

Effectiveness of group counseling with positive self-talk in reducing anxiety among pregnant women in Indonesia: A true experimental study

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Abstract

Pregnancy can present significant risks, particularly during the childbirth process, which often induces fear and anxiety in pregnant women. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of group counseling using the Positive Self-Talk technique in reducing anxiety among pregnant women. A true experimental pretest-posttest control group design was employed, with 20 participants divided into two groups: 10 pregnant women in the experimental group and 10 in the control group. Anxiety data were collected using the Perinatal Anxiety Screening Scale (PASS), adapted to measure anxiety in pregnant women. Pre-test and post-test results were analyzed using the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test via SPSS 20. The findings revealed a significant reduction in anxiety within the experimental group (Asymp. Sig. = 0.037), with the average anxiety score decreasing from 84.5 at pre-test to 50.8 at post-test, while the control group exhibited an increase in the average anxiety score from 85.7 to 91.4 (Asymp. Sig. = 0.0628). These results suggest that group counseling with the Positive Self-Talk technique is effective in reducing anxiety among pregnant women. This study provides valuable insights into psychological interventions aimed at alleviating anxiety in pregnant women, particularly in preparation for childbirth.

Kata Kunci: Group Counseling, Positive Self Talk Technique, Anxiety in Pregnant Women, True Experimental Design, PASS

Abstrak

Kehamilan dapat menimbulkan risiko signifikan, terutama selama proses persalinan, yang sering kali memunculkan rasa takut dan kecemasan pada ibu hamil. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengevaluasi efektivitas konseling kelompok menggunakan teknik Positive Self-Talk dalam mengurangi kecemasan pada ibu hamil. Desain eksperimen sejati pretest-posttest control group digunakan, dengan 20 peserta yang dibagi menjadi dua kelompok: 10 ibu hamil di kelompok eksperimen dan 10 di kelompok kontrol. Data kecemasan dikumpulkan menggunakan Perinatal Anxiety Screening Scale (PASS), yang diadaptasi untuk mengukur kecemasan pada ibu hamil. Hasil pre-test dan post-test dianalisis menggunakan Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test melalui SPSS 20. Temuan menunjukkan penurunan signifikan dalam kecemasan pada kelompok eksperimen (Asymp. Sig. = 0.037), dengan skor kecemasan rata-rata turun dari 84,5 pada pre-test menjadi 50,8 pada post-test, sementara kelompok kontrol menunjukkan peningkatan skor kecemasan rata-rata dari 85,7 menjadi 91,4 (Asymp. Sig. = 0.0628). Hasil ini menunjukkan bahwa konseling kelompok dengan teknik Positive Self-Talk efektif dalam mengurangi kecemasan pada ibu hamil. Penelitian ini memberikan wawasan berharga mengenai intervensi psikologis yang bertujuan mengurangi kecemasan pada ibu hamil, khususnya dalam persiapan menghadapi persalinan.

Kata Kunci: Konseling Kelompok, Teknik Positive Self Talk, Kecemasan Ibu Hamil, True Experimental Design, PASS



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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, pregnancy-related anxiety has emerged as a significant mental health concern due to its profound impact on both maternal and fetal health. Anxiety experienced during pregnancy not only affects the psychological well-being of the mother but also has adverse effects on her physical health and fetal development, increasing the risks of preterm birth, low birth weight, and developmental delays in the child (Pascal et al., 2023; Stanova et al., 2015). Research indicates that pregnancy-related anxiety is among the most common mental health disorders encountered during pregnancy and the postpartum period, with prevalence rates ranging from 10% to 20% across various countries (Hadfield et al., 2022; Viswasam et al., 2021).

The growing prevalence of anxiety among pregnant women calls for effective and accessible interventions. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) has been widely recognized as one of the most effective approaches to reducing anxiety in diverse populations, including pregnant women (Arch, 2014; Li et al., 2022). One of the most prominent techniques within CBT is Positive Self-Talk, which focuses on transforming negative thought patterns into more constructive and rational self-talk. This technique has been applied in numerous studies with promising results in reducing anxiety and improving psychological well-being (Beck & Weishaar, 1989; Biondi, 2025). Positive Self-Talk helps individuals replace negative perceptions with more rational viewpoints, making it particularly relevant in addressing anxiety related to pregnancy, childbirth, and fetal health.

Despite the proven effectiveness of Positive Self-Talk in various contexts, its application in maternal mental health in developing countries, including Indonesia, remains limited. Anxiety in pregnant women in Indonesia, especially in rural areas, is influenced not only by biological and psychological factors but also by complex social and cultural aspects (Pohan et al., 2024, 2025). In many regions, pregnant women still face stigma surrounding mental health issues and lack access to adequate psychological services. Research conducted in developing countries such as Indonesia has shown that, despite the relatively high prevalence of pregnancy-related anxiety, psychological interventions based on psychoeducation and cognitive-behavioral therapy, such as Positive Self-Talk, are rarely implemented (Amalia et al., 2025; Silaban & Sibarani, 2021).

Although there is substantial evidence supporting the effectiveness of CBT in developed countries, the application of these techniques in culturally diverse settings, such as Indonesia, has been largely unexplored. This raises important questions regarding the barriers to the implementation of such techniques and the potential effectiveness of these interventions in alleviating anxiety among pregnant women in Indonesia, particularly considering the existing socio-cultural challenges (Fau et al., 2026; Ramadhani et al., 2026). Understanding these challenges is critical for the development of contextually relevant interventions.

To fill this gap, the present study aims to assess the effectiveness of group counseling with the Positive Self-Talk technique in reducing anxiety among

pregnant women in Desa Bukit Tempurung, Kecamatan Kota Kuala Simpang, Kabupaten Aceh Tamiang. This research will provide valuable insights into how this technique can be applied in the local context of Indonesia, where access to mental health services is limited. By employing a True Experimental pretest-posttest control group design, this study aims to determine whether Positive Self-Talk can effectively reduce anxiety among pregnant women in Indonesia and identify the factors influencing the effectiveness of this intervention in a developing country setting.

In alignment with the global goal of improving maternal mental health, this study also seeks to contribute to the development of psychosocial interventions that can be more broadly implemented, not only in Indonesia but also in other developing countries facing similar challenges. The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes the importance of holistic and community-based mental health care, which includes cognitive-behavioral psychological interventions for pregnant women as part of strategies to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to maternal and child health (WHO, 2018). The findings of this study are expected to provide strong evidence supporting the implementation of this technique in prenatal care programs in developing countries.

Positive Self-Talk is a technique closely associated with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), which has been proven effective in addressing various mental health disorders, including anxiety (Edmunds et al., 2017). Numerous studies

have shown that CBT, including the Positive Self-Talk technique, is effective in reducing anxiety across various populations, including pregnant women (Hofmann et al., 2013). Previous studies have shown that CBT-based techniques can reduce anxiety in pregnant women, enhance their mental health, and have a positive impact on fetal development (Challacombe et al., 2021). However, the application of this technique in Indonesia, particularly in areas with limited access to psychological services, has not been extensively explored. By addressing this gap, the current study aims to provide stronger evidence regarding the effectiveness of Positive Self-Talk in the Indonesian context.

METHODS

This study employs an experimental method using a True Experiment pretest-posttest control group design. This design was selected to ensure that the treatment effects can be directly compared between the experimental and control groups, providing more valid and accurate results (Casler, 2015). The study was conducted in Desa Bukit Tempurung, Kecamatan Kota Kuala Simpang, Kabupaten Aceh Tamiang, involving 20 first-time pregnant women as research subjects. The subjects were divided into two groups: the experimental group and the control group. Each subject underwent two measurement phases: a pretest before the treatment and a posttest after the treatment to assess changes in anxiety levels among pregnant women.

Subjects

The sample of this study consisted of 20 first-time pregnant women, selected through purposive sampling, based on specific criteria relevant to the research

objectives, such as gestational age and willingness to participate in the study. The inclusion criteria included pregnant women who exhibited anxiety, as measured by the Perinatal Anxiety Screening Scale (PASS). Data were collected using the self-report instrument Perinatal Anxiety Screening Scale (PASS), which has been adapted to measure anxiety levels in pregnant women. The PASS instrument was developed by Somerville et al. (2015) in Western Australia for screening anxiety issues in pregnant and postpartum women (Somerville et al., 2015). The PASS consists of four main domains: excessive worry and specific fears, perfectionism, control and trauma, social anxiety, and acute anxiety and regulation. Each statement in this instrument is scored using a Likert scale, measuring the extent to which the pregnant woman agrees with the statement (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The total score obtained indicates the level of anxiety, which can be categorized as mild, moderate, or severe.

Intervention Implementation

The intervention provided was group counseling with the Positive Self-Talk technique, which took place over six sessions: the pretest, four sessions of group counseling, and the posttest. During the four counseling sessions, participants were given material related to anxiety during pregnancy and how Positive Self-Talk can be used to manage anxiety. The counseling was conducted in a group setting to create a supportive atmosphere and reduce anxiety through interaction among participants. Pre- and post-treatment anxiety levels were measured using PASS to observe the changes.

Prerequisite Analysis

To ensure the reliability of the data, prerequisite tests were conducted before proceeding with hypothesis testing. The prerequisite tests included a normality test to determine if the distribution of anxiety data in the pretest and posttest followed a normal distribution, and a homogeneity test to check whether the variance in anxiety levels between the experimental and control groups was homogeneous. The normality test was performed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, while homogeneity was tested using Levene's test.

Data Analysis

Hypothesis testing in this study employed non-parametric statistical analysis using the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test through SPSS 20. The Wilcoxon test was chosen to analyze paired differences between the pretest and posttest in both the experimental and control groups. This test was selected because the data did not meet the assumption of normality, and the Wilcoxon test is appropriate for analyzing paired data that does not follow a normal distribution. The analysis steps included calculating the difference scores between pretest and posttest for each participant, determining the sign of the differences (positive or negative), and ranking the differences based on their magnitude. The significance of the differences was tested using Asymptotic Significance (2-tailed) with alpha = 0.05.

Research Procedure

The research procedure began with subject selection, where pregnant women who met the inclusion criteria were invited to participate. Following this, a pretest was conducted to measure anxiety using the PASS. Subsequently, group counseling intervention was carried out over four sessions, utilizing the Positive Self-Talk

technique to manage anxiety. After the intervention, a posttest was conducted to measure the change in anxiety levels among the participants. The data obtained from the pretest and posttest were analyzed using the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test to assess the significance of the difference in anxiety levels before and after the intervention.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical research principles. All participants were provided with an explanation of the study's purpose and were given the opportunity to provide informed consent. Furthermore, participant data confidentiality was strictly maintained, and participants were given the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Additionally, the study obtained ethical clearance from the Department of Islamic Guidance and Counseling, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Langsa, under approval number No. 39/In.24/RJ/PP.00.9/01/2023, confirming that the research was conducted in accordance with applicable ethical standards.

RESULTS

This research was conducted starting from January 30, 2023. The schedule for the study was determined in accordance with an agreement made with the research subjects. The subjects of this study were pregnant women from Desa Bukit Tempurung, Kecamatan Kota Kuala Simpang, Kabupaten Aceh Tamiang, with a total of 20 participants, divided into two groups: 10 in the experimental group and 10 in the control group. Prior to the intervention, prerequisite tests were conducted, including normality tests and homogeneity tests. The research findings are as follows:

Table 1 shows that the anxiety scores for the experimental group decreased from pre-test to post-test. At the pre-test, the anxiety levels were generally categorized as moderate, with an average score of 84.5. Among the participants, 5 individuals initially in the severe anxiety category improved, with 3 of them moving to a mild anxiety category. Next, Table 2 provides an overview of the data for the control group, comparing pre-test and post-test results.

Table 1. Experimental Group Scores

Initials	Pre-test		Post-test	
	Score	Category	Score	Category
FTR	98	Severe	59	Mild
SRS	97	Severe	66	Mild
MA	100	Severe	58	Mild
NMD	102	Severe	48	No
HNM	99	Severe	50	No
NRL	82	Moderate	61	Mild
DFP	75	Moderate	47	No
ANG	77	Moderate	44	No
IPH	55	Mild	36	No
CTK	60	Mild	39	No
Total	845		508	
Average	84.5	Moderate	50.8	No

Hypothesis Testing and Statistical Analysis

This study examines the effectiveness of group counseling with the Positive Self-Talk technique in reducing anxiety among pregnant women, using a True Experiment Pretest-Posttest Control Group design. To test the hypothesis, statistical analysis was performed using the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test to compare the changes in anxiety levels between the pre-

test and post-test for both the experimental and control groups, as well as the Mann-Whitney U Test to compare the post-test anxiety differences between the experimental and control groups.

Table 2. Control group scores

Initials	Pre-test		Post-test	
	Score	Category	Score	Category
SR	100	Severe	105	Severe
RSK	98	Severe	98	Severe
SDH	101	Severe	97	Severe
DW	102	Severe	99	Severe
RN	97	Severe	103	Severe
YN	76	Moderate	95	Moderate
LNA	75	Moderate	90	Moderate
FNI	80	Moderate	82	Moderate
TT	61	Mild	75	Mild
SRI	67	Mild	70	Mild
Total	857		914	
Average	85,7	Moderate	91,4	Moderate

Experimental Group

The results of the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test for the experimental group showed a significant reduction in anxiety after receiving the group counseling intervention with the Positive Self-Talk technique. The average pre-test anxiety score was high, but after participating in the counseling, participants showed a significant decrease in their anxiety levels, as reflected in the lower post-test scores. The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test yielded an Asymp. Sig. = 0.037, which is less than $\alpha = 0.05$, indicating that the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted and the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. This demonstrates that group counseling with the Positive Self-Talk technique is effective

in reducing anxiety among pregnant women in the experimental group.

Control Group

In contrast to the experimental group, the control group, which did not receive any intervention, showed an increase in anxiety from the pre-test to the post-test. The results of the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test for the control group indicated an Asymp. Sig. = 0.0628, which is greater than $\alpha = 0.05$, meaning there was no significant difference in anxiety levels between the pre-test and post-test in the control group. This suggests that, without the intervention, the anxiety levels of pregnant women in the control group did not undergo any significant changes.

Comparison Between Experimental and Control Groups

To compare the post-test anxiety levels between the experimental and control groups, a Mann-Whitney U Test was conducted. The results showed a significant difference between the two groups, with an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) = 0.00018, which is less than $\alpha = 0.05$. This indicates that group counseling with the Positive Self-Talk technique had a significant impact in reducing anxiety among the experimental group compared to the control group, which did not receive any intervention.

Based on the statistical analysis, it can be concluded that group counseling with the Positive Self-Talk technique is effective in reducing anxiety among pregnant women. The experimental group, which received the intervention, showed a significant reduction in anxiety, while the control group, which did not receive the intervention, did not show any significant changes. The comparison between the experimental and control groups demonstrates that the Positive Self-Talk technique had a greater impact on reducing anxiety among pregnant women.

DISCUSSION

The main finding of this study shows that Positive Self-Talk, as a technique within Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), effectively reduced anxiety among pregnant women. The experimental group experienced a significant reduction in anxiety, with the majority of participants moving to the "non-anxious" category in the post-test. Specifically, 4 pregnant women moved to the "mild" anxiety category, and 6 others moved to the "non-anxious" category. This reduction indicates the success of the technique in altering the negative perceptions commonly experienced by pregnant women regarding their health and the health of their fetus.

The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test results (Asymp. Sig. = 0.037) confirmed the significance of this change, strengthening the claim that Positive Self-Talk significantly reduces anxiety in the experimental group. This finding is consistent with previous research showing the effectiveness of CBT techniques in addressing anxiety, particularly in the context of pregnancy (Evans et al., 2020; Loughnan et al., 2018; Steinert et al., 2014; Zuliani et al., 2025). As Hofmann et al. (2014) explained, the Positive Self-Talk technique within CBT can help reframe negative thought patterns and improve emotional responses, thereby reducing anxiety (Arsini et al., 2023; Steinert et al., 2014).

Dynamic and Active Group Counseling Process

One key factor in the success of this intervention was the dynamic and active group counseling process. During the four sessions, pregnant women were given the opportunity to share experiences and feelings in a comfortable and open atmosphere. The interaction among group members fostered trust and mutual support, which contributed to the reduction

in anxiety. Yalom & Leszcz (2005) state that a strong therapeutic relationship, built within a familiar and supportive group, is essential for the effectiveness of psychological interventions (Diefenbeck et al., 2014; Restek-Petrović et al., 2014).

Further research add that a warm and supportive counselor-client relationship facilitates the psychological change process (Stewart et al., 2013). In this context, the counselor's ability to provide a warm environment enabled the pregnant women to feel more open to sharing their concerns, enhancing the effectiveness of the Positive Self-Talk technique (Latinjak et al., 2023). The success of this intervention highlights the importance of group-based approaches, emphasizing social support and familiarity, in reducing anxiety.

Warmth and Familiarity in Group Counseling

An important aspect contributing to the success of Positive Self-Talk was the warmth and familiarity created during the group counseling sessions. This experience provided pregnant women with the confidence to share their innermost feelings, which often relate to fears and worries about pregnancy. Previous research has shown that a strong therapeutic relationship is crucial in psychological interventions, as it accelerates the healing process (Bhola et al., 2025; Wampold, 2021). In this study, the warmth created through Positive Self-Talk in group counseling helped pregnant women reduce their anxiety while also strengthening a sense of community and social support.

Counseling Content and Its Impact on Perception and Action

The content discussed during the group counseling sessions, such as the reasons pregnant women are more sensitive, the effects of anxiety on the fetus, and ways to manage anxiety, was highly relevant in helping pregnant women change

their perceptions of anxiety. This directly relates to the cognitive restructuring theory within CBT, where pregnant women are empowered to alter their negative thought patterns about pregnancy and anxiety (Atif et al., 2020; O'Mahen et al., 2012). The knowledge provided during the sessions led to changes in the actions of the pregnant women, with them adopting new ways of responding to anxiety.

Previous research has also shown that the knowledge provided through education and counseling can reduce anxiety, particularly when pregnant women are given better coping strategies (George et al., 2013; Pasha et al., 2022). In this study, Positive Self-Talk successfully reduced anxiety because pregnant women gained better insights into their anxiety and how to approach it positively.

Control Group and Lack of Significant Change

This study also showed that the control group, which did not receive the intervention, did not exhibit any significant changes in anxiety levels, as reflected by the slight increase in the average post-test score to 91.4. This increase indicates that without intervention, the anxiety levels of pregnant women remained in the moderate category. This reinforces the conclusion that group counseling with the Positive Self-Talk technique has a significantly positive impact compared to the absence of treatment.

Although this study yielded positive results, some limitations should be noted. First, the relatively small sample size (20 participants) limits the generalizability of these findings. Future research should involve a larger and more diverse sample from different regions to improve external validity. Second, the limited duration of the intervention (only four sessions) makes it difficult to assess the long-term impact of the Positive Self-Talk technique. Therefore,

longitudinal research is necessary to evaluate the sustainability of this intervention's effectiveness over time.

Further research could also consider multicultural aspects by testing this technique in various regions of Indonesia, including areas with different cultural and social backgrounds. This would provide a broader understanding of how CBT techniques can be adapted to the diverse context of Indonesia, as well as other developing countries facing similar maternal mental health challenges.

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that group counseling with the Positive Self-Talk technique is an effective intervention for reducing anxiety in pregnant women. The significant reduction in anxiety observed in the experimental group, compared to the control group that did not receive any intervention, confirms that this technique can effectively alleviate anxiety. This study contributes to the growing literature on cognitive-behavioral techniques in the context of maternal mental health and suggests that this technique can be applied in prenatal care programs worldwide, particularly in resource-limited settings. Future research with larger, more diverse samples and extended study designs is needed to assess the long-term effectiveness of this intervention and its broader application in various regions and countries.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that group counseling with the Positive Self-Talk technique is an effective intervention for reducing anxiety among pregnant women in Desa Bukit Tempurung, Kecamatan Kota Kuala Simpang, Kabupaten Aceh Tamiang. The experimental group showed a significant reduction in anxiety, while the control group did not show any meaningful

changes, reinforcing the effectiveness of this technique in managing pregnancy-related anxiety.

Furthermore, the study offers valuable insights into the application of Positive Self-Talk in Indonesia, particularly in rural areas with limited access to mental health services. The findings fill a gap in the existing literature, which has primarily focused on developed countries, and provide evidence that this CBT-based technique can be effectively applied in developing countries like Indonesia, despite cultural and social challenges. This technique not only helped pregnant women reduce anxiety but also improved their overall psychological well-being.

The dynamic group counseling process, along with social support and the warm environment fostered during the sessions, played a critical role in reducing anxiety. These findings underscore the importance of psychosocial interventions in maternal mental health, which are more accessible and affordable for pregnant women in underserved areas.

Overall, the study contributes to the development of psychosocial interventions in maternal mental health and suggests that Positive Self-Talk can be a valuable tool in prenatal care programs, both in Indonesia and other developing countries. However, further research with larger and more diverse samples, as well as longitudinal studies, is needed to assess the long-term impact and broader applicability of this intervention.

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CREDIT

CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Marimbun Marimbun: Conceptualization, Funding, Writing-review & editing, **Nurhaliza Nurhaliza:** Writing-review & editing, **Wan Chalidaziah:** Writing-review & editing.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The Authors Declare No Conflict of Interest in This Paper.

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