Available on: https://jsshrs.ep-journals.org/ E-ISSN: 3051-3561, P-ISSN: 3051-3553

Journal of Social Science and Human Research Studies

Volume: 02 Issue: 06 June-2026

Control in Crowds: An Analysis of the Mediating Role of Emotional Regulation in Conformity to Aggressive Behavior Among Student Supporters in Surabaya

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Published Date: June 01, 2026 **Article DOI: 10.65150/EP-jsshrs/V2E6/2026-02**

ABSTRACT: This study explores the relationship between conformity, emotional regulation, and aggressive behavior among high school and vocational high school students in Surabaya. Conformity is understood as an individual's ability to adapt to group norms, while emotional regulation refers to the capacity to manage emotional responses in various situations. The primary focus of this study is aggressive behavior, including physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility.

This study employs a quantitative approach with a correlational design and involves 263 respondents selected using snowball sampling. The research instrument consisted of a questionnaire measuring aggressive behavior, emotional regulation, and conformity. The results of the analysis indicate that emotional regulation acts as a mediator in the relationship between conformity and aggressive behavior. Students with high levels of conformity tend to experience a decline in their emotional regulation ability, which subsequently triggers aggressive behavior. The normative and informational influences of conformity were also found to contribute significantly to students' emotional dynamics and aggression. This study emphasizes the importance of developing emotional regulation to help students cope with social pressure, thereby minimizing aggressive behavior. These findings provide practical insights for educators and school administrators in designing programs to support emotional regulation and the formation of positive social norms within the educational environment.

KEYWORDS: Aggressive Behavior, Conformity, Emotional Regulation, Social Psychology, Student Supporters

INTRODUCTION

It is not uncommon for teenagers in school to join fan communities with the aim of cheering on the team or group they support. Fans are people who come to support an individual or a sports team (Jibar, 2024). Supporters typically shout, chant, or sing while wearing matching gear to cheer on the individual or team they support (Kunto Wibowo, 2024). Data from Goodstats indicates that Indonesia has the third-largest number of soccer fans, also known as supporters, in the world totaling 165.48 million people (Medy, 2025). This large number spans a wide age range; at least among the 22,000 respondents involved in the Ipsos survey, their ages ranged from 18 to 74 years (Annur, 2022). In other words, there is a large number of supporters in Indonesia, including teenagers still in school who are active supporters of their school teams.

The level of enthusiasm shown by fans typically influences the course of a match, both positively and negatively. Research by Waskito and Sutopo (2021) indicates that fans play a vital role in providing encouragement and motivation to the team they support, thereby fueling their performance on the field. Not only do they serve as a source of energy, but supporters also act as sports consumers who can drive economic activity on both small and large scales, such as purchasing tickets, merchandise, and even as television viewers (Wahyudi et al., 2023). On the other hand, supporters can also have the opposite effect. Numerous cases of disturbances during matches, ranging from national-scale incidents like the Kanjuruhan Tragedy in 2022 as cited in Wikipedia (2026) to local-scale incidents, frequently occur. This results in matches being temporarily suspended, and in the worst cases, leads to casualties (Wikipedia, 2026).

Many of these incidents of violence between fans occur due to issues arising during the game. This often leads to explosive emotions and causes fans to engage in destructive and damaging behavior—in other words, aggressive behavior. Aggressive behavior is one of the problematic behaviors exhibited by adolescents today. This is demonstrated by adolescents intentionally harming others, whether physically or verbally (Saputra, 2018). Aggressive behavior encompasses all forms of behavior intended to harm others, whether physically or psychologically (Myers, 2012). Aggression

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can manifest in direct forms, such as physical or verbal confrontation, or in indirect forms, such as spreading rumors or marginalizing others (Anderson & Bushman, 2002).

Current research has extensively explored the causes of aggressive behavior in individuals, particularly in the social and emotional domains. Eckhardt's (1971) study explains that aggressive behavior can arise as a result of adherence to social norms or orders from authority figures, in other words, conformity. This aligns with several similar studies indicating that conformity contributes to aggressive behavior among young people, whether as students in school or as members of pencak silat groups (Putra, 2022; Wilujeng, 2013).

Aggressive behavior is also closely linked to a person's emotional state; as shown in the study by Dvikaryani and Jannah (2020), emotional regulation plays a significant role in the occurrence of aggressive behavior. Emotional regulation accounts for as much as 15.4% of the variance in aggressive behavior (Thohar, 2022). Emotional regulation is the way individuals consciously or unconsciously maintain, strengthen, or reduce one or more aspects of emotional responses, namely emotional experiences and behavior (Gross, 2014). This indicates that expressing emotions is a healthy and constructive activity when done appropriately, but if done inappropriately, it can lead to behavior that is harmful to oneself and others.

Based on the above discussion, conformity or the process of aligning one's attitudes, behaviors, or beliefs with group norms, often triggers aggressive behavior, particularly in the context of rivalry among sports fans, thereby serving as an independent variable that directly influences aggressive behavior. Meanwhile, emotion regulation plays a role as an important mediator in the relationship between conformity and aggressive behavior among high school and vocational school supporters. In this situation, adolescents who are unable to regulate their emotions well are more likely to exhibit aggressive behavior, and vice versa. Thus, this study aims to examine how conformity can influence the aggressive behavior of high school and vocational school supporters in Surabaya through the mediating role of emotion regulation.

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

In their study, Allen & Anderson (2017) provide a conceptual framework that attempts to explain the role of aggressive behavior, which is defined as an intentional response aimed at causing physical, emotional, or social harm to others. In this study, aggression is influenced by conformity as an independent variable, with emotion regulation serving as a mediator that explains the relationship between the two. Conformity, as the independent variable, is defined as an individual's tendency to adapt to the norms, pressures, or expectations of a social group. Conformity can play a significant role in either increasing or suppressing aggressive behavior, depending on the group norms being followed. When individuals are in a group that supports aggressive behavior, the tendency to imitate such behavior tends to increase.

On the other hand, emotional regulation serves as a mediating variable that explains how an individual's ability to manage and control emotions influences the relationship between conformity and aggression. Low emotional regulation can amplify the effect of conformity on aggression, as individuals are more susceptible to impulsivity and peer pressure. Conversely, individuals with good emotional regulation tend to be able to control aggressive impulses even when facing high social pressure.

Aggressive behavior is the result of a complex interaction between social pressure (conformity) and an individual's ability to regulate emotions. Thus, this conceptual model suggests that conformity can influence the level of aggression through emotional regulation. In other words, the higher a person's level of conformity—especially in environments with aggressive norms—and the lower their emotional regulation ability, the greater the likelihood that the individual will engage in aggression. This framework offers a more holistic understanding of the relationship between social and psychological factors in influencing aggression (see Figure 1).

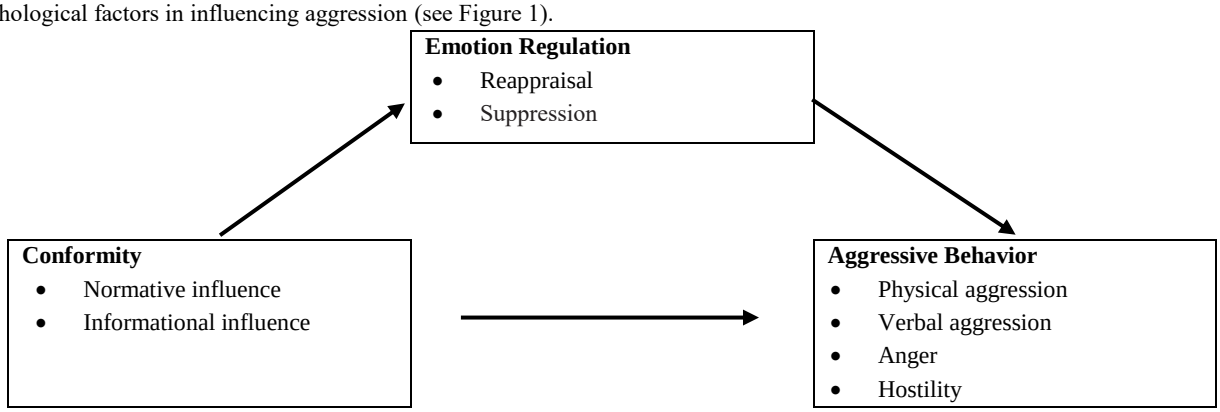


Figure 1. Research Framework

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs a quantitative correlational design to measure both direct and indirect relationships between variables. This study was conducted in accordance with the research objective to analyze the pathway of conformity leading to aggressive behavior through emotional regulation. The study population consisted of all high school (SMA) and vocational high school (SMK) students in Surabaya. The sampling technique used was snowball sampling, which involves sequential sampling. A total of 263 students participated in this study, all of whom had previously participated in supporter activities either at school or outside of school. The majority of the sample were aged 17–18 and attended vocational high schools (SMK); see Table 1. In addition, the respondents' aggressive behavior profiles tended to be moderate (38%) or low (31.6%), with the remainder distributed across the high and very high categories.

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Table 1. Respondent Demographic Data

Variables	N	%
Ages		
15	28	11%
16	52	20%
17	88	33%
18	95	36%
Type of School		
High school (SMA)	44	17%
Vocational high school (SMK)	219	83%
Total	**263**	**100%**

Data collection utilized a questionnaire-based research instrument distributed online. Aggressive behavior was measured using the aggression scale developed by Buss and Perry (1992), which consists of 24 valid items and has been validated. The correlation coefficients for the aggression behavior scale ranged from 0.598 to 0.837 (coefficients < 0.350), and the Cronbach's alpha value was 0.966. Furthermore, the conformity variable was measured using a scale adapted from the concept by Deutsch and Gerard (1955), which consists of 38 items and has been validated. The correlation coefficients ranged from 0.533 to 0.870 (coefficients < 0.350), while the Cronbach's alpha reliability was 0.982. Data for the emotional regulation variable will be collected using the emotional regulation measurement scale based on Gross's (2003) concept, comprising 16 items. The scale has been pilot-tested, yielding correlation coefficients ranging from 0.585 to 0.771 (coefficients < 0.350) with a Cronbach's alpha reliability value of 0.944. The data analysis technique in this study employs simultaneous path analysis to test the relationships among variables based on the previously formulated hypotheses.

RESULTS

The results of the analysis for Hypothesis 1 indicate that the indirect effect has a Z-value of -10.850 ($p < 0.001$), meaning that emotional regulation mediates the relationship between conformity and aggressive behavior; therefore, Hypothesis 1 is accepted (Table 2). Path analysis for each variable was also used to determine the dynamics between variables; see table 3. The results of the second hypothesis test showed that the Z-value for the path from conformity to aggressive behavior was -5.130 ($p < 0.001$), meaning that the higher the level of conformity, the lower the level of aggressive behavior among high school and vocational school students; thus, the second hypothesis was rejected. Analysis of the third hypothesis revealed a Z-value of 15.000 ($p < 0.001$), meaning that the higher the conformity, the higher the emotional regulation among high school and vocational school students; thus, the third hypothesis is accepted. The results of the analysis of the fourth hypothesis showed a Z-value of -12.740 ($p < 0.001$), meaning that the higher the emotional regulation, the lower the aggressive behavior exhibited by high school and vocational school students; therefore, the fourth hypothesis was accepted.

Table 2. Mediation Analysis

Variable	Z-value	*p*	Description
Conformity → Emotion Regulation → Aggressive Behavior	-10.850	<0.001	Significant

Table 3. Path Analysis

Variables	Z-value	*p*	Description
Conformity → Aggressive Behavior	-5.130	<0.001	Significant
Conformity → Emotion Regulation	15.000	<0.001	Significant
Emotion Regulation → Aggressive Behavior	-12.740	<0.001	Significant

As an additional finding, the data in this study were categorized into five categories, namely: a) Very High; b) High; c) Moderate; d) Low; and e) Very Low. These categorization criteria were based on those used by Azwar (2016) as follows in table 4. The categorization results found that 15.6% of respondents in the Very High group, 14.8% in the High group, 38% in the Moderate group, 31.6% in the Low group, and 0% in the Very Low group exhibited aggressive behavior characterized by physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility..

Table 4. Norm Categorization

Categories	Norm
Very High	X < M – 1,5 SD
High	M – 1,5 SD < X < M – 0,5 SD
Moderate	M – 0,5 SD < X < M + 0,5 SD
Low	M + 0,5 SD < X < M + 1,5 SD
Very Low	M +1,5 SD < X

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DISCUSSION

Based on the results outlined above, it appears that emotional regulation is fully capable of mediating the relationship between conformity and aggressive behavior among high school and vocational high school students in Surabaya. This is because the reappraisal aspect of the emotional regulation variable enables individuals to reassess the emotions they are experiencing (Gross, 2003). When students conform to their school's supporters, they can emotionally re-evaluate through cognitive processing whether the behavior exhibited by their group benefits them or, conversely, endangers them. Thus, based on this processing, students can reduce their aggressive behavior. This study supports the concept proposed by Allen & Anderson (2017) that behavior is influenced by biological and environmental factors; in the context of this study, environmental conditions refer to influences within the group, while biological factors involve an individual's emotional regulation before ultimately deciding to engage in aggressive behavior.

The fourth hypothesis states that the relationship between conformity and aggressive behavior is negative, meaning that when students conform to group values that prioritize peaceful conflict resolution and mutual respect, they tend to avoid aggressive behavior toward rival fan groups. This is due to accurate and constructive informational influences that encourage viewing situations from the perspective of other groups, enabling students to develop empathetic attitudes and reduce perceived threats, which ultimately leads to decreased hostility (Buss & Perry, 1992). Students also tend to manage conflicts peacefully and avoid physically aggressive behavior toward other supporters when the information shared within their group is positive and promotes understanding, tolerance, and intergroup cooperation. The norms established within the group also significantly reduce the intensity of negative emotions, such as students' anger. When group norms prioritize polite behavior and peaceful conflict resolution, students tend to align with these values, thereby curbing their tendency to engage in aggression. The General Aggression Model (GAM) by Allen & Anderson (2017) can explain this through situational and personological factors (the need to be accepted), suggesting that social pressure or an individual's need for acceptance can influence their internal state and lead them to behave conformistically in accordance with the norms and information established within the group.

The second hypothesis, which posits a relationship between conformity and emotional regulation, was accepted. This is because the higher the level of conformity, the greater the students' ability to manage their emotions effectively. When student supporters conform, they are influenced by the normative expectations of their group, which can lead to better emotional regulation. Normative influence that promotes positive values, such as tolerance and cooperation, can help student supporters engage in constructive reappraisal. When group norms teach the importance of understanding other perspectives and reducing conflict, students are more likely to use reappraisal to view situations more objectively, which helps reduce tension within the supporter group. This study supports Wilensky (2022) previous research that normative influence affects how individuals suppress their emotions.

The third hypothesis, which posits a relationship between emotional regulation and aggressive behavior, is also examined in this study: when student supporters are able to regulate their emotions—whether by suppressing them or reflecting on them—they can reduce their aggressive behavior. Specifically, the anger factor within the aggressive behavior variable can be effectively managed through emotional regulation. Because suppressed emotions are not expressed or managed properly, when students suppress their negative feelings in conflict situations, those feelings do not disappear but instead accumulate, intensifying the anger that emerges when emotional pressure reaches the tolerance threshold. These results support previous research by Larsson et al. (2024), which specifically discussed how emotional regulation factors influence an individual's ability to control their anger. This study also aligns with research by Moreira et al. (2024), which states that when an individual has low emotional regulation skills, this can lead to misinterpreting information and result in negative behaviors such as aggression.

In general, it is known that emotional regulation plays a mediating role in the relationship between conformity and aggressive behavior. This suggests that biased or provocative information can undermine student supporters' ability to behave objectively; however, if student supporters are able to assess situations objectively, this tends to reduce their likelihood of engaging in aggressive behavior. This study offers new findings that emotional regulation is key for student supporters in determining their behavior amidst conflict and widespread group narratives. Nevertheless, there are still several limitations that need to be highlighted: first, the number of subjects involved in this study is still limited and restricted to high school and vocational school students who are supporters in Surabaya; therefore, comprehensive generalization to all supporters in Surabaya cannot yet be made. Second, this study is cross-sectional in nature and only examines the relationships between variables; thus, the dynamics of each variable have not yet been explored in depth. Consequently, further studies are still needed in the future.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that emotion regulation plays a significant role as a partial mediator in the relationship between conformity and aggressive behavior among high school and vocational school student supporters in Surabaya. This study indicates that conformity does not always have a direct impact on aggressive behavior but is influenced by an individual's ability to manage emotions. These findings contribute theoretically to the development of social psychology and adolescent developmental psychology research, particularly regarding the dynamics of aggressive behavior within student supporter groups. Furthermore, this study reinforces the understanding that emotional regulation factors, such as cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression, play a role in determining how students process group influences before exhibiting verbal or physical aggressive behavior.

The practical contribution of this study lies in the importance of developing emotion-regulation-based intervention programs in school settings, particularly for students involved in fan communities. Schools can develop training in emotion management, information literacy, and conflict resolution education to help students evaluate information more objectively and reduce the tendency toward aggression resulting from group provocation. Additionally, school administrators, guidance counselors, and fan club advisors need to establish a mentoring system capable of fostering a healthier and more sportsmanlike culture of support among groups.

For future research, it is recommended that researchers consider other variables that may influence aggressive behavior, such as social identity, self-control, moral disengagement, or school climate. Future research could also expand the characteristics of the subjects across different

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educational levels or regions to ensure the findings have broader generalizability. Additionally, the use of longitudinal methods or mixed-methods approaches can provide a deeper understanding of the processes underlying the development of aggressive behavior among student supporters over time.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT
Author have no acknowledment.

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