



# Empowering high school students as peer counselors to prevent free sex and early marriage

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Article history</b>            Received: 2024-01-26            Revised: 2024-05-11            Accepted: 2024-05-20            Published: 2024-05-24</p> <p><b>Keywords</b>            Early marriage            Free sex            Peer counselors</p>	<p>Adolescence is a period that is vulnerable to various problems, the establishment and training of peer counseling in schools can be the right choice in an effort to fortify adolescents from negative environmental influences and play a role in promoting the issues of free sex, early marriage, and reproductive health through counseling activities. The activity was carried out using the training method, in August 2023. The location of the activity was SMA Negeri 15 Surabaya, with the target participants being 2 representatives of class X and XI students, totaling 48 students. The instruments used in this activity are pre-test and post-test, with the main material of counseling on free sex, early marriage, reproductive health, and skills to become peer counselors. The success indicator of this activity, where &gt;50% of participants get a minimum point increase of 5%. Community service activities through peer counseling training were successful in fulfilling activity success indicators. &gt;50% of participants got an increase in points of at least 5% after training; namely, a total of 26 (54.17%) participants experienced an increase in knowledge scores of more than 5%. The training activities that have been carried out are effective in increasing the knowledge of participants.</p>
<p><b>Kata Kunci</b>            Konselor sebaya            Pernikahan dini            Seks bebas</p>	<p><b>Pemberdayaan Siswa SMA menjadi konselor sebaya sebagai upaya pencegahan seks bebas dan pernikahan dini.</b> Remaja adalah masa yang rentan terhadap berbagai masalah, pembentukan dan pelatihan konseling sebaya di sekolah dapat menjadi pilihan yang tepat dalam upaya membentengi remaja dari pengaruh negatif lingkungan serta berperan mengusung isu seks bebas, pernikahan dini dan kesehatan reproduksi melalui kegiatan konseling. Kegiatan ini dilakukan dengan menggunakan metode pelatihan, pada bulan Agustus 2023. Lokasi kegiatan bertempat di SMA Negeri 15 Surabaya, dengan target peserta 2 perwakilan dari siswa kelas X dan XI, dengan total 48 siswa. Instrumen yang digunakan dalam kegiatan ini adalah pre-test dan post-test, dengan materi utama konseling tentang seks bebas, pernikahan dini, kesehatan produksi dan keterampilan menjadi konselor sebaya. Indikator keberhasilan kegiatan ini, dimana &gt;50% peserta mendapatkan peningkatan poin minimum sebesar 5%. Kegiatan pelayanan masyarakat melalui konseling sebaya berhasil memenuhi indikator keberhasilan kegiatan. Lebih dari 50% peserta mendapatkan peningkatan poin setidaknya 5% setelah pelatihan; yaitu, sebanyak 26 (54,17%) peserta mengalami peningkatan nilai pengetahuan lebih dari 5%. Kegiatan pelatihan yang telah dilakukan terbukti efektif dalam meningkatkan pengetahuan peserta.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Copyright © 2024, Arifin et al            This is an open access article under the CC-BY-SA license</p> 

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## INTRODUCTION

The development of technology, which has increased significantly, has many impacts on the lives of adolescents. In the era of globalization, which is currently experienced, culture from outside is accessed quickly and freely among the community, especially teenagers in Indonesia, many of whom carry out activities outside normal limits and cause problems both for themselves and others (Ridhani & Abidarda, 2020). Adolescence is a period that is vulnerable to various problems,

including personal, social, educational, and career problems. Adolescence is a period in which an individual experiences a transition from childhood to adulthood, which is accompanied by a series of radical physical, psychological, and behavioral changes (Salmiati et al., 2018). This period is often known as the rebellious period because adolescents who have just experienced puberty often display a variety of emotional turmoil, withdraw from the family, and experience many problems both at home, school, and in their friendship environment (Karlina, 2020).

Not all adolescents can go through the maturation process well; not a few of them fail to complete their developmental tasks so that they fail to achieve the expected competencies, and even behavioral deviations can occur (Fajar et al., 2022). One of the behavioral deviations that is a major issue and needs attention is free sex. In Indonesia, there are around 4.5% of male adolescents and 0.7% of female adolescents aged 15–19 who claim to have had premarital sexual intercourse. Among adolescents aged 15–19 years, the largest proportion dated for the first time at the age of 15–17 years. About 33.3% of adolescent girls and 34.5% of adolescent boys aged 15–19 started dating when they were not yet 15 years old (Andriani et al., 2022). Premarital sex can result in early marriage, potentially leading to numerous health issues arising from decreased birth weight and insufficient parental support (Nurmala et al., 2019). Meanwhile, this period is a time when adolescents are vulnerable to sexual and reproductive health problems, including early marriage, pregnancy at a young age, unwanted pregnancy, low sexual and reproductive health knowledge, sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV and AIDS, abortion, and gender-based violence (Fatkhiyah et al., 2020). The presence of issues, poses a risk and contributes to the relatively high age-specific fertility rate among individuals aged 15-19 years (Kosasih et al., 2021).

Year after year, the incidence of adolescent health problems in East Java Province is rapidly escalating. The emergence of risky behaviors among adolescents further compounds the expanding impact and burden of disease, contributing to its continuous growth (Permatasari & Suprayitno, 2021). Based on the results of Susenas in 2018, out of 34 provinces in Indonesia, 23 provinces had cases of early marriage in women, with a higher prevalence of early childhood marriage compared to the national figure. In 2018, the number of marriage cases for women under 18 years of age was 11.21%, while for men it was 1.06% (BPS, 2020). The Directorate General of Religious Courts (Badilag) of the Indonesian Supreme Court presented data on marriage dispensation throughout 2022 in all Religious High Courts (PTA) in Indonesia, with a total of 50,704 cases of early marriage. As many as 30% came from East Java, with a total of 15,243 cases handled by PTAs throughout 2022. Other data from the Surabaya Religious Court showed a total of 375 cases in 2021, 264 cases in 2022, and 19 cases recorded until February 2023 (Directorate General of Religious Courts Agency, 2023).

To overcome these various problems, they can be overcome through peer group counseling. Counseling or peer counselors are adolescents who are able to provide information about health and help their peers recognize their problems and realize the need to seek help (referral) in order to solve their problems. Peer counselors are not professionals in the field of counseling, but peer counselors are expected to be an extension of professional counselors (Purwanti et al., 2022). For numerous decades, literature has shown evidence that peer counseling is equally effective (Topping, 2022). The effects of peer education were reviewed, that peer education proved advantageous in enhancing understanding of sexual health topics (Wong et al., 2019) and has the potential to diminish risky behaviors (He et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2018). The results of research conducted by Salmiati et al. (2018) showed that peer counselor training is one of the strategies for solving student problems at school. Similar research also states that peer counseling activities show effectiveness, especially in relation to guiding and directing peers to fortify themselves from negative environmental influences (Sarmin, 2017).

Peer counselors assist the counselee in the decision-making process for the problems experienced by the counselee. Peer counselors identify what kind of decision is needed by the counselee based on the diagnosis of the problem and describe the advantages and disadvantages of each decision option and its consequences (Purwanti et al., 2022). Salmiati et al. (2018) revealed that adolescents, especially students, are generally more comfortable talking about the problems they face with their peers than consulting with professionals in the school guidance and counseling room. On the other hand, when participants have the same diagnosis and severity level, they frequently share comparable experiences, fostering a deeper mutual understanding (Andalibi & Flood, 2021; Ruiz Rodríguez et al., 2018). Desirable traits of peer counselors involve coming from the same community, speaking the same language and sharing similar cultural beliefs (Rujumba et al., 2020). This shows that when adolescents are faced with a problem, they need friends who are able to accompany their developmental tasks well and can solve the problems they experience together through their peers. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to determine the participants' knowledge on free sex, early marriage and reproductive health through peer counseling activities at school. The establishment and training of peer counseling in schools can be the right choice in an effort to fortify adolescents from negative environmental influences and play a role in promoting the issues of free sex, early marriage, and reproductive health through counseling activities.

This program also aligns with certain Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) number 3, which focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. Empowering high schools peer counselors to educate their peers on sexual health and relationships, can reduce sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unwanted pregnancies and early marriages, aligning with SDGs number 3. Additionally, it supports SDGs number 4 by promoting inclusive and equitable education. This approach fosters inclusivity and respect for all individuals, particularly girls and women, contributing to SDG 5's goal of gender equality and empowerment.

## METHOD

The activity was carried out using the training method, which was divided into two stages of implementation in August 2023. The location of the activity was SMA Negeri 15 Surabaya, with the target participants being 2 representatives of class X and XI students, totaling 48 students. The outline of how activities will be carried out to implement the methods was summarized in Figure 1.



Figure 1. The stages of activity implementation and problem solving.

An initial meeting was held to initiate cooperation in community service activities with the principal of SMA Negeri 15 Surabaya, followed by virtual routine coordination between community service members. Subsequently, preparation for training activities was made, include materials such as PowerPoints presentations, booklets and videos. Evaluation methods was outlined, involving pre-test, post-test and response questionnaires via Google Form. The implementation of the first phase of training is carried out by filling out pre-test questions, counseling, and question-and-answer discussions. At the end of the activity, participants will be given the task of practicing counseling with their peers in their respective classes for 1-2 weeks after the training. This practice included role-playing scenarios to stimulate peer interactions to stimulate peer interactions or exploring alternative approaches, such as seeking guidance from professionals, to address their concerns (Kalkbrenner et al., 2020). During the implementation of the second stage of training, participants will present the results of counseling to their peers who have been assigned to the first stage of training. At this stage, participants were given post-test questions to obtain data on the participants' final understanding after the training. Response questionnaires were also given to capture responses and input from participants regarding the training activities that had been carried out.

The instruments used in this activity are pre-test, post-test, and response questionnaires, with the main material of counseling on free sex, early marriage, reproductive health, and skills to become peer counselors. The success indicator of this activity is obtained from the pre-test and post-test evaluation results, where >50% of participants get a minimum point increase of 5%.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Community service activities have been carried out according to the implementation plan and agreement located at SMA Negeri 15 Surabaya as a community service program partner. The implementation of the community service program through this counseling was carried out in two stages, with the target participants being high school students, considering that this age is included in adolescence. Before the activity implementation stage, preparations were made by coordinating with activity partners and preparing materials that would be delivered during counseling.

The first phase of the activity was carried out on August 11, 2023, which included filling out pre-test questions, counseling, and question-and-answer discussions. Giving pre-test questions aims to determine the initial knowledge possessed by the participants. Counseling was delivered directly by a team of Surabaya State University lecturer facilitators, with the material presented including: a) free sex; b) early marriage; c) reproductive health; and d) peer counselors. Counseling materials are also delivered through PowerPoints, booklets, and interactive videos that can attract participants' interest so that they can understand the counseling material well. In this activity, participants will also be given the opportunity to discuss with the facilitator team so that they can express their opinions and understand the

material that has been delivered. High enthusiasm was shown by the participants, which was shown by the active participants asking questions and discussing in this session.

At the end of the first activity, participants will be given a peer counseling simulation task where they will become counselors and counsees to each other and apply the peer counseling process that has been explained. Relatedly, initiative for peer-to-peer mental health support involve the training of students by school mental health professionals. These trained students then play a role in educating their peers about both physical and mental wellness. In certain instances, they are also equipped to identify and refer their peers to mental health support services when needed (Kalkbrenner *et al.* 2020). The role-playing and peer counseling activities aim to impart empathy and active listening skills. Students take turns playing the roles of counselors and counsees in various activities for both teaching techniques (Rodríguez *et al.*, 2018).

The second phase of the activity was held on August 23, 2023, and at this stage, the selected participants will present the results of the simulation that was assigned at the previous meeting (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. Peer counseling presentation by trainees

At the end of the second phase of activities, participants will be given post-test questions. Giving these questions aims to measure the level of knowledge possessed by participants after the material provided at the first meeting and the peer counseling simulation that has been carried out. Giving pre-test questions at the beginning of the meeting and post-test questions at the end of the meeting is evaluation data that will be used as a benchmark for indicators of the success of the activity.

Table 1. Trainee activity evaluation scores

Category	Knowledge Evaluation Score	
	Pre-test	Post-test
Good	24 (50.00%)	38 (79.17%)
Fair	22 (45.83%)	10 (20.83%)
Poor	2 (4.17%)	0 (00.00%)

Table 1 shows the evaluation value of training activities obtained from pre-test and post-test data. The results show that there is an increase in the number of participants with a score category of "good" from the pre-test data of 24 (50.00%) participants after the implementation of the post-test, which rose to 38 (79.17%) participants. There was a decrease in the number of participants who scored in the "fair" category, from 22 (45.83%) participants to 10 (20.83%) participants. There was also a decrease in the number of participants who scored in the "poor" category, from 2 (4.17%) participants to 0 (0.00%) participants after counselling.

The learning media used for counselling can also affect the evaluation results. Extension materials delivered through PowerPoints, booklets, and interactive videos tend to attract the attention of trainees who can develop creative thinking

skills. This is in line with the results of research conducted by Rachmawati et al. (2020), which show that students use interactive learning media effectively to be applied, as evidenced by the results of the pre-test before using interactive media and the post-test after using interactive learning media experiencing significant differences.

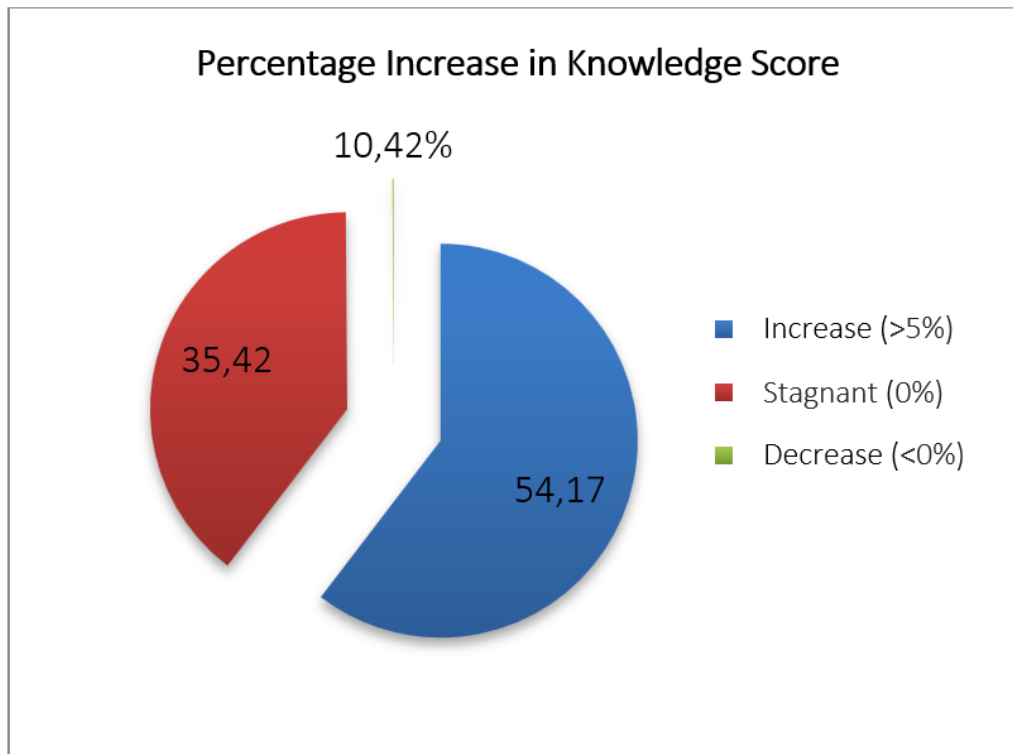


Figure 3. Increased post-training knowledge scores of participants

Based on the data on the increase in participants' knowledge scores after training (Fig. 3), it can be seen that this training activity was successful with the fulfillment of the activity success indicator, namely that >50% of participants got a minimum point increase of 5% after training. A total of 26 (54.17%) participants experienced an increase in knowledge value of more than 5%; 17 (35.42%) participants did not experience an increase in knowledge value or stagnant; and as many as 5 (10.42%) participants experienced a decrease in knowledge value. From this data, it can be seen that the training activities that have been carried out are effective in increasing the knowledge of participants. Participants have understood the material about peer counseling after the counseling is given. The result of a research conducted by Murdiningsih & Hindun (2020), indicated that participants can increase their knowledge through accessing diverse, reliable sources and engaging with various stakeholders such as schools, parents and environmental.

Based on the evaluation results of community service activities that have been carried out, there are supporting and inhibiting factors that affect the level of knowledge of training participants. Supporting factors that influence include: a) the existence of a team of facilitators who are experts in their fields and are able to explain the material and facilitate activities well; b) media for delivering counseling material through PowerPoints, booklets, and interesting interactive videos; c) support from the principal of SMA Negeri 15 Surabaya as an activity partner who welcomes the implementation of training activities; d) the enthusiasm of training participants in activities both during discussions and peer counselor practices; and d) the availability of funds to support activities from the university for the smooth running of community service activities. Media in delivering counseling services, especially audio-visual media plays a crucial role. According to Fuady & Mutalib (2018), utilizing instructional media significantly enhances the effectiveness of the learning process, aiding in message delivery and enriching lesson content. If teachers take an active role in the learning process, audio-visual materials can offer numerous advantages. Students can derive greater educational benefit from audiovisual media, as it facilitates broader thinking, analysis and enhances memory retention (Fauzi et al., 2017). Sutarto et al. (2020) states that participant's interest also important, interest serves as a catalyst for motivation, ultimately enhancing learning outcomes.

The inhibiting factors or obstacles experienced during the implementation of activities include: a) many training participants still do not have prior knowledge of the activity material, especially about peer counselors; b) participants' varying capacities, so that it takes longer to understand the material for participants who have low capacity. Ridha (2019) explained that the application of peer counselors in schools can be influenced by several factors, such as the types of problems experienced by students and the openness of students to conveying problems. This conclusion is supporting by

the findings of Permatasari & Suprayitno (2021), that the implementation of adolescent reproductive health counselling by peer counselors was influenced by three main factors: predisposing factors, enabling factors and reinforcing factors. Predisposing factors including knowledge, motivation, support and supervision of peer counselors play a significant role. Enabling factors involve the availability of training facilities and infrastructure. Reinforcing factors, such as support from family, teachers and peers, also contribute to the process. According to previous studies conducted by Malihah et al. (2022), while peers and schoolmates also play a role, the family stands out as the primary influence on adolescent development. The stronger the bond between adolescents and their parents, the greater the adolescents' self-control and conversely. When adolescents are not open and act more according to their immature minds, adults will find it increasingly difficult to control and guide them (Rafiola et al., 2022).

With the peer counselor training that has been carried out, training activity participants, especially SMA Negeri 15 Surabaya students, can gain knowledge about peer counseling and its application in everyday life so that the objectives of the training activities that have been carried out are achieved. Peer counselors are not professionals in the field of counseling, but peer counselors are expected to be an extension of professional counselors (Purwanti et al., 2022). The peer group is important for adolescents, not receiving acknowledgement or validation from this social group can lead to intense feelings of unworthiness, loneliness and despair (Cowie & Sharp, 2017). The results of research conducted by Sarmin (2017) show that peer counselors have a vital role in helping schools and communities shape and foster adolescents into individuals who have better character and avoid juvenile delinquency. The implementation of peer counselors in schools shows positive changes and helps optimize the performance of BK and teachers in solving student problems at SMK 10 Surabaya (Ridha, 2019). The connection formed with a school counselor can facilitate students in articulating their problems. Surveys and tests serve as valuable tools, aiding in a deeper understanding of students and their needs (Akyol & Kutlu, 2023).

School counselors play a crucial role in trauma-informed schools and can advocate for this approach to enhance responsive service delivery (Brown, 2020). Peer counselors can lead to new abilities in psychosocial aspects of students that have been underdeveloped, namely understanding themselves and others and the willingness to be involved in dealing with other people's problems. On the school side, there will also be a movement to develop activities, namely by optimizing guidance activities to bridge and eliminate negative perceptions of school guidance and counseling. Besides serving as an extension of guidance and counseling service, peer counseling cadres can act as intermediaries for school counselors in developing necessary student programs and also assist school counselors in analyzing the situations and conditions faced by students (Ramli et al., 2024). For school counseling to effectively offer the required psychological support and other assistance in both scenarios, there is a critical need for an ample number of well-equipped and competent school counselors (Karaman et al. 2021). The formation of a peer counseling community can also be an agent of change for adolescents in schools (Salmiati et al., 2018).

## CONCLUSION

Community service activities through peer counseling training were successful in fulfilling activity success indicators. >50% of participants got an increase in points of at least 5% after training; namely, a total of 26 (54.17%) participants experienced an increase in knowledge scores of more than 5%. The training activities that have been carried out are effective in increasing the knowledge of participants. Participants have understood the material about peer counseling after the counseling is given. Peer counseling in schools can be the right choice in an effort to fortify adolescents from negative environmental influences and is expected to play a role in promoting the issues of free sex, early marriage, and reproductive health through counseling activities.

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