

## **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COGNITIVE BEHAVIOUR GROUP COUNSELLING ON BULLIES AMONGST THE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDNETS IN MALAYSIA**

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### **Abstract**

This experimental study is to assess the effectiveness of structured group counselling, suing a phenomenological-cognitive behavioural approach, on pupil who were bullies. Two types of group counselling were developed, 'the weekly group counselling' and 'the marathon group counselling'. The effectiveness of group counselling in reducing bullying behaviour was measured using four self-report scales related to bullying behaviour, empathy, aggressiveness and self-esteem. The subjects (n=48), comprising of Form 2 and Form 4 pupils, were randomly assigned to two Form 2 and two Form 4 experimental groups and two wait-list control groups. Subjects were administered the pre- and post-test for the four self-report measures. Treatment consisted of weekly group counselling and marathon group counselling. Altogether experiment group subjects received 11 counselling sessions of two-hour duration per session, over six weeks. The treatment focused on the developing new belief systems and building empathy through cognitive restricting and role-play. Statistical analyses the experimental data were, Multivariate analyses of covariance-Mancova, and Post Hoc-Tukey. The significant level was set at .05. The study showed that the cognitive behaviour group counselling based on the integrated model of phenomenological-cognitive behavioural approach was significantly effective in: i) reducing the bullying behaviour and aggressiveness of all the subjects; ii) increasing the empathy of all subjects and iii) increasing the self-esteem of Form 2 subjects. However, it had no significant effect in increasing the self-esteem on Form 4 Subjects. Group counselling can help reduce bullying while increasing the empathy.

**Keywords:** Cognitive behaviour, group counselling, bullies, secondary school students, experimental

### **Abstrak**

Kajian ini untuk mengenal pasti kesan daripada kaunseling berkumpulan ke atas masalah pembuli di sekolah-sekolah. Dua bentuk kaunseling berkumpulan dijalankan iaitu kaunseling mingguan dan kaunseling berterusan. Dengan mengambil kira 48 subjek dalam 11 sesi kaunseling selama tempoh enam minggu, berdasarkan empat variable iaitu tindakan buli, agresif, empati dan harga diri; tumpuan dibuat untuk membina kepercayaan baru dan membina rasa empati di kalangan subjek ini. Kaunseling ini boleh mengurangkan peratus kecenderungan tingkah laku agresif dan sekaligus meningkatkan perasaan empati dan meningkat rasa harga diri.

Kata Kunci: Tingkah laku kognitif, kaunseling berkelompok, buli, pelajar sekolah menengah, eksperimental

### **INTRODUCTION**

The bully behaviour is a problem to students, schools and the community. The existence of bullies make other student felt uneasy and under pressure. The case of bully make parents anxious about the safety of their children and they started questioning the capabilities of the school as agent for education. The anxiousness increased with the reports by the mass medias concerning the harm because of the bully indicates.

Based on the definition by Olweus (1993), Farrington (1993), Hazler (1992) and Randall (1997) bully is type of aggressive behaviour. It is a repeated oppression on the weak by the strong. Behaviour will be defined as bully behaviour when it involves three main elements. Firstly, an attack either physically, verbally or psychological, a threat that aims at scaring, hurting or making the victim suffer. Secondly, the imbalances in the physical or psychological strength, where a more powerful individual pressurize the weaker individual, or a group of people act against the victim. Thirdly, exists a series of repeated incident between the same individuals in a long period of time. In this study, bully is defined as the overall behaviour of bullying which include the verbal, physical bullying behaviour and social isolation. This also includes behaviour that harms or makes the victim uneasy, physically, mentally or psychologically.

Bullying behaviour have negative effects on the victim, either physiologically or psychologically.

The research shows bullies' aggressive behaviour shattered the victim's self-esteem as a result of continuous harassment in various forms (Glover, Gough, Johnson and Cartwright, 2000). Furthermore the bullies' action affects the academic ability and social potential of the victims. Suicide is one of the serious effects that resulted from bully cases. Although, the occurrence is seldom but it must be noted that it is a small part from a large number of incidents experienced by thousands of children and teenagers daily (Dake et al. 2004). This will continue to give a negative effects on the students' growth if the effort to overcome the aggressive behaviours of the bullies is not attended to.

Bully behaviour also creates problems on the bullies themselves. The research carried out by Farrington (1993), shows a correlations between bully behaviours in school and criminal behaviours in adults. It is also related to other social problems such as gangsters, drugs and below average academic achievements. Based on these problems, actions must be taken by all parties concerned, such as, the school and the parents. The school, especially the school's counselors, should take action using the counselling approach against the bullying behaviour. This is very important to ensure the safety and growth of the students, either the victim or the protagonists. The effort to redress the problem needs in depth orientation on the proper treatment.

## **PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH**

The research is to assess (i) the effect of the cognitive behaviour group counselling in treating the bullying behaviour among the secondary school's students, and (ii) to identify the differences in effect of the different type of treatment (weekly group counselling and marathon group counselling) on the bullying behaviour among from two and form four students who participated in the group counselling session.

## **The Significant of the Research**

The result of this research will explain the effect of the group counselling treatment on the bullying behaviour that could be used as a guideline to the counsellors and the schools in general to help students with bullying behaviour to turn the harmonious climate of the school, ensure the smoothness of the students' growth and reassure the community of the school's role.

Furthermore, this experimental research, which is theory oriented as well as the usage of the intervention-application model is hoped to strengthen the theoretical functions and the usage of cognitive reconstruction technique as an alternative for counselling intervention.

### **Research Hypothesis**

The effectiveness of the group counselling treatment is seen through four dependent variables of the research: the Bullying Behaviour, Emotional Empathy, Aggressiveness and the Self-esteem of the subject. Therefore, to identify the effect of treatment between the treatment group and controlled group in the pre- and post-test measures of bully behaviour, aggressiveness, empathy, and self-esteem score among the form two and form four subjects of the research.

To identify the differences in the effect of the treatment among the three groups of weekly, marathon and controlled groups, this hypothesis is constructed: There are no significant differences in the effect of treatment between the Weekly Group with the Marathon Group or the Controlled Group in bullying behavior score of the post-test measures among the form two and the form four students.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

By referring to past research, it shows that the bullying phenomenon is generally handled through *school-based program*. Generally, the objectives of the programme to promote a safe school environment by eliminating aggressive behaviour among the students. This programme involved the aspects of discipline, curriculum, school policy and parents education which involved the school and community. Past researches on the use of counselling approach in handling bullying behaviour are very limited. Banks (1999) used a solution-focused group counselling approach in treating aggressive bullying behaviour among teenagers. Instilling the pre-social behaviour through group co-operation will be able to prevent the aggressive bullying behaviour. Group counselling is also effective in modifying the behaviour of problematic subjects. This has been proven by past researchers, which aims are; to handle criminal problem (Biggam & Power, 1999) and instilling social skills among the teenagers (Bierman & Furman, 1984).

Furthermore, a research by Abdul Malek (2003a) and, Abdul Malek and Mohammad Nasir (2003) found out that Group Counselling Method is successful in reducing bullying behaviour, building empathy and lessening aggressiveness. Based on the result of past researches, this research utilised the group counselling approach in modifying bullying behaviour (*anti-social*) to positive behaviour (*pro-social*). Role-paly technique and cognitive reconstruction are used to build and increase the social emotional skills of the bully subjects.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The subject were selected from two sources. The first source is through schools discipline record and the second source is form the record of the counsellors and teachers. Both sources involved responses from the students using a General Survey Questionnaire. The survey is used to trace students with the bullying behaviour. Both teachers and students responded through the survey.

For the first source, the researcher explained and distributed handouts on 'What is the Bullying Behaviour' to Students Affairs Senior Assistant (*Guru Kanan Hal Ehwal Murid*), Discipline Teacher, Form Two Class Teachers, and the School Councilors. The researcher then carried out a discussion session with the Senior Assistant, Discipline Teacher and School Councilor based on the School's Discipline Record and the Counselling Record. After the briefing and discussion, they were asked to complete the *General Survey Questionnaire-Teacher respond*. However the researcher also utilised a checking procedure to trace bully students by *asking the students involved to answer General Survey Questionnaire-Students Respond*. This is the second source for the research subject.

### **Research Instruments**

Three research tools are utilised in this research. The instruments are: General Survey Questionnaire (Ortega and Ortega, `999); The Bullying Behaviour Scale (Sharp et al., 1994); Balced Emotional Empathy Scale (Albert Mehrabian, 2000); The Aggression Questionnaire (Buss and Perry, 1992), and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (Coopersmith, 1967).

### **The Procedures of Group Counselling Session**

Two types of Group Counselling were carried out, the first, namely the Weekly group and the second was the Marathon Group (refer to the table 3.1a and 3.1b).

Both are based on the Cognitive Behavioural approach. The group counselling is aiming at helping the research subjects to reduce the bullying behaviour through cognitive adjustment, emotional and empathy building. All through the session, the research subjects learnt, comprehended, appreciating the thought and emotion of self and other people. The weekly session was carried out for six weeks, while the marathon group was carried out for twenty continuous hours. The group only stopped for prayers, meals and sleep. All the group session have the same aim and procedures to attain the treatment objectives. The content for each session is as followed: Session 1: Introduction; Session 2-3: exploring and understanding the bullying behaviour I; Session 4-8: The implication of the bullying behaviour II; Session 9; Relaxation Exercises; Session 10: Cognitive re-construction and Session 11: Closure.

**Table 3.1a:** Distribution of Form Two Subjects According to Groups

Category	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
Weekly Group	3	5	8
Marathon Group	5	3	8
Controlled Group	6	2	8
Total	14	10	24

**Table 3.1b:** Distribution of Form Four Subjects According to Group

Category	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
Weekly Group	5	3	8
Marathon Group	4	4	8
Controlled Group	5	3	8
Total	14	10	24

## RESULTS

The analysis of the pre-treatment data shows that both the treatment groups and controlled group have no significant differences on all the four variables before going through the group counselling.

The form two subjects *ANOVA* test value for bullying behaviour:  $F(2, 23) = 3.036$ , ( $p > .05$ ); empathy  $F(2, 23) = .851$ , ( $p > .05$ ); aggressiveness  $F(2, 23) = 1.285$ , ( $p > .05$ ); and self-esteem  $F(2, 23) = .849$ , ( $p > .05$ ). Whereas the form four subjects *ANOVA* test value for bullying behaviour variables is at  $F(2, 23) = .462$ , ( $p > .05$ ); and self-esteem  $F(2, 23) = .599$ , ( $p > .05$ ).

### **The Effects of Experiment on the Bullying Behaviour, Empathy, Aggressiveness and Self-esteem Among the Subjects.**

The analysis shows that there is a significant treatment effect for the experimental group on three dependent variables. The form two subjects *Mancova* test value for bullying behavior variables at  $F(2, 23) = 3.940$ , ( $p < .05$ ); empathy  $F(2, 23) = 17.520$ , ( $p < .05$ ); aggressiveness  $F(2, 23) = 5.080$ , ( $p < .05$ ); and self-esteem  $F(2, 23) = .637$ , ( $P < .05$ ). Whereas the form four subjects *Mancova* test for bullying behavior variables is at  $F(2, 23) = 3.916$ , ( $p < .05$ ), empathy  $F(2, 23) = 4.608$ , ( $p > .05$ ); and aggressiveness  $F(2, 23) = 3.734$ , ( $p < .05$ ). There is no significant treatment effect for self-esteem  $F(2, 23) = .426$ , ( $p > .05$ ). The result of the analysis using *Post Hoc-Tukey* test shows that the weekly group counselling is more effective compared to the marathon group counselling in reducing the score of all the variables both of the Form Two Subjects and Form Four Subjects (except for the self-esteem variable, because there was a significant different effect on the treatment group).

### **The Interaction Effect Between the Treatment Factor and the Sex Factor**

The interaction effect between the treatment factor and the sex factor for the form two subjects on all variables treated that is the Bullying Behaviour, empathy, aggressiveness and the self-esteem is also not significant at the value of  $F(2, 23) = .337$ , ( $p > .05$ ),  $F(2, 23) = 1.925$ , ( $p > .05$ ),  $F(2, 23) = .561$ , ( $p > .05$ ), and  $F(2, 23) = 1.575$ , ( $p ? .05$ ), respectively. This means that only the treatment factor of group counselling has an effect on the bullying behavior score. The analysis also shows that the differences in the score for bullying behavior is not affected by the sex factor or its interaction with the treatment factor. The result of the analysis using the *Post Hoc-Tukey* test shows that the weekly group counselling is more effective compared to the marathon group counselling in reducing the score of the bullying behavior, the empathy, the aggressiveness and the self-esteem of the Form Two subjects.

The interaction effect between the treatment factor and the sex factor for the form four subjects on all variables treated that is the Bullying Behaviour, empathy, aggressiveness and the self-esteem is also not significant at the value of  $F(2, 23) = 2.545$ , ( $p > .05$ ),  $F(2, 23) = .545$ , ( $p > .05$ ),  $F(2, 23) = 2.058$ , ( $p > .05$ ), and  $F(2, 23) = .776$ , ( $p > .05$ ), respectively. This means that only the treatment factor of group counselling has an effect on the bullying behavior score. The analysis also shows that the differences in the score for bullying behavior is not affected by the sex factor or its interaction with the treatment factor. The result of the analysis using the *Post Hoc-Tukey* test shows that the weekly group counselling is more effective compared to the marathon group counselling in reducing the score of the bullying behavior, the empathy, the aggressiveness and the self-esteem of the Form Two subjects.

This means that the treatment factor of the group counselling has an effect on the changes in the Bullying Behaviour, the Empathy, the Aggressiveness and the Self-esteem score. It also shows that treatment factor do not able to change the self-esteem of the form four subjects. The result of the analysis also point out that the changes in all the score has no relation to the sex factor or its interaction with treatment factor. The result of the analysis using the *Post Hoc-Tukey* test shows that weekly group counselling is more effective in reducing the Bullying Behaviour, Empathy, Aggressiveness and Self-esteem of all the subjects (except for the self-esteem variable of the form four subjects) compared to the marathon group counselling and the controlled group.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The Cognitive Behaviour Approach shows that a treatment to reduce aggressive bullying behavior is effectively performed by Group Counselling. Beside that this approach also effectively develops the empathy and self-esteem of the form two subjects. The exploration level at the early part of the treatment helps the aggressive bullies to understand the types and the reasons or causes of the behavior. This understanding combined with exercise in social skills, that is through role play, relaxation training, and cognitive restructuring, will help the research subjects in modifying their negative thoughts and emotions as well as understanding self and other people's feeling which will then develop their emotional empathy, thus lead to effective reduction of aggressive bullying behavior.



## **The effect of Weekly and Marathon Group Counselling Treatments on Bullying Behaviour and Aggressiveness**

Weekly group is identified as more effective than marathon group on the two variables of bullying behavior and aggressiveness. The weekly group was conducted twice a week for six weeks, while the marathon group went through the counselling session for 22 hours continuously. According to Ellis (1996) the Cognitive Behaviour therapy will be effective if conducted at least for six weeks so that the group members will have the chance to carry out exercises given by the facilitators as homework. This opportunity is not available in the Marathon Group homework. The treatment carried out in this research showed that bullying behavior can be reduced significantly using the Cognitive Behaviour's Group Counselling approach, which included role play, relaxation training, and cognitive restructuring.

Through the counselling sessions, the group members were encouraged to explore their thoughts, emotions and bullying behavior in stages. At the exploration stage, the group members started by carrying out self-exposure activities. They shared past experiences with the group. The discussion gradually tied to the 'bullying behaviour' theme. Through the exploration, the group members stated that they started to understand the thought, emotions and the bullying behavior they practiced previously. This caused the subjects to be aware of themselves and others as individuals. It is important for each group member to experience this awareness and to share it with the others in the group. The sharing of experience will prevent inferior feeling and build confidence, which will then encouraged the members to be more open in their interaction, getting feedbacks, and sharing their experience in depth and personal.

The exploration resulted in understanding and awareness of the aggressive bullying behavior that they practiced. The learning through explanation about the bullying behavior at this initial stage enabled the group members to understand their behavior problems and the factors that caused them. This will provide an opportunity for the group members to correct their negative way of thinking and furthermore give them a chance to learn and understand other people's feelings. This treatment definitely showed a significant decrease of the bullying behavior compared to the controlled group that had not gone through the same stages in the treatment.

## **The Implication of the Research**

This research on the aggressive bully behaviour and the counselling treatment will contribute to the past researches. A research in the form of outcome research such as this one will directly bring the research in counselling to a higher level. Through the experiment Group Counselling, the effect can be evaluated and the result can be used as evidence of the effectiveness and advantage of the counselling services to the clients should be apparent.

This research also shows that the bullying behaviour problem will lessen when the bully was given understanding of self and to correct their erroneous way of thinking using specific techniques. Conducive and therapeutic environment to acceptance among the group members will create a good interaction setting and promote the process of learning. The treatment techniques and the conducive environment will not only effective in lessening the aggressive bullying behaviour, but it is also able to develop emotional empathy and self-esteem, and lessen the aggressiveness traits.

The School's Counselling Service Unit is more practical in designing and carrying out programmes to identify and rehabilitate students with aggressive bullying behaviour in school. However this research does not limit the sex factor in order to enrich the group. There is a possibility that the variety in composition affect the effectiveness of the treatment. Therefore, in order to make sure of the effectiveness of the treatment in future researchers, it is proposed that the composition of the group limited and the effectiveness of each group evaluated. Ethnic factor should also be included as a controlled variable. This research's subject only consist of the Malays (the majority ethnic group in Malaysia). This research is not able to make generalization on the effectiveness of the treatment on other ethnic groups such as Chinese and Indian. Therefore, it is suggested that future research involves the other ethnic groups so that the composition of the group members will have ethnic variation.

## **CONCLUSION**

Various programmes to manage and reduce the cases of students' misconduct had been carried out. Many techniques that involved the students, parents, teachers, and the school's officials had also been conducted to form a policy and to create a harmonious school environment. However, this research proposed an alternative program to manage the aggressive bullying behaviour. It is found out that the group counselling can be used to treat the problem.

The research shows that the technique is effective in the context of the rural area secondary schools in Malaysia. The research also point out that the school counsellors have the opportunity to explore the bully phenomenon in school. They should play their role in research to know all the needs and experiences of the students in school so that these can be translated into counselling programmes that will bring about changes.

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