

Overview of Adolescents' Perceptions of Bullying

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ABSTRACT

Bullying behavior continues to increase from year to year, one of which occurs among Indonesian students. Most bullying behavior is found at the senior high school level. Adolescent perceptions of bullying play an important role in efforts to prevent and handle this problem. The purpose of this study was to determine the description of students' perceptions towards bullying behaviour that they do at school. The type of research used is quantitative research with a descriptive design involving 73 students using probability sampling techniques with the type of systematic sampling. Data were collected through questionnaires and processed with descriptive statistics. The results showed that the majority of adolescents had good perceptions of bullying, namely 62 respondents (84.9%), and sufficient perceptions, as many as 11 respondents (15.1%). The majority of respondents have good perceptions, so that adolescents are expected to maintain and increase their understanding that bullying is an action that is not commendable, so that the prevention of bullying can increase.

Keywords: adolescent, bullying, perception

INTRODUCTION

A study covering 65 countries found that the prevalence of bullying among adolescents was 32.03% (Man et al., 2022). In a study involving 48 countries, predominantly low- and middle-income, the prevalence of bullying victimization was reported at 30.4%. This study highlighted the strong association between bullying and increased risk of suicide attempts among adolescents (Koyanagi et al., 2019). The UNESCO report indicated that 32% of children globally reported experiencing bullying, with psychological or verbal aggression being the most common type (Sinclair et al., 2022). Indonesia is among the countries where a large number of hostile acts, including bullying behavior among adolescents, are observed. Thirty-two percent of adolescents have reported experiencing physical violence, and forty percent have experienced bullying at school. Additionally, the country has been alerted to the grave consequences of bullying, particularly in educational institutions (Yusuf et al., 2022). School bullying cases have increased over time nationally. The National Child Protection Commission of Indonesia (2020) stated that from 2011 to 2019 they received 37,381 reports of violence among children and the trend continues to increase (Borualogo & Casas, 2022).

Bullying is one of the cases that often occurs in school among adolescents, but it still receives less attention because it is often considered a common thing in schools. In Indonesia, there

have been many victims of bullying who are not recognized by the perpetrators, who can only be silent, resigned, and unable to fight (Indriyani et al., 2019). Youth bullying in Indonesia is a significant public health concern, affecting a substantial portion of the adolescent population. Bullying manifests in several forms, including physical, verbal, cyber, non-verbal, and relational bullying, each with distinct characteristics and impacts (Hanani,et al., 2024).

Factors contributing to bullying include peer influence, social media usage, family dynamics, and individual personality traits. Gender norms also play a role, with different perceptions and experiences of bullying between male and female adolescents (Febrianti et al., 2024). Perceptions of student behaviour and students' beliefs that bullying is a common pastime at school is one of the factors students to bully. Some people use the name of friendship every time they bully, because they often bully their friends, they feel that their friendship is closer. However, they commit acts of bullying. Due to the lack of response, bullying becomes more frequent. People who see it more often let it go and assume that the act is trivial, even though it is very dangerous. The bully will perceive their behaviour as justified and even gain a social identity (Butar Butar & Karneli, 2021).

Bullying behaviour that increases every year has caused damage or negative impacts for both perpetrators and victims (Safaat, 2023). Bullying significantly increases the risk of mental health disorders among adolescents. Victims often experience anxiety, depression, and psychological distress, with studies showing a statistically significant increase in these conditions among bullied teenagers (Wafa et al., 2023). Bullying affects teenagers' social interactions, leading to feelings of loneliness, social isolation, and low self-esteem. These social consequences can hinder their ability to form healthy relationships and participate in social activities. Teenagers who are bullied may engage in risky behaviors, including substance abuse and self-harm, as coping mechanisms to deal with the emotional pain caused by bullying. The perpetrators of bullying are also at risk of negative outcomes, such as academic problems, drug abuse, and future involvement in violent behaviors (Salsabila & Rosyadi, 2024).

According to research conducted by Safitri et al. (2023), some students have not been able to separate bullying behaviour from jokes, fights, brawls, and teasing, which are forms of bullying; only a few students have the correct understanding. In a study conducted by Postigo et al. (2019), adolescents anticipate that someone in the class will be bullied, and they should not feel angry about it because it is considered a joke. This also shows how low students' knowledge is about forms of bullying. In addition, some teenagers have the perception that if someone becomes a victim of bullying, it is due to reasons that are more related to the victim

than to the perpetrator. This phenomenon causes bullying behaviour to continue to increase. Prevention cannot be implemented if the perpetrators and victims have a lack of perception about the forms of bullying. The results of a study by Kennedy (2020), found that adolescents who participated in prevention programmes, both inside and outside the United States had a 32% higher chance of reducing victims of relational and physical bullying compared to the control group, and 28% higher for reducing victims of verbal bullying for programmes implemented outside the United States. This research shows that students' perceptions of bullying greatly influence how prevention can be implemented.

Initial survey was conducted by researchers at SMA Methodist Berastagi Medan by interviewing the counselling guidance teacher. It was found that there were several cases of bullying that occurred more frequently in class X. The most common bullying are verbal bullying and physical bullying. There are still many students who bully verbally with physically, mocking, ridiculing, and even insulting their friends, leading to arguments. Physical bullying, students hitting or pushing their friends. The students think that this behaviour is a normal thing that is done as a joke among friends. This shows the low knowledge of students about what forms of bullying. In addition, the school does not have a school programme or activities regarding bullying, which is one of the factors that prevent bullying actions from being carried out. There is still little research on adolescents' perceptions of bullying in Medan. When students have different perceptions of bullying behaviour, this can result in variations in bullying behaviour that occur in schools. In addition, students' lack of understanding of the forms of bullying can also hinder prevention efforts. Based on this explanation, the purpose of this study is to determine the description of adolescents' perceptions of bullying.

METHODS

Study Design and Setting

This study employed a quantitative descriptive design to explore adolescents' perceptions of bullying. Descriptive research accurately represents variables in a population without manipulating them, making it suitable for understanding phenomena such as perception. This study was conducted February 2024 to May 2024 in SMA Methodist Berastagi Medan.

Samples

The population in this study consisted of 270 students from grades X and XI at SMA Methodist Berastagi. Inclusion criteria were students aged 15–18 who were actively enrolled and willing

to participate by signing informed consent. Exclusion criteria included students who were absent or unable to complete the questionnaire due to illness at the time of data collection. The sample size was determined using Slovin's formula with a 10% margin of error, resulting in 73 respondents. A probability sampling method, specifically systematic random sampling, was used. Participants were selected based on odd-numbered positions on the attendance list across eight classes (four each from grades X and XI), ensuring representative distribution.

Data Collection

Data collection was carried out in the following stages 1) apply for research permission to the head of Faculty of Nursing, Universitas Sumatera Utara; 2) obtain approval from the ethics committee of Universitas Sumatera Utara; 3) apply for permission from the principal of SMA Methodist Berastagi Medan; 4) researcher coordinated with the counseling teacher in identifying samples according to the predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria; 5) researcher began data collection by entering each class that had been determined, data were collected using a self-administered structured questionnaire that included demographic information and perception-related items about bullying; 6) researcher greeted and explained the purpose of the research on the respondent's; 7) requesting the availability of respondents as research objects by signing an informed consent sheet and distributing questionnaires; 8) take and check back the questionnaire that has been filled in by respondents; 9) completing the data collection, the researcher asks for a letter of completion.

Ethical Consideration

The study obtained ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Nursing, Universitas Sumatera Utara Number 617/KEPK/USU/2024. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence.

Instrument

The questionnaire that included demographic information and 20 perception-related items about bullying. The questionnaire assessed students' understanding of bullying types (verbal, physical, relational, cyberbullying) and their views on bullying prevention (via self, family, and school roles). The questionnaire was developed based on previous literature and validated by subject matter experts. Validity testing indicated high relevance for all items (mean CVI = 4.0), and reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha yielded a score of 0.87, indicating excellent internal consistency. Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1

(strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Scores were categorized as: good perception (81–120), moderate (41–80), and poor (1–40).

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 73 students participated in the study, consisting of 44 students (60.3%) from Grade X and 29 students (39.7%) from Grade XI. The gender distribution included 41 females (56.2%) and 32 males (43.8%). The majority of respondents were 16 years old (54.8%), 7 years old (32.9%), 15 years old (9.6%), and 18 years old (2.7%). Below table 1.

Table 1. Characteristic Respondent

Characteristic	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Class		
X	44	60,3
XI	29	39,7
Gender		
Male	32	43,8
Female	41	56,2
Ages		
15 years	7	9.6
16 years	40	54.8
17 years	24	32.9
18 years	2	2.7

Perception of Bullying

Total of 73 students participated in the study, the majority 62 people (84.9%) had a good perception of bullying, while 11 people (15.1%) had a moderate perception. None of the students showed a poor perception. This indicates a generally high awareness and understanding of bullying among students at SMA Methodist Berastagi Medan.

Table 2. Perception of Bullying

Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Good	62	84,9
Enough	11	15,1
Less	0	0

DISCUSSION

The results of this study revealed that most of the respondents had a good perception of bullying. These results highlight a positive trend in student awareness and align with prior research indicating that educational and social support systems play a pivotal role in shaping youth perceptions (Kennedy, 2020). Perceptions influence a person's behaviour, or behaviour is a mirror of the perceptions they have (Nisa et al., 2023). The results of this study are in line with research conducted by Budiana et al. (2022) where more than half of the students had a level of knowledge about bullying in the good category. The majority of respondents in this study were female, with more than half of the respondents. Female students' perceptions of bullying are good, while male students have moderate perceptions of bullying. In line with the results of research conducted (Riskinanti & Lindawati, 2019), female students have a serious appreciation and understanding in seeing bullying. In contrast to male students, who lack serious judgment and understanding when they see bullying. If male students do not understand that their behaviour is bullying, it will be difficult to prevent bullying. The results of research conducted by Striebing (2022) that men may have a higher tolerance for workplace misconduct and apply a stricter definition when assessing whether they have been bullied, which could contribute to underreporting or a lack of perceived knowledge about bullying.

The results of research on adolescents' perceptions of forms of bullying are good. The majority of female respondents have good perceptions of physical bullying, in contrast to men who have moderate perceptions. This is in accordance with research (Nurida, 2018), respondents realise that actions taken against friends such as hitting and scolding friends are a form of bullying. The majority of female and male respondents had good perceptions of verbal bullying. This is in line with research conducted by Kalymbetova et al. (2020), that adolescents realise the most dominant forms of bullying that occur at school are insults, gossip and intrigue, threats, exclusion from joint activities, which are forms of bullying. The majority of female and male respondents had a moderate perception of relational bullying. This is in line with research conducted by Butar Butar & Karneli (2021) that the perpetrator's perception of relational bullying is in the moderate category. The majority of female and male respondents had a moderate perception of cyberbullying. This is in line with research conducted by Dewi et al. (2020) that respondents consider cyberbullying a very terrible thing because it can be fatal for its victims. Respondents believe that behaviour with bad intentions, such as intimidating someone or bullying someone on social media, is cyberbullying. In addition, subjects consider

that cyberbullying is sending malicious messages such as harassment and ridicule, spreading hatred, spreading lies, and hacking someone's account on social networks.

The results of the study regarding adolescents' perceptions of prevention are good. The majority of respondents had good perceptions of bullying prevention through education units. This is in line with research conducted by Kalymbetova et al. (2020), which coordinates and, to some extent, develops the activities of school personnel who demonstrate the value of respectful relationships and the need to stop bullying. The majority of respondents had a moderate perception of bullying prevention through self. This is in line with research conducted by Budiana et al. (2022), if a teenager's belief is formed in negative nuances, this certainly has an impact on the formation of identity a person to bully their peers, which will also affect them now and in the future. Interestingly, the results also reflect the impact of the school environment and family communication on student perceptions. Respondents emphasized the importance of reporting bullying, the role of guidance counseling, and the need for strict yet supportive school interventions. This is consistent with findings from Butar Butar & Karneli (2021), who argued that students are more likely to misinterpret bullying as playful behavior when institutional boundaries are unclear or absent.

Furthermore, the belief that strong family communication reduces bullying behavior supports earlier research by Tangkas et al. (2023), which found that adolescents with supportive home environments are more likely to develop empathy and social awareness. The majority of respondents had good perceptions of bullying prevention through the family. The results of this study are in line with research conducted by Nuraini et al. (2024), where researchers found that it is very important to always foster relationships and two-way communication with children, so that they feel safe talking about problems experienced to those closest to them, and are not affected by threats made by bullying perpetrators.

The findings also underscore the need for structured, school-wide anti-bullying programs. Although students showed high awareness, the lack of formal policies at the school presents a risk that positive perceptions may not translate into action. As noted by Kennedy (2020), schools that implement anti-bullying education experience significantly lower rates of reported bullying incidents.

While the overall student perception was promising, the presence of moderate-level understanding in some students indicates the need for targeted interventions. Specific efforts should focus on distinguishing between bullying and humour or teasing, especially in verbal

and relational contexts, where boundaries are more easily blurred This finding reflects the intricate nature of peer interactions among adolescents, where actions intended as jokes can sometimes be misinterpreted or felt as offensive by others. It highlights the importance of educational initiatives that go beyond simply defining bullying—they must also foster emotional awareness and empathy among students so they can better understand how their behaviour affects those around them.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that the majority of adolescents at SMA Swasta Methodist Berastagi hold a good perception of bullying, recognizing its various forms and understanding the importance of prevention through individual, familial, and institutional efforts. These positive perceptions reflect a growing awareness among students and suggest that many are capable of identifying harmful behaviors and supporting anti-bullying initiatives. Nonetheless, the presence of students with only moderate levels of perception indicates that continued education and reinforcement are necessary to address lingering misconceptions and ensure that all students are equally informed and empowered. Schools must prioritize structured anti-bullying programs, promote open communication between teachers, students, and parents, and incorporate these values into school culture to prevent the normalization of harmful behaviours.

LIMITATION

This study was conducted in one school which may affect the generalizability of the results. Future research should consider expanding to multiple schools.

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