

Media Literacy Level and Violence Exposure Among Junior High School Students: A Pre-Post Descriptive Survey of a Social Intervention

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords

Media Literacy
Media Violence
Exposure
Social Intervention

ABSTRACT

This study examines media literacy levels and violence exposure among eighth-grade students prior to a socialization intervention, and describes changes in comprehension, attitude, and practical knowledge following the program. Employing a pre-post descriptive survey design, data were collected from 32 students of class VIII B at SMP Negeri 1 Mertoyudan, Magelang, before a socialization program titled 'Bijak Menonton, Bijak Bertindak' (Watch Wisely, Act Wisely), and from 31 students in a post-socialization questionnaire. Pre-socialization findings revealed that 93.8% of students owned personal smartphones, 59.4% used them for three or more hours daily, and TikTok was the dominant platform. While 56.3% encountered violent or negative content at least occasionally, only 21.9% formally identified themselves as violence victims and despite behaviourally reported victimization rates being substantially higher. Media literacy was limited where only 43.8% of students reported knowing appropriate digital response steps. Following the socialization, which used the KPH (Kenali–Pahami–Hindari) framework with animated video, structured presentation, and a gamified quiz, it showed over 90% of students recognized victimization signs, over 85% knew appropriate responses to negative social media content, and the majority reported increased caution in interpersonal and online conduct. These findings highlight the persistent gap between violence experience and recognition, and demonstrate that interactive, framework-based media literacy socialization can meaningfully improve adolescent violence literacy in a single session.

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Introduction

The rapid expansion of social media platforms has fundamentally altered the informational and social environment of Indonesian adolescents (Coelho et al., 2017; Nugroho, 2025; Skoric et al., 2016). Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp now function as primary sites for peer interaction, entertainment, and identity formation among junior high school students. While this digital integration offers genuine benefits, it also exposes young users to potentially harmful content, where it's including violent, degrading, and aggressive material at a scale and frequency that earlier generations did not encounter (Bolton et al., 2013; Cho et al., 2024; Vermeire & Van den Broeck, 2024). What remains underexplored in the Indonesian school context is the relationship between this exposure and students' capacity to recognize and respond to violence and their media literacy

in a violence-specific sense. Studies found out the positive relations between media violence and underage people, where it's prone to extremism content (Alava et al., 2017), gender based violence (Simaremare & Pribadi, 2022), political activism (Dookhoo, 2015), hate speech (Lim, 2017) and well beings (Zych et al., 2023).

Media literacy, broadly defined as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media content (Cho et al., 2024; Oxstrand et al., 2009; Pangrazio, 2016; Yildiz, 2019) encompasses not only critical consumption skills but also the competency to identify when media exposure is shaping behaviour or normalizing harm. In the adolescent context, where peer norms are heavily mediated through platform-based content, this competency is both more consequential and more difficult to develop. Research consistently shows that high exposure to violent media content correlates with increased aggression, reduced empathy, and the normalization of peer mistreatment, in which particularly when the content is consumed without critical framing (Kanz, 2016; Trifecta, 2015)

The specific context for this study is SMP Negeri 1 Mertoyudan, a public junior high school in Kecamatan Mertoyudan, Kabupaten Magelang, Central Java. Community-level needs assessment at this site revealed patterns of peer aggression, particularly verbal in nature, that went largely unrecognized by students themselves and it has been a phenomenon the school's guidance counsellor confirmed through internal peered interview. This gap between lived experience and conceptual recognition of violence constitutes the central problem this study addresses. To address this gap, a team of seven Communication Studies students from Universitas Tidar conducted a pre-socialization needs assessment survey with class VIII B (N=32) on November 11, 2025, followed by a structured socialization program on November 25, 2025, and a post-socialization survey (N=31) on December 4 to 6, 2025. The socialization program, titled *Bijak Menonton, Bijak Bertindak* (Watch Wisely, Act Wisely), was employed the KPH (Kenali–Pahami–Hindari / Recognize–Understand–Avoid) framework and utilized animated video, structured presentation, and gamified review as instructional strategies.

This paper reports descriptive findings from both survey phases. The research questions are: (1) What are students' media usage patterns, violence exposure levels, and media literacy competencies prior to the socialization? (2) What is the gap between students' behaviourally reported victimization experience and their formal self-identification as violence victims? (3) How do students' comprehension, attitudes, and practical knowledge compare before and after the socialization program? The study contributes empirical description of a real recognition-experience gap in violence literacy, grounded in pre-post survey data from an actual intervention cohort.

Method

This study employed a descriptive quantitative survey design with two data collection phases which are pre and post socialization. The goal is to describe media literacy levels, violence exposure, and the outcome of a socio-educational intervention. This research design which is descriptive is appropriate and suitable when the goal is to systematically characterize a phenomenon within defined group without actually describing the causal claims (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The pre-post structure allows this research for having comparison of key indicators across time points, though without a control group, causal attribution to the intervention is not warranted.

Participants

The study population was class VIII B at SMP Negeri 1 Mertoyudan, Kabupaten Magelang. This class was purposively selected following community-level needs assessment that identified high social media engagement and documented verbal aggression among the student body, confirmed through internal peered interview with the school's Guidance and Counselling (BK) teacher. The pre-socialization survey was completed by 32 students (17 male, 15 female) on November 11, 2025. The post-socialization survey was completed by 31 students on December 4–6, 2025 (one absent from the post-survey).

Instruments

The pre-socialization instrument comprised based on five thematic sections, which are (A) media usage patterns including platform use, daily screen time, and content exposure frequency (**Table 1**); (B) victimization experience across five behavioural indicators which are being mocked/insulted, having rumours spread, being socially excluded, physical assault, and property damage; (C) perpetration behaviours using the same five indicators; (D) emotional and behavioural effects of media use and school environment perception; and (E) media literacy knowledge, specifically knowledge of digital response steps and help-seeking pathways. A direct question on self-identification as a violence victim (Q6) was embedded in Section B (**Table 2**).

The post-socialization instrument comprised five sections assessing on (A) comprehension of violence types and victimization recognition; (B) attitudinal and behavioural intention change; (C) practical knowledge of digital response strategies and help-seeking; (D) overall program reception; and (E) open-ended feedback on preferred learning modalities. Both instruments used five-point Likert-type frequency/agreement scales. The pre-instrument was administered via physical forms during a school visit; the post-instrument was distributed via online forms.

Intervention

The social-education program ran for approximately 65 minutes on November 25, 2025 in the VIII B classroom. It followed a structured sequence where (1) a 5 minute animated educational video depicting forms of violence in school settings; (2) a 20 minute presentation by four team members covering definitions, typology of violence (verbal, non-verbal, digital), media impact mechanisms, and the KPH prevention framework; (3) a 20 minute gamified quiz ('Stop and Answer Challenge') using a pass-the-object mechanics to select student respondents; and (4) closing activities including certificate presentation to the BK teacher and placement of campaign posters in the classroom. The KPH framework which consist of Kenali (Recognize), Pahami (Understand), Hindari (Avoid), served as the operative conceptual anchor throughout.

Analysis

Pre-socialization data were analysed through frequency distribution and percentage calculation for all closed items. A critical analytical step involved comparing Q6 (direct victimhood self-report) against B1–B5 (specific behavioural victimization items) to quantify the recognition-experience gap. Post-socialization data were analysed descriptively, with responses target grouped into positive, neutral, and negative categories. Cross-phase comparison was conducted on matched indicators. Open-ended responses (pre-survey Section E and post-survey Section E) were subject to simple content analysis for recurring themes. No inferential statistics were applied.

Results and Discussion

Media Usage Patterns and Violence Exposure

This research shown the pre-socialization survey regarding student’s digital media usage and exposure to violent online content (See Table 1). The findings indicates of the 32 respondents, 93.8% owned a personal smartphone, was a near-universal penetration rate consistent with broader trends in Indonesian youth digital access. TikTok emerged as the overwhelmingly dominant platform, appearing in 28 of 32 responses either alone or in combination with Instagram and WhatsApp. This platform concentration is significant where TikTok's algorithm-driven, short-form video format has been specifically associated with elevated exposure to aggressive, provocative, and conflict-laden content through passive recommendation dynamics (Firth & Marinelli, 2025; Kantar, 2020).

The research further revealed on daily screen time was substantial or relatively high, where 59.4% of students reported using their devices for three or more hours per day, with 15.6% exceeding seven hours. These figures exceed the two-hour recreational screen time guideline recommended for adolescents by major health organizations (WHO, 2019) for a majority of the cohort. Notably, three students reported less than one hour of daily use, suggesting meaningful within-class variability that a uniform socialization approach may not fully address. Moreover, prolonged violence content exposure, no student reported never encountering violent or negative content, which is a finding with considerable implications. While 43.8% encountered it rarely, 56.3% encountered it at least sometimes, and 31.3% encountered it often or very often. The types of content most frequently cited were hostile comments and verbal abuse (appearing in the majority of responses), physical violence videos, and content denigrating specific groups on the basis of physical appearance, religion, race, or ethnicity. This multi-type exposure profile aligns with what (Kowalski et al., 2019) described as the ambient aggression of social media environments, where harmful content is encountered as background noise rather than deliberate search.

Table 1
 Pre-Social Intervention Survey Profile (N=32)

Variable	Category	N	%
Phone Ownership (N=32)	Yes	30	93.8
	No	2	6.2
Daily Screen Time (N=32)	< 1 hour	3	9.4
	1-3 hours	10	31.3
	3-5 hours	11	34.4
	5-7 hours	3	9.4
	7 hours	5	15.6
Freq. of Violent Content Encountered (N=32)	Never	0	0.0
	Rarely	14	43.8
	Sometimes	8	25.0
	Often	8	25.0
	Very Often	2	6.3
Self-Identified as Violence Victims (N=32)	Yes	7	21.9
	No	25	78.1
Knowledge of Digital Response Steps Pathway	Know	14	43.8
	Partially Know	13	40.6
	Do not Know (Zero Knowledge)	5	15.6

The Recognition-Experience Gap: Actual vs. Acknowledged Victimization

One of the most analytically significant finding of the pre-socialization phase is the profound gap between students' direct self-identification as violence victims and their reported behavioural experiences. When respondent asked directly whether they had ever been victims of violence, only 21.9% (n=7) answered yes. However, when the same students responded to the five specific behavioural victimization items (B1–B5), 84.4% reported experiencing at least one form of negative treatment. This figure indicates and corresponds matching the documented figure cited in the project's activity report. This findings also suggested the presence of a considerable gap between formal recognition of violence and actual victimization experiences.

Table 2 presents the distribution of victimization experiences across all five behavioural items. Verbal victimization (B1), defined as experiences of being mocked, insulted, or called bad names, demonstrated the highest non-zero response frequency. A total of 62.5% students reported experiencing this at some frequency, yet a large proportion of these same students did not classify themselves as violence victims on Q6. This is the definitional blind spot the guidance counsellor identified where students conceptualize violence as physical harm, leaving verbal aggression, by far the most common form where cognitively excluded from the category. This normalization process is particularly concerning because repeated exposure to verbal hostility may contribute to the gradual internalization of aggressive communication patterns within peer environments.

Table 2
Behavioral Victimization - Pre-Socialization (N=32)

Victimization Behaviour	Never (%)	Rarely (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often+ (%)
B1: Mocked/ Insulted/ Called bad names	37.5	28.1	25.0	9.4
B2: Rumours/ Gossips spread about them	53.1	25.0	18.8	3.1
B3: Excluded from group activities	56.3	28.1	12.5	3.1
B4: Pushed, hit, or slapped	68.8	15.6	9.4	6.2
B5: Belongings taken or damaged	62.5	18.8	12.5	6.2
Any negative treatments experienced (B1-B5 combined)	15.6	-	84.4 experienced >1	-

This gap is not incidental, but it is structurally reproduced by how violence is conceptually framed in everyday adolescent discourse. Teasing and name-calling are routinely normalized as “*bercanda*” (joking around), which insulates perpetrators from accountability and inhibits victims from seeking help. describe a nearly identical dynamic in peer aggression literature that when harmful acts are socially coded as normative peer behaviour, neither victims nor bystanders trigger formal help-seeking responses (Espelage et al., 2003). The interview data from the BK teacher corroborate this students who called peers by their parents' names as insults did not register this as aggression, and the teacher confirmed this was the most frequently occurring but least reported form of school-based violence.

The pre-socialization data also reveal a meaningful gap in media literacy competency specifically. Only 43.8% of students reported knowing the practical steps to take when experiencing negative treatment on social media (blocking, reporting, preserving evidence). An additional 40.6% had partial knowledge, and 15.6% had no knowledge at all. Given that 56.3% of students encountered violent or negative content at least occasionally, this means a significant proportion of students were navigating harmful content without actionable

coping tools and relying instead on avoidance (example: 'I skip it') or passive resignation. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that students' challenges are not limited solely to exposure to harmful content, but also involve conceptual misunderstandings regarding violence and limited operational knowledge of digital self-protection. Consequently, anti-violence and digital literacy interventions must address both dimensions simultaneously: expanding students' recognition of non-physical aggression while also strengthening their practical capacity to respond to harmful online experiences in informed and proactive ways.

Post-socio Intervention Outcomes and Pre-Post Comparison

Following the socialization program, post-survey data (N=31) indicate improvements across all three targeted dimensions. **Table 3** presents a cross-phase comparison of matched indicators.

Table 3
 Pre-Post Comparison of Key Indicators

Indicator	Pre-Socialization (N=32)	Post-Socialization (N=31)
Formally identified as violence victim	21.9% (Yes)	90%+ recognized victimization signs (A5: Clear/Very Clear)
Experienced ≥1 negative behavior (B1–B5)	84.4%	—
Knowledge of digital response steps	43.8% (Saya Tahu)	85%+ knew what to avoid/do on social media (C1)
Encounter violent content (often/very often)	31.3%	—
Behavioral intention: more cautious in speech/behavior	—	77.4% Agree/Strongly Agree (B1)
Overall program adequacy rating	—	Majority rated 'Ya' or 'Sangat Ya' (D1)

The most striking improvement is in victimization recognition. While only 21.9% of students initially identified as violence victims, over 90% reported clarity in recognizing victimization signs post-socialization (item A5). This shift is best understood not as an increase in victimization per se, but as a narrowing of the recognition-experience gap documented in the pre-survey. Students now possessed a conceptual vocabulary, such as verbal, non-verbal, and digital violence as distinct categories, that enabled them to retrospectively and prospectively categorize experiences they previously dismissed (Hoff et al., 2009; Troop-Gordon, 2017).

Media literacy knowledge showed similarly meaningful improvement. Pre-socialization data showed 43.8% fully knowing digital response steps. Post-socialization, over 85% of students reported knowing what to avoid or do when encountering negative social media content (item C1), though partial knowledge remained the modal response for

specific platform mechanics such as evidence preservation, indicating that foundational awareness improved but technical procedural fluency requires more targeted instruction.

Attitudinal shifts were more variable. Item B1 (increased caution in speech and behaviour toward peers) yielded 77.4% agreement where it showed a positive outcome, though 16.1% remained neutral and 6.5% disagreed. Item B3 (willingness to report) showed the widest distribution, with 29% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. This finding reinforces a well-established limitation of single-session interventions: awareness and conceptual understanding can shift relatively quickly, but behavioural intention that particularly around reporting, which carries social risk, is more resistant to change and requires sustained systemic support (Nickerson et al., 2014)

In addition, open-ended responses in the post-survey added texture to these findings. Student feedback identified the material presentation and the KPH framework as the most impactful elements. Several students cited the animated video as particularly effective for comprehension. Suggestions for improvement included louder presenter volume, longer video segments, and more real-case examples which all of which reflect students' desire for deeper, more concrete engagement with the content. Two outlier respondents rated the entire program negatively where their responses point to the challenge of heterogeneous classrooms where a standardized program cannot meet every student's engagement threshold.

Implications for School-Based Media Literacy Programming

Taken together, the pre-post social intervention data findings presented a coherent picture of students at SMP Negeri 1 Mertoyudan entered the intervention with high social media exposure, moderate violence content encounter rates, severely limited definitional understanding of violence (particularly its verbal and digital forms), and partial-to-poor knowledge of response strategies. At the same time, the data revealed meaningful improvements were observed in students' ability to recognize forms of violence and identify concrete response strategies, although changes in attitudes and reporting willingness appeared more limited and inconsistent.

Furthermore, these pattern findings suggest that definitional education constitutes one of the most effective components of the intervention. Many students initially failed to categorize verbal harassment, ridicule, and digitally mediated aggression as forms of violence. Providing explicit explanations accompanied by concrete examples appeared to substantially improve recognition and conceptual awareness. This indicates that students' previous lack of recognition stemmed not necessarily from acceptance of violence itself, but from limited understanding of what behaviors should be included within the category of violence. In this context, educational interventions that clarify the boundaries of harmful behavior may produce relatively high-impact outcomes even within short implementation periods. Nevertheless, the persistent gap in reporting willingness (item B3) points to a structural limitation that no classroom session can fully address. Students who do not report violence are not simply uninformed, they are navigating a social environment in which reporting carries real risks: peer ostracism, being labeled a "tattletale", or retaliation. Addressing this requires institutional interventions: anonymous reporting mechanisms, clearly communicated non-retaliation policies, and explicit modeling by teachers of how reports are received and handled. The BK teacher's candid acknowledgment that perpetration goes unaddressed due to student volume underscores the systemic dimension of the problem.

The finding that 15.6% of students still had no knowledge of digital response steps post-socialization (versus pre-survey where the figure was higher) also points to the need for platform-specific media literacy instruction. Knowing that one should block or report is not the same as knowing how to do so across TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp which platforms with different reporting interfaces and community standards. A dedicated, hands-on digital literacy module would complement the conceptual framing provided by the KPH program.

Despite this finding, this study contains methodological limitations that constrain interpretation and should be acknowledged. The absence of a pre-test on the exact post-survey items prevents precise measurement of change; the pre and post instruments, while thematically matched, used different question formats. Without a control group, the contribution of the socialization itself, versus maturation, social desirability, or contemporaneous events that cannot be isolated. Self-report measures introduce the well-documented tendency for respondents to provide socially desirable answers, particularly in educational settings. Future research should employ pre-post matched instruments, a control or comparison class, and if possible behavioral observation measures to strengthen the evidence base.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that students at SMP Negeri 1 Mertoyudan operate within a highly digitalized environment marked by intensive social media use, frequent exposure to harmful online content, and limited media literacy regarding violence recognition and digital self-protection. Although students showed high levels of digital engagement, their understanding of violence remained narrowly cantered on physical harm, while verbal and digital aggression were often normalized as ordinary peer interaction. The study's main finding is the substantial gap between victimization experiences and self-recognition as victims. While 84.4% of students reported experiencing at least one form of behavioural victimization, only 21.9% identified themselves as victims of violence. This suggests that harmful behaviours such as verbal harassment and online aggression frequently remain unrecognized and underreported within adolescent social environments.

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of sustained, institutionally integrated media literacy programs that combine violence awareness, practical digital safety skills, and accessible reporting mechanisms. The study also suggests that behavioural-based measures provide a more accurate representation of adolescent victimization than direct self-identification alone.

Declarations

Author contribution. First author contributed into the conceptual research, method and drew findings, while the 2nd and the 3rd author contributed equally in data research and conclusion

Funding statement. This research doesn't receive any fundings

Conflict of interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Additional information. No additional information is available for this paper.

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