

Bullying in pesantren and its mitigation

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Abstract: *This study aims to investigate the forms, impacts, and factors of bullying, along with the efforts to mitigate bullying impacts on the victims. This case study adopted a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and documentation. The Miles and Huberman analysis model was used interactively and consistently to analyze the data, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the case context being studied. The research subject was a single individual who experienced bullying at the Multazam Bontonompo Pesantren. The results showed that: 1) the victim experienced physical, verbal, and social forms of bullying; 2) the bullying was attributed to both internal and external factors; and 3) an assertive training technique was implemented as an effort to mitigate bullying impacts on the victim, who gradually showed improvement.*

Keywords: *behavior; bullying; assertive training technique; boarding school.*

Abstrak: Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui gambaran bentuk perilaku bullying, dampak perilaku bullying, faktor penyebab terjadinya bullying dan upaya penanganan perilaku bullying pada korban. Jenis penelitian ini adalah deskriptif kualitatif dengan penelitian studi kasus, metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini untuk pengumpulan data melalui observasi, wawancara dan dokumentasi, model analisis data yang digunakan Miles & Huberman yang dilakukan secara interaktif dan terus menerus hingga jenuh yang kemudian menganalisis data untuk memahami konteks kasus yang diteliti. Subjek pada penelitian ini berjumlah 1 orang yang menjadi korban bullying di Pondok Pesantren Multazam Bontonompo. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa (1) gambaran bentuk perilaku bullying yang dialami pada subjek yaitu bullying fisik, bullying verbal dan bullying sosial, (2) faktor yang menyebabkan perilaku bullying yang terdiri dari faktor internal dan eksternal. (3) upaya yang dilakukan dalam menangani masalah perilaku bullying pada subjek MA adalah dengan menggunakan teknik latihan asertif, setelah intervensi diberikan maka subjek MA secara perlahan dapat mengurangi perilaku bullying yang dialami.

Kata kunci: perilaku; perundungan; teknik latihan asertif; pesantren.

INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a deviant behavior that remains prevalent in Indonesia, particularly among adolescents. Bullying is currently one of the three major issues in education that continues to occur frequently, especially in schools Kasih (2021). Perpetrators repeatedly bully weaker individuals for their own amusement without considering the consequences (Alwi, 2021; Borualogo et al., 2024).

Bullying involves deliberate and repeated actions taken by an individual to harm or belittle the victim physically, verbally, and mentally, instilling fear and threats in the victim (Yuhbaba, 2019). It is defined as aggressive behavior carried out by an individual or a group of individuals who deliberately and repeatedly target a victim who cannot defend themselves or feel cornered (Pandie & Weismann, 2016).

A study by Zahro (2022) found that bullying victims suffer mental health issues, such as discouragement, unstable emotions, and low confidence levels. If bullying continues, mental health issues may exacerbate, requiring more serious and effective mitigating strategies.

The 2021 UNICEF report revealed that the majority of adolescents aged 13-15 have experienced harassment, such as physical fighting or bullying, by their peers at school (Isnawati & Yunita, 2022). Similarly, data released by the Indonesian Child Protection Commission found that the number of male victims was higher than that of their female counterparts, with adolescence being the most vulnerable age group for bullying (Amalia et al., 2019).

A study by Isnawati & Yunita (2022) revealed that one of the santri at Zainul Hasan Pesantren was bullied by their peers. The majority of the victims experience verbal bullying, which is considered more harmful than psychological bullying. They are often subjected to rude and offensive language, as well as insults about their physical appearance. Based on a study by Nashiruddin (2019), bullying also frequently occurred at Al-Hikmah Kajen Pesantren in Pati Regency, carried out by santri who were physically larger and psychologically more mature than the victims.

A study by Retnowuni (2022) conducted in a pesantren in Jombang Regency found that the bullies target others to seek amusement and

desire to be perceived as superior. Initially, bullying involved direct physical contact, but over time, it expanded to include other forms, significantly impacting the psychological well-being of victims (Diniaty, 2018; Rezapour et al., 2019).

The uniqueness of this study lies in its finding that bullying occurs not only in schools but also in pesantren, institutions for religious education. Many parents choose pesantren as a place for their children's education and character development, emphasizing religious values to instill goodness in their children. In pesantren, bullying seems to be an unbreakable vicious cycle that is difficult to stop Yuhbaba (2019).

Children are strictly prohibited to engage in bullying behaviors, such as frightening, threatening, and even committing acts of violence. Biologically, behavior is observable, both directly and indirectly (Kharis, 2019). Based on the social learning theory by Albert Bandura, observation and imitation in the learning process can lead to the development of either positive or negative behaviors (Fauziyah & Rusmana, 2022). Consequently, if negative behavior—such as bullying—persists, it is likely to be imitated by others, necessitating attention and handling.

Based observations conducted at Tahfidzul Qur'an Multazam Bontonompo Pesantren on February 2, 2023, the researchers found that physical, verbal, and social bullying frequently occurred in the male santri dormitory. Physical bullying included acts of pushing and hitting, while verbal bullying involved insulting and referring to targets by their parents' names. A male santri named MA became the primary target of bullying. Unable to defend himself, he withdrew into silence.

The results of the interviews with MA and a teacher indicate that bullying frequently occurs at Multazam Pesantren. Actions must be taken to mitigate the negative effects of bullying on the victim's both physical and psychological health. Victims may exhibit behaviors such as self-isolation, low self-confidence, and fear of social interaction.

It is not surprising that bullying persists, as people resort to silence and avoidance when confronted with it. Victims of bullying often

isolate themselves, become reluctant to engage in social activities, and remain quiet in the presence of others. This is in line with a study by (Emi, Syahrial & Hardi, 2021) that found an association between bullying and social interaction skills in children; a child exhibiting higher levels of bullying tend to have poorer social interaction skills.

Serious and effective strategies are needed to combat bullying, reduce the number of victims, and mitigate its negative impacts. More importantly, such strategies should aim to address social issues in pesantren. Proper intervention could potentially eliminate bullying and support the victims in their recovery.

METHOD

This case study adopted a qualitative approach. It typically aims to collect descriptive data, such as both oral and written utterances about a certain behavior (Moha, 2019). Observations, interviews, and documentation were performed for data collection. The Miles and Huberman analysis model was implemented interactively and consistently for data analysis, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the meanings of the data rather than creating generalizations. According to Sugiyono (2018), qualitative methods are often referred to as naturalistic methods because the research is conducted in natural settings, and the data collected are analyzed qualitatively.

Data analysis in this study followed several steps outlined by Fitrah (2018), including data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The research subject was a single individual who experienced bullying at the Multazam Bontonmpo Pesantren. The study was conducted at the Multazam Tahfidzul Quran Pesantren, located in Somba Opu Sub-District, Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Forms of bullying in pesantren

The results showed that the forms of bullying experienced by MA include:

a. Physical bullying

MA experienced physical bullying in pesantren. He was pushed and beaten repeatedly. Recently, he was kicked by the perpetrators. Zakiyah et al., (2017) argued that stronger and older perpetrators typically carry

out more dangerous attacks despite their intention of non-serious injury.

b. Verbal bullying

MA also experienced verbal bullying, with the perpetrators referring to him with his father's name. In the interviews, MA revealed that he felt uncomfortable with the repeated name-calling. In addition, the perpetrators often ridiculed MA by calling him "a whining baby" as he typically cried when being bullied. MA exhibited indications of feeling frightened. As Yuhbaba (2019) noted, victims of bullying often feel frightened, anxious, and threatened in various situations.

c. Social bullying

In pesantren, MA was isolated by his friends, as his close friend revealed in the interview. This social isolation led MA to believe that no santri were interested in forming friendships with him.

Fadhilah et al. (2021) found that the most prevalent form of bullying in pesantren is social bullying, which is perpetrated indirectly by suggesting others to exclude the target. This is followed by physical bullying, which is overt and identifiable, and verbal bullying. As a result of persistent bullying, MA frequently exhibited indications of fear and threat.

As noted by Yuhbaba (2019), victims of bullying often feel frightened, anxious, and threatened in various situations. Bullying is an unfavorable phenomenon with the potential to negatively impact the well-being of all parties involved. If bullying persists, disruptive effects will intensify, turning it into a long-term problem. Victims are likely to suffer from heightened pressure and trauma (Adawi, Fadhila & Hofifah, 2023).

These results suggest that different forms of bullying occur in pesantren. Firstly, physical bullying experienced by MA included being pushed, beaten, and kicked. Second, verbal bullying involved being referred to using MA's parents' names. Third, social bullying caused MA to be isolated by his friends. Due to persistent bullying, MA experienced fear and anxiety in various situations.

2. Factors of bullying behavior in pesantren

Bullying experienced by MA was caused by internal and external factors.

a. Internal Factors

Internal factors are factors that originate from within the individual. MA frequently became the target of bullying due to his reserved

personality, which often led him to remain silent in the face of adversity. In the interviews, MA revealed that he stayed silent and smiled. However, when things became more challenging, he began to cry. Furthermore, due to his shyness, he found difficulties expressing his thoughts and feelings. Consequently, he was likely to remain passive at the time of bullying.

This is in line with the results of a study by (Choirunnisa & Kudus, 2022) that individuals who are reluctant to take disagreeable actions, physically different from others, and unable to defend themselves are susceptible to becoming the targets of bullying. Children who often become the victims of bullying are typically passive, sensitive, silent, and weak in nature; consequently, they are less likely to retaliate if attacked or disturbed (Utami, 2019). However, a person with an assertive personality can easily convey their thoughts and emotions without inflicting harm on themselves and other people (Hikmat et al., 2024).

b. External Factors

1) Peers

MA perceived social differences between himself and the perpetrators. The interviews revealed that MA identified the existence of a clique among the santri, comprising individuals who held significant influence. Furthermore, relationships and social interactions with peers have been identified as potential contributors to bullying behavior. A study by Bulu et al., (2019) found that some adolescents target their victims of bullying based on their social status.

Adolescents have a tendency to form friendships with individuals they perceive to possess the same social status while avoiding those they consider of lower status. Many teenagers form groups with peers who hold high social status. Social status within a group plays a significant role in shaping their self-image.

This image gives a sense of honor to the individual within their group and reflects the unique motivation that drives individuals to take a particular action. This aligns with MA's experiences, as he was excluded from a social group based on his perceived social status. He was deemed unsuitable for inclusion due to his inability to meet the group's social criteria. Consequently, he became a target of bullying at the pesantren.

2) Environment

The environment is a contributing factor to the occurrence of bullying. At the pesantren where this study was conducted, there were an

unfinished building still under construction and a secluded hallway that was not monitored by the teaching staff.

The interviews revealed that some areas at the pesantren were not equipped with CCTV, hindering teachers to monitor their santri effectively. A study by Nugroho et al. (2020) found that bullying can occur due to the conditions of the pesantren, such as a lack of monitoring by the staff, especially in areas where bullying is likely to take place.

Therefore, it can be assumed that the bullying experienced by MA resulted from a combination of internal and external factors. Internal factors may have included MA's personality traits, while external factors could have involved his peers and the pesantren environment. Based on the results of previous studies, people with weak personality are more likely to become the victims of unpleasant treatments, including bullying. In addition, during adolescence, individuals tend to form groups based on their perceived social status. In this developmental stage, high social status often plays a significant role in shaping an individual's self-image.

3. Intervention to mitigate bullying in pesantren

As previously explained, both internal and external factors contribute to the bullying experienced by MA. Due to internal factors, MA was unable to communicate his feelings and experiences as a victim of bullying, hindering him from stopping and reporting the bullying. Therefore, a strategy to address the effects of bullying on the victims is counseling. Another approach is to provide behavioristic counseling using assertive training techniques.

Such techniques can prevent individuals from becoming the targets of bullying and encourage the victims to adopt an active stance rather than remaining passive when being bullied. Assertiveness serves as a respectful and effective strategy for adolescents to protect themselves from bullying. Assertive behavior can prevent victims from reacting to bullying with violence and from remaining passive in the face of it (Ainiyah & Cahyanti, 2020).

To address this problem, the researchers conducted an assertive behavior training, consisting of six stages:

a. Introduction and rationalization of actions

The first stage began with building a good rapport between the counselor and the counselee. Following this, the counselee was educated on the assertive technique and reassured of his commitment to completing a series of activities. This stage concluded with establishing a time contract and setting schedule for the next meeting with the counselee.

b. Identification of the causes of the problem

At the second stage, the counselee identified the problem, which is the bullying incident. MA experienced physical, verbal, and social bullying when no authorities at the pesantren were present to witness the incidents. The counselee handled these situations by remaining passive and defenseless, making him a constant target for bullying at the pesantren.

c. Distinguishing between assertive and non-assertive behaviors and exploring targets

At this stage, the counselee became aware of how he handled bullying and how assertive behavior differed from non-assertive behavior. He was then asked to categorize his actions into these two types of behaviors. Finally, he realized that assertive behavior is an empowering tool for confronting bullying. This stage also involved a discussion between the counselor and counselee about the incorporation of role-play in the next meeting.

d. Practicing assertive behavior and saying “no” through role-playing

After completing these activities, the counselee learned how to communicate his feelings about his problems and identify positive actions to address them. In this meeting, the counselee learned that assertive behavior, demonstrated through the positive responses provided by the counselor during the role-play, did not hurt his feelings or make him feel disadvantaged. In fact, he was unsure how to continue the role-play, as the counselor had already expressed his feelings.

e. Conducting practical exercises

The counselor presented a situation similar to the verbal bullying incident experienced by the counselee and asked how he would handle such a situation. During the role-play, the counselor encountered the same challenges as in the previous session, but they were successfully addressed. The counselor and counselee then repeated the role-play multiple times to ensure that the counselee would be able to apply the strategies in real life.

f. Evaluation and follow-up

The evaluation results revealed that MA experienced less bullying, as indicated by the positive responses he gave during the evaluation stage conducted by the researchers. The changes MA experienced include his ability to express his feelings and exhibit assertive behavior in the face of bullying. Furthermore, MA gained the confidence to report bullying to his Ustaz and Ustazah, both incidents he personally experienced and those affecting others.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The results showed that one of the santri at the Tahfidzul Quran Multazam Bontonampo Pesantren, called MA, experienced bullying, and intervention was conducted to mitigate its impacts. The forms of bullying experienced by MA include: 1) physical bullying, such as being pushed, beaten, and kicked; 2) verbal bullying, such as being referred to using his father’s name and ridiculed as a crybaby; and 3) social bullying, such as being isolated and alienated by his friends in pesantren.

The bullying experienced by MA was caused by both internal and external factors. The internal factors include MA’s reserved personality, his tendency to remain passive when being bullied, and his shyness, which hindered him from saying “no” to the perpetrators. The external factors, however, include: 1) peers who perceived social status as an important aspect of making friends; and 2) the pesantren environment that was unsafe, as there were certain areas in the pesantren that were not monitored by teachers, and there was a lack of effort by the pesantren to reduce bullying.

The intervention carried out to mitigate the impact of bullying on MA was offering counseling services using a behavioristic approach with assertive training techniques. Assertive training was carried out through six stages: 1) introduction and rationalization of actions; 2) identification of the causes of the problems; 3) distinguishing between assertive and non-assertive behavior and exploring targets; 4) practicing assertive behavior and saying “no” through role-playing; 5) conducting practical exercises; and 6) evaluation and follow-up. After the intervention, MA was gradually able to behave assertively and experienced less bullying.

Based on the conclusions of the study, the following suggestions are proposed. Firstly, the study can be used by pesantren as a resource to raise awareness about bullying that occurs among students and as a guide for implementing strategies to minimize such behavior. Secondly, the study provides teachers in pesantren with valuable information on bullying behavior and offers guidance on how teachers can address and reduce bullying effectively. Lastly, this study can serve as a reference and comparison for future research on bullying and its mitigation in educational settings.

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