

# Organized activities in peer groups improve mental and social well-being in adolescents: A qualitative study

*by* Bagong Suyanto

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# Organized Activities in Peer Groups Improve Mental and Social Well-Being in Adolescents: A Qualitative Study

Suharmanto<sup>1,2</sup>, Bagong Suyanto<sup>3</sup>, Windhu Purnomo<sup>4</sup>, Rahma Sugihartati<sup>3</sup>, Oedojo Soedirham<sup>4</sup>, Sutinah<sup>3</sup>

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** Mental and social well-being in adolescents can be improved by organized activities in peer groups. This qualitative study aimed to explore organized activities in peer groups related to mental and social well-being in adolescents.

**Method:** Five focus groups were carried out with 30 adolescents aged 12–24 in Surabaya, Indonesia. Participants were purposively selected and had all experienced organized activities. A thematic approach was used for analysis and data collection was completed at the point of data saturation.

**Results:** Four interconnected themes emerged from the data; (a) self-esteem and self-regulation, (b) resilience, hardiness and mental toughness, (c) social adjustment and (d) social support in organized activities. Adolescents who involve in sports, arts, and clubs have high confidence, easiness to control their emotion, stronger in facing various problems. They also felt more adapt, respect, tolerant of others and get social support.

**Conclusions:** This study demonstrates that organized activities in peer groups improve mental and social well-being. Adolescents can have good self-esteem, self-regulation, resilience, hardiness and mental toughness. Adolescents also can have good social adjustment and social support. One of the efforts to prevent a mental and social problem is early recognition or detection in adolescents.

**Keywords:** Organized activities, peer groups, mental and social well-being, adolescents, qualitative research, focus groups.

## Introduction

Mental and social health is one of the health problems in the world, including in Indonesia. One population that has a risk for mental and social health disorders is adolescents. Mental disorders in adolescents include anxiety and depression, while social disorders that occur are social isolation and loneliness.<sup>1</sup>

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Adolescence is a transitional period of development between childhood and adulthood. The development of adolescent social life is characterized by the influence of peers in adolescent life.<sup>2</sup> Peer groups are a place for adolescents to socialize with peers and they gain social support.<sup>3,4,5</sup> Activities undertaken by adolescents with peers include activities such as sports, arts and clubs and impact on social and mental well-being.<sup>6</sup>

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World Health Organization states that health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.<sup>7</sup> Mental health is a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can work productively and able to make a contribution to the community. A social well-being manifests if one is able to relate to another person or group well.

Criteria of mental well-being as follows mental efficiency, control and integration of motives, control of conflicts and frustrations, positive and healthy feelings and emotions, the tranquility of peace of mind, healthy attitudes, healthy self-concepts, adequate ego identity and adequate relation to reality.<sup>8</sup> Mental well-being enhances our cognitive process, and to deal with simple as well as complex task. It also helps us in developing intrinsic motivation.

Social well-being concerned with social support and interpersonal relationship. Social support was simultaneously related with health and personal control beliefs in relation to well-being.<sup>9</sup> Close support figure can be sufficient to promote well-being. The high social well-being is a positive significance in coping with the stresses of life and developed high productivity to make an effective community. One factor that related to well-being among adolescents was organized activities involvement.<sup>10</sup>

**13** The purpose of this study is to explore organized activities in peer groups related to mental and social well-being in adolescents.

### Materials and Method

**Study design:** This study used qualitative description<sup>11</sup> as a design and focus group<sup>12</sup> for information gathering to explore organized activities in peer groups related to mental and social well-being in adolescents. This study chose focus groups because this method possible to acquire valuable data.<sup>13</sup> Ethical approval was granted by The Faculty of Public Health Airlangga University Health Research Ethics Committee (No: 69-KEPK).

**Recruitment process:** Participants were male and female students who attend organizations in schools with peer groups. We used a purposive sampling technique, aiming to be inclusive of experiences of boys and girls from diverse backgrounds. Recruitment ended once theoretical saturation was achieved.<sup>14</sup> In total, 30 adolescents ranging in age from 12 and 21 years, 12 participants were girls (40%) and 18 (60%) were boys.

**Conduct of focus groups:** Data collection was carried out by the main researcher from January-December 2017. Focus group were conducted with pupils in same year group to get naturalistic discussions. We designed a questioning route informed by existing mental and social well-being literature and guidance on

focus groups.<sup>12,15</sup> Focus groups lasted 50-60 minutes and were digitally audio recorded. The researcher assistant took field notes including verbal and non-verbal communication. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim.

**1** **Data analysis:** All data emerging from interviews and field notes helped inform the data-analysis process, were reviewed and coded by the researcher. This study using a thematic analysis approach.<sup>16</sup> Pupils were given the opportunity to feedback on results to encourage participation validation.

### Results

Five focus groups were conducted in this study with 30 participants. Four interconnected themes emerged from the data; (a) self-esteem and self-regulation, (b) resilience, hardiness and mental toughness, (c) social adjustment and (d) social support in organized activities.

**Self-esteem and self-regulation along join an organized activities:** Participants reported about self-esteem and self-regulation along join an organized activity in peer groups. Self-esteem and self-regulation are part of mental well-being.

*Pupil A.2: "I feel more confident after meeting peer groups because they always support positive things I do like sports and arts activities."*

*Pupil B.3: "I feel valuable when with them because I am more recognized in the group if I follow the activities of peer groups."*

*Pupil C.15: "Before I joined the peer groups, I had difficulty controlling the behavior, but after joining the peer groups, I found it easier to control my behavior for the better."*

Participants felt more confident and valuable after following organized activities in peer groups. They can control behavior after joining organized activities. It can be concluded that adolescents have higher self-esteem and self-regulation than before following peer groups activities.

*Resilience, hardiness and mental toughness in organized activities*

Participants also reported about resilience, hardiness and mental toughness in peer groups activities. Mental well-being in adolescents can be identified by resilience, hardiness, and mental toughness.

*Pupil E.19: "I become easier to control feelings of anxiety and stress, after joining the peer groups because we always discuss the problem of group members and find the solution."*

Pupil A.2: "I feel stronger in facing various problems both at school and at home because there is a place to store and solve the problem that is peer groups activities."

Pupil D.13: "After I attended peer groups activities, I was more able to control my emotions, especially control anger, because my friend reminded me of a patience."

Participants reported that they felt easier to control their feelings of anxiety and stress than before joining organized activities. They also reported that they felt stronger in facing various problems and easy to control their emotions. It can be concluded that adolescents have better resilience, hardiness, and mental toughness after following peer groups activities.

#### **Social adjustment in organized activities:**

Interviews related to a social adjustment in peer groups activities, participants reported that they have a good social adjustment along following organized activities in peer groups.

*Pupil D.27: "I am more able to adapt and respect others since I join this activity (study club, sports)."*

Pupil C.8: "I am more tolerant of my friends in peer groups activity because they come from various backgrounds, such as different in tribe and religion."

Participants said that they feel more adept, respect and tolerant with others since joining organized activities. This study can be concluded that adolescents have a good social adjustment with the following peer groups activities.

**Social support from peers:** Participants reported that they get social support from peers along following peer groups activities.

Pupil 3: "My friends give me attention and support if I have a problem, and she/he always help me to solve my problem."

It can be concluded that adolescents get social support from peers in peer groups activities. This social support important for them to help solve a problem.

## **Discussion**

This qualitative study used focus groups to provide a naturalistic setting in which to explore organized activities in peer groups related to mental and social well-being in adolescents. This study has shown that organized activities (sports, arts, clubs) has consistently been associated with well-being.<sup>26</sup> Mental well-being in the adolescent can be identified by self-esteem and self-regulation. Self-esteem is an individual's judgment of self-respect.<sup>17</sup> Self-esteem contributes in healthy functioning.<sup>18</sup> There is an association between organized peer groups activities and high self-esteem.<sup>19</sup> High self-esteem has been linked to mental and social health outcomes.<sup>20,22</sup> Lower externalizing and internalizing problems as well as increased self-regulation<sup>23</sup>, social skills and academic performance.<sup>27,28,29</sup> Someone who participated in organized activities demonstrated significantly higher self-regulation.<sup>30</sup> Self-regulation contributes to social and mental well-being.<sup>24,25</sup> Self-regulation promotes harmonious interactions with others and poor self-regulation can contribute to crime and health risk behavior<sup>25</sup>.

This study has shown that adolescents have a good resilience, hardiness, and mental toughness after following organized activities in peer groups. Resilience is the ability to adapt in life and related to health.<sup>31</sup> School connectedness may provide a role in promoting resilience for mental health for adolescents.<sup>31</sup> Resilience was positively associated with psychological well-being and negatively associated with psychological distress, depression and anxiety.<sup>32</sup> Hardiness is a personality style characterized by a commitment, control, and perception of problems as a challenge. High hardiness is associated with lower psychological distress, higher quality of life and a high level of mental health. Hardiness is a psychological style associated with resilience, mental and social well-being.<sup>33,34,35,36</sup> Hardiness was negatively correlated with physiological responses of systolic blood pressure, diastolic blood pressure, and respiratory rate.<sup>37</sup> Resilience and hardiness were positively associated with psychological well-being, and negatively associated with psychological distress.<sup>38</sup> Mental toughness was a multi-dimensional construct<sup>39</sup> and positively correlated with mental and social well-being.<sup>40,41</sup>

This study also has shown that adolescents have a good social adjustment with following organized activities in peer groups. Self-adjustment is the harmony between individuals and the environment in which individuals



can interact, socialize and behave appropriately with the environment. There is a relationship between social adjustment and social well-being.<sup>45</sup> Organized activities have consistently been associated with adjustment and well-being.<sup>26</sup>

This study has shown that adolescents get a social support in peer groups activities. Peer interactions play an important role and related to social support. Organized activities involvement related to social support and adolescent wellbeing.<sup>21,42,43,44</sup>

### Conclusions

This study has shown that organized activities in peer groups improve mental and social well-being. Adolescents who involve in sports, arts, and clubs have high confidence, easiness to control their emotion, stronger in facing various problems. They also felt more adapt, respect, tolerant of others and get social support. Adolescents can have good self-esteem, self-regulation, resilience, hardiness and mental toughness. Adolescents also can have good social adjustment and social support. One of the efforts to prevent a mental and social problem is early recognition or detection in adolescents.

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