

## The Effectiveness of PSS (Problem Solving Strategy) in enhancing the ability of anger regulation

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### Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine the effectiveness of Problem Solving Strategies (PSS) in enhancing the ability of emotion regulation for high school students. This study was carried out at Malang Smart Brawijaya High School with a sample size of 12 students equally divided into the experimental (n = 6) and control (n = 6) groups. Furthermore, the experimental group was trained on Problem Solving Strategies, contrary to the control group. Data were analyzed using Mann Whitney U Test, which is a non-parametric statistical analysis tool. The result showed that the Asymp or P-value of 0.003 < 0.05, therefore, there is a significant difference between the post-test scores in the experimental and control groups. In conclusion, the Problem-Solving Strategy is an effective technique for enhancing the ability of anger regulation. School counselors are encouraged to utilize Problem Solving Strategies as intervention techniques to enhance anger regulation. Further research needs to be carried out using behavioristic techniques.

**Keywords:** Anger, problem solving strategy; the ability of anger regulation

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## Introduction

Adolescence behaviours are affected by physical growth and socio-emotional development. According to [Van der Giessen et al. \(2015\)](#), emotional changes during adolescence are often due to conflicts between peers and adults. During adolescence, the brain is regulated and generated with the limbic system and prefrontal cortex used to improve structural and sustainable functional development. Therefore, during this period, there is an increase in internalizing and externalizing associated with poor emotional regulation, namely depression, fear, and antisocial therapy ([Zeitler et al., 2017](#)). In line with the cognitive development of adolescence, studies were carried out to determine the effects of behaving in a harmful way ([Sherman, Payton, Hernandez, Greenfield, & Dapretto, 2016](#)). This is because not all teenagers have the ability to manage their emotions, which is usually intense in adolescence than younger or older individuals ([Ford & Gross, 2018](#)).

The phenomenon found was related to adolescents based on the resulting survey of a preliminary study carried out on 119 respondents randomly obtained from BSS high school, where 47.9% (57 students) stated that they experience anger in their daily lives ([Utami, Lasan, & Hambali, 2019](#)). The percentage classified as the most negative emotion was sad (22.7%), disappointment (12.6%), and afraid (16.8%). Furthermore, 36.4% (43 students), 34.7% (41 students), 23.7% (28 students), and 5.1% (6 students) stated that the way to cope with anger is to restrain, think positively, ignore and vent emotions. An interview carried out with BK teachers in Malang Brawijaya Smart School (BSS) Malang revealed that adolescents tend to have overflowing emotions. Therefore, the related social issues often occur due to students' inability to control

their anger, stress tendencies, and depression. According to the counseling teacher, some students are unable to control their emotions and hide their anger, rather they make use of cursing, or harsh words which leads to quarreling (Bonnevill, 2016). The Guidance and Counseling teacher also added that the main triggers for students to carry out this behavior is because they are more likely to exaggerate the problem, being too prejudiced with others, which tends to make them have negative thinking (Smith, Mustaffa, Jones, Curry, & Allen, 2016).

Anger stimulates behavior with passion, increases the desire to respond, focuses on threatening situations, leads to negativity, aggressive protection, and over-dramatization (Tara & Ahsan, 2020). However, similar to emotion, it is maladaptive when experienced too intensely and for a prolonged period (Martin, 2020). In interpersonal relationships, uncontrolled anger causes resistance. According to Ammerman, Kleiman, Uyeji, Knorr, and McCloskey (2015), anger provokes emotion due to self-protection and resistance caused by individuals' inability to control the adverse effects. Some people are more likely to be more aggressive, while others have the ability to control themselves when angry (Lonigro et al., 2015). It is in line with this issue that individuals unable to control their emotions tend to encourage aggression and destruction. Those with difficulty in overcoming these problems face the serious risk of psychological and physiological health issues (Hamarta, Karahan, Zorlu, & Parmaksız, 2015). In addition, the inability to anger regulation tends to have psychopathological problems. For instance, individuals with external problems are impulsive (Steinberg & Drabick, 2015).

Therefore, adolescents need to have the ability to regulate their anger and respond in an acceptable way to the surrounding environment (Park, Wang, Williams, & Alegría, 2017). Adolescents with emotional regulation ability have higher social competence, prosocial behavior, better academic achievement, and fewer problems of internalization and externalization (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015). Brooks, Rushton, Walker, Lovell, & Rogers (2016) stated that adolescents able to manage their emotions help others cope with stress, enabling them to face their future lives and mental health.

The process of emotion regulation involves a cognitive role, therefore the capacity to regulate emotions is a significant cognitive function for human adaptation, and most of the negative emotion regulation is used to determine the effect on mental and physical well-being. Cognitive strategies are crucial in managing threats and helping individuals regulate, manage, and control emotions (Mulki, Jaramillo, Goad, & Pesquera, 2015). A strategy used to regulate emotions that involves cognitive functions is implementing the Problem-Solving Strategy (Nigg, 2017). The potential strategies of reducing anger, which combines cognitive and behavioral strategies, help individuals to solve problems and teach them the unique situations that cause and reduce anger in the most appropriate (Smith et al., 2016). Problem-Solving Strategy is implemented to improve the ability of information processing for individuals that exhibit anger, aggressive and disturbing behavior with the aim of T "Thinking before Acting" (Katzmann, Goertz-Dorten, Hautmann, & Doepfner, 2019). This technique is implemented in anger regulation to teach individuals to construct initially cognitive and irrational behavior to become rational when an angry emotional situation occurs (Thagard, 2015). According to Sukhodolsky, Smith, McCauley, Ibrahim, & Piasecka (2016), problem-solving interventions are associated with developing thinking skills, causes, consequences, and solutions. PSS implementation in anger regulation is carried out in counseling groups, which focuses on interpersonal processes and problem-solving strategies of thoughts, feelings, and behavior (Lusli et al., 2016). This is based on consideration of the PSS technique's characteristics in regulating groups, which allow individuals to get input from group resources (Ginnett, 2019). The use of counseling groups helps individuals get support from participants in the group and motivates them to progress better. The participation of members in this group activity helps to teach them useful skills (Tara & Ahsan, 2020).

## Method

This is a quantitative research carried out using the Nonequivalent Control Group Design, which comprises experimental and control groups (Mulyani, Solihat, & Hanifah, 2018). The purposive sampling method was used to obtain data from a sample of 12 students at Malang Smart Brawijaya High School. Furthermore, the experimental group was given intervention in the form of a Problem-Solving Strategy, contrary to the control group. However, it was assumed that both groups adhered to the guidance and counseling service program provided by the school counselor.

The instruments used in this study were (1) Anger Emotional Ability Management Tests and (2) the Problem-Solving Strategy. In addition, the anger emotion management ability test used was examined for validity and reliability by involving 40 high school BSS students. The number of items before conducting

the test was 35, and after testing, 24 items were valid and reliable and used to screen research subjects with low anger regulation abilities.

This research was carried out at SMA Brawijaya Smart School (BSS), involving a sample size of 12 students with low anger regulation abilities. The twelve students were divided into the experimental ( $n = 6$ ) and control ( $n = 6$ ) groups. The implementation of group counseling interventions using the Problem-Solving Strategy technique was carried out during 7 meetings. After the intervention has been provided to the two groups, the authors conducted a post-test by providing a test of the ability to anger regulation to the research subjects.

## Results and Discussion

The results of testing the hypothesis in this study are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Hypothesis testing results through wilcoxon signed rank test analysis

	Negative ranks	Positive ranks	Ties	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
<b>Experimental Group</b>	0	6	0	3.50	21.00	-2.000 <sup>b</sup>	.027
<b>Control Group</b>	0	4	2	2.50	10.00	-2.000 <sup>b</sup>	.046

Table 1 shows that the experimental group subjects increased after administering the problem-solving-strategy comprising 6 people with mean and sum ranks of 3.50 and 21.00, respectively. Asymp.Sig Value (2-tailed) in the experimental group of 0.027 shows a change in the ability of anger regulation after given a problem-solving strategy treatment because the sig value is  $0.027 < 0.05$ , therefore  $H_a$  is accepted. This shows significant differences in the ability of anger regulation in the experimental group subjects before and after the treatment.

In the control group, 4 subjects experienced an increase, while 2 subjects did not experience changes in their ability to manage emotions. The significance value indicates a difference in managing emotions before and after following the guidance and counseling program provided by school counselors at  $0.046 < 0.05$ .

**Table 2:** Mean rank (experiment and control groups average)

	Ranks			
	method	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
post test experiment	Pb	6	9.50	57.00
	St	6	3.50	21.00
	Total	12		

Table 2 shows the Mean or average rank of each group. The experimental group treated with a problem-solving strategy has a mean value of 9.50 greater than the control group at 3.50. Therefore, the test results obtained by comparing the post-test values in the experimental and control groups with the Mann-Whitney U test's statistical analysis produced the data shown in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Analysis of the mann-whitney u test on the post-test scores of the experiment and control group

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>	
	post test experiment
Mann-Whitney U	.000
Wilcoxon W	21.000
Z	-2.903
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.004
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.002 <sup>b</sup>
a. Grouping Variable: metode	
b. Not corrected for ties.	

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Table 3 shows U and V values of 0,000 and 21,000, respectively. When converted to Z-value, the amount becomes -2.903 at Sig or P-Value of 0.004 <0.05. Therefore, in conclusion, there are significant differences between the post-test scores in the experimental and control groups. Based on the statistical hypothesis test results, the interventions given to the experimental group are effective in increasing the ability of anger regulation. Therefore, the Problem-Solving Strategy technique is sufficient to improve the ability of anger regulation for high school students. Furthermore, after testing the pre-test and post-test values in the experimental group using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test, the Asymp Sig (2-tailed) value was 0.027, and less than 0.05. Hence, it can be concluded that there is a difference in scores on the ability of anger regulation in the experimental group before and after treatment using the Problem-Solving Strategy. Therefore, it is further interpreted that the PSS technique affects increasing the score and ability of anger regulation for high school students, marked by a significant difference in scores. The meta-analysis study of the Problem-Solving Strategy is advantageous in reducing anger compared to the affection training strategies, such as relaxation, positive images, and emotional training. This is because the Problem-Solving strategy teaches people how to think of causes, consequences, and solutions in anger situations (Peña-Sarrionandia, Mikolajczak, & Gross, 2015).

Furthermore, the statistical test results use the Mann Whitney U Test to compare the experimental group's post-test scores, which is intervened with the Problem-Solving Strategy of the control group. This shows that there are significant differences between the post-test scores of the two groups. Therefore, the problem-solving strategy has the efficacy of enhancing the ability of anger regulation in high school students. This study's results are supported by the research on anger regulation training with cognitive-behavioral therapy carried out by Suveg et al. (2018). This approach effectively reduces student anxiety and increases their level of anger regulation abilities (Suveg et al., 2018).

The first finding when giving intervention in the field is associated with the emergence of angry emotions felt by the participants due to an individual's perception of the emotional situation. According to the research subjects, feelings of anger are generally caused by negative prejudice in associated situations. Emotion arises due to the situation experienced by an individual. When the evaluation is positive or negative, it tends to individual emotions, which arise during a meaningful situation or interaction and in accordance with the stimulus that appears (De Castella, Platow, Tamir, & Gross, 2018). This is in line with the research, which stated that the failure in the thought process causes anger. Therefore, a process of cognition has a relationship with anger and aggression. Adolescents with aggression problems are more likely to benefit from interventions with CBT elements and individual components (Hoogsteder et al., 2015).

The counselee's experience when angry is caused by prejudice or negative thought patterns in emotional situations, which has a relationship with the implementation of Problem-orientation as part of the stages of the Problem-Solving Strategy technique (Redlinger, Grosse, 2020). This is in line with preliminary studies that stated that the Problem-Solving Therapy technique has a significant effect capable of overcoming mental and health problems and providing intervention on PST by involving problem-orientation training. Furthermore, implementing problem-orientation training places the evaluation of problems as challenges that requires effort and time. This is also relevant to the research carried out on emotional regulation strategies, which is reappraisal with the highest impact on the acceptance and repression strategy. Furthermore, a study carried out by Yıldız & Duy (2019) asserted that individuals carry out effective strategies to reduce anger in an attempt to modify the situation through re-evaluation. The problem-orientation stage has similarities with reappraisal, which reassess an issue.

The second finding in this study is selecting solutions conducted by the experimental group to overcome interpersonal conflicts that cause angry emotions (Martinez-Corts, Demerouti, Bakker, & Boz, 2015). For example, interpersonal conflicts produce suggestions and input in the group counseling process, which are carefully discussed between two parties to avoid misunderstanding. Furthermore, the desire to solve the problem aims at providing the intervention of the Problem-Solving Strategy. This is in line with research carried out by Merrill, Smith, Cumming, and Daunic (2017), which stated that the implementation of the Social Problem-Solving Program reduces aggressive behavior, and the training facilitates social competence, anger regulation, and conflict resolution. Therefore, proving an intervention Problem-Solving Strategy helps individuals to solve problems constructively when the conflicts occur and avoid aggressive responses arising from angry emotions when facing interpersonal conflict. A rational solution is aimed to notice the problems accurately and take rational steps for systematic resolution. When individuals implement problem-solving strategies to manage emotions, they tend to solve problems constructively.

The third research finding is the subjects are less able to practice implementing solutions in the form of responses. Although the authors implemented the Problem-Solving Strategy that develops the cognitive processes, however, the subjects were unable to implement the solution. Therefore, each subject is asked to practice responding to the demonstration when facing an angry situation. Furthermore, adolescents are less skilled in expressing emotional responses, which needs to be good and not harmful. The Problem-Solving Strategy helps to construct the mindset and encourage students to have a behavioral response. However, the implementation of Problem-Solving Strategy is not sufficient to help the change in individual behaviour even though the solution provided in this technique tends to respond to the behavior forms. Therefore, the implementation of this Problem Solving Strategy is combined with behavioral intervention. Similarly, the research carried out on anger regulation training using Social Problem Solving Training, and Social Skills Training showed that Sukhodolsky discusses SPST to help individuals in developing the ways of thinking and finding solutions, as well as the practice of social skills and replace maladaptive responses to be adaptive in conflict situation through SST. Problem-solving skills training is a simple process that trains students to reduce aggression and social adjustment (Azizi, Saeidmanesh, Kazemi, & Radaie, 2019).

Furthermore, the Problem-Solving Strategy also proves that providing a cognitive therapy with others is an effective rehabilitation therapy, that combines CBT with relaxation, social training, and the highest effect on overcoming anger (Lee & DiGiuseppe, 2018). This is similar to the research carried out by Sari, Triyono, and Mappiare (2018), which stated that a culture-based counseling approach anticipates bullying and requires a multicultural approach tailored to the characteristics of the community in building a multicultural approach to emotion regulation.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the Problem-Solving Strategy techniques are effective for enhancing the ability of anger regulation in high school students. This created an impact on the research subject, which constructs negative thought patterns on emotional situations into positive with the subjects used for constructive solutions when dealing with emotional situations. These findings indicate that the PSS technique impacts research subjects as a strategy for anger regulation. Furthermore, based on the study results, school counselors need to facilitate students to achieve emotional maturity. This is because the anger regulation and social relationships in adolescents are characterized by many changes that impact the social, cognitive, and psychological domains. Moreover, the adolescence often characterized with their peer relationships becomes increasingly prominent. It is considered important to illustrate the potential role of anger regulation in peers' context (Perry-Parrish et al., 2017). Emotions are inseparable from humans, therefore, they need to regulate their anger properly. Various strategies are carried out to help students manage emotions, such as implementing the intervention of the Problem-Solving Strategy technique within the scope of psychoeducation or counseling groups. Future studies need to implement Problem-Solving Strategy to explore deeper by combining the behavioristic technique, which has the ability to teach individuals the right response when faced with emotional challenges.

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