

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL SUPPORT AND POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH IN EARLY ADULT BULLYING VICTIMS

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### Abstrak

#### Keywords:

Social Support,  
Post-Traumatic Growth,  
Bullying,  
Early Adulthood,  
Trauma.

*This study aims to examine the relationship between social support and post-traumatic growth among early adult victims of bullying. The research used a quantitative method with a correlational design, involving participants aged 18-25 who had experienced bullying. The results showed a significant positive relationship between social support and post-traumatic growth ( $r = 0.992, p = 0.000$ ). This study emphasizes the importance of social support in helping bullying victims overcome traumatic experiences and find new meaning in their lives. The study involved 104 participants, with demographic details showing a balanced gender distribution and age range. Instruments used were validated scales for post-traumatic growth and social support, with high reliability (Cronbach's alpha > 0.93). Data analysis confirmed normality and linearity, supporting the correlational findings. Implications include practical recommendations for victims to seek social support and for practitioners to develop interventions. Limitations include the cross-sectional design and potential self-report biases. Future research could incorporate qualitative methods or longitudinal studies to deepen understanding. Overall, the study contributes to psychological literature on trauma recovery in early adulthood.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Bullying is an unacceptable act carried out deliberately by perpetrators, both verbally and physically. Bullying can occur anywhere, including in homes, educational environments, workplaces, and even on social media. Based on statistical data from the Indonesian Education Monitoring Network (JPPI) in 2024, bullying cases in Indonesia reached 573 reported incidents in educational settings. In 2023, the Indonesian Education Monitoring Network (JPPI) reported 285 bullying cases. Meanwhile, data



presented by Irjen Kemenkes Murti Utami through IDN TIMES stated that bullying cases in 2024 recorded 234 incidents, while in 2025 there was an increase to 620 bullying cases (Faisol, 2025). Thus, bullying cases in Indonesia have experienced a very significant increase. One of the psychological effects of bullying behavior is the trauma that arises in the victim's self.

According to Fadilah R, et al. (2024), trauma is a psychological problem that causes damage to the body's system due to oppression or coercion of violence. Trauma is one of the mental health disorders that occur due to situations that cause inner wounds that occur intentionally or unintentionally. Mental disorders due to trauma, if left untreated, will worsen a person's mental health. According to Prawita et al. (2024), mental symptoms caused by trauma include increased anxiety, depression, and PTSD. However, there is the concept of post-traumatic growth in bullying victims.

According to Wahyunnisa Aisy Agustini and Anniez Rachmawati Musslifah (2024), post-traumatic growth means a situation where an individual has experienced trauma or had a bad experience in their life, and then the individual experiences positive growth and finds new meaning in life. Furthermore, according to Manurung and Ningsih (2023), post-traumatic growth is a positive achievement of an individual after experiencing pre-trauma due to unpleasant events in the past, where the individual feels increased changes in their life as a result of overcoming life's trials. Linley (2004) Post-traumatic growth can help a person find deeper meaning in life. This growth is not just about feeling happy or freed from suffering, but also about experiencing more profound changes in relationships with oneself, others, and even the spiritual aspects of life. Early adulthood is also a very potential period for post-traumatic growth. This is because cognitive and emotional maturity begins, allowing individuals to reflect on traumatic experiences in a more profound and meaningful way.

According to Putri (in Julliyaningtyas & Khasan, 2025), early adulthood is the transition period from adolescence to adulthood, where individuals achieve significant development in various aspects. At this stage, individuals begin to achieve economic independence, discover self-identity, and face emotional and social challenges. They also begin to adjust to changing values, increase creativity, and accept greater responsibilities. All of this helps them become more independent and reduce dependence on others. According to Santrock, early adult individuals are usually more focused on themselves. That is, they are often less involved in social tasks or collective responsibilities, as well as difficult to commit to others. They also tend to prioritize freedom in managing their own lives. As many as 45% of 2,777 early adult teenagers surveyed through UNICEF's U-Report platform admitted to having experienced bullying. Robert Gass, UNICEF's Deputy Representative, stated that every day many teenagers have to face bullying, which disrupts their learning process and has a major impact on their health and well-being (Julliyaningtyas & Khasan, 2025). One of the supporting factors for post-traumatic growth in early adult individuals is social support.

Social support plays a very important role in the process of recovery and post-traumatic growth, including for individuals who are victims of bullying. When someone experiences bullying, the psychological impact left can be very heavy, including feelings of anxiety, depression, or helplessness. According to Gore (in Harsono et al., 2020), external resources in the form of social support can help individuals overcome stressors. According to D G Marpaung, B G Siahaan, A Bernard (2024), social support

is a form of care given to someone experiencing trauma or difficulties shown through communication full of affection, appreciation, respect, and acceptance, so that individuals feel valued and not alone.

According to Rizqi Ayuwandari, Rini, and Pratitis (2023), social support comes from close people, such as family, friends, acquaintances, or other individuals, can play an important role in helping bullying victims feel more accepted and assisted in their recovery process. Based on the above description, it can be concluded that social support has a crucial role in fostering post-traumatic growth, because with the attention, appreciation, and acceptance from the surrounding environment, individuals who experience traumatic experiences such as bullying can feel more valued, emotionally strengthened, and encouraged to rise and find new meaning in life.

Based on the background above, it can be concluded that post-traumatic growth in bullying victims is influenced by social support.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. *Post-Traumatic Growth*

Post-traumatic growth refers to positive psychological changes that emerge as a result of an individual's efforts to face traumatic events or life experiences that are very threatening to life. According to Calhoun & Tedeschi, post-traumatic growth describes a state where a person can take lessons from the traumatic experience they have experienced, then use it as a basis for growing and living life better. This process allows individuals to see their lives with deeper meaning, according to their personal way of thinking and experience (in Dinarayu Aldililla, 2021). Post-traumatic growth according to Calhoun and Tedeschi is a process of positive change experienced by a person after going through a traumatic event, which brings them to a higher stage of life that is more meaningful. Unlike just recovering to the previous condition, individuals who experience post-traumatic growth show increases in psychological aspects. This growth appears from increased understanding of oneself, stronger social relationships, and a deeper view of life. This condition can be achieved when individuals accept the new reality in their lives post-trauma and adjust themselves constructively to the traumatic experience (in Nurmasita, Nursan Junita, 2024).

Linley and Joseph (2004) state that post-traumatic growth is a form of positive psychological development that emerges as a result of an individual's efforts to face and overcome very difficult or traumatic life events. They explain that this growth does not only describe the individual's ability to return to their mental condition before trauma (recovery), but also shows an increase in quality in various aspects of life. This growth can be reflected in several dimensions, such as increased appreciation for life, strengthened interpersonal relationships, personal strength, new possibilities in life, and spiritual or life view changes. With this, individuals who experience post-traumatic growth not only rise from suffering but also experience profound self-transformation that makes them more resilient, reflective, and have a more positive life perspective (Mawarpury, 2018).

From the above, it can be concluded that post-traumatic growth is a process of positive psychological transformation that occurs after an individual experiences a traumatic event. Not just recovery, individuals who experience post-traumatic growth show development in self-understanding, social relationship quality, and life

perspective. This is achieved through acceptance of the new reality and healthy adjustment to the traumatic experience.

## **2. Social Support**

Social support is defined as interpersonal involvement manifested through communication that emphasizes appreciation, affection, respect, and acceptance towards individuals. When someone who has experienced a traumatic event receives support from their family, friends, or social environment, that individual will feel the presence of people who care and provide attention. Cohen, S., & Hoberman (1983) state that social support is an emotional and psychological resource that arises from interpersonal relationships, playing an important role in the individual's recovery process. Social support is a concept that has various dimensions, covering functional and structural aspects.

Generally, social support refers to tangible actions from others in providing assistance to individuals in need. Social support according to Hupeey and Foote (in Handono, 2013) is a form of resource from the social environment that functions to help individuals face life pressures. This support can be in the form of positive interactions or helping actions directed at individuals who are in need. Meanwhile, Felton and Berry (1992) distinguish types of social support into instrumental, which is practical or direct assistance, more effective if given by family members due to close emotional and family relationships that contribute to psychological well-being, while emotional support focused on feelings and empathy is more effective if given by people outside the family. From the above, it can be concluded that social support is a fundamental aspect in maintaining and recovering individual mental health, especially when facing psychological pressure or traumatic events.

This support not only includes tangible assistance (instrumental support), but also emotional support that touches on psychological aspects such as feeling valued, understood, and accepted. Both have significant contributions to psychological well-being, with effectiveness depending on the context and relationship between giver and receiver. Thus, social support has a role in the post-traumatic growth process. Its existence becomes the main support in the adaptation process to life pressures and in achieving overall psychological well-being

## **METHOD**

This study used a quantitative approach with a correlational design, involving participants aged 18-25 who had experienced bullying. The research method was quantitative with a correlational design, with participants aged 18-25 who had experienced bullying. The population was individuals in early adulthood aged 18-25 in Surabaya. The sampling technique used purposive sampling, selecting participants based on specific criteria determined by the researcher, namely individuals in early adulthood (18-25 years) who had experienced bullying and were willing to fill out instruments related to social support and post-traumatic growth.

The data collection instrument used a questionnaire. According to Sugiyono (2017), a questionnaire is a data collection tool in the form of a series of written questions given to respondents to answer according to their answers or based on their experiences and knowledge. This study used a 5-point Likert scale, with a range of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The post-traumatic growth scale was

modified from the theory of post-traumatic growth by Tedeschi and Calhoun in 1996, consisting of 30 items (15 favorable, 15 unfavorable).

The social support scale was modified from Cohen and Hoberman (1983), consisting of 16 items (8 favorable, 8 unfavorable), but after testing, it became 15 items. Data analysis used the Product Moment correlation technique to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables. Prerequisites included normality test using Kolmogorov-Smirnov ( $p > 0.05$  for normal distribution) and linearity test using ANOVA ( $p < 0.05$  for linear relationship).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study involved 104 participants, consisting of 42 males (40.4%) and 62 females (59.6%), all aged between 18-25 years, aligning with the early adulthood criteria. This demographic distribution reflects a slightly higher female participation, which may relate to greater willingness among women to report experiences of bullying and trauma, consistent with gender differences in help-seeking behaviors observed in psychological research.

Categorization of scores revealed that for social support, 14 participants scored low, 71 medium, and 15 high, indicating a predominantly medium level of perceived social support among the sample. For post-traumatic growth, 11 participants scored low, 73 medium, and 16 high, suggesting that most victims of bullying in early adulthood experience moderate levels of positive transformation post-trauma. These categorizations were based on standardized scoring ranges derived from the scales used, where low scores indicate limited support or growth, medium reflects average adaptation, and high denotes strong resilience and development.

Correlation analysis using Pearson Product Moment yielded a coefficient of  $r = 0.982$  with a significance level of  $p = 0.000$ , demonstrating a very strong positive relationship between social support and post-traumatic growth. This means that as social support increases, so does the likelihood of experiencing post-traumatic growth. The relationship is statistically significant, rejecting the null hypothesis and supporting the study's aim to explore this link in early adult bullying victims.

In the discussion, these findings align with theoretical frameworks such as Tedeschi and Calhoun's (1996) model of post-traumatic growth, which posits that social support facilitates cognitive processing of trauma, leading to positive changes in self-perception, relationships, and life philosophy. The strong correlation underscores how emotional and instrumental support from family, friends, or communities helps victims reframe bullying experiences as opportunities for personal strength and new life meanings. For instance, participants with higher social support scores likely benefited from validation and encouragement, reducing feelings of isolation and fostering resilience.

Comparatively, this result corroborates Rianingsih (2023), who found that female bullying survivors exhibit post-traumatic growth through supportive networks, emphasizing emotional processing. Similarly, Alma (2023) highlighted social support's role alongside resilience and character strengths in aiding recovery from sexual abuse trauma in adolescents, extending to early adults here. Hasanah et al. (2023) reported post-traumatic growth in child maltreatment survivors, where social interactions promote adaptive coping, mirroring our findings. Ning et al. (2023) meta-analysis of

217 studies showed a moderate positive link ( $r = 0.418$ ) between social support and post-traumatic growth, with stronger effects in caregivers and older adults, suggesting our high correlation ( $r = 0.982$ ) may reflect the specific context of bullying in early adulthood, where developmental transitions amplify support's impact.

Implications for early adults include encouraging proactive seeking of social networks to mitigate bullying's long-term effects. Practitioners should integrate social support interventions, such as group therapy or family counseling, to enhance post-traumatic growth. However, limitations include the correlational design, which precludes causality longitudinal studies could confirm if support precedes growth. Self-report biases may inflate correlations due to social desirability. Additionally, the sample's urban focus (Surabaya) limits generalizability to rural areas. Future research could employ mixed methods, incorporating qualitative narratives for deeper insights, or explore moderators like coping styles or cultural factors.

Overall, the study reinforces social support as a pivotal factor in transforming bullying trauma into growth, offering hope for early adult victims and informing targeted psychological interventions.

## CONCLUSION

The research concludes that there is a strong positive relationship between social support and post-traumatic growth in early adult bullying victims. Higher social support correlates with higher post-traumatic growth, as evidenced by a correlation coefficient of 0.982 and p-value of 0.000. This supports the hypothesis that social support aids recovery and positive transformation after trauma. The findings underscore social support's importance in fostering resilience, emotional strength, and new life meanings. For early adults, this means seeking support from family, friends, or communities can significantly enhance post-traumatic growth. The study contributes to psychology by highlighting social support's role in trauma recovery, suggesting interventions like counseling or support groups. Limitations include the correlational design, which cannot infer causality, and reliance on self-reports. Future research should explore longitudinal effects or additional variables like coping strategies. Overall, the results affirm that social support is crucial for bullying victims' psychological well-being in early adulthood.

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