Fostering Safe Schools: Empowering Educators and Parents in the Fight Against Violence in Early Childhood Education Setting

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Bullying was a concerning issue among pre-schoolers within kindergarten settings, though its definition remained debated. This research's aim is to uncover the forms of bullying, its causes, and impacts on children, as well as the intervention programs implemented by early childhood education teachers. This research engaged 87 teachers in anti-violence training, collecting data via bullying worksheets and interviews with 18 preschool teachers. The results showed that in early childhood education, verbal bullying involved the use of degrading words, while physical bullying included actions that hurt the victim's body. Relational bullying impacted social exclusion, whereas emotional bullying focused on hurting the victim's feelings. Internal causes included aggressive tendencies and low social values, while external causes included negative environmental influences and upbringing. Victims experienced depression, isolation, and learning disorders. The abuser might lose empathy, have difficulty forming relationships, and show aggressive behavior in the future. Teachers communicated openly with perpetrators and victims to help understand the root causes of behavior and provide emotional support. Follow-up actions taken by early childhood education institutions included counseling, developing empathy and social skills, strengthening positive values, and creating a safe environment. Parental involvement through education and open communication was also an important factor in creating a conducive environment for positive child development and preventing bullying.

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Introduction

In 2023, Indonesia had an early childhood population of 30.2 million, which accounted for approximately 10.91% of the total population (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023). there must be special attention related to handling violence in early childhood The Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) reported that in 2022 there were 1064 cases of violence involving young children (KPAI, 2022), and in 2023 there were 563 cases (KPAI, 2023) in the Special Protection of Children (KPA) cluster, including the sub-cluster of child victims of physical and or psychological violence of the bullying type. The Office of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection and Family Planning (DPPA) of South Kalimantan Province recorded 261 cases, and increased to 403 cases in 2022 with the most common type of violence being bullying in children with the highest reported cases in Banjarmasin City (DPPA Kalsel, 2023)

Bullying can occur in pre-schoolers and is a severe problem in kindergarten, according to recent studies (Ilola et al., 2016; Repo & Sajaniemi, 2015b; Saracho, 2017a, 2017b). Many studies also view bullying as a group phenomenon where the group's passive acceptance of unpleasant actions heavily influences its continuation. Bullying is different from other violent behaviours; however, childhood aggression is a risk factor. Bullying occurs when clear forms of hostility and relational or indirect relationships contain an imbalance of power, occur frequently, and are chronic (Jara et al., 2017; Juvonen & Graham, 2014).

Recent research suggest that bullying begins in early education, making prevention initiatives crucial. Few studies have examined kindergarten bullying, but recent findings show that 7.1% of three- to six-year-olds are bullies, 3.3% are victims, 2.2% are bully-victims, and exclusion from peer groups is the most common kind (Ju & Lee, 2019). Threats and extortion are more widespread than physical or verbal bullying. Based on the aforementioned data, it can be inferred that there is a resemblance between preschool bullying and school bullying.

However, the prevalence of bullying can vary depending on the definition used and data collection methods, which can include self-reports, peer nominations, teacher assessments, parental evaluations, or observations (Verlinden et al., 2014). School-based studies primarily rely on self-report methods, while kindergarten studies often employ teacher assessments or observations. Preschool teachers are suggested to be the most reliable in evaluating bullies and victims. Kindergarten-aged children might struggle to recognize victims but can easily identify bullies. This complicates comparing the prevalence of bullying in early education and school settings (Shackleton, 2014).

Despite the fact that bullying can lead to serious relationship problems in the future, little attention has been given to bullying prevention practices in kindergarten education and organizations (Nickerson, 2019; Repo & Sajaniemi, 2015b). Therefore, recognizing early signs of bullying and preventing its development is crucial. In addressing preschool bullying, a holistic and proactive approach in early education will play a significant role in creating a safe and supportive environment for children's development.

Current scholarly investigations have revealed that the examination of bullying phenomena places significant emphasis on social interactions, with a particular focus on the intricate dynamics of social processes (Swearer & Hymel, 2015; Thornberg, 2018). This observation highlights the significance of group affiliation and social norms in relationships characterised by cooperation and prosocial behaviour, since they shape children's reactions to situations involving bullying. Furthermore, existing research pertaining to bullying and aggressiveness

indicates that those who engage in bullying behaviour exhibit a deficiency in cognitive processes, emotional responses, and behavioural tendencies associated with compassion and moral sensitivity (García-Sancho et al., 2014). Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the majority of research on bullying mostly concentrates on incidents that take place in primary and secondary educational settings, leaving a dearth of studies explicitly examining the early years.

However, there are varying viewpoints on this matter. Some argue that the prevalence of bullying is similar among preschool and elementary school students (Levine & Tamburrino, 2014), but others contend that behaviours considered normal among children under the age of five could be mistakenly misconstrued as bullying (Ostrov et al., 2019). Therefore, there is a need for research that explicitly targets the preschool age range. In addition, it is worth noting that there is a significant gap in the literature about the consideration of parental and practitioner viewpoints on early childhood social interactions and relational aggression, despite the extensive research conducted on individual and environmental factors associated with bullying and therapies targeting this issue.

Hence, assertions regarding early childhood are contingent upon perspectives that are imbued with value derived from the observable context. Academic theory, research, and governmental regulations all contribute to the multifaceted dynamics at play in this context. Nevertheless, the perception of early childhood as weak and in need of full care might paradoxically contribute to the notion that they are solely passive, lacking skills, and devoid of valuable knowledge. Simultaneously, this perspective also assigns agency and knowledge primarily to adults. This perspective posits that bullying, as previously characterised, may not be applicable to early childhood due to their limited ability to discern appropriate and inappropriate behaviours towards others in the absence of instruction. Nevertheless, it can be contended that early childhood exhibits discernible social consciousness and participate in activities not solely due to external influence, but also as a result of their own initiative. Therefore, it is imperative to possess an understanding of the agency and decision-making capabilities of early childhood.

The Nature of Bullying

According to Dan Olweus (1994), a renowned researcher in bullying, victims experience negative actions repeatedly over time, with an imbalance of power. This definition highlights negative actions, repetition, and power imbalance as its key components (Einarsen et al., 2020; Volk et al., 2014). Most bullying definitions include repetition, intention to harm, power inequity, and provocation. However, their relevance, practicality, and meanings are still debated.

The use of repetition is a fundamental characteristic seen in the majority of bullying definitions (Cuadrado-Gordillo, 2012; Jeffrey & Stuart, 2020; P. K. Smith et al., 2012). The significance is in the recurrent occurrence of the behaviour in order to classify it as bullying, so distinguishing it from individual acts of aggression. The repetition employed in this context serves to emphasise the idea that bullying not only causes immediate anguish and injury, but also poses a potential risk of future attacks, so distinguishing it from isolated events.

While not specifically articulated in the majority of definitions, it is commonly presumed that the experience of victimisation elicits distress in individuals across different age groups, including children and adults (Goldsmid & Howie, 2014). The level of distress experienced

can vary from minor irritation to significant psychological, social, and physical harm. This criterion is consistent with the recognition that the consequences of bullying reach beyond the immediate context and have enduring implications.

The presence of purpose to do harm is a vital factor in the delineation of bullying, as it serves to differentiate it from instances of inadvertent harm (Cuadrado-Gordillo, 2012). The inclusion of adjectives such as 'deliberate' in most definitions serves to emphasise the significance of the perpetrator's intention. This particular characteristic serves to distinguish bullying from unintentional harm and emphasises the malicious intent inherent in the behaviour.

The concept of bullying is often grounded in the widely acknowledged criterion of power inequality. The fundamental nature of bullying is rooted in the inappropriate exercise of authority or control by one person over another (Cuadrado-Gordillo, 2012; Jeffrey & Stuart, 2020; P. K. Smith et al., 2012). The manifestation of power imbalance can take on diverse forms, encompassing physical, psychological, economic, or hierarchical types of domination. Bullying is distinguished from generic aggressiveness by its emphasis on the manipulation of power dynamics.

The concept of provocation, typically linked to proactive aggressiveness, is a subject of ongoing discussion in relation to the classification of bullying (Volk et al., 2014). Proactive aggressiveness refers to the deliberate use of unprovoked and forceful strategies in order to exert control over others. There is a contention that the act of rationalising bullying based on provocation holds no relevance, regardless of whether it is examined from the standpoint of the perpetrator or an external observer. This argument posits that the presence of provocation alone does not invalidate the classification of behaviour as bullying.

Olweus's definition forms the basis for global research and prevention programs. However, with young children, aggression might stem from exploration rather than malicious intent. Aggressive behaviors among peers increase in preschool, often not fully meeting bullying criteria (Williams et al., 2016). Young children might lack the understanding of bullying's impacts, and a more suitable definition considers their developmental stage. Preschool interactions shape social skills, reducing aggressive behaviors. Recent research supports early childhood bullying's existence, with around 13% of children engaged in bullying in early education (Kirves & Sajaniemi, 2014). Bullying can lead to lasting psychological and social consequences (Armitage, 2021; Wolke & Lereya, 2015), and preschoolers face similar negative impacts (Bistrong et al., 2016; Tanrikulu, 2018). Thus, comprehending early childhood bullying is vital, including the attitudes of caregivers.

Bullying in Early Childhood: A Controversial Issue

The term "bullying" sparks debate when applied to young children. Scholars question whether the standard bullying concept is suitable for early childhood's violent behavior. This stems from three key criteria: intent to harm, repetitive actions, and a power imbalance. Some argue these criteria lack refinement for early childhood, while others believe toddlers can grasp motives and intentions (Kirves & Sajaniemi, 2014; Repo & Sajaniemi, 2015b; Rodkin et al., 2015).

The definition of bullying for young children remains disputed, yet empirical evidence supports the existence of bullying-like conduct early in life. Although some children may not fully consider repetition and intention, research shows young children's aggressive behaviors

align with the bullying definition. Experts recognize that young children might not fully comprehend repetition and intention.

Bullying in physical and verbal forms is more common in early childhood than emotional and relational bullying types, but inappropriate and unwanted touching, using sexualised language and pressurising another to act promiscuously and aggressive behavior or emotional manipulation delivered through digital technology looks more significant increased (Armitage, 2021). However, categorizing children as bullies or victims risks stigmatization and reinforces expected behaviors (Mazzone et al., 2018; Repo & Sajaniemi, 2015a). Thus, prioritizing prevention matters more than labeling. Anti-bullying education should focus on recognizing and understanding bullying behaviors in early life, implementing effective prevention strategies in early childhood settings. While debate surrounds bullying's definition among young children, emphasizing prevention through comprehension and intervention remains paramount.

Method

This research employs a qualitative approach, particularly phenomenology method. The qualitative approach aims to understand phenomena in their natural context, explore the meanings behind these phenomena, and explain the processes involved. In this case, the research focuses on understanding the perspectives, experiences, and practices of teachers and early childhood education practitioners regarding bullying and its prevention programs.

The research questions are as follows:
 (1) How do teachers observe the forms of bullying in early childhood education settings?
 (2) How do bullying causes and impacts manifest themselves?
 (3) How do early childhood teachers implement intervention strategies to address bullying?

The researcher collected data from 87 early childhood teachers and practitioners who participated in anti-violence education training. This anti-violence education training was carried out by the early childhood Islamic education study program at the Antasari State Islamic University and the Muhammadiyah University of Banjarmasin on March 16-18th, 2023. Data was gathered through description sheets about bullying and its prevention programs completed by all training participants. This included their views on bullying, their experiences with bullying situations, and the plans or prevention programs they proposed.

Additionally, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with 18 preschool teachers. In-depth interviews were used to obtain more detailed and profound accounts of teachers' perspectives, experiences, and understanding regarding bullying and its prevention programs. In-depth interviews provide participants with the space to speak more freely and in-depth about their experiences and perspectives.

Data collected from the description sheets about bullying and its prevention programs were analyzed using the data analysis model developed by Miles and Huberman. The Miles and Huberman data analysis model is a popular method in qualitative research. This method involves a systematic series of steps to reduce data, explore patterns and themes, and organize findings into meaningful narratives.

Possible data analysis steps based on the Miles and Huberman model include:

(1) The researcher reduces data by organizing, classifying, and selecting relevant data. This involves sorting data based on significant themes or elements related to bullying and its prevention.

(2) The reduced data can be presented in the form of tables, graphs, or matrices to visualize emerging patterns and findings. The researcher ensures that the reduced and presented data are accurate and aligned with the original data. The researcher identifies common patterns, themes, and relationships among the reduced data. This involves identifying frequently occurring elements, differences in views or experiences, and concepts arising from the data.

(3) The researcher interprets the findings by relating them back to the research questions, context, relevant literature, and practitioners' viewpoints. The results of interpretation are used to formulate conclusions that present the main findings of the research. Practical and theoretical implications of the findings are also discussed.

The utilisation of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is employed in the examination of the comprehensive interviews conducted with the 18 specifically chosen teachers, as it aligns with the investigative character of the study. The conceptual foundation of the phenomenological approach encompasses an inherent inclination towards exploration (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The objective of the researchers is to refrain from imposing predetermined frameworks and instead allow the data to dictate the structure of the analysis. This approach seeks to comprehend the perspectives of teachers regarding bullying behaviour and their participation in such incidents. All interviews are meticulously documented through the use of audio recording devices and afterwards transcribed in an exact manner, capturing the same words and expressions used by the participants.

The examination of transcripts is conducted in accordance with the principles established by Smith and Osborn (J. A. Smith, 2011). Commencing with a sequential approach, the researcher engages in a thorough examination of each interview transcript, dedicating many iterations to its perusal, in conjunction with the corresponding audio recording, in order to cultivate a comprehensive understanding of its substance. The objective is to get a comprehensive viewpoint that produces interpretations based on the narratives provided by the participants. Salient or notable points are recorded in the left margin. Once multiple readings have been conducted and no other significant points can be discerned, the utilisation of the right margin becomes necessary. This facilitates the progression of initial notes into emergent themes. The emergent themes are consistently cross-referenced with the transcript to maintain a strong alignment with the source data. The identified themes are subsequently recorded on individual sheets of paper, and the associations between them are documented, leading to the formation of clusters among certain topics and the emergence of overarching concepts (J. A. Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). To ensure the avoidance of any potential bias or influence, interviews are subject to independent analysis, thereby preventing the incorporation of one participant's perspectives onto others. Subsequently, the aforementioned iterative process is replicated on the remaining transcripts.

The third phase of analysis is the comparison of topics throughout the fourteen transcripts, leading to the formation of a unified list of themes by integration and establishing connections between them. During the analysis phase, in accordance with the fundamental principles of IPA methodology, the emphasis is placed on identifying themes that arise directly from the data provided by the participants, rather than attempting to align them with pre-existing theoretical frameworks. Direct quotations from the interviews are presented verbatim in order to substantiate the assertions put forth.

Results

Observed Forms of Bullying in Early Childhood Education

This research data was collected from teachers' reflective descriptive assignments about bullying in early childhood education institutions. However, to meet the definition of bullying, the action must fulfill the three conditions stated by Olweus: aggressive behavior intended to harm or cause distress to an individual, involving a power imbalance, occurring repeatedly, and with a consistent victim. Teachers often document instances of violence among young children without adhering to the precise definition of bullying, which encompasses four main categories: verbal, physical, relational, and emotional bullying.

Verbal bullying occurs when someone uses words or speech to demean, hurt, or ridicule others. This form of bullying can include the use of harsh words, insults, sarcasm, or inappropriate language. The goal of verbal bullying is to harm the feelings or self-esteem of the victim by emotionally hurting them through words. Examples include name-calling with offensive words, teasing, or mocking someone.

Physical bullying involves tangible actions that impact the victim's body. This includes actions such as pushing, hitting, kicking, forcefully hugging, or intentionally causing physical harm to someone. The objective is to cause physical pain or injury to the victim. This form can have significant physical and emotional consequences for the victim.

Relational bullying, also known as social bullying, occurs when someone tries to influence someone's social relationships with the goal of demeaning or isolating them. This form includes actions like excluding friends, avoiding interactions with someone, persuading others not to be friends with the victim, or spreading damaging rumors. Relational bullying is often harder to detect as these actions occur socially and don't always involve direct physical or verbal actions.

Emotional bullying is a form that focuses on the victim's feelings and emotions. It involves actions designed to damage someone's feelings, make them afraid, or make them feel worthless. Examples of these actions include threats, laughing at someone when they make a mistake, or spreading hurtful gossip. Emotional bullying can have long-term impacts on the victim's mental and emotional well-being.

Classification by Gender provides insights into the forms of bullying performed by boys and girls, highlighting the types of bullying actions that might be exhibited by each gender. In many cases, the types of bullying carried out by each group may differ, and understanding these differences is important in designing effective prevention and intervention approaches to address bullying in educational environments.

The interviewees' perspectives highlight the intricate nature of bullying behaviors among children. The observations reveal gender differences, with boys more likely to display physical aggression and girls relying on verbal and relational bullying. However, there's a consensus that these actions might not necessarily meet the criteria for bullying, emphasizing the need to consider repetition and intentionality. Additionally, the role of emotional regulation, peer influence, and social dynamics underscores the complexity in interpreting children's behaviors and determining whether they constitute bullying.

P12: Initially, I thought every harmful action a child took towards another was bullying. Through training, I realized that it's often a matter of the child's developing emotional and social regulation. A boy hitting his friend might not necessarily be bullying; he could be defending himself because his toy was taken away or due to being called a name he doesn't like.

P05: Based on my observations, boys often engage in physical and verbal aggression. Sometimes, they form small groups. There are standout children who appear dominant, and their behavior is imitated or supported by the group. Other children might just imitate. There's no clear reason why they engage in physical or verbal aggression.

P14: Boys tend to engage more in physical aggression, while girls often show verbal or relational aggression by isolating certain girls. However, these actions might not yet be classified as bullying since they aren't consistently repeated involving the same perpetrator or victim.

P09: They might engage in aggression because they haven't mastered emotional regulation and are simply imitating their peers' behavior. Boys often exhibit physical aggression, displaying dominance. Girls, on the other hand, often resort to verbal, emotional, and relational aggression, such as gossiping about other children and excluding them from friendships.

Based on the provided data, we can discern patterns in the classification of bullying forms carried out by boys and girls. The following analysis offers a general overview of the tendencies in bullying forms based on gender:

Table 1 Classification of Bullying Tendencies in Boys and Girls

Boys	Girls
physical bullying. This is demonstrated by behaviors like hitting, kicking, and taking or damaging others' belongings. These actions involve direct physical contact and often exhibit direct aggression toward the victim	Relational bullying involves actions like teasing, pulling a friend's scarf, refusing to be friends, and persuading others not to be friends with someone, showing efforts to damage social relationships and isolate victims from their social environment
verbal bullying, using foul language to insult friends and making derogatory comments. There are also actions indicating inappropriate behavior, such as making obscene gestures or thumbs-down signs	verbal bullying by using inappropriate language to insult friends. Moreover, actions such as not inviting others to play and coaxing friends not to be friends with someone, along with forcefully taking belongings or stationery items from others, indicate efforts to damage relationships and disrupt the victim's experience

Understanding the Causal Factors Behind Childhood Bullying

The causes of bullying can be grouped into two main categories: internal factors and external factors. Understanding these causes, teachers can be more effective in designing prevention and intervention strategies to reduce bullying incidents and create safer and more supportive environments for children.

P18: Besides early childhood education, my institution also provides daycare services. Due to longer interactions among children, cases of aggression and bullying are more common compared to regular early childhood education settings.

P010: Handling bullying cannot solely be assigned to teachers. Children spend more time at home and in their surrounding environment. The influence of parenting styles, exposure to media content, and poor modeling from friends or adults plays a significant role.

P07: Indeed, some children struggle more with emotional regulation. Those with speech delays and hyperactivity sometimes engage in harmful actions towards their peers, such

as grabbing toys and physical violence. However, there are also children aiming to assert their existence and dominance by intimidating others.

P08: Nowadays, many video games contain violent content and offensive language. Children quickly imitate these behaviors. Digital literacy among parents needs improvement because children engage in gaming not only at school.

The interviewees' perspectives highlight that trigger factors for aggression and bullying in children are multifaceted and involve a combination of influences from various environments. The extended interactions in daycare settings, the impact of parenting styles and media exposure, individual differences in emotional regulation, and the influence of digital media all contribute to the complex dynamics of aggressive behaviors among children. This underscores the need for a holistic approach that considers the interplay of factors within and beyond the school environment when addressing and preventing bullying.

Table 2 Internal and External Factors that Trigger Bullying

Internal Factors	**Aggressive and Emotional Nature** Children with aggressive tendencies often resort to violence as a way to deal with situations, especially when they feel frustrated or unfulfilled. • Emotional imbalance or impulsiveness in children can lead to excessive reactions, including bullying, as a response to distressing situations. **Lack of Social and Religious Values** Insufficient understanding of values such as respect, compassion, and empathy can render children less capable of comprehending the negative consequences of bullying behavior. **Lack of Self-Regulation** Children struggling to control their emotions and impulsive actions are more prone to engage in aggressive acts as a means of problem-solving. **Personal Experience** Children who have been victims of bullying themselves, particularly in their home or immediate surroundings, can develop a misguided understanding that bullying is an acceptable way to handle conflicts. **Desire for Existence and Attention** Children feeling empowered or in control of certain situations might express dominance through bullying weaker individuals. Children seeking attention from peers or adults might resort to bullying as a means of drawing attention.
External Factors	**Social Environment and Exposure to Media** An unsupportive social environment and exposure to violent media content can influence children's behavior, particularly their use of offensive language or aggressive actions. **Parenting Styles and Family Environment** Children growing up in families rife with violence or conflict tend to imitate such behavior, viewing it as a form of control or conflict resolution. Parenting styles that are either overly strict or overly lax can encourage children to seek attention or express themselves, including through bullying behavior.

In the effort to prevent bullying, it is important for parents and relevant parties to understand these causative factors and strive to create an environment that supports positive child development, instills empathy, and teaches healthy conflict resolution.

Consequences of Bullying: Effects on Both Perpetrators and Victims

Bullying has serious and detrimental impacts on both victims and perpetrators. Victims face significant emotional and psychological consequences such as depression, anxiety, and social isolation. These effects can be long-lasting, even into adulthood. On the other hand, perpetrators also experience negative effects, including a lack of empathy,

difficulties in social relationships, and the risk of maintaining aggressive behavior in the future.

Understanding both sides of these impacts is crucial for designing holistic prevention and intervention approaches. Educating about the effects of bullying and promoting positive social values can help prevent bullying and mitigate its effects. Moreover, emotional support and counseling for both victims and perpetrators are vital to helping them cope with psychological impacts and breaking the cycle of bullying.

> P13: If that indeed constitutes bullying, its impact might be more severe than just difficulties in early-age emotional and social regulation. Because the victim is continuously intimidated, they can become depressed, isolate themselves socially, and even lose confidence in presenting themselves in public.
> P06: Usually, not long after a fight, they become friends again. This indicates it's often a momentary emotional reaction. However, there are also children who consistently intimidate their peers due to their larger build. Ironically, these children may suffer from poor emotional regulation, lack of empathy, and habitual intimidation.
> P11: There was once a child whose academic performance drastically declined suddenly. Initially, they possessed exceptional intelligence. It turned out they were excluded from friendships. Other children disliked them receiving praise from teachers.

Table 3 Consequences of Bullying on Perpetrators and Victims

Impacts of Bullying on Victims	Impacts of Bullying on Perpetrators
Depression and Mental Disorders	**Lack of Empathy**
Bullying victims can experience depression, anxiety, and other mental disorders due to continuous pressure from demeaning and threatening experiences.	Bullying perpetrators may lose the ability to understand and empathize with victims' feelings due to their aggressive behavior
Lack of Self-Confidence	**Lack of Healthy Social Relationships**
The impact of bullying can lower victims' self-esteem, causing self-doubt and a feeling of inadequacy in the eyes of others.	Perpetrators might struggle to build healthy and sustained social relationships due to their aggressive behavior.
Social Isolation	**Continued Aggressive Attitudes**
Victims tend to avoid social interactions due to fear and insecurity, isolating them from friends, family, and their surroundings	The aggressive behavior of perpetrators may persist in their future interpersonal relationships, both in school and professional environments.
Anxiety and Stress	**Dominant Behavior and Potential for Ongoing Bullying Cycle**
The experience of bullying can trigger high anxiety and stress levels, as victims remain vigilant about potential threats or harassment.	Perpetrators might develop an understanding that dominant and aggressive behavior is an effective way to fulfill their desires, damaging their relationships with others.
Disruption of Learning Patterns	**Academic Decline**
Victims' focus often shifts from learning to dealing with bullying-related issues, which can affect their academic performance	Perpetrators' focus might shift away from academic achievement as they concentrate more on their negative actions.

Primary Interventions by Teachers in Bullying Incidents

The teachers employ a combination of strategies when intervening in cases of bullying. They aim to address both the aggressor's behavior and the victim's emotional well-being. Directly addressing the aggressor, supporting the victim, facilitating communication and reconciliation, involving parents, and promoting self-confidence are all key components of these interventions. The teachers' methods underscore the importance of immediate action,

guidance, and open communication in effectively addressing bullying situations in the early childhood setting

> P01: For instance, immediately reprimanding the act by directly addressing the aggressor, explaining to them about the consequences of their actions, or involving their parents in the situation, and encouraging them to apologize.
> P02: I immediately validate the feelings of the victim by offering comfort and encouragement, emphasizing their strengths and qualities, and explaining that negative behaviors should not be imitated or retaliated against.
> P08: I would initiate communication involving both parties. I'd have the involved child sit down with me to provide understanding and guidance. I'd also inquire and discuss the incident with both the bullying child and the victim, addressing their feelings and facilitating reconciliation. Then, I typically communicate and meet with the parents to discuss the situation and seek their cooperation in providing positive guidance at home. As the head of the early childhood institution, I emphasize this bullying handling approach to all the teachers in our institution.
> P16: There are several actions I usually take. First, I calm down the victim of bullying, offering advice to both the perpetrator and the victim. I encourage the perpetrator to apologize and promise not to repeat their actions. Lastly, I provide motivation to the victim to boost their self-confidence and courage to act if they are in the right.

The first interventions performed by teachers in bullying cases are critical in stopping the ongoing act and preventing further violence or harassment. Steps such as calming, intervening, and quickly stopping the situation are vital to avoid potential physical and psychological harm. These actions help create a safe and supportive environment for all students in school.

Furthermore, teachers play a significant role in identifying the underlying causes of bullying behavior and gaining a deeper understanding of the motivations behind it. By privately engaging with the perpetrator, teachers can gain insights into any specific issues or dissatisfactions that drive this negative behavior. This is crucial for designing appropriate interventions that target the root issues.

Providing an understanding of the negative impacts of bullying actions is an important step in changing the attitude and behavior of perpetrators. Educating them about the emotional, social, and psychological consequences that victims and they themselves might face can help build awareness and empathy. Reprimanding and apologizing are steps that provide lessons about responsibility, the consequences of actions, and the importance of repairing damaged social relationships. This helps shape positive attitudes and morals within perpetrators.

Involvement of parents is also a crucial part of intervention. Communicating with the parents of the perpetrator can open the door to understanding family context, detecting early signs of negative behavior, and jointly devising solutions. Parents play a role in supporting behavior change in their children within their everyday environment.

Continuing Responses of Early Childhood Institutions in Addressing Bullying Incidents

The strategies discussed in the interviews reveal a deep understanding of the intricate nature of bullying within the realm of early childhood. These educational institutions are driven to establish a holistic approach that not only directly addresses instances of bullying

but also places substantial emphasis on fostering emotional growth, cultivating positive character traits, and nurturing wholesome interactions among young children. Through the involvement of experts, the cultivation of empathy, and a recognition of each child's uniqueness, these institutions aspire to construct a bedrock for constructive social engagement that extends well beyond the initial stages of childhood.

However, despite their well-conceived strategies, these institutions encounter challenges when it comes to engaging parents in the process of intervening in cases of bullying. Factors such as the lack of parental participation in parenting programs and the seemingly haphazard arrangement of these programs are identified as underlying causes. Additionally, there is a prevailing sentiment among parents that the full responsibility for their child's education and development rests solely with the educational institutions.

This highlights a potential disconnect between the efforts made by these institutions and the engagement of parents in tackling labelling. While the institutions are proactive in implementing comprehensive strategies, there seems to be a gap in effectively involving parents as partners in this endeavor. Overcoming these challenges requires a collaborative effort that emphasizes transparent communication, the meaningful inclusion of parents in the intervention process, and the recognition of the shared responsibility in fostering a safe and nurturing environment for children

> P17: Reminding the child that friends should love one another, discouraging teasing, and encouraging the child to apologize. If the child refuses to apologize, they are given some time, after which they are engaged in conversation or read a storybook relevant to the situation. Or they might read a hadith about compassion until the child realizes and is willing to apologize. Building good character and an inclusive safe environment is an ongoing effort that requires time and synergistic cooperation between the school and home. To achieve this, we maintain good communication with parents using WhatsApp groups and parenting activities.

> P08: We promote open communication with both the perpetrator and the victim in resolving issues, to avoid labeling either as a bullying perpetrator or victim, as this labeling can have detrimental ongoing effects. Through this communication, children are encouraged to express their feelings while respecting the feelings of others. Aggressive actions are not taken immediately. We also involve teachers with a background in psychology in every bullying intervention. Aside from addressing the children, teachers also communicate with parents to ensure a consistent understanding of child-rearing approaches, as parents often exhibit selfish attitudes rather than problem-solving. It's amusing when the children have reconciled but the parents continue to feud.

> P04: We've encountered confusing situations. A hyperactive child often hits and takes toys from classmates. Eventually, no one wants to be friends with that child. We communicated with the parents and involved a counselor because the child also struggled with communication. It turned out the child was raised solely by their mother, while the father worked on another island. Initially, the mother was resistant and unwilling to cooperate, but she acknowledged the challenges of raising the child and frequently gave them gadgets to keep them calm.

ECE teachers recognize the uniqueness of each child by encouraging a holistic approach to foster emotional growth, positive character, and healthy interaction with their environment. They also aim to cultivate empathy so that children can constructively engage socially. Despite some parents believing that the responsibility for their children's education solely

rests with preschool institutions and teachers, this perception does not diminish the motivation of such institutions and educators to acknowledge the importance and challenges of involving parents as partners. They achieve this by fostering communication through social media platforms like WhatsApp groups, organizing parenting activities, and engaging experts and teachers with a background in psychology to prioritize steps for intervention against bullying, which can be implemented both at school and at home by parents.

Table 4 Short- and Long-Term Follow-up by ECE Institutions

Short-Term Follow-Up	Long-Term Follow-Up
Counseling Involving counseling experts is crucial for providing emotional support to both victims and perpetrators. This helps them cope with psychological effects that may arise from bullying incidents.	**Creating a Safe Environment** Establishing a safe and inclusive school environment requires long-term efforts, including anti-bullying policy development, staff training, and programs rewarding positive behavior.
Group Approaches Group sessions help build awareness of the importance of cooperation, friendship, and understanding others' feelings. This can reduce social isolation and foster positive communication skills.	**Parent Education** Involving parents in the bullying resolution process is crucial. Parent education helps them understand signs and impacts of bullying, as well as how to support their children in overcoming such issues
Empathy and Social Skills Coaching Teaching social skills helps children interact healthily and develop empathy towards their peers' feelings. This helps prevent future bullying behavior.	**Monitoring and Evaluation** Regular monitoring ensures that the school environment remains safe and free from bullying. Periodic evaluation measures the effectiveness of taken measures and provides room for improvement
Reinforcing Positive Values Teaching positive values like kindness, respect, and empathy through stories, songs, or creative activities helps shape a social norm that supports a safe and positive environment	**Involving External Parties** If situations become more complex, involving external parties such as counselors or psychologists can offer additional perspectives and expert support in handling more challenging cases.

The short- and long-term follow-up actions taken by the early childhood institution reflect a holistic approach to addressing bullying. This approach not only involves immediate interventions to address ongoing bullying incidents but also long-term efforts to shape a positive, educational, and supportive environment for children's social and emotional development.

Discussion

In the early childhood education setting, children encounter situations of social acceptance and rejection, which play a significant role in their social and emotional development. An illuminating account by Gartrell (2008) shares the experience of Karen, a preschool teacher who adeptly handled a complex social interaction among her students. This narrative serves as a valuable lesson in dealing with such scenarios empathetically.

Karen's swift response to the commotion caused by Shayna's distress showcased her proactive approach. Upon hearing Shayna's cries, she immediately intervened to understand the situation. Her empathetic questioning allowed Shayna to express her hurt feelings stemming from Amanda and Christina's rejection. This initial response by Karen laid the foundation for addressing the issue constructively. Karen's approach went beyond mere reprimanding or hastily labeling the situation as bullying. Instead, she delved into the underlying dynamics, teaching Shayna the impact of words on emotions. By doing so, she empowered Shayna to navigate conflicts more effectively. Karen recognized the need to involve all parties, Amanda and Christina included, in the conversation. This approach aligns with research suggesting that prompt and effective teacher intervention is pivotal in managing bullying incidents.

This account underscores the importance of comprehending the intricate social dynamics among young children (Saracho, 2017a). Karen's resolution of the conflict wasn't just a resolution; it was a lesson in empathy, respect, and the significance of acknowledging others' emotions and rights. Her approach facilitates positive social development and underscores the role of preschool teachers in discerning and addressing such scenarios with tailored approaches.

Challenges of Identifying Bullying in the Early Childhood Context

The complexity of recognizing bullying in early childhood presents a challenging and multifaceted issue. While there's a general awareness of bullying among young children, discussions about its intentional nature create conflicting viewpoints. This study's participants employed two primary strategies to address conflict-related discussions around early childhood bullying: depicting young children as incapable of such thoughts and involving the role of parents.

Identifying bullying in early childhood is a struggle arising from the clash between the belief that young children lack the understanding of intentions and moral concepts like "right" and "wrong," and the observed behaviors that occasionally align with the broader bullying definition. Despite the definition of bullying involving repetition and intentionality (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017), this study's participants revealed intricate debates and thoughts, indicating the issue's complexity. Interviews brought forth conflicting perspectives on early childhood bullying behavior, particularly focusing on young children's "incapability" and parents' role, resulting in tensions surrounding children's intentions, agency, and morality.

Furthermore, research distinguishes between studies exploring young children's agency in pragmatic situations like play and those delving into their empathy and moral capacities. Some suggest that the ability to understand mental states significantly develops after the age of four. The inclusion of values promoting social and emotional development in early childhood, along with recognizing children's autonomy supports the notion of children as agents before moral reasoning develops (Carnevale et al., 2015; Parker et al., 2015).

In practical terms, research on bullying behavior in older individuals' centers on social processes, group dynamics, and peer influence, while early development research highlights adult impact on social competence (Bouchard & Smith, 2017). Children's social competence and behavior are shaped by interactions with adults beyond their parents. In early childhood settings, these interactions, along with parent-professional connections, gain significance (Kingery et al., 2020). Contextual circumstances collectively contribute to protective factors and resilience, impacting a child's development.

Parent-Teacher Competence and Collaboration in Addressing Bullying

Research on bullying has primarily involved school-based interventions, with a limited focus on parental perspectives and interventions within the family setting (Hong et al., 2014; Mann et al., 2015; Noboru et al., 2021). Involving parents in addressing bullying aligns with theoretical and empirical evidence (Cho et al., 2019; Cross et al., 2018; Gaffney et al., 2021). Anti-bullying initiatives often include families (Huang et al., 2019; Nocentini et al., 2019). Early childhood center-parent partnerships are pivotal, aiding children's development and mitigating long-term consequences of bullying. This cooperation should occur through both parents and professionals, establishing a collaborative framework to address bullying's effects at a vulnerable stage.

Results show parents and early childhood personnel exhibit similar responses. Engaging in dialogue with both the victim's and perpetrator's parents is recommended by both (Helfrich et al., 2020; Kolbert et al., 2014). Parental opinions influence well-being assessments, while positive evaluations correlate with children's thriving. Nevertheless, a disparity emerges, with early childhood personnel expressing more negative views on parent collaboration than parents themselves.

This study also highlights the divergence in parental responses between those of bullying perpetrators and bullying victims, that can be attributed to a complex interplay of psychological, social, and cultural factors. When parents discover that their child is engaged in bullying behavior, it's a challenging situation triggering emotions like shame, disappointment, and frustration. To cope with these emotions, parents might instinctively defend their child. A natural parental instinct is to protect and uphold their child. When accused of wrongdoing like bullying, this protective instinct can lead to a defensive reaction. Parents may resist accepting their child's misbehavior and seek ways to refute the accusations (Hale et al., 2017; Sawyer et al., 2011). The realization that their child is a bully can potentially tarnish the family's reputation within the community. Concerns about how others perceive their family due to their child's negative behavior may lead parents to deny or counter the allegations. Parents might not want to acknowledge their child's violence, believing their upbringing should have prevented such actions. Denial can result, with parents of bullying children even perceiving their child as a victim influenced by others' actions, thus feeling empathetic and that accusations are unjust.

In instances where parents of bullying victims advocate for punishment against the bullying child, multiple factors are at play. They may view taking action against the bully as a form of justice for their child, ensuring fairness and protection (Harcourt et al., 2014). Concerns about their child's safety and well-being might drive the need for strong action to prevent future harm. This perspective stems from the significant psychological impacts that bullying victims endure, such as trauma and diminished self-esteem. Parents of victims aim to provide the necessary support to overcome these effects and encourage behavior change in the bullying child through punishment.

Research (Hale et al., 2017) indicates that parents at times express dissatisfaction with the bullying interventions implemented by schools. This discontent often stems from perceptions of unfairness, as parents may believe that the teacher's response lacks empathy due to their child not being the victim of the bullying (Ju & Lee, 2019). Moreover, certain parents have voiced concerns regarding the school's approach, which they perceive as minimizing the severity of bullying incidents and classifying them as ordinary developmental challenges in a child's emotional growth. This variance in perspective between schools and parents highlights the necessity for enhanced communication and collaboration to effectively carry out bullying interventions.

Parents who notice that their child isn't receiving the same attention or support as the victim might feel that the school's response is biased. This perception can lead to feelings of frustration and doubt regarding the school's commitment to addressing bullying comprehensively. Furthermore, when parents sense that the school regards bullying as a minor issue in a child's development, they may question the institution's dedication to establishing a secure and nurturing environment for all students.

The divergence in viewpoints between schools and parents underscores the significance of

establishing transparent lines of communication and cultivating collaboration. Schools and parents should collaborate to create an integrated and comprehensive approach to bullying interventions. Through the exchange of information, insights, and perspectives, both parties can acquire a more comprehensive understanding of the situation and collaboratively devise strategies that prioritize the well-being of all the children involved (Ostrander et al., 2018).

Conclusion

In the context of early childhood education, various forms of bullying can occur, including verbal, physical, relational, and emotional bullying. Verbal bullying involves demeaning words, physical bullying entails actual actions against the victim's body, relational bullying affects social relationships, and emotional bullying focuses on the victim's feelings.

The causes of bullying can be internal (aggressive nature, lack of social values) and external (social environment, parenting patterns). These factors can differ between boys and girls, influencing the types of bullying they are more likely to engage in. Both victims and perpetrators face serious impacts. Victims experience emotional, social, and psychological effects such as depression, isolation, and learning disorders. Perpetrators can lose empathy, struggle in social relationships, and develop aggressive behaviors in the future.

Teachers play a crucial role in stopping bullying directly and preventing it from escalating. They must intervene promptly, diffuse situations, and prevent potential greater harm. Approaching perpetrators through personal conversations helps understand the underlying causes of behavior and design appropriate interventions. Follow-up actions taken by early childhood institutions include counseling, fostering empathy and social skills, reinforcing positive values, and creating a safe environment. Parental involvement is also crucial through education and open communication. These steps create an environment that supports positive child development and prevents bullying from occurring.

The limitation of this research is that it does not specifically differentiate how the stages of bullying intervention are carried out by teachers with backgrounds in Bachelor of Early Childhood Teacher Education or psychology compared to teachers with mismatched backgrounds. The study also does not depict the responses from bullying perpetrators or victims to each intervention provided, and how teachers assess the interventions to design improvements for subsequent interventions. These gaps could be explored in future research.

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