



The Effectiveness of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in Helping Victims of Bullying

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ABSTRACT

Bullying remains a serious school-based problem because it harms victims' emotional well-being, academic engagement, and social functioning. Although cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) has been widely recognized as a promising intervention for bullying victims, recent evidence synthesizing its effectiveness across studies remains limited. Therefore, this study aimed to analyze the effectiveness of CBT in helping victims of bullying through a systematic literature review. This study employed a Systematic Literature Review design. The review instrument consisted of keyword-based search procedures and inclusion–exclusion criteria used to identify relevant studies. Data were collected from Google Search and Google Scholar using the keywords “cognitive behavioral therapy” and “bullying victims,” with the review limited to full-text journal articles published between 2021 and 2025. From 207 identified records, five eligible articles were selected for in-depth review. The data were analyzed through screening, evaluation, and comparison of similarities and differences across the selected studies. The findings show that CBT is effective in reducing anxiety, depression, trauma-related reactions, and low self-esteem among bullying victims, while improving self-confidence, emotional control, social skills, and positive thinking. CBT was found to be applicable in individual and group formats, including techniques such as thought stopping. These findings imply that CBT is not only useful as a therapeutic intervention but also has potential as a preventive school-based approach for building safer and more supportive learning environments.

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INTRODUCTION

Bullying in schools is a serious problem that can negatively impact students' mental and emotional health (Rohmani & Aini, 2024). This phenomenon not only affects the victims but can also create a hostile and detrimental learning environment for the school community (Syifa et al., 2025). Bullying is generally referred to as intimidation, extortion, and exclusion, and is carried out systematically using power (Wijaya, 2022).

This behavior includes verbal violence such as spreading rumors, physical violence such as kicking and biting, and cyberbullying through electronic media. All forms of bullying, both physical and verbal, will cause physical and psychological harm to the victim (Karyanti & Aminudin, 2019). The negative impacts of bullying include fear or reluctance to attend school. Victims of bullying often have unpleasant memories, such as experiencing verbal abuse or physical pain. This causes victims to avoid the situation, reluctance and fear of going to places where they experienced bullying. Bullying is not only detrimental to a person's physical health.

Bullying also impacts the psychological well-being of victims, such as excessive fear, which can also affect their focus on the educational material being studied (Rohmani & Aini, 2024). Students who experience bullying often experience depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem, which can affect adulthood (Nur, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial to identify and implement effective interventions to address these issues. Cognitive behavioral therapy is an effective strategy in reducing bullying incidents and increasing students' self-esteem (Rahmananda et al., 2025). Cognitive behavioral therapy focuses on improving negative thought patterns and perceptions (Syifa et al., 2025).

Cognitive behavioral therapy is a cognitive and behavioral intervention based on scientific therapeutic principles. The goal of cognitive intervention is to change maladaptive cognitions, self-perceptions, or beliefs. Cognitive behavioral therapy is an intervention strategy that focuses on issues derived from cognitive theory and learning theory (Aini, 2019). Cognitive behavioral therapy is based on the idea that negative perceptions can negatively impact behavior, while positive perceptions, feelings, and actions are closely related (Rizky & Karneli, 2022).

Cognitive behavioral therapy emphasizes that psychological problems are not solely caused by past experiences but also by an individual's ability to recognize and respond to current experiences. This type of therapy is active, structured, and collaborative, meaning the therapist and client work together to achieve clear goals. Individuals are instructed to analyze negative thoughts, understand the relationship between their thoughts and feelings, and attempt to change them using various techniques, such as cognitive restructuring, relaxation techniques, and positive behavioral activation (Rahmatullah et al., 2025).

Additionally, cognitive behavioral therapy uses behavioral techniques, in which individuals are instructed to confront situations that cause fear or anxiety. This teaches individuals that their problems are not unsolvable and will ultimately worsen

if left unaddressed. Cognitive behavioral therapy teaches that changes within a person are not solely influenced by their external environment; these changes also come from within themselves through more rational and healthy ways of thinking. Cognitive behavioral therapy is not simply a type of psychological intervention, but rather a way of life that helps people think positively, cope with stress, and improve their mental health comprehensively (Rahmadini & Alfian, 2024). Based on the above background, the author is interested in conducting a literature review regarding the effectiveness of cognitive behavioral therapy in helping victims of bullying.

METHOD

This study used the Systematic Literature Review method, which, according to (Cahyono et al, 2019), is a research approach aimed at compiling previous research findings and analyzing the findings from paragraphs within the text. The literature review focuses not only on reading existing literature but also on analyzing, evaluating, and critiquing previous research on a specific topic (Andriani, 2022). The primary intervention evaluated in this literature review is the effectiveness of cognitive behavioral therapy in helping victims of bullying. The literature search was conducted using search engines such as Google, Google Scholar, or Google Scholar using keywords that matched the search terms.

The primary focus of this study was journal articles published in the last five years, from 2021 to 2025, accessible in full-text PDF format in Indonesia. These articles were then evaluated to meet established inclusion and exclusion criteria. The articles were then analyzed and evaluated, considering similarities and differences between the articles.

A search using Google Scholar and Google Search with the keywords "cognitive behavioral therapy, bullying victims" yielded approximately 207 relevant articles and journals. Of these, 147 articles were reviewed, with 60 excluded. Nine of the 30 articles reviewed in full-text format did not meet the requirements and were therefore excluded. Finally, five full-text articles that met the criteria were reviewed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the literature review process, five articles were selected for analysis. The articles will explain their contents with the aim of drawing conclusions. It is hoped that the results of this literature review will serve as a basis for research to address the issue of bullying.

Table 1. Reviewed articles

Number	Name	Article Title	Year	Sample	Conclusion
1	Winda Ratna Wulan	Literature Review: Psychological Treatment for	2025	Literature review of 16 journals that	The study results showed that CBT was effective in

		Adolescents with Bullying Using Cognitive Behavior Therapy		examine adolescent victims of bullying	increasing self-esteem, reducing anxiety, and changing negative thought patterns in bullying victims to more positive ones. CBT is also recommended for implementation in school counseling services.
2	Charis Rizqi Pradana & Lisa Maharani	Implementation of CBT Theory Using Thought Stopping Technique to Address the Impact of Bullying in Islamic Boarding Schools	2024	Students at Islamic boarding schools who experienced trauma due to bullying (qualitative case study)	The Thought Stopping technique in CBT has been shown to be effective in stopping negative thoughts and reducing anxiety in victims of bullying. Victims have shown increased self-confidence and emotional control.
3	Pamela Aprillida Ammarandatu & Erlina Listyanti	Reducing Anxiety with Cognitive Behavior Therapy in Bullying Victims	2023	One teenager victim of bullying (individual case study with psychological assessment BAI, SSCT, WISC)	CBT effectively reduces social anxiety and transforms irrational thoughts into rational ones. Anxiety scores decreased by 22 points after each therapy session.
4	Siska Damaiyanti & Marizki Putri	Group Cognitive Behavior Therapy to Reduce Anxiety Levels in Bullying Victims in Elementary Schools	2021	70 elementary school students who were victims of bullying (35 experimental group and 35 control group)	Group CBT significantly reduced anxiety levels in bullying victims ($p < 0.05$). Victims showed increased self-confidence and social skills after therapy.
5	Setyorini	Application of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in Addressing	2023	High school adolescents (literature study and application in guidance and	CBT effectively helps victims of bullying manage their emotions, reduce anxiety, increase self-confidence, and

		Bullying Problems in Adolescents		counseling services)	develop positive social behaviors. CBT can be implemented preventively and curatively in school guidance and counseling services.
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The literature reviewed by Wulan (2025) focuses on empirical research findings from several studies that used cognitive behavioral therapy to address bullying in adolescents. The results show that cognitive behavioral therapy is consistently effective in reducing the emotional impact of bullying. Through cognitive restructuring, victims learn to identify negative perceptions arising from bullying, such as feelings of worthlessness, fear of socializing, or a tendency to blame themselves. Cognitive behavioral therapy helps them replace these perceptions with more realistic and positive ones, thereby increasing their self-confidence and self-esteem. Furthermore, cognitive behavioral therapy helps victims develop a desire to re-engage in social interactions. Based on various research findings by Wulan (2025), it was found that after cognitive behavioral therapy interventions, there was a decrease in anxiety and an increase in self-esteem, both individually and collectively. This indicates that cognitive behavioral therapy is not only effective in clinical contexts but can also be adapted to educational contexts through school counseling services.

Furthermore, research conducted by Maharani & Pradana (2024) highlighted the use of a specific cognitive behavioral therapy technique, thought stopping, in the context of bullying. The research findings showed that this technique successfully reduced recurring negative thoughts that often arise after experiencing bullying. Victims often initially experience fear and shame, and have difficulty interacting with peers. By using the phrase "stop negative thinking" and replacing it with positive affirmations, counselors have demonstrated increased self-confidence, initiated resocialization, and the ability to control emotions in social situations. Therefore, research confirms that cognitive behavioral therapy, specifically through the thought-stopping technique, is effective in reducing cognitive and emotional damage caused by bullying because it provides effective self-management mechanisms for children. Therefore, this research is a case study, so its effectiveness has not been thoroughly researched.

This is in line with a study conducted by Ammarandatu (2023) that tested the effectiveness of cognitive behavioral therapy in reducing bullying using individual counseling. Based on the results of psychological instruments such as the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) and the Sacks Sentence Completion Test (SSCT), there was a significant decrease in anxiety scores after cognitive behavioral therapy. During the therapy process, victims of bullying are helped to understand the

relationship between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that arise after experiencing bullying. Through cognitive restructuring, counselors help victims replace irrational statements such as "everyone hates me" or "I don't deserve friends" with more adaptive beliefs. As a result, victims exhibit positive changes such as decreased social anxiety, increased adaptability, and increased self-confidence. This provides strong empirical evidence that cognitive behavioral therapy is effective in addressing bullying, especially when implemented as individual therapy with a professional counselor.

A study by Siska (2021) examined the use of group cognitive behavioral therapy to address bullying in elementary schools. Through a quasi-experimental design, it was found that group cognitive behavioral therapy significantly reduced bullying rates among students, with a significance level of $p < 0.05$. The intervention was conducted over several sessions that supported group discussions, positive exercises, and adaptive simulations. The group cognitive behavioral therapy approach provided consistent emotional and experiential support, which enhanced the cognitive and social effects of the therapy. Pre- and post-intervention measurements showed that children's social interaction skills improved and their anxiety levels decreased significantly. This suggests that cognitive behavioral therapy is also effective when used in group settings, particularly in schools, as it can increase empathy and a sense of camaraderie among victims of bullying.

According to research by Setyorini (2023), cognitive behavioral therapy is not only effective in addressing bullying but also helps victims and those around them understand the psychological damage caused by bullying. For victims, cognitive behavioral therapy increases self-confidence, reduces anxiety, and helps them develop a more positive outlook on themselves and their social environment. Through cognitive restructuring, students learn to deal with bullying more rationally and avoid internalizing negative stigma. Furthermore, the behavioral approach in cognitive behavioral therapy encourages them to engage in social activities.

CONCLUSIONS

This systematic literature review concludes that cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is an effective intervention for helping victims of bullying overcome both emotional and social difficulties. Across the five selected studies, CBT consistently showed positive outcomes in reducing anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, while also improving self-confidence, emotional control, social skills, and more positive thinking patterns. These findings indicate that CBT can be applied flexibly through individual counseling, group therapy, and specific techniques such as thought stopping. The implication of this study is that CBT should be considered not only as a curative psychological intervention, but also as a practical approach that can be integrated into school counseling services to promote safer and more

supportive learning environments.

However, this review also has several limitations. The analysis was based on only five eligible articles published between 2021 and 2025, and the included studies varied in design, sample size, and intervention format, with some relying on case studies and small-scale contexts. As a result, the generalizability of the findings remains limited. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples, apply stronger experimental or longitudinal designs, and examine the long-term effectiveness of CBT for bullying victims in different educational settings. Further studies should also explore how CBT can be systematically combined with school-based prevention programs so that its benefits can extend beyond recovery toward the prevention of bullying itself.

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