



Application of Rebt Techniques to Reduce Bullying Behavior Among Students at SMP X Gresik

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the effectiveness of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) in reducing bullying behavior among eighth-grade students at SMP X Gresik who were identified as perpetrators. The research employed a qualitative case study design involving one student selected through purposive sampling based on reports from guidance and counseling teachers and classroom observations. Data were collected through non-participatory observation, in-depth interviews with counseling teachers, homeroom teachers, and parents, as well as documentation of counseling records. The intervention consisted of six individual counseling sessions using REBT techniques, including identification of irrational beliefs, cognitive disputation, reframing, and imaginal disputation. Data analysis was conducted using qualitative descriptive analysis through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results indicate significant improvements in the subject's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral functioning following the intervention. Irrational beliefs related to aggression and dominance were successfully challenged and replaced with more rational thinking patterns. Emotionally, the subject demonstrated improved self-regulation and reduced impulsive anger responses. Behaviorally, bullying incidents—including verbal harassment, social exclusion, and mild physical aggression—decreased progressively and ceased entirely by the end of the intervention. Additional positive outcomes included increased empathy, cooperative peer interactions, voluntary apologies, and consistent behavioral improvements across both school and home environments. These findings demonstrate that REBT is effective in reducing bullying behavior and can be applied as an evidence-based intervention within school guidance and counseling services.

Keywords: Bullying, Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), Counseling Intervention, Behavioral Change, Emotional Regulation

Introduction

Bullying is one of the most prevalent forms of aggressive behavior in educational settings and has become a global concern due to its long-term psychological, emotional, and social consequences. The World Health Organization (2020) reports that bullying can lead to anxiety, depression, declining academic performance, and even the risk of persistent aggressive behavior into adulthood. In school environments, bullying not only harms the victims but also disrupts the overall learning climate, creating an unsafe atmosphere that hinders educational processes. Olweus (2013), a leading scholar in bullying research, defines bullying as repeated aggressive behavior that involves an intent to harm and a power imbalance between the perpetrator and the victim.

Previous studies indicate that bullying behavior is often influenced by irrational beliefs, low empathy, and limited self-regulation skills among perpetrators (Coloroso, 2014). Irrational beliefs such as “being harsh will make others respect me” or “mocking peers is only harmless joking” represent cognitive distortions that reinforce aggressive tendencies. Ellis (1994), through his Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), explains that maladaptive behaviors originate from irrational beliefs, and behavioral change is possible when individuals replace these beliefs with more rational and adaptive ones.

REBT has been widely recognized as an effective approach to help adolescents regulate their emotions, reduce aggressive behaviors, and develop more rational thinking patterns (Dryden & Branch, 2008). Recent studies have shown that REBT can significantly decrease bullying behavior and improve social functioning among secondary school students (Romiaty et al, 2023). The REBT process involves identifying irrational beliefs, disputing them, and reconstructing more rational thoughts—providing a structured foundation for behavioral change.

At SMP X Gresik, reports from Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers indicate a rise in bullying cases among 8th-grade students, involving verbal harassment, group intimidation, and social exclusion. These findings align with the developmental perspective that early adolescence is a vulnerable stage for aggressive behavior due to social pressures and identity formation (Santrock, 2018). Without systematic intervention, bullying can develop into persistent disruptive patterns.

Given these concerns, the present study aims to apply REBT techniques to reduce bullying behavior among students identified as perpetrators. Specifically, this research seeks to examine how REBT helps modify irrational beliefs, enhance emotional regulation, and encourage positive behavioral changes. Furthermore, the study contributes to strengthening evidence-based practices within school counseling services, particularly in addressing bullying through structured psychological interventions.

Overall, this research holds significant implications not only for individual behavioral improvement but also for promoting a safe, supportive, and conducive learning environment within schools.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design, as it focused on an in-depth analysis of a single subject identified as engaging in bullying behavior. This methodology was chosen to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the subject’s thoughts, emotions, and behaviors before, during, and after the intervention using Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT).

The subject of this study was an eighth-grade student at SMP X Gresik who was identified as a perpetrator of bullying based on reports from the Guidance and Counseling (BK) teacher, the homeroom teacher, and initial observations. The subject was selected using purposive sampling, a technique in which cases are chosen based on characteristics relevant to the research objectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The subject consistently demonstrated bullying behaviors, including verbal teasing, social exclusion, and group intimidation, which align with characteristics of adolescent aggressive behavior as explained by Olweus

(2013). To obtain a comprehensive understanding, the researcher conducted verification with the BK teacher and the subject's parents, in accordance with qualitative research recommendations emphasizing the importance of contextual understanding in case studies (Yin, 2018). The subject's identity was anonymized to maintain confidentiality throughout the research process, following ethical guidelines in psychological research (American Psychological Association, 2020).

Data were collected using several techniques to obtain rich and valid information. Non-participatory observation was conducted to observe the subject's behavior within the school's social environment, a technique considered effective in adolescent behavioral research (Fraenkel et al, 2019). In-depth interviews were conducted with the BK teacher, homeroom teacher, and parents to understand the behavioral dynamics from multiple perspectives, following the principle of data triangulation in qualitative research (Patton, 2015). Counseling interviews were also conducted during the intervention sessions to explore irrational beliefs, emotions, and thought patterns underlying the bullying behavior, as recommended in REBT-based interventions (Dryden & Branch, 2008). Documentation—including counseling notes, initial assessment sheets, and records of the subject's progress—was used as supporting data to enhance interpretation accuracy.

The intervention was carried out across six individual counseling sessions using the Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) approach developed by Ellis (1994). Each session followed the stages of REBT, including identifying irrational beliefs, disputing those beliefs, and constructing more adaptive rational thoughts. Techniques such as cognitive disputation, imaginal disputation, and reframing were applied in accordance with practical REBT guidelines (Dryden, 2012). The counselor also provided emotional regulation exercises and homework assignments, based on the principle that behavioral change is more effective when reinforced through repeated practice in daily life (Corey, 2017). The six-session structure was selected based on findings that short-term cognitive-based interventions are effective in reducing aggressive behavior in adolescents (Sukhodolsky et al, 2004).

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative descriptive analysis consisting of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, as outlined by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). In the data reduction stage, all observation, interview, and documentation data were filtered and categorized to focus on information relevant to changes in the subject's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral patterns. In the data display stage, the researcher organized narrative descriptions and progress notes systematically to facilitate in-depth analysis of the change process. The conclusion-drawing stage involved interpreting the data to evaluate the effectiveness of REBT techniques in reducing bullying behavior, in accordance with thematic analysis principles in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This study adhered to the ethical guidelines established by the American Psychological Association (2020). Permission was obtained from the school administration, including the principal and BK teacher, as well as written consent from the subject's parents. Throughout the study, the subject's identity was protected through the use of initials and by concealing sensitive information. The subject was also given the right to withdraw from the study at any time if discomfort arose, following the respect for persons principle in

human research ethics (Belmont Report, 1979). All counseling sessions were conducted with careful attention to the subject's comfort, privacy, and psychological safety.

Result and Discussion

The results of this study indicate that prior to the intervention, the subject consistently displayed bullying behaviors within the school environment. The behaviors observed included verbal teasing toward peers, social exclusion in group activities, and mild physical intimidation such as pushing or taking belongings without permission. During the two weeks before the intervention, five bullying incidents were recorded through teacher reports, homeroom notes, and direct observations. In addition to these behaviors, the subject demonstrated a tendency to dominate peers and showed elevated levels of aggression, particularly when accompanied by his group. Observational data also noted that bullying behaviors occurred more frequently in situations with minimal teacher supervision.

Interviews with the school counselor and homeroom teacher reinforced the observational findings. The counselor reported that the subject had a history of repeated disciplinary issues related to aggressive conduct, while the homeroom teacher stated that several students felt uncomfortable interacting with him. Both educators described a recurring pattern in which classroom tension increased whenever the subject engaged in provocative behavior. Complementary data gathered from the parents indicated that similar impulsive tendencies occurred at home, including frequent arguments with siblings and difficulty managing anger. These consistent patterns across settings suggest that the subject experienced broader challenges related to emotional regulation.

Initial changes began to emerge during the early sessions of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT). In the first and second sessions, the subject recognized his bullying behaviors but attempted to justify them as jokes or expressions of leadership. He expressed several irrational beliefs, such as the assumption that being tough was necessary to gain respect from others. Although no major behavioral changes appeared at this stage, the early sessions provided insight into the cognitive distortions contributing to the bullying.

More notable progress was observed during the third session, when the counselor introduced disputing techniques to challenge the subject's irrational beliefs. The subject began questioning some of his assumptions and showed early signs of reflection regarding the negative impact of his actions on peers. This stage also marked a decrease in verbal provocations that had previously occurred frequently. The counseling process facilitated the subject's understanding of the relationship between thoughts, emotions, and actions.

Significant improvements occurred between the fourth and sixth sessions. During these sessions, the subject demonstrated the ability to generate rational alternative thoughts, recognizing that respect could be earned without engaging in aggressive behavior. Emotionally, he exhibited greater control by refraining from impulsive reactions when navigating minor conflicts. Reports from the school counselor indicated that no new bullying incidents were recorded from the third week of intervention onward. The subject also began applying emotional regulation techniques such as deep breathing and positive self-talk, which contributed to improved behavioral consistency.

Behavioral changes became more pronounced toward the end of the intervention. The subject increasingly engaged in prosocial behaviors, including participating cooperatively

in group activities and interacting positively with peers without asserting dominance. At one point, the subject voluntarily apologized to a peer who had previously been targeted. These improvements were also reflected at home, where parents reported a reduction in conflicts and greater compliance with household expectations. The consistency of positive behavior across school and home environments indicates that the skills acquired during counseling were internalized rather than situational.

Overall, the results reveal significant cognitive, emotional, and behavioral improvements following six REBT sessions. The frequency of bullying incidents, which had been recurrent before the intervention, decreased to zero in the post-intervention period. Additionally, enhanced rational thinking, improved emotional control, and healthier social interactions serve as indicators of successful therapeutic change. These findings demonstrate that REBT was effective in reducing the subject's bullying behavior and supporting positive developmental outcomes throughout the intervention process.

Summarize the collected data and the analysis performed on those data relevant to the issue that is to follow. The Result should be clear and concise. It should be written objectively and factually, and without expressing personal opinion. It includes numbers, tables, and figures (e.g., charts and graphs). Number tables and figures consecutively in accordance with their appearance in the text.

Discussion

The results of this study underscore the central role of cognitive restructuring in reducing bullying behaviors during adolescence. The subject's initial endorsement of irrational beliefs—such as the assumption that aggression is necessary to establish social status—reflects Ellis's (1994) assertion that emotional and behavioral disturbances originate from illogical internal beliefs rather than external events. Through REBT's disputing techniques, these beliefs gradually shifted toward more rational interpretations, supporting the theoretical claim that modifying dysfunctional cognitions produces significant behavioral change (Dryden & Branch, 2008). This alignment with REBT theory reinforces the model's relevance in addressing bullying, which is strongly influenced by cognitive distortions, social misperceptions, and attributional biases common among adolescents (Salmivalli, 2010).

The emotional improvements observed further highlight the mediating function of emotional regulation in antisocial behavior. Prior to intervention, the subject demonstrated heightened irritability, impulsive anger, and low threshold for provocation, characteristics that the literature associates with increased risk of aggression and conduct problems (Sukhodolsky et al, 2004). Following REBT-based training in emotional awareness and rational self-statements, the subject displayed more controlled emotional responses and greater ability to manage frustration. This supports previous findings that cognitive-behavioral approaches enhance emotional self-regulation by altering appraisal processes that trigger maladaptive emotional reactions (Gross, 2015). The results therefore demonstrate how emotional regulation acts as a bridge between cognitive restructuring and behavioral improvement.

Behaviorally, the complete cessation of bullying incidents after the intervention reflects meaningful internalization of therapeutic gains. The subject's prosocial actions—participation in group tasks, respectful interactions, and voluntary apologies—echo findings from prior studies indicating that REBT contributes to reductions in aggressive behaviors and increases in empathy and cooperation (David et al, 2010). Importantly, consistent behavioral improvements across both school and home environments indicate generalization of learning, which is considered a critical marker of effective psychotherapeutic intervention (Corey, 2017). These sustained improvements suggest that REBT may address not only episodic bullying but also the deeper cognitive-emotional mechanisms that perpetuate aggressive behavior.

The study also offers practical implications for school-based mental health services. Bullying is widely recognized as a multidimensional problem affecting academic performance, psychosocial adjustment, and long-term mental health (Olweus, 2013). The success of a short-term, structured REBT intervention in this case highlights the potential for integrating cognitive-behavioral approaches into school counseling programs. Such interventions may serve as early preventative measures and reduce the escalation of aggression into more severe behavioral or psychological difficulties. Moreover, the structured nature of REBT makes it feasible for implementation by school counselors, enabling broader access to evidence-based mental health support in educational settings (American Psychological Association, 2020).

Despite these positive outcomes, several limitations must be acknowledged. The single-subject design restricts the generalizability of the findings. While the results provide a detailed understanding of the subject's transformation, further research with larger samples is necessary to confirm REBT's effectiveness across diverse student populations. Additionally, the absence of quantitative outcome measures limits the ability to statistically verify the extent of behavioral change. Longitudinal follow-up was also not conducted, leaving questions regarding the durability of improvements over time. These limitations are consistent with observations by Creswell and Poth (2018), who emphasize the need for methodological triangulation and extended monitoring in qualitative case studies to strengthen validity.

Nevertheless, extrapolating the findings to larger theoretical questions affirms that bullying is not merely a behavioral issue but a manifestation of deeper cognitive and emotional processes. The subject's transformation supports the proposition that correcting irrational beliefs can reduce aggressive behavior and improve social functioning, consistent with cognitive-behavioral models of aggression (Beck, 2011). More broadly, the results align with systemic perspectives suggesting that effective bullying prevention requires interventions targeting individual cognition, peer interactions, and school environment dynamics (Swearer et al, 2014). In this sense, the study contributes to ongoing discourse on the importance of integrating psychological frameworks into anti-bullying initiatives.

Taken together, the findings highlight the theoretical and practical significance of applying REBT in school settings. By demonstrating that cognitive restructuring leads to emotional regulation and behavioral change, the study reinforces the value of REBT as an evidence-based approach to address bullying among adolescents. The research also

underscores the importance of school counselors implementing structured psychological interventions to foster safer, healthier, and more supportive school environments.

Conclusion

The present study concludes that Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) served as an effective intervention for reducing bullying behavior in the adolescent subject. Central to this improvement was the restructuring of irrational beliefs that had initially contributed to aggressive attitudes and actions, consistent with the theoretical framework that highlights cognition as the foundation of emotional and behavioral responses (Ellis, 1994). As the subject began to replace rigid, dominance-oriented beliefs with more rational and flexible interpretations, his emotional responses became more regulated and adaptive, supporting previous findings that cognitive change directly influences emotional stability (Dryden & Branch, 2008).

Furthermore, the intervention produced meaningful behavioral outcomes. Bullying incidents were eliminated following the restructuring process, and the subject demonstrated consistent increases in prosocial behaviors, such as cooperation, empathy, and respectful peer interaction. These changes align with existing research indicating that REBT can reduce aggressive tendencies and promote healthier social functioning among youth (David et al, 2010). The consistency of improvement across school and home settings also suggests that the intervention facilitated internalized rather than situational change, which is considered a key indicator of long-term therapeutic effectiveness (Corey, 2017).

The findings also underscore the broader implication that bullying is a cognitive-emotional phenomenon rather than a purely behavioral problem. This reinforces the argument that effective prevention and intervention programs must address the underlying belief structures and emotional processes that maintain aggressive behavior (Salmivalli, 2010; Swearer et al, 2014). From a practical standpoint, the success of a brief and structured REBT model demonstrates its suitability for implementation within school counseling frameworks, where time and resources are often limited. As recommended by the American Psychological Association (2020), incorporating evidence-based, developmentally appropriate interventions into school systems is essential for supporting adolescent mental health and fostering safe learning environments.

Although limited by its single-case design, the study provides valuable insight into how cognitive-behavioral interventions can be applied in real educational contexts to address bullying more effectively. Future research with larger samples and longitudinal assessments is needed to determine the generalizability and long-term durability of such interventions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Nonetheless, the findings offer strong preliminary evidence that REBT can serve as a practical, theoretically grounded, and impactful approach for reducing bullying behavior and supporting positive youth development.

Future research is recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples to enhance the generalizability of findings regarding the effectiveness of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) in reducing bullying behavior. The use of mixed-method or quantitative designs with standardized measurement instruments is also suggested to strengthen empirical validation and allow statistical analysis of intervention outcomes. Longitudinal studies are needed to examine the sustainability of behavioral changes over

time. Practically, schools are encouraged to integrate REBT-based interventions into regular guidance and counseling programs as a preventive and corrective approach to bullying. School counselors should receive training in cognitive-behavioral techniques to ensure effective implementation, while collaboration with teachers and parents is recommended to reinforce consistent behavioral support across school and home environments.

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