

IMPLEMENTATION OF SFBT GROUP COUNSELING IN ADDRESSING THE VULNERABILITY OF MALADAPTIVE DATING BEHAVIOR IN MOTHERLESS ADOLESCENT GIRLS

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Abstract

Parental divorce followed by maternal absence (motherless) triggers psychological vulnerability in adolescent females, frequently manifesting as maladaptive dating behavior as an emotional coping mechanism. This study analyzes the vulnerability patterns of excessive dating and evaluates the implementation of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) group counseling conducted within a junior high school setting. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive-exploratory design, five 8th-grade female students at SMP Negeri 3 Brebes experiencing maternal deprivation due to divorce and labor migration were selected via purposive sampling. Data were gathered through non-participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and school documentation, analyzed through interactive qualitative analysis (data condensation, data display, conclusion drawing) and source triangulation involving peers and the school counselor. Findings indicate four primary vulnerability archetypes: romantic partners as primary emotional surrogates, compulsive communication demands, anxious overthinking and jealousy, and boundary violations exceeding developmental norms. The 6-session SFBT intervention leveraging miracle, exception, and scaling questions effectively fostered cognitive reframing, emotional self-reliance, and academic re-prioritization. Three participants terminated toxic relationships, one reconstructed her relationship into an academically supportive partnership, while one participant required specialized individual follow-up due to chronic attachment deficits and unmonitored home environments. SFBT group counseling demonstrates operational efficacy in mitigating relational vulnerability by mobilizing internal agencies and alternative support systems without ruminating on past familial trauma.

Keywords: Adolescent Vulnerability; Group Counselling; Maladaptive Dating; Motherless; Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT).

1 INTRODUCTION

Family dissolution due to divorce in Indonesia has shown a significant escalation in recent years. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) shows that Central Java has a high divorce rate, with Brebes Regency consistently ranking at the top, recording between 4,164 and 4,825 divorce cases in 2024, largely due to economic pressures. The sociological and psychological impact of divorce in suburban areas often forces mothers, the sole financial supporter of the family, to move to another area for work. This phenomenon creates a structural and functional motherlessness, where daughters lose the physical presence, emotional warmth, and daily guidance of their mothers at a crucial stage in their development.

The lack of consistent maternal care creates an emotional void and disrupted attachment. From a developmental psychology perspective, early adolescence is characterized by an imbalance in neurobiological development between the limbic system, which is highly responsive to social and emotional stimuli, and the immature prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for executive function and impulse control. When girls lack a maternal figure, who typically serves as a secure base and primary regulator of emotional control, they are vulnerable to developing maladaptive coping mechanisms. In the school environment, this condition manifests itself through involvement in maladaptive dating behavior. Romantic relationships are treated not simply as a means of normative socialization but rather as a compensatory means to fill an emotional void and seek instant external validation (*pseudo-intimacy*).

Manifestations of maladaptive dating behavior in motherless adolescents include extreme emotional *over-dependency*, pathological fear of abandonment, boundary *erosion*, and tolerance for emotional manipulation and dating violence. At SMP Negeri 3 Brebes, this condition is exacerbated by grandparental caretaking, which is hampered by generational gaps, limited physical energy among the elderly, and weak daily supervision (*monitoring gaps*). The resulting systemic impacts include decreased concentration in learning, neglect of schoolwork, identity crises, chronic anxiety, and the risk of victimization from relational violence.

Conventional counseling approaches, which focus on etiological investigation and processing of past divorce trauma, often create emotional resistance and trap adolescents in a narrative of helplessness (a victim mentality). The loss of a mother is an unchangeable historical reality, so therapeutic interventions require a future-oriented paradigm that values the internal potential of those seeking help and can be effectively integrated into school service plans. Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT), developed by Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg, presents itself as a postmodern intervention model, based on the principle that problem solutions do not always have to be related to the causes of the problem. SFBT facilitates clients to explore past successes (*exceptions*), construct visualizations of the desired future (*preferred future*), and develop measurable micro-steps.

Although the efficacy of SFBT has been widely studied in the realm of resilience and aggressiveness management in schools, exploratory studies that examine the integration of SFBT group counseling in reducing the specific vulnerability of maladaptive dating behavior in motherless female adolescents at the junior high school level are still very few and limited. Therefore, this study aims to: (1) analyze the description of vulnerability of maladaptive dating behavior in motherless female adolescents at SMP Negeri 3 Brebes; (2) describe the stages of the SFBT group counseling service process guided by the BK teacher; (3) evaluate the description of changes in female students' behavior after the intervention; and (4) identify contextual obstacles in the implementation of SFBT group counseling interventions in the school environment.

2 METHODOLOGY

Adolescence is a transitional phase connecting childhood to adulthood and is characterized by biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional restructuring. Developmental models emphasize that hormonal increases during puberty via the *hypothalamic-pituitary-gonadal* (HPG) axis increase the intensity of affective reactions to social stimuli. Emotion regulation involves situation selection, situation modification, attention control, cognitive reappraisal, and response modulation. Adolescents who do not develop adaptive reappraisal strategies tend to use maladaptive strategies such as expressive suppression or obsessive thinking, which can ultimately lead to internalizing or externalizing disorders. In this transitional ecosystem, the presence of significant others plays a significant psychosocial role.

In the family structure, the mother figure serves as the primary secure base and the primary facilitator of *maternal mirroring*, a psychological mechanism by which daughters develop self-concept, self-esteem, and loveability through maternal acceptance. *Motherlessness* due to divorce and physical separation disrupts the continuity of *dyadic co-regulation*, triggers maternal wounds, and weakens cognitive and decisional self-control in adolescent girls. The transfer of caregiving responsibilities to grandparents often faces a monitoring gap due to physical limitations and intergenerational understanding.

Referring to John Bowlby's Attachment Theory, maternal deprivation activates an anxious-*ambivalent attachment pattern* and emotional hyperactivation strategies. Adolescent girls develop persistent fear of abandonment and deep loneliness. To alleviate this inner suffering, individuals adopt compensatory mechanisms by adopting romantic partners as surrogate attachment figures. Dating relationships then develop into extreme relational *over-dependency*, unconditional compliance, loss of personal *boundaries*, and a high tolerance for toxic relationships and the risk of dating violence *victimization*.

Group counseling in a school setting provides a therapeutic climate based on multidirectional social dynamics that facilitate self-disclosure, the universality of suffering, and vicarious learning among peer members. The implementation of group counseling moves gradually through the phases of formation, transition (*storming*), norming, working (*performing*), and ending (*adjourning*) based on the principles of confidentiality, openness, and voluntariness.

Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) is a postmodern approach based on social constructionism that positions psychological reality as a product of language construction. SFBT rejects the conventional pathology-oriented medical model, opting instead to operate on the optimistic principle that each client possesses sufficient internal resources (*resourcefulness*). The counselor adopts a "not-knowing" position to position the client as the expert on their own life. Therapeutic change in SFBT is driven by three main operational principles: *the ripple effect*, *the law of exceptions*, and the transformation of discourse from problem-talk to solution-talk. Practically, SFBT interventions utilize the techniques of miracle questions, exception questions, scaling questions, and the provision of praise and homework to guide clients towards gradually realizing their preferred future.

The research method used in this study is a naturalistic exploratory descriptive qualitative approach. This approach is designed to describe the dynamics of sensitivity to problematic relationships and explore in depth the effectiveness of SFBT group counseling interventions in a natural school context. The researcher positioned herself as a non-participant observer who monitored, recorded verbal and non-verbal language, and analyzed the dynamics of the intervention guided and facilitated directly by the Guidance and Counseling (BK) Teacher at SMP Negeri 3 Brebes, Mrs. Nur Amaluna Afiah, S.Pd., as the main counselor.

The selection of participants was carried out using *purposive sampling technique* based on the following criteria: active eighth grade students of SMP Negeri 3 Brebes; experiencing *motherless status* due to parental divorce where the mother migrated to work outside the region or abroad; being cared for by a substitute caregiver; and indicated to show maladaptive dating behavior based on the results of the Student Needs Questionnaire (AKPD) and BK casebook records.

Table 1 shows the demographic profile and parenting structure of the five main participants.

Participant Initials	Class	Age (Years)	Domicile	Substitute Parenting	Mother's Status	Presence
ALM	VIII B	14	Gandasuli	Grandfather and grandmother	Traveling out of town; regular communication	telephone
ZZA	VIII G	14	Banjar	Grandma	Mother factory worker (PT); minimal communication	direct
MAS	VIII J	14	Gandasuli	Grandpa	Overseas migrant worker since elementary school; communication is very rare	
RDO	VIII D	14	Pasarbatang	Older Sister	Overseas migrant workers; intensive daily virtual communication	
GNN	VIII K	14	Pasarbatang	Grandma	Traveling out of town; regular communication	telephone

Secondary data sources for triangulation purposes involved five close peers of each primary participant (MAP, ASR, SAL, PP, and TK) and the guidance counselor as informants for assessing daily behavioral development at school. School institutional documents in the form of AKPD records, attendance records, BK case handling archives, and behavior change contract sheets were used as tertiary data sources.

Data collection was conducted through triangulation methods: Semi-structured interviews were conducted pre- and post-counseling to explore subjective perceptions, affective dynamics, and shifts in the client's independence scale. Non-participant observation was applied during six group counseling sessions and during students' daily interactions during school breaks to record the intensity of physical closeness, device dependence, and changes in learning focus. Documentation studies examined case files and verbatim recordings of counseling sessions.

The data analysis used the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model, which involved condensing data through verbatim transcription, thematic coding, and extracting the essence of the conversation; presenting data in narrative and in-depth descriptive form (thick description) and in the form of a comparison matrix; and drawing conclusions and verifying them by utilizing triangulation of sources from various informants.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Overview of Vulnerability Patterns of Maladaptive Dating Behavior in Motherless Adolescents

The results of observations, in-depth interviews, and data triangulation confirmed that the absence of a mother figure due to divorce triggers the formation of maladaptive dating behaviors that are polarized into four main vulnerability themes.

First, the partner is positioned as the primary source of affective needs. The absence of a mother figure creates a sense of emptiness and existential loneliness that drives clients to project all their affection needs onto their partners. ALM participants revealed that they pursued dating solely to offset their daily loneliness at home, while MAS viewed their partner as their sole reliance due to the lack of attention from their elderly grandfather or their mother, who worked abroad. This dependency reduces the function of dating to an unhealthy form of substitute attachment.

Second, uncontrolled communication dependency and relational anxiety. All five participants considered the speed of text message replies and the frequency of phone calls as benchmarks for self-acceptance. Delays in receiving news triggered affective panic, feelings of worthlessness, and fear of abandonment. Peer triangulation (MAP and ASR) confirmed that nighttime text message conflicts consistently resulted in participants daydreaming, feeling depressed, and losing energy for class the next day.

Third, the dominance of irrational jealousy and overthinking. Fear of *rejection* leads clients to biasedly interpret neutral events. RDO and GNN participants frequently assume their partners are bored or have other interests without any rational evidence, which then disrupts their concentration at school.

Fourth, excessive togetherness and the erosion of age-related boundaries. The most complex vulnerability was identified in participant MAS. Due to the lack of maternal guidance since fourth grade and the absence of supervision from his grandfather, MAS engaged in relationships that exceeded the boundaries of what is considered normal for junior high school students: habitually staying out late at night with his partner, chronically neglecting academic work, and willing to stay in the relationship despite enduring restrictive behavior and verbal abuse from his partner to avoid loneliness.

Table 2 profiles and stratification of the vulnerability levels of the five participants before the implementation of the SFBT intervention.

Participant Initials	Dominant Behavioral and Domestic Care Context	Degree of Vulnerability
MAS	Extreme dependency, staying out late, neglecting tasks, enduring verbal aggression Elderly grandfather; total communication barrier; lack of supervision	Very high
ALM	Withdrawing during conflict, hypersensitivity to text messages, bottling up emotional baggage Grandmother; limited communication; socially withdrawn	Currently
ZZA	Procrastination of schoolwork, disruption of study time due to intensive phone calls, sadness when ignored Factory worker mother (coming home late); limited emotional interaction	Currently
GNN	Mood fluctuations (bad mood), attention anxiety, fixation on schoolwork help Grandmother and sister; mother's regular telephone communication; active coping	Currently

RDO	Situational overthinking, distorting academic concentration	relational worry about	Big sister opens up; mother's daily virtual communication is maintained	Low
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This stratification shows that the severity of maladaptive behavior is inversely proportional to the availability of affective communication channels and the quality of supervision in the substitute family structure.

3.1.1 Stages of Implementing SFBT Group Counseling Services

The group counseling intervention was held in six sessions of 60 minutes each in the Guidance and Counseling Room of SMP Negeri 3 Brebes, using a circular seating formation without dividing tables to ensure equality and emotional closeness.

Table 3 shows the operational structure and stages of the SFBT intervention guided by the BK teacher.

Session	SFBT Intervention Focus	Therapeutic Activities	Operational	Group Output	Dynamics
1	Building Trust & Structuring	Socialization of the principles of confidentiality, group contracts, neutral introductions, exploration of initial expectations of counseling.		Formation of a sense of psychological safety (safe space) and initial cohesiveness.	
2	Problem-Free Identification	A concise mapping of relational distress situations without delving into past divorce wounds.		Deconstructing the problem narrative; understanding the reality of the current crisis.	
3	Goal Formulation & Miracle Questions	Application of The Miracle Question technique to visualize an ideal state without dependencies.		Formulation of concrete, specific, and measurable micro behavioral change contracts.	
4	Exception Finding & Resource Mining	Exploring moments of exceptions when the client is able to be independent, calm, and focused on learning.		Awareness of internal coping resources (agency) and self-efficacy.	
5	Progress Measurement (Scaling)	Application of Scaling Questions (scale 1–10) to measure the level of independence and academic focus.		Identify realistic baby steps for gradual scale-up.	
6	Compliments, Feedback & Termination	Providing specific reinforcement (compliments), validating progress, and formulating independent action plans.		Strengthening commitment to behavioral independence and closing services	

The therapeutic dynamics reached a crucial point in Sessions 3 and 4. Through the stimulation of The Miracle Question, clients were guided to project a functional state without excessive attachment: ALM imagined waking up in the morning with a calm mind without the anxiety of checking their phone, RDO visualized smooth learning without the distraction of relationships, and GNN imagined independent emotional stability. Furthermore, the Exception Questions technique succeeded in dismantling the clients' mistaken belief that they were helpless without their partner. Clients found concrete evidence that they had moments of successful coping—such as the warmth of interactions with their grandmother, the joy of being with their younger sibling at home, togetherness with their peers (MAP, SAL, TK), and the experience of focusing on learning in class—which had previously been overlooked from their awareness.

3.1.2 Overview of Results and Evaluation of Post-SFBT Behavior Change Services

Two-week post-counseling monitoring evaluation verified through final interviews and source triangulation showed significant behavioral adaptation differentiation in all five participants. **Table 1.** *Caption for the table.*

Table 4 comparison matrix of participants' conditions before and after the SFBT intervention

Participant Initials	Pre-Counseling Conditions	Post-Counseling Independence Scale	Final Behavior Change Trajectory
ALM	Burying problems; acute loneliness; anxiety about late messages.	Increased from scale 2 to scale 6 (Self Confidence: 8).	Ending a relationship; shifting affection needs to friends (MAP); being more assertive and calm.
ZZA	Procrastination; sadness when ignored; low maternal communication.	Increased from scale 2 to scale 6 (Self Confidence: 8).	Maintaining a healthy relationship; initiating daily dialogue with the mother; and disciplined learning.
MAS	Pathological dependency; tolerance of aggression; neglected tasks.	Shifted from scale 2 to scale 4–5 (Self Confidence: 6).	Cognitive awareness of toxic relationships increases, but behavior is inconsistent; still seen with partners.
RDO	Relational overthinking; academic achievement anxiety.	Increased from scale 6 to scale 7 (Self Confidence: 9).	Ending a relationship; fully focusing on academic achievement; optimizing family support.
GNN	Hypersensitive to partner's attention; unstable mood.	Increased from scale 2 to scale 6 (Self Confidence: 9).	Ending a relationship; becoming emotionally independent; positioning oneself as a role model for younger siblings

The changes achieved reflect three typologies of intervention outcomes: first, relationship termination leading to the restoration of self-autonomy, demonstrated by ALM, RDO, and GNN. These three students made the firm decision to end their relationships after realizing that romantic dependency actually hindered their personal and academic development. ALM successfully overcame the illusion that her boyfriend was the only protection from loneliness by opening up to her best friend, MAP. RDO chose to prioritize academic achievement goals by relying on supportive communication with her older sibling and mother. GNN found existential strength by focusing her affective energy on accompanying her younger sibling and enjoying the dynamics of healthy peer friendships.

Second, ZZA demonstrated the restructuring of relationships toward a supportive partnership. The success of SFBT isn't defined rigidly as ending a relationship. ZZA demonstrated behavioral restructuring by establishing boundary-setting, rejecting learning distractions, and actively establishing face-to-face

communication with her mother after work, shifting her relationship from a relationship to a motivating factor for learning.

Third, the cognitive *-behavioral gap* experienced by MAS. Through SFBT, MAS successfully achieved a sufficient level of self-awareness *regarding* her partner's restrictive and abusive relationship patterns. However, behaviorally, MAS experienced inconsistent behavior outside of school after counseling. Findings from supporting informants confirmed that MAS was still seen riding together and uploading photos with her partner. This condition is rooted in chronic maternal deprivation since fourth grade, social isolation at home due to an elderly grandfather, and a crippling existential fear of total loneliness (*fear of isolation*). Therefore, this case requires further intervention in the form of in-depth individual counseling.

3.1.3 Critical Discussion and Theoretical Relationships

Conceptually, the effectiveness of SFBT group counseling in reducing vulnerability to maladaptive dating lies in its ability to dismantle the client's internal deficit bias without triggering secondary anxiety. Consistent with contemporary counseling literature, SFBT facilitates emotional regulation and distress tolerance in adolescents affected by divorce by shifting cognitive focus from rumination of past trauma to articulation of future actions. The application of solution - *talk* reduces psychological resistance in *motherless female students* who often feel stigmatized by their family status.

The group format acts as a corrective social microcosm that restores the absence of maternal mirroring . Through the universality of the shared experience of suffering within the group, feelings of isolation are gradually eroded. These interactions facilitate co -*regulation of emotions* among peers, which acts as a bridge to affective independence.

However, the dynamics experienced by MAS participants underscore the boundary *conditions* of brief therapy. In cases of prolonged maternal deprivation accompanied by a complete lack of family supervision, a brief six-session group intervention is insufficient to restructure chronically internalized attachment schemas . Gaps in domestic supervision outside of school create space for the persistence of destructive relationship patterns, thus underscoring the urgency of implementing a stepped -*care model* in school counseling programs.

3.1.4 Obstacles to SFBT Implementation in School Environments

The process analysis identified four main obstacles to the implementation of SFBT group counseling in the school environment: the presence of deep-rooted chronic emotional attachments as the main internal obstacle, where a deep fear of loneliness prevents the client from executing rational decisions, thus triggering a disconnection between cognitive understanding and real actions in the field. The absence of structured supervision from substitute caregivers at home weakens the client's compliance with the behavioral contract when faced with a partner's invitation outside the school environment. The limited time allocation for group counseling sessions in secondary schools (six meetings) is very responsive for mild to moderate levels of vulnerability, but requires the integration of further sessions for cases of severe maternal deprivation. Long-distance communication barriers with the biological mother who works as a migrant worker limit the synergy of the family system's intervention as a whole, so that the guidance counselor bears the burden of recovery unilaterally at school.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The vulnerability of maladaptive dating behavior in *motherless female adolescents* due to divorce at SMP Negeri 3 Brebes stems from affective compensation efforts to fill the void of the mother figure, which is manifested in the form of placing the partner as the sole attachment figure, compulsive communication demands, jealousy and *overthinking* , and erosion of age developmental boundaries. The implementation of group counseling with the *Solution-Focused Brief Therapy* (SFBT) approach for six sessions was proven to be effective in facilitating the reconstruction of the client's mindset from maladaptive dependency to the restoration of self-agency, the establishment of healthy relational boundaries, and the reorientation of academic priorities. Variations in intervention results showed that the majority of participants (ALM, RDO, GNN) succeeded in ending unhealthy relationships and shifting their affection needs to the support system of peers and family; one participant (ZZA) succeeded in reconstructing the dating relationship into an academically supportive partnership; while one participant (MAS) succeeded in increasing cognitive awareness but required further individual counseling services due to chronic maternal deprivation and lack of supervision at home.

Based on these conclusions, Guidance and Counseling Teachers are advised to adopt the SFBT group counseling protocol as a standard preventive and curative intervention in secondary schools, complemented by an initial needs assessment to identify clients who can complete their studies in a group format and those who require further individual support. Schools are expected to provide structural support for the provision of private counseling services and strengthen psychoeducational programs for healthy adolescent relationships. For surrogate caregivers (grandparents), it is recommended to increase daily supportive supervision and facilitate regular virtual affective communication between adolescents and their biological mothers. The limitation of this study lies in the local scale of qualitative subjects in one school; therefore, it is recommended for future researchers to test the effectiveness of SFBT through a multi-school longitudinal quasi-experimental design and integrate parenting training modules for surrogate families.

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