

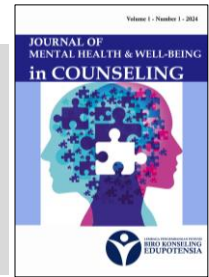


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Understanding Assertive Behavior in Junior High School Students: A Descriptive Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Assertive behavior is an important social skill that adolescents need to possess in facing the demands of their social environment, particularly at school. This study aims to determine the general description of assertive behavior among students at SMP Negeri 21 Tasikmalaya and its implications for guidance and counseling services at the school. This study used a quantitative approach with descriptive methods. The research subjects were 279 students in grades VIII and IX selected using a total sampling technique. Data were collected through an assertive behavior scale that covers cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects and has met validity and reliability tests. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics and independent difference tests. sample t- test with the help of the SPSS program. The results of the study indicate that students' assertive behavior is generally in the moderate category with an average score of 122 and a standard deviation of 12. This finding indicates that students have basic abilities in expressing opinions, feelings, and defending their rights appropriately, but have not been displayed consistently in various social situations. This condition reflects that students' assertive behavior is still in the development and strengthening stage. Overall, the results of the study indicate that students have quite good assertive potential and can be developed more optimally through a conducive educational environment.



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Introduction

Adolescence is a transitional developmental phase characterized by complex biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional changes. During this period, adolescents experience puberty, increased abstract thinking skills, and a strong need to establish self-identity and independence (Latifah, 2023). This process of self-discovery encourages adolescents to explore new experiences, but is often accompanied by the emergence of deviant behavior known as juvenile delinquency (Santrock , 2018). Juvenile delinquency refers to various forms of behavior that violate social, moral, and legal norms committed by individuals aged 12–18, such as brawls, substance abuse, risky sexual behavior, and dangerous acts in public spaces (Quraini & Fatmawanti , 2024; Wibowo & Wulandari, 2020). This phenomenon not only impacts the physical safety of adolescents but also contributes to mental health and social welfare problems in society. In the context of education, the degradation of students' character remains a recurring problem. Various cases such as bullying , student brawls , exposure to pornography, cybercrime, and sexual harassment demonstrate the weak internalization of moral and social values in the school environment. Data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI, 2023) shows a significant increase in student brawls and high rates of child involvement in pornography and cybercrime. Furthermore, a survey by the Indonesian Ministry of Social Affairs (2022) reported that the majority of children aged 12–17 have experienced bullying . This situation emphasizes the urgency of strengthening character education through the development of adaptive social-emotional skills, one of which is assertive behavior

Assertive behavior is an individual's ability to express thoughts, feelings, needs, and beliefs honestly, directly, and appropriately, without violating the rights of others and while maintaining self-respect (Alberti & Emmons, 2017; Cornell & Lurie, 2020). Assertiveness is in a moderate position between passive and aggressive communication styles, thus enabling individuals to build healthy and balanced interpersonal relationships (Papalia et al., 2021). Assertive individuals tend to be able to manage conflict constructively, resist negative social pressure, and maintain their psychological health (Wuryandani et al., 2021). al., 2019; Kustiawan et al., 2022). Various empirical findings indicate that assertive behavior has a protective role in adolescent development. Research by Novalia and Dayaksini (2013) found a negative relationship between assertiveness levels and the tendency to become victims of bullying, while Azhari et al. et al. (2015) showed that assertive behavior is positively correlated with students' ability to adjust to school. Furthermore, low assertiveness is known to be associated with adolescent involvement in deviant behavior such as brawls, drug abuse, and risky sexual behavior (Puspita, 2009). Preliminary data also showed that most adolescents tend to remain silent when faced with situations that provoke anger, indicating weak assertive communication skills.

Assertive behavior is not an innate trait, but rather a social skill that can be learned and developed through experience and social interaction (Alberti & Emmons, 2017). Internal factors such as self-confidence, emotional regulation skills, and mindset, as well as external factors such as family support, peers, and school climate, play an important role in shaping students' assertiveness levels (Townsend, 2014; Akın, 2015). Adolescents who are less assertive tend to be more easily influenced by peer pressure and are at risk of exhibiting maladaptive behavior (Pratiwi, 2015). In the school context, guidance and counseling services play a strategic role in developing students' assertive behavior. Through individual and group counseling, guidance and counseling teachers can facilitate the development of interpersonal communication skills, emotional regulation, and constructive self-advocacy through techniques such as role-playing, play, social modeling, and social skills training (Prayitno, 2017; Mutmainah & Sunaryo, 2020). Strengthening assertive behavior through guidance and counseling services has been shown to be effective in reducing social anxiety, preventing bullying behavior, and increasing students' self-esteem and psychological well-being (Misnani, 2016; Yosep et al., 2016). et al., 2024).

Method

Participant

This study used a quantitative approach with a descriptive method. The quantitative approach was chosen to obtain a general overview of students' assertive behavior based on statistically analyzed numerical data. The descriptive method was used to describe the level of students' assertive behavior objectively without providing specific treatment or intervention. The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 21 Tasikmalaya in the even semester of the current academic year. The population in this study were all 279 students in grades VIII and IX of SMP Negeri 21 Tasikmalaya. The sampling technique used was total sampling, so that all members of the population became research subjects. The use of this technique aims to obtain representative data and describe the overall condition of students' assertive behavior.

Measure

The instrument used in this study is Assertion A school-adapted version of the Inventory (AI) developed based on the theory of Alberti and Emmons, and supported by the assertiveness concept of Galassi and Galassi and Bishop. This instrument aims to measure students' assertive behavior tendencies in the context of the school environment, specifically students' ability to express opinions, feelings, and needs firmly, honestly, and responsibly without violating the rights of others.

Assertion The inventory consists of 38 situational statements with a five-choice Likert scale, including both favorable and unfavorable items. Scoring is done according to item characteristics, where a higher score indicates a higher level of assertive behavior. The quality of the instrument was analyzed using the Rasch Model approach with the help of the Winsteps application, and the test results showed that the instrument has an adequate level of validity and reliability, so it is suitable for use in descriptive research to describe students' assertive behavior tendencies.

Procedure

This research began with coordination with the school to determine the implementation schedule and the classes that would be the subjects of the research. After obtaining permission, the researcher explained the purpose, benefits, and procedures of the research to the students and requested their willingness to participate. Next, the students were given a research instrument in the form of an assertive behavior scale that had been developed in accordance with the research objectives. Questionnaires were completed in class under the researcher's supervision to ensure that the instructions were understood properly without influencing the respondents' answers. After all questionnaires were collected, the researcher checked the completeness of the data and continued the data processing process to obtain an overview of the students' assertive behavior tendencies as a basis for analysis and discussion of the research results.

Data analysis

Data analysis in this study was conducted through descriptive statistical procedures aimed at describing the tendency of assertive behavior in students of SMPN 21 Tasikmalaya in the 2025/2026 academic year. Descriptive statistics were used to identify the characteristics of the distribution of students' overall assertive behavior scores, including minimum, maximum, average, and standard deviation scores. The results of this analysis were then used to group the level of students' assertive behavior into three categories, namely low, medium, and high, based on the categorization criteria proposed by Azwar (2012). The grouping of these categories provides an initial overview of the profile of students' assertive behavior, while also showing the proportion of students at each level of assertiveness. Through this analytical approach, the study was able to provide a comprehensive understanding of the condition of students' assertive behavior as a basis for formulating the implications of guidance and counseling services in the school environment.

Results

Based on the results of descriptive statistical analysis, it was obtained that the assertive behavior of students at SMP Negeri 21 Tasikmalaya was generally in the moderate category. The average (mean) score of students' assertive behavior was 122 with a standard deviation of 12. These results indicate that most students have sufficient assertive abilities, although they have not yet developed optimally.

Table 1. Student Respondent Demographic Data

Variables	Frequency
Gender	
Man	138
Woman	141
Age	
13	34
14	142
15	97
16	6
Parents' job	
ASN	4
Self-employed	249
Private sector employee	3
Doesn't work	23
Extracurricular	
Futsal	54
Scout	42
Pmr	25
Student Council	33
Volleyball	20
Pks	4
Flag Raising Team	3
Dance Art	5
There isn't any	92
Child	
Only child	21
Firstborn child	87
Middle Child	84
Youngest child	87
Amount	279

Based on demographic data, the respondents of this study consisted of 138 male students and 141 female students with a relatively balanced proportion, so there was no particular gender dominance in the characteristics of the respondents. In terms of age, the respondents were in the range of 13–16 years, with the majority aged 14 years, followed by ages 15 and 13 years, and a small portion aged 16 years. This age distribution is in accordance with the characteristics of junior high school students in grades VIII and IX who are in the developmental phase of early adolescence to middle adolescence. Judging from family background and school activities, most of the respondents' parents are self-employed, while the rest have various jobs, including civil servants, private employees, and parents without permanent jobs. In terms of participation in extracurricular activities, although a number of students actively participate in various activities such as futsal, scouts, student council, red cross, and volleyball, there is still a proportion of students who are not involved in extracurricular activities. In

addition, respondents have varying birth order and number of siblings, reflecting the diversity of family backgrounds, ranging from small families to families with larger members.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Assertive Behavior

N	279
Minimum Score	86
Maximum Score	155
Actual Average	122
Standard Deviation	12

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that the assertive behavior of seventh- and ninth-grade students at SMP Negeri 21 Tasikmalaya is generally categorized at a moderate level. This finding suggests that most students possess basic competencies in expressing opinions, communicating feelings, and defending personal rights appropriately; however, these abilities have not yet been demonstrated consistently across diverse social contexts. In other words, students have begun to develop assertive tendencies but still experience fluctuations in their application, indicating that assertiveness remains in a developmental phase rather than reaching a stable and mature level of social functioning. The dominance of the moderate category can be understood through the lens of adolescent psychosocial development. Adolescence represents a transitional stage characterized by identity exploration, emotional sensitivity, and increased dependence on peer acceptance. According to Santrock (2018) and Kroger (2017), adolescents actively negotiate between personal autonomy and social belonging, which often creates internal conflicts when expressing personal opinions that differ from group expectations. Consequently, students may demonstrate assertiveness in supportive or familiar environments but become hesitant in situations involving authority figures, peer pressure, or potential social rejection. This developmental instability explains why assertive behavior tends to appear situational rather than consistent, resulting in a higher proportion of students within the moderate category compared to the high category.

Furthermore, assertive behavior should be viewed as a learned social competence rather than an inherent personality trait. Speed, Goldstein, and Goldfried (2018) as well as Corey (2017) emphasize that assertiveness develops through repeated interpersonal interactions, communication practice, and the strengthening of emotional regulation skills. Students categorized as moderately assertive generally show the ability to express disagreement or refuse requests appropriately; however, they may still experience hesitation, fear of negative evaluation, or difficulty managing emotional responses in challenging interpersonal situations. These characteristics indicate partial mastery of assertive skills, suggesting that students require continued opportunities for guided practice and reinforcement within educational settings. From an educational perspective, the presence of students with low assertiveness levels deserves particular attention because insufficient assertive skills may lead to passive behavior, vulnerability to peer pressure, or difficulties in academic participation and social adaptation. Previous studies (Andriyani et al., 2013) highlight that inadequate assertiveness can hinder social-emotional development and reduce students' confidence in expressing academic needs or personal boundaries. Therefore, systematic interventions through school guidance and counseling services become essential to facilitate skill acquisition, emotional awareness, and adaptive communication patterns.

Assertive behavior is also shaped by multidimensional contextual factors, including family parenting styles, school climate, cultural norms, and educational experiences (Alberti & Emmons, 2017). In collectivistic cultural contexts such as Indonesia, social harmony and respect toward authority are often emphasized, which may unintentionally limit open self-expression among adolescents. As a result, students may interpret assertiveness as confrontational behavior, leading them to regulate self-expression cautiously. Educational environments thus play a strategic role in redefining assertiveness as respectful and responsible communication rather than opposition or disobedience. Moreover, education contributes significantly to the development of cognitive and socio-emotional competencies that support assertive behavior, such as critical thinking, interpersonal communication, and self-efficacy (Alberti & Emmons, 2008; Sari, 2021; Putri, 2020). Classroom interactions, collaborative learning activities, and counseling programs provide opportunities for students to practice expressing ideas, negotiating differences, and managing interpersonal conflicts constructively. Therefore, the predominance of moderate assertiveness levels should not be interpreted as a limitation but rather as an indication of developmental potential that can be optimized through structured educational interventions and supportive learning environments.

In summary, the findings demonstrate that students' assertive behavior is progressing but requires systematic reinforcement. The moderate category reflects a transitional developmental stage in which adolescents are learning to balance self-expression with social acceptance. With consistent guidance, counseling interventions, and positive educational experiences, students' assertive competencies can gradually develop toward higher levels of psychological maturity and adaptive social functioning.

Conclusion

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the assertive behavior of seventh and ninth grade students at SMP Negeri 21 Tasikmalaya is generally in the moderate category. This finding indicates that students have basic skills in expressing opinions and feelings and defending their rights appropriately, but these skills have not been consistently internalized in various social interaction contexts. This condition indicates that students' assertive behavior is still in the developmental stage and requires further reinforcement. The dominance of the moderate category relates to the psychosocial developmental characteristics of adolescents who are in the process of searching for their identity. During this phase, sensitivity to social judgment, the need for group acceptance, and adjustment to environmental norms influence the stability of assertive behavior displayed. Furthermore, assertive behavior as a social skill is influenced by interpersonal experiences, communication skills, and emotional regulation, which are still developing, so its application is not yet fully consistent. Overall, the results of this study indicate that students have quite good potential for assertive behavior, which can be optimally developed through a conducive learning environment. Therefore, students' assertive behavior should be viewed as a dynamic ability that develops gradually along with the support of the educational and social environment they experience.

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