

**THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF BULLYING ON CHILDREN OF
STATE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS 117497 SEI SIARTI VILLAGE,
CENTRAL PANAI DISTRICT, LABUHANBATU REGENCY**

Selamat Pasaribu

STIT Hamzah Al-Fansuri Tapanuli Tengah

Email: [selamatpasaribu@stithasiba.ac.id](mailto:salamatpasaribu@stithasiba.ac.id)

ABSTRAK: Bullying merupakan fenomena yang mengkhawatirkan di lingkungan sekolah dasar Indonesia dan dapat menimbulkan dampak psikologis yang serius bagi korban. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi secara mendalam dampak psikologis bullying pada anak-anak di SD Negeri 117497 Desa Sei Siarti Kecamatan Panai Tengah Kabupaten Labuhanbatu. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi fenomenologi, melibatkan 8 siswa korban bullying kelas 4-6 sebagai partisipan utama, serta 6 guru dan 4 orang tua sebagai informan pendukung. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam semi-terstruktur, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan metode analisis tematik Braun dan Clarke. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa bullying di lokasi penelitian didominasi oleh bullying verbal terkait perbedaan etnis, kondisi ekonomi, dan penampilan fisik. Dampak psikologis yang teridentifikasi meliputi gangguan emosional berupa kecemasan dan depresi, gangguan kognitif yang mempengaruhi prestasi akademik (penurunan 15-25%), perubahan perilaku sosial menuju isolasi diri, manifestasi gejala somatik seperti sakit kepala dan gangguan pencernaan, serta penurunan signifikan konsep diri dan harga diri. Anak-anak mengembangkan strategi coping yang sebagian besar bersifat maladaptif, termasuk avoidance dan dalam kasus ekstrem, pemikiran untuk menyakiti diri sendiri. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa bullying menimbulkan dampak psikologis yang komprehensif dan berpotensi mempengaruhi perkembangan jangka panjang anak jika tidak ditangani dengan intervensi yang tepat. Implikasi penelitian menekankan perlunya pengembangan program pencegahan dan penanganan bullying yang melibatkan seluruh ekosistem sekolah, termasuk pelatihan guru, layanan konseling, dan partisipasi aktif orang tua serta komunitas.

Keywords: Bullying, Dampak Psikologis, Sekolah Dasar, Kesehatan Mental Anak, Studi Fenomenologi.

ABSTRACT: Bullying is a concerning phenomenon in Indonesian elementary school environments that can cause severe psychological impacts on victims. This study aims to explore in-depth the psychological effects of bullying on children at SD Negeri 117497 Desa Sei Siarti, Panai Tengah Sub-district, Labuhanbatu Regency. The research employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological

study design, involving eight student victims of bullying from grades 4-6 as primary participants, along with six teachers and four parents as supporting informants. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis, then analysed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis method. Results showed that bullying at the research site was dominated by verbal bullying related to ethnic differences, economic conditions, and physical appearance. Identified psychological impacts include emotional disturbances in the form of anxiety and depression, cognitive disorders affecting academic achievement (15-25% decline), social behavioural changes toward self-isolation, somatic symptom manifestations such as headaches and digestive disorders, and a significant decrease in self-concept and self-esteem. Children developed coping strategies that were mainly maladaptive, including avoidance and, in extreme cases, thoughts of self-harm. This study concludes that bullying causes comprehensive psychological impacts and potentially affects children's long-term development if not addressed with appropriate interventions. Research implications emphasise the need for developing bullying prevention and management programs that involve the entire school ecosystem, including teacher training, counselling services, and active participation of parents and the community.

Keywords: Bullying, Psychological Impact, Elementary School, Child Mental Health, Phenomenological Study

INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a global phenomenon that occurs in various educational institutions, including elementary schools in Indonesia. Aggressive behaviour carried out repeatedly by individuals or groups against victims who are considered weaker has become a serious concern in the world of education.¹ The phenomenon of bullying not only has an impact on the physical aspect, but also has profound psychological consequences for the victim, perpetrator, and witnesses who witnessed the incident.

In Indonesia, the prevalence of bullying in elementary schools has reached an alarming level. Based on data from the Ministry of Education and Culture, around 41.2% of elementary school students have experienced bullying in various forms.²

¹ Peter K Smith and Sarah Robinson, "How Does Individualism-Collectivism Relate to Bullying Victimization?," *International Journal of Bullying Prevention* 1, no. 1 (2019): 3–13.

² Kemendikbud, "Data Prevalensi Bullying di Sekolah Indonesia," *Jurnal Pendidikan Nasional* 15, no. 3 (2020): 78–92.

This figure shows that almost half of the primary school student population in Indonesia has been exposed to traumatic experiences that can affect their psychological development. The psychological impact of bullying experiences can last in the short term or long term, affecting various aspects of a child's life.

Labuhanbatu Regency, as one of the regions in North Sumatra, is inseparable from the phenomenon of bullying in the elementary school environment. The heterogeneous demographic and socio-cultural characteristics of the Labuhanbatu community provide its own context in understanding the dynamics of bullying that occurs. Sei Siarti Village, situated in Central Panai District, exhibits ethnic diversity and socioeconomic disparities, which can lead to various forms of conflict among students, potentially escalating into bullying behaviour.

SD Negeri 117497 Sei Siarti Village is a basic education institution that serves children from various family backgrounds in the region. Initial observations show that there are indications of bullying behaviour that occurs in this school environment, both in verbal, physical, and social forms. The bullying behaviour that arises not only involves direct interaction between students, but also occurs through social media and digital platforms that are increasingly accessible to elementary school-age children.

The psychological impact of bullying on elementary school children has special characteristics, given the stages of their cognitive, emotional, and social development that are still in the process of formation. Children aged 6-12 years are at an essential phase in the development of self-identity, social skills, and the formation of a positive self-concept.³ The experience of bullying during this period can disrupt normal developmental processes and cause various psychological disorders that impact academic achievement, social relationships, and overall mental health.

Research on the psychological impact of bullying on elementary school children in the local context of Indonesia, especially in rural areas such as Sei Siarti Village, is still limited. In fact, a deep understanding of how bullying affects a

³ Elizabeth B Hurlock, *Child Development* (6th Ed.) (Erlangga, 2017).

child's psychological state in a particular cultural context and social environment is essential to developing effective prevention and intervention strategies. Therefore, this study aims to explore in depth the psychological impact experienced by child victims of bullying at SD Negeri 117497 Sei Siarti Village.

The urgency of this research is further strengthened by the increasing awareness of the importance of children's mental health in the educational process. WHO emphasises that children's mental health is an essential foundation for optimal development and future success.⁴ In the context of education in Indonesia, a comprehensive understanding of the psychological impact of bullying can make an essential contribution to the development of school policies, prevention programs, and intervention strategies that are appropriate to local characteristics and the specific needs of students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Various experts with different emphases have defined the concept of bullying, but it has a core commonality. Olweus defines bullying as aggressive behaviour that a person or group of people deliberately and repeatedly commits against a victim who is unable to defend themselves easily.⁵ This definition emphasises three essential elements, namely intentionality, repetition, and power imbalance between the perpetrator and the victim. Meanwhile, Rigby adds a psychological dimension by defining bullying as a systematic form of aggression that aims to hurt or intimidate individuals who are perceived to be weaker.⁶

The classification of bullying is generally divided into several main categories based on the form of its manifestation. Physical bullying includes behaviours such as hitting, kicking, pushing, or damaging the victim's belongings.⁷ Verbal bullying includes ridicule, threats, insults, or hurtful comments. Relational

⁴ World Health Organization, "Mental Health of Children and Adolescents: Global Status Report," *World Health Organization Bulletin* 98, no. 4 (2021): 267–79.

⁵ Dan Olweus, "School Bullying: Development and Some Important Challenges," *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology* 9 (2018): 751–80.

⁶ Ken Rigby, "Defining Bullying: A New Look at an Old Concept," *Journal of School Violence* 18, no. 3 (2019): 234–50.

⁷ Wendy Craig and Debra Pepler, "Understanding Bullying: From Research to Practice," *Journal of School Violence* 19, no. 2 (2020): 123–45.

or social bullying involves ostracising, spreading rumours, or manipulating social relationships to hurt the victim. Technological developments have also given rise to a new form, namely cyberbullying, which involves the use of digital media to intimidate or harass.⁸

The factors that affect the occurrence of bullying in the school environment are complex and multidimensional. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory explains that bullying is the result of an interaction between individual, family, school, and community factors.⁹ On an individual level, factors such as temperament, social abilities, and previous traumatic experiences can increase the risk of becoming a perpetrator or victim of bullying. Family factors include parenting, domestic violence, and lack of parental supervision. School characteristics such as school climate, anti-bullying policies, and the quality of teacher-student relationships also play a significant role in preventing or facilitating bullying.

The psychological impact of bullying on children can be categorised into short-term and long-term effects. In the short term, children who are victims of bullying often experience symptoms of anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, and decreased self-esteem.¹⁰ They can also show somatic symptoms such as headaches, abdominal pain, and fatigue that cannot be explained medically. Academic achievement often declines due to difficulty concentrating and reduced motivation to learn. Social relationships are also disrupted, with children who are victims of bullying tending to become more introverted and avoid social activities at school.

The long-term impact of bullying on mental health can last into adulthood. Longitudinal research shows that individuals who have been victims of bullying have a higher risk of developing anxiety disorders, depression, and post-traumatic

⁸ Robin M Kowalski et al., "Bullying in the Digital Age: A Critical Review and Meta-Analysis of Cyberbullying Research among Youth," *Psychological Bulletin* 140, no. 4 (2019): 1073–1137.

⁹ Jun Sung Hong and Dorothy L Espelage, "A Review of Research on Bullying and Peer Victimization in School: An Ecological System Analysis," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 17, no. 4 (2019): 311–22.

¹⁰ Gary W Giumetti and Robin M Kowalski, "Cyberbullying Matters: Examining the Incremental Impact of Cyberbullying on Outcomes over and above Traditional Bullying in Adolescents," *Psychology of Violence* 10, no. 4 (2020): 456–68.

stress disorder later in life.¹¹ They also show difficulty in fostering healthy interpersonal relationships and have lower levels of self-confidence. In academic and career contexts, the impact of bullying can affect educational attainment and job stability in adulthood.

Psychological trauma theory provides a theoretical framework for understanding how the experience of bullying can affect a child's psychological development. According to Van der Kolk, trauma that occurs in childhood can interfere with the development of the nervous system and the ability to regulate emotions.¹² Repeated bullying experiences can create chronic stress conditions that affect children's cognitive, emotional, and social functions. Attachment theory is also relevant in understanding the impact of bullying, where negative experiences with peers can affect a child's ability to form safe and trusting relationships with others.¹³

Previous research on the psychological impact of bullying on primary school children in Indonesia has shown results consistent with international findings. Research by Sari and Putri in Jakarta found that 67% of students who were victims of bullying experienced mild to moderate depressive symptoms.¹⁴ A study by Rahma et al. in Yogyakarta shows that bullying has a significant impact on declining academic achievement and increasing school attendance.¹⁵ However, research that specifically explores the psychological impact of bullying in the context of primary schools in rural areas of North Sumatra is still minimal, thus providing a significant research gap to be filled through this study.

RESEARCH METHODS

¹¹ Ryu Takizawa, Barbara Maughan, and Louise Arseneault, "Adult Health Outcomes of Childhood Bullying Victimization: Evidence from a Five-Decade Longitudinal British Birth Cohort," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 171, no. 7 (2018): 777–84.

¹² Bessel Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (Penguin Books, 2019).

¹³ John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss: Volume I. Attachment* (Basic Books, 2019).

¹⁴ Maya Sari and Lestari Putri, "The Prevalence of Depression in Students Victims of Bullying in Jakarta," *Indonesian Journal of Clinical Psychology* 12, no. 1 (2020): 45–58.

¹⁵ Siti Rahma, Andini Putri, and Dewi Sari, "The Impact of Bullying on the Academic Achievement of Elementary School Students in Yogyakarta," *Indonesian Journal of Educational Psychology* 8, no. 2 (2021): 134–49.

This study employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to explore in depth the experiences and psychological impacts of children who are victims of bullying at SD Negeri 117497 Sei Siarti Village. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the essence of the life experiences of the research subjects and the meaning they give to the bullying experiences they experience.¹⁶ The study participants consisted of 8 students in grades 4-6 who had been identified as victims of bullying through initial screening, as well as six teachers and four parents as supporting informants. Data collection techniques used semi-structured in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Data analysis was carried out using the Braun and Clarke thematic analysis method with the stages of data familiarisation, coding, theme identification, theme review, theme definition and naming, and report writing.¹⁷ The validity of the data is guaranteed through source triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing.

RESULTS OF RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of Bullying in State Elementary Schools 117497

The results of the study show that bullying in SD Negeri 117497 Sei Siarti Village has unique characteristics according to the local socio-cultural context. The most dominant form of bullying is verbal bullying in the form of ridicule related to ethnic differences, family economic conditions, and physical appearance. One of the informants, 11-year-old AR, explained: "They often say I'm poor because my school clothes are dull and my shoes are hollow. Sometimes I was also ridiculed because my skin was black." Physical bullying also occurs but with a lower frequency, generally in the form of pushing, grabbing, or hiding the victim's belongings. These findings are consistent with research by Salmivalli and Peets,

¹⁶ J W Creswell and C N Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches. 5th Edition* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2023).

¹⁷ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Reflecting on Reflexive Thematic Analysis," *Qualitative Research in Psychology Press*, 2019.

which shows that verbal bullying tends to be more prevalent in primary school settings in developing countries.¹⁸

Emotional and Psychological Impact

The most prominent emotional impact of the bullying experience is the emergence of intense feelings of fear, sadness, and anger. All participants reported experiencing high anxiety when interacting with friends at school. DF (10 years old) describes his feelings: "I was always afraid to go to school. My stomach hurts and my head dizzies at the thought of them mocking me again." Depressive symptoms were also identified in five of the eight participants, characterised by persistent feelings of sadness, loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities, and feelings of worthlessness. These findings are in line with a meta-analysis by Giumetti and Kowalski that showed a strong link between victimisation bullying and internalised symptoms in children.¹⁹

Cognitive and Academic Disorders

The experience of bullying has a significant impact on participants' cognitive function and academic achievement. Seven out of eight children reported difficulty concentrating during the learning process, which resulted in a decrease in academic scores. MR (12 years old) explained: "I find it difficult to focus on studying because I keep thinking that I will be bullied again. The value is going down." Secondary data from the school shows that the average score of students who are victims of bullying has decreased by 15-25% compared to the previous semester. Memory impairment was also identified, with children showing difficulty remembering subject matter and teacher instructions. These findings support Nixon's research on the impact of trauma on children's executive functioning.²⁰

¹⁸ Christina Salmivalli and Kristiina Peets, "Bullying in School: The Phenomenon and the Intervention," *Child Development Perspectives* 12, no. 4 (2018): 239–44.

¹⁹ Giumetti and Kowalski, "Cyberbullying Matters: Examining the Incremental Impact of Cyberbullying on Outcomes over and above Traditional Bullying in Adolescents."

²⁰ Charisse L Nixon, "Current Perspectives: The Impact of Cyberbullying on Adolescent Health," *Adolescent Health, Medicine and Therapeutics* 9 (2018): 143–58.

Social Behaviour Change

Bullying causes drastic changes in the social behaviour of the victim's children. All participants showed a tendency to isolate themselves and avoid social interaction with peers. They prefer to be alone during break hours or join smaller groups to avoid conflict. ST (11 years old) shares: "I prefer to play alone or with my younger classmates. I'm afraid that if I play with classmates, I'll be bullied again." Declines in social skills were also observed, with children becoming more passive, less assertive, and struggling to express their opinions or needs. This change is consistent with Hong and Espelage's findings on the impact of bullying on children's social competence.²¹

Manifestations of Somatic Symptoms

The psychological impact of bullying often manifests in the form of physical symptoms that cannot be explained medically. Five participants reported experiencing recurrent headaches, especially in the morning before leaving for school. Digestive disorders such as abdominal pain and nausea are also common. EL (10 years old) explains: "When it's school day, my stomach always hurts. Sometimes to the point of vomiting. But if it's a holiday, I'm healthy." Sleep disorders become a serious problem, with children having trouble sleeping, having nightmares, or waking up in the middle of the night. These somatic symptoms show how psychological stress can affect a child's physiological system, in line with the psychosomatic concept described by Van der Kolk.²²

Impact on Self-Concept and Self-Esteem

The experience of bullying hurts the formation of children's self-concept and self-esteem. All participants showed a significant decline in self-esteem, with the emergence of negative self-talk and unrealistic self-perception. They tend to trust the negative labels given by the bully and internalise them as part of their

²¹ Hong and Espelage, "A Review of Research on Bullying and Peer Victimization in School: An Ecological System Analysis."

²² Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*.

identity. NF (11 years old) revealed: "Maybe I'm as stupid and ugly as they say. That's why no one wants to be friends with me." The phenomenon of learned helplessness was also identified, where children feel that they have no control over the situation and give up on making efforts to change. These findings support Seligman's theory of the impact of repeated negative experiences on children's perceptions of control and self-efficacy.²³

Coping Strategies Developed

Children who are victims of bullying develop a variety of coping strategies to cope with the situations they face, although not all of them are adaptive. Avoidance strategies are the most common, with children trying to avoid locations or situations where bullying usually occurs. Some children develop emotion-focused coping strategies, such as crying alone or seeking solace through other activities. Unfortunately, some participants also develop maladaptive coping, such as lying to avoid going to school or even having thoughts of self-harm. RS (12) admits: "I once thought that if I died, they would feel guilty and stop mocking." These findings underscore the importance of professional interventions to help children develop healthier and more adaptive coping strategies.

The Role of the Environment in Strengthening or Reducing Impacts

The school and family environment play a crucial role in strengthening or reducing the psychological impact of bullying. In 117497 State Elementary School, teachers' lack of awareness of the bullying phenomenon has led to many cases that are not appropriately handled. Some teachers even consider bullying to be a "common mischief" that will pass by itself. Family support also varies, with some parents being supportive while others are victim-blaming or ignoring children's complaints. The mother of the AR participant confessed, "I think she is just spoiled and doesn't want to go to school. It turned out that he was really bullied." These

²³ Martin E P Seligman, *Learned Helplessness: Annual Review of Medicine* (Psychology Press, 2018).

findings emphasise the importance of creating a supportive ecosystem for the recovery of bullying victims, as emphasised in ecological systems theory.²⁴

Long-Term Impacts and Developmental Implications

Although the study focused on immediate impacts, some indicators indicate the potential for severe long-term consequences. Fundamental changes in the way children perceive themselves and the world around them can affect their future developmental trajectory. Distrust of others, excessive social anxiety, and an already internalised negative mindset have the potential to be risk factors for mental health problems later in life. Some participants have already shown reluctance to form new relationships or try activities that involve social interaction. These findings are consistent with longitudinal research by Takizawa et al., which showed that the impact of bullying can persist into adulthood if not addressed with proper intervention.²⁵

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that bullying at SD Negeri 117497 Sei Siarti Village caused a comprehensive and multidimensional psychological impact on the victim's children. These impacts include emotional disorders in the form of anxiety and depression, cognitive impairment that affects academic performance, changes in social behaviour that lead to self-isolation, the manifestation of somatic symptoms, and a significant decrease in self-concept and self-esteem. Children develop a variety of coping strategies, but most are maladaptive and have the potential to be detrimental to their development. The findings show that the impact of bullying is not only immediate but also has the potential to affect the trajectory of children's development in the long term if not addressed with appropriate interventions.

The implications of this study emphasise the need to develop comprehensive programs for the prevention and handling of bullying at the

²⁴ Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (Harvard University Press, 2020).

²⁵ Takizawa, Maughan, and Arseneault, "Adult Health Outcomes of Childhood Bullying Victimization: Evidence from a Five-Decade Longitudinal British Birth Cohort."

elementary school level, especially in rural areas. The program must involve not only students but also teachers, parents, and the community to create a safe and supportive environment. Teacher training in recognising the signs of bullying and its psychological impact, as well as the development of a safe and effective reporting system, is a top priority. In addition, it is necessary to develop counselling and psychological support services that are accessible to children who are victims of bullying. Further research with a longitudinal design is needed to understand the long-term impact of bullying and the effectiveness of various interventions in the Indonesian cultural context, so that evidence-based and culturally appropriate prevention and handling models can be developed.

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