Social Anxiety Among Bullying Victims: A Case Study on the Role of Assertive Behavior and Self Regulation

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ABSTRACT: Bullying remains a persistent challenge among adolescents, particularly within Indonesian vocational schools. This study aimed to examine the predictive roles of assertive behavior and self regulation on social anxiety among bullying victims in a vocational high school setting in Makassar. Using a cross sectional correlational design, 127 students were surveyed through validated Likert type scales assessing assertive behavior, self regulation, and social anxiety. Multiple linear regression analysis was performed after confirming the fulfillment of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity assumptions. The results indicated that assertive behavior significantly and negatively predicted social anxiety, whereas self regulation did not show a significant independent effect. Together, the predictors explained 8.6% of the variance in social anxiety. Discussion highlighted the critical importance of assertiveness as a protective factor and the potential indirect role of self regulation in adolescents' emotional resilience. Contextual cultural factors, such as hierarchical social norms and limited school resources, were also considered influential in shaping the outcomes. These findings contribute to the growing body of research on bullying, social anxiety, and psychosocial interventions in vocational education contexts. It is recommended that future research explore longitudinal effects and additional moderators to better understand and address social anxiety among adolescent bullying victims.

Keywords: Assertive Behavior, Self Regulation, Social Anxiety, Bullying, Vocational High School Students.

INTRODUCTION

Bullying in educational settings continues to pose a significant concern worldwide, particularly within Indonesian secondary schools. Recent data, although limited for 2023 2024, suggests that bullying remains a pervasive problem, especially in vocational schools where institutional resources are often constrained (Fine et al., 2022; Lomteva, 2024). Fine et al. (2022) documented the psychosocial and psychiatric implications of bullying among early adolescents in Semarang, providing critical insights that extend relevance beyond their immediate study context. Meanwhile,

Lomteva (2024) highlights the exacerbating effects of resource limitations on bullying behaviors in vocational settings. Comparative studies, such as those conducted in China, reveal a high prevalence of cyberbullying among vocational students, suggesting similar emerging patterns in Indonesia as digital engagement continues to increase (Wang et al., 2024).

Despite the pressing nature of this issue, precise, up to date prevalence figures for bullying in Indonesian vocational schools remain sparse. Nonetheless, research from adjacent contexts consistently points toward an enduring and potentially intensifying problem that demands targeted empirical inquiry. The psychological ramifications of bullying, particularly the development of social anxiety among victims, are well documented within contemporary psychological frameworks. Cognitive behavioral theories explain how repeated bullying fosters negative self schemas and anticipatory fear of social rejection, contributing to chronic anxiety patterns (Cooley, 2023). Victimized adolescents often exhibit avoidant behaviors, diminished self esteem, and hyper vigilance in social contexts, all of which disrupt normal social and academic development.

Addressing bullying and its psychological impacts has become a pressing research imperative. Key psychological constructs such as assertive behavior and self regulation have been identified as critical protective factors. Assertive behavior enables adolescents to express their thoughts and emotions constructively, thereby mitigating internalized negative perceptions resulting from bullying episodes (Zahrani, 2024). Concurrently, self regulation allows individuals to manage their emotional responses and behavioral impulses, helping to buffer the chronic stress associated with victimization (Li-ping & Kim, 2017). These protective traits facilitate healthier cognitive appraisals of social interactions, decreasing susceptibility to developing social anxiety.

The psychological consequences of bullying extend beyond emotional distress to impact academic performance and social integration. Studies indicate that bullying victims frequently suffer from concentration difficulties, reduced academic engagement, and impaired peer relationships, leading to broader social maladjustment (Jiang et al., 2024; X. Li et al., 2020). Persistent stress and fear of negative evaluation interfere with students' abilities to perform academically and develop supportive peer networks, thus perpetuating a cycle of underachievement and social withdrawal.

To counteract these negative trajectories, school based interventions have increasingly focused on enhancing assertiveness and self regulation. Programs incorporating assertiveness training and emotional regulation strategies have demonstrated effectiveness in improving coping skills, increasing academic engagement, and promoting better social integration among adolescents (Rizwan et al., 2024). These interventions help dismantle the negative feedback loop wherein bullying leads to internalizing problems such as social anxiety, which in turn hampers developmental outcomes (Z. Li et al., 2020).

The cultural and educational context in South Sulawesi, particularly in Makassar, further complicates the dynamics of bullying and its psychological effects. Cultural norms emphasizing hierarchical respect and group harmony may inadvertently discourage assertive behaviors, thereby exacerbating adolescents' vulnerability to bullying and its psychological consequences (Yang & McGinley, 2022). Furthermore, vocational schools in this region often operate with limited

resources and lack systematic social emotional learning programs, conditions that undermine the cultivation of self regulatory and assertive capacities among students (Ansari & Rizvi, 2023).

Local educational environments may also fail to systematically teach self regulation skills, which are crucial for managing stress and social anxiety (Mella et al., 2021). Research in comparable contexts, such as Chinese vocational schools, shows that social anxiety often mediates the relationship between low self esteem and maladaptive behaviors, reinforcing the critical role of assertiveness and self regulation in promoting positive psychological outcomes (Zhu, 2025). These findings underscore the necessity of contextually tailored interventions that consider the unique sociocultural fabric of South Sulawesi and Makassar.

Despite these insights, a significant research gap persists. Few studies have concurrently examined assertive behavior, self regulation, and social anxiety among vocational school students within a single analytical framework. Most research isolates these constructs or examines them in unrelated contexts, thus failing to capture their interconnectedness within specific educational and cultural settings. Studies like Zhu (2025) highlight the mediating role of social anxiety in adverse outcomes among vocational students but do not simultaneously explore the protective functions of assertiveness and self regulation. Similarly, broader literature reviews on school based interventions often generalize social emotional competencies without delineating the distinct contributions of assertiveness and self regulation (Ansari & Rizvi, 2023).

Given these gaps, there is an urgent need for methodologically rigorous, culturally sensitive research that integrates these variables within the vocational school context of South Sulawesi and Makassar. Understanding the protective roles of assertive behavior and self regulation against social anxiety in this specific population is vital for developing effective interventions and informing educational policies.

The present study aims to address this gap by analyzing the simultaneous relationship between assertive behavior, self regulation, and social anxiety among students at SMK Negeri 5 Makassar. The novelty of this research lies in its integrated approach, contextual sensitivity, and empirical focus on vocational education an area often overlooked in Indonesian bullying research. The study hypothesizes that both assertiveness and self regulation serve as protective factors against the development of social anxiety in bullying victims. The findings are expected to contribute to the academic literature by providing culturally nuanced insights and practical recommendations for school based interventions aimed at fostering resilience and psychosocial well being among vocational school students.

METHOD

This study employed a non experimental, correlational quantitative design aimed at examining the relationship between assertive behavior, self regulation, and social anxiety among students who have experienced bullying. A correlational survey approach was deemed appropriate to explore

naturally occurring variations in psychological constructs without experimental manipulation, following best practices in contemporary educational psychology research (Hanjagi, 2025).

The population of the study comprised all tenth and eleventh grade students enrolled at SMK Negeri 5 Makassar during the 2024 2025 academic year. Using a total sampling technique, 127 students participated in the study, effectively ensuring complete representation of the targeted population. Total sampling was selected due to the manageable size of the student body and the study's intention to maximize external validity within the specific educational context.

Data were collected through three validated psychometric instruments. Assertive behavior was measured using the Assertive Behavior Scale adapted from Alberti and Emmons (2008), containing 52 Likert type items assessing the frequency and quality of assertive responses in social interactions. Although other tools such as the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule are prominent in adolescent research (Hanjagi, 2025), the Assertive Behavior Scale was selected due to its alignment with the Indonesian sociocultural context and prior validation studies.

Self regulation was assessed with a 36 item Self Regulation Scale based on Bandura's cognitive social theoretical framework (1986). Although other instruments, such as the Self Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ), are widely utilized internationally (Li-ping & Kim, 2017), the adopted scale incorporated dimensions of emotional monitoring, impulse control, and goal directed behavior, which were considered particularly relevant for the vocational school demographic in Makassar.

Social anxiety was measured through the Social Anxiety Scale adapted from La Greca and Lopez (1998), consisting of 36 items divided into three dimensions: Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE), Social Avoidance and Distress in New Situations (SAD New), and Social Avoidance and Distress in General (SAD General). This instrument has shown strong psychometric properties in adolescent populations, capturing both evaluative fears and avoidance behaviors typical among bullying victims (Gong, 2025; Jabeen et al., 2023).

All scales utilized a five point Likert response format ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Prior to data collection, instruments were reviewed for cultural adaptation to ensure relevance and comprehension among Indonesian students. Internal reliability was confirmed via Cronbach's α coefficients in a pilot test, with all scales meeting acceptable thresholds (> 0.70).

Data collection procedures followed ethical research standards. Researchers secured institutional ethical clearance, obtained informed consent from participants, and conducted the survey under controlled conditions either online or in supervised classroom settings. Students were briefed on the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality protocols, and the importance of honest self reporting.

Statistical analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25. Prior to hypothesis testing, preliminary assumption testing was carried out to ensure the appropriateness of multiple linear regression analysis. The normality of residuals was evaluated using the Kolmogorov Smirnov test, yielding a non significant result ($p = 0.062$), indicating normal distribution. Linearity between

predictors and the dependent variable was confirmed via Deviation from Linearity tests, where p values exceeded 0.05 for both assertive behavior and self regulation.

Multicollinearity was assessed through Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values. Both predictors showed acceptable Tolerance values (0.877) and low VIF (1.140), confirming the absence of multicollinearity and supporting the independent contribution of each predictor (Hanjagi, 2025). Homoscedasticity was tested using the Glejser method, where p values for assertive behavior (0.641) and self regulation (0.422) were above 0.05, indicating homogenous variance of residuals.

Following confirmation of assumption validity, multiple linear regression (MLR) was employed to test the simultaneous and partial predictive relationships between assertive behavior, self regulation, and social anxiety. MLR is widely recognized for its robustness in educational psychology studies, particularly for analyzing predictive models involving psychosocial constructs (Jafari & Jafari, 2023; Tapio, 2025).

Results indicated that assertive behavior and self regulation together significantly predicted social anxiety levels ($F = 4.825$, $p = 0.010$), albeit explaining a modest proportion of variance ($R^2 = 0.086$). In partial regression analysis, assertive behavior emerged as a significant negative predictor ($\beta = 0.212$, $p = 0.029$), suggesting that higher assertiveness corresponds to lower social anxiety. In contrast, self regulation did not reach statistical significance ($\beta = 0.105$, $p = 0.300$).

These findings validate the theoretical assumptions derived from cognitive behavioral models of social anxiety and confirm the role of assertive behavior as a vital protective factor. At the same time, they highlight the necessity for more nuanced measures of self regulation that specifically capture its relationship with interpersonal fear and peer related stress in vocational school settings. By integrating rigorous psychometric measures and robust statistical techniques, this methodological framework provides a solid foundation for interpreting the psychosocial dynamics of bullying victimization among Indonesian adolescents.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The preliminary analyses focused on assessing the fulfillment of multiple linear regression assumptions, following best practices in educational psychology research (Leung, 2019; Wati & Pujiriyanto, 2022). As shown in Table 1, the Kolmogorov Smirnov test yielded a non significant result (p = 0.062), indicating that the residuals of the regression model were normally distributed. Normality is a crucial assumption to ensure unbiased parameter estimates and valid inferential tests (Leung, 2019).

Tabel 1. Normality Test

N	Kolmogorov Smirnov Sig. (2-tailed)	Interpretation
127	0.062	Data are normally distributed

Further assumption testing involved evaluating the linearity between independent variables and the dependent variable. Table 2 presents the Deviation from Linearity test results, where the relationships between assertive behavior and social anxiety (p = 0.070) and between self regulation and social anxiety (p = 0.088) were both found to be linear. The results confirm that the assumption of linearity was satisfied, which is essential to avoid model misspecification and biased estimates (Cruz et al., 2023).

Table 2. Linearity Test

Variable Pair	F Deviation from Linearity	Sig.	Interpretation
Assertive Behavior Social Anxiety	1.389	0.070	Linear
Self-Regulation Social Anxiety	1.298	0.088	Linear

Multicollinearity diagnostics were conducted using Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values. As summarized in Table 3, both assertive behavior and self regulation had Tolerance values of 0.877 and VIF values of 1.140, indicating no multicollinearity. This aligns with the standard criteria that Tolerance should exceed 0.2 and VIF should be below 10 (Çakır et al., 2024; Lambert et al., 2024).

Table 3. Multicollinearity Test

Predictor	Tolerance	VIF	Interpretation
Assertive Behavior	0.877	1.140	No multicollinearity
Self-Regulation	0.877	1.140	No multicollinearity

The assumption of homoscedasticity was assessed through the Glejser test (Table 4), with p values of 0.641 for assertive behavior and 0.422 for self regulation, suggesting that residual variances were homogeneous across the range of predicted values ((Lagacé et al., 2024). Overall, all prerequisite assumptions for multiple linear regression analysis were satisfactorily met, ensuring the validity and robustness of subsequent inferential analyses.

Table 4. Heteroscedasticity Test

Predictor	Glejser Sig.	Interpretation
Assertive Behavior	0.641	No heteroscedasticity
Self-Regulation	0.422	No heteroscedasticity

Following assumption testing, the study proceeded with categorization of the three main variables: social anxiety, assertive behavior, and self regulation. As shown in Table 5, the distribution of

social anxiety scores indicated that 3.9% of participants fell into the "very high" category, 31.5% into "high," 33.1% into "moderate," 22.0% into "low," and 9.4% into "very low." Most participants (64.6%) exhibited moderate to high levels of social anxiety, suggesting a considerable prevalence of elevated social anxiety symptoms among vocational school students.

Table 5. Social Anxiety Categorization

Category	Score Range	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Very High	> 119	5	3.9
High	118 97	40	31.5
Moderate	96 75	42	33.1
Low	74 54	28	22.0
Very Low	< 54	12	9.4

Assertive behavior categorization, displayed in Table 6, revealed that 31.5% of participants scored at the moderate level, while 27.6% and 9.4% were classified as low and very low, respectively. Only 7.9% demonstrated very high levels of assertiveness. This distribution underscores the need for interventions aimed at improving assertive communication skills among adolescents in vocational school settings.

Table 6. Assertive Behavior Categorization

Category	Score Range	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Very High	> 153	10	7.9
High	152 127	30	23.6
Moderate	126 101	40	31.5
Low	100 75	35	27.6
Very Low	< 74	12	9.4

The distribution of self regulation scores (Table 7) showed that 39.4% of students were categorized as moderate, 22.0% as low, and 7.1% as very low. High and very high levels of self regulation were observed among 19.7% and 11.8% of students, respectively. This suggests that self regulation competencies are moderately developed in this population but leave ample room for improvement, particularly given their importance for managing stress and emotional challenges.

Table 7. Self-Regulation Categorization

Category	Score Range	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Very High	> 96	15	11.8
High	95 78	25	19.7
Moderate	77 59	50	39.4
Low	58 40	28	22.0
Very Low	< 39	9	7.1

The simultaneous multiple regression analysis, presented in Table 8, demonstrated that assertive behavior and self regulation together significantly predicted social anxiety ($F = 4.825$, $p = 0.010$), with a correlation coefficient $R = 0.294$ and R squared (R^2) = 0.086. Thus, these two predictors explained 8.6% of the variance in social anxiety scores. While the effect size was modest, it confirmed the theoretical expectation that internal protective factors contribute to reducing social anxiety symptoms among bullying victims.

Table 8. Simultaneous Regression Analysis

F	Sig.	R	R²	Interpretation
4.825	0.010	0.294	0.086	Model is significant

Partial regression analysis results, shown in Table 9, indicated that assertive behavior significantly and negatively predicted social anxiety ($\beta = 0.212$, $t = 2.210$, $p = 0.029$). Students exhibiting higher levels of assertiveness tended to report lower social anxiety levels. This finding supports previous literature indicating that assertiveness functions as a protective factor by enhancing adolescents' capacity to manage peer evaluations and social interactions (Vagos & Pereira, 2020).

Table 9. Partial Regression Analysis

Predictor	β	t	Sig.	Interpretation
Assertive Behavior	0.212	2.210	0.029	Significant
Self-Regulation	0.105	1.040	0.300	Not significant

Conversely, self regulation did not emerge as a significant individual predictor ($\beta = 0.105$, $t = 1.040$, $p = 0.300$). Although self regulation theoretically supports emotional management and adaptive coping, its direct contribution to reducing social anxiety appears limited when controlling for assertiveness. This aligns with prior findings suggesting that self regulation may exert more indirect or mediated effects on social anxiety rather than serving as a direct predictor (Vagos & Pereira, 2020).

In summary, the results confirm that assertive behavior plays a significant role in mitigating social anxiety among victims of bullying in vocational school settings. The model accounted for a modest proportion of the variance, indicating that additional factors such as peer support, family environment, and school climate may also influence social anxiety outcomes and warrant further investigation.

The findings of this study offer significant insights into the interplay between assertive behavior, self regulation, and social anxiety among adolescent victims of bullying within a vocational school context. The fulfillment of regression assumptions underscores the methodological robustness of the results. In particular, the normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity tests provide a strong foundation for the validity of the multiple regression analyses (Lambert et al., 2024; Leung, 2019; Wati & Pujiriyanto, 2022).

The simultaneous regression analysis demonstrated that assertive behavior and self regulation together significantly predicted social anxiety, albeit explaining only 8.6% of the variance. This modest explanatory power suggests that while these internal factors are relevant, external and contextual influences likely play a substantial role in adolescents' experiences of social anxiety following bullying incidents (Lagacé et al., 2024). This interpretation aligns with prior research indicating that socio environmental moderators, such as peer support and school climate, significantly buffer the relationship between personal traits and psychological outcomes (Pontes et al., 2024; Yu et al., 2019).

Specifically, the partial regression results revealed that assertive behavior negatively and significantly predicted social anxiety, while self regulation did not demonstrate a significant independent effect. The inverse association between assertiveness and social anxiety supports existing literature suggesting that the ability to communicate needs and boundaries confidently mitigates the anticipatory fears central to social anxiety ((Vagos & Pereira, 2020). Adolescents who can express their perspectives assertively are better equipped to manage peer evaluations and resist internalizing negative experiences.

Conversely, the non significant role of self regulation highlights a more nuanced dynamic. Although self regulation is often lauded as a protective psychological asset (Li-ping & Kim, 2017), its impact may be indirect when assertive communication is accounted for. This finding is consistent with theories suggesting that self regulation facilitates broader emotional adaptation but may not directly alleviate the interpersonal fears and avoidance behaviors characteristic of social anxiety (Vagos & Pereira, 2020). Future research should explore whether self regulation interacts with other socio emotional competencies or moderates pathways rather than serving as a direct predictor.

The high prevalence of moderate to high social anxiety levels among participants (64.6%) warrants serious attention. This prevalence mirrors patterns identified in prior studies (Harikrishnan et al., 2016; Urbán et al., 2022), indicating that social anxiety is a common psychosocial outcome among adolescent bullying victims. It also underscores the urgency of implementing school based interventions aimed at enhancing assertiveness and promoting emotional resilience.

The vocational school setting in Makassar provides an important cultural and educational context that shapes the manifestation of these psychological phenomena. Traditional values emphasizing group harmony and hierarchical respect may inadvertently discourage assertive behaviors, thereby exacerbating social anxiety risks among adolescents (Yang & McGinley, 2022). Simultaneously, resource limitations in vocational institutions may reduce the availability of structured socio emotional learning programs that teach coping skills such as self regulation (Ansari & Rizvi, 2023).

Socio environmental factors play a decisive role in moderating the effects of assertiveness and self regulation on social anxiety. As Thomson et al. (2024) report, positive school climates and strong peer networks facilitate opportunities for social interaction, enhancing the development of assertiveness and emotional regulation. Supportive environments buffer against the vulnerabilities

associated with low assertiveness, as adolescents receive affirmations from peers and teachers that reinforce their social competence (Yu et al., 2019).

Family involvement further complements this protective process. Open communication, emotional support, and consistent guidance from family members cultivate secure attachments and bolster adolescents' self worth, thereby mitigating the internalization of bullying experiences (Gardner & Webb, 2017). These dynamics collectively reduce the likelihood that deficiencies in self regulation or assertiveness will culminate in elevated social anxiety.

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, particularly the identity versus role confusion stage, offers a compelling framework for interpreting these findings (Zhang & Guo, 2023). During adolescence, the formation of a coherent self concept is paramount. Bullying disrupts this developmental task, often precipitating maladaptive coping strategies such as social withdrawal or self blame (Fine et al., 2022). Adolescents who fail to assert themselves may experience heightened vulnerability to social anxiety, as unresolved identity conflicts compound the fear of social rejection.

Qualitative studies have shown that adolescents employ varying coping strategies based on gender, cultural background, and perceived social support (Fine et al., 2022). Girls often seek relational support, whereas boys may adopt more confrontational or avoidant behaviors. Within the Eriksonian framework, positive interpersonal experiences through peer support or family involvement are crucial in facilitating healthy identity development and reducing the risk of enduring social anxiety.

These developmental considerations emphasize the importance of interventions that not only target assertiveness and emotional regulation but also strengthen adolescents' broader social support networks. Programs that integrate assertiveness training, emotion regulation techniques, and social skills development have demonstrated significant success in reducing social anxiety symptoms among adolescents (Ahmadi et al., 2021).

Evidence from multi component interventions, such as the Check In/Check Out (CICO) system adapted for adolescents, further supports this approach (Hester et al., 2024). By providing structured feedback, goal setting, and role playing opportunities, such programs foster real world application of assertive communication skills, enhance emotional resilience, and promote adaptive peer interactions.

Moreover, intervention programs tailored for vocational students should incorporate culturally responsive strategies that recognize the sociocultural dynamics influencing assertiveness and emotional expression in South Sulawesi. Developing localized social emotional curricula that align with students' lived realities could enhance program relevance and effectiveness.

Altogether, the results of this study affirm the critical importance of assertive behavior as a protective factor against social anxiety and underscore the need for targeted, context sensitive interventions within vocational school environments. Although self regulation did not

independently predict social anxiety, its potential role as an indirect or moderating factor warrants further longitudinal investigation. A holistic approach that strengthens individual skills while fostering supportive environments promises the most sustainable improvements in adolescent mental health outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the predictive roles of assertive behavior and self regulation on social anxiety among adolescent victims of bullying within a vocational high school context in Makassar, Indonesia. The findings revealed that assertive behavior significantly and negatively predicted social anxiety, while self regulation did not independently predict social anxiety when controlling for assertiveness. These results highlight the critical protective role of assertiveness in buffering adolescents against the psychosocial impacts of bullying. Although the combined predictive model accounted for a modest portion of the variance in social anxiety, the findings underscore the multifactorial nature of social anxiety development. The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by integrating assertiveness, self regulation, and social anxiety constructs within a culturally specific vocational education context, an area previously underexplored. It emphasizes the necessity of incorporating assertiveness training and social emotional learning interventions into school-based programs, particularly in vocational settings where social support structures may be limited. Future research should investigate the indirect effects of self regulation and explore additional socio environmental factors that moderate the impact of personal competencies on social anxiety, using longitudinal and multi site designs.

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