

Prevalence and Associated Factors of Verbal Bullying among Adolescents in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVE: This study aimed to determine the prevalence and associated factors of verbal bullying among adolescents in Aceh, Indonesia.

METHODOLOGY: This cross-sectional study was conducted among 264 adolescents in the Aceh Besar district of Indonesia from June to August 2024. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across different age groups and genders within the adolescent population. Participants included adolescents aged 12 to 18 years who were residents of the Aceh Besar district. Adolescents with cognitive impairments that could hinder understanding of the questionnaire or those who did not provide informed consent were excluded from the study.

RESULTS: The findings indicated a strong correlation between verbal bullying and physical bullying ($r_s = 0.69$, $p < 0.001$) as well as social bullying ($r_s = 0.69$, $p < 0.001$), with a moderate correlation to age ($r_s = 0.14$, $p < 0.01$).

CONCLUSION: The findings suggest that adolescents experiencing verbal bullying are likely to face other forms of bullying. This underscores the need for comprehensive anti-bullying interventions that address multiple bullying types, particularly targeting younger adolescents who may be more vulnerable. Effective strategies to combat verbal bullying among adolescents in Aceh are essential for improving their mental health outcomes. Future research should explore longitudinal effects and causal relationships to enhance intervention effectiveness.

KEYWORDS: Bullying, adolescents, vulnerable, intervention, mental health

INTRODUCTION

Bullying become a globally problems around the world, especially in the age of adolescences. Bullying behavior can be defined as a pattern of persistent violence or deliberate harm over time, in which a person with more authority abuses another person who are powerless in defending themselves. It can occur in a variety of ways, such as verbal (teasing-name calling), physical (hitting, tripping), social (spreading issue/ rumors, leaving someone on a certain purpose, and sexual (unwanted touching, gestures). It has changed over the past ten years, even taking on a new form on the internet known as "cyberbullying". Unfortunately, bullying has become a serious issue as one in three children has been bullied globally^{1,2}.

Among Adolescents, bullying reported as a caused of several health problems resulting low academic level, the increased chance of depression and anti-social behavior. Bullying behavior can be triggered by negative attitudes. The perpetrator has feelings of envy, resentment, and hostility towards the victim¹. Bullying stated as a significant issue that can affect

someone's health in short and long-term². Likewise, adolescents who are victimized more likely to be suffer from anxiety and mental health problems³. Numerous studies have demonstrated that the victims of bullying, particularly in schools, have decreased academic performance as well as psychological and psychosocial problems⁴. Another study indicates that the adolescence who had never experienced bullying stated notably higher level of wellbeing⁵.

The estimated rates of bullying incidence vary significantly between countries as well as among gender and age groups⁶. The percentage of adolescents who report involvement in bullying were approximately 13% in the US, 24 % in the United Kingdom, and 8% in Germany. A study conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO) involving 227,441 students from 45 countries (aged 11, 13, and 15 years) found that the majority of students had experienced bully-victim (10%) and had carried out bullying (6%) two or three times in two months⁷. Meanwhile, in Spain, bullying incidents in adolescents reached 3%-5% for traditional bullying and 5.5% to 6.5% for cyberbullying (as victims and perpetrators)⁷. In Indonesia, incidence of bullying among adolescence have been increase annually⁸. The result of the Massachusetts and Department of Public Health and the Centers for Diseases Control (CDC) showed that about 9.9% of male adolescents are being the perpetrators of bullying and around 29.8% of adolescent females are more vulnerable to being the victims of bullying. The incidence of bullying rate

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among adolescents in schools ranks as the highest public complaint according to the Indonesian Child Protection Commission⁸

The Child Protection Commission reported that there were 369 complaints related to bullying from January 2011 to August 2014. This number is around 25% of the total complaints in the education sector, which was many as 1480 cases. The highest rate of bullying in the three biggest cities in Indonesia included Yogyakarta, Surabaya and Jakarta, which showed that the occurrence of bullying violence in high schools was as much as 67.9% meanwhile in junior high schools the percentage was reported in 66.1%⁹ Previous studies in Indonesia reported verbal bullying was the most common type of bullying happened in school-age group compared to other types¹⁰⁻¹³ A study conducted in Yogyakarta showed the prevalence of verbal bullying happened approximately 40-45% among the students in junior high school. Furthermore, the result also indicated several reasons caused bullying behavior among the students such as the feeling of more power in terms of seniority, having an unpleasant experience as a victim previously, family background, friend's issue and the impact of social media exposed¹⁴. Another survey showed there are several forms of verbal bullying frequently practiced among the students specifically swearing, dubbing, insulting, and mocking such as calling with inappropriate nick names, calls with bad titles, performing embarrassing statements and sharing the victim's confidential news¹⁴⁻¹⁶. It also stated that verbal bullying might occur frequently because the perpetrators were easily performed it in words since it has no physical harms directly but affect more psychological¹⁰⁻¹³

METHODOLOGY

Study Design, Population and Sample

This cross-sectional study was conducted among 264 adolescents in the Aceh Besar district of Indonesia from June to August 2024. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across different age groups and genders within the adolescent population. Participants included adolescents aged 12 to 18 years who were residents of the Aceh Besar district. Adolescents with cognitive impairments that could hinder understanding of the questionnaire or those who did not provide informed consent were excluded from the study.

Instrument

The questionnaire consisted of questions about sociodemographic information, including age and gender. The presence of bullying was examined using the Adolescent Peer Relations Instrument (APRI)¹⁷ This instrument measures bullying behaviors and victimization among adolescents, focusing on physical, verbal, and social forms of bullying. It consists of two scales: the Perpetration Scale (measuring how often the respondent engages in bullying) and the Victimization Scale (measuring how

frequently the respondent is bullied). In this study, only the victimization scale was utilized. Responses are rated on a Likert scale, from 1 (Never) to 6 (Every day). The APRI is divided into three subscales: Physical, Verbal, and Social/ Relational bullying, with separate items for both perpetration and victimization. Higher scores indicate greater involvement in bullying (either as a perpetrator or victim). The APRI has demonstrated high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.87 to 0.96 across different subscales, ensuring strong reliability for measuring peer relations. The Cronbach alpha of the APRI in the current study population was 0.74, suggesting acceptable reliability. The instrument has been widely used in research to assess bullying dynamics and inform school-based interventions¹⁷.

Data Analysis

The characteristics of each research variable were presented in mean or median standard deviation (SD) for numerical variables. Proportions or percentage values were reported for categorical data. The correlation between verbal abuse and other predictor variables was examined using the Spearman test or Mann-Whitney U test, where relevant. Statistical analyses were performed using Stata 13 statistical software.

Ethical Statement

The ethics committee of the Faculty of Nursing, Universitas Syiah Kuala, approved the study (reference number:113045030724). Parents or the guardian signed informed consent, and they participated in the study voluntarily.

RESULTS

Our findings indicated that more than half of respondents were girls (53.4%), The mean of age was 13 years old (SD = 0.6), and the majority was at 13 years old (57.2%). The majority also have a pocket money of Rp. 5.000 to Rp. 10.000 (57.8%). Their mean of height was 146.7 cm (SD = 20.6), while the mean of weight was 38.7 kg (SD = 12.7). The mean of BMI was 17.5 (SD = 5.6). The Sociodemographic characteristics of study respondents in presented in

Table I.

Table I: Characteristic Respondents (n=264)

Characteristics	f	%
Gender		
Girl	141	53.4
Boy	123	46.6
Age (Years)		
12	75	28.4
13	151	57.2
14	35	13.3
15	3	1.1
Daily Pocket Money		
Rp. 5.000 – Rp. 10.000	179	67.8
Rp. 12.000 – Rp. 30.000	85	32.2

Furthermore, bivariate analysis suggest that verbal bullying was correlated with physical bullying ($r_s = 0.6$, $p < 0.001$), social bullying ($r_s = 0.69$, $p < 0.001$) and age ($r_s = 0.14$, $p < 0.01$). Other variables such as weight, height, BMI and daily pocket money was not associated with the verbal bullying among the current study participants. Detail of the correlation between verbal bullying and other variables is presented in **Table II**.

Table II: Correlation between verbal bullying, physical abuse, social abuse and age (n=264)

Variable	r_s/U	P
Physical bullying	0.60	0.001
Social bullying	0.69	0.001
Age	0.14	0.01
Weight	0.05	0.35
Height	0.06	0.27
BMI	0.05	0.06
Daily pocket money	0.24	0.80

DISCUSSION

The study revealed that majority of 53.4% were girl respondents. This result supported by one study conducted in several countries highlighting that girls have a higher victimization rate in countries characterized by greater inequality. Specifically, girls were more likely to report experiences of bullying compared to boys¹⁸. This also supported by one study identified that verbal bullying significantly more common in girls when bullying was stratified by gender³. Another qualitative study showed that verbal bullying more likely happened in females than males. Female generally perform bully in terms of heartfelt/harsh words while male involving more physical¹⁹. In contrast, the finding of our study is not consistent with some previous studies demonstrated a higher prevalence in boys than girl^{1,2,20}. One reason for this probably because mostly adolescent's girls in school especially in Indonesia common involved in a separate group/ gang. Each group usually have a regulation for each member related to style, modes of expression and the way they act to identify who they are. Hence, they tend to perform verbal bullying to whom they perceived not fitting with their style.

The result of this study revealed that majority of respondents are 13 years old, accounting for 57.2%. Consistent with previous finding in 689 students from private and government schools in Chandigarh, North India presented that the average mean age of the respondents was 13.02 years³. Correspondingly, previous study in Qatar showed mostly the frequency of bullying happened mostly in participants in ages 11-15 years with the school grades in the preparatory phase (junior high school). The study also highlighted that in this phase of age, the students were more likely

to be involved in all types of bullying such as verbal, physical, social and cyber bullying¹. A similar study presented that the students from grade 7 dan 8 reported bullying behavior more frequently, while grade 9 recognized less of bullying experiences, respectively²¹. Another study also highlighted bullying mostly happened during the period of junior high school and diminish slowly in the end of adolescence period²².

Most participants in this study have a lower daily pocket money (67.8%). Previous study demonstrated students with low family income are linked to a higher likelihood of experiencing bullying. Furthermore, the students from low socioeconomic backgrounds experience greater financial hardship that impact them feeling insecure and uncomfortable that leading negative emotions²³. In contrast, another study emphasized the participants who involved in bullying mostly come from high level of economic status, especially the perpetrators were higher in private school rather than public school^{20,24}. Similarly, a study among Brazilian adolescents found that students from private school with higher economic background reported more likely to perform verbal bullying. Other study points that there was a positive correlation between bullying and private school^{25,26}. Another study also indicated that the students from higher level of economy are more likely tend to be the perpetrators in which they feel free to perform everything to their poor friends¹⁴. However, more study also needed to further investigate related to these terms.

This study revealed that verbal bullying was strongly associated with the physical bullying ($p = 0.001$), followed by social bullying ($p = 0.001$) and age ($p = 0.01$). This result is linked to the previous study reported the prevalence of bullying among students based on the type of bullying were verbal bullying followed by physical bullying and relational bullying. Specifically, it was confirmed that verbal bullying is the most prevalent form of bullying perpetrated by adolescents³. A similar study emphasized there was a relationship between verbal, physical and social bullying. Additionally, social bullying was found to have more harmful effect to adolescent's health-related quality of life compared to other types of bullying². Another study specifically highlighted that the victims of physical bullying have a higher likelihood of being the victims of verbal bullying compared to those who never experience physical bullying previously²⁷. Based on the terms, verbal bullying can be defined as a form of intimidation through words such as unpleasant name-calling, ridicule or making fun with the parent's name and threatened the victim with the intention of destroying or humiliating them²³. Previous study has established several negative impacts of verbal bullying, such as a decrease in self-confidence, lost motivation and concentration, and experience simultaneously anxiety resulted depression. Additionally, the study arguments that majority of the victims are those who are weak

and have unusual physical appearance⁴. The findings revealed that verbal bullying has associated with the age of adolescence. An earlier study addressed that younger adolescents conveyed were more likely to be a victim rather than older adolescents. It may describe the power imbalance when students with different ages join in the same classes³. A study conducted in Brazil investigate the associated factors of verbal bullying in adolescence resulted that verbal bullying has connection with younger adolescence in which this age of period frequently reported being as victims²⁵. One study in Korea stated that verbal bullying that involves ridiculing names of family is considered more serious than other forms of bullying leading to physical bullying. The victims feel even more ashamed since parents becoming a significant figure in their life²⁸

CONCLUSION

Bullying is a serious public health concern resulted negative consequences that continue to be felt even after the adolescent years have passed. Our research will help to give the better understanding of the related factors of verbal bullying. Bullying must not be permitted. Based on our study, adolescents experiencing verbal bullying are likely to face other forms of bullying. This underscores the need for comprehensive anti-bullying interventions that address multiple bullying types, particularly targeting younger adolescents who may be more vulnerable. Effective strategies to combat verbal bullying among adolescents in Aceh are crucial for improving their mental health outcomes. Therefore, the school and government must collaborate to start anti-bullying program to provide the safe environment without any tends of bullying behavior. For the parents, they should be a role model for their children to practice the way they behave related to empathy and respect attitude to others. Hence, the adolescents have to speak up and talk to the teacher or parents when they are becoming the victim of bullying. Future research should explore longitudinal effects and causal associations to enhance intervention effectiveness.

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Data Sharing Statement: The corresponding author can provide the data proving the findings of this study on request. Privacy or ethical restrictions bound us from sharing the data publicly.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Hidayati H: Designed the study, wrote the initial manuscript

Martina: Conducted data collection and data analysis
Marthenis: Supervised data collection, data analysis and manuscript preparation

All authors have agreed for the final version of manuscript

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