Mahsya Educreativa

Identification of Bullying Behavior and Its Impact on the Mental Health of Elementary School Children

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Keywords:	:	ABSTRACT
Bullying; *mental health; elementary school; children; systematic review*		Bullying in elementary school is a critical issue with long-lasting psychological consequences. This systematic literature review (SLR) aims to identify the types of bullying behavior and their mental health impacts on elementary school children. Using the PRISMA method, 30 peer-reviewed English-language journal articles were selected from 2010 to 2024 through databases such as Scopus, ScienceDirect, and PubMed. Inclusion criteria included relevance to elementary-aged children and direct mention of psychological effects. The analysis revealed that verbal and relational bullying are the most prevalent, often leading to anxiety, low self-esteem, depression, and social withdrawal. Vulnerable groups include children with disabilities, learning difficulties, or those lacking social support. The school environment plays a crucial role, as inadequate intervention often worsens the impact. This review highlights the urgency of implementing comprehensive, school-based intervention programs involving teachers, parents, and peers.
Kata-kata kunci:		ABSTRAK
Bullying; kesehatan mental; sekolah dasar; anak-anak; tinjauan sistematis		***Identifikasi Perilaku Bullying dan Dampaknya terhadap Kesehatan Mental Anak Sekolah Dasar.*** Bullying di sekolah dasar merupakan isu penting yang dapat berdampak psikologis jangka panjang. Studi literatur sistematis (SLR) ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi jenis perilaku bullying serta dampaknya terhadap kesehatan mental anak-anak sekolah dasar. Menggunakan metode PRISMA, sebanyak 30 artikel jurnal berbahasa Inggris yang terbit antara 2010 hingga 2024 dikaji dari basis data seperti Scopus, ScienceDirect, dan PubMed. Kriteria inklusi mencakup relevansi dengan anak usia sekolah dasar serta penyebutan langsung dampak psikologis. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa bullying verbal dan relasional adalah yang paling umum, dengan dampak seperti kecemasan, harga diri rendah, depresi, dan penarikan sosial. Kelompok rentan meliputi anak-anak dengan disabilitas, kesulitan belajar, atau tanpa dukungan sosial. Lingkungan sekolah berperan penting, karena intervensi yang tidak memadai memperburuk kondisi korban. Kajian ini menekankan pentingnya penerapan program intervensi berbasis sekolah secara menyeluruh yang melibatkan guru, orang tua, dan teman sebaya.

INTRODUCTION

Bullying remains one of the most persistent problems in the educational environment, particularly in elementary schools. Children at this stage of development are highly impressionable and emotionally vulnerable, making them susceptible to the psychological effects of bullying (Lin & Shih, 2024). Numerous studies have reported that early exposure to bullying behaviors whether physical, verbal, social, or digital can lead to a range of negative mental health outcomes, including anxiety, depression, emotional trauma, and behavioral disorders (Swearer et al, 2009).

The increasing incidence of bullying cases in primary educational settings, both in developed and developing countries, indicates a systemic issue that requires immediate academic and practical attention. The lack of adequate school-based prevention programs and the normalization of peer aggression among young students worsen the situation. While various policies and interventions have been introduced globally, the root behavioral patterns and their psychological consequences are often overlooked in early childhood education (Espelage & Swearer, 2010).

This study aims to systematically identify patterns of bullying behavior in elementary schools and examine their impact on children's mental health. Through a comprehensive analysis of relevant scholarly literature using the PRISMA methodology, this research addresses the need for evidence-based insights to inform anti-bullying strategies and mental health support services within school environments (Yoon & Bauman, 2014).

Theoretically, this review is grounded in the ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner, which emphasizes how a child's development is influenced by multiple environmental layers, including school, peers, and broader societal norms (Zhou et al, 2024). Additionally, concepts from social learning theory suggest that bullying behavior can be learned and reinforced through observation and imitation, highlighting the importance of early intervention and proper role modeling in the school context (Rose et al, 2015).

It is hoped that the findings of this study will provide a clearer understanding of the dynamics of bullying in primary schools and contribute to the design of more targeted, age-appropriate prevention and intervention strategies (Catone et al, 2021). By highlighting both the behavioral trends and mental health consequences, this research is expected to assist educators, psychologists, and policymakers in creating safer and more supportive educational environments for young children (Leon-del-Barco dkk, 2020).

METHOD

This study used a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework. Data were collected from five major databases Scopus, PubMed, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar focusing on English-language articles published between 2013 and 2023 (Crokidakis, 2025). A total of 30 articles were selected based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, and analyzed thematically to identify patterns of bullying behavior and their psychological impacts on elementary school children (Zhao et al, 2024).
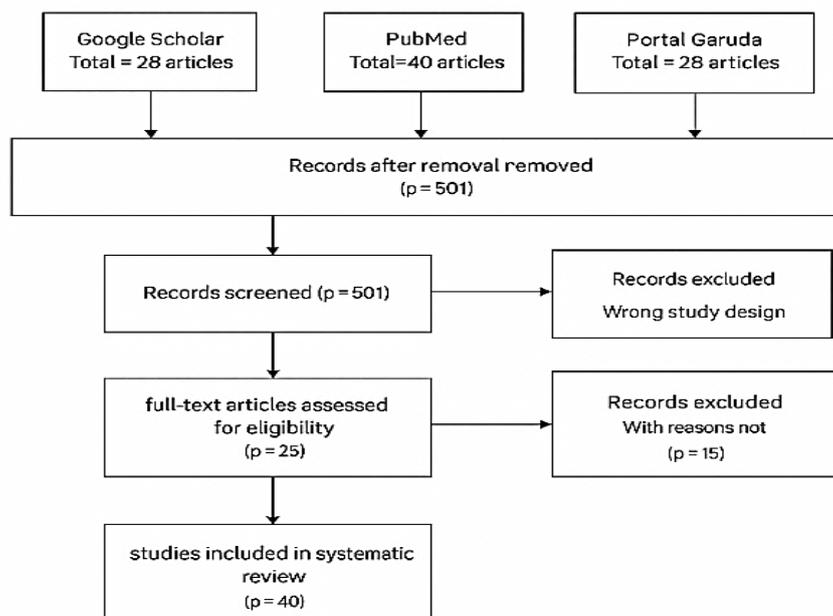
Figure 1. Framework Diagram Based on the PRISMA Guideline

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This systematic literature review identified four dominant themes related to bullying behavior and its psychological effects on elementary school students. The results presented here are the outcome of a qualitative thematic analysis of 30 selected peer-reviewed articles (Halliday et al, 2021). The findings are organized into subthemes that directly answer the research question and are supported by empirical evidence and theoretical perspectives (Nansel et al, 2001).

Table 1. Summary of Selected Data

Author	Title	Method	Findings	Summary
Smith et al (2008)	Cyberbullying among Adolescents	Qualitative Review	Cyberbullying is rising due to increased online presence; girls more affected relationally.	Schools must address both in-person and digital bullying forms to protect students.
Copeland et al (2013).	Childhood Bullying and Long-Term Mental Health Outcomes	Longitudinal Study	35% of victims show depression symptoms two years later.	Bullying has lasting psychological effects; early intervention is critical.
Zuo et al (2025)	Interventions Reducing Internalizing Symptoms	Meta-analysis	School-based programs reduce depression and anxiety effectively.	Holistic interventions are more effective than punishment-only approaches.
Rose et al (2015)	Bullying and Students with Disabilities	Qualitative Case Study	Children with disabilities are more vulnerable to bullying.	Schools must provide inclusive support and early detection mechanisms.
Espelage & Swearer (2010)	Bullying in the School Community	Review	Peer culture and teacher response are key factors.	Climate-based approaches help mitigate bullying behavior sustainably.

Kowalski et al (2014)	Cyberbullying and Adolescent Mental Health	Cross-sectional Survey	Online bullying leads to sleep problems and suicidal thoughts.	Cyberbullying must be addressed with digital literacy and school policies.
Zhou et al (2024)	Theory of Mind and Physical Bullying in Preschool	Experimental Design	Emotional understanding impacts bullying behavior.	Developing empathy in early education may reduce aggression.
Olweus (2013)	School-Based Intervention Program	Program Evaluation	Olweus Program reduces bullying frequency in long-term.	Structured anti-bullying programs are effective with consistent application.

Forms of Bullying in Elementary School

The reviewed literature indicates that bullying in elementary schools manifests in four main forms: verbal, relational, physical, and cyberbullying (Myers & Cowie, 2019) (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009). Among the selected articles, verbal bullying was the most frequently mentioned (25 articles), including insults, teasing, and threat (Lin et al, 2020). Relational bullying, such as social exclusion and rumor spreading, was highlighted in 20 articles and is more common among girls (Zuo et al, 2025). Physical bullying, like hitting and pushing, was reported in 13 studies, mostly involving boys. Cyberbullying, although still emerging in the elementary context, was identified in 10 studies and is growing due to increased gadget use by children (Rose et al, 2015).

Table 1 below summarizes the number of articles that address each type of bullying and their corresponding psychological impacts.

Table 1. Types of bullying and their associated mental health consequences.

Type of Bullying	Number of Articles (n=30)	Common Psychological Impacts
Verbal	25	Anxiety, self-blame, emotional distress
Relational	20	Depression, social withdrawal, trust issues
Physical	13	Trauma, fear, aggressive behavior
Cyberbullying	10	Isolation, sleep problems, suicidal ideation

Verbal and relational bullying are often overlooked due to their subtle and indirect nature, especially when school staff are not trained to recognize them (Smith et al, 2008). The persistence of these behaviors has a compounding psychological effect on victims.

Psychological Impacts of Bullying

Across the reviewed studies, bullying has consistently been linked to various negative mental health outcomes. Victims often report fear, anxiety, low self-esteem, loneliness, and academic disengagement (Holt et al, 2015) (Kowalski et al, 2014). Several longitudinal studies suggest that early exposure to bullying can result in long-term psychological disorders such as clinical depression or post-traumatic stress symptoms (Bandura, 1977). Adolescents exposed to cyberbullying show increased emotional distress and internalizing symptoms (Bansal et al, 2024).

One study found that 35% of bullied children experience symptoms of depression even two years after the bullying ends (Copeland et al, 2013). In addition, Cyberbullying is increasingly recognized as a cross-cultural risk factor for depression among school-aged children, particularly in poorly monitored digital spaces (Khadka et al, 2024) (Li et al, 2025). Cyberbullying victims are at greater risk of suicidal thoughts due to the public and inescapable nature of online attacks (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) (Copeland et al, 2013).

Risk Factors and Vulnerable Groups

The literature reveals that children aged 8–10 are particularly vulnerable, especially when they lack strong parental or peer support systems. Positive peer relationships are linked with lower rates of victimization (Zhu et al, 2025). Gender differences were also noted: boys are more likely to be involved

in physical bullying as perpetrators or victims, while girls are more often subjected to relational bullying (Klocek, 2024).

Children with learning difficulties, disabilities, or those who differ in appearance or behavior from their peers are more frequently targeted (Kowalski et al, 2014). These children often lack the social defenses to protect themselves or seek help, making them more susceptible to chronic psychological effects (Wang et al, 2009). Victimization in primary school is closely associated with symptoms of anxiety and poor well-being (Adeyele, 2021)

Role of the School Environment

The reviewed studies emphasize the critical role of school climate, teacher intervention, and peer culture. Schools that implement anti-bullying policies, foster positive peer interactions, and train teache`rs in social-emotional learning (SEL) report significantly lower bullying prevalence (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009) (Lin et al, 2020). Strong teacher–student relationships can serve as a protective buffer against victimization (Westerberg et al, 2020)

However, many schools fail to respond adequately. Teachers may dismiss bullying as "normal conflict" or lack training to differentiate between playful teasing and harmful behavior (Espelage & Swearer, 2010). This results in delayed or absent intervention, allowing bullying to escalate. In fact, teacher perceptions and responses significantly shape the outcomes of bullying incidents (Demol et al, 2020).

Theoretical Implications

These findings are consistent with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which posits that a child's development is influenced by multiple environmental layers home, school, peers, and broader societal systems (Hymel & Swearer, 2015). Bullying behavior, in this context, is seen as a product of dysfunctional interactions within these systems.

Additionally, Bandura's social learning (Zuo et al, 2025) helps explain the perpetuation of bullying behavior: children may model aggression observed in parents, media, or peers. Moral disengagement contributes to the persistence of bullying behavior by minimizing feelings of guilt or responsibility (Liu et al, 2023). Thus, preventing bullying involves not only individual-level intervention but systemic changes in how children learn social behavior. This is because deficits in social cognition, such as understanding others' perspectives, are associated with increased aggression (Kelij et al, 2022).

Prevention and Intervention

The studies reviewed suggest that multilevel, holistic intervention programs are more effective than single strategies. Programs such as Olweus Bullying Prevention Program and KiVa have shown reductions in bullying incidents by promoting empathy, peer support, and active adult monitoring (Smith et al, 2008). Developing students' empathy skills is a protective factor against both bullying perpetration and victimization (Hikmat et al, 2024). A meta-analysis confirms that empathy training can significantly reduce bullying behavior (Salavera et al, 2021).

In contrast, punishment-based approaches (Olweus, 2013) are often ineffective and may lead to increased resentment or retaliation. Integrative programs that include students, teachers, parents, and even the community are essential for sustainable change. Parent involvement in school programs strengthens anti-bullying outcomes (Christiana, 2023) . Besides that, integrating social-emotional learning into curricula may reduce bullying by fostering emotional competence and self-regulation (Fithria et al, 2025).

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CONCLUSION
This review concludes that verbal and relational bullying are the most prevalent forms among elementary school children and have significant negative impacts on their mental health, highlighting the urgent need for integrated school-based interventions that involve students, educators, and families.

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