

Reconstructing Anti-Bullying Awareness through Persuasive Community Engagement: Evidence from School-Based Intervention in Eastern Indonesia

 <https://doi.org/xxxxxx>

Afdhal^{1*}, Feky Manuputty¹, Simona Christina Henderika Litaay¹, Nathalia Debby Makaruku¹

¹Universitas Pattimura, Jalan Ir M. Putuhena, Ambon 97233, Indonesia

Abstract

This study reconstructs students' anti-bullying awareness through a persuasive community engagement approach implemented in a school-based intervention in Eastern Indonesia. It addresses the persistent normalization of bullying behaviors, such as teasing, exclusion, and humiliation, that are often overlooked as forms of psychological violence in everyday student interactions. Adopting a qualitative design within a community-based participatory research framework, the study integrates service-learning activities involving students, teachers, and school stakeholders. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and reflective narratives, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that persuasive and participatory engagement significantly transforms students' perceptions, shifting bullying from a normalized social practice to a recognized harmful behavior with psychological, social, and legal implications. The intervention also fosters empathy and promotes more responsible social conduct among students. Furthermore, the involvement of teachers enhances the sustainability of these changes by embedding anti-bullying values into school culture. The study's novelty lies in proposing a persuasive community engagement model that integrates empathy-driven communication, active participation, and experiential learning as a transformative mechanism for behavioral change. This approach advances beyond conventional punitive strategies by emphasizing dialogical and reflective processes. The study contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship and offers practical implications for sustainable, community-based educational interventions in developing contexts.

Keywords: Anti-Bullying Awareness, Community Engagement, Empathy, Participatory Research, Persuasive Communication



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Article Info:

Correspondence E-Mail:
afdhal@lecturer.unpatti.ac.id

Received manuscript: 12/02/2025

Final revision: 08/06/2025

Approved: 18/07/2025

Online Access: 30/07/2025

Published: 11/08/2025

How to cite: Afdhal, Manuputty, F., Litaay, S. C. H., & Makaruku, N. D. (2025). Reconstructing Anti-Bullying Awareness through Persuasive Community Engagement: Evidence from School-Based Intervention in Eastern Indonesia. *Jurnal Penelitian dan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat (JPPM)*, 1(3), 206-226. <https://doi.org/xxxxxx>

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Publisher: PT. Sarana Mandiri Investama
RT 07 RW 03 Desa Salamrejo Kec. Karanganyar, Kab. Trenggalek, Provinsi Jawa Timur, Indonesia

E-mail:
selectaedukasigrup.journal@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Bullying in school environments remains a persistent and deeply embedded social problem, particularly in developing regions where certain forms of aggression are often normalized as part of everyday interaction. In many school settings across Eastern Indonesia, behaviors such as teasing, exclusion, and public humiliation are frequently dismissed as harmless jokes or rites of passage among peers. This normalization obscures the psychological violence embedded in such actions and contributes to the reproduction of harmful social dynamics among students. Empirical evidence continues to demonstrate that bullying has

significant and long-term consequences, including decreased academic performance, mental health disorders, and social withdrawal (Jensen, 2022; M. López et al., 2024; Michael Mu, 2024). National data in Indonesia also indicate that a substantial proportion of students have experienced or engaged in bullying, reflecting a broader cultural and institutional challenge in addressing the issue (Mariotto et al., 2024; Sciacca et al., 2021). These findings suggest that bullying is not merely an individual behavioral problem but a socially constructed phenomenon that is reinforced through everyday interactions and collective perceptions.

The urgency of addressing bullying lies not only in its prevalence but also in the limitations of existing intervention strategies. School-based responses often rely heavily on punitive measures, such as sanctions and disciplinary actions, which may deter behavior temporarily but rarely lead to meaningful internalization of anti-bullying values. Such approaches tend to emphasize compliance rather than understanding, thereby failing to engage the cognitive and affective dimensions necessary for sustainable behavioral change (Fancourt et al., 2022; Gabriel Løvlie, 2023). Moreover, the gap between formal regulations and lived experiences at the grassroots level remains significant, particularly in peripheral regions where access to resources, training, and contextualized intervention models is limited. As a result, there is a growing recognition that addressing bullying requires more than regulatory enforcement; it demands a transformation in how students perceive and relate to one another within their social environments.

A growing body of literature has explored bullying from multiple perspectives, including its prevalence, causes, and consequences. Early foundational work by Balasa et al. (2024) and Chapman (2025) conceptualized bullying as repeated aggressive behavior characterized by a power imbalance, setting the stage for subsequent empirical and theoretical developments. Later studies expanded this framework by examining the ecological context of bullying, highlighting the role of peer groups, school climate, and family background in shaping behavior (Bayat et al., 2021; Peprah et al., 2025). Research has also emphasized the psychological impact of bullying, linking it to anxiety, depression, and decreased self-esteem among victims (Bates et al., 2024; Langarita et al., 2024; Markland et al., 2023). These studies collectively underscore the complexity of bullying as a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be fully understood through individual-level analysis alone.

More recent scholarship has turned its attention to intervention strategies, particularly within school settings. Programs such as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program and KiVa have demonstrated the effectiveness of structured, school-wide approaches in reducing bullying incidents (Burrow et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2025; Lindsay et al., 2025). These interventions typically involve a combination of policy development, teacher training, and student education, aiming to create a supportive and inclusive school climate. However, their implementation in developing contexts often encounters challenges related to cultural relevance, resource constraints, and institutional capacity (Bjereld et al., 2025; Francis, 2024). Furthermore, while these programs have shown promising results in reducing observable

behaviors, questions remain regarding their ability to foster deep and lasting changes in students' attitudes and values.

In parallel, studies on communication and behavior change have highlighted the importance of persuasive and participatory approaches in shaping social awareness. Theories of persuasive communication emphasize the role of message framing, emotional engagement, and interpersonal interaction in influencing attitudes and behaviors (Ganbaatar et al., 2024; Wensel et al., 2024). Community-based participatory research further extends this perspective by involving participants as active agents in the research and intervention process, thereby enhancing relevance and ownership (Fletcher et al., 2025; Kasherwa et al., 2024). In the context of education, such approaches have been shown to facilitate experiential learning and value internalization, particularly when combined with interactive and reflective activities (Espino et al., 2022; Hummelstedt et al., 2021; Skrzypiec et al., 2023). These insights suggest that fostering anti-bullying awareness may require a shift from didactic instruction to more dialogical and participatory forms of engagement.

Despite these advances, much of the existing literature remains fragmented, with limited integration between studies on bullying, communication, and community engagement. Research tends to focus either on measuring the prevalence of bullying or evaluating the effectiveness of specific programs, often overlooking the processes through which awareness and meaning are constructed among students. In particular, there is a scarcity of studies that examine how anti-bullying awareness can be reconstructed through persuasive, community-based interventions in culturally diverse and resource-constrained settings such as Eastern Indonesia. This absence becomes more pronounced when considering the need for approaches that not only inform but also transform, engaging students as active participants in redefining their social realities.

In this context, the present study seeks to offer a different way of understanding and addressing bullying by situating awareness as a socially constructed and continuously negotiated process. Rather than treating students as passive recipients of information, the study engages them as co-constructors of meaning through a series of persuasive and participatory activities embedded within their everyday school environment. Such an approach opens up possibilities for reimagining intervention not as a top-down imposition of rules, but as a collaborative process of reflection, dialogue, and emotional engagement. It is within this space that new forms of awareness can emerge, ones that are not only cognitively understood but also affectively experienced and socially reinforced.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to reconstruct anti-bullying awareness among students through a persuasive community engagement approach implemented in a school-based intervention in Eastern Indonesia. By integrating insights from communication theory, community-based research, and educational practice, the study aims to explore how participatory and empathy-driven interactions can reshape students' perceptions of bullying and encourage more inclusive and respectful social behavior. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing efforts to bridge the gap between research and practice, offering a model that is both

conceptually grounded and contextually responsive to the challenges of developing and transitional societies.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design to capture the nuanced processes through which anti-bullying awareness is constructed and transformed within a specific social context. A qualitative approach is particularly appropriate because the study does not merely aim to measure the prevalence of bullying or quantify behavioral change, but rather to understand how students interpret, negotiate, and internalize the meaning of bullying through lived experiences and social interactions. Such an approach allows for a deeper exploration of subjective perspectives, emotional responses, and the dynamics of interpersonal communication that are often inaccessible through quantitative methods (Dietrich et al., 2023; Vanner et al., 2022). The research is situated in a secondary school in Eastern Indonesia, a region selected due to its sociocultural complexity and the persistence of normalized bullying practices within everyday student interactions. The choice of location is also grounded in the relative scarcity of context-sensitive intervention studies in peripheral regions, where educational challenges are often shaped by limited institutional resources and deeply rooted social norms.

The informants in this study consist of 25 participants, including 18 students, 5 teachers, and 2 school administrators. Students were selected as the primary subjects because they are directly involved in peer interactions where bullying occurs, while teachers and administrators were included to provide institutional perspectives and to assess the sustainability of the intervention within the school environment. Informants were identified using purposive sampling, based on their relevance to the research objectives and their willingness to participate in the intervention process (Briones et al., 2022; Chobphon, 2024; Sánchez-Sánchez et al., 2024). The inclusion of diverse actors within the school community reflects the study's commitment to a community-based participatory approach, where multiple voices contribute to a more holistic understanding of the issue.

Data collection was conducted through a combination of participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and reflective documentation. Participatory observation was employed to capture real-time interactions among students during the intervention activities, allowing the researcher to observe behavioral changes and social dynamics as they unfolded. Semi-structured interviews were conducted before and after the intervention to explore shifts in students' perceptions, attitudes, and emotional responses toward bullying. This method provides flexibility for probing deeper into individual experiences while maintaining a consistent thematic focus across participants (Goodyear et al., 2024; Stanley et al., 2023). In addition, reflective documentation in the form of student narratives and group reflections was used to capture the internalization process, offering insights into how students make sense of their experiences. The combination of these methods ensures a rich and layered dataset that reflects both observable behavior and internal cognitive-affective processes.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation was employed by comparing information obtained from different sources and methods. This includes cross-verifying students' narratives with observational data and teacher perspectives, as well as examining consistency between pre- and post-intervention responses. Methodological triangulation strengthens the validity of qualitative research by reducing the risk of bias and providing a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Jones et al., 2021; Kelly et al., 2025). Additionally, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with selected participants to confirm the accuracy of the findings and to incorporate their feedback into the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reframing Bullying: From Normalized Practice to Recognized Harm

At the outset of the study, bullying among students was not readily recognized as a problematic or harmful behavior, but rather embedded within the fabric of everyday social interaction. Findings from initial interviews and participatory observations reveal that students commonly interpreted acts such as teasing, mocking, exclusion, and public embarrassment as normal expressions of friendship or humor. For instance, one student (initials: AR) explained that "we joke like that all the time, it's just for fun, nobody really means to hurt anyone," while another participant (initials: DS) noted that being teased was often seen as a sign of being accepted within a peer group. These narratives indicate that bullying behaviors were not only normalized but also socially legitimized through shared meanings that blurred the boundary between playful interaction and psychological harm. Such interpretations reflect what has been widely discussed in the literature as the internalization of permissive social norms, where repeated exposure to certain behaviors leads individuals to perceive them as acceptable and even expected (Freitas et al., 2022; M. L. López et al., 2025; Schaub et al., 2022).

This normalization was further corroborated through classroom observations, where subtle forms of verbal aggression frequently occurred without eliciting corrective responses from peers or teachers. In several instances, students laughed collectively when a peer was ridiculed, reinforcing the perception that such behavior was socially endorsed. This dynamic illustrates how bullying is sustained not merely through individual actions but through collective participation and tacit approval within the peer group. As noted by (Borchers, 2025; Micallef et al., 2025), bullying often persists in environments where bystanders interpret harmful behavior as trivial or justified, thereby contributing to a cycle of normalization. Within this context, the absence of critical reflection among students suggests that their understanding of bullying was shaped more by social convention than by ethical consideration.

However, the intervention introduced in this study created a critical rupture in this taken-for-granted understanding. Through a series of persuasive and participatory activities,

such as role-playing, guided discussions, and reflective exercises, students were gradually encouraged to re-examine their assumptions about everyday interactions. Post-intervention interviews reveal a notable shift in how students conceptualized bullying. A participant (initials: MF) reflected that “before, I thought it was just joking, but now I realize it can actually hurt someone deeply, even if we don’t see it.” Similarly, another student (initials: NL) expressed increased awareness of the emotional impact of exclusion, stating that “being left out is not just a small thing, it can make someone feel really alone.” These reflections indicate a movement from uncritical acceptance toward a more reflexive and empathetic understanding of social behavior.

The transformation observed in this study aligns with the concept of social norm internalization, where individuals revise their beliefs and behaviors in response to new normative frameworks introduced through social interaction (Asamoah & Bigodza, 2025; Niederdeppe et al., 2024). Importantly, this process was not driven by external enforcement or disciplinary measures, but rather emerged through dialogical engagement and collective reflection. The participatory nature of the intervention allowed students to confront their own experiences and assumptions, creating space for the deconstruction of previously held norms. As Andersson et al. (2024) argue, norms are not static but can be reshaped when individuals are exposed to alternative perspectives within a supportive social context. In this study, such exposure was facilitated through structured yet flexible activities that encouraged students to articulate, question, and ultimately revise their understanding of bullying.

To further illustrate this shift, the following table summarizes key changes in students’ perceptions before and after the intervention:

Table 1 Transformation of Students’ Perceptions of Bullying

Aspect	Before Intervention	After Intervention
Definition of bullying	Seen as joking or normal interaction	Recognized as harmful behavior
Emotional awareness	Limited recognition of victims’ feelings	Increased empathy and emotional understanding
Social acceptance	Considered socially acceptable	Viewed as socially and morally unacceptable
Response to bullying	Passive or supportive (e.g., laughing)	More critical and resistant to such behavior

Source: Research Data Analysis (2025)

The table highlights that the most significant change occurred not only at the level of knowledge but also in the moral and emotional dimensions of students’ awareness. This suggests that the intervention was effective in moving beyond surface-level understanding toward deeper cognitive and affective transformation. Such findings reinforce the argument that addressing bullying requires more than simply informing students about rules and consequences; it necessitates engaging them in processes that challenge and reconstruct the

social meanings attached to their actions.

The Role of Persuasive Engagement in Shaping Cognitive and Affective Awareness

The transformation of students' awareness observed in this study cannot be separated from the central role of persuasive engagement embedded within the intervention process. Rather than relying on one-directional instruction, the activities were deliberately designed to create dialogical spaces where students could actively participate, express their thoughts, and reflect on their experiences. Through interactive discussions, role-playing simulations, and guided reflections, students were not positioned as passive recipients of anti-bullying messages, but as co-constructors of meaning. This approach proved critical in reshaping both the cognitive and affective dimensions of their understanding. At the cognitive level, students began to articulate more precise and critical definitions of bullying, moving beyond vague or dismissive interpretations. At the same time, the affective dimension, often overlooked in conventional interventions, emerged strongly as students engaged emotionally with the scenarios presented during the activities.

Initial observations during the early stages of the intervention showed that many students could identify bullying in abstract terms but struggled to connect it with their own behaviors. However, when exposed to narrative-based simulations and peer storytelling, a noticeable shift occurred. For example, in one role-play session, students were asked to act out scenarios involving exclusion and verbal humiliation. Following the activity, a participant (initials: RK) reflected, "When I played the role of someone being ignored, it felt uncomfortable and embarrassing. I didn't realize before that it could feel that serious." Similarly, another student (initials: SP) noted that hearing a peer's personal story about being mocked made them "feel guilty for laughing at similar situations before." These responses illustrate how emotional engagement served as a bridge between abstract knowledge and lived experience, enabling students to internalize the meaning of bullying in a more profound way.

This finding resonates strongly with the framework of narrative persuasion and emotional engagement, which suggests that individuals are more likely to change their attitudes when they are immersed in stories that evoke empathy and self-reflection (Becktel & Sweetser, 2025; Birchley et al., 2024; Looman et al., 2021). Unlike purely informational approaches, narrative-based engagement allows participants to momentarily step into the perspectives of others, thereby reducing psychological distance and fostering emotional connection. In the context of this study, the use of storytelling, simulation, and peer dialogue created an environment where students could not only understand bullying intellectually but also feel its impact. This dual engagement, cognitive and affective, proved to be a crucial mechanism in shifting their perceptions.

Furthermore, the dialogical nature of the intervention encouraged students to critically examine their own roles within bullying dynamics. Rather than labeling individuals as "perpetrators" or "victims," the discussions emphasized the fluidity of these roles and the collective responsibility of the peer group. This approach aligns with contemporary

perspectives in persuasive communication, which highlight the importance of participation and self-reflection in fostering durable attitude change (Abeyasinghe et al., 2025; Amankwaah, 2023; Udir et al., 2025). By engaging students in conversations rather than prescriptions, the intervention allowed them to arrive at their own conclusions, thereby increasing the likelihood of internalization.

The interplay between cognitive understanding and emotional resonance is further illustrated in the comparative changes observed before and after the intervention, as summarized below:

Table 2 Cognitive and Affective Shifts in Students' Awareness

Dimension	Before Intervention	After Intervention
Cognitive (Understanding)	General and ambiguous definition of bullying	Clear recognition of various forms of bullying
Affective (Emotional Response)	Limited empathy, often indifferent or amused	Increased empathy, discomfort toward harmful behaviors
Behavioral Intention	Passive acceptance or indirect support	Greater intention to intervene or avoid harmful actions

Source: Research Data Analysis (2025)

The table indicates that the most meaningful transformation lies in the alignment between what students know and what they feel. Prior to the intervention, there was a disconnect between cognitive awareness and emotional response; students might recognize certain actions as “not good” but did not feel compelled to respond differently. After the intervention, this gap began to close, as emotional engagement reinforced cognitive understanding and translated into more responsible behavioral intentions.

Importantly, the persuasive dimension of the intervention was not rooted in coercion or authority, but in empathy-driven communication. Facilitators intentionally avoided moralizing language or rigid instructions, instead fostering an *वार्तावहार* where students felt safe to express uncertainty, admit past mistakes, and reconsider their perspectives. This human-centered approach contributed to a sense of psychological safety, which is essential for meaningful learning and transformation. As one participant (initials: AL) expressed, “It didn’t feel like we were being told what is right or wrong, but more like we were discovering it together.” Such reflections highlight the subtle yet powerful role of empathy in persuasive engagement.

Experiential Learning and the Internalization of Anti-Bullying Values

The process of internalizing anti-bullying values in this study unfolded most vividly through experiential learning activities that placed students at the center of lived, simulated, and reflective experiences. Unlike conventional instructional approaches that rely on abstract explanations, the intervention engaged students in role-playing scenarios, collaborative games, and guided group reflections designed to mirror real-life social interactions. These activities allowed students to encounter bullying not as a distant concept, but as an embodied

experience (Chenekew Goshu et al., 2025; Pan et al., 2025). During participatory observation, it became evident that students responded more intensely and authentically when they were directly involved in these simulations. For instance, in one role-play session, students alternated roles between being the target, the initiator, and the bystander of exclusionary behavior. This structured yet flexible setting enabled them to experience the emotional complexity of each position, thereby deepening their understanding beyond surface-level recognition.

The impact of these experiential activities was clearly reflected in students' narratives. A participant (initials: FR), who previously considered teasing as harmless, described a shift in perspective after participating in a simulation: "When I had to act as someone being laughed at, I felt embarrassed and wanted to leave. It made me think about times I did that to others." Another student (initials: YM) shared that playing the role of a bystander made them realize their passive complicity: "I used to just watch and laugh, but now I see that staying silent also hurts the person." These reflections suggest that experiential engagement facilitated a process of perspective-taking, allowing students to emotionally and socially situate themselves within the dynamics of bullying. Such findings reinforce the idea that meaningful learning occurs when individuals are able to connect knowledge with personal experience and emotional resonance.

This pattern aligns closely with the theoretical foundations of experiential learning in social behavior change, which emphasize that knowledge is constructed through cycles of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Nichols, 2021; Scholz et al., 2025). More recent studies have also highlighted the relevance of experiential approaches in fostering empathy and moral reasoning, particularly in adolescent populations (Dimond et al., 2022; Rushforth et al., 2021; Stuppy & Smith, 2023). In this study, the integration of reflection sessions following each activity played a crucial role in consolidating learning. Students were encouraged to articulate what they felt, what they observed, and how their perceptions changed, thereby transforming immediate experiences into longer-term insights. This reflective component ensured that the learning process did not remain episodic, but evolved into a deeper internalization of values.

Importantly, the internalization observed in this study extended beyond cognitive comprehension into the emotional and social domains. Students did not merely learn to define bullying; they began to feel discomfort toward behaviors they previously accepted and developed a sense of responsibility toward their peers. This multidimensional shift is particularly significant, as internalization is often understood as a process in which external norms become integrated into an individual's value system, influencing both attitudes and behavior (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2025; Thongmak, 2025). The data suggest that such integration was facilitated by the interplay between experience, emotion, and social interaction. In group discussions, students frequently referenced not only their own feelings but also the reactions of their peers, indicating that the learning process was collectively

negotiated rather than individually absorbed.

The transformation in students' internalization of anti-bullying values can be further illustrated in the following table:

Table 3 Internalization of Anti-Bullying Values through Experiential Learning

Dimension	Before Intervention	After Intervention
Understanding of roles	Limited awareness of victim, perpetrator, bystander	Clear recognition of multiple roles and their impacts
Emotional engagement	Detached or indifferent	Strong emotional responses (empathy, discomfort, guilt)
Value internalization	External (rules-based, compliance-oriented)	Internal (value-based, self-reflective)
Behavioral orientation	Reactive or passive	Proactive and socially responsible

Source: Research Data Analysis (2025)

The table demonstrates that experiential learning contributed to a shift from externally imposed understanding toward internally grounded values. Prior to the intervention, students tended to perceive anti-bullying norms as rules to be followed primarily in the presence of authority figures. After engaging in experiential activities, however, these norms became part of their personal value systems, influencing how they interpreted and responded to social situations. This transition from compliance to internalization is critical for ensuring the sustainability of behavioral change, as it reduces reliance on external enforcement.

Another important aspect of experiential learning observed in this study is its capacity to create a shared emotional vocabulary among students. Through collective participation in simulations and reflections, students developed a common language to describe feelings such as embarrassment, exclusion, and empathy. This shared understanding not only enhanced communication but also strengthened peer accountability. As one participant (initials: DN) noted, "Now when something like that happens, we can remind each other because we all know how it feels." Such statements indicate that experiential learning not only transforms individual awareness but also contributes to the formation of a more supportive and reflective social environment.

Community Participation as a Catalyst for Sustainable Change

The sustainability of the changes observed in this study is closely linked to the active participation of the broader school community, particularly teachers and institutional actors who play a pivotal role in shaping everyday social norms within the educational environment. While the initial transformation in students' awareness was catalyzed through persuasive and experiential engagement, its continuity depended significantly on whether these newly formed values could be reinforced, modeled, and embedded within routine school practices. Findings from post-intervention observations and interviews suggest that when teachers

positioned themselves not merely as authority figures but as co-participants in the process, the anti-bullying discourse began to permeate beyond the intervention setting and into the daily interactions of the school (Salomi, 2025; Sayem et al., 2025; Susanti & Khu, 2025).

Teachers who were actively involved in the intervention demonstrated a heightened sensitivity toward subtle forms of bullying that were previously overlooked. For example, one teacher (initials: HT) reflected that “before, I only reacted when there was a clear conflict, but now I pay more attention to small jokes or comments that might hurt students.” This shift indicates that the intervention did not only influence students but also prompted a recalibration of teachers’ interpretive frameworks. By becoming more attentive to the nuances of student interaction, teachers contributed to creating an environment where harmful behaviors were less likely to be normalized. Another teacher (initials: SR) emphasized the importance of consistency, noting that “students start to change when they see that we are serious about it every day, not just during the program.” Such statements highlight that sustainability is not achieved through isolated activities, but through continuous reinforcement within the social ecology of the school.

The involvement of school administrators further strengthened this process by providing institutional support for the integration of anti-bullying values into school policies and routines. In several instances, administrators initiated follow-up discussions during assemblies and encouraged teachers to incorporate reflective conversations into their classroom practices. This alignment between individual-level transformation and institutional commitment is critical, as it ensures that the values introduced during the intervention are not perceived as temporary or optional, but as integral to the school’s normative framework. As one administrator (initials: ML) noted, “we try to make this part of how we build our school culture, not just a one-time activity.” This perspective underscores the importance of institutionalization in sustaining behavioral change.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings resonate with community-based participatory frameworks, which emphasize the role of local actors as active agents in the process of social change (Aghdam et al., 2025; Nourashrafi & Moafian, 2025). Rather than imposing external solutions, such approaches prioritize collaboration, shared ownership, and contextual relevance. In the context of this study, the engagement of teachers and school leaders functioned as a form of localized agency, enabling the intervention to adapt to the specific cultural and social dynamics of the school. Recent scholarship has further underscored that participatory approaches enhance the durability of interventions by fostering a sense of collective responsibility and mutual accountability among stakeholders (Ducasse, 2025; Wagner et al., 2024). This is particularly important in educational settings, where social norms are continuously negotiated through interaction.

The data also reveal that students themselves began to take on more active roles in maintaining the changes initiated during the intervention. Several students reported reminding their peers when jokes crossed the line or when someone was being excluded. A participant (initials: AN) shared that “now if someone starts teasing too much, we tell them

to stop because we all agreed it's not okay." This peer-level reinforcement indicates that the intervention contributed to the emergence of new social norms that were collectively upheld rather than externally enforced. Such dynamics are crucial for sustainability, as they reduce dependence on authority figures and embed change within the peer culture itself.

However, the process of institutionalizing these values was not without challenges. Some teachers noted that maintaining consistency required ongoing effort, particularly in balancing disciplinary responsibilities with empathetic engagement. Additionally, the deeply ingrained nature of certain social behaviors meant that occasional relapses occurred, especially in informal settings outside the classroom. Nevertheless, these challenges did not negate the overall trajectory of change; rather, they highlighted the iterative nature of social transformation, where progress is achieved through continuous negotiation and reinforcement (Li, 2025; Olbermann & Schramm, 2025; Yurkova et al., 2025).

What emerges from this analysis is a recognition that sustainable change in anti-bullying awareness cannot be achieved through student-focused interventions alone. It requires a holistic engagement of the school community, where teachers, administrators, and students collectively participate in redefining and sustaining social norms. The persuasive community engagement approach employed in this study demonstrates that when local actors are meaningfully involved, the intervention evolves from a discrete program into a living practice embedded within the culture of the institution. This embeddedness is what ultimately allows the values of empathy, respect, and responsibility to endure beyond the temporal boundaries of the intervention itself.

Toward a Persuasive Community Engagement Model for Anti-Bullying Awareness

The findings of this study converge into a conceptual articulation of a persuasive community engagement model that explains how anti-bullying awareness can be reconstructed as a transformative social process rather than a compliance-driven outcome. This model is not introduced as an abstract framework detached from empirical realities, but emerges inductively from the interplay of three interrelated dimensions observed throughout the intervention: empathy-based persuasive communication, active community participation, and experiential learning. Together, these dimensions form a dynamic process through which students move from an initial state of normalization, where bullying is perceived as an ordinary social practice, toward a stage of critical awareness, and ultimately toward more responsible and reflective behavioral orientations.

At the core of this model lies the role of persuasive communication grounded in empathy. Unlike conventional approaches that rely on directive instruction or moralizing discourse, the intervention facilitated dialogical interactions that allowed students to question, reinterpret, and reconstruct their own understandings. This process resonates with contemporary perspectives on persuasive communication, which emphasize that durable attitude change is more likely when individuals are engaged in reflective and emotionally resonant exchanges rather than passive reception of information (M. J. Hobbs & O'Keefe, 2024; Worters et al., 2025). In this study, empathy functioned as a mediating force that

connected cognitive recognition with emotional understanding. Students did not simply learn that bullying is harmful; they came to feel its consequences through shared narratives and simulated experiences. As one participant (initials: LF) expressed, “it’s different when you just hear about it and when you actually feel it, it stays with you.” This illustrates how persuasion, when rooted in empathy, becomes less about convincing and more about enabling self-realization.

Equally important within this model is the dimension of active community participation, which extends the locus of change beyond individual students to the broader social environment of the school (Boukes & LaMarre, 2021; Gusweni et al., 2025). The involvement of teachers and administrators was not peripheral, but constitutive of the transformation process. Their participation created continuity between the intervention space and everyday school life, ensuring that the values discussed were not confined to isolated sessions. This aligns with the principles of community-based participatory approaches, which highlight the importance of shared ownership and collaborative engagement in achieving sustainable outcomes (M. Hobbs et al., 2025; Mantzari et al., 2022; Rahro et al., 2024). In the context of this study, participation was not merely a methodological choice but a strategic mechanism for embedding new norms within the institutional fabric. A teacher (initials: SR) noted that “when we are part of the process, it becomes easier to carry it forward in our daily teaching,” reflecting how participation fosters both commitment and continuity.

The third dimension, experiential learning, provides the mechanism through which values are internalized and translated into action. By engaging students in role-play, simulations, and reflective exercises, the intervention created opportunities for embodied learning that bridged the gap between abstract knowledge and lived experience. This process is consistent with the broader framework of transformative social learning, which posits that meaningful change occurs when individuals critically reflect on their assumptions through experience and dialogue (Heinrich et al., 2022; Prathap & Devimeenakshi, 2025). In this study, experiential learning did not operate in isolation but was interwoven with persuasive communication and community participation, forming a cohesive process of transformation. Students’ reflections indicate that this integration was crucial in reshaping not only what they knew, but how they related to others. As one student (initials: AN) observed, “now it’s not just about knowing what’s wrong, but actually trying to act differently.”

What distinguishes this model from many existing anti-bullying interventions is its departure from punitive and compliance-oriented paradigms. Traditional approaches often focus on rule enforcement and behavioral control, which, while necessary in certain contexts, may not address the underlying social meanings that sustain bullying practices. In contrast, the model proposed here operates on the premise that sustainable change requires a reconfiguration of those meanings through processes that are participatory, reflective, and emotionally engaging (Gede Agung et al., 2024; Hamidah & Duncik, 2024; Vargas-Merino et al., 2025). This shift is particularly relevant in developing and transitional contexts, where

formal regulations may exist but are not always effectively internalized at the community level. By foregrounding interaction and experience, the model offers a pathway for aligning institutional expectations with lived social realities.

The implications of this model extend beyond the immediate context of bullying prevention. It contributes to a broader discourse on how educational interventions can be designed to foster transformative learning in settings characterized by cultural diversity and structural constraints. The integration of persuasive communication, community participation, and experiential learning reflects an interdisciplinary approach that bridges insights from communication studies, education, and community development. Such an approach is well aligned with contemporary calls for more context-sensitive and socially embedded forms of knowledge production and application (Knaus, 2023; Taye et al., 2025). It also resonates with the mission of community-engaged scholarship, where research and practice are intertwined in addressing real-world challenges.

In practical terms, the model offers a framework that can inform the design of future programs within both research and community service contexts. It suggests that interventions should not be treated as standalone events, but as processes that evolve through continuous engagement with participants and stakeholders. The emphasis on empathy, participation, and experience provides guiding principles that can be adapted to different educational settings while maintaining conceptual coherence. At the same time, the findings underscore that such transformation is inherently gradual and contingent upon sustained interaction, institutional support, and cultural sensitivity.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that reconstructing anti-bullying awareness among students cannot be effectively achieved through normative instruction or punitive regulation alone, but requires a transformative process grounded in persuasive community engagement. By integrating empathy-based communication, participatory interaction, and experiential learning within a school-based intervention, the study shows that students are able to move beyond the normalization of bullying toward a more critical and reflective understanding of its psychological and social consequences. This shift is not merely cognitive, but also affective and relational, as students begin to develop empathy, reconsider their roles within peer dynamics, and demonstrate more responsible social behavior. Importantly, the findings also indicate that the sustainability of such transformation depends on the active involvement of teachers and school institutions in embedding these values into everyday practices, thereby extending the impact beyond the intervention itself. In this sense, the study offers a contextually grounded contribution by advancing a persuasive community engagement model that positions awareness as a socially constructed and continuously negotiated process, providing an alternative to conventional approaches that tend to prioritize control over understanding.

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing and language editing, without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors express their gratitude to the informants for their valuable insights, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this article.

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