The Phenomenon of Bullying in School Environments: Strategies and Challenges

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Abstract: Bullying is a complex phenomenon that requires a holistic approach to addressing it. Preventive efforts are a critical first step. Anti-bullying education in schools, teacher and staff training, and awareness campaigns involving students can encourage cultural and behavioral change. Activities that promote empathy and collaboration also play a role in building an environment that supports positive interpersonal relationships. An intervention approach is needed to address bullying cases that have already occurred. Safe and confidential reporting mechanisms give victims or witnesses the courage to speak up. In addition, counseling for victims and perpetrators helps deal with the emotional impact while addressing the root of the problem. Parent and community involvement strengthens these efforts, making bullying a shared responsibility. Technology also plays a strategic role in bullying prevention, especially in addressing new challenges such as cyberbullying. Digital applications and platforms for reporting bullying cases facilitate quick and confidential reporting. In addition, monitoring online activity through collaboration with parents and internet service providers is key to protecting students from online threats. However, a number of challenges still hinder the effectiveness of this strategy. Lack of awareness and support makes anti-bullying programs difficult to implement, especially in environments that have a culture that is permissive of such behavior. Limited resources, such as budget, expertise, and facilities, also limit the ability of schools and communities to address bullying comprehensively. Meanwhile, the rise of cyberbullying adds complexity, given its anonymous nature and wide reach in the digital world. To meet this challenge, collaboration between schools, families, communities, and governments is essential. With a comprehensive and sustainable approach, bullying can be prevented and addressed more effectively, creating a safer, healthier, and more inclusive environment for all.

Keywords: Bullying, Challenges, School Environment, Strategy

A. Introduction

Bullying in school environments has become a global issue that affects students' mental, emotional, and academic health. This phenomenon can be verbal, physical, social, or digital violence that occurs repeatedly with the aim of weakening or dominating others (Rismayani, 2024). Data from UNICEF shows that almost one in three students worldwide experience bullying at school (UNICEF-Indonesia, 2020).

Bullying cases in Indonesia are also a serious concern, UNICEF Indonesia reported that 2 out of 3 girls or boys aged 13-17 years have experienced at least one type of violence during their lives. Then it was reported that 3 out of 4 children and adolescents who had experienced one or more types of violence reported that the perpetrators of violence were their friends or peers (UNICEF-Indonesia, 2020).

The 2018 PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) study revealed the types of bullying from the highest to the lowest proportion, namely students being teased by other students, other students taking or destroying students' belongings, other students deliberately excluding students, students being hit or ordered around by other students, students being threatened by other students. Bowes et al. (2015) revealed that aggressive behavior among young people, including violence and bullying, is associated with an increased risk of mental disorders in the life span, poor social functioning and educational processes.

Bullying has a wide impact, both for the victim and the perpetrator. Victims of bullying experience psychological disorders such as low self-confidence, anxiety, depression, and even the desire to end their lives. Meanwhile, perpetrators of bullying are at risk of growing into individuals who have difficulty empathizing, have criminal tendencies, or have difficulty in establishing healthy social relationships. These impacts are not only detrimental to the individual but also damage the learning environment that should be conducive to student development (Wang, 2024).

The challenges in overcoming bullying in schools are complex. One of the main causes is the lack of awareness of forms of bullying that may be considered trivial or "ordinary" by students and teachers. In addition, a culture of silence often makes bullying cases go unreported because victims are afraid to report it or perpetrators feel that their actions will not have consequences. On the other hand, there are still shortcomings in the implementation of anti-bullying policies in many schools, both in terms of prevention and handling of cases (Garg & Chaudhary, 2024).

The government through the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, with the support of UNICEF and the Nusantara Sejati Foundation, has developed a "Positive Discipline" program to train educators on how to teach discipline to students without using elements of violence, either physical or verbal. Violence in discipline is ineffective and can have long-term effects on children. Other

policies to reduce bullying rates include implementing character education programs, strengthening the role of teachers as educators and supervisors, and providing a safe reporting system for students (UNICEF-Indonesia, 2020).

The phenomenon of bullying is not an issue that can be considered trivial. It requires cooperation between the government, schools, and the community to ensure that every student feels safe, valued, and can develop optimally in the educational environment. This paper aims to explore strategies and challenges in dealing with bullying in schools, as well as provide recommendations for creating an inclusive and violence-free learning environment.

B. Methods

This study uses a literature study method as the main approach. Literature study is a research method that is carried out by collecting, reviewing, and analyzing various relevant secondary data sources, such as books, scientific journals, previous research reports, official documents, and other publications (Herdiansyah, 2016). In this context, this method was chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of the strategies and challenges in dealing with bullying in schools, by utilizing existing knowledge to support arguments and analysis.

This research begins with a systematic literature search using appropriate keywords through various scientific databases and libraries. Furthermore, a selection process is carried out to ensure that only relevant and credible sources are used. The collected literature is then critically analyzed to identify research gaps, relevant theories, and empirical results that support the development of a conceptual framework or solution in this study.

Through the literature study approach, this study not only attempts to explain the phenomenon being studied based on a theoretical perspective, but also integrates findings from various previous studies to provide valid and evidence-based recommendations. Thus, this method provides a strong basis in answering research questions and achieving the stated objectives.

C. Results and Discussion

Prevalence and Characteristics of Bullying

UNESCO (2019) reported that around 1 in 3 students worldwide experience bullying at least once a month. The forms of bullying reported vary, including verbal bullying (35%), physical bullying (25%), and gender-based bullying (8%). Then the 2018 PISA survey revealed that as many as 23% of students worldwide are often bullied by classmates, with the highest prevalence in developing countries. Not much different from the WHO (World Health Organization) report showing that bullying is a

significant problem among adolescents, as many as 28% of children aged 13-15 years worldwide reported having experienced bullying in physical, verbal, or online forms. At the national level, a survey conducted by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture in 2021 found that around 24% of students in Indonesia admitted to having been victims of bullying at school. The most common forms of bullying are verbal (taunts or insults), followed by physical (pushing or hitting), and social (exclusion or intimidation).

Data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) in 2022 recorded 267 cases of violence in schools, most of which were bullying. The dominant types of bullying are psychological and physical. In addition, the increasing use of social media has also increased cyberbullying. Data shows that 13% of junior high and high school students in Indonesia have been victims of online bullying.

Bullying rates in Indonesia are within the global range, but reporting rates are lower due to lack of student awareness and ineffective reporting mechanisms. Globally, cyberbullying is increasing rapidly, especially in countries with high internet penetration. In Indonesia, cyberbullying is still a new threat with massive use of social media by students.

Bullying victims are generally individuals with certain characteristics that make them more vulnerable to being targeted. According to (1993), victims tend to have characteristics such as low self-confidence, being introverted, or looking different in terms of physical, social, or academic. The KPAI report (2022) shows that children with special needs or from low socioeconomic backgrounds are often the targets of bullying.

Craig and Pepler (2007) revealed factors that influence victims to become targets of bullying, namely children who have difficulty socializing or lack interpersonal skills tend to be less able to defend themselves and become targets. UNESCO (2019) added that students who are considered "different" in physical appearance, ethnicity, or sexual orientation are more often victims. In addition, victims often come from two extreme poles, where those who are very high achievers (viewed enviously by friends) or who have difficulty learning (stigmatized).

Bullies usually have dominant and aggressive traits. They try to gain power or recognition in their environment (Olweus, 1993). Data from Rigby (2002) study shows that children who become perpetrators have a family background full of conflict or a permissive parenting style. Kowalski and Morgan (2017) said that conflict between parents, lack of attention, or absence of supervision are often the main causes of bullying behavior in children. They added that children who grow up in violent families often imitate this behavior. According to Bandura (1977), children who are not guided by the values of empathy and morality are more likely to become perpetrators or allow bullying to occur.

In addition to the family environment, peer pressure also influences bullying behavior. According to Salmivalli (2010), in many cases, students behave bullying to maintain social status or gain recognition from their group. This is reinforced by collective behavior, where the group supports bullying actions against certain victims. On the personality side, according to Gini (2006), perpetrators often show a lack of empathy and emotional management skills, which makes it difficult for them to understand the impact of their actions on the victim. School culture also plays a role in influencing bullying behavior among students. According to UNESCO (2019), schools that fail to instill values of inclusion and empathy tend to have higher rates of bullying. In addition, schools that do not have effective policies or reporting systems tend to allow bullying to flourish.

The Impact of Bullying: Victims, Perpetrators and School Climate

The impact of bullying extends to various aspects of the victim's life, including psychological, emotional, social, and academic. These effects will last long, even after the bullying stops (Zhang, 2024). Therefore, comprehensive efforts are needed from schools, families, and communities to protect victims and minimize their impact.

Victim

Bullying can leave deep psychological scars on victims, both in the short and long term. Victims will experience anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress and depression. Research by Hawker and Boulton (2000) showed that victims of bullying have a risk of depression and anxiety twice as high as those who do not experience bullying. Gini and Pozzoli (2009) found that bullying behavior consistently damages victims' self-confidence, causing feelings of worthlessness and inferiority, and this triggers physical disorders due to stress, such as headaches, digestive disorders, or insomnia. Bullying victims often face severe emotional challenges. Craig et al. (2007) research showed that victims felt isolated due to the loss of peer support. Victims also felt afraid to go to school or interact with the perpetrator, which exacerbated anxiety. In some cases, Zhang (2024) found that victims may internalize their anger or even become bullies later in life as a form of revenge.

Bullying also affects victims' ability to interact socially. Victims tend to withdraw from social relationships for fear of being judged or bullied again. They are labeled negatively by peers, which reinforces their social isolation (Hymel & Swearer, 2015). The effects of bullying can extend into adulthood, where victims find it difficult to build healthy interpersonal relationships due to feelings of mistrust (Wolke et al., 2013).

An unsafe school environment due to bullying can interfere with the academic performance of victims. The fear and stress experienced by victims can reduce their concentration in class. The PISA study (2018) showed that victims of bullying have

lower academic test results than other students. In addition, many victims of bullying skip school or choose to change schools to avoid the perpetrators. This hinders their education process. Ladd et al. (2017) revealed that feeling unsafe at school causes victims to lose interest in learning and participating in school activities.

Actor

Bullying behavior not only has a negative impact on the victim but also has serious consequences for the perpetrator. This impact continues into the future, especially in the form of a tendency towards antisocial behavior and other psychosocial problems. Ishak et al. (2023) revealed that bullies have a higher risk of being involved in violence in their social environment, both at school and in interpersonal relationships.

A longitudinal study by Farrington (1993) showed that school-age bullies were more likely to engage in criminal activity such as theft, assault, and other law violations in adulthood. Liu et al. (2023) reported that bullies were more likely to develop antisocial personality disorder, which is characterized by lack of empathy, manipulation, and impulsive behavior.

Although often considered "strong," bullies can also experience psychological problems due to their own behavior. Hymel and Swearer (2015) said that in some bullies, bullying can trigger feelings of guilt or emotional stress, especially when they realize the negative impact on the victim. Bullies often have difficulty managing their emotions, which can result in angry outbursts or aggressive tendencies (Ishak et al., 2023). A study by Gini and Pozzoli (2009) showed that bullies are also susceptible to depression, especially when they face social or legal consequences for their actions. Pepler et al. (2008) said that when bullying occurs, the perpetrator will lose trust and support from peers after their behavior is known. They tend to have problems in building healthy and trusting relationships with others in adulthood. According to Wolke et al. (2013), the identity as a bully can be a stigma attached, especially if the behavior is recorded in their academic or social records.

Implications on school climate

Bullying not only impacts individuals, both victims and perpetrators, but also has a significant impact on school climate. Nickerson dan Parks (2021) study found that bullying creates an unsafe environment for students, teachers, and staff. The existence of bullying makes students afraid to come to school, either because they are worried about being victims or witnessing bullying actions against others. This reduces the overall sense of safety. When bullying is considered not handled properly, students and parents tend to lose trust in the school as an institution that protects them. According to Menesini dan Salmivalli (2017), students who witness bullying feel reluctant to participate in school activities for fear of being involved or becoming the next target. Students will become less involved in social relationships, limiting healthy

interactions with peers and teachers, which negatively impacts the school's social climate.

An environment filled with conflict and intimidation reduces students' concentration in class, thus affecting the school's collective academic achievement (Juvonen et al., 2011). Bullying also affects teachers and school staff, teachers feel burdened by the task of dealing with bullying, especially if there is no adequate support from the school. A work environment full of conflict due to bullying incidents can lead to job dissatisfaction among teachers and staff, reducing their effectiveness in educating and managing students (Nickerson & Parks, 2021).

Bullying Handling Strategies

Preventive Efforts

Bullying in school environments is a serious concern that affects students' emotional, social, and academic health. To address this issue, a preventive approach is an important step in creating a safe and inclusive school environment. Incorporating anti-bullying education into the curriculum is a strategic step to provide students with an understanding of bullying. According to Olweus (1993), the curriculum can include lessons on empathy, respect for differences, and conflict resolution skills. This education helps students understand that bullying is morally and socially unacceptable. The curriculum can be in the form of case studies or simulated situations to analyze how bullying occurs and how they can act to prevent it. Willard (2007) added that the curriculum also needs to include education on safe and ethical internet use, given the prevalence of cyberbullying among students.

Teachers and school staff have a key role in preventing and responding to bullying. Adequate training can improve their ability to detect, understand, and respond to bullying situations. A study by Bradshaw et al. (2007) found that it is important for teachers to be trained to recognize the signs of bullying, both physical and emotional, in students. For example, students who are victims of bullying may show symptoms of anxiety or withdrawal from social activities. Teachers are given strategies to intervene effectively in bullying situations and ensure that all parties are treated fairly. In addition, teachers are also trained to communicate with the parents of victims and perpetrators of bullying to identify the root of the problem and find solutions together. Raising students' awareness of bullying is a preventive measure to encourage changes in attitudes and behavior. Schools can hold annual campaigns involving students, teachers, and parents to voice the importance of a bullying-free school environment. An example is "Anti-Bullying Day" which holds various activities, such as seminars, poster competitions, or thematic dramas. A study by Ishak et al. (2023) found that activities to promote empathy and cooperation are preventive efforts to overcome bullying behavior. Students can be involved in activities such as group work, empathy simulations, or collaborative games that emphasize the importance of supporting each

other. Forming student groups tasked with providing support to their friends, especially for victims of bullying. This program strengthens solidarity among students and minimizes the dominance of certain groups.

Intervention Approach

One of the biggest challenges in dealing with bullying is the difficulty for victims or witnesses to report the incident. Many students fear retaliation from the perpetrator or feel embarrassed to speak up about their experiences. Therefore, schools need to provide a safe and confidential reporting mechanism (Rigby & Smith, 2011). Schools can appoint a special person, such as a guidance counselor, to receive and handle bullying reports to ensure that each case is followed up professionally and confidentially.

Counseling is an important step in bullying intervention to help victims recover and bullies address the root causes that drive their behavior. Victims of bullying experience psychological impacts such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Counseling sessions can help them understand their innocence and rebuild their self-confidence (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Counselors can provide victims with skills to cope with future bullying situations, such as how to properly report incidents or seek support from friends.

On the other hand, counseling for perpetrators can provide an understanding of the impact of their behavior. According to Ishak et al. (2023), perpetrators are usually not aware of the significant impact of their actions. Counseling helps them understand the emotional and social consequences of bullying behavior on victims. Wurf (2021) explains that many bullies come from troubled family backgrounds or experience violence at home. Counseling can help them manage their emotions constructively and find positive ways to interact with others.

Bullying cannot be solved by schools alone. The role of parents and communities is very important in creating a supportive environment and suppressing bullying practices (Drăghicescu & Stăncescu, 2019). Schools can hold training sessions or seminars for parents on how to recognize signs of bullying in children and how to support them. In addition, parents of victims and perpetrators need to be invited to discuss openly and constructively to find a joint solution without blaming certain parties (Smith, 2016).

Technology as a Prevention Tool

Current technological advances offer opportunities to address this issue in more innovative and effective ways. One strategic approach is the use of digital applications or platforms to report bullying cases, as well as monitoring cyberbullying through collaboration between parents and internet service providers (Nee et al., 2023).

Digital apps and platforms have emerged as practical and anonymous bullying reporting tools. For example, dedicated apps like STOPit or ReportBullying allow students, parents, or teachers to quickly report bullying incidents. These features not only provide a safe space for victims but also ensure that reports are received directly by authorities such as schools or counselors. In addition, these apps are equipped with educational modules that provide information on the signs of bullying, how to deal with it, and steps to prevent it (Ramos-Galarza et al., 2023).

Cyberbullying that uses digital media as a tool for bullying requires special attention because of its anonymous nature and wide reach. Cyberbullying monitoring strategies require close collaboration between parents, schools, and internet service providers. Parents can be empowered through education about the importance of monitoring their children's online activities, such as activating parental control settings on digital devices and discussing internet ethics (Miccoli et al., 2022).

Meanwhile, internet service providers have a critical role to play in supporting this oversight. With technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) algorithms, service providers can detect and block potentially harmful content, including hate speech and online bullying. They can also work with legal authorities and educational institutions to ensure their platforms are safe digital spaces (Topcu-Uzer & Tanrıkulu, 2018).

The effectiveness of the strategy depends on close collaboration between various parties. Parents, teachers, and digital communities must work together to build a supportive environment, both physically and virtually. Training for teachers and education personnel on handling bullying is also important to ensure they are able to provide a quick and appropriate response (Miccoli et al., 2022). In addition, integrating technology into the education curriculum is a long-term preventive measure. Digital literacy programs that teach children about responsible internet use can prevent cyberbullying behavior from an early age (Willard, 2007).

Challenges in Handling Bullying

Bullying is a social phenomenon that continues to be a serious concern in the educational environment. Although various initiatives have been taken to address this act, challenges still remain. The lack of public awareness of the impact of bullying is a major challenge. Many parents and educators still view bullying as part of the growing up process or a "mental test" for children. This perspective ignores the fact that bullying can cause long-term trauma, including anxiety, depression, and even suicidal thoughts. According to Olweus (1993), "Bullying is not merely a part of growing up, but a serious threat to the well-being of individuals." This lack of understanding often leaves victims feeling alone and reluctant to report, because they believe their actions will not be taken seriously.

In addition, limited support from families, teachers, and communities further exacerbates the situation. Schools without clear anti-bullying policies tend to be fertile grounds for this practice. A study by Ishak et al. (2023) showed that schools that were active in anti-bullying campaigns experienced a significant decrease in the number of reported cases, underscoring the importance of institutional support.

Another challenge is limited resources, both in terms of professional staff and infrastructure. Many schools, especially in rural areas, do not have counselors or psychologists trained to handle bullying cases. In addition, the lack of budget for anti-bullying programs hinders the implementation of effective strategies, such as teacher training or the provision of digital reporting tools. According to Rigby dan Smith (2011), "Schools with insufficient resources often struggle to implement sustainable anti-bullying programs, leaving students vulnerable." This situation is further complicated when limited funds also affect the involvement of the community, which should be a partner in handling bullying. As a result, many cases of bullying are not handled adequately.

The advancement of digital technology has given birth to a new form of bullying, namely cyberbullying. Unlike conventional bullying, cyberbullying takes place in a digital space that is difficult to monitor, is sometimes anonymous, and occurs all the time without geographical boundaries. Berguer (2015) stated that cyberbullying amplifies the reach and frequency of traditional bullying, making it increasingly difficult for victims to escape from its dangers. The anonymous nature of cyberbullying makes it difficult to identify perpetrators, while the lack of regulation on some digital platforms makes reporting these incidents ineffective. Internet service providers (ISPs) and social media do not yet have adequate mechanisms to deal with cyberbullying content. Furthermore, low digital literacy among children and adolescents makes them unprepared to face this threat.

D. Conclusion

Bullying is a complex phenomenon that requires a holistic approach to addressing it. Preventive efforts are a critical first step. Anti-bullying education in schools, teacher and staff training, and awareness campaigns involving students can encourage cultural and behavioral change. Activities that promote empathy and collaboration also play a role in building an environment that supports positive interpersonal relationships. An intervention approach is needed to address bullying cases that have already occurred. Safe and confidential reporting mechanisms give victims or witnesses the courage to speak up. In addition, counseling for victims and perpetrators helps deal with the emotional impact while addressing the root of the problem. Parent and community involvement strengthens these efforts, making bullying a shared responsibility. Technology also plays a strategic role in bullying prevention, especially in addressing new challenges such as cyberbullying. Digital applications and platforms for reporting bullying cases make it easy to report quickly

and confidentially. In addition, monitoring online activity through collaboration with parents and internet service providers is key to protecting students from online threats.

However, several challenges still hinder the effectiveness of this strategy. Lack of awareness and support makes anti-bullying programs difficult to implement, especially in environments where the culture is permissive of the behavior. Limited resources, such as budget, expertise, and facilities, also limit the ability of schools and communities to address bullying comprehensively. Meanwhile, the rise of cyberbullying adds complexity, given its anonymous nature and wide reach in the digital world. To address these challenges, collaboration between schools, families, communities, and governments is essential. With a comprehensive and sustainable approach, bullying can be prevented and addressed more effectively, creating a safer, healthier, and more inclusive environment for all.

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