



## **Development of a cognitive-behavioral theory-based group counseling guide to enhance middle school students' understanding of bullying in Gorontalo**

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### **ABSTRACT**

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Bullying at the junior high school level undermines students' emotional well-being, peer relationships, and academic performance, thereby demanding a preventive counseling protocol that is both structured and culturally responsive. This study aimed to develop and evaluate a CBT-based group counseling manual designed to strengthen students' anti-bullying literacy and assertive responses, while also providing an operational guide for school counselors. A modified research and development (R&D) design was employed, consisting of seven sequential stages: needs analysis, manual design, expert validation, revision, individual counselor pilot testing, small-scale field trials, and final refinement. Participants included 12 school counselors and 24 eighth-grade students. The evaluation combined pre-post comparisons with structured narrative feedback to assess feasibility, contextual relevance, and learning outcomes across cognitive, emotional, and moral domains. Findings indicated that the manual was judged feasible and contextually appropriate for the school setting. Compared to pre-intervention, students demonstrated significant improvements in cognitive understanding, emotional empathy, and moral reasoning regarding bullying; they also reported enhanced abilities to identify irrational thoughts and adopt assertive responses to intimidating behaviors. Counselors highlighted the clarity of session steps, the appropriateness of the language, and the potential for cross-school adaptation as strengths supporting its practical use in school counseling services. The final product provides an evidence-based, ready-to-use resource for bullying prevention in Indonesian junior high schools and offers a foundation for larger-scale controlled trials and the development of digital adaptations.

**Contribution/Originality:** This study develops and validates a culturally adapted CBT-based group counseling manual for bullying prevention in Indonesian junior high schools. Integrating cognitive, emotional, and moral development, it offers a practical, research-based tool for school counselors to implement effective interventions. The manual's originality lies in its unique moral reasoning integration.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Bullying remains a persistent challenge across educational systems worldwide and is especially salient in junior high school, a developmental period marked by rapid social, emotional, and moral change. Its manifestations verbal, physical, relational, and digital carry lasting consequences for psychological well-being, academic attainment, and social integration among those targeted (Halliday, Taylor, Turnbull, & Gregory, 2023). Importantly, the

phenomenon extends beyond victims: involvement by perpetrators and bystanders reshapes peer dynamics and reinforces power asymmetries within school ecologies (Andrews, Cillessen, Craig, Dane, & Volk, 2023; Gotdiner & Gumpel, 2024).

In Indonesia, national initiatives promoting inclusive and child-friendly schooling have been introduced, yet implementation on the ground remains uneven. School counseling services often rely on generic, reactive modules that isolate victims or perpetrators without addressing the broader peer milieu. The limited availability of culturally grounded, evidence-based preventive tools constrains students' capacity to understand bullying in a nuanced and reflective manner (Bäker, Wilke, Eilts, & von Düring, 2023; Bayne, Ocampo, & Wilson, 2023).

These conditions underscore the need for a practical counseling guide anchored in a well-substantiated psychological framework and adapted to local school cultures. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) offers a strong candidate: it targets maladaptive cognitions, strengthens emotional regulation, and cultivates prosocial behavior patterns (Silveus, Schmit, Oliveira, & Hughes, 2023). Core CBT strategies cognitive restructuring, role-play, and guided reflection translate readily to group formats in school settings, where peer processes can be leveraged to build empathy and collective awareness (Corey, 2016; Zhu, Luke, Liu, & Wang, 2023). Yet despite the increasing number of school-based applications, explicitly junior-high-focused CBT interventions aligned with Indonesia's educational system are still scarce.

The present study addresses this gap by developing and evaluating a CBT-based group counseling manual tailored for Indonesian junior high schools. The manual is preventive and participatory by design, developmentally appropriate for early adolescents, and operationalized so that school counselors can deliver structured sessions with fidelity. Substantively, it seeks to strengthen students' anti-bullying literacy and assertive action while advancing understanding across cognitive, affective, and moral domains.

The conceptual contribution lies in integrating these domains into a coherent school-counseling protocol. Rather than centering solely on behavior change among victims or perpetrators, the approach foregrounds peer influence, empathic responding, and social responsibility as interconnected levers of change (Aalsma et al., 2023). In parallel, it prioritizes positive moral development as a foundation for durable attitude and behavior shifts (Silveus et al., 2023).

Methodologically, the study employs a structured research-and-development pathway encompassing needs analysis, product design, expert validation, iterative revision, pilot implementation with counselors and students, and broader effectiveness evaluation. Through this process, the manual is positioned not only as a practical tool for routine school counseling but also as an intervention capable of helping students identify and modify irrational beliefs related to bullying, deepen empathy, and exercise assertive, prosocial responses. Taken together, the work advances a culturally responsive, evidence-oriented model that can be scaled within Indonesian schools and adapted to comparable educational contexts.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to develop and evaluate a CBT-based group counseling manual that is culturally relevant, developmentally appropriate, and practically applicable for bullying prevention in Indonesian junior high schools.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. *Nature and Impact of Bullying in Adolescence*

Bullying is typically defined as repeated aggression that causes physical or psychological harm and is maintained by a power imbalance (Olweus, 1993). During adolescence, bullying includes verbal abuse, exclusion, physical violence, and digital harassment (Nickerson, Jenkins, Yang, & Harrison, 2024). Junior high school students, navigating identity formation and social hierarchy, are particularly vulnerable. Their still-developing socioemotional skills can reinforce aggressive behaviors, solidifying roles that become difficult to shift (Strohmeier, Stefanek, & Yanagida, 2024). Prolonged exposure leads to adverse outcomes anxiety, depression, academic difficulties, and increased suicidality indicating an urgent need for school-based interventions (Bäker et al., 2023; Halliday et al., 2023).

Bullying, therefore, must be viewed beyond isolated behavior; it reflects ongoing socioemotional dynamics that influence how adolescents perceive peers, authority, and themselves. Understanding bullying requires addressing its intersection with emotional development, moral reasoning, and the struggle for peer acceptance.

### ***2.2. School-Based Preventive Approaches and the Role of Counseling Services***

Evidence shows that whole-school, preventive strategies are more sustainable than punitive responses, especially when they build empathy and equip students with social-emotional skills to counter aggression (Bayne et al., 2023). Yet in practice, schools in Indonesia often apply generalized and reactive interventions, failing to address bullying's cultural and contextual dimensions. Most resources treat bullies and victims separately, lacking a systemic approach.

School counselors are ideally positioned to implement preventive interventions but often lack structured, culturally relevant materials. When equipped with evidence-based tools, counselors can create safe, reflective spaces for students to explore values, practice perspective-taking, and develop prosocial competencies. The absence of counselor-ready, theoretically grounded manuals has created a practical gap in Indonesian school systems.

### ***2.3. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in Group Counseling***

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), initially developed in clinical psychology, has been adapted for educational settings to target irrational thoughts and foster emotional regulation and behavioral change (Beck, 2021; Dryden, 2021). In group counseling, CBT leverages peer interaction through role-play, modeling, and group reflection to simulate real-life social scenarios (Corey, 2016). This structure allows students to engage with each other, enhancing learning through observation and shared experience.

Empirical studies support CBT's effectiveness in reducing aggression and increasing empathy in adolescents (Cabell, Burgess, Brown, & Medina, 2024; Silveus et al., 2023). Moreover, CBT's structured format makes it ideal for manualized delivery in schools, especially when sessions are culturally adapted to students' lived experiences.

### ***2.4. Research Gap and Contribution of the Present Study***

Despite the promise of CBT, few interventions in Indonesia have translated these principles into structured, preventive counseling manuals targeting bullying. Most existing programs underutilize the integration of cognitive, emotional, and moral dimensions and neglect sociocultural tailoring.

This study addresses the gap by developing and validating a CBT-based group counseling manual tailored for Indonesian junior high schools. The manual merges psychoeducation, emotional reflection, and moral reasoning, using culturally relevant scenarios and language. Through expert validation, pilot testing, and school-based trials, the manual demonstrates both theoretical and practical value. It offers a replicable framework for school counselors to foster reflective, empathetic, and ethically informed student behavior, ultimately contributing to safer and more inclusive school environments.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a modified research-and-development (R&D) design adapted from the Borg and Gall model to guide the iterative creation and evaluation of a CBT-based group counseling manual for schools (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 2003). The workflow comprised seven structured stages: (1) needs analysis, (2) initial product design, (3) expert validation, (4) product revision, (5) individual try-out with counselors, (6) larger field testing with students, and (7) final refinement. Each stage generated actionable feedback for the subsequent phase to ensure developmental fit and contextual relevance.

### *3.1. Population and Sample*

The study was conducted in junior high schools in Gorontalo, Indonesia. The target population included students and school counselors. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling to ensure direct relevance to school counseling practice. For the field trial, 24 eighth-grade students completed a sequence of six structured group counseling sessions. Twelve school counselors participated in validation and the individual try-out phase, while three domain experts contributed to the expert review.

Data collection took place at State Junior High School 4 Gorontalo and State Junior High School 6 Gorontalo, with coordination and ethical clearance facilitated by the Faculty of Education, Universitas Negeri Gorontalo.

### *3.2. Data Collection Procedures*

A mixed set of quantitative and qualitative techniques was used. A pretest–posttest design assessed changes in students' understanding of bullying. The test consisted of 20 multiple-choice and scenario-based items designed to capture three domains cognitive, emotional, and moral. Qualitative information was gathered from expert review sheets, counselor assessment forms, and students' narrative feedback to illuminate feasibility, clarity, and contextual appropriateness.

### *3.3. Expert Validation*

During validation, three experts in guidance and counseling independently rated the manual on relevance, structural coherence, linguistic clarity, and practical applicability. Consolidated feedback from this stage informed targeted revisions to the content, sequence, and wording of session materials before any implementation with counselors or students.

### *3.4. Individual Try-Out*

Twelve school counselors engaged in a structured simulation of the group sessions. They documented practical considerations including ease of use, timing, and implementation barriers and provided written recommendations for improving instructions, prompts, and activity flow in the manual.

### *3.5. Field Trial*

The field trial spanned three weeks and comprised six CBT-informed group sessions. Activities operationalized key CBT principles, including cognitive restructuring, role-play, and guided group reflection. Students completed the same instrument immediately before and after the sequence to capture shifts in cognitive, emotional, and moral understanding related to bullying. In parallel, their reflective narratives were analyzed to trace perceived changes in empathy, perspective-taking, and assertiveness.

### *3.6. Data Analysis*

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean scores, standard deviations, and percentage gain to summarize pretest–posttest change. Qualitative data from expert, counselor, and student sources underwent inductive thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns that spoke to feasibility, clarity, and perceived impact.

### *3.7. Final Product Refinement*

Findings from all phases were integrated to refine the counseling manual for cultural relevance and developmental appropriateness for junior high school students in Indonesia. The finalized product is intended for routine use by school counselors to strengthen students' understanding of bullying and to foster empathy, perspective-taking, and assertive responding within group counseling contexts (Gall et al., 2003).

## 4. RESULTS

This section reports outcomes across the seven R&D stages: (1) needs identification, (2) initial product design, (3) expert validation, (4) revision based on expert feedback, (5) individual try-out with counselors, (6) field testing and effectiveness evaluation, and (7) final product refinement.

### 4.1. Needs Identification

Open-ended questionnaires and interviews with six school counselors, complemented by a focus group with junior high students, converged on the same diagnosis: schools lacked a structured CBT-based group counseling manual capable of addressing bullying comprehensively. Counselors emphasized the need for an evidence-informed guide rooted in cognitive-behavioral principles, whereas students described limited, and sometimes fragmented, understandings of bullying. Together, these inputs established clear design specifications for the manual (e.g., session clarity, cultural relevance, feasible timing).

### 4.2. Initial Product Design

The CBT group counseling manual was drafted to strengthen students' understanding of bullying across cognitive, emotional, and moral domains. It was organized as a six-session core sequence with a planned post-counseling follow-up, mapping standard group-counseling phases pre-counseling, initial, transition, working, ending, and post-counseling onto CBT tasks (psychoeducation, cognitive restructuring, behavioral rehearsal, guided reflection). Pre-counseling covered needs assessment and scheduling, with goals and procedures communicated upfront. The initial phase built rapport and established a group contract and participation norms. The transition phase moved from orientation to deeper self-exploration (self-disclosure, cognitive framing). The working phase delivered the core CBT interventions targeting irrational beliefs and prosocial behavior. The ending phase consolidated learning and documented commitments to action, and the post-counseling phase enabled reflective follow-up where needed. **Table 1** presents the outline of the initial CBT group counseling manual, detailing the session themes, CBT focuses, group-counseling phases, and key activities implemented in each stage. This structure ensures that cognitive, emotional, and moral aspects are systematically developed throughout the intervention process.

**Table 1.** Outline of the initial CBT group counseling manual.

Session	Theme	CBT focus	Group-counseling phase	Key activities
1	Recognizing bullying and self	Psychoeducation	Initial	Icebreakers; group contract; ABC (thought-feeling-behavior) model
2	Identifying irrational thoughts	Cognitive restructuring	Transition	Downward-arrow technique; belief analysis; bullying case discussion
3	Building adaptive beliefs	Mindset formation	Working	Acting as if; alternative-thought drills; self-talk practice
4	Planning assertive responses	Shaping & behavior planning	Working	Social simulations; response planning; values appraisal
5	Problem-solving & self-control	Problem solving	Working	Decision practice; five-step problem solving; emotion regulation.
6	Reflection & commitment	Reinforcement & self-evaluation	Ending	Reflective journaling; learning share-out; behavior-change contract.
7	Evaluation & follow-up	Progress monitoring	Post-counseling	Behavior observation; optional booster/individual counseling.

### 4.3. Expert Validation

Three experts' guidance and counseling, Indonesian language, and manual design rated the draft using a structured rubric covering CBT-group relevance, clarity of language, service structure/phases, and practical

feasibility. Mean scores indicated a “Highly Valid” profile (overall 91.5). Feedback prioritized fine-tuning session timing and adding locally resonant case examples. **Table 2** presents the summary of expert evaluations, showing that all assessed aspects, including the relevance of CBT techniques, clarity of language, service structure, and practical feasibility, achieved “Highly Valid” ratings. This result confirms the manual’s strong content validity and suitability for practical application in school settings.

**Table 2.** Expert evaluation summary.

Aspect	Mean score	Category
Relevance of CBT group techniques	91	Highly valid
Clarity of descriptions and language rules	90	Highly valid
Service structure and phases	92	Highly valid
Practical feasibility	90	Highly valid
Overall mean	91.5	Highly valid

#### 4.4. Revisions Based on Expert Feedback

Revisions focused on (a) streamlining technical terms for clarity, (b) adjusting time allocations per session to match school timetables, and (c) embedding culturally salient examples to improve transfer from session activities to everyday peer interactions.

#### 4.5. Individual Try-Out

Three school counselors piloted the revised manual via structured simulations and completed evaluation forms. The average rating was 87.3% (“Very Good”), with positive remarks on activity clarity, session flow, and contextual fit. Practical notes (e.g., pacing during role-plays, prompts for quieter students) informed minor wording and sequencing adjustments.

#### 4.6. Field Test and Effectiveness

Twenty-four eighth-grade students participated in the CBT group sequence. Pretest–posttest results indicated significant gains across cognitive, emotional, and moral understanding of bullying. Mean scores increased from 63.4 (moderate) to 84.6 (high), a raw gain of +21.2 points approximately +33.4% relative to baseline. Qualitative reflections corroborated these trends: students reported greater empathy, sharpened moral awareness, and stronger confidence in responding assertively to bullying. **Table 3** presents the comparison of students’ understanding before and after the counseling intervention, clearly showing substantial improvement from the pretest to the posttest phase. These results demonstrate the effectiveness of the CBT-based group counseling manual in enhancing students’ comprehension and moral reasoning related to bullying behavior.

**Table 3.** Student understanding before and after counseling.

Assessment	Mean score	Category
Pretest	63.4	Moderate
Posttest	84.6	High
Gain	+21.2	Substantial

Illustrative excerpts include.

“I now realize teasing can be bullying when it happens repeatedly. I will be more careful with my words and help friends when I see something wrong.” (W.S1)

“The group counseling helped change how I view kinds of bullying that can harm others and myself.” (W.S2).

#### 4.7. Final Product Refinement

The final product comprised a revised facilitator guide and a student activity booklet. Revisions integrated all empirical and practical insights: clearer session instructions, calibrated timing, and structured reflection components. The manual is positioned for wider deployment in junior high school counseling, with the explicit aim of strengthening understanding, empathy, and moral reasoning about bullying while providing counselors with a culturally responsive, session-by-session protocol.

### 5. DISCUSSION

The present study developed and evaluated a CBT-based group counseling manual intended to deepen junior high school students' understanding of bullying. While the results demonstrated validity, practical utility, and effectiveness in enhancing cognitive, emotional, and moral competencies, critical limitations must be acknowledged upfront to contextualize these findings. Specifically, the relatively small sample size and geographically restricted setting in Gorontalo may constrain the generalizability of the outcomes. These factors highlight the need for cautious interpretation and suggest that broader replication is necessary to strengthen external validity.

Despite these constraints, the observed outcomes remain notable. Across development and testing phases, the intervention coheres with the theoretical premise that modifying maladaptive cognitions can precipitate adaptive emotional and behavioral change (Beck, 2021). This confirms the relevance of CBT in school-based contexts, particularly when culturally adapted to the Indonesian educational environment.

#### 5.1. Effectiveness of the CBT Manual

Substantial pre-post gains indicate that a sequence combining psychoeducation, guided reflection, and behavioral rehearsal equips students to recognize irrational beliefs, adopt empathic perspectives, and plan assertive responses. This pattern aligns with evidence that CBT enhances adolescents' social-emotional competencies (Silveus et al., 2023). Notably, the group format amplified these effects by leveraging peer dynamics: students practiced skills in a setting that mirrors everyday interactions, benefiting from modeling, role-play, and reciprocal feedback characteristic of group work (Corey, 2016).

Recent literature confirms the broad utility of CBT-based group counseling in improving adolescents' cognitive, emotional, and moral understanding of bullying. Such interventions effectively reduce psychological symptoms and emotional dysregulation while building resilience and adaptive coping skills (Bani et al., 2024). Importantly, group settings allow adolescents to engage with complex social issues, promoting critical consciousness and emotional well-being (Beasley, Ieva, & Steen, 2024).

Evidence also underscores the potential of CBT to promote positive identity formation and increase self-esteem, both of which are vital for adolescents exposed to bullying (Beasley et al., 2024). When implemented with culturally affirming strategies, these interventions become more attuned to the lived experiences of diverse student populations, thereby enriching moral comprehension and improving social dynamics within schools (Bryan, Kim, & Liu, 2023; Copeland et al., 2024).

Peer dynamics serve as a key mechanism of CBT's effectiveness in bullying prevention. Role-play and modeling offer students the opportunity to practice social and emotional skills in realistic yet controlled environments (Chance, Villares, Brigman, & Mariani, 2023). These activities promote perspective-taking and help students internalize prosocial behaviors. Observing peers navigate bullying scenarios enables social learning and encourages behavior change through identification and imitation (Beasley et al., 2024).

In addition, group reflection sessions offer a space for shared meaning-making and emotional processing. These discussions allow students to develop emotional competence, challenge maladaptive thoughts, and co-construct adaptive responses to bullying incidents. As students openly reflect on their experiences and perspectives, they foster

a sense of collective empathy and responsibility (Ermis-Demirtas & Rizzo, 2024; Olsen, Betters-Bubon, & Edirmanasinghe, 2024).

The small-group format also supports psychological safety and the development of self-efficacy. This dynamic enables students to engage more confidently in discussions about moral reasoning and assertive action. Such environments cultivate mutual respect and deepen moral insight, equipping adolescents with the tools necessary to navigate social conflict and support peers in distress (Beasley et al., 2024).

### *5.2. Contribution to School-Based Bullying Prevention*

Within school systems that often rely on reactive, individual-focused responses, this study's CBT-based counseling manual offers a preventive and counselor-ready protocol that is both structured and adaptable to local educational norms. Its explicit integration of moral reasoning and empathy training speaks directly to character-building aims frequently pursued in school counseling and resonates with reports underscoring the value of such emphases for shaping prosocial conduct (Cabell et al., 2024). The active engagement of counselors in validation and refinement further strengthens contextual fit and supports sustainable implementation.

Structured counseling manuals have been shown to enhance bullying prevention in culturally diverse middle and junior high school environments by providing systematic, evidence-based strategies. These resources help counselors navigate complex classroom dynamics using culturally responsive practices tailored to student populations (Ellington, Dunbar, & Wachter-Morris, 2023). Role-play and modeling, key components of this manual, not only promote peer engagement but also help modify bullying behaviors and build empathic understanding among students (Midgett, Peck, & Doumas, 2025).

Moreover, structured manuals empower school counselors by clearly delineating their roles within comprehensive prevention frameworks. This clarity enables consistent implementation while also allowing flexibility for contextual adaptation. Integrating these resources into counseling programs promotes proactive climate-building through school-wide engagement and continuous reflective practice (Lee et al., 2024). Additionally, they serve as training tools for broader school personnel, enabling educators to better comprehend and respond to the cultural complexities their students face (Muzacz, Houston, Renwick, & Carew, 2023).

The inclusion of empathy training and moral reasoning in school-based CBT interventions has been linked to increased emotional intelligence and ethical awareness. These components are instrumental in reducing bullying behaviors and fostering healthier peer interactions. Role-playing scenarios allow students to experience moral dilemmas and practice assertive responses in a supportive environment, reinforcing their ability to behave prosocially in real-life contexts (Midgett et al., 2025).

Research on bystander intervention further supports the integration of these elements. Programs that emphasize empathy and social accountability have been associated with a greater willingness among students to intervene when witnessing bullying. This collective responsibility strengthens group cohesion and builds a school culture that actively resists aggression (Midgett et al., 2025).

### *5.3. Implications for Practice and Theory*

Practically, the CBT-based group counseling manual developed in this study offers a structured, stepwise curriculum that can be integrated into routine school counseling schedules. This marks a strategic shift from reactive case handling to preventive, group-centered approaches that treat the group setting as a learning laboratory. Such a shift allows for more consistent delivery of interventions and supports broader school-wide mental health goals (Ellington et al., 2023; Kitching & Pondl, 2025).

The use of counselor-ready CBT manuals empowers school counselors to implement tiered, developmentally appropriate interventions that accommodate diverse student needs. These manuals serve not only as instructional guides but also as tools for embedding social-emotional learning (SEL) within the fabric of daily school life. The

inclusion of activities such as role-play, guided reflection, and modeling ensures that students develop core competencies like empathy, assertiveness, and emotional regulation key components for preventing bullying (Olsen et al., 2024; Pincus, Kurz, Rock, & Hines, 2025).

From a theoretical standpoint, this work advances the integration of CBT principles with character education in addressing school-based aggression. It demonstrates how cognitive restructuring, when combined with empathic perspective-taking and morally oriented decision-making, forms a coherent pathway from belief change to behavioral transformation (Beck, 2021; Cabell et al., 2024; Silveus et al., 2023).

Furthermore, embedding empathy training and moral reasoning within CBT interventions contributes to a deeper understanding of the social-emotional context of bullying. These elements promote ethical reflection and foster prosocial behavior, aligning with literature that emphasizes emotional intelligence as a protective factor in peer conflict resolution (O'Donnell et al., 2025).

The integration of mental health promotion within school-based CBT programs also aligns with a broader vision of education that values psychological well-being alongside academic achievement. Such a dual focus helps reduce bullying and improves overall school climate. When teachers and administrators perceive counseling as central to student development, it reinforces a system-wide commitment to early intervention and ongoing mental health support (O'Donnell et al., 2025; Saunders, Cogburn, & Nguyen, 2024).

Equally important is the cultural responsiveness of these interventions. Manuals adapted to reflect local values, language, and community dynamics ensure that counseling strategies resonate with students from diverse backgrounds. This responsiveness not only increases engagement but also enhances the effectiveness of interventions aimed at both behavior change and emotional development (Joo, Kim, & Gilfillan, 2023).

## 6. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The CBT-based group counseling manual significantly strengthened students' understanding of bullying across cognitive, emotional, and moral domains and proved feasible for use by school counselors following a structured R&D process. Students showed clear improvements in identifying bullying, empathizing with peers, and planning assertive, prosocial responses gains consistent with core CBT techniques such as reframing, role-play, and guided reflection (Beck, 2021; Corey, 2016; Silveus et al., 2023).

The manual's structured development process and strong counselor involvement ensured its practical feasibility and contextual relevance. As an evidence-informed, culturally adapted resource, it contributes a novel framework for integrating CBT and moral development into routine school counseling. In doing so, it offers a replicable model for preventive interventions in Indonesian schools and a foundation for future digital or hybrid formats (Cabell et al., 2024).

## 7. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The CBT-based group counseling manual improved students' understanding of bullying across cognitive, emotional, and moral domains. Students showed gains in identifying bullying, expressing empathy, and planning prosocial responses aligned with core CBT techniques like reframing, role-play, and reflection (Beck, 2021; Corey, 2016; Silveus et al., 2023). Developed through a structured R&D process with counselor input, the manual is contextually relevant and practically feasible. Its culturally responsive, developmentally appropriate format bridges theory and application in school settings.

This study contributes a replicable CBT framework that integrates empathy and moral reasoning, supporting both behavioral change and peer support. The inclusion of peer dynamics modeling, role-play, and reflection enhances emotional learning and long-term impact (Cabell et al., 2024). In short, the manual offers a scalable, evidence-based tool that strengthens school counseling practices and promotes inclusive school climates. It also sets the stage for future digital or hybrid adaptations.

However, several limitations warrant attention. First, the study was situated in a single geographic region with modest samples of students and counselors, constraining generalizability. Second, outcomes were assessed over a short horizon; longer-term behavioral maintenance was not evaluated. Third, effectiveness may depend on counselor motivation and skill, which likely vary across schools. Finally, the absence of a control group limits causal inference. Future research should recruit larger and more diverse samples, employ experimental or quasi-experimental designs with control conditions, and conduct longitudinal follow-ups to examine durability of effects.

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**Transparency:** The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

**Competing Interests:** The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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