

# Social Support for High School Bullying Victims: A Quantitative Analysis

Harmalis<sup>1</sup>, Ekawarna<sup>2</sup>, Hendra Sofyan<sup>3</sup>, Rosmiati<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Kerinci, Jambi, Indonesia; harmalis1705@gmail.com

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## ABSTRACT

Bullying victimization among adolescents is associated with psychological distress, social withdrawal, and decreased academic performance. Social support is a critical protective factor that can mitigate these negative effects. This study investigates the relationship between perceived social support and bullying victim behavior among high school students in Kerinci Regency, Indonesia. A descriptive quantitative approach was employed with a sample of 278 students selected using stratified random sampling. Data were collected using two validated instruments: the Delaware Bullying Victimization Scale (DBVS) and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). Instrument reliability was confirmed through a pilot study (Cronbach's  $\alpha > 0.85$ ). Data analysis included descriptive statistics and simple linear regression using SPSS version 29. Findings revealed a significant positive relationship between social support and reduced bullying victim behavior ( $R = 0.742$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), with social support accounting for 59.1% of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.591$ ). Among the three dimensions of support, family support was perceived as the highest, followed by support from significant others and peers. The results underscore the importance of strengthening social support systems—especially family support—in mitigating the negative effects of bullying. Interventions that involve families, peers, and school staff can enhance the resilience and psychological well-being of students who experience bullying.

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## Corresponding Author:

Harmalis

Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Kerinci, Jambi, Indonesia; harmalis1705@gmail.com

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Bullying in schools remains a pervasive and deeply concerning issue, particularly among adolescents, as it affects not only their psychological well-being but also their academic and social development. Victims of bullying often experience a range of negative emotional outcomes, including feelings of helplessness, social withdrawal, low self-esteem, and clinical symptoms such as anxiety and depression (Nishina & Juvonen, 2005; Hertz et al., 2017). These consequences can persist over time, shaping a student's long-term mental health and academic trajectory (Sulkowski et al., 2012). In the

educational context, bullying is not only an interpersonal problem but also a systemic one that reflects the broader climate of school relationships, peer interactions, and familial support structures.

Bullying victimization typically manifests in various forms, including physical aggression, verbal abuse, social exclusion, and, more recently, cyberbullying. Each of these forms can have unique psychological effects, but they often share a common thread: they undermine the victim's sense of safety and belonging. Studies indicate that repeated exposure to such victimization leads to internalized distress, social isolation, disinterest in school, and impaired self-concept (Holt & Espelage, 2007; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). While many studies have focused on the causes of bullying or on the profiles of aggressors, there is a growing interest in identifying protective factors that can buffer the negative impacts of victimization. One of the most widely studied and empirically supported protective factors is social support.

Social support is generally defined as the perception or experience that one is cared for, valued, and part of a supportive social network (Sarason & Sarason, 2015; Zimet et al., 1988). It may come from various sources, including family, peers, teachers, and other significant figures. This support has been shown to play a vital role in helping individuals cope with stressful life events, including bullying (Compas et al., 2001; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Specifically, social support can mitigate psychological distress, foster resilience, and promote adaptive coping strategies among adolescents. For example, supportive family environments are linked to higher self-esteem and lower levels of depressive symptoms among youth exposed to peer victimization (Harter, 1999; Eisenberg et al., 2003). Likewise, peer support has been associated with a reduction in feelings of loneliness and increased emotional well-being (Nishina & Juvonen, 2005).

In the school setting, social support operates on multiple levels. At the individual level, it serves as an emotional resource that reinforces one's ability to interpret and respond to bullying situations. At the interpersonal level, it enhances a student's sense of belonging and connectedness, reducing their vulnerability to victimization (Rothson et al., 2011). Moreover, the presence of supportive figures—such as teachers, counselors, or community leaders—can empower students to report bullying and seek help. Previous research has emphasized that the type and source of support matter: while family support may offer emotional stability and a secure base, peer support provides immediate empathy and shared experiences (Holt & Espelage, 2007). Support from significant others, including school personnel, can provide both instrumental assistance and advocacy within institutional systems.

While substantial research on social support and bullying has been conducted in Western contexts, there remains a notable gap in understanding how cultural and regional factors shape the perception and provision of support. In Indonesia—particularly in rural or culturally traditional areas such as Kerinci Regency—strong familial and communal bonds coexist with limited awareness of mental health issues, including bullying. Prevailing cultural norms often discourage the open expression of emotional distress or interpersonal conflict, potentially influencing how students seek out or receive social support (Karina et al., 2013). Consequently, it is crucial to investigate how social support functions within these sociocultural settings and whether it offers the same protective benefits observed in more urbanized or Western environments.

This study addresses these gaps by exploring the relationship between perceived social support and the behavioral responses of bullying victims among high school students in Kerinci Regency, Indonesia. It focuses on three dimensions of support—family, peers, and significant others—and investigates how each contributes to students' coping behaviors and psychological resilience. By doing so, the research aims to inform not only academic discourse but also practical interventions that can be implemented in schools and communities.

The theoretical foundation of this study draws on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), which posits that close and reliable relationships, especially with caregivers, foster a secure base from which individuals can manage external stressors. In the context of bullying, supportive attachments may serve as a psychological buffer that enhances victims' coping capabilities and reduces maladaptive responses such as withdrawal or aggression. Furthermore, the study is informed by stress-buffering models in

health psychology, which argue that social support moderates the relationship between stressful events and negative health outcomes (Sarafino & Smith, 2012).

Therefore, the objective of this research is to examine the extent to which perceived social support influences the behavior of bullying victims in senior high schools in Kerinci Regency. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing body of literature on adolescent mental health and bullying prevention by offering insights specific to the Indonesian educational and cultural context.

## 2. METHODS

This study employed a descriptive quantitative design to examine the relationship between perceived social support and bullying victimization behavior among high school students in Kerinci Regency, Indonesia.

### 2.1 Participants

The study population comprised students from Public Senior High School 3 and 4 in Kerinci Regency during the 2023/2024 academic year, totaling 994 students. A sample of 278 students was selected using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table for determining sample size. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure proportional representation across grades and gender.

### 2.2 Instruments

#### 1. Delaware Bullying Victimization Scale (DBVS)

Developed by Bear et al. (2016), this scale measures the extent to which students experience verbal, physical, and social bullying. The instrument consists of 12 items, rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The DBVS was adapted linguistically and culturally for the Indonesian context following standard procedures, including translation, back-translation, and expert validation.

#### 2. Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)

Originally developed by Zimet et al. (1988), the MSPSS measures perceived social support from three sources: family, friends, and significant others. It includes 12 items, also rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The Indonesian version used in this study was adapted through a pilot test to ensure cultural relevance.

### 2.3 Validity and Reliability

To assess the psychometric properties of the instruments in the local context, a pilot study was conducted involving 50 students from schools not included in the main sample.

1. Construct validity was examined using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with Principal Component Analysis (PCA).
2. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, resulting in  $\alpha = 0.87$  for DBVS and  $\alpha = 0.91$  for MSPSS, indicating high internal consistency.

### 2.4 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted in-class using paper-based questionnaires after obtaining informed consent from students and school administrators. The study received ethical clearance from the institutional ethics board of [insert institution name].

### 2.5 Data Analysis

1. A simple linear regression analysis was conducted using SPSS version 29 to test the hypothesis regarding the relationship between social support and bullying victimization behavior.

2. Additionally, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage) were used to describe the distribution of perceived social support across the three dimensions (family, friends, significant others).

Assumptions for regression (normality, linearity, homoscedasticity) were tested and met prior to analysis.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the hypothesis testing indicate a strong and statistically significant relationship between perceived social support and the behavior of bullying victims among students in Kerinci Regency. The correlation coefficient (R) was found to be 0.742, with a p-value of 0.001 ( $p < 0.05$ ), confirming the significance of the relationship. The coefficient of determination ( $R^2 = 0.591$ ) suggests that social support explains 59.1% of the variance in bullying victim behavior. This finding underscores the crucial role of social support in mitigating the negative behavioral outcomes associated with bullying.

Social support may influence the responses of bullying victims through several psychological mechanisms. It can enhance self-esteem, reduce stress, and foster the development of social and emotional competencies (Harter, 1999; Holt & Espelage, 2007). Furthermore, support from family, peers, or other significant individuals can strengthen students' coping strategies, allowing them to respond more adaptively to adverse social experiences (Compas et al., 2001).

These findings are consistent with prior research demonstrating that higher levels of perceived social support are significantly associated with lower levels of distress and maladaptive behavior among bullying victims (Nishina & Juvonen, 2005; Sulkowski et al., 2012). Therefore, it is essential for schools, families, and communities to actively foster supportive environments that protect and empower students facing bullying.

A detailed analysis of the perceived support from significant others among students who experienced bullying is presented in the following table.

**Table 1.** Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Support Dimensions from Significant Others for Student Victims of Bullying (n = 278)

Score Interval	Category	Frequency (F)	Percentage
$X < 17$	Very Low	9	3.24%
$17 < X \leq 18$	Low	19	6.83%
$18 < X \leq 20$	Currently	142	51.08%
$20 < X \leq 21$	High	103	37.05%
$X > 21$	Very high	5	1.80%

Source: Primary data processed 2025

Analysis of the data presented in Table 1 shows that support from significant others—including teachers, school counselors, and community figures—plays an important role in the experiences of bullying victims, with 37.05% of students reporting a high level of support in this category. This suggests that many students who experience bullying perceive a meaningful level of support from adults outside their immediate family or peer group. Such support can be instrumental in enhancing students' self-esteem and psychological well-being, thereby increasing their resilience in the face of bullying.

According to Sarafino and Smith (2012), individuals who receive consistent social support feel valued and emotionally connected to their social environment. This aligns with the present findings, which demonstrate that support from significant others contributes positively to students' self-perceptions. Ghufron (2010) emphasizes that self-esteem is shaped by how individuals perceive they are treated by others, directly influencing their sense of competence and self-worth.

Support from significant others also promotes psychological well-being, which Ryff and Keyes (1995) define as a multidimensional state that enhances one's capacity to manage stress and develop adaptive responses. For victims of bullying, this form of support provides emotional reassurance and practical guidance, making it easier to confront or report abusive behavior.

Hoover (1998) and Sejiwa (2008) further argue that low self-esteem makes students more vulnerable to environmental pressure, while high self-esteem equips them to resist victimization. Victims who remain silent often do so out of emotional exhaustion and lack of coping resources, perpetuating the bullying cycle.

In this context, the findings of this study confirm that social support from significant others is a key factor in strengthening self-esteem and psychological resilience, enabling students to more effectively withstand the pressures associated with bullying.

A further breakdown of peer support dimensions among students who experienced bullying is presented in the following table.

**Table 2.** Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Peer Support Dimensions for Students Who Are Victims of Bullying by Category (n=278)

Score Interval	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage
$X < 17$	Very Low	17	6.12%
$17 < X \leq 18$	Low	19	6.83%
$18 < X \leq 20$	Currently	140	50.36%
$20 < X \leq 21$	Tall	102	36.69%
$X > 21$	Very high	0	0.00%

*Source: Primary data processed 2025*

As shown in Table 2, peer support emerged as a significant contributor to the experiences of students who are victims of bullying, with 36.69% of participants reporting high levels of support from their peers. This indicates that many victims receive meaningful assistance from friends in the form of both emotional and informational support, which plays an important role in buffering the psychological effects of bullying.

Emotional support from peers—such as empathy, companionship, and a sense of belonging—can enhance the emotional well-being of victims, enabling them to better cope with the distress associated with bullying. This is supported by findings from Nishina and Juvonen (2005), who demonstrated that peer support significantly reduces feelings of loneliness and emotional distress among bullying victims.

In addition, informational support—such as advice or guidance on how to respond to bullying—can help victims understand their situation and develop effective coping strategies. According to Hertz et al. (2017), this type of support can alleviate anxiety and reduce the psychological burden of victimization.

Lahey (2007) also emphasized that individuals who receive strong social support from friends tend to respond more positively to daily challenges and are less prone to negative psychological outcomes. This suggests that peer support can play a protective role, reducing not only emotional harm but also the likelihood of persistent bullying behavior.

In this context, the findings of the current study reinforce the importance of fostering peer support systems within schools. Educational institutions should actively promote peer-based interventions to support students affected by bullying and to cultivate a more inclusive and empathetic school climate. A detailed analysis of family support for students who are victims of bullying is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Family Support Dimensions for Students Who Are Victims of Bullying by Category (n=278).

Score Interval	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage
$X < 17$	Very Low	9	3.24%
$17 < X \leq 18$	Low	22	7.91%
$18 < X \leq 20$	Currently	143	51.44%
$20 < X \leq 21$	High	100	35.97%
$X > 21$	Very high	4	1.44%

Source: Primary data processed 2025

As shown in Table 3, family support was found to make a significant contribution to the experiences of students who are victims of bullying, with 35.97% of participants reporting a high level of support. This suggests that many victims perceive their families as a reliable source of assistance. The support provided by families typically manifests in two main forms: instrumental support, such as assistance with daily tasks (e.g., helping with homework or transportation), and applied support, such as guidance in developing coping strategies and assertive communication to address bullying situations.

Numerous studies have emphasized the critical role of family support in enhancing victims' social competence and psychological well-being. Holt and Espelage (2007) noted that family involvement fosters stronger communication and interpersonal skills among adolescents. Similarly, Hinduja and Patchin (2010) found that adolescents who receive consistent family support are better equipped to navigate social challenges and are less likely to internalize feelings of insecurity.

Family support has also been linked to increased life satisfaction and emotional stability. When children feel supported by their families, they are more likely to develop a sense of security and confidence, enabling them to manage stressful experiences such as bullying more effectively (Sullivan et al., 2006). Eisenberg et al. (2003) also highlight the role of family in helping adolescents reduce aggressive behaviors and build constructive social interactions.

Comparative analysis across the three dimensions of social support—family, peer, and significant others—revealed that family support had the highest overall contribution to reducing bullying victim behavior, with an average score of 51.44%, compared to 50.36% for peer support and 51.08% for support from significant others. This finding aligns with attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), which emphasizes the importance of secure emotional bonds formed during childhood, particularly between parents and children. Consistent support from parents helps establish a strong foundation for emotional regulation, resilience, and healthy self-concept.

Furthermore, family support can play a pivotal role in psychological recovery following exposure to bullying. When victims receive recognition and encouragement from their families, their self-esteem tends to improve, and their capacity to withstand external social pressures is strengthened (Harter, 1999). As this study has demonstrated, students who perceive higher levels of family support are more likely to exhibit adaptive behaviors and lower psychological distress in response to bullying.

However, it is important to note that none of the three support dimensions received a "very high" category rating, indicating that while support exists, it may not be optimal. Several factors could contribute to this outcome:

1. Limited awareness among parents regarding the psychological impact of bullying and the role of family support.
2. Insufficient skills or resources within families to provide emotional or strategic support effectively.
3. Cultural and environmental influences, such as communication norms or stigma related to discussing emotional difficulties, which may hinder supportive family dynamics.

In the specific context of Kerinci Regency, the findings emphasize that family-based support remains a crucial protective factor against bullying victimization. The region's cultural emphasis on family unity and collective responsibility aligns with the protective mechanisms described in this study. However, systemic challenges—including limited access to mental health education, a lack of public awareness, and socioeconomic constraints—may hinder families from fully realizing their supportive roles.

Given these findings, it is recommended that local governments, schools, and community organizations in Kerinci work collaboratively to increase awareness about bullying and the importance of family-based intervention. This can be achieved through targeted educational programs, parent training workshops, and broader community engagement initiatives aimed at building a safe and supportive environment for students.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study concluded that social support plays a critical role in reducing the negative behaviors associated with bullying victimization among high school students in Kerinci Regency, with family support showing the strongest influence (51.44%) compared to support from significant others (51.08%) and peers (50.36%). Social support contributes to improved self-esteem, stress reduction, and enhanced social skills, all of which help victims cope more effectively with bullying. However, a key limitation of this study lies in its reliance on self-reported data from a limited geographic region, which may not fully capture the broader sociocultural factors influencing bullying dynamics or the effectiveness of social support in other contexts. Future research should consider expanding the sample across diverse regions, utilizing mixed-methods approaches, and exploring longitudinal effects of social support to better understand how different types of support impact bullying outcomes over time. Additionally, further studies could investigate the quality and depth of support interactions to complement the quantitative findings presented here.

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