

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Experiences of bullying behavior among students in the school: A qualitative study

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of bullying among students in schools has increased rapidly. Cases of bullying among students cause various problems such as stress, depression, anxiety, and even problems with academic abilities. Exploring the experiences of bullying among students is necessary to determine the incidents of bullying experienced by students. The aim of this research is to explore the experiences of bullying experienced by students at school. The method used was qualitative study with semi-structured interviews regarding experiences of bullying among students. The sample used in this research was 10 students aged 15–18 at school in Bandung Barat, West Java, Indonesia who had experienced bullying. The results showed that the experience of bullying in students has three themes, namely verbal bullying, physical bullying, and cyberbullying. Various experiences of bullying in students cause psychological problems. Students become insecure at school because of bullying they have experienced. Bullying can be in the form of harassment, physical humiliation, insults with low grades, and sudden beatings. Bullying victims said that the perpetrators of bullying were mostly upperclassmen to their younger classmates, so bullying was also caused by the power relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. Bullying behavior in schools requires special handling by schools to make policies to prevent bullying. So that further research is needed on the factors that cause bullying in adolescents at school.

Keywords: bullying; physical bullying; students; schools; verbal bullying

1. Introduction

Bullying is a form of violence carried out intentionally by one person or group of people who is stronger or more powerful towards another person, with the aim of hurting and is carried out continuously^[1]. Bullying is a case that often occurs among school adolescents which is carried out in the name of seniority^[2]. Students can become perpetrators of bullying against other students, become targets/victims of bullying from other students, or witness bullying events that occur in their school environment^[3]. Bullying is also defined as physical and psychological damaging activities carried out by perpetrators who feel stronger than victims. The impacts of bullying behavior can hurt the victim physically and psychologically^[4].

Cases of bullying in schools in Japan reached a record high throughout 2016, the Japanese Ministry of Education released bullying figures reaching more than 320,000 cases^[5]. In detail, as many as 328,808 cases

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occurred in elementary schools, junior high schools, and senior high schools. In 2017 there was an increase of 43.8% compared to 2016^[6]. Types of bullying include ridicule and slander or swearing are what many students experience to the point of reached 6.25%. Online bullying with computers and cellphones also increased by 3.3%, with the highest increase occurring in high schools^[7]. Meanwhile acts of violence at the elementary, junior high and high school levels increased by 2651 cases to 59,457 cases. A previous survey of children aged 12–17 years showed that 84% had experienced cases of bullying^[8].

The results of survey by UNICEF^[9] show that 41% of Indonesian adolescents experience bullying. Additionally, a poll of 2777 Indonesian young people aged 14–24 found that 45% reported they had experienced cyberbullying^[9]. The most incidents of bullying in Indonesia are in the provinces of East Java, Central Java and West Java. Survey results in Indonesia show that 574 boys were victims of bullying, 425 girls were victims of bullying at school^[10]. The results of previous studies related to bullying show that 10%–60% of students in Indonesia report being teased, ridiculed, exclusion, hitting, kicking, or pushing, at least once a week. The most common impacts of bullying on victims is that it triggers mental health problems, such as anxiety disorders, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The impacts of bullying on mental health is usually experienced by victims over a long period of time. This also disrupts the learning process at school, such as the emergence of arguments during learning and disrupting the learning process^[11].

Factors that cause bullying include differences in culture or environment. Previous research shows that the factors that cause bullying are personality factors, interpersonal communication built by adolescents and their parents, differences in views or opinions and the role of peer groups in the environment^[12]. Other research states that family factors, peer factors, and mass media factors are the causes of bullying behavior among students^[13]. If there are students who are rejected by their peers, they will prefer to argue, disturb other friends, have no shame, are rigid and socially insensitive, students will tend to behave aggressively or bully^[14].

This act of bullying has a negative influence on physical condition and psychological condition. Bullying causes individuals to withdraw from society, the impacts of learning on the subject is lack of concentration, daydreaming during teaching and learning activities so that the subject's value decreases^[15]. Adolescents who are victims of bullying will experience problems with their physical health, mental condition and social interactions, the impacts that will arise is a lack of enthusiasm for doing things they previously liked, reluctance to socialize, easily afraid, not confident, social phobia, dropping out of school and even quitting from work and committed suicide because he was mentally disturbed due to being bullied^[16].

Victims of bullying experience behavioral effects in the long and short term. In the short term, they will feel depressed, lose their desire to go to school and eventually avoid school itself, while in the long term, there is a tendency to think of themselves as low for a long time^[8]. As a result, victims of bullying find it difficult to adjust to a bad environment, they even tend to have negative emotions, get angry easily, feel uncomfortable with the surrounding environment so that they have no ability to deal with bullying actions such as verbal, sexual and even physical violence, because at this time adolescents experience their emotional peak^[17]. which is a high emotional development, adolescents do not only pursue physical satisfaction but increase to psychological pressure.

Previous studies have shown that high school students experience physical bullying, namely being kicked by their friends^[18,19]. The bullying caused him to feel inferior so he did not dare to appear in public and hang out with other friends. Other studies also show that most adolescents have experienced bullying^[6,20]. The bullying he experienced was both physical and verbal^[21].

Researcher interviews with students stated that students had experienced bullying at school, namely being beaten by other students. The student was accused of stealing, then without any direct evidence was beaten by

other students. This phenomenon indicates that there are cases of bullying among students at senior high schools in West Bandung Regency. Based on this background, the authors are interested in exploring the experience of bullying in senior high school students in West Bandung District, West Java, Indonesia. The aim of this research is to explore the experiences of bullying experienced by students at school.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Study design and sample

This research used a qualitative design using phenomenology on students at one of the high schools in West Bandung Regency^[22]. The inclusion criteria for respondents in this study were that students had experienced bullying and had no communication barriers. Researchers held discussions with teachers to determine the sample to be selected. Participants were selected used a purposive sample that targeted students between the ages of 15–18 years class of X–XII who were currently enrolled in high schools in Bandung Barat, West Java. This age range was chosen to focus on youth who are more likely to be affected by bullying. The samples in this study are 10 samples.

2.2. Data collection

The semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide that consisted of open-ended questions about students' experiences with bullying. Questions included, 'can you describe a specific incident of bullying you experienced?' and 'how did you respond to those incidents?'. Respondents were selected based on the results of discussions with teachers and counseling guidance teachers. Before respondents take part in the interview, participants are given informed consent regarding the purpose of the research, and the rights and obligations of the respondent. The authors recorded audio and noted important points obtained from the interviews conducted. Researchers recorded using two recorders to prevent errors during recording.

2.3. Ethical considerations

This research was conducted under consideration of ethical approval. This topic is a sensitive topic regarding bullying experiences. This research was carried out voluntarily, consent was independent, consent was not binding, participants had the right to withdraw from the research, and there was confidentiality of research data which could only be accessed by researchers. Before the interview, participants were explained again regarding the research procedures carried out. Participants were also given the opportunity to ask questions related to the research. Participants gave their informed consent after being thoroughly informed about the purpose and procedures of the study. They were assured that their responses would be kept confidential, and pseudonyms were used when reporting results. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. The ethics of this research have been approved by the West Java Province STIKEP PPNI Research Ethics Commission with ethics number: III/020/KEPK-SLE/STIKEP/PPNI/JABAR/VI/2022.

2.4. Data analysis

Data analysis in this study used the Colaizzi technique^[20]. Data analysis followed a systematic process. First, transcripts were coded using a thematic analysis approach. The codes were then grouped into themes, and interrater reliability was established through discussion among researchers. The process continued until data saturation was achieved. There are seven steps taken by the authors in analyzed this research data:

- 1) Reread the interview transcript from the respondent.
- 2) Take the most critical statements from the transcript according to the research objectives.
- 3) Write a definition based on a theoretical review related to the context of the phenomenon in this research.

- 4) Grouping transcripts into themes obtained from research results.
- 5) The transcript results are combined and a brief explanation of the phenomena found is made.
- 6) The transcript results were confirmed to the respondents.
- 7) Revise the writing of transcripts according to recommendations from respondents.

3. Results

3.1. Demographic characteristics

The sample in this study was 10 middle school students in West Bandung Regency. Demographic characteristics are presented through gender, class and age data. This data is seen from the participant attendance list during the data collection process (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics ($n = 10$).

Socio-demographic	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	5	50
Female	5	50
Class		
X	2	20
XI	4	40
XII	4	40
Age		
15	1	10
16	4	40
17	3	30
18	2	20

The results of demographic characteristics show that the number of male respondents is the same, namely 5 people (50%). Respondents were spread from three classes, namely class X, XI, and XII. Most respondents from class Xi (40%) and class XII (40%). Based on the age of the respondents, 40% of the respondents were 16 years old (4 people).

3.2. Verbal bullying

Based on the results of interviews with 10 respondents, it was found that the experiences of bullying that students had received were verbal bullying and physical bullying. Bullying experiences are verbal in the form of physical humiliation, parental humiliation, and hate comments on social media. The form of verbal bullying is presented in the following quotes:

“I was once shouted at for not taking a shower in front of many people on a school trip by a group of other students.” (A1).

“My parents were made fun of. I was also called by my parents’ names by my friends at school.” (A3).

“You’re really ugly, you can’t make up. Those are the words my friends say because I don’t wear makeup to school.” (A4).

“Jablay, those are the words that the male students said to me. “My makeup is said to be too excessive.”

“I’ve been bullied on social media, they say I’m ugly and only good if I use a filter.” (A8).

3.3. Physical bullying

The experience of physical bullying in students takes the form of being hit, held, and pinched. Physical bullying is carried out by peers of the same or different gender. Respondents responded by avoiding when physical bullying was carried out by the perpetrator. This is presented through quotes as follows:

“Been hit, I was hit by a student in class all of a sudden.” (A6).

“My friend suddenly pinched me while studying in class. While saying don’t pretend to be smart, you keep learning.” (A4).

“My buttocks were spanked by my friends, they said that I was sexy so they were excited about my ass.” (A10).

“Suddenly there was a male student who tried to hold my breasts. I tried to avoid it but the student said he was selling too much.” (A9).

4. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that students experience various forms of bullying such as verbal bullying, physical bullying, and cyberbullying. Most of the respondents were women who were victims of bullying. The perpetrators of bullying on average are boys and their upperclassmen. Students who are victims of bullying experience fear, depression, and lose self-confidence.

In general, bullies will take actions against weaker people, meaning that bullies have more power. This research shows that the perpetrators of bullying are mostly male. However, it is different from previous research which found that out of a total of 51 male respondents, 60.33% of them had experienced being victims of bullying and of a total of 67 female respondents, 58.87% had been victims of bullying^[23]. Other studies also show that as many as 63 or 59.4% of male students are victims of bullying and 43 or 40.56% of female students are victims of bullying^[24,25]. Other research also shows that the percentage is mostly male with a percentage of 62.31% and female bullies of 57.31%. This is in line with previous research where the profile of bullies is more male than female^[26].

This study shows that there are two types of bullying felt by students, namely verbal bullying and physical bullying. Verbal bullying is the most commonly used form of bullying, by both girls and boys. Verbal bullying is easy to do and can be whispered in the presence of adults and peers, undetected^[27]. Verbal bullying can be shouted on the playground mixed with the noise that is heard by supervisors, ignored because it is only considered as a stupid and unsympathetic dialogue between peers^[28]. Verbal oppression can be in the form of nicknames, reproaches, slander, cruel criticism, insults, and statements with the nuances of sexual solicitation or sexual harassment^[29,30]. In addition, verbal bullying can take the form of depriving pocket money or goods, abusive telephone calls, intimidating e-mails, anonymous letters containing threats of violence, untrue accusations, vile gossip, and gossip^[31].

Physical bullying is the most visible and identifiable type of bullying among other forms of bullying, but incidents of physical bullying account for less than a third of bullying incidents reported by students^[17]. Types of physical bullying include hitting, choking, elbowing, punching, kicking, biting, holding hands, scratching, and spitting on the child who is being bullied to a painful position, as well as damaging and destroying the clothes and belongings of the child who is being bullied^[32,33]. The stronger and more mature the bully is, the more dangerous this type of attack is, even if it is not intended to cause serious harm.

Most cases of bullying occur because of the power relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, namely that the perpetrator is an upperclassman. An older person wants to be seen as strong and usually abuses

the weak^[10]. Bullying incidents occur as a result of strong individuals bullying the strong to see which of them is the strongest. Previous research shows that bullying often occurs among new students by their upperclassmen^[17]. Other studies also show that the perpetrators of bullying are mostly upperclassmen^[34,35].

The impacts received by participants/victims of bullying include psychological impacts, namely feeling inferior, embarrassed, quiet, confused, angry, afraid and hurt), physical impacts consisting of heat, soreness, redness and pain and social impacts including not wanting to play, lazy to study, lazy to play, uncomfortable studying group assignments, and want to change classes^[36,37]. This research is supported by previous research which shows that victims of bullying are lazy about going to school to avoid the perpetrators of bullying, the resulting social impact is reduced self-confidence and poor social adjustment^[17,38]. Some of the results of this research show that there are children who completely close themselves off from their social environment, causing the child to become anti-social towards their play environment. Bullying treatment has a psychological impacts on victims such as feelings of irritation, sadness, lack of self-confidence, discomfort, and decreased levels of concentration in learning^[35,39]. This is in line with previous studies which shows that the psychological impacts that victims receive is sadness, discomfort and annoyance^[37,40].

The factor of peer influence is one of the causes of bullying cases. This is because students spend a lot of time with their peers. Previous research shows that peers can have a negative influence by giving the idea that bullying will have no impacts and is a normal thing to do^[41]. Apart from that, other research also shows that the presence of peers can have negative and positive impacts on adolescents. Group acceptance of peers is important because they can share feelings and experiences with their peers and group^[42]. Peer groups that have problems at school will have negative impacts such as violence, truant behavior, low levels of respect for fellow students and teachers. Friends in the school environment ideally act as students' "partners" in the process of achieving educational programs^[43].

Bullying is also considered a normal thing in Indonesia. Previous research shows that bullies feel that their actions are normal and do not intend to hurt other people^[44]. This causes bullying incidents in Indonesia to occur repeatedly. This is supported by previous research which shows that verbal bullying behavior is a normal form of interaction between adolescents in Indonesia^[45]. Verbal bullying, such as calling children their parents, is normalized by society because it is a form of humor. Apart from that, other research also shows that calling parents' names is the most common form of verbal bullying in Indonesia^[46].

Bullying behavior can also be done through social media. This research shows that victims experience hate comments on social media. In line with this research, previous data shows that cases of cyberbullying have increased every year^[15]. Other research also shows that many cases of cyberbullying occur in adolescents, because adolescents are currently the highest internet users^[19].

Handling cases of bullying requires special handling involving various parties, namely health workers, government, families, and the general public. So that comprehensive collaboration of various parties is needed to build a system to prevent bullying in adolescents. Previous studies have shown that school-based nursing involving schools, nurses, psychologists and doctors has shown effective results in reducing the incidence of bullying in adolescents^[47,48]. Other studies also show that collaborative interventions by health workers that focus on empowering families and children can significantly reduce bullying behavior in adolescents^[49,50].

Limitations

The limitation of this research is that the respondents do not represent all classes in the school. In addition, interviews were only conducted with students who were victims of bullying. This study did not reach a sample of bullies who could provide comprehensive data on the causes of bullying behavior. The handling of bullying cases must be carried out comprehensively for perpetrators and victims to reduce the incidence of bullying in

schools.

5. Conclusion

This research shows that the incidents of bullying experienced by students are verbal bullying and physical bullying. Verbal bullying takes the form of physical insults, insults from parents, and insults to individual abilities. Physical bullying causes physical damage through hitting, pinching and touching sensitive areas. Bullying cases require special handling involving schools, families and health workers.

The implication of this research is that there is data on bullying behavior experienced by students at school which is a consideration for schools to create policies to overcome bullying problems. Recommendations for further research are the need for research on the factors that cause bullying among students at school. Apart from that, comprehensive research regarding the experiences of bullying among students at school.

Author contributions

Conceptualization, IY, AM, SS, HSM, and HH; methodology, IY, AM, and SS; software, IY and AM; validation, IY, AM, and HH; formal analysis, SS, and HH; investigation, IY, AM, and SS; resources, HSM, and HH; data curation, AM, and HSM; writing—original draft preparation, IY, AM, SS, HSM, and HH; writing—review and editing, IY, AM, SS, HSM, and HH; visualization, IY, and AM; supervision, IY; project administration, AM; funding acquisition, IY. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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