

Loneliness as a predictor of Self Harm Tendency in Junior High School Students

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Abstract. This study aims to determine the relationship between loneliness and self-harm tendencies in Junior high school X students in Padang City. The background of this study departs from the phenomenon of increasing self-harm tendencies in adolescents, one of the contributing factors is loneliness. This study uses quantitative methods with a correlational approach. The subjects of this study were 221 students who were selected using random sampling technique. The data collection tools in this study used two scales, namely the Loneliness scale prepared based on Russel's (1996) theory with a reliability of 0.829 and the self-harm tendency scale based on Walsh's (2006) theory with a reliability of 0.843. Data analysis used Spearman correlation Based on the categorization results, it was found that the level of loneliness of SMP X Padang City students was mostly at a moderate level with a percentage of (66.5%), while the level of self-harm tendency was also dominant at a moderate level with a percentage of (51.1%). With a Spearman correlation value of loneliness variables and self-harm tendencies of -0.018 with a significance of 0.795. These results show that there is no relationship between loneliness and the tendency to self-harm in students of Junior high school X in Padang City.

Keywords: Loneliness, self harm, Junior High School, Students

1 Introduction

Junior high school students are in a developmental phase characterized by identity exploration, emotional instability, and personality formation (Diananda, 2019). Erikson (1968) described this stage as *identity vs. role confusion*, where failure to establish a clear identity may result in alienation, confusion, and emotional distress. During this period,

adolescents highly depend on sufficient social support from both family and peers. One of the most common issues faced by adolescents is loneliness. Loneliness occurs when there is a gap between the social relationships an individual expects and the reality they experience (Peplau & Perlman in Irham et al., 2022). Even if adolescents have many friends, they may still feel lonely if they do not find meaningful emotional closeness. This condition often leads to feelings of emptiness, rejection, and difficulty in finding someone to confide in.

Unresolved loneliness can generate negative emotions such as sadness, disappointment, or frustration. For adolescents who lack healthy coping mechanisms, this condition may develop into maladaptive behaviors, one of which is self-harm (Azizah, 2013; Karimah, 2021). Self-harm is defined as deliberately injuring oneself to relieve emotional distress without suicidal intent (Klonsky et al., 2011). This behavior is often performed as an attempt to transfer psychological pain into physical pain.

Research indicates that loneliness plays a significant role in adolescents' tendency to engage in self-harm. Adolescents who feel lonely are more vulnerable to high emotional distress, perceive a lack of support, and may channel these feelings into self-injury (Sutton, 2007; Ronka, 2013). Several studies in Indonesia have also found high prevalence rates of loneliness and self-harm among adolescents (Sagita & Hermawan, 2020; Lubis & Yudhaningrum, 2020).

This phenomenon is also reflected in several cases of mass self-harm among junior high school students in Indonesia, such as in Bengkulu, Bali, and Yogyakarta, where dozens of students injured themselves simultaneously due to loneliness, bullying, or family problems (Ratnaningsih et al., 2023; Kusuma et al., 2024). A YouGov Omnibus survey further reported that 36.9% of Indonesians had engaged in self-harm, with the highest prevalence among adolescents. These findings highlight self-harm as a serious issue among school-aged youth.

Preliminary interviews with the school counselor at SMP X Padang revealed that some students engaged in self-injury, socially withdrew, and expressed feelings of loneliness due to insufficient support from both family and peers. Several students reported that self-harm provided temporary relief or a sense of freedom from problems. This aligns with previous findings that self-harm is often a way to escape from negative emotions triggered by loneliness (Mutiar Insani & Ina Savira, 2022).

An initial survey of 30 students at SMP X Padang further confirmed this phenomenon. The results showed that 60% felt they had no close friends, 80% struggled to find someone to talk to, 40% had engaged in self-harm when frustrated, and 86% had thought about doing so even if they had not acted on it. These findings indicate that loneliness and self-harm tendencies are real and pressing issues among students at SMP X Padang.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationship between loneliness and self-harm tendencies in junior high school students in Padang.

2. Research Methods

This study employed a **quantitative method with a correlational approach**, aiming to examine the relationship between loneliness and self-harm tendencies among junior high school students. A correlational design was considered appropriate because it enables researchers to identify the direction and strength of the association between the two psychological variables without experimental manipulation. The subjects of this study consisted of **221 students** from SMP X Padang, selected using a **random sampling technique** to ensure that each participant had an equal chance of being included in the study. The inclusion criteria were students within the age range of 12–15 years who were actively enrolled during the academic year and willing to participate voluntarily.

Data collection was carried out using two psychometric instruments. The first was the **Loneliness Scale**, developed based on Russell's (1996) theory, which measures subjective experiences of social isolation and dissatisfaction with interpersonal relationships. This instrument demonstrated a reliability coefficient of **0.829**, indicating high internal consistency. The second instrument was the **Self-Harm Tendency Scale**, constructed based on Walsh's (2006) theory, which evaluates behavioral inclinations toward non-suicidal self-injury. This scale had a reliability coefficient of **0.843**, also within the acceptable range for psychological research.

Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained, and informed consent was secured from both students and their guardians. Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The questionnaires were distributed and completed in classroom settings under the supervision of the researcher and the school counselor to provide clarification if needed.

The data analysis technique used in this study was the Spearman rank-order correlation test, as the data did not meet the assumptions of normality required for Pearson correlation. Spearman's rho was applied to examine the association between loneliness and self-harm tendencies among students.

In addition to correlation analysis, categorization procedures were conducted to classify students into different levels of loneliness and self-harm tendencies (e.g., low, moderate, and high categories). This was done to provide a clearer description of the prevalence and intensity of these psychological phenomena within the study population.

Through this methodology, the study sought to provide both statistical evidence and practical insights into how loneliness relates to self-harm tendencies among junior high school students in Padang.

3. Result and Discussion

The results of this study indicate that there is no significant relationship between loneliness and self-harm tendencies among students of SMP X Padang. Statistical analysis using the Spearman rank-order correlation test showed that the correlation coefficient did not reach the level of significance, suggesting that variations in loneliness scores were not associated with variations in self-harm tendency scores.

Categorization results further demonstrated that both loneliness and self-harm tendencies were generally in the moderate category. This means that although students reported a noticeable degree of loneliness and a moderate level of self-harm tendencies, these two variables did not statistically influence one another within the study population.

The findings of this study revealed that there was no significant relationship between loneliness and self-harm tendencies among junior high school students at SMP X Padang. This result suggests that while both loneliness and self-harm tendencies were found to be at a moderate level, they do not appear to be directly associated in this population.

One possible explanation is the presence of protective factors that may buffer the impact of loneliness on self-harming behavior. Adolescents in Padang generally grow up in a cultural context where family cohesion and social ties are emphasized. Strong family bonds, peer support, and religious practices may provide students with alternative coping mechanisms that reduce the likelihood of translating feelings of loneliness into self-harm behaviors.

Another consideration is that self-harm is a complex and multifactorial behavior, often influenced not only by loneliness but also by other psychological variables such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, or difficulties in emotional regulation. It is possible that these factors play a more dominant role in shaping self-harm tendencies than loneliness itself.

Furthermore, the moderate level of loneliness reported by the students may not have reached a threshold that is sufficient to trigger harmful behaviors. In other words, while students may experience feelings of isolation, these feelings may still be manageable and do not necessarily escalate into self-harm.

Cultural and religious values may also play a significant role. In the Indonesian context, particularly in Padang where religious identity and community values are strong, self-harm behaviors may be perceived negatively and thus less likely to be expressed openly, even among those experiencing loneliness. This could explain why loneliness does not directly correlate with self-harm in the current study.

Lastly, methodological aspects such as self-report measures might also have influenced the findings. Students may underreport their self-harm tendencies due to fear of stigma or misunderstanding of the questionnaire items. This could have reduced the observable association between the two variables.

Taken together, the absence of a significant relationship in this study highlights the importance of considering contextual, cultural, and individual protective factors when examining the link between loneliness and self-harm. Future research should include

additional variables such as coping strategies, parental support, religiosity, and emotional regulation to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics underlying self-harm in adolescents.

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