Exploring Students' Perceptions of Bullying: A Case Study in a Malaysian Higher Education Institution

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ABSTRACT

Recognized as a significant source of trauma for adolescents, bullying necessitates an ecological framework to achieve a comprehensive understanding. Thus, this study pursued three main objectives: evaluating students' perceptions of bullying in a higher learning institution, analyzing influencing factors, and comparing perceptions between male and female students. To gather the required data, questionnaires were administered to a sample of students from an institution. Out of a total student population of 6190, 361 questionnaires were distributed, resulting in a 41% response rate. The results indicated a high perception of bullying occurrence. Peer pressure emerged as the most influential factor, obtaining the highest agreement with an average rating of 4.41, emphasizing its significance. The family factor ranked second at 4.07, while the individual factor received the lowest mean rating at 3.91. Meanwhile, no significant gender impact was observed. A key recommendation for future research is for students to proactively address bullying by reporting incidents, asserting their rights, and avoiding silence to prevent potential mental and physical health issues. Cultivating friendships is crucial, and parents should focus on bonding with their children to deter bullying. Boosting self-esteem is another vital measure to reduce the likelihood of becoming a target for bullies. Given the absence of gender-based distinctions in bullying, higher educational institutions should actively promote awareness about bullying for all students, regardless of gender.

Keywords: *bullying, family factors, gender, individual factors, peer factors*

INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a pervasive issue that can manifest in various settings, often making it conspicuous and prompting bystanders to take notice and intervene. It serves to distinguish the vulnerable from the aggressor. Previous studies have posited that bullying is not confined to specific social strata but is prevalent even in workplace environments. Sivaraman, Nye, and Bowes (2019) established a link between bullying and various forms of psychological and physical aggression, while Türkmenet et al. (2013) provided comprehensive data on the prevalence of bullying issues through extensive surveys in Malaysia. In alignment with the perspectives of Malaysia's Ministry of Education, Vijaindren (2019) reported over 14,000 instances of bullying, with a majority involving physical abuse, occurring between 2012 and 2015. A cross-sectional survey conducted by Nur et al. (2023) involved 677 samples from 23 secondary schools in the north of Peninsular Malaysia using a questionnaire to collect bullying data. Exploratory factor analysis revealed four common factors among Malaysian teenagers: physical bullying, verbal bullying, antisocial bullying, and cyberbullying. Each factor shows a high-reliability value between .73 to .89. where physical bullying has the highest factor loading among the four bullying constructs examined in the study.

In a study conducted by Skrzypiec (2008), the impact of bullying on student learning, social and entrepreneurial well-being, and psychological health was assessed. The study included approximately 1400 graduates from Australian tertiary institutions who had completed seven, eight, or nine graduate courses. The research revealed that 33% of students who had experienced bullying reported significant difficulties in focusing and concentrating on their learning. Moreover, this fear of being bullied was closely associated with these difficulties. Similarly, a study by Plan International emphasized the global prevalence of bullying in schools, with harassed students frequently experiencing concentration issues and learning difficulties (Moore et al., 2008). Bullying, a form of collective aggression, remains a pervasive challenge for many young students. Among the various strategies for assessing bullying, self-assessment methods hold particular significance, requiring individuals to consistently exhibit observed provocation mechanisms within a defined time frame or express their subjective experiences as victims (Nansel et al., 2001). A cross-sectional survey in northern Malaysia involving 677 samples from 23 secondary schools used a questionnaire to collect data on adolescent bullying (Busthami Nur et al., 2023). Results revealed four prevalent bullying factors: physical bullying, verbal bullying, antisocial bullying, and cyberbullying. Each factor showed high reliability (ranging from .73 to .89), with physical bullying having the highest factor loading. This study underscores the presence of bullying among Malaysian adolescents, particularly physical bullying, highlighting the need for serious attention from school leaders, the Malaysian Ministry of Education, and the community to educate youths on the negative societal impact of such behaviour.

The tragic passing of Zulfarhan Osman Zulkarnain, a student enrolled at Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia (UPNM), on May 22, 2017, sent shockwaves throughout the Malaysian community. This heart-wrenching incident reverberated due to the distressing bullying experience Zulfarhan endured. He became the target of a brutal and relentless physical assaults inflicted by his fellow students, using implements such as belts, rubber pipes, cloth hangers, and even a heated iron. Shockingly, these actions resulted in severe burns covering approximately 80% of the victim's body surface (Wahab & Sakip, 2019). This case deeply concerned the Malaysian community, underscoring the pressing need for appropriate measures to prevent such occurrences in higher education institutions. Bullying is not confined to workplaces and schools; university students in Malaysia also experience incidents of intimidation. Hence, this study focuses on the specific context of bullying among students in one higher education institution in Malaysia thereby narrowing the scope to this demographic. The objective is to examine the potential associations between bullying and peer, family, and individual factors. Furthermore, the study seeks to verify if there is a significant difference in students' perceptions of bullying based on gender.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bullying

In recent decades, there has been a pervasive issue of bullying in both office and classroom settings. This concern has prompted increased research in countries like Finland (e.g., Analitis et al. 2009; Coleyshaw, 2010). Examining data from the Global School-Based Student Health Survey between 2003 and 2015 in 65 countries, a study by Man et al. (2022) investigated the impact of the frequency and type of bullying on adolescent mental health. Among the 167,286 adolescents in the sample, the prevalence of bullying stood at 32.03%, with Africa exhibiting the highest rate among the countries studied. In particular, verbal bullying appeared with the highest prevalence and showed the greatest negative impact on adolescent mental health. However, despite these efforts, there is a noticeable gap in university-level studies on bullying, leaving a significant lack of awareness regarding how university students perceive and experience this problem. Research indicates that bullying not only impacts immediate well-being but also raises the risk of mental and psychological issues in the future. Roles associated with bullying can persist from school to work, impacting individuals throughout their lives (e.g., Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Meland et al., 2010).

Bullying among students remains a significant social problem in many parts of the world, as exemplified by recent distressing cases in Malaysia. In one instance, a student of music was violently harassed by former schoolmates, sparking outrage and social media attention (Malay Mail Online, 2017). Shockingly, this was the second case in less than two weeks where a senior student tragically lost his life due to inhumane abuse and murder by fellow students (The Star Online, 2017). These incidents are deeply troubling, highlighting the serious consequences of bullying in Malaysia and drawing international attention. The fact that these incidents involve adolescents suggests that addressing bullying practices at a younger age may prevent or alter such actions, especially during primary school years (Craven et al., 2007). It is now well-known that bullying can persist as students transition to high school and even university. The involvement of children as young as elementary school age in bullying poses a significant societal challenge, and some scholars argue that bullies are more likely to engage in more severe criminal behaviour during adolescence and adulthood (Haynie et al., 2001).

Despite the prevalence of college bullying in Malaysian institutions, there have been relatively few studies on school bullying in Malaysia, particularly in the last two decades, despite frequent media reports. Existing research suggests that while bullying is widespread among Malaysian school students, it may not have reached alarming levels. For example, a study on "Bullying among elementary school children in Malaysia" found that bullying is prevalent among school students, emphasizing the need for further investigation and long-term strategies to address this issue. The study revealed that a significant portion of students engaged in various forms of bullying, with psychological bullying being more common than physical bullying (Uba et al., 2010). Furthermore, bullying incidents and issues can occur at any time and in any location, including Islamic educational institutions. Numerous reports on the factors triggering bullying have been consistently published. Muluk's et al. (2021) study reveals that individuals subjected to bullying experience four distressing conditions: diminished confidence, heightened stress, increased anxiety, and a passive demeanor.

Peer Factor

Social vulnerabilities, including aspects like social processes, low social status, avoidance of peers, and feelings of social inadequacy are significant factors that make individuals susceptible to mental and physical abuse, particularly among males (Juvonen et al., 2003; Gendron et al., 2011). One noteworthy finding is that superficiality is a substantial predictor of juvenile victimization in various grade levels, including grades 5, 8, and 11, over a one-year period. In such cases, seeking help from school counselors specializing in mental health can play a vital role in addressing victimization (Green et al., 2011).

The development of overly negative expectations of teachers by students is another crucial indicator of victimization, often influenced by peer social reinforcement, which has demonstrated its effectiveness in reducing bullying, particularly in grades 5, 8, and 11. However, it is worth noting that some statistics indicate that students from lower-status groups may form stigmatized groups that engage in bullying against higher-status individuals (Barboza et al., 2009). Victims may hesitate to report bullying to authorities due to concerns about potential retaliation by the bullies (Morrison, 2002). However, research has found that boys are more likely to engage in bullying than girls (Williams & Guerra, 2007). Significantly, predictors of aggression, such as a superficial attitude, align with predictors of bullying, such as social intervention (Rose et al., 2015; Meyers-Adams & Conner, 2008). Both bullies and victims often experience social exclusion from their peers (Barboza et al., 2009). Furthermore, students with a pessimistic view of school are at a greater risk of engaging in both violent behaviours (as aggressors) and avoidance behaviours (as victims), including school avoidance. The interplay between victimization and bullying is a recurring theme in the study of bullying and its victims.

Furthermore, a 2020 study conducted by Pörhölä et al. gathered survey data from undergraduates in 47 universities across four countries—Argentina (N = 969), Estonia (N = 1053), Finland (N = 4403), and the United States (N = 2072). The findings revealed a significant prevalence of bullying during university studies, involving both fellow students and staff members. With substantial sample sizes and consistent measures, the study corroborated previous results while emphasizing pronounced cultural variations in bullying prevalence and forms. The results indicated a transformation in university-level bullying, resembling patterns observed in workplace bullying. Argentina displayed the highest overall rates of bullying victimization and perpetration, followed by the USA, Finland, and Estonia. Notably, Estonia reported the highest incidence of victimization by university personnel, followed by Argentina, the USA, and Finland.

Family Factor

Various family-related risk factors are associated with bullying, including over-involved/protective mothers and distant/over-important fathers (Duncan, 2004), abusive parents (Barboza et al., 2009), and sibling bullying (Barboza et al., 2009). However, family life factors, such as parental interference and sibling bullying, are also commission risk factors (Guerra et al., 2011). Victims of domestic bullying may sometimes internalize this behaviour, essentially "bullying themselves" (Guerra et al., 2011). Despite these connections, deLara (2020) emphasizes that family bullying's impacts have received less attention in research, leading to a limited understanding of its effects.

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According to Orpinas and Morne (2006), teenagers' susceptibility to being bullied is closely linked to negative family experiences. Research has consistently shown that poor parent-child relationships and communication increase the likelihood of being bullied (Moon et al., 2010; Stevens et al., 2002). A study by Jaynes (2008) examined parental involvement and bullying among students in grades 7 to 12, identified parental involvement as a predictor of bullying. Scholars studying family factors associated with children's resilience to bullying found that a warm maternal and paternal relationship, friendly sibling interactions, and a positive home atmosphere reduce the risk of being bullied (Bowes et al., 2010). Warm and supportive family relationships act as protective factors, helping to shield children from the negative effects associated with bullying victimization.

Individual Factor

The primary defining characteristic of bullying lies in the degree of relative power inequality. Bullying is essentially a means to gain and maintain control, often providing individuals, especially young people, a way to alleviate feelings of worthlessness and powerlessness (Barboza et al., 2009; Guerra et al., 2011). Based on insights from focus groups, boys may engage in bullying to elevate their status among peers and establish dominance (Guerra et al., 2011). This can involve acts of violence against other males or undermining the reputation of girls, which is seen as a way to limit competition through spreading rumors, causing disturbances, and exclusion, all aimed at increasing their physical and sexual attractiveness. This behaviour is often rooted in ongoing vulnerability, which can shift individuals between the roles of perpetrator and victim. However, it is worth noting that some individuals may be physically and socially stronger than their counterparts, and they tend to become bullies (Juvonen et al., 2003). Feelings of exclusion and vulnerability are closely associated with bullying (Barboza et al., 2009). Overweight and obese individuals also face an increased likelihood of being victims of bullying, as evidenced by studies (VanGeel et al., 2014). The quality of an individual's relationships with their environment, including peers and parents, serves as an indicator of susceptibility to school bullying, with acceptance in school potentially acting as a protective factor against bullying (Martínez Sánchez et al., 2019). Moreover, factors such as age, gender, coping skills, family environment, and the presence of psychiatric disorders have been identified as related influences on bullying behaviours, as indicated by various studies (Halabi et al., 2018; Khamis, 2015)

One key observation is that while adults, such as those conducting research for the WHO, might attribute problems and risks to a lack of communication or understanding, young people can interpret behaviour from a completely different perspective. Their views on these problems and risks may not align with those of adults, even when they appear to result from a lack of communication and gender dynamics (Guerra et al., 2011). Most studies on bullying primarily rely on self-reported information from young people. Therefore, an optimistic approach to anti-bullying efforts can be considered once the outcomes and preparatory interventions have been thoroughly examined.

Gender and Bullying

In a 2022 study led by Azid et al., the examination of gender's influence on the likelihood of Malaysian school students engaging as bullies or becoming victims of bullying was conducted. The study, encompassing 700 students aged 13, 14, and 16, employed questionnaires to evaluate bullying and victimization across various dimensions (physical, verbal, anti-social, and cyber). The sample comprised 349 males and 351 females. The findings indicated a noteworthy gender disparity in the inclination to act as a bully, with male students demonstrating a higher propensity than their female counterparts. However, there was no significant gender difference in the overall likelihood of being a bullying victim. Nonetheless, when specific categories such as physical bullying and cyberbullying were considered, gender-based distinctions surfaced.

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In a separate investigation by Shongwe et al. (2021), analyzing data from the 2013 Eswatini Global School-based Student Health Survey, gender-related differences in the repercussions of diverse bullying forms on the mental health of 2920 adolescents aged 15–17 were uncovered. The outcomes revealed that both boys and girls encountered feelings of loneliness and expressed concerns about potential re-victimization following instances of bullying. Consequently, it can be deduced that both male and female students may exhibit tendencies to be either perpetrators or victims of bullying.

METHODOLOGY

This study focused on students from one of the higher education institutions (HEIs) in Malaysia who were engaged in learning activities for a semester in 2022 and were approached at individual level. The primary objectives were to assess the extent of bullying perceptions among students and investigate the relationships between peers, family and individual factors with student bullying. The study's target population consisted of 6190 individuals. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a minimum sample size of 361 was required. However, the study managed to collect responses from 148 participants, representing 41% of the required sample size. This response rate is in line with Vanderleest (1996) thus was deemed satisfactory. Additionally, as per Roscoe (1975), the suggested sample size range for most studies is between 30 and 500.

Data collection was carried out using self-administered questionnaires. Convenience sampling was employed, assuring participants of confidentiality and emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions. A total of 148 questionnaires were returned and considered usable for analysis. The study used established measures from previous research, including Marais and Meier (2010) and Khalim and Mohamad Salleh (2007) for student bullying, Espelage et al. (2003) for peer factor, Orpinas et al. (2006) and Carney and Merrell (2001) for individual factor. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This scale selection was based on Chomeya's (2010) argument that it allowed respondents to express neutrality, as they could choose the middle point (3) without affecting the research's data analysis negatively. Additionally, 5, 7, or 10-point response scales are all considered equivalent for analytical tools such as structural equation models or confirmatory factor analysis (Dawes, 2008).

Skewness values for all variables ranged from -0.850 to 0.009 which falls within an acceptable range as outlined by Sharma and Ojha (2020). Regarding kurtosis, all values also fell within the acceptable range for normally distributed data, which is -7 to +7, with values ranging from -0.873 to 5.904. As both skewness and kurtosis measures met the specified cut-off values (Sharma et al., 2020), it can be concluded that data distribution is normally distributed. To ensure internal consistency, the reliability of each construct was examined. Since these constructs had not been previously studied within this institution involving different faculties and levels of study, the primary concern was establishing internal consistency, i.e., the degree to which the items comprising each construct were interrelated. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was employed to assess internal consistency. Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) suggest that the appropriate Cronbach's alpha coefficient for internal consistency should exceed 0.7, and items falling below this threshold should be eliminated to enhance construct reliability. All constructs used in this study met the acceptable reliability criterion. For the dependent variable, student bullying which comprised of five questions, the Cronbach's alpha value was 0.895, falling within the range of $0.8 < 0.9$. This value indicated very good reliability, and all questions in this section were accepted and positively correlated. The section on peer factor included five questions, with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.705, falling within the range of $0.7 < 0.8$ and considered acceptable for internal consistency. The independent variable for family factor had a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.781, was also considered acceptable. For the individual factor, the Cronbach's alpha value was 0.895, falling within the range of $0.8 < 0.9$. As all the investigated constructs exhibited reliability scores above 0.70, they were deemed reliable based on the established benchmarks.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Frequency Analysis

The majority of respondents were aged 21-23, accounting for 89.9%, while the lowest percentage was in the 18-20 age group at 4.7%. This suggests a strong representation of the 21-23 age group, aligning with our university-focused target audience. In terms of gender, 75.7% of respondents were female, with males made up the remaining 24.3%. This indicated a predominantly female student population in the university. Regarding educational level, 87.8% were pursuing bachelor's degrees, with only 12.2% pursuing the diploma level. This reflected the active participation of bachelor's degree students in the questionnaire, possibly due to research requirements, while diploma students showed less engagement. In the context of faculty, 70.3% of respondents were from Business Management, while only 3.4% were from Art and Design. This suggested active distribution of the questionnaire within the Business Management community. Finally, Semester 5 had the highest representation at 43.2%, indicating a willingness to engage with the questionnaire, while Semester 2 had the lowest at 4.7%. In summary, the demographic profile of the study showed a predominant presence of 21–23-year-olds, mostly females, pursuing bachelor's degrees in the Business Management faculty, and primarily from Semester 5. These findings provided valuable insights into our study's participant characteristics and their questionnaire engagement.

Descriptive Analysis

Mean Score of Bullying

To assess the respondents' perceptions of the bullying issue, they were asked to respond to five Likert-scale questions. The mean level of bullying was found to be 4.66, indicating that respondents agreed to strongly agree with the statements in this study. The interpretation of the mean level was in line with Dilman's (2014) categorization, which used the five categories of "1 - strongly agree, 2 - agree, 3 - undecided (or neither agree nor disagree), 4 - disagree, and 5 - strongly disagree." This indicates that students from this institution concurred with the research findings. Many students opted for scales between 4 and 5, demonstrating their agreement with the issues related to bullying. To fulfill the analysis for the first research objective, a mean percentage test was conducted to determine the percentage of the level of bullying among the students.

Mean Score of Peers, Family and Individual Factors

Three factors contributed to bullying on this campus. The factor with the highest agreement among students was the peer factor, with a mean level of 4.41, in comparison to the other two factors. The factor with the second-highest mean was the family factor, with a score of 4.07, while the individual factor had the lowest mean level at 3.91. As observed in a previous study, some students indicated that perceived pressure to engage in bullying often stemmed from within their friendship groups when discussing bullying in the third person. Some students resorted to bullying to maintain their inclusion and demonstrate their belonging to a particular group. This behaviour may be linked to social expectations to conform to their peer group (Gini, 2006), reputational bias (Hymel, 1986) or branding (Becker, 1963), where a reputation or label that students believe is hard to change has formed (Becker, 1963; Hymel, 1986). Family factors were particularly influential among young children, while during adolescence, peer influence becomes more significant (Harris, 1995).

Certain explanations of bullying underscore the role of personality, conceptualizing it as a set of enduring psychological traits that shape behaviour. According to Farrell and Volk (2017), bullying is linked to an anti-social personality characterized by predatory and exploitative traits. Personality assessments reveal that children who engage in bullying often display traits such as extraversion,

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psychopathy, sadism, narcissism, Machiavellianism, disagreeableness, and a deficiency in emotional empathy (Vangeel et al., 2017), some of which have a genetic basis (Veldkamp et al., 2019). An alternative perspective proposed by Wampold (2015) suggests that psychoanalytical theory can explain bullying as a manifestation of a predisposition to protect one's ego through projection and/or scapegoating. However, Swearer et al. (2014) presents a contrasting view, recognizing bullying as a social relationship issue with complexity rooted in the interplay between individuals and their social environment. The connection between bullying and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) is considered a valuable framework for understanding the intricate nature of bullying behaviours and their social aspects. Within the SCT context, students may adopt bullying behaviours through observational learning, potentially affecting their academic performance. The theory emphasizes reciprocal interactions among individual traits, environmental influences, and behaviour. SCT elucidates bullying by emphasizing imitation and modeling, providing insights into how individuals learn to engage in bullying through observational learning and reinforcement. Cognitions related to support for bullying and beliefs about anticipated consequences contribute to the likelihood of individuals engaging in such behaviours. Direct intervention with individuals who bully not only aids in understanding individual variations in bullying but also teaches perpetrators alternative, prosocial ways of interacting with others.

ANOVA

To discern the variations in perceptions of bullying between male and female students, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Measures of Association were conducted, and the results are presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.1: ANOVA Table

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Bullying Gender	*	0.245	1	0.245	1.023	0.314

In Table 4.2, the p-value suggests that there is no significant difference between genders, as it exceeds 0.05. This p-value indicates the level of statistical significance. It appears that the incidence of bullying is similar among both females and males. The study also computed Eta squared, resulting in a value of 0.007. Eta squared is a measure of association that indicates the ratio of variance in the outcome variable explained by the predictor variable, while controlling for other factors (Adams & Conway, 2014). This metric helps explain how the variables behave within the researcher's sample (Salkind, 2010). In the field of effect size interpretation, benchmarks proposed by Cohen (1988) categorize effect sizes as small (d = 0.2), medium (d = 0.5), and large (d = 0.8). These benchmarks are typically used when results are highly novel and not easily comparable to existing literature. It is worth noting that a widely accepted minimum power level is 0.80 (Cohen et al., 1988). Consequently, based on the Eta squared value of 0.007, we can conclude that the difference between respondents' genders in this research is relatively small.

The prevalence of bullying is comparable between both genders, suggesting that females and males are equally likely to experience bullying. This finding recommends that this institution should implement counseling and a comprehensive bullying awareness programme that encompasses both genders rather than concentrating solely on one gender. Notably, multiple other studies support this, showing no significant gender differences in bullying and victimization. For example, Peskin, Tortolero, and Markham's (2006) study of American students from grades 6 to 12 found higher victim percentages (12%) compared to bullies (7%) with no significant gender disparities. Similarly, research by Kokkinos and Panayiotou (2004) on adolescents in Cyprus and a study by Kljakovic et al. (2015) among New Zealand adolescents also indicated no gender-based variations in overall bullying and victimization rates.

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CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research aims to clarify the perception or view of students on the issue of bullying among students, especially at the higher education level in public institutions. Descriptive analysis was used to explore the perceptions of students on the factors of peers, family and inviduals on students bullying. Three factors contributed to bullying at this campus, as revealed by student responses. The factor with the highest agreement among students was peer pressure, with an average rating of 4.41, indicating its prominence. Family factor ranked second, with a score of 4.07, while individual factor had the lowest mean rating at 3.91. Interestingly, the study found that some students felt pressured to engage in bullying within their friendship groups, particularly when discussing bullying involving others. This suggests that some individuals resorted to bullying to maintain their social inclusion and demonstrate allegiance to a specific group. This behaviour could be linked to social expectations to conform to their peer group, reputational bias, or the influence of labeling. It is worth noting that family factors are particularly influential among young children, whereas, during adolescence, peer influence becomes more significant. Overall, the study highlights the role of peer pressure and family factors in contributing to bullying behaviours in this HE institution, shedding light on the dynamics and motivations behind bullying. Additionally, the study examined gender differences using ANOVA and Association Measures, ultimately revealing no significant variations in student perceptions of bullying between male and female students (p-value < 0.05). Further research in this area is warranted, particularly in investigating the combined effects of peers, family, and individual factors, and student bullying among undergraduates. Future studies could use qualitative or triangulation methods to investigate the "what" and "how" questions related to these effects. Longitudinal research can provide some insights into the evolving dynamics of these factors over time. Conducting comparative studies across various educational institutions and exploring additional variables can contribute to a more comprehensive comprehension of students' perceptions of bullying.

Given the prevalence of bullying in this institution, it is vital for students to act when they witness bullying. They should promptly report such incidents to authorities, assert their rights, and not suffer in silence to prevent potential mental and physical health issues. Additionally, students might consider enrolling in self-defense classes to protect themselves from physical bullying. As the research underscores the significance of peer influences in bullying, students should proactively select peer groups that are supportive and offer constructive guidance. Building friendships with such peers is essential. Furthermore, parents should prioritize bonding with their children, providing attention and affection as this can deter bullying behaviours. Boosting self-esteem is another crucial measure to reduce the likelihood of becoming a bullying target. In addition, while the study found no significant gender-based differences in bullying, organizations should raise awareness about bullying for all students, regardless of gender. Educational campaigns and programmes should be developed to equip students with skills to address bullying situations. Drama theater programmes can facilitate learning and discussions on handling bullying. The focus should be on treating bullying as a campus-wide issue without gender discrimination.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION

We certify that the article is the Authors' and Co-Authors' original work. The article has not received prior publication and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. This research/manuscript has not been submitted for publication nor has it been published in whole or in part elsewhere. We testify to the fact that all Authors have contributed significantly to the work, validity and legitimacy of the data and its interpretation for submission to Jurnal Intelek.

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