

The Dynamics of Bullying in Schools: Causes, Impacts, and Prevention Strategies

Jumra¹, Mukhawas Rasyid², Andi Baharuddin³, Arifullah⁴
^{1,2,3,4}Universitas Andi Sudirman, Indonesia

Abstract

Bullying in schools is a persistent social issue that significantly impacts students' psychological well-being, academic performance, and overall development. This study aims to analyze the dynamics of bullying by exploring its underlying causes, the consequences for both victims and perpetrators, and the most effective prevention strategies in educational settings. Using a literature review approach, this research synthesizes findings from various academic sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of school bullying. The results indicate that bullying arises from multiple interconnected factors, including individual traits, family environment, peer influence, and school policies. Victims often suffer from long-term psychological effects such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, which can lead to decreased academic motivation and social withdrawal. Meanwhile, perpetrators may develop aggressive tendencies that persist into adulthood, increasing the likelihood of engaging in antisocial behavior. Moreover, bullying negatively affects the overall school climate, creating an unsafe learning environment that disrupts students' educational experiences. To address this issue, schools must implement a multifaceted prevention approach, including educational campaigns, strict anti-bullying policies, teacher training programs, and parental involvement. Establishing a supportive and inclusive school culture is essential to reducing bullying incidents and fostering positive student interactions. By incorporating these strategies, schools can create a safer and more conducive learning environment that promotes student well-being and academic success.

Keywords: bullying, school violence, psychological, academic performance, prevention strategies

1. Introduction

Bullying in schools has become a global concern, significantly impacting students' psychological well-being, academic performance, and social development (Froeschle et al., 2008; Ma et al., 2001). It is a pervasive issue that occurs in various forms, including physical aggression, verbal abuse, relational bullying (such as social exclusion), and cyberbullying. The effects of bullying extend beyond the immediate harm to victims, affecting the overall school climate and creating an environment of fear, anxiety, and hostility. Despite growing awareness, bullying continues to be a challenge due to its deep-rooted causes, which often stem from individual, familial, school, and societal factors. Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive understanding of its underlying dynamics and the implementation of proactive measures to create a safe and supportive educational environment (Mislia et al., 2021; Nurman et al., 2022a).

Bullying is not just a conflict between students; rather, it is a power imbalance where the perpetrator intentionally inflicts harm on a weaker individual, often repeatedly over time (Hall, 2017; WULF, 2010). Research suggests that bullying behavior may originate from multiple factors, including personality traits, family upbringing, peer influence, and cultural or societal norms that condone aggression. In many cases, children who bully others come from backgrounds where they have experienced neglect, abuse, or exposure to violence. Conversely, victims of bullying often struggle with self-confidence, social anxiety, or difficulties in asserting themselves, making them more vulnerable to such mistreatment. Additionally, schools that lack clear anti-bullying policies or effective intervention strategies may unintentionally contribute to the persistence of bullying behaviors.

The consequences of bullying are far-reaching, affecting both victims and perpetrators (Froeschle et al., 2008; Sprague & Nishioka, 2012). Victims often experience severe emotional distress, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, which can lead to social withdrawal and reduced academic

performance. Many students subjected to bullying lose motivation for learning, develop school avoidance behavior, or even drop out entirely. In extreme cases, persistent bullying has been linked to self-harm and suicidal ideation. On the other hand, students who engage in bullying behavior may develop long-term antisocial tendencies, such as aggression, substance abuse, and delinquency, which can continue into adulthood. Furthermore, the overall school environment suffers when bullying is prevalent, leading to decreased student engagement, increased absenteeism, and a decline in the overall academic atmosphere.

Given the serious implications of bullying, it is crucial to explore effective strategies for its prevention and intervention (Ma et al., 2001; Nurman et al., 2022b). Schools play a fundamental role in combating bullying by fostering a culture of respect, inclusion, and mutual support among students. Implementing clear anti-bullying policies, providing teacher training programs, engaging parents in preventive efforts, and promoting social-emotional learning can help create a safer school environment. Moreover, early identification and intervention strategies are essential to address bullying before it escalates into a more severe issue.

This study aims to examine the dynamics of bullying in schools by analyzing its root causes, psychological and academic impacts, and the most effective strategies for prevention and intervention. By understanding these key elements, educational institutions, policymakers, and stakeholders can collaborate to develop a holistic approach that ensures a safer and more conducive learning environment for students. A multi-faceted strategy that involves educators, parents, and students is necessary to break the cycle of bullying and promote a school culture based on empathy, kindness, and mutual respect.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach through a comprehensive literature review to analyze the dynamics of bullying in schools. The research focuses on identifying the causes, impacts, and prevention strategies related to bullying in educational settings. The methodology involves collecting and synthesizing information from various academic sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and credible reports from international organizations focused on education and child welfare.

Research Design

This research utilizes a descriptive-analytical approach to explore bullying in schools from multiple perspectives. The study examines existing literature to provide a structured analysis of bullying-related issues, including its prevalence, contributing factors, consequences, and best practices for prevention and intervention. The data collected is analyzed thematically, focusing on key elements that influence the occurrence of bullying and how educational institutions respond to it.

Data Collection

The data for this study is obtained from secondary sources, including academic journals and articles that discuss bullying in schools, its psychological and academic impacts, and intervention strategies. Government and institutional reports from international organizations such as UNESCO and UNICEF provide valuable insights into policy frameworks and initiatives aimed at addressing bullying in educational settings. Additionally, books and scholarly publications written by experts in education, psychology, and sociology contribute to a deeper understanding of bullying dynamics and prevention mechanisms. Case studies from different educational institutions illustrate real-world examples of bullying incidents and the measures taken to address them.

Data Analysis

The collected literature is analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. This method involves identifying recurring themes related to the causes, impacts, and intervention strategies of bullying. The causes of bullying are examined through psychological, social, familial, and institutional perspectives to understand the multifaceted nature of the issue. The impacts of bullying are categorized into emotional, academic, and social consequences, highlighting how bullying affects both victims and perpetrators in the short and long term. The effectiveness of intervention and prevention strategies is assessed by reviewing school-based programs, policies, and the role of parental involvement in creating a safe and supportive learning environment. A comparative approach is used to analyze findings from

different countries, allowing for an understanding of how cultural, social, and institutional factors influence bullying behavior and its management.

Limitations

As this research is based on a literature review, it is limited by the availability and scope of existing studies. The absence of primary data collection, such as surveys or interviews with students, teachers, or school administrators, means that the study relies solely on previously published findings. This limitation may result in a lack of firsthand perspectives on the issue of bullying. Additionally, variations in definitions, methodologies, and cultural contexts across different studies may affect the generalizability of findings. Future research may incorporate empirical investigations to complement the insights derived from secondary sources, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the issue.

3. Results

The findings of this study highlight the multifaceted nature of bullying in schools, emphasizing its causes, impacts, and the effectiveness of various prevention strategies. Through the analysis of existing literature, several key themes have emerged, providing a deeper understanding of how bullying develops, its consequences, and the necessary interventions to mitigate its effects. The results indicate that bullying is not merely an issue of individual behavior but a reflection of broader social, familial, and institutional dynamics that influence the interactions between students in educational settings.

Causes of Bullying

Bullying in schools arises from a combination of psychological, social, familial, and institutional factors (Levy et al., 2012; Pottinger & Stair, 2009). From a psychological perspective, students who engage in bullying often exhibit characteristics such as low empathy, high levels of aggression, and a strong desire for dominance over others. Some perpetrators demonstrate narcissistic tendencies, while others may bully as a coping mechanism for their own insecurities or personal struggles. Additionally, certain personality traits, such as impulsivity and a lack of emotional regulation, contribute to bullying behaviors, making some individuals more prone to aggressive interactions with peers.

Social influences play a significant role in reinforcing bullying behavior, as peer pressure often drives students to conform to group norms, even when these norms encourage aggressive or exclusionary actions. In many cases, students bully others to assert dominance within their peer groups, to fit into a specific social hierarchy, or to gain the approval of influential peers. Additionally, societal perceptions of power and competition, particularly in cultures where dominance and assertiveness are valued, may indirectly contribute to bullying behaviors among students.

Family dynamics significantly impact the likelihood of a child engaging in or becoming a victim of bullying. Children who grow up in authoritarian households, where discipline is enforced through harsh punishments, may internalize aggressive behaviors and replicate them in school settings. Conversely, children who experience neglect or lack parental supervision may struggle with social interactions, making them more vulnerable to being bullied. Exposure to domestic violence, parental substance abuse, or an environment where conflict resolution is not modeled effectively increases the risk of children developing aggressive tendencies or being unable to defend themselves against bullying.

Institutional factors within schools also shape the prevalence of bullying. Schools that lack clear policies on bullying or fail to enforce anti-bullying regulations effectively create an environment where aggressive behaviors are tolerated. A lack of supervision in common areas such as hallways, cafeterias, and playgrounds provides opportunities for bullying to occur unnoticed. Additionally, if teachers and administrators do not take reports of bullying seriously or fail to intervene in a timely and consistent manner, students may feel discouraged from seeking help, leading to a culture of silence where bullying persists unchecked.

Impacts of Bullying

The consequences of bullying extend beyond the immediate distress experienced by victims and have long-term psychological, academic, and social effects (Čulić-Viskota, 2018; Pergolizzi et al., 2009). Victims of bullying often experience a wide range of emotional and mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and post-traumatic stress symptoms. These psychological effects

can persist into adulthood, impacting victims' ability to build relationships, succeed academically, and maintain stable employment. In severe cases, prolonged exposure to bullying has been linked to self-harming behaviors, suicidal ideation, and social withdrawal, highlighting the devastating effects of unchecked bullying.

Academically, bullying has a profound impact on students' motivation, engagement, and overall performance. Victims frequently report difficulty concentrating in class, declining grades, and a loss of interest in school activities. Fear of bullying may lead to increased absenteeism, avoidance of certain areas within the school, and, in extreme cases, school dropout. The stress and anxiety associated with bullying not only affect individual victims but also contribute to a negative learning environment for the entire student body, reducing overall academic achievement.

The effects of bullying are not limited to victims alone. Perpetrators of bullying often face long-term consequences as well. Research suggests that individuals who engage in bullying during childhood or adolescence are more likely to develop antisocial behavior patterns that persist into adulthood. These individuals face a heightened risk of engaging in criminal activities, substance abuse, and violent behavior later in life. Furthermore, their ability to form healthy relationships and integrate into professional or social environments is often impaired, leading to difficulties in maintaining stable employment and social connections.

The overall school climate suffers when bullying is prevalent. Schools with high rates of bullying experience a decline in student morale, increased disciplinary issues, and diminished trust between students and educators. A hostile school environment discourages collaboration and inclusivity, making it challenging for students to feel safe and supported in their educational journey. Teachers and school staff may also struggle with maintaining discipline and fostering a positive learning atmosphere when bullying is widespread, ultimately affecting the effectiveness of the educational system as a whole.

Effectiveness of Prevention and Intervention Strategies

Numerous prevention and intervention strategies have been implemented to address bullying, with varying levels of effectiveness (Setiawan et al., 2021; Sprague & Nishioka, 2012; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). School-based programs that integrate anti-bullying policies, awareness campaigns, and teacher training have demonstrated positive outcomes in reducing bullying incidents. Schools that actively promote a culture of respect, inclusion, and empathy report lower levels of bullying and improved student relationships. Educational programs that teach social-emotional skills, conflict resolution techniques, and the importance of bystander intervention empower students to respond constructively to bullying situations and support their peers.

The role of teachers and school staff is crucial in addressing bullying effectively. Schools that invest in professional development programs for teachers, equipping them with the skills to identify, prevent, and intervene in bullying situations, tend to experience better outcomes in reducing bullying. Active teacher supervision, mentoring programs, and a strong emphasis on positive behavioral reinforcement contribute to a safer and more supportive school environment.

Parental involvement is another key factor in bullying prevention. Schools that engage parents in workshops, communication strategies, and collaborative efforts to monitor student behavior see greater reductions in bullying incidents. Parents who maintain open lines of communication with their children are better able to recognize signs of bullying and intervene before the situation escalates. Home-school partnerships that emphasize the importance of kindness, respect, and responsible online behavior contribute to a more positive school culture.

Legislative and policy frameworks play an essential role in institutionalizing anti-bullying measures. Countries with strong legal protections against bullying and school violence have seen improvements in student safety and well-being. Policies that mandate clear reporting procedures, accountability measures, and intervention strategies ensure that bullying is not ignored or dismissed as a minor issue. National and regional education authorities that provide resources, training, and monitoring mechanisms support schools in maintaining effective anti-bullying initiatives.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study reinforce the complex and multifaceted nature of bullying in schools. The causes of bullying are deeply rooted in psychological, social, familial, and institutional factors, making

it a challenge that requires a multi-layered response. The emotional, academic, and social consequences of bullying are severe, affecting both victims and perpetrators in the short and long term. Schools that adopt a holistic approach—integrating policy enforcement, teacher and parent involvement, and student empowerment programs—see the most success in reducing bullying incidents.

Addressing bullying requires a collective effort from educators, families, policymakers, and students. Schools that prioritize inclusivity, empathy, and proactive intervention create environments where bullying is less likely to thrive. Future research should explore the long-term effectiveness of various intervention programs and examine how evolving social and technological trends, such as social media, influence bullying dynamics. By fostering a culture of respect and accountability, schools can ensure that all students feel safe, valued, and supported in their educational journey.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of bullying in schools, revealing the interplay between individual, familial, social, and institutional factors that contribute to the perpetuation of bullying behavior. The discussion focuses on interpreting these findings in light of existing research, evaluating the effectiveness of current intervention strategies, and identifying areas for further improvement in bullying prevention efforts.

Interpreting the Causes of Bullying

Bullying is not an isolated phenomenon but rather a reflection of deeper social and psychological issues (Gudyanga et al., 2014; Harlow & Roberts, 2010). The study confirms that bullying behavior often stems from a combination of personality traits, environmental influences, and cultural factors. Students who exhibit aggressive tendencies may do so due to learned behavior from their home environments, exposure to violent media, or the need to assert dominance within peer groups. These findings align with social learning theory, which suggests that individuals acquire aggressive behaviors by observing and imitating role models in their surroundings.

Additionally, the role of peer influence in reinforcing bullying behavior cannot be overlooked. Peer groups often function as enablers, where students engage in bullying to gain acceptance, avoid victimization themselves, or conform to group norms. This social dynamic is supported by research on group behavior, which indicates that individuals are more likely to participate in harmful activities when such actions are normalized within their immediate social circles. Schools that fail to actively challenge these norms may inadvertently allow a culture of bullying to flourish.

Institutional factors also play a crucial role in shaping the prevalence of bullying. Schools that lack clear policies on bullying, fail to implement consistent disciplinary measures, or provide insufficient supervision create an environment where bullying thrives (Cahaya et al., 2022; Harlin, 2008; Kasim et al., 2022). The absence of teacher intervention or delayed responses to bullying incidents further exacerbates the problem, as students may feel that reporting bullying is futile or that their concerns will not be taken seriously. This aligns with the organizational climate theory, which posits that institutional structures and leadership approaches significantly influence behavioral norms within an organization, including schools.

Examining the Impacts of Bullying

The study's findings confirm that bullying has far-reaching consequences, affecting victims, perpetrators, and the overall school climate. The emotional and psychological distress experienced by victims often leads to long-term mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and, in severe cases, suicidal ideation. These findings are consistent with existing psychological research that links chronic exposure to bullying with increased vulnerability to emotional disorders. The impact of bullying on victims' academic performance further underscores the importance of addressing bullying as a serious educational issue rather than merely a social problem (Glew et al., 2005; Kumpulainen, 2008). Interestingly, the study also highlights the long-term risks associated with being a perpetrator of bullying. Students who engage in bullying are more likely to develop delinquent behavior patterns, struggle with maintaining healthy relationships, and face difficulties in professional and social settings later in life. This supports the deviant trajectory hypothesis, which suggests that early engagement in aggressive and antisocial behaviors increases the likelihood of continued behavioral problems in

adulthood. These findings emphasize the importance of early intervention not only to protect victims but also to redirect the behavioral patterns of perpetrators before they become deeply ingrained.

At the institutional level, schools with high bullying rates experience a decline in overall student engagement, higher dropout rates, and a decrease in academic achievement across the student body. A toxic school climate not only affects the direct participants in bullying but also contributes to a general sense of insecurity and disengagement among other students. Research suggests that students who witness bullying but do not intervene may also experience feelings of guilt, helplessness, and reduced trust in school authorities, further reinforcing a cycle of fear and inaction.

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Prevention Strategies

The study identifies several key prevention and intervention strategies that have shown promise in reducing bullying incidents. School-based programs that incorporate anti-bullying policies, awareness campaigns, and teacher training have demonstrated positive outcomes in fostering a safer school environment. Programs that integrate social-emotional learning into the curriculum help students develop empathy, improve communication skills, and learn conflict resolution techniques. However, while these initiatives have been effective in certain contexts, their success often depends on how consistently they are implemented and whether they are adapted to the specific needs of the school community (Garrard & Lipsey, 2007; Johnson et al., 1996; Stepien & Baernstein, 2006).

The role of teachers and school administrators in preventing bullying is critical. Schools that provide ongoing training for educators on recognizing, addressing, and preventing bullying tend to experience lower rates of bullying incidents. Active teacher supervision, prompt intervention in bullying cases, and the establishment of clear consequences for bullying behaviors contribute to a more positive school climate. Research indicates that when teachers model respectful and inclusive behavior, students are more likely to adopt similar attitudes, thereby reducing the prevalence of bullying.

Parental involvement also plays a key role in bullying prevention. Parents who maintain open communication with their children, monitor their online activities, and reinforce positive social behaviors at home contribute to lower bullying rates. Schools that engage parents through workshops and collaborative programs tend to see greater success in reducing bullying incidents. However, one challenge remains in ensuring that parents recognize the signs of bullying and take proactive steps to support their children, whether they are victims or perpetrators.

One area that requires further improvement is the regulation of cyberbullying. With the rise of digital communication platforms, cyberbullying has become an increasingly prevalent issue that extends beyond school grounds. Traditional anti-bullying policies often fail to address cyberbullying effectively, as it occurs in online spaces where school authorities have limited control. Developing comprehensive digital literacy programs and collaborating with technology companies to monitor and prevent online harassment could be crucial steps in addressing this challenge.

Future Directions and Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made to enhance bullying prevention and intervention efforts. Schools should adopt a multi-tiered approach that integrates policy enforcement, student education, teacher training, and parental involvement. Establishing a strong reporting system where students feel safe to report bullying incidents without fear of retaliation is essential. Additionally, promoting a culture of inclusion and respect through extracurricular activities, peer mentoring programs, and student-led initiatives can help shift social norms away from bullying behaviors.

Further research is needed to examine the long-term effectiveness of various intervention programs, particularly in different cultural and educational contexts. Understanding how social media influences bullying behaviors and identifying effective strategies to combat cyberbullying should be key areas of focus for future studies. Additionally, more research on the psychological resilience of bullying victims could help educators develop better support systems to aid in their recovery.

Addressing bullying requires a collective effort from educators, families, policymakers, and students. Schools that prioritize inclusivity, empathy, and proactive intervention create environments where bullying is less likely to thrive. By fostering a culture of respect and accountability, educational institutions can ensure that all students feel safe, valued, and supported in their academic and social development.

5. Conclusion

This Bullying in schools is a widespread and deeply rooted issue that affects students' psychological well-being, academic performance, and social development (Glew et al., 2005; Q'Moore et al., 1997; Wahyuni et al., 2021). This study has explored the multifaceted nature of bullying by analyzing its causes, impacts, and the effectiveness of various prevention and intervention strategies. The findings reveal that bullying is not an isolated behavioral problem but rather the result of complex interactions between individual, familial, social, and institutional factors. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing effective and sustainable solutions to prevent and address bullying in educational settings. The causes of bullying are deeply embedded in the social fabric of schools, with factors such as personality traits, peer influence, family upbringing, and institutional policies all playing significant roles. Students who engage in bullying often exhibit aggressive tendencies, a lack of empathy, or a need for dominance, which may be reinforced by exposure to violence at home or in the media. Peer pressure further exacerbates the issue, as students may bully others to gain social status or to conform to dominant group norms. Additionally, schools that lack strict anti-bullying policies and effective intervention mechanisms create an environment where bullying can persist without consequence.

The impacts of bullying are severe and long-lasting, affecting both victims and perpetrators. Victims often suffer from emotional distress, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, which can hinder their academic performance and social interactions. Many victims struggle with school attendance due to fear and insecurity, leading to decreased engagement and educational attainment. In extreme cases, prolonged bullying exposure has been linked to self-harm and suicidal ideation. Perpetrators, on the other hand, are more likely to develop antisocial behaviors that persist into adulthood, increasing the risk of delinquency, substance abuse, and difficulties in maintaining stable relationships. Moreover, schools with high bullying rates experience a decline in overall student engagement and a hostile learning environment that negatively affects all students. Prevention and intervention strategies must be comprehensive and multidimensional to effectively combat bullying. School-based programs that incorporate anti-bullying policies, awareness campaigns, and social-emotional learning have proven to be effective in reducing bullying incidents. Teachers play a critical role in shaping the school climate by identifying bullying behaviors early, intervening promptly, and fostering a culture of respect and inclusion. Parental involvement is equally essential, as parents who communicate openly with their children and reinforce positive social behaviors contribute to lower bullying rates. Furthermore, policymakers must ensure that schools have clear guidelines and sufficient resources to address bullying, while also developing regulations to tackle emerging challenges such as cyberbullying.

The study highlights the need for a collective effort involving educators, parents, students, and policymakers to create a safer and more supportive school environment. Schools must implement a proactive rather than reactive approach by promoting inclusivity, empathy, and accountability. Establishing peer mentoring programs, student-led anti-bullying initiatives, and stronger disciplinary policies can contribute to a positive and respectful school culture. While this study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of bullying, further research is needed to assess the long-term effectiveness of various intervention programs and to explore new challenges posed by digital communication and social media. Future studies should focus on the evolving nature of bullying, particularly in the context of cyberbullying, and develop innovative strategies to protect students in both physical and virtual spaces.

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