

Effectiveness of Cognitive-Behavioral Psychoeducation in Reducing Breakup Distress Among Eleventh-Grade Students: A Quasi-Experimental Pretest-Posttest Design Study at SMAN 6 Malang

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Abstract

Breakup distress, an emotional response to romantic dissolution, poses significant challenges to adolescent mental health, particularly in urban settings like Malang, Indonesia, where social media amplifies relational pressures. According to recent data, approximately 34.9% of Indonesian adolescents aged 10–17 experience mental health issues, with romantic-related distress contributing to 20–30% of cases in high schools. This quasi-experimental pre-posttest study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of a cognitive-behavioral psychoeducational model in reducing breakup distress among 50 eleventh-grade students at SMAN 6 Malang who had experienced a breakup in the past six months. Using purposive sampling, participants underwent four 60-minute sessions focusing on emotional understanding, coping strategies, and self-reflection. Data were collected via the breakup distress scale, with pre- and post-test scores analyzed using a paired samples *t*-test and effect size calculation. Results indicated a small, non-significant reduction in mean scores (pre: $M = 36.1$, $SD = 12.8$; post: $M = 35.6$, $SD = 14.4$; $p = .489$, Cohen's $d = 0.04$), though individual variations suggested potential benefits for some. Findings highlight the need for longer interventions to achieve significance, contributing to psychological theories on adolescent resilience. Limitations include sample size and lack of a control group; future research should incorporate randomized designs.

Abstrak

Breakup distress, respons emosional terhadap putusnya hubungan romantis, menimbulkan tantangan signifikan bagi kesehatan mental remaja, terutama di lingkungan urban seperti Malang, Indonesia, di mana media sosial memperbesar tekanan relasional. Menurut data terkini, sekitar 34,9% remaja Indonesia berusia 10–17 tahun mengalami masalah kesehatan mental, dengan *distress* terkait romantisme menyumbang 20–30% kasus di sekolah menengah atas. Studi kuasi-eksperimental *pre-posttest* ini bertujuan mengevaluasi efektivitas model psikoedukasi berbasis kognitif-perilaku dalam mengurangi *breakup distress* pada 50 siswa kelas XI SMAN 6 Malang yang mengalami putus cinta dalam enam bulan terakhir. Menggunakan *sampling purposive*, peserta menjalani empat sesi 60 menit yang berfokus pada pemahaman emosi, strategi coping, dan refleksi diri. Data dikumpulkan melalui skala *breakup distress*, dengan skor *pre*- dan *post-test* dianalisis menggunakan uji *t* sampel berpasangan dan perhitungan ukuran efek. Hasil menunjukkan penurunan kecil yang tidak signifikan pada skor rata-rata (pre: $M = 36,1$, $SD = 12,8$; post: $M = 35,6$, $SD = 14,4$; $p = 0,489$, Cohen's $d = 0,04$), meskipun variasi individu menunjukkan manfaat potensial bagi sebagian. Temuan menekankan kebutuhan intervensi lebih panjang untuk mencapai signifikansi, berkontribusi pada teori psikologi tentang resiliensi re-

maja. Keterbatasan meliputi ukuran sampel dan kurangnya kelompok kontrol; penelitian mendatang sebaiknya gunakan desain acak.

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INTRODUCTION

Breakup distress represents a prevalent and emotionally intense psychological challenge among adolescents, characterized by feelings of sadness, rumination, helplessness, and motivational decline following the termination of a romantic relationship (Field, 2023). During adolescence, romantic experiences play a significant role in shaping identity and emotional regulation; thus, relationship dissolution often triggers profound emotional pain that may resemble depressive symptoms or anxiety (Sbarra & Emery, 2019). Empirical studies have demonstrated that romantic breakups can cause short-term emotional disturbances and long-term maladaptive coping behaviors such as withdrawal, academic disengagement, or risk-taking behaviors (Tashiro & Frazier, 2019). These symptoms highlight the importance of addressing breakup-related distress as a specific and relevant aspect of adolescent mental health.

In Indonesia, mental health issues among adolescents are a growing public health concern. National surveys report that 34.9% of Indonesian adolescents aged 10–17 years, approximately 15.5 million individuals, experience some form of psychological distress, with 1% reporting depressive symptoms and 3.7% anxiety (Kementerian Kesehatan Republik Indonesia, 2025). Romantic-related distress has been found to contribute to 20–30% of such emotional cases among high school students (Pratiwi & al., 2022). In urban settings such as Malang, the intensity of breakup distress may be exacerbated by heightened exposure to social media and peer comparison, both of which increase emotional vulnerability and the likelihood of online rumination or cyber-stalking behaviors after breakups (Fauzia & Lestari, 2023). Internal counseling reports from SMAN 6 Malang in 2024 revealed an increased number of students seeking emotional support following romantic breakups, indicating the urgent need for structured psychological interventions within school environments. These findings support the notion that breakup distress is not a trivial matter but a significant psychosocial issue that affects adolescents' well-being, academic concentration, and interpersonal functioning.

The psychological dynamics underlying breakup distress can be understood through various theoretical perspectives. According to Bowlby's attachment theory by Bowlby (1969), adolescents with insecure attachment, particularly anxious-preoccupied patterns, tend to experience more severe emotional reactions and prolonged grief following relationship loss. This occurs because romantic partners often serve as attachment figures, and their absence may trigger fear of abandonment, self-blame, and obsessive thoughts (del Palacio-González et al., 2017). Furthermore, the cognitive-behavioral model, Beck (1979), posits that negative automatic thoughts such as "I am not worthy of love" or "I will never recover" can intensify emotional suffering, leading to maladaptive coping responses like avoidance or self-criticism. Social support, conversely, acts as a protective factor that buffers stress and fosters recovery, consistent with Cohen and Wills (1985) buffering hypothesis. Thus, interventions that promote cognitive restructuring, emotional regulation, and peer-based support are crucial in mitigating the negative psychological impact of breakup distress among adolescents.

Psychoeducation, as a structured psychological intervention, provides knowledge, emotional awareness, and coping skill training to individuals experiencing distress (Lukens & McFarlane, 2004). Within a cognitive-behavioral framework, psychoeducation aims to help participants understand the relationship between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, thereby empowering them to reframe irrational beliefs and engage in adaptive coping strategies. Cognitive-behavioral psychoeducation (CBP) typically involves interactive sessions that combine theory-based learning with reflective exercises, self-monitoring, and problem-solving activities (Rosner et al., 2011). In adolescent populations, CBP has been shown to reduce emotional distress and enhance resilience by promoting self-efficacy, emotional literacy, and adaptive social functioning (Sari & Handayani, 2024). However, in Indonesia, research exploring CBP in the context of breakup distress remains scarce. Most studies focus on depression, anxiety, or general emotional regulation, with limited attention to romantic-related distress or the school-based implementation of psychoeducational models (Pratiwi et al., 2022). This gap underscores the need for empirical research testing the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral psychoeducation as an intervention to reduce breakup distress among adolescents.

SMAN 6 Malang was selected as the research site due to its documented rise in emotional counseling cases related to relationship issues in 2024, reflecting a broader urban adolescent trend. The focus on eleventh-grade students (aged 16–17) is theoretically justified, as this stage of development corresponds with Erikson's (1968) psychosocial crisis of identity versus role confusion, wherein romantic relationships play a critical role in self-concept formation. Relationship dissolution during this stage can therefore disrupt self-esteem and identity coherence, leading to heightened vulnerability to emotional distress.

Based on these considerations, the present study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of a cognitive-behavioral psychoeducational model in reducing breakup distress among eleventh-grade students at SMAN 6 Malang. It employs a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest design to examine whether participation in the intervention results in a significant reduction in distress levels. By addressing a neglected area of adolescent psychology, this study contributes to the growing body of evidence on culturally relevant interventions for Indonesian youth. Moreover, it aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG-3), which emphasizes the promotion of mental health and well-being for all.

METHODS

This study employed a quasi-experimental pre–posttest design to evaluate the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral psychoeducation in reducing breakup distress among eleventh-grade students at SMAN 6 Malang. This design was selected due to its appropriateness for educational settings, where full randomization is often difficult to implement, yet it allows for the measurement of behavioral and emotional changes before and after intervention within the same group (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). The intervention group received a structured cognitive-behavioral psychoeducational program, with pretest and posttest assessments conducted to measure changes in the participants' levels of breakup distress.

The study population consisted of approximately 500 eleventh-grade students enrolled at SMAN 6 Malang during the 2024/2025 academic year, aged 16–17 years. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, with inclusion criteria specifying students who had experienced a romantic breakup within the previous six months and were willing to participate voluntarily. A total of 50 students were recruited at the beginning of the study, but only 38 completed all intervention sessions and the posttest due to scheduling conflicts, resulting in a final participation rate of 76%. The

adequacy of the sample size was determined using GPower analysis for paired-sample *t*-tests, assuming a medium effect size ($d = 0.50$), significance level ($\alpha = .05$), and statistical power ($1-\beta = 0.80$). The analysis indicated a minimum requirement of 34 participants, and 50 were recruited to anticipate possible attrition (Faul et al., 2007). All participants provided written informed consent prior to participation, and ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Universitas Negeri Malang.

Data were collected using the breakup distress scale (BDS) adapted from Field (2013). The instrument comprises 16 statements rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*), measuring emotional and cognitive aspects of breakup distress such as sadness, anger, rumination, and loss of motivation. The adaptation process followed a forward-backward translation procedure and was reviewed by three psychologists to ensure linguistic accuracy, cultural appropriateness, and content validity. The instrument demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$) and satisfactory construct validity, supported by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results showing good model fit (CFI = .92; RMSEA = .07; Boateng et al., 2018).

The cognitive-behavioral psychoeducational intervention was developed based on cognitive theory by Beck (1979), which emphasizes the interconnection between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in shaping individuals' psychological responses to life events. The program was implemented across three sessions, each lasting approximately 60 minutes, facilitated by a trained counselor and held in the school's meeting room. Simple media such as worksheets, writing tools, and a projector were used to support the sessions. The program was designed to be interactive, combining group discussions, reflective exercises, and cognitive-behavioral learning activities to help students recognize and regulate their emotional responses after a breakup.

The first session, "Know Yourself," focused on the concept of social comparison. This session aimed to help participants understand how comparing themselves to others, particularly former partners or peers, can influence self-esteem and emotional well-being following a breakup. Through guided discussions and reflection, participants learned to identify unrealistic comparisons and develop more balanced, self-accepting perspectives.

The second session, "Take Care of Yourself," centered on the concept of self-compassion. Participants were introduced to the idea of accepting themselves with kindness, recognizing that suffering is a universal human experience, and responding to personal pain with warmth rather than self-criticism. Activities such as positive affirmations, self-reflection, and journaling were used to foster self-kindness and emotional resilience.

The third session, "Recover Yourself," addressed the topic of breakup distress and emotional recovery. In this session, participants explored their emotional responses, such as sadness, anger, and denial, associated with breakup experiences. They were guided to reinterpret negative thoughts through cognitive restructuring (reframing) and to practice problem-solving techniques to rebuild emotional balance. The session concluded with the establishment of personal growth goals to strengthen resilience and promote long-term emotional well-being.

Quantitative data analysis was conducted using Jamovi software. Descriptive statistics, including mean, median, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values, were used to summarize the pretest and posttest data. The Shapiro-Wilk test was applied to assess the normality of data distribution, revealing that the data were normally distributed (pretest: $W = .967$, $p = .176$; posttest: $W = .944$, $p = .057$). Since normality assumptions were met, a paired-sample *t*-test was used to determine significant differences between pre- and post-intervention scores. Cohen's d was calculated

to measure the effect size, indicating the magnitude of the intervention’s impact. When normality assumptions were violated, the nonparametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used as an alternative.

All procedures adhered to ethical research standards involving human participants. Participant confidentiality was strictly maintained, and each student retained the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

RESULTS

This quasi-experimental study analyzed data from 38 eleventh-grade students who completed both pretest and posttest assessments after 12 participants withdrew due to scheduling conflicts. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1. The sample consisted of 21 females (55.3%) and 17 males (44.7%), with a mean age of 16.5 years ($SD = 0.60$). The majority of participants were Muslim (89.5%), reflecting the predominant demographic composition of adolescents in Malang City (*Badan Pusat Statistik Malang, 2025*).

Table. 1
Participants’ Demographic Characteristics ($N = 38$)

Demographic Variable	Category	<i>n</i>	%
Gender	Female	21	55,3
	Male	17	44,7
Age	Mean (<i>SD</i>)	16,5 (0,6)	-
Religion	Muslim	34	89,5
	Non-Muslim	4	10,5

Descriptive statistics for the BDS are presented in Table 2. The mean pretest score was 36.1 ($SD = 12.8$, range = 16–70), and the mean posttest score was 35.6 ($SD = 14.4$, range = 16–74), showing a very small reduction after the intervention. The Shapiro–Wilk test confirmed that both the pretest ($W = .967, p = .176$) and posttest ($W = .944, p = .057$) distributions were normal, allowing the use of a parametric paired-sample *t*-test.

Table. 2
Descriptive Statistics and Normality Tests for Breakup Distress Scores ($N = 38$)

Variable	<i>N</i>	Mean	Median	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max	Shapiro-Wilk <i>W</i>	Shapiro-Wilk <i>p</i>
A (Pre-test)	38	36.1	35.5	12.8	16	70	0.967	0.176
B (Post-test)	38	35.6	34.0	14.4	16	74	0.944	0.057

The paired-sample *t*-test revealed no significant difference between pretest and posttest scores, $t(37) = 0.363, p = .719$, with a mean difference of 0.447 ($SE = 1.23$). The effect size was small (Cohen’s $d = 0.059$), indicating that the cognitive-behavioral psychoeducation program produced only a minimal reduction in breakup distress. To confirm robustness, the nonparametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test was also conducted and showed consistent results ($W = 313, p = .572$, rank biserial correlation = .114), supporting the conclusion that no significant change occurred after the intervention.

Further examination of score distributions indicated that four participants (10.5%) scored in the low distress range (≤ 20) at pretest, suggesting mild emotional disturbance, while one participant (2.6%) showed a high distress score (≥ 70). At posttest, the number of participants in the low distress category increased slightly to five (13.2%), while those in the moderate range (21–45) decreased

marginally from 78.9% to 76.3%. These findings suggest subtle individual improvements, though not sufficient to produce a statistically significant overall effect.

Table. 3
Distribution of Breakup Distress Categories ($N = 38$)

Distress Category	Score Range	Pretest n (%)	Posttest n (%)
Low	≤ 20	4 (10.5)	5 (13.2)
Moderate	21–45	30 (78.9)	29 (76.3)
High	≥ 46	4 (10.5)	4 (10.5)

Although the overall difference was not statistically significant, the descriptive pattern indicates slight positive changes among some students, implying that certain individuals may have benefited from specific components of the cognitive-behavioral psychoeducation, such as increased emotional awareness and improved coping strategies.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated whether a cognitive-behavioral psychoeducational program could reduce breakup distress among eleventh-grade students at SMAN 6 Malang. The results revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest scores, suggesting that the three-session intervention did not produce a measurable reduction in breakup distress levels. Despite the absence of significant change, descriptive data indicated minor individual improvements, such as an increase in the proportion of students reporting low distress from 10.5% to 13.2%. These findings partially answer the research question, suggesting that while the intervention did not yield a group-level effect, it may have facilitated early-stage emotional awareness and cognitive shifts for certain participants.

The findings can be understood in light of the short duration of the program and the complex psychological nature of breakup distress. According to Beck's cognitive theory (1979), emotional distress arises from maladaptive thought patterns; therefore, cognitive restructuring requires repeated reinforcement and practice to produce significant behavioral changes. The three-session format in this study may not have provided sufficient exposure to the restructuring process, which explains the limited impact observed. This result aligns with prior studies reporting that short-term psychoeducational programs often yield minimal changes when applied over brief periods (Pratiwi et al., 2022; Rosner et al., 2011). Conversely, longer or more intensive interventions have been shown to produce moderate improvements in emotional regulation and coping among adolescents (Sari & Handayani, 2024).

The lack of significant results might also be explained by contextual factors. Adolescents in urban environments such as Malang are highly exposed to social media, where social comparison and peer evaluation are common, intensifying breakup-related distress (Fauzia & Lestari, 2023). Although the psychoeducation included elements of social comparison awareness and self-compassion, its impact may have been moderated by these pervasive online influences. Furthermore, attachment patterns and social support levels may have contributed to individual variability in outcomes, consistent with findings by van der Watt et al. (2022), which highlighted that adolescents with secure attachments and strong peer support tend to recover faster from emotional disruptions.

Methodologically, this study's design is quasi-experimental without a control group, which may have limited its ability to detect subtle changes over time. Nevertheless, the non-significant statistical results do not imply ineffectiveness but rather suggest that the intervention's benefits may manifest

more gradually or require reinforcement through follow-up sessions. This interpretation is consistent with evidence from psychoeducational and CBT-based interventions showing cumulative effects after 6–10 sessions (Rosner et al., 2011).

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings highlight the importance of integrating cognitive-behavioral psychoeducation with social-contextual elements such as peer support and online behavior management. The results propose a modified conceptual framework in which the effectiveness of psychoeducation in breakup distress is mediated by three factors: (1) the duration and continuity of cognitive training; (2) the individual's attachment style and emotional resilience; and (3) the social environment's influence, particularly through digital interaction. This modification expands Beck's cognitive framework by incorporating socio-emotional variables relevant to Generation Z adolescents, whose experiences of romantic loss are increasingly shaped by online dynamics.

In broader terms, the findings emphasize the need to adapt psychoeducational interventions to the realities of modern adolescence. While the cognitive-behavioral model remains a strong foundation, its implementation should be tailored to developmental and cultural contexts, particularly in Indonesia, where collectivist values and social harmony may influence emotional expression. Despite the small effect size, this study contributes to the growing evidence base for school-based mental health programs and provides valuable insights for counselors developing early interventions for breakup-related distress. Future research should apply a randomized controlled design with a larger sample, extended duration, and digital psychoeducation components to evaluate long-term efficacy and improve intervention sustainability.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of a cognitive-behavioral psychoeducational program in reducing breakup distress among eleventh-grade students at SMAN 6 Malang. The findings indicated a small, non-significant decrease in distress levels from pretest to posttest, suggesting that while the intervention did not have a significant overall effect, some students experienced minor individual improvements. These results partially support the hypothesis that cognitive-behavioral psychoeducation can help adolescents enhance emotional awareness and resilience, even over a short intervention period. In conclusion, this study provides preliminary evidence that cognitive-behavioral psychoeducation can serve as a supportive approach for managing breakup distress among adolescents, though its effectiveness may depend on duration, intensity, and contextual factors. Future studies are recommended to employ longer interventions with larger and more diverse samples to better evaluate long-term impacts and strengthen the evidence base for school-based mental health programs in Indonesia.

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