

Dynamics of the Emergence of Bullying Behavior in Elementary Schools in Manggarai Regency

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ABSTRACT

Previous research has indicated that bullying typically emerges during late childhood, often within elementary school settings. Although bullying behaviors are commonly observed among elementary school children, many students remain unfamiliar with the term "bullying". This study aimed to explore both students' and teachers' understanding of bullying, as well as the dynamics contributing to the development of such behavior. Employing a case study approach, data were collected through interviews with individuals identified as bullying perpetrators and those closest to them, including peers, teachers, and parents. The findings revealed that both teachers and students recognized bullying as harmful behavior that leads to emotional distress and physical harm. In this case, bullying behavior was associated with aggressive tendencies modeled by parents, and the school failed to provide an adequate response or intervention. These results underscore the importance of establishing a consistent and shared understanding of bullying among all school staff, and fostering collaboration between schools and the broader support systems of children to effectively prevent bullying behavior.

Keywords: Bullying Perpetrators, Case Study, Elementary School, Students

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INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a behavioral issue characterized by the intentional or unintentional misuse of power by an individual or group. It can manifest in various forms, including verbal abuse, physical violence, social exclusion, and blackmail. Typically repetitive in nature, bullying inflicts both physical and psychological harm on the victim, often leaving them in a state of discomfort and distress (16).

Although bullying can occur at any age, research indicates that it is most prevalent during late childhood and early adolescence—a critical period in a child's social development. During this stage, children are especially focused on gaining acceptance from their peers,

particularly within immediate social groups such as their classroom. In their pursuit of popularity or social status, some children may resort to behaviors such as belittling or excluding others. Therefore, bullying at this stage is closely linked to developmental factors and the social pressures associated with peer acceptance (17).

The socialization process intensifies when children begin school, where they encounter peers from diverse backgrounds. As they learn to interact, children are expected to develop social skills that help navigate interpersonal relationships and prevent conflict. When bullying occurs in the school setting, it reflects a breakdown in this socialization process. As such, bullying represents a serious threat to children's

safety and well-being within the educational environment (2).

Previous studies have consistently shown that bullying most commonly emerges during late childhood and early adolescence, indicating that it is already prevalent at the elementary school level (18).

A preliminary investigation at SD X, an elementary school in Ruteng City, Manggarai Regency, revealed the presence of bullying among students. Most of the students at SD X come from the Manggarai region. Interviews with students in grades 4, 5, and 6 found that although many had heard the term "bullying," some were unfamiliar with its meaning. Nevertheless, nearly all students reported witnessing incidents of harassment, including teasing, kicking, and hitting among peers.

The investigation also revealed that the school's response to bullying was inadequate. Teachers were not effectively addressing the issue, as perpetrators continued to engage in aggressive behaviors. This suggests a significant gap in the school's approach to preventing and managing bullying. Furthermore, teachers at SD X appeared to have a limited or inaccurate understanding of what constitutes bullying.

Given these findings, the current study aims to explore how both students and teachers at SD X understand the concept of bullying and the dynamics contributing to its emergence. Research suggests that bullying is shaped by multiple factors, including individual traits, family background, school climate, and broader community environments (17). The development of bullying behavior is often associated with these environmental influences during critical periods of growth. For

instance, studies by Cook et al. (2010) suggest that bullying can be influenced by children's externalizing behaviors, associations with deviant peer groups, and broader socio-economic conditions (5). Through this case study, the researchers aim to examine how these interconnected factors contribute to the formation of bullying behavior in elementary school students.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research approach, specifically utilizing a case study design, to explore the research questions. The research was conducted at SD X, located in the Langke Rembong sub-district of Manggarai Regency.

A total of thirty student participants from SD X, identified as having been involved in bullying behaviors, were included in the study. To identify these individuals, the researcher conducted brief screening interviews with students in grades 4, 5, and 6 using several questions related to bullying. In addition, data were collected from key individuals connected to the bullying incidents, including peers, victims, teachers, and parents.

To build rapport and encourage open communication, the researcher spent time engaging with both students and teachers at the school. Field notes were used to specifically document instances of bullying behavior. Data collection was carried out using two primary techniques: interviews and observations. The researcher also played a central role in the data analysis process.

The analysis focused on understanding the meaning of bullying within the school community and exploring the underlying factors contributing to bullying behavior among elementary school students. In the first stage of data

collection, the aim was to identify perpetrators and to explore how both students and teachers understand the concept of bullying. In the second stage, the researcher examined the dynamics that contribute to the emergence of bullying behavior in students.

Additional preparations prior to data collection included the development of an interview guide, which was informed by a review of relevant literature and tailored to each type of participant. Peer nomination was also conducted through brief interviews with 30 students in grades 4–6 to identify individuals perceived as bullying perpetrators. In the second stage, in-depth interviews were carried out with three identified perpetrators, and observations were conducted at their respective homes.

Ethical considerations were rigorously observed throughout the study. The researcher obtained all necessary approvals, including ethical clearance, permission from the school administration, and informed consent from both students and their parents. These measures ensured that participants were fully informed of the study's objectives and procedures, and that data collection was conducted in strict adherence to research ethics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that a significant number of students reported experiencing at least one instance of peer violence while at school. The most common form of physical violence involved being pushed by peers until they fell, while verbal violence primarily took the form of teasing in front of other students. Such negative behaviors elicited strong emotional responses, including feelings of hurt, disappointment, and annoyance. These emotions led to discomfort and fear, with

many students reluctant to stand up to their peers due to concerns about further victimization or social exclusion.

Interviews with the school principal revealed that teachers tend to perceive bullying primarily from the perspective of the perpetrators. Similar to the students, teachers at SD X viewed bullying as either verbal or physical violence, or as playful behavior that crosses boundaries and results in emotional or physical harm. Although teachers acknowledged that some students exhibited mischievous or disruptive behaviors, they generally did not label these students as "bullies" or recognize their actions as intentionally harmful. This gap in perception may contribute to an underestimation of the severity of the problem.

One commonly reported example of negative behavior that instills fear in other students is the act of demanding money through threats. As one participant stated:

“Yes, he often asks his friends for money, and if they refuse, he threatens them.”

The perspectives of both teachers and parents regarding children's behavior were notably similar. Parents frequently described their children's actions as "naughty" rather than harmful, implying that such behaviors were still within acceptable limits. They tended to defend their children's actions, attributing them to external circumstances rather than acknowledging them as patterns of bullying. This permissive attitude may inadvertently reinforce harmful behaviors, allowing children to continue without experiencing meaningful consequences.

Perpetrators often framed their actions as retaliatory responses to perceived

wrongdoings by their peers. This aligns with the cognitive and moral development stage of children aged 7–9, who may view retaliation as justified and may not fully understand the consequences of their actions. According to Gasser, Malti, and Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger (2012), children in this age group may not consider aggression as warranting punishment and often perceive it as a natural reaction to provocation (7). This perception indicates a developmental stage where children struggle to differentiate between self-defense and harmful aggression.

Teachers often interpreted such negative behavior as mere mischief or “play,” rather than recognizing it as bullying. This finding is consistent with research by Mishna et al. (2005), which revealed that teachers often struggle to distinguish between typical student behavior and bullying (14). This misinterpretation highlights the urgent need for improved teacher training and awareness to more effectively identify and address bullying. Consequently, victims often suffer emotional harm that goes unrecognized and unaddressed by the adults around them.

Kustanti (2015) supports the notion that students who experience mistreatment—whether verbal or physical—tend to recognize these actions as bullying, even when teachers or perpetrators do not (12). This discrepancy in understanding is significant, as it reveals that the experiences of victims are frequently overlooked. Kustanti also found that older students were less likely to report bullying, potentially due to a lack of adult support or the perception that the issue was not taken seriously. As students progress through school, they may become increasingly reluctant to disclose bullying, especially in environments where adult intervention is minimal.

Azizah, Hawanti, and Winarsih (2014) emphasized that teachers often recognize bullying as a serious issue only when it results in physical harm (2). However, the psychological and emotional consequences of bullying are equally serious and can have long-lasting effects on a victim’s mental health. This underscores the need to address both physical and emotional aspects of bullying through holistic and empathetic intervention strategies.

The differing interpretations of bullying among students, teachers, and parents may be rooted in a lack of comprehensive education and awareness. At SD X, neither students nor staff had received formal training or educational programs on bullying. Providing both groups with structured information on the nature of bullying could significantly improve the school community’s ability to identify, report, and respond to problematic behavior. Research by Chalmers et al. (2016) showed that schools with appropriate bullying prevention training were more effective in addressing such incidents (3). Similarly, Saptandari and Adiyanti (2013) found that elementary schools implementing psychoeducational programs experienced a notable decrease in bullying cases compared to those that did not (15).

Maunder, Harrop, and Tattersall (2010) recommend that teachers establish open lines of communication with students regarding bullying to develop a shared understanding of the issue (13). A consistent and clearly communicated definition of bullying can help bridge the gap between student and teacher perceptions and foster a more supportive environment for addressing these concerns.

This case study also identified several individual and environmental factors—

including family dynamics, peer relationships, and teacher involvement—as key influences in the development of bullying behavior. Research by Chang et al. (2003) suggests that harsh parenting may lead to emotional dysregulation, contributing to increased aggression in children (4). Moreover, children often model behaviors observed in parents or caregivers, whether through learned behavior or inherited traits (10). These early patterns of interaction can shape a child's social behavior and response to conflict.

One major challenge identified in the study was the lack of effective communication between parents and teachers, which compounded the problem. Infrequent parent-teacher meetings and limited ongoing dialogue made it difficult to develop unified strategies for addressing bullying. Research by Ayers et al. (2012) found that regular communication between parents and teachers significantly reduced bullying incidents by encouraging collaborative approaches to behavior management (1). Involving both parents and teachers in crafting consistent discipline strategies is essential for ensuring a coordinated response to bullying and providing necessary support for affected students.

In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of comprehensive education, open communication, and collaborative engagement among students, teachers, and parents in effectively addressing bullying. A deeper and shared understanding of bullying—especially its emotional and psychological impact—is crucial for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies. By cultivating a school culture grounded in awareness, empathy, and active participation, SD X can take significant steps toward reducing bullying and

creating a safer, more inclusive environment for all students.

LIMITATIONS

This study acknowledges several limitations that may have influenced its findings and outcomes. These include constraints related to the research timeline, available resources, and the researcher's capacity. Due to these limitations, the scope and depth of the study may not fully capture all dimensions of the issue. Furthermore, the sample size and the contextual factors specific to the school environment may have affected the generalizability of the results.

While every effort was made to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, the study is not without its imperfections. It is hoped that future research will address these limitations by expanding the scope, incorporating a broader sample, and utilizing more diverse methodologies to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the subject.

RESEARCH ETHIC

Ethical considerations are a critical aspect of conducting research, ensuring that the rights and dignity of all participants are respected throughout the study. The following ethical principles were upheld: Confidentiality, all information collected from participants was treated with the highest level of confidentiality. The identities and personal data of participants were securely protected, and the information was used solely for research purposes.

Respect for justice and inclusiveness, the principles of fairness, honesty, and openness guided the research process. The researcher was committed to ensuring equal treatment of all participants, providing transparent

communication regarding the study's objectives, and promoting inclusivity in participant selection.

Balancing harm and benefits, efforts were made to maximize the benefits of the research while minimizing any potential harm to participants. The study aimed to contribute positively to society by addressing important issues, with particular attention to the well-being of those involved.

Respect for human dignity, participants' rights were fully respected. They were informed about the purpose and methods of the research, provided informed consent voluntarily, and retained the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

By adhering to these ethical principles, the research sought to maintain the highest standards of integrity and respect for all individuals involved.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The researcher declares that there are no conflicts of interest associated with this study. All aspects of the research were conducted impartially and objectively, with the goal of contributing to the academic field without external influence or bias.

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CONCLUSION

Both teachers and students recognize bullying as an act of violence in which one student harms another, typically resulting in emotional distress or physical injury. While there is a shared understanding of the general nature of bullying, significant differences emerge in how teachers and students perceive the intention behind such behavior and its impact. Students often interpret the perpetrator's actions as deliberately harmful, intended to cause pain. In contrast, teachers may view these actions as less intentional, frequently categorizing them as mischief or harmless play. This discrepancy affects how bullying is identified and addressed within the school environment.

The differing perceptions of bullying have tangible implications for how teachers respond to problematic student behavior. A failure to recognize the full emotional and psychological impact of bullying can lead to inadequate preventive measures and insufficient support for victims, particularly concerning their mental health and emotional well-being.

According to social learning theory and research on environmental influences, bullying is shaped not only by internal factors within the child but also by external factors such as family dynamics, peer relationships, and the school setting. When a child's relationship with their family—especially their parents—is characterized by a lack of warmth or support, it can foster the development of aggressive behaviors and negative social attitudes. These behaviors are often learned from the immediate social environment and replicated in broader social contexts.

Ideally, such aggressive behaviors should be addressed through appropriate

interventions and disciplinary actions at school. However, findings from this study suggest that teachers often fail to respond effectively, sometimes dismissing harmful behaviors as part of normal childhood mischief rather than recognizing them as signs of bullying. This lack of intervention can reinforce cycles of aggression, preventing the school from becoming a truly safe and supportive space for all students.

This study underscores the need for greater awareness and education regarding the full scope of bullying—including both its physical and emotional dimensions—as well as the importance of nurturing positive relationships among students, teachers, and families. Only through a deeper understanding of these issues can schools begin to effectively address and prevent bullying, creating a healthier and more supportive environment for every student.

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