# Students' Perception of Their Self-Efficacy by Being a "Hey Peer Educator" in Drug Abuse Prevention

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## ABSTRACT

*Background: Peer education programs provided in schools are one method to help prevent drug abuse; however, the effectiveness of these programs relies, in part, on their delivery to the population in need. Therefore, the effectiveness of the program relies on the self-efficacy of peer educators. The peer education program helps students to practice their skills as peer educators in avoiding drug abuse. Aims: This study aimed to explore the students' self-efficacy as peer educators after being a peer educator in the peer education program. Methods: In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 45 student peer educators in Middle schools located in Surabaya, Indonesia. Results: Adolescents who acted as student peers perceived and experienced an improvement in their knowledge and ability to help their peers avoid drug abuse. Conclusion: The peer education program is perceived to improve students' self-efficacy in counseling tasks, to learn analytical skills, and to maintain positive behavior.*

*Keywords: high school education; program evaluation; public health; self-efficacy; student peer educator*

## INTRODUCTION

The number of narcotic abusers in Indonesia was 784 cases in the first semester alone (National Narcotics Agency, 2017). The number of drug abuse cases in Indonesia is 1,184, with 1,483 suspects in 2021. This number increased in 2022 to 1,350 cases, with 1,748 suspects. In 2023, from January to July, there were already 1,125 drug cases involving 1,625 people (Narcotics National Agency, 2023).

Data from all three surveys (2009, 2012, and 2017) showed prevalence by education level, indicating a user group shift. In 2009 the high prevalence of abusers was at the level of secondary education (junior high and high school equivalent) to a young college education. In the 2012 survey, the prevalence was high in the group of unschooling, high school graduates, and college graduates. In the 2017 survey, the prevalence of drug abuse was high in the group of elementary school children and high school graduates.

This age range of drug abusers should be a concern as the behavior could potentially lead to more dangerous engagement in risky behavior and poor health outcomes (National Narcotics Agency, 2018). The survey results in 2023 still showed that students were the highest group of drug users (fourth), and teenage drug users were dominated by high school students (Provincial National Narcotics Agency, 2023). Efforts to improve human resources to support adolescents are critical to discourage them from engaging in drug abuse.

Peer education is one of the prevention programs conducted for students held by the District Education Office in Surabaya, Indonesia. However, the program is not currently running since the power shift from the District Education Office to the Provincial Education Office in 2014. Peer education programs are aimed at empowering students as peer educators. The peer education program helps students understand healthy behaviors and

strengthen their knowledge and skills by educating others. The Peer Educator Program empowers students to improve their self-efficacy as an educator of their peers (Ghasemi *et al.*, 2019).

As stated by several researchers, the peer educator program has been proven to be effective and has played an important role for adolescents or youth who are living with HIV (ALHIV) in their issues of self-acceptance as HIV sufferers, ART treatment, and developing self-esteem (Kitetele *et al.*, 2022). Engaging in the peer educator training program has led to enhancements in health behaviors (Vivian & Flanagan, 2022). Properly organized peer educator training has the potential to enhance the knowledge of volunteer students and foster a positive shift in attitude (Ozaydin *et al.*, 2020). The experience of being a peer educator was found to have improved personal skills and knowledge, self-confidence, self-esteem, sense of belonging, and civic engagement (Mehta *et al.*, 2020).

One example of a peer educator program is the HEY (Health Educator for Youth) Program started in 2017. This program continues to be developed to support teenagers to become peer educators who have the necessary skills and knowledge. This program provides training and materials and involves students as peer educators.

Self-efficacy is a person's belief in his/her ability to organize and complete various tasks that affect his/her life (Bandura, 1994). Self-efficacy can also be interpreted as a person's evaluation of their ability or competence in performing a task, achieving a goal, or overcoming a problem. This confidence in one's ability can affect one's feelings, ways of thinking, motivation, and social behavior. The stronger the self-efficacy, the higher the individual's achievements and abilities.

Self-efficacy is comprised of three dimensions: the confidence to be able to carry out tasks, learn specific skills, and control positive behavior despite challenges (Schwarzer & Renner, 2009). One of the forms of self-efficacy is verbal persuasion (Bandura, 1997). An example of verbal persuasion would be an attempt to convince peers that the student peer educators can achieve certain results. Verbal persuasion through peer counseling can strengthen resilience and prevent engagement in risky behaviors. The function of student peer educators is as friends who are willing to help, listen, and understand, help their peers to grow and develop with their groups, as well as leaders who care for social change (Rogation, 1996). It is expected that student peer educators can motivate their peers to prevent drug abuse despite challenges that may arise and increase the efficacy of their peers to avoid drug abuse.

Peer educator programs have increased adolescents' self-efficacy in avoiding drug use (Demirezen *et al.*, 2019). Peer educator programs may strengthen the role of self-efficacy especially in drug abuse prevention (Nurmala *et al.*, 2020) and they offer policymakers valuable and cost-effective ways to improve health, increase self-efficacy, strengthen community engagement, and promote active participation and trust (Mehta *et al.*, 2020). The literature showed the benefit of peer education programs for improving students' efficacy, especially those who participated as peer educators. Therefore, this study was conducted to examine the students' self-efficacy by being a peer educator in avoiding drug abuse.

## METHODS

### Design and Participants

A qualitative case study approach was adopted to capture peer educators' views of their self-efficacy after participating in a peer education program. We drew on this research approach due to its flexibility in allowing researchers to openly explore peer educators experiences, and, therefore, provide detailed and in-depth accounts (Moeloeng, 2006). Each part of the investigation contains a combination of grouping, analyzing, intuiting, and description to understand and interpret the phenomenon under study (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

The formation of peer education in each school was a school initiative program as a follow-up program which was carried out by the Surabaya Education Office. The process of selecting students who are student peer educators at each school was different. Some schools stated that the student peer

educators were selected through health ambassador selection, but some teachers chose the student peer educators because of the activity of those students in the organization at school.

10 schools participated in this study. These schools were chosen to represent each region in Surabaya. There was one private school and one public school in each region. To identify potential participants, the researchers approached teachers working within all regions in Surabaya who had an awareness of students who had participated in a peer-education program in their school. Participants were recruited by the teachers in each school with inclusion criteria of students who have been involved as peer educators and have participated in training as peer educators at least once. 45 voluntary participants identified as student peer educators by their teachers between 15 – 19 years of age. The participants were students in West Surabaya, North Surabaya, Central Surabaya, South Surabaya, and East Surabaya. The key participants in this study were students who were student peer educators in their school environment.

### Data Collection and Analysis

Ethical approval for this study was granted in June 2018 by the Health Research Ethics Committee [reference: 940-KEPK]. The Health Research Ethics Committee is responsible for ensuring the research protocol follows ethical guidelines and protects the study respondents. The researchers conducted interviews and focus groups with student peer-educators between May and August 2018 with each interview lasting 30 – 60 minutes in length. Focus groups were conducted with participants if the participating school had more than six student peer educators. Before each interview, written consent was obtained from all participants.

A semi-structured interview guide was used to allow participants to speak openly and comfortably, thus allowing the researcher to capture their perceptions of changes in their knowledge and skills related to their role as student peer educators. To foster a safe and comfortable environment, thus helping to ensure that the responses participants provided were authentic, the researcher interviewed the participants in a place and time that the participants felt comfortable and the researchers ensured that the teachers were not present in the interview's location. The interview topics were related to their experience as peer educators and only followed up by related questions to answer the research questions.

To capture participant discussions, each interview/focus group was audio recorded using a digital tape recorder and transcribed verbatim. To help further enhance the credibility of the data collected, we also conducted the observation in high school environment related to the available space and information related to drugs abuse prevention. We conducted the observation as part of source triangulation as required in the qualitative studies.

After each of the interviews/group interviews, the researchers analyzed the interviewees' answers. Interviews and group interviews were transcribed and data were coded and categorized into the dimension of self-efficacy due to the peer educator program (Creswell, 1998). The researchers used inductive reasoning which moves from specific observations to broad conclusions. The researchers reading and re-reading transcripts were to get a sense of participant experiences and continue to look for themes related to the confidence to be able to carry out tasks, to learn specific skills, and to control positive behavior despite challenges from the transcripts. We assigned codes related to the three dimensions of self-efficacy and added other codes to accommodate other findings.

With qualitative research, acknowledging the inherent biases that may arise through the research teams' prior knowledge and experience is important (Watanabe, 2017), in this case within the domains of adolescent health promotion. To help acknowledge and reflect on biases that may occur during the research process, the researchers engaged in frequent and ongoing dialogue regarding all aspects of the research process (Onwuegbuzie *et al.*, 2009).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis showed findings related to the dimensions of self-efficacy of the participants. The results section describes the characteristics of these peer

educators and their perception of the 3 dimensions of self-efficacy. Characteristics of student peer-educators included: student peer educators men or women, at the first, second, or last grade (age 15-19 years old), had experience as a peer educator in <1 year or 1 year and more (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Characteristics of student peer-educators (N = 45)

| Participant characteristics | | *n* |
|---|---|---|
| Age (years) | 15-16 | 23 |
| | 17-19 | 22 |
| Grade | First | 6 |
| | Second | 17 |
| | Last | 22 |
| Gender | Male | 12 |
| | Female | 33 |
| Experienced as a peer educator | <1 year | 18 |
| | 1 year and more | 27 |

### Self-Efficacy

Students stated that their self-efficacy in educating their peers to avoid drug abuse was improved by being student peer-educators especially self-efficacy related to the confidence to be able to carry out tasks, to learn specific skills, and to control positive behavior despite challenges. These skills are the results of the training that they participated in and from their experience as educators for their peers.

### The Confidence to Be Able to Carry Out Tasks

After serving their role as student peer educators, the participants explained that there had been a change before and after becoming student peer educators. The most widely felt difference by the participants was their ability to carry out tasks in counseling with their peers about the dangers of abusing drugs. Specifically, participants reported multiple improvements in carrying out cognitive tasks, including improvements in knowledge about avoiding drug abuse, together with improvements in providing information to help others solve their problems.

*"The difference is I did not have any knowledge about that (drug abuse) before. So when I get the knowledge from my peer counselors from training. So when there is a friend in need I can give him/her*

*appropriate information. I feel that we learn about it together." (Student 4).*

*"I did not have appropriate knowledge about that (drug abuse). After being a peer educator my knowledge about drugs (narcotics, psychotropic, and addiction substances) increased. There is a friend who said that I am very motivating to help people and can set the pattern as I like." (Student 3)*

The participants also explained that their peers often talked about the problems they faced, including family and relationship problems.

*"The problem is when there is somebody who confides about his girlfriend. I just said that I could not give him solutions because I am not experienced. He said, 'What kind of counselor are you?' yeah, something like that." (Student 1)*

*"(…) Family problems, youth problems, and so on." (Student 7)*

*"Yes, like problems with their girlfriends. They usually talked about their girlfriends' family." (Student 8)*

*"Yes, my friend told me about his problem in romance. I did not have any experience about that. So I just told him to do this and that and also give a little advice that I think could help him." (Student 1)*

### The Confidence to Learn Specific Skills

The participants also explained that, after they were selected as student peer educators by the school, in 2017 they received training and counseling from the Surabaya Education Office which was given to several high schools that had student peer educators. Participants reported that this training helped lay the foundation for peer educators to learn specific analytical skills which helped them identify drug use and addiction within their social environment

*"They held a training, so there were about 5 training in education office, they continuously made training for each school, but those*

*who ran this peer education program were only a few schools." (Student 11)*

In addition, student peer educators also received training and coaching from stakeholders such as the National Narcotics Agency (BNN) and the Police.

*"We were chosen as health ambassadors and we will have training each month, after we have learned the material, we can educate our peers about this. Now we will have the task as the top 10 health ambassadors to spread the information to other friends." (Student 12)*

*"We directly saw the presenter tell a story, we were also given photos that made us think, 'We should not be like this'. It was so inspiring. I think it is so cool to work at the BNN to help sick people like that, who need to be rehabilitated so maybe if I have a friend or neighbor like that, I can help them." (Student 4)*

**The Confidence to Control Positive Behavior Despite Challenges**

The student peer educator expected the school and stakeholders to monitor their activities by providing continuous training on the latest issues regarding drug abuse. In addition, several participants also wished that the supervising teacher would hold regular meetings with the student peer educators to discuss cases and challenges in adolescent's problems. The student peer-educators felt that their peers should have the ability to control their positive behavior despite many challenges. Unfortunately, the school and community has not supported the regular meeting for these student peer-educators

*"Counseling is rarely held, there should be (...) Like from the community health center, yes the material should be about teenage problems." (Student 9)*

*"In our school, the counselors are not active (...) There is a counselor in each class, they can have a group discussion every week to talk about the problem faced by our friends." (Student 10)*

This study aimed to look at the three aspects of self-efficacy that student peer educators need to possess. Self-efficacy was related to the confidence to be able to carry out tasks, learn specific skills, and control positive behavior despite challenges. Regarding the confidence to be able to carry out tasks, the student peer-educators in this study felt that they experienced an improvement in their skills. These skills were beyond the cognitive aspect, these student peer-educators perceived the improvement in their skill of giving advice and implementing what they know without having the same experience as their peers. By being student peer educators, they can help their peers, whether inside or outside of the school environment. Research shows that an individual's development will be fostered if students have supportive peers, while friends who like to impose their will and create many conflicts will hinder development (Santrock, 2006). A positive environment for peers can be used to change adolescents' behavior and values (Laursen, 2005). Peer education programs contribute to this conclusive and positive environment.

Regarding learning specific skills, the peer education program helped student peer educators acquire new specific skills. The peer education program training provided the media that the student peer-educators used to identify their social environment and use their analytic skill in preventing addiction to drug abuse. The self-efficacy to learn specific skills is important especially as adolescence is a challenging period and there are many ways in which students' self-efficacy can be reduced by the negative influences (Zimmerman, 2010). In addition, research has found that, conceptually, self-efficacy is an individual's belief about his ability to achieve his goals. Psychometrically, self-efficacy is formed from the construction of self-motivation, especially about target outcomes, self-concept, or locus of control (Zimmerman, 2000). This supported the notion that student peer-educators with high self-efficacy are more likely to have control of their behavior to make healthy choices, and that in turn may help them to use this skill to motivate their friends to do the same.

Regarding the third self-efficacy construct, to control positive behavior despite challenges, these student peer-educators faced challenges that contributed to, and influenced, student achievement (Elahi *et al*., 2011): specifically, the direct effect of self-efficacy and indirect academic participation on achievement motivation and self-learning strategies (Yusuf, 2011). Previous research has shown there were no statistically significant differences in students' academic self-efficacy beliefs in terms of gender (Yang & Ersanl, 2015). These challenges were overcome with goal setting, access to information, and the expectation of reward (Schunk, 1991). Peer education programs offered the skill to set goals, access to information, and a sense of accomplishment as the reward. The goals of helping their friend were supported through active listening, showing empathy to friends who experienced social or emotional difficulties, and providing peer support (Cowie & Wallace, 2000). Training provided by the school and stakeholders is beneficial for the student peer educators in carrying out their role of controlling positive behavior. After receiving the training, the student peer-educators were encouraged to implement these trainings to their peers individually or in groups. Student peer-educators in this study gave support to their peers by listening to their peers' stories and by offering solutions to the problems. One of the tasks of the student peer educators is to support their peers in existing networks or pay attention to those showing signs of having a problem (Suwarjo, 2008). One challenge, as conveyed by the participants, was that training was rarely held and they were expected as a school to continue establishing cooperation with stakeholders to provide training continuously. Continuous training will maximize peer educator's ability to help and assist their peers. The teaching methods of these training should be varied by using multiple methods and media. When applied to the development of practical skills, alternative teaching methods to traditional one-on-one tutoring can produce equivalent learning outcomes (Maloney *et al*., 2013). Based on the many advantages gained by the students in peer education programs, schools, and other stakeholders should continue their support for the sustainability of the program.

This study is unique since it explores the perceived self-efficacy resulting from the program that they participated in at school as many works of literature evaluate students' self-efficacy from the perspective of the teachers. This study highlights the importance of involving these students in planning the peer-education program implementation in their school to get the maximum benefit in their self-development as student peer educators and contributes to the existing literature by providing another perspective on the development of self-efficacy of these student peer educators. Study results also serve as recommendations to stakeholders to continue their support for the sustainability of the training program of these student peer educators. It must, however, be noted that the study was conducted in Surabaya and, therefore, the results of the study may not reflect the Indonesian population. However, Surabaya is the second biggest city in Indonesia with a diverse ethnic and cultural population, and, as such, may provide a broad insight into how diverse groups experience the improvement of self-efficacy in the confidence to be able to carry out tasks, to learn specific skills, and to control positive behavior despite challenges.

## CONCLUSION

Peer educator programs increase students' self-efficacy in three ways: the confidence to be able to carry out tasks, to learn specific skills, and to control positive behavior despite challenges. The result showed that the peer education program helps the students in improving their self-efficacy in avoiding drug abuse. Therefore, the local government needs to maintain the improvement of the self-efficacy of these student peer educators by conducting capacity-building activities. These efforts may support the sustainability of the peer education program in Surabaya. It is also necessary to do a direct observation to measure the increase in the self-efficacy of the student peer educators.

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