Gender Disparities and School Climate: Key Factors in Understanding Bullying on Islamic Junior High School Students

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Abstract

This study aimed to test two main hypotheses regarding bullying in schools. The first hypothesis was that male and female students significantly differed in bullying behavior. The second hypothesis was that school climate significantly influenced bullying. This article used a quantitative design to examine gender and school climate differences in student bullying behavior. Data were obtained through the scale of school climate and bullying. The subjects were 150 (75 males and 75 females) Islamic junior high school students in East Java. The data were analyzed using variance analysis and regression analysis. The results exhibited a difference between males and females in terms of bullying. School climate affected bullying, both overall and in every aspect. Among the five aspects of school climate tested, only student relations had a significant negative effect on bullying. This study indicates that student relations are crucial in bullying and recommends specific interventions to improve safety and inclusivity.

Keywords: Gender disparities, Islamic junior high school, school climate, students' bullying

A. Introduction

Bullying in schools has harmful repercussions that should not be ignored. When this behavior is left without a proper resolution, victims can experience long-term trauma, and their psychological state will be disturbed by bullying and humiliation treatment (Lu, 2020; Raitanen, 2019). The learning environment worsens student academic achievement (Li, 2020). Therefore, bullying must be addressed academically immediately by cooperating with the school, teachers, counselors, parents, and students. This collective effort is needed to create a learning environment that supports the development of all students without fear so that they can develop optimally.

Research on bullying in schools reveals three main trends. First is research that focuses on the causes and motivations of perpetrators. This model research tries to understand the reasons behind bullying, including environmental and individual factors influencing the behaviors (Gaffney, 2019; Košir, 2020). Second, some research analyses the psychological impact on victims and their effect on academic achievement. This research model aims to analyze the psychological effects of bullying on victims, such as stress, low self-esteem, and impaired concentration, that lead to decreased academic performance (Alivernini, 2019; Ringdal, 2020). Third is research aimed at developing prevention and intervention strategies to address the problem of bullying. Researchers are trying to develop bullying prevention programs that can be implemented in school settings (Wachs, 2019; Wang, 2019). This article discusses the second and third tendencies in depth, namely analyzing the psychological impact on victims of bullying and examining strategies carried out by teachers to overcome this problem.

The concept of bullying in the school environment is an important foundation for understanding this phenomenon more deeply. Bullying is a repetitive and aggressive act committed by one or more individuals against someone weaker (Goodwin, 2019; Zhang, 2019). These behaviors can take form in physical, verbal, or psychological forms and are often aimed at dominating, intimidating, or degrading the victim. The consequences of this bullying can include serious repercussions on the victim, including psychological, physical, and academic impacts (Ding, 2020; Tan, 2019). Therefore, properly understanding these definitions and concepts is essential to identify bullying behavior and take effective preventive measures.

In the context of bullying in the school environment, three main actors are interrelated and form complex dynamics: bully, fighter, and victim (Akbari & Siavas, 2015; Hamel et al., 2021). Bully are individuals who hold the role of bully. They often use physical, verbal, or social influence to dominate or intimidate other students. On the other hand, there are fighter groups, individuals who feel the urge to fight or protect victims from bullying behavior. These fighters may feel strong empathy or morality in countering unjust actions. Meanwhile, victims are individuals who are targeted by bullying behavior. They experience negative psychological and emotional impacts due to bullying (Fitria, 2017; Norman, 2020). Based on this explanation, to address the issue of bullying in schools, it is imperative to comprehend the functions and incentives of all parties involved, along with their impact on the social milieu within the school.

On the dynamics of bullying in schools, gender differences have a significant influence. Research shows that men tend to have higher rates of bullying than females, who are more likely to engage in physical or verbal bullying. It can be due to complex social, cultural, and psychological factors, such as masculinity norms that encourage dominance and aggression (Chai, 2020; Horton, 2019). On the other hand, females are often more likely to engage in relational bullying, which involves social isolation and the destruction of relationships between friends (Mennicke, 2021; Rohmat & Widiyanto, 2020). An understanding of gender differences is essential in efforts to address bullying, as it helps design approaches that are responsive to the needs and experiences of both male and female students.

School climate also has a major effect on students' bullying behavior. Bullying incidents tend to decrease when schools create a positive and welcoming environment. However, bullying can be more frequent in schools with a negative atmosphere, where bullying and degrading behavior are allowed to drag on (Cui, 2021; Suriadi, 2020). How teachers and school staff communicate and handle bullying also affects student behavior. When students feel safe reporting issues and know that bullies will be punished, they are likelier to report those cases (Marengo, 2021; Stasio, 2016). Therefore, it is crucial to create a supportive school climate, promote values such as respect, and have strong anti-bullying policies. These steps can help reduce bullying and keep students safe and comfortable.

Despite extensive research on school bullying, several key areas remain underexplored, forming the basis of this study's research gap. Previous studies primarily

focus on the causes and motivations of perpetrators, the psychological impact on victims, and the development of prevention and intervention strategies. However, there is a lack of comprehensive studies that simultaneously consider internal factors like gender differences and external factors such as school climate and their combined effects on bullying behavior. Existing research often isolates these factors: examining gender differences in bullying behaviors (Atteberry-Ash et al., 2020; Pontes, 2018) and the impact of school climate on bullying prevalence (Jain, 2018; Teng, 2020). Few studies integrate these dimensions to explore their interaction and influence. This integrated approach is crucial for developing more effective, multifaceted anti-bullying strategies. This study addresses these gaps by testing hypotheses related to both gender differences and the impact of school climate on bullying, aiming to provide a more holistic understanding of the factors influencing school bullying.

This research sought to examine two primary hypotheses concerning school bullying. The first hypothesis investigated whether significant differences exist in bullying behavior between male and female students. The second hypothesis explored the impact of school climate on bullying. By evaluating these hypotheses, the study aims to provide insights into how internal factors, such as gender, and external factors, such as school climate, affect the occurrence of bullying. By shedding light on these dynamics, the research aspires not only to deepen the understanding of the root causes of school bullying but also to inform the development of more effective, tailored interventions. These findings could be instrumental in creating safer, more supportive school environments where all students can thrive without fear of bullying, ultimately contributing to improved academic performance and overall well-being.

B.   Method

This article used a quantitative research design to examine gender and school climate differences in student bullying behavior. Through statistical analysis, this article aims to identify the potential reduction of bullying behavior by developing a positive school climate (Deborah Ragin, 2020). The study collected data on students' perceptions of the school climate and bullying experiences. By analyzing the data collected, it is expected to see a significant link between an inclusive school climate and a lower number of bullying incidents. This research provides valuable insights into the important role of school climate in reducing bullying behavior among students.

The sample consisted of 150 students who were selected purposively by considering the balance of numbers between men and female. Purposive sample selection ensures a relevant representation of bullying experiences in the school environment. The sample of 150 students is expected to provide considerable insight into the relationship between school climate and bullying behavior. In this study, the focus on junior high school students as a population allowed researchers to gain a more specific understanding of bullying at this stage of education. Thus, this study's results are expected to contribute to reducing bullying among junior high school students.

The data collection method involved two psychological scales: the school climate scale and the bullying scale. The school climate scale measures students' perceptions of inclusive and safe learning environments. The school climate scale encompasses 22 items, unveiling five aspects: student-to-student relationships, teacher-to-student relationships, educational environment, sense of inclusion, and fairness (Grazia & Molinari, 2020). This measurement instrument has been utilized in several studies and presents a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.88. The bullying scale describes students' experiences of bullying behavior they may encounter. The scale used is the Illinois Bullying Scale (IBS), developed by Espelage and Holt. The scale consists of eighteen items measuring three factors: bullying, fighting, and victim (Akbari & Siavas, 2015). The questionnaire contains a 5-item Likert Scale (never=1, up to seven times or more= 5). The reliability of the IBS is 0.83. Participants were asked to respond to statements on these scales, providing an accurate picture of school conditions and bullying incidents.

Data analysis was carried out using descriptive and inferential statistical analysis techniques (variance analysis techniques and regression analysis). Descriptive analysis provides an overview of the distribution and characteristics of school climate variables and bullying. Furthermore, a difference test analysis was used to compare significant differences between males and females in terms of bullying. Finally, regression analysis was employed to evaluate the effect of school climate on bullying rates. Through the combination of these three techniques, the data will provide deeper insight into the relationship between these variables. Thus, analysis of this data will reveal important information about the role of gender and school climate in preventing bullying behavior among students.

C.   Result and Discussion

The results section outlines three important findings related to the results of descriptive analysis, the results of testing the difference between males and females on bullying, and the results of regression analysis on the effect of school climate on student bullying.

1.   The results of descriptive analysis

This section presents the results of descriptive analysis of the mean, standard deviation, maximum, and minimum data on each aspect of the school climate and bullying variables. The complete data is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The result of descriptive analysis on students' school climate and bullying

	School climate					Bullying		
	SR	STR	EC	SB	IJ	BU	FI	VI
Male (N=75)								
Mean	18.97	15.48	19.65	18.74	10.90	16.26	11.65	11.66
SD	2.92	2.52	3.07	2.49	2.32	6.58	3.93	3.81
Female (N=75)								
Mean	19.37	15.86	21.00	19.73	11.74	11.98	8.25	10.05
SD	3.03	3.02	2.87	2.57	2.42	3.44	2.76	4.09
Total (N=150)								
Mean	19.17	15.67	20.32	19.24	11.32	14.12	9.95	10.86
SD	2.97	2.78	3.03	2.57	2.40	5.66	3.79	4.02

Noted: SR= Student relations, STR= Student-Teacher Relations, EC= Educational climate, SB= Sense of belonging, IJ=Interpersonal justice, BU=Bully, FI= Fighter, and VI= Victim

Table 1 demonstrates that male subjects had a low level of school climate because the empirical mean obtained was lower than the total subject mean. Conversely, they had a high level of bullying because the mean obtained was higher than the total mean. In female subjects, the condition was the opposite. They had a high school climate and a low level of bullying.

Differences in perceptions about school climate and bullying actions between men and females can be explained through a psychological perspective that includes social, emotional, and cognitive factors. Males often have low levels of school climate

because they tend to exhibit more dominant and aggressive behavior to maintain status or gain recognition from peers. The drive to compete strongly and dominate within the school environment can create disharmony that affects the overall school climate. Females often exhibit different behaviors. They are more likely to focus on interpersonal relationships and social harmony. Therefore, they tend to be more aware of the negative impact of bullying behavior on social relationships and the overall school climate (Bacchini, 2021). Thus, it can be understood that gender differences can be a starting point for understanding bullying behavior in schools.

2.   The effect of gender on students' bullying

In this section, the results of the variance analysis regarding the effect of gender differences on student bullying are presented. Tests were conducted on bullying data in general and each aspect of bullying (bully, fighter, and victim). The results of the analysis are detailed in Tables 2 (results of analysis of variance on the significance of the test results) and 3 (differences in mean values between males and females).

Table 2. The result of variance analysis on students' bullying

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Bullying	Between Groups	3238.727	1	3238.727	30.288	.000
	Within Groups	15825.733	148	106.931		
	Total	19064.460	149			
Bully	Between Groups	686.940	1	686.940	24.872	.000
	Within Groups	4087.653	148	27.619		
	Total	4774.593	149			
Fighter	Between Groups	433.500	1	433.500	37.537	.000
	Within Groups	1709.173	148	11.548		
	Total	2142.673	149			
Victim	Between Groups	97.607	1	97.607	6.231	.014
	Within Groups	2318.453	148	15.665		
	Total	2416.060	149			

Table 2 reveals significant differences between males and females in bullying. There are general differences in bullying conditions and each aspect of bullying (bully, fighter, and victim). Furthermore, the analysis results in Table 3 demonstrate that males had a higher level of bullying than females.

Table 3. Mean differences between males and females in bullying

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Bullying	Male	75	39.58	12.00
	Female	75	30.29	8.35
	Total	150	34.94	11.31
Bully	Male	75	16.26	6.58
	Female	75	11.98	3.44
	Total	150	14.12	5.66
Fighter	Male	75	11.65	3.93
	Female	75	8.25	2.76
	Total	150	9.95	3.79
Victim	Male	75	11.66	3.81
	Female	75	10.05	4.09
	Total	150	10.86	4.02

The results of this study suggest that the first hypothesis that gender differences affected bullying was accepted. Males tended to be higher than females both in bullying overall (39:30) and in the aspects of bullying (16:11), fighter (11:8), and victim (11:10). The research indicating that males tended to have higher rates of bullying than females has been an important highlight in efforts to understand the dynamics of behavior in schools.

Recent studies have revealed that men are often more prone to engage in bullying, both physically and verbally, possibly due to a variety of social and psychological factors. They also tend to engage in bullying because of the urge to show strength and gain control over others. They use bullying behavior to achieve this goal, which can damage the school climate. Females, in terms of psychology, often exhibit different behaviors. They are more likely to focus on interpersonal relationships and social harmony. Therefore, they tend to be more aware of the negative impact of bullying behavior on social relationships and the overall school climate. It may make females more likely to maintain a positive school climate and avoid bullying behavior.

The implications of finding that men tend to be higher in bullying behavior than females for educational practices in schools are significant. This points to the need for a more focused approach to tackling this issue, with the development of anti-bullying programs that understand gender differences in student behavior. In addition, gender awareness education integrated into school curricula can help change gender stereotypes that may influence bullying behavior (Bacchini, 2021; Russell et al., 2016). Parents' education is also key, as they must be involved in identifying and addressing the signs of bullying in the home (Barreto et al., 2021). School leadership must be

responsive to these gender differences, creating an environment where all students feel heard and given appropriate support. Teachers must also be trained to identify and address gender-based bullying behavior in a mindful and effective strategy (Buonomo, 2020). Schools can create a safer environment and minimize bullying incidents by taking these steps.

Research that reveals men have higher rates of bullying than women shows several advantages to similar studies that have been done before (Hamel et al., 2021; Russell et al., 2016). This study's merit lies in its relevance to shifting social norms and understanding of gender. This study can better capture the current nuances and dynamics in interactions between men and women in the school environment. In addition, this study has the potential to have a more comprehensive analytical framework by considering various factors that influence gender bullying, such as school culture, socioeconomic, and home environment influences.

3.   The effect of school climate on students' bullying

The results of simultaneous regression analysis yielded the value of R=.324, R^2 =.105 p<.005. These results indicate that school climate significantly affects student bullying. In other words, student bullying was influenced by school climate by 10.5%. Furthermore, more partial analysis results are shown in Table 4. The result demonstrates that school climate affects bullying overall and in each aspect. The analysis shows that only student relations significantly negatively affected bullying among the five aspects of school climate tested. It means that the relationship between students at school could predict the high or low level of student bullying.

Table 4. The effect of school climate on students' bullying

	Unstandardized Coeff.		Standard. Coeff.	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
Student relations	-.980	8.023	-.258	.009*
Student-teacher relations	.177	.370	.044	.680 [ns]
Educational Climate	-.518	.428	-.139	.136 [ns]
Sense of belonging	.344	.345	.078	.434 [ns]
Interpersonal justice	-.464	.438	-.099	.339 [ns]

Level of significance **=.001, *=.005, ^{ns}=no significant

The second hypothesis, which is that school climate influences bullying, was accepted. Among the five factors of school climate, it was found that social relationships among students significantly influenced bullying. The other four factors, namely teacher-student relationships, educational climate, feelings of belonging to the school, and interpersonal justice, did not significantly affect student bullying. Thus, a conducive school climate to overcome student bullying is to create an atmosphere that can ensure harmonious social relations among students.

The results of this study imply that schools should provide opportunities for students to learn how to interact well, understand differences, and respect each other. Anti-bullying programs focusing on emotional and social education can also help reduce bullying behavior. In addition, the important role of teachers and parents in supporting this effort cannot be ignored (Horton, 2020; Russell et al., 2016). By developing positive relationships in schools and involving the entire educational community, a safer and more supportive environment for all students can be created.

School climate theory posits that the overall quality and character of school life, including norms, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures, significantly impact students' behavior and experiences. A positive school climate is characterized by a supportive, respectful, and inclusive environment that promotes student well-being and academic success (Cohen et al., 2009; Thapa et al., 2013). In the context of bullying, this theory suggests that when students feel safe, valued, and connected to their peers, they are less likely to engage in or become victims of bullying. The study's findings that student relations significantly affect bullying behavior support this theory. A positive school climate, where students have strong, supportive relationships, reduces bullying by fostering a sense of belonging and mutual respect. This underscores the importance of schools focusing on building a positive climate through programs that enhance social skills, empathy, and peer support. By improving student interactions and creating a nurturing environment, schools can effectively reduce bullying and promote a safer, more inclusive atmosphere.

This research makes an important contribution to the development of educational psychology by bringing a deeper understanding of the differences in bullying rates between men and female in the school environment. By identifying and analyzing factors that influence gender bullying rates, this research can provide valuable insights

to educational psychologists to design anti-bullying interventions and programs that are more effective and appropriate to changing social contexts. In addition, the findings of this study can help support changes in social and cultural norms in schools, which in turn can contribute to creating a safer, inclusive, and supportive learning environment for all students. Thus, this research provides a strong foundation for the development of educational psychology in overcoming the problem of bullying, which significantly impacts student well-being and the quality of education.

D.   Conclusion

The results of this study highlight the critical need to understand and address bullying in schools continuously. The finding, revealing that males exhibit higher rates of bullying than females, emphasizes the complexity of bullying, which is influenced by factors such as social norms, school culture, and individual traits. Therefore, a holistic approach that includes education, emotional-social training, and gender education is essential. Teachers and parents play vital roles in fostering a safe and supportive learning environment, which can significantly change behavior patterns towards a more respectful and equitable society.

A key recommendation from this study is to integrate gender differences into anti-bullying programs, particularly by fostering positive social relationships among students. Schools should include gender education in their curriculum to promote understanding and equality. Anti-bullying initiatives should also provide training in empathy and cooperation across genders, helping students respect and understand each other's differences. Additionally, schools should create an environment where students feel safe discussing gender issues and bullying, with teachers trained to address these issues and parents actively supporting their children's learning about empathy, tolerance, and respect.

The study's limitations include a small sample size of 150 students, which may affect the generalizability of the findings, and the use of only quantitative methods, which might not capture the full context of bullying. As such, future research should incorporate qualitative methods such as interviews and observations to gain deeper insights. Moreover, considering factors like home environment and social media influence could provide a more comprehensive understanding of gender-related

bullying. Combining quantitative and qualitative approaches will offer better guidance for effective prevention and intervention strategies in schools.

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