

Peer counseling training and self-motivation at Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta

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ABSTRACT

Adolescents were vulnerable to mental health challenges as they faced new environments and experiences. To support them, the Student and Alumni Development Institute at Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta provided counseling services through peer counselors. However, these peer counselors experienced low motivation and limited confidence due to the absence of structured training. This study aimed to examine the effect of peer counseling training on the self-motivation of peer counselors. A quantitative study with a quasi-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design was conducted involving 31 peer counselors selected through total sampling. The intervention consisted of structured peer counseling training sessions. Data were analyzed using the Wilcoxon test. Results showed a significant increase in self-motivation scores after training compared to before ($p = 0.043$). These findings indicated that peer counseling training effectively improved the self-motivation of peer counselors. Strengthening training programs may enhance the quality of counseling services provided to adolescents through peer-based interventions.

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INTRODUCTION

Mental health is a condition that enables individuals to develop optimally in all aspects, physical, intellectual, and emotional, while remaining aligned with the development of others, thereby allowing them to interact effectively with their surrounding environment, which is also a basic human need (Fakhriyani Vidya, 2019; World Health Organisation, 2022). University students have been reported as having a higher risk compared to the general population (Chen & Lucock, 2022; Julius et al., 2024). Research on mental health has shown that most university students experience poor mental health (Astutik & Dewi, 2022; Norhasmi et al., 2021), with 88% suffering from depression, 77.9% experiencing eating disorders, 88.3% having bipolar disorder, and 95.4% experiencing anxiety disorders. In coping with mental health problems, 70.5% of students sought help from friends (Kaligis et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2025).

Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to mental health disorders because adolescence is a transitional period that requires them to face new environments and gain new experiences. However, studies in low-middle-income countries proved that resources for mental health are limited and counseling services are not regularly established at universities (Dessauvague et al., 2022). In Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, the Student and Alumni Development Institute (*Lembaga Pengembangan Kemahasiswaan dan Alumni, LPKA*), which is responsible for improving student welfare and health, has established a program to provide counseling services delivered by peer counselors.

Counselors must possess experience, high competence, integrity, and personal stability, as the personal qualities of counselors directly influence their effectiveness in assisting clients (Ahadiyah, 2017). However, several peer counselors at LPKA Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (UMY) have experienced difficulties with motivation and a lack of self-confidence in providing peer counseling, primarily because they had not yet received formal counseling training. Counseling training is designed to strengthen social psychology so that peer counselors can provide counseling independently and with confidence (Salmiati et al., 2018). Given the increasing demand for counseling, LPKA UMY needs to implement peer counselor training. Such training is expected to enhance the quality of counseling services and improve the motivation of peer counselors at LPKA UMY.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental design with a one-group pretest-posttest design. Respondents first completed a pretest (O1). After receiving the training intervention (X), they then completed a posttest (O2). The results of the two tests were compared to determine whether the training had an effect on the group.

$$O1 \rightarrow \text{---} \rightarrow (X) \rightarrow \text{---} \rightarrow O2$$

Description:

O1: Pretest score (before receiving the training)

X: Counseling training intervention

O2: Posttest score (after receiving the training)

The self-motivation scale for peer counselors consisted of 25 items, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.904 for reliability testing and $p < 0.05$ for validity testing. Scoring on the self-motivation instrument was based on a Likert model with four response options.

The study population comprised all peer counselors of the Student and Alumni Development Institute (LPKA) at Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, totaling 31 individuals. The sample was determined using a total sampling technique, resulting in 31 participants. Inclusion criteria were peer counselors registered at LPKA UMY, willing to participate as research respondents, and who had never previously attended counseling training. The exclusion criterion was peer counselors who did not fully participate in the training sessions. Data analysis employed the nonparametric Wilcoxon test, as the self-motivation scale used an ordinal measurement scale. Nonparametric analysis was selected due to the relatively small sample size ($n < 30$). Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used due to the ordinal nature of the self-motivation scale, which employed a Likert-type assessment, and the relatively small sample size ($n = 23$), rendering nonparametric analysis more suitable than parametric options like the paired t-test. Nevertheless, the study did not compute the effect size; hence, although the Wilcoxon test established a statistically significant difference, the extent of the training's impact on self-motivation was not measured. The study was conducted on March 9, 2024, at Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A total of eight respondents did not complete the questionnaires before and after the training, while 23 respondents completed them in full.

Sample Characteristics

The distribution of respondent characteristics by gender, faculty, and year of enrollment is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample characteristics

Characteristic	N	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	13	56.5
Female	10	43.5
Total	23	100
Faculty		
FPB	3	13.0
FAI	11	47.8
FISIP	1	4.3
FKIK	1	4.3
FISIPOL	1	4.3
Vocational Studies	1	4.3
Electrical Engineering	1	4.3
FEB	3	13.0
Law	1	4.3
Total	23	100
Year of Enrollment		
2020	2	8.7
2021	4	17.4
2022	17	73.9
Total	23	100

The sample characteristics showed that of the 23 respondents, 13 (56.5%) were male. Most respondents were from the Faculty of Islamic Studies (47.8%) and the majority were from the 2022 cohort (73.9%).

Univariate Analysis

The self-motivation scale was categorized into five levels: very low, low, moderate, high, and very high. The distribution of respondents based on peer counselor motivation at LPKA UMY in 2024 is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents by peer counselor motivation at LPKA UMY, 2024

Motivation Level	Pretest (N, %)	Posttest (N, %)
Very Low	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Low	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Moderate	2 (8.7)	0 (0.0)
High	18 (78.3)	18 (82.6)
Very High	3 (13.0)	5 (21.7)
Total	23 (100)	23 (100)

The findings indicated that no respondents fell into the very low or low categories. In the pretest, two respondents (8.7%) were in the moderate category, while none remained in this category after training. Eighteen respondents (78.3%) remained in the high category across pretest and posttest, while the number in the very high category increased from three (13.0%) to five (21.7%).

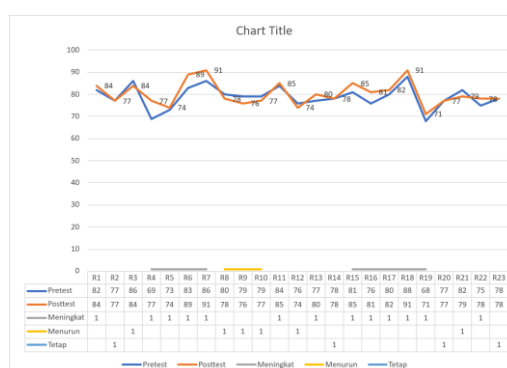


Figure 1. Motivation scores of respondents

Among the 23 respondents, 13 (56.5%) showed an increase in motivation scores between pretest and posttest, six (26.1%) showed a decrease, and four (17.4%) remained unchanged.

Bivariate Analysis

The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was applied to assess differences between pretest and posttest scores (Tri Mawartinah, 2020). Results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Wilcoxon test results	
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	Interpretation
0.043	H_0 accepted

The Wilcoxon test result of 0.043 ($p < 0.05$) indicated a significant difference in self-motivation scores of peer counselors before and after the training.

Qualitative Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used, with qualitative data serving to complement the primary quantitative analysis.

Understanding of Counseling

Thirteen respondents who demonstrated increased motivation scores also reported improved understanding of counseling (R1, R4, R5, R6, R7, R11, R13, R15, R16, R17, R18, R19, R22). One respondent stated: "Peer counseling is counseling conducted by a counselor of the same or similar age as the client."

Understanding of Counselor Attitudes

The same 13 respondents also reported enhanced awareness of counselor attitudes. They identified key attitudes such as "empathy, congruence, and unconditional acceptance."

Understanding of Counselor Skills

Respondents reported improved understanding of the essential skills of a counselor, including knowledge of mental health, empathy, congruence, non-discrimination, active listening, and both verbal and nonverbal communication.

The Wilcoxon test confirmed a significant improvement in self-motivation scores among peer counselors following training. This result is consistent with (Herfi Rahmawati et al., 2019; Hsu et al., 2025; Pandang & Umar, 2021), who found an increase in student motivation after counseling training. Prior to training, many peer counselors reported feeling unhappy, uninterested, embarrassed, and afraid. Following training, significant improvements were observed, and participants expressed enthusiasm when receiving and reading the counseling skills training module, which provided new knowledge and experience.

Thirteen respondents with increased motivation also demonstrated enhanced knowledge, consistent with findings from a community service program in 2023, in which peer counselors of the Student Executive Board (BEM) at UMY received training in theory, practice, and psychological first aid. The results showed improved self-efficacy, knowledge, and skills (Nurmaguphita & Sugiyanto, 2019; Song, 2024).

These findings align with Syafitri and Rahmah, who reported that most peer counselors displayed improved counseling skills such as empathy, attentive listening, and appropriate vocal intonation after training (Savira et al., 2021; Syafitri & Rahmah, 2021). Similarly, Yuliasari reported that before training, respondents lacked peer counseling skills and communication strategies. After training, counselors showed improvements in empathy, congruence, and unconditional acceptance (Yuliasari, 2020).

Respondents also highlighted that effective counseling required mastery of verbal and nonverbal communication, active listening, and emotional differentiation. This finding supports Mudis, who argued that peer counseling training increased confidence and persuasive communication skills, enabling peer counselors to become credible role models. Peer counselors derived four main benefits: improved interpersonal competence, mutual support through reciprocity, acquisition of relevant new knowledge, and social approval from peers they assisted (Huangfu et al., 2023; Mudis & Onyango, 2015; Xia et al., 2022).

Quantitatively, six respondents showed decreased motivation. The largest declines were noted in items 10, 13, and 19. Respondents reported that they tended to act only under supervision and often felt reluctant to complete burdensome tasks. This aligns with Rizqi's study on the effect of counseling training on peer counselor self-efficacy, which noted that declines could occur when counselors realized the demanding nature of the role and felt they had not yet achieved an ideal standard of competence (Arif Rizqi et al., 2017; Nisrina et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

Based on the study entitled "The Effect of Peer Counseling Training on Increasing Self-Motivation Among Peer Counselors at the Student and Alumni Development Institute of Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta," it can be concluded that peer counseling training effectively enhanced the self-motivation of peer counselors at LPKA UMY. The findings contribute to university policy by emphasizing the importance of integrating structured peer counseling training as a formal component of student mental health services. The results support the need for institutional policies that provide continuous supervision, mentoring, and collaboration between peer counselors, LPKA, and professional psychologists to maintain service quality. Moreover, the study highlights the policy implication of establishing a sustainable framework for peer counseling programs, ensuring that counseling knowledge and skills are consistently applied in practice, and that the mental health support system within the university is strengthened through ongoing evaluation and professional oversight.

With institutional support and standardized training modules, peer counseling training should be extended in other institutions and high schools to increase its advantages. Ethics and effective supervision need collaboration with professional counselors or psychologists. Regular evaluation and refresher programs help motivate and improve counselors. Educational institutions could also foster mental health awareness and eliminate stigma. Future research should compare and longitudinally study the program's long-term impact and adaptability in other educational situations. To further evaluate the program's success, self-efficacy, empathy, and peer support outcomes might be examined. Qualitative techniques are recommended to examine peer counselors' post-training experiences and issues.

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