



Why Do They Bully? The Factors Behind Bullying Behavior Among Students

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Abstract. This study aims to investigate whether internal and external environments influence teenagers' propensity to bully their peers. We propose three variables to predict bullying behavior in high school students, namely parenting styles, peer interaction and social media. Data were collected through questionnaires from 763 students of SMAN 2 Kotabaru, South Kalimantan Province, Indonesia. We employ SEM-PLS to examine the relationship among variables. The results indicate that parenting styles significantly influence bullying behavior among students, suggesting that parents are responsible to shape their children's behavior at home. Parents are the role model for their children which spend their time most with and most likely adopt their parent values. Furthermore, peer interaction also influences student's propensity to bully their peers. The circle of friends determines how students treat their peers or people outside their circle. Peers may directly or indirectly form a supportive or resistant climate for bullying behavior among their circles. It is not surprising that the results also found that social media significantly influences bullying behavior among students. Social media delivers various forms of content, ranging from educational, entertainment to violent. Students need to be guided and supervised regarding their use of gadgets and social media. The results suggest the role of all parties including parents, school authorities and government to discourage bullying behavior among teenagers. A comprehensive education and socialization are needed to provide understanding of bullying behavior and its effect on social milieu as preventive action.

Keywords: Students, Bullying Behavior, Parenting Styles, Social-Media, Social Interaction.

1 Introduction

Bullying is now becoming an increasingly common form of violence in society, especially with the rise of the internet and social media use. Bullying has serious impacts both short and long term to bullies and victims. Bullying can have psychological effects and even lead to criminal behavior, in certain cases, it may even cause suicidal thoughts because of the pressure. In the long term, bullying can affect a person's ability to adapt, self-control and perceive other people in their environment. In other words, bullying could affect personality and social skills.

Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia (National Child Protection Commission of Indonesia) has reported 2,473 bullying cases between 2011–2019, experiencing an upward trend [13]. The Indonesian Teachers Union Federation have released at least 23 bullying cases throughout January to September 2023, in which 50% has occurred in junior high schools, 23% in elementary schools, and 13.5% each in senior high schools and vocational schools. UNICEF also revealed that 2 of 3 teenagers aged between 13 to 17 in Indonesia have experienced at least one type of violence in their life, and the perpetrators were their friends or peers. It also mentioned that bullying in the form of physical and verbal violence often occurs in school [25]. The PISA report showed that Indonesia is the fifth ranked country that displayed the highest percentage of bullying experience among students [5]. Bullying behavior affects both psychologically and mentally in the short and long term. It can lead to future trauma and may trigger other problems in the future such as criminal behavior. Based on these facts, it is necessary to explore the factors that contribute bullying behavior among teenagers.

Bullying occurs due to several factors. [1] highlights the correlation between parenting styles and bullying behavior. Parents are the closest social networks that teenagers spend the most time with and are the main role models in their lives, especially during their childhood. Parenting styles applied by parents play a significant role in shaping one's personality and characteristics. Taught, values and real actions by parents in teenager's daily life could shape their way of thinking which become a guidance in treating others. According to [21], parenting styles refers to the control and involvement of parents in guiding children toward physical and psychological maturity. [11] adds that parenting also addresses children's emotional needs, such as security and affection, and serves as a means of socializing societal values. Effective parenting styles not only shape a child's character but also their ability to interact with the social environment, including their peers.

Peer interactions significantly influence the tendency for bullying behavior among high school students, particularly at the secondary level. [7] defines interaction as a reciprocal relationship between two systems that mutually influence each other. Among peers, adolescents provide feedback to one another on their behaviors, which include forms of interaction such as cooperation, competition, conflict, conformity, and integration. Cooperation strengthens relationships, healthy competition encourages achievement, while unmanaged conflicts can lead to bullying behavior.

[21] explains that peers are individuals of similar age or maturity who learn from each other about acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. These interactions also play a role in shaping self-concept and social values. Indicates a significant negative correlation between peer interactions and cyberbullying, suggesting that positive peer interactions reduce bullying tendencies. Conversely, [19] found that peer groups can significantly increase bullying tendencies depending on the quality of interactions within the group.

[22] shows that 80% of children imitate negative behaviors from the media. Amidst the rapid development of information and technology, supported by a tech-savvy generation, social media has emerged as a medium that can shape individual behavior. Among the 285 million population in Indonesia, more than half of them are social media users. Most of them use social media to find inspiration for things to do and buy

(51%) and see what is being talked about (50%). The extensive use of social media among teenagers also plays a significant role in contributing to bullying behavior. Teenagers are exposed to numerous contents by a wide range of individuals, some of them serve as their role models, leading them to imitate their role models behavior.

Social media can strengthen connections among teenagers but may also reduce face-to-face interactions. [2], as cited in [9] highlights that the intensity of social media use, including attention, engagement, duration, and frequency can impact the quality of social interactions. Excessive use may diminish direct interactions, worsen social dynamics, and increase the risk of bullying behavior. [24] indicates that social media usage correlates with adolescents' social interaction abilities. Social media usage further exacerbates or accelerates bullying, particularly electronic bullying. Social media allows students to engage in indirect bullying through messages, images, or videos [11].

However, [23] found that this relationship is not always significant and depends on how social media is utilized. While social media can foster stronger connections, it also creates opportunities for bullying due to its anonymity, which facilitates harassment and the spread of harmful content. Thus, proper supervision and education are essential to maximize the positive impacts of social media while minimizing the risks of bullying.

There are opportunities for research to the countries where the prevalence of bullying is very high such as Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Morocco, the Dominican Republic and the Philippines [18] because the international visibility of research from these countries recorded by WoSCC seems to be low or non-existent. [23] suggest future study to explore school bullying in rural areas and parents 'view on school bullying and continuing to explore contextual factors, such as family and school environment related to bullying behavior. Also suggest further research to explore the relationship between parent-child attachment and school bullying. Therefore, this study aims to explore how contextual factors, namely family as parenting styles, peer interaction and social media influence bullying behavior among students in rural areas such as Kotabaru, Indonesia.

2 Methods

The study is a quantitative explanatory design by using an online questionnaire to the target respondents. The population of this study are students at Public High School (SMA Negeri 2) Kotabaru, Kalimantan Selatan, Indonesia. A total population of 826 students from 2024/2025 academic year ranging from level 1 to level 3. A total sample of 763 students was chosen by Slovin formula and with the simple random sampling. The questionnaire consists of several items with 5-point Likert scale i.e. from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The instrument was developed by relevant theoretical constructions and previous empirical studies. The indicators for parenting styles refer to [21], which are control and boundaries; punishment implementation; nurturing approach and parent's involvement. Peer interaction includes communication styles, similarity, appreciation and presence. Attention, enthusiasm, duration and fre-

quency are the indicators for social media which refer to [2]. Whereas, bullying behavior is reflected by verbal bullying, physical bullying, non-verbal abuse, emotional abuse and exclusion [8]. The proposed model is presented in the following figure:

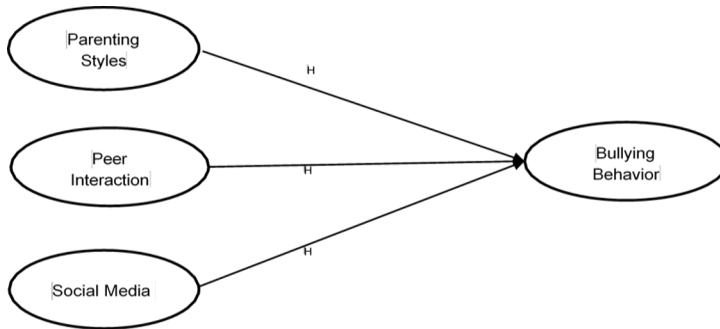


Fig. 1. Research model.

3 Results

3.1 Respondent's Profile

The questionnaire was distributed online to 763 students at SMAN 2 Kotabaru. The respondent's response can be seen on table 1:

Table 1. Respondent's profile.

Level	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
1st	124	154	278
2nd	112	130	242
3rd	97	146	243
Total	333	430	763

Majority of respondents is female and distributed from 1st grade to 3rd grade. However, table 2 provides parents' educational and occupational background from all respondents:

Table 2. Parents' educational and occupational background.

Profile	Category	Father	Mother	Total	%
Educational Background	Graduate	17	3	20	1,3
	Undergraduate	123	129	252	16,5
	High school	325	332	657	43,1
	Middle school	138	144	282	18,5

Profile	Category	Father	Mother	Total	%
Occupational Background	Elementary	143	137	280	18,3
	Dropped out	17	18	35	2,3
	Entrepreneur	250	110	360	23,6
	Private sector	147	49	196	12,8
	Civil servant	125	80	205	13,4
	Others	208	88	296	19,4
	Retiree	9	-	9	0,6
	Housewife	-	425	425	27,9
	Passed Away	24	11	35	2,3

Table 2 shows that student’s parents are high school graduated and mostly works as entrepreneur and most of their mother are housewife, whereas 2,3% of student’s parent has passed away.

3.2 Findings

The Outer Model Test, also known as the Measurement Model, explains the causal relationship between latent variables (both endogenous and exogenous) and their indicators while testing validity and reliability. This test includes Convergent Validity, Discriminant Validity, and Internal Consistency Reliability. The loading factors for each item were tested, and the results show that loadings of all items for each construct meet the criteria, i.e. above 0.70. However, the value of Cronbach’s Alpha, Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted can be shown on table 3 below:

Table 3. Constructs reliability and validity.

Constructs	Cronbach’s alpha	Composite reliabil-ity	Average Variance Ex-tracted (AVE)
Parenting Styles	0.964	0.965	0.636
Peer Interactions	0.971	0.971	0.694
Media Social	0.944	0.945	0.641
Bullying Behavior	0.971	0.967	0.700
R ² = 0.453			

From table 3 we can conclude that the outer model meets convergent validity (outer loading >0,70) and AVE <0,50. Meanwhile, both Cronbach’s Alpha and Composite Reliability are valid discriminant. The inner model results are presented in table 4 below:

Table 4. Path coefficients

		Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Parenting Styles	→	0.223	0.224	0.035	6.461	0.000
Bullying Behavior						
Peer Interactions	→	0.470	0.470	0.021	22.245	0.000
Bullying Behavior						
Media Social	→	0.222	0.224	0.036	6.101	0.000
Bullying Behavior						

The results show that the p-values of parenting styles, peer interactions and media social are 0.000, which means that the three constructs significantly affect bullying behavior among students in SMAN 2 Kotabaru.

4 Discussion

Parenting style has a significant effect on students bullying behavior. All parenting styles could contribute to shaping children's behavior. A strict authoritarian parenting style tends to produce aggressive children due to the pressure of control at home, while an authoritative parenting style fosters independent children but may lead to a lack of empathy if not explicitly taught. [4] states that families of bullies are sometimes simultaneously hostile and permissive, they do not monitor and supervise their children often and closely. They also encourage that parents of bullies have poor problem-solving skills and teach their children to strike back at the least provocation.

Neglectful parenting, where parents are minimally attentive, often triggers children to seek attention through negative behaviors, including bullying. On the other hand, an indulgent parenting style that is too permissive often results in children with low self-control who are more prone to bullying. Perhaps parents' educational background determines their parenting styles that they choose to, which in turn affect their children's character. Conversely, neglectful parenting makes students more likely to seek recognition from peer groups, sometimes in unhealthy environments. Indulgent parenting, which is spoiled without boundaries, can make students dependent on peers for social needs, often without clear direction. Despite all parenting styles having strengths and weaknesses, at least it guides parents in nurturing their children and shaping their children's attitude and behavior in their lifetime. Children without parents and have been nurtured by their extended family may have different patterns of behavior than who has.

A neglectful parenting style, with minimal attention, causes children to seek recognition from peers. If their peer group supports bullying, they are more likely to be influenced. Meanwhile, an indulgent parenting style, with unlimited freedom, can provoke children to use bullying to gain attention or recognition within the group. Educational background also plays a role in how parents raise their children. [15] also found

that parents' educational background affects their ability to implement the best fit parenting styles and their mindset. Parents could also implement parenting styles identically with their parents as inherited parenting styles without considering generational and era differences between them and their children. The majority of students' parents were high school graduates, and this may relate to their lack of a perspective of fitting parenting styles to their children so that they tend to treat their children as their parents did to them.

Parenting styles are also related to family closeness, which is the degree of emotional connection that individuals feel toward family members. The quality of relationships allows them to openly communicate their problems, so it is expected that parents can provide sufficient time to offer support in all aspects, including building their children's empathy. Parents or families engaged in bullying behaviors with a variety of family characteristics and conditions. Parents' status such as single parent, divorce or socioeconomic status may affect the tendency of bullying behavior among children.

Peer interactions can enhance bullying behavior through social dynamics such as cooperation, competition, conflict, conformity, and blending. In cooperation, peer groups sometimes collaborate in negative actions, such as bullying, to strengthen solidarity or dominance. Competition in achievements, popularity, or social influence can trigger bullying to bring rivals down. Conflict, in the form of individual or group disputes, often acts as a trigger for bullying to release emotions or assert power. Conformity or peer pressure also encourages individuals to follow norms that support bullying to be accepted by the group. Blending, when individuals try to fit in with a new group, sometimes uses bullying to prove loyalty or status.

Youth age is a time when children want to assert their identity, especially among their peers. mention that bullies were leaders and were able to direct their peers according to their ideas. They also mention there is distinction between male and female bullies, which found that female bullies were more often isolated than male bullies. They also confirmed that bullies have larger friendship networks and affiliate with other bullies. Bullies also try to get attention among their peers by showing off their bravery and power through bullying behavior and to be accepted in their circles, which have identical traits. [10] by social rank theory have explained that aggressive behavior holds a great deal of power within a social group. [14] found that bullying was strongly related to endorsing pro-bullying attitudes and negatively related to pro-victim attitudes. Along with social dominance theory by [23] which posits that human beings are predisposed to create social dominance hierarchies. It can be concluded that bullying behavior is contagious, causing behavior to spread among group members. Children may choose the safest environment by becoming a member of bullies' friendship to avoid being victimized.

Excessive use of social media can increase bullying behavior among students. Exposure to negative content, such as harsh comments, violent videos, or aggressive role models, can shape the mindset that such actions are normal or acceptable. Intense interaction with social media also lowers moral sensitivity, reduces empathy, and encourages students to imitate aggressive behavior. Platforms with anonymity or minimal supervision, such as discussion forums and messaging apps, often become channels for spreading negative comments, rumors, or embarrassing others. Violent-themed games

can also influence how students resolve conflicts aggressively. Additionally, apps for watching movies or dramas often feature toxic behavior that inspires negative interactions. Social media, through its various content, can reinforce aggressive attitudes and worsen bullying. Therefore, supervision and education regarding the use of social media are crucial in preventing its negative impact on student behavior.

Students who are active on social media tend to connect more frequently with their peers to share experiences, information, or the latest trends. The duration of use, frequency of interaction, and attention to negative content such as mockery or insults can affect the dynamics of peer relationships. Students exposed to negative content tend to mimic these patterns in direct interactions. Social media also strengthens peer group norms that support aggressive behavior through social validation, such as comments or likes.

5 Conclusion

Bullying has serious costs, both directly and indirectly. Victims may exhibit lack of self-confidence, depression, anxiety, and negative mood to academic consequences of students. By knowing the factors behind bullying behavior, schools and/or parents could supervise their children to prevent them from becoming bullies. The findings of the study revealed that parenting styles implemented by student's parents or their family affect students' bullying behavior. Supportive parenting styles with affection, respect, full of kindness, openness and trust may prevent the children bullying their friends. Whereas, disrespectful, accustomed to violence, ignorant, neglected students perhaps tend to exhibit bullying behavior. Peer interactions also affect bullying behavior among students. The interactions are reflected by how students communicated with each other, cooperated with and how they accepted the differences in their school environment. Competition is merely an academic way and respecting each other is supporting a favorable climate to students so that they prevent bullying behavior. The findings also show that social media plays a role in increasing the tendency toward bullying behavior. Social media provides various content; both bring positive and negative impact to their users. Social media usage without boundaries and controls among young people may affect their behavior, including bullying behavior. Students who are frequently exposed to abusive content, whether verbal or physical, may become more aggressive. Teachers can also prevent bullying by supervising, engaging, and creating a supportive climate among students and teachers. The study encouraged the importance of parenting styles, peer interaction and social media on bullying behavior among students.

The practical implications of this study encourage the role of home, namely parents and family, to devote more time to their children, to foster their empathy, and be role models to their children. Parents and family also take responsibility to supervise and make boundaries of social media use from an early age. The role of peers in fostering bullying can be minimized as parents play a greater role in accompanying their children's daily lives. However, schools and teachers still need to play a role in mitigating

bullying behavior by creating a safe and supportive environment for students and the academic community.

The study has several limitations, namely it is not considering parents' view of their children behavior. The study relies on subjective assessment by students, which can lead to bias. Future study should consider developing more objective assessment of student behavior. The study also does not consider family structure and welfare, which are thought to influence parenting styles, and the level of attention children receive. We also suggest future research to categorize bullying behavior into victims and perpetrators.

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