell'Aquila, and Uribe (2017). The first stage involved forward translation, in which two language experts translated the instruments from English to Indonesian while considering cultural

relevance and the characteristics of the target population. During this stage, no items were omitted or added, and the wording was adjusted to ensure clarity and comprehensibility for respondents.

The second stage involved translation review, decentering, and content reconciliation. The research team examined the translated items to ensure consistency with the study's content and cultural context, particularly for students in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara. The refined version was then submitted for back translation by two additional experts to ensure that the translated content accurately reflected the meaning of the original instrument. Any discrepancies identified during this process were resolved through discussion and revision.

The final stage involved team review and further cultural adaptation, followed by pilot testing. Expert validators assessed the items for reliability, cultural appropriateness, and theoretical alignment before field implementation. A pilot test was conducted with 100 students to evaluate item validity (minimum item-total correlation of 0.30) and reliability (Cronbach's Alpha above 0.60). After the statistical evaluation met the required criteria, the research team reached a consensus confirming that the adapted instrument was suitable for use as a research measurement tool.

Data Analysis

The collected pre-test and post-test data were analyzed using SPSS version 21 by employing a one-way ANOVA to examine the effectiveness of the intervention in reducing students' stress and anxiety levels associated with cyberbullying. The analysis aimed to identify statistically significant differences between groups receiving Cognitive Restructuring techniques and those receiving regular counseling techniques, as well as differences based on sex. Through this statistical procedure, the study sought to determine whether the implemented Cognitive-Behavioral Group Counseling intervention contributed meaningfully to decreasing psychological distress in students who had experienced cyberbullying.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

After conducting a series of assessments, the researchers then calculated the mean and standard deviation of the pre-test and post-test assessment results for each research group. The results of data analysis for the experimental group, given cognitive-behavioral group counseling with cognitive restructuring techniques to reduce stress caused by cyberbullying, showed pre-test results (M = 33.70, SD = 1.05) and post-test results (M = 26.80, SD = 1.13). The results of data analysis for the experimental group, given cognitive-behavioral group counseling without special techniques to reduce stress due to cyberbullying behavior, showed pre-test results (M = 34.00, SD = 0.66) and post-test results (M = 33.10, SD = 0.66). Furthermore, to examine the main and interaction effects for each group, the results of the one-way ANOVA indicate the main effects and interaction effects. The results of comparing the pre-test assessment in the experimental group using the t-independent test showed that the experimental group given Cognitive Behavior group counseling with the Cognitive Restructuring technique, with the experimental group given ordinary Cognitive Behavior group counseling without specific techniques, had no significant difference in stress levels due to cyberbullying behavior ($t(18) = 0.75, p > 0.05$). Table 1 presents the descriptive characteristics of stress variables associated with cyberbullying behavior.

Table 1. Descriptive Characteristics of Cyberbullying Stress Variables in the Research Group

| Group | Pre-Test (T1) | | Post-Test (T2) | |
|------------------------------|---------------|------|----------------|------|
| | M | SD | M | SD |
| Experiment 1 | 33.70 | 1.05 | 26.80 | 1.13 |
| Experiment 2 | 34.00 | 0.66 | 33.10 | 0.87 |
| M_{time} | 33.85 | 0.87 | 29.95 | 3.37 |
| $F(1,18) = 193.08, p < 0.01$ | | | | |

Based on the results of the one-way ANOVA test, the main effect of time on reducing stress behavior in the experimental group was significant ($F(1, 18) = 193.08, p < 0.01$). The effect of time at the time of measurement showed a decrease in stress due to cyberbullying behavior in the experimental group T1 ($M = 33.85, SD = 0.87$) and T2 ($M = 29.95, SD = 3.37$). The results of data analysis for the experimental group, given cognitive-behavioral group counseling with cognitive restructuring techniques to reduce anxiety caused by cyberbullying, showed pre-test results ($M = 34.10, SD = 0.73$) and post-test results ($M = 25.60, SD = 0.51$). The results of data analysis for the experimental group, given cognitive-behavioral group counseling without special techniques to reduce anxiety due to cyberbullying behavior, showed pre-test results ($M = 34.20, SD = 0.63$) and post-test results ($M = 33.50, SD = 0.52$). The results of comparing the pre-test assessment in the experimental group using the independent t-test showed that the experimental group given Cognitive Behavior group counseling using the Cognitive Restructuring technique with the experimental group given ordinary Cognitive Behavior group counseling without specific techniques did not have a significant difference in the level of anxiety due to cyberbullying behavior ($t(18) = 0.32, p > 0.05$). In Table 2, the descriptive characteristics of the anxiety variable due to Cyberbullying are presented.

Table 2. Descriptive Characteristics of Cyberbullying Anxiety Variables in the Research Group

| Group | Pre-Test (T1) | | Post-Test (T2) | |
|------------------------------|---------------|------|----------------|------|
| | M | SD | M | SD |
| Experiment 1 | 34.10 | 0.73 | 25.60 | 0.51 |
| Experiment 2 | 34.20 | 0.63 | 33.50 | 0.52 |
| M_{time} | 34.15 | 0.67 | 29.55 | 4.08 |
| $F(1,18) = 312.05, p < 0.01$ | | | | |

Based on the results of the one-way ANOVA test, the main effect of time on anxiety reduction due to cyberbullying in the experimental group was significant ($F(1, 18) = 312.05, p < 0.01$). The effect of time at the time of measurement showed a decrease in anxiety due to cyberbullying behavior in the experimental group T1 ($M = 34.15, SD = 0.67$) and T2 ($M = 29.55, SD = 4.08$). The results of the data analysis of the experimental group that was given cognitive behavioral group counseling with cognitive restructuring techniques to reduce stress and anxiety simultaneously due to cyberbullying showed pre-test results ($M = 67.80, SD = 1.47$), and post-test ($M = 52.40, SD = 1.35$). The results of the data analysis of the experimental group that was given cognitive behavioral group counseling without specific techniques to reduce stress and anxiety simultaneously due to cyberbullying showed pre-test results ($M = 68.20, SD = 1.03$), and post-test ($M = 58.70, SD = 0.94$). Furthermore, to determine the main and interaction effects for each group, the results of the one-way ANOVA statistical test are presented. The results of comparing the pre-test assessment in the experimental groups using the independent t-test showed that there was no significant difference in stress and anxiety levels between experimental group 1 and experimental group 2 due to cyberbullying behavior ($t(18) = 0.49, p > 0.05$). In Table 3, the descriptive characteristics of the stress and anxiety variables due to Cyberbullying are presented.

Table 3. Descriptive Characteristics of Cyberbullying Stress and Anxiety Variables in the Research

| Group | Pre-Test (T1) | | Post-Test (T2) | |
|------------------------------|---------------|------|----------------|------|
| | M | SD | M | SD |
| Experiment 1 | 67.80 | 1.47 | 52.40 | 1.35 |
| Experiment 2 | 68.20 | 1.03 | 58.70 | 0.94 |
| M_{time} | 68.00 | 1.25 | 55.55 | 3.42 |
| $F(1,18) = 198.45, p < 0.01$ | | | | |

Based on the results of the one-way ANOVA test, the main effect of time on reducing stress and anxiety due to cyberbullying behavior in the experimental group was significant ($F(1, 18) = 198.45, p < 0.01$). The effect of time at the time of measurement showed a decrease in stress and anxiety due to cyberbullying behavior in the experimental group T1 ($M = 68.00, SD = 1.25$) and T2 ($M = 55.55, SD = 3.42$).

Discussion

This study tested the effectiveness of Cognitive Behavior group counseling in reducing stress and anxiety caused by cyberbullying in students. Based on the data analysis, Cognitive Behavior group counseling was effective. The results of this study demonstrate the quality of Cognitive Behavior group counseling with Cognitive Restructuring techniques in reducing stress and anxiety caused by cyberbullying. These results strengthen previous research indicating that Cognitive Behavior counseling is effective in reducing stress and anxiety (Clark & Beck, 2010; Hoffman, Asnaani, Vonk, Sawyer & Fang, 2012; Murphy et al., 2017).

Comparing the effectiveness of Cognitive Behavior group counseling with Cognitive Restructuring techniques in reducing stress and anxiety, Cognitive Behavior group counseling with Cognitive Restructuring techniques is better at reducing anxiety. The results of this study explain that anxiety is more closely related to cognitive distortions than stress. Furthermore, anxiety is rooted in internal cognitive distortions, while stress is influenced by complex external and physiological factors (Goldberger & Breznitz, 1982; Hancock & Warm, 2003). According to Beck (1976), the implementation of Cognitive Behavior counseling with Cognitive Restructuring techniques directly targets and corrects irrational thoughts by replacing them with more realistic and adaptive thoughts. Therefore, this technique can directly touch the root cause of anxiety, namely, errors in thinking. Meanwhile, stress is more complex because it does not originate solely from negative thoughts, but also from external and physiological factors that cannot be completely changed by cognitive restructuring alone.

Furthermore, anxiety is an internal response that can be changed through cognitive awareness. Anxiety, in this case, is an internal reaction to a perceived threat, not a real threat. Through Cognitive Restructuring, individuals learn to recognize that the threat they perceive is often disproportionate to their beliefs. By changing this perception, anxious emotional reactions are reduced. Conversely, stress is often a response to actual external conditions that, although perceptually changeable, still require behavioral coping and environmental management beyond simply changing thoughts.

In the context of the Cognitive Behavior approach, anxiety is viewed as a specific and repetitive automatic thought. This pattern is well-suited to systematic identification and restructuring within a Cognitive Behavior group. Furthermore, group discussions can help individuals see that negative thought patterns are not unique, thereby facilitating greater insight and social support among group members. Cognitive Behavior group counseling can also validate and provide social learning for overcoming anxiety, where group members can see their negative thoughts as similar to others, creating a normalization of the anxious experience, reattribution (thinking errors understood rationally), and increased self-efficacy in managing anxiety (Forreman & Pollard, 2011). Stress, on the other hand, is more often situational, fluctuating, and not always characterized by fixed cognitive patterns, so the application of Cognitive Restructuring lacks the clear targets of anxiety. Furthermore, the direct emotional effects of anxiety are more pronounced than those of stress. Research conducted by Hofmann, Asnaani, Vonk, Sawyer & Fang (2012) and Clark & Beck (2010) shows that Cognitive Restructuring can reduce physiological and emotional symptoms of anxiety significantly and can only partially reduce stress because stress symptoms also require behavioral and relaxation interventions such as stress management and coping skills training (Moksnes & Espnes, 2016).

Furthermore, this study provides a clearer picture of the application of Cognitive Behavior group counseling with Cognitive Restructuring techniques, which is more effective than ordinary Cognitive Behavior group counseling in reducing stress and anxiety simultaneously. The results of this study indicate that Cognitive Behavior group counseling is basically suitable for reducing stress and anxiety due to cyberbullying behavior that occurs in students because this approach views emotional disorders that arise from symptoms of stress and anxiety caused by cognitive distortions where the problem originates from irrational, negative, and unrealistic thought patterns about oneself, others or environmental situations so that it can affect individual emotions and behavior (Beck, 1976). Thus, changing negative thoughts can result in more adaptive emotional and behavioral changes (Beck, 2008).

In the context of students who are victims of cyberbullying, they often develop automatic thoughts such as considering themselves worthless, hated by others, and the environment rejecting them, where these thoughts can strengthen feelings of stress, anxiety, withdrawal, insecurity, and depression. The application of Cognitive Behavior group counseling with Cognitive Restructuring techniques to reduce stress and anxiety due to cyberbullying behavior aims to recognize automatic negative thoughts, test their truth rationally, and replace them with more realistic and adaptive thoughts. Through the process of Cognitive Behavior group counseling, individuals learn that emotional reactions to cyberbullying are not caused by the event itself, but rather the individual's way of interpreting the event (Beck, 2008). By changing maladaptive interpretations and beliefs, the intensity of psychological stress and anxiety can be significantly reduced.

In addition, Cognitive Behavior group counseling, which incorporates Cognitive Restructuring techniques, also teaches individuals to gain social support and empathy from others, learn from others' experiences and coping strategies, and develop a sense of togetherness through self-acceptance. According to Cohen & Willis (1985), based on social support theory, positive interactions in groups can reduce stress and anxiety because individuals feel less alone and receive emotional validation. This can also strengthen the effects of cognitive restructuring, as new rational thoughts are supported by others' real experiences. Furthermore, after negative cognitions are restructured, individuals begin to interpret cyberbullying experiences more objectively, responding with adaptive coping strategies, thereby reducing the emotional stress reactions they experience.

Limitation

This study was limited to reducing stress and anxiety caused by cyberbullying in students using cognitive behavioral group counseling with cognitive restructuring techniques. Future researchers are expected to conduct more specific research on cyberbullying behavior. Furthermore, this study was limited to high school students at one school, and future researchers are expected to conduct research with a broader scope. Furthermore, future researchers are expected to utilize cognitive-behavioral group counseling in conjunction with other techniques.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that Cognitive-Behavioral Group Counseling with Cognitive Restructuring techniques is effective in reducing stress and anxiety associated with cyberbullying. This effectiveness is reflected in the intervention's ability to modify cognitive distortions, foster more rational and adaptive patterns of thinking, provide meaningful social support within the group process, and enhance students' coping and emotional regulation capabilities. Together, these therapeutic mechanisms demonstrate the significant role of cognitive-behavioral approaches in mitigating the psychological impacts of cyberbullying.

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