

Original Article

Students' Perceptions of School Counselors and Help-Seeking Intentions among Male Vocational High School Students: A Correlational Study

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Abstract: The interest in counseling among male students at school remains relatively low, even though Guidance and Counseling services are available, so it is important to understand the factors that influence it. This study aims to examine the relationship between perceptions of school counselors and male students' interest in counseling at vocational high schools. The research uses a quantitative correlational approach with Spearman's rank correlation analysis. The sample consisted of 226 male students selected using probability sampling with a cluster sampling method. Data were collected through questionnaires measuring perceptions of school counselors ($\alpha = 0.942$) and interest in counseling ($\alpha = 0.907$), both of which met reliability criteria. The results indicate a positive and significant relationship between perceptions of school counselors and students' interest in counseling, with a significance value of 0.000 and a correlation coefficient of 0.670. The more positive students' perceptions of school counselors, the greater their interest in seeking counseling services.

Keywords: perception, interest in counseling, male students, school counselor, counseling services

Abstrak: Minat konsultasi pada siswa laki-laki di sekolah masih cenderung rendah meskipun layanan Bimbingan dan Konseling telah tersedia, sehingga perlu dipahami faktor-faktor yang memengaruhinya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui hubungan antara persepsi terhadap guru bimbingan dan konseling dengan minat konsultasi pada siswa laki-laki di SMK. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif korelasional dengan analisis korelasi Rank Spearman. Sampel penelitian berjumlah 226 siswa laki-laki yang diperoleh menggunakan teknik probability sampling dengan metode cluster sampling. Data penelitian diperoleh melalui angket persepsi terhadap guru Bimbingan dan Konseling ($\alpha = 0,942$) dan angket minat konsultasi ($\alpha = 0,907$) yang telah memenuhi kriteria reliabilitas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya hubungan positif dan signifikan antara persepsi terhadap guru Bimbingan dan Konseling dengan minat konsultasi siswa, dengan nilai signifikansi 0,000 dan koefisien korelasi sebesar 0,670. Semakin positif persepsi siswa terhadap guru BK, semakin tinggi minat siswa untuk berkonsultasi di sekolah.

Kata Kunci: persepsi, minat konsultasi, siswa laki-laki, bimbingan dan konseling

Introduction

Adolescents are an age group experiencing various changes in emotional, social, and academic aspects. These changes can lead adolescents to face various problems that have the potential to affect their psychological condition or learning activities if not handled properly (Hurlock, 2017). The challenges adolescents face require appropriate support to avoid hindering their development. Such support can be provided through various services available in the school environment. In this context, Guidance and Counseling services in schools play an important role in helping students understand themselves, develop their potential, and overcome various issues that arise during their development process (Prayitno, 2017). Therefore, counseling services are among the efforts schools make to support students' optimal development (Ulfah & Arifudin, 2020).

Guidance and Counseling services in schools help students address various problems in personal, social, academic, and career areas (Ulfah & Arifudin, 2020). Yusuf & Nurihsan (2016)

explain that counseling services also assist students in the process of self-adjustment while in the school environment. One of the services that students can utilize is counseling services. Through this service, students can express the problems they are experiencing and receive help and guidance from school counselors. Previous research shows that students' understanding and experience of counseling services are related to their utilization in school (Wangid et al., 2025). However, some students remain reluctant to use school counseling services, even when facing personal problems or learning difficulties (El Rahma & Kholisna, 2021). Based on initial interviews with school counselors at SMK Negeri 1 and SMK Negeri 5 in Semarang City, some male students remain hesitant to use counseling services at school. These findings align with phenomenological studies indicating that some students still feel afraid, nervous, and reluctant to use counseling services even though these services are available at school (Putriana et al., 2023). Some students feel uncomfortable discussing personal issues with school counselors because they worry about facing negative judgment from the school environment if it becomes known that they visit the BK room. These findings are consistent with research by Ariyati (2024), which shows that public stigma and self-stigma can influence teenagers' low intention to seek counseling help. Some students also prefer to solve problems on their own or share their stories with peers rather than consulting with school counselors.

Students' interest in using counseling services does not arise on its own but can be influenced by how they perceive the school counselor. Research by McPhail et al. (2024) shows that teenagers' perceptions of support services in the school environment influence their decisions to seek and use assistance when facing problems. When students view the school counselor as friendly, open, and trustworthy, they tend to feel more comfortable consulting with them. Conversely, negative perceptions of the school counselor can reduce students' willingness to use counseling services. Theoretically, positive perceptions of the school counselor can enhance trust, a sense of safety, and confidence that the help provided will be beneficial. These conditions encourage readiness to seek help and utilize counseling services when facing issues (McPhail et al., 2024). However, some students still see the school counselor as someone associated with problematic students or as a disciplinary figure at school (Aisyah et al., 2022). Such perceptions can make students hesitant to use counseling services even when they are facing problems.

Experiences and interactions at school can shape students' perceptions of school counselors (Rahmah et al., 2024). Counselors who are perceived as friendly, open, and able to maintain confidentiality tend to gain students' trust more easily. Conversely, unpleasant experiences can lead to negative views of the counselor, making students more hesitant to use counseling services (Abdurrahman Wahid et al., 2020).

The perception of school counselors is becoming increasingly important for male students. Compared to female students, male students tend to be more selective in expressing their feelings and seeking help when facing problems. Booth et al. (2019) explain that masculinity norms can encourage men to suppress emotions and try to resolve issues independently. Psychologically, male students tend to face social demands to appear strong, independent, and capable of solving problems without help from others. This condition can lead male students to be more cautious in revealing personal problems or seeking help when facing difficulties. As a result, male students may be less likely to utilize counseling services at school because they tend to be less open in expressing their feelings and seeking help. This condition makes male students more selective about whom they share their problems with or ask for help. These findings align with the results of Sheikh et al. (2025), which show that masculinity norms and stigma against help-seeking behavior can hinder male students from accessing support when facing problems. Lisk et al. (2023) also found that adherence to traditional masculinity norms is related to low help-seeking behavior among adolescent boys. Therefore, trust in the school counselor is one factor that can encourage male students to be more open and to utilize counseling services at school.

Research on students' perceptions of counseling services and their interest in using them has been conducted by El Rahma and Kholisna (2021), who found that students' perceptions of counseling services are related to their interest in counseling at school. Another study by Cahyono and Darminto (2013) also found a significant relationship between students' perceptions of guidance and counseling and their interest in utilizing counseling services at school. Similar results were reported by Maifitri and Daharnis (2021), who showed that students' perceptions of

the school counselor's role were positively and significantly related to their interest in participating in counseling services. Furthermore, Putri and Harahap (2023) found that students' positive perceptions of school counselors are associated with increased interest in using school counseling services. These findings are reinforced by research by Mustamir et al. (2025), which showed that students' perceptions significantly influence their interest in participating in school counseling services.

This study is expected to expand research on help-seeking behavior among adolescents, particularly regarding the role of perceptions of school counselors in male students' interest in counseling at vocational high schools (SMK). The SMK context is important to examine because SMK students face academic demands, practical work experiences, and preparation for entering the workforce, which can pose various challenges in their development and their need for psychological assistance. However, research specifically exploring the relationship between perceptions of school counselors and the interest in counseling among male students at SMK remains relatively limited.

In fact, male students tend to be more reserved in expressing their feelings and seeking help when facing problems (Booth et al., 2019). Therefore, this study was conducted to examine the relationship between perceptions of school counselors and the interest in counseling among male eleventh-grade students at SMK Negeri 1 and SMK Negeri 5 in Semarang City.

Method

This study employed a quantitative correlational design using Spearman's Rank correlation analysis to examine the relationship between perceptions of school counselors and interest in counseling among male eleventh-grade students in vocational high schools. The research was conducted at SMK Negeri 1 and SMK Negeri 5 in Semarang City. The study population consisted of male eleventh-grade students from various majors at SMK Negeri 1 and SMK Negeri 5 in Semarang City.

Table 1. Population of the Study

School Origin	Number of Majors	Number of Male Students
SMK Negeri 1 Kota Semarang	9	208
SMK Negeri 5 Kota Semarang	6	104
Total		312

The sampling technique used is probability sampling with the cluster sampling method. The number of samples was determined using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error, resulting in a minimum sample size of 220 students. A total of 226 students met the criteria for analysis. The research instruments used in this study include an 18-item perception questionnaire for school counselors and a 20-item questionnaire measuring students' interest in counseling, both of which use a Likert scale. These two instruments were adapted from Mutiara Zahra (2019) study and modified to meet the research needs.

The research was conducted in stages: instrument development, online distribution of questionnaires, data collection, and data analysis. The questionnaires were distributed with the assistance of a school counselor and directly to students in the classroom to ensure the target number of respondents was met. The research instruments had been tested for validity and reliability before being used for data collection. Validity testing was conducted using the Product-Moment correlation, while the instrument's reliability was analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha. The research data were analyzed using normality tests and hypothesis testing with Spearman's Rank correlation (Sugiyono, 2019).

The test results indicate that all items on the research instrument meet the validity criteria and can be used for data collection. The Cronbach's Alpha values for both variables are also above 0.70, so the instrument is considered reliable.

Table 2. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Description
Perception of School Counselor	0.942	Reliable
Interest in Counseling	0.907	Reliable

Table 3. Normality Test Results

Variable	Sig.	Description
Perception of School Counselor	0.000	Non-normal
Interest in Counseling	0.000	Non-normal

The normality test results show a significance value of 0.000 for both the school counselor perception and interest-in-counseling variables. These values are below 0.05, indicating that neither variable is normally distributed.

Table 4. Categorization of Perceptions of School Counselors and Interest in Counseling

Category	Perception of The School Counselor	Interest in Counseling
High	15 students (6,6%)	8 students (3,5%)
Moderate	137 students (60,6%)	82 students (36,3%)
Low	74 students (32,7%)	136 students (60,2%)

The majority of students have a moderate perception of the school counselor (60.6%), while the interest in counseling is mostly in the low category (60.2%). This finding indicates that a fairly good perception of the school counselor has not yet been matched by a high level of interest among male students in seeking guidance at school.

The Spearman Rank Correlation analysis produced a correlation coefficient of 0.670 with a significance value of 0.000. These results indicate a strong positive relationship between students' perceptions of the school counselor and their interest in counseling among eleventh-grade male students at the vocational high school. The more positive students' perceptions of the school counselor, the higher their interest in seeking counseling.

Table 5. Spearman Rank Correlation Analysis

Variable	Correlation Coefficient	Sig.	Description
Perception of The School Counselor and Interest in Counseling	0.670	0.000	Significant positive relationship

Results and Discussion

The research results indicate a positive and significant relationship between eleventh-grade male students' perceptions of school counselors and their interest in seeking counseling from school counselors. The more positive students' perceptions of the school counselor, the higher their interest in counseling with the school counselor. This finding suggests that students' perceptions of the school counselor are among the factors related to their interest in using school counseling services.

Students' positive perceptions of school counselors are associated with increased interest in seeking consultations, as students tend to feel safer and more comfortable expressing their problems. This finding aligns with the help-seeking perspective, which explains that an individual's decision to seek help is influenced by their perception of available help sources. When help sources are perceived positively, individuals are more likely to seek and accept assistance when facing problems (McPhail et al., 2024).

The perception of the school counselor as friendly, understanding, and non-judgmental tends to make students more willing to share their problems. Prayitno & Amti (2018) explain that warm relationships and acceptance from the counselor can help students feel safe expressing the issues they face. Conversely, if the school counselor is perceived negatively, such as being

considered irritable or only dealing with problematic students, students tend to be reluctant to utilize counseling services at school (Slameto, 2015).

The results of this study indicate that students' perceptions of the school counselor are related to their interest in seeking counseling. This relationship shows that positive experiences students have when interacting with school counselors help shape the belief that school counselors are a safe and reliable source of help. When this trust is established, students become more open to utilizing counseling services. Conversely, unpleasant experiences can create doubts among students about consulting with a school counselor (Abdurrachman Wahid et al., 2020).

For male students, perceptions of the school counselor become an important factor in encouraging help-seeking behavior. Male students tend to suppress their emotions and are more selective about seeking help than female students, due to the belief that they should appear strong and independent. This condition causes some students to be more cautious in opening up to others, including the school counselor. Therefore, when the school counselor is perceived as a trustworthy figure who understands students and maintains confidentiality, it can encourage more male students to seek consultation. These findings are in line with Booth et al. (2019), Sheikh et al. (2025), and Lisk et al. (2023), which show that masculinity norms can make male students more cautious about seeking help, highlighting the importance of a trusted figure in promoting help-seeking behavior.

The results of this study are consistent with research by El Rahma & Kholisna (2021), which shows that students' positive perceptions of counseling services are associated with increased interest in counseling at school. A positive assessment of the school counselor can make students feel more comfortable and confident in seeking advice at school. The similarity in these findings indicates that positive perceptions of counseling services and school counselors are consistently associated with an increased desire among students to use available help at school.

The categorization results show that students' perceptions of the school counselor are mostly in the moderate category at 60.6%, while the majority of male students' interest in counseling is in the low category at 60.2%. This condition indicates that a somewhat positive perception of the school counselor has not fully motivated them to seek consultation at school. Although students have a fairly good view of the school counselor, some of them still tend to be reluctant to ask for help when facing problems. The low interest in counseling among male students may be influenced by their tendency to withhold issues and avoid seeking help, due to masculinity norms that expect men to appear strong and independent. This situation leads some of them to prefer keeping problems to themselves or talking to peers rather than consulting the school counselor directly. These findings suggest that perceptions of the school counselor are not the only factor influencing the interest in counseling. Other factors, such as masculinity norms, stigma surrounding seeking help, and a preference for solving problems independently, are also believed to contribute to low interest in counseling among male students (Booth et al., 2019; Sheikh et al., 2025).

This condition can also be understood in light of the ongoing stigma surrounding counseling services in schools. Some students still view the school counselor as someone who only handles problematic students or administers punishment. This perception can make students feel afraid, embarrassed, or reluctant to seek help. Therefore, providing counseling services in an open, supportive, and non-judgmental manner is important to build students' trust in the school counselor (Aisyah et al., 2022).

A warm, supportive relationship between the school counselor and students can encourage students to use counseling services at school. School counselors who demonstrate empathy and openness and maintain students' comfort can help reduce fear and stigma around counseling services. Winkel & Hastuti (2017) explain that a positive relationship between counselors and students can help students become more open during counseling. This condition supports the findings of this study, which show that a positive perception of a school counselor is related to increased interest in counseling among male students at school.

Conclusion

This study shows that male eleventh-grade students' perceptions of school counselors are positively and significantly related to their interest in counseling at vocational high schools. The more positive students' views of the school counselor, the higher their interest in seeking counseling at school. Students who feel that school counselors are capable of understanding, maintaining confidentiality, and providing comfortable services tend to be more open in sharing their problems. However, the study also indicates that the interest in counseling among male students remains relatively low, even though most students' perceptions of school counselors fall into the moderate category. This finding suggests that male students' interest in counseling is related not only to their perceptions of the school counselor but also to their tendency to suppress problems and avoid seeking help. These findings reinforce the theoretical understanding that students' perceptions of school counselors are a factor related to their interest in seeking counseling at school. The results also provide empirical evidence of the importance of a positive perception of school counselors in fostering interest in counseling, especially among male students in vocational high schools. Therefore, school counselors need to build more open, supportive relationships so that male students feel safer and more confident using counseling services at school.

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Competing interests:

The authors declare that they have no significant competing financial, professional or personal interests that might have influenced the performance or presentation of the work described in this manuscript.