Understanding Adolescent Bullying During School Transition in Indonesian Context:

A Sociocultural Approach

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Abstract

This study examines the context of adolescent bullying during school transitions in Indonesia. Following a sociocultural approach on bullying (Maunder & Crafter, 2018), we argue that bullying is a situational and contextually sensitive phenomenon that is contingent on students' experiences with peers, and the responses of teachers', school and society, including the educational system in Indonesia. Individual interviews were undertaken with teachers (*N=16*) and paired interviews with students from Grade 7 and Grade 10 (*N=40*). Preliminary analyses for this ongoing study reveal similarities and differences in teachers' and students' understanding of bullying based on school locations, grades, and gender. Potential implications of the research are discussed.

Keywords: *Bullying; School Transition; Adolescence; Indonesia; Sociocultural Approach*

Introduction

Bullying has been universally recognised as a form of negative behaviour characterised by a power imbalance and repetitive acts intended to inflict harm or discomfort upon individuals (Olweus, 1993). It commonly occurs within educational environments and has garnered global attention as a significant issue of concern (UNESCO, 2019; OECD, 2019). International research has provided insights into bullying prevalence and its impact on adolescents' well-being, mental health, and educational attainment (Chudal et al., 2022; OECD, 2019; Pengpid & Peltzer, 2019; Smith et al., 2018; UNESCO, 2019). However, relatively little work considers the sociocultural profiles of countries, including general social systems, norms, cultural values, and local beliefs to understand how these may contribute to the different nature and prevalence of bullying within and between countries. We, therefore, extend the research specifically in relation to youths in school settings in two different areas in Indonesia.

Indonesian context

There is still relatively little research on school bullying in Indonesia, particularly in terms of how bullying happens in middle and high schools and its social cultural context. With regard to anti-bullying efforts in Indonesia, the work of Noboru et al. (2021) examined the strategies adopted by teachers to tackle bullying in the Lombok region. Teachers perceived the integration of national values into curricular and extracurricular activities, in tandem with religious education, to be beneficial in reducing bullying. However, the role of Indonesian teachers in identifying bullying in school contexts has not so far been investigated. Indonesian teachers often perceive non-physical bullying as normative among adolescents unless it turns into physical forms (Bowes et al., 2019). Moreover, it is imperative to

incorporate the voices of students (Fine et al., 2022) and to understand their perspectives and experiences about how bullying happens in their schools.

Several studies highlighted bullying during school transitions (e.g., Farmer et al., 2015; Pellegrini & Long, 2002; Wang et al., 2016), and Indonesian-specific social and cultural educational context factors warrant a more detailed examination of students' transition periods, like the prolonged hazing tradition during *Masa Orientasi Sekolah (MOS)*. Although the traditions are prohibited by law in Indonesia (Permendikbud Number 85, 2015), its impact on reducing bullying remains unknown. Furthermore, the Indonesian government undertook a significant curriculum transformation during the Covid-19 pandemic. The new curriculum "Merdeka Belajar" places a strong emphasis on flexible learning approaches prioritising the development of students' soft skills and characteristics aligned with the national values, including reducing the likelihood of bullying in schools (Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan, 2022; Pusat Penguatan Karakter, 2021). Nonetheless, implementing the curriculum is not without its challenges, particularly in light of the presence of learning loss as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, and changed approaches to learning online to offline instruction for most students.

Sociocultural perspective

This research employs a sociocultural framework to investigate students' understandings and experiences of bullying and school transitions (Crafter & Maunder, 2012; Maunder & Crafter, 2018). The importance of social and cultural context in bullying research has also been highlighted by several cross-cultural studies suggesting further investigation of the role of cultural contexts (Grothaus, 2023; Smith et al., 2016; Smith & Robinson, 2019).

The sociocultural approach could potentially help untangle the complexity of bullying by contextualising the phenomenon and identifying how societal changes influence individuals' perspectives and experiences. This research examines the perspectives and

experiences of the active agents within school bullying, such as students and teachers, which will benefit anti-bullying prevention and intervention studies (Hellström & Lundberg, 2020; Lohmeyer, 2023; Thornberg & Delby, 2019).

Method

We recruited teachers in rural and urban areas of East Java, Indonesia, to attend online individual interviews in Zoom (*N=16*). Interviews were conducted between March and May 2023, and transcriptions and analysis are on-going. We also interviewed students (*N=40*) in pairs. Interviews were conducted by two local interpreters' due to local language gaps between researchers and the students. The interpreters used a combination of Indonesian and local language to ensure that interviewees understood questions and felt more comfortable to express their ideas and experiences. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the IOE's Research Ethics Committee.

Provisional Findings

Initial analyses of students' and teachers' perspectives suggest that there are disparities and congruences between their experiences and views. Students' perceptions of bullying vary, depending on the location and grade groups. For example, behaviour that is perceived as verbal bullying (e.g., mocking parents' names) by students in the urban area, were perceived as acceptable acts by students in the rural area. Moreover, high school students recognised more types of covert bullying, including relational and cyber bullying, than middle school students from both locations.

In terms of teachers' perspectives on handling bullying, teachers from both locations agreed that the quality of teacher-student relationship is important - positive relationships with teachers make students feel more comfortable to share their problems. However, some teachers in the rural area perceived that their intervention in bullying would depend on the severity of problems and the student reporting. Teachers were aware of relational problems

among their students, but they often allowed students to solve the problems themselves unless they asked for help. Teachers in the rural area indicated that that physical bullying should involve an immediate intervention. Conversely, teachers in the urban area were more likely to intervene in bullying or other peer problems with or without students' reports.

Gender disparities among students were also evident regarding their views of teachers' likelihood to intervene in bullying. Female students feel more comfortable when teachers they trust intervene in their problems with peers. They believe that teachers could help to solve their problems. In contrast, male students reported preferring to solve their problem themselves, and do not feel confident when teachers get involved.

Potential Implications

This research goes beyond documenting the prevalence of bullying; it examines the cultural and contextual nuances that shape this phenomenon in Indonesia. It emphasises the importance of a consideration of sociocultural contexts when studying bullying particularly in the context of school transitions in a specific country. Future bullying research and the content of anti-bullying programmes should be culturally sensitive (Jones & Augustine, 2015), which are likely to vary across countries or even school communities within a country.

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