

Jurnal Ilmiah Kesehatan Keperawatan

p-ISSN 1858-0696 | e-ISSN 2598-9855

The Relationship Between Bullying Behavior and Self-Esteem Among Adolescents at SMP Negeri 2 Tayu, Pati Regency

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: May 29, 2026

Revised: June 18, 2026

Accepted: June 24, 2026

Keywords:

Bullying,
Adolescents,
Self-esteem.

ABSTRACT

Background. Bullying remains a common psychosocial problem among adolescents, particularly in school environments (1). This behavior may negatively affect psychological development, especially self-esteem, which plays an important role in shaping adolescents' confidence and social adjustment (2). Repeated experiences of bullying can lead to emotional distress, decreased self-confidence, and feelings of worthlessness (3). Therefore, understanding the relationship between bullying behavior and self-esteem is important to support adolescent mental health promotion.

Objective. This study aimed to analyze the relationship between bullying behavior and self-esteem among adolescents in a junior high school setting.

Methods. This study employed a quantitative design with a cross-sectional approach (4). The research was conducted at a public junior high school in Pati Regency, Central Java. The population consisted of 200 students, with 67 respondents selected using proportional random sampling. Data were collected using structured questionnaires measuring bullying behavior and self-esteem. Data analysis included univariate analysis to describe respondent characteristics and bivariate analysis using the Chi-square test with a significance level of $p < 0.05$.

Results. The findings indicated that a large proportion of respondents experienced bullying in the high category. Statistical analysis showed a significant relationship between bullying behavior and self-esteem ($p = 0.013$), indicating that adolescents exposed to higher levels of bullying were more likely to report lower self-esteem.

Conclusion. There is a significant relationship between bullying behavior and self-esteem among adolescents. These findings highlight the importance of school-based interventions to prevent bullying and strengthen adolescents' psychological well-being, particularly through mental health education and supportive school environments.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a critical developmental period marked by biological, psychological, and social transitions that may influence mental health and social behavior [1-5]. During this stage, peer relationships become increasingly important, making adolescents more vulnerable to social problems such as bullying [6]. Bullying is recognized as a repeated aggressive behavior intended to harm individuals who are perceived as less powerful. This behavior can manifest in physical, verbal, and psychological forms and may negatively affect adolescents' emotional well-being and social development [7].

Current evidence suggests that bullying is associated with various psychological problems, including anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Self-esteem reflects an individual's evaluation of their

own worth and plays a significant role in shaping confidence, social interaction, and emotional resilience [8]. Adolescents with high self-esteem tend to have better coping strategies and social adjustment, whereas those with low self-esteem are more likely to experience emotional difficulties and negative social experiences, including victimization from bullying [9].

Although the association between bullying and self-esteem has been widely studied, limited evidence is available regarding this relationship among early adolescents in specific school environments, particularly in regional settings [10]. Understanding this relationship is essential to support the development of effective school health interventions. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the relationship between bullying behavior and self-esteem among adolescents at SMP Negeri 2 Tayu, Pati Regency.

2. METHODS

2.1 Study Design

This study employed a quantitative design with a cross-sectional approach [11]. This design was used to identify the relationship between bullying behavior as the independent variable and self-esteem as the dependent variable at the same time, without any intervention from the researcher. This approach was chosen because it effectively describes the respondents' conditions and analyzes the relationships between variables based on data collected over a single research period.

2.2 Setting and Participants

This research was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Tayu, Pati Regency, from October 17, 2025, to December 20, 2025. The relatively extended research period allowed sufficient time for participant recruitment, data collection, and questionnaire completion. The population consisted of all 200 students. The sample size was determined using proportional random sampling, ensuring that each member of the population had an equal opportunity to be a respondent, based on the proportion of participants in each class. This resulted in a sample size of 67 respondents.

The inclusion criteria were students aged 11–13 years who were willing to participate and who took part in the research process until completion. The exclusion criteria were students who were absent during data collection or who completed the questionnaire incompletely.

2.3 Instruments and Measures

Data collection was conducted using a bullying behavior questionnaire and a self-esteem questionnaire. Prior to data collection, both instruments underwent validity and reliability testing. The validity test was conducted on 10 respondents, with an *r*-table value of 0.632. For the bullying behavior questionnaire, the item-total correlation coefficients (*r*-count) ranged from 0.641 to 0.999 across 20 items, indicating that all items were valid. Similarly, for the self-esteem questionnaire, the *r*-count values ranged from 0.661 to 0.953 across 20 items, exceeding the *r*-table value and confirming the validity of all items.

Reliability testing showed excellent internal consistency. The bullying behavior questionnaire obtained a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.976, while the self-esteem questionnaire obtained a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.980. Both values exceeded the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating that the instruments were reliable and suitable for use in this study. Scores were then categorized into levels of bullying behavior (high and low) and self-esteem (high and low).

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process was conducted after the researcher obtained permission from the school.

Before completing the questionnaire, the researcher explained the purpose, benefits, and procedures of the study to respondents. Respondents who agreed were then asked to complete an informed consent form. The questionnaires were completed independently within a specified time, with the researcher's guidance to ensure respondents understood each question. After all questionnaires were collected, the researcher checked the completeness of the data before conducting analysis.

2.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in two stages: univariate and bivariate analysis. Univariate analysis was used to describe the frequency distribution of respondent characteristics and research variables. Bivariate analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between bullying behavior and self-esteem using the Chi-square test with a 95% confidence level and a significance level of $p < 0.05$. Data processing was performed using statistical software to improve the accuracy of the analysis results, and the results were presented in tables and narrative form to facilitate interpretation.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in accordance with ethical research principles, including respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. All respondents were provided with an explanation of the research objectives and their rights as participants before agreeing to participate. Respondents' identities were kept confidential by not including their names on the questionnaires, and all collected data were used solely for research purposes. This study received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of Universitas Karya Husada Semarang under ethical clearance number 0366/KEP/UNKAHA/LPPM/X/2025 [12].

3. RESULTS

The univariate analysis showed that the distribution of respondents based on the research variables was dominated by 36 respondents who experienced high levels of bullying, while 31 respondents experienced low levels of bullying. Based on the self-esteem variable, 46 respondents fell into the high self-esteem category and 21 into the low self-esteem category (Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Respondents Based on Bullying Level ($n = 67$)

Bullying level	n	Percentage (%)
High	36	53.7
Low	31	46.3
Total	67	100

Table 1 shows that 36 respondents (53.7%) experienced high levels of bullying and 31 respondents (46.3%) experienced low levels of bullying.

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Respondents Based on Self-Esteem ($n = 67$)

Self-esteem level	n	Percentage (%)
High	46	68.7
Low	21	31.3
Total	67	100

Table 2 shows that 46 respondents (68.7%) had high self-esteem and 21 respondents (31.3%) had low self-esteem.

A cross-tabulation of bullying behavior and self-esteem revealed that of the 36 respondents who experienced high levels of bullying, 20 (55.6%) had high self-esteem and 16 (44.4%) had low self-esteem. Meanwhile, of the 31 respondents who experienced low levels of bullying, 26 (84.0%) had high self-esteem and 5 (16.0%) had low self-esteem. Thus, high self-esteem was more prevalent among respondents with low levels of bullying than among those with high levels of bullying (Table 3).

Table 3. Relationship Between Bullying Behavior and Self-Esteem

Bullying level	High self-esteem, n (%)	Low self-esteem, n (%)	Total	<i>p</i> -value
High	20 (55.6)	16 (44.4)	36	0.013
Low	26 (84.0)	5 (16.0)	31	
Total	46 (68.7)	21 (31.3)	67	

Chi-square test; $p < 0.05$ indicates statistical significance.

The bivariate analysis using the Chi-square test showed a p -value of 0.013 ($p < 0.05$), indicating a significant relationship between bullying behavior and self-esteem among adolescents. Respondents who experienced higher levels of bullying tended to be at greater risk of low self-esteem than those who experienced lower levels of bullying.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Principal Findings

The results of this study indicate a significant relationship between bullying behavior and self-esteem among adolescents at SMP Negeri 2 Tayu, Pati Regency, with a p -value of 0.013 ($p < 0.05$). The cross-tabulation results also show that respondents with high levels of bullying had a greater proportion of low self-esteem than respondents with low levels of bullying. These findings indicate that bullying experiences can affect adolescents' psychological condition, especially in how they evaluate themselves.

4.2 Comparison with Previous Studies

The results of this study align with previous research that found bullying to be linked to adolescents' psychological well-being, particularly self-esteem. Other research has also shown that adolescents who experience bullying tend to have lower self-esteem than those who do not. This reinforces the notion that bullying is a risk factor that can affect adolescent psychosocial development [13].

However, research also suggests that not all victims of bullying have low self-esteem, owing to protective factors such as family support, peer support, and individual coping skills. This indicates that adolescents' self-esteem is influenced not only by bullying experiences but also by environmental factors and social support [14].

4.3 Interpretation and Implications

The results of this study indicate that bullying can be a factor influencing adolescent mental health, particularly in the development of self-esteem. Adolescents who frequently experience negative treatment from their environment are at risk of decreased self-confidence and difficulties in social interaction.

The clinical implications of this study demonstrate the important role of health workers, particularly nurses, in providing mental health education to adolescents. Schools also play a crucial role in creating a safe environment through bullying prevention programs and strengthening student character. From a public health perspective, these results can serve as a basis for promoting adolescent mental health through health education, peer counseling, and raising awareness of the impacts of bullying. From a policy perspective, schools are expected to strengthen regulations related to bullying prevention and improve monitoring systems for student interactions within the school environment.

4.4 Strengths and Limitations

The strength of this study is its use of a quantitative method with a cross-sectional approach, which successfully illustrates the relationship between bullying behavior and self-esteem among adolescents. Furthermore, the use of a questionnaire instrument allowed for data collection in a relatively short time.

However, this study also has limitations, including a relatively limited sample size and the use of a cross-sectional design that cannot directly explain causal relationships. Furthermore, the data obtained from the questionnaire are subject to subjective bias on the part of the respondents. Therefore, future research is recommended using a larger sample size and a longitudinal or interventional design to obtain more comprehensive results.

5. CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate a significant relationship between bullying behavior and self-esteem among adolescents, with those who experience higher levels of bullying tending to be at higher risk of low self-esteem. This finding confirms that negative social interactions in the school environment can contribute to the formation of adolescents' self-concept.

However, the results also indicate that not all adolescents who experience bullying have low self-esteem, suggesting that other factors—such as social support, individual adaptability, and family

environment—may play a protective role. This indicates that bullying is not the sole factor influencing self-esteem, but rather a risk factor that requires attention [15].

The implications of this study emphasize the important role of health workers, particularly community and psychiatric nurses, in promotive and preventive efforts through mental health education, early detection of adolescent psychosocial problems, and collaboration with schools in bullying prevention programs. Schools are also expected to strengthen child-friendly policies and establish effective bullying reporting systems.

The limitations of this study lie in its cross-sectional design, which describes the relationship between variables at only a single point in time and therefore cannot confirm causality. In addition, the use of self-report instruments may introduce subjective bias. Future research is therefore recommended to use a longitudinal design, increase the sample size, and include other variables such as family support, friendships, and coping mechanisms to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the factors influencing adolescent self-esteem [16].

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The datasets generated and/or analyzed during this study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

FUNDING

The authors received no specific funding for this work.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no competing interests.

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