


Exploring Challenges and Solutions to Prevent and Overcome Bullying Behavior Among Vocational School Students

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<p>Submitted: 2024-11-21</p> <p>Published: 2024-12-31</p> <p>Keywords: Bullying, Vocational School, Guidance and Counseling Teachers, Prevention Strategies, Education Policy</p> <p>Copyright holder: © Author/s (2024)</p> <p>This article is under:</p>  <p>How to cite: Wardah, A., Auliah, N., Aminah, A., Andriyani, R., & Pebrianti, N. (2024). Exploring Challenges and Solutions to Prevent and Overcome Bullying Behavior Among Vocational School Students. <i>Bulletin of Counseling and Psychotherapy</i>, 6(3). https://doi.org/10.51214/002024061191000</p> <p>Published by: Kuras Institute</p> <p>E-ISSN: 2656-1050</p>	<p>ABSTRACT: Bullying continues to be a significant problem in educational settings, adversely affecting the psychological, physical, and social well-being of kids. This study investigates the difficulties and solutions for preventing and mitigating bullying among Vocational High School (SMK) students in Banjarmasin, Indonesia. Data were gathered via written and semi-structured interviews with four guidance and counseling educators from public and private vocational institutions Using a qualitative research methodology and case study design. The thematic analysis identified three primary challenges: the perception of bullying as a "joke," the impact of social media and the social context, and the difficulties of emotional regulation in adolescents. In response to these difficulties, schools are adopting various strategic approaches, including traditional services, anti-bullying policies, a WhatsApp hotline for reporting incidents, and collaborative initiatives that include all stakeholders within the school community. This research underscores the significance of technology integration and community engagement in fostering a secure and inclusive educational atmosphere. These findings substantially enhance the formulation of successful educational policies and anti-bullying initiatives.</p>
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INTRODUCTION

Bullying, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), is aggressive behavior that involves the abuse of force or power by an individual or group against another person. These behaviors often result in severe negative impacts, such as repeated physical, psychological, and social damage. Cases of bullying are not only limited to school settings but also occur where children gather and on social media, which expands the reach of its impact (Kanda & Suci Rosulliya, 2024).

The topic of bullying has become one of the most worrying global challenges, especially among adolescents. In South Korea, statistics show that 36 incidences of bullying were reported in a specific period (Isfaizah et al., 2023). Meanwhile, in Japan, the number of bullying cases climbed considerably, from 198,108 instances in 2012 to 70,000 new cases in 2013 (National Mental Health and Education Centre, 2006). In Indonesia, a 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) poll showed that 41% of students had been victims of bullying, suggesting that the issue is also a national concern. Data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) till August 2023 recorded 2,355 cases of child protection violations, of which 87 cases were bullying. The rest include physical assault, sexual violence, and several other crimes linked to child welfare (Masyrafina, 2023). This demonstrates that bullying is an important issue that deserves considerable attention from various stakeholders.

Bullying encompasses a wide range of behaviors, including harassment, exclusion, intimidation, and the misuse of authority to harm an individual's physical or emotional well-being. This activity can occur at all educational levels, from elementary school to college (Kanda & Suci Rosulliya, 2024). The consequences of bullying are profoundly harmful, affecting both the victim and the social milieu. Victims frequently endure psychological issues like despair, anxiety, and sleep disruptions, with

physical ailments such as headaches, abdominal discomfort, and muscle strain. This syndrome might diminish the victim's sense of security, motivation for learning, and academic performance (Lestari & Pasilaputra, 2024).

The variables that induce bullying are relatively different. Wicaksono et al. (2021) identified that bullying can be influenced by home environment, socialization, school, and social media. Wardah dan Auliah (2020) notes that economic factors, personality, and popularity also affect bullying behavior. The most common forms of bullying in schools are verbal activities such as mocking, insults, and insulting nicknames (Asri et al., 2022). In addition, cyberbullying is more common, with forms such as nasty comments, unfriendly communications, and the transmission of content that embarrasses the victim (Wardah & Auliah, 2022). The consequences of bullying can be classified into three primary dimensions: psychological, emotional, and physical. Victims frequently experience isolation and a decline in self-confidence. The victim becomes emotionally sensitive, withdrawn, and apprehensive about social engagement. Concurrently, sufferers often endure intense stress, exhaustion, and notable eating problems (Asri et al., 2022).

Previous studies have proposed many preventive methods. Nurdiana et al. (2021) advocated establishing school policies that ban bullying. Saputra (2022) discovered that information service programs can enhance students' understanding of the effects of bullying and the significance of mutual respect. Furthermore, Wiyani (2017) and Andryawan et al. (2023) highlighted the importance of counseling guidance teachers as catalysts for proactive change in developing students' character and addressing bullying incidents.

Recent instances of bullying highlight the necessity of these preventive measures. In 2023, two significant events in Indonesia garnered national notice. In Cimahi, five junior high school pupils perpetrated a physical assault on their peers, which was then recorded and disseminated on social media. A high school student in Banjarmasin stabbed his friend as a result of trauma from being a bullying victim. These two instances underscore the significance of a methodical strategy for avoiding and addressing bullying, particularly within educational environments.

This study examines the issues and solutions aimed at preventing and addressing bullying behavior among vocational school students in Banjarmasin City. The results of this study are anticipated to substantially enhance educational policies and augment counseling services in educational institutions.

METHODS

Design

This research employs a qualitative methodology utilizing an interpretative paradigm and a case study design. The interview technique is used to address research inquiries. Prior to the commencement of data collection, the researcher elucidates the study's objectives to potential participants and solicits their consent for participation. After obtaining the participants' agreement, they were requested to complete a questionnaire soliciting their background information. This technique offers a preliminary overview of participant characteristics and enables subsequent interviews.

The interview was executed in two phases. The initial phase consists of a written interview, wherein participants respond to research inquiries informed by their experiences and perspectives. The second stage involves a face-to-face interview to verify data and elucidate any material inadequately addressed in the written interview. Face-to-face interviews are arranged according to a mutually agreed time and location between the researcher and the participant. Each interview session lasts 30 to 60 minutes and is documented via a recording application on a smartphone to guarantee data precision. The recordings are subsequently listened to multiple times and meticulously transcribed for analytical purposes. All interviews are conducted in Indonesian, enabling

participants to articulate their viewpoints quickly and clearly. This method seeks to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the topic under investigation.

Participants

This research involves guidance and counseling teachers who serve in Vocational High Schools (SMK), including State Vocational Schools and Vocational Schools managed by non-governmental foundations. Before recruiting volunteers, the researcher met with prospective participants to explain the research goal and ask them about their desire to participate. Prospective participants were provided thorough information about their potential benefits from engagement in this study. The researcher further underlined that participation is voluntary, and individuals can resign at any moment if they feel uncomfortable or have other activities that cannot be abandoned.

A total of four guidance and counseling teachers were recruited as research participants. They consisted of two teachers from State Vocational Schools and two from Private Vocational Schools in Banjarmasin City. In reporting the study results, the researcher employed the initials to safeguard the secrecy of the participants' identities. Participants' data is appropriately kept per the norms of research ethics. This approach was taken to preserve the anonymity of participants while increasing their trust and comfort during the research procedure.

Table 1. Participants demographics.

No	Name (Not real)	School Type (Initial)	Years of Service (Years)
1	Yuni	Vocational Public School 1/VPS1	>10
2	Warni	Vocational Public School 2/VPS2	>10
3	Yanto	Vocational Private School 3/VPS3	>10
4	Fatmah	Vocational Private School 4/VPS4	>10

Data Collection Methods

Written interviews followed by semi-structured interviews obtained data. The data is generally grouped into two categories: (1) problems in efforts to avoid bullying behavior among vocational school students. (2) solutions to avoid bullying in numerous Banjarmasin City vocational schools. The semi-structured interview guide's formulation, which will be conducted in person, is grounded in Rigby's (2012) assertion that bullying stems from a desire to harm. This drive is shown in actions that inflict suffering upon an individual. Actions are executed by a dominant individual or majority group and performed frequently, with the perpetrator exhibiting irresponsibility and deriving enjoyment from the act. Bullying is the exertion of power to harm an individual or group through verbal, physical, or psychological means, resulting in feelings of depression, trauma, and helplessness in the victim.

Before collecting data, the researcher will first create personal closeness with the individuals. Participants must give all the necessary details. Researchers believe that when an emotional connection has been formed between researchers and participants, interviews become more accessible, and participants feel comfortable. In addition, interviews were done by considering flexible time and settings for participants and researchers. Before the data was analyzed, the research participants were given the option to review the interview data (member checking) to build data trustworthiness and maintain ethics in (re)constructing data (Harvey, 2015).

Data Analysis

Before concluding, the acquired data were evaluated using thematic content analysis (Fullana, Pallisera, Colomer, Pena & Perez-Buriel, 2014). This strategy is focused on comprehending the content of the tale transmitted by the participants, not just the narrative framework. The purpose is to discover participant problems, experiences, and insights based on themes relevant to the study question.

The analysis process begins with the repeated reading of interview transcripts to understand the profound significance of the stories communicated by the participants. Each transcript is then methodically classified according to themes, subthemes, and potential new themes arising from the data. This analysis allows researchers to classify and categorize the data into more precise themes, supporting responses to previously defined research questions. With a thematic analysis technique, this study intends to examine and construct a systematic comprehension of the qualitative data that has been acquired.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

The Challenge of "Joking" Perception in Bullying

A series of comprehensive interviews with guidance and counseling instructors at SMK Kota Banjarmasin uncovered several key themes concerning preventing and managing bullying behavior within the school setting. Thematic data analysis used inductive coding to discern notable patterns in participant experiences and insights. This analysis found two primary themes: (1) obstacles in preventing bullying behavior among vocational school students and (2) strategic strategies to address bullying behavior in diverse vocational schools. These studies offer comprehensive insights into the intricacies of bullying issues in educational institutions and outline measures to foster a safer and more conducive learning atmosphere.

Addressing bullying behavior in Vocational High Schools (SMK) entails numerous intricate issues. A primary difficulty is the view among students who frequently regard bullying as only a benign "joke" despite the potential for severe repercussions. This attitude constitutes a substantial barrier to prevention initiatives since students often undervalue the detrimental effects of bullying on victims. Interviews with guidance and counseling teachers revealed that "students perceive bullying behavior as mere joking and mutual exchanges among peers" (Yuni, face-to-face interview, June 1, 2024). Another educator said that "students often perceive it merely as a jest, disregarding their peers' emotions" (Warni, face-to-face interview, June 2, 2024). This perspective indicates that kids' awareness of the detrimental impacts of bullying is insufficient.

The findings are supported by data obtained from extensive interviews with 20 students at SMK Negeri 2 and SMK Negeri 4 in Kota Serang. A considerable proportion of students regard bullying as a widespread occurrence in schools. This action is sometimes considered a joke or a method of expressing friendship (Sari & Muslihah, 2020). This viewpoint suggests that a culture that regards bullying as humor poses a substantial barrier to addressing such behavior. Nugroho et al. (2020) investigated bullying within pesantren environments and found that it is often regarded as humor, a traditional method for orienting new students, or a source of entertainment stemming from demanding academic pressures and insufficient resources. These findings are noteworthy as they illustrate that the perception of bullying as humor is widespread in both public schools and faith-based educational institutions. Adinda et al. (2024) similarly noted that bullying in educational institutions often presents as a form of joking among students. Sartana and Afriyeni (2017) determined that cyberbullying is frequently committed for amusement, vengeance, or anonymity provided by the digital realm. It intensifies the problem since the perpetrator feels challenges in being identified, hence feeling empowered to partake in bullying conduct. This issue underscores the need for organized efforts to educate youngsters about the harmful effects of bullying, particularly in schools and online contexts.

Challenges of the Social Environment and Social Media

A fundamental issue in addressing bullying behavior is students' tendency to underestimate its harmful consequences. This challenge is increasingly complex due to the influence of the social milieu and social media, which perpetuate a culture of bullying. In the digital era, bullying extends outside educational environments and proliferates on online platforms, posing significant challenges for monitoring by schools and parents. Discussions with guidance and counseling experts revealed that overseeing student engagement on social media often presents difficulties. It arises from the environmental factors affecting students and the number of their social media accounts (Fatmah, face-to-face interview, June 5, 2024). Students in vocational schools proficient in social media are frequently more vulnerable to ongoing bullying. Social media fosters an unregulated atmosphere that enables the spread of bullying behavior. The anonymity afforded by cyberspace often encourages perpetrators to partake in detrimental actions without fear of repercussions. As a result, victims experience psychological anguish and significant social shame.

Contemporary cyberbullying includes broader pressures, not only from peers but also from many entities within the internet. Harahap and Sampurna (2024) assert that this substantially impacts the mental health of victims, who often endure emotional and psychological challenges due to social media assaults. The complexity of these challenges requires deliberate efforts to create an environment that supports the advantageous use of technology. Hariguna et al. (2023) argue for steps to cultivate a secure social media ecosystem through implementing digital education programs and enhancing technological literacy to encourage judicious social media usage among students.

Emotional Challenges and Self-Management in Puberty

Adolescence is recognized as a transitional phase from infancy to maturity. According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, this phase represents a change from concrete operational thinking to formal operational thinking, during which adolescents acquire the capacity for abstract and logical reasoning (Neviyarni, 2020). The alterations during this period encompassed substantial cognitive, physical, psychological, and social dimensions. Physical transformations, including accelerated growth, frequently induce discomfort, insecurity, or a decline in self-confidence among adolescents.

The hormonal changes throughout puberty psychologically influence teenage emotions, including the emergence of attraction to the opposite sex and variable mood swings. This syndrome frequently induces bewilderment and worry and may even lead to stress or despair. Socially, adolescence is defined by the quest for identity and the aspiration to establish a secure role within the social milieu. During this transition period, kids frequently encounter numerous issues, including bullying, which significantly affect their well-being (Nafisah et al., 2024).

Emotional difficulties are a significant factor during puberty. Students' capacity for emotional regulation and self-control is underdeveloped, resulting in challenges when confronting negative urges (Linda et al., 2024). This condition can exacerbate the issue, particularly without sufficient environmental support. Interviews with guidance and counseling educators indicate that vocational school students in puberty frequently struggle with emotional regulation and self-control, resulting in disputes or undesirable actions (Yanto, face-to-face interview, June 7, 2024).

The development of children and teenagers is a pivotal phase in life that significantly impacts the quality of adult life. In contemporary education, developmental issues are becoming increasingly intricate due to multiple elements, including societal pressure, technological influence, and evolving educational regulations (Lainah et al., 2022; Triyanto, 2020). Consequently, comprehending teenagers' difficulties during this transitional phase is crucial for developing a more effective and supportive educational strategy.

Socialization Through Classical Services

The socialization process regarding bullying is facilitated through traditional informational services in schools, where detailed materials on various forms of bullying and their effects on students are disseminated. Additionally, during MPLS activities, this material is presented along with the repercussions of bullying peers. According to the findings from interviews with Guidance and Counseling educators, "Delivering traditional socialization regarding bullying and its consequences through conventional services, disseminating information, and employing diverse methodologies such as lectures, video presentations, role-playing, and focus group discussions." Face-to-face interview for Warni#2 on June 8.

Classical guiding services are fundamental services that operate as preventive measures, also called preventive words. Bahri, S. (2020). Classical tutoring services designed to avoid bullying have demonstrated considerable efficacy. Research findings (Soleman, 2021) indicate that classical guidance can reduce bullying behavior. The study's conclusions (Ru'iyah, S., 2022) suggest that nearly all orphanage residents exhibit reduced bullying potential after engaging with classical guidance through films.

In addition to utilizing videos, Guidance, and Counseling, Teachers can offer a range of traditional services, including digital-based conventional services. Digital service platforms coupled with social media are referred to as enemy platforms. The Zedemy platform is an alternative for developing conventional service modules to reduce cyberbullying (Putro, H. Y. S. et al., 2022). Implementing traditional service modules will encourage kids to engage with intriguing technological platforms, thereby reducing instances of cyberbullying (Rachman et al., 2021). The Zedemy platform offers social media facilities, facilitating socialization among friends and groups based on shared interests, knowledge, and preferences.

The Role of WhatsApp Hotline for Bullying Reports

In the dynamic digital age, information and communication technology has transformed human interaction and communication across all facets of life (Fajriah & Ningsih, 2024). This technological transition induces substantial alterations in communication modalities via many digital platforms, including social media, websites, podcasts, online videos, and instant messaging applications like WhatsApp. This medium has emerged as a prevalent instrument for communicating diverse ideas, particularly in initiatives to prevent and address bullying inside educational settings.

To address bullying incidents, school counselors offer their personal WhatsApp numbers to the pupils they guide. This initiative seeks to facilitate reporting bullying incidents experienced or observed by students. During socialization, kids receive information regarding the necessary actions to take if they encounter or observe bullying within or beyond the school environment. Students must promptly report to the guidance and counseling instructor (BK) for support. The curriculum has demonstrated efficacy, as numerous kids express increased comfort in disclosing their issues to BK teachers.

According to interviews with guidance and counseling educators, a strategy implemented is to "Establish a hotline via a WhatsApp number for students facing bullying, in addition to promoting discipline in bullying prevention" (Yuni, face-to-face interview, June 10, 2024). Another educator stated, "Services are accessible 24 hours a day through chat, voice note, phone, or students may directly approach the BK teacher at school to report bullying incidents" (Warni, face-to-face interview, June 25, 2024). This stage illustrates the significance of technology-driven innovation in establishing efficient communication pathways between students and counselors. Alongside WhatsApp, another prospective technological innovation is creating a dedicated program to address bullying. Anwara (2024) made the BEASTRO (Be a Stronger) application, intended as a platform for socialization, education, and services for bullying consultation and complaints. The application comprises four primary features: Be A Voice, Be Smart, Counseling, and Call Center. The Be A Voice

feature encourages victims or witnesses of bullying to report incidents they encounter via the application. The Be Smart feature educates users on the definition of bullying, its various forms, and the measures that may be implemented to address this issue. The Counseling tool enables users to seek direct consultation regarding the bullying issues they are experiencing. Simultaneously, the Call Center feature offers emergency assistance or addresses technical issues within the program.

By incorporating technology to prevent and address bullying, utilizing programs like BEASTRO, and essential communication platforms like WhatsApp, educational institutions may foster a safer and more supportive atmosphere for students. This innovation facilitates access to reporting while enhancing the preventive strategy through education and mentorship.

Implementation of Rules and Consequences

Anti-bullying regulations have been introduced at SMK 5 Banjarmasin as a proactive strategy to mitigate bullying. According to an interview with guidance and counseling educators, "The code of conduct for bullying prevention in our school has been enacted due to its significant classification with maximum points." All forms of bullying are classified as serious" (Yuni, face-to-face interview, July 3, 2024). The implemented system utilizes the SP (Warning Letter) protocol, which comprises three tiers: SP 1, SP 2, and SP 3. Each level is tailored to the student's problem description (Yanto, face-to-face interview, July 10, 2024). Guidance and counseling educators additionally offer follow-up through individual therapy for pupils implicated in bullying incidents.

National policies further reinforce the government's initiatives to combat bullying in educational settings. The Minister of Education and Culture has promulgated Regulation Number 82 of 2015 about the Prevention and Countermeasures of Violence in Educational Institutions (Permendikbud 82 of 2015). This policy establishes a secure, pleasant, and enriching educational atmosphere for pupils. This policy is implemented at the school level by legislation addressing bullying. Sulaeni (2024) asserts that anti-bullying punishment constitutes a legal normative framework to prevent bullying. This code of conduct delineates the prohibition of bullying, categorizes the types of bullying, outlines consequences for offenders, specifies reporting procedures, and describes recovery mechanisms for victims. This policy is communicated to students, teachers, staff, and parents via multiple methods, including new student orientation and school communication platforms.

Schools respond to bullying incidents with prompt and decisive measures, including conducting investigations, imposing sanctions on offenders, and assisting victims. Abdi et al. (2024) observed that schools engage other entities, such as law enforcement or child protection organizations, particularly in instances of bullying that entail illegal activities. At SMA IT Mentari Ilmu Karawang, the management stage entails the homeroom teacher issuing an initial reprimand. Should the behavior persist, guidance and counseling educators will assume responsibility for management, potentially involving parental engagement, issuance of warning letters, or collaboration with external entities if deemed a serious matter (Bagaskara et al., 2024). The inquiry is conducted impartially by engaging all relevant parties, including the victim, perpetrator, and witnesses. The school offers counseling services to assist the victim in mitigating the psychological effects they have endured (Sunarso & Kn, 2022). Upon substantiation of a bullying incident, the offender will face disciplinary measures following the school's anti-bullying policy, which may range from suspension to financial penalties, contingent upon the gravity of the offense. Educational institutions also offer intervention for offenders via counseling and rehabilitation programs to facilitate the comprehension of their errors and amend their conduct.

External intervention is essential when bullying entails significant physical violence or poses a threat to the victim's safety. In such instances, the school collaborates with law enforcement or child protective organizations to report the occurrence and facilitate the investigation. This participation

guarantees that criminal acts of bullying are addressed appropriately, following relevant legal protocols.

Anti-Bullying Campaign: Implementation in Schools

Schools have implemented proactive measures to prevent and address bullying incidents by establishing anti-bullying task forces, ambassadors, and organizations. Interviews with guidance and counseling educators reveal that a definitive measure implemented is the establishment of an "anti-bullying task force" and the formation of an "anti-bullying group," which is to be communicated to all students (Fatmah, face-to-face interview, July 5, 2024; Warni, face-to-face interview, July 6, 2024). This task force administers multiple initiatives, including socialization, anti-bullying campaigns, and direct case management. The program engages multiple stakeholders, including school administrators, educators, support staff, counselors, parents, and kids, to guarantee the efficacy of its execution.

The anti-bullying task force aligns with the government's initiative via the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project incorporated in the new curriculum and the Roots Program endorsed by UNICEF. The Roots program enlists peers as catalysts for change to promote a constructive influence on bullying behavior. Thirty selected kids from each school, designated as change agents, underwent rigorous training throughout 15 sessions. They possess the competencies to successfully disseminate information against bullying, establish commendable values, and advocate for constructive activities inside educational institutions (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2023; Gusman et al., 2023). The campaign incorporates innovative strategies, like anti-bullying posters, artistic performances, and group discussions, to communicate anti-bullying themes effectively and engagingly (Rena et al., 2021).

The presence of change agents at SMK Negeri 2 Banjarbaru yields a substantial positive effect. The outcomes attained encompass enhanced comprehension among students regarding the concept of bullying and its repercussions, increased bravery among victims to report incidents of bullying, and a reduction in severe bullying behaviors, such as submerging peers in pools or utilizing parental names for mockery (Gusman et al., 2023). The initiative fosters a safer and more supportive educational atmosphere for pupils. Alongside a campaign-oriented strategy and socialization, anti-bullying initiatives are executed in Islamic educational institutions by fostering Islamic values. Principles such as solidarity, empathy, respect for diversity, and fairness constitute the foundation for student character development. This program's execution encompasses establishing anti-bullying organizations, facilitating talks and workshops, and coordinating creative events using students as peer educators (Sholeh, 2023). This strategy emphasizes the prevention and management of bullying and seeks to cultivate an ethically responsive generation that fosters an inclusive educational atmosphere.

Cooperative initiatives among governments, educational institutions, and organizations such as UNICEF illustrate the significance of a comprehensive strategy in addressing bullying. By involving kids as catalysts for change, harnessing cultural and religious values, and employing innovative techniques, anti-bullying initiatives can effectuate substantial transformation in the school environment. It affirms that bullying prevention involves regulation and dedication from all facets of schooling.

CONCLUSION

Bullying among vocational school students is often trivialized as humor, perpetuating harmful behaviors both online and in person. Social media platforms amplify these challenges by providing anonymity, while adolescents' emotional vulnerabilities demand supportive environments fostered by educators and counselors. Effective prevention strategies include classical services that disseminate anti-bullying messages, technology-based reporting mechanisms like WhatsApp

hotlines, and clear regulations with consequences that safeguard victims and rehabilitate offenders. Peer-involvement initiatives, such as the Roots Program, further cultivate positive school cultures by integrating cultural and ethical values into character education. Ultimately, a holistic approach encompassing education, technology, policy, and community collaboration is crucial to create safer, more inclusive vocational schools.

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