

# Bullying and Social Support in Elementary School Students: A Qualitative Study

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**Abstract.** This descriptive qualitative study aimed to comprehend the perception of elementary school children in Bandung about bullying, focusing on the understanding of the phenomenon and the use of social support from teachers, parents, and peers. In order to achieve this aim, semi-structured interviews were carried out with four children aged between 12 to 13 years, from different elementary schools in Bandung. The data obtained from the conducted interview were subsequently transcribed and analyzed using a thematic analysis framework. The analysis results showed children comprehended bullying differently in a manner that did not entirely harmonize with the conventional definition. It was also important to acknowledge that children viewed emotional support as a more important factor compared to direct problem-solving. The obtained results were extensively discussed to explore implications for further analysis concerning the interplay between bullying and the association with social support.

**Keywords:** Bullying, social support, elementary school students

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## Introduction

Bullying is a pervasive issue which has been observed to adversely impact children in school worldwide, including those in Indonesia. According to Olweus (1997) an individual is considered to experience bullying when subjected to persistent aggressive behavior from one or more individuals, resulting in difficulty in self-defense due to an inherent power imbalance. Generally, bullying in school can take different forms, either direct or indirect. Direct manifestations include physical, verbal, or sexual behavior. Indirect forms comprise actions such as spreading negative rumors about others or the exclusion of an individual from group activities (Smith & Ananiadou, 2003).

According to the results of the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) and Plan International (2015), 84% of children aged between 12 to 17 years in Indonesia had experienced violence at school. Furthermore, recent data from the initial Children World Survey in 2019 showed that around 50% of children at elementary school had experienced physical, verbal, and psychological bullying (Borualogo & Gumilang, 2019). The survey data also showed that Bandung City is one of the areas in West

Java with the highest rate of bullying among elementary school children.

Several studies in Bandung City focused on examining bullying, particularly regarding the experiences of elementary school children. One of these is the ok investigation carried out by Chodijah (2019), where it was showed that verbal bullying, mocking, threatening, or the utterances of harsh words, were the most common form of bullying, both among girls and boys. Another study also emphasized that girls were usually bullied because of the physical condition and appearance, while boys were primarily bullied because of the popularity at school and religion (Borualogo et al., 2020). These unpleasant incidents have been observed to predominantly occur in classrooms or school corridors, and the victims usually have the tendency to tell bullying experiences to parents rather than teachers (Borualogo et al., 2020).

As stated in a previous study, bullying constitutes a significant problem and this is primarily because the behavior negatively impacts the physical and mental condition of individuals (Wolke & Lereya, 2015), specifically those directly involved. These negative impacts can affect different aspects of individual lives including education (Blood & Blood, 2016) and health (Armitage, 2021). This is evidenced by the meta-

analysis and systematic review study carried out by Moore et al. (2017) where it was suggested that victims of bullying often experience a significant causal connection to mental health issues and substance use. Another meta-analysis study, conducted by Cunningham et al. (2016), also showed that children who had been victims of bullying are more susceptible to develop psychosomatic problems compared to peers who have not experienced bullying. Similar result were observed in Indonesia, showing a connection between anxiety and the experience of bullying (Utami et al., 2019). As shown in previous investigations, the detrimental effects of childhood and adolescent bullying persist into adulthood, with both victims and perpetrators facing an increased risk of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety (Copeland et al., 2013), and challenges in adaptation (Wolke & Lereya, 2015).

According to Teasley and Nevarez (2016), addressing the severe impact of bullying necessitates a serious approach, including raising awareness and fostering a deeper understanding of the dynamics. In this situation, gaining a proper understanding of this subject matter can be considered significant a first step toward implementing rules capable of serving as an effective preventive measure (Teasley & Nevarez, 2016). In the study conducted by Hellström et al. (2015), it was found that the manner in which children comprehend bullying was diverse, with girls and older children having a more inclusive understanding of the term than boys or younger children. This shows that different perspectives exist regarding the understanding of bullying. Children might adopt the term 'bullying' to comprise actions beyond conventional definitions, and this may potentially affect study outcomes due to varying interpretations, leading to an inaccurate description of the phenomenon (Canty et al., 2016). In Indonesia, there exists a scarcity of analyses exploring the perspectives of children about bullying, despite the numerous interventions that have been carried out with the aim of enhancing the overall comprehension of this issue (Fauziah et al., 2023; Rahmatullah & Azhar, 2020; Situmorang et al., 2020).

Despite interventions, bullying-related studies in Indonesia comprise in-depth analysis into the influence of the social environment of children, including the roles of parents, teachers, and schools, in the occurrence and dynamics of the subject matter (Abdullah & Ilham, 2023; Aswat et al., 2022; Ramadhanti & Hidayat, 2022). According to Bakar and Syahrudin (2017), social support holds significant importance for bullying victims in Indonesia. This result was also observed to be in line with other studies conducted abroad (Herráiz & Gutiérrez, 2016; Šmigelskas et al., 2018).

Social support refers to the perceived care, appreciation, and assistance demonstrated by certain people in the life of an individual (Harter, 2015). Human health and well-being have been observed to be significantly influenced by social connections. These relationships play a significant role in shaping cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and biological factors (Lakey & Cohen, 2015). The necessity for social support among individuals, including elementary school children, remains consistent. However, the level of this support varies in accordance with a few factors such as age, race, ability, and gender (Demaray & Malecki, 2003). It is important to acknowledge that an aspect of social support theory stems from a relationship perspective. This perspective emphasizes that the beneficial effects of social support are intertwined with the relationships between individuals. Accordingly, these relationships, characterized by friendship, intimacy, and minimal social conflict, concurrently generate and provide support (Lakey & Cohen, 2015). An alternative viewpoint in social support theory stems from a stress and coping perspective. This viewpoint emphasizes that social support contributes to health by shielding individuals from the detrimental effects of stress. As stated in a previous study, individuals can manage perceived stress in certain situations through either problem-focused coping or emotion-focused coping, thereby leveraging social support to mitigate the impact on health (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In instances of bullying, adequate and pertinent support from parents, teachers, and peers comprise direct intervention to halt bullying (problem-focused) or offering essential emotional backing (emotion-focused) for alleviating the stress experienced by victims. A lack of perceived social support from peers, school, and parents have been found to increase the probability of becoming bullying victims (Herráiz & Gutiérrez, 2016). Following this, there exists a positive correlation between social support and subjective well-being, and a collective negative correlation between these two factors and bullying behavior (Alcantara et al., 2017). Additional study showed that children who confided bullying experiences to parents tended to encounter fewer adverse effects as a result (Georgiou & Stavrinides, 2013).

In accordance with this, various factors can influence the choice of bullying victims to disclose such incidents to an adult (Blomqvist et al., 2020), despite the potential benefits. In Indonesia, children perceive immediate assistance from teachers as crucial support, and individuals within the school community such as parents, teachers, and peers, are expected to offer help in this regard when required (Bakar & Syahrudin, 2017).

Various previous studies have been carried out with a focus on examining the lasting adverse effects of bullying. These studies underscored the importance for intensified analyses in preventing bullying, particularly in Bandung City, where elementary school children exhibit the highest rates of this adverse behavior. Accordingly, this study was conducted with a focus on examining the perception of children towards social support, as a protective element against bullying. In the initial stage, the primary focus includes exploring the comprehension of children about the subject matter. This approach is crucial, considering the fact that there is a limited amount of analyses in Indonesia that extensively focused on the manner in which children perceive bullying, unlike similar studies conducted abroad (Hellström & Lundberg, 2020; Jeffrey & Stuart, 2020; Thornberg & Delby, 2019). In accordance with this, Younan (2019) emphasized the significance of harmonizing the understanding of bullying between academics and respondents. As stated by Volk et al. (2017), there is a risk that children may rely on their understanding rather than the correct definition of the term (Volk et al., 2017), and this may potentially influence the analysis outcomes. Therefore, this qualitative study was carried out among elementary school children in Bandung. It aimed to explore their comprehension of bullying and perception about social support, as a factor that could be used to effectively manage the behavior.

## Methods

This study used descriptive qualitative method to investigate the understanding of elementary school children about bullying and the perspectives on social support in handling such adverse behavior. This study was conducted on May 17, 2023, through semi-structured interviews. The questions posed were open-ended, and focused on the cognitive aspects relevant to the aim of the study, which included discerning the manner children perceive bullying and the accompanying social support in the school environment. Drawing from previous studies on the definition of bullying and perceptions of social support, the questions were framed specifically with the aim of understanding the perception of children about bullying actions and the roles of teachers, family, and peers when individuals experienced bullying. The first two questions were tailored towards gathering relevant information on the perception of children about bullying, while the third question sought insights into the perceptions of social support when addressing bullying.

This study adhered to ethical guidelines by obtaining school permission before data collection and securing informed consent from parents and respondents. Accordingly, the consent covered study

details, risks, voluntary participation, confidentiality, withdrawal procedures, and contact information, and it was ensured that all participants read and signed this consent. Given the sensitivity of discussing bullying, which might evoke negative emotions, prioritizing the comfort of respondents was crucial. In the event of emotional distress, ethically, halting the interview and seeking school support for respondent would be the appropriate course of action.

In this study, the data used were collected by interviewing four 6th-grade children from elementary schools in Bandung City (Piaget, 1945). The duration of the data collection was approximately 60 minutes for each child, and it was conducted offline in the school library during break time. It is important to state that before recording the interview, permission was sought from the respondents as outlined in the informed consent. Subsequently, the interview data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed, adopting the thematic analysis method introduced in Braun and Clarke's framework (2006). This study also used deductive codes derived from previous studies on bullying, particularly referencing Olweus (1997), along with codes related to social support in elementary school children. Accordingly, the thematic analysis carried out in this study progressed through several stages namely 1) data familiarity, 2) initial codes creation, 3) themes development, 4) potential themes review, 5) themes definition and naming, and 6) reports generation. Following these stages, a thematic map was assembled and reviewed by two additional academics. This collective review was carried out specifically to ensure data reliability before the creation of a comprehensive report (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

## Results and Discussion

The thematic analysis process provided insights into the comprehension of elementary school children about bullying and the perceptions of social support from teachers, peers, and parents when addressing the situation.

### The Understanding of Elementary School Children on Bullying

#### *Theme 1: Bullying is a behavior that hurts others*

All respondents shared a consensus that bullying comprises acts of insulting or mocking others. Additionally, one emphasized that the behavior was intended to cause harm, as evidenced by the following transcribed statement.

Table 1  
Demographic Data

Subject	Gender	Age	Domicile
1	Male	13	Bandung
2	Female	13	Bandung
3	Male	12	Bandung
4	Female	12	Bandung

*Iya, dan maksudnya apa (melakukan bullying). Jadi, seseorang niatnya ngapain. Kan' kalau misalnya bullying ada juga yang emang pengen nge-bully. Kalau bercandanya masih wajar, ya itu bukan (bullying), tapi kalau bercandanya yang udah parah itu udah masuk nge-bully. Bercanda yang parah itu, udah sampai nyakitin... udah sampai main fisik, terus dari omongannya juga udah sampai sakit ke hati. (Subjek 2)*

Yes, and what is the intention (of bullying) for? What is someone's intention when bullying? Because there are also those who want to bully. If the joke is still reasonable, it is not (bullying). However, if the joke is already severe, it is already bullying. The severe jokes it is already hurting, even already physical bullying. Moreover, from the words, it is already hurting to the heart. (Subject 2)

In addition to verbal insults, physical actions such as "hitting," "kicking," and "threatening" were unanimously acknowledged by all respondents as forms of bullying at school. One respondent even recounted a personal experience of being bullied through "threatening to ask for money". Additionally, one participant mentioned experiencing indirect bullying by hearing from others that this individual was referred to as "kafir."

#### *Theme 2: Bullying is repeated*

Under this theme, two respondents showed that hurtful behavior qualifies as bullying only when it occurs persistently. In this situation, one respondent specified that teasing was considered bullying "if it is also that frequent." Additionally, another respondent elaborated that the act of bullying comprised varying degrees or levels:

*(Bullying) kalau yang masih rendah, ngejek tapi nggak terlalu sering, jadi ada jeda. Yang tingkatan tengah, sering tapi nggak terlalu menyakiti, kalau yang atas, bisa jadi udah sampai membunuh. (Subjek 1)*

(Bullying) at the low level, teasing but not too often, therefore, there is a break. At the middle level, often but not too hurtful. Meanwhile, if the upper ones, it could be up to killing. (Subject 1)

One of respondents recounted seeing news on social media about victims who died due to bullying. The other two respondents did not specify the frequency of bullying but showed having witnessed "mocking behavior" frequently in the classroom or school environment, interpreting the action as forms of bullying.

#### *Theme 3: Bullies have negative characteristics*

Considering this theme, male respondents associated characteristics of bullies with traits such as "arrogance due to achievements or athleticism," being "cool," or having a tendency to "engage in negative behavior." Meanwhile, female respondents associated bully traits with "negative emotions," a "mean appearance," and a challenging "home environment." In accordance with this conviction, one respondent discussed the impact of the wrong environment, evidenced in the statement as follows:

*Karena mungkin beberapa dari mereka juga, maaf ya... apa namanya... punya masalah keluarga, atau kurang kasih sayang, orangtuanya selalu sibuk bekerja, kurang menasihati kayak gitu. Sedangkan mungkin anak yang jarang mem-bully orang itu atau tidak pernah mem-bully orang itu biasanya mendapatkan kasih sayang yang cukup, tidak pernah di-bully kayak gitu... orangtuanya perhatian lah, jadi apa namanya... terkait tentang pem-bully-an itu anak harus bener-bener dibimbing gitu sama orangtuanya, membutuhkan kasih sayang... tapi seharusnya menurut aku, si anaknya ini harusnya punya pendirian. Walaupun keluarganya kayak gitu, atau kurang kasih sayang sih menurut aku harusnya... dia... nggak kayak gitu sih, jangan mem-bully, kayak, baik aja gitu ke temen... malah harusnya lebih baik lagi. (Subjek 2)*

Because maybe some of them also, sorry to say, "have family problems" or lack affection, or their parents are always busy working, and they are rarely counseled. Maybe children who rarely or never bully others usually get enough affection, are never bullied like that, and their parents are attentive. Therefore, regarding bullying, children should be guided by their parents because they need love. However, in my opinion, the child should also have a principle. Even though their family has problems or lacks love, they should not do that. Do not bully, just do good to peers, even better. (Subject 2)

#### *Theme 4: Victims of bullying are considered inferior to perpetrators*

All respondents interviewed shared the perception that victims of bullying are often considered "lesser" than bullies. One respondent even clarified that this assumption arises because victims are typically seen as "different," having "weaknesses," or being "weak" in some aspect. The exact statement of the respondent is as follows:

*Misalnya kalau, berbeda agama... kan' kadang ada orang yang tidak bertoleransi, atau misalnya maaf ya nih... misalnya udah yatim. Anak yatim. Sama, itu, yang... kurang mampu biasanya. Kekurangan tuh kayak misalnya... ada... cacat, jadi... misalnya nggak bisa... nggak ada kaki satu atau buta atau gimana, terus... terus penyakit-penyakit. Kalau lemah, lemahnya mungkin ada di pembelajaran atau kalau lagi tanding, bola, sering kebobolan terus. (Kemampuan olahraganya) lebih rendah dibandingkan yang mem-bully. (Subjek 1)*

For example, if having a different religion, sometimes people are not tolerant. Also, sorry to say, for example, they are orphans. Likewise, the underprivileged too. Weaknesses are like if they have a disability, cannot walk, only have one leg, are blind, or have certain diseases. If it is called weak, the weak might be in learning, or if it is a soccer match, they often concede. (Their sporting ability is lower than the bullies). (Subject 1)

Some respondents also showed that victims of bullying might experience mistreatment due to the physical characteristics being perceived as different from the norm, evidenced by the following statement.

*Body shaming. Mungkin dihina kayak maksudnya... mukanya mirip hewan... terus pendek tingginya seseorang. (Subjek 1)*

Body shaming. Maybe being insulted like having a face resembling animal, and then someone's height. (Subject 1)

The respondents also shared that victims often receive derogatory nicknames like "nerd," "whiny," or, for girls, "pick me girl." Two male respondents emphasized that those who struggled in sports or lack martial arts skills tended to become targets of bullying. Following this, all respondents observed that in the experiences of witnessing bullying, bullies were typically classmates or close friends of victims. It was also showed that even after bullying occurred, victims and bullies maintained contact, albeit with changes such as victims becoming "quieter" or shifts in the nature of the relationship.

*Theme 6: Victims of bullying tend to keep quiet if bullied*

Under this theme, all respondents unanimously showed that victims of bullying typically responded by "keeping quiet" when being bullied.

*Mending diam aja. Dapet pahala. Nanti juga kan' sadar sendiri (pelaku bullying-nya). (Subjek 3)*

Better to keep quiet. Get the reward. Later they will realize it themselves (bullies). (Subject 3)

In this situation, one respondent expressed the perspective that victims of bullying might consider it preferable "not to fight back," believing that doing so could prevent the situation from escalating and that the behavior might eventually stop on its own, as evidenced by the following statement.

*Ya mungkin bakal di-bully terus tapi kalau bisa tahan itu anaknya, ya kemungkinan itu bisa hilang juga bullying-nya. (Subjek 1)*

Yes, maybe bullying will continue, but if the child can endure it, the bullying might disappear. (Subject 1)

The respondent then suggested that victims of bullying might feel the need to "improve themselves" as one of the ways to address or cope with bullying being experienced.

*Mungkin memperbaiki sikapnya, bahkan kalau diem, itu kan sikapnya berarti masih itu itu aja pas masih di-bully, berarti kalau sikapnya berubah lebih baik, kemungkinan yang bully-nya juga udah nggak ada. Misalnya kalau culun ya, kalau bisa dia nggak culun lagi, jarang nangis. (Subjek 1)*

Maybe improve their attitude. If they stay quiet, their attitude is still the same as when bullied. Therefore, if their attitude improves, the bully might not be there anymore. For example, if they are nerd, do not be nerd again, do not be whiny. (Subject 1)

Two respondents also shared their experiences of being teased by peers, suggesting that remaining silent could be an effective way to address such situations. It was observed that this measure was suggested by these study participants primarily because they aimed to "avoid thinking about the bullying behavior" and wished to avoid being seen as "whiny" or "weak." Additionally, other respondents stated that victims of bullying might prefer to stay silent to prevent prolonging the issue or damaging the friendships.

### **The Role of Social Support on Bullying**

*Theme 1: The use of social support is important for bullying*

The respondents laid emphasis on the crucial role of various school entities like teachers, principals, parents, and peers in providing social support to address bullying among children. Accordingly, regarding the stance of schools on bullying, the interviewed children unanimously perceived that teachers play a crucial role in "preventing" and "stopping" bullying. As stated by one of the respondents, this can be achieved by "advising the bullies" or "educating the class against bullying." Another respondent emphasized the importance of

school sanctions in addressing bullying behaviors. This can be comprehended from the following statement.

*Sama kepala sekolah pem-bully-nya disuruh minta maaf, terus anaknya dikasih tahu, betapa bahayanya mem-bully orang, kayak nggak boleh kita sampai mem-bully orang. Cuma mungkin dari beberapa anak anggapannya kayak 'ah yaudahlah cuma dikasih tahu ini' gitu. Atau nggak kalau kurang ketat itu 'lagian cuma diceramahin doang, kalau misalnya dilakuin lagi juga paling cuma diceramahin doang nggak bakal kayak kena sanksi yang berat.' Makanya masih suka terjadi lagi kasus pem-bully-an. (Subjek 2)*

The principal told the bully to apologize, then advised him about how dangerous it is to bully people and forbade us to bully people. However, maybe some children think that "it is okay just to be advised". It seems like it is not strict enough. "It is just advice that if it is carried out again, it will only be advised and not be subject to severe sanctions". That is why there are still cases of bullying. (Subject 2)

In terms of the role played by parents, two significant actions were identified namely "reporting" bullying incidents to the school and "supporting" children while showing empathy. Some respondents clarified that the term "supporting," in this situation, meant parents advising children to "not dwell on it" or providing comfort during bullying.

Regarding the role of peers, all respondents emphasized the importance of "supporting" or "defending" victims of bullying. This support could include actions such as "intervening to stop bullying," "offering comfort," or emotionally aiding victims, as it is believed that victims would feel "sad." Further elaboration was provided by one child on this topic using the following statement.

*Peran temennya itu, menurut aku, harusnya ngedukung dia kalau misalnya di-bully, kayak temennya itu bilang ke pem-bully itu 'eh gak boleh kayak gitu, itu masuk ke pem-bully-an loh, bahaya. Takutnya dia sakit hati atau gimana kan kita gak tahu.' Dan temennya ini lebih nyemangatin aja sih, kayak, 'kamu jangan putus asa ya, kamu jangan, ambil masukkin hati, ayo kita main lagi'... itu kan bisa mengganti perasaan nggak enak, gitu. Tapi kalau misalnya punya temen yang support. Kalau gak punya temen yang support lebih dipendam sendiri, atau curhat ke jurnal, diary. (Subjek 2)*

The role of peers, in my opinion, should be to support victims. For example, a child is bullied, and the others tell bullies to stop doing that because it can be bullying and dangerous. We do not know if they are hurt or what. We can be more encouraging, like, 'Do not despair, do not take it seriously, let us

play again'. It can replace victims' unpleasant feelings. However, if they do not have supportive peers, it is better to keep it to ourselves or confide in a journal or diary. (Subject 2)

#### *Theme 2: Barriers to using social support against bullying*

Under this theme, one respondent expressed a differing perspective, suggesting that reporting bullying incidents to parents might have the unintended consequence of "prolonging the problem."

*Kalau ke orangtua yang tadi... kalau lapor jadi memperpanjang masalah. Jadi bilang sabar aja ke anaknya. (Subjek 3)*

If we tell them to report it to their parents, it will only prolong the problem. Therefore, we just tell them to be patient. (Subject 3)

Another respondent also expressed concern regarding the roles of peers in addressing bullying, suggesting that if a girl defends a boy who is a victim of bullying, she might turn out to become a target of teasing herself. The following statement was made by the respondent in this regard.

*Mending ya udah gitu, soalnya kalau dibela pasti di-cie-cie-in. (Subjek 4)*

Better than just be silent, because if you defend them, you will be teased. (Subject 4)

#### **Discussion**

This qualitative study was carried out to explore the understanding of elementary school children about bullying, their perceptions of social support, and how these perceptions are applied to address the bullying-related issues. The study yielded various significant findings, firstly, the manner in which the respondents comprehended bullying exhibited similarities to the definition put forward by [Olweus \(1997\)](#). Olweus viewed bullying as a continuous behavior aimed at harming someone considered inferior, accompanied by a power imbalance that impeded victims from defending themselves. This implies that respondents interpreted bullying behavior in line with the conventional definition. However, the study also unveiled another aspect of the understanding, which included the intentionality behind bullying behavior. [Olweus \(1997\)](#) also defined bullying as intentional and hurtful behaviors or words. However, an interesting perspective was observed from one respondent who believed that continuous harm, even if unintentional, qualifies as bullying. Despite this nuanced interpretation, the behavior recognized by elementary school children as bullying was considerably in line with conventional examples, comprising verbal acts such as taunting and physical actions including hitting or kicking ([Olweus, 1997](#)). It is important to

acknowledge that this study did not directly mention indirect forms of bullying such as spreading rumors, deliberate exclusion from groups (Smith & Ananiadou, 2003), sexual bullying, and cyberbullying. However, previous literature showed occurrences of sexual bullying and cyberbullying in Bandung (Wicaksono et al., 2022). One respondent also stated another indirect form of bullying, which included the spreading of rumors about others.

From the data obtained, it was observed that the respondents commonly perceived bullying as stemming from differences between victims physical and others, whether in appearance, attitudes, or backgrounds such as economic status. This finding is in line with the fact that children from lower economic backgrounds face an increased risk of being bullied (Azeredo et al., 2015). In accordance with this, one respondent perceived that bullying victims often come from troubled home environments. This perception was found to be in line with a systematic review conducted by Chairunnisa and Dewi (2023), where the impacts of parenting styles on bullying behavior was extensively discussed. However, this connection has primarily been observed in adolescents.

In general, the majority of respondents who discussed the personal experiences and observations of numerous bullying-related news on social media showed that the perceptions of children towards bullying heavily rely on the surroundings. The understanding is shaped by both firsthand encounters and exposure through social platforms. This result is in line with the notion that, practically, bullying is dynamic rather than static, diverging from conventional definitions due to the unique and intricate social context and history (Canty et al., 2016).

In this study, elementary school children consistently identified peers, teachers (Bakar & Syahrudin, 2017), and parents (Borualogo et al., 2020) as important individuals who have the capability to address bullying, both in resolving incidents and providing emotional support. However, it was observed that despite recognizing the importance of teachers and parents, children tended to refrain from reporting bullying due to fears of being labeled as complainers, facing intensified bullying, damaging friendships, prolonging the issue, or perceiving school sanctions against bullies as ineffective. Furthermore, one respondent suggested that peers should not intervene in bullying situations. This suggestion was conceived of the fear that peers could face adverse repercussions for defending victims. The perspective is significant, specifically considering the fact that the majority of respondents stressed the importance of peers in halting bullying by intervening or supporting one another. Additionally, the belief among respondents that bullying victims possess inherent flaws raises questions

about whether elementary school children perceive bullying as a natural outcome of differences in victims.

Respondents further showed that offering emotionally-focused support, such as comfort or encouragement, to bullying victims was perceived as more feasible than directly addressing bullying (problem-focused support). This understanding was in line with earlier studies where various factors influencing the decisions of victims to share the experiences of bullying with adults or schools were identified (Blomqvist et al., 2020; Wójcik & Rzeńca, 2021). In order to prevent bullying, school must create safe learning environments for children (Teasley & Nevarez, 2016) while also promoting victims to confidently report the experiences for effective intervention.

This study has some limitations, including the homogeneity of respondents, all of whom were 6th-grade children from the same school. This factor is perceived as a limitation primarily because it restricts the representation of elementary school children in Bandung. Based on this understanding, it becomes important to exercise caution when generalizing these results to elementary school children more broadly. Additionally, it is important to emphasize that three respondents disclosed personal inclusiveness in bullying incidents, either as victims or perpetrators. This suggested that the data obtained might reflect subjective experiences rather than an entirely objective perception of bullying among children.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provided an overview of the manner in which elementary school children in Bandung comprehended and perceived social support, as a measure to address the inherent issue of bullying. The obtained results showed that the observed children perceived bullying from a different standpoint, diverging from prior studies and conventional definitions. Generally, the respondents viewed bullying as persistent hurtful behaviors characterized by a power imbalance, which leaves victims with the inability to defend themselves against verbal and physical abuse.

Children were observed to recognize the significance of social support, particularly emotional aid and direct intervention, in curbing bullying. Furthermore, the respondents also expressed difficulties in seeking problem-focused support, such as reporting incidents to teachers or parents and intervening when a friend is bullied. In this situation, it was found that concerns about potential negative consequences or a perceived lack of effective follow-up actions after reporting inhibited the willingness to seek such kind of help. In order to address these concerns, it was recommended that stricter sanctions be implemented, and rules regarding bullying behavior be

enforced in school. These measures were considered crucial primarily because of the capability to foster an environment where children could feel safe to openly address bullying. This study aimed to contribute to a broader understanding of effectively addressing bullying behavior in educational settings by thoroughly exploring the manner in which elementary school children perceived bullying and social support mechanisms.

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