The Meaning of Verbal and Nonverbal Bullying Experiences on Teenagers' Self-Confidence

Afda Naila Yulsefani[1,a], Devi Nuradhari[2], Elit Puspita Sari Harahap[3], Isra Datul Jannah[4], Padia Fatmala[5], Sari Wati[6]

[123456]*Sultan Syarif Kasim State Islamic University of Riau*
Jl. H.R Soebrantas No. 155 KM.15 Simpang Baru Panam Pekanbaru. 28293.

[1]afdanaila17@gmail.com

Abstract. *This study aims to explore the meaning of bullying experiences and their implications for adolescents' self-confidence. Adolescence is a crucial developmental stage in which individuals build identity, establish social relationships, and develop self-confidence; however, this process is often disrupted by bullying, both verbal and nonverbal. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this research involved adolescents who had direct experiences of bullying. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires distributed via Google Forms and complemented by follow-up interviews through WhatsApp. The research instrument consisted of open-ended questions designed to capture participants' personal experiences regarding the influence of bullying on their self-confidence. Data analysis employed descriptive qualitative techniques, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings showed that 90% of respondents reported experiencing bullying occasionally, while 10% experienced it frequently, with significant psychological impacts. Specifically, 70% of respondents indicated that nonverbal bullying such as exclusion, derogatory gestures, or hostile facial expressions was more painful and detrimental to self-confidence compared to verbal bullying. Verbal bullying, however, also negatively affected victims' academic performance and emotional regulation. Further analysis revealed that the sources of bullying came from peers, family members, and seniors. Nevertheless, some respondents demonstrated resilience by reframing bullying as motivation, particularly when supported by protective factors such as encouragement from family or peers. In conclusion, bullying, especially in its nonverbal form, significantly undermines adolescents' self-confidence, but resilience and social support can serve as buffers to help victims cope with its psychological consequences.*

Keywords: *Bullying; Experience; Self-Confidence.*

INTRODUCTION

Masa Adolescence is a period of development that is full of dynamics, both physically, psychologically, and socially. During this phase, adolescents try to find their identity, build broader social relationships, and form self-confidence as an important asset to face life's challenges. However, this development process often does not run smoothly. One of the serious obstacles faced by adolescents is the phenomenon of bullying, both verbal and nonverbal. Bullying is understood as a form of aggressive and negative behavior carried out repeatedly by individuals or groups, using an imbalance of power to hurt the target or victim, both physically and psychologically (Novan Ardy W. in Pramoko, 2019). This action is not only harmful to the victim, but also provides satisfaction to the perpetrator. Andini et al. emphasize that people who bully often feel pleasure when they see the victim suffering and under pressure, which encourages the repetition of similar behavior continuously. (Andini et al., 2024)

Verbal bullying includes teasing, insults, and words that demean a person's dignity, while nonverbal bullying can take the form of gestures, expressions, or physical treatment that hurts the victim. Both forms of bullying not only have a temporary impact but can also cause long-term psychological damage. The bullying that teenagers often experience is closely related to their affective attitudes, especially their self-confidence. Self-confidence is a person's mental attitude in assessing themselves and the objects around them so that they have the confidence and ability to do something according to their abilities (Azmi et al., 2021). The most obvious impact of bullying is a decrease in adolescents' self-confidence. Low self-confidence has the potential to affect academic achievement, social skills, and overall mental health. This statement is supported by previous studies, including research by Sahbani & Yandi, which emphasizes that the more frequent the bullying, the lower the students' self-confidence levels. The forms of verbal bullying found include insults, inappropriate nicknames, negative gossip, and questions with sexual undertones. The effects that arise include students becoming vengeful, quiet, undisciplined, and having difficulty controlling their emotions (Sahbani et al., 2023). Similarly, the results of Melsa's research show that students who experience

However, these studies are still limited to verbal bullying. Research by Pramanik et al. confirms that bullying, whether verbal or nonverbal, can make victims feel inferior, worthless, afraid to go to school, avoid social interaction, and even experience a decline in academic performance. In extreme cases, victims may even be driven to commit suicide as a means of escaping their suffering. (Pramanik et al., 2024). Based on this description, it can be seen that previous studies have focused on the end result of a person's self-confidence due to bullying, but have not explored qualitatively the meaning of the bullying experience itself for adolescents' self-confidence. In fact, understanding how adolescents interpret this experience is important to provide a more comprehensive picture of the psychological impact they experience. Therefore, this article aims to examine in depth how adolescents interpret their experiences of bullying and the implications for their self-confidence. The results of this study are expected to contribute to efforts to prevent and handle cases of bullying, as well as to serve as a reference for educators, parents, and counseling practitioners in supporting optimal adolescent growth and development.

METHODOLOGY

This research method uses a descriptive qualitative approach. According to Sugiyono, qualitative research aims to understand the phenomena experienced by research subjects, such as behavior, perceptions, motivations, and actions, holistically by describing them in

words within a specific natural context. (Sugiyono, 2023). The research subjects in this study were adolescents who had experienced verbal and nonverbal bullying. The informant selection technique used total sampling, given the relatively small population size (less than 15 individuals). Thus, all members of the population were respondents in this study.

Data collection was conducted through an open-ended interview questionnaire designed in the form of a Google Form questionnaire. This instrument contained a number of open-ended questions that allowed respondents to express their experiences, feelings, and perceptions related to verbal and nonverbal bullying, as well as its impact on their self-confidence. The collected data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis. The analysis process was carried out through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing as described by Sugiyono. Data reduction was carried out by sorting relevant information, then the data was presented in the form of descriptive narratives, and finally conclusions were drawn to find the meaning of the bullying experiences of adolescents.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of Bullying Case Intensity

Seberapa sering kamu mengalami bullying verbal & nonverbal?
10 jawaban

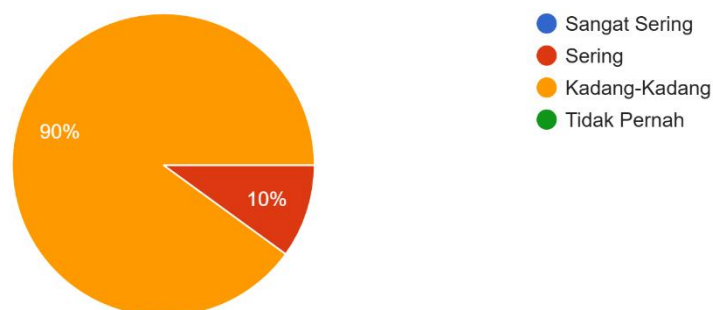- Sangat Sering
- Sering
- Kadang-Kadang
- Tidak Pernah

Figure 1. Intensity of Bullying Experiences

Figure 1 shows data on the frequency with which individuals experience verbal and nonverbal bullying. From the data processing results, it can be seen that most respondents, namely 90%, stated that they sometimes experience bullying. Meanwhile, only 10% of respondents admitted to experiencing bullying frequently. This illustrates that bullying cases are still quite high, even though the majority are experienced with low frequency. However, the existence of the 10% who are frequently bullied remains a serious concern because it can have a negative impact on the psychological and social conditions of the victims. This phenomenon is reinforced by A. J. Ilmu, who states that bullying among teenagers in Indonesia is still high, especially in schools and on social media. It takes various forms, both verbal and non-verbal. The main

causes of bullying among adolescents are environmental factors, aggressive behavior, and lack of empathy (Yanti Wulandari et al., 2025).

The term bullying comes from the English word bull, which literally means an animal known for its behavior of charging in various directions. (Wardani & Anjasmoro, 2022). From this basic meaning, the term has developed in Indonesian to mean "penggertak" (bully), which is someone who tends to harass, pressure, or belittle others who are considered weaker or in a subordinate position. Terminologically, Ken Rigby defines bullying as the urge or desire to

Respondents' Experiences Regarding the Impact of Bullying

The researchers asked questions about the impact of bullying that had a lasting effect on respondents. The results can be seen in Figure 2 below:

Menurut mu, mana yang lebih menjatuhkan rasa percaya diri mu? Apakah dibully secara verbal atau non-verbal (gestur menghina, tatapan tidak suka, dikucilkan)?
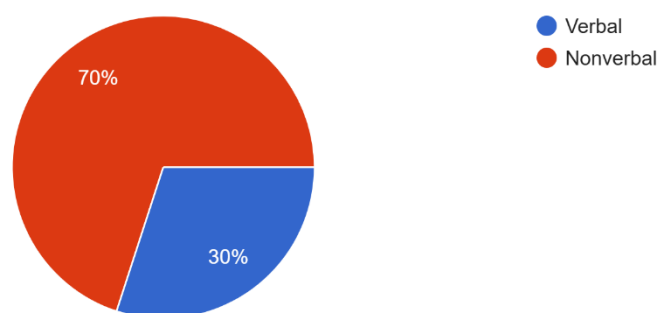
10 jawaban

Figure 2. Analysis of Bullying on Self-Confidence

Based on Figure 2, it was found that most respondents, namely 70%, felt that nonverbal bullying (such as insulting gestures, condescending looks, or exclusion) was more hurtful and had a negative impact on their self-confidence. Meanwhile, the other 30% of respondents stated that verbal bullying (such as teasing, insults, or demeaning words) hurt them more. These results show that although verbal bullying is often considered real because it is conveyed with words, in reality, nonverbal actions are actually more painful for victims. This could be because nonverbal bullying often takes place silently, repeatedly, and is difficult to deal with directly, leaving deep psychological scars.

Although previous studies did not specifically distinguish between the effects of verbal and nonverbal bullying, a number of findings indicate that nonphysical bullying, which includes relational forms such as exclusion, rejection, or belittling attitudes, can have serious psychological consequences. This type of bullying can damage an individual's self-concept, lower self-esteem, and increase the risk of anxiety and depression. In the long term, these effects can even trigger self-harming

behavior. This is in line with the view that nonverbal communication plays a dominant role in conveying emotional meaning.

Analysis of Bullies Based on Respondents' Experiences

The next question was still in the multiple-choice questionnaire designed to identify respondents' perceptions of the majority of bullies they experienced. After that, the researchers conducted open interviews via the WhatsApp application in an effort to explore qualitative information in more depth and obtain a more comprehensive description of the respondents' experiences. The results showed that 50% of respondents experienced bullying from peers, 30% from family members, and the remaining 20% from seniors/older classmates. Several respondents stated that bullying from peers often took the form of physical taunts and derogatory comments on social media. This made it difficult for them to build self-confidence in front of their peers. Another respondent, FF, shared a different experience, namely bullying from family members. "My family often insults my physical appearance, which sometimes damages my mental health and self-confidence." According to FF, harsh words and negative comparisons from parents or siblings are even more hurtful because they come from the closest environment, which should provide support.

These results appear to be in line with the theory proposed by Chan, in which family support is seen as a protective factor (buffer) that can strengthen a person's self-confidence, including in performing their work more optimally. (Chan et al., 2020) However, bullying from family can be understood as a condition that hinders the family's function as a source of emotional support. Instead of being a buffer, the family in this case has the potential to weaken an individual's self-confidence and reduce their motivation in carrying out their roles and work. Thus, although Chan's theory emphasizes the importance of family support, the findings of this study show that when the family fails to provide support and instead becomes the perpetrator of bullying, the effect can be reversed, namely eroding self-confidence and negatively impacting individual performance.

Furthermore, a respondent with the initials PN revealed that the bullying he received from his seniors/older classmates took the form of demeaning orders and intimidating behavior. This made them feel inferior and reluctant to socialize with older groups. Based on the interview, he said, "My seniors tended to intimidate me and my friends when we wanted to explore ourselves by actively participating in school activities. They said we were showing off and often made fun of us, which made us feel insecure." Another respondent, whose initials are DA, responded, "I was bullied because they said that my friends and I were annoying and liked to seek attention from our seniors, so my friends and I were confronted by our seniors, but only verbally. I felt isolated, but there were other seniors who defended us, so we didn't feel alone. However, when we heard we were going to be confronted, we didn't dare leave the classroom, so we brought our lunch and stayed in the classroom."

Based on the interviews, it was concluded that the experiences of PN and DA showed that bullying by seniors had a significant influence on students' self-confidence and courage in socializing. Intimidation, both verbal and nonverbal, can create an atmosphere of discomfort, social isolation, and decreased self-efficacy. However, the presence of social support from some individuals in the school environment can also serve as a protective factor that helps victims survive the psychological effects of bullying.

Question: "In your opinion, did that experience affect your self-confidence? Why is that?"

1. Decreased Self-Confidence

The results of the interviews obtained from the interview guidelines show that most respondents feel that after experiencing bullying, their self-confidence has decreased.

Initials A: "I was bullied because I have black skin, and I was also bullied because I am poor and would never be able to go to college. When I was bullied, my self-confidence decreased. but my mother advised me that the words of the bullies should be used as motivation to prove them wrong. I was challenged and it actually increased my enthusiasm and confidence to go to college and have an ideal body."

Initials HM: "I remember when I was in junior high school, a boy teased me, saying I was skinny, ugly, and dark-skinned. At first, I felt very insecure, but I faced everything positively. Everyone has their own changes. The most important thing is to start loving yourself, to appreciate yourself as God's most perfect creation, and most importantly, to have family and friends who accept us for who we are."

Initials TA: "I was suddenly shunned when I was little, so I ended up not wanting to have a close relationship with them because my self-confidence had declined. I only interacted with them when necessary. However, I still have a good relationship with them now."

Based on the interview results, it appears that the three respondents experienced different forms of bullying, but all of them had an impact on their self-confidence. Respondent A revealed that he was bullied because of his physical condition (skin color) and his family's economic background. This treatment caused his self-confidence to decline, in accordance with Carl Rogers' self-concept theory, which states that self-concept is formed from social interactions, where the appreciation or rejection of others greatly influences how individuals assess themselves. However, the support from his mother, who advised him to use the teasing as motivation, acted as a buffer, similar to Chan's previous findings. This is in line with the Resilience theory, which emphasizes that individuals who receive positive support from their environment can transform negative experiences into a source of strength. (Rahmat et al., 2019).

As a result, respondent A was able to turn pressure into a challenge that motivated him to prove himself, showing that he could attend college and improve himself.

Respondent HM experienced bullying in the form of physical taunts (skinny, ugly, black) during junior high school, which initially caused feelings of insecurity. This is in line with Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, in which negative social experiences can lower a person's belief in their abilities. (Amir & Risnawati, 2015). However, HM was able to overcome this pressure by developing self-acceptance and positive thinking. The support of family and friends who accepted HM for who he was acted as a protective factor that helped restore his confidence. As a positive result, HM was not only able to recover from the bullying, but also develop a healthier mindset towards himself.

TA respondents recounted experiences of being shunned by their friends when they were young. This behavior constitutes a form of nonverbal-relational bullying in the form of exclusion (relational aggression), which according to Crick & Grotpeter (1995) can have serious effects on children's social development (Utomo, 2019). As a result, TA felt his self-confidence decline and chose not to form close relationships with others. This indicates a tendency toward social withdrawal, which is the behavior of withdrawing from social interaction due to low self-confidence. However, TA still maintained functional relationships, even though his interactions were limited. If this condition persists over the long term, it can hinder social skills and reduce the quality of interpersonal relationships.

Self-Confidence Remains Unchanged

Different results were obtained from a respondent with the initials FF, who said, "Yes, because in my experience, people are different in families, with different physical appearances, and are often excluded by their families. I feel that I am not considered important or useful to them, so I lack attention and affection. Therefore, I have been accustomed to this since childhood, so I just have to be patient, and my self-confidence is the same as before I was bullied."

Based on this interview, the researcher concluded that respondent FF did not feel that bullying from the family was a serious issue, because the unpleasant experiences in his life were already widespread. Therefore, there was no noticeable difference in his self-confidence before or after being bullied, or it remained unchanged. Although the respondent said that their self-confidence did not change, this condition reflects a form of passive adaptation, where individuals become accustomed to negative treatment so that they no longer explicitly express a decline in self-confidence. In the long term, this has the potential to cause problems such as difficulty in building warm relationships with others, feelings of alienation, or even learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975), a condition in which individuals feel unable to change the negative situations that befall them.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that experiences of bullying have a profound impact on the formation and development of self-confidence in adolescents. Most respondents acknowledged that bullying, whether verbal or nonverbal, had a negative impact on their self-confidence. This was evident in the emergence of feelings of inferiority, withdrawal from social environments, and reduced belief in their own abilities. However, there were also respondents who were able to turn their experiences of bullying into motivation to prove themselves, so that bullying actually became a trigger for increased enthusiasm and psychological resilience. On the other hand, there are also adolescents who feel that bullying does not significantly change their level of self-confidence because they are accustomed to an unsupportive environment. However, this shows a form of passive adaptation that has the potential to cause long-term psychological problems, such as feelings of alienation or learned helplessness. Thus, the meaning of bullying experiences on adolescents' self-confidence is not singular but varies depending on their background, the social support they receive, and the coping mechanisms they possess. These findings emphasize the importance of the role of family, peers, and the school environment in providing positive support so that adolescents can build healthy self-confidence even if they have experienced bullying

REFERENCE

Amir, Z., & Risnawati. (2015). *Psikologi Pembelajaran Matematika*. Aswaja Pressindo.

Andini, R. D., Putra, N. P., & Nurhabibah, P. (2024). Analisis Dampak Bullying Terhadap Karakter Siswa Sekolah Dasar. *J-CEKI: Jurnal Cendekia*, *3*(5). https://ulilalbabinstitute.co.id/index.php/J-CEKI/article/view/4521

Azmi, I. U., Nafi'ah, N., Thamrin, M., & Akhwani, A. (2021). Studi Komparasi Kepercayaan Diri (Self Confidance) Siswa yang Mengalami Verbal Bullying dan Yang Tidak Mengalami Verbal Bullying di Sekolah Dasar. Jurnal Basicedu, 5(5), 3551–3558. https://jbasic.org/index.php/basicedu/article/view/1389

Chan, X. W., Kalliath, P., Chan, C., & Kalliath, T. (2020). How Does Family Support Facilitate Job Satisfaction? Investigating the Chain Mediating Effects of Work-Family Enrichment and Job-related Well-being. . *Stress and Health*, *36*(1), 97–104.

Levi, T., Jesslyn, A., Hadibroto, M. G., Cheriselyn, J. N., & Yulianto, J. E. (2023). Speech Your Colors!: Mengurangi Kecenderungan Social Withdrawal Pada Anak Usia 6-10. *Procedia: Studi Kasus dan Intervensi Psikologi*, *11*(4), 149-155.

Marsela, M., & Fitriyeni. (2024). Dampak Verbal Bullying terhadap Kepercayaan Diri Siswa SD Negeri 010 Bukit Kauman Kecamatan Kuantan Mudik. *Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu Pendidikan Indonesia*, *3*(2), 223–230. https://jpion.org/index.php/jpi/article/view/260

Pramanik, G. F., Rohman, U., & Ismail, S. (2024). Analisis dampak bullying terhadap kepercayaan diri remaja. *Realita: Jurnal Bimbingan Dan Konseling (JRbk)*, *9*(1).

Rahmat, A., Komariah, K., & Setiawan, W. (2019). Komunikasi dan dukungan sosial di lingkungan masyarakat terdampak pembangunan Waduk Jatigede Sumedang. *Jurnal Kajian Komunikasi*, *7*(1), 120.

Sahbani, L., Yandi, M., & Sulaiha. (2023). Dampak Bullying Terhadap Kepercayaan Diri Santri di Lingkungan Pesantren. e Issn 2797, 5908(2), 2023. *Tadribuna: Journal of Islamic Management Education* , *3*(2), 31–37.

Sugiyono. (2023). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R&D*. Alfabeta.

Tamaela, J. M., Nurhidayah Amir, Mariyo Jane Sanggel, & Rifki Sakinah Nompo. (2024). The Impact of Non-Physical Bullying on Adolescents' Self-Concept: An Observational Study in the Adolescent Community in Sausapor, Tambrauw Regency, West Papua, Indonesia. *Scientia Psychiatrica*, *5*(3), 509–519. https://doi.org/10.37275/scipsy.v5i3.171

Utomo, K. D. M. (2019). Cognitive Behavioral Therapy untuk Meningkatkan Self-Efficacy Akademis pada Siswa SMA Korban Bullying Relasional. *SOLUTION: Jurnal of Counseling and Personal Development*, *1*(1).

Wardani, K. T. P. A., & Anjasmoro, A. (2022). Dampak Bullying terhadap Kepercayaan Diri Anak. *PSKIODINAMIKA: Jurnal Literasi Psikologi*, *2*(2), 78–82. https://ejournal.uniramalang.ac.id/psikodinamika/article/view/78-82

Yanti Wulandari, E., Triodara Radisty, E., Fitrianti, M., Romiaty, R., & penulis, K. (2025). Bullying Bukan Bercanda; Ancaman Nyata Bagi Kesehatan Mental Remaja. *Agama Dan Budaya*. http://jurnalinspirasimodern.com/index.php/Zaheen/article/view/165

Zakiyah, E. Z. (2017). Faktor yang Mempengaruhi Remaja dalam Melakukan Bullying. . *Jurnal Penelitian Dan PPM*, *4*(2), 129–139.