

# The Relationship Between Peer Social Support and Assertiveness among of Adolescent Victims of Bullying

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## Abstract

Nowadays, bullying among adolescents, especially in the school environment, continues to show an increase, which has a major impact on the mental health of victims. One phenomenon that often appears in adolescent victims of bullying is low assertiveness, which is reflected in the tendency of victims to remain silent, unable to express their opinions, and not daring to defend their personal rights. One of the factors that affect assertiveness is the situation of the peer environment (peer social support). This study aims to describe the level of peer social support and assertiveness in adolescent victims of bullying, and analyze the relationship between the two. This study uses a quantitative method of correlational type. The population was 246 students of SMP Negeri 7 Padang aged 13–15 years (48.3% male and 51.7% female) who were identified as bullying victims. A sample of 152 students was taken by Stratified Random Sampling based on class strata. Data were collected using a peer social support questionnaire and a bullying victim assertiveness questionnaire, with sample items "Friends comfort me when I am belittled by others" and "I keep quiet when friends take my things without permission". The results of data analysis using the Pearson product moment technique, the results showed that peer social support and assertiveness were in the high category. Pearson correlation indicated a moderate positive association between peer social support and assertiveness,  $r = 0.462$ , 95% CI (0.40-0.59),  $0.000 < 0.001$ ,  $N = 152$ . There is a positive and significant relationship between peer social support and assertiveness of adolescent victims of bullying. The higher the peer social support, the higher the assertiveness of students who are victims of bullying.

**Keywords:** Adolescents, Bullying, Peer Social Support, Assertiveness



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## Introduction

Nowadays, violence among adolescents is increasing, one of which is bullying. Bullying is one of the social problems among adolescents, especially those that occur in the school environment. It causes adverse effects on physical, emotional, behavioral and psychosocial health among victims and may continue into adulthood (Pei, Ling, Huey, Gill & Hock, 2022). Bullying involves not only perpetrators but also victims who experience physical and psychological impacts. Adolescents who are victims of bullying often experience psychological distress, such as frustration, low self-esteem, depression, increased impulsivity, low self efficacy, hopelessness and even suicidal ideation (Susanti & Ubudiyah, 2025).

According to data from the Program for International Students Assessment (PISA) in 2018, Indonesia ranks fifth out of 78 countries with the highest number of students experiencing bullying and

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in 2019 there were 153 cases of bullying in the educational environment (Palawa, 2024) Data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) shows 119 cases of bullying occurred in 2020, 17 cases of bullying in 2021, 226 cases of bullying in 2022 and 64 reports of bullying occurred in 2023 (Palawa, 2024).

According to Yonita & Karneli (2019) victims of bullying are usually unable to do anything and accept all the actions of others because bullying is an act of violence that hurts, offends, humiliates and mentally drops others. Victims of bullying tend to find it difficult to establish interpersonal relationships with others, victims tend to get a lot of obstacles when in a social environment, especially the environment where the victim is bullied (Rizqi & Inayati, 2019).

Gustiwan, Karneli, Miaz & Firman (2021) explain the forms of bullying that occur physically include hitting, holding the head and ears, stepping on the feet. While verbal bullying is by calling with nicknames or titles, borrowing by force, and calling parents' names. In addition, most of the bullying victims showed an attitude that tended to be closed and difficult to speak, indicating that they were unsure of themselves. In line with this, Mardiah (2023) explained that victims of bullying tend to feel they do not have the ability to get help from others, thus making them more closed to the help of others.

One phenomenon that often arises in victims of bullying is their inability to be assertive in dealing with bullies (Zamroni & Sumarwiyah, 2021). Victims of bullying often lack the ability to act assertively, choose to remain silent, and even consider bullying as "ideal" in their environment. Assertiveness is a person's ability to state their feelings, opinions and rights honestly and confidently in a direct and non-aggressive manner (Stein & Book, 2006). Furthermore, Rathus & Nevid (2016) stated that assertiveness is a behavior that is shown by the courage to honestly and openly express feelings, needs, thoughts that are as they are to defend personal rights, and reject inappropriate requests. Poroeh & McIntosh (Dewanto & Raihana, 2019) identified a person's barriers to assertiveness, namely concerns about what others think about them, anxiety due to lack of confidence and low self-esteem. Factors that underlie low assertiveness in individuals, namely the influence of an environment that is less conducive and does not teach assertiveness, parental parenting, weak self-concept, sociocultural conditions, gender, age, and economic level).

Based on the initial data survey in the form of a questionnaire that the author collected at State Junior High School 7 Padang on October 10, 2024 to October 16, 2024 where the author found that there were 246 students who were victims of bullying at the school. Furthermore, based on the results of observations that researchers found in the field in students at SMP Negeri 7 Padang on October 12, 2024, it shows that there are students who get unfavorable treatment from their peers, such as mocking friends, calling friends with impolite names and the ridiculed students are also laughed at by their peers, just keep quiet when bullied. In line with this, Ramadhani, Saman & Buchori (2024) explained that victims of bullying feel sad about the treatment they get, so they feel less able to fight back and express their anxiety when they get unfavorable treatment from their friends. As a result, adolescent victims of bullying tend to be passive, avoid social situations and feel inferior when they have to voice their opinions or defend their rights.

One of the factors that affect assertiveness, namely external factors related to the situation of the peer environment (peer social support) (Sakawuni & Silondae, 2022). In this situation, peer support emerges as an important factor in the psychological well-being of bullying victims (Satria & Kurniawati, 2024). Peer social support is a form of support provided by peers that individuals can feel when needed so that it makes someone feel valued and loved in their environment (Sari & Indrawati, 2016). Peer social support can increase adolescent assertiveness where social support can affect the growth of assertiveness in adolescents because it can make these adolescents from those who are less brave to express something frankly to be brave to express their opinions (Hadziqoh, Santi & Kusumadari, 2023). This is supported by previous research conducted by Fahmi & Aswirna (2020) that the causes of low

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assertiveness include an environment that does not support learning and does not teach assertiveness, parenting style, poor self-concept, sociocultural factors or economic position.

Based on Social Support Theory (Sarafino & Smith, 2014) emotional and instrumental support provided by peers can increase feelings of security, reduce stress, and motivate individuals to act more confidently. In the context of bullying victims, peer support can help restore self-confidence eroded by negative experiences and also provide a means of practicing expressing opinions without fear. Peer social support is very important for students or adolescent victims of bullying in order to motivate students to remain enthusiastic in facing various kinds of problems in their relationships (Fitriyani, 2023).

This study defines bullying victims as students who experience repeated verbal, physical, or social aggression by peers within the past three months. Based on the theoretical foundation and previous findings, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: There is a positive and significant relationship between peer support and assertiveness in bullying victims.

In addition, this type of support can take the time to listen to the complaints of victims of bullying and provide appreciation, encouragement and inspiration to victims of bullying. Several studies have examined the relationship between peer social support and assertiveness in adolescent victims of bullying. However, most of these studies focused on high school and college levels. However, the context of adolescent victims of bullying at the junior high school level has not been a primary focus in previous studies. Therefore, it is interesting to study further whether there is a significant relationship between peer social support and assertiveness of adolescent victims of bullying. The disclosure of this problem is useful for the development of guidance and counseling services to help victims of bullying increase their assertiveness.

## **Method**

This study used a cross-sectional correlational quantitative design to examine the relationship between peer social support (X) and assertiveness of bullying victims (Y) with the hypothesis of a positive and significant relationship. The population was 246 students of SMP Negeri 7 Padang aged 13–15 years (48.3% male and 51.7% female) who were identified as bullying victims. A sample of 152 students was taken by stratified random sampling based on class strata (VII=80, VIII=35, IX=37) using a lottery, with the inclusion criteria of experiencing bullying at least three times in the last three months (verbal, physical, cyberbullying). A priori analysis showed a minimum N requirement of  $\approx 84$  ( $r = 0.30$ ;  $\alpha = 0.05$ ; power = 0.80), so the study sample exceeded the requirement. The instruments were the Peer Social Support Scale and the Bullying Victim Assertiveness Scale, each with 25 valid items (score 1–5) with a Likert Scale. One example of a peer social support item is "My friends comfort me when I'm belittled by others," and one example of an assertiveness item for a teenager who is a victim of bullying is "I keep quiet when a friend takes my things without permission." The back translation process begins with the preparation of instrument items based on the grid, the instrument goes through an expert review stage, and a trial of the initial 34 items. The following are the results of the validity test of the research instrument:

**Table1. Result of the Validity Test of Research Instruments**

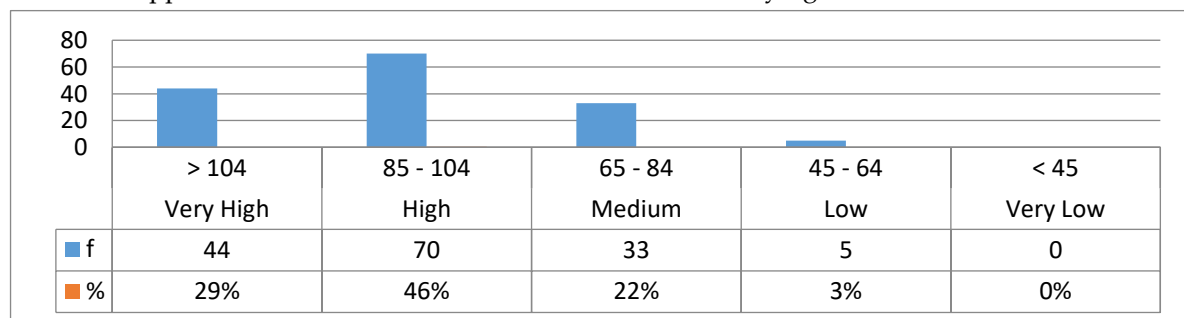
Variable	Number of Items		
	Trials	Dropped after Trial	Selected items after valid test
Peer Social Support	34	9	25
Assertiveness of Bullying Victims	34	9	25

Based on the validity test results in Table 1 above, 9 items were declared invalid, leaving 25 valid items for each variable. The reliability test results show that the peer social support instrument ( $\alpha = 0.845$ ) and the assertiveness of bullying victims ( $\alpha = 0.885$ ) have very high reliability, so this instrument can be declared reliable and suitable for use in research. Based on the analysis results, the Corrected Item-Total Correlation value for all items is in the range of -0.611 to 0.685. Most items have adequate item-total correlations ( $\geq 0.30$ ), although there are several items with low or negative correlations that need to be revised or removed to improve instrument consistency. Data collection was conducted from May 12–31, 2025, at SMP Negeri 7 Padang, using a printed questionnaire with instructions for respondents on how to complete the questionnaire, maintaining researcher neutrality, ensuring confidentiality of answers, and ensuring completeness. Research ethics included obtaining informed consent from guidance and counseling teachers and assent from students, and providing a referral mechanism to the school or professional staff in case of distress.

Analysis used SPSS version 20.0 with  $\alpha = 0.05$  (two-tailed). Data were normally distributed ( $p = 0.805$ ) and the relationship between variables was linear ( $p = 0.431$ ). Missing data were handled using listwise or pairwise deletion or imputation, while outliers were identified using z-scores, boxplots, or Mahalanobis distance and handled by deletion, transformation, or winsorizing. Pearson correlation was chosen because Likert scores are considered interval data that sensitively measure linear relationships between variables. To ensure the robustness of the results even if the assumptions of normality or linearity are violated, a robustness check using Spearman's correlation ( $\rho$ ) is performed to test the consistency of the results against violations of the assumptions of normality or linearity. If Spearman's results are consistent with Pearson's, the relationship found is considered valid and independent of the parametric assumptions.

## Result and Discussion

Based on research that has been carried out at SMPN 7 Padang regarding variable X, namely peer social support with variable Y, namely assertiveness of bullying victims, which is carried out by administering a research questionnaire. The research was conducted on students who were victims of bullying with research subjects as many as 152 students who were conducted directly. After the research was conducted, the researchers then processed the data obtained from the respondents' answers. Based on the data processing that has been done, the findings are obtained related to the relationship between peer social support and assertiveness of adolescent victims of bullying. The research results as follows:

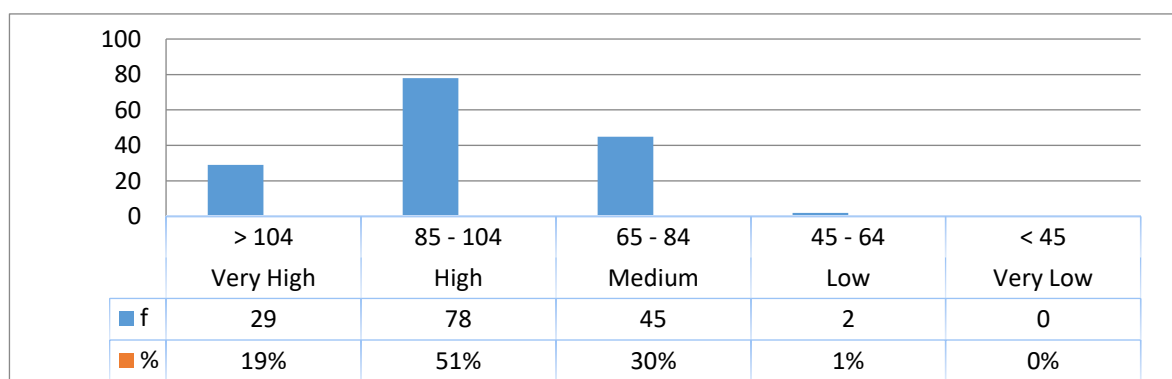


**Figure 1. Distribution of Peer Social Support**

The very low–low–medium–high–very high categorization in this study used the interval score method based on the instrument's theoretical range. This approach was chosen because the measurement scale has clear minimum (55) and maximum (119) limits, thus dividing the intervals provides a simpler and more understandable interpretation. Based on figure 1 above, it can be seen that peer social support in adolescent victims of bullying is in the high category, namely 70 students with a percentage of 46%. Furthermore, 44 students with a percentage of 29% are in the very high category, then as many as 33 students with a percentage of 22% are in the medium category, 5 students with a percentage of 3% are in the low category, and no students are in the very low category. Based on this explanation, it illustrates that peer social support for adolescent victims of bullying in SMP Negeri 7 Padang tends to be good because it is included in the high category. These results indicate that adolescent victims of bullying receive good social support from their peers. This means that adolescent victims of bullying at school feel cared for, heard, and have a place to share problems, especially in the condition of being a victim of bullying.

According to Sarafino & Smith (2014) peer social support is a form of social support provided by peers that includes emotional support and appreciation, information support, instrumental support and friendship support. This support is important for adolescent victims of bullying because peer social support has a major influence on adolescent social and emotional development. In line with that, Santrock (2016) stated that peers are the main source of social and emotional support in adolescence, especially in the face of psychological pressure, such as bullying. Thus, the results of this study indicate that the role and support of peers is very important in helping victims of bullying build a sense of security, being heard and valued.

Peer social support can help adolescent victims of bullying think positively, get a good environment, become motivated to learn and can overcome the bullying experienced. This is supported by Puspita & Kustanti (2018) which shows that social support can prevent bullying behavior. Adolescents who get support from their peers make them able to deal with bullying and feel a sense of belonging to the group. In this case, when adolescents feel sad and down due to bullying behavior, they still feel the presence of their friends so that they can share their problems and make them feel better.



**Figure 2. Distribution of Assertiveness of Bullying Victims**

The very low–low–medium–high–very high categorization in this study uses the interval score method based on the theoretical range of the instrument. This approach was chosen because the measurement scale has clear minimum (62) and maximum (120) limits, so that the interval division provides a simpler and easier to understand interpretation. Based on figure 2 above, it can be seen that the assertive attitude of adolescent victims of bullying is in the high category, namely 78 students with a percentage of 51%. Furthermore, 43 students with a percentage of 28% are in the moderate category, then 29 students with a percentage of 19% are in the very high category, 2 students with a percentage of 1% are in the low category and no students are in the very low category. Based on the explanation

above, it can be concluded that the assertiveness of adolescent victims of bullying is generally in the high category, meaning that adolescent victims of bullying in SMP Negeri 7 Padang have good assertiveness, where they are able to express feelings, defend personal rights, and express opinions and thoughts openly. This also shows that adolescent victims of bullying at the school are brave in voicing their opinions and can defend themselves.

In line with that, Hasanah, Supriyono, Herani & Lestari (2010) explained that assertiveness is important for adolescent victims of bullying because assertiveness helps adolescent victims of bullying in socializing and becoming relationships with their environment. Then, assertiveness will help them express their feelings and desires directly and frankly. Therefore, the presence of assertiveness in adolescent victims of bullying will avoid the appearance of uncomfortable feelings due to holding back and keeping something that wants to be expressed. In addition, assertiveness can help them solve problems in various situations and can help improve a person's thinking ability and make them more open with their peers and encourage their curiosity.

**Table 2. Descriptive Result of Peer Social Support (X) and Assertiveness of Bullying Victims (Y)**

Item Statistics				
	M	SD	Range	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Peer Social Support (X)	93.76	14.67	20	.845
Assertiveness of Bullying Victims (Y)	91.95	13.43	20	.885

Based on Table 2 above, the average (mean) score for peer social support (X) was 93.76 with a standard deviation of 14.67, a range of 20, and a scale reliability of 0.845, while the average score for assertiveness (Y) was 91.95 with a standard deviation of 13.41, a range of 20, and a scale reliability of 0.885. The high mean values for both variables indicate that most respondents have a high level of peer social support and assertiveness, with relatively moderate data variation. Based on the results of the research that has been conducted, there are normality test results. The complete data regarding the overall normality test results can be seen in the following table:

**Table 3. Normality Test Result for X and Y Variables**

**One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test**

		Unstandardized Residual
N		152
Normal Parameters <sup>a</sup>	Mean	.0000000
	Std. Deviation	11.89067778
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.052
	Positive	.035
	Negative	-.052
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		.641
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.805

a. Test distribution is Normal.

Based on Table 3, Based on the results of the normality test using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test, the significance value for variables X and Y is 0.805 ( $> 0.05$ ), so the data for both variables are normally distributed.

**Table 4. Linearity Test of X and Y Variables**

**ANOVA Table**

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Y * X	Between Groups	(Combined)	13234.167	52	254.503	1.811	.006
		Linearity	5800.353	1	5800.353	41.265	.000
		Deviation from Linearity	7433.814	51	145.761	1.037	.431
	Within Groups		13915.807	99	140.564		
	Total		27149.974	151			

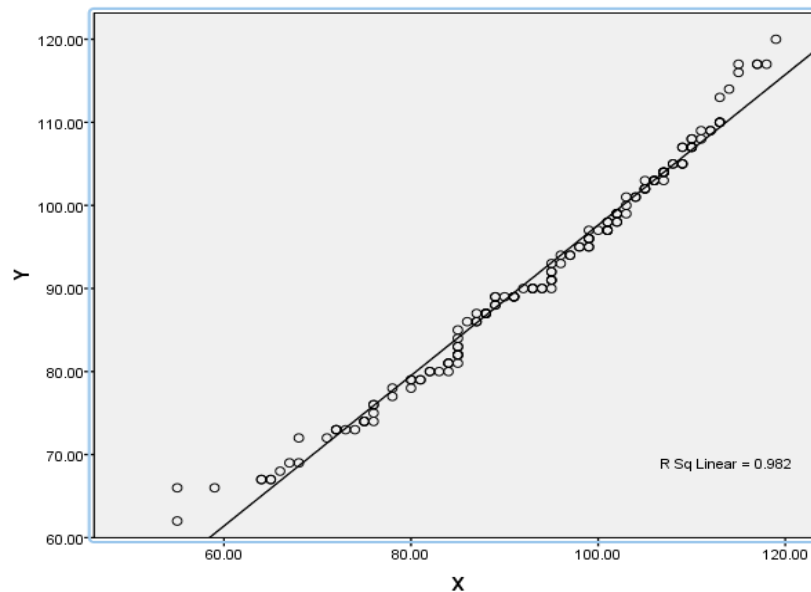
The linearity test in this study uses ANOVA, based on Table 4 above. The results of the linearity test show a significance value of 0.431 ( $> 0.05$ ), which is insignificant. Thus, the linearity assumption is met, allowing further analysis of the relationship between peer social support and assertiveness in adolescent victims of bullying using correlation analysis.

**Table 5. Correlation Test of Peer Social Support (X) and Assertiveness of Bullying Victims (Y)**

Correlations			
		X	Y
X	Pearson Correlation	1	.462**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	152	152
Y	Pearson Correlation	.462**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	152	152

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Based on Table 5 above, to determine the correlation between peer social support and assertiveness of bullying victims, the significance value  $< 0.05$ , it can be seen that the significance value of peer social support with assertiveness of bullying victims is 0.000, then  $0.000 < 0.05$ , it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between peer social support and assertiveness of bullying victims. The significance value of 0.000 to determine the correlation between peer social support and assertiveness of adolescent victims of bullying in SMP Negeri 7 Padang, then the significance value  $< 0.05$  then  $0.000 < 0.05$ , thus indicating a correlation between peer social support and assertiveness of adolescent victims of bullying in SMP Negeri 7 Padang. Furthermore, the coefficient value between the peer social support variable (X) and the assertiveness of bullying victims (Y), is 0.462 which indicates a positive correlation. Kedua variabel memiliki hubungan yang positif dan signifikan dengan  $r(152) = 0.462$ ,  $0.000 < 0.001$ , 95% CI (.40 - .59). Thus, it can be concluded that there is a positive and significant relationship with moderate strength.



**Figure 3. Scatterplot of The Relationship between Peer Social Support (X) and Assertiveness of Bullying Victims (Y)**

The relationship between peer social support and assertiveness of adolescent victims of bullying is strengthened by the XY Scatterplot according to Figure 3 above, the Scatterplot shows a very strong positive linear relationship between variables X and Y, where an increase in the value of X is followed by an increase in the value of Y. The  $R^2$  value of 0.982 indicates that 98.2% of the variation in Y can be explained by variations in X, so the simple linear regression model is very appropriate to use. Almost all data points are close to the regression line, only a few deviate in the low X section (around 60–70), so this model has a high and accurate fit to predict Y based on X. So, it can be concluded that there is a positive and significant relationship between peer social support and assertiveness of bullying victims. This means that the higher the support of social peers, the higher the assertiveness of adolescent victims of bullying.

This is in line with research conducted by Ayuwandari, Rini & Pratitis (2023) showing that there is a strong positive relationship between social support and assertive behavior, with a correlation score of 0.668. In addition, high social support is also positively correlated with assertive behavior, which in turn is negatively and significantly related to bullying behavior. This means that the higher the social support from peers, the higher the ability and assertive behavior of students, which can help reduce bullying behavior. Then strengthened by Hairani & Putikadyanto (2025) explained that support from caring and empathetic peers can provide a sense of comfort and encourage victims to be more courageous in expressing themselves and reporting the bullying experienced. Effective handling of bullying also includes developing assertiveness through assertive skills training and creating a supportive social environment, which can help victims feel more confident in dealing with social pressure and expressing their personal needs and boundaries.

In addition, high social support is also positively correlated with assertive behavior, which in turn is negatively and significantly related to bullying behavior. This means that the higher the social support from peers, the higher the ability and assertiveness of students, which can help reduce bullying behavior. Peer support can enhance assertiveness through a multi-layered psychological mechanism, where a sense of acceptance from the social environment fosters social efficacy, an individual's belief in their ability to interact effectively, which in turn facilitates the expression of assertiveness. This finding aligns with previous studies showing that supportive friendships contribute to social confidence and assertiveness (Riskiyah, Wiantina & Siregar, 2025).



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Practical implications include the need for school programs that facilitate increased peer support and assertiveness in adolescent victims of bullying through activities such as peer mentoring, collaborative group projects, and empathy training to create a safe and supportive social environment. Assertiveness can be developed through role-play-based assertive communication training, strengthening social efficacy through opportunities to participate in small forums, and consistent support from guidance and counseling teachers or counselors.

From the description above, it can be concluded that peer social support and assertiveness of adolescent victims of bullying have a positive and significant relationship. In other words, the higher the peer social support, the higher the assertiveness of adolescent victims of bullying, and vice versa. From the results of this study, it was found that adolescent victims of bullying tend to have a high level of peer social support and have high assertiveness, so that the hypothesis put forward earlier can be accepted.

### **Guidance and Counseling Service Implications**

The types of guidance and counseling services that can be provided to students who are victims of bullying, so as to increase peer social support and assertiveness in themselves, include the following:

#### **Classroom Support (Classroom Education on Peer Social Support and Assertive Communication)**

Provides all students with a basic understanding of the importance of social support and how to communicate assertively. Consequently, students are more aware of supporting each other and are able to express their opinions appropriately, creating a more inclusive and supportive classroom environment.

#### **Group Guidance with Assertive Role-Play and Peer Feedback**

Practices assertiveness skills in small groups through simulations and peer reflection. This strengthens students' practical abilities in dealing with bullying situations and increases self-confidence through peer support.

#### **Individual Counseling for High-Risk Cases**

Provides specialized interventions for victims of bullying with a high level of psychological risk to address the issue in-depth and personally. This ensures victims receive more intensive support, thereby minimizing potential negative impacts.

#### **Parental Involvement and Anti-Bullying School Policies**

Encourages parents and schools to work together to create a safe and supportive environment with a firm policy against bullying. This ensures support not only from peers but also from within the family and institutions, strengthening the protection network for victims.

This study was conducted in a single school, using self-report data, so the findings reflect respondents' perceptions within a specific environmental context. Several potential variables, such as self-concept and parental support, were not analyzed, so the relationships between these variables may be influenced by other factors. Future research is recommended to use longitudinal or intervention designs, involve multiple informants, and examine the role of social efficacy as a mediator between peer social support and assertiveness.

## Conclusion

Based on the results of research conducted on the relationship between peer social support and assertiveness of adolescent victims of bullying at State Junior High School 7 Padang, it can be concluded that the results showed that peer social support and assertiveness were in the high category. Pearson correlation indicated a moderate positive association between peer social support and assertiveness,  $r = 0.462$ , 95% CI (0.40-0.59),  $0.000 < 0.001$ ,  $N = 152$ . There is a positive and significant relationship between peer social support and assertiveness of adolescent victims of bullying. The higher the peer social support, the higher the assertiveness of adolescent victims of bullying. Implications that can be done by creating school programs that strengthen peer support have the potential to increase assertive behavior, such as classroom education, group guidance, individual counseling, parental involvement, and anti-bullying school policies. Pearson correlation indicated a moderate positive association between peer social support and assertiveness,  $r=0,462$ , 95% CI (0,40-0,59),  $0,000 < 0,001$ ,  $N=152$ .

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