

## Are the Impacts of Bullying Always Negative? Case Study of Resilience in Adult Bullying Victims

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze whether the impact of bullying was always negative. So far, there has been a view that bullying always has a negative effect on its victims. This study wants to observe bullying's relation to resilience. Several questions arising from this study include: (a) what forms of bullying increase resilience, and (b). how do we model the resilience dynamics of the impact of bullying? The research method used was qualitative research using case studies. The informants of this study were bullying victims who were adults and did not have psychological disorders/barriers. Data collection was carried out using thorough interviews with informants. Data analysis was carried out by writing down the results of the interviews verbatim and then analyzing them by thematic analysis. The thematic analysis is then narrated, conforming to the focus of the problem. The results of this study concluded that (a) forms of bullying that may increase resilience include verbal bullying and social bullying; on the contrary, physical bullying causes pain and trauma while cyberbullying in this study was not a case because the informants did not experience much influence from cyber media. (b) resilience dynamics occur when individuals perceive bullying as a motivator and a mirror to rise. Forms of verbal bullying that undermine the competence and condition of the victim can be changed by individuals into positive things. (c) From this study, it can also be concluded that social support is critical in helping to change negative perceptions into positive ones and providing guarantees of safety and comfort to victims of bullying. This research suggests that the role of family, close friends, and a positive environment can increase resilience among victims. Openness is also essential for people if they want to solve their experience with bullying handled immediately.

**Keywords:** *bullying; resiliency; victims.*

### Introduction

Bullying is defined as any intentional, repeated aggressive behavior directed by a perpetrator against a target in the same age group (Olweus, 2005). According to the American Psychological Association (2003), bullying is aggressive behavior that is characterized by three conditions, notably: (a) negative behavior that aims to damage or harm, (b) repeated behavior for a certain period of time, (c) There exists a disparity in power or potency among the parties engaged. Certain circumstances pertain more to those that have the potential to inflict trauma, anxiety, and unease upon the victim (APA, 2023).

Bullying happens everywhere: schools, workplaces, friend groups, online, and it doesn't just happen to children (Case, 2023). As long as social interaction among people exists, bullying can potentially occur. Some places where bullying occurs include at school, at work, in the community, in the political environment, in the military settings, and in cyberspace. Based on the place or setting of this incident, the types of bullying include at school (school bullying) and on campus, at work (workplace bullying), in the community (thugs, motorcycle gangs), in the political



environment (political bullying), in the military environment (military bullying) and hazing. The last bullying that occurs in cyberspace is called cyberbullying.

Bullying usually occurs because there is an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim. There are three forms of bullying, notably physical (hitting, pinching), verbal (cursing, gossiping, mocking), and psychological (intimidating, isolating, ignoring and discriminating) (Siswati & Widayanti, 2009).

Three parties are involved when discussing bullying: perpetrators, victims, and witnesses (bystanders). There is an impact on each of the parties involved in bullying. Besides affecting the perpetrator, bullying involves witnesses or ordinary people, known as bystanders. Bystanders are people who hear or see bullying happening. There are two kinds of bystanders, i.e., hurtful and helpful bystanders. Hurtful bystanders usually encourage or support the bully to bully. Hurtful bystanders are individuals who choose to remain silent and observe acts of bullying without taking action. Conversely, helpful bystanders are characterized by their willingness to intervene and protect bullying victims or to seek assistance when confronted with instances of bullying (Levine & Crowther, 2008).

There is a negative impact on adult victims of bullying. Bullying among school-age children is an issue of public health significance that receives limited attention in Middle Eastern nations such as Iran (Rezapour et al., 2019). In this study, there is a correlation between bullying and its impact on mental health. Wolke and Lereya (2015) also claimed that children who were victims of bullying have been consistently found to be at higher risk for internalizing problems, in particular diagnoses of anxiety disorder and depression in young adulthood and middle adulthood (18–50 years of age).

When a teenager receives ridicule from his peers, he will feel depressed, and this depressed feeling will lead to negative emotions, such as anger, resentment, annoyance, depression, fear, shame, sadness, discomfort, and threat, but powerless to deal with it. In the long term, these emotions can lead to feelings of inferiority that one is not worthy of. When an individual can get out of a negative situation so that he can get up and recover, this shows a specific ability known as resilience (Tugade & Fredrikson, 2004).

Even though the negative impact of bullying is more prominent than its positive impact, we as humans should take a bright spot from all the events that happen to us in life, including the unpleasant ones. The positive impact makes the victim feel the influence and also change that is positive/builds the victim to be even better than before. Therefore, the author thinks that the positive impact that bullying victims have needs to be studied further to take advantage of the existing benefits to build better personal character for the victims.

Although the author explains the positive effects of bullying, it should be emphasized that the author does not support any form of bullying that is a threat to a person's physical, mental, and psychological health that has the potential to have a lasting impact and pose a danger to oneself and others around them.

Resilience is an individual's ability to bounce back from a downturn. There are three sources of resilience, i.e., I am, I have, and I can (Grotberg, 2003). Resilience can be increased when support is given (I have), when internal strengths such as self-confidence, an optimistic attitude, an attitude of respect and empathy are developed (I am), and when interpersonal skills and problem-solving are acquired (Grotberg, 2003). Reivich and Shatte (2002) describe resilience as the ability to cope and adapt when faced with difficult events and problems in life. Resilience is a power that exists within a person to overcome. According to Grotberg (2003), each individual has a different quality of resilience. The age level determines this quality, level of development, intensity when dealing with unpleasant situations, and the amount of social support that forms the individual's resilience. During its development, an individual's ability to bounce back from adversity

is called resilience (Sibert, 2005). Sibert (2005) explains that resilient individuals can cope well with feelings when problems override them and are difficult to accept.

Based on the explanation above, it appears that the impact of bullying on bullying victims is quite varied. They could have a negative effect, but some become resilient. The researcher intends to explore how bullying victims become resilient after experiencing bullying and how the components of resilience possessed by individuals in terms of Grotberg's theory must be studied so that students, parents, and schools are prepared to deal with bullying. By having the necessary readiness, it is hoped that the negative impacts caused by bullying can be prevented.

From the above description, this study aims to analyze whether the impact of bullying was always negative. So far, there has been a view that bullying always has a negative effect on its victims. Several questions arisen from this study include: a) what kinds of bullying that increase resilience, b) How do we model the resilience dynamics of the impact of bullying?

## Method

The research method used was qualitative research using case studies. According to Tellis (1997), this method can also be effectively employed with other research methods. This approach's extensive application and dependability should encourage its wider adoption among researchers, particularly when they gain a comprehensive understanding of its distinctive characteristics. Stake (1995) recommended that the selection offers the opportunity to maximize what can be learned, knowing that time is limited. Hence, the cases that are selected should be easy and willing subjects.

The informants of this study are victims of bullying who are adults and do not have psychological disorders/barriers. This criterion is chosen because if the informant is unhappy or has psychological problems, that means they still have psychological problems and can't see their out from the negative impact of bullying. There are 3 informants from this study—first, the first subject with a career as a teacher in a junior high school. The second subject is the profession as an "entrepreneur", and the third subject is a retired private company who has served as a leader. Subjects were selected based on existing criteria and cases and according to information criteria—research subjects willing to give informed consent.

Data collection was carried out using thorough interviews with informants. Data analysis was carried out by writing down the results of the interviews verbatim and then analyzing them by thematic analysis. From the thematic analysis is then narrated according to the focus of the problem. Yin (1994) recommended the use of case-study protocol as part of a carefully designed research project that would include the following sections: a) Overview of the project (project objectives and case study issues), b) Field procedures (credentials and access to sites), c) Questions (specific questions that the investigator must keep in mind during data collection), d) Guide for the report (outline, format for the narrative).

## Results

### **Forms of Bullying and Their Impact on Resilience**

Based on the results of the thorough interviews, the forms of bullying experienced by the informants were found. From the three informants, bullying occurred in childhood and adolescence and commonly happened in the playground and school environment. The playground is usually located in the yard around the house, which, in the afternoon or after returning home, seems to be used a lot for children to play together. This playground can be the yard, sports fields, or other places where children usually gather.

Schools are also places where bullying often occurs. From leaving to going home, school students may experience bullying. From leaving the house, meeting on the street, arriving at school, and returning home, there are all opportunities for bullying to occur. When the children go

to school, calling names by linking body shapes and inviting them to run until school, which ends in heartache. While in class, being nosy and teasing can also be a form of bullying. Throwing chalk and hiding pencils, books, and sometimes bags are also daily actions that occur frequently. Coming home from school also has the potential to become a location for bullying, although not always.

Informant 1 experienced bullying with the nickname "Gendhut" because this person is a bit fat. Informant 2 was threatened and feared that he would be shunned in friendship. Information 2 also often experiences bullying because her friend hid her school books and pencils. Meanwhile, informant 3 did not experience bullying with harsh words but rather social bullying, such as being unaccompanied.

Forms of bullying when they were in primary and secondary education began to shift. Swear words and harsh words also often appear. Beatings and kicks, accompanied by threats, also occurred. Bullying no longer occurs between individuals but also involves groups. Hitting and sometimes threats also occurred. Bullying by groups against individuals also occurs. At this time, the threat of being "unaccompanied" or shunned is a form of bullying experienced by these victims. When the peer group becomes aware of the subject's cowardice, they invite him for a stroll and play within the graveyard, only to abruptly desert him amidst the eerie surroundings of the burial ground.

An example of such a case was experienced by informant 3. The subject stated: "One time, my friends made fun of me and asked me for money. If I don't give my money, they shun me". The money is used to buy food in the school canteen. Meanwhile, the case experienced by informant 2 was that he was beaten because after playing, he lost and made fun of each other. Meanwhile, subject 1 was about to be thrown a stone because after playing with throwing stones, it was known as "aborted the mountain." Because they feel defeated and dissatisfied with the defeat, then the threat is made.

The form of bullying in senior secondary education is different again. Relational bullying is more common. When associated with words, then bullying can be in the form of harsh words. Bullying activities at this age have begun to decrease when associated with violence. As individuals grow older, they begin to experience a maturation process, leading to heightened social interaction. Friendship is more about preserving harmony, yet it is not unheard of for individuals to exploit their friendships to bully others.

In this study, there were no victims of sexual bullying or cyberbullying. The average birth year of the subjects becoming informants ranged from the 1960s to the 1970s. The internet doesn't exist yet. The rural atmosphere, full of games between neighbors and friends, allows direct interaction more often than indirect one. From the bullying experiences of the two subjects, it can be explained that the forms or types of bullying experienced, including verbal bullying, relational bullying, physical bullying, and being shunned by friends, seem to be essential sources.

### ***Resilience Dynamics on Individual Victims of Bullying***

The dynamics of resilience in individual victims of bullying who have succeeded in overcoming and creating resilience is shown from the process of perception of the source or cause of bullying. Perception plays a vital role in building resilience or psychological trauma due to bullying.

Informant 1 said that at first, he was angry, protested, and could not accept the condition because my friends shunned me. From there, the informant began to see the positive side. If I'm away from them, then I will have a lot of time to think about myself and can study hard again. With this condition, the informant took advantage of the shunned condition by studying more frequently and managing himself to outperform his friends.

Meanwhile, informant 2 learnt that by being teased in class when the book was hidden, the subject became more careful in keeping her book and stationery in her bag. Meanwhile, informant

3, who used to be small in stature, was bullied socially. He did lots of sports so that his body would grow bigger, and he participated in martial arts.

Of the three cases above, it can be analyzed that when subjects are faced with decline, they generally carry out an adaptation process, and this is done after perceiving and seeing acts of bullying towards them and then having positive or negative perceptions. When someone faces the problem of bullying, that person will perceive that bullying has two options: bullying can be used as a motivator, and bullying can be used as a threat to the victim. Bullying becomes a motivator when the subject sees the positive actions he is experiencing, adapts, gives positive values, and takes further, more useful actions. Bullying becomes a threat when the subject evaluates negatively the actions that are treated to him and sees this form of behavior with less adaptive actions.

Perception and adaptive behavior of victims of bullying are the keys to success in dealing with bullying. Therefore, victims need to have a way of perceiving problems and the ability to adapt to pressure or stressors due to bullying. Help for victims to interpret or perceive is required in line with the age of the victim of bullying. The younger the age, the more guidance or support is needed compared to adults. In the case that was experienced by informant 1, when his friends were about to ostracize him, his parents' instructions were that you better study at home, right? It's better than just playing with enemies. The support of parents or close people is essential because the people around us can be a place to ask if the victim of depression needs help and also guidance to get rid of bullying or overcome bullying.

## Discussion

### **Forms of Bullying and Their Impact on Resilience**

Bullying is directly related to peer victimization, especially in schools. Peer victimization harms the victim's health, especially in inducing states of psychological distress and impaired physical health (Mohan & Bakar, 2021). Based on the data obtained in the field, the forms of bullying that have an impact on resilience in this study are verbal bullying, relational bullying, and physical bullying. Meanwhile, sexual bullying and cyberbullying do not yet exist because the average informant did not use the internet during his childhood and secondary education.

The form of bullying produced in this study follows the type of bullying presented by Coloroso (2007). According to Coloroso (2007), there are three types of bullying i.e., a) Verbal bullying, b) Physical bullying, c) Relational bullying. Verbal bullying can take the form of name-calling, taunting, belittling, cruel criticism, personal defamation, racist slurs, sexually suggestive (of a sexual nature) or sexually abusive remarks. Physical bullying can take the form of slapping, hitting, choking, poking, punching, kicking, biting, scratching, twisting, spitting, or damaging the victim's clothes or property. Relational bullying is a form that is difficult to detect.

Meanwhile, sexual bullying did not occur in this study because the study was more on rights, and norms seemed to influence children at that time to talk about sexual problems. So, among children and adolescents of their age at that time, no one dared to mention sexual matters at all or commit acts of harassment related to sexual issues.

### **Resilience Dynamics on Individual Victims of Bullying**

Based on the results of this study, typically, victims of bullying see the cases they are facing and then change them into positive ones. Bullying is not seen as making him weak but as trying to survive and adapt to favorable situations. The act of bullying made him try to cope with the stress he was facing. This coping aligns with Kumpfer's (1999) that coping has a significant role in developing resilience. So, it can be argued that coping affects a person's resilience. Li (2008) says resilience results from active coping, such as seeking help and solving problems. According to



Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping is a cognitive and behavioral effort carried out continuously to manage internal and external pressures considered threatening.

Meanwhile, Feldman et al. (1999) define coping as efforts made by individuals to control, reduce, or learn to tolerate threats that can cause stress. Wu et al. (2020) said understanding the relationship between students' coping styles and undergraduate psychological resilience is crucial for undergraduates' mental health and long-term development. Perceptions are changed from negative to positive. Build self-confidence, seek social support, build trust in those closest to you, take positive action, recover and even exceed expectations. Individuals often experience stress when they find themselves unable to exert control over a particular event or stressor. This sense of helplessness frequently leads to the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among those affected.

Two factors are always linked in the study of resilience: protective and risk factors. Earvolino-Ramirez (2007) defines protective factors, or what is commonly referred to as protective factors, as specific attributes or situations where these situations are needed in forming resilience.

The risk factor in resilience is the possibility of having unpleasant conditions that are felt by individuals such as members of high-risk groups, namely children who grow up in lower economic families status, grow up in violent environments, are born with disabilities, injuries, or have an illness, experience stress and trauma. Risk factors can come from biological, psychological, environmental and socio-economic factors that influence the possibility of vulnerability to stress (Schoon, 2006)

From this study, protective factors occur in individuals who perceive threats or acts of bullying as a trigger to rise and become a motivator for self-development or individual self-improvement. Meanwhile, the risk factor in this case was his tiny body and slurred speech, which made the subject study even harder so that he would not be called negative.

From this study, the role of parents' close friends is also crucial. The smoothness in getting up is strongly supported by social support from the surrounding environment. The role of parents to help deal with stress due to bullying and the role of friends to motivate victims is very important. The stressor will be readily understood as a motivator if this social support appears and self-disclosure of victims of bullying also appears.

## Conclusion

This study concluded that (a) bullying can increase resilience when it is perceived positively by turning it into a motivator to grow and develop. (b) resilience dynamics occur when individuals perceive bullying as a motivator and a mirror to rise. Forms of verbal bullying that undermine the competence and condition of the victim can be changed by individuals into positive things. (c) From this study, it can also be concluded that the role of social support is very important in helping to change negative perceptions into positive ones and providing guarantees of safety and comfort to victims of bullying.

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