

A Solution-Focused Group Work in Preventing Bullying in an Islamic Junior High School

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Abstract. This study evaluates the outcomes of implementing Solution-Focused Group Work (SFGW) to prevent bullying at an Islamic junior high school in Indonesia. One hundred fifty-three students (ages 13-15) participated in the program facilitated by 24 trained master's students in Educational Psychology. The program aimed to raise awareness of bullying, foster empathy, and promote prosocial behaviors using a non-punitive, solution-focused approach. Structured sessions included ice-breakers, presentations, video discussions, and group reflections. Pre- and post-test assessments measured knowledge changes, while feedback forms assessed students' subjective experiences. The results showed minimal changes in knowledge, with Grade VII scores slightly decreasing and Grade VIII scores slightly increasing. These changes were not statistically significant, likely due to high pretest scores indicating prior knowledge of bullying. However, feedback forms indicated high satisfaction and positive responses, suggesting the program effectively met students' needs despite limited knowledge score changes.

Keywords: Bullying prevention, Solution-Focused Group Work, Empathy, Prosocial Behaviour, Islamic Junior High School

1. Introduction

Bullying among children and adolescents has been a persistent issue for decades [1]. Moreover, has evolved into a global public health concern. This phenomenon has attracted considerable attention from educators and researchers, leading to the development of various intervention programs aimed at reducing bullying within these age groups [2]. Bullying is characterized by a deliberate intention to inflict harm, an unequal power dynamic between the perpetrator and the victim, and its recurrence over time [3]. Such an imbalance of power can arise from various factors, including physical strength, social status within a group, or the size of the group (e.g., multiple individuals targeting a single person). Additionally, power may be derived from the perpetrator's awareness of the victim's vulnerabilities, such as physical appearance, learning difficulties, family circumstances, or personal traits, and the exploitation of this knowledge to inflict harm [1].

Recent Federasi Serikat Guru Indonesia (FSGI) data highlights the urgent need to address bullying within Indonesian schools. Between July and September 2024, FSGI reported a sharp increase in violence cases, rising from 15 incidents in July to 21 in September, culminating in 36 cases. Most incidents were reported in middle schools (36%) and primary schools (33.33%),

followed by high schools (28%) and vocational schools (14%). Notably, 66.66% of these cases occurred in schools governed by the Ministry of Education. In comparison, 33.33% took place in religious schools overseen by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, where physical violence tragically resulted in the deaths of four students. Furthermore, there were 48 identified perpetrators and 144 student victims of violence [4]

The prevalence of bullying in religious schools, including Islamic institutions, stands in stark contrast to the core principle of *Ukhuwah Islamiyah*, which emphasizes a sense of familial unity and mutual support, fostering an environment where both joys and challenges are shared collectively. These schools serve as spaces for character development and moral education (*akhlaqul karimah*) among students [5]. However, despite these guiding tenets, bullying remains a considerable challenge in these contexts. A pertinent example can be observed at a partner, Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs), located in Cimahi, where reports indicate a troubling upward trend in incidents of bullying in recent years. Specifically, data reveal a 10% increase in intimidation behaviours, a 20% rise in social exclusion or teasing, a 13% escalation in cyberbullying incidents, and a 15% increase in physical bullying.

Notably, during the second semester of 2024, a particularly alarming incident involved a group of seventh-grade female students who orchestrated the social exclusion of a peer and intentionally damaged the peer's smartphone, resulting in a cracked screen. The school's response included implementing group counselling sessions facilitated by the school counsellor, convening case conferences, and involving the parents of all students implicated. Disciplinary actions were also taken, including placing the perpetrators under the school counsellor's guidance and issuing a first warning letter. However, one month later, follow-up evaluations revealed that one of the involved students exhibited a troubling lack of remorse for the actions. Another distressing incident involved a male student who sustained bruising to the left side of his head after being struck by a peer during a basketball game on the school premises. These cases starkly illustrate the enduring presence of bullying behaviours, even within institutions that profess religious values. Such incidents underscore the ongoing challenge of reconciling the principles of character education with the lived experiences of students in religious educational settings.

Beyond the immediate harms evident in these incidents, the broader, long-term impacts of bullying are substantial and impose serious psychological, social, and academic effects on all parties involved [6]. Victims, in particular, often experience heightened levels of anxiety, depression, school absenteeism, and academic decline [7], [8], [9], [10]. Additionally, victims frequently report low self-esteem, loneliness, disordered eating, impaired social relationships, tendencies toward self-harm, and suicidal ideation [11], [12], [13]. These adverse effects can persist well into adulthood, underscoring the long-lasting and pervasive nature of bullying's impact [14], [15]. Additionally, children who witness bullying often experience increased anxiety and depression, feel less at ease in the school environment, and may struggle with social adjustment issues [16].

Acknowledging the substantial personal and societal impacts of bullying and its infringement on the fundamental human right to safety in educational settings [3], schools are increasingly recognized as vital environments for implementing interventions to reduce inappropriate behaviour. [17]. Despite the implementation of various intervention strategies over the years [18], bullying continues to profoundly impact young people, with significant repercussions on their emotional, psychological, physical, academic, and behavioural development [19]. More supportive approaches are essential to reduce bullying and foster a positive school culture and

climate [20]. Notably, involving students rather than teachers or authoritative adults as support agents has become common in bullying prevention programs and strategies [20], [21]. This approach leverages the influence of bystander students, who generally constitute the largest group within school settings, making them critical allies in creating a safer, more supportive environment [22]. However, peer advocacy programs and strategies have many barriers, including high costs, time constraints, and the need for an intensive workforce. These programs must be ergonomic, brief, understandable, and applicable to students [21], [23].

Considering the large student population in schools and the limited intervention time, our team identified that a solution-focused approach could effectively address these challenges, mainly through group work involving peer intervention. This approach can facilitate implementation by prioritizing practical and efficient strategies, making engaging students in anti-bullying initiatives easier. A solution-focused approach is recommended because it can yield positive results within a brief intervention. It helps individuals find their solutions and emphasizes solutions rather than problems [24], [25]. This dual focus enhances the effectiveness of bullying prevention efforts by empowering students to take an active role in creating a safer school environment.

A few studies have been conducted to consider bullying prevention and interventions that use solution-focused approaches and peers. This approach has primarily been applied in counselling, focusing on victims' coping skills. For example, a study explored the effectiveness of a peer-driven, empathy-building, and solution-focused approach to bullying intervention [20]. This initiative employs a model known as the Solution Team, wherein a teacher or staff member guides the accused student, bystanders, and supportive peers through a series of solution-focused meetings. Data analysis from 284 Solution Teams revealed a significant reduction in the intensity and frequency of bullying in 86.8% and 87.6% of cases, respectively. In addition to these findings, a study also investigated the effectiveness of the support group, a non-punitive, problem-solving strategy to address pervasive bullying situations in 66 Dutch elementary schools participating in the KiVa intervention [26]. While the support group approach demonstrated short-term reductions in victimization, it did not produce lasting effects on victims' well-being over time. However, it did succeed in increasing the number of defenders for victims, reinforcing the importance of peer involvement in creating a supportive environment.

In this study, solution-focused group work (SFGW) is a non-punitive and solution-focused strategy. SFGW was developed to reduce or prevent bullying by enhancing students' awareness of bullying, fostering empathy, and encouraging prosocial behaviours such as upstander actions. Bullying prevention is more effective and less burdensome than managing the complex challenges that can arise as a result of bullying behaviours [21]. The SFGW approach empowers bystander students to act as advocates in bullying situations, presenting strategies in an engaging, youth-friendly, and positive manner. This approach resonates with young people and encourages active participation. Often, bystanders remain passive when they witness bullying, largely due to uncertainty about how to respond or what actions to take. Implementing proactive bullying prevention is generally more effective and less taxing than addressing the complex issues that can develop as a result of ongoing bullying behaviours. When bystander students encourage bullies, the incidents of bullying might increase. On the other hand, if bystanders support victims to defend themselves, it could reduce bullying [27]. This study aimed to describe the outcomes of implementing Solution-Focused Group Work (SFGW) to prevent school bullying, particularly among students of an Islamic junior high school in Indonesia.

2. Method

2.1. Study design

This study examined the effectiveness of Solution-Focused Group Work (SFGW) in preventing school bullying among students at an Islamic junior high school in Cimahi, West Java, Indonesia. A one-group pretest-posttest design was utilized to measure changes in students' knowledge of bullying before and after participating in the program. The study was conducted in an Islamic junior high school in Cimahi, West Java, with 153 students (76 seventh and 77 eighth graders, 78 males and 75 females, ages 13 to 15). The school consists of four classes per grade level. The SFGW sessions were held within the classrooms. Students and facilitators were arranged in a U-shape seating formation to promote social equality and encourage positive interactions. This seating arrangement aimed to reduce the perceived social hierarchy between facilitators and students, facilitating a stronger rapport and open communication within the group. The U-shaped arrangement also allowed students to make eye contact with one another, which is beneficial for group cohesion and engagement. Table 1 summarizes the details of the SFGW program.

2.1.1 Solution-Focused Group Work (SFGW)

The SFGW program is a non-punitive, solution-focused strategy designed to mitigate or prevent bullying by enhancing students' awareness of the issue, fostering empathy, and encouraging prosocial behaviours such as upstander actions. SFGW plays a vital role by cultivating a collaborative environment where students can engage in dialogue and share experiences to identify solutions to bullying. This approach empowers students to develop the necessary skills for effective intervention and support by emphasizing positive outcomes and individual strengths.

Before the program's launch, a comprehensive framework was established with specific objectives: to enhance students' understanding of bullying, nurture empathy, encourage prosocial behaviours, and underscore the critical role of upstanders in bullying prevention. This framework underwent expert review to ensure its validity and effectiveness before implementation. Furthermore, a Training of Trainers (ToT) session was conducted to ensure facilitators thoroughly understood the material before the program's initiation.

Table 1. SFGW program

Activities	Subject	Duration	Teaching methods and techniques
Opening	Introduction and rapport building	10 min	
Ice Breaking	Warm-up game "Walk or Stop" to create a relaxed atmosphere among participants	10 min	
Pre-test	Distribution of a pretest to evaluate students' initial understanding of bullying and related concepts	7 min	
Apperception	Display bullying-related images and videos to initiate discussion and gauge student perspectives on bullying	10 min	Question and answer, guided discussion, personal sharing

Activities	Subject	Duration	Teaching methods and techniques
Defining Bullying	A concise explanation of bullying, followed by an invitation for students to share relevant personal experiences.	10 min	Lecture, personal sharing
Identifying Bullying Behaviors	A group activity in which students identify bullying behaviours based on their personal experiences and observations. They then categorize their findings according to the types of bullying the facilitator explains.	13 min	Lecture, group discussion
Exploring Causes of Bullying	Explanation and discussion of potential causes and impacts of bullying, supplemented by a video clip for further insight.	10 min	Lecture, group discussion, and sharing
Explanation of Participant Roles	Description of the roles in bullying, including aggressor, bystander, and upstander roles.	5 min	Lecture, role clarification
Solution-focused group work	Analysis and discussion based on a video: Students identify characters in specific roles, reflect on group dynamics, and discuss practical solutions for handling bullying situations positively, using approaches that are appropriate and relatable for middle school students.	25 min	Group discussion and presentation
Reflection	Students record their key takeaways	3 min	
Posttest		7 min	
Feedback		3 min	

2.1.2 Participants and facilitators

The study included all seventh- and eighth-grade students from the participating school, totaling 153 students (n = 153). This sample consisted of 76 students from Grade 7 and 77 from Grade 8, with a balanced gender distribution of 78 boys and 75 girls (see Table 2 for demographic details). The SFGW sessions were led by 24 trained facilitators, all master's students specializing in Educational Psychology. The facilitators received specific training on the SFGW methodology, ensuring consistency and quality in program delivery. To optimize group dynamics and provide adequate attention to each student, the sessions were conducted across eight classrooms, each facilitated by a team of three facilitators. This facilitator-to-student ratio was chosen to foster a supportive environment, allowing facilitators to engage more effectively with students, address individual needs, and encourage active participation.

Table 2 Sosio-demographic of the students

No	Grades	Total Students		
		Boys	Girls	Total
1	VII	44	32	76

2.2 Data collection

Data collection involved administering a pre-test and a post-test to all participants to assess changes in their knowledge about bullying due to the Solution-Focused Group Work (SFGW) program. The pre-test was conducted before the intervention, while the post-test was administered after the program's completion to gauge knowledge improvements. The test consisted of twelve multiple-choice questions to evaluate participants' understanding of bullying. Correct responses were awarded one point, while incorrect responses received zero points. This scoring system provided a straightforward measure of each participant's knowledge level, with possible scores ranging from 0 to 12. A score of 12 indicated a comprehensive understanding of bullying, whereas a score of 0 indicated minimal knowledge. By comparing pre-test and post-test scores, the study aimed to identify the program's effectiveness in enhancing students' knowledge of bullying. This would serve as an indicator of the SFGW intervention's impact on awareness and understanding.

The feedback form was developed to gather participants' insights and assess their satisfaction with multiple aspects of the Solution-Focused Group Work (SFGW) program and to capture comprehensive feedback; the form enabled an evaluation of the program's effectiveness and identified areas for improvement. Participants were encouraged to share their experiences, highlight impactful elements, and suggest potential changes to enhance future program sessions. This approach provided a holistic view of participant satisfaction and the program's overall impact.

2.3 Data analysis

The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0 software. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was employed to assess the normality of the distribution, and the results indicated that the data did not follow a normal distribution. Therefore, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was subsequently utilized for further analysis. Cohen's effect size was calculated to determine the magnitude of observed changes.

3. Result

3.1 The effectiveness of the Solution-Focused Group Work (SFGW)

The effectiveness of the Solution-Focused Group Work (SFGW) program was assessed by comparing the pre-test and post-test scores of participants in Grades VII and VIII. As presented in Table 3, the mean pre-test score for Grade VII was 10.93 (SD = 1.37), slightly decreasing to 10.88 (SD = 1.48) in the post-test. For Grade VIII, the mean score increased marginally from 11.28 (SD = 1.20) in the pre-test to 11.36 (SD = 1.15) in the post-test. Neither of these changes was statistically significant, with p-values of 0.781 for Grade VII and 0.377 for Grade VIII, indicating that the differences in scores before and after the program were not substantial. Effect sizes were also minimal (0.04 for Grade VII and 0.07 for Grade VIII), suggesting a negligible impact of the program on the outcomes.

Table 3. Changes in pretest and posttest

Grades		Mean (SD)	Median	<i>P</i>	Effect size
VII	Pretest	10.93 (1.37)	11	0.781	0.04
	Posttest	10.88 (1.48)	11		
VIII	Pretest	11.28 (1.20)	12	0.377	0.07
	Posttest	11.36 (1.15)	12		

Note: N = 153
SD: Standard Deviation

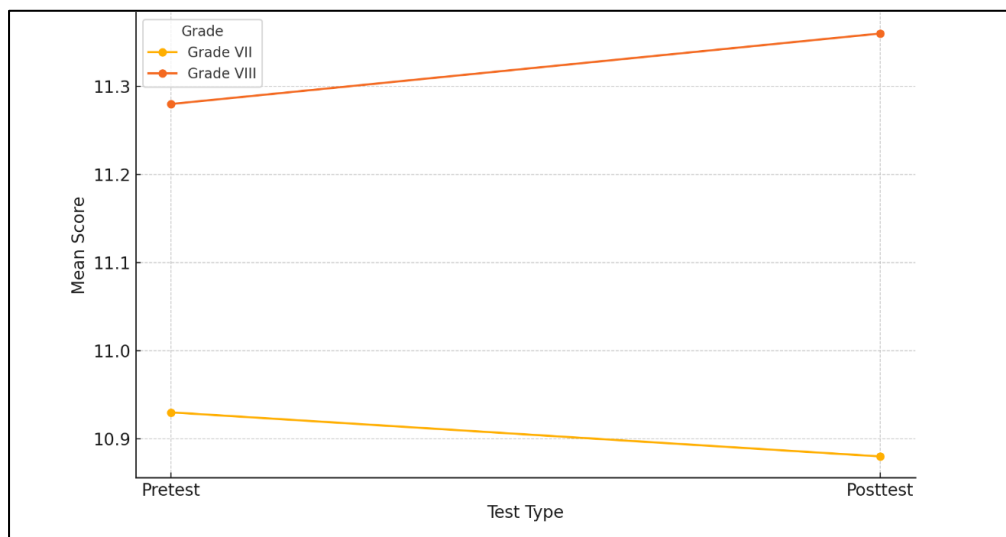


Figure 1. A slight increase in posttest mean scores for Grade VIII and a minor decrease for Grade VII

3.2 Participants satisfaction with various aspects of the Solution-Focused Group Work (SFGW)

The data on participant satisfaction with the Solution-Focused Group Work (SFGW) program shows generally positive feedback across various aspects. Results are presented in Table 4. Most

participants agreed or strongly agreed on the relevance of topics (57% and 43%, respectively), and the majority felt an increased awareness and understanding of bullying behaviour, with 71% in strong agreement. Similarly, 68% extremely agreed on understanding empathy and prosocial behaviour, while 56% felt strongly aware of the upstander role. Regarding the process, 66% of participants enjoyed the program, and 63% agreed that the sessions allowed sufficient interaction and flexibility. Participants also rated facilitator competence highly, with 55% agreeing and 43% strongly agreeing. Additionally, pretest and posttest completion was perceived as straightforward, with 98% finding these tasks easy or very easy combined.

The usefulness of the information and materials presented by the facilitator was rated positively, with 55% finding it beneficial and 45% rating it as extremely beneficial. The pretest and posttest were also well-received, with 62% and 37% of participants finding the pretest effective. In comparison, 55% and 44% reported similar views on the posttest's role in reinforcing initial understanding. Engagement within group activities was another highlight, as 56% of participants rated the interaction and collaboration as beneficial, and an additional 43% found it extremely beneficial, emphasizing the program's ability to foster a supportive and collaborative learning environment. Facilitator performance was well-regarded, with 54% of participants satisfied and 46% extremely satisfied. Furthermore, overall program satisfaction was strong, with 47% satisfied and 53% extremely satisfied. These results underscore the SFGW program's success in delivering relevant, engaging content and meeting participants' expectations, making it a valuable intervention for building awareness, empathy, and prosocial behaviour among attendees.

Table 4. Participants satisfaction with various aspects of the Solution-Focuse Group Work (SFGW)

Aspect Evaluated	Extremely disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Extremely Agree (%)
Relevance of Topics	0 %	0%	57%	43%
Awareness and Understanding of Bullying Behavior	1%	0%	28%	71%
Understanding Empathy and Prosocial Behavior	1%	1%	31%	68%
Awareness of Upstander Role	1%	1%	43%	56%
Enjoyment of the SFGW Program Process	0%	1%	66%	33%
Facilitator Competence	1%	1%	55%	43%
Session Interaction and Flexibility	1%	1%	63%	36%
Aspect Evaluated	Extremely difficult (%)	Difficult (%)	Easy (%)	Extremely easy (%)
Pretest completion	0%	1%	70%	28%
Posttest completion	0%	1%	55%	44%

Aspect Evaluated	Extremely unbeneficial (%)	Not beneficial (%)	Beneficial (%)	Extremely beneficial (%)
The usefulness of the information or material presented by the facilitator	0%	0%	55%	45%
The pretest effectiveness for the participants' initial understanding	0%	1%	62%	37%
The posttest effectiveness for the participants' initial understanding	0%	1%	55%	44%
The effectiveness of interaction and collaboration within groups during the activities	0%	1%	56%	43%
Aspect Evaluated	Extremely dissatisfied (%)	Dissatisfied (%)	Satisfied (%)	Extremely satisfied (%)
Participants' satisfaction with the facilitator's performance	0%	0%	54%	46%
Participants' satisfaction with the entire program	0%	0%	47%	53%

4. Discussion

This study offers insights into the nuanced effectiveness of Solution-Focused Group Work (SFGW) as a bullying prevention strategy in an Islamic junior high school in Indonesia, highlighting both the potential benefits and limitations of this non-punitive and solution-focused approach. While the changes in knowledge scores were minimal (Grade VII's mean decreased slightly from 10.93 to 10.88, and Grade VIII's mean increased from 11.28 to 11.36), participants expressed high satisfaction with the program. A notable finding was the already elevated pretest scores among participants before the program's implementation. Discussions with the school's guidance counselors provided further insight, suggesting that the school environment might have played a role in students' high baseline awareness of bullying. Many students had prior exposure to bullying information due to previous incidents, which the school addressed by providing information on bullying. This foundational knowledge might create a ceiling effect, limiting measurable post-program knowledge gains.

Given this context, SFGW might be more effective in reinforcing empathy and fostering proactive, prosocial behaviours than simply enhancing knowledge about bullying. Student feedback supports this interpretation, with 28% agreeing and 71% strongly agreeing that participation in SFGW increased their awareness and understanding of bullying behaviours. Furthermore, 31% agreed, and 68% strongly agreed that the SFGW sessions deepened their understanding of cultivating empathy and prosocial behaviours toward others. Additionally, 43% agreed, and 56% strongly agreed that SFGW helped them recognize the role of upstanders in preventing bullying. These findings suggest that while knowledge gains may plateau due to

high initial awareness levels, the SFGW program effectively promotes behavioural and attitudinal shifts that support a safer school environment.

The overall feedback results indicate high satisfaction and positive responses to the program's content, structure, and facilitation (see Table 4) and the program's effectiveness in meeting students' needs. These findings align with previous [20], [26], which demonstrated that solution-focused, peer-led approaches can yield immediate positive effects, particularly in empathy and engagement, even if short-term knowledge retention remains a challenge [23], [28]. Additionally, a study suggests that the effects of solution-focused groups can extend beyond the intervention period, indicating the potential for sustained impact [26]. The similarity of these results highlights SFGW as an appealing tool for fostering empathy and potentially setting the foundation for longer-term attitude shifts, especially within culturally sensitive settings like Islamic schools, where punitive approaches may not align with core educational and religious values.

From a school counseling perspective, the relevance of SFGW is particularly promising. The program empowers students to actively defend victims and advocate against bullying through a non-punitive, reflective approach that resonates with their preferred style and is well-accepted among peers. This empowerment-focused model aligns with *Ukhuwah Islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood) values, fostering a school culture of shared accountability, empathy, and mutual support.

However, this study has certain limitations. The specific school setting may restrict the generalizability of these findings to broader educational contexts. Additionally, students' high baseline awareness of bullying may have reduced the pretest's sensitivity to capture meaningful changes. Conducting a preliminary assessment of students' prior knowledge of bullying would allow for a more targeted test design, facilitating clearer measurement of the program's impact on student learning and engagement. Future prevention programs should integrate SFGW with complementary interventions, such as peer mentorship, which could yield a more comprehensive bullying prevention framework and potentially broaden its impact across various educational settings.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Solution-Focused Group Work (SFGW) is a promising, culturally relevant approach to bullying prevention in an Islamic junior high school. Although the program's impact on students' knowledge levels was minimal due to high pre-existing awareness, it fostered empathy and encouraged prosocial behaviour, aligning with *Ukhuwah Islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood) values. Feedback results highlight strong satisfaction with the program's structure, facilitation, and content, confirming its positive reception among students.

Acknowledgments

We sincerely thank Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, the School of Postgraduate Studies, Mr Anenda Bagus Satya Ganesha, S. Psi., M. Pd., Mrs Elfitra Khairin Lutfiah Br. Sitepu, S. Psi., and the Master's students of Educational Psychology for their support with resources, invaluable guidance, and technical assistance. Finally, we are deeply grateful to all the school teachers, staff and students who enthusiastically accepted the invitation to participate and contributed their time and effort to this research.

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