

Why do Indonesian survivors of school bullying trade a fixed mindset for a calling to become the counselors who once failed them?

Hendro Yulius Suryo Putro

hendro.putro@ulm.ac.id

Universitas Lambung Mangkurat

Noor Ainah

Universitas Lambung Mangkurat

Sulistiyana Sulistiyana

Universitas Lambung Mangkurat

Muhamad Fajar Riva'i

Universitas Lambung Mangkurat

Research Article

Keywords: School bullying, Mindset, Institutional betrayal, Posttraumatic growth, Wounded healer, Counselor education, Indonesia

Posted Date: October 27th, 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-11298742/v1>

License:   This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

[Read Full License](#)

Additional Declarations: No competing interests reported.

Abstract

Survivors of school bullying are often expected to carry lasting self-doubt, yet some go on to train for the profession meant to protect students like them. This phenomenological study asked why. We interviewed eight Indonesian undergraduates in a guidance and counseling program, each with a history of chronic school bullying lasting one to five years, analyzed the transcripts through a phenomenologically informed thematic procedure supported by NVivo 15, and read the accounts through mindset theory. Four themes emerged. First, victimization was experienced as compounded betrayal, including one account in which a school counselor disclosed a student's identity as a reporter. Second, bullying labels functioned as verdicts on fixed traits: all eight participants recalled a global, fixed judgment of their former self, and some hid their abilities, in one case by deliberately lowering grades. Third, recovery was rehearsed through self-regulation, behavioral practice, professional help, and an accepting peer community, and was accompanied by growing beliefs that ability and worth can change. Fourth, seven participants extended this belief to others and framed becoming a counselor as a reparative project. The path from victim to counselor therefore appears to run through a shift from fixed self-verdicts toward a malleable view of self and others, a shift that institutional betrayal can obstruct and supportive peers can enable. Two participants reported little lasting impact, and mindsets were inferred rather than measured. Implications for confidentiality safeguards, mindset-informed support, and the supervision of wounded healers in counselor education are discussed.

1 Introduction

Bullying remains one of the most persistent threats to students' well-being in Indonesian schools. In the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), 41% of Indonesian 15-year-olds reported being bullied at least a few times a month, compared with an average of 23% across countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) [1]. Prevalence across Southeast Asia is similarly high, yet the region remains under-represented in international bullying research [2]. National case records continue to register thousands of incidents each year, including 204 cases in South Kalimantan, the province in which this study was conducted [3]. These figures describe the scale of the problem; they say little about what happens to victims after the bullying stops.

Evidence from longitudinal cohorts suggests that the consequences rarely stop with the bullying. Childhood victimization predicts anxiety, depression, and poorer social and economic functioning well into adulthood, even after adjustment for pre-existing vulnerabilities [4–11]. Indonesian studies converge on a narrower but consistent finding: students who have been bullied report lower self-confidence than their peers [12–15], a pattern also observed among university students [16]. However, this local evidence is almost entirely cross-sectional and correlational. It establishes that confidence is lower among victims, but not how confidence is lost, defended, or rebuilt, nor how victims interpret these processes as they move from school into higher education [17, 18].

Three further gaps limit the usefulness of existing work for educators. The first concerns institutions. School-based bullying research has largely cast teachers and counselors as potential protectors whose task is to detect and intervene. Far less attention has been paid to situations in which the adults charged with protection compound the harm. Smith and Freyd [19] described such situations as institutional betrayal: failures by a trusted institution to prevent or respond supportively to wrongdoing, which can worsen psychological outcomes beyond the original injury [20]. In Indonesian schools, guidance and counseling teachers (*guru bimbingan dan konseling*, or *guru BK*) are the designated first responders to bullying, and their professional codes treat confidentiality as non-negotiable [21]. Recent curriculum reforms in Indonesia have shifted pedagogical vocabulary without substantially addressing students' psychological safety [22], which makes the conduct of school counselors a particularly consequential point of failure or protection.

The second gap concerns the beliefs through which victims interpret what happened to them. Mindset research distinguishes an entity theory, the belief that personal qualities such as intelligence or personality are fixed, from an incremental theory, the belief that they can be developed [23, 24]. Adolescents who hold an entity theory tend to read peer victimization as evidence of permanent deficiency in themselves or others, and they respond with more stress, vengeance, and withdrawal [25–27]. Brief interventions teaching that people can change have reduced aggression and depressive symptoms after victimization [26]. More broadly, entity beliefs have been associated with more mental health problems in young people [28] and with less effective self-regulation [29]. Seen through this lens, bullying is a sustained campaign of entity messages: labels such as “dwarf,” “hypocrite,” or “traitor” present a quality as a fixed truth about the target. Yet research on mindsets and victimization is almost entirely experimental or correlational, conducted largely in North America and Europe, and focused on short-term outcomes. Little is known about how victims' beliefs about their own malleability are shaped over years of bullying, how they are reworked in early adulthood, or how they relate to later career choices. Because the effects of mindset interventions are modest and vary across contexts [30–32], understanding the lived process of belief change is more, not less, important.

The third gap concerns what victims do with their experiences. Posttraumatic growth (PTG) refers to positive psychological change that arises from the struggle with highly challenging circumstances, including new life possibilities, closer relationships, and a greater sense of personal strength [33, 34]. Related work on altruism born of suffering suggests that some survivors of victimization become unusually motivated to protect others [35, 36]. In the helping professions, this motivation has long been described through the figure of the wounded healer, whose lived experience can deepen empathy but can also produce over-identification and boundary difficulties if left unexamined [37]. Surveys of psychotherapists indicate that personal experiences of distress are a common motive for entering the profession [38]. Students in counselor education programs are therefore a theoretically strategic population: they are simultaneously survivors of school-based harm and future custodians of the very systems that failed or protected them. To our knowledge, no study has examined how Indonesian pre-service counselors with histories of school bullying narrate this double position.

This study addresses these gaps through a phenomenological inquiry with undergraduates in a guidance and counseling program who had experienced chronic bullying at school. Three research questions guided the study: (1) How do students experience and make sense of chronic school bullying in retrospect? (2) What residual effects do they perceive on their self-confidence in higher education? (3) How do they describe their recovery, and how does it relate to their professional aspirations? Put simply, the study asks why survivors of school bullying would choose to join the profession that once failed them, and whether a shift in mindset helps to explain that choice. It aims to contribute (a) a process-level account of how bullying-related self-doubt is enacted and reworked, (b) an empirical illustration of institutional betrayal within school counseling, (c) a mindset account of how bullying labels instill fixed self-verdicts and how recovery is accompanied by incremental beliefs that participants extend to others, and (d) implications for counselor education programs that enroll students whose career choice is rooted in their own victimization.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Bullying and the erosion of self-efficacy

Following Olweus [39], bullying is defined here as intentional aggression that is repeated over time and occurs within a relationship marked by an imbalance of power. Subsequent work has emphasized that bullying is embedded in the social ecology of schools rather than confined to perpetrator–victim dyads [40–43]. To explain how such experiences shape confidence, we draw on Bandura’s self-efficacy theory [44, 45], which identifies four sources of efficacy beliefs: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and affective states. Bullying plausibly corrupts all four. It converts attempts at participation into experiences of failure, exposes victims to models of helplessness, supplies a stream of degrading verbal persuasion, and conditions anxious arousal in social situations. Self-efficacy theory also implies a route to recovery, since each source can in principle be rebuilt.

2.2 Institutional betrayal

Betrayal trauma theory proposes that harm is intensified when it is perpetrated or enabled by those on whom a person depends [46]. Smith and Freyd [19] extended this logic to institutions, arguing that when trusted organizations fail to prevent harm, respond dismissively, or punish those who report, victims experience an additional injury that undermines trust in the system itself. School counseling is a clear case of a trust-dependent institution: students disclose bullying on the expectation that their identity and information will be protected [21]. We use the concept as a sensitizing lens to interpret accounts in which school responses appeared to worsen rather than relieve victimization.

2.3 Coping, growth, and the wounded healer

Lazarus and Folkman’s transactional model [47] distinguishes emotion-focused coping, which regulates distress, from problem-focused coping, which acts on the stressor or one’s capacity to meet it; both forms have been documented among Indonesian adolescents who have been bullied [48]. PTG theory

adds that some individuals do more than return to baseline, reporting changes in relationships, priorities, and identity that they attribute to the struggle itself [33, 34, 49]. Herman's notion of a survivor mission [50] and the literature on altruism born of suffering [35, 36] describe how such growth can take a prosocial form. The wounded-healer literature cautions that this form carries risks as well as resources for practitioners [37].

2.4 Mindsets as a lens on victimization and recovery

Implicit theories, popularly called mindsets, are lay beliefs about whether human qualities are fixed or can be developed [23, 24]. They are domain-specific: a person may believe that intelligence can grow while believing that personality, or other people's character, cannot. Entity beliefs orient individuals toward proving or protecting a supposedly fixed quality and toward avoiding situations that might expose it, whereas incremental beliefs orient them toward learning and treat setbacks as information rather than verdicts [23, 51]. Mindset theory complements self-efficacy theory. Efficacy beliefs concern what one can do now; implicit theories concern whether that capacity can change, and therefore how new mastery experiences are interpreted. Incremental beliefs about people also matter socially, because they make it reasonable to expect that peers, aggressors, and institutions can change [26, 51]. Consistent with a phenomenological stance, none of these frameworks was used to generate codes. They were brought into dialogue with the data after initial coding. Mindset theory entered at the interpretive stage, when participants' comparisons of their past and present selves repeatedly turned on whether qualities were fixed or changeable.

3 Methods

3.1 Design and researcher positionality

We used a descriptive phenomenological design, which seeks to describe the essential structure of a shared lived experience as participants understand it [52, 53]. The study is reported in line with the Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research [54]. The research team comprised two lecturers in the Department of Guidance and Counseling who supervised the study (HYSP, with training in psychology, and NA) and an undergraduate student in the same program as the participants (MFR), who conducted the interviews. MFR's insider position facilitated rapport and disclosure but also created a risk that shared assumptions about the program would be read into the data [55]. To reduce this risk, preliminary interpretations were discussed with both supervisors during documented supervision meetings, and claims that drew on program-specific experiences were checked against participants' own wording. To limit the influence of staff-student power relations, interviews were conducted by a peer rather than by teaching staff.

3.2 Setting and participants

The study took place at Universitas Lambung Mangkurat, a public university in Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan. Participants were selected through purposive sampling. A brief online screening

questionnaire (13 items rated on a four-point agreement scale) on bullying experiences, their duration, and current self-confidence was circulated among undergraduates in the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education and received 31 responses. Most respondents agreed that they had been targets of verbal bullying (n = 28, 90.3%), and more than half agreed that they had been deliberately excluded or targeted by gossip (n = 18, 58.1%), whereas physical bullying (n = 7, 22.6%) and cyberbullying (n = 1, 3.2%) were less common. Nine respondents (29.0%) agreed that their victimization had lasted more than six months. The responses also pointed to fragile social confidence in this wider group: 45.2% disagreed that they felt comfortable meeting new people and 38.7% disagreed that they were not easily made insecure by mockery, whereas every respondent agreed that they could complete the tasks they faced (Fig. 1). Interview participants were recruited from this pool.

Inclusion criteria were (a) current enrollment as an undergraduate, (b) self-reported repeated victimization at primary or secondary school lasting at least one year, and (c) a perception at recruitment that the experience still affected them. Eight students (coded F1–F8) met the criteria and consented. All were 20 years old and enrolled in the guidance and counseling program. Their reported victimization lasted between one and approximately five years and occurred between Grade 4 of primary school and senior high school (Table 1; Fig. 2).

Sample adequacy was judged by information power rather than saturation [56]. The study aim was narrow, all participants held dense and specific experience of the phenomenon, and the interviews were extensive, which together justify a small sample. The sample also falls within the range commonly recommended for phenomenological studies [52].

Table 1
Participant characteristics and victimization histories as reported at interview

Code	School level	Duration	Dominant forms (participant's description)	Frequency
F1	Grade 4 to Grade 8	~ 5 years	Verbal labels ("bookworm," "skinny," "show-off"); exclusion; false accusations; belongings hidden or thrown	Almost daily
F2	Junior to senior high school	4 years	Relational exclusion after a misunderstanding, instigated by a former close friend	Almost weekly
F3	Junior high school	~ 2 years	Verbal insults; near-physical assault; belongings and chair hidden	Almost daily
F4	Junior high school (selective class)	3 years	Religious-identity labels ("holier-than-thou," "hypocrite"); exclusion orchestrated by an instigator	Almost daily
F5	Junior high school	1.5 years	Social punishment and labels ("snitch," "traitor") after the school counselor disclosed F5's identity as a reporter	Almost daily
F6	Junior to senior high school	~ 3 years	Ridicule of skin color, appearance, and perceived wealth, including on social media	Weekly
F7	Senior high school	1 year	Repeated dismissal and belittling remarks by a close friend ("annoying," "nag")	Almost daily
F8	Grade 4 to Grade 8	~ 4 years	Body shaming related to height ("shorty," "dwarf")	Almost weekly

All participants were 20 years old at interview. Durations and frequencies are participants' retrospective estimates. Grades 7–9 correspond to junior high school (SMP) and Grades 10–12 to senior high school (SMA) in Indonesia.

3.3 Data collection

Data were collected through individual, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews conducted in Indonesian in an outdoor seating area on campus between 13 and 16 April 2026. Each participant was interviewed once. The interview guide was developed by the authors from the literature and the research questions. An initial version of 18 questions covered three domains: experiences of bullying, self-confidence, and long-term effects. The guide was then reviewed by an expert in guidance and counseling from the same department (18 September 2025), who rated it usable with revisions. The reviewer recommended adding questions on coping and adaptation and a closing reflective question, and suggested probes on post-bullying social interaction and on how participants view themselves now compared with the past. Two questions were added accordingly, yielding a final guide of 20 questions across five domains (Supplementary File 2). Interviews were audio-recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim. Figure 3 shows the interview setting and the consent form signed by participants.

3.4 Data analysis

Analysis followed the phenomenological procedure described by Creswell and Poth [52], adapted from Moustakas [53], with thematic organization informed by Braun and Clarke [57, 58]. Transcripts were first read in full and annotated with analytic memos. Significant statements about the experience of bullying, its aftermath, and recovery were then identified and coded in NVivo 15, producing 20 codes and 123 coding references organized under three parent nodes that corresponded to the research questions. In the next step, codes were clustered into units of meaning and refined through team discussion. During refinement, codes describing career motivation and change-agent identity formed a coherent pattern distinct from coping, and were separated into a fourth theme. At the interpretive stage, participants' before-and-after accounts (interview questions 15 and 16 in particular) were reread with mindset theory as a sensitizing lens, attending to whether ability, worth, and other people were described as fixed or changeable; this lens was not used during data collection. Finally, textural descriptions (what participants experienced) and structural descriptions (the conditions under which they experienced it) were written for each theme. Code frequencies are reported in Table 2 to show the density of the coded material; they are not treated as indicators of importance. Quotations were translated from Indonesian by the authors, and, following recommendations for transparent cross-language qualitative research [59], original-language excerpts are provided in Supplementary File 1. The overall procedure is summarized in Fig. 4.

3.5 Trustworthiness

Credibility, dependability, and confirmability were addressed following Lincoln and Guba [60]. Member checking was conducted with participants to confirm that the interpretations reflected their experience [61]. Accounts were compared across all eight participants to distinguish shared from idiosyncratic meanings, and cases that diverged from the dominant pattern were retained and reported. Peer debriefing took place during supervision with HYSF and NA, and an audit trail of the NVivo project, memos, and coding decisions was maintained.

3.6 Ethical considerations

The study followed the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Ethical approval was granted by the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Lambung Mangkurat, in accordance with the faculty's procedure for research involving its students (letter no. 103/UNS.1.2/PL.01/2026, issued on 20 January 2026 by the Vice Dean for Academic Affairs on behalf of the Dean). Before the interviews (13–16 April 2026), each participant signed a written informed consent form stating that participation was voluntary and free from coercion, that their data would be kept confidential and accessible only to the researchers, and that files containing identifying information would be used only for data processing and destroyed when no longer needed. Identifying details have been removed, and participants are referred to by codes.

4 Findings

Four themes describe the structure of participants’ experience: being betrayed twice, hiding to survive, rehearsing safety, and becoming the counselor they never had. Table 2 shows how the NVivo codes map onto these themes. Although the themes are presented in sequence, participants did not describe a clean progression. Residual vigilance and growth-oriented narratives frequently coexisted in the same account.

Table 2
Themes, constituent codes, and coding references

Theme	Constituent codes (coding references)	Total references
1 Betrayed twice	Verbal bullying (12); Social/relational bullying (8); Physical bullying and intimidation (4); Pattern of incidents (6); Participants’ criteria for recognizing bullying (5); Emotions during victimization (7); Initial responses (5)	47
2 Hiding to survive	Academic self-confidence (8); Speaking up (5); Social interaction (7); Social anxiety (6); Self-perception and self-worth (6); Behavioral change (4)	36
3 Rehearsing safety	Self-strengthening (6); Managing anxiety (5); Academic and social preparation (5); Social support (10); Professional help (4)	30
4 Becoming the counselor I never had	Academic and career motivation (5); Change-agent identity (5)	10
Total	20 codes	123

Coding references indicate the density of coded material and should not be read as measures of prevalence or importance.

Figures 5 and 6 visualize the same coding structure. The treemap shows the relative density of each code within its theme, and the coding map shows how codes were organized under the four themes and the research questions. Figure 7 presents the NVivo word-frequency cloud generated from the Indonesian transcripts. Words such as pengalaman (experience), perundungan and bullying, merasa and perasaan (to feel, feelings), kampus (campus), percaya (confidence, trust), motivasi (motivation), and dampak (impact) dominate the cloud, which is consistent with participants’ emphasis on the emotional aftermath of bullying and its carry-over into university life. Because the cloud was generated from complete transcripts, it also contains interviewer prompts such as ceritakan (tell) and jelaskan (explain), and it is therefore offered as a descriptive overview rather than as analytic evidence.

4.1 Theme 1: Betrayed twice

Participants described bullying as chronic, layered, and inescapable rather than as a series of discrete incidents. Six of the eight reported victimization occurring between daily and weekly over periods of two

years or more. For F1, the duration itself became part of the injury:

“Almost every day for nearly five years, from Grade 4 to Grade 8. It felt so long because every morning I was already afraid to go to school.” (F1)

Verbal attacks were the most common form and were rarely random. They targeted whatever made participants visible: height for F8, religious practice carried over from an Islamic boarding school for F4, skin color and perceived wealth for F6, and academic effort for F1 and F3, who were labeled show-offs. F8 recalled that classmates “deliberately stood next to me” to dramatize the difference in height. These labels did more than insult. Each named a supposedly permanent quality of the target, such as being short, a show-off, a hypocrite, or a snitch, and repetition made it feel like a fact; F6 described the cumulative result as never being good enough in the eyes of others. Relational aggression was experienced as a form of punishment without trial. F2 described being excluded after a misunderstanding: “They quietly distanced themselves from me without ever giving me a chance to explain... it felt like a social punishment with no clear end.” Physical intimidation was less frequent but shaped a constant sense of threat. F3 recalled that a classmate “almost slapped me in front of the class” after F3 refused to lend an assignment, and that books, bags, and even F3’s chair regularly disappeared.

Participants distinguished bullying from ordinary conflict using criteria that closely mirror the scholarly definition: repetition, the absence of any opportunity to clarify, and an evident intention to humiliate. F7’s account sits at the boundary of this definition. The aggressor was a close friend who repeatedly dismissed and belittled F7 in favor of a romantic partner, and F7 described the experience in the language of betrayal rather than domination. We retained this account because it shares the repetitive, humiliating, and relationally asymmetric structure of the others, but we note its distinct character.

The most consequential layer of betrayal came from the institution itself. After F5 reported classmates for truancy and cheating, the school counselor disclosed F5’s identity as the source of the report. The disclosure transformed an act of integrity into the trigger for 18 months of exclusion and labeling:

“Angry, disappointed, and betrayed... it felt like being betrayed twice, by the friend I reported and by the counseling teacher who was supposed to protect me.” (F5)

F5’s phrase gives this theme its name. In this account, the guidance and counseling system did not merely fail to stop bullying; it supplied the information that made the bullying possible.

4.2 Theme 2: Hiding to survive

The second theme captures how participants adapted to chronic victimization by making themselves less visible, and how these adaptations persisted after the bullying ended. The most striking adaptation was deliberate academic underperformance. F4, who had been mocked for religious practice and academic success in a selective class, explained: “I used to be afraid of getting good grades because I’d be called a show-off. I once deliberately lowered my grades.” F5, who had been accused of dishonesty,

developed a different defensive habit: at university, F5 keeps records of every stage of an assignment so that its authenticity can be demonstrated if challenged. Both strategies protected participants from renewed attack, but at the cost of the visible achievement on which confidence is built.

Silence functioned in the same way. Seven of the eight participants described having stayed silent in class during the period of victimization, and F8 recalled having been the quietest student in the room. In relationships, hiding took the form of vigilance. F5 described being “paranoid that someone would betray me again” and now gives new acquaintances “time to observe first before really opening up.” F7 waits for a friendship to prove consistent before calling anyone a close friend, and F3 remains wary of people with aggressive manners. For F8, the target of concealment was the body itself: “I used to hate my own body. I often prayed to be made taller.” F1 described a more global erosion of self-worth, recalling a period of feeling “worthless and always wrong.” When asked to compare themselves before and after the bullying, all eight participants described their former self in the language of global, fixed judgment: feeling worthless (F1), ashamed of being seen as strange (F2), small and weak (F3), unworthy of friendship (F4), guilty because of slander (F5), always wrong (F6), not good enough (F7), or hating one’s own body (F8). In this period, hiding made sense: if a quality is fixed and shameful, the safest strategy is not to display it.

These residues had not disappeared at the time of interview. F3 still experiences a racing heart when someone speaks harshly; F7 becomes anxious when a new friend grows close to others; and several participants described physiological arousal before speaking in front of unfamiliar audiences, which they linked explicitly to the fear of being judged on the same grounds as before. At the same time, the accounts show that these residues can be reworked. F8 is now “grateful for my body,” and F1 has come to understand that “my worth does not come from other people’s mockery.”

Two participants diverged from this pattern. F4 and F6 reported that their experiences had little current effect on their emotional life or social functioning at university, and F6 reported no effect on academic self-belief. F6 attributed the change to a sibling’s advice and to a deliberate shift in perspective before entering university. These negative cases indicate that long-term residues are neither uniform nor inevitable, even after years of victimization.

4.3 Theme 3: Rehearsing safety

Recovery was not described as something that happened to participants with the passage of time. It was described as work: deliberate, repeated, and often planned in advance of specific situations. At the internal level, participants used self-regulation techniques to manage the arousal they had learned to associate with social exposure. F1 “practiced in front of the mirror and told myself: ‘You are safe now.’” F2 used a grounding routine when anxiety rose, “look around, take a deep breath, and focus on one point.” F4 visualized an attentive, smiling audience before presentations; F5 used journaling and meditation; and F8 repeated a daily affirmation: “My height does not determine my worth.”

At the behavioral level, participants rehearsed the situations they feared. F2 brought small notes to presentations and attended public speaking training; F8 practiced in front of a mirror; and F3 role-played confrontations with trusted friends and used online resources to learn how to respond to verbal threats. Three participants (F1, F4, and F5) sought counseling or therapy, and F1 described recovery as a gradual exposure process: “I went to counseling, read self-help books, and slowly stepped out of my comfort zone.”

Alongside these practices, participants described a change in how they understood ability and failure. F2 came to see failure as normal and as something to learn from, and described turning the fear of failure into a reason to study harder. F4 shifted attention from final grades to the process of learning and building competence, and F8 concluded that ability is not measured by physical appearance. F1, in turn, had come to understand that personal worth is not fixed by other people’s mockery. These statements treat competence and worth as qualities that develop, rather than as fixed endowments exposed by every performance, and participants linked them directly to the experience of having practiced and improved.

The relational level was decisive in most accounts. Participants identified acceptance by peers in their study program as the condition that allowed rehearsed skills to take hold:

“My friends in the counseling program who always support me... They accept me as I am, without judging.” (F4)

F2 credited lecturers and peers in the program, and F7 and F8 described campus friendships free of ridicule as their main source of strength. Notably, the supportive environment that participants described was specific: a cohort trained in, and expected to practice, non-judgmental acceptance. Participants did not describe the wider university in the same terms, and the accounts therefore do not support claims about campus climate in general.

4.4 Theme 4: Becoming the counselor I never had

Seven of the eight participants linked their decision to pursue a career in counseling directly to their experience of being bullied, and in each case the imagined professional role mirrored the specific harm they had suffered. F1 wanted to become “a counselor who can protect children from bullying.” F8 hoped to work with children targeted for body shaming, F7 with young people struggling in friendships, and F4 with schools that need to become more inclusive of religious and cultural difference. F5, betrayed by a school counselor, framed the aspiration as a corrective: to become a counselor who handles cases of slander and protects students’ confidentiality. F2 had already begun practicing as a peer counselor.

For several participants, this vocation was accompanied by a shift from a victim identity to a protective one. F3 summarized the change:

“I learned that fear can be turned into courage. And now I can protect other people from threats, not only myself.” (F3)

These aspirations rest on an implicit belief that victimized children can recover and that schools can become safer. F2, for example, wanted to show that victims of bullying can succeed and inspire others, and F4 wanted to help create inclusive schools. This identity was enacted as well as narrated. F1 described approaching withdrawn peers on campus, F5 was often asked to mediate conflicts, and F7 made a point of including friends who were being ignored. F6 was again the exception: F6's motivation was framed as proving personal capability rather than helping others. The growth-oriented narratives in this theme came from participants who, as Theme 2 shows, still experienced residual vigilance and arousal. Growth and distress were therefore not sequential stages but concurrent features of participants' lives.

Figure 8 summarizes how the main features of each theme were distributed across the eight participants. The display makes two points visible that are easy to lose in thematic prose. First, no single participant carried every feature: institutional betrayal, for example, appeared in one account, and strategic underperformance or defensive documentation in two. Second, the features of growth in Theme 4 were present in participants who also reported resurfacing emotions or relational hypervigilance in Theme 2.

5 Discussion

This study examined how Indonesian pre-service counselors with histories of chronic school bullying experience victimization, its residues, and their recovery. Figure 9 summarizes the interpretation developed below. The findings support existing evidence that bullying leaves long-term traces [6, 7, 9] and that it depresses self-confidence among Indonesian students [12, 14]. They extend this literature in five ways, beginning with the question posed in the title.

5.1 From fixed verdicts to a malleable self: a mindset reading

Why would survivors of school bullying choose to become the counselors who once failed them? A mindset reading offers part of the answer. As participants described it, bullying operated as a prolonged lesson in entity theory. Labels named a quality as permanent, repetition made it feel true, and by the end of the period every participant described their former self in fixed, global terms. Experimental studies show that adolescents who believe people cannot change suffer more after victimization [26, 27]; these accounts suggest the reverse direction as well, namely that chronic victimization may itself teach entity beliefs about the self. Recovery, in turn, was accompanied by incremental claims: failure is a step in learning, competence grows with practice, and worth is not fixed by other people's mockery. Rehearsal mattered because it produced the evidence that made these claims credible. In Bandura's terms [44], new mastery experiences were interpreted as signs of growth rather than as lucky exceptions, which is precisely the interpretive work that incremental beliefs perform [51].

Most participants then extended the incremental belief outward. If they could change, so could other bullied children and the schools that had failed them. This outward extension is what connects mindset to vocation. Counseling presupposes that people and settings can change, and participants' choice of the profession can be read as a commitment to that presupposition, learned first on themselves. Two cautions apply. First, mindsets were inferred from retrospective narratives rather than measured, and the lens was introduced after data collection, so the direction of influence between belief change and recovery cannot be established. Second, a mindset account does not explain everything. F6 recovered without adopting a helping vocation, and F4's lowering of grades was driven by social danger rather than by doubts about ability, as discussed in Section 5.3. Mindset is therefore best understood as one strand interwoven with peer acceptance and institutional context, not as a master key.

5.2 When the protector discloses: institutional betrayal in school counseling

F5's account illustrates institutional betrayal in a form that has received little attention in the bullying literature: a breach of confidentiality by the professional designated to receive reports. Smith and Freyd [19, 20] argued that betrayal by a trusted institution adds an injury distinct from the original harm, because it undermines the victim's confidence that any protective system can be relied upon. F5's description of being betrayed twice captures this added injury with unusual precision. The disclosure also had a structural consequence. By exposing the reporter, it converted an act of upstanding into the cause of victimization, and it taught both F5 and the peer group that reporting is dangerous. Indonesian research on school bullying has generally framed the guidance and counseling teacher as part of the solution [18, 41]. This case, although single, shows that the same role can function as a vector of harm when confidentiality fails. Because the participant who experienced it is now training for that role, it also shows how such failures can shape the professional ethics of the next generation of counselors.

5.3 Strategic self-diminishment: trading mastery for safety

The deliberate lowering of grades reported by F4, together with the near-universal withdrawal from classroom speech, suggests a mechanism that self-efficacy research has rarely considered. Bandura [44] identified mastery experiences as the most powerful source of efficacy beliefs, but mastery requires visible performance. In peer cultures that punish visible achievement, which Indonesian scholars have described as crab mentality [62], visibility carries a social price. Participants appeared to resolve this dilemma by suppressing performance, which protected them from attack in the short term but deprived them of the mastery experiences from which confidence develops. This pattern resembles self-handicapping [63], in which individuals create obstacles to their own performance, but the motive differs. Self-handicapping is usually understood as protecting self-esteem from the implications of failure; the strategy described here protected interpersonal safety from the consequences of success. The pattern also marks a limit of mindset theory, which links performance avoidance to entity beliefs about ability [23]. F4 did not doubt the ability in question; F4 hid it because displaying it was dangerous. We propose the term strategic self-diminishment for this pattern. With only two clear instances in the data, the proposal is tentative and requires testing in larger samples.

5.4 Recovery as rehearsal and relational repair

Participants' recovery strategies map onto both emotion-focused and problem-focused coping [47], but their significance lies in how they rebuilt the sources of efficacy that bullying had damaged. Grounding, self-talk, and visualization regulated the physiological states that participants had learned to interpret as signs of incompetence. Behavioral rehearsal created new mastery experiences under controlled conditions. Acceptance by peers reversed the negative social persuasion of the school years, consistent with evidence that peer support buffers the impact of bullying on quality of life [64]. The decisive role of this relational repair, however, must be interpreted cautiously. The accepting environment that participants described was a guidance and counseling cohort, a group trained to practice non-judgmental regard. It may not be representative of other programs or of the university as a whole, and a stronger test of its role would compare students in different academic environments.

5.5 Wounded healers in counselor education

The aspiration of seven participants to become counselors, and the close correspondence between each participant's intended specialization and the harm they had suffered, is consistent with the PTG domains of new possibilities, relating to others, and personal strength [33, 34]. It also fits Staub and Vollhardt's account of altruism born of suffering [35] and Herman's notion of a survivor mission [50]. These interpretations should be held with care, because self-reported growth does not always correspond to measured change over time [65]. Participants' reports of growth were self-generated narratives, collected in a single interview and without a standardized measure of PTG, and they coexisted with ongoing vigilance and arousal. More importantly for counselor education, the wounded-healer literature indicates that lived experience can deepen empathy but can also lead to over-identification with clients, difficulty maintaining boundaries, and vulnerability to secondary distress when experiences remain unprocessed [37]. Counselor education programs therefore face a dual task: to recognize survivors' motivation as a professional resource without romanticizing it, and to provide structures in which unresolved experiences can be examined before trainees work with children who are being bullied.

5.6 Implications for practice and policy

Five implications follow. First, schools and education authorities should treat confidentiality breaches by counselors as a serious professional failure, with clear reporting protocols that protect the identity of students who report bullying, anonymous reporting channels, and accountability mechanisms when protocols are violated [21]. Second, anti-bullying programs should address peer norms that penalize visible achievement, since such norms appear to suppress both participation and the development of self-efficacy. Third, universities should not assume that the effects of school bullying end at enrollment; transition programs and counseling services can screen for, and respond to, residual social anxiety and self-silencing among first-year students. Fourth, counselor education programs should incorporate structured reflection on trainees' own experiences of victimization, address over-identification and countertransference in supervision [66], and use cases of institutional betrayal, such as F5's, to teach the practical meaning of confidentiality. Fifth, school and university counseling services can help victims

question the fixed verdicts that bullying labels convey, for example by drawing attention to evidence of their own growth. Such mindset-informed support should accompany, not replace, changes to the peer and institutional conditions that produced the labels; otherwise it risks placing the burden of change on victims, and the modest average effects of mindset interventions caution against treating them as stand-alone solutions [30, 31].

5.7 Limitations and future research

Several limitations qualify these findings. First, all participants were 20-year-old students in a single counseling program at one university. Students drawn to counseling may be especially inclined to narrate their experiences as growth, and the sample excludes victims who did not enter higher education or who continue to struggle severely, which introduces survivorship bias. Second, the accounts are retrospective. Recall of school bullying is reasonably stable for core events but can be reshaped by later experience [67, 68], and participants' present position in a supportive environment may have colored their interpretation of past coping. Third, the interviewer was a peer from the same program; this insider position supported disclosure but may also have encouraged socially desirable narratives of recovery. Fourth, PTG and mindsets were inferred from narratives rather than measured, the mindset lens was applied after data collection, each participant was interviewed once, the interview guide was reviewed by a single expert although content-validation guidance recommends at least three [69], and quotations were translated from Indonesian. Fifth, gender was not used as an analytic category because the sample was too small to support sex or gender comparisons. Finally, F7's experience lies at the boundary of the conventional definition of bullying. Future research should follow students longitudinally across the transition to higher education, compare counseling students with students in other disciplines, combine interviews with validated measures of PTG, implicit theories, and social anxiety, and evaluate supervision or group interventions designed for pre-service counselors with histories of victimization.

6 Conclusion

Why do survivors of school bullying choose to become the counselors who once failed them? For the eight participants in this study, the answer lay partly in a change of mindset. School bullying was not an episode that ended at graduation. It was experienced as chronic and layered harm, intensified in one account by a school counselor's breach of confidentiality; it left fixed verdicts about who they were and led them to hide their abilities and voices in order to stay safe; and it was reworked through deliberate rehearsal and an accepting peer community into a belief that people can change and a vocation to protect others. The findings suggest that the quality of institutional responses, and not only the behavior of peers, shapes how deeply bullying wounds. They also suggest that counselor education programs may enroll a substantial number of students whose professional motivation is rooted in their own victimization. Recognizing these students as wounded healers, and supporting them accordingly, is a practical step toward ensuring that the next generation of school counselors does not repeat the failures that brought many of them to the profession.

Declarations

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

This study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Ethical approval was granted by the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Lambung Mangkurat (letter no. 103/UNS.1.2/PL.01/2026, dated 20 January 2026). Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection.

Consent for publication

Participants consented to the confidential use of their interview data for research purposes. Only anonymized excerpts are reported. The participant shown in Fig. 3a is photographed from behind and cannot be identified, and the person whose face is visible is the third author, who consents to publication. The signature on the consent form in Fig. 3b has been redacted.

Funding

The authors received no specific funding for this work.

Author Contribution

HYSP: conceptualization, methodology, supervision, validation, writing – review and editing. NA: supervision, validation, writing – review and editing. STY: validation, investigation, formal analysis. MFR: conceptualization, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, writing – original draft. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Acknowledgement

We thank the participants for their willingness to share painful experiences, and M. Andri Setiawan (Department of Guidance and Counseling, Universitas Lambung Mangkurat) for expert review of the interview guide.

Data Availability

The interview transcripts generated and analysed during the current study are not publicly available because they contain sensitive personal accounts of bullying victimization, and participants were assured in the written consent form that identifiable data would be accessible only to the research team. To support transparency, the original Indonesian excerpts of all quotations reported in the article and the research instruments (the screening questionnaire and the interview guide) are provided as Supplementary Files 1 and 2. The anonymised NVivo coding framework and the aggregated screening questionnaire responses are available from the corresponding author, Hendro Yulius Suryo Putro (hendro.putro@ulm.ac.id), on reasonable request.

References

1. OECD. PISA 2018 results (Volume III): what school life means for students' lives. Paris: OECD Publishing; 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1787/acd78851-en>.
2. Sittichai R, Smith PK. Bullying in South-East Asian countries: a review. *Aggress Violent Behav*. 2015;23:22–35. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2015.06.002>.
3. Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection of the Republic of Indonesia. Statistik kasus perundungan Indonesia tahun 2025 [Statistics on bullying cases in Indonesia, 2025]. Jakarta: KemenPPPA; 2025. <https://kekerasan.kemenpppa.go.id/ringkasan>.
4. Copeland WE, Wolke D, Angold A, Costello EJ. Adult psychiatric outcomes of bullying and being bullied by peers in childhood and adolescence. *JAMA Psychiatry*. 2013;70(4):419–26. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2013.504>.
5. Takizawa R, Maughan B, Arseneault L. Adult health outcomes of childhood bullying victimization: evidence from a five-decade longitudinal British birth cohort. *Am J Psychiatry*. 2014;171(7):777–84. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.2014.13101401>.
6. Arseneault L. Annual research review: the persistent and pervasive impact of being bullied in childhood and adolescence: implications for policy and practice. *J Child Psychol Psychiatry*. 2018;59(4):405–21. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12841>.
7. Wolke D, Lereya ST. Long-term effects of bullying. *Arch Dis Child*. 2015;100(9):879–85. <https://doi.org/10.1136/archdischild-2014-306667>.
8. Ttofi MM, Farrington DP, Lösel F, Loeber R. Do the victims of school bullies tend to become depressed later in life? A systematic review and meta-analysis of longitudinal studies. *J Aggress Confl Peace Res*. 2011;3(2):63–73. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17596591111132873>.
9. Moore SE, Norman RE, Suetani S, Thomas HJ, Sly PD, Scott JG. Consequences of bullying victimization in childhood and adolescence: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *World J Psychiatry*. 2017;7(1):60–76. <https://doi.org/10.5498/wjp.v7.i1.60>.
10. Wolke D, Copeland WE, Angold A, Costello EJ. Impact of bullying in childhood on adult health, wealth, crime, and social outcomes. *Psychol Sci*. 2013;24(10):1958–70. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797613481608>.

11. Lereya ST, Copeland WE, Costello EJ, Wolke D. Adult mental health consequences of peer bullying and maltreatment in childhood: two cohorts in two countries. *Lancet Psychiatry*. 2015;2(6):524–31. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(15\)00165-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(15)00165-0).
12. Oktavianto E, Melinda DW, Timiyatun E. Kejadian bullying dan kepercayaan diri pada remaja [Bullying and self-confidence among adolescents]. *Surya Medika*. 2023;18(1):8–15. <https://doi.org/10.32504/sm.v18i1.745>.
13. Permana AA, Rahman FS, Ermasaroh N. Hubungan tindakan bullying dengan tingkat kepercayaan diri seseorang [The relationship between bullying and self-confidence]. *J Pract Learn Educ Dev*. 2021;1(1):6–10. <https://doi.org/10.58737/jpled.v1i1.2>.
14. Pramanik GF, Rohman U, Ismail S. Analisis dampak bullying terhadap kepercayaan diri remaja [The impact of bullying on adolescents' self-confidence]. *Realita J Bimbingan Konseling*. 2024;9(1):2226–36. <https://doi.org/10.33394/realita.v9i1.10215>.
15. Adiningsih P, Rakhmawati D, Maulia D. Pengaruh bullying terhadap kepercayaan diri korban bullying kelas XI di SMA Lab School Universitas PGRI Semarang [The effect of bullying on victims' self-confidence]. *DA'WA J Bimbingan Penyuluhan Konseling Islam*. 2024;4(1):67–74. <https://doi.org/10.36420/dawa.v4i1.527>.
16. Rahmadian A, Mutaqin AK. Analisis pengaruh bullying terhadap kepercayaan diri mahasiswa Fakultas MIPA Universitas Islam Bandung angkatan 2019 [The effect of bullying on university students' self-confidence]. *Bandung Conf Ser Stat*. 2023;3(2). <https://doi.org/10.29313/bcss.v3i2.8204>.
17. Harmiasih S, Kumari R, Watini S. Dampak bullying terhadap sosial emosional anak [The socio-emotional impact of bullying on children]. *JlIP J Ilm Ilmu Pendidik*. 2023;6(11):8703–8. <https://doi.org/10.54371/jiip.v6i11.3142>.
18. Arinata FS, Mulyani PK, Wasono A, Kurniawati E, Mubarak MA. Dampak bullying pada siswa sekolah dasar: kajian literatur sistematis [The impact of bullying on primary school students: a systematic literature review]. *J Bimbingan Konseling Ar-Rahman*. 2024;10(2):356–66. <https://doi.org/10.31602/jbkr.v10i2.17540>.
19. Smith CP, Freyd JJ. Institutional betrayal. *Am Psychol*. 2014;69(6):575–87. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037564>.
20. Smith CP, Freyd JJ. Dangerous safe havens: institutional betrayal exacerbates sexual trauma. *J Trauma Stress*. 2013;26(1):119–24. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.21778>.
21. American School Counselor Association. ASCA ethical standards for school counselors. Alexandria (VA): American School Counselor Association; 2022.
22. Putro HYS, Setyowati AJ, Muslihati, Hambali I, Indreswari H, Hotifah Y, et al. When the jargon shifts the philosophy: a critical analysis of the evolution of curriculum and learning approaches in Indonesia. *Veredas do Direito*. 2026;23(8):e233810. <https://doi.org/10.18623/rvd.v23.3810>.
23. Dweck CS, Leggett EL. A social-cognitive approach to motivation and personality. *Psychol Rev*. 1988;95(2):256–73. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.95.2.256>.

24. Dweck CS. *Mindset: the new psychology of success*. New York: Random House; 2006.
25. Yeager DS, Trzesniewski KH, Tirri K, Nokelainen P, Dweck CS. Adolescents' implicit theories predict desire for vengeance after peer conflicts: correlational and experimental evidence. *Dev Psychol*. 2011;47(4):1090–107. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0023769>.
26. Yeager DS, Trzesniewski KH, Dweck CS. An implicit theories of personality intervention reduces adolescent aggression in response to victimization and exclusion. *Child Dev*. 2013;84(3):970–88. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12003>.
27. Yeager DS, Johnson R, Spitzer BJ, Trzesniewski KH, Powers J, Dweck CS. The far-reaching effects of believing people can change: implicit theories of personality shape stress, health, and achievement during adolescence. *J Pers Soc Psychol*. 2014;106(6):867–84. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0036335>.
28. Schleider JL, Abel MR, Weisz JR. Implicit theories and youth mental health problems: a random-effects meta-analysis. *Clin Psychol Rev*. 2015;35:1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2014.11.001>.
29. Burnette JL, O'Boyle EH, VanEpps EM, Pollack JM, Finkel EJ. Mind-sets matter: a meta-analytic review of implicit theories and self-regulation. *Psychol Bull*. 2013;139(3):655–701. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029531>.
30. Sisk VF, Burgoyne AP, Sun J, Butler JL, Macnamara BN. To what extent and under which circumstances are growth mind-sets important to academic achievement? Two meta-analyses. *Psychol Sci*. 2018;29(4):549–71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797617739704>.
31. Yeager DS, Hanselman P, Walton GM, Murray JS, Crosnoe R, Muller C, et al. A national experiment reveals where a growth mindset improves achievement. *Nature*. 2019;573(7774):364–9. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-019-1466-y>.
32. Yeager DS, Dweck CS. What can be learned from growth mindset controversies? *Am Psychol*. 2020;75(9):1269–84. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000794>.
33. Tedeschi RG, Calhoun LG. Posttraumatic growth: conceptual foundations and empirical evidence. *Psychol Inq*. 2004;15(1):1–18. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli1501_01.
34. Tedeschi RG, Shakespeare-Finch J, Taku K, Moore BA. *Posttraumatic growth: theory, research, and applications*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge; 2025. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003562641>.
35. Staub E, Vollhardt J. Altruism born of suffering: the roots of caring and helping after victimization and other trauma. *Am J Orthopsychiatry*. 2008;78(3):267–80. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0014223>.
36. Vollhardt JR. Altruism born of suffering and prosocial behavior following adverse life events: a review and conceptualization. *Soc Justice Res*. 2009;22(1):53–97. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-009-0088-1>.
37. Zerubavel N, Wright MO. The dilemma of the wounded healer. *Psychotherapy*. 2012;49(4):482–91. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027824>.
38. Farber BA, Manevich I, Metzger J, Saypol E. Choosing psychotherapy as a career: why did we cross that road? *J Clin Psychol*. 2005;61(8):1009–31. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.20174>.
39. Olweus D. *Bullying at school: what we know and what we can do*. Oxford: Blackwell; 1993.

40. Smith PK. The growth of the school bullying program and the impact of Dan Olweus. School bullying and the legacy of Dan Olweus. Hoboken (NJ): Wiley; 2025. pp. 53–95.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781394173556.ch5>.
41. Febrianti R, Syaputra YD, Oktara TW. Dinamika bullying di sekolah: faktor dan dampak [Bullying dynamics in schools: factors and impacts]. *Indones J Educ Couns*. 2024;8(1):9–24.
<https://doi.org/10.30653/001.202481.336>.
42. Salmivalli C. Bullying and the peer group: a review. *Aggress Violent Behav*. 2010;15(2):112–20.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2009.08.007>.
43. Juvonen J, Graham S. Bullying in schools: the power of bullies and the plight of victims. *Annu Rev Psychol*. 2014;65:159–85. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010213-115030>.
44. Bandura A. Self-efficacy: the exercise of control. New York: W. H. Freeman; 1997.
45. Usher EL, Pajares F. Sources of self-efficacy in school: critical review of the literature and future directions. *Rev Educ Res*. 2008;78(4):751–96. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654308321456>.
46. Freyd JJ. Betrayal trauma: the logic of forgetting childhood abuse. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press; 1996.
47. Lazarus RS, Folkman S. Stress, appraisal, and coping. New York: Springer; 1984.
48. Lubis J, Asmaryadi A, Harahap E. Strategi coping stres pada remaja korban bullying di SMK Negeri 1 Kotanopan [Stress-coping strategies among adolescent bullying victims]. *RULING J Bimbing Konseling*. 2025. <https://jurnal.rumahkonseling.id/index.php/ruling/article/view/1>
49. Tedeschi RG, Calhoun LG. The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory: measuring the positive legacy of trauma. *J Trauma Stress*. 1996;9(3):455–71. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.2490090305>.
50. Herman JL. Trauma and recovery. New York: Basic Books; 1992.
51. Yeager DS, Dweck CS. Mindsets that promote resilience: when students believe that personal characteristics can be developed. *Educ Psychol*. 2012;47(4):302–14.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2012.722805>.
52. Creswell JW, Poth CN. Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five approaches. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks (CA): SAGE; 2018.
53. Moustakas C. Phenomenological research methods. Thousand Oaks (CA): SAGE; 1994.
54. O'Brien BC, Harris IB, Beckman TJ, Reed DA, Cook DA. Standards for reporting qualitative research: a synthesis of recommendations. *Acad Med*. 2014;89(9):1245–51.
<https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0000000000000388>.
55. Berger R. Now I see it, now I don't: researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qual Res*. 2015;15(2):219–34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112468475>.
56. Malterud K, Siersma VD, Guassora AD. Sample size in qualitative interview studies: guided by information power. *Qual Health Res*. 2016;26(13):1753–60.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315617444>.

57. Braun V, Clarke V. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qual Res Psychol.* 2006;3(2):77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.
58. Braun V, Clarke V. Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qual Res Sport Exerc Health.* 2019;11(4):589–97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>.
59. Squires A. Methodological challenges in cross-language qualitative research: a research review. *Int J Nurs Stud.* 2009;46(2):277–87. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2008.08.006>.
60. Lincoln YS, Guba EG. *Naturalistic inquiry.* Beverly Hills (CA): SAGE; 1985.
61. Birt L, Scott S, Cavers D, Campbell C, Walter F. Member checking: a tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation? *Qual Health Res.* 2016;26(13):1802–11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870>.
62. Salsabella F, Albaar R. Dampak bullying terhadap rasa percaya diri siswa dan normalisasi budaya mental crab: studi kasus kualitatif di MTsN 1 Lamongan [Bullying, self-confidence, and the normalization of crab mentality: a qualitative case study]. *Conseils J Bimbingan Konseling Islam.* 2026;6(1). <https://doi.org/10.55352/bki.v6i1.2292>.
63. Berglas S, Jones EE. Drug choice as a self-handicapping strategy in response to noncontingent success. *J Pers Soc Psychol.* 1978;36(4):405–17. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.36.4.405>.
64. Flaspohler PD, Elfstrom JL, Vanderzee KL, Sink HE, Birchmeier Z. Stand by me: the effects of peer and teacher support in mitigating the impact of bullying on quality of life. *Psychol Sch.* 2009;46(7):636–49. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.20404>.
65. Frazier P, Tennen H, Gavian M, Park C, Tomich P, Tashiro T. Does self-reported posttraumatic growth reflect genuine positive change? *Psychol Sci.* 2009;20(7):912–9. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2009.02381.x>.
66. Hayes JA, Gelso CJ, Hummel AM. Managing countertransference. *Psychotherapy.* 2011;48(1):88–97. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022182>.
67. Rivers I. Retrospective reports of school bullying: stability of recall and its implications for research. *Br J Dev Psychol.* 2001;19(1):129–41. <https://doi.org/10.1348/026151001166001>.
68. Hardt J, Rutter M. Validity of adult retrospective reports of adverse childhood experiences: review of the evidence. *J Child Psychol Psychiatry.* 2004;45(2):260–73. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.2004.00218.x>.
69. Lynn MR. Determination and quantification of content validity. *Nurs Res.* 1986;35(6):382–5. <https://doi.org/10.1097/00006199-198611000-00017>.

Figures

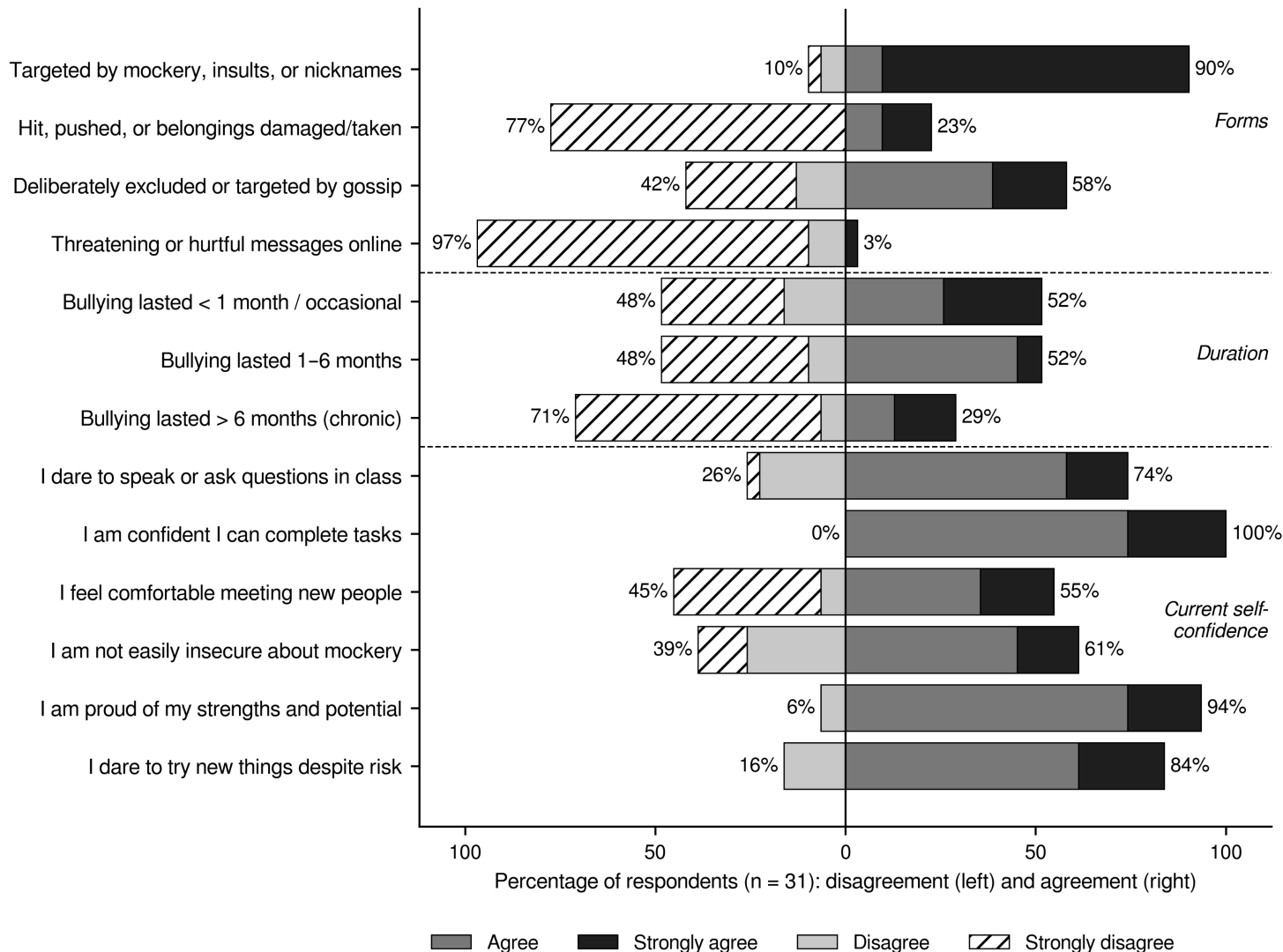


Figure 1

Responses to the screening questionnaire (n = 31). Bars to the right of zero show agreement and bars to the left show disagreement; items are grouped into forms of bullying, duration of bullying, and current self-confidence. Percentages are rounded

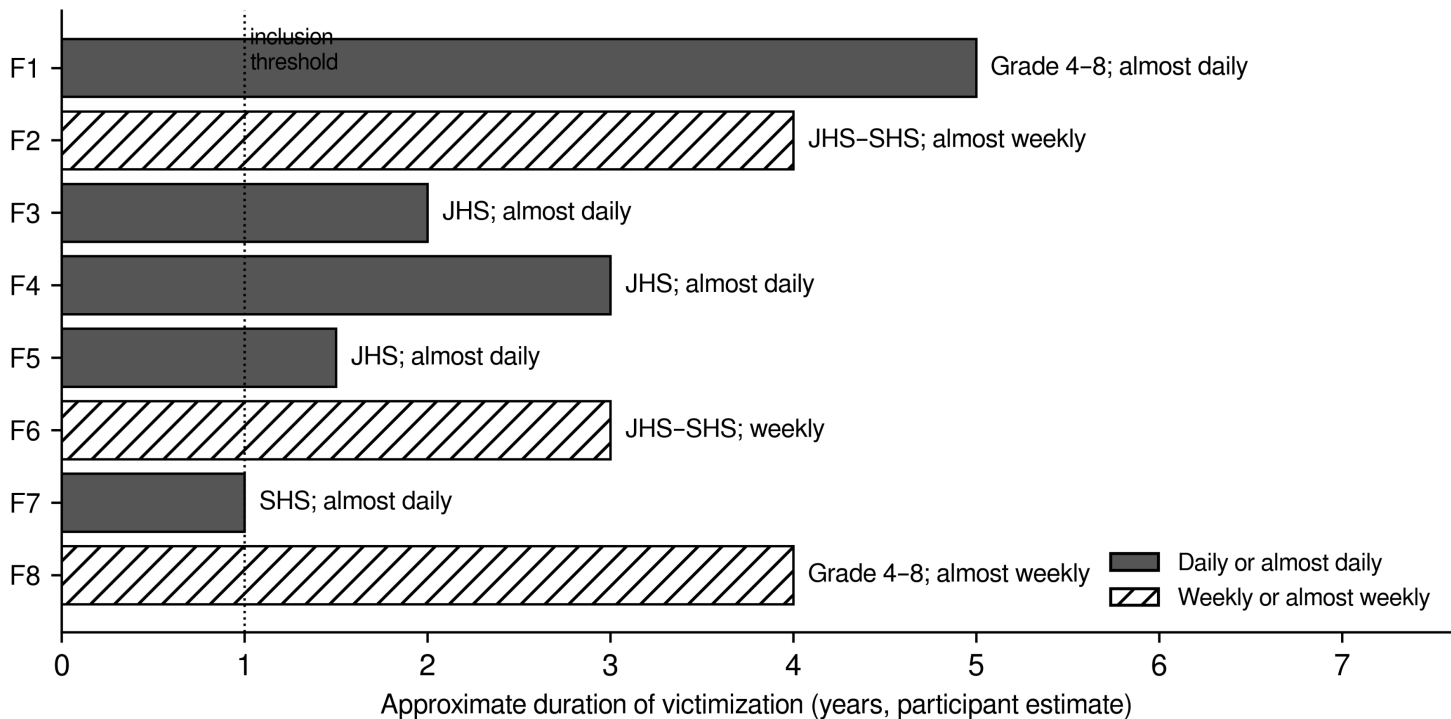


Figure 2

Approximate duration and frequency of victimization reported by each participant. Labels give the school level and frequency; the dotted line marks the one-year inclusion threshold. JHS, junior high school; SHS, senior high school

All participants were 20 years old at interview. Durations and frequencies are participants’ retrospective estimates. Grades 7–9 correspond to junior high school (SMP) and Grades 10–12 to senior high school (SMA) in Indonesia.



Figure 3

Documentation of data collection. (a) A face-to-face interview conducted by the third author in an outdoor seating area on campus; the participant is photographed from behind and is not identifiable. (b) The informed consent form signed by each participant before the interview; the signature has been redacted

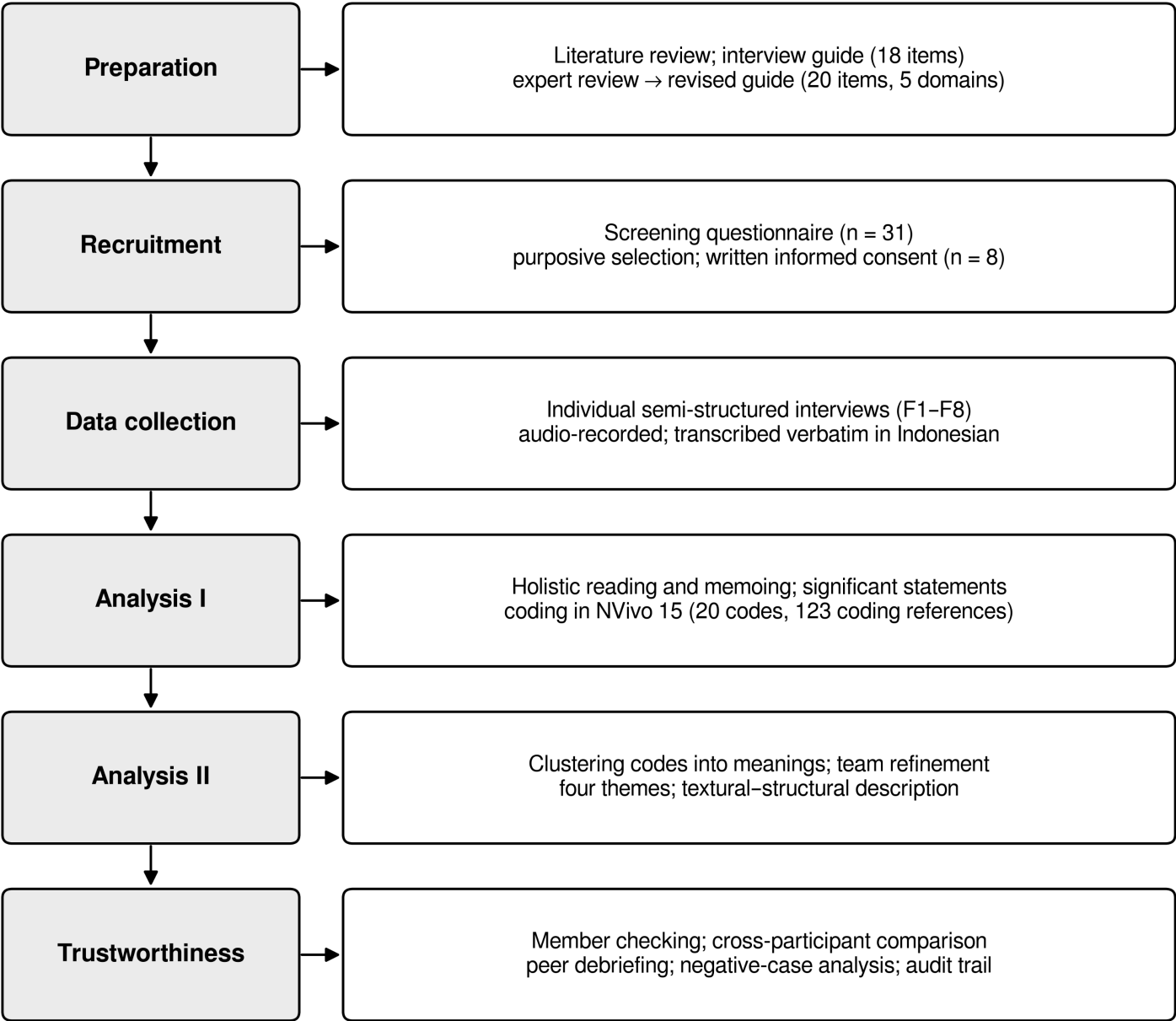


Figure 4

Study procedure from preparation of the interview guide to trustworthiness checks. Counts refer to screening respondents, interview participants, NVivo codes, and coding references

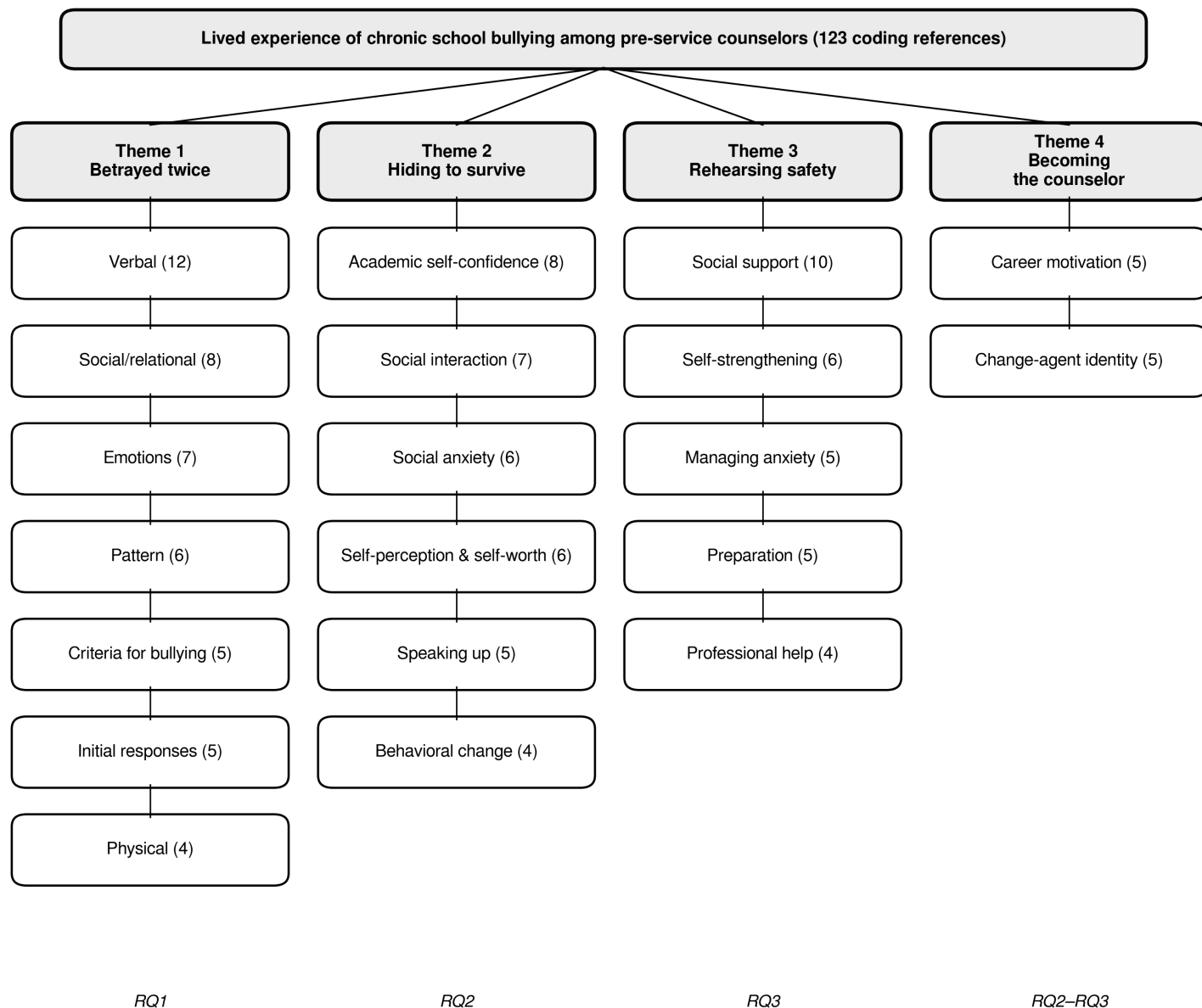


Figure 6

Coding map showing the four themes, their constituent codes, the number of coding references for each code, and the research questions to which they respond



Page 28/31



Figure 8

Distribution of key features across participants. Filled cells indicate that the feature was present in the participant’s interview, based on the authors’ coding; empty cells indicate that it was not described. Features are grouped by theme

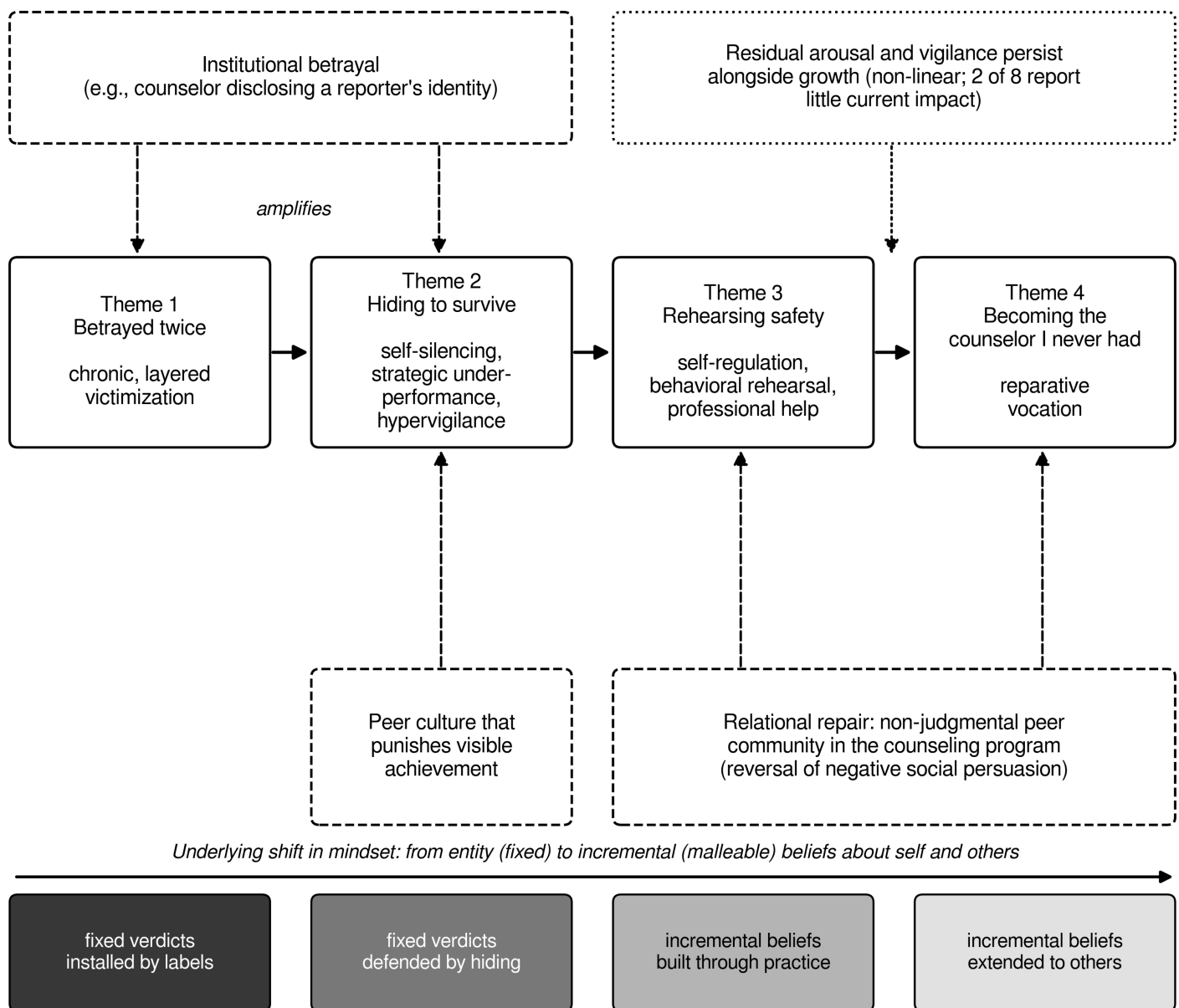


Figure 9

Interpretive model of participants' experience. Solid boxes and arrows show the four themes; dashed boxes show contextual conditions that amplified harm or supported recovery; the dotted box indicates that residual effects persisted alongside growth; the shaded band shows the underlying shift from entity to incremental beliefs that accompanied the four themes. The model is an interpretive synthesis of eight accounts and does not represent tested causal relationships

Supplementary Files

This is a list of supplementary files associated with this preprint. Click to download.

- [SupplementaryFile1Hendro.docx](#)
- [SupplementaryFile2Hendro.docx](#)