

The Efficacy of Group Counseling Using CBT Techniques in Reduce Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) Among Female University Students in Islamic Boarding Environments

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Abstract

The phenomenon of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) has increased along with the growing use of social media among university students, including female students living in a student Islamic boarding school environment. FoMO is characterized by feelings of fear, worry, and anxiety when individuals perceive that they are missing out on others' social experiences, which may negatively affect psychological well-being and academic concentration. This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of group counseling using Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) techniques in reducing FoMO behavior among Among Female University Students in Islamic Boarding Environments of Institut Attanwir Bojonegoro. This study employed a quantitative approach with a pre-experimental design using a one group pretest-posttest design. The research participants consisted of eight female students selected through purposive sampling based on a high level of FoMO. The instrument used was a FoMO behavior scale that had been tested for validity and reliability. Data were analyzed using the nonparametric Mann-Whitney U Test. The results indicated a significant decrease in FoMO behavior after the implementation of group counseling with CBT techniques. The significance value (sig. 2-tailed) of 0.001 (< 0.05) demonstrated a meaningful difference between pretest and posttest scores. These findings suggest that CBT-based group counseling is effective in helping female students modify irrational thoughts, reduce social anxiety, and improve self-control related to social media use. Therefore, group counseling with CBT techniques can be considered an applicable psychological intervention to reduce FoMO behavior in student Islamic boarding school settings in the digital era.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology and social media has fundamentally reshaped human interaction, social relationship building, and identity formation. Social media platforms enable users to share instantaneous experiences, observe the lives of others, and seek social validation through likes, comments, and followers. According to data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association, adolescents and emerging adults constitute the largest demographic of internet users in Indonesia. Consequently, university students have

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become the group most intensively exposed to social media and, therefore, the most vulnerable to its psychological repercussions.

One prominent psychological impact arising from social media consumption is the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). Przybylski et al. (2013) define FoMO as a pervasive apprehension and anxiety that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent. It is characterized by a compulsive desire to maintain constant connection with what others are doing, anxiety when disconnected, and a tendency to engage in upward social comparison via digital representations (Alt & Boniel-Nissim, 2018). JWT Intelligence further elucidates that FoMO emerges from real-time information transparency, which compels individuals to stay updated to avoid social exclusion.

Research indicates that FoMO is intricately linked to the fulfillment of basic psychological needs, specifically relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Przybylski et al., 2013). When these needs are not adaptively met in the physical world, individuals tend to seek gratification through social media. This is reinforced by the findings of Elhai et al. (2016), stating that FoMO correlates significantly with anxiety, depression, and problematic smartphone use. Thus, FoMO is not merely a habit of checking social media but a complex psychological phenomenon reflecting the tension between social needs and self-control.

University students are in the developmental stage of emerging adulthood, characterized by identity exploration and a heightened need for social acceptance (Nida & Aulia, 2025). During this phase, social media serves as a tool for self-actualization and social comparison. Individuals often evaluate their self-worth based on the curated online lives of others. Alt & Boniel-Nissim (2018) demonstrated that FoMO is associated with lower subjective well-being and increased social anxiety. Furthermore, Drakel (2018) found that high social media intensity adversely affects students' learning concentration. These findings underscore that FoMO in university students carries serious academic and psychological implications.

The phenomenon of FoMO is also evident within local contexts, specifically among female students at the PESMA of the Institut Attanwir Bojonegoro. Preliminary observations indicate that during and after religious activities, such as Quranic recitations, several students exhibit a persistent tendency to check their mobile devices for social media updates. This behavior signifies a drive to remain connected to the external digital world despite being in a boarding environment that normatively emphasizes discipline, self-regulation, and spiritual focus. This condition suggests that FoMO is not exclusive to students in secular universities but also permeates those living in collective, religious environments.

The university-affiliated Islamic boarding environment possesses unique characteristics, including social proximity, collective regulations, and strong religious values. However, reality shows that digital-based social pressure continues to influence female residents. This is understandable as FoMO is not solely triggered by technological access but by the psychological need for social acceptance and recognition. If these needs are not optimally met through direct interaction within the pesantren, social media becomes the alternative fulfillment. This condition potentially fosters irrational thought patterns, such as the belief that one must constantly monitor others' activities to remain socially accepted.

Addressing this condition requires a psychological intervention that goes beyond suppressing social media use to targeting the underlying cognitive processes. A highly relevant approach is Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT). Beck & Dozois (2011) explain that CBT focuses on

the interplay between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, helping individuals identify and modify cognitive distortions that drive maladaptive behaviors. In the context of FoMO, CBT assists individuals in recognizing irrational beliefs, such as "I must always know what others are doing" or "I will be left behind if I don't check my phone," and replacing them with more realistic and adaptive mindsets.

The efficacy of CBT in managing anxiety has been widely documented. A meta-analysis by Hofmann et al. (2012) showed that CBT is effective in reducing anxiety and improving emotion regulation. Elhai et al. (2016) also emphasized that cognitive-behavioral interventions are pertinent for addressing problematic smartphone use linked to FoMO. Therefore, CBT provides a robust theoretical and empirical foundation for reducing social media-related FoMO.

Implementing CBT within a group counseling format offers distinct advantages. Gazda (1969) explains that group counseling allows individuals to learn through interpersonal interaction, social support, and group dynamics. Wibowo (2005) adds that it provides a space for individuals to understand their own problems through the shared experiences of other members. In the context of FoMO, group counseling enables female students to realize that their social anxiety is not an isolated personal struggle but a shared experience, fostering normalization and emotional support.

Empirical evidence suggests that group counseling is effective in enhancing psychosocial aspects; for instance, group guidance has been shown to improve students' interpersonal skills (Budianto et al., 2020). This is relevant to FoMO because individuals with strong interpersonal skills tend to rely less on digital validation. Budianto, Faizin, & Romadhoni (2025) demonstrated that group counseling significantly influences the reduction of anxiety and enhances student adjustment. Moreover, Zahro (2024) found a significant positive correlation between FoMO and social media intensity. These findings indicate that FoMO is a tangible phenomenon amenable to counseling interventions.

Despite these findings, most FoMO research remains correlational, while experimental studies testing the efficacy of interventions remain limited, particularly within the context of university-affiliated Islamic boarding schools. Given that pesantren environments possess social characteristics and values distinct from general educational institutions, there is a significant research opportunity to test whether a CBT-based group counseling approach remains effective within a religious context governed by collective rules and a culture of discipline.

Based on the empirical phenomena at PESMA Institut Attanwir Bojonegoro, female students across various programs and semesters show a tendency to check social media during collective activities. This symptom indicates the presence of social media FoMO, which could potentially disrupt concentration, direct interaction quality, and psychological well-being. Consequently, a systematic and evidence-based intervention is required to help these students manage FoMO adaptively.

A CBT-based group counseling approach is deemed relevant as it addresses both cognitive and behavioral aspects simultaneously. Through group discussions, students can identify irrational thought patterns regarding social media, develop healthier behavioral habits, and gain social support from peers. Thus, this intervention not only aims to reduce FoMO but also strengthens self-regulation and the quality of real-world social relationships. Based on the

aforementioned background, this study aims to examine the efficacy of group counseling using a Cognitive Behavior Therapy approach in reducing social media FoMO among female students at PESMA Institut Attanwir Bojonegoro, utilizing a pretest-posttest experimental design. This research is expected to contribute theoretically to the study of FoMO and group counseling, and practically as a counseling service model tailored to the university-affiliated Islamic boarding context.

METHODS

Approach, Design and Participants

This study employs a quantitative experimental research method, specifically utilizing a pre-experimental design. The chosen framework is the One-Group Pretest-Posttest Design, a pre-experimental structure in which the group is measured and observed both before and after the administration of a treatment or intervention (Sugiyono, 2019). The subjects of this research consist of 75 female students at the PESMA Institut Attanwir Bojonegoro. The sampling technique implemented in this study is purposive sampling, which involves selecting sample members from the population based on specific criteria determined in accordance with the research problem. Consequently, the research sample comprises 8 female students selected based on high levels of FoMO behavior. To expedite the process, the FoMO behavior scale was distributed directly via Google Forms through the researcher's WhatsApp number. The research instrument utilized is a FoMO behavior scale adapted from Przybylski et al. (2013), consisting of 20 statements categorized into favorable and unfavorable items, with response options including strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree.

Instruments and Validity Testing

The designed FoMO behavior scale was subsequently distributed to 39 students as a trial sample. The researcher utilized a tested tryout scale; after the students completed the scale, validity testing was conducted using the Product Moment technique assisted by SPSS 25.0, followed by reliability testing using the Cronbach's Alpha technique (Azwar, 2018). Referring to the r-table for a sample size of 39, the obtained critical value was 0.316. From the 20 statement items tested for validity through the Product Moment formula, all 20 items were found to be valid, with the highest score reaching 0.683. The results of the reliability testing for the FoMO behavior scale among female students at the Institut Attanwir Bojonegoro reached 0.900, which falls into the category of very high reliability. Based on the average value, Career Anxiety (as cited in the original text) is situated within the very high category within the interval of 0.90–1.00. Subsequently, the analysis was conducted by applying descriptive analysis tests using SPSS version 25.00.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The initial phase of this empirical investigation commenced with a comprehensive and systematic screening of the target population to identify the prevalence and intensity of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) among the residents. This preliminary assessment was academically crucial to map the distribution of digital anxiety and social apprehension within a unique socio-religious ecosystem. In such an environment, traditional values often intersect with modern digital connectivity, creating a complex psychological dynamic for the students. By

employing a rigorous purposive sampling approach, the study was able to strategically identify and isolate specific subjects from a total population of 75 female students residing at the PESMA Institut Attanwir Bojonegoro. The selection process was guided by clearly defined inclusion criteria, which were meticulously designed to ensure that the chosen participants truly represented the psychological phenomenon under study. Specifically, the researcher focused on individuals exhibiting high levels of anxiety related to the perceived loss of social information and digital interactions. This strategic identification was necessary to ensure that the subsequent intervention was targeted toward those with the most urgent clinical need for behavioral restructuring. By establishing this robust baseline, the research provides a foundational understanding of how digital social pressures manifest within the structured and disciplined life of a religious boarding institution, thereby allowing for a more profound analysis of the effectiveness of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in this specific cultural context.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Research Population

Statistics	Value
Valid Sample (N)	75
Missing Data	0
Mean Score	49.04
Standard Deviation	7.540

Based on the statistical parameters presented in Table 1, the 75 participants yielded a mean score of 49.04 with a standard deviation of 7.54. This mean serves as the central point for categorizing the intensity of FoMO behavior among the students. To ensure a robust categorization, the study employed a distribution formula based on the mean and standard deviation: scores below (Mean - 1 SD) were classified as Low, scores within (Mean +/- 1 SD) as Moderate, and scores exceeding (Mean + 1 SD) as High.

Table 2. Quantitative Framework for Sample Categorization

No	Category	Mathematical Formula	Calculated Range	Student Count
1	Low	$X < M - 1 \text{ SD}$	$X < 41.5$	14
2	Moderate	$M - 1 \text{ SD} \leq X < M + 1 \text{ SD}$	$41.5 \leq X < 56.5$	53
3	High	$X \geq M + 1 \text{ SD}$	$X \geq 56.5$	8
Total				75

The distribution analysis reveals a significant trend within the institution. As illustrated in Table 3, the majority of the students fall within the moderate category, suggesting a pervasive but manageable level of digital apprehension.

Table 3. Percentage Distribution of FoMO Behavior Levels

Category	Score Interval	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Low	28 - 41	14	19%
Moderate	42 - 56	53	71%
High	57 - 66	8	11%
Total		75	100%

Qualitatively, the Low Category represents students who maintain high cognitive control and

spiritual focus, rendering them less susceptible to digital distractions. The Moderate Category reflects a state where digital anxiety begins to emerge in social contexts but remains under the individual's self-regulatory capacity. However, the High Category identifies individuals experiencing chronic psychological distress and an obsessive need for social validation, which often disrupts their spiritual and academic focus.

Efficacy of Group CBT Intervention

The primary intervention focused on the 8 students categorized with high FoMO. Through three intensive sessions of Group Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), the participants underwent a cognitive restructuring process aimed at identifying and modifying irrational beliefs associated with digital social comparison.

Table 4. Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Outcomes

No	Participant	Pre-test Score	Pre-test Category	Post-test Score	Post-test Category
1	Alfi	66	High	56	Moderate
2	Ainis	61	High	54	Moderate
3	Alma	60	High	52	Moderate
4	Ani	60	High	50	Moderate
5	Chyta	60	High	48	Moderate
6	Ida	61	High	46	Moderate
7	Ilul	61	High	44	Moderate
8	Wati	60	High	42	Moderate

The recapitulation in Table 4 demonstrates a definitive downward shift in scores for all participants. Every student who initially exhibited high-intensity FoMO successfully transitioned to the moderate category, indicating a significant reduction in maladaptive digital habits and an improvement in psychological well-being.

Statistical Hypothesis Testing

To validate the significance of these changes, the Mann-Whitney U Test a non-parametric statistical procedure was conducted to compare the pre-test and post-test data.

Table 5. Rank Distribution Analysis

Observation Phase	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Pre-test	8	12.50	100.00
Post-test	8	4.50	36.00
Total	16		

Table 6. Mann-Whitney U Test Statistics

Test Parameter	Statistical Value
Mann-Whitney U	0.000
Wilcoxon W	36.000
Z-Score	-3.396
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001

The statistical analysis yielded an Asymptotic Significance (2-tailed) value of 0.001, which is substantially lower than the standard alpha level of 0.05 ($p < 0.05$). With a Z-score of -3.396, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis (H_a). This result confirms that Group Counseling utilizing CBT techniques is statistically effective in mitigating Fear of Missing Out among female students in the Pesantren environment. The intervention not only reduced symptomatic behavior but also empowered students to prioritize real-world social interactions and spiritual academic duties over digital social comparison.

Discussion

Based on the distribution of the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) behavioral instrument among female students at the PESMA of the Attanwir Institute Bojonegoro, a diverse profile of FoMO levels was identified. The pre-test, which was conducted on August 8, 2025, involving 75 female students, revealed a mean score of 49.04 with a standard deviation of 7.54. These scores were categorized into three distinct levels consisting of low, moderate, and high categories based on the mean and standard deviation criteria. The classification results indicated that 71 percent of the students fell into the moderate category, 19 percent into the low category, and 11 percent into the high category. These findings suggest that the majority of students experience a moderate level of FoMO. This means they have begun to feel social anxiety regarding missing out on information or the social activities of others, yet it has not fully disrupted their overall psychological functioning. This is consistent with the FoMO concept developed by Przybylski et al. (2013) through Self-Determination Theory. This theory posits that FoMO arises when the need for social relatedness is not optimally satisfied, which in turn drives individuals to persistently monitor the social activities of their peers.

Students in the low category demonstrated relatively robust self-control in managing social anxiety. This condition aligns with the perspective of Trudel-Fitzgerald et al. (2024), who stated that adaptive coping mechanisms such as emotional regulation and problem-solving can mitigate the negative impacts of stress. Individuals with adaptive coping are capable of rationally managing the fear of being left behind, which prevents the condition from escalating into excessive anxiety. In contrast, students in the moderate category exhibited mild to moderate social anxiety but remained capable of utilizing positive coping strategies to manage these feelings. This phenomenon can be explained through the Coping Circumplex Model by Stanisławski (2019), which emphasizes the balance between problem control and emotional regulation in facing stressors. At this level, FoMO is not yet pathological, but it holds the potential to intensify if the individual lacks adequate self-regulatory skills.

Furthermore, students in the high category displayed more intense anxiety and difficulties in emotional control, which potentially compromises their psychological well-being. This aligns with the findings of Tutgun-Ünal and Deniz (2015), showing a significant negative correlation between high FoMO and mental health, specifically regarding increased anxiety and decreased psychological well-being. Consequently, students in this category require specific interventions to help develop adaptive coping strategies and enhance emotional control.

Overall, this mapping confirms that FoMO is a tangible psychological phenomenon among the female students of PESMA Institut Attanwir Bojonegoro and necessitates attention as a preventive mental health measure. The support of educators and mentors is vital in helping students develop adaptive coping mechanisms so that social anxiety resulting from FoMO does not evolve into more serious issues. The primary objective of implementing group

counseling with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) techniques in this study was to assist female students in recognizing, understanding, and managing the fear, worry, and anxiety triggered by FoMO. CBT aims to restructure irrational thought patterns that fuel anxiety into more rational mindsets while fostering more adaptive behaviors (Beck and Dozois, 2011).

Based on the pre-test results, eight students with high FoMO levels were selected as research subjects through purposive sampling. Following the treatment of group CBT counseling, measurements were retaken via a post-test. Qualitatively, prior to counseling, the students lacked a clear understanding of the causes and impacts of their anxiety. In the first session, the counseling focused on providing an understanding of the concept of negative emotions and their link to FoMO behavior. The second session addressed the environmental situations and conditions that trigger FoMO and its negative impact on academic concentration and social relationships. The third session focused on gradually reducing FoMO behavior through thought management and the formation of healthier, more adaptive behaviors.

The post-test results showed a decrease in the average FoMO scores after the implementation of group counseling. Students began to realize that the negative impact of the fear and worry caused by FoMO far outweighed the fleeting benefits of following others' activities on social media. This awareness helped them reduce the intensity of FoMO behavior and manage their emotions in a healthier manner. These findings support the view of Corey (2016) that group counseling is effective in helping individuals develop self-awareness and emotional control through group dynamics.

Statistical analysis using the Mann-Whitney U test revealed that the mean rank of the pre-test group at 12.50 was significantly higher than the post-test group at 4.50. The U-value was 0.000 and the W-value was 36.000, with a Z-score of -3.396 and a significance value (Asymp. Sig. 2-tailed) of 0.001, which is less than 0.05. These results indicate a significant difference between FoMO levels before and after the group CBT counseling treatment. Thus, the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted and the null hypothesis (H_o) is rejected, signifying that group CBT counseling is effective in reducing FoMO behavior among female students at PESMA Attanwir Bojonegoro. This finding is consistent with research by Mumpuni et al. (2023), which showed that group counseling can increase self-control and individual understanding of the fear and anxiety that trigger FoMO. These results also reinforce CBT theory, which states that cognitive change will be followed by emotional and behavioral changes (Beck and Dozois, 2011). Consequently, CBT-based group counseling is not only statistically effective but also practically relevant in helping students manage social anxiety within a digital media context.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) behavior among female students at the PESMA Institut Attanwir Bojonegor exists at varying levels, with the majority falling into the moderate category and a specific portion in the high category. This condition indicates that FoMO is a tangible psychological phenomenon within the lives of the students, particularly regarding the use of social media and the fundamental need for social relatedness. The results of the hypothesis testing prove that group counseling utilizing Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) techniques is effective in reducing FoMO behavior among the female students at PESMA Institut Attanwir Bojonegoro. The significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores indicates that CBT intervention within a group setting is capable of assisting students in understanding the sources of their irrational thoughts,

managing negative emotions such as fear, worry, and anxiety, and ultimately modifying maladaptive behavioral patterns related to social media consumption. Theoretically, these findings support the Self-Determination Theory which explains that FoMO emerges as a result of unfulfilled basic psychological needs for social relatedness. Through the process of group counseling, students are provided with a safe space to build healthier interpersonal relationships directly so that their dependency on social validation through digital media platforms can be minimized. Practically, the results of this study strengthen the position that CBT-based group counseling is a relevant and applicable approach for addressing the psychological issues of adolescents and university students within a boarding school environment in the digital era.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

The authors conceptualized the research framework, conducted the data collection, and performed the statistical analysis. Furthermore, the author drafted, reviewed, and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

COMPETING OF INTEREST

The authors declare no competing of interest.

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