

The Effect of Moral Disengagement on Bullying Behavior Tendency with Empathy as a Mediator on Students in Pekalongan City

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Abstract

This study intended to explore the role of empathy as mediator in mediating the relationship between moral disengagement and bullying behavior. The sample of this study was 388 students selected using Cluster Random Sampling technique. To collect the data this study used three instruments, namely Moral Disengagement Scale (MDS), Form Bullying Scale – Perpetration (FBS – P), and Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) instruments. Meanwhile, to analyze the data this study used bootstrap mediator analysis technique corrected by method (N = 5000) with the confidential interval of 95%. The results of this study showed that moral disengagement predicted the tendency of bullying and empathy on students. Then, empathy mediated moral disengagement and tendency of bullying on students. These findings provide understanding for guidance and counselling teachers about the effect of empathy in mediating moral disengagement and bullying on students

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INTRODUCTION

Bullying is violence that is frequently practice by students at school. It involves imbalance of power and happens many times in a long term with the aim of harming others. Olweus, Shaw T, et al. (2013) classify bullying into five types, namely verbal, threatening, physical, relational, and social. In junior high school, the types of bullying that often occur are punching, pushing, pulling, biting, kicking, mocking, cursing, threatening, isolating, quieting, and severing friendship intentionally. The bullies are not able develop a healthy relationship, observe from others' perspectives, and have low empathy. If they are not handled well, they will create a trauma for the victims. Besides, the bullies will repeat it and will not think about the consequences, so the behavior may be imitated by others (Silvia, F. 2017).

Actually, school bullying is a moral behavior. Thus, it is important for students to behave morally for the sake of creating a peaceful, orderly, and harmonious life. From moral perspective, bullying is one of behaviors that violates and causes insecure and uncomfortable atmosphere in academic learning. Therefore, this behavior can be seen from moral disengagement view.

Bandura (1999) developed the idea of moral disengagement as an extension of social-cognitive theory. Bandura adds the theory of social-cognitive of moral agency that individual has a moral standard in seeing what is right and wrong in order to be a reference and limit of behavior. Bandura, Hymel, et al. (2005) classify moral disengagement into five dimensions, namely cognitive restructuring, minimizing agency, distortion of negative consequence, and blaming dehumanizing the victim. People may make an unethical decision because of the inactivity of moral self-regulation process. This inactivity is called moral disengagement (Bandura, 1999). Regarding previous explanation, bullying is practice by students who have moral distortion as a result of the deactivation of moral regulation that causes moral disengagement.

School bullying victims surely get some issues. The negative effects of this behavior can contribute to their psychological adjustment, such as having high level of anxiety, having sleep disorders, having traumatic symptoms, having feeling of fears, lacking of self-confidence, having low self-esteem, and even having idea to do suicide.

Furthermore, the role of guidance and counseling in school is important to make students optimally develop and avoid actions that harm themselves. As a result, they are able to securely and comfortably follow learning activities. Hadi, S. (2017) argues that guidance and counseling is one of integrated components in educational system in school. It helps students to overcome their real life problems in which they will not fall into violating behavior that is bullying.

A fact says that moral disengagement has significant effects toward bullying practiced by students. However, Gini's study (2006) conclude that apparently bullies get higher score than non-aggressive students in moral disengagement scale identified by Bandura. Therefore, Ponari and Wood (2010) suggest that it is necessary to conduct further study about moral disengagement towards bullying by students. Previous studies will give more information about moral disengagement contribution towards bullying, so it can suggest suitable intervention to handle bullying for school.

Regarding preliminary explanation, guidance and counselling teachers have an important role to keep students away from inactivity of moral disengagement. Hadi, S. (2017) reveals that guidance and counselling is one of integrated parts of education in school. Wibowo (2017) suggests that guidance and counseling teachers or counselors are professionals who provide counseling service to optimally help an individual to develop his/herself in accordance with developments and environmental demands.

After observing phenomena and previous studies about moral disengagement towards bullying, the researchers added empathy

as mediator variable of moral disengagement. Thus, this study was expected to give contributions to related institutions, such as school or guidance and counseling teachers to find out moral disengagement that is assumed to give effect on students to practice bullying.

METHODS

This study used quantitative method with correlational design. The number of population was 13.025 junior high school (SMP) students sampled using Cluster Random Sampling technique. Moreover, the researchers used Slovin technique with an error level of 5% and obtained 388 selected samples.

This study used several instruments, namely Form Bullying Scale – Perpetration (FBS – P), Moral Disengagement Scale (MDS), and Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) instruments. Before the inventories were distributed to the respondents, firstly the researchers translated it with the help of one of translators in Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES) since all of instruments are adoption. Then, the translation products were adjusted to the condition in Indonesia. As a result, the instruments questions and statements could be easily understood by the respondents before being submitted to the expert validators. Once the process of validation has been completed and received permission from the validators to use, the researchers used inventories to be distribute to the respondents/ research sample.

To measure moral disengagement done by students, this study used Moral Disengagement Scale (MDS) adapted from Hymel et al. (2005). It consists of 18 items from 4 moral disengagement aspects, namely 5 valid items of cognitive restructuring (Rxy 0.258 – 0.490), 3 valid items of minimizing one's agentive role (Rxy 0.300 – 0.350), 4 valid items

of disregarding the consequences (Rxy 0.326 – 0.636), and 6 valid items of blaming / dehumanizing the victim (Rxy 0.297 – 0.503) with Cronbach Alpha 0.648 criterion. In addition, Form Bullying Scale – Perpetration (FBS – P) that was used to measure students' bullying was adapted from Shaw T (2013). This instrument consists of 10 items that measures 5 aspects of bullying, namely 2 valid items of verbal bullying (Rxy 0.449 – 0.474), 2 valid items of threatening bullying (Rxy 0.327 – 0.348), 2 valid items of physical bullying, 2 valid items of relational bullying (Rxy 0.532 – 0.630), and 2 valid items of social bullying (R_{xy} 0.478 – 0.659). This instrument gained Cronbach Alpha of 0.704. Another instrument, the Interpersonal Relational Index (IRI) adapted from Davis (1983) was used to measure students' empathy using 28 statement items. These items measure 4 aspects of empathy, namely: 7 valid items of perspective taking (Rxy 0.256 – 0.590), 7 valid items of fantasy (Rxy 0.273 – 0.649), 7 valid items of empathy concern (Rxy 0.264 – 0.494), and 7 valid items of personal distress (Rxy 0.260 – 0.481) with Cronbach Alpha of 0.782. Moreover, to examine the research hypothesis, this study used simple linear regression and mediation statistical analysis technique developed by Hayes (2010).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The descriptive analysis results from statistical analysis showed that the minimum value of respondents from their questionnaire answers of moral disengagement was 43 and the maximum values was 73.00. Meanwhile, the mean value was 60.59 and standard deviation value or data distribution was 5.03. These results showed that mean was bigger than standard deviation meaning that the data distribution had good representation.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistical Analysis

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
MD	388	43	73	60.59	5.028
Empathy	388	58	105	79.09	7.14
Bullying	388	22	40	31.71	3.81

Based on table above, the results of descriptive analysis showed that the minimum value of respondents from their empathy questionnaire answer was 58, the maximum value was 105, the mean value was 79.09, and standard deviation was 7.14. These results showed that mean value was bigger than standard deviation value, in other words the distribution data positively had a good representation.

The results of descriptive analysis showed that the minimum score was 22, and the maximum score was 40. By having greater mean

value than standard deviation, namely 31.71, and 3.81 respectively, the data distribution had a good representation.

Hypothesis test was performed to find out whether independent variable influenced dependent variable. To conduct the test, this study used mediator, moderator, and conditional process analysis developed by Hayes (2010). Additionally, the analysis of this study also used regression based path-analytic framework. Through this analysis technique, the understanding of relationship between variables was expected to be well- explained.

Table 2. Hypothesis Test

Predictors	R	R ²	F	df ₁	df ₂	P	B	SE	T	P	BL 95%		
											LL	DL	
Criterion: Empathy	0,416	0.173	80.764	1	386	0.000							
Moral disengagement							0.380	0.047	-8.987	0.000	-0.463	0.297	
Criterion: Bullying	0.639	0.408	132.702	2	385	0.000							
Moral disengagement							0.269	0.062	4.572	0.000	0.153	0.385	
Empathy							-0.795	0.077	-12.318	0.000	-0.922	0.668	
Indirect effect							0.302	0.059	6.419	0.000	0.211	0.396	
Efek Total							0.571	0.066	9.046	0.000	0.447	0.695	

As can be seen on the table 2, moral disengagement showed the variance from empathy level of 17.3% (R²=0,173) (β = -0,380, t = -8,987, p = 0,000). Based on signification value on t test (0.000) < 0.05 with coefficient value of -0.380, it meant that moral disengagement had positive effect on empathy.

The relationship between moral disengagement and empathy showed variance of bullying of 40.8% (R²=0,408) (moral disengagement was β = 0,269, t = 4,572, p = 0,000 and empathy level of β = -0,795, t = -12,318, p = 0,000). Regarding the signification value of F test (0.000) < 0.05, the model of moral disengagement and empathy was able to

simultaneously affected bullying. For more, the signification value of moral disengagement was 0.000 with coefficient value of 0.269, meaning that moral disengagement had positive effect on bullying. By having the significant value of 0.000 with coefficient value of -0.795, it was proved that empathy negatively affected on bullying.

To conduct analysis mediation, this study used bias corrected, bootstrapping

N=5000, with confidential interval of 95%. This analysis found the two direct influenced paths between X (moral disengagement) and Y (bullying) and also indirect influenced effect of X and Y through M (empathy). The following figure is a template of model number 4 which consisted of 1 dependent variable (bullying), 1 independent variable (moral disengagement), and mediator variable (empathy).

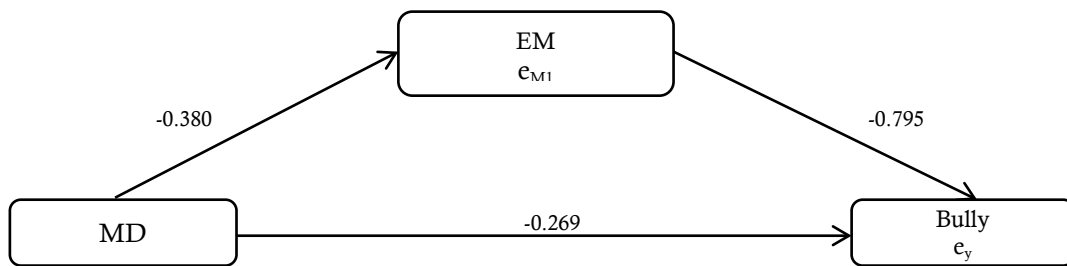


Figure 1. The Mediational Relation between Moral Disengagement and Bullying through Empathy. Notes: MD = Moral Disengagement; EM = Empathy; Bully = Bullying. All $p < 0.001$.

Since empathy was able to perform as a mediator variable (intervening) ($p = 0,000$, $SE = 0,035$, $LL (CI 95\%) = 0,153$, $DL (CI=95\%) = 0,290$), there was significant effect between moral disengagement towards bullying with empathy as a mediator variable (intervening) was accepted.

The findings are in accordance with a study conducted Pozzoli, Vieno, A., and Gini, G (2012). This study proves that children who do bullying, similar to other aggressive children tend to more frequently use moral disengagement mechanisms than their non-aggressive friends. Apparently, an intimidation is done by children with high moral disengagement. Bandura says that moral disengagement makes inactivity of self-regulation of individual moral or removes obstacles for individuals and carries negative and inhuman actions to occur. Consequently, individuals are free from self-criticism and potential guilt.

Since moral disengagement had significantly negative effect on empathy, it means that whenever moral disengagement increases, empathy will decrease. These findings

are in line with a study done by Detert, J., R., Trevin, L., K., Sweitzer, V., L. (2008). The study informs that empathy should emphasize on the observer feeling toward the emotion of target, so the role taking is very important for moral development and assessment. This importance of role taking in moral assessment shows that empathy often happens before moral assessment and increases the sensitivity of moral characteristics. In other words, individuals who have high level of empathy tend to consider other's problems and can suppress moral disengagement.

This study also showed that low empathy was predictive towards intimidation behaviour or adolescences who have moral disengagement. Adolescences with moral disengagement tend to quietly show empathy understanding and various emotion which tend to trigger their aggressive tendency (Lazuras, L. et al., 2012)

Moreover, Zahro (2018) reveals that inculcating empathy on students is important to be done to make them recognize, understand, and communicate their emotional condition and others'. In other words, students who have high

empathy will be able to understand and observe from others' point of view, so they will be prevented from violence acts as a result of moral disengagement mechanism in the form of bullying.

Then, moral disengagement was significantly proved to have indirect effect towards bullying through empathy as the mediator variable. In line with this finding, Ana, A. et al. (2010) suggest that empathy has been considered as factor that can inhibit antisocial behavior. It is negatively correlated with aggressive behavior, meanwhile the low empathy is related to the tendency towards bullying.

In addition, Paciello, M's study (2012) mentions that empathy factors, including moral prosocial reasoning and moral disengagement influence a tendency to help. It means if an individual gives more empathy to others, he will rarely use moral disengagement and experience difficulty. As a result they more likely use moral disengagement.

Regarding previous explanation of findings, it can be concluded the distorted moral made students performed bullying without feeling guilty. It would be different from individuals who have integrated regulation and all controls and regulation of their behaviors (Sunawan, 2016). These kind of individual would be away from moral disengagement mechanism to get legitimation of acts that violate morals, such as bullying.

Empathy has four basic morality that function as individual moral consideration when dealing with the target victims who are suffering. Additionally, empathy has important capacity for individuals in increasing aggressive behaviors to others. The lack of empathy is associated with aggressive behavior and delinquency since individuals are not prevented to do harmful behavior.

CONCLUSION

Moral disengagement has a positive and direct effect on bullying practiced by Junior High School students in Pekalongan City. When

one has higher moral disengagement, his tendency of bullying is also higher. After the analysis, the moral disengagement is concluded to have a negative and direct effect on Junior High School students' empathy in Pekalongan City. It means that the higher moral disengagement will result in lower empathy. Further, it is also concluded that empathy has a negative effect on bullying behavior by Junior High School students in Pekalongan City. This finding means that low of empathy is cause of students' bullying. Besides, moral disengagement has an effect on the tendency of bullying with empathy as mediator practiced by Junior High School students in Pekalongan City. It proves that the higher moral disengagement causes the higher tendency of bullying. Consequently, it causes the decrease in students' empathy.

Based on the findings, counselors need to provide service in order to improve students; moral self-awareness, such as providing social personal service, so students will have behaviors in accordance with moral norms. Additionally, the counselors also need to have comprehensive services integrated into school programs to deal with bullying.

Furthermore, the future researchers are expected to carry out further studies to reveal which moral disengagement aspect that has the greatest contribution to the tendency of bullying by having proper subjects and research methods. It can be done by examining each aspect of moral disengagement, bullying, and empathy. Besides, the researchers can also conduct studies with different quantitative approach or mixed methods. It is related to the limitation of this study that has not been able to reveal the influence of each aspect of moral disengagement. Other models, such as Structural Equation Model (SEM) are also recommended for the advancement of this study.

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