

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMPATHY AND BULLYING BEHAVIOR IN SMKN STUDENTS IN WEST CIKARANG

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Abstract

This study aims to obtain an overview of the level of empathy and its relationship with bullying behavior in students of State Vocational High School (SMKN) in West Cikarang. This study uses a quantitative approach with a correlational method to identify the relationship between empathy variables and bullying behavior. The sampling technique used was convenience sampling, with a total of 124 respondents from SMKN students in West Cikarang. This method was chosen because of the ease of access to research subjects that are in accordance with predetermined criteria. Data collection was carried out using two main instruments, namely the bullying instrument adapted from the Brazilian Portuguese version of the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (OBVQ) to measure bullying behavior, and the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) to measure students' empathy levels. Both instruments have been widely used in previous studies and have good validity and reliability in measuring the construct in question. The data analysis techniques used in this study are descriptive statistics and correlation analysis to see the relationship between the two variables. The results of the study showed that there was a significant negative relationship between empathy and bullying behavior in SMKN students in West Cikarang. This means that the higher the level of empathy that students have, the lower their tendency to engage in bullying behavior. Conversely, low empathy is associated with increased potential for bullying behavior. These findings affirm the importance of developing empathy as one of the preventive efforts to reduce bullying behavior in the school environment, as well as being the basis for schools to design more effective and sustainable intervention programs.

Keywords: Empathy, Bullying, Vocational School Students, West Cikarang

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memperoleh gambaran mengenai tingkat empati serta hubungannya dengan perilaku perundungan pada siswa Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan Negeri (SMKN) di Cikarang Barat. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan metode korelasional untuk mengidentifikasi hubungan antara variabel empati dan perilaku perundungan. Teknik pengambilan sampel yang digunakan adalah convenience sampling, dengan jumlah responden sebanyak 124 siswa SMKN di Cikarang Barat. Metode ini dipilih karena kemudahan akses terhadap subjek penelitian yang sesuai dengan kriteria yang telah ditentukan. Pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan menggunakan dua instrumen utama, yaitu instrumen perundungan yang diadaptasi dari Brazilian Portuguese version of the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (OBVQ) untuk mengukur perilaku perundungan, serta Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) untuk mengukur tingkat empati siswa. Kedua instrumen tersebut telah banyak digunakan dalam

penelitian sebelumnya dan memiliki validitas serta reliabilitas yang baik dalam mengukur konstruk yang dimaksud. Teknik analisis data yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah statistik deskriptif dan analisis korelasi untuk melihat hubungan antara kedua variabel. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat hubungan negatif yang signifikan antara empati dengan perilaku perundungan pada siswa SMKN di Cikarang Barat. Artinya, semakin tinggi tingkat empati yang dimiliki siswa, maka semakin rendah kecenderungan mereka untuk melakukan perilaku perundungan. Sebaliknya, rendahnya empati berkaitan dengan meningkatnya potensi perilaku perundungan. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya pengembangan empati sebagai salah satu upaya preventif dalam mengurangi perilaku perundungan di lingkungan sekolah, serta menjadi dasar bagi pihak sekolah dalam merancang program intervensi yang lebih efektif dan berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: Empati, Perundungan, Siswa SMKN, Cikarang Barat

INTRODUCTION

Bullying in educational environments has become a pervasive and alarming phenomenon, particularly among adolescents in school settings. This issue is not only a reflection of interpersonal conflict among students but also represents a broader form of violence that can significantly affect the psychological, emotional, and social development of young individuals. Bullying is increasingly recognized as a critical concern in contemporary education systems worldwide, including Indonesia. According to Handayani (2025), bullying in schools is a common occurrence and constitutes a form of violence among teenagers that requires serious attention from educators, policymakers, and researchers. The widespread nature of bullying indicates that it is not an isolated issue but rather a systemic problem embedded within school cultures and peer interactions.

Statistical data further highlight the severity of bullying in Indonesia. Maghfiroh (2021) reports that among 78 countries, Indonesia ranks sixth in bullying incidents involving children, indicating a relatively high prevalence compared to other nations. The forms of bullying experienced by students vary, with physical bullying accounting for the highest proportion at 55.5%, followed by verbal bullying at 29.3%, and psychological bullying at 15.2%. These findings suggest that physical aggression remains the most dominant form of bullying, although verbal and psychological forms are also significant and can have long-term detrimental effects. Furthermore, data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI, 2025) reveal that in 2024 alone, there were 2,057 reported cases of bullying in schools. Similarly, the Indonesian Education Monitoring Network (JPPI) recorded 573 cases of violence in educational environments, with approximately 31% categorized as bullying cases (Zuhriyah, 2024). These figures underscore the urgent need for effective interventions to address bullying in schools.

From a conceptual perspective, bullying is defined as a form of aggressive behavior that is carried out repeatedly over time, with the intention of causing harm to the victim. Montero-Carretero et al. (2021) describe bullying as intentional and repetitive aggressive behavior that negatively impacts individuals physically, psychologically, and socially. A key characteristic of bullying is the imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the

victim, where the aggressor exerts dominance over a weaker individual. Sitohang et al. (2024) emphasize that bullying often arises from the misuse of power, where individuals exploit their physical, social, or psychological advantages to harm others. This imbalance of power differentiates bullying from other forms of conflict, as it involves systematic and sustained victimization.

Bullying can manifest in various forms, including physical, verbal, and psychological aggression. Physical bullying involves acts such as hitting, kicking, or damaging personal belongings, while verbal bullying includes name-calling, insults, and threats. Psychological bullying, on the other hand, involves behaviors such as social exclusion, intimidation, and spreading rumors. These forms of bullying often occur simultaneously, creating a compounded effect on the victim's well-being. As such, bullying can be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon that encompasses various types of harmful behaviors. Based on these definitions, bullying can be concluded as a form of intentional and repeated violence, whether physical, verbal, or psychological, inflicted by perpetrators on victims.

One of the key factors influencing bullying behavior is empathy. Empathy is widely recognized as an essential socio-emotional competence that enables individuals to understand and share the feelings of others. Garaigordobil (2009) defines empathy as a personality trait that allows individuals to perceive and respond to the emotional states of others, both cognitively and affectively. Cognitive empathy refers to the ability to understand another person's emotions and perspectives, while affective empathy involves the capacity to emotionally resonate with others' feelings. Both dimensions play a crucial role in shaping prosocial behavior and reducing aggressive tendencies.

Numerous studies have demonstrated the relationship between empathy and bullying behavior. Del Rey et al. (2016) found that individuals with low levels of cognitive and affective empathy are more likely to engage in bullying across different age groups and genders. Similarly, Mitsopoulou and Giovazolias (2015) argue that a lack of empathy prevents individuals from understanding the emotional impact of their actions, making them more prone to aggressive behavior. This lack of emotional awareness and perspective-taking reduces the likelihood of experiencing guilt or remorse, thereby facilitating bullying behavior. Furthermore, Baldry et al. (2015) highlight that low empathy is also associated with cyberbullying, indicating that the influence of empathy extends beyond traditional face-to-face interactions to digital environments.

Meta-analytical research by Zych et al. (2019) provides further evidence of the negative relationship between empathy and bullying. Their findings indicate that both cognitive and affective dimensions of empathy are inversely related to bullying behavior, meaning that higher levels of empathy are associated with lower levels of bullying. This relationship underscores the importance of empathy as a protective factor against aggressive behavior. In other words, individuals who are capable of understanding and sharing the emotions of others are less likely to harm them intentionally.

Interestingly, empathy is not only relevant to perpetrators but also to victims of bullying. Chan and Wong (2015) suggest that low levels of empathy may also be present in victims, which can affect their ability to respond effectively to bullying situations. This highlights the complex role of empathy in bullying dynamics, where both perpetrators and victims may exhibit deficiencies in socio-emotional skills. Therefore, interventions aimed at reducing bullying should focus on enhancing empathy among all students, not just those identified as aggressors. In the context of vocational high school students (SMKN) in West Cikarang, bullying remains a significant concern. Adolescents in vocational schools often experience unique social dynamics, including peer competition, identity formation, and exposure to diverse backgrounds. These factors can contribute to the emergence of bullying behaviors if not managed effectively. Moreover, the transitional nature of adolescence makes students more vulnerable to emotional instability, which can exacerbate aggressive tendencies.

The role of empathy in this context becomes particularly important, as it can serve as a key mechanism for promoting positive social interactions and reducing conflict. Developing empathy among students can foster mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation, thereby creating a more inclusive and supportive school environment. Educational institutions, particularly guidance and counseling (BK) teachers, play a crucial role in facilitating this process through targeted interventions and programs. Despite the growing body of research on bullying and empathy, there remains a need for context-specific studies that examine these variables within particular educational settings, such as vocational schools in West Cikarang. Most previous studies have been conducted in general school settings or in different cultural contexts, which may not fully capture the unique characteristics of vocational education environments in Indonesia. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by investigating the relationship between empathy and bullying behavior among SMKN students in West Cikarang.

This study is expected to provide valuable insights into the levels of empathy and bullying among students, as well as the extent to which empathy influences bullying behavior. By understanding this relationship, educators and policymakers can develop more effective strategies to prevent bullying and promote positive social behavior in schools. Specifically, the findings of this study can serve as a reference for guidance and counseling teachers in designing intervention programs that focus on empathy development. In conclusion, bullying is a complex and multifaceted issue that requires a comprehensive approach to address. Empathy has been identified as a key factor in reducing bullying behavior, highlighting the importance of socio-emotional education in schools. By fostering empathy among students, it is possible to create a safer and more supportive learning environment, ultimately contributing to the overall well-being and development of adolescents.

METHODS

This study uses a quantitative approach with a correlational method that aims to determine the relationship between empathy and bullying behavior at SMKN Cikarang Barat. The

population in this study is all students of SMKN in West Cikarang which totals 124 students. Sampling techniques are carried out Techniques *convenience sampling*. Technique *convenience sampling* is a sampling technique based on the availability of elements and ease of access to obtain them (And & Bougie, 2016) and in accordance with the criteria determined by the researcher (Siregar, 2017). Data collection in this study was carried out by distributing two instruments, including instruments of bullying are *Brazilian Portuguese version of the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (OBVQ)* made by Olweus, (1993) and has been adapted and used to measure bullying in high school students. The instrument consists of 23 items and is divided into 2 categories, namely *direct bullying* (direct bullying) and *indirect bullying* (indirect bullying) . In addition, to measure empathy, researchers use instruments *Interpersonal Reactivity Indeks (IRI)* developed by . This instrument has 28 items that have 4 aspects including (Davis, 1983)*perspective taking, fantasy, empathic concern, and personal distress*.

Before use, the instrument has gone through validity and reliability tests. The validity test was carried out using *the Pearson Product-Moment* correlation technique, while the reliability test used *Cronbach's Alpha* method. The collected data were analyzed using *the Pearson Product-Moment correlation technique* to measure the relationship between empathy and bullying behavior of students of SMKN Cikarang Barat. The entire data analysis process is carried out with the help of SPSS software *version 25 and Microsoft Office Excel 15*. This study is expected to be able to provide an overview of bullying that occurs in students at SMKN Cikarang Barat and a clear relationship regarding the empathy variable and bullying behavior of SMKN Cikarang Barat students, as well as become a reference source for BK teachers to create relevant guidance and counseling programs at SMKN Cikarang Barat.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of data analysis in this study, it shows that 124 students at SMKN Cikarang Barat who filled in the instrument *Brazilian Portuguese version of the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (OBVQ)* It was found that 17 students (14%) had a low level of bullying behavior, 78 students (63%) had a moderate level of bullying behavior, and 29 students (23%) had a high level of bullying. Thus, the analysis can be concluded that the majority of students tend to carry out bullying behavior in the moderate category. Clearly the distribution of the level of bullying behavior of students at SMKN Cikarang Barat can be seen in the table below:

Table 1. Categorization of the Level of Bullying Behavior of Students at SMKN Cikarang Barat

CATEGORY	NORM	QUANTITY
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LOW	$X < 24.8$	17
MEDIUM	$24.8 < X < 44.4$	78
HEIGHT	$X > 44.4$	29

With the explanation above, it is appropriate for BK teachers at SMKN Cikarang Barat to provide alleviation services immediately in order to overcome bullying behavior that occurs in students with high categories. Meanwhile, students in the medium and low categories are still made prevention program services so that the phenomenon of bullying behavior can be avoided properly in the school. As for the results of data analysis regarding the level of empathy in students at SMKN Cikarang Barat, the researcher presents it in the table below:

Table 2. Categorization of Students' Empathy Level at SMKN Cikarang Barat

CATEGORY	NORM	QUANTITY
LOW	$X < 87,6$	19
MEDIUM	$87.6 < X < 110$	86
HEIGHT	$X > 110$	19

Based on Table 2 above, it can be seen that the majority of students at SMKN Cikarang Barat have a moderate level of empathy.

Hypothesis

A correlation test using *Pearson product-moment correlation* showed that empathy and bullying were correlated in a negative and significant direction, $r = -0.179$, $p = 0.047$. This finding implies that the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. On the other hand, the alternative hypothesis (H_a) that states that there is a relationship between empathy and bullying behavior is acceptable. In detail, the researcher presented the results of the empathy correlation test with bullying behavior of students at SMKN Cikarang Barat as follows:

Table 3. Correlations of Empathy with Student Bullying Behavior at SMKN Cikarang Barat

		Empat hy	Bullying
EMPAT HY	Pearson Correlation	1	-.179*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.047
	N	124	124
BULLYI NG	Pearson Correlation	-.179*	1

	Sig. (2-tailed)	.047	
	N	124	124

***. CORRELATION IS SIGNIFICANT AT THE 0.05 LEVEL (2-TAILED).**

The Relationship of Empathy and Bullying Behavior

The results of the hypothesis test showed a significant negative correlation between empathy with bullying behavior in students at SMKN Cikarang Barat, meaning that students who have a high level of empathy tend to commit bullying in the low category and vice versa. These findings are in line with the results of research conducted by from Maghfiroh, A., (2021); Mertayasa, (2024); Azizah et al., 2025) shows that Empathy is negatively related to bullying behavior. Furthermore, the results of the meta-analysis conducted by Hikmat et al., (2024) which reveals that pEducators with a high level of empathy tend to be more active in defending victims of bullying, while low levels of empathy tend to reinforce bullying behavior or passive observer attitudes. In addition, his findings also mentioned that affective empathy that students have refers to their ability to feel and empathize with other people's emotions directly. For example, when a person sees someone who is suffering, they feel deep sympathy or sadness in response to the experience. Therefore, affective empathy is often considered a strong emotional drive to help others and can motivate individuals to act proactively in helping those who need support.

Meanwhile, cognitive empathy involves the ability of learners to understand and interpret the feelings of others rationally and cognitively. It involves the ability to identify and understand the perspective of others, without even feeling the same emotions as them. For example, individuals with high levels of cognitive empathy may be able to understand the reasons behind someone's actions or feelings, even if they don't feel the same emotions. This ability allows individuals to become more rational and objective in helping others, taking into account the different factors and perspectives involved in a particular situation.

CONCLUSION

Based on As a result of the research and discussion above, it can be concluded that there is a significant negative relationship between empathy and bullying behavior in students at SMKN Cikarang Barat. In addition to bullying behavior being influenced by high and low levels of empathy, other factors such as school climate also contribute to overcoming bullying behavior that is increasingly prevalent in students from year to year. As with the findings made by Montero-Carretero et al., (2021) The It shows that different dimensions of the school climate predict moral release, empathy, and victimization, and this, in turn, predicts the occurrence of bullying. In addition, the results of his research also show the need to create a supportive educational environment to reduce the rate of moral detachment and victimization and increase empathy in students as a strategy to prevent

the negative consequences associated with bullying. The same is true of the findings of the Wigati et al., (2020) that empathy indicated to play a role in cyberbullying in high school students in Merangin, Jambi. Furthermore, the school climate has also been shown to have a significant role in cyberbullying. Thus, for the next researcher, it is recommended to involve other variables that can contribute to addressing the level of bullying behavior that occurs in students, such as the school climate.

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