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Empathy Dysfunction and Risk Factors for Brawl and *Klithih* Behavior among Muslim High School Students in Yogyakarta City

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine empathy profiles and empathy dysfunction among Muslim adolescents involved in brawl and *klithih* behavior in Yogyakarta City high schools and to identify factors underlying their involvement. The research used a descriptive design combining quantitative and qualitative data. Participants were seven Muslim students from private high schools selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using an empathy scale and in-depth interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively using measures of central tendency and dispersion, whereas qualitative data were examined using Miles and Huberman's model of data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that involvement in brawls and *klithih* is closely associated with empathy dysfunction, which is exacerbated by low emotional regulation and unsupportive family backgrounds. These results inform guidance and counseling services and can guide strategies to develop adaptive empathy among students at risk of violent behavior. The study enriches empirical understanding of adolescent empathy and school violence. This study has limitations in geographical scope, being restricted to Yogyakarta City schools, so the findings may not generalize to adolescents in regions with different sociocultural contexts. The study also focused mainly on individual factors, while external influences such as social environments, educational systems, and institutional roles were not systematically explored. Future research should broaden the participant context across diverse regions and deepen the analysis of structural dimensions that contribute to empathy dysfunction and youth violence.

Future studies should also use participatory approaches involving students, teachers, and school communities to build a more holistic and applicable understanding.

Keywords: Adolescent; Brawl; Emotional Regulation; Empathy; *Klithih*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji profil empati dan disfungsi empati pada remaja Muslim yang terlibat perilaku tawuran dan *klithih* di SMA Kota Yogyakarta serta mengidentifikasi faktor yang melatarbelakangi keterlibatan mereka. Penelitian menggunakan desain deskriptif dengan mengombinasikan data kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Partisipan berjumlah tujuh siswa Muslim dari SMA swasta yang dipilih melalui teknik purposive sampling. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan skala empati dan wawancara mendalam. Data kuantitatif dianalisis secara deskriptif berdasarkan ukuran pemusatan dan penyebaran, sedangkan data kualitatif dianalisis menggunakan model Miles dan Huberman yang mencakup reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa keterlibatan dalam tawuran dan *klithih* berkaitan erat dengan disfungsi empati yang diperparah oleh regulasi emosi yang rendah dan latar belakang keluarga yang kurang suportif. Hasil ini memberikan masukan penting bagi layanan bimbingan dan konseling di sekolah serta menjadi dasar penyusunan strategi intervensi untuk mengembangkan empati adaptif pada siswa yang berisiko melakukan kekerasan. Penelitian ini juga memperkaya pemahaman empiris tentang empati remaja dan kekerasan di sekolah. Penelitian ini memiliki keterbatasan pada cakupan geografis karena hanya dilakukan di sekolah-sekolah Kota Yogyakarta sehingga temuan belum tentu dapat digeneralisasi ke daerah lain dengan konteks sosial budaya berbeda. Fokus penelitian terutama pada faktor individual, sementara pengaruh lingkungan sosial, sistem pendidikan, dan peran institusi belum dieksplorasi secara sistematis. Penelitian selanjutnya perlu memperluas konteks partisipan lintas wilayah dan memperdalam analisis dimensi struktural yang berkontribusi terhadap disfungsi empati dan kekerasan remaja. Studi mendatang juga disarankan menggunakan pendekatan partisipatoris yang melibatkan siswa, guru, konselor, dan orang tua untuk membangun pemahaman yang lebih holistik, aplikatif, komprehensif, serta berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: Empati; *Klithih*; Regulasi Emosi; Remaja; Tawuran

INTRODUCTION

Empathy is a core element of human social life and plays a critical role in sustaining harmony across historical and cultural contexts. In an era of globalization and rapid change, education holds a strategic position in preparing students to confront global challenges and transform them into opportunities. Achieving this goal requires not only equipping students with technical knowledge and skills, but also fostering social–emotional competencies such as empathy. Strengthening empathy is widely regarded as a foundational step in cultivating adaptive and responsible character, enabling individuals to coexist peacefully amid the complexity of modern society. Yet the accelerated development of digital technology has introduced new obstacles to character education, particularly in relation to empathy among adolescents. Reed et al. (2017) show that social media frequently serves as a vehicle for threats, harassment, cyberbullying, and other forms of aggression. In addition, online game addiction has been linked to poorer mental health and reduced emotional intelligence, including lower levels of empathy (Wartberg et al., 2019).

Consistent with these findings, Milani et al. (2015) and Khalil et al. (2019) report that adolescents who are frequently exposed to violent video games tend to exhibit more violent and aggressive behavior and show declines in academic performance. These results support the hypothesis that low or ineffectively functioning empathy can be a key psychological factor triggering deviant behaviors, including collective violence such as brawls and *klithih*. In Yogyakarta, youth violence of this kind has become a serious concern in recent years. Brawls (*tawuran*) are typically triggered by interschool conflicts, group rivalries, or acts of retaliation, and are carried out openly, often resulting in physical injury or property damage (Ichwanul, 2022; Rizki et al., 2024). *Klithih* is a local term originating in Yogyakarta that originally referred to aimless wandering but has gradually shifted to denote a form of random street violence perpetrated by adolescents against unknown victims, often involving sharp weapons or other physical aggression (Anjasmara et al., 2024; Jatmiko, 2021). Although Yogyakarta is known as a student city, it has not been spared from increasing violence involving school-age youth, including Muslim high school students from both public and private institutions.

From an Islamic perspective, this phenomenon is particularly concerning. Islam strongly emphasizes peace, compassion, and empathy in social relations. Values such as

mutual respect, control of anger, and the avoidance of violence are deeply embedded in Islamic teachings, as reflected in various Qur'anic verses and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The Qur'an 21:107 states, "And We have not sent you [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds" (Nasr et al., 2015), while the Prophet teaches that "The strong is not the one who overcomes others by his strength, but the one who controls himself while in anger" (Al-Bukhari, 1997). These teachings highlight empathy, nonviolence, and self-restraint as integral components of the Islamic moral framework. The involvement of some Muslim adolescents in brawls and *klithih* thus reveals a striking gap between the normative understanding of religious values and their internalization in everyday behavior (Salleh et al., 2015).

Empathy is widely regarded as a key psychological factor associated with aggressive behavior in adolescence. It can be defined as the capacity to understand, share, and respond to the feelings or experiences of others as if one were in their position, accompanied by genuine concern. In social and religious contexts, empathy provides a crucial foundation for prosocial behavior and functions as a protective factor against violence (Jiang et al., 2024; Veríssimo et al., 2025). Nevertheless, not all adolescents who receive moral and religious education—including Muslim adolescents—demonstrate effective empathic behavior in daily life. This discrepancy raises a fundamental question: is the empathy possessed by these adolescents functioning adequately to prevent deviant behaviors such as brawls and *klithih*, or are there obstacles that render empathy partially or fully dysfunctional?

Recent data from law enforcement agencies underscore the urgency of this question. Information from the Yogyakarta Special Region Police indicates that street crime cases categorized as *klithih* have tended to increase, or at least occur almost every month from early 2024 to mid-October 2024. Mapping by the Yogyakarta Regional Police identified at least 36 student gangs in the region with potential involvement in street crime (Junianto, 2024). In addition, data from the Yogyakarta City Police recorded five student brawl cases between January and August 2024, commonly triggered by misunderstandings and spontaneous emotional reactions (Huda, 2024). These patterns reflect serious problems in emotion regulation and suggest a weakened empathic capacity, both of which are crucial components of healthy socio-emotional development in adolescence.

Empathy is often conceptualized as a primary antidote to aggression. Meta-analytic evidence indicates a small but consistent negative correlation between empathy and aggressive behavior. Ritchie et al. (2022) report that empathy is negatively associated with verbal and physical aggression. Their findings also show that although low empathy is related to aggression, more severe, persistent, and instrumental forms of aggression tend to be driven by deeper personality factors such as callous–unemotional traits. Complementing this, Gantiva et al. (2018) found that adolescents with high levels of aggression score significantly lower on cognitive empathy than those with low aggression, who tend to have higher cognitive empathy. These results suggest that empathy, while conceptually central to prosocial behavior, may variably succeed or fail in preventing violence. In some contexts, empathy can become dysfunctional when adolescents are overwhelmed by negative emotions or embedded in social environments that normalize or even reward violence.

A growing body of research has further clarified how empathy deficits relate to specific patterns of aggression. Low affective and cognitive empathy have been linked to increased tendencies toward physical, verbal, and relational aggression (Jiang et al., 2024; Veríssimo et al., 2025). Individuals who struggle to recognize and appropriately respond to others' emotions may lack internal brakes on impulses to harm or dominate others. Empathy thus functions as a moral regulator and internal form of social control that restrains aggressive impulses through mechanisms such as empathic concern and emotion matching (Batson & Ahmad, 2009; Vecchio et al., 2023). From a neuropsychological perspective, empathy activates brain regions associated with affective processing and perspective-taking, thereby inhibiting aggressive impulses (Veríssimo et al., 2025). Adolescents with low empathic capacity show weaker cortical responses to others' suffering, which increases the likelihood of violent behavior (Knauf & Eschenbeck, 2025). Emotion matching and empathic concern have also been shown to exert protective effects against aggression by strengthening inhibition of impulses to harm others (Yang et al., 2023).

Within a developmental framework, empathy not only directly suppresses aggression but also mediates the relationship between emotion regulation and aggressive behavior. Vecchio et al. (2023) found that children and adolescents with poor emotion regulation but high empathy levels are less likely to behave aggressively than peers with similarly poor regulation but low empathy. This supports the view that empathy can buffer the impact of

emotional dysregulation in stressful interpersonal situations. Environmental and social conditions further shape empathic functioning. Experiences of violence, neglect, or bullying may erode empathy and intensify aggression. Jiang et al. (2024) note that adolescents who have been victims of bullying and possess low emotional and social competence tend to show elevated aggression. In a broader context, research by Taylor et al. (2020) and Malti et al. (2016) points to the importance of out-group empathy in mitigating aggression rooted in discrimination and intergroup conflict.

Empathic dysfunction has also been associated with proactive, premeditated aggression, as reported by Díaz-Vázquez et al. (2024). Conversely, children and adolescents with higher empathy levels are more likely to favor peaceful, prosocial, and collaborative strategies for resolving conflict (Palade & Pascal, 2023). These findings underscore the importance of empathy-based interventions targeting both affective and cognitive components as part of comprehensive efforts to prevent and manage adolescent aggression, particularly in school settings.

In Indonesia, recent studies have examined various forms of youth violence, especially student brawls and *klithih* attacks. Most of this work, however, has focused on sociological, criminological, and legal dimensions, emphasizing causal factors, typologies of violent behavior, and social or legal consequences. A review of the literature indicates that many studies remain largely descriptive and normative and have not yet articulated psychosocial or counseling interventions directly targeting adolescent perpetrators. With respect to *klithih*, Anjasmara et al. (2024) conceptualize it as a form of juvenile delinquency emerging from weak social supervision, deviant group identity formation, and the need for social recognition in the context of urban pressures. Their analysis highlights *klithih* as a complex phenomenon deeply linked to Yogyakarta's socio-cultural landscape. Jatmiko (2021) argues that *klithih* has evolved into a form of open social conflict that threatens social stability and identifies deficits in informal social control by families and communities, as well as limited school engagement in values-based character education, as aggravating factors. Yet neither study proposes concrete psychosocial intervention models that can be directly implemented with perpetrators.

A similar pattern appears in the work of Lubis et al. (2023), which underscores the importance of family education and value internalization but remains normative and does

not extend to the design of empirically tested interventions. Fuadi et al. (2019) show that aggressive behaviors such as *klithih* are shaped by interactions between adolescents and their social environments, but their contribution is largely limited to mapping determinant factors without offering specific preventive or rehabilitative programs. Research on student brawls follows comparable trends. Ichwanul (2022) examines victimology in youth group fights in Jakarta, while Rizki et al. (2024) explore the potential application of restorative justice in resolving brawl-related cases in Medan. These studies focus on legal and structural aspects, with limited attention to school-based counseling or psychosocial development. Other contributions, such as those by Hutapea et al. (2024) and Resti et al. (2023), identify situational triggers and permissive parenting as risk factors, and Hamdani et al. (2024) applies differential association theory to explain how violent behavior is socially learned. However, few studies explicitly examine whether perpetrators are Muslim or non-Muslim, and the specific role of empathy dysfunction in *tawuran* and *klithih* remains largely unexplored. Internal psychological mechanisms, especially those related to empathy development, have received comparatively little empirical attention.

Against this backdrop, the present study offers novel and contextually grounded insights that can serve as an empirical foundation for developing psychosocial intervention models, particularly those informed by a eudaimonic well-being framework. This framework emphasizes optimal realization of individual potential through meaningful life goals (purpose in life), positive relationships (positive relations), strengthened autonomy, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, and personal growth. Interventions based on these principles are expected to enhance adolescents' empathic capacities and support the development of more prosocial, reflective, and responsible character traits, particularly among youth who have previously engaged in brawls and *klithih* violence.

METHODS

This study employed an embedded mixed-methods design in which quantitative data played a supportive role to deepen the primary qualitative analysis (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Quantitative measurement of empathy was first conducted using an empathy scale, followed by in-depth interviews to explore empathy dysfunction and the factors underlying involvement in brawls and street assaults (*klithih*). The mixed-methods procedure, including

the sequence of data collection and integration of quantitative and qualitative strands, is depicted in Figure 1. Flowchart of the research process illustrating the embedded mixed-methods design applied in the study. Figure 1 shows how qualitative data from in-depth interviews and quantitative data from the empathy scale are used to determine empathy dysfunction, identify causal factors of student involvement in brawls and *klithih*, and assess students' empathy levels, which are then integrated through a narrative weaving procedure into a single, coherent interpretation.

Participants were seven Muslim high school students in Yogyakarta City who had been involved in brawls and *klithih*. They were selected using purposive sampling based on recommendations from a Guidance and Counseling teacher and confirmation through initial assessment. In line with ethical guidelines, the names of schools and participants are not disclosed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The demographic characteristics of the seven participants are presented in Table 1. Demographic Data of the Seven Subjects. Formal permission from school authorities and written informed consent from participants or their guardians were obtained prior to data collection.

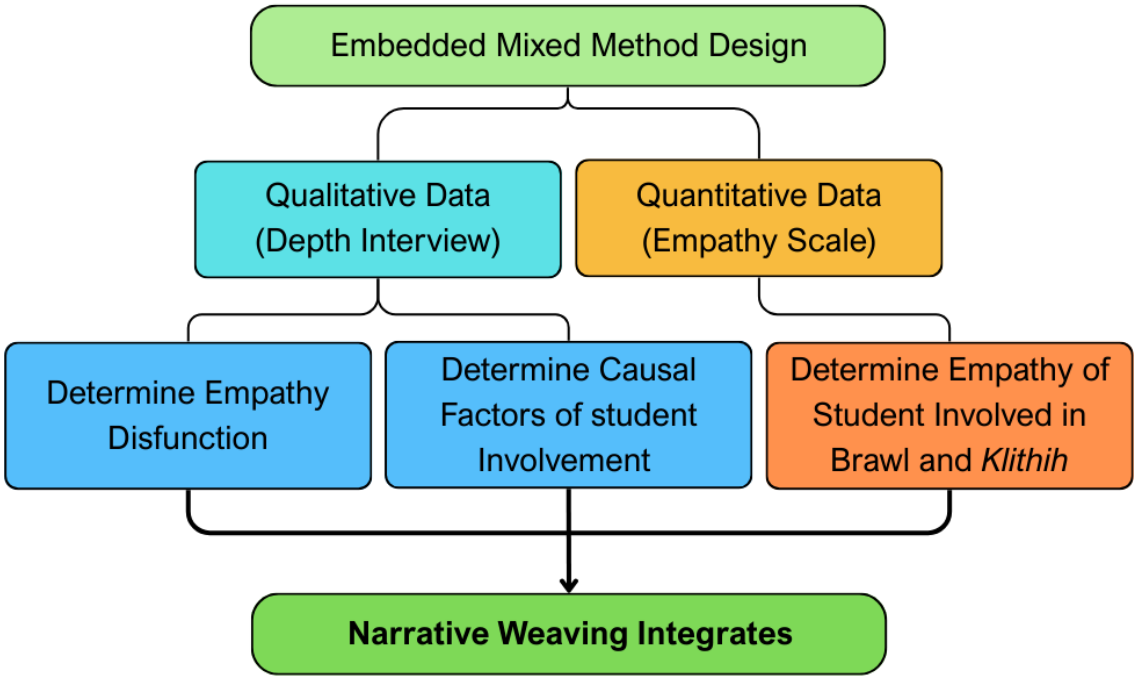

Figure 1. Flowchart of the research process illustrating the embedded mixed methods design applied in the study

Table 1.
Demographic Data of the Seven Subjects

Subject	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Religion
NOU	Male	18	Dayak	Muslim
REY	Male	18	Javanese	Muslim
VAR	Male	18	Javanese	Muslim
ASF	Male	18	Javanese	Muslim
BAG	Male	18	Javanese	Muslim
KEV	Male	17	Malay	Muslim
RIF	Male	17	Javanese	Muslim

Empathy was measured using an Empathy Scale developed with reference to Batson and Ahmad's (2009) framework, comprising four dimensions: imagine-self perspective, imagine-other perspective, emotion matching, and empathic concern. The initial instrument contained 56 items constructed by the researcher to reflect the behavioral context of adolescents involved in school violence, with responses on a four-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly inappropriate" to "strongly appropriate". Content validity was established through expert judgment by specialists in developmental psychology and guidance and counseling, followed by a pilot test with 511 students from five high schools in Yogyakarta that were considered highly vulnerable to brawls and *klithih*. Rasch model analysis identified one misfitting item, resulting in a final 55-item scale that met psychometric criteria. Qualitative data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide developed around themes of empathy dynamics and adolescent violence, refined through expert review. In-depth interviews were conducted by the researcher with support from a research assistant who documented non-verbal cues and participated in peer debriefing to enhance the credibility of the qualitative data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Qualitative data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014), comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Interview transcripts and observational notes were coded with a focus on indicators of empathy dysfunction and factors contributing to violent behavior, then organized into thematic matrices and case summaries. A narrative weaving approach was used to integrate themes across participants and to connect qualitative insights with the quantitative empathy profiles (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Quantitative data from the Empathy Scale were analyzed using descriptive statistics only, given the small sample size (n = 7). Mean scores and total scores for each empathy dimension were calculated at both individual and group levels, and

empathy levels were categorized (low, moderate, high) based on predefined score ranges. Descriptive findings were then compared and aligned with qualitative themes to produce an integrated, analytically rich account of empathy dysfunction and its relation to adolescents' involvement in brawls and *klithih*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The assessment of students' empathy in this study was grounded in two core components, cognitive empathy and affective empathy, as conceptualized by Bason and Ahmad (2009). Cognitive empathy refers to perspective taking, whereas affective empathy concerns emotional responsiveness. Perspective taking consists of two forms. The first is the imagine-self perspective, namely how individuals think and feel when they place themselves in another person's situation. The second is the imagine-other perspective, namely how individuals imagine what others think and feel about the situation they are experiencing. Emotional responsiveness is reflected in two forms, namely emotion matching, which refers to feeling emotions similar to those experienced by others, and empathic concern, which reflects sensitivity to and concern for others' needs. The analysis of empathy among students involved in brawls and *klithih* across these four aspects is presented in Table 2.

The results of the measurement of the four empathy dimensions indicate that students who perpetrated brawls and *klithih* scored highest on Empathic Concern, with a mean of 3.08. This suggests a relatively strong tendency to feel compassion and concern for others who are facing difficulty or suffering. Emotion Matching is at a moderate level, with a mean of 2.79, which indicates that respondents are reasonably able to resonate with and align their emotions with those of others. The Imagine-Self Perspective dimension has a mean score of 2.77, reflecting a moderate capacity to imagine themselves in another person's situation and to feel as if they are undergoing the same experience. The lowest mean score is found in the Imagine-Other Perspective dimension (2.65), which reflects a more limited ability to understand other people's perspectives in an objective manner. Taken together, the empathy profile of these students shows that emotional concern for others is relatively stronger than their cognitive capacity to adopt others' perspectives, indicating that cognitive empathy is lower than affective empathy.

Table 2.
Mean empathy scores of students involved in brawls and *klithih* across four dimensions

No	Aspect	Mean
1	Imagine-Self Perspective	2.77
2	Imagine-Other Perspective	2.65
3	Emotion Matching	2.79
4	Empathic Concern	3.08

Table 3.
Empathy of each student involved in brawl and *klithih* cases across four dimensions

No.	Subject	Score	Category	Mean Scores on Empathy Dimensions			
				Imagine-Self Perspective	Imagine-Other Perspective	Emotion Matching	Empathic Concern
1	NOU	164	Moderate Empathy	2.93	2.71	2.92	3.36
2	REY	158	Moderate Empathy	3	2.71	2.77	3
3	VAR	161	Moderate Empathy	2.93	2.71	3.15	2.93
4	ASF	150	Moderate Empathy	2.57	2.5	2.85	3
5	BAG	151	Moderate Empathy	2.5	2.57	2.62	3.29
6	KEV	163	Moderate Empathy	2.86	2.79	2.77	3.43
7	RIF	140	Moderate Empathy	2.57	2.57	2.46	2.57

A further analysis of the empathy profiles of individual students identified as perpetrators of brawls and *klithih* in senior high schools in Yogyakarta City shows that all respondents fall within the moderate empathy category. Nonetheless, there is meaningful variation in scores across the four dimensions, indicating distinct empathy profiles between students. The detailed distribution of each student's empathy scores is presented in Table 3.

Across the seven students who were involved in brawls and *klithih*, all fell within the moderate empathy range, with total scores between 140 and 164. An examination of the four dimensions—Imagine-Self Perspective, Imagine-Other Perspective, Emotion Matching, and Empathic Concern—shows that Empathic Concern tends to be the highest dimension overall. This is particularly evident in the case of KEV, who obtained the highest mean score on Empathic Concern (3.43), indicating a strong tendency to show emotional concern and attention to others' conditions. By contrast, the Imagine-Other Perspective

dimension generally has the lowest mean scores among most respondents, suggesting that the ability to objectively adopt others' viewpoints remains relatively limited. Some respondents, such as NOU and VAR, display a more balanced empathy profile between affective and cognitive dimensions. In contrast, RIF obtained the lowest scores across all dimensions, including Emotion Matching and Empathic Concern, which suggests a comparatively lower level of emotional sensitivity and concern than other respondents. These findings indicate that although the respondents' empathy levels are categorized as moderate, there remains a clear need to strengthen the cognitive aspects of empathy, especially the ability to imagine and understand others' perspectives, in order to enhance overall empathy quality.

Based on semi-structured interviews with the seven students involved in brawls and *klithih* at private high schools in Yogyakarta, and following the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing as proposed by Miles et al. (2014), a detailed description was obtained regarding empathy dysfunction and the factors contributing to involvement in brawls and *klithih*. A summary of findings on empathy dysfunction among these Muslim adolescents is presented in Table 4.

Table 4.
Summary of interview findings on empathy dysfunction

No.	Subject	Empathy Dysfunction
1	NOU	NOU demonstrates concern and empathy toward his friends and fellow group members, yet responds with pronounced aggression toward individuals he perceives as opponents or enemies of the group. In anger-provoking situations, he reports no hesitation in engaging in physical violence, including the use of sharp weapons such as machetes and modified metal gears ("girs"), to injure his opponents. He acknowledges considerable difficulty regulating feelings of anger and a tendency to be easily offended, which points to marked impairments in emotion regulation. Although his empathy score falls within the moderate range, this capacity does not appear to function adaptively in emotionally challenging social situations. Difficulties in emotional regulation are likely to contribute to this empathy dysfunction, such that empathy does not operate as a protective factor against aggressive behavior, particularly in the context of intergroup conflict or strained interpersonal relationships.
2	REY	REY displays strong concern and loyalty toward his friends and fellow gang members, yet responds with marked aggression toward those he defines as enemies. He reports having little hesitation in using physical violence, including bladed weapons, guided by the principle that "rather than me getting hurt, it is better for the enemy to be hurt." Rey explained that his own experience of the

		pain of defeat motivates him to ensure that his opponents endure a similar experience. He also acknowledged that he remains easily provoked by feelings of revenge, particularly in situations that evoke memories of prior defeat or humiliation. The assessment indicated that Rey's level of empathy falls within the moderate range, although this capacity does not appear to operate adaptively in conflict-based social contexts. Difficulties in regulating negative emotions, especially anger and vengefulness, are presumed to contribute to Rey's empathy dysfunction. Notably, Rey's empathy for his own past suffering seems to fuel retaliatory motives toward others, in that he wishes his enemies to experience the same distress. In Rey's case, empathy that is not accompanied by adequate emotional regulation appears to intensify, rather than inhibit, aggressive behaviour.
3	VAR	VAR presents as courteous and caring toward his friends. He reports feeling comfortable within his peer group, and the emotional closeness that develops makes him inclined to comply with his friends' invitations without careful deliberation. In certain situations, this pattern results in a loss of self-control, with VAR remaining willing to participate in violent acts, such as group brawls or *klithih* assaults, purely out of solidarity with his friends. VAR even admitted that he has been willing to take part in paid fights in order to respond to invitations or requests from his peer group. His strong sense of concern and solidarity toward his friends reflects an empathic tendency, yet the empathy expressed is ineffective and maladaptive. The subject responds to his friends' distress, encouragement, or pressure by engaging in aggressive behaviour, rather than seeking more adaptive and constructive solutions. A perceived lack of trust from his parents contributes to feelings of frustration and a tendency to withdraw from the family environment. As compensation, VAR feels more accepted and comfortable within his friendship circle, which becomes his primary source of emotional support. Consistent with this pattern, the assessment results indicated that VAR's empathy level falls within the moderate range, although the way in which this empathy is enacted in daily social life remains non-adaptive.
4	ASF	ASF presents as humorous and caring toward his friends and fellow gang members. The emotional bond with his group appears strong; however, this closeness does not extend to individuals identified as enemies of the gang. When facing opponents, he reports little hesitation in using violence, including carrying and using sharp weapons such as a samurai-style sword to inflict injury. ASF is a teenager who tends to act impulsively and is highly susceptible to peer pressure. He readily accepts invitations from friends, even in high-risk situations such as brawls and *klithih* assaults, without adequately considering the potential consequences of his actions, which indicates limited reflective capacity and poor self-control. He is also known to ride his motorcycle at very high speed, reflecting sensation seeking and further impulsive tendencies. During the interview, ASF acknowledged ongoing difficulties in controlling himself, especially in situations that trigger strong negative emotions. This lack of self-control, combined with a reduced capacity for rational deliberation and consequence evaluation, appears to contribute to empathy dysfunction in ASF.

		Although he demonstrates concern for his friends, the form of empathy expressed is largely non-adaptive because it reinforces aggressive behaviour toward others. Consistent with this pattern, his empathy scores fell within the moderate range, yet the way this empathy is enacted in everyday social contexts remains maladaptive.
5	BAG	BAG appears to be a quiet adolescent who shows concern for his friends and gang members. In social interactions, he sometimes chooses to give in to preserve his relationships with peers. Beneath this reserved demeanour, however, he reports little reluctance to engage in violence, including the use of sharp weapons, against individuals perceived as enemies of the gang. BAG described feeling highly uncomfortable in restrictive or stressful situations. As he feels more constrained or under pressure, his negative emotions, particularly anger, tend to intensify and are subsequently expressed through aggressive behaviour. He also reported frequent experiences of loneliness, during which urges to vent his emotions through street violence (*klithih*) with his gang friends become stronger. These acts are often carried out without consideration of the broader context or of their impact on others. His limited capacity to regulate negative emotions such as anger and loneliness, and his tendency to cope with stress through aggression, indicate that his empathy has not developed in a functional manner. Although BAG displays concern for his friends and fellow gang members, his empathic responses are largely confined to this immediate ingroup and do not generalise to individuals outside it. When he is in an intense emotional state, such as feeling distressed or lonely, he fails to take into account the consequences of his behaviour for others. This pattern reflects empathy dysfunction, characterised by an inability to extend understanding to a wider range of others and to refrain from actions that cause harm. Assessment results placed BAG's empathy in the moderate range, yet its application in daily social life remains non-adaptive.
6	KEV	KEV demonstrates concern and care, particularly toward close friends and fellow gang members. He expresses a desire to protect people who are important to him. However, the empathy he possesses does not inhibit violent behaviour; instead, it appears to drive greater aggression toward individuals perceived as threats. He endorses the principle that "rather than me getting hurt, it is better for the enemy to get hurt," which reflects a defensive-aggressive mindset in which pre-emptive attack is viewed as necessary to avoid becoming a victim. In this sense, his empathy is not directed toward a broader understanding of others but primarily serves to strengthen within-group bonds and legitimise violent actions against outsiders. Although KEV obtained moderate scores on empathy measures, this capacity does not yet operate in a healthy or adaptive manner. Narrow, ingroup-focused empathy instead becomes a basis for justifying aggressive actions toward others.
7	RIF	RIF shows concern for his friends and gang members and appears to have strong social bonds within his group, accompanied by high solidarity toward his peers. This empathy, however, is largely restricted to the immediate ingroup and does not extend to individuals labelled as enemies of the gang. In conflict situations, he reports no hesitation in using sharp weapons to injure opponents. For RIF, winning a fight represents a form of achievement in his social environment. He believes that the ability to prevail in physical confrontations increases others'

respect for him and their fear of him. Because he frequently wins fights, his friends have nicknamed him "gladiator," a label that within the gang community symbolises pride and elevated social status. RIF also acknowledges that he is easily provoked to anger, particularly in situations he perceives as challenging or conflictual. This pattern suggests difficulty in regulating emotional impulses in a healthy way and a limited capacity to consider the impact of his actions on others. Although his empathy scores fall within the moderate range, this capacity does not function effectively to reduce aggressive behaviour. Instead, empathy that is narrowly directed toward his own group intensifies emotional reactivity and aggressiveness toward outsiders. This pattern illustrates empathy dysfunction, in which the ability to resonate with others' feelings is not supported by adequate emotional regulation and self-control.

The following section provides a narrative interpretation of both quantitative and qualitative findings regarding empathy and empathy dysfunction among high school students involved in brawls and *klithih*, presented for each individual subject. NOU obtained a moderate mean empathy score (2.93), with the highest value in the Empathic Concern dimension (3.36), indicating a notable capacity for emotional responsiveness. His empathy appears to operate primarily within close interpersonal relationships, such as with friends and fellow gang members. In conflict situations, however, he exhibits marked aggression, including the use of sharp weapons. Although his empathic concern is relatively high, limited emotional regulation, reflected in irritability and impulsiveness, renders his empathy dysfunctional in emotionally charged social contexts.

REY also demonstrates a moderate level of empathy (mean: 2.87), with relatively balanced scores between Imagine-Self Perspective and Empathic Concern. His empathy nonetheless seems distorted by unresolved traumatic experiences, which fuel strong impulses for revenge. In his case, empathy directed toward his own past suffering appears to intensify aggressive behavior toward others. A moderate empathy score alone does not guarantee adaptive emotional regulation, and in this instance, empathy may actually contribute to violent behavior.

VAR's empathy level is moderate (mean: 2.93), with a particularly high score on Emotion Matching (3.15), indicating sensitivity to others' emotional expressions. This sensitivity is expressed maladaptively as blind loyalty to his peer group. He is highly susceptible to peer pressure, including participation in violent acts and paid fights. Weak self-control and a strong desire for social acceptance prevent his empathy from functioning as a protective factor, so it fails to inhibit aggressive behavior.

ASF has a moderate overall empathy score (mean: 2.73), but lower scores in the Imagine-Self and Imagine-Other dimensions (2.57 and 2.50, respectively). These scores are consistent with his impulsive tendencies and limited capacity for social reflection. While he feels emotionally attached to his group, he lacks consideration of the consequences of his actions, which prevents empathy from functioning as a moral brake. His empathy is predominantly group-oriented and does not extend to a broader and more inclusive understanding of others.

BAG's mean empathy score is 2.75, with a relatively high value on Empathic Concern (3.29). His empathy, however, is largely confined to in-group relations and does not extend to outsiders. Under conditions of stress or loneliness, he tends to channel negative emotions into violent acts. In his case, negative affect disrupts the role of empathy as an inhibitor of aggression. His cognitive empathy appears weaker than his emotional responsiveness, which further limits the adaptive potential of his empathy.

KEV's mean empathy score (2.96) places him at the upper end of the moderate range, with the highest Empathic Concern score among all subjects (3.43). Nonetheless, his empathy is narrowly directed toward his own group. His belief that "it is better they get hurt than me" reflects a defensive and aggressive mindset in which empathy is used to justify violence under the pretext of protecting the group. In the absence of adequate emotional regulation and moral reflection, his empathy fails to operate adaptively in social interactions.

RIF has the lowest mean empathy score among all participants (2.54), with particularly low scores on Emotion Matching (2.46) and Empathic Concern (2.57). This pattern is consistent with his high level of aggression and his tendency to glorify fighting as a form of achievement and a route to social status. His empathy is highly restricted to in-group members and does not extend beyond that circle. Deficits in emotional regulation and self-reflection further exacerbate empathy dysfunction and reinforce aggressive tendencies.

Overall, the findings show that all subjects have moderate levels of empathy, yet their empathy does not function adaptively in everyday social life. Empathy is largely confined to the closest social circle (ingroup), such as friends or gang members, and rarely extends to individuals outside the group. In intergroup conflict situations, empathy can even become the basis for justifying aggressive acts. A prominent pattern is the emergence of intense

revenge motives, particularly among subjects with histories of defeat, humiliation, or emotional pain. These experiences are not mitigated by empathy; instead, empathy toward one's own suffering becomes a psychological driver to inflict similar suffering on others as an act of retaliation. Difficulties in managing negative emotions such as anger, resentment, frustration, and social pressure further exacerbate empathy dysfunction. The subjects tend to respond to emotional stress in impulsive and destructive ways, without considering the impact of their behavior on others. Empathy that is not accompanied by emotional regulation and self-control may therefore amplify, rather than inhibit, aggressive motivation. Empathy dysfunction in these adolescents is thus characterized not by a complete absence of empathy, but by an inability to apply empathy in a broad, constructive, and contextually appropriate manner, especially in emotionally and relationally challenging social situations.

A description of the interview findings regarding the causal factors underlying involvement in brawls and *klithih* among Muslim adolescents in Yogyakarta high schools, following the Miles and Huberman model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, is presented in Table 5.

Table 5.
Summary of interview findings on factors contributing to student involvement in brawls and *klithih*

No.	Subject	Factors Contributing to Involvement in Brawls and ***Klithih***
1	NOU	NOU reported that he had participated in so many brawls and *klithih* incidents that he could no longer estimate their number. His involvement with gangs began in junior high school, when he started accompanying close friends to spend time together after school. At first, NOU perceived these gatherings as casual social activities. However, because he often felt lonely at home, he gradually experienced more comfort in that peer environment and eventually decided to join the gang. NOU explained that his loneliness was closely related to his family situation. His father, who served as a police officer, was frequently occupied with work, while his mother, a civil servant, had been assigned to another island. Consequently, NOU spent most of his time living with his grandmother in Yogyakarta, with limited direct emotional support from his parents. Over time, he came to understand that the gang operated with an organised structure and strict internal regulations. New members were required to undergo an orientation process, locally referred to as *tatrap*, which included taking an oath before the gang leader to obey the group's rules. These rules prohibited members from leaving the gang or disclosing its secrets, and required participation in *rese* activities, that is, creating riots or engaging in *klithih*, typically carried out on Sundays or holidays. Members were also expected to possess sharp weapons, demonstrate bravery by using them to

		injure opponents, collect school uniforms taken from rivals during fights, and recruit new members. Violations of these rules were sanctioned through physical punishment by other members. During his initial orientation, NOU displayed considerable courage by slashing and injuring opponents with sharp weapons without apparent fear. This behaviour led other members to view him as a dominant figure. When the previous coordinator's leadership term ended, NOU was then trusted and appointed as Gang Coordinator, the highest position in the gang hierarchy, giving him substantial authority over group activities, decision making, and strategic planning.
2	REY	REY stated that his gang involvement was driven initially by feelings of loneliness at home. Ongoing parental conflict that ultimately resulted in divorce created an atmosphere in which he felt uncomfortable within his own family. He described feeling emotionally neglected, believing that his views were not heard and that he had no one with whom he could share his feelings. The accumulation of these experiences left him emotionally exhausted and deprived of a psychological "safe space". In this context, REY sought escape through increased social interaction outside the home and eventually decided to join a gang at school. According to REY, the gang offered a sense of acceptance and belonging that he did not experience in his family. To release his anger and psychological distress, he began participating in after-school brawls with his gang peers. He also reported having been apprehended by the police during one such incident, yet this experience did not deter him. Instead, he felt that his status in the group improved, as he was perceived as more respected and "recognised". Within the gang structure, REY held the roles of *JONGKI* and fighter, positions that reflect active and direct involvement in violent confrontations.
3	VAR	VAR explained that his initial involvement in gang-related brawls also emerged from recurrent feelings of loneliness at home, particularly during his free time. VAR perceived that his parents did not fully trust him; he felt that they frequently doubted or did not take him seriously. This lack of perceived trust led to disappointment and contributed to his preference for spending time outside the home with peers of the same age. In this peer environment, VAR became accustomed to hanging out and socialising regularly. From this routine, he was invited to join a paid gang group associated with football supporter activities. After joining, VAR began actively participating in fights and brawls carried out according to "jobs" or assignments given by the group. Within the gang structure, he occupied the position of *JONGKI*, a field-level member directly involved in violent acts. This pattern suggests that VAR's involvement in gang brawls was shaped by a need for social acceptance and a means of expressing disappointment towards his family context. In addition to participating in fights, VAR admitted that he often channelled anger and emotional tension through acts of vandalism, such as graffiti or damaging public facilities, which he regarded as a way to express anger and dissatisfaction that he found difficult to communicate verbally.
4	ASF	ASF reported that his gang involvement began with the habit of spending time with close friends at school. Initially, he assumed that these gatherings were simply opportunities to socialise. Over time, however, he was introduced to higher-risk behaviours, including alcohol consumption and participation in

		klithih (street violence) with the group. His involvement deepened as he began attending regular gang meetings. ASF stated that his parents granted him considerable freedom; he did not experience strict restrictions on staying out late at night. He even noted that his father allowed him to drink alcohol, provided he was not driving. Despite this rule, ASF once chose to ride a motorcycle while intoxicated and was involved in an accident, during which he hit three elderly individuals. This incident illustrates a pronounced lack of self-control and limited consideration of the risks and social consequences of his behaviour. Within the gang structure, ASF held the positions of *JONGKI* and FIGHTER, indicating an active role in brawls and *klithih* activities.
5	BAG	BAG described his gang involvement as emerging from feelings of irritation and constraint at home. He portrayed his father as a strict figure who enforced rigid rules, such as prohibitions against going out at night. Additionally, his mother exercised close monitoring, for example by requiring BAG to make video calls every time he went out with friends. This combination of high parental control and limited space for self-expression left him feeling frustrated and uncomfortable at home. In an effort to obtain a sense of freedom, BAG began seeking ways to leave the house secretly, including sneaking out through the window at night. These activities eventually exposed him to gang groups. BAG then became accustomed to joining his friends in the middle of the night and engaging in *klithih* or street violence as a means of releasing anger and asserting the freedom that he perceived as lacking at home. In the gang structure, he served as *JONGKI*, that is, an active field member directly participating in *klithih* as both rider and executor. This pattern suggests that BAG's involvement in brawls and *klithih* behaviour functions as a form of compensation for emotional distress arising from overly restrictive parenting practices.
6	KEV	KEV explained that his gang involvement began when a friend invited him to participate in a revenge fight that originated from his friend's prior conflict. This episode marked the starting point of his broader engagement with a gang network. KEV further reported feeling uncomfortable at home because family relationships were tense. His father was strict, and there were frequent disputes between his father and older brother. This situation made KEV feel pressured and led him to experience greater comfort in his peer group. Within this peer circle, KEV participated in several brawls and *klithih* activities alongside his gang friends. In the gang structure, he occupied the positions of *JONGKI* and FIGHTER, reflecting active involvement in field-based violence and street assaults.
7	RIF	RIF stated that his involvement in gangs began in junior high school, when he often joined friends in various activities outside school hours. As the only child of parents who both worked as factory employees, he spent much of his time at home alone. The limited presence and attention of his parents led him to seek more intensive social interaction outside the home, particularly with peers. Over time, RIF became more deeply involved with peer groups that later invited him to engage in *klithih* and brawls. His courage in fighting, especially in one-on-one duels, earned him the nickname "Gladiator" from his gang friends. This nickname not only signalled peer recognition but also underscored his central role within the gang. Structurally, RIF served as FIGHTER and GLADIATOR,

positions that designate members who play a primary role in physical confrontations while carrying the name and reputation of the gang.

Field data also show that within the structure of groups or gangs involved in brawls and *klithih* in Yogyakarta high schools, specific informal roles or nicknames are attached to members. These include "fighter," "jongki," "coordinator," and "gladiator." Each role carries distinct functions and status in group dynamics. The term "fighter" refers to members who play the main role in direct confrontations, such as those at the front line during brawls or those who ride motorcycles during *klithih* attacks. The "jongki" are members carried by the fighters and usually act as executors or carriers of sharp weapons. "Coordinators" function as strategists, decision-makers, and leaders who direct group movements and attacks. "Gladiators" are members recognized for their superior fighting ability and mental toughness; they are often selected to engage in one-on-one duels as representatives of their gang in symbolic fights with rival groups. The gladiator role becomes a symbol of honor and prestige within the group. This organizational structure indicates that violent acts committed by adolescents in the form of brawls and *klithih* are not merely spontaneous or impulsive, but represent a type of collective action that is organized, role-differentiated, and embedded in a hierarchy of status and group identity.

The field findings further reveal a spiritual dimension. All seven subjects reported that they often missed the obligation of performing the five daily prayers. The spiritual domain plays an important role in shaping adolescents' self-regulation and behavioral control. In this study, all respondents acknowledged that they did not consistently perform the obligatory prayers, and they tended to neglect or postpone them. This irregularity indicates a weak spiritual attachment that may undermine psychological resilience and moral integrity. Torralba et al. (2021) argue that adolescents' engagement in religious practices can strengthen emotional regulation and serve as a psychological resource in dealing with social pressure and inner conflict. Religious coping is considered an important pathway for maintaining mental health and reducing tendencies toward aggression. Several other studies support this view, showing that spiritual practices such as prayer and meditation contribute meaningfully to emotion regulation and empathy. Brandão (2025), through a systematic review, identified a positive association between religiosity and the use of adaptive emotion-regulation strategies such as cognitive reappraisal. Cross-cultural research by Vishkin et al.

(2019) in the United States, Israel, and Turkey found that individuals with higher religiosity are more likely to use adaptive strategies, including reappraisal and acceptance, and less likely to rely on maladaptive strategies such as rumination. In the context of university students, Graça and Brandão (2024) showed that spiritual involvement enhances psychological well-being through emotion-regulation coping strategies. Surzykiewicz et al. (2024) further found that spiritual sensitivity fully mediates the relationship between empathy and aggression; when spiritual variables are included, the negative association between empathy and aggression becomes non-significant, indicating full mediation.

On the basis of the narratives of the seven subjects, it can be concluded that involvement in brawls and *klithih* among high school students in Yogyakarta does not occur suddenly, but rather emerges from an accumulation of complex psychosocial conditions. Most subjects report similar emotional experiences, including feelings of loneliness, a lack of emotional warmth within the family, and difficulty expressing emotions in healthy ways. Family conflict, authoritarian or excessively permissive parenting, and the absence of responsive caregivers contribute to psychological vulnerability. In this context, gangs and peer groups become avenues of escape that provide acceptance, recognition, and a space to express repressed emotions, even when this expression takes destructive forms. The subjects also tend to normalize violence as a legitimate means of problem solving and self-assertion, which points to disturbances in emotion regulation and empathy. Their involvement in street violence and brawls should therefore not be viewed merely as juvenile delinquency, but as a manifestation of unmet psychological needs within their immediate environment, particularly the family.

This study shows that difficulties in managing negative emotions such as anger, resentment, frustration, and social pressure contribute directly to empathy dysfunction. The subjects tend to respond to emotional distress in impulsive and destructive ways, without adequately considering the consequences for others. Empathy that is not combined with emotional regulation and self-control can intensify aggressive motivation. These findings are consistent with Wang et al. (2023), who examined affective empathy, sympathy, personal distress, anger proneness, and physical aggression in 663 students. Their study showed that affective empathy can indirectly inhibit physical aggression by increasing sympathy, but it can also indirectly promote physical aggression through the sequential

mediation of personal distress and anger proneness. Parallel to these results, the mean empathy scores of students involved in brawls and *klithih* in this study indicate that cognitive empathy is lower than affective empathy.

Kahhale et al. (2024) further highlight the importance of empathy type. Somatic empathy appears to protect adolescents from aggressive behavior, whereas affective empathy is positively associated with reactive aggression when not accompanied by adequate emotional control. These studies underscore that empathy that is restricted to in-group members and is not supported by healthy emotional regulation is likely to function dysfunctionally and may even intensify motivations for violence as a form of revenge or emotional release. Geiger et al. (2025) similarly report that when individuals are able to understand others' thoughts (mentalizing), share others' emotions (emotional sharing), or feel concern for them, they are more likely to choose socially oriented strategies such as validation and comforting. In contrast, when they experience high personal distress in response to others' emotions, they tend to adopt self-protective strategies such as cognitive reappraisal and emotional avoidance and are less likely to engage in interpersonal support. These findings imply that not all forms of empathy promote prosocial responses; the specific type of empathy experienced plays a crucial role in shaping emotional regulation and social behavior.

The results of this study are also in line with the findings of Romero et al. (2024), who examined the relationships among empathy, personality, and aggression in 197 adolescents. They found that cognitive empathy reduces instrumental aggression (both physical and verbal), whereas neuroticism is a strong predictor of affective aggression, such as anger and hostility, in both boys and girls. These findings converge with the present results, which show that difficulties in regulating negative emotions, including anger, resentment, frustration, and social pressure, can exacerbate empathy dysfunction and increase the likelihood of aggressive acts. Neuroticism can therefore be understood as a dispositional tendency toward poor emotion management that undermines adaptive empathy and strengthens aggressive impulses. Empathy dysfunction is thus not simply the absence of empathy, but arises from an imbalance between empathy and emotional control, which underscores the need for interventions that prioritize the development of negative emotion management as a prerequisite for empathy to function adaptively.

The analysis of factors leading to adolescent involvement in brawls and *klithih* in Yogyakarta high schools shows that non-conducive family conditions—characterized by weak parental supervision, lack of emotional warmth, and limited opportunities to channel stress or anger—make a significant contribution to such involvement. These findings are consistent with Creemers et al. (2024) and Rosyidah et al. (2023), who argue that a combination of parenting factors such as parental monitoring and emotional closeness jointly predicts the risk of juvenile delinquency. Astridge et al. (2023), in a systematic review, also report that 39 percent of juvenile offenders have experienced more than one adverse childhood experience (ACE) and are more likely to engage in repeated violent acts. This pattern suggests that gangs and peer networks outside the home often become spaces for emotional escape that partially substitute for family functions, although in maladaptive and destructive ways.

This study also demonstrates recurring patterns of emotional experience among adolescents involved in brawls and *klithih*, including feelings of loneliness, lack of emotional warmth in the family, and difficulty channeling emotions in healthy ways. Family conflict, authoritarian or excessively permissive parenting styles, and the absence of responsive caregivers contribute to the psychological vulnerability of these adolescents. Figure 2 illustrates the process through which brawling behavior emerges as an outcome of empathy dysfunction shaped by psychosocial factors.

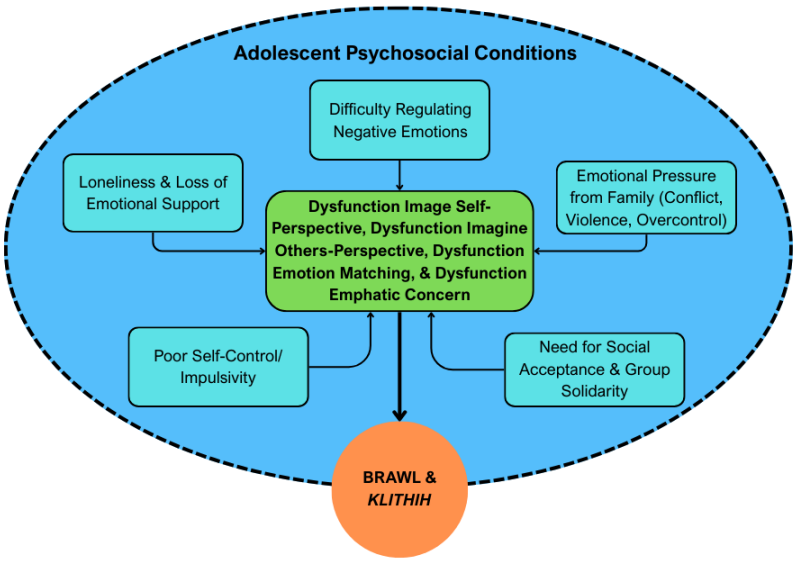

Figure 2. Illustration of the process by which brawling behavior develops as a consequence of empathy dysfunction influenced by psychosocial factors

Feelings of loneliness and the absence of emotional warmth in the family can heighten the risk of aggressive behavior. Herd et al. (2023) found that negative parenting in adolescence, such as excessive control and criticism, undermines emotion regulation and leads to externalizing symptoms, including aggression and health-risk behaviors, in young adulthood. Consistent with this, Zhong et al. (2024) in China reported that negative parenting is closely linked to low basic empathy and a greater tendency to side with bullies rather than protect victims. Comparable evidence from Brunei shows that adults who reported emotional abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction in childhood also experienced high levels of peer violence such as bullying and fights, indicating that early maltreatment can reinforce aggressive norms and undermine sensitivity to others' suffering in later social relationships (Sulaiman et al., 2024). Boullion et al. (2023) showed that parental warmth, expressed through affection and emotional support, facilitates adolescents' use of adaptive emotion-regulation strategies, such as cognitive reappraisal, which in turn reduces both internalizing symptoms (for example, anxiety) and externalizing problems, including aggression. Conversely, authoritarian or overly permissive parenting exacerbates emotion dysregulation. Longitudinal research by Rademacher et al. (2023) demonstrated a direct relationship between authoritarian parenting and increased child aggression, largely due to insufficient development of emotional skills. The present study similarly finds that adolescents involved in brawls and *klithih* tend to normalize violence as a way of solving problems and proving themselves, which reflects disturbances in emotion regulation and empathy. Prior research has already indicated that unresponsive parenting and minimal emotional bonding within the family can hinder the development of empathy and heighten the risk of aggressive and antisocial behavior (Zhong et al., 2024; Boullion et al., 2023).

Taken together, the accumulation of psychosocial stressors such as loneliness, emotional neglect, and experiences of violence or excessive parental control shapes adolescents' emotional vulnerability and social interactions. When their capacities for emotional regulation and empathy are low, and when emotional expression lacks constructive outlets, peer violence in the form of brawls and *klithih* becomes a readily normalized, maladaptive strategy for venting emotions and proving oneself.

Findings from several national studies indicate that emotional intelligence plays a pivotal role in shaping empathy and adaptive social behavior among adolescents. Amanda

et al. (2024) report that students with higher emotional intelligence show stronger learning motivation and more positive social relationships, which enhances their sensitivity to others' feelings. This aligns with findings that students with more mature emotional intelligence are better able to express emotions in healthy ways and engage in constructive social behavior (Andryani et al., 2022; Arrohmah & Prabawa, 2023). In contexts of deviant behavior such as school brawls and street violence (*klithih*), an inability to regulate emotions often acts as a primary trigger, as negative emotions such as anger, frustration, or feeling offended are not processed adaptively but discharged through physical aggression. Asih and Pratiwi (2024) emphasize that emotional maturity fostered through social interaction, including cooperative learning, can cultivate more reflective forms of empathy that are essential for reducing interpersonal and intergroup conflict. Rozifa and Qodliyah (2025) also show that emotion-focused interventions, such as the use of emotion cards, can effectively enhance emotional awareness and social skills from an early age, thereby providing a preventive foundation against the later emergence of aggressive behaviors in adolescence. By contrast, low levels of empathy and emotional intelligence are associated with an increased likelihood of bullying and peer violence (Tawaa & Silaen, 2020). These findings suggest that deficits in emotional understanding and regulation lie at the root of deviant behaviors such as brawls and *klithih*, whereas strengthening emotional intelligence and empathy offers a strategic pathway for prevention and rehabilitation.

The novelty of this study lies in its in-depth examination of empathy among Muslim adolescents involved in brawls and street violence (*klithih*), a topic that has received limited attention in previous research. In contrast to studies that rely primarily on quantitative scores, this research integrates quantitative assessment with rich qualitative data from seven adolescents who were directly involved in violent incidents. This mixed-methods approach makes it possible to uncover underlying psychosocial conditions that shape empathy dysfunction, including emotional deprivation, family conflict, peer dynamics, and emotion-regulation difficulties, dimensions that are often overlooked in standard measurement approaches. The findings also provide a substantive basis for designing contextually grounded counseling interventions tailored to the actual needs of high-risk youth.

The study contributes to a deeper understanding of the psychological dynamics of adolescents involved in brawls and *klithih* at the high school level in Yogyakarta City,

particularly with respect to empathy dysfunction and the factors driving violent behavior. The identification of low consistency in performing religious obligations and the reliance on maladaptive emotion-regulation patterns highlights the need for holistic and context-sensitive intervention models. The present findings can serve as a preliminary reference for developing counseling approaches that focus not only on behavioral change but also on character formation and broader psychological well-being. One promising direction is a counseling model based on eudaimonic well-being. Rather than emphasizing short-term pleasure, this approach prioritizes the realization of personal potential, a deep sense of life meaning, and the cultivation of healthy and meaningful relationships. Ryff (1989) identifies six core dimensions of eudaimonic well-being—self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, and autonomy—all of which are highly relevant for adolescent perpetrators of violence who need support in building empathy, emotional control, and a more positive and future-oriented life perspective.

This study, however, has several limitations. The sample was restricted to schools in Yogyakarta City, which limits the generalizability of the findings to adolescents in other regions with different sociocultural contexts. The analysis also focused primarily on individual psychological factors, while broader structural influences such as the school environment, community context, and institutional roles were not examined in a systematic manner. Future research is therefore recommended to broaden the participant pool to include adolescents from diverse regions, to deepen the analysis of structural factors that contribute to empathy dysfunction and youth violence, and to adopt participatory approaches that actively involve students, teachers, and school communities. Such efforts would generate a more holistic and applicable understanding of how empathy, emotion regulation, and social context interact in the development and prevention of adolescent violence.

CONCLUSION

This study advances previous work by offering a more fine-grained account of empathy dysfunction grounded in in-depth qualitative data from adolescents directly engaged in violent behavior, a dimension that has received limited attention in research relying primarily on quantitative measures. By integrating emotional, familial, and spiritual determinants, the study proposes a more comprehensive psychosocial framework for

understanding adolescent aggression. Nonetheless, the findings should be interpreted with caution, given the small sample size and the specific sociocultural setting, which may limit the extent to which the results can be generalized. Future research would benefit from including larger and more diverse samples and from examining longitudinally how counseling interventions shape empathy development and subsequent behavioral change. The results have important implications for policy, intervention, and education, especially for the design of school-based counseling models targeting high-risk adolescents. Group counseling approaches informed by the concept of eudaimonic well-being appear particularly promising, as they emphasize self-understanding, emotional regulation, meaningful interpersonal relationships, and a coherent sense of life purpose. Such models not only address key psychosocial drivers of youth violence but also support the formation of adolescents who are more empathic, reflective, and purpose-oriented.

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