

Peer Support System and School Climate Management: A Strategic Approach to Building an Anti-Bullying Culture

Muh. Amar^{1*}, Andi Kasmawati², Mustaring³, Najamuddin⁴, Bakhtiar⁵, Fitriani. K⁶

Universitas Negeri Makassar

Corresponding Author: Muh. Amar 240002301041@student.unm.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Peer Support System, School Climate, Anti-Bullying Culture

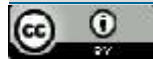
Received : 21, September

Revised : 23, November

Accepted: 25, January

©2026 Amar, Kasmawati, Mustaring, Najamuddin, Bakhtiar, Fitriani. K:

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Atribusi 4.0 Internasional](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



ABSTRACT

This study examines the strategic role of peer support systems and school climate management in fostering an anti-bullying culture in secondary schools in Jeneponto, Indonesia. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis involving teachers, principals, and students. The findings reveal that bullying is deeply rooted in patriarchal social structures and reinforced by weak school climate management. Peer support Systems function as informal yet effective emotional networks that promote empathy and Solidarity among students. However, the absence of institutionalized mechanisms limits Their sustainability. The study suggests Integrating peer-based interventions with Inclusive school climate management to establish a participatory, equitable, and gender-responsive education system.

INTRODUCTION

Bullying in schools has become a serious problem in modern education, not only because of its psychological and social impact on students, but also because it reflects the failure of the education system to build a safe and equitable learning ecosystem. A report by the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) and the Indonesian Teachers' Union Federation (FSGI) noted a drastic increase in the number of reported bullying cases in schools. From 119 cases in 2020 and 53 cases in 2021, the number jumped to 266 cases in 2022, and increased sharply again to 1,478 cases in 2023 (Fitriani, 2025). This condition shows that schools have not been fully successful in fostering a culture of empathy, collaboration, and inclusiveness as the foundation of educational character.

Bullying in Indonesia is still an “iceberg” phenomenon, the scale of which is much greater than what is revealed on the surface (Rahmawati, 2016). Data from various surveys and reports show an alarming prevalence of bullying among adolescents. The 2021 National Survey on Children and Adolescents' Life Experiences (SNPHAR) conducted by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection revealed that 20% of boys and 25.4% of girls aged 13-17 had experienced violence in their lives. This figure is reinforced by data from the 2018 SNPHAR, which shows that 1 in 3 children aged 13-17 in Indonesia have experienced at least one type of violence, with 3 out of 4 victims reporting that the perpetrator was a friend or peer (Prastiwi, 2025). This clearly shows that the social environment closest to adolescents, which should be a source of support, has instead become the most dominant source of threat.

Phenomenologically, bullying behavior does not arise from individual actions alone, but rather exists in a school social climate that is permissive of symbolic violence and inequality in relationships between students. When the school climate is not conducive—whether due to weak teacher leadership, competitive communication between students, or a lack of strong social support—bullying becomes a culturally legitimized practice (Sembiring & Tarigan, 2023). On the other hand, bullying is often understood as a “group process” in which different roles, such as perpetrator, victim, and observer, are played (Salmivalli, 2010). Various studies show that peer support plays an important role in reducing aggressive behavior in schools. This system allows students to act as active social agents in building solidarity and caring among friends, rather than simply being recipients of disciplinary rules (Widianingtyas & P, 2023; Ramadani et al., 2024). Thus, building an anti-bullying culture does not only depend on teacher intervention or school policy, but requires participatory school climate management based on peer support.

Theoretically, this study attempts to integrate the perspective of school climate management with a social support approach to formulate a strategic concept for shaping an anti-bullying culture. Previous studies tend to place school management in the administrative realm, while the social-emotional dimensions of students, especially the role of peer support, have not been systematically explored. In addition, this paper contributes to enriching knowledge by offering an integrated managerial and social perspective, which places students not as objects of policy, but as subjects who participate in constructing a healthy school culture.

In practical terms, this research contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDGs 4 (Quality Education) and SDGs 5 (Gender Equality). By integrating peer support systems and school climate management, this research offers a strategic model for secondary schools in building a safe, inclusive, and gender-equitable learning environment. This approach focuses on preventing bullying behavior by strengthening students' social-emotional competencies through empathy, solidarity, and appreciation for diversity.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze how peer support systems and school climate management can be used as strategic approaches to foster an anti-bullying culture in secondary schools. Therefore, this study contributes to strengthening education governance that is responsive to gender equality and students' psychosocial well-being, as well as supporting the realization of a fair, humane, and sustainable education system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bullying in the School Context

Bullying remains a persistent problem in educational settings worldwide, negatively affecting students' psychological well-being, academic performance, and social development. Research consistently shows that bullying behavior is not only an individual issue but also a systemic problem influenced by school norms, peer relationships, and institutional responses. A school environment that tolerates aggression, exclusion, or power imbalance tends to increase the prevalence of bullying, while a supportive and inclusive environment reduces such behavior. Therefore, addressing bullying requires comprehensive strategies that involve students, teachers, and school management rather than relying solely on punitive measures.

Peer Support System in Schools

A peer support system refers to structured programs where students are trained to provide emotional, social, or practical support to their peers. Previous studies highlight that peers play a critical role in shaping student behavior, as adolescents are often more influenced by their friends than by authority figures. Peer support initiatives, such as peer mentoring, peer counseling, and buddy systems, have been shown to increase empathy, social responsibility, and prosocial behavior among students. These programs also empower students to intervene when witnessing bullying and to provide safe spaces for victims to share their experiences. As a result, peer support systems

are increasingly recognized as effective tools for bullying prevention and early intervention.

School Climate Management

School climate refers to the quality and character of school life, encompassing relationships, safety, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures. Effective school climate management involves leadership practices, clear policies, positive teacher–student relationships, and consistent enforcement of rules. Literature indicates that a positive school climate is strongly associated with lower levels of bullying, improved student engagement, and better mental health outcomes. Schools that actively manage their climate by promoting respect, inclusivity, and student voice tend to create environments where bullying behaviors are less likely to thrive.

The Relationship Between Peer Support and School Climate

Recent research emphasizes the interconnection between peer support systems and school climate management. Peer support programs contribute to a positive school climate by fostering mutual respect, trust, and collaboration among students. At the same time, a well-managed school climate provides the structural and cultural foundation needed for peer support systems to function effectively. Studies suggest that when peer support initiatives are aligned with school policies and supported by leadership, their impact on reducing bullying becomes more sustainable and significant.

Building an Anti-Bullying Culture

An anti-bullying culture is characterized by shared values that reject violence, intimidation, and discrimination. Literature highlights that such a culture cannot be achieved through isolated programs but requires a strategic approach integrating peer involvement and institutional commitment. Peer support systems encourage student participation and collective responsibility, while school climate management ensures consistency, fairness, and long-term implementation. Together, these approaches help shift school norms from passive bystander behavior to active prevention and support.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a case study approach to examine in depth the dynamics of peer support systems and school climate management in building an anti-bullying culture in senior high schools in Jeneponto Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. This approach was chosen because it allows for an intensive study of contemporary phenomena in a real-world context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the background are unclear. Case studies were chosen for their ability to comprehensively describe phenomena based on rich and contextual field evidence (Yin, 2018). The approach used resembles a focused and in-depth descriptive case study, in which researchers formulate research questions and initial hypotheses aimed at carefully exploring the social dynamics that are the subject of study (Mills et al., 2012).

Specifically, this study examines the dynamics of peer support systems and school climate management practices in efforts to build an anti-bullying culture.

Data was collected using triangulation techniques, namely in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies. Key informants in this study consisted of strategic actors who were directly or indirectly involved in the implementation of an anti-bullying culture, namely: school principals, teachers, homeroom teachers, and students. In-depth interviews were used to explore experiences, perceptions, and strategies applied in building positive social relationships at school. Participatory observation was conducted to understand patterns of interaction and the social climate in the school environment naturally, while documentary studies focused on tracing policy documents, activity reports, and school programs relevant to the research theme.

The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1992) interactive model, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification.

RESEARCH RESULT

Based on observations and in-depth interviews with students, teachers, and school principals, it was found that bullying often takes the form of verbal, social, and symbolic abuse, such as teasing boys who are considered "weak" or girls who are considered "too active" and "defying norms."

These results indicate that bullying in Jenepono does not exist as an individual behavior, but is part of a social value system that normalizes the dominance of masculinity. This phenomenon is rooted in the view that boys must be strong and dominant, while girls are expected to be obedient and gentle. When gender expressions deviate from these norms, children become targets of bullying by both their peers and their social environment.

Other findings show that most cases go unreported due to a culture of silence among children and parents, who view bullying as part of social maturation. As a result, forms of symbolic violence (stigmatization of girls who look different) continue without meaningful intervention from schools or the community.

There are four types of bullying: verbal, physical, relational, and cyberbullying (Coloroso, 2007; McCulloch & Barbara, 2010) which the researchers describe in the following table.

Table 1. Forms of Gender-Based Bullying and Their Driving Factors in Jenepono Regency

Type of Bullying	Empirical Case	Perpetrators & Gender Relations Pattern	Social Context (Arena of Incident)	Main Driving Factors	Impact on Victims
Physical Bullying	Male students push or hit peers who refuse to join fights or are perceived as "not manly enough."	Groups of male students display aggression toward peers (often male) who deviate from masculinity norms.	School yard, routes to/from school, students' gathering spots.	Normalization of violence as a status marker; peer pressure; local culture of aggression.	Physical injuries; fear; school absenteeism; decline in academic performance and participation.
Verbal Bullying	Mocking appearance, labeling as "improper," or moral humiliation in class and WhatsApp groups.	Both male and Female students direct insults toward peers, often targeting girls' bodies or morality.	Classrooms, canteen, Classroom social media groups.	Social control over girls' bodies and behavior; gender stereotypes; pressure for conformity.	Low self-esteem; shame/stigmatization; anxiety; withdrawal from school activities.
Social/Relational Bullying	Exclusion from study groups, spreading rumors to sever friendships.	Peer groups (both male and female) manipulate social networks to isolate victims.	Study groups, extracurricular activities, classroom communities.	Enforcement of social/religious norms; social sanction mechanisms; community moral	Social isolation; loneliness; mild depression; reduced access to emotional support.

				surveillance.	
Cyberbullying	Body-shaming in comments, spreading photos/rumors via WhatsApp and social media.	Perpetrators may be male or female; often act anonymously or within closed groups.	Digital platforms: WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok.	Low digital literacy; anonymity; rapid content dissemination; lack of supervision.	Distorted body image; intense social pressure; prolonged and widespread bullying exposure.

Source: *Processed Data, 2025*

Table 1 shows that gender-based bullying practices in Jeneponto Regency are multidimensional and layered, covering four main forms: physical, verbal, social/relational, and cyberbullying. These four forms do not stand alone but are interrelated within a system of social relations that reinforces norms of masculinity, control over women's bodies and behavior, and pressure on individuals who are considered to deviate from social expectations.

In addition, it was found that peer support systems and school climate management play a strategic role in preventing and reducing bullying in the school environment. The analysis results show three main interrelated findings: (1) an informal but effective peer support structure in building emotional solidarity among students, (2) the role of school climate management that is adaptive to the local social and cultural context, and (3) the limitations of institutional policies that hinder the sustainable strengthening of an anti-bullying culture. Table 2 below summarizes the results of mapping the roles of actors and their contributions to efforts to build an anti-bullying culture in schools.

Table 2. Roles and Contributions of Key Actors in Building an Anti-Bullying Culture in Schools

Actor	Main Role	Strengths	Weaknesses
Students (Peer Support Group)	Act as peer-support agents and initiators of anti-bullying campaigns.	Possess strong emotional closeness; peer-to-peer communication is more effective; able to build mutual trust.	Lack of conflict mediation skills and limited psychosocial understanding.
Teachers and Homeroom Advisors	Serve as facilitators in fostering a positive classroom climate and monitoring social dynamics.	High pedagogical experience; close relationship with students; formal authority within the school system.	Limited time and heavy administrative workload; interventions tend to be reactive rather than preventive.
School Principals	Policy makers and leaders in managing the overall school climate.	Hold authority and access to policy resources; capable of integrating inclusive values into school governance.	Lack of inter-unit coordination; absence of explicit school policies regulating peer-support systems.
Parents and School Committee	Provide moral and social support from home; collaborate in anti-bullying campaigns.	Act as sources of character reinforcement; expand preventive social networks.	Limited active participation; insufficient two-way communication between school and parents.
Local Community and Educational NGOs	Serve as external partners in training programs and social literacy initiatives.	Offer new perspectives; enrich school practices with socio-cultural approaches.	Involvement remains sporadic and dependent on external project funding.

Source: Processed Data, 2025

The analysis shows that peer support dynamics in schools are formed naturally through social relationships between students. Peer groups function not only as informal social spaces, but also as safe spaces that allow students to express themselves without fear of judgment. In some cases, students are more likely to disclose experiences of bullying to peers than to teachers or counselors, due to emotional trust and psychological closeness. However, this support mechanism is not yet systematically structured; most of it is still spontaneous and depends on the initiative of individuals or small groups with a high level of social concern.

On the other hand, inclusive and supportive school climate management has proven to be a key factor in preventing bullying. Schools with participatory leadership styles, open communication between teachers and students, and respect for diversity show lower rates of bullying. Observations at one school showed the practice of weekly reflection among students, which indirectly strengthened group empathy and solidarity. Nevertheless, limited resources, lack of teacher training on conflict mediation, and a managerial orientation that still emphasizes formal discipline are obstacles to building a sustainable anti-bullying culture.

DISCUSSION

Gender-Based Bullying as a Manifestation of Patriarchal Structures in the School Context

The findings of this study reveal that bullying in Jeneponto Regency is a phenomenon rooted in patriarchal social and cultural structures, where gender roles and expressions are determined normatively and rigidly. The patterns of bullying found, whether verbal, physical, social, or cyber, function as social mechanisms to enforce gender order and control student behavior that is considered deviant from the dominant norms of masculinity or femininity. These findings are in line with Bronfenbrenner's social ecology theory framework, which emphasizes that bullying behavior cannot be understood in isolation from the surrounding social, cultural, and institutional contexts (Swearer & Hymel, 2015; Zhu, 2023).

From a social ecology perspective, bullying in Jeneponto operates at various levels of the system: at the microsystem level (peer relationships), mesosystem (school environment), exosystem (school and local community policies), to the macrosystem (patriarchal cultural values that normalize gender hierarchy). Research shows that boys who are considered "weak" or do not meet expectations of masculinity become targets of ridicule and physical violence, while girls who are considered "too active" or "deviant" face verbal and social bullying aimed at returning them to their expected gender roles. Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) argue that this pattern reflects "hegemonic masculinity," a system that maintains the dominance of a particular type of masculinity through the subordination of femininity and other forms of masculinity that are considered inappropriate.

International studies support these findings by showing that gender-based bullying serves as a form of gender policing that enforces conformity to rigid gender norms (Gullotta & Bloom, 2014). Research by Tam & Brown (2020) found that adolescents who experience gender-based harassment (GBH) tend to have higher levels of anxiety and depression, and that bystanders' willingness to intervene is greatly influenced by their sense of ownership of the school and their perceptions of gender typicality. These findings confirm that an inclusive and supportive school climate can be a protective factor that encourages students to oppose gender-based bullying.

The phenomenon of a culture of silence identified in this study, where most bullying cases go unreported because they are perceived as part of the social maturation process, serves as a strong indicator of the normalization of symbolic violence within the local context. Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic violence explains that social domination is maintained not only through physical coercion but also through the internalization of structures of domination by those who are dominated. In the context of Jeneponto, both students and parents have internalized the belief that bullying, particularly gender-based bullying, is a normal aspect of socialization. This perception hinders both reporting and effective intervention.

Comparative research shows that the culture of silence in the context of school bullying can be overcome through the implementation of a structured peer support system. A study by Avilés Martínez & Petta Daud (2018) on Peer Support Systems in Brazil and Spain found that the degree of communication of bullied students is also significantly better in schools that have a formal peer support structure, compared to schools that do not have such a system. These findings indicate that peer support systems can serve as an alternative reporting mechanism that is more accessible to students who are reluctant to report to formal authorities due to stigma or fear of retaliation.

Peer Support System: Mechanisms of Change and Effectiveness of Intervention

The results of the study show that peer support systems in Jeneponto schools are formed naturally through social relationships between students and function as safe spaces that allow students to express themselves without fear of being judged. This finding is in line with social support theory, which emphasizes that emotional support from peers can increase resilience and reduce the negative impact of bullying experiences (Cohen & Wills, 1985). However, this study also identified that existing peer support mechanisms are still spontaneous and not systematically structured, so their effectiveness is limited and depends on the initiative of individuals or small groups.

International literature shows that the effectiveness of peer support systems is highly dependent on the quality of training, systemic support from schools, and integration with broader anti-bullying policies. A meta-analysis by Ttofi & Farrington (2011) found that anti-bullying programs involving peer support components showed a 20-23% reduction in bullying incidents when implemented with high fidelity and strong institutional support. A study by Siddiqui & Schultze-Krumbholz (2023) on peer-training interventions in Pakistan, a context with cultural similarities to Indonesia, reported that training peer mentors increased their knowledge about bullying and prosocial bystanding behavior, although changes in the overall school climate did not reach statistical significance in the pilot study.

The mechanisms of change identified in the literature include four main pathways:

1. Increased help-seeking behavior.
2. Changes in anti-bullying norms.
3. Increased prosocial bystanding (active intervention by witnesses).
4. Perceptions of teacher and principal intervention.

Longitudinal research by Strohmeier et al. (2024) used latent transition analysis to track changes in student status from victim or perpetrator to uninvolved group, and found that victims who transitioned to the uninvolved subgroup experienced increases in help-seeking and anti-bullying norms, while bullies who transitioned to the uninvolved subgroup experienced an increase in seeking help, perceptions of teacher intervention, and anti-bullying norms. These findings confirm that effective peer support systems must be designed to explicitly enhance all four mechanisms through structured training curricula and ongoing support from schools.

In the context of this study, peer groups in Jeneponto show potential as agents of change, but lack conflict mediation skills and a strong understanding of psychosocial issues, as shown in Table 2. This is in line with Smolleck's (2018) findings, which emphasize that peer support programs require comprehensive training, adult supervision, and monitoring mechanisms to avoid tokenism and ensure sustainable impact. Programs such as KiVa in Finland and ViSC in Austria show that integrating peer support with whole-school approach components, including teacher training, parental involvement, and clear school policies, results in more significant and sustainable reductions in bullying (Gradinger et al., 2015; Kärnä et al., 2011).

The bystander intervention model is also relevant for understanding the dynamics of peer support in the context of Jeneponto. Baron et al. (2005) explain that an individual's willingness to intervene is influenced by five stages of decision-making: (1) recognizing the situation, (2) interpreting the situation as an emergency, (3) feeling responsible for acting, (4) knowing how to act, and (5) deciding to act. This study shows that peer support training can improve students' capacity in each of these stages, particularly in overcoming obstacles in the third stage (diffusion of responsibility), which is the tendency to assume that someone else should act, and the fourth stage (lack of competence), which is ignorance about how to help victims effectively. In the context of Jeneponto, a

strong culture of collectivism can be a social asset that strengthens a sense of shared responsibility, but it can also be an obstacle if group norms normalize bullying.

School Climate Management as a Determinant of Anti-Bullying Culture

Research findings show that inclusive and supportive school climate management is a key factor in preventing bullying. Schools with participatory leadership styles, open communication between teachers and students, and respect for diversity show lower levels of bullying. Observations in schools identified weekly reflection practices among students that indirectly strengthen empathy and group solidarity. These findings are in line with the concept of positive school climate defined by the National School Climate Center (2020) as the quality and character of school life based on patterns of people's experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures.

International research consistently shows that school climate is a strong predictor of bullying incidents and the effectiveness of anti-bullying interventions. A study by Bradshaw et al. (2014) found that schools with a positive organizational climate, as measured by teacher collaboration, supportive school leadership, and high academic expectations, experienced lower rates of bullying, even after controlling for student and school demographic characteristics. Furthermore, a meta-analysis by Gaffney et al. (2019) showed that whole-school approaches that integrate school climate change with curriculum, policy, and community engagement components produce larger effect sizes than interventions that focus only on the individual or classroom level.

In the context of this study, the limitations identified, such as lack of resources, minimal teacher training on conflict mediation, and a managerial orientation that still emphasizes formal discipline, reflect structural challenges in transforming the school climate. These findings are consistent with research by Cornell & Huang (2016) which shows that the implementation of punitive zero-tolerance policies can actually worsen the school climate and increase students' distrust of school authorities. Conversely, restorative justice and positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) approaches that emphasize relationship restoration and positive behavior reinforcement have proven to be more effective in creating a supportive school climate and reducing bullying incidents (Hollands et al., 2022).

The role of the principal as an instructional and moral leader is crucial in shaping an anti-bullying climate. The principal's active leadership in communicating anti-bullying values, modeling respectful behavior, and providing support for teachers' professional development on classroom management and conflict mediation significantly improves students' perceptions of school safety and reduces incidents of bullying (Selian & Restya, 2024). In the context of Jeneponto, Table 2 shows that although principals have policy authority and resources, there is still a lack of integration between units and no school policy that explicitly regulates peer support systems. This indicates an urgent need for capacity building of school leadership in designing and implementing comprehensive and evidence-based anti-bullying policies.

The involvement of parents and school committees, as identified in Table 2, is also an important component of holistic school climate management. Research by Lester et al. (2017) found that two-way communication between schools and parents on bullying issues, as well as parental involvement in prevention programs, increases the consistency of anti-bullying messages between home and school, which in turn strengthens the internalization of anti-bullying norms by students. However, in the context of Jeneponto, this study identified a lack of active parental participation and two-way communication, reflecting the challenges in building effective school-home partnerships in the local cultural context.

Integrating a Socio-Ecological Approach into Anti-Bullying Strategies

These research findings emphasize the importance of a socio-ecological approach that integrates interventions at various levels of the system to achieve sustainable change in school culture. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social ecology model provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding how factors at the individual level, interpersonal relationships (peers), institutional context (school), and cultural value systems (society) interact in shaping bullying behavior and responses to it.

In the context of this study, analysis of the four forms of bullying physical, verbal, social/relational, and cyber shows that each form operates at and is influenced by various levels of the social ecology. Physical bullying, for example, not only reflects individual aggression but also the normalization of violence at the local cultural level and peer pressure to prove masculinity. Verbal and social bullying function as social control mechanisms that enforce gender norms at the mesosystem level (school and peer group), while cyberbullying extends the reach of violence to the digital space beyond the physical boundaries of the school, reflecting the influence of the exosystem (social media platforms and low digital literacy).

International research on the application of socio-ecological models in bullying prevention shows that multilevel interventions targeting change at various levels of the system produce stronger and more sustainable effects. A study by Espelage & Swearer (2003) that applied a social-ecological framework to understand bullying found that factors at the individual level (such as empathy and social skills), peer group (such as group norms and social status), school (such as school climate and policies), and community (such as cultural values and social cohesion) all contribute significantly to variations in bullying behavior. These findings confirm that interventions that focus only on individual change without changing the broader social and institutional context will have limited impact.

Bullying prevention programs that have been rigorously evaluated, such as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) and KiVa, adopt a socio-ecological approach by integrating components at various levels: (1) universal/school level (school policy, staff training, monitoring), (2) classroom level (curriculum, classroom rules, class meetings), (3) individual level (interventions for perpetrators and victims), and (4) community level (parent and community involvement) (Olweus & Limber, 2010; Salmivalli et al., 2011). Evaluations of these programs show a significant reduction in bullying (20-23% depending on implementation fidelity) and an improvement in the positive school climate (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011).

In the context of Jenepono, the implementation of a socio-ecological approach requires culturally sensitive adaptation to the local context. Research by Strohmeier et al. (2012) on the implementation of the ViSC program in various countries shows that the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs is highly dependent on the compatibility between program design and local cultural values, educational system structures, and institutional capacity.

The findings of this study on strong patriarchal culture, a culture of silence, and limited school resources indicate that program adaptation must include:

1. Integration of positive local values (such as collectivism and mutual cooperation) to strengthen anti-bullying solidarity.
2. Communication strategies that are sensitive to stigma to overcome the culture of silence.
3. Intensive training for teachers and principals on transformative leadership and conflict mediation, and (4) the involvement of community and religious leaders to strengthen the legitimacy of the program in the eyes of parents and the community.

Cyberbullying as an Extension of Gender-Based Violence into the Digital Space

This study identifies cyberbullying as a form of bullying that is increasingly prevalent among students in Jeneponto, manifested in body-shaming, spreading rumors, and sharing photos via social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. Characteristics of cyberbullying such as anonymity, the speed of content dissemination, and the ability to reach a wide audience make it a highly destructive form of bullying with long-lasting psychological effects.

International literature shows that cyberbullying cannot be separated from the dynamics of traditional bullying and is often an extension of offline conflicts into the digital space. Victims of cyberbullying also experience traditional bullying, and that the risk factors for both forms of bullying largely overlap, including rigid gender norms, social status within peer groups, and an unsupportive school climate (Kowalski et al., 2014, 2019). In the context of gender, research shows that girls are more often the targets of cyberbullying based on physical appearance and sexual morality (slut-shaming), while boys are more often subjected to cyberbullying that challenges their masculinity (Ringrose & Renold, 2012).

The findings in Table 1 show that cyberbullying in Jeneponto is driven by low digital literacy, anonymity, and minimal supervision. This is in line with research by Patchin & Hinduja (2015) which identified that a lack of understanding of digital ethics and the legal consequences of cyberbullying, coupled with perceptions of anonymity and psychological distance, lower the moral barriers to online bullying. Effective interventions for cyberbullying require an approach that integrates digital literacy education with broader anti-bullying programs.

In the context of Jeneponto, where social media use among teenagers is very high but digital literacy is still low, there is an urgent need to integrate critical digital literacy education into the school curriculum. Critical digital literacy encompasses not only technical skills in using technology, but also the ability to think critically about digital content, understand the impact of online actions, and develop digital empathy (Pangrazio, 2016). Therefore, digital literacy programs that integrate a gender perspective and teach students to recognize and challenge gender stereotypes in digital content are effective in reducing gender-based cyberbullying.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides empirical evidence on the complexity of gender-based bullying in senior high schools in Jeneponto Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, and the strategic role of peer support systems and school climate management in building an anti-bullying culture. Findings show that bullying is a manifestation of patriarchal social structures that normalize gender hierarchies and symbolic violence. A socio-ecological approach that integrates interventions at the individual, peer, school, and community levels is necessary to achieve sustainable change.

Peer support systems show potential as an alternative reporting mechanism and source of emotional support that can overcome a culture of silence, but their effectiveness depends on formal structures, comprehensive training, and integration with broader school management systems. Inclusive school climate management, with participatory leadership and open communication, is the foundation that enables peer support systems to function effectively and anti-bullying norms to be internalized by the entire school community.

Integrating a gender perspective into all aspects of bullying prevention, from school policies, curricula, and teacher training to peer support programs is essential to addressing the structural roots of gender-based bullying. Similarly, gender-sensitive critical digital literacy education is necessary to prevent the spread of gender-based violence into the digital space.

This research contributes to strengthening education governance that is responsive to gender equality and students' psychosocial well-being, and supports the realization of a fair, humane, and sustainable education system. The implementation of the recommendations generated from this research requires political commitment, resource investment, and collaboration between various stakeholders, schools, parents, communities, local governments, and civil society organizations to create a safe and supportive educational environment for all students.

Based on research findings and synthesis with international literature, several implications for educational policy and practice can be formulated:

First, there needs to be an explicit and comprehensive school policy on bullying prevention that integrates gender perspectives and socio-ecological approaches. This policy should include: (1) a clear definition of various forms of bullying, including gender-based bullying and cyberbullying, (2) multiple and accessible reporting mechanisms (including peer support systems), (3) clear and fair investigation and response procedures, (4) support for victims and restorative rather than purely punitive interventions for perpetrators, and (5) mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the policy.

Second, the implementation of a structured and sustainable peer support system requires investment in training, supervision, and institutional support. Based on international best practices, an effective peer support system should include: (1) selection of peer supporters based on clear criteria (such as empathy, communication skills, and trust from peers), (2) intensive training in active listening, conflict mediation, recognizing signs of distress, and referral to professional services, (3) regular supervision by trained school counselors or teachers, (4) integration with the school case management system to ensure appropriate follow-up, and (5) periodic evaluation of user satisfaction and outcomes..

Third, developing the leadership capacity of schools and teachers in creating an inclusive and anti-bullying school climate should be a priority in professional development programs. Training should include: (1) understanding the dynamics of bullying and its impact, particularly gender-based bullying, (2) skills in creating a positive and inclusive classroom climate, (3) strategies for integrating character education and social-emotional learning into the curriculum, (4) conflict mediation techniques and restorative practices, and (5) leadership in implementing whole-school approaches.

Fourth, parental and community involvement must be strengthened through effective communication strategies and structured partnership programs. Research shows that parent education programs on bullying that include information on signs that a child is a victim or perpetrator, strategies for supporting children, and ways to communicate with schools increase parental awareness and consistency of anti-bullying messages between home and school [36]. In the context of Jeneponto, the involvement of community and religious leaders in anti-bullying campaigns can increase the legitimacy and acceptance of programs at the community level.

Fifth, the integration of gender-sensitive critical digital literacy education into school curricula is an urgent need to prevent cyberbullying. Digital literacy programs should include: (1) understanding digital ethics and the consequences of online actions, (2) skills to recognize and respond to cyberbullying, (3) critical thinking about gender representation in digital media, (4) strategies to protect digital privacy and security, and (5) development of digital empathy and positive online citizenship.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

This study is limited to high schools in Jeneponto District, which has specific socio-cultural characteristics, so generalizing the findings to other contexts must be done with caution. Comparative research involving various geographical and cultural contexts in Indonesia will enrich our understanding of variations in the manifestations of gender-based bullying and the effectiveness of interventions. Recommended future directions include: (1) longitudinal studies, (2) evaluation of locally-based interventions, (3) exploration of intersectionality in bullying experiences, (4) the role of digital technology in prevention, and (5) implementation studies to understand the sustainability of anti-bullying programs.

REFERENCES

- Avilés Martínez, J. M., & Petta Daud, R. (2018). Los Sistemas de Apoyo entre Iguales (SAI) para el fomento de la convivencia en positivo, la mejora del clima de aula y la prevención de situaciones de bullying: La experiencia de Brasil y de España. *European Journal of Child Development, Education and Psychopathology*, 6(1), 5. <https://doi.org/10.30552/ejpad.v6i1.58>.
- Baron, A. R., & Byrne, D. (2005). *Psikologi Sosial, Edisi Kesepuluh, Terjemahan Ratna Djuwita*. Erlangga.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and Symbolic Power* (T. by G. R. and M. Adamson (Ed.)). Harvard University Press.

- Bradshaw, C. P., Waasdorp, T. E., Debnam, K. J., & Johnson, S. L. (2014). Measuring School Climate in High Schools: A Focus on Safety, Engagement, and the Environment. *Journal of School Health*, 84(9), 593–604. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12186>.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Harvard University Press.
- Cohen, S., & Wills, T. A. (1985). Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis.
- Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gender & Society*, 19(6), 829–859. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639>.
- Cornell, D., & Huang, F. (2016). Authoritative School Climate and High School Student Risk Behavior: A Cross-sectional Multi-level Analysis of Student Self-Reports. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 45(11), 2246–2259. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-016-0424-3>.
- Criminology, 7(1), 27–56. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-010-9109-1> Widianingtyas, S. I., & P, I. F. (2023). FAKTOR KEDEKATAN TEMAN SEBAYA. DENGAN PERILAKU BULYING PADA REMAJA. *Jurnal Keperawatan*, 12(2), 8–17. <https://doi.org/10.47560/kep.v12i2.536>.
- Espelage, D. L., & Swearer, S. M. (2003). Research on School Bullying and Victimization: What Have We Learned and Where Do We Go From Here? *School Psychology Review*, 32(3), 365–383. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02796015.2003.12086206>.
- Fitriani, K. (2025). Angka Bullying Meningkat, Solusinya Akidah Kuat? KBR.ID. <https://kbr.id/articles/indeks/angka-bullying-meningkat-solusinya-akidah-kuat>- Gaffney, H., Farrington, D. P., & Ttofi, M. M. (2019). Examining the Effectiveness of School-Bullying Intervention Programs Globally: a Meta-analysis. *International Journal of Bullying Prevention*, 1(1), 14–31. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42380-019-0007-4>.
- Gradinger, P., Yanagida, T., Strohmeier, D., & Spiel, C. (2015). Prevention of Cyberbullying and Cyber Victimization: Evaluation of the ViSC Social Competence Program. *Journal of School Violence*, 14(1), 87–110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2014.963231>.
- Gullotta, T. P., & Bloom, M. (Eds.). (2014). *Encyclopedia of Primary Prevention and Health Promotion*. Springer US. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-5999-6>.
- Hollands, F. M., Leach, S. M., Shand, R., Head, L., Wang, Y., Dossett, D., Chang, F., Yan, B., Martin, M., Pan, Y., & Hensel, S. (2022). Restorative Practices: Using local evidence on costs and student outcomes to inform school district decisions about behavioral interventions. *Journal of School Psychology*, 92, 188–208. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2022.03.007>.
- Kärnä, A., Voeten, M., Little, T. D., Poskiparta, E., Kaljonen, A., & Salmivalli, C. (2011). A Large-Scale Evaluation of the KiVa Antibullying Program: Grades 4–6. *Child Development*, 82(1), 311–330. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01557.x>.
- KOMPAS.Com.<https://www.kompas.com/edu/read/2025/02/13/130805071/hasil-survei-3451-persen-peserta-didik-berpotensi-alami-kekerasan>.
- Kowalski, R. M., Giumetti, G. W., Schroeder, A. N., & Lattanner, M. R. (2014). Bullying in the digital age: A critical review and meta-analysis of cyberbullying research among youth. *Psychological Bulletin*, 140(4), 1073–1137. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035618>.

- Kowalski, R. M., Limber, S. P., & McCord, A. (2019). A developmental approach to cyberbullying: Prevalence and protective factors. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 45*, 20–32. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2018.02.009>.
- Lester, L., Pearce, N., Waters, S., Barnes, A., Beatty, S., & Cross, D. (2017). Family Involvement in a Whole-School Bullying Intervention: Mothers' and Fathers' Communication and Influence with Children. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 26*(10), 2716–2727. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-017-0793-6>.
- McCulloch, & Barbara. (2010). Dealing With bullying Behaviours in the Workplace: What Work a Practitiiner's View. *Jurnal of the International Ombudsmen Assciation, 3*(2).
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, M. A. (1992). Analisis Data Kualitatif. Universitas Indonesia. Mills, A. J., Durepos, G., & Wiebe, E. (2012). Encyclopedia of Case Study Research. SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412957397> National School Climate Center. (2020). School climate.
- Olweus, D., & Limber, S. P. (2010). Bullying in school: Evaluation and dissemination of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 80*(1), 124–134. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-0025.2010.01015.x>.
- Pangrazio, L. (2016). Reconceptualising critical digital literacy. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 37*(2), 163–174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2014.942836>.
- Patchin, J. W., & Hinduja, S. (2015). Measuring cyberbullying: Implications for research. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 23*, 69–74. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2015.05.013>.
- Prastiwi, M. (2025). Hasil Survei: 34,51 Persen Peserta Didik Berpotensi Alami Kekerasan. *Psychological Bulletin, 98*(2), 310–357. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.98.2.310>
- Coloroso, B. (2007). Stop Bullying!: Memutus Rantai Kekerasan Anak dari Prasekolah hingga SMU (The Bully, The Bullied, and The Bystander: from Preschool to High School-How Parents and Teachers Can Help Break the Cycle of Violence. Terjemahan). PT Serambi Ilmu Semesta. Buku asli diterbitkan tahun 2003.
- Rahmawati, S. W. (2016). Peran Iklim Sekolah terhadap Perundungan. *Jurnal Psikologi, 43*(2), 167–180.
- Ramadani, T., Suarnianti, & Fajriansi, A. (2024). Hubungan Peran Kelompok Teman Sebaya dengan Perilaku Bullying pada Remaja di SMA Negeri 21 Makassar. *JIMPK : Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa & Penelitian Keperawatan, 4*(4), 38–42.
- Ringrose, J., & Renold, E. (2012). Slut-shaming, girl power and 'sexualisation': thinking through the politics of the international SlutWalks with teen girls. *Gender and Education, 24*(3), 333–343. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2011.645023>.
- Salmivalli, C. (2010). Bullying and the peer group: A review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 15*(2), 112–120. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2009.08.007>.
- Salmivalli, C., Kärnä, A., & Poskiparta, E. (2011). Counteracting bullying in Finland: The KiVa program and its effects on different forms of being bullied. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 35*(5), 405–411. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025411407457>.
- Selian, S. N., & Restya, W. P. D. (2024). Peran Kepala Sekolah dalam Mengatasi Bullying di Sekolah. *Ideguru: Jurnal Karya Ilmiah Guru, 9*(2), 531–539. <https://doi.org/10.51169/ideguru.v9i2.751>.

- Sembiring, M., & Tarigan, T. (2023). Pengaruh Iklim Sekolah terhadap Perilaku Bullying Siswa pada SMA Santa Maria Kabanjahe. *HELPER: Jurnal Penelitian Dan Pembelajaran*, 40(1), 1-13.
- Siddiqui, S., & Schultze-Krumbholz, A. (2023). The Sohanjana Antibullying Intervention: Pilot Results of a Peer-Training Module in Pakistan. *Social Sciences*, 12(7), 409. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12070409>.
- Smolleck, L. A. (2018). Creating Safe Schools: The Importance of Peers in Bully Prevention Programs. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.14738/assrj.56.4805>.
- Strohmeier, D., Hoffmann, C., Schiller, E., Stefanek, E., & Spiel, C. (2012). ViSC Social Competence Program. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 2012(133), 71-84. <https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.20008>.
- Strohmeier, D., Stefanek, E., & Yanagida, T. (2024). What Works for Whom? Evaluating Patterns and Mechanisms of Change Among Bullies, Victims, and Bully-Victims Participating in a School-Based Prevention Program. *International Journal of Bullying Prevention*, 6(3), 267-282. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42380-023-00160-2>.
- Swearer, S. M., & Hymel, S. (2015). Understanding the psychology of bullying: Moving toward a social-ecological diathesis-stress model. *American Psychologist*, 70(4), 344-353. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038929>.
- Tam, M. J., & Brown, C. S. (2020). Early Adolescents' Responses to Witnessing Gender-Based Harassment Differ by their Perceived School Belonging and Gender Typicality. *Sex Roles*, 83(7-8), 412-425. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-020-01126-0>
- Ttofi, M. M., & Farrington, D. P. (2011). Effectiveness of school-based programs to reduce bullying: a systematic and meta-analytic review. *Journal of Experimental*.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods* (6th ed.). Sage.
- Zhu, Y. (2023). Bullying in School Among Children and Adolescents from Cognitive and Developmental Perspectives: Implications for Prevention Practices. *Studies in Social Science & Humanities*, 2(6), 43-52. <https://doi.org/10.56397/SSSH.2023.06.05>.