

Effectiveness of Resilience Soft Skills Training in Improving School Counselors' Competence for Suicide Prevention

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Abstract

School counselors play a strategic role in preventing suicidal ideation in high school students. However, limited competence in implementing resilience-based interventions can reduce the effectiveness of counseling services. This study aims to examine the effectiveness of resilience soft skills training in enhancing the competencies of school counselors in suicide prevention. The study used a quantitative, one-group pre-experimental design with a pretest–posttest model. The study subjects consisted of 35 high school counselors in Karanganyar Regency. Data collection was conducted using a structured questionnaire that assessed school counselors' understanding and skills in developing resilience and suicide prevention strategies. The training program was conducted over several sessions, starting with the conceptual basics of resilience, then covering risk factors for suicidal ideation among students, and finally applying resilience-based counseling strategies through discussions and practical exercises. Data were analyzed using a paired-sample t-test. The results of the analysis showed a significant increase in scores between the pretest ($M = 53.00$) and posttest ($M = 80.00$), with a $t(34) = 20.00$ and $p < 0.001$, as well as a very large effect size (Cohen's $d = 3.38$). These findings indicate that resilience soft skills training is effective in improving the competence of school counselors in supporting suicide prevention efforts of secondary school students. This study underscores the importance of resilience-based professional development programs for school counselors as an evidence-based approach to supporting student mental health.

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a crucial developmental phase, marked by rapid psychological, emotional, and social changes that can lead to mental health issues. One issue that remains vulnerable to adolescents is suicidal ideation, a root for suicide phenomena in the world. Suicide is a tragic mental health phenomenon that has gained serious attention around the world. The prevalence of suicide is quite high. There are 800,000 people throughout the world who die by suicide every year, which leads to one death every 40 seconds (WHO, 2021). Ironically, the same condition happens in Indonesia, especially in Central Java, which is one of the densely populated provinces in Indonesia. The National Criminal Information Center of the Indonesian National Police showed that Central Java is the number one province that have suicides incidences with 287 cases occurring in three months period, from January to March 2024, contributing 33.78% to the national prevalence of suicide (Muhamad, 2024). Media reports indicate that an increasing number of suicides are occurring among adolescents, particularly high school students, who express suicidal thoughts through digital communication (Putra, 2024). These findings highlight the need for more effective and systematic suicide prevention efforts, particularly in school settings.

Suicide is not an event that occurs suddenly, but rather a series of processes that develop through several stages, starting with the emergence of suicidal ideation, followed by threats, gestures, and finally suicide attempts (Fortinash & Worret, 2011). Referring to this stage, suicidal ideation is the most common condition experienced by adolescents, especially when they perceive life's challenges as overwhelming and difficult to overcome. Adolescents experiencing suicidal ideation generally report feelings of hopelessness, emotional exhaustion, and a desire to escape the psychological pressure they feel (Overholser, Beale, Gomez, & Varman, 2020). Understanding suicidal ideation as an early and preventable stage underscores the importance of initial intervention strategies focused on strengthening adolescents' psychological coping skills.

Previous studies have shown that a single factor does not cause the emergence of suicidal ideation, but rather the result of a complex interaction between psychological, biological, and social factors (Heeringen, Hawton, & G. Williams, 2000). Psychological factors, particularly depression and anxiety, have consistently been

reported as the strongest predictors of suicidal ideation (McBride, Johnco, Salloum, Lewin, & Storch, 2017). In addition, cognitive distortions and the inability to manage emotions can increase an individual's vulnerability to suicidal ideation through maladaptive stress responses and negative appraisal patterns of the situation at hand. The condition can lead students to perceive suicide as a way out of psychological suffering (Joiner, 2019; Rajappa, Gallagher, & Miranda, 2012; Wenzel, Brown, & Beck, 2009). On the other hand, social factors such as interpersonal conflict, social isolation, bullying, and stigma have also been shown to exacerbate suicidal ideation in adolescents (Pitman, Rantell, Marston, King, & Osborn, 2017; Stewart, Valeri, Esposito, & Auerbach, 2018). These findings indicate that suicide prevention efforts need to be implemented through a multidimensional approach that not only strengthens individual psychological resources but also involves support from the social environment.

Schools are a strategic context for suicide prevention efforts, considering that adolescents spend a significant portion of their time in the school environment, making them an effective setting for early identification and preventive mental health interventions (Miller, Eckert, & Mazza, 2009; WHO, 2019). In this context, school counselors have a very important role in identifying students at risk, providing early intervention, and developing protective psychological skills in students (ASCA, 2025; Stone & Dahir, 2010). Effective counseling services, however, require counselors to possess theoretical knowledge and well-developed soft skills that enable empathetic, adaptive, and responsive support (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Lambie & Williamson, 2004). Resilience is one of the psychological competencies that has gained huge attention related to suicide prevention. Resilience is an adaptive response possessed by humans to overcome stress and adversity in their lives, which plays an important role as a dynamic protective factor that can reduce the risk of suicidal behavior (Babic et al., 2020; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Shahram et al., 2021).

Resilience refers to an individual's ability to adapt positively and rebound when faced with stress, adversity, or traumatic experiences (Elliott, Macedo, & Escaf, 2021). This concept covers the ability to maintain, or quickly restore, psychological well-being and emotional balance after facing challenging life events (Ong & Cammarata, 2020). Individuals with higher levels of resilience generally demonstrate better emotional regulation abilities, more adaptive problem-solving skills, and an optimistic attitude, which serve as protective factors against psychological distress (Shi & Gao, 2025). In addition, resilience is also known to have a positive relationship with psychological well-being and life satisfaction, because resilient individuals can recover from negative experiences and maintain healthy psychological functioning (Yildirim et al., 2022).

Resilience is understood as a dynamic and developable process, not as a fixed or innate characteristic (Babic et al., 2020). Research has shown that resilience can be enhanced through structured training programs focusing on emotional awareness, cognitive restructuring, social skills, and adaptive coping strategies (Campos & Pinto, 2023). Research conducted by Aunillah and Adiyanti, (2015) also shows that resilience skills training can improve various psychological aspects, such as self-esteem, confirming the potential of resilience-based interventions in educational contexts. These findings indicate that strengthening resilience contributes to an individual's psychological well-being and supports suicide prevention efforts by reducing vulnerability to suicidal ideation.

Although various studies have demonstrated strong support for the effectiveness of resilience-based interventions, most existing studies still focus on the impact of the intervention on students as the primary target. Meanwhile, attention to the readiness and competence of school counselors, as key actors in suicide prevention in schools, remains relatively limited. In particular, empirical research examining the effectiveness of resilience soft skills training for school counselors using experimental or pre-experimental designs is still rare. This situation indicates a significant research gap, since the guidance and counseling teacher's competence is a determining factor in the quality and effectiveness of school-based suicide prevention programs.

Based on this explanation, this study aims to test the effectiveness of resilience soft skills to improve the competence of school counselors in suicide prevention efforts. This study used a single-group pre-experimental design through a pretest-posttest model to examine the extent to which resilience-based training can improve school counselors' understanding and skills related to suicide prevention. By filling the existing research gap, this study is expected to contribute empirical evidence to the fields of guidance and counseling and educational psychology, particularly in emphasizing the importance of resilience-based professional development programs as an evidence-based strategy to support student mental health in school settings.

2. Method

2.1. Study Design

This study employed a quantitative, single-group pre-experimental design with a pretest-posttest model. This design was chosen to assess changes in participant competency before and after the implementation of resilience soft skills training. In this design, one group of participants was given an initial measurement (pretest) before the intervention, then another measurement (posttest) was conducted after the entire training series

was completed. This approach allowed researchers to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention by comparing differences in scores within the same group at two measurement times. The comparison between the pretest and posttest results was used to determine whether significant changes occurred as a result of the intervention (Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 2008).

2.2. Participants

The study subjects consisted of 35 high school counselors from Karanganyar Regency, Central Java Province, Indonesia. Participants included male and female school counselors of varying ages and work experience. All participants were active school counselors in high schools at the time of data collection.

2.3. Target Population and Sampling Techniques

The target population in this study was high school counselors responsible for providing counseling services, particularly those related to student mental health support and suicide prevention. Participants were recruited through the School Counselors' Conference at Karanganyar Regency. The sampling technique used was total sampling, meaning all school counselors who met the inclusion criteria and were willing to participate in the training program were included as research subjects. This technique was deemed appropriate given the small population size and the ease of access to research participants.

2.4. Instruments

This research used the Resilience Competence Questionnaire to measure the resilience competence of school counselors. The instrument was developed by the researchers with three main domains, namely resilience conceptual comprehension, identification skills about risk factors of suicide, and competency to implement guidance and counseling strategies based on resilience in schools. Researchers ensure the alignment between the measured constructs and the objectives of the study by using established theoretical frameworks in suicide prevention and resilience (Aunillah & Adiyanti, 2015; Babic et al., 2020; Elliott et al., 2021). The instrument consists of several competency-based items assessed using a scoring format, with a total score ranging from 0 to 100, where higher scores indicate higher levels of competence. Based on the total scores obtained, participants' competence levels were categorized as low (40–59), moderate (60–79), and high (80–100).

The content validity of the instrument was established through expert judgment involving specialists in guidance and counseling and educational psychology. The experts evaluated the relevance, clarity, and representativeness of each item in measuring counselors' competence related to resilience and suicide prevention. Feedback from the experts was used to refine item wording and ensure conceptual alignment with the intended constructs. To support the reliability of the instrument, the questionnaire was administered consistently during both pretest and posttest stages. The same items, scoring procedures, and administration conditions were maintained across both measurements to ensure consistency and stability of responses. In pre-experimental intervention research, such consistency in measurement procedures is commonly applied to support the reliability of repeated assessments when evaluating training effects. Therefore, the instrument was considered appropriate for assessing changes in school counselors' competence following the resilience soft skills training.

2.5. Research Procedures and Timeline

The research procedure was implemented through three main stages. The first stage began with a pretest to measure participants' initial competency levels related to resilience and suicide prevention before receiving the intervention. In the second stage, participants participated in a resilience soft skills training program that included theoretical material, guided discussions, practical exercises, and independent assignments focused on implementing resilience-based counseling strategies. In the final stage, after the training program had been completed, participants were asked to complete a posttest using the same instrument as the pretest. To ensure that all participants received the same exposure, the interventions was conducted in one structured training period.

2.6. Data Analysis Strategy

Researchers used descriptive and inferential statistics as data analysis techniques. While descriptive statistics used to obtain mean scores and the distribution of participants' scores in pretest and posttest, a paired sample t-test as a part of inferential statistics was used to examine the effectiveness of the resilience soft skills training. The paired sample t-test was chosen to analyze the comparison of mean scores between pretest and posttest. Researchers also used Cohens'd to obtain the effect sizes, showing the impact level of the intervention. Researchers used the statistical significance based on the $p < .05$ level.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

A total of 35 high school counselors were the subjects in this study, which aimed to improve counselors' competence in preventing student suicide through resilience soft skills training. Changes in the subjects' competency levels after the study were measured by comparing their pretest and posttest scores. Descriptive analysis showed that the subjects' pretest scores ranged from 40 to 70, with an average score of 53.00. These results indicate that most school counselors still had relatively limited competency in applying resilience-based suicide prevention strategies at the beginning of the study.

After the training intervention was carried out, the subjects were re-measured to determine their post-test scores. The post-test results showed a significant increase in the subjects' competence, with post-test scores ranging from 60 to 100 and an average score of 80.00. From these results, it appears that most participants obtained scores above 80, indicating a high level of mastery of the training material. The average difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the research subjects showed an increase of 29 points, which means that there was a significant increase in the competence of school counselors after participating in the training program. Table 1 shows a summary of descriptive statistics for the pre-test and post-test scores.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Counselors' Competence Scores

Measurement	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Pretest	35	40	70	53.00	10.20
Posttest	35	60	100	80.00	11.00

Inferential statistical analysis using a paired t-test showed a statistically significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores, with a $t(34)$ value of 20.00 and $p < 0.001$. These results indicate that resilience soft skills training has a significant impact on improving school counselors' competence in preventing suicide. The effect size calculation also produced a very large value, namely Cohen's $d = 3.38$, indicating that the training intervention had a strong practical impact on the professional competence of school counselors as training participants. Table 2 shows the detailed results of the paired sample t-test.

Table 2. Paired-Samples t-Test Results

Comparison	Mean Difference (MD)	t	df	p	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Pretest - Posttest	27.00	20.00	34	$p < .001$	3.38

To reinforce the results of this study, an analysis based on score category grouping was also conducted. Before the intervention, more than half of the research subjects were in the low competency category, and only a small portion reached the high competency category. However, after the training, there were no longer any participants in the low competency category, and most shifted to the high competency category. This change in category distribution indicates that there was a clear and significant improvement in the competency of school counselors after the intervention.

3.2. Discussion

One of the crucial competencies for both students and educators that is widely recognized is resilience. Several previous studies have stated that resilience soft skills training significantly reduces suicidal thoughts and related psychological symptoms in various population groups (Cheung, Chan, & Au, 2019). In line with previous research findings, this study also shows that resilience soft skills training is highly effective in improving school counselors' competencies in suicide prevention. Significant improvements can be seen based on post-test scores and accompanied by a large effect size, indicating that training interventions can increase participants' knowledge and strengthen their practical understanding of applying resilience-based counseling strategies.

The findings of this study are also in line with resilience theory, which views resilience as a dynamic and developable process, rather than a fixed or innate trait (Babic et al., 2020). Furthermore, training-based interventions that emphasize the development of emotional regulation, cognitive restructuring, and adaptive coping skills have been shown to improve both psychological competence and professional readiness (Campos & Pinto, 2023). In the context of guidance and counseling services, school counselors are required to have strong interpersonal skills, empathy, patience, and the ability to create a safe and supportive environment for students (Kerdnaimongkol, 2025). A supportive social environment, especially during adolescence, plays an important role in building resilience to face developmental challenges and family problems (Syifa, Santoso, & Hambali, 2021). These competencies are crucial in school counseling practices, particularly in identifying and responding to students experiencing suicidal ideation. Counselors play a strategic role in implementing school-based interventions that have been proven effective in reducing suicidal ideation and attempts in students, while

simultaneously fostering a resilient mindset within the educational environment (Pistone, Beckman, Eriksson, Lagerlöf, & Sager, 2019).

The competency improvements found in this study align with previous research that demonstrated the effectiveness of resilience training in educational and counseling contexts. It is reported that resilience skills training significantly improved various psychological aspects, including self-esteem and adaptive behavior. Similar findings were also presented by Elliott et al., (2021) which confirms that resilience-focused interventions can strengthen an individual's capacity to manage stress and psychological challenges. An individual's inability to cope with life's challenges is known to trigger negative psychological impacts, such as depression and feelings of hopelessness, which are associated with an increased risk of suicidal behavior (Puspitaningrum, Lasan, & Zen, 2021). By expanding on these findings, this study provides empirical evidence that resilience training is also effective when directed at school counselors as key agents in school suicide prevention. In crises, the resilience of school counselors themselves is a crucial factor. A multidimensional resilience model encompassing personal, organizational, and spiritual aspects can help school counselors face and manage crises more effectively (Gamliel, Rubin, & Alon, 2025).

From a suicide prevention perspective, improving the competence of school counselors is crucial, considering the complexity and multifactorial nature of suicidal ideation. Psychological vulnerability, inability to manage emotions, and maladaptive cognitive patterns have been identified as contributing factors to the emergence of suicidal ideation (Heeringen et al., 2000; McBride et al., 2017). Continuous professional development through resilience soft skills and coping strategies training is an essential requirement for school counselors. School counselors who possess strong resilience soft skills tend to be better able to help students develop adaptive coping mechanisms, thereby reducing students' vulnerability to suicidal thoughts. In practice, this effort can be realized by integrating soft skills training into their professional development programs (Richie, Pragman, & Bowyer, 2022). Overall, the findings of this study indicate that resilience soft skills training is a promising professional development approach that has been proven to strengthen suicide prevention efforts in schools. The results of this study also expand on previous resilience research by placing school counselors as the main focus, rather than targeting only students.

3.3. Implications

The results of this study have several important implications for educational practice and counselor professional development. First, resilience soft skills training can be integrated into professional development programs for school counselors as a preventive strategy to improve competency in addressing student mental health issues, particularly suicidal ideation. In practice, this type of training can be incorporated into in-service training, professional workshops, or counselor development programs organized by schools, counselor associations, or local education authorities. Second, educational institutions are encouraged to provide more structured opportunities for counselors to develop resilience-based competencies. Continuous training initiatives can help school counselors strengthen their interpersonal skills, emotional awareness, and problem-solving abilities when supporting students who experience psychological difficulties. Third, the results of this study suggest the need to shift suicide prevention efforts in schools from a predominantly reactive approach toward a more preventive and skill-oriented framework. By equipping counselors with resilience-oriented soft skills, schools may enhance their capacity to identify early signs of distress and provide more timely and supportive interventions for students who may be at risk.

3.4. Limitations

The results of this study produced significant findings, but several limitations still need to be considered. First, the use of a pre-experimental design with a pre-test and post-test model in a single group limits the ability to draw causal conclusions, as the absence of a control group makes it difficult for researchers to control for external factors. Second, the relatively small sample size and limitation to a single geographical area may limit the generalization of the research results to a broader context. Third, the measurement of school counselor competence in this study relied solely on self-report questionnaires, which could potentially lead to response bias.

4. Conclusion

This study examined the effectiveness of resilience soft skills training in enhancing school counselors' competence for suicide prevention. The findings demonstrated a significant improvement in counselors' competence following the training, as indicated by a significant increase in posttest scores compared to pretest scores and a very large effect size. These results provide empirical evidence that resilience-based training is an effective professional development approach for strengthening school counselors' capacity to support suicide prevention efforts in school settings. The results of this study reinforce the view that resilience is a dynamic and developable competence that can be enhanced through structured training. By improving counselors' understanding of resilience concepts and their ability to apply resilience-based strategies in counseling services, the training program contributes to more proactive and preventive mental health support for high school students. Strengthening counselors' competence is particularly important given their central role in early

identification and intervention for students at risk of suicidal ideation. Despite the positive outcomes, the findings should be interpreted in light of the study's limitations, including the use of a pre-experimental design and a relatively limited sample. Nevertheless, the significant improvement observed suggests that resilience soft skills training holds strong potential as an evidence-based intervention in school counseling practice. Future research is encouraged to employ more rigorous experimental designs, include larger and more diverse samples, and examine the long-term impact of resilience-based training on counselors' professional practice and student mental health outcomes.

Author Contributions

Budi Astuti contributed to conceptualization, methodology, supervision, validation, and writing–review and editing. Mitta Kurniasari contributed to conceptualization, investigation, formal analysis, data curation, and writing–original draft. Rizqi Lestari contributed to methodology, investigation, resources, visualization, and writing–original draft. Salma Salsabila Hasna contributed to data curation, investigation, project administration, validation, and writing–review and editing. All authors contributed equally to this study, and all authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration on AI Use

The authors declare that artificial intelligence tools were used to support language refinement and to improve academic writing. The authors take full responsibility for the content, originality, interpretation, and integrity of the manuscript.

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