

Prevention Efforts Against Bullying in Schools According to Middle School Students

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.908000480>

Received: 30 August 2025; Accepted: 04 September 2025; Published: 17 September 2025

ABSTRACT

Schools serve as environments designed to nurture students comprehensively, supporting not only academic growth but also emotional development and life skills. Unfortunately, the essential mission of schools is increasingly disrupted by the widespread issue of bullying. This study aims to examine how middle school students perceive efforts to prevent bullying. Using a qualitative approach with purposive sampling, data were obtained through in-depth interviews and thematically analyzed. The findings indicate that students view bullying as a deliberate and repeated act of aggression carried out by individuals or groups against peers with less power, expressed in physical, verbal, or psychological forms. According to the students, preventive strategies include: (1) embedding anti-bullying education into the curriculum, (2) establishing school-based anti-bullying task forces, (3) strengthening collaboration among schools, parents, and communities, and (4) encouraging students' active participation in extracurricular programs that provide constructive outlets for their energy.

Keywords: prevention, bullying, middle school students.

INTRODUCTION

A school is more than just a collection of classrooms and desks; it represents a dynamic arena where knowledge, values, culture, and social skills are cultivated to prepare learners to become responsible and independent individuals. Schools hold a crucial role in fostering students' holistic growth—covering intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions. Ki Hadjar Dewantara conceptualized schools as a “garden” where children develop naturally while being guided toward both physical and spiritual independence. He emphasized that education should not merely transmit knowledge but also shape individuals to be free in thought, body, and spirit. His philosophy, reflected in the principles of *Trikon* (continuity, convergence, and concentricity) and the motto *Ing ngarso sung tulodo, ing madya mangun karso, tut wuri handayani*, underlines that schools function as centers for moral development, intellectual enrichment, cultural preservation, and preparation for civic engagement (Suharto, 2017).

Recent data released by the Indonesian Child Protection Commission in early 2025 indicated that approximately 2,300 cases of bullying—including incidents occurring in schools and online—were reported in 2024. These cases encompassed physical, verbal, psychological, and cyber forms of violence. The Commission also noted an upward trend in bullying cases going viral on social media, sparking greater public awareness and willingness to report such incidents (Indonesian Child Protection Commission, 2025). Throughout 2024, awareness campaigns revealed that around 21,000 children had experienced bullying in physical or psychological forms. The majority of these cases took place in immediate environments such as homes, schools, and neighborhoods, with perpetrators often being people close to the victims, including parents (53%), neighbors (11%), online acquaintances (10%), peers (9%), teachers (5%), stepfathers (5%), and extended family members (2%). Locations were predominantly within families (60%), followed by schools (17%), community settings (15%),

and social media platforms (8%).

Bullying is particularly harmful to victims as it produces serious psychological and educational consequences. Juvonen and Espinoza (2011) observed that bullying negatively impacts students' academic achievement and motivation. Research also shows its correlation with higher absenteeism, poor academic performance, lower self-esteem, greater susceptibility to depression, juvenile delinquency, and even adult criminality. Other findings reveal declines in IQ and cognitive abilities among victims. Moreover, bullying has been linked to increased aggression, suicidal ideation, and death.

Middle school students are especially vulnerable to bullying. Compared to elementary students, they experience more complex social interactions, yet lack the emotional maturity and self-regulation of high school students. Adolescence, particularly ages 12–15, is marked by significant physical, social, and emotional changes, accompanied by a strong desire for peer acceptance, identity formation, and heightened sensitivity to social pressures. These factors contribute to their susceptibility to conflicts such as bullying, whether as perpetrators, victims, or bystanders.

A study by Anggraeni (2023), drawing on Amin's research in Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Surabaya, reported that 67.9% of bullying incidents took place in middle schools, with 43.7% of students acknowledging experiences of psychological bullying. In Malang, one notable case that gained national attention involved the physical assault of a student by peers in Sukun on March 1, 2024, captured on CCTV just before Friday prayers.

Understanding how middle school students perceive bullying and its prevention is therefore critical for designing effective strategies that align with their daily experiences and social interactions. Prior studies emphasize that prevention programs achieve greater success when students are actively engaged through interactive and participatory approaches rather than being passive recipients of information. For instance, Ennett et al. (2003) demonstrated that initiatives integrating social influence, skill development, and participatory learning outperform purely informational methods. Similarly, evaluations of the KiVa program showed improved outcomes when bullying cases were addressed collectively through classroom and school-wide collaboration rather than solely through top-down authority (Garandeau et al., 2014). These insights highlight the necessity of involving students not only as beneficiaries but also as active contributors to anti-bullying efforts.

This study therefore centers on the perspectives of middle school students, aiming to explore their understanding of bullying, their responses to incidents, and their suggestions for effective preventive measures. The goal is to generate contextual and practical insights for developing more targeted anti-bullying programs.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design to gain deeper insights into middle school students' perceptions of bullying. Participants were chosen using purposive sampling, focusing on students who had either witnessed or directly experienced bullying incidents. Data were primarily collected through in-depth interviews and classroom observations. To support and validate the findings, additional responses were gathered using Google Forms distributed to students.

The data analysis process followed a thematic approach. This involved systematically coding the interview transcripts, categorizing the codes into themes, and interpreting patterns that emerged. The interview questions were designed to capture students' perspectives on several aspects of bullying, including its meaning, impact, victims' emotions, perpetrators' emotions, underlying causes, preventive strategies, school-based programs, attitudes toward victims, and personal messages directed at those who engage in bullying.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the data collection on the meaning, impact, feelings of victims, feelings of perpetrators, reasons for bullying, prevention efforts, school programs, attitudes towards victims, and messages to perpetrators of bullying are presented in the following table.

Table 1. Responses about bullying

No	Description	Responses
1.	Meaning of bullying according to students	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evil actions committed by one or more people. 2. Hurting others by insulting, mocking, hitting, and kicking. 3. Malicious behavior toward someone considered weaker. 4. Bullying is violence committed by the perpetrator, and the victim is the one affected. 5. Bullying is an intentional act of hurting others repeatedly. 6. Makes others sad, angry, afraid, anxious, disappointed, and stressed.
2.	Impact of bullying	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Victims often miss school and fail to do their homework. 2. Victims of bullying do not want to interact with other friends. 3. It can cause depression, anxiety, fear, and lack of confidence. 4. Victims lose focus on school activities and often feel lonely. 5. The bully feels satisfied, arrogant, and superior.
3.	Feelings as a victim	Unpleasant, sad, disappointed, pressured, afraid, hopeless, lazy, stressed, hopeless, and depressed.
4.	Feelings as a perpetrator	Happy, feeling superior, worried, sad, regretful, afraid.
5.	Reasons for bullying	Joking, feeling offended, unmet desires, wanting to dominate, seeing it on social media, revenge for being a victim, and physical and cultural differences.
6.	Bullying prevention efforts	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Choose friends wisely, and reprimand if someone is bullying. 2. Report to teachers, school principals, parents, or authorities if someone is bullying. 3. Enforce strict anti-bullying rules, implement them, and apply firm sanctions. 4. School counselors, security, student affairs, and principals regularly patrol the school environment. 5. Organize activities to boost students' confidence, such as martial arts extracurriculars. 6. Conduct activities to teach the wise use of social media and respect for others. 7. Be brave to speak up, reprimand bullies, and defend the victim when bullying occurs.
7.	Bullying prevention programs in schools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Schools conduct regular counseling, socialization about the impact of bullying, and character education for students with guest speakers. 2. School counselors and the school are ready to assist students who feel bullied. 3. School counselor programs include bullying prevention, such as anti-bullying and violence socialization during orientation or at other specific times. 4. Classes now emphasize cooperative learning and mutual respect among students. 5. Invite parents to meetings, including discussions about bullying.
8.	Students' attitudes toward bullying victims	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Keep victims away from the bullies. 2. Report to adults, school counselors, class teachers, and principals. 3. Encourage friends not to be passive bystanders but to care for others. 4. Help take the victim to the school health unit or treat any wounds or bruises. 5. Approach and comfort the victim to help them not feel sad or afraid.
9.	Students' messages to bullying perpetrators	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explain the negative impact of their actions, and offer empathy and motivation to the victim. 2. Know that every word and action can leave a deep wound on others. 3. Stop hurting others, whether with words or actions. You may think it's funny or cool, but you're actually making someone suffer. Learn to respect others and

		<p>solve problems in a good way, not through violence or mockery. For bullying victims: You are not alone. Don't be afraid to speak up and seek help. Talk to a teacher, parent, or trusted friend. You are valuable, strong, and deserve to be treated well. Don't let others' words or actions make you feel inferior.</p> <p>4. Perpetrators, stop this behavior. You may think you're cool, but you look disgusting when you do this. Stop bullying! For victims, stay strong, don't give up easily, and if you can't take it anymore, report it to the authorities.</p> <p>5. Stop hurting others because it won't bring true happiness or satisfaction.</p>
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The results of the research show that middle school students define bullying as an evil act committed by one or more people against someone perceived as weaker, in the form of violence that causes harm to others, whether through insulting, mocking, hitting, or kicking. Bullying is intentionally and repeatedly done by the perpetrator, which results in the victim feeling sad, angry, fearful, anxious, disappointed, and stressed. Olweus, a key figure in the development of the bullying concept, defined bullying as an aggressive or violent act committed repeatedly by one or more individuals against a weaker individual, either physically or psychologically, where the perpetrator holds greater power than the victim (Olweus, D., 1993). According to Smith (2000), bullying refers to aggressive behavior that is repeated with an imbalance of power. Similarly, Rigby (2008) stated that bullying is deliberate, repetitive, and harmful behavior, whether physical, verbal, or psychological, committed by one or more individuals against a weaker person. These views align with the findings of this study, where the reasons students engage in bullying include joking around, feeling offended, unmet desires, wanting power, seeing it on social media, revenge for having been a victim, and physical or cultural differences.

The research also showed that the impact of bullying, according to students, is that the victims often miss school and fail to complete their assignments. They refuse to socialize with other friends, suffer from depression, anxiety, fear, and a lack of confidence, and lose focus in school activities. Victims often feel lonely. Perpetrators, on the other hand, feel satisfied, arrogant, and superior. The victims of bullying expressed feelings of sadness, disappointment, fear, stress, hopelessness, and depression.

Results from various studies also indicate that bullying has significant psychological effects on the victims, including depression, anxiety, and social isolation (Arseneault et al. 2010). The academic impact includes a decline in school performance and learning motivation (Juvonen & Espinoza, 2011), and social effects include difficulty forming interpersonal relationships and trusting others (Takizawa et al. 2014). Bullying can also lead to long-term mental health problems such as PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder), substance abuse, and even suicidal thoughts (Klomek et al. 2010). Regarding the perpetrators, they often feel pleased, powerful, but also worried, sad, regretful, and afraid. The long-term impact on the bullies can include antisocial behavior, criminality, and violence in adulthood (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011).

According to students, the efforts to prevent bullying include choosing friends wisely, reprimanding bullies, reporting bullying to teachers, principals, parents, or authorities, enforcing clear anti-bullying rules, and ensuring that consequences are enforced. Additionally, school counselors, security, student affairs, and the principal should regularly patrol the school grounds. Other efforts include creating activities that boost students' self-confidence, such as martial arts extracurricular programs, educating students on the proper use of social media and respecting others, and empowering students to speak up, reprimand bullies, and defend the victims.

This is in line with Olweus (1993), who stated that bullying prevention should involve a comprehensive school approach with anti-bullying policies, teacher training, and education for students and parents. Another important approach is character education from an early age, teaching empathy, social responsibility, and moral courage (Coloroso, B., 2003). Educating teachers to recognize signs of bullying and provide appropriate responses in the classroom, including creating a positive classroom atmosphere and managing student behavior, is crucial (Craig & Pepler, 2007). Involving parents and the community is also vital (Rigby, K., 2008), along with counseling and psychological interventions (Sweare & Espelage, 2004). Therefore, bullying prevention must be systemic (involving the whole school community), value-based (empathy and justice), supported by policies and training, and involve families and communities.

Students also recommended school programs to prevent bullying, such as regular counseling, socialization on the impacts of bullying, character-building training with guest speakers, and ensuring that school counselors and staff are available to help students who feel bullied. Programs also include anti-bullying and violence socialization during orientation or other events, fostering cooperation and mutual respect in class, and inviting parents to meetings to discuss bullying. Salmivalli et al. (2011) mentioned that school-based programs targeting attitude and social norm changes, particularly in Finland, have been successfully implemented.

To strengthen the discussion on school programs aimed at preventing bullying, incorporating recent references is essential. For instance, a study by Efianingrum et al. (2023) highlights the significance of collective mentoring and character-building efforts in reducing bullying behavior in schools, emphasizing the need for ongoing counseling and anti-bullying socialization throughout a student's education. Furthermore, the effectiveness of programs like Finland's KiVa has been well-documented in reducing bullying. KiVa, a comprehensive anti-bullying program, has been successfully implemented in several countries and continues to be a model for anti-bullying initiatives worldwide (Khoiri, 2018). Additionally, research by Lawson (2013) discusses how empathy-building activities, such as literature lessons, can further alleviate bullying, particularly when integrated into school curriculums as part of character-building efforts.

Regarding students' attitudes toward bullying victims, they reported that they would keep victims away from perpetrators, report the incident to adults, school counselors, class teachers, and principals, encourage peers not to be passive bystanders but to show concern for others, and help victims by bringing them to the school health unit or treating injuries. They would also approach and comfort victims to prevent them from feeling sad or afraid. As for the messages students would give to bullying perpetrators, they would explain the negative impacts of bullying, encourage empathy and motivation toward the victim, and ask perpetrators to stop their actions. Messages for victims include empowering them to speak up, seek help from trusted individuals, and remind them of their worth and strength. Furthermore, students would urge perpetrators to stop bullying and understand that their actions cause harm to others.

CONCLUSION

Bullying can be defined as a deliberate and repeated aggressive act committed by individuals or groups against peers who are perceived as weaker, involving an imbalance of power. It manifests in physical, verbal, or psychological forms and often results in negative consequences for victims, such as sadness, fear, anxiety, disappointment, stress, and a decline in academic performance. Factors contributing to bullying include excessive joking, feelings of offense, unmet desires, the urge to dominate, exposure to harmful content on social media, revenge for past victimization, and differences in physical or cultural background.

The study highlights that bullying leads to serious outcomes for victims, such as absenteeism, poor academic achievement, social withdrawal, low self-confidence, and psychological distress including depression and anxiety. For perpetrators, bullying may initially produce feelings of superiority but can foster long-term behavioral issues such as antisocial tendencies and delinquency.

To address this issue, comprehensive prevention strategies are essential. These include integrating anti-bullying education into school curricula, establishing dedicated anti-bullying teams within schools, strengthening partnerships among schools, parents, and communities, and encouraging students to develop their skills and interests through constructive extracurricular activities. Such systemic and collaborative efforts are necessary to foster a safer, more inclusive, and supportive school environment for all students.

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