

## **BULLYING EXPERIENCE OF INDONESIAN STUDENTS (A PHOTOVOICE STUDY ABOUT CHILDREN-FRIENDLY SCHOOL)**

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### **Abstract**

The Children-Friendly School Policy is set by the Indonesian government to accelerate the protection and fulfillment of children's rights. One of this policy efforts is the elimination of bullying in schools. However, the implementation of this policy is considered ineffective because bullying behavior is still found in relations between students at school. This program also does not directly reduce bullying because the current bullying movement is quieter and harder to detect by the school. This study aims to understand the experiences of students who lived in relationships with bullying at school. Seven high school seniors participated in the interview and photo voice sessions through their drawings about bullying. The students' drawing results about bullying were then analyzed using the significance of Barthes' semiotics. The study results concluded that the denotations, connotations, and myths found in students' drawing about bullying contained (1) ugly, geeky, and weird students deserved to be bullied, (2) two worlds of victims of bullying, and (3) seniority as a myth in school. Policymakers are expected to consider students' perspectives to promote anti-bullying program in the digital era through massive socialization, action research movements, and prevention efforts through various school programs to create children-friendly schools.

**Keywords:** Bullying; Children-Friendly School; Photo Voice

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Bullying is a serious problem among school students [1]–[8] and especially in the classroom [9]–[12]. Scientific research explain why bullying occurs. Carney & Merrell stated students bully other to gaining popularity in their group [13]. As previously written by Dan Olweus that bullies are popular students in their schools, known to many friends and feared by most students so that they have the power to suppress students who are considered weak [14]. A review conducted by explained that bullies are motivated by a desire to pursue high status and a strong dominant position in the peer group [1].

Meanwhile, Coloroso asserted that bullying is about contempt—a powerful feeling of dislike towards someone considered to be worthless or inferior, combined with a lack of empathy, compassion or shame[15]. More specifically, bullying is an action with an intention from someone to another to be hurt repeatedly[16]. Mishna explained the existence of bias-based bullying that occurs because of and strengthens discrimination against minorities and marginal groups based on certain characteristics[17]. Mitchell concluded that bullying is an increasingly widespread social problem in schools and requires a comprehensive solution[18]. Conversely, bullying behavior is closely related to the lack of tolerance and respect for differences and diversity so that something different in social groups becomes the reason for rejection.

In Indonesian context, based on a PISA survey in 2018, it was reported that at least several times a month, 41% of students in Indonesia admitted to having been bullied [19]. The Indonesian Child Protection Commission reported that within nine years, from 2011 to 2019, there were 37,381 complaints of violence against children. Specifically, in cases of bullying both in education and social media, the number reached 2,473 reports, and the trend continues to increase [20]. Meanwhile, data on children who were bullies at school tended to decrease in the 2016-2020 period, namely 131, 116, 127, 51, and 12 cases in the last year. It contrasts with the data on cases of children as victims of bullying in schools, which actually experienced fluctuations from 2016 to 2020, namely 122, 129, 107, 46 and 76 cases. It signifies that bullying behavior carried out by children is still found in schools, both children as perpetrators and as victims. In this case, various social media contribute to bullying behavior among students. Bullying is not only done traditionally, but the involvement of social media enables students to do text bullying among friends [21]. It indicates that schools need certain mechanisms and management to control bullying.

In this regard, the Government of Indonesia then adopted the application of the Children-Friendly School (hereinafter abbreviated as CFS) concept initiated by UNICEF to minimize bullying behavior in schools. In CFS, every child is allowed to participate, their rights are heard [22], and they are given protection for their rights [23]. CFS are also intended to minimize violence in schools [24], [25], especially those that will impact student learning outcomes [26]. Research on the application of CFS to minimize bullying in Indonesia pays attention to strengthening school culture through various positive activities in schools [27], and support for collaborative commitments between school members and the community and the role of parents of students [28]. However, these things have not touched the understanding of bullying behavior often done and accepted by students at school.

CFS program have not significantly stopped bullying behavior because social media smoothes the way students work on bullying each other, which is increasingly difficult for schools to detect. To minimize bullying and achieve the fulfillment of child protection from violence in schools, it is vital to know how students experience bullying as data for policymakers, conduct participatory action research, and empower students to behave and decide on appropriate actions against bullying behavior. In this case, photovoice plays an important part in voicing students and their lived-bullying behavior. Thus, CFS are not only a slogan for the image of a school but are carried out as a whole to provide a comfortable and safe learning atmosphere for students and empower them.

## 2. METHOD

This research was conducted in senior high school in Surakarta City, Indonesia as a child-friendly city that declares all school in its territory as CFS. This research was concentrated to see student experiences related to bullying behavior in their schools. This qualitative study used photovoice, focus group discussion, and interviews as its main method of gathering data. Stories elicited from pictures collected from seven students in grades X and XI who were purposively selected as participants. This research took place from October 2021 to March

2022 started with observed CFS regarding bullying and used snowball sampling to interview informants. The researchers started the introduction with the students who were members of the Change Agents in Schools and seven student were willing to share their experiences with bullying at school through visual media. Selected participants were given an explanation of the purpose of the study and asked to fill out informed consent.

The participants were gathered together for FGD and then deepened through an offline interviews different times for the next data mining process. The drawings of these seven students were also exhibited during a RootsDay event themed “Stop Bullying,” held at a Senior High School 3 in February 2022. This event was attended by students in all grades, teachers, and stakeholders from the City Government. Data analysis was performed using semiotic analysis [29] and also employed triangulation techniques [30] to ensure data validity.

### **3. RESULTS**

The seven pictures presented had various meanings but the same message: how students fought and responded to bullying behavior at school. All of the picture were more in the position of being bullied victims or someone who saw bullying behavior being carried out. The connotations that could be generated from the pictures are that (1) students who were considered “weird,” “ugly,” and “geeky” were those who deserved to be bullied; (2) two worlds of bullying victims, and (3) seniority as a myth in school. The three meanings found in the study perpetuated the structure of domination among students and hindered the realization of CFS.

### **4. DISCUSSION**

Bullying behavior is a matter of competition, anger, envy, and a sense of domination from the perpetrator, expressed by acts of violence against the victim. These actions are repeated [14], systematic [31], insulting [15], and aim to hurt repeatedly [16]. However, bullying is often considered non-existent by the school, even though these actions are actually found symptomatic in daily life and make student’s uncomfortable living at school. It is because the form of bullying that many students do is in the form of verbal bullying (gossip, rumors, challenging words, demeaning, or belittling actions) and is carried out quietly. Pictures were generated by students to express their experiences and thoughts about bullying in schools were grouped into three parts: (1) bullying behavior, (2) impact of bullying on victims, and (3) their hopes about bullying.

#### **4.1 Bullying behavior**

The data showed that bullying behavior did occur not only in the real world but also in cyberspace through social media intermediaries, such as Facebook and WhatsApp. The process of bullying in social media is facilitated by the comment column containing various emoticons and letters, allowing students to mock, bully, and even insult each other. The participants stated that bullies tended to have power, feel older (students with higher grades than victims of bullying), have support groups and are ready to spread rumors about someone quickly through

the social media. The victims it was not always who were ugly, black, and had strange faces. Female students with beautiful faces, proportional bodies, and smart were also often victims of bullying. They were considered to have the potential to compete with their seniors in gaining popularity. The perpetrators of bullying were more female students who were victims of bullying by their juniors, both male and female. Their way of working was done systematically by utilizing a solid circle of friends to spread rumors, news, and issues about victims of bullying and incite their friends also to take similar actions. Pictures 1 and 2 represent how verbal bullying occurred on students' social media.

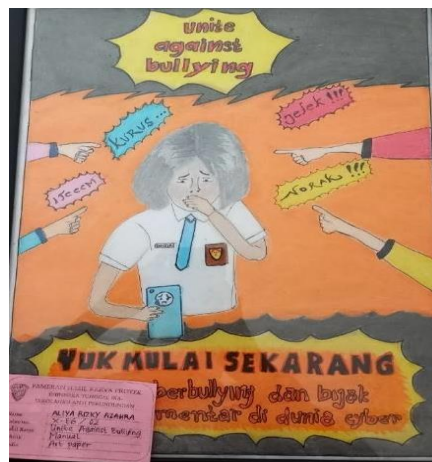


Figure 1: Represent Bullying through Social Media (Berliana)

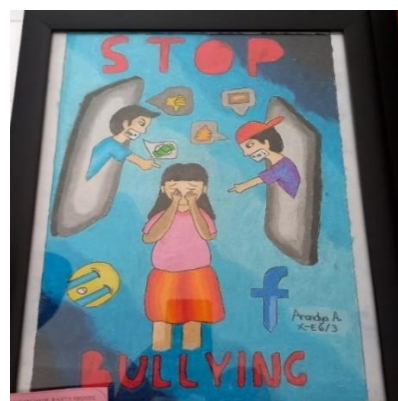


Figure 2: Represent Bullying through Social Media (Lamia)

Data findings also explain that verbal bullying was carried out in secret so that it was difficult for schools to detect. This fact is similar to the analysis that cyberbullying on Facebook is related to school bullying behavior [4]. Insinuations, insults, and negative comments are mostly mediated through social media which are only known by fellow students who are connected. It means that the movement of bullying is smoother, tighter, and difficult to detect, but it can spread quickly through the WhatsApp status screenshot facility, which is then shared en masse via WhatsApp groups to reach many people. Students do not include the teacher as a member

so that the teacher does not know the conversation taking place. In addition, the WhatsApp status facility created by individuals allows hiding the status from connected people who are not allowed to see it. It causes verbal bullying to be quiet and difficult to detect by the school.



**Figure 3: The representation direct bullying experienced of boy student (Joel)**



**Figure 4: The representation direct bullying experienced of girl student**

Meanwhile, the meaning of Pictures 3 and 4 refers the form of direct bullying which could be seen in real terms at school. These two pictures denotatively shows that victims of bullying know no gender. The victims were not always physically discriminated against by students who looked significantly different from other students (ugly, black skin, curly hair, snub nose, skinny body shape, and others). Victims of bullying could also target smart, diligent students who had good grades and excelled. Pictures 3 and 4 depict the character of diligent students with the gesture of holding a book in front of their chest, wearing glasses, and carrying a backpack. Pictures also emphasized that bullying was always done in groups by targeting one individual as a victim. In students' terms, it is "playing gang" (attacking the victim directly, but the perpetrator brings his supporters to bring down the victim's mentality and frighten the victim while the victim is alone).

Pictures 1, 2, 3 and 4 connotatively provide meaning that confirms the myths are developing in the culture of young people in Indonesia about bullying. The connotative meaning that emerged that students who were "different," "weird," and "odd" were considered worthy of

being bullied targets, both in the real world and in the world of social media. Their oddity was believed to make other students have the right to bully. His strangeness justified him as a victim. As noted by Thornberg that the victim is seen as a person regarded as weird. The constructed differentness in everyday life at school is then used to justify bullying[3].

Seniority is also a myth believed in and silences the perpetrators of bullying. The three-year period in senior high school made students who were victims of bullying tend to accept and were reluctant to fight, especially if the form of bullying was through social media. It has further been suggested that cyberbullying is employed by students who cannot confront their victims face-to-face but also by students who feel restless and seek adventure and excitement [32]. In addition, seniority among students who justify the occurrence of bullying because of these actions, as mentioned by Thornberg[3], becomes a social positioning between victims and perpetrators of bullying. The difference in grade levels among students becomes a social hierarchy in schools that constantly reproduces myths about seniority.

#### 4.2 Impact of Bullying



Figure 5: The world contradictions of victims of bullying (Jelita)

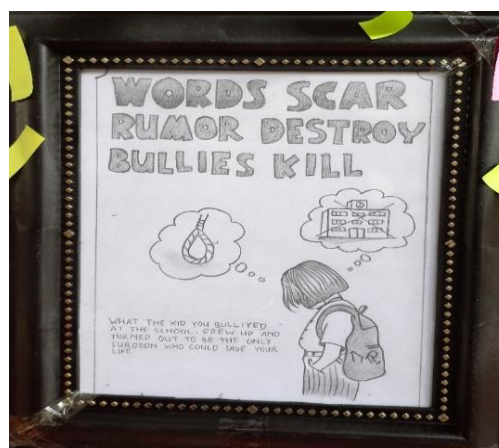


Figure 6: The mental impact of bullying (Jodi)

The school world that they thought was fun turned into an uncomfortable shackle because of the bullying they received. Pictures 5 and 6 refer more to the denotative meaning that expressed the impact of bullying felt by the victim. Denotatively, the two pictures show the things felt by victims of bullying in terms of mental health. Weeping marks, tears, chains on both hands, friends taking pictures of the victim's condition, and tools icons for fun activities (books, cameras, music, balls, chemistry experiment glasses, painting tools, and various colorful backgrounds) connotatively is a description of the negation of the two lives lived by victims of bullying. The rope sign for hanging himself and the crossed school building is the negation of two things that seem to be choices for victims of bullying. The rope sign means suicide, which interpretively symbolizes hopelessness and feelings of depression from someone. The connotative meaning explained that the victim of bullying suffered mentally and psychologically because the world in front of and behind the victim of bullying was much different. Crying, hands tied with iron chains, and sitting with their backs to various fun activities are the meanings of victims of bullying. Being a victim of bullying made students unable to enjoy the happy life that children deserved. Their creativity also seemed to be locked by a lock on their hand chain.

### 4.3 Student Expectations



**Figure 7: Diversity should be Unity to reduce bullying (Cantika)**

Figure 7 carrying the theme of unity felt that bullying can be reduced with unity. This picture denotatively express three children with cheerful faces, two girls (one wearing a headscarf, one not), and one boy holding a red and white flag. The two red and white background images that the symbol of the Indonesian flag emphasized the unity of Indonesia. Connotatively, three children reflect the diversity, both gender and religion (the veil symbolizes Muslims), and the word "unity in diversity" means how Indonesia's diversity should be a unite, not a divider, because we are friends, not enemies. This picture seeks to explain the importance of diversity to respect each other as a strategy to reduce bullying in school.

In the context of schools in Indonesia with the slogan "Children-Friendly Schools", each school is expected to meet indicators that seek to ensure the fulfillment of rights and protection for

children, including policies that support the elimination of violence in schools. However, the presence of bullying behavior in schools negates this ideal reality. Thus, students need empowerment, reinforcement, and self-preparation to act against bullying behavior. Prevention and handling of bullying in schools must start with understanding their experiences with bullying and then reinforce by building empathy, accepting diversity, and respecting each other.

Furthermore, children who were victims of bullying were a vulnerable group at school. Bullying prevention in schools evaluated by CFS mechanism must be addressed to empowering and strengthening student capacity to respond bullying behavior and not only considered quantitatively by number of bullying happen in school. Familiarizing students to stop bullying is to provide awareness and values of equality, tolerance, and mutual respect, which impacts awareness of this behavior especially in a school environment. Policymakers at the school level and the City Government should consider students' voices about their experiences in lived bullying behavior. Their experiences are useful as input for implementing programs, indicators, and evaluation materials to realize a school without bullying, namely a children-friendly school.

## 5. CONCLUSION

CFS policies need to consider the evaluation process related on reducing bullying that touches on non-material indicators: character. The pictures is an expression of their experiences of bullying explained that some myths in schools still allowed bullying to occur silently. Ugly, geeky, weird, and even achievers were considered normal to make students victims of bullying. In addition, seniority still occupied the main reason and became a culture perpetuating the structure of dominative power relations between perpetrators and victims. The experiences and voices of students who saw and experienced bullying need to be heard as policy inputs to stop bullying behavior in schools in order to make a friendly school for children.

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