

Community-Based Anti-Bullying Intervention for Strengthening Inclusive and Safe Learning Environments in Rural Indonesia

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Abstract

Bullying continues to undermine the development of safe and inclusive learning environments, particularly in rural schools where preventive resources and support systems remain limited. This study investigates the implementation of a community-based anti-bullying intervention designed to enhance students' awareness, strengthen inclusive school culture, and promote collaborative bullying prevention in rural Indonesia. Employing a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach integrated with Participatory Action Research (PAR), the study was conducted at MTs Al-Hilaal Katapang, West Seram Regency, Maluku, involving 60 students, teachers, school leaders, and parents. Data were collected through observations, interviews, focus group discussions, pre- and post-intervention assessments, and participatory reflections. The intervention comprised five stages: needs assessment, anti-bullying education, participatory discussions, case-based simulations, and collective commitment-building activities. The findings reveal substantial improvements in students' understanding of bullying, empathy, tolerance, and willingness to engage in prevention efforts. Furthermore, the program fostered stronger collaboration among school and community stakeholders, contributing to a more supportive and inclusive learning environment. The study proposes a Community-Based Anti-Bullying Intervention Model (CB-AIM) consisting of Assessment, Education, Participation, Reflection, and Collective Commitment. This model represents a shift from individual-centered bullying prevention toward a community-centered framework tailored to rural educational contexts. The findings highlight the importance of stakeholder collaboration in promoting sustainable bullying prevention and strengthening social resilience within school communities.

Keywords: Anti-Bullying Intervention, Inclusive Education, Rural Schools, School-Community Collaboration, Student Empowerment



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INTRODUCTION

Creating safe and inclusive learning environments has become one of the central priorities of contemporary education systems worldwide. Schools are expected not only to facilitate academic achievement but also to provide social spaces where students can develop positive relationships, experience psychological security, and cultivate respect for diversity. However, these expectations continue to be challenged by the persistence of bullying, a

complex social phenomenon that affects millions of children and adolescents across different educational contexts. Bullying encompasses repeated aggressive behaviors characterized by power imbalances that may manifest physically, verbally, socially, or through digital platforms (Hakim & Baihaqi, 2024; Hateriah & Sarkiah, 2023). Its consequences extend beyond immediate emotional distress, often contributing to long-term psychological difficulties, diminished academic engagement, social withdrawal, and reduced educational attainment (Hidayati & Amalia, 2021; Noboru et al., 2021; Tamaela et al., 2024).

Globally, bullying remains a significant concern despite extensive efforts to promote child-friendly and inclusive education. Reports from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization indicate that nearly one-third of students worldwide have experienced bullying at least once during their school years (Aisyah et al., 2023; Kadir et al., 2025; Virginia et al., 2024). The prevalence of bullying is particularly alarming because it undermines the realization of equitable education and directly contradicts the principles embedded in Sustainable Development Goal 4, which emphasizes inclusive and quality education for all. Beyond individual consequences, bullying weakens social cohesion within schools, creates barriers to participation, and reinforces patterns of exclusion that disproportionately affect vulnerable students (Hajdú & Rahman, 2021; Nurhayati et al., 2021). As a result, bullying prevention has increasingly been recognized not only as an educational issue but also as a broader social development challenge requiring collective action from multiple stakeholders.

The Indonesian educational context reflects many of these global concerns. Cases of bullying continue to be reported across elementary, secondary, and religious educational institutions, suggesting that school-based violence remains a persistent issue despite various policy interventions. While national programs promoting character education and child-friendly schools have demonstrated positive outcomes, implementation gaps remain evident, particularly in rural and geographically isolated areas. In many communities, bullying behaviors are frequently normalized as part of everyday peer interaction, making early identification and intervention difficult. Such normalization often discourages victims from reporting incidents and reduces the likelihood of meaningful institutional responses (Fadilla & Fuady, 2022; Zaenudin et al., 2023). The situation is further complicated by limited access to counseling services, insufficient anti-bullying literacy among students and parents, and the absence of coordinated prevention mechanisms involving schools and communities.

The challenges faced by rural schools deserve particular attention because educational inequalities frequently intersect with social vulnerabilities. Rural educational institutions often operate with limited resources, fewer trained personnel, and restricted access to psychosocial support programs compared to their urban counterparts (Arifin et al., 2022; Lumira, 2024; Saripudin et al., 2023). Consequently, preventive initiatives tend to focus primarily on academic concerns, while social and emotional dimensions of student well-being receive less systematic attention. Within such contexts, bullying may remain hidden, underreported, or inadequately addressed. This reality highlights the need for interventions

that move beyond punitive responses and instead foster supportive relationships among students, teachers, families, and community members. Building inclusive learning environments therefore requires approaches that recognize bullying as a collective social issue rather than solely an individual behavioral problem.

The growing body of literature on bullying prevention provides important insights into effective intervention strategies. Early studies largely conceptualized bullying as an individual behavioral issue that could be reduced through disciplinary measures and psychological interventions targeting perpetrators and victims (Rahma et al., 2023; Vionalita & Kusumaningtiar, 2023). The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program subsequently became one of the most influential models, demonstrating that structured school policies, teacher involvement, and continuous monitoring could reduce bullying incidents significantly (Ekowati et al., 2023; Nurazizah & Apriani, 2024; Yosep et al., 2025). These findings established the foundation for future anti-bullying programs by emphasizing the importance of institutional commitment and preventive education.

Subsequent scholarship expanded the focus from individual behavior to broader school environments. Researchers began highlighting the importance of school climate, peer relationships, and organizational culture in shaping bullying dynamics (Karmiyati et al., 2024; Payong, 2023). Positive school climates characterized by trust, inclusivity, and supportive teacher-student relationships were consistently associated with lower rates of bullying and victimization. These studies contributed to the development of school-based interventions that integrated social-emotional learning, peer mentoring, and character education into broader prevention frameworks. Evidence from multiple countries demonstrated that interventions targeting school culture often produced more sustainable outcomes than strategies focused solely on individual students (Haryanto et al., 2023; Latif & Paramita, 2023; Suartama et al., 2024).

The literature further evolved through the emergence of whole-school approaches that recognized the interconnected roles of teachers, administrators, students, and parents. Whole-school interventions seek to transform the social ecology of schools by encouraging collective responsibility for student well-being (Azwar et al., 2021; Sukarno et al., 2024; Utami et al., 2022). Research findings indicate that programs incorporating parental engagement, teacher training, and student participation generate stronger and longer-lasting reductions in bullying behaviors than isolated classroom-based initiatives. Such approaches acknowledge that bullying is embedded within broader social interactions and therefore requires comprehensive responses involving multiple actors.

More recent studies have increasingly emphasized community engagement as a critical component of violence prevention and inclusive education. Community-based educational initiatives have demonstrated considerable potential in strengthening social resilience, enhancing stakeholder ownership, and promoting sustainable behavioral change (Anggini et al., 2024; Hunaepi et al., 2023; Jatmiko et al., 2024). Within educational settings, community participation can foster stronger connections between schools and local social

structures, thereby creating supportive environments that extend beyond school boundaries. Research conducted in various developing contexts suggests that collaborative interventions involving families, local leaders, and community organizations can significantly improve student well-being and social inclusion (Nabilah, 2024; Thoyib et al., 2021). Nevertheless, empirical evidence regarding how such approaches can be systematically applied to bullying prevention remains relatively limited, particularly in rural educational environments.

Although previous studies have generated valuable knowledge concerning bullying prevalence, psychological impacts, school climate, and educational interventions, much of the existing evidence continues to originate from urban schools and institution-centered programs. The dominant emphasis remains on individual awareness, behavioral outcomes, or school policy implementation, while the broader social networks surrounding students often receive less analytical attention. Moreover, limited research has explored how anti-bullying initiatives can mobilize community resources and collective participation to strengthen inclusive learning cultures in rural schools characterized by distinct social and cultural dynamics. As a consequence, there remains a need for frameworks that integrate anti-bullying education, stakeholder collaboration, student empowerment, and community engagement within a coherent intervention model capable of addressing both individual behaviors and the social environments in which those behaviors emerge.

Responding to this need, the present study examines the implementation of a community-based anti-bullying intervention in a rural Islamic junior secondary school in Indonesia. Rather than positioning students merely as recipients of anti-bullying messages, the intervention encourages active participation from students, teachers, parents, and local community members in shaping collective commitments to safer and more inclusive educational environments. By combining principles of Community-Based Participatory Research and Participatory Action Research, the study seeks to generate practical knowledge while simultaneously facilitating social change within the participating community. Through this approach, the research contributes to ongoing discussions regarding inclusive education by demonstrating how community engagement can be integrated into bullying prevention strategies in resource-constrained rural settings.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze students' initial understanding of bullying and its consequences, evaluate changes in awareness and attitudes following a community-based intervention, examine the collaborative roles of school and community stakeholders in promoting inclusive learning environments, and formulate a Community-Based Anti-Bullying Intervention Model that can be adapted and replicated in other rural educational contexts. In doing so, the study contributes to the advancement of community-engaged educational practices and offers evidence-based recommendations for strengthening sustainable, inclusive, and safe learning environments in developing regions.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach within the framework of Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) integrated with Participatory Action Research (PAR). The selection of a qualitative design was based on the nature of the research problem, which seeks to understand bullying not merely as an observable behavioral phenomenon but as a social reality shaped by interactions, perceptions, cultural norms, and collective experiences within the school community. Qualitative inquiry enables researchers to explore how students, teachers, parents, and community members interpret bullying, respond to its occurrence, and participate in efforts to create safer and more inclusive learning environments. Furthermore, the combination of CBPR and PAR was considered appropriate because the study was intended not only to generate knowledge but also to facilitate social change through active stakeholder involvement in identifying problems, implementing interventions, and reflecting on outcomes (Erizar et al., 2024; Ghina et al., 2023; Hunaina et al., 2024).

The study was conducted at MTs Al-Hilaal Katapang, located in West Seram Regency, Maluku, Indonesia. This site was selected purposively due to its representation of a rural educational setting characterized by limited access to counseling services, anti-bullying programs, and psychosocial support mechanisms. Preliminary observations and informal discussions with school personnel indicated that bullying-related behaviors were occasionally perceived as ordinary peer interactions, reflecting a broader challenge faced by many rural schools in Indonesia. The school therefore provided a relevant context for examining how community-based interventions could strengthen awareness, participation, and collective responsibility in bullying prevention.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their relevance to the research objectives and their involvement in the educational and social environment of the school. The study involved 60 students who participated in the intervention activities, alongside six teachers, including guidance and counseling personnel and homeroom teachers, one school principal, and five parents representing different student backgrounds. Students were included because they were the primary beneficiaries of the intervention and directly experienced peer interactions within the school environment. Teachers and the principal were involved because they played central roles in shaping school culture, implementing educational policies, and responding to bullying incidents. Parents were included to capture perspectives from the family environment and to explore how home-school collaboration could contribute to sustainable bullying prevention efforts.

Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and reflective documentation. Participant observation was conducted throughout the intervention process to capture behavioral changes, interaction patterns, and participant engagement during educational sessions, simulations, and group activities. Semi-structured interviews allowed researchers to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and reflections in greater depth while maintaining flexibility to

follow emerging themes. Focus group discussions were conducted with students and parents to encourage collective reflection and generate diverse perspectives regarding bullying and school inclusivity. Reflective notes and program documentation were also utilized to record the implementation process and stakeholder responses. The use of multiple data collection techniques was intended to provide a comprehensive understanding of both the intervention process and its perceived outcomes (Adira, 2023; Asri et al., 2025; Malik et al., 2024).

Data analysis followed the thematic analysis procedures proposed, involving data familiarization, initial coding, theme development, theme review, and interpretation. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, triangulation was conducted through the integration of multiple data sources, methods, and participant groups. Information obtained from students was compared with data gathered from teachers, parents, and school leaders, while observational findings were cross-checked against interview and discussion results. Member checking was also undertaken by sharing preliminary interpretations with selected participants to verify the accuracy of the researchers' conclusions. Through these procedures, the study sought to produce credible, contextually grounded, and socially meaningful findings regarding the implementation of community-based anti-bullying interventions in rural educational settings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Initial Conditions of Bullying Awareness and School Social Climate in Rural Educational Settings

The initial needs assessment revealed that bullying was present within students' daily interactions, although it was rarely recognized as a serious social or educational issue by members of the school community. Findings from participant observations, focus group discussions, and interviews indicated that most students associated bullying exclusively with physical aggression, such as hitting, pushing, kicking, or other forms of direct violence. When asked to describe examples of bullying, students consistently referred to visible physical acts, while verbal harassment, social exclusion, intimidation, humiliation, and psychological victimization were seldom identified as forms of bullying. This finding suggests that students' understanding of bullying remained relatively narrow and was largely influenced by observable manifestations of aggression. As a result, many harmful behaviors occurring in everyday interactions were normalized and left unchallenged.

The limited conceptualization of bullying became particularly evident during focus group discussions. Several students initially expressed the belief that teasing, mocking classmates, or assigning offensive nicknames constituted ordinary peer interactions rather than harmful behavior. One student participant, identified as R, explained that calling friends by embarrassing nicknames had become a common practice among students and was generally perceived as a form of humor rather than a potential source of psychological harm. Similar views were expressed by other participants, who noted that such behaviors had existed for many years and were rarely questioned by either students or adults. These findings

indicate that certain forms of verbal and relational bullying had become embedded within everyday social practices and were therefore difficult to recognize as problematic. Previous studies have similarly demonstrated that students often underestimate the seriousness of non-physical forms of bullying because these behaviors are socially normalized within peer groups (Almanfaluthi et al., 2023; Riki et al., 2024; Tesar & Pangastuti, 2024).

The assessment also revealed that students possessed limited awareness of the long-term consequences experienced by victims of bullying. While participants generally acknowledged that physical violence could cause injury, few were able to articulate the emotional, psychological, and academic impacts associated with repeated victimization. During interviews, several students indicated that victims should simply learn to be “stronger” or ignore negative comments from peers. Such responses reflect a tendency to individualize the problem and place responsibility on victims rather than addressing the broader social dynamics that sustain bullying. This perspective is concerning because it may discourage reporting behaviors and reinforce a culture of silence among students who experience victimization. Research has consistently shown that bullying can contribute to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, academic disengagement, and social isolation, particularly when schools fail to provide adequate support mechanisms (Kustulasari et al., 2021; Yolandana et al., 2024).

Teachers demonstrated greater awareness of bullying compared to students; however, the findings suggested that responses to bullying incidents remained largely reactive rather than preventive. Interviews with teachers revealed that interventions were typically initiated only after conflicts became visible or escalated into disciplinary problems. One teacher, identified as M, acknowledged that although minor incidents of teasing and exclusion frequently occurred among students, the school lacked specific guidelines for identifying early signs of bullying. Another teacher, identified as N, explained that staff members often relied on personal judgment when addressing student conflicts because no formal anti-bullying framework or reporting mechanism had been established. Consequently, responses varied considerably depending on individual perceptions and experiences. Similar challenges have been documented in rural educational settings where limited institutional resources often constrain the development of systematic prevention programs (Arifandi et al., 2024; Qotadah et al., 2022).

The perspectives of parents further illustrated the limited social recognition of bullying within the broader community. Most parents who participated in the study acknowledged that conflicts among children occurred regularly but tended to view such incidents as a normal part of growing up. Several parents expressed greater concern about academic achievement than social interactions among students. One parent participant, identified as S, stated that teasing among children was generally perceived as harmless unless it resulted in physical confrontation. This perception reflects a broader cultural tendency to minimize non-physical forms of victimization and highlights the challenges of fostering collective awareness regarding bullying prevention. Previous research has emphasized that parental perceptions

significantly influence the effectiveness of school-based prevention initiatives because family attitudes shape how children interpret and respond to aggressive behaviors (Aminah et al., 2021; Karmiyati et al., 2024).

Another important finding concerned the absence of clear reporting and support procedures for students experiencing bullying. Neither students nor teachers could identify a structured mechanism through which incidents could be reported confidentially and addressed consistently. Students frequently indicated uncertainty regarding whom they should approach if they experienced bullying, while teachers acknowledged the lack of dedicated protocols for documenting and following up reported cases. This institutional gap contributed to an environment in which many incidents remained unreported and unresolved.

These findings can be understood through the lens of the Social-Ecological Theory, which emphasizes that bullying is shaped not only by individual characteristics but also by interpersonal relationships, institutional practices, and community norms (Wijayanti & Rostika, 2024; Zahro et al., 2024). The normalization of teasing, the limited awareness of psychological harm, the absence of reporting mechanisms, and the perception that bullying is a routine aspect of childhood collectively demonstrate how social environments influence the interpretation and management of aggressive behavior. Rather than representing isolated acts committed by individual students, bullying in this context appeared to be embedded within broader social interactions and cultural expectations. Consequently, addressing bullying requires interventions that extend beyond individual behavioral change and engage the wider school and community ecosystem. The needs assessment therefore provided a critical foundation for designing a community-based intervention aimed at transforming not only students' knowledge but also the collective norms and relationships that shape the social climate of the school.

Enhancing Anti-Bullying Literacy Through Community-Based Educational Intervention

The implementation of the community-based anti-bullying educational intervention marked an important turning point in how students, teachers, and parents understood bullying and its implications within the school environment. Prior to the intervention, the needs assessment revealed that most participants associated bullying primarily with physical aggression. However, observations, interviews, reflective discussions, and post-intervention assessments conducted after the educational sessions demonstrated a substantial expansion in participants' understanding of the phenomenon. The intervention, which combined interactive presentations, participatory discussions, case simulations, and collaborative reflections, enabled participants to move beyond simplified interpretations of bullying and develop a more comprehensive understanding of its various manifestations and consequences.

One of the most notable changes was observed in students' ability to define bullying in a broader and more nuanced manner. During the post-intervention discussions, students were no longer limited to describing bullying as acts of physical violence. Instead, they

increasingly recognized verbal harassment, social exclusion, intimidation, humiliation, rumor-spreading, and repeated psychological aggression as forms of bullying. This shift indicates that the educational activities successfully expanded students' conceptual understanding and challenged previously normalized assumptions regarding peer interactions. Several students demonstrated an increased ability to distinguish between friendly joking and harmful behaviors that intentionally cause emotional distress. For example, a student identified as A explained that he previously believed mocking classmates was merely part of everyday friendship but later realized that repeated ridicule could negatively affect a person's confidence and sense of belonging. Such reflections suggest that the intervention encouraged critical self-awareness regarding behaviors that had previously been taken for granted within the school community.

The intervention also strengthened students' awareness of the psychological and social consequences experienced by bullying victims. During the initial assessment, many participants struggled to explain the impacts of bullying beyond physical injury. Following the educational sessions and case simulations, students demonstrated a deeper understanding of how bullying can affect emotional well-being, academic participation, social relationships, and self-esteem. In one focus group discussion, participant R stated that victims often appear quiet not because they choose isolation but because they may feel afraid, embarrassed, or unsupported. Another participant, D, reflected that repeated verbal attacks could be as harmful as physical aggression because they affect how individuals perceive themselves. These findings indicate that students began to develop a more empathetic perspective toward victims and became increasingly aware that bullying extends beyond visible acts of violence. Such outcomes align with previous studies showing that anti-bullying education can increase emotional awareness and improve students' ability to recognize the hidden consequences of victimization (Habibi, 2023; Yuniarti et al., 2024).

The educational intervention also contributed to changes in teachers' understanding of bullying prevention. Interviews conducted after the program revealed that teachers increasingly viewed bullying as a systemic issue requiring preventive rather than solely disciplinary responses. Before the intervention, most teachers described their role primarily in terms of resolving conflicts after incidents occurred. Following participation in the educational activities and collaborative discussions, teachers reported a greater appreciation of early detection, classroom dialogue, and proactive engagement with students. One teacher, identified as M, explained that the program helped him recognize subtle indicators of social exclusion that previously might have been overlooked. Another teacher, identified as N, emphasized that bullying prevention should become an ongoing component of educational practice rather than an occasional response to specific incidents. These reflections suggest that the intervention fostered a shift from reactive management toward preventive educational engagement, a principle that is widely recognized as essential for sustainable bullying prevention (Armila, 2023; Kusmawati et al., 2022; Nurazizah & Apriani, 2024).

Equally important was the growing awareness among parents regarding their role in supporting anti-bullying efforts. Prior to the intervention, many parents perceived bullying as a relatively minor aspect of children's social development. Through participatory discussions and community engagement activities, parents were encouraged to reflect on how family communication patterns influence children's social behavior. Interviews conducted after the program revealed increased recognition of the importance of active parental involvement, emotional support, and regular communication with children regarding their school experiences. Participant S, a parent representative, noted that the program helped her understand that children may not openly disclose experiences of bullying unless parents create a supportive and trusting environment. Other parents similarly expressed intentions to engage more frequently in conversations about peer relationships and emotional well-being. These findings reinforce previous research emphasizing that parental awareness and involvement are critical components of effective bullying prevention strategies (Fiharsono et al., 2024; Karmiyati et al., 2024).

From a theoretical perspective, these findings support the concept of preventive education within the Whole-School and Community Approach, which argues that bullying prevention is most effective when educational efforts engage all stakeholders involved in children's social development (Alawlaqi & Dihliza, 2023; Rahma et al., 2023). Rather than focusing exclusively on perpetrators or victims, preventive education seeks to transform collective understanding, social norms, and shared responsibilities across the broader educational ecosystem. The intervention implemented in this study demonstrated that increasing anti-bullying literacy among students, teachers, and parents can create a common foundation for dialogue and collective action. As participants developed a shared understanding of bullying and its consequences, opportunities emerged for stronger collaboration and more consistent responses to harmful behaviors.

Transformation of Students' Social Attitudes: Empathy, Tolerance, and Collective Responsibility

Beyond improving anti-bullying literacy, the community-based intervention generated notable changes in students' social attitudes, particularly in relation to empathy, tolerance, and collective responsibility. Findings from participant observations, focus group discussions, reflective sessions, and follow-up interviews indicate that the intervention contributed to a gradual shift in how students perceived their relationships with peers and their role in maintaining a safe learning environment. While knowledge enhancement constituted an important foundation, the most meaningful transformation appeared in the way students interpreted the experiences of others and positioned themselves within the social dynamics of the school community.

One of the most significant changes observed during the intervention process was the development of greater empathy toward victims of bullying. Prior to the program, many students tended to view bullying incidents from the perspective of observers rather than considering the emotional experiences of those directly affected. During the initial

discussions, some participants suggested that victims were often responsible for attracting negative attention because they appeared different, lacked confidence, or were unable to defend themselves. Such perceptions reflected a tendency to normalize victimization and place responsibility on individuals experiencing harm. However, as students engaged in participatory discussions and case simulations, they were encouraged to examine bullying situations from multiple perspectives and reflect on the emotional consequences experienced by victims.

The simulation activities proved particularly influential in fostering emotional understanding. By analyzing real-life scenarios and assuming different social roles within bullying situations, students were able to explore feelings of exclusion, fear, embarrassment, and helplessness that often accompany victimization. During a reflective session, participant A acknowledged that he had never previously considered how repeated teasing could affect a person's emotional well-being. He explained that after participating in the simulations, he began to understand why some classmates became withdrawn or reluctant to participate in classroom activities. Similarly, participant R noted that the intervention helped her recognize that emotional wounds caused by bullying could persist long after the incident itself. These reflections suggest that the intervention facilitated perspective-taking, a process that is widely regarded as essential for the development of empathy and prosocial behavior among adolescents (Achmad et al., 2024; Pahmi et al., 2023).

The growth of empathy was accompanied by a noticeable decline in attitudes that blamed victims for their own experiences. During the needs assessment phase, students frequently interpreted bullying as a consequence of personal weakness or social difference. Individuals who were perceived as shy, academically weak, physically different, or socially isolated were often regarded as naturally vulnerable to victimization. Such assumptions reinforced existing social hierarchies and contributed to the normalization of exclusionary behaviors. Following the intervention, however, students increasingly challenged these narratives. Discussions revealed a growing recognition that no individual deserves to be mistreated because of personal characteristics or social status. Participant D explained that differences among students should not be viewed as reasons for ridicule but as natural aspects of human diversity. This shift is particularly important because reducing victim-blaming attitudes can create a more supportive environment in which students feel safer seeking help and reporting incidents of bullying (Ediyanto et al., 2021; Markolinda & Putri, 2024; Yosep et al., 2025).

Another important outcome involved the strengthening of tolerance toward diversity within the school community. The intervention encouraged students to reflect on differences related to personality, family background, academic performance, economic circumstances, and religious practices. Through facilitated dialogue, students were invited to discuss how stereotypes and prejudices can contribute to exclusion and bullying. Observational data indicated that these discussions fostered greater openness and respect among participants. Several students reported becoming more aware of the challenges faced by peers from

different social and economic backgrounds. Participant S stated that the activities helped him understand that students often experience difficulties that are not immediately visible to others. This realization encouraged greater sensitivity in everyday interactions and reduced the tendency to judge classmates based on superficial differences. Similar findings have been reported in studies demonstrating that anti-bullying interventions incorporating dialogue and reflection can promote social inclusion and reduce prejudicial attitudes among students (Hajdú & Rahman, 2021; Nurhayati et al., 2021; Zaenudin et al., 2023).

Perhaps the most transformative finding was the emergence of a stronger sense of collective responsibility for preventing bullying. Prior to the intervention, many students viewed bullying as an issue that should be addressed exclusively by teachers or school authorities. Their role was largely limited to avoiding involvement in conflicts or protecting themselves from becoming targets. Following participation in collaborative discussions and group reflections, students increasingly expressed the belief that all members of the school community share responsibility for creating a safe and inclusive environment. Participant M emphasized that remaining silent when witnessing bullying could indirectly allow harmful behaviors to continue. Another student, identified as N, stated that preventing bullying should not depend solely on victims reporting incidents but also on peers actively supporting one another and intervening when appropriate. These perspectives reflect a transition from passive observation to active engagement in promoting positive social norms.

The observed transformation can be understood through the Social-Ecological Theory, which emphasizes that attitudes and behaviors are shaped through interactions across multiple social environments, including peer groups, schools, families, and communities (Fadilla & Fuady, 2022; Saripudin et al., 2023). From this perspective, changes in empathy, tolerance, and collective responsibility are not merely individual outcomes but indicators of broader shifts in group norms and social expectations. As students engaged in shared learning experiences and collective reflection, new understandings of acceptable behavior began to emerge. The intervention created opportunities for participants to question previously normalized practices and construct alternative norms grounded in respect, inclusion, and mutual support.

Student Participation as a Driver of Bullying Prevention and Inclusive School Culture

One of the most significant outcomes of the community-based anti-bullying intervention was the transformation of students from passive recipients of educational messages into active participants in bullying prevention efforts. This shift emerged gradually throughout the intervention process as students became increasingly involved in discussions, simulations, reflections, and collaborative problem-solving activities. Consistent with the principles of Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) and Participatory Action Research (PAR), the program was designed not merely to transfer knowledge but to encourage participants to identify challenges, reflect on their social realities, and contribute to collective solutions. As a result, students began to perceive themselves not only as beneficiaries of a safer school environment but also as agents capable of shaping that

environment through their everyday interactions and decisions.

During the initial stages of the intervention, many students tended to view bullying prevention as the responsibility of teachers, school administrators, or parents. Interviews conducted during the needs assessment indicated that students rarely considered themselves capable of intervening when bullying occurred. Several participants expressed concerns about becoming targets of ridicule if they attempted to defend classmates or report inappropriate behavior. This finding reflects a common phenomenon in school settings where bystanders remain passive due to fear of social consequences or uncertainty regarding appropriate responses (Arifin et al., 2022; Hakim & Baihaqi, 2024). However, as students engaged in participatory learning activities and group reflections, a gradual change in perspective became evident. They increasingly recognized that maintaining a safe and inclusive environment requires the active involvement of all members of the school community.

One of the clearest manifestations of this transformation was the spontaneous emergence of peer-support networks among students. Although the intervention did not formally establish peer-support groups as a program requirement, observations conducted during and after the intervention revealed that students began creating informal support structures within their peer circles. These networks functioned as spaces where students could share concerns, discuss interpersonal conflicts, and provide emotional support to classmates experiencing difficulties. During a focus group discussion, participant A explained that students had become more willing to check on classmates who appeared isolated or upset. Similarly, participant R described how several students had started encouraging their peers to speak openly about negative experiences rather than keeping problems to themselves. These developments suggest that students were beginning to assume collective responsibility for one another's well-being, thereby strengthening the social support mechanisms available within the school environment.

Another important outcome was the increased willingness of students to report bullying incidents and seek assistance when problems emerged. Prior to the intervention, many participants indicated that reporting bullying was often perceived as an act of disloyalty or weakness. Students frequently preferred to remain silent, believing that conflicts should be resolved independently or ignored altogether. Following the intervention, however, interviews and reflective sessions revealed a notable shift in attitudes toward reporting. Students increasingly viewed reporting not as a form of punishment but as a means of protecting themselves and others from harm. Participant D explained that the discussions helped him understand that informing teachers about bullying could prevent situations from escalating and provide support to victims. Another participant, identified as S, noted that students now felt more comfortable approaching trusted teachers or peers when witnessing inappropriate behavior. This change is particularly significant because underreporting remains one of the major barriers to effective bullying prevention in schools worldwide (Hidayati & Amalia, 2021; Payong, 2023).

Beyond reporting behaviors, students also demonstrated greater confidence in addressing problematic conduct directly among their peers. Observational data collected during classroom activities and informal school interactions indicated that students increasingly challenged behaviors that had previously been tolerated or ignored. In several instances, students were observed reminding classmates to use respectful language, discouraging exclusionary behavior, and intervening when teasing appeared likely to cause emotional harm. Participant M reflected that before the intervention many students would laugh when someone was mocked, whereas after the program they were more likely to question such behavior or encourage their peers to stop. These seemingly small actions represent important indicators of changing social norms, as they demonstrate a growing willingness among students to act as guardians of positive peer relationships rather than passive observers.

The intervention also contributed to the creation of more open and constructive spaces for dialogue among students. Throughout the participatory activities, students were encouraged to express their opinions, share personal experiences, and engage in collective reflection regarding school relationships. This process helped foster a culture of communication that extended beyond the formal intervention sessions. Several participants reported feeling more comfortable discussing sensitive issues with their peers, including experiences of exclusion, misunderstanding, and conflict. Participant N explained that the discussions helped students realize that many of their classmates had faced similar challenges, thereby reducing feelings of isolation and encouraging mutual understanding. The emergence of these dialogical spaces is particularly important because open communication serves as a protective factor against bullying by strengthening trust and social connectedness within school communities (Noboru et al., 2021; Vionalita & Kusumaningtiar, 2023).

From a theoretical perspective, these findings strongly support the principle of participatory engagement embedded within both CBPR and PAR frameworks. These approaches emphasize that sustainable social change is most likely to occur when community members actively participate in identifying problems and developing solutions rather than receiving externally imposed interventions (Ekowati et al., 2023; Oktriani et al., 2023). The experiences observed in this study suggest that students possess significant potential to contribute to bullying prevention when provided with meaningful opportunities for participation and reflection. Rather than functioning solely as targets of intervention, students became co-creators of a safer and more inclusive school culture.

Strengthening School–Family–Community Collaboration in Building Safe Learning Environments

One of the most important findings of this study was the emergence of stronger collaboration among schools, families, and the wider community in promoting a safer and more inclusive learning environment. Prior to the intervention, responsibility for addressing student conflicts was largely perceived as belonging to the school alone. Teachers were expected to manage behavioral issues, while parents and community members tended to

become involved only when problems had already escalated. However, the participatory nature of the intervention gradually reshaped these perceptions by encouraging stakeholders to recognize bullying as a shared social concern requiring collective responsibility. Through educational workshops, reflective discussions, community meetings, and collaborative activities, participants developed a more comprehensive understanding of how different social environments influence students' experiences and behaviors.

The role of teachers evolved considerably throughout the intervention process. Initially, many teachers viewed bullying primarily as a disciplinary issue requiring corrective action after incidents occurred. However, participation in anti-bullying education sessions and collaborative reflections encouraged a broader understanding of their role as facilitators of positive social development. Observational data and interviews revealed that teachers increasingly incorporated discussions about respect, empathy, and inclusion into daily classroom interactions. Rather than intervening only when conflicts became visible, teachers began to engage proactively in fostering positive peer relationships and creating opportunities for students to discuss social challenges openly. One teacher, identified as M, explained that the intervention helped him realize the importance of recognizing subtle signs of exclusion and emotional distress before they developed into more serious problems. Another teacher, identified as N, emphasized that preventing bullying requires continuous dialogue rather than occasional disciplinary measures. These findings suggest that teachers became important agents in promoting preventive rather than reactive approaches to student well-being, a strategy widely recognized as essential for sustainable bullying prevention (Lumira, 2024; Widyaningsih et al., 2024).

Beyond their educational role, teachers increasingly functioned as mediators in resolving interpersonal conflicts among students. Interviews indicated that students felt more comfortable approaching teachers to discuss social difficulties following the intervention. This increased trust was partly attributed to the more open communication climate that emerged during program activities. Teachers reported greater confidence in facilitating restorative conversations between students and encouraging constructive problem-solving rather than assigning blame. Such practices contributed to the development of a school environment in which conflicts could be addressed through dialogue and mutual understanding. Previous studies have demonstrated that supportive teacher-student relationships are among the most influential protective factors against bullying and social exclusion (Iswanti et al., 2024; Tamaela et al., 2024).

The intervention also highlighted the critical role of parents in reinforcing anti-bullying values beyond the school setting. Prior to participation, many parents perceived bullying as a routine aspect of childhood socialization and rarely discussed the issue directly with their children. Through community discussions and educational sessions, however, parents gained a deeper understanding of the emotional and developmental consequences of bullying. As awareness increased, many parents reported becoming more attentive to their children's social experiences and more proactive in fostering communication at home. Participant S

explained that the program encouraged her to ask more frequently about her child's interactions with peers rather than focusing exclusively on academic performance. Similarly, participant T stated that she had become more aware of how everyday conversations within the family could influence children's attitudes toward respect, empathy, and conflict resolution. These findings underscore the importance of family engagement in creating consistent social messages regarding acceptable behavior and mutual respect (Hateriah & Sarkiah, 2023; Kadir et al., 2025).

At the community level, the intervention generated broader support for efforts to create a safer educational environment. Although community members were not directly involved in daily school activities, their participation in awareness-building sessions contributed to the development of shared social norms regarding bullying prevention. Local community representatives expressed support for initiatives promoting non-violence, respect for diversity, and collective responsibility for children's well-being. During one community discussion, participant H emphasized that children's social behavior is shaped not only within schools but also through interactions occurring in neighborhoods, religious gatherings, and community events. This perspective reflects an understanding that educational outcomes are influenced by wider social environments and that community engagement can strengthen the sustainability of school-based interventions. Research has consistently shown that bullying prevention efforts become more effective when supported by broader community norms that discourage violence and promote inclusion (Virginia et al., 2024).

The school itself played a central coordinating role by creating conditions that enabled collaboration among stakeholders. Throughout the intervention, school leaders facilitated meetings, provided spaces for dialogue, and encouraged active participation from teachers, students, and parents. One particularly important development was the establishment of clearer communication pathways for reporting concerns related to bullying and student well-being. Although the school had not previously maintained formal reporting procedures, discussions during the intervention highlighted the need for accessible and supportive mechanisms through which students could seek assistance. Consequently, the school began strengthening its role as a safe space where students could express concerns without fear of stigma or retaliation. Such institutional commitment is essential because students are more likely to report bullying when they perceive school authorities as supportive and responsive (Aisyah et al., 2023).

These findings can be understood through the Whole-School and Community Approach, which emphasizes that effective bullying prevention requires coordinated action across multiple social contexts rather than isolated interventions within classrooms (Lumira, 2024). This perspective recognizes that students' attitudes and behaviors are shaped through continuous interactions with teachers, parents, peers, and community members. The positive changes observed during this study suggest that when these actors work collaboratively, they can create reinforcing systems of support that strengthen both prevention and response efforts.

Developing Inclusive and Supportive School Culture Through Collective Commitment

One of the most meaningful outcomes of the intervention was the gradual emergence of a more inclusive and supportive school culture. While earlier stages of the program primarily focused on increasing awareness and encouraging participation, the long-term effects became visible through changes in everyday interactions, communication patterns, and collective expectations regarding acceptable behavior. Findings from observations, interviews, focus group discussions, and reflective sessions indicated that the intervention contributed not only to individual learning but also to the development of shared norms that increasingly discouraged bullying and promoted mutual respect among members of the school community.

A notable transformation was observed in the quality of communication between students and teachers. During the initial assessment, many students expressed hesitation in discussing interpersonal conflicts with teachers, often fearing judgment, punishment, or misunderstanding. Consequently, minor incidents frequently remained unresolved until they escalated into more serious problems. Following the intervention, however, students reported feeling more comfortable approaching teachers to discuss social difficulties and emotional concerns. Participant R explained that the anti-bullying discussions helped create a sense of trust because students perceived teachers as willing to listen rather than immediately assign blame. Similarly, participant A noted that classroom conversations had become more open, allowing students to express opinions and concerns without fear of ridicule. These findings suggest that the intervention contributed to the development of more supportive communication structures, which are widely recognized as fundamental components of a positive school climate (Hajdú & Rahman, 2021; Zaenudin et al., 2023).

The intervention also contributed to a noticeable decline in the social acceptance of bullying behaviors. Prior to the program, teasing, exclusion, and verbal humiliation were often tolerated as normal aspects of peer interaction. Such behaviors were rarely challenged unless they resulted in visible conflict. Throughout the intervention process, however, students increasingly questioned actions that previously had been normalized. Observational data showed that students were more likely to discourage disrespectful behavior and express concern when peers appeared isolated or distressed. Participant M reflected that behaviors once considered harmless jokes were now more frequently recognized as potentially harmful. This shift indicates that anti-bullying norms were becoming embedded within the collective consciousness of the school community. Rather than relying solely on formal rules, students and teachers increasingly shared common expectations regarding respectful conduct and social inclusion.

Another important outcome involved students' growing sense of safety within the school environment. During interviews conducted after the intervention, participants consistently reported feeling more secure in expressing themselves and participating in school activities. Several students indicated that they experienced greater confidence interacting with peers because they believed classmates were becoming more respectful and

supportive. Participant D stated that students had become more aware of how their words and actions affected others, resulting in a more welcoming atmosphere. Although the intervention did not eliminate all forms of conflict, it appeared to strengthen the perception that bullying was less acceptable and that support would be available if problems emerged. Research on school climate consistently demonstrates that feelings of safety are strongly associated with positive peer relationships, academic engagement, and overall student well-being.

Perhaps the most enduring change was the emergence of a collective commitment to maintaining an inclusive learning environment. Throughout the participatory activities, students, teachers, parents, and school leaders engaged in continuous reflection regarding their shared responsibility for preventing bullying. This process culminated in a broader cultural shift whereby the promotion of respect, empathy, and inclusion became viewed as a collective obligation rather than the responsibility of specific individuals. One teacher, identified as N, emphasized that the intervention encouraged all stakeholders to recognize that school culture is shaped through daily actions and interactions. This collective commitment became visible through ongoing discussions, peer support practices, and collaborative efforts to address emerging concerns. Viewed through the lens of school climate transformation, these developments suggest that meaningful change occurred not only at the individual level but also within the institutional culture itself. The findings support previous research indicating that sustainable bullying prevention depends on transforming the social norms, relationships, and organizational practices that shape students' experiences within educational settings (Hajdú & Rahman, 2021; Zaenudin et al., 2023).

The cumulative findings of this study led to the development of the Community-Based Anti-Bullying Intervention Model (CB-AIM), which represents the principal conceptual contribution of the research. The model emerged inductively from the experiences, reflections, and collaborative actions of students, teachers, parents, and community members throughout the intervention process. Rather than viewing bullying prevention as an isolated educational activity, CB-AIM conceptualizes it as a continuous community-driven process that integrates learning, participation, reflection, and collective action.

The first stage, Assessment, involves identifying local perceptions, experiences, and social norms related to bullying through observations, interviews, and participatory discussions. Findings from this study demonstrated that understanding the local context is essential because many bullying behaviors were normalized and therefore invisible to conventional disciplinary approaches. The second stage, Education, focuses on expanding anti-bullying literacy among stakeholders through interactive learning activities. As demonstrated in this research, educational engagement helps participants recognize the various forms and consequences of bullying while fostering empathy and awareness.

The third stage, Participation, emphasizes the active involvement of students, teachers, parents, and community members in prevention efforts. Findings showed that meaningful participation encourages ownership of the intervention and strengthens

collective responsibility. The fourth stage, Reflection, creates opportunities for stakeholders to evaluate experiences, discuss challenges, and generate shared learning. Through reflective dialogue, participants were able to critically examine existing social norms and identify pathways for improvement. The final stage, Collective Commitment, involves translating knowledge and reflection into sustained action through the development of shared values, collaborative practices, and inclusive school norms.

The CB-AIM framework extends existing Whole-School Approaches and Social-Ecological perspectives on bullying prevention by explicitly incorporating three dimensions that remain underrepresented in much of the literature: community participation, rural educational realities, and collective commitment as a mechanism of cultural transformation. While many anti-bullying programs focus primarily on changing individual attitudes or school policies, the present model recognizes that sustainable prevention requires broader social engagement and locally grounded solutions. This perspective is particularly relevant for rural schools, where formal support systems may be limited and community relationships play a significant role in shaping educational experiences.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that bullying in rural educational settings is not merely an individual behavioral issue but a social phenomenon shaped by the interactions, norms, and relationships that exist within schools, families, and local communities. The findings indicate that the implementation of a community-based anti-bullying intervention successfully enhanced students' understanding of bullying, strengthened empathy and tolerance toward diversity, encouraged active participation in bullying prevention, and fostered greater collaboration among teachers, parents, and community members in creating a safer learning environment. More importantly, the intervention contributed to the gradual development of an inclusive school culture characterized by open communication, shared responsibility, and reduced acceptance of bullying behaviors. These findings suggest that sustainable bullying prevention requires moving beyond school-centered or individual-focused strategies toward approaches that actively engage broader social actors in the educational process. In this regard, the study proposes the Community-Based Anti-Bullying Intervention Model (CB-AIM), consisting of Assessment, Education, Participation, Reflection, and Collective Commitment, as a contextually grounded framework for strengthening inclusive and safe learning environments in rural schools. The model extends existing bullying prevention approaches by emphasizing community participation and collective commitment as essential components of long-term cultural change, while offering a practical reference for future educational and community engagement initiatives in similar rural contexts.

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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