

PROFILE OF SOCIAL WITHDRAWAL BEHAVIOR AMONG STUDENTS

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Abstract

Social withdrawal during adolescence is a behavior characterized by a tendency to limit social interactions, avoid engagement with peers, and prefer individual activities. This condition warrants attention because it can hinder students' social and emotional development and their adjustment to the school environment. This study aims to describe the level of social withdrawal among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Wanaraja, identify differences based on gender, and formulate implications of the research findings for guidance and counseling services. The study used a quantitative approach with a descriptive design. The study population consisted of 451 eighth-grade students, with 199 students selected as the sample through incidental sampling. Data were collected using a social withdrawal instrument and analyzed using descriptive statistics and the Mann–Whitney U test. The results showed that students' social withdrawal scores ranged from 24 to 120, with a mean of 72 and a standard deviation of 12. A total of 141 students (71%) fell into the moderate category, 57 students (29%) fell into the low category, and 1 student fell into the high category. By aspect, “nonfearful” accounted for 55%, while “dysregulation” accounted for 54%; both fell into the moderate category. Analysis by gender revealed a significant difference between male and female students ($p = 0.009$). These findings indicate the importance of group counseling services focused on developing social skills, emotional regulation, self-confidence, and the ability to build interpersonal relationships.

Keywords: social withdrawal, adolescents, students, gender, group counseling, guidance and counseling

Abstrak

Social withdrawal pada masa remaja merupakan perilaku yang ditandai oleh kecenderungan membatasi interaksi sosial, menghindari keterlibatan dengan teman sebaya, dan lebih memilih aktivitas secara individual. Kondisi tersebut perlu mendapat perhatian karena dapat menghambat perkembangan sosial, emosional, dan penyesuaian peserta didik di lingkungan sekolah. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggambarkan tingkat social withdrawal peserta didik kelas VIII SMP Negeri 1 Wanaraja, mengidentifikasi perbedaannya berdasarkan jenis kelamin, serta merumuskan implikasi hasil penelitian bagi layanan bimbingan dan konseling. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain deskriptif. Populasi penelitian berjumlah 451 peserta didik kelas VIII, dengan 199 peserta didik sebagai

sampel yang diperoleh melalui teknik *incidental sampling*. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan instrumen *social withdrawal* dan dianalisis melalui statistik deskriptif serta uji Mann–Whitney U. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa skor *social withdrawal* peserta didik berkisar antara 24–120, dengan nilai rata-rata 72 dan standar deviasi 12. Sebanyak 141 peserta didik (71%) berada pada kategori sedang, 57 peserta didik (29%) berada pada kategori rendah, dan 1 peserta didik berada pada kategori tinggi. Berdasarkan aspek, *nonfearful* memperoleh persentase 55%, sedangkan *dysregulation* sebesar 54%, keduanya berada pada kategori sedang. Analisis berdasarkan jenis kelamin menunjukkan adanya perbedaan yang signifikan antara peserta didik laki-laki dan perempuan ($p = 0,009$). Temuan ini mengindikasikan pentingnya layanan konseling kelompok yang berorientasi pada pengembangan keterampilan sosial, regulasi emosi, kepercayaan diri, dan kemampuan membangun hubungan interpersonal.

Kata kunci: *social withdrawal*, remaja, peserta didik, jenis kelamin, konseling kelompok, bimbingan dan konseling

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a developmental period characterized by intense changes in biological, cognitive, emotional, and social aspects. At this stage, relationships with peers become increasingly important as adolescents begin to build their identities, gain social acceptance, develop independence, and learn to manage interpersonal relationships outside the family. The quality of social experiences during this period is not only related to adolescents' ability to interact in the present but can also shape patterns of psychosocial adjustment in subsequent developmental stages. Longitudinal studies indicate that the quality of social acceptance and friendships during adolescence is associated with various indicators of well-being in young adulthood; thus, social experiences during this period should be viewed as a crucial component of long-term development (Shah et al., 2024).

In this context, the ability to engage adaptively in social environments is a crucial developmental competency. However, not all adolescents are able to establish and maintain social interactions optimally. Some adolescents exhibit a tendency to reduce social interactions, avoid social situations, prefer solitude, or experience difficulty forming relationships with peers. This pattern is known as *social withdrawal*. Current literature positions *social withdrawal* not merely as a preference for solitude, but as a developmental phenomenon with diverse forms and consequences, ranging from a tendency toward solitude and shyness to more persistent forms of social withdrawal that interfere with interpersonal functioning (Chen & Liu, 2023).

It is important to distinguish between adaptive solitude and problematic *social withdrawal*. Solitude, to a certain extent, can be a normal part of self-regulation, reflection, and the need for personal space. Conversely, *social withdrawal* becomes a cause for concern when this tendency persists consistently, reduces social engagement, and is associated with adjustment difficulties. Research on everyday experiences of *social withdrawal* indicates that adolescents do not form a homogeneous group; there is variation in the patterns and intensity of withdrawal experiences related to the context of daily life (Bamps et al., 2022). Thus, when measuring *social withdrawal* among

students, it is important to recognize that solitary behavior does not always indicate a psychological problem; however, it can serve as a significant indicator when accompanied by social avoidance and impairments in developmental functioning.

This phenomenon has garnered increasing attention through research on *hikikomori* or severe social withdrawal. A systematic review indicates that *hikikomori* has been reported across various cultural contexts and is not limited to Japanese society; thus, the phenomenon of social withdrawal should be understood as a cross-cultural issue (Nonaka et al., 2022). Research in China also confirms the existence of *social withdrawal/hikikomori* and demonstrates that this phenomenon can emerge in social contexts different from the original context of the *hikikomori* concept (Hu et al., 2022). Similarly, research on French adolescents reveals a spectrum of *social withdrawal* and psychological characteristics that require contextual understanding, while studies on Italian adolescents document the clinical characteristics of *hikikomori* and the need for follow-up care for adolescents with severe social withdrawal (Hamasaki et al., 2022; Tolomei et al., 2023).

The issue of *social withdrawal* is becoming increasingly important because this behavior is linked to various aspects of adolescents' psychological and social well-being. A longitudinal study by Verhagen et al. (2023) revealed a relationship between *social withdrawal*, developmental characteristics, negative parenting styles, and loneliness throughout adolescence. These findings indicate that social withdrawal cannot be separated from the relational context in which it occurs. Research on friendship relationships also indicates a transactional relationship between *social withdrawal* and friendship development during adolescence; the quality of friendships may be associated with changes in the level of withdrawal, while withdrawal itself may limit adolescents' opportunities to build quality social relationships (Barzeva et al., 2022).

The peer environment is a crucial context for understanding this phenomenon. Adolescents who experience social acceptance and positive friendships are more likely to have social experiences that support their development. Conversely, experiences of rejection, victimization, or poor social relationships can reinforce a tendency to avoid interactions. Longitudinal research on bullying indicates that students who are both victims and bullies ("bully-victims") have higher baseline levels of social withdrawal and exhibit greater increases in social anxiety and social withdrawal over time (Kowalski et al., 2022). These findings suggest that social withdrawal should be viewed not only as an individual characteristic but also as a behavior that can develop through social dynamics within the school environment.

The relationship between *social withdrawal* and social experiences is also evident through loneliness. Studies in European schools show that loneliness among adolescents is associated with both individual characteristics and the school environment, including teacher support and social experiences at school (Schnepf et al., 2023). Other research indicates that peer relationships play a role in explaining adolescents' experiences of loneliness, with certain psychological factors also contributing to these relationships

(Liu et al., 2024). In fact, a longitudinal study of families in China indicates that early-childhood caregiving experiences can shape patterns of peer relationships and loneliness as children enter adolescence (Yang et al., 2024). Therefore, *social withdrawal* must be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by the interplay of individual, family, peer, and school environment characteristics.

The development of digital technology has also created a new context for adolescents' social relationships. Adolescents' interactions today take place not only in person but also through online social networks. Research by Al-Jbouri et al. (2024) indicates that adolescents' friendship networks encompass both face-to-face and online relationships, while social media use may be associated with friendship closeness and perceptions of the importance of technology in maintaining social connections. At a broader population level, an analysis of nearly 300,000 adolescents from 79 countries shows that social isolation is associated with patterns of physical activity and sedentary behavior, suggesting that limited social engagement may be linked to other daily behavioral patterns (Werneck et al., 2023). These findings reinforce the argument that *social withdrawal* needs to be viewed within the context of changing patterns of social interaction among adolescents in the digital age, rather than solely as a personality issue.

In addition to the social environment, internal psychological factors may also contribute to tendencies toward social withdrawal. Recent research indicates a link between *social withdrawal* and social anxiety. Kaçmaz et al. (2025), for example, found that *social anxiety* plays a mediating role in the relationship between *cognitive disengagement syndrome* and *social withdrawal* among adolescents. This finding is important because social withdrawal can be a manifestation of broader psychological difficulties, particularly when adolescents experience fear of social evaluation or feel unable to cope with the demands of social interaction. Thus, students who appear passive, shy, avoid communication, or are reluctant to participate in social activities need to be understood carefully so that such behavior is not simply dismissed as a lack of motivation or an introverted personality.

The impact of *social withdrawal* also extends beyond adolescence. A longitudinal meta-analysis by Gazelle et al. (2024) shows that *social withdrawal*, *shyness*, and *social anxiety* during childhood and adolescence can predict various indicators of psychosocial adjustment in adulthood. This research provides an empirical basis for the notion that social withdrawal is a developmental issue with long-term implications. In other words, failing to identify tendencies toward *social withdrawal* during the school years can result in missed opportunities to provide support at an earlier stage.

Schools, therefore, play a strategic role in identifying and preventing *social withdrawal*. Schools are the primary social environment where students routinely interact with teachers and peers. In addition to being the setting for academic learning, schools provide a space for the development of social competencies, communication, cooperation, and identity formation. School-based interventions also show potential for addressing this issue. Sousa et al. (2023), through a study of *social-emotional learning*

programs, demonstrated that universal school-based programs can be used to reduce *social withdrawal* and *social anxiety* among adolescents. These findings underscore the importance of educational services and guidance and counseling in conducting early detection and fostering students' social competencies.

From a guidance and counseling perspective, identifying *social withdrawal* is a crucial initial step before schools determine the appropriate form of intervention. Students who exhibit tendencies toward social withdrawal do not always require the same intervention. Some may require reinforcement of social skills; others may need support in building peer relationships; while still others may require further assessment regarding social anxiety, loneliness, experiences of bullying, or other psychological issues. Therefore, empirical data on the nature of *social withdrawal* at the school level is necessary so that guidance and counseling services are not merely reactive but are based on students' actual needs.

Although international research on *social withdrawal* among adolescents has expanded, there remains significant room for research within the context of junior high schools in Indonesia. Recent literature primarily addresses *social withdrawal* in the context of *hikikomori*, mental health, social anxiety, loneliness, bullying, or peer relationships across various countries. Cross-cultural research also indicates that the manifestations and consequences of *social withdrawal* can vary depending on the social and cultural context (Chen & Liu, 2023; Hamasaki et al., 2022). However, there remains a limited body of research that specifically maps the levels and characteristics of *social withdrawal* among seventh-grade students in Indonesian junior high schools, particularly within the context of Wanaraja State Junior High School 1. This gap is significant because the transition from elementary school to junior high school is a period marked by increased social demands, a growing number of peer relationships, higher academic expectations, and the need to adapt to a new environment.

The empirical context at Wanaraja State Junior High School No. 1 reinforces the urgency of this study. Based on the researcher's initial observations of seventh-grade students, a number of behaviors indicating a tendency toward social withdrawal were identified, including shyness in interacting with others, a preference for solitude, anxiety when interacting with peers, reluctance to speak in front of the class, low self-confidence, and avoidance when asked to speak or participate in learning activities. These preliminary findings cannot yet be used to conclude that students experience *social withdrawal* to a certain degree, but they provide empirical indications that this phenomenon needs to be systematically measured using standardized instruments.

The need for empirical mapping becomes increasingly important because *social withdrawal* is linked to the development of interpersonal relationships, loneliness, social anxiety, school engagement, and psychosocial adjustment. Recent research even suggests that social support can serve as a protective factor in the relationship between social withdrawal and well-being. Among multicultural adolescents, for example, parental support has been shown to be a significant factor in the relationship between *social withdrawal* and life satisfaction (Um, 2024). Meanwhile, the quality of

friendships during adolescence has implications for well-being in adulthood (Shah et al., 2024). Therefore, mapping the prevalence of *social withdrawal* in schools can serve as a crucial foundation for designing preventive services as well as more targeted guidance and counseling interventions.

Based on the above discussion, there is an academic and practical need to generate empirical evidence regarding the profile of *social withdrawal* among junior high school students. This study is specifically aimed at identifying and describing the levels of *social withdrawal* among seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Wanaraja. A quantitative descriptive approach was used to obtain an objective picture of the distribution of *social withdrawal* levels based on the results of the measurement instrument. The research results are expected to provide *baseline evidence* for guidance and counseling teachers, schools, and educational stakeholders in developing early detection strategies, social skills development services, and psychopedagogical interventions tailored to the characteristics of the students.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative approach with a descriptive-comparative design. The quantitative approach was chosen because the study focuses on measuring students' levels of *social withdrawal* through numerical data, which is then analyzed statistically. The descriptive design was used to obtain an empirical overview of the distribution and levels of students' *social withdrawal*, while the comparative component was used to identify possible differences in levels of *social withdrawal* based on gender. With this design, the study was not intended to test cause-and-effect relationships but rather to provide an objective mapping of the state of *social withdrawal* among students as a basis for developing guidance and counseling services at the school. Operationally, this study aims to answer three questions: (1) What is the profile of the level of *social withdrawal* among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Wanaraja? (2) Are there differences in the level of *social withdrawal* between male and female students? and (3) What are the implications of the research findings for the design of group counseling services to reduce *social withdrawal*? Thus, the study integrates quantitative findings with the practical needs of guidance and counseling services.

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at Wanaraja State Junior High School 1, Garut Regency, West Java, Indonesia. The study population consisted of all eighth-grade students, totaling 451 students. Based on this population, the study involved 198 students as the research sample. The sample was selected using a non-probability sampling technique with the incidental sampling method. The students who served as respondents were eighth-graders who were available and met the participation criteria at the time data collection took place. This technique was chosen based on the accessibility of respondents in the context of field research at the school. However, because *incidental sampling* does not provide equal opportunity for all members of the population to be selected, the research results must be interpreted carefully and should not be directly generalized beyond the

characteristics of the population and the context of the school under study. To enhance methodological transparency, the study should explicitly define inclusion criteria, namely students enrolled in eighth grade, attending classes during the study period, and willing to participate in completing the research instrument. Respondents who did not complete the instrument in full may be excluded from the analysis in accordance with the *data screening* procedures established prior to statistical analysis.

Research Instrument

Research data were collected using the *social withdrawal* scale, which is used to identify students' tendencies to reduce or avoid social interaction with their peers. The instrument is used to generate individual scores, which are then converted into categories of *social withdrawal* levels. Before being used in the main analysis, the instrument must be confirmed to have adequate evidence of validity and reliability. Instrument validity is used to ensure that each item adequately represents the construct of *social withdrawal*, while reliability is used to ensure the instrument's internal consistency in measuring the same construct. If the instrument is an adaptation or modification of a previous scale, the adaptation process, validation, and psychometric characteristics must be explicitly described to allow for the replication of the study. The *social withdrawal* scores are then used as the basis for determining the low, moderate, and high categories. Categorization is based on ideal criteria as used in the psychological measurement approach referenced by the study.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted after the researcher obtained permission from the school. The researcher explained the purpose of the study, the procedure for completing the instrument, and the characteristics of the data being collected to the students. The scales were administered in a structured manner, ensuring that all respondents received the same instructions.

In studies involving school-aged students, data collection procedures must adhere to research ethics principles, including confidentiality of respondents' identities, data confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the use of data solely for research purposes. Students' identities were not included in the analysis database; therefore, the research results were reported in aggregate form. After all questionnaires were collected, the data underwent a data screening phase, which included checking the completeness of responses, identifying invalid data, coding responses, and preparing the database for statistical analysis. Data that met the analysis criteria were then processed using statistical software. Data analysis was conducted in two main stages: descriptive analysis and comparative analysis. First, descriptive analysis was used to describe the level of social withdrawal among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Wanaraja. The analysis included score distributions, descriptive statistics, and the percentage of students in each social withdrawal category. The social withdrawal levels were categorized as low, moderate, and high based on predetermined criteria. The analysis results are presented in tables and narrative descriptions to provide an overview of the patterns of social withdrawal in the study population.

Second, comparative analysis was used to test whether there were differences in the levels of social withdrawal based on gender. The analysis was conducted using SPSS. Before determining the appropriate test for differences, the data were examined based on relevant statistical assumptions, particularly data distribution and homogeneity of variances. If the parametric assumptions are met, differences in social withdrawal scores between the male and female groups can be analyzed using an independent-samples t-test. Conversely, if the parametric assumptions are not met, the analysis can use an appropriate nonparametric approach.

The test results were interpreted based on a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. A p-value < 0.05 indicates a statistically significant difference between the male and female student groups, while a p-value ≥ 0.05 indicates that the observed difference is not statistically significant. In addition to statistical significance, robust research reporting must also consider the effect size, as statistically significant differences do not necessarily carry great practical significance. Development of Group Counseling Implications The third stage of the study focused on formulating implications for group counseling services based on the social withdrawal profiles obtained from the data analysis. This section is not intended as a test of the intervention's effectiveness, but rather as a needs-based counseling program developed based on the study's findings.

The design of the group counseling service is intended to address the characteristics of social withdrawal identified among students. Service components may include service objectives, target students, materials, group counseling techniques, implementation stages, time allocation, media, and success indicators. The focus of the service can be directed toward developing interpersonal communication skills, the courage to interact, the ability to express opinions, participation in groups, managing social anxiety, and developing positive relationships with peers. With this approach, the research results do not stop at mapping the level of social withdrawal but can be translated into diagnostic information relevant to guidance and counseling teachers in designing services that are better suited to students' needs. Methodological Rigor To enhance the trustworthiness and transparency of quantitative research, several data quality control procedures were implemented, including checks for data completeness, coding consistency, testing of the instruments' psychometric characteristics, and verification of statistical assumptions prior to hypothesis testing. The entire analysis process was conducted according to statistical procedures consistent with the study's objectives.

Nevertheless, the use of *incidental sampling* constitutes one of the study's methodological limitations, as the sample characteristics are heavily dependent on the students available at the time the research was conducted. This condition may limit the representativeness of the sample and reduce the study's ability to make broad generalizations. Therefore, the research findings should primarily be understood as an empirical description of *social withdrawal* among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Wanaraja, with transferability likely limited to schools or groups of students with similar contextual characteristics.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Overall Profile of Social Withdrawal among Grade VIII Students

The descriptive analysis was conducted to identify the overall level of social withdrawal among Grade VIII students at SMP Negeri 1 Wanaraja. A total of 199 students completed the social withdrawal instrument. The observed scores ranged from 24 to 120, with a mean score of 72 and a standard deviation of 12, indicating considerable variability in students' levels of social withdrawal. Based on the predetermined categorization criteria, students were classified into three levels: low, moderate, and high. The distribution of social withdrawal is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Social Withdrawal among Grade VIII Students

SOCIAL WITHDRAWAL CATEGORY	SCORE RANGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
HIGH	85–120	1	0.5%
MODERATE	61–84	141	70.9%
LOW	24–60	57	28.6%
TOTAL		199	100%

Note. Percentages are calculated based on N = 199.

As shown in Table 1, the majority of students (70.9%) were classified as having a moderate level of social withdrawal, while 28.6% were categorized as low and only 0.5% as high. Thus, the dominant pattern among Grade VIII students was moderate social withdrawal rather than either extreme withdrawal or the absence of withdrawal. The mean score of 72 further supports the predominance of the moderate category. Although only one student was classified in the high category, the presence of this group remains educationally relevant because severe social withdrawal may indicate a need for more intensive individual assessment and counseling support. At the same time, the relatively large proportion of students in the moderate category suggests that social withdrawal is not an isolated phenomenon within the study setting but represents a behavioral pattern that may warrant preventive and developmental intervention at the school level.

These findings are broadly consistent with previous studies reporting the presence of social withdrawal among adolescents in school settings. Novianti et al. (2023), for example, identified a substantial proportion of adolescents exhibiting tendencies toward social withdrawal, although the magnitude and categorization differed from those observed in the present study. Similarly, Zainal (2022) reported a higher proportion of students in the high social-withdrawal category. The differences may reflect variation in participants' developmental stages, school environments, measurement instruments, and local social contexts. Therefore, the present findings should be interpreted primarily within the context of Grade VIII students at SMP Negeri 1 Wanaraja.

2. Social Withdrawal by Dimensions and Indicators

To obtain a more detailed understanding of the phenomenon, social withdrawal was further examined according to two dimensions: **nonfearful** and **dysregulation**. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Social Withdrawal by Dimensions and Indicators

DIMENSION	OVERALL (%)	INDICATOR	PERCENTAGE (%)
NONFEARFUL	55	Feeling comfortable when alone	59
		Lack of interest in making friends	49
		Difficulty interacting with others	57
DYSREGULATION	54	Difficulty recognizing emotions	53
		Difficulty managing emotions	57
		Difficulty controlling behavior	50

The findings indicate that both dimensions were within the moderate range, with the nonfearful dimension obtaining an overall percentage of 55%, while dysregulation obtained 54%. The difference between the two dimensions was therefore relatively small. Within the nonfearful dimension, the highest indicator was feeling comfortable when alone (59%), followed by difficulty interacting with others (57%). The lowest indicator was lack of interest in making friends (49%). This pattern suggests that students' social withdrawal was not necessarily characterized by an explicit rejection of friendship. Rather, a substantial proportion of students appeared to experience greater comfort in solitary situations and difficulties engaging effectively in interpersonal interactions.

Within the dysregulation dimension, difficulty managing emotions (57%) represented the highest indicator, followed by difficulty recognizing emotions (53%) and difficulty controlling behavior (50%). These findings suggest that emotional regulation may constitute an important component of the students' social withdrawal profile. Students who experience difficulties recognizing and managing their emotional states may find social interactions more demanding and consequently reduce their participation in interpersonal situations. The relatively similar scores between nonfearful and dysregulation indicate that social withdrawal among the participants cannot be explained exclusively by a preference for solitude or by emotional difficulties. Instead, the phenomenon appears to involve an interaction between students' orientation toward social interaction and their capacity to regulate emotional and behavioral responses in social contexts.

This interpretation is consistent with the conceptualization of social withdrawal as a multidimensional phenomenon. Rubin and Coplan's framework distinguishes between withdrawal associated with limited social approach and withdrawal associated with social-emotional difficulties. Accordingly, the moderate scores on both dimensions in the present study indicate that students may require interventions addressing not only social participation but also emotional awareness and regulation.

3. Differences in Social Withdrawal by Gender

The study subsequently examined whether social withdrawal differed between male and female students. The sample consisted of 113 male students and 86 female students. Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Social Withdrawal by Gender

GENDER	N	MEAN (%)	SD	LOW	MODERATE	HIGH
MALE	113	55	12	25 (22.1%)	88 (77.9%)	0 (0%)
FEMALE	86	53	12	32 (37.2%)	53 (61.6%)	1 (1.2%)

The descriptive results indicate that the majority of both male and female students were classified in the moderate category. Among male students, 77.9% were categorized as moderate and 22.1% as low, with no students classified as high. Among female students, 61.6% were categorized as moderate, 37.2% as low, and 1.2% as high. The mean descriptive score was slightly higher among male students (55%) than female students (53%). However, the difference in descriptive means should not be interpreted as evidence of a statistically meaningful difference without reference to the inferential analysis.

Before conducting the group comparison, a test of variance indicated a significance value of 0.023, which was below the 0.05 threshold. This indicated that the assumption of equal variances was not satisfied. Therefore, a non-parametric comparison using the Mann–Whitney U test was conducted. The Mann–Whitney U analysis produced a significance value of $p = .009$, which is below the predetermined significance level of .05. Thus, the null hypothesis of no difference between male and female students was rejected. The results indicate a statistically significant difference in social withdrawal between male and female students.

Importantly, the statistical significance should be distinguished from the magnitude of the descriptive difference. Although the mean percentages reported in Table 3 differ by only two percentage points, the Mann–Whitney U test indicates that the distributions of social withdrawal scores between the two groups differed significantly. Therefore, the finding suggests that gender is associated with differences in the distribution of social withdrawal within this sample, although the present study does not establish gender as a causal determinant.

4. Interpretation of the Gender Difference

The gender-related finding requires cautious interpretation because social withdrawal is conceptually related to several psychological and interpersonal constructs, including shyness, social anxiety, emotional regulation, peer relationships, and social competence. These constructs should not be treated as interchangeable with social withdrawal. Previous research has suggested that gender differences may emerge in adolescent social-emotional functioning, although findings are not necessarily consistent across contexts. In particular, differences in shyness or social anxiety cannot automatically be interpreted as equivalent to differences in social withdrawal. The discrepancy between the descriptive mean scores and the statistical significance observed in the present study further indicates the importance of examining the distribution of scores rather than relying exclusively on group means.

Accordingly, the present finding should be understood as evidence of a gender-associated difference in social withdrawal scores among Grade VIII students, rather than evidence that one gender is universally more socially withdrawn than the other. Differences in developmental stage, peer culture, school environment, social expectations, and individual emotional characteristics may contribute to the observed pattern. This distinction is important because earlier literature has reported inconsistent gender patterns in social withdrawal and related constructs. Such inconsistencies may arise from differences in the operationalization of withdrawal, the age of participants, informants, and measurement procedures. Therefore, future research should consider multidimensional assessments that distinguish social withdrawal from shyness, social anxiety, loneliness, and deliberate preference for solitude.

5. Implications for Group Counseling Services

The descriptive findings provide an important basis for developing school-based counseling services. The predominance of the moderate social withdrawal category (70.9%) suggests that intervention should not be limited exclusively to students with severe withdrawal. Rather, the findings support a preventive-developmental approach in which students are provided opportunities to strengthen social interaction, communication, emotional regulation, and interpersonal confidence. Group counseling is particularly relevant because it provides a structured interpersonal environment in which students can practice social behaviors while receiving feedback and support from peers and counselors. For students experiencing moderate social withdrawal, group-based activities may provide opportunities to gradually increase participation without immediately exposing them to highly demanding social situations.

A group counseling program can incorporate social skills training, including initiating conversations, expressing opinions, active listening, asking for assistance, responding appropriately to peers, cooperating in group activities, and managing interpersonal conflict. Role-play, modeling, behavioral rehearsal, peer feedback, and structured group discussion can be incorporated into the intervention. The findings concerning the nonfearful dimension (55%) indicate that interventions should address students' tendency to feel comfortable when alone and their difficulties engaging with others.

Meanwhile, the dysregulation dimension (54%), particularly the indicator concerning difficulty managing emotions (57%), indicates the importance of integrating emotional-regulation components into counseling activities. Thus, the proposed counseling service should not conceptualize social withdrawal solely as a lack of social skills. Instead, intervention should address the combination of social participation, interpersonal competence, emotional awareness, and emotional regulation. This approach is consistent with the multidimensional nature of social withdrawal and provides a more comprehensive basis for school counseling intervention.

6. Synthesis of the Main Findings

Taken together, three major findings emerge from this study. First, social withdrawal among Grade VIII students at SMP Negeri 1 Wanaraja was predominantly at a moderate level, with 141 of 199 students (70.9%) falling within this category. Second, both the nonfearful (55%) and dysregulation (54%) dimensions were within the moderate range, suggesting that students' withdrawal was associated with both patterns of solitary preference/social disengagement and difficulties in emotional regulation. Third, the Mann–Whitney U test demonstrated a statistically significant difference in social withdrawal between male and female students ($p = .009$). The findings provide an empirical basis for strengthening school-based guidance and counseling services. Because the largest proportion of students exhibited moderate rather than high social withdrawal, the most appropriate response is not necessarily intensive remedial counseling for all students but a tiered intervention model consisting of universal preventive programs, targeted group counseling for students with moderate difficulties, and individualized counseling or further assessment for students exhibiting severe withdrawal. From a practical perspective, group counseling integrated with social skills training may be developed as an intervention strategy because the dominant findings point toward difficulties in social interaction and emotional regulation. Such a program should be systematically designed, implemented, and evaluated rather than merely recommended. Future research should therefore examine the effectiveness of specific group counseling models in reducing social withdrawal using experimental or quasi-experimental designs.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicate that social withdrawal among eighth-grade students at Wanaraja Public Junior High School 1 generally falls into the moderate category. Of the 199 students, 141 (70.9%) were in the moderate category, 57 (28.6%) were in the low category, and only 1 (0.5%) was in the high category. The mean score of 72 with a standard deviation of 12 indicates that social withdrawal is a fairly significant phenomenon in the studied group, although the majority of students have not yet reached an extreme level. This finding is important because social withdrawal during adolescence does not always take the form of total isolation but can manifest as a tendency to reduce social participation, feel more comfortable alone, experience difficulty initiating interactions, or limit involvement with peers. Recent literature emphasizes that social withdrawal in adolescents is a multidimensional construct that

must be distinguished from a mere preference for solitude. Chen and Liu (2023) demonstrate that solitude, shyness, and social withdrawal have distinct developmental consequences and are influenced by social and cultural contexts.

The predominance of the moderate category in this study can be interpreted as an indication that most students still possess the capacity to function within social environments, though their interpersonal engagement is not yet fully optimized. This condition differs from extreme social withdrawal or hikikomori, which is characterized by a far more intense withdrawal from school, work, and social life. Muris and Ollendick (2023) explain that extreme social withdrawal is a more complex phenomenon and can develop into a serious pattern of social isolation if it persists over time. Thus, the finding that only 0.5% of students fall into the high category does not mean that the issue of social withdrawal can be ignored. On the contrary, the high proportion in the moderate category indicates a need for preventive interventions and developmental counseling before such behavior escalates into a more severe form.

This finding is also consistent with research showing that social withdrawal in adolescents follows a heterogeneous developmental pattern. Bamps et al. (2022), through the identification of groups based on daily experiences of social withdrawal, demonstrated that adolescents do not experience withdrawal in a uniform pattern. In other words, two students who are both categorized as withdrawn may have different reasons, subjective experiences, and psychosocial consequences. This perspective is relevant to the research findings at Wanaraja Public Junior High School No. 1 because the dominant “moderate” category should not be treated as a diagnosis or psychological label. This category is better understood as an indicator that students require reinforcement of their social-emotional skills and further monitoring.

Analysis by dimension revealed that the “nonfearful” category accounted for 55%, while “dysregulation” accounted for 54%. Both dimensions were at relatively similar levels. These findings suggest that students’ social withdrawal is not solely related to fear of social situations but also to a tendency to enjoy solitude, a low drive to form friendships, difficulties interacting, and challenges in recognizing and managing emotions. These findings support the view that social withdrawal has multiple developmental pathways. Gazelle (2022) emphasizes that the development of social withdrawal and social anxiety can occur through various pathways, meaning that not all adolescents who withdraw have the same psychological mechanisms.

In the nonfearful dimension, the highest indicator was *feeling comfortable when alone* at 59%, followed by *difficulty interacting with others* at 57%, and *lack of interest in making friends* at 49%. This pattern suggests that students’ tendency toward social withdrawal is not always caused by fear or social anxiety. Some students may indeed feel more comfortable when alone, but at the same time experience limitations in developing social interactions. This finding aligns with the research by Brunetti et al. (2024), which highlights the importance of distinguishing between *shyness* and *unsociability*. That study found that the relationship between social withdrawal and internalizing problems can be explained through experiences of loneliness and

aloneliness, meaning that time spent alone does not always carry the same psychological significance.

Findings regarding comfort when alone are also supported by Sette et al. (2025), who showed that the motivation for social withdrawal, time spent alone, and internalizing problems are interrelated but not identical constructs. Therefore, students who choose solitude cannot automatically be categorized as having psychological problems. In the context of this study, these findings have important implications for guidance counselors: they should avoid applying negative labels to students who tend to be quiet or who enjoy individual activities. The focus of interventions should be on whether such behavior hinders social functioning, learning, communication, and the ability to build positive relationships with peers.

Meanwhile, the 54% score for the dysregulation dimension indicates that difficulties with emotional regulation are a key component of students' social withdrawal patterns. The highest indicator was difficulty managing emotions at 57%, followed by difficulty recognizing emotions at 53%, and difficulty controlling behavior at 50%. These findings have theoretical relevance because emotional regulation is a critical mechanism for successful social interaction during adolescence. Demkowicz et al. (2024) demonstrated through longitudinal analysis that emotional distress, emotional regulation, and social connectedness are interrelated in early adolescence. Thus, difficulties in emotional regulation may be associated with changes in the quality of social connectedness, while social relationship issues may also exacerbate emotional distress.

These results are further supported by De Neve et al. (2023), who found a correlation between difficulties in emotional regulation, engagement in learning, and relationships with peers and teachers in the classroom setting. Consequently, the finding that difficulties in managing emotions represent the highest indicator on the dysregulation dimension has direct implications for guidance and counseling services. Interventions must go beyond simply teaching communication skills; they must also help students recognize emotions, understand emotional triggers, use adaptive regulation strategies, and develop more effective social responses. Furthermore, the research results show gender differences in social withdrawal, with a Mann–Whitney U test result of $p = .009$. This finding indicates that the distribution of social withdrawal scores between male and female students is statistically different. However, the descriptive difference is relatively small, as the reported averages are 55% for males and 53% for females. Therefore, these results should not be interpreted as evidence that one gender is substantively more withdrawn than the other. Statistical differences must be understood within the context of score distributions, sample characteristics, and the instruments used.

This interpretation is important because previous research has shown that the relationship between gender and social withdrawal is not always consistent. For example, a study on the trajectories of social anxiety and social withdrawal conducted by Cañas et al. (2022) found no gender differences in the trajectory of social withdrawal over the study period, but did find that experiences of being bullied were associated

with higher initial levels of withdrawal and increased social anxiety and withdrawal. These findings suggest that social environmental factors may be more important than gender alone in explaining the development of withdrawal.

Recent research even suggests that gender may interact with specific psychological mechanisms. Kaçmaz et al. (2025) found that social anxiety plays a role in the relationship between cognitive disengagement syndrome and social withdrawal and identified a moderating role of gender in that model. Therefore, the differences identified in this study should serve as a basis for further assessment, not as a basis for defining withdrawal characteristics based on gender. Peer relationship factors also need to be considered in understanding the results of this study. White et al. (2025) found a reciprocal relationship between the motivation for social withdrawal and difficulties with peers in early adolescence. This means that withdrawal may be related to peer relationship difficulties, but negative social experiences also have the potential to reinforce withdrawal tendencies. This provides an important perspective on the findings at Wanaraja Public Junior High School No. 1: students who experience difficulties interacting do not always withdraw solely because of individual characteristics, but may be caught in a mutually reinforcing interpersonal cycle.

This relationship is also evident in research on peer victimization. Gaffney et al. (2022) demonstrated that peer victimization is associated with internalizing problems and that the quality of friendships can serve as a protective factor. These findings indicate that fostering a supportive peer environment is a crucial part of efforts to address social withdrawal. Furthermore, Allen et al. (2024) showed that school belonging during adolescence is linked to mental health into young adulthood. Thus, schools should be viewed not only as academic settings but as an ecological context that can either reinforce or reduce students' social isolation. From an intervention perspective, the findings of this study provide a strong foundation for group counseling services based on social-emotional learning (SEL) and social skills training. This is supported by Sousa et al. (2023), who empirically tested a school-based SEL program and demonstrated its effectiveness in reducing social withdrawal and social anxiety among adolescents. Such interventions are relevant to the students' profiles in this study because the majority fall into the moderate category; thus, universal and group approaches can be used as preventive strategies before needs escalate into more complex individual cases.

In the context of SMP Negeri 1 Wanaraja, group counseling services can be designed around several components: self-awareness, emotional regulation, communication skills, peer interaction, empathy, problem-solving, and behavioral rehearsal. Students can be given opportunities to engage in role-playing, conversation simulations, exercises in expressing opinions, group work, peer feedback, and reflection on social experiences. This approach is more appropriate than simply offering advice because students need opportunities to practice social behaviors in a safe and structured environment. More broadly, the findings of this study indicate that social withdrawal should be viewed as an indicator of social-emotional development requiring detection and tiered intervention, rather than merely as "quiet" behavior. A meta-analysis by Gazelle et al. (2024) shows that social withdrawal during childhood and adolescence

can be a predictor of psychosocial adjustment in adulthood. Meanwhile, the longitudinal study by Cruz et al. (2023) shows that the trajectories of social withdrawal and social anxiety are related to self-esteem and undergo changes throughout specific developmental periods and social contexts. Thus, the finding that 70.9% of students fall into the moderate category should be understood as an early warning signal, not as a diagnosis.

Overall, this study shows that social withdrawal among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Wanaraja is a phenomenon predominantly at the moderate level and has a multidimensional nature. The nonfearful and dysregulation dimensions show relatively balanced contributions, while difficulty managing emotions and comfort when alone emerge as the most prominent indicators. Statistically significant gender differences were also found, but the magnitude of these descriptive differences was relatively small, so they cannot serve as a basis for broad generalizations. These findings reinforce the need to develop guidance and counseling services that are not only oriented toward reducing withdrawal but also toward enhancing social competence, emotional regulation, peer connectedness, and school belonging. With this approach, schools can shift from a reactive intervention model toward a preventive and developmental counseling model that is better suited to the developmental needs of adolescents.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that *social withdrawal* is a phenomenon that warrants attention in the social and emotional development of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Wanaraja. Of the 199 students who participated in the study, the majority fell into the moderate *social withdrawal* category—141 students (71%)—while 57 students (29%) fell into the low category and 1 student fell into the high category. These findings suggest that although the majority of students have not yet reached a high level of *social withdrawal*, the tendency to withdraw remains a relevant issue in the context of student development. In the behavioral dimension, the *nonfearful* aspect accounted for 55%, while *dysregulation* accounted for 54%, both of which fell into the moderate category. Analysis by gender revealed a significant difference in levels of *social withdrawal* between male and female students, as determined by the *Mann–Whitney U* test ($p = 0.009$). This finding suggests that gender characteristics should be considered when understanding withdrawal behavior. In practical terms, the research results reinforce the importance of guidance and counseling services—particularly group counseling—as preventive and developmental measures to enhance students’ social skills, self-confidence, emotional regulation, and interpersonal abilities. Service designs should be tailored to students’ needs and aimed at creating a supportive, inclusive, and conducive school environment for adolescents’ psychosocial development.

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