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Bystander Bullying Reduction Interventions: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

This systematic review aims to: (1) identify and analyze various intervention programs conducted to reduce the passive role of bystanders in bullying cases, (2) evaluate the effectiveness of each intervention program based on its strengths and weaknesses, and (3) examine the characteristics of intervention programs that successfully change the behavior of bystanders into defenders. The review process included planning, sourcing, selection, data extraction, and synthesis of results. Based on 14 articles that met the criteria, several types of interventions involving bystanders were found, such as bystander education programs, bystander social skills training, empathy enhancement, and teacher training. The results show that bystander education and empathy enhancement programs tend to be effective in reducing the passive role of bystanders in bullying cases. The bystander education program aims to build bystander awareness about the importance of defending victims of bullying in a constructive way. Increased empathy in bystanders is shown to motivate bystanders to take action to defend because they are able to understand the feelings of the victim. Meanwhile, bystander social skills training aims to improve bystander interpersonal skills in order to effectively interact with victims and perpetrators of bullying. In general, it can be concluded that interventions involving education, increasing empathy, and providing skills seem to be more effective in reducing the passive role of bystanders in school bullying cases than other interventions.

Keywords: Bystander Intervention, Bystander Education Program, Social Skills Training, Empathy, Systematic Review.

INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a social problem that often occurs in society. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) website, bullying occurs when a person or group of people show repeated aggressive behavior towards others. Bullying can be verbal, physical, social, or cyber (Rokhanawati et al., 2020). Bullying is a social problem that has been found since school age, even in kindergarten (Kirves & Sajaniemi, 2014). Almost every child may have experienced some form of unpleasant treatment from an older or younger person (Landreth, 2023). This condition is inseparable from the existence of bullying that often occurs in schools covertly and is often not reported so that it is less realized by those around it. Judging from the number of cases that lead to bullying that occurs in schools, it is clearly an urgent problem to find a handle, so that a safe and comfortable school can be realized. As there is research by (Kusdaryani et al., 2016)which explains that the existence of a friendly school for students is a very urgent thing to implement. All stakeholders who care about education and the formation of a commendable mental attitude or character of students must work together to realize these noble ideals. WHO reports that 1 in 3 children

experience bullying at school. UNICEF Indonesia survey results in 2018 showed 44.4% of junior high school students experienced bullying at school. This phenomenon indicates a serious social problem and requires intervention to prevent bullying.

One of the factors that cause bullying is the presence of bystanders or spectators who do not take action to prevent bullying. Bystanders often just watch without intervening. Speaking of bullying, bullying is not a one-to-one relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. 85% of bullying cases are present in the context of peers. So in addition to the perpetrator and victim, the other main role is the bystander (Staub, 2017). (Keashly, 2024) define a bystander as a person who is at the scene of bullying and simply watches or walks away without providing assistance to the victim. Despite not actively participating in the bullying. The presence of a bystander has an influence ± be it in the form of support or rejection - on the bullying behavior that is taking place. Therefore, in addition to the perpetrator and victim, the bystander is also a core figure in the cycle that participates in the occurrence of bullying behavior.

Research shows that the presence of bystanders can either exacerbate or improve bullying situations. For example, (Trach & Hymel, 2020) found that when bystanders choose not to act, bullies feel supported and are more likely to continue their behavior. Conversely, when bystanders intervene to defend the victim, the bullying situation can be stopped in a short period of time. However, only 20-30% of bystanders are actually willing to take action to help the victim (Koehler & Weber, 2018), suggesting that there are psychological and social barriers that prevent active intervention. There are several reasons why bystanders tend to be passive in bullying situations. One of the main causes is diffusion of responsibility, where individuals feel that the responsibility to act is spread among many other bystanders, so they feel less compelled to help. In addition, fear of retaliation from the perpetrator may also deter bystanders from intervening, especially if the bully has higher social power or is more popular among their peers.

Social norms within peer groups also play an important role in determining whether bystanders will act or not. In environments where bullying behavior is perceived as "normal" or socially acceptable, bystanders are less likely to intervene for fear of being rejected by their group. This indicates that group dynamics and social pressure can significantly influence bystanders' behavior. Furthermore, the lack of skills and knowledge on how to intervene safely is also a barrier. Many bystanders may want to help the victim but do not know how to appropriately do so without putting themselves in danger or making the situation worse. Therefore, interventions that focus on education and training for bystanders are crucial in an effort to reduce their passive role in bullying incidents.

Bystanders who do not act in bullying situations not only reinforce the perpetrator's behavior but also have a greater psychological impact on the victim. Bullying victims who feel ignored or unsupported by those who witness the incident tend to experience higher levels of stress and feel more socially isolated (Salmivalli, 2014). Victims who receive support from bystanders are less likely to experience long-term trauma symptoms compared to victims who do not receive support.

Meanwhile, for perpetrators, the presence of passive or even supportive bystanders indirectly provides validation for their actions. Bystanders who passively support the

perpetrator (e.g. by laughing or doing nothing) can increase the perpetrator's sense of superiority and reinforce their aggressive behavior.

Therefore, interventions to change the behavior of bystanders not only benefit the victim, but can also help reduce overall bullying behavior. Various intervention programs have been conducted in different countries to reduce the number of bystanders in bullying cases. However, it is not systematically known which intervention programs are the most effective. Therefore, this research aims to conduct a systematic review of existing bystander bullying reduction intervention programs to comprehensively examine their design and outcomes. The benefit of this research is that the results of this review are expected to provide recommendations regarding the most effective intervention programs to prevent bullying through the role of bystanders.

RESEARCH METHOD

The stages of the process in conducting a systematic review begin with planning the review (identifying benefits and development), implementing the review (journal search, selection, quality assessment, extracting and synthesizing), and ending with reporting. Planning the review begins with posing a systemic review question with the SPIDER formulation (Sample, Phenomenon of Interest, Design, Evaluation, Research Type). The question in this research is, what can be used to reduce bystander bullying behavior in people? Next, the author continues the process by designing search keywords in the database. After the author gets the terms from the research question, the author continues the search with the terms found, namely bystander bullying, bystanders, bullying. And some of the search terms the author used in several databases such as Eric, Elesevir, Springer, Wiley Online Library, and Taylor & Francis Online. Furthermore, after several articles were collected, the author checked for duplication using Mendeleyy and Rayyan. The authors filtered from the title and abstract, and continued with the entire manuscript. After selection from 272 journals, there were 14 journals that met the criteria, namely discussing empirical research articles published in the last 10 years, discussing specific intervention programs for bystander bullying, including quantitative or qualitative data on the effectiveness of the intervention, describing the intervention methodology and procedures in detail, listing the advantages and disadvantages of the intervention program, measuring changes in bystander behavior before and after the intervention, clearly describing the characteristics of the research subjects. The selection flow chart can be seen in Figure 1.
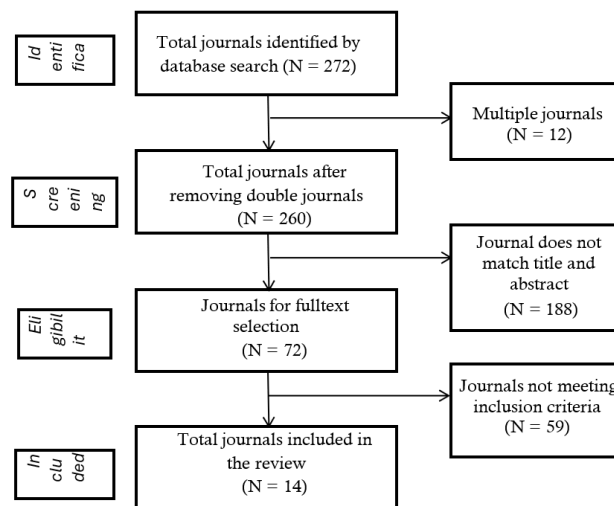
Figure 1. PRISMA graph of journal selection flow

The journal selection flow can be seen through the prism graph in Figure 1. The researcher determines the limitations in the journal review with the journal content discussing bystander bullying by including interventions for its prevention.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A bystander can be defined as someone who witnesses or sees bullying but is not directly involved in the bullying and is not a victim of bullying. Students who witness bullying can act in various ways, including directly helping the bully by participating in the bullying act as an "assistant", promoting and motivating the bully as an "amplifier", ignoring or leaving the bullying situation as an "outsider", or doing something to stop or disrupt the bullying as a "defender". Research shows that up to 80% of adolescents witness bullying behavior at school.

The Bystander Intervention Model provides a conceptual framework for understanding bystanders' self-defense behaviors. The model suggests that bystanders must go through a series of five sequential stages in order to defend victims of bullying, namely: (a) noticing the bullying incident, (b) interpreting the bullying incident as an emergency situation that requires help, (c) accepting the responsibility to intervene in the observed bullying situation, (d) knowing how to intervene in the bullying situation, and (e) intervening in the bullying situation. Research with high school students suggests that each stage of this model is positively associated with self-defense behavior. A recent literature review examining factors contributing to students acting as "defenders" showed that altruism, social competence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, perspicacity, and empathy were all positively associated with defensive behavior.

Table 1. List of interventions that can reduce bystander bullying behavior

No	Author	Subject	Intervention	Results	Pros	Weaknesses
1	(Paranti & Takwin, 2022)	109 high school students	Empowerme nt of bystanders as defenders, Improved bystander social skills, Building a supportive school climate, Increased bystander awareness, Anti-bullying community building	Rural schools can emphasize the importance of the norm of helping students, while urban schools need to improve the positive school climate so that students' perceived safety can increase.	a. Strengthen the role of bystanders in bullying prevention. b. Increase bystander courage and social responsibilit y. c. Removing the bystander's internal barriers to action. d. Improve overall social skills.	a. Requires time and resources for training. b. Not all bystanders are ready to become defenders right away. c. May not have a noticeable impact on bystander responses to bullying.
2	(Thomps on et al., 2020)	43 people	a. Crucial conversati ons b. Bystander action / bystander interventio n c. Bystander support programs d. Bystander training	Bystander awareness. Bystanders do not always recognize and understand bullying behavior, and therefore do not provide adequate support to the victim.	a. bystanders can be agents of change in dealing with harassment. b. bystanders are often present and have the potential to positively impact the victim. c. Alternative new approaches are needed in addition to training or general policies.	a. It is difficult for bystanders to judge whether a behavior is harassment or not. b. Bystanders have difficulty distinguishin g between a single incident and ongoing harassment.
3	(Lesmon o & Prasetya , 2020)	70 Kritsten Junior High School students	Empathy education, Rewarding prosocial behavior, Emergency response training, Anti-bullying group formation,	There is a positive relationship between empathy and prosocial behavior in bystanders to help	a. Increase empathic understandi ng and awareness. b. Motivating bystanders to behave prosocially.	a. No long-term impact, just providing information. b. Focusing on rewards is not necessarily sustainable.

No	Author	Subject	Intervention	Results	Pros	Weaknesses
			Peer mediation	victims of bullying.	c. Provide skills to deal with victims of bullying. d. Facilitate friend cooperation to prevent bullying. e. Address peace issues and focus on reconciliation	c. Not necessarily applied well in real situations. d. Depends on the group, does not continue without school support. e. It requires a skilled mediator and is a lengthy process.
4	(Brehmer, 2023)	419 Students in United Kingdom	a. Predicting college students' bystander intentions towards relational bullying. b. Contribution to preventive measures to foster prosocial intentions towards bullying	The traditional components of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), significantly predicted students' intention to engage in bullying situations.	a. Multidimensional approach: knowledge, attitudes, social norms and confidence. b. Facilitate participants as agents of change. c. Support the formation of participants' social networks.	a. Requires a lot of resources. b. Results depend on interest and support. c. Limited long-term measurement.
5	(Gönültaş & Mulvey, 2021)	179 participants	School intervention programs that increase bystander intervention against bias-motivated bullying.	This research suggests a complex relationship between school and teacher factors in shaping adolescent bystander responses to social exclusion.	a. Improve factors that influence witness response, such as group contact, discrimination, peer norms and social skills. b. Directly target improvements in witness attitudes and behaviors to	-There is no detailed description of the intervention method, so effectiveness cannot be measured. -Focuses on a particular factor without looking at the complex relationships of the variables. -Evaluation of effectiveness is only short-term, not measuring long-term.

No	Author	Subject	Intervention	Results	Pros	Weaknesses
					reduce bullying. c. Develop a structured intervention program in schools that is easy to implement and scalable.	-Not considering influential out-of-school factors. - Implementation depends on school resources and support.
6	(Zhang et al., 2022)	333 chinese participants	-Increase students' awareness of the importance of social status. -Encourage a positive attitude about actively standing up for victims of bullying.	Social status insecurity is positively associated with active defending behavior and negatively associated with passive bystander behavior in Chinese adolescents.	a. Social status awareness motivates bystanders to defend the victim. b. Rewards reinforce positive victim-defending behavior. c. Anti-bullying groups lead by example. d. Skills training for effective victim defense.	a. Only targeting cognitive factors, not yet influencing behavior. b. Awards focus on instrumental functions. c. Rely on role models in anti-bullying groups. d. Skills training requires manpower and funds. e. Not yet involving teachers and parents.
7	(Fredrick et al., 2020)	336 children in grades 4-5	Bystander intervention model, improving empathy and social skills.	The decision to intervene is the result of a series of stages Cognitive and affective empathy have different roles in the intervention process Internalization issues can affect the	a. Using a systematic 5-step witness intervention model to identify intervention points. b. Linking model steps with cognitive and affective empathy. c. Enables understanding of the relationship between	a. Did not test specific interventions to improve witness intervening behavior. b. Only implicitly indicates the need for intervention. c. Suggested interventions are general in nature such as empathy and social skills.

No	Author	Subject	Intervention	Results	Pros	Weaknesses
				effectiveness of empathy in driving intervention behavior.	witness characteristics and likelihood of intervention.	d. Not yet described the intervention in detail and measurable.
8	(Jiang et al., 2022)	435 grade 6 students	Increase student awareness, Reduce moral disengagement, Developing students' social skills, - Training empathy and perspective of others. Make the teacher a role model. Building an anti-bullying school climate	The experience of being bullied was positively associated with bystander behavior and negatively associated with defender behavior.	a. Increase students' awareness of bullying issues in schools. b. Wrap the issue of bullying as a collective responsibility, not an individual one. c. Practice empathy and social skills that are useful in various situations. d. Building a supportive school climate on an ongoing basis.	a. Only increasing awareness and understanding, not necessarily changing behavior. b. Less attention to internal factors such as sensitivity to bullying. c. Lack of evaluation and follow-up after the intervention. d. Depending on school and teacher factors, it has not been evenly distributed.
9	(Moxey & Bussey, 2020)	301 Australian teenagers aged 12-17 years	Aggressive and constructive bystander intervention styles in cyber bullying incidents.	This suggests that the higher one's moral disengagement, the higher the tendency to intervene aggressively, and the lower the tendency to intervene constructively in cyber bullying incidents.	a. It can help stop cyberbullying by telling the perpetrator to stop and providing support to the victim. b. Be supportive and prosocial, so as not to make the situation worse. c. It may be more	a. Not all perpetrators will heed the request to stop. b. Sometimes it does not influence the perpetrator to change their behavior. c. It can escalate the situation and make the cyberbullying incident worse. d. Often used for revenge

No	Author	Subject	Intervention	Results	Pros	Weaknesses
					effective to scare the perpetrator into stopping cyberbullying. d. Avenging the perpetrator's evil deeds.	rather than to defend the victim. e. Doesn't fundamentally solve the problem. f. Elevate the negative role of the bystander.
10	(Nazarov & Averbukh, 2023)	1,762 junior high school & vocational school students	Socialization to raise eyewitness awareness of the importance of intervening in bullying cases. Education to provide examples of strategies that eyewitnesses can take	Witnesses of traditional bullying, cyber bullying at school, and cyber bullying outside of school. Witnesses who preferred not to intervene were highest among witnesses of cyber bullying at school, while witnesses who supported the victim were highest among witnesses of traditional bullying.	a. Increase bystander awareness and knowledge on the importance of their role in preventing bullying. b. Provide clear examples of strategies that eyewitnesses can take, such as helping the victim or reporting. c. Monitor whether the intervention has an impact on increasing the active attitude of bystanders in preventing bullying.	a. It only recommends interventions theoretically without detailing practical implementation methods. b. The effectiveness of the intervention is unknown as there is no follow-up data on the results. c. The subjective nature of the baseline data from the questionnaire made the intervention less robust. d. It only focuses on eyewitnesses in Russia, so the results cannot be generalized. e. There is no quantitative measure to gauge changes in eyewitness attitudes and behaviors.

No	Author	Subject	Intervention	Results	Pros	Weaknesses
11	(Doumas et al., 2023)	126 elementary and junior high school students	a. Comprehensive bullying prevention program, b. Bystander training component c. Stand-alone bystander intervention. Examples: SPACE (Students Promoting and Cultivating Empathy) and ViSC (Violence Is Preventable) programs. d. Bystander Intervention Model	Witnessing bullying at school was a significant predictor of depressive symptoms, but gender did not moderate the relationship.	a. Educate bystanders in decision-making against bullying. b. Establish a culture supporting defensive behavior. c. Systematic model-based training. d. Integrated engagement with the school's bullying prevention program to make it more effective.	a. Relies on self-report so subject to bias. b. Does not include long-term outcome measures after the intervention. c. Less involvement of teachers and parents as partners in supporting defensive behavior. d. Not yet applied to various cultural contexts, making generalization difficult. e. The success of the intervention depends on the ability of the trainer and the resources available.
12	(Deng et al., 2021)	25012 teenagers	Increasing students' empathy, especially affective empathy, is believed to encourage them to engage in behaviors to defend victims of bullying.	The results showed that adolescents' empathy, especially affective empathy, has a close relationship with witness defense behavior in school bullying cases.	a. Focus on affective empathy that correlates with defending. b. Educate students to understand the perspectives, responsibilities, and benefits of defending.	a. The cognitive and affective effectiveness of interventions can differ between individuals. b. Less address other factors such as peer pressure. c. Interventions are limited to empathy and awareness.

No	Author	Subject	Intervention	Results	Pros	Weaknesses
					c. Potentially increases positive attitudes and willingness to defend. d. Equip students with social-emotional skills for healthy interactions.	d. Less inclusion of holistic theories such as prosocial morality.
13	(García-Vázquez et al., 2022)	685 grade 8 junior high school students	a. Spirituality enhancement program (religious activities). b. Subjective well-being interventions, such as improving students' happiness at school. c. Altruism training, such as teaching empathy. d. Bullying socialization e. Peer helping program.	Spirituality, happiness, altruism contribute to increasing prosocial bystander behavior, both directly and indirectly	a. Focus on empirically proven positive factors. b. Holistic involves spiritual, emotional, cognitive, and social aspects. c. Potential to increase direct or indirect prosocial behavior. d. Educate students to build character and social awareness. e. Can be applied integrated in schools.	a. There is no empirical evidence of the effectiveness of bullying witness interventions. b. Success depends on implementation and resources. c. Long-term effects need longitudinal evaluation d. Less consideration of other factors, such as peer pressure.
14	(Qamaria & Astuti, 2020)	8 teacher	Anti-bullying training for teachers	Anti-bullying training is able to increase the knowledge and understanding of participants after attending	a. Training is effective in improving knowledge and skills. b. Materials according to the needs of teachers in dealing with bullying.	a. It only measures cognitive improvement, without affective and conative. b. No follow-up application of knowledge is described.

No	Author	Subject	Intervention	Results	Pros	Weaknesses
				anti-bullying training. Increased teacher knowledge and understanding also greatly impacts teacher behavior that is able to prevent student behavior that leads to bullying behavior.	c. Results were measured by pre-test and post-test which showed improvement.	c. Training period is not detailed, long-term effectiveness is not clear. d. Using only one post-test, long-term retention has not been assessed.

Types of Bystander Interventions

Based on the literature review, there are several types of interventions that involve the role of bystanders in an effort to reduce bullying, including:

a. Bystander Education Program

These interventions provide education and training to bystanders to be able to recognize bullying events and react effectively to stop bullying. Examples of bystander education programs are the Riveria Program, Steps to Respect, and Bully Blocking.

b. Bystander Social Skills Training

Provide training to improve bystander social skills in communicating assertively to perpetrators and providing support to victims. An example is the Bergen program.

c. Improvement of Supportive School Conditions

Establish a caring and tolerant school environment by conducting anti-bullying socialization to all school members. The goal is to make bystanders comfortable to intervene if they see bullying.

Effectiveness of Bystander Interventions

These studies show that bystander interventions are effective in reducing bullying. Some research results found a 20% reduction in the percentage of children involved in bullying after the implementation of the Riveria Program. Another research found a 22% reduction after the Steps to Respect bystander education intervention (Mujal et al., 2021). The Bully Blocking intervention by (Twemlow & Sacco, 2012) also showed significant improvements in bystander attitudes and social skills in helping victims of bullying. Overall, interventions involving bystanders can reduce bullying by 20-23%. Thus, it can be concluded that bystander interventions are quite effective in reducing bullying problems in schools. The role of bystanders is very influential in reducing bullying.

Implementation of Intervention Program

Based on the literature review, several findings were found regarding the implementation of bystander bullying reduction intervention programs, among others:

a. Most programs are conducted for 1-2 years with training frequency of 2-4 times per semester. Only a few programs are conducted for more than 2 years.

b. The program is implemented by targeting students aged 10-15 years in primary and junior high schools.

c. The training methods used were mostly group discussions, role simulations, and role playing to keep participants active.

d. Some programs involve teachers and parents to support the success of the intervention in schools.

e. Program facilitators are mostly teachers/school counselors who have received special training on the program.

f. Some programs use multimedia such as educational videos to attract students' attention.

g. All programs were evaluated using questionnaires before and after the intervention to measure changes in students' attitudes and knowledge.

h. The outcome variables evaluated were mostly anti-bullying knowledge, attitudes towards bullying, and reported incidents of bullying.

This shows that the implementation of the intervention program was structured and planned by involving multi-stakeholders in the school to support the success of the intervention. Participatory methods are used to motivate students to actively learn. Quantitative evaluation was conducted to objectively measure effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the systematic review of intervention programs to reduce bystander involvement in bullying incidents that there are various intervention programs designed to reduce the role of bystanders in bullying incidents. These programs are implemented in different countries with different approaches. Most of the programs proved effective in increasing anti-bullying knowledge, supportive attitudes towards victims, as well as bystander involvement in preventing bullying. Participatory approaches, such as discussions and role plays, tend to be more effective than lectures. Support from teachers, parents and school authorities greatly influenced the success of the program implementation. This analysis shows that interventions involving bystanders, such as educational programs, social skills training, and improvements to the school environment, can reduce the percentage of children's involvement in bullying by 20-23%.

This research contributes by providing recommendations for adopting intervention programs that have proven effective in Indonesia by considering the local cultural context. In addition, it is important to increase the involvement of teachers and parents in the implementation of anti-bullying intervention programs, conduct regular program evaluations, and develop specific training modules on the important role of bystanders in preventing bullying. This research also suggests the establishment of a knowledge sharing forum between schools to support the sustainability of the program. The results of this

research are expected to serve as a reference for the development of better anti-bullying programs in the future, thus contributing to the creation of a safer and more conducive school environment for student development.

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