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Social Group Dynamics and Its Role in the Phenomenon of Bullying in Secondary Schools

Hamsah Hamsah¹, Romi Mesra², Darmawan Edi Winoto³, Marven Ajels Kasenda⁴,
Delbert Mongan⁵

^{1,2,3,4,5}Faculty of Social Sciences and Law, Manado State University

*Corresponding author. Email: hamsah@unima.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the dynamics of social groups and their role in the phenomenon of bullying in secondary schools. The main focus is to understand how interactions between groups, social norms, and hierarchical structures within groups affect the prevalence and forms of bullying. The method used is a qualitative approach with a systematic literature review. Relevant sources were identified through academic databases using specific keywords, then evaluated and analyzed using thematic analysis. The results of the study indicate that social group dynamics play a significant role in the phenomenon of bullying. Rigid hierarchical group structures, norms that support dominance, and intergroup competition tend to increase the risk of bullying. Conversely, groups with more egalitarian structures and inclusive values tend to show lower levels of bullying. The role of group leaders and bystanders was also found to be crucial in shaping responses to bullying. Contextual factors such as school transitions and the use of social media also influence the dynamics of bullying. Analysis using Social Identity Theory and Social Control Theory revealed that bullying is often rooted in the need to strengthen group identity and respond to weak social ties. These findings emphasize the importance of a holistic approach in bullying prevention and intervention efforts, which considers the complexity of group dynamics and the broader social context.

Keywords: *Social Group Dynamics, Phenomenon of Bullying, Secondary Schools*

1. INTRODUCTION

Bullying has become a serious and disturbing problem in secondary schools around the world [1]. This phenomenon not only negatively affects the victims, but also affects the overall social and academic climate [2]. To understand and effectively address the problem of bullying, it is important to analyze the dynamics of social groups that play a role in the occurrence of this behavior [3]. Social groups in secondary schools have a significant influence on individual behavior and attitudes, including in the context of bullying [4]. Interactions between students in various social groups can shape norms, values, and expectations that encourage or prevent bullying [5].

Therefore, research on social group dynamics is crucial in understanding the root of the problem and finding appropriate solutions [6]. In the context of secondary schools, social groups can be formed based on various factors such as interests, academic achievement,

socio-economic background, or other similar characteristics [7]. Each group has an internal structure, hierarchy, and unwritten rules that influence the behavior of its members [8]. These dynamics can create pressure to conform or adjust to group norms, which sometimes encourages negative behavior such as bullying [9].

The role of group leaders is also significant in shaping members' attitudes and behaviors towards bullying [10]. A leader who tolerates or even encourages bullying can influence group members to adopt similar behaviors [11]. In contrast, leaders who promote positive values and empathy can create an environment that discourages bullying [12]. In addition, competition between social groups in schools can lead to bullying as a means of asserting dominance or maintaining social status [13]. Groups that feel threatened or want to increase their position in the school's social hierarchy may use bullying as a means to intimidate or demean other groups [14]. This phenomenon is often reinforced by stereotypes and prejudices that exist between different social groups [15].

Bullying can also emerge as a mechanism to strengthen internal group cohesion, where group members unite in negative actions against individuals or groups that are perceived as different or weak [16]. This creates an “us vs. them” dichotomy that can exacerbate social divisions in the school environment [17]. The role of technology and social media in social group dynamics and bullying cannot be ignored either [18]. Online platforms have created new spaces for social interaction and, unfortunately, also become a vehicle for cyberbullying [19].

Group dynamics can extend from the real world to the virtual world, creating new challenges in addressing bullying. Understanding how social groups operate in both of these realms is essential to developing comprehensive prevention strategies [20]. Teachers, counselors, and school administrators have a critical role to play in understanding and navigating social group dynamics to prevent bullying. They need to identify patterns of interaction that potentially lead to bullying and develop effective interventions. This may include programs that promote empathy, social skills, and conflict resolution among students. Approaches that involve the entire school community, including parents and the surrounding community, are also needed to create an inclusive and safe environment for all students [21].

More research on social group dynamics and their role in bullying in secondary schools is needed. Longitudinal studies that track the development of social groups and the incidence of bullying over time can provide valuable insights. Additionally, cross-cultural comparative research can help identify universal and culture-specific factors that influence these dynamics. A deeper understanding of this topic will help design more effective policies and programs to prevent and address bullying in secondary schools. By addressing the complexities of social group dynamics, we can hope to create school environments that are safer, more inclusive, and more conducive to the positive development of all students.

Research conducted by Salmivalli et al. examined the role of peer groups in bullying in secondary schools. The study found that group dynamics have a significant influence on bullying behavior, where group norms and pressure can encourage or discourage such acts. This finding emphasizes the importance of interventions that target the social group as a whole, rather than just the individual perpetrator or victim.

Pellegrini and Long [22] examined the transition from elementary to secondary school and its impact on bullying. They found that changes in social structure and the need to assert status in a new environment can trigger an increase in bullying behavior. This study highlights the importance of understanding the developmental context in analyzing bullying dynamics.

Espelage et al. [23] explored the relationship between school climate, group norms, and bullying. This study revealed that students' perceptions of school climate and peer norms significantly influenced their involvement in bullying, both as perpetrators and victims. A research gap that can be identified from these studies is the lack of focus on the interactions between different social groups in secondary schools and how these interactions affect bullying dynamics.

Most previous studies tend to focus on homogeneous peer groups, without considering the complexity of interactions between different groups. In addition, the role of technology and social media in shaping and influencing social group dynamics related to bullying has not been fully explored in the secondary school context.

The novelty of the proposed research lies in its comprehensive approach in analyzing social group dynamics and its role in the phenomenon of bullying in secondary schools. This research will integrate the analysis of interactions between diverse social groups, considering factors such as social hierarchy, group identity, and intergroup competition. In addition, this research will combine offline and online perspectives in understanding social group dynamics, recognizing the important role of technology in shaping contemporary social interactions among adolescents. This approach is expected to provide a more nuanced and contextual understanding of how social group dynamics contribute to the phenomenon of bullying in secondary schools, as well as provide new insights for the development of more effective prevention and intervention strategies.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study will use a qualitative approach with a systematic literature review method to analyze the dynamics of social groups and their role in the phenomenon of bullying in secondary schools. Qualitative methods are chosen because they allow for in-depth exploration of the complexity of social phenomena and interactions between individuals in a group context.

A systematic literature review will be conducted to collect, evaluate, and synthesize previous studies relevant to this topic. The review process will involve several stages: First, identification and selection of relevant sources will be carried out using academic databases such as JSTOR, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar. Search keywords will include, but are not limited to: "bullying", "social groups", "group dynamics", "secondary school", "adolescent social interaction", and "cyberbullying". Second, selected articles will be evaluated based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria, such as topic relevance, year of publication, and methodological quality.

Third, data from selected articles will be extracted and analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. This will help identify patterns, key themes, and gaps in the existing literature. Fourth, a narrative synthesis will be conducted to integrate findings from various studies and develop a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. This approach will allow researchers to explore various aspects of social group dynamics in the context of bullying, including factors that influence group formation and behavior, the role of group norms and values, and interactions between different groups.

In addition, this method will also help in identifying recent trends and developments in research on bullying and social group dynamics in secondary schools. Through a critical analysis of the existing literature, this study aims to provide new insights into how social group dynamics contribute to the phenomenon of bullying, as well as identify areas that require further research. The results of this literature review are expected to provide a strong theoretical basis for the development of more effective bullying prevention and intervention strategies, taking into account the complexity of social group dynamics in secondary schools.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Result

The results of the study indicate that social group dynamics play a crucial role in the phenomenon of bullying in secondary schools. The literature analysis revealed several main themes that illustrate the complexity of the interaction between social groups and bullying behavior. First, the hierarchical structure in social groups was found to have a significant influence on the incidence of bullying. Groups with strong and rigid hierarchies tend to have higher levels of bullying, where members at the top of the hierarchy often use intimidation to maintain their status. In contrast, groups with more egalitarian structures tend to show lower levels of bullying. Group norms and values have also been shown to be important factors in influencing bullying behavior.

Groups that embrace values of dominance and power tend to tolerate or even encourage bullying behavior as a way to assert their superiority. On the other hand, groups that prioritize values such as empathy, inclusiveness, and equality tend to reject bullying practices and actively prevent them. The role of group leaders in shaping the norms and behavior of group members towards bullying is very significant. Leaders who show positive attitudes towards bullying or are directly involved in the behavior tend to create an environment where bullying is considered the norm. In contrast, leaders who actively challenge bullying and promote prosocial attitudes can have a positive impact on preventing such behavior among group members.

Group identity and belonging have also been found to have a complex relationship with bullying. On the one hand, a strong group identity can create important social cohesion and support for adolescents. However, on the other hand, overly strong identification with a group can lead to an “us vs. them” attitude that encourages bullying of individuals or groups perceived as different. Competition between social groups in middle school is often a catalyst for bullying behavior. Groups competing for status, resources, or recognition may use bullying as a strategy to demean or intimidate other groups. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the context of competition between popular and unpopular groups, where bullying is used as a tool to maintain or enhance social status. Changes in the composition and dynamics of social groups during transitions, such as the transition from elementary to middle school, have been found to be critical periods that can trigger increased bullying. As students attempt to rebuild their social identities and find their place in new social hierarchies, the risk of bullying increases.

The role of technology and social media in shaping group dynamics and facilitating bullying has emerged as an increasingly important theme. Cyberbullying has expanded the arena in which group dynamics operate, creating new spaces for group formation, norm enforcement, and bullying perpetration. Social media platforms can reinforce existing group dynamics or create new dynamics unique to the online environment. Group-based interventions have been shown to be an effective approach to reducing bullying. Programs that focus on changing group norms, increasing empathy, and developing conflict resolution skills at the group level have shown promise. This approach recognizes that bullying is often a group phenomenon and that change must occur at the group level to achieve lasting impact.

The role of bystanders in bullying dynamics has also emerged as an important aspect of group interaction. Research suggests that bystander attitudes and actions can significantly influence the outcome of bullying situations. Social groups that encourage active intervention by bystanders tend to have lower rates of bullying, while groups that tolerate or ignore bullying tend to exacerbate the problem. Contextual factors such as school climate and anti-bullying policies have been found to have significant effects on how social groups respond to bullying. Schools with positive climates and strong anti-bullying policies tend to have social groups that are more likely to speak out against bullying. This highlights the importance of a systemic approach that involves the entire school community in bullying prevention efforts.

Research also reveals gender differences in group dynamics related to bullying. Male- and female-dominated social groups tend to exhibit different patterns of bullying, with physical bullying more common among

male groups and relational bullying more common prevalent among girls. Understanding these differences is important for designing gender-sensitive interventions. The intersectionality of factors such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation in shaping group dynamics and bullying experiences emerges as an area in need of further research. Minority or marginalized groups are often at higher risk for bullying, and group dynamics can exacerbate or mitigate these experiences. Longitudinal studies have shown that individual roles in group bullying dynamics can change over time.

Individuals who are initially victims may later become perpetrators or vice versa, demonstrating role fluidity across social group contexts. Understanding these trajectories is important for developing effective, long-term interventions. Finally, research underscores the importance of a holistic approach to understanding and addressing bullying in secondary schools. Interventions that focus solely on the individual without considering the social group context are likely to be less effective. Strategies that integrate an understanding of group dynamics, social norms, and broader contextual factors show the greatest potential for creating lasting change in reducing bullying and creating safer and more inclusive school environments.

3.2. Discussion

The results of the study on the dynamics of social groups and their role in the phenomenon of bullying in high schools can be further analyzed using two relevant sociological theories: Social Identity Theory and Social Control Theory. These theories provide a useful conceptual framework for understanding the complexity of social interactions that underlie bullying behavior in a group context. Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, states that individuals gain a sense of identity and self-esteem through their membership in social groups. In the context of bullying in high schools, this theory helps explain why students may engage in bullying behavior as a way to strengthen their group identity and distinguish themselves from other groups. The tendency to bully individuals or groups that are considered "different" can be understood as an effort to increase the status and cohesion of the in-group, while demeaning the out-group.

The "us vs. them" phenomenon that often appears in bullying dynamics can be explained through the lens of Social Identity Theory. Social groups in high schools may use bullying as a tool to assert their superiority and maintain clear group boundaries. This explains why bullying often targets students who are perceived as not conforming to dominant norms or who are from minority groups. Social Identity Theory also highlights the important role of group leaders in shaping bullying norms and behaviors. Leaders who promote a group identity

based on dominance and power may be more likely to encourage bullying behavior as a way to strengthen group status. Conversely, leaders who emphasize values of inclusivity and empathy may help create a group identity that rejects bullying.

The transition from elementary to middle school, which is often marked by increased bullying, can be understood through Social Identity Theory as a period in which students strive to establish and assert their new social identities. The uncertainty and anxiety associated with this change may encourage behaviors aimed at gaining status and acceptance within the new social group. Social Control Theory, developed by Travis Hirschi, offers a complementary perspective for understanding the dynamics of bullying. This theory argues that deviant behavior, including bullying, is more likely to occur when an individual's ties to society (in this case, the school community) are weakened. Four key elements of this theory—attachment, commitment, involvement, and beliefs—can be applied to understanding how group dynamics influence bullying behavior.

Attachment, or emotional connections to others and institutions, plays an important role in preventing bullying. Social groups that facilitate strong bonds between members and with the school as a whole tend to exhibit lower rates of bullying. In contrast, groups with weak ties may be more prone to antisocial behavior, including bullying. Commitment to conventional goals and prosocial activities may serve as antidotes to bullying. Social groups that emphasize academic achievement, participation in extracurricular activities, or community involvement tend to create environments in which bullying is less acceptable. This explains why intervention programs that focus on promoting positive student engagement are often effective in reducing bullying.

Involvement in conventional activities, as emphasized by Social Control Theory, may reduce opportunities for bullying. Social groups that encourage their members to actively participate in school and community activities may be less likely to engage in bullying because their time and energy are directed in more constructive directions. Beliefs in broader societal norms and values also influence the prevalence of bullying within social groups. Groups that internalize norms that discourage violence and support equality are more likely to reject bullying. This underscores the importance of efforts to instill positive values at the group level as a bullying prevention strategy.

The role of bystanders in bullying dynamics can be understood through the lens of Social Control Theory. Social groups that encourage active intervention by bystanders strengthen informal social control over bullying behavior. This explains why anti-bullying programs that focus on empowering bystanders are often

effective in reducing bullying incidents. Cyberbullying, as a relatively new form of bullying, challenges some of the traditional aspects of bystander Social Control Theory. The online environment may undermine some of the social control mechanisms that typically operate in face-to-face interactions. However, the basic principles of this theory remain relevant in understanding how online communities can be formed to prevent cyberbullying through the development of shared norms and values.

The intersectionality of factors such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation in bullying dynamics can be analyzed using a combination of Social Identity Theory and Social Control Theory. Complex social identities can influence how individuals interact with different social groups and how they experience or engage in bullying. At the same time, these factors can also influence the strength of an individual's social ties, which in turn influences their propensity to engage in or be a victim of bullying. Finally, the holistic approach to understanding and addressing bullying in secondary schools, highlighted by the study findings, is consistent with the broader perspectives of both theories. Social Identity Theory and Social Control Theory both emphasize the importance of understanding the broader social context in shaping individual behavior. This supports the argument that effective interventions must consider group dynamics, social norms, and broader contextual factors, rather than focusing solely on the individual.

4. CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study shows that social group dynamics play a crucial role in the phenomenon of bullying in secondary schools. Through analysis using Social Identity Theory and Social Control Theory, it was revealed that bullying behavior is often rooted in the need to strengthen group identity, maintain social status, and respond to weak social ties. Factors such as group hierarchical structure, norms and values adopted, the role of leaders, and interactions between different groups significantly influence the prevalence and forms of bullying. These findings emphasize the importance of a holistic approach in bullying prevention and intervention efforts, which not only focus on individuals, but also consider the broader social context, including group dynamics, school climate, and other contextual factors. With a deeper understanding of the complexity of social interactions underlying bullying, educators, policymakers, and practitioners can develop more effective strategies to create a safe, inclusive school environment that supports the positive development of all students.

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