

# Bullying Experience in Elementary School Students

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**Abstract---** *The aim of the study was to determine the experience of bullying in elementary school students. The approach in the study was phenomenology qualitative and the analysis technique was IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis). This study used a qualitative method with IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis) approach. This research was conducted on 60 elementary school students selected through purposive sampling. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured group interviews (Focus Group Discussion). The findings of this study are forms of bullying that occur in elementary students, namely physical bullying, verbal bullying and social bullying. The things that cause fear in school are hostile, ridiculed, bullied. The things that saddened the victims are ridicule, exclusion, hostility, bullied. The things caused anger in victims are being ridiculed, harassed, ostracized, despised. The victims of bullying experienced get harsh words, ridiculed, threatened, pinched, bitten, pulled his hair, beaten, pushed to fall, invited to fight. The feelings emerged after accepting bad treatments were marah, menyesal, takut, sedih, jengkel, sakithati, sabar, merasatidakditerima. The actions conducted after being the victims of bullying were angry, sorry, afraid, sad, annoyed, hurt, patient, feeling unaccepted. For the bullies, the forms of bullying were mocking, kicking, pushing a friend to fall, hit, pinched, biting. The feelings after conducted bullying were happy, angry, sad, feel guilty, do not want to repeat it again, uncomfortable heart. For bystander, the feelings emerged after being witnesses of bullying were sad, feel sorry, happy. The actions performed after being witness of bullying were help a friend, intervene, report to the teacher, advise, hit a naughty friend, fight a naughty friend.*

**Keywords---** *Bullying, Experience, Phenomenology, Elementary School Students.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a violent behavior that occurs when a person or group of people disturbs or threatens the safety and health of others both physically and psychologically, threatens one's property, reputation, or social acceptance and is carried out repeatedly and continuously (Bernard & Milne, 2008). Bullying can be done repeatedly by students who have power, towards other weaker students, with the aim of hurting that person (Black & Jackson, 2007; Carney & Marrel, 2001; Craig, Henderson & Murphy, 2000). Bullying is mostly associated with aggressive behavior in situations when students are seen repeatedly over long periods of time carrying out negative actions either to a person or more (Olweus, 1993; Fekkes & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2005).

Bullying is a serious problem that requires serious handling. However, handling bullying problem is challenging because all elements including teachers and parents considered bullying as a normal behavior. Bullying as a negative

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action is still seen as something "normal" and in school culture, bullying has become common (Harger, Brent., 2016). The school environment and elements in it mutually influence the occurrence of bullying behavior. Student involvement in bullying is influenced by friends, teachers and the surrounding environment (Nassem, Elizabeth, M., 2017). Bullying that occurs in schools is related to group conformity (Kustanti, Erin R., 2013). As violent behavior, bullying can be divided into overt bullying (direct bullying behavior) and relational bullying (indirect aggressive behavior). Overt bullying is bullying that is done directly addressed to the victim or the intended person as the target of the behavior. While relational bullying is bullying done through an intermediary of another person to hurt the victim or the intended person to be hurt (Papalia, et al, 2004).

Bullying has become a worldwide problem and is experienced by thousands of children every day (Carney &Marrel, 2001). In Indonesia, violence against children in schools has been increasing. Plan International and the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) in 2015 released the results of a study which showed that 84% of children in Indonesia experienced violence in schools. These findings are higher than the average findings in Asian countries which are only 70% ([www.news.liputan6.com](http://www.news.liputan6.com)). Bullying occurs at various levels of education with the highest percentage in elementary school students (Kustanti, 2015). Bullying occurs in the forms of traditional bullying and bullying that is done in cyberspace (cyberbullying). Nowadays, cyberbullying also increasingly occurs and a research suggests that cyberbullying mostly occurs in adolescents (Kustanti, Erin R., 2015). Bullying in elementary students most often occurs in classrooms and school yards (Kustanti, 2015). Therefore, often the phenomenon of bullying occurs outside the supervision and knowledge of the teacher and the school. The Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) states that the increase in the amount of violence or bullying in schools throughout 2015 increased by 50% ([www.kompas.com](http://www.kompas.com)). The occurrence of various types of bullying behavior and the increasing number of bullying events from year to year raises the researchers' interest to obtain an overview of bullying incidents experienced by elementary school students.

The occurrence of all forms of aggressiveness can be explained through three theoretical approaches (Myers, 2008), namely (1) aggressiveness arises due to biological impulses influenced by instinctual drive to survive by damaging, neural effects related to damage to the central nervous system causing the emergence of antisocial behavior, as well as genetic influences that influence an individual's temperament; (2) aggressiveness is a response to frustration experienced by someone when the needs cannot be met properly; and (3) aggressiveness is learned behavior. This approach is closely related to the theory of observational learning from Bandura (in Olson &Hergenbahn, 2009) which suggests that a behavior is learned through a modeling process that includes a series of observations to the formation of behavior.

The learning approach is the most appropriate approach to explain the occurrence of violent behavior including bullying in children. Research shows that children show greater violent behavior in an environment that provides a greater stimulus for the onset of violence. The intended environment consists of parents or family environment, school, friendship, and mass media (Huang, Hong, &Espelage, 2013; I. Bibou-Nakou, Tsiantis, Assimopoulos, Chatzilambou, &Giannakopoulou, 2012). Parents with low economic condition and reactive parenting styles in responding to the child's unpleasant behavior, are predictors of the emergence of aggressiveness in children (Barker, Boivin, &Brendgen, 2008). The school environment also influences the occurrence of aggressive behavior, which

includes harsh disciplinary methods through punishment, behavioral values conducted in the classroom, low quality instruction in the classroom, disorganization of school and classroom settings, and the social structure of students involved with antisocial behavior (Allen, 2010; Castello, Gotzens, Badia, & Genovard, 2010).

Bullying has a negative impact on victims. Victims of bullying experience poor social adjustment and low self-esteem. Students who are victims of cyberbullying and traditional bullying have low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, health problems and are often absent from school (Kowalski & Limber, 2013). Schneider et al (2012) in their study found that bullying has caused low school performance and school attachments. Victims of bullying are observed to have low self-esteem, fear, discomfort, and worthlessness, poor social adjustment, withdraw from school, and have low academic achievement (Rigby, 2007; Salmon, James & Smith, 2015). If not treated immediately, this condition will cause victims of bullying to be angry, frustrated, and depressed (Okoiye, et al., 2015).

Victims of bullying tend to do revenge that can cause victims to become perpetrators of bullying (Sourander, et al., 2010). Besides, victims of bullying will also show avoidance (Hutzell & Payne, 2012). If not being cured, such behavior will cause victims of bullying to have antisocial behavior, anxiety, depression and panic disorders as adults (Copeland, Dieter, Adrian & Costello, 2013). Students who are victims of bullying are also vulnerable to physical pain longer than students who are not victims (Stuart, Jaimee & Jose, Paul E., 2014). Victims of bullying are observed to have lower the pattern of safe attachment to parents and the lower self-esteem which make social adjustment more challenging (Kustanti, Erin R., 2017).

In the bullies, the arising behavior is related to the regulation of emotions and attachment that exists with their parents. The results showed that the bullies have poor emotional regulation and unsafe attachment pattern with his parents (Kustanti, Erin R., 2013; 2016). The bullies also experience stress, low self-esteem, depression and suicidal ideation (Seals, Young & Rigby, in Holt, 2007). A research suggested that children who feels inferior, weak, unable to do something tend to have the aggression to do violence in the form of bullying behavior to people (Istanti, S.R & Yuniardi, M. S., 2018). The research conducted by Maryam & Fatmawati (2018) shows that the bullies have low emotional maturity. The results suggested that the emotions experienced by the bullies affect them when carrying out bullying behavior. The bullies experience anger, impatience and hate the moment before bullying. After bullying, the offender feels happy and satisfied, but on the other hand, they feel sad and depressed, as well as feel guilty or sorry. The result of this study indicates that the lack of the ability of the bullies to control their emotions are their reasons to do bullying (Mamesah, Michiko & Hidayat, D.R., accessed from [www. Journal.unj.ac.id](http://www.Journal.unj.ac.id)).

## **II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### ***Participants***

This study involved 60 participants who were students from 3 elementary schools located in Tembalang District, Semarang City. Tembalang District was chosen since the region has experienced technological and demographic advancements since the expansion of Diponegoro University campus area. Participants were selected using purposive sampling approach. Purposive sampling is the type of sampling technique that is most suitable for research employing phenomenological qualitative methods (Smith, Flower & Larkin, 2009). Characteristics of

participants are students of 5th and 6th grade of elementary school. This selection is based on the assumption that they have been able to develop abstract thinking skills and adequate verbal ability to understand and answer questions raised by researchers. The number of 5th and 6th grade students in three elementary schools in the study locations was 60 people. All students were present and expressed willingness to be involved in the data collection process.

### ***Data Collection Method***

Data collection method in this study was semi-structured group interviews (FGD / Focus Group Discussion). Although FGD does not appear to be in accordance with the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach used in the data analysis, the focus group approach in collecting qualitative phenomenological research data is taken into account (Palmer, Larkin, de Visser, & Fadden, 2010). Focus group provides an interesting data retrieval method because it allows a variety of responses to be delivered at one time, getting data in a wider number of samples into more narrow data collection opportunities. The FGD guidelines were arranged in the form of semi-structured interviews. This guide reveals a general picture of the social relations that was observed between students at school, which include questions about friends who are liked, friends who are feared, friends who are hated. It also includes questions about things that are fun, scary, sad as well as things that make the participants angry at school.

### ***Data Analysis***

The analysis of qualitative data obtained through FGD using IPA was carried out in accordance with the stages of the analysis conducted by Palmer et al., (2010). IPA is one of the approaches to qualitative phenomenological research methods that invites participants to articulate events, thoughts, and feelings related to participants' experiences about target phenomena from a first-person perspective (Smith, 2004). The stages of the IPA are presented in Table 1. The interviews during the FGD process were recorded and transcripts from the interviews were compiled. Then, the coding of the interview transcript was applied. Every word in the transcript was considered as the unit being analyzed. The analysis of the data was conducted using IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Approach) approach. IPA is a qualitative data analysis technique that is applied to have a deeper exploration to the subject's experience, such as feelings, thoughts and responses to questions from researchers (Smith, Flower & Larkin, 2009). Data analysis using IPA is not only implemented to analyze the results of the interviews but also to analyze the result of FGD (Palmer, et al, 2010). Data were analyzed based on the stages of analysis in IPA as suggested by Smith, Flowers & Larkin. (see table 1). Data were then summarized and categorized into emergence themes, superordinate themes, and main themes.

Table 1: Stages of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Activity</b>
Preliminary Stage	Writing the transcript of FGD result
Stage 1	Reading transcript several times
Stage 2	Preliminary note: descriptive comments, linguistic comments, conceptual comments
Stage 3	Developing emergent theme
Stage 4	Developing superordinate theme
Stage 5	Moving to the next subject
Stage 6	Defining pattern between subjects
Stage 7	Defining main theme

Based on the stages of IPA approach as presented in table 5, there are five main themes, and 13 superordinate themes and emergence themes (see table 2)

Table 2: Main Themedan Sub-theme

<b>Emergent theme</b>	<b>Superordinate theme</b>	<b>Main theme</b>
Beaten; Bitten; Pinched; Pulled his hair; Kick Push to fall	Physical Bullying	Forms of Bullying
Mocked; Threatened; Harsh words	Verbal Bullying	
Not invited to play; Being hated; Casted out	Social Bullying	
Bullied; hostile friend; Scolded; Mocked; Horrible friend; Boring friend	Things causing fears	
Bullied; Mocked; Naughty Friends ; Being bullied by a friend; Fight with friends; Not invited by friends; hostile friend; Hated by friends	Things causing sadness	Things encouraging bullying
Scolded by the teacher; Annoyed by friend; Ridiculed by friend; Bullied; Mocked by friends; Fight with friends annoying friend; Bad friend ; Hostile friend; Casted out	Things causing anger	
accepting harsh words, badly treated, mocked, threatened, pinched, bitten, (hair) pulled, told to do something according to one's request, hurted, framed, bullied, hit (body, head), pushed to fall, injured using pencil, invited to fight	Bad treatment experienced by participants	Dynamics of victims of bullying
Angry; Regret; Afraid; Sad; Annoyed; Moody; Heartache; Cry; Be patient; Feeling not accepted	Feelings after being bullied	
Does not do anything; Angry; Apologize; Leave it alone; Revenge; Tell the mother; Be patient; Cry	Actions after being victims of bullying	
Mock; Kick; Encourage friends to fall; Hit; Pinch; Bite ; Bullying; Being naughty	Forms of bullying that have been carried out	Dynamics of the bullies
Sad;No regret; Angry; Feel guilty; Happy; Don't want to repeat it again; Sorry; Uncomfortable feeling	Feeling after bullying	
Sad; Sorry; Feel sorry for; Happy	Feelings when witnessing bullying	Dynamics on pada bystander
Help a friend; Intervene' Report to the teacher; Advising; Hit naughty friends ; Fight naughty friends; Rebuke; Prevent from bullying friends, Following others	Actions after witnessing bullying	

### III. RESULT

The study observed five main themes regarding the depiction of bullying among elementary school students. The main themes found in this study include forms of bullying, things that encourage bullying, dynamics experienced by victims of bullying, dynamics in perpetrators of bullying and dynamics in bullying bystander.

The first main theme explains the forms of bullying understood by participants. Participants have diverse experiences regarding bullying. Among the participants, some had experienced being a bystander, even victims and perpetrators. According to the participant's perspective, there are various forms of bullying behavior. The results of the subsequent analysis obtained superordinate themes that focuses on the form of physical bullying, verbal bullying, and social bullying. Physical bullying is one of the most common forms of bullying recognized by participants, which involves direct physical contact that has an impact on physical discomfort, such as punches, bites, pinches, kicks, pushes, to hair pulling. The following data were obtained from participants:

*"I was bleeding. I was scratched, hit, injected with a pencil, kicked, pushed by my seniors".*

*"I was pinched, eye poked, beaten, pushed to the door" .*

*"I was kicked, hair pulled, ear pulled, watered down using water from fish ponds" .*

This finding is in line with the results of previous studies stating that physical bullying is the mostly experienced by elementary students compared to students at higher education levels, with forms of physical bullying including being ridiculed, beaten, bullied, pinched and hair pulling (Kustanti, 2015).

Verbal bullying is the second form of bullying that is more commonly recognized by participants, which involves verbal pitching that causes psychological discomfort, such as ridicule, threats and harsh words. The forms of verbal bullying obtained from the research are outlined below:

*"given orders, if I refused, they threatened me".*

*"nicknamedempek-empek. I was from Palembang and my mom sells empek-empek" .*

*"mocked for suffering from asthma, I can't run, throw balls, so I was mocked in every PE.*

The data shown is in accordance with the results of previous research suggesting that the forms of verbal bullying in elementary school students are teasing, making fun of, threatening, yelling and calling by the nickname (Hertinjung, 2013, Kustanti, 2015).

Although recognized as one of the most common forms of bullying, social bullying is a form of bullying that is least felt by participants compared to the other two types of bullying, which involves rejection to the victims such as not being invited to play, shunned, or even hostile. Participants reported that bullying is not experienced separately but can also be combined with other forms of bullying. The following are the data that explain the existence of social bullying:

*"bullied by juniors – casted out, nobody wants to be my friends".*

*"he persuades others to be against me, so I can't be with them".*

*"I am not invited for any game, I am asked to leave when I join them".*

The results of the study are in accordance with the results of previous studies showing that besides physical bullying and verbal bullying, there are social bullying or relational bullying (Hertinjung, 2013, Kustanti, 2015).

The second main theme explains the things that encourage bullying among participants. Bullying behavior is a result of participants' negative emotions, especially fear, sadness, and anger. These feelings emerged as a result of unpleasant experiences such as dysfunctional interactions between subjects with friends and teachers, academic problems, or rarely, personal mistakes that have an impact on other losses. Similar events might result in different negative emotional reactions. Dysfunctional interactions causing negative emotions are being victims of bullying (physical, verbal, and social), unpleasant friendship (feel friends are boring, fight, be hated, mocked, made annoyed), and 'punishment' from the teacher (fierce teacher, scolded). Academic problems (multiple assignments, exams, difficulty working, difficulty accepting lessons, getting bad grades) might also trigger negative emotions, .

Typical conditions that may only occur in a small proportion of children are the emergence of sadness as a result of cheating (being cheated by friends) or making mistakes. This shows the variety of differences in moral development in children. Students of elementary schools who were participating in the study have expressed things that make them afraid to be in school. Some of these are related to bullying by their friend.

*“because he mocks and provokes me”.*

*“ he threatens me”.*

*“ he chases me and wants to hit me”.*

Participants of the study also conveyed several things that made them sad when they were in school. These are related to bullying.

*“ I am always mocked”.*

*“ I am mocked and casted out”.*

*“ He asks for money”.*

Besides fear and sadness, students of elementary school express various things that make them angry, and those things are related to bullying. The followings are the result of the study showing anger:

*“because I am regularly bullied”.*

*“ I am teased”.*

*“ I am mocked”.*

The previous studies indicate that most of victims of bullying show emotional and social problems. Feelings such as fear, sadness and anger will impair emotional symptoms such as anxiety and depression, problems in friendships and poor perceptions of the school environment. (O’ Brennan, L. M., Bradshaw, C. P., & Sawyer, A. L. , 2009).

The third main theme explains the dynamics experienced by victims of bullying. This main theme is an extract from the victims' experience, including the superordinate theme such as ill treatments, feelings after experiencing bullying, and actions taken after becoming victims of bullying. Various forms of bullying directed at the victims such as physical (without or with intermediaries), verbal, and social bullying result in the emergence of various negative emotions both directed at oneself (sorry, sad, depressed) and others (angry, afraid irritated, hurt). Special themes are observed when participants demonstrate a desire to be patient in dealing with bullying.

The followings are respondents' feelings after becoming victims of bullying:

*“ hurtful experiences”.*

*“sad, regret, angry. I cry every time I remember that”.*

*“sometimes I cry, but I can't do anything”.*

Previous research suggests that bullying in students results in high depression syndrome, low self esteem, and blaming oneself for being the victim of bullying (Raskauskas, J., 2010).

The last superordinate theme explains that the actions to overcome bullying are being silent / doing nothing and perseverance in the experience that is felt (angry, be patient, cry), and taking actions as direct problem solving (constructive - apologize, or is destructive - taking revenge) or indirect actions (telling to mother). The following are the results of the victims' responses to the bullying they experienced.

*"We still be friends, but when I remember being bullied, I feel irritated".*

*"Just do nothing, let him do whatever he wants".*

*"report him to (my) mother and teacher".*

The fourth main theme explains the dynamics experienced by the bullies, including two superordinate themes, namely the forms of bullying and the feelings after bullying. The subject of bullying claimed that the form of bullying behavior varied in severity, starting from the mildest level or bullying as a joke, the desire to beat others down in verbal form (to taunt), to actions that might cause physical injury (kicking, hitting, pinching, biting, pushing). The following are the results of the forms of bullying committed by the bullies:

*"(I) pinch, hit, pull his hair, get angry to him".*

*"(I) cast her out".*

*"mock others, hide her book to make her cry".*

Feelings as a result of bullying behavior are directed at three kinds of conditions, namely contemplation and guilt (uncomfortable, sad, angry at yourself), remorse and self-control, and lack of sensitivity (appearing as in-existence of regret, or even happy). Ambivalence nuances of feelings (conflict) can be found in the bullies. On the one hand, the bullies feel discomfort, while it is difficult to avoid bullying behavior. The bullies also shows the 'avoidance' of negative emotions, while they are satisfied with the actions taken because they seem to be able to meet their needs. The bullies convey what they feel after they have bullying their friends.

*"sometimes (I feel) sad, angry, emotional.. (I still) want to mock him/her"*

*"(I am) happy to hit my friend, it feels uncontrollable to hit others, and there is a feeling of anger when I hit my friend".*

*"I feel superior from others".*

The fifth main theme explains the dynamics of bystanders, including two superordinate themes, namely the feeling when they become the witnesses of bullying and the actions taken after seeing bullying. Feelings that arise by bystanders when they witness bullying can lead to negative emotions (feeling sorry, sad, afraid, and sorry). The emergence of these negative emotions can be a result of efforts to take the perspective of the victim, to put themselves in the victims' shoes, feeling helpless because they are unable to help. Although classified as few, there are also bystanders who feel satisfied (happy) due to the observed bullying behavior. This might be due to the

indirect satisfaction of needs through the bystanders' observations. The bystanders showed various reaction when witnessing bullying

*"I'm enthusiastic when somebody hit another person".*

*"I am irritated by the bully".*

*"I feel pity for the victim when witnessing bullying".*

In general, bystanders show various forms of behavior to provide direct assistance to victims such as (interrupting), calming the offender (advising, preventing from bullying friends), showing hostility towards the offender (reprimanding, fighting / hitting a naughty friend), or providing indirect assistance (reporting to the teacher). In addition, the impact of fear and being helpless as targets of bullying behavior are the reasons why the participants decided to get involved as perpetrators. The data show that there are different responses when bystander becomes a witness of bullying.

*"I support the bully... mocking my friend".*

*"I defend the bully victim".*

*"submit a report to the teacher".*

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Based on the study, it can be concluded that:

1. Bullying was observed in elementary school students
2. There are three forms of bullying: physical, verbal, and social
3. Some of the students who were the victims of bullying were able to tell their teachers or parents, the others have not told their parents nor teachers
4. Students who bullied others felt angry, happy, and consider themselves as champions
5. Some students who witnessed bullying supported bullies because they are afraid for being the next victims, others defended the victims and filed a report to their teachers and parents

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