

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) Based Intervention: An Effective Strategy of Individual Counseling For Students' Self Injury Recovery

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Published: June , 2025

ABSTRACT

This study aims to make a significant contribution to the understanding of self injury behavior among santri, as well as the effectiveness of CBT-based counseling services in helping them. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to explore the experiences of santri who experience self injury and undergo CBT-based individual counseling. The subjects consisted of three santri, with data collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Data triangulation was conducted with counselors and boarding school caregivers. Analysis used Braun and Clarke's thematic technique. Validity was maintained through triangulation and member checking. This study highlights behavioral, cognitive, and emotional changes during the counseling process in the context of pesantren. The results of this study show that self injury behavior in santri emerges in response to emotional distress and the social environment of the pesantren that is less supportive of emotional expression. Cognitive distortions such as feeling worthless and negative assumptions exacerbate their psychological condition. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)-based counseling is effective in changing negative thought patterns into more rational ones. However, the success of the intervention relies heavily on an empathic and safe therapeutic relationship. Therefore, counseling in pesantren needs to combine the CBT approach with humanistic values to respond to the emotional needs of santri more thoroughly.

Keywords; Self Injury, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Santri Counseling

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of *self-injury* without suicidal intent is an alarming problem in Indonesia. As a recent YouGov Omnibus study found that more than a third (36%) of Indonesians have self-harmed. This is especially found among young Indonesians, with more than two in five people (45%) having self-harmed. Among young Indonesians, data shows that 7% frequently self-harm (Ho 2019). Two out of five respondents have self-harmed and it is especially prevalent among young people. This fact is in line with the statement of a mental health specialist at RSUD dr. Soetomo, Dr. dr. Yunias Setiawati SpKJ., that in an average week ten adolescent patients (average age 13-15 years) come

in a condition that has scratched their hands, scratched, or hit themselves against the wall (Suud, 2019; Prabowo et al., 2025).

Self-injury behavior is also possible in Pondok Pesantren. Islamic boarding schools are Islamic educational institutions that are a means for students to study, understand, appreciate, and practice Islamic teachings and emphasize akhlakul karimah in everyday life. The characteristics of Islamic boarding schools can be seen from the spirit, hard work, sincerity, discipline, and independence in accordance with the expectations of the nation (Nurul Romdoni & Malihah, 2020) . Daily activities in Islamic boarding schools are quite dense, ranging from formal learning activities, yellow book learning activities, diniyyah school activities, to religious activities. These activities sometimes last until late at night. In addition, students must also obey and obey the rules in the pesantren. The dense pesantren activities and the regulations that apply, do not deny that some students consider it a pressure. Santri as individuals who are in a period of self-discovery often face pressures that have the potential to affect their mental health (Khirunisah et al., 2023) . One of the impacts of this pressure is *self injury* behavior.

There have been many studies that discuss the phenomenon of *self injury* in students, such as research conducted by Isvania & Fahmawati (2021) found self-harm behavior without suicidal intent (Nonsuicidal Self-Injury) in students of An-Nur Sidoarjo Islamic Boarding School and research by Azizah & Yasin (2022) also found *self harm* or *self injury* behavior among female students of MANU Buntet Pesantren. Based on the initial study conducted by researchers at the Darussalam Islamic Boarding School management related to the behavior of students who commit *self injury*, researchers found the phenomenon of *self injury* among male students in the form of often hitting the wall to injure their own hands. Pondok Pesantren Darussalam Blokagung Banyuwangi, an Islamic-based educational institution known for its high discipline and commitment to the moral formation of students, is now facing the phenomenon of *self-injury*.

Self-injury behavior can occur due to problems from within the individual that cannot be overcome properly, causing stress. Each individual's response to problems and stress is different, when the individual experiences a problem, the individual will look for a way out to solve the problem. *Self injury* behavior is one of the negative problem solving for the perpetrator, but in the *self injury* perpetrators themselves, they state that *self injury* behavior is one of the coping that is quite helpful in overcoming the negative emotions experienced so that it affects the perpetrator to continue to do *self injury* (Malumbot et al., 2022; Prabowo et al., 2024) .

Self-injury behavior is a problem that is increasingly faced by adolescents in various environments, including in Islamic educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools (Fina Syifaatu Makhshush 2023) . This phenomenon is often considered taboo and rarely discussed, although its impact on individual mental health is very significant (Sabriana & Indrawan, 2022) . Santri,

who are in a complex phase of emotional development, often face pressures stemming from academic demands, social expectations, and religious values.

In this context, *self-injury* often stems from cognitive distortions, which are irrational and negative thought patterns (Yudotomo, 2024). These cognitive distortions then create the urge to self-harm in an attempt to reduce emotional pain or gain control over a seemingly uncontrollable situation (Zebua et al., 2023). These actions provide a temporary sense of relief, but afterwards, individuals typically feel guilt, shame, or disappointment in themselves (Guntur et al., 2021; Prabowo & Ekaningsih, 2025). These feelings trigger the urge to repeat the same behavior, creating a destructive cycle that further worsens the psychological state (Anugrah et al., 2023). To prevent and overcome the destructive cycle from getting worse, *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy* (CBT) is one of the effective approaches. CBT-based approaches are also flexible and can be tailored to individual needs, making them effective in diverse contexts, including the pesantren environment.

CBT focuses on the relationship between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. This approach teaches individuals to recognize negative thought patterns that can trigger maladaptive behaviors, including *self injury*. (Pihasniwati 2023) By helping students identify and replace those negative thoughts with more positive and realistic ones, CBT provides the necessary tools to change harmful behaviors. What's more, CBT also involves the development of emotion management skills, which is particularly relevant for santri who often face strong emotional distress (Ayu Iteng Purnamasari 2021).

A study conducted by Indra Saputra (2024) found that the problem of students who do *self injury* can be followed up using the *Cognitive Behavior Therapy* (CBT) approach which centers on the idea that an individual is able to change cognitive and therefore change the impact of thinking on individual cognitive well-being by understanding individuals based on distorted cognitive reconstruction, the belief of the counselee to bring about emotional change and behavioral strategies in a better direction. Meanwhile, Esti Paramitayani (2021) found that the application of *Cognitive Behavior Therapy* (CBT) with relaxation, cognitive restructuring and self-management methods was quite effective when the subject was in an emotional state that tended to be unstable such as sadness, anger, despair or facing problems that could not be expressed to others. Another study conducted by Elma Prastika Maharani (2022) states that *Cognitive Behavior Therapy* (CBT) using confrontation and *self-management* techniques can reduce self-injurious behavior. Cognitive confrontation successfully corrects incongruent thoughts and changes irrational thinking to be more rational.

Conclusion This literature review reveals that CBT is an effective method to address *self-injury* behavior, especially when tailored to the needs of the individual and their socio-cultural context. Further research is needed to explore the adaptation of CBT in the context of pesantren or rural

communities in Indonesia. In addition, efforts to increase public awareness and reduce stigma towards mental health are also crucial to support the widespread implementation of this intervention.

In this article, various CBT techniques that can be applied in individual counseling to address *self-injury* behavior will also be outlined. These include the identification of negative thoughts, reframing, as well as the development of emotion management skills (Putra and Wahyuni 2023) . These techniques not only aim to reduce *self injury* behavior, but also to improve the overall coping skills of santri. Thus, it is expected that santri can learn to deal with their emotional challenges in a more constructive way.

This research aims to make a significant contribution to the understanding of *self injury* behavior among santri, as well as the effectiveness of CBT-based counseling services in helping them. It is hoped that the results of this study will not only benefit the development of counseling programs at Pondok Pesantren Darussalam Blokagung, but can also serve as a reference for other pesantren in dealing with similar mental health issues. Thus, this article is expected to be the first step in creating a more supportive environment for the mental health and well-being of santri.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to explore in depth the experiences of students who experience self injury and the recovery process through individual counseling interventions based on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). This approach was chosen because it is able to reveal the subjective meaning and psychological dynamics experienced by individuals in the social and cultural context of pesantren. The research subjects consisted of three santri who were identified as having a history of self injury and were willing to participate in CBT-based individual counseling sessions (Roosinda et al., 2021) .

Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation of counseling process notes. The researcher also triangulated data through interviews with counselors and caregivers to obtain a more holistic perspective. Data analysis used Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis technique which includes the process of coding, theme identification, and interpretation of meaning. Data validity was maintained through source and method triangulation techniques, as well as member checking with subjects to ensure the accuracy of data and interpretations (Sari et al., 2022) .

This research not only focuses on changes in self injury behavior, but also examines cognitive and emotional transformations that occur during the counseling process. Thus, this research method is expected to be able to fully describe the effectiveness of CBT interventions in dealing with self injury among santri, as well as contribute to the development of guidance and counseling services based on a cognitive approach in a pesantren environment (Abdussamad & Sik, 2021) .

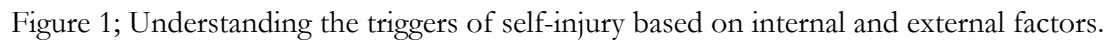
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Santri Self Injury Patterns Influenced by Emotional Stress and Pesantren Social Environment

One of the important findings in this study shows that self-injury behavior in santri does not solely appear as a form of behavioral deviation, but is more triggered by intense and accumulative emotional pressure, which is not channeled in a healthy manner. In the context of life in pesantren that demands high discipline, order, and compliance with rules, there is often not enough space for students to express feelings, especially negative emotions such as anger, disappointment, and sadness. Pressure from academic assignments, spiritual demands, and the dynamics of social relations between students create vulnerable psychological conditions, especially for individuals who have high emotional sensitivity or a less supportive family background. In situations like this, some santri tend to seek escape through self-harming behavior as a way to relieve inner tension or divert emotional pain to physical pain that is more "controllable." This was corroborated by one informant, a 17-year-old female santri, who stated in an in-depth interview:

"Sometimes I feel really tired, but I can't tell anyone. Even if I cry, there is no place. So I end up hurting myself to relieve myself, so that I have a feeling that I can manage myself."

This quote indicates a disconnect between the emotional needs of individuals and the support system available in the pesantren environment. This situation shows the importance of developing a counseling system and a safe emotional expression space for santri, so that self-injury behavior can be prevented through interventions that are more humanistic and responsive to their emotional needs. In the dynamics of life in pesantren, santri are faced with various demands, both from academic, spiritual, and social aspects. Although pesantren is known as an educational environment that emphasizes discipline and character building, the emotional reality of the students is often hidden behind the routine and compliance with the rules. This study reveals that the self-injury behavior experienced by some santri does not occur suddenly, but rather as a response to accumulated emotional distress and the lack of healthy expression channels. To understand more systematically the patterns that drive the emergence of this behavior, the following main indicators found in the field findings are presented, which can clarify how emotional distress and the social environment of pesantren contribute to the phenomenon of self-injury among santri.



The interpretation of these findings confirms that self-injury behavior among santri cannot be understood solely as a form of behavioral deviation or moral weakness, but rather as a psychological response to intense emotional pressure in a closed social environment. In the perspective of stress and coping theory by Wolfers & Utz, (2022) , self injury can be categorized as a form of maladaptive coping, which is a strategy to relieve psychological distress when healthy coping mechanisms are not available or not taught. This finding is in line with a study by Vafaei et al., (2023) , which states that adolescents with limited access to emotional support and open interpersonal communication tend to be more prone to self injury as a way to regulate their negative emotions. In the context of pesantren, the hierarchical structure, strict social norms, and the absence of space to channel emotional expression make it easier for santri to feel emotionally isolated. The need for a safe place to express frustration, disappointment, and sadness is not met, so these emotions are internalized and manifested in self-harm. Therefore, from a humanistic perspective Ou et al., (2024) , it is important to have a counseling approach that emphasizes empathy, unconditional acceptance, and contextual understanding of the emotional background of santri. This study recommends that pesantren begin to build a psychological support system that allows students to talk openly about their feelings without fear of being judged, so that self-injury behavior can be prevented preventively and treated restoratively.

Cognitive Distortion is the Dominant Factor in Self Injury Behavior

This study reveals that cognitive distortion is one of the dominant factors behind self-injury behavior among santri. Cognitive distortions refer to irrational and negative thought patterns that cause a person to view themselves, the environment, and the future incorrectly. In the case of santri who commit self injury, it is found that they tend to have thoughts that are full of judgment towards themselves, such as feeling worthless, feeling that they have failed to meet the expectations of parents or pesantren, and having a deep sense of guilt for small mistakes. The most common forms of distortions were overgeneralization ("I always fail at everything"), dichotomous or black-and-white thinking ("If I am not perfect, then I am really bad"), and negative assumptions about others' judgments. These distortions form negative beliefs that are embedded in their minds, which then encourage the emergence of self-harming behavior as an escape mechanism from the cognitive and emotional stress. One informant, a 16-year-old male santri, revealed in an interview session.

"I feel stupid, I have nothing to be proud of. If one thing fails, it feels like everything I do must be wrong too. So I thought, maybe I deserve to be punished, and self-harm became a kind of punishment for me."

This quote clearly illustrates how unaddressed negative thoughts can develop into destructive beliefs, which ultimately lead to selfinjury as a form of self-punishment. This finding emphasizes the importance of CBT-based interventions that are able to identify and transform cognitive distortions into healthier and more rational mindsets.

This finding strengthens the understanding that cognitive distortions play a central role in the emergence of self-injury behavior among santri. In the cognitive perspective by Menzel, (2023) , cognitive distortion is a systematic bias in thinking that is rooted in negative cognitive schemes, and this becomes the main foundation of emotional disorders and maladaptive behavior. Students who experience self injury show internalization of negative thoughts such as feelings of worthlessness, excessive guilt, and perceptions of total failure, all of which are the result of cognitive distortions such as overgeneralization, catastrophizing, and personalization. This finding is in line with research by Fallah Neudehi et al., (2023) which emphasizes that cognitive distortions contribute significantly to the emergence of Non-Suicidal Self-Injury (NSSI), mainly because individuals with such distortions have difficulty in validating emotions and understanding reality objectively. In the context of pesantren, the pressure for high academic and spiritual performance can reinforce extreme mindsets in santri, especially those with low self-concept. This distortion gives rise to the need for self-punishment as a form of "redemption" for what they perceive as failure, as reflected in the informants' quotes. Thus, the Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) approach becomes highly relevant to address

this case, as CBT directly targets negative thought patterns and replaces them with more adaptive cognitions. This intervention not only provides a new understanding of the reality of the self, but also equips students with rational thinking strategies that can prevent recurrence of self injury in the future.

Safe and Empathic Therapeutic Relationship is the Key to the Success of CBT Counseling

In the implementation of individual counseling based on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), this study found that the quality of the therapeutic relationship between counselors and students plays a crucial role in the success of the intervention. Students who experience self-injury behavior generally have complex emotional backgrounds, as well as a tendency to withdraw from the social environment due to shame, fear of being judged, or not believing that others are able to understand their condition. In situations like this, an empathic, open, and non-judgmental counseling approach becomes the main foundation so that students feel safe to express the psychological burden that has been harbored. The therapeutic relationship that is built with trust allows the intervention process to run more deeply, because students begin to open themselves, explain the background of their behavior, and accept cognitive input from the counselor more openly. Counselors who are able to show their full emotional presence through body language, warm intonation, and validation of santri feelings are proven to be able to build bonds that support behavior transformation more effectively.

This is illustrated in the quote of one 18-year-old female santri who underwent CBT counseling for six sessions:

"At first I was afraid to tell because I was afraid of being judged badly, but the way the counselor talked made me feel understood. I became brave enough to be honest, and it turns out that by talking about everything, I feel lighter."

This quote shows that a safe therapeutic relationship not only facilitates communication, but also becomes the starting gate in the process of emotional recovery and mindset change. Therefore, aspects of empathy and trust are not just complements, but the core of an effective counseling approach.

In the CBT counseling process for students with self-injury behavior, the quality of the therapeutic relationship is the main foundation for the success of the intervention. To understand the key elements that make up an effective therapeutic relationship, the following table presents the aspects and descriptions of the findings of this study.

Table 1: Key Aspects in the Therapeutic Relationship of CBT Counseling		
No	Aspect	Description
1	Counselor Empathy	The counselor's ability to understand the feelings of students without judgment or negative labeling.
2	Santri's Trust	Santri feel safe to open up because they believe the counselor understands and supports them.
3	Emotional Presence of the Counselor	Body language, tone, and responses of the counselor that show full acceptance.
4	Open and Warm Communication	The counselor creates an atmosphere where students are free to tell their stories without fear of being judged.
5	Validation of Feelings	Counselors acknowledge and normalize the emotions experienced by students so that students feel understood.
6	Mindset Transformation	Santri are more open to receiving cognitive interventions after feeling emotionally accepted.

The success of CBT counseling for students who experience self injury is highly dependent on the quality of the therapeutic relationship that is built. Aspects such as empathy, trust, emotional presence, and validation of feelings play an important role in creating a safe space for students to open up. When this relationship is built warmly and sincerely, students become more responsive to cognitive interventions, so that the process of emotional recovery and behavior change can take place more effectively and deeply.

The interpretation of these findings confirms that the success of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)-based individual counseling does not only depend on the cognitive and behavioral techniques used, but is largely determined by the quality of the therapeutic relationship between the counselor and the client. In Shepherd's (2024) theory of humanistic therapy, it is stated that three core conditions namely empathy, genuineness, and unconditional positive regard are the main conditions for positive psychological change. Although CBT comes from a more structural and cognitive logic-based paradigm, this finding shows that the principles of the humanistic approach remain relevant and even synergistic in the context of CBT, especially in cases of self injury that are closely related to emotional wounds and fragile self-confidence. This research is also in line with a study from Simpson et al., (2021) which states that the strength of the therapeutic alliance has a greater impact than the approach of a particular therapeutic method. In the context of santri, safe and empathic relationships open up space for emotional expression that has been inhibited by pesantren norms that tend to be formal and restrain personal expression. Therefore, counselors need to prioritize building therapeutic relationships as an initial foundation before conducting cognitive restructuring. This shows that the effectiveness of CBT will be much more optimal when applied in a humanist and relational atmosphere, not just mechanistic. Trust and empathy are the entrance to change that cannot be underestimated in the practice of counseling adolescent students.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion of this study, it can be concluded that *self injury* behavior in santri is a complex response to intense emotional pressure and the pesantren social environment that is less responsive to the needs of individual emotional expression. Life in pesantren that demands high discipline and strict social norms often creates a narrow space for students to manage emotions healthily. In this condition, self-harm behavior becomes a form of maladaptive *coping* used to relieve inner tension. This finding is reinforced by the presence of cognitive distortion as a dominant factor that exacerbates the psychological condition of santri. Negative mindsets such as feeling worthless, failing, or deserving to be punished, arise due to excessive generalizations, negative assumptions, and irrational cognitive schemes embedded in santri. These distortions lead them to self-harming behavior as an outlet for emotions and a form of self-punishment. In the context of intervention, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)-based counseling has proven to be effective because it is able to identify and change negative thought patterns to become more rational. However, the success of counseling does not only depend on the CBT technique itself, but is also strongly influenced by the quality of the therapeutic relationship between counselors and students. A safe, empathic, and judgment-free relationship is proven to be the main key in opening up the emotional openness of students and encouraging healthier behavior changes. Thus, the counseling approach in pesantren must combine CBT principles with humanistic values in order to be able to respond to the psychological conditions of santri as a whole and effectively.

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