

Forms and effects of verbal bullying: Perceptions of junior high school students in Indonesia

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Abstract One form of bullying that frequently occurs is verbal bullying. Several studies have shown that perpetrators of verbal bullying often do not realize that their actions are categorized as violence, which is why these actions have not received sufficient attention. Therefore, it is important to take steps to stop verbal bullying, one of which is to scientifically explore the utterances categorized as bullying and their effects. This study aims to describe the forms and effects of verbal bullying according to students' perceptions. The research uses a case study approach. The participants were 200 students from public, private, and sports schools in Surakarta. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews, then analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The results showed that the majority of junior high school students agreed that verbal bullying has negative emotional and psychological impacts. Most students identified words referring to physical deficiencies or body shaming (71%), academic achievement (56%), and family background (57%) as significant forms of bullying. Verbal bullying related to physique and family background was reported as the most hurtful. Approximately 40% of students reported feeling hurt, and 38% felt embarrassed by verbal bullying, which impacted their self-confidence and emotional well-being.

Keywords: verbal bullying, student perception, bullying effect, junior high school, Indonesia

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a crucial developmental phase in a person's life, during which individuals begin to form self-identities and develop more complex social relationships (Smith & Taylor, 2018). During this period, adolescents are particularly vulnerable to various forms of social pressure, including bullying (Hikmat et al., 2024). One common form of bullying is verbal bullying, which includes behaviors such as ridicule, humiliation, harassment, and derogatory name calling. According to surveys in the field of education, bullying is increasingly prevalent, with the majority occurring in junior high schools (BPS, 2021). A 2018 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) reported that 41% of 15-year-old students experienced bullying at least several times a month (PISA, 2020). Bullying can take physical, verbal, or psychological forms (Ahmad & Smith, 2022). Although verbal bullying is nonphysical, its effects can be devastating for victims. Verbal bullying involves the deliberate and sometimes cruel use of language to demean, hurt, or intimidate, often targeting the victim's emotions and self-esteem (Cregan & Kelloway, 2021). As a form of aggressive behavior, verbal bullying is increasingly common among adolescents, particularly in junior high schools (Herman et al., 2020). Other experts define verbal bullying as the use of words to demean, insult, or threaten others (Chen et al., 2023).

Verbal bullying has a significant effect on adolescents' mental and emotional health. Research indicates that adolescents who fall victim to verbal bullying often experience reduced self-confidence, increased anxiety, depression, and, in extreme cases, self-harm (Barasuol et al., 2017). Therefore, addressing this issue is crucial for creating a safe and supportive school environment conducive to student development. Studies have shown that bullying can damage self-esteem and cause stress, anxiety, and depression (Nurlia & Suardiman, 2020). The effects of verbal bullying can extend to academic performance, lead to sleep disturbances, and even manifest as physical symptoms such as headaches. The emotional toll of verbal bullying can have serious consequences for victims' well-being, leading to psychological distress, including stress, anxiety, and depression (Ayu et al., 2022). Verbal bullying occurs when words, perceived as neutral by some, have abusive or hurtful meanings for the victim (Chekan et al., 2024). In more extreme cases, verbal bullying can result in social isolation and suicidal thoughts. This is further supported by findings that the long-term effects of verbal bullying can include chronic psychological trauma, eating disorders, and even suicidal ideation (Nazim & Duyan, 2021; H et al., 2022).

"Surakarta city, one of the major cities in Indonesia, hosts a variety of educational institutions with students from diverse social, cultural, and economic backgrounds. At the junior high school level, social interactions among students are highly

dynamic, reflecting this diversity. These interactions provide opportunities for students to learn about differences and strengthen their social relationships (Rinaldi et al., 2023). However, the high intensity of these interactions also presents potential conflicts, one of which is verbal bullying. This issue can arise when differences in opinion, social pressure, or power imbalances in social relationships trigger aggressive behavior between students (Wang et al., 2023; Junianse & Jatmika, 2024). As a result, preventive and educational efforts are essential to ensure that the school environment fosters the development of students' character and social skills.

Given the seriousness of verbal bullying among junior high school students, effective prevention and intervention strategies are crucial (Li et al., 2024). Education on empathy, tolerance, and effective communication should be promoted, and a holistic approach involving schools, families, and communities is necessary to create a safe and supportive environment for children in Surakarta. By deepening our understanding of the causes, effects, and implications of verbal bullying, we can work collectively to implement effective solutions to protect junior high school students from its harmful impacts (Dangal & Singh, 2020).

This study aims to describe the forms of speech and the effects of speech that contribute to verbal bullying on the basis of students' perceptions. By understanding these perceptions, it is hoped that a clearer picture will emerge regarding the prevalence of verbal bullying, how students respond to it, and what they perceive as its effects. The findings from this study are expected to serve as a foundation for developing more effective strategies to intervene in and prevent verbal bullying among adolescents, particularly within the school environment. The research problem is formulated as follows:

- (1) What forms of speech contribute to verbal bullying according to students' perceptions?
- (2) What are the effects of speech that leads to verbal bullying according to students' perceptions?

Kurniasih et al.'s (2020) study on verbal bullying identified aggressive behaviors in the school environment, such as cursing, insults, swearing, ridicule, and threats. Other researchers have noted symbolic aggression that causes psychological harm, particularly speech involving vocal components (e.g., shouting, pitch changes) and verbal components (e.g., cursing, insults) (Makarova et al., 2020). As technology advances and social dynamics shift, new forms of verbal bullying have emerged. Li (2008) concluded that "verbal bullying can include any form of speech that demeans or intimidates the victim, including taunts, insults, threats, and ridicule." According to the principle of politeness theory, verbal bullying is speech that deviates from these norms (Brown & Levinson, 1987), particularly through face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1978).

Research conducted by Elipe et al. (2022) revealed that victims of verbal bullying experience serious impacts on their mental well-being, including feelings of inferiority, difficulty expressing themselves, conflicts with other students, and poor communication within their social environment. Similarly, the findings of Yu & Zhao (2021) indicate that victims of verbal bullying are vulnerable to various mental health issues. Other researchers have reported that victims of verbal bullying are at greater risk of developing mental health problems such as low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and even suicidal thoughts (Ariyanti et al., 2024).

Several studies on verbal bullying have been conducted, including those that focus on the factors contributing to it (Bulut & Hih, 2021; Moraes et al., 2021). Similar research has also been carried out, but these studies have focused mainly on the impacts experienced by victims of verbal bullying (Syarifuddin et al., 2023; Fernanda & Carla, 2023). The novelty of this study, compared with previous research, lies in its holistic approach, as it examines both the forms and effects of verbal bullying. This broader perspective can serve as a reference for developing anti-bullying education. By understanding the specific words, phrases, and sentences that may indicate bullying, individuals can be more mindful and avoid such harmful language. Currently, no comprehensive data on the forms and effects of verbal bullying have been gathered in this manner.

2. Research Methods

2.1. Research design

This study employs a case study approach with a mixed-method design that combines both quantitative and qualitative methods. Case studies are empirical approaches that explore and analyze cases in real-world contexts (Yin, 2018). Through case studies, researchers can compare similar events to gather evidence and identify best practices. Case studies are generally used to answer "how" and "why" questions. In this study, a descriptive case study was applied to provide a complete and detailed account of the research findings. The outcome of this case study is both a description and an interpretation of the case (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009). Therefore, the case study serves as an in-depth research method used to answer "how" and "why" questions in real-world contexts, with descriptive interpretations that aim to produce best practices on the basis of the case under study.

2.2. Participants

This research was conducted in junior high schools in Surakarta city, Central Java Province, Indonesia. The participants were 8th-grade students from various schools in Surakarta. These students were selected because they are at a critical stage of psychosocial development, where social interaction and peer influence significantly impact their lives. At the age of 13--15,

8th-grade students are mature enough to recognize and understand social dynamics within the school environment, including bullying behavior. Additionally, they are at a stable point in junior high school, having adapted to the environment but not yet burdened by final exam preparations, as 9th graders are. This condition makes them more reflective and open in expressing their experiences related to verbal bullying. Therefore, the data collected from these students provide an accurate and in-depth representation of the prevalence and impact of verbal bullying among adolescents. A total of 360 students were selected for the study, with 120 participants from each type of school (public, private, and sports junior high schools). The research sampling was conducted via a purposive sampling technique, considering factors such as age, gender, and school qualifications, on the basis of data from the Surakarta City Office of Education and Culture.

2.3. Data collection technique

The data collection techniques for this study focused on verbal bullying among 8th-grade junior high school students in Surakarta via a combination of questionnaires and interviews. Questionnaires were the primary tool for gathering quantitative data, with questions focused on the frequency, forms, and effects of verbal bullying that students had experienced or witnessed. Structured interviews were also conducted with selected students to gain deeper qualitative insights into their experiences and perceptions of verbal bullying, both as victims and witnesses. To complement the data, participant observation was conducted within the school environment, where researchers observed students' social interactions to capture the dynamics of verbal bullying in everyday contexts. Additional data were collected through documentation techniques, including a review of school bullying case records and antibullying policies and programs. This combination of techniques aims to provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the perceptions of junior high school students in Surakarta regarding verbal bullying.

2.4. Data analysis technique

Qualitative data were analyzed via an interactive analysis model, which involved three main activities: data reduction, data presentation, and result verification. These activities were conducted interactively throughout the data collection process (Hennink et al., 2020). For example, as the interviews were conducted, the data reduction process occurred simultaneously to ensure that the interviews remained focused on relevant topics. The quantitative data were analyzed descriptively, and the results were summarized as percentages.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

3.1.1. Forms of verbal bullying

Verbal forms of bullying were obtained through a questionnaire completed by 200 junior high school students. The questionnaire was distributed to 8th-grade students in three junior high schools totaling 360, but only 200 students responded completely (Table 1).

Table 1 Questionnaire on Forms of Verbal Bullying.

Statement	Response Percentage			
	Very Agree	Agree	Disagree	Very Disagree
1. Kata-kata yang menyatakan kekurangan fisik saya adalah verbal bullying 'Words stating my physical shortcomings are verbal bullying.'	71%	17.5%	10%	1.5%
2. Kata-kata yang menyatakan hal negatif tentang karakter saya adalah verbal bullying 'Words that state negative things about my character are verbal bullying'	32.5%	21%	42%	4.5%
3. Kata-kata yang menyatakan hal negatif tentang prestasi saya adalah verbal bullying 'Words that say negative things about my achievements are verbal bullying'	56%	12%	24%	8%
4. Kata-kata yang menyatakan hal negatif tentang sikap/perilaku adalah verbal bullying 'Words that say negative things about my attitude/behavior is verbal bullying'	33%	21.5%	43%	2.5%
5. Kata-kata yang menyatakan hal negatif tentang keluarga saya adalah verbal bullying 'Words that say negative things about my family are verbal bullying'	57%	21.5%	21.5%	0%

3.1.2. Physical or body shaming



For the first question, “*Kata-kata yang menyatakan kekurangan fisik saya adalah verbal bullying*” (“Words that state that my physical deficiencies are verbal bullying”), 71% of the students stated that they VERY AGREE. The following explanations were obtained from the interviews: (1) physical deficiencies include fat bodies, short bodies, acne, black skin, slanted eyes, birthmarks on the face, and curly hair; (2) the method of stating can be in the form of direct and indirect speech; and (3) the form of statements can have denotative and connotative meanings. This can be related to the results of the interviews with the following students.

“Saya paling tidak suka kalau ada yang menyinggung tentang badan saya yang gemuk dan mata saya yang sipit” (perempuan, siswa sekolah negeri)

“Kalau ada yang berkata ‘awas bisnya lewat’, saya merasa itu ditujukan pada saya dan itu termasuk perundungan verbal” (perempuan, siswa sekolah swasta)

“Kata-kata yang menyatakan bahwa saya pendek dan mata saya sipit dapat membuat saya tersinggung” (laki-laki, siswa sekolah keolahragaan)

“Kalau ada yang mengatakan tubuh saya semampai alias semester tidak sampai, itu contohnya verbal bullying” (perempuan, siswa sekolah swasta)

“Saya tidak suka kalau ada yang berkata bahwa wajah saya jerawat dan kulit saya hitam” (perempuan, siswa sekolah swasta)

“I dislike it the most when people mention my fat body and narrow eyes” (female, public school student)

“If someone says ‘watch the bus go by’, I feel like it is directed at me and that is verbal bullying” (female, private school student)

“Words stating that I am short and I have narrow eyes can offend me” (male, sports school student)

“If someone says that my body is slender, aka the semester is not up, that is an example of verbal bullying” (female, private school student)

“I do not like it when someone says that my face is spotty and my skin is black” (female, private school student)

The results of the study on verbal bullying focusing on body shame revealed that students from various school backgrounds, including public, private and sports backgrounds, experienced bullying that targeted their physical appearance. The respondents, both male and female, expressed their discomfort with comments that demeaned certain physical aspects, such as weight, slanted eyes, height, acne, or skin color. For example, one student expressed her dislike when her fat body or slanted eyes were teased, whereas another student felt offended when she was referred to as having a short body or black skin. In addition, some respondents recognized banter such as “*awas bisnya lewat*” atau “*semester tidak sampai*” (“watch the bus go by” or “the semester did not arrive”) as a form of verbal bullying directed at their physical appearance. This phenomenon shows that physical appearance-based bullying is a fairly common form of verbal violence in the school environment. These actions cause feelings of offense and humiliation and have an impact on students' self-confidence. This research highlights the importance of awareness of the dangers of body shaming as well as efforts to create a more supportive school environment free from verbal bullying.

3.1.3. Achievement

With respect to the third statement that “*Kata-kata yang menyatakan hal negatif tentang prestasi saya adalah verbal bullying*” (“Words that state negative things about my achievements are verbal bullying”), 56% of the students stated that they VERY AGREE. In this context, the students explained that (1) statements about achievements that indicate verbal bullying include frequent remediation, poor grades, difficulty understanding lessons, and losing matches; (2) the way of stating can be in the form of direct and indirect speech; and (3) the form of statements can have denotative and connotative meanings. These facts are based on the results of interviews with students, and some of them are as follows:

“Mereka bilang, ‘Buat apa belajar keras, ujung-ujungnya tetap goblok juga kan?’ Rasanya seperti setiap usaha yang saya lakukan itu percuma dan nggak ada gunanya.” (laki-laki, siswa sekolah swasta)

“Mereka sering ketawa sambil bilang, ‘Kamu mending duduk aja di bangku cadangan, muka kamu nggak pantas di lapangan.’ Itu bikin saya ngerasa kayak nggak ada harganya sama sekali.” (perempuan, siswa sekolah keolahragaan)

“Setiap kali saya menang lomba, ada yang bilang, ‘Hasil kayak gitu cuma kebetulan, besok juga bakal kalah.’ Rasanya kayak apa pun yang saya capai selalu diremehkan.” (laki-laki, siswa sekolah keolahragaan)

“Mereka sering bilang, ‘Nggak usah mimpi jadi yang terbaik, kamu tuh cuma bayang-bayang kita,’ dan itu bikin saya merasa kecil, seperti nggak pernah cukup baik buat apa pun.” (perempuan, siswa sekolah negeri)

“Pernah ada yang ngomong ke saya, ‘Prestasi kayak gitu sih nggak usah bangga, orang bodoh juga bisa dapat kalau beruntung,’ dan itu bikin saya merasa apa pun yang saya lakukan nggak akan pernah dianggap.” (laki-laki, siswa sekolah keolahragaan)

"They say, 'Why study hard, you will end up stupid anyway, right?' It feels like every effort I make is useless and pointless." (male, private school student)

"They often laugh and say, 'You better sit on the bench, your face does not belong on the field.' That makes me feel like I have no value at all." (female, sports school student)

"Every time I win a competition, people say, 'That result was just a fluke, you will lose tomorrow too.' It feels like whatever I achieve is always underestimated." (male, sports school student)

"They often say, 'Do not dream of being the best, you're just our shadow,' and that makes me feel small, like I'm never good enough for anything." (female, public school student)

"Someone once said to me, 'There's no need to be proud of achievements like that, stupid people can also get them if they're lucky,' and that made me feel like whatever I did would never be considered." (male, sports school student)

The results of the above research illustrate a form of verbal bullying that targets the mental and emotional aspects of students from various school backgrounds, including private, public, and sports. The respondents experienced verbal abuse that belittled their efforts, abilities and achievements, leading to feelings of worthlessness, not being good enough and not being considered. A male student from a private school, for example, felt that his learning efforts were useless after often hearing insults that belittled his abilities, such as "buat apa belajar keras, ujung-ujungnya tetap goblok juga" ("why study hard, you will end up stupid anyway.") On the other hand, a female student from a sports school felt unfit to be on the field because of taunts that told her to sit on the bench. Another form of verbal bullying was observed when the achievements of a male student from a public school were considered mere "kebetulan," ("coincidences,") as if his success was not worthy of appreciation. Feelings of worthlessness were also experienced by a female student from a private school who was often made fun of herself as a mere "bayang-bayang" ("shadow") of her peers. Moreover, a male student from a sports school felt that he was never appreciated despite his achievements because his success was the result of mere luck. This bullying shows how powerful the negative impact of constant insults and ridicule can be on students, creating feelings of inadequacy, loss of confidence, and even casting doubt on the value of their efforts.

3.1.4. Family

For the fifth question, "*Kata-kata yang menyatakan hal negatif tentang keluarga saya adalah verbal bullying*" ("Words that state negative things about my family are verbal bullying"), 57% of the students stated that they VERY AGREE. From the interviews, the following explanations were obtained: (1) statements about achievements that indicate verbal bullying include disharmony, lack of attention, financial problems, and lack of time together; (2) the way of stating can be direct and indirect speech; and (3) the form of statements can have denotative and connotative meanings. This can be related to the results of interviews with several students below.

"Mereka bilang, 'Kamu miskin karena keluargamu memang terkutuk, dari dulu nggak ada yang sukses,' dan itu bikin saya ngerasa seperti saya nggak punya harapan untuk masa depan." (perempuan, siswa sekolah negeri)

"Ada yang ngomong, 'Orang tua kamu cuma buruh kasar, makanya kamu nggak mungkin punya masa depan cerah.' Setiap kali dengar itu, saya merasa mereka menghina semua yang keluarga saya perjuangkan." (laki-laki, siswa sekolah negeri)

"Saya pernah diejek, 'Keluargamu nggak pernah bisa beli apa-apa, makanya kamu selalu minta-minta.' Itu bikin saya ngerasa malu banget, kayak semua orang tahu betapa susahny hidup kami." (perempuan, siswa sekolah keolahragaan)

"Mereka sering bilang, 'Orang tua kamu nggak peduli sama pendidikan kamu karena mereka sendiri nggak sekolah, makanya kamu juga bodoh,' itu bikin saya merasa gagal bukan karena diri saya, tapi karena mereka menyerang keluarga saya." (laki-laki, siswa sekolah menengah negeri)

"Teman-teman suka ngomong, 'Keluargamu dari dulu nggak pernah ada yang sukses, jadi jangan mimpi tinggi-tinggi.' Rasanya seperti apa pun yang saya capai nggak akan pernah diakui karena latar belakang keluarga saya." (perempuan, siswa sekolah swasta)

"They say, 'You're poor because your family is cursed, no one has ever been successful,' and that makes me feel like I have no hope for the future." (female, public school student)

"Some people say, 'Your parents are just manual laborers, that is why you cannot have a bright future.' Every time I hear that, I feel like they are insulting everything my family has worked for." (male, public school student)

"I was once teased, 'Your family can never afford anything, that is why you're always begging.' It makes me feel truly ashamed, like everyone knows how hard our lives are." (female, sports school student)

"They often say, 'Your parents do not care about your education because they themselves did not go to school, that is why you're stupid too,' it makes me feel like I'm failing not because of myself, but because they're attacking my family." (male, public high school student)

"Friends like to say, 'Your family has never been successful, so do not dream high.' It feels like whatever I achieve will never be recognized because of my family background." (female, private school student)

This research shows that verbal bullying, which affects students' economic status and family background, has a deep emotional impact. Students from different types of schools feel insulted about their family conditions, which often makes them feel inferior, ashamed, and lose hope for the future. For example, a female student from a public school felt like she had no future because she was taunted that her family was "*terkutuk*" ("cursed") and would never succeed. A male student from a public school feels that his family's struggle is devalued when his parents are referred to as "*buruh kasar*" ("manual laborers"), who are considered incapable of providing a bright future. This ridicule not only attacks the individual but also the dignity of their family, creating a deep sense of shame, helplessness, and a feeling that whatever they do will never be recognized because of their family background.

3.1.5. Effects of verbal bullying

Table 2 Verbal Bullying Effects Questionnaire.

Statement	Response Percentage			
	Very Agree	Agree	Disagree	Very Disagree
1. Verbal bullying dapat membuat saya malu 'Verbal bullying can make me embarrassed'	38%	35%	20%	7%
2. Verbal bullying dapat membuat saya sakit hati 'Verbal bullying can make me hurt'	40%	38%	22%	0%
3. Verbal bullying dapat membuat saya tidak percaya diri 'Verbal bullying can make me insecure'	36%	42%	16%	8%
4. Verbal bullying dapat membuat saya benci pada diri sendiri 'Verbal bullying can make me hate myself'	12%	22.5%	38%	37.5%
5. Verbal bullying dapat membuat saya ingin menyendiri 'Verbal bullying can make me want to be alone'	17%	21.5%	41.5%	20%

3.1.6. Shame

For the first question, "*Verbal bullying dapats members say a malu*" ("Verbal bullying can make me feel ashamed"), 38% of the students stated that they VERY AGREE. From the interviews, the following explanations were obtained: (1) statements about verbal bullying can be embarrassing when someone openly mocks another person's appearance, ability, or background, which can cause a deep feeling of shame; (2) the way of stating can be in the form of direct and indirect speech; and (3) the form of statements can have denotative and connotative meanings. This can be related to the results of the interviews with the following students.

"Setiap kali ada yang bilang, 'Ya ampun, otak kamu tuh di mana sih? Bikin malu aja,' di depan orang lain, rasanya kayak dunia langsung runtuh, dan saya cuma pengen hilang biar nggak usah dengerin kata-kata itu lagi." (perempuan, siswa sekolah keolahragaan)

"Mereka suka bilang, 'Orang miskin kayak kamu ngapain sekolah tinggi-tinggi, ujung-ujungnya juga nggak bakal jadi apa-apa.' Setiap kali dengar itu, saya ngerasa kayak semua usaha saya percuma, dan saya cuma dihakimi karena keluarga saya nggak punya uang." (laki-laki, siswa sekolah negeri)

"Waktu mereka bilang, 'Jerawatmu banyak banget, nggak heran nggak ada yang mau dekat sama kamu,' rasanya kayak saya nggak pantas dilihat sama orang. Saya lebih milih sembunyi di kamar daripada keluar dan ditatap kayak gitu." (perempuan, siswa sekolah swasta)

"Kalau ada yang ngomong, 'Liat nilai kamu, mimpi jadi sukses aja udah kebanyakan,' itu bikin saya ngerasa kayak orang bodoh yang nggak pantas buat ngelakuin apa-apa, dan lebih baik saya nggak usah ada di sini." (laki-laki, siswa sekolah negeri)

"Setiap kali mereka ejek saya dengan bilang, 'Kamu nggak tahu malu ya pakai baju kayak gitu ke sekolah? Dasar nggak punya selera,' itu bikin saya takut banget buat datang ke sekolah, kayak semua orang bakal ngetawain saya hanya karena apa yang saya pakai." (perempuan, siswa sekolah negeri)

"Every time someone says, 'Oh my gosh, where are your brains? It is embarrassing,' in front of other people, it is like the world comes crashing down, and I just want to disappear so I do not have to hear those words anymore." (female, sports school student)

"They like to say, 'Why do poor people like you go to high school, they will not amount to anything in the end.' Every time I hear that, I feel like all my efforts are useless, and I'm just being judged because my family does not have money." (male, public school student)

"When they say, 'You have so many pimples, no wonder no one wants to get close to you,' I feel like I do not deserve to be seen by people. I would rather hide in my room than come out and be stared at like that." (female, private school student)

"If someone says, 'Look at your grades, you're already dreaming of being successful,' it makes me feel like an idiot who does not deserve to do anything, and I'd rather not be here." (male, public school student)

"Every time they tease me by saying, 'You do not know how to wear clothes like that to school? You have no taste,' it makes me truly afraid to come to school, like everyone will laugh at me just because of what I wear." (female, public school student)

The results of this study reveal the significant psychological impact of verbal bullying on students, especially in terms of self-esteem, self-confidence, and emotional well-being. Teasing that undermines intellectual ability, economic status, physical appearance, and style of dress makes victims feel depressed, embarrassed, and worthless. A female student from a sports school, for example, felt as if the world had come crashing down when taunts about her intelligence were made in front of others, making her want to disappear. A male student from a public school felt that his efforts were in vain and was looked down upon simply because of his family's economic background. Owing to their feelings of acne and physical appearance, female students from private schools prefer to hide in their rooms rather than interact with others. Insults about academic grades and aspirations made a male student feel unworthy of trying, even questioning his existence. Moreover, a female student from a public school felt anxious and afraid to come to school for fear of being ridiculed just because of her choice of clothes. These findings indicate that verbal bullying has a damaging effect on students' mental health, making them feel isolated, insecure and demotivated.

3.1.7. Lack of self-confidence

With respect to the second question, "*Verbal bullying dapat members say a sakit hati*" ("Verbal bullying can make me hurt"), 40% of the students stated that they VERY AGREE. From the interviews, the following explanations were obtained: (1) statements about verbal bullying can be embarrassing when words that hurt, demean, or belittle someone personally; (2) the way of stating can be in the form of direct and indirect speech; and (3) the form of statements can have denotative and connotative meanings. This can be related to the results of the interviews with the following students.

"Setiap kali mereka bilang, 'Kamu tuh bego banget, ngapain juga belajar, otak nggak bakal jalan,' rasanya kayak dihancurkan dari dalam. Udah capek-capek berusaha, tapi tiap denger itu, saya cuma pengen ngilang aja." (laki-laki, siswa sekolah negeri)

"Waktu mereka ngomong, 'Hitam banget sih kamu, kayak nggak pernah mandi,' rasanya kayak semua harga diri saya jatuh. Mereka nggak ngerti betapa tiap kali dibilang gitu, saya merasa kayak orang paling jelek di dunia." (perempuan, siswa sekolah swasta)

"Setiap kali ada yang bilang, 'Kamu tuh cuman beban di tim, nggak guna, keluar aja deh,' rasanya kayak semua yang udah saya lakuin sia-sia. Saya udah latihan keras, tapi tetep aja dianggap nggak pantes ada di sana." (laki-laki, siswa sekolah keolahragaan)

"Mereka sering bilang, 'Ya jelas aja kamu susah, liat aja keluargamu, miskin dari sananya,' dan itu bikin saya sakit hati banget. Rasanya kayak mereka ngerendahin saya karena hal yang nggak bisa saya ubah." (perempuan, siswa sekolah keolahragaan)

"Ada yang pernah bilang, 'Ngimpi aja kamu mau sukses, muka aja udah nggak layak dilihat.' Kata-kata itu bikin saya merasa kayak saya nggak pernah bisa lebih dari apa yang mereka liat di luar." (perempuan, siswa sekolah swasta)

"Every time they say, 'You're so stupid, why are you studying, your brain will not work,' it feels like I'm destroyed from the inside. I have tried so hard, but every time I hear that, I just want to disappear." (male, public school student)

"When they say, 'You're so black, it is like you have never showered,' it is like all my self-esteem falls. They do not understand how every time they say that, I feel like the ugliest person in the world." (female, private school student)

"Every time someone says, 'You're just a burden on the team, you're useless, just quit,' it feels like everything I have done has been in vain. I have practiced hard, but I'm still not considered worthy of being there." (male, sports school student)

"They often say, 'It is obvious you're struggling, just look at your family, they're poor from the beginning,' and that truly hurts me. It feels like they're putting me down for something I cannot change." (female, sports school student)

"Someone once said, 'Do not even dream of being successful, your face is not worth looking at.' Those words made me feel like I can never be more than what they see on the outside." (female, private school student)

This research shows that verbal bullying has very damaging psychological effects on students. Ridicule-targeting intellectual ability, physical appearance, role in the team, economic status, and ideals destroy self-esteem and confidence. A male student from a public school felt that his learning efforts were wasted when he was constantly teased as "*bego*,"

("dumb,") making him want to disappear. A female student from a private school felt that her self-esteem crumbled every time she was insulted because of her skin color, making her feel like the ugliest person. The male student from the sports school, despite his hard training, felt worthless because he was considered a "*beban*" ("burden") on his team. Meanwhile, the mockery of his family's economic condition made a female student from a sports school feel hurt at being put down for something that could not be changed. Another female student from a private school felt that her appearance was a barrier to her success, making her feel that she could never be more than what people saw from the outside. All of these findings illustrate that verbal bullying erodes students' motivation, confidence and emotional well-being, often causing them to feel trapped in the negative views of others.

3.2. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that forms of verbal bullying (1) are subjected to negative comments concerning physical appearance, such as those related to weight, skin color, or other physical characteristics, which can cause feelings of shame and inferiority. (2) Verbal bullying highlights how verbal bullying can undermine students' motivation in academic and nonacademic achievement. (3) Family-related verbal bullying not only is personally harmful but also reinforces negative stereotypes about students' family backgrounds. These findings suggest that verbal bullying at school not only is a matter of physical teasing but also involves aspects of academic achievement and family conditions, all of which have a profound impact on students' emotional well-being. Further findings regarding the effects of verbal bullying (1) revealed that insults related to personal appearance, ability, or background were the main triggers of embarrassment, and (2) the participants felt hurt by words that demeaned them personally, either directly or indirectly.

The first finding of this study is that the form of verbal bullying that often occurs is body shaming, which is relevant to the results of research by Ayu et al. (2022). The results of the analysis revealed a significant relationship between verbal bullying and body shame behavior and students' self-confidence levels. This study revealed that when students were victims of verbal bullying or body shame, they experienced a significant decrease in their self-confidence. Students who are often ridiculed or shamed for their physical appearance or through demeaning words tend to feel inferior, worthless, and begin to doubt their own abilities. This finding shows that verbal bullying and body shame have very strong negative effects on students' mental and psychological health, which in turn affects their overall well-being, both in social and academic settings.

Another finding is that offending achievement is a form of verbal bullying that is sensitive to students, which is in line with the research of Al-Raqad et al. (2017). The results showed that bullying in schools has a significant effect on student academic achievement, both for victims and perpetrators of bullying. The research findings revealed a strong relationship between acts of bullying and decreased academic achievement. Students who are victims of bullying tend to lose concentration during lessons, as they experience emotional distress that disrupts their focus on learning. In addition, bullying also causes a decrease in students' interest in learning. The anxiety, fear and embarrassment experienced by victims make it difficult for them to actively participate in academic activities, which ultimately results in a decrease in their grades and performance at school. Bullying perpetrators can also be distracted in the learning process by engaging in these negative actions.

Further research revealed that stating negative things about the family is a form of verbal bullying that has an impact on students. Research conducted by Azeredo et al. (2015) revealed that bullying in schools affects students' academic achievement, both for victims and perpetrators. This study revealed a strong relationship between bullying and decreased academic achievement. Students who are victims of bullying, especially those who are ridiculed because of their family, experience great emotional distress, making it difficult to concentrate during lessons. Negative comments about their economic circumstances or family background make students feel inferior and ashamed, which ultimately affects their motivation to learn. In addition, bullying causes students to lose interest in learning because their attention is focused on the anxiety and stress caused by bullying, so their academic grades tend to decline.

Further research that discusses the effect of shame from verbal bullying is in line with the findings of Strom (2015). The results showed that verbal bullying has a significant effect on 70% of the feelings of shame experienced by victims. Students who are subjected to taunts, insults, or demeaning comments often feel very embarrassed, which can affect their self-esteem. This shame arises because victims feel humiliated in front of their peers, making them doubt their own self-worth and their ability to be accepted in a social environment. As a result, victims of verbal bullying tend to withdraw from social interactions, feel isolated, and experience decreased self-confidence. These deep feelings of shame also have an impact on long-term mental health and psychological well-being, often hindering their ability to thrive academically and socially.

The results of research on the effects of verbal bullying conducted by Kurniati et al. (2023) are also in line with this study, in which victims feel insecure. The results revealed that bullying has a significant effect on children, especially in terms of psychological, social, and academic aspects. Victims of bullying often experience psychological problems, such as low self-confidence, which directly affects their mental well-being. In addition, the stress of bullying often leads to sleep disturbances, with many victims reporting difficulty falling asleep or sleeping poorly. Socially, victims feel alienated and have difficulty interacting with others, which causes their social relationships to deteriorate. This impact is also apparent in academic performance, where victims lose interest in learning, feel uncomfortable at school, and experience a decline in learning outcomes.

4. Conclusions

The conclusion of this study is that most junior high school students agree that various forms of verbal bullying have a negative impact on them, both emotionally and psychologically. The results of the questionnaire completed by 200 students revealed that the majority of the students considered body shaming (71%) and negativity toward achievement (56%) and family (57%) as significant forms of verbal bullying. Research also shows that verbal bullying, especially that related to physical characteristics such as weight, appearance, and family background, is often the target of hurtful actions. These taunts can be both direct and indirect and often have both denotative and connotative meanings.

The effects of verbal bullying are also felt emotionally by students. Forty percent of the students strongly agreed that verbal bullying made them hurt, and 38% felt embarrassed. Students stated that teasing about their physical appearance, achievements, or family background made them feel inferior, lose confidence, and even want to be alone. The interview results supported these findings, showing how negative statements can inflict deep emotional wounds on students, who often feel unappreciated and demeaned in front of their peers.

Thus, this study highlights how serious the effects of verbal bullying among students are, especially on psychological aspects such as shame, hurt, and decreased self-confidence, potentially affecting their emotional and social well-being.

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Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants, including the students and their guardians, to ensure their voluntary participation. The confidentiality and anonymity of all respondents were strictly maintained throughout the research to protect their privacy and well-being. The researchers were committed to minimizing any potential psychological discomfort, especially considering the sensitive nature of verbal bullying.

Conflict of Interest

The authors confirm that there are no conflicts of interest to declare for this publication.

Funding

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest. This research was conducted independently, with the aim of contributing to the understanding of the forms and effects of verbal bullying among junior high school students in Indonesia.

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