

Educational Counseling on Bullying Prevention in the School Environment

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Bullying is an aggressive behavior that is carried out intentionally and repeatedly by individuals or groups who possess greater power against those who are weaker, whether physically, verbally, socially, or through digital media. This phenomenon has become a serious problem in Indonesia, particularly within the school environment, with a relatively high prevalence in the Southeast Asian region. Data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) and the Office of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection indicate that bullying cases most frequently occur at the elementary school level. The high incidence of bullying among school-aged children is closely related to ongoing cognitive, physical, mental, and social development, which makes children vulnerable to moral and social problems. Bullying behavior is influenced by internal factors such as age, gender, and personality characteristics, as well as external factors including family, environmental conditions, and peer influence. The impacts of bullying are extensive for both victims and perpetrators, ranging from psychological disorders and decreased academic achievement to an increased risk of antisocial behavior in the future. Therefore, bullying prevention requires the involvement of multiple stakeholders through education, strict school policies, the strengthening of the roles of teachers and counselors, and the utilization of technology. These integrated efforts are expected to create a safe, inclusive educational environment that supports optimal child development.

Keywords: Bullying, Impact of Bullying, School-Aged Children, Bullying Prevention.

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1. Introduction

Bullying is an intentional desire to harm others in order to cause suffering. This desire is manifested in physical, verbal, and social forms (Sejiwa, 2008). Such actions are carried out by individuals or groups who are physically and mentally stronger against individuals or groups who are physically and mentally weaker, conducted repeatedly, deliberately, irresponsibly, and often accompanied by feelings of pleasure (Rigby, 2019).

Indonesia is one of the countries with the highest rates of school bullying in the ASEAN region, reaching 84%, followed by Nepal and Vietnam at 79%, Cambodia at 73%, and Pakistan at 43% (KPAI, 2017). The latest data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) recorded 37 cases of bullying in schools from January to April 2019. The highest number of cases occurred among elementary school students, with 25 cases, followed by junior high school students with 5 cases, senior high school students with 6 cases, and higher education institutions with 1 case (KPAI, 2019). Meanwhile, data from the Office of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection of West Sumatra Province reported 30 cases of bullying from January to September 2019, all of which occurred in school settings.

The high prevalence of bullying at the school level is attributed to the increasing cognitive development during school-age years, when children begin to think critically about various issues. At this stage, children are actually more receptive to education compared to earlier and later developmental periods

(Hidayat, 2009). During this phase, physical, mental, social development, and self-concept continue to evolve, which may give rise to various moral and social developmental problems (Wong, 2009).

Bullying is an aggressive behavior carried out repeatedly with the intention of harming, degrading, or dominating others who are perceived as weaker. This behavior may take the form of physical, verbal, social, or cyberbullying conducted through digital media. Bullying does not occur solely in school environments but can also be found in workplaces, communities, and social media platforms. Its consequences are severe, affecting victims, perpetrators, and the broader social environment.

Victims of bullying often experience psychological disorders such as anxiety, depression, and long-term trauma. In extreme cases, bullying may cause victims to withdraw from social interactions, lose self-confidence, and even develop suicidal ideation. Perpetrators of bullying are also at risk of developing behavioral problems later in life, including violent behavior and juvenile delinquency. Therefore, bullying prevention is crucial in creating a safe, healthy, and supportive environment for all individuals.

There are several forms of bullying among children: (1) verbal bullying, such as swearing, mocking, shouting, slandering, insulting, teasing, ridiculing, gossiping, jeering, name-calling, and making racist remarks; (2) physical bullying, such as kicking, pinching, slapping, pushing, bumping, stepping on feet, tripping, spitting, throwing objects, extorting, hitting, and damaging others' belongings; and (3) indirect or social bullying, such as social exclusion, ignoring others, public humiliation, hostile staring, threatening looks, and degrading behavior (Sejiwa, 2008). If such behaviors persist, they may have detrimental effects on the mental development of both victims and perpetrators.

Bullying behavior is influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors include characteristics inherent to the child, such as age, gender, aggressive personality traits, impulsivity, manipulateness, and disruptive tendencies. These disruptive behaviors may emerge due to poor peer interactions and weak group identification (American Association of School Administrators, 2009). This theory is supported by a study conducted in several elementary schools in Padang City, which found that bullying was more frequently perpetrated by older children against younger ones and that boys were more commonly involved in physical bullying (Arif, 2016).

External factors contributing to bullying behavior include family environment, social surroundings, and peer influence. Peers within both school and residential environments play a significant role in shaping bullying behavior. This influence may stem from several conditions: (a) peers who hold positive attitudes toward bullying behavior; (b) peers who engage in bullying; (c) peers from middle-to-upper socioeconomic backgrounds who use bullying as a means of gaining social control and maintaining status among friends; and (d) peers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who use bullying to elevate social status and resist aggressive treatment directed at them (American Association of School Administrators, 2009). This theory is supported by research conducted in a school in Yogyakarta, which found a significant relationship between peer group dynamics and bullying behavior among students (Rohimah, 2016).

If left unaddressed, bullying can have serious negative effects on children's development and lead to broader life problems for both victims and perpetrators. Bullying in schools can cause victims to develop fear of attending school due to feelings of insecurity, anxiety, shame, social withdrawal, stress, depression, suicidal ideation, hostility toward their social environment, fear of social interaction, low self-esteem, resentment, hatred toward perpetrators, and decreased academic performance due to disrupted learning processes (Sejiwa, 2008).

For perpetrators, bullying behavior during school age is closely associated with antisocial behavior in adolescence and adulthood. Additional consequences include the risk of extending bullying behavior into the home environment, such as running away from home, truancy, increased risk of depressive symptoms, involvement in criminal activities, and substance abuse, including alcohol and illicit drugs (American Association of School Administrators, 2009).

Bullying prevention requires the involvement of multiple stakeholders, including families, schools, communities, and government institutions. Education on empathy, healthy communication, and mutual respect must be instilled from an early age. Schools, as educational institutions, play a strategic role in fostering an anti-bullying culture through strict policies, teacher training, and counseling programs. Furthermore, the use of technology to monitor and report bullying incidents should be optimized. Through collective awareness and effective prevention strategies, it is expected that bullying cases can be reduced and social environments can become more inclusive and safer for all individuals.

2. Literature Review and Problem Statement

Bullying is an aggressive behavior that is carried out intentionally and repeatedly by individuals or groups who possess greater power or higher social status against weaker individuals. Bullying is not a single incident, but rather a pattern of behavior involving an imbalance of power (UNICEF, 2020). At the junior high school level, students are in early adolescence, a developmental stage characterized by physical, emotional, and social changes, which increases vulnerability to conflict and aggressive behavior.

The literature indicates that bullying can occur both directly and through digital media. Forms of bullying include verbal bullying, physical bullying, mental or psychological bullying, cyberbullying, and sexual harassment. Verbal and psychological bullying are the most common forms because they are difficult to detect, yet they have profound psychological impacts. Meanwhile, cyberbullying has been increasing along with the high use of social media among adolescents (Freska, 2023).

Numerous studies have shown that bullying has significant effects on adolescents' mental and social health. Victims of bullying are at risk of experiencing anxiety, stress, depression, low self-esteem, social isolation, and thoughts of self-harm or suicide. In addition to victims, perpetrators of bullying are also at risk of developing behavioral problems and experiencing difficulties in social adjustment in the future (Sejiwa, 2008; World Health Organization [WHO], 2017).

The etiology of bullying is multifactorial. Individual factors include a lack of empathy, poor self-control, and a desire to demonstrate dominance. Family factors, such as inappropriate parenting styles and conflict-filled home environments, also contribute to bullying behavior. Furthermore, school environments with weak supervision, as well as social and media influences that normalize violence, play a role in the emergence of bullying behavior (Rigby, 2019).

Bullying that occurs continuously can trigger chronic stress, which affects the nervous and hormonal systems. Prolonged activation of the stress response may lead to anxiety disorders, depression, sleep disturbances, and decreased immune function. Clinical manifestations of bullying may appear in the form of physical complaints, psychological disorders, and behavioral changes such as declining academic performance and school refusal (WHO, 2017).

Bullying remains a serious problem in school environments, particularly at the junior high school level. Although various forms of bullying have been widely identified, bullying practices still frequently occur and are not optimally addressed. Limited understanding among students, teachers, and parents regarding the forms, impacts, and early signs of bullying often results in delayed detection.

Moreover, the impacts of bullying are not limited to psychosocial aspects but also affect physiological conditions and long-term adolescent development. If not properly addressed, bullying can lead to serious complications such as mental health disorders, decreased academic achievement, social isolation, and an increased risk of psychological problems in adulthood. Therefore, a comprehensive review of bullying among junior high school students is needed as a foundation for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies in school settings.

3. Method

Structure of Implementation

This activity was organized by a team of implementers in collaboration with the principal and teachers of SMP IT Muhammadiyah, Kota Juang District, Bireuen Regency. The activity aimed to prevent bullying among students in order to maintain a safe and secure school environment.

Prior to the implementation of the activity, the team, together with students, met with Ustazah Yuli to establish cooperation for the implementation of the counseling program. During this meeting, the types of activities to be carried out were agreed upon. Based on the agreement with Ustazah Yuli and the school principal, the activity was scheduled to be conducted on Tuesday, November 4, 2025, at SMP IT Muhammadiyah.

Subsequently, the team prepared a proposal to be submitted to the Institute for Research and Community Service (Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat/LPPM) of Universitas Muhammadiyah Mahakarya Aceh. The implementation of the community service activity at SMP IT Muhammadiyah was carried out through the following stages:

1. Identification of bullying incidents among students
2. Pre-test
3. Educational counseling with practical materials on bullying prevention
4. Re-demonstration of bullying and violence prevention efforts among children
5. Post-test
6. Evaluation



Figure 1. Dikumentation

Target Group

Students of SMP IT Muhammadiyah, Gelanggang Village, Gampong, Kota Juang District, Bireuen Regency.

SAP

Table 1. Alur Kegiatan

Activity Stage	Activity	Duration
Opening	a. Greeting	5 minutes
	b. Self-introduction	
	c. Explanation of the counseling objectives	
	d. Agreement on time allocation	
Main Session	a. Identification of bullying incidents	20 minutes
	b. Delivery of practical materials on bullying prevention	
	c. Demonstration of bullying prevention strategies	
	d. Re-demonstration of bullying prevention by SMP IT students	
	e. Question and answer session	
Closing	a. Evaluation	5 minutes
	b. Reinforcement	
	c. Conclusion of the activity	
	d. Closing greeting	

Activity Results

Based on the evaluation of the counseling activity, all participants were found to be highly active and enthusiastic in following the sessions from the beginning to the end of the program. The school principal, teachers, and all students expressed strong expectations that similar activities would continue in the future to enhance students' knowledge and awareness regarding bullying prevention.

The community service activity focusing on practical bullying prevention was successfully conducted with the support of the lecturer team and organizing team. The activity was attended by 20 seventh-grade students of SMP IT Muhammadiyah, accompanied by subject teachers and homeroom teachers. The educational session was conducted on November 4, 2025, from 07:30 to 12:00 WIB. All participants and teachers showed high enthusiasm throughout the activity. During the re-demonstration and question-and-answer sessions, participants were cooperative and actively engaged.

a. Children's Characteristics

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Characteristics of Seventh-Grade Students at SMP IT Muhammadiyah

Characteristics	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	11	55%
Female	9	45%

Based on Table 1, it is known that the gender distribution of seventh-grade students at SMP IT Muhammadiyah shows a higher number of male students compared to female students. Of the total 20 respondents, 11 students (55%) were male, while 9 students (45%) were female. This composition indicates that male students slightly outnumber female students. The difference in percentages is not very significant, suggesting that the gender distribution among students is relatively balanced. However, the dominance of male students still needs to be considered in further analysis, as several studies indicate

that male students tend to be more frequently involved in aggressive behaviors, including physical bullying, compared to female students.

This gender distribution is an important factor in understanding the dynamics of social interactions within the school environment. The presence of a higher number of male students may influence patterns of social behavior, including the potential occurrence of conflicts or bullying behaviors. Therefore, gender-based characteristic data can serve as a basis for designing more targeted bullying prevention strategies by taking into account differences in behavioral characteristics between male and female students.

b. Students' Knowledge

Table 3. Frequency Distribution of Seventh-Grade Students' Knowledge at SMP IT Muhammadiyah Before and After the Educational Intervention

Knowledge	Before	After	Improvement
Correct answers	3	6	3
Menjawab salah	17	14	
Incorrect answers	20	20	

Based on Table 3, of the total 20 students, before the educational intervention only 3 students (15%) were able to answer correctly, while 17 students (85%) answered incorrectly. These data indicate that the students' initial level of knowledge regarding the educational material was relatively low.

After the educational intervention, the number of students who answered correctly increased to 6 students (30%), while the number of students who answered incorrectly decreased to 14 students (70%). Thus, there was an increase of 3 students, or 15%, in the number of correct answers. This improvement indicates that the educational program had a positive effect on students' knowledge. The decrease in incorrect answers also suggests an improvement in students' understanding of the material presented, although the level of improvement is still considered moderate.

4. Conclusion

Bullying is a serious problem among adolescents, including junior high school students. Bullying, whether physical, verbal, social, or through digital media (cyberbullying), can significantly disrupt a child's emotional, social, and academic development. Bullying not only impacts psychologically but also causes biological and neurophysiological changes in the body, such as activation of the stress system (HPA axis), which can lead to mental disorders such as anxiety, depression, and even long-term trauma (PTSD). Manifestations of bullying can be recognized through physical complaints (headaches, sleep disturbances), psychological symptoms (withdrawal, fear), and behavioral symptoms (decreased academic performance, truancy). If not addressed promptly, bullying can lead to serious complications such as chronic mental health disorders, decreased social functioning, and the risk of suicide or substance abuse. The assessment and diagnosis of bullying require a multidisciplinary approach involving teachers, psychologists, parents, and medical personnel. Effective prevention must be carried out systematically through character education, supervision of the school environment, and strong social support from those closest to the child. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of bullying and the implementation of appropriate prevention and intervention strategies are crucial to protecting the health and future of Indonesian children.

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