



Self-esteem influence on bullying through the role of social support

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Article Info	Abstract
Keywords: Bullying; self-esteem; social support	Bullying remains a serious concern in educational settings due to its negative consequences for students' psychological well-being, social relationships, and academic development. This study aimed to examine the association between self-esteem and bullying, with social support as a mediating variable, among students in Kendal Regency, Indonesia. A quantitative correlational research design was employed, involving 167 respondents. The findings revealed that self-esteem was not directly associated with bullying. However, self-esteem was significantly associated with social support, which, in turn, was significantly associated with bullying. Furthermore, an indirect association between self-esteem and bullying through social support was identified, suggesting that social support may play a mediating role in this relationship. These findings highlight the importance of considering social support when examining the relationship between self-esteem and bullying among students. Future research is recommended to employ longitudinal and qualitative approaches to further explore the underlying mechanisms and provide a more comprehensive understanding of these relationships.
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Introduction

Bullying is not only experienced by female students, but also male students. Central statistics agency (BPS) on its reports "Indikator Tujuan Pembangunan Berkelanjutan Indonesia 2022", revealed that male students become the majority of bullying victim in Indonesia. In 2021, bullying cases based on educational level showed significant trend. In the 5th grade of elementary school level, the percentage of bullying cases among male students reached 31.6%, 21.64% among female students, and nationally 26.8%. At the 8th grade of junior high school level, the percentage of bullying cases among male students reached 32.22%, which is the highest across all levels and genders, followed by the percentage for female students, which reached 19.97%, and 26.32% nationally. Meanwhile, bullying case in the 11th grade of senior or vocational high school level reached 19.68% among male students, 11.26% among female students, and 15.54% nationally. The reported data indicates that bullying is prevalent across education system, from elementary to high school level.

The questionnaire results distributed to public senior high school students in Kendal Regency demonstrated the students' experiences with bullying behaviors. The findings reveal that 14.11% of students experienced physical bullying, 17.09% experienced verbal bullying, 19.58% experienced psychological/social bullying, and 12.44% experienced cyberbullying. The results indicate that bullying cases frequently occur in that school. being a peer bullying and cyberbullying target raises concern among students, teachers, and parents around the world (Salmivalli et al., 2021). Children and adolescents experiencing offline and online bullying may suffer from either mental or psychosomatic problems, such as depression, lack of self-esteem, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, headaches, and sleep disturbances (Olweus, 2012).

Samara et al. (2021) stated that, compared to children who are not victims of bullying, they tend to have low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, negative self-perception, high levels of depression, anxiety, disability, hypersensitivity, insecurity, panic, and nervousness at school. As a result, they get concentration disruption, possible peer rejection, avoid social interaction, become more withdrawn, lack friends, feel isolated, and suffer from profound loneliness.

According to Anderson & Carnagey (2004), other factors influencing bullying behavior are self-esteem. People with high self-esteem tend to gain more social support Rueger et al., (2010), yang kemudian mengurangi keterlibatan mereka dalam perilaku bullying. A study conducted by Boulton & Macaulay (2023) revealed that a moderate level of authentic self-esteem can mitigate the relationship between bullying and social anxiety, as well as concentration disruption in class. Prastika (2023) stated that self-esteem should be improved so that students have the ability to do self-evaluation, to accept or reject, and strengthen their confidence, meaning, achievement, and self-worth.

Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh (2016) identified the lower level of self-esteem and social support as a cyberbullying victim predictor. The results broaden the understanding of potential personal and social risk factors for victimization during adolescence. Qurban et al. (2019) stated that parents' support, both tangible and intangible, mediates the relationship between predictors (self-esteem and motivation) and the outcome (sport participation). Chang et al. (2018) demonstrated that parental support and peer support are directly associated with depression. Recent findings show that high self-esteem leads to improvements in social relationships.

Based on the research background mentioned, this study aimed to examine the influence of self-esteem on bullying through social support among the XI grade students of public senior high schools in Kendal Regency. This research is intended to understand the role of social support mediation in the relationship between self-esteem and involvement in bullying behavior, thereby serving as a foundation to develop more effective counseling intervention in bullying prevention efforts. In addition, these results may serve as a scientific reference for future researchers to examine the psychosocial factors influencing bullying behavior among adolescents.

Method

This research involved 167 students as respondents selected by applying proportional random sampling technique. As for determining the sample size, it was conducted based on the Isaac and Michael formula table. The research instrument employed a researcher-developed psychological scale, which was tested with 34 respondents. The self-esteem scale was based on the theory developed by Coopersmith (1995). This scale consisted of 16 questions across 4 indicators: strength, meaningfulness, wisdom, and ability. It employed a five-point likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). The trial yielded 1 invalid question, with a correlation coefficient of 0.275 and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.837.

The bullying scale was developed based on the theories proposed by Coloroso (2002) and Raskauskas & Stoltz (2007). This scale consisted of 16 questions covering 4 indicators: verbal bullying, physical bullying, relational bullying, and cyberbullying. It applied five likert scales ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). From the trial results, 4 invalid questions were identified, with correlation coefficients ranging from -0.059 to 0.312 and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.614.

Social support scale was developed based on theory proposed by House (Smet, 1994). This scale consisted of 16 questions covering 4 indicators; emotional support, instrumental support, achievement support, and informative support. It applied five likert scales ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). From the trial results, 1 invalid question was found with a correlation coefficient of 0.338 and a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.864. With that, this instrument was appropriate for research.

Result and Discussion

The collected data were processed by using path analysis technique through IBM SPSS Statistics 26 software. Based on descriptive analysis, the result showed mean score 49.25 ($SD= 7.44$) for self-esteem, 50.51 ($SD= 9.22$) for social support, and 25.45 ($SD= 6.97$) for bullying.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics Analysis Result

	Mean	SD
Self-Esteem	49.25	7.44
Bullying	25.45	6.97
Social Support	50.51	9.22

Table 2. Path Analysis and Sobel Test Result

Predictor	β	t	P	R	R^2	F	p
Criteria: Social Support				0.39	0.15	28.74	< 0.01
Self Esteem	0.39	5.36	< 0.01				
Criteria: Bullying				0.23	0.05	4.50	< 0.05

Self Esteem	-0.08	-0.99	> 0.05	
Social Support	-0.18	-2.23	< 0.05	
Mediator	B	Zsobel	SE	p
Self Esteem – Social Support – Bullying	-0.07	-2.07	0.03	< 0.05

Based on the path analysis and Sobel test results depicted in Table 2, it was found that there was a positive correlation between self-esteem and social support ($\beta = 0.39$, $p = < 0.01$). Social support explained self-esteem variance of 15% ($R^2 = 0.15$). Furthermore, there was an insignificant negative correlation between self-esteem and bullying ($\beta = -0.08$, $p = > 0.05$), and a negative correlation between social support and bullying $\beta = -0.18$, $p = < 0.05$). Sobel test result indicated significant mediation of social support on the correlation between self esteem and bullying ($Z = -2.07$, $p < 0.05$).

The regression analysis showed a significant positive influence of self-esteem on social support, an insignificant negative influence of self-esteem on bullying, and a significant negative influence of social support on bullying. This study indicated that self-esteem did not have a significant negative impact on bullying behavior. It means that high self-esteem did not necessarily prevent the students from bullying behavior.

The students with high self-esteem do not necessarily reduce the risk of bullying involvement. Salmivalli (2001) stated that self-esteem is not always associated with involvement in aggressive or bullying behavior; instead, social factors and group norms are stronger predictors. The study found that not only is self-esteem level important, but also its stability. People with high yet unstable self-esteem tend to be more reactive and aggressive when they feel that their self-esteem is questioned. Salmivalli emphasizes that high self-esteem is not always positive if it is unstable and vulnerable to threats. People with such self-esteem are more likely to engage in aggressive behavior as their self-defense against perceived threats to their image.

However, this finding is inconsistent with the study by Sır & Lok (2024), which found that improvements in self-esteem reduce bullying behavior. It indicates that a self-esteem development program can be implemented to enhance self-esteem and reduce exposure to peer bullying among students. Adolescents with low self-esteem lack social connection, leading to their inability to adapt to social norms and to an escalation in aggressive behavior (Donnellan et al., 2005). On the other hand, this study found that the direct effect of self-esteem on bullying behavior is not significant. It indicates that students with high self-esteem are not necessarily better at self-control or less engaging in bullying.

Furthermore, this research showed that self-esteem had a significant positive impact on social support. It means that students with high self-esteem tend to gain more social support, have better social skills, have greater confidence when interacting with others, and have more effective ways to build positive relationships with peers, teachers, and parents. It is aligned with Ikiz & Cakar (2010), which state that there is a statistically significant positive correlation between adolescent self-esteem level and the levels of all perceived social support agents. It is relevant to the study conducted by Grant-Vallone et al. (2003), whose results showed that higher levels of self-esteem and greater peer support yield better academic and social adaptation. Moreover, those who frequently use student support and counseling services report greater social adaptation.

In addition, this research showed significant negative influence between social support and bullying. It indicates that students with high social support are able to avoid bullying behavior. These findings are parallel with Bartolomé & Diaz (2020), stating that individuals with a lack of social support from their families tend to be victims of bullying. Other than that, the lack of social support from family becomes one of the prevalent characteristics found in bullying and pure victims. Support not only assists the victims but also the perpetrator in developing a healthy relationship. This is supported by Jaskulska et al. (2022), which reveal that teacher and peer support are crucial protective factors associated with a low probability of becoming a bullying victim.

This research found that social support can serve as a full mediator in the correlation between self-esteem and involvement in bullying behavior, meaning that self-esteem influences involvement in bullying through social support. Individuals with high self-esteem tend to receive more social support, which in turn reduces the likelihood of their involvement in bullying. Another study supporting these findings is by Yıldırım et al. (2024), which reveals that social support serves as a mediator in the correlation between self-esteem and positive and negative experiences. It highlights the essential role of self-esteem in understanding subjective well-being and explains that interventions aimed at increasing self-esteem can positively impact individuals' overall well-being. Therefore, it is crucial to foster adolescents' self-esteem to help them maintain their physical and mental health and promote harmonious stability in society (Hu et al., 2023).

Conclusion

Self-esteem bring influence on bullying behavior through social support. Based on the results, it is suggested that counselors design an intervention program to improve students' self-esteem and social support. Counselors can provide training to teachers and parents on the importance of supporting self-esteem development and building positive social support, thereby reinforcing the synergy between school and home in preventing bullying behaviors. For future researchers, it is recommended to involve a diverse sample to enhance the generalizability of the findings and to utilize a longitudinal research design to provide deeper comprehension of the causal mechanism. Moreover, this study has a limit as it focused on the XI grade of students in two schools. Thus, the findings' generalization must be interpreted carefully.

Author Contributions Statement

Daniel Wahyusetyawan: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft. **Awalya:** Supervision, Methodology, Validation, Writing – review & editing. **Sugiyo:** Supervision, Validation, Project administration, Writing – review & editing. All authors participated in the preparation of this manuscript and approved the final version for publication.

Declaration of Generative AI

During the development of this manuscript, ChatGPT was utilized to assist in improving language quality and refining the presentation of the text. The authors examined the suggested revisions and adjusted the content as needed. The authors remain fully responsible for the accuracy, integrity, and final version of the manuscript.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors confirm that they have no known financial conflicts or personal affiliations that could have improperly influenced the research process or the interpretation and reporting of its findings.

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