

STUDENTS' REFLECTIONS ON BULLYING ROLES: A NARRATIVE VIGNETTE STUDY IN AN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL

A Thesis

**Submitted to the Master's Study Program of Education in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

Master of Arts (M.A.)



by:

Intan Fasya Zahara

04212310006

UNIVERSITAS ISLAM INTERNASIONAL INDONESIA

DEPOK

2025

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ABSTRACT

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Bullying remains a persistent and complex issue within the communal environment of Islamic boarding schools, where close social interactions and hierarchical structures can perpetuate cycles of aggression and social exclusion. This research investigated the lived experiences and reflections of students regarding their roles as victims and bystanders in bullying incidents, specifically within the context of a modern Islamic boarding school in Jakarta. Twelve students were purposively selected based on early adolescent age (13–15 years), a critical developmental stage marked by emotional and psychological transitions. Data were collected using a narrative-based vignette method within a qualitative social-constructivist framework. Findings revealed that students reflected both as victims and bystanders in bullying situations. Victims consistently reported emotional distress such as fear, loneliness, and sadness. Yet, often remained passive, with this passivity inadvertently creating space for further victimization. Many victims also lacked a reliable support system, and their marginalization was often tied to factors such as personality traits, perceived differences, or mistakes that became the basis of social sanctions. Meanwhile, bystanders exhibited varied responses: some reinforced or remained silent out of fear of social consequences, while others defended victims, often motivated less by moral conviction than by a desire to align with majority opinion and maintain peer acceptance. This reflects the significant weight of social belonging in adolescence. Moreover, the boarding school environment itself, with its communal living and disciplinary structures, was found to both shape and sustain these bullying dynamics, making it challenging to break the cycle. The study concludes that addressing bullying in boarding schools requires not only fostering empathy and resilience among students but also rethinking institutional practices and policies that inadvertently enable exclusion. Such efforts are essential to disrupt entrenched patterns of aggression and to cultivate a more supportive and inclusive school culture. Findings revealed that the imaginary and students' life reflection, victims were consistently portrayed as experiencing intense emotional distress, particularly fear, loneliness, and sadness, often linked to low social standing or perceived deviance from peer norms. Meanwhile, bystanders were categorized into passive observers, reinforcers, and active defenders, with their responses shaped by multiple factors, including personal empathy, peer influence, and perceived social risk. A minority of students become defenders motivated by driven empathy and moral conviction, despite the risk of social backlash. This study concluded that bullying in boarding schools is sustained by complex social dynamics and power structures, and implies a need for increased awareness and multi-level interventions, from fostering empathy and courage among students to reforming school policies by school management, to disrupt these patterns and cultivate a more supportive school culture.

Keywords: *bullying, narrative vignette, participant roles, power relations*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY	ii
ANTI-PLAGIARISM STATEMENT.....	iii
THESIS ATTESTATION.....	iv
THESIS DEFENSE APPROVAL	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	viii
LIST OF TABLES	x
LIST OF APPENDIX	xi
LIST OF GLOSSARIES.....	xii
CHAPTER I	
INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Research Background.....	1
1.2 Research Questions	7
1.3 Research Objectives	8
1.4 Research Significance.....	8
CHAPTER II	
THEORETICAL FOUNDATION.....	10
2.1 Literature Review	10
2.1.1 Bullying in Boarding School: Indonesia context and several countries.....	10
2.1.2 Islamic Boarding School as Social Agency: Educational System, Model, and Characteristic.....	13
2.1.3 Exploring Bullying through Vignette.....	15
2.2 Theoretical Framework.....	17
2.2.1 Bullying and the Participant’s Role	17
2.2.2 Foucault’s Power Relation Theory.....	20
2.2.3 Narrative-based Vignette.....	21
CHAPTER III	
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	24
3.1 Research Approach and Design.....	24
3.2 Data and Data Sources.....	25
3.2.1 Narrative-based Vignettes.....	25
3.2.2 Interviews.....	27
3.2.3 Focus Group Discussion.....	29
3.2.4 Data analysis	29
3.3 Object and Subjects of Research	30
3.4 Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations	31

CHAPTER IV	
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	33
4.1. Research Results.....	33
4.1.1. Students' Reflections on Victims in Bullying Situations at Boarding School Context.....	34
4.1.2. Student Reflection of Bystander in Bullying Incident at Boarding School....	45
4.1.3. The Interconnection of Power Relation, Social Hierarchies, and Bullying Dynamics.....	56
CHAPTER V	
CONCLUSION.....	65
5.1 Conclusion.....	65
5.2 Suggestion	66
REFERENCE.....	70
APPENDICES	74

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4. 1 The Explanation of Victims' Conditions.....	38
Table 4. 2 Bullying Behaviors in Boarding School X, Jakarta	43
Table 4. 3 Presentation of Student Involvement as a Third Party.....	48
Table 4. 4. Presentation of the number of pro-social/pro-bully role engagements	55
Table 4. 5 Power Relation in Boarding School.....	64

LIST OF APPENDIX

Appendix 1 Guide to Interview Questions for Students	74
Appendix 2 Vignette Instruments	76

LIST OF GLOSSARIES

<i>Ana/Ane</i> :	I / Me
<i>Bandongan</i> :	A classical method of teaching in a boarding school where the kyai reads and explains classical Islamic texts to a group of students
<i>Halaqah</i> :	A study circle or small group discussion
<i>Mudabbir</i> :	A student leader or dormitory supervisor in a boarding school, typically an older or more senior student, is responsible for guiding, supervising, and assisting younger students in daily activities at the boarding school
<i>Mudhakah</i> :	A method leader or dormitory supervisor in a boarding school, typically an older or more senior student responsible for guiding, supervising, and assisting younger students in daily activities and discipline
<i>Kyai</i> :	Religious leader, scholar, or teacher who leads a boarding school
<i>Pesantren</i> :	An Islamic boarding school in Indonesia, where students (<i>santri</i>) live and study religious as well as general subjects under the supervision of religious teachings
<i>Pondok Modern</i> :	A type of boarding school that incorporates both traditional Islamic religious teachings and modern secular education, using updated curricula, language instruction, and sometimes technology
<i>Ta'zim</i> :	An Islamic value emphasizing deep respect or reverence, especially towards elder, teachers (kyai, ustadz/ustadzah), and senior students;
<i>Ustadz</i> :	Male teacher at boarding school
<i>Ustadzah</i> :	Female teacher at boarding school

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the foundational elements of the research, beginning with the background that frames its purpose and context. It then introduces the research questions that guide the investigation. Finally, it highlights the study's significance and potential contributions.

1.1 Research Background

What does it feel like to be both a witness and a victim in a closed communal world where power is not just about age, but also about silence? Living in a boarding school meant adhering to a disciplined routine while cohabiting with peers, teachers, and religious figures, far from home. That was my experience in a senior dormitory during my third year in boarding school (equivalent to 9th grade in junior high school), where all students from different grade levels lived together under the same roof, creating a close-knit atmosphere with a strong social hierarchy. I had a misunderstanding with a fourth-year senior student (equivalent to 10th grade in senior high school), which led to bullying, cornering me, talking about me in her batch, gossiping, and provoking my friends to stay away from me if they didn't want to experience the same thing. I felt miserable and wished my days were limited to school hours, not returning to the dorm. This situation disrupted my focus and caused my academic performance to decline. When I told my sister, who was a teacher, her advice was simply to be patient, not to worry my parents, framing the issues as a trial to build resilience and trust that this would eventually pass as a part of life's tests. Over time, two of my friends supported me and ignored the senior's threats. However, I still didn't have the confidence to report this case to *Mudabbir* or *Ustadzah*, worrying that the situation might get worse. I chose to let things flow, believing that in time, things would return to normal, even if it took time.

Eight years later, I found out that similar circumstances still happened. This time, I became a dormitory teacher at a boarding school, taking care of 3 rooms with 7-8 students of the same age in one room. I observed that each room had bullying problems with various causes, such as making mistakes, being quiet, not being involved in the surroundings, or physical differences and characteristics that were highlighted. Interestingly, when I observed more deeply, there was always one child who became a provocateur, several children who joined in, and others who were just silent to find safety. What I also discovered is that the perpetrator can become a victim and vice

versa, a victim who turns into a perpetrator, either actively or passively, although this cycle does not affect all children equally. The accumulation of my personal experiences and observations of my surroundings sparked an interest in looking deeper into the issue of bullying that still occurs today. Although many studies have examined the issue, issues related to bullying need to be examined more deeply, not only on the surface, but looking at the patterns and cycle of perpetrators to understand the incident better.

In recent years, the issue of bullying in boarding schools has become a topic of heated discussion that has attracted several academics to examine it further through research. Based on UNICEF data (2018), violence and bullying among Indonesian youth remain a critical issue. Two out of three boys and girls aged 13-17 have experienced at least one form of violence in their lifetime. Moreover, three out of four children and adolescents who experienced violence reported that the perpetrator was a peer or someone close to them. Focusing more specifically on bullying, the prevalence among Indonesian students is particularly high about 41 % of 15-year-old students. The most common forms of bullying reported by students include being excluded or ostracized by friends is around 29%, being mocked or making jokes is about 22%, having negative rumours around 19 % and being threatened or intimidated is 18 %. These findings show that bullying in Indonesia exists in various forms of aggression.

Arif et al. (2024) examined the factors, characteristics, and efforts to overcome bullying cases in the boarding school environment through a literature review in understanding the pattern of events over the last 10 years. In this case, the environment is very influential on the existence of bullying until today, which is formed through the system, culture, culture, and surroundings. In line with Zulfikar's research (2023), focusing on one specific boarding school, this study shows a high rate of physical and verbal bullying, along with other forms of bullying such as psychological aggression. Bullying in the boarding school environment also has a deeper psychological impact on the victim because the frequency of interaction with the perpetrator is unavoidable, making the victim's position even more cornered. One place that is vulnerable to bullying is the dormitory because it is often absent from teacher supervision, students are reluctant to report, and consider it a joke or normal behavior, ignore it, which is in line with several studies that will be discussed later (Zulfikar, 2023). Through the study of Zulfikar (2023) also mentioned that bullying in boarding school occurs both individually and in groups.

It is aligned with research by Salmivalli (2009), which states that bullying is a group activity that involves isolating each of them, not just an individual activity. When reflecting on bullying in school days, every student could be a bully, a victim, or a bystander who witnessed a similar incident (Howard et al., 2014; L. J. Lester, 2012). Breaking the chain of violence involves more than just identifying and stopping bullies; it consists of examining why and how someone becomes a bully or targets others to be bullied (Benedini et al., 2016; Strohmeier et al., 2024). Bystanders in these events escalate to prosocial responses, which involve them defending victims in bullying events (Humbaina & Rizkyanti, 2020; Steinvik et al., 2024). In this case, bullying is dominated by one bullying perpetrator, several witnesses who act as outsiders or defenders, as well as assistants who help make the bully's activities a success (Prescott, 2014). Several similar incidents are still taking place, although with varying intensities, involving the 'dominant' as the victim. Students who know it was a wrong action and were involved, or tend to remain silent, are dominated by fear, or the lack of power they have. In line with this, someone chooses to remain silent or be a passive observer because of these factors. Supported by the research of Rizkyanti et al (2021), which explained that one role that can be relied on is a defender who can influence the surroundings to break the chain of bullying or report to adults to help victims seek help.

School bullying in adolescence is not a new phenomenon; it is widespread worldwide, has been happening for a long time, and has both long-term and short-term impacts on emotional, physical, or behavioral development as well as academic attainment (Jimerson et al., 2010; L. Lester & Mander, 2015; O'Brien, 2016; Salmivalli et al., 2021). Several studies support that the adolescent transition period is a critical moment marked by many complex biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional changes, identity exploration, autonomy, and involvement with friends, which, while often beneficial, can bring friendship problems (Salmivalli et al., 2021). The numerous cases of bullying perpetrated by peers during adolescence (Ighaede-Edwards et al., 2023), to the specific findings of bullying occurring during the junior high school transition period (Aminah et al., 2023) including early adolescent transition in middle school from grades 7-9 in various Australian boarding school settings (L. Lester et al., 2015). This is due to many factors, both internal, such as family background, sense of superiority, and personal issues, and external, such as social patterns and friendship conflicts (Aminah et al., 2023; Humbaina & Rizkyanti, 2020; Strohmeier et al., 2024). However, addressing bullying is like an iceberg, where several large icicles lie underwater but appear much smaller on the surface (Zulfikar, 2023). This illustration

represents school bullying in the Indonesian educational context, especially in the boarding school system, where the witnesses remain silent.

Discussions related to bullying in the boarding school environment have increased dramatically due to violent incidents that have occurred over time. Research by Natsir & Rohman (2024) through media analysis in the last three years showed 15 cases of violence that led to death in the boarding school environment. Geographically, cases occurred in West Java (Tangerang, Kuningan), East Java (Ponorogo, Kediri, Bangkalan, Sidoarjo, Blitar), Central Java (Grobogan, Temanggung, Sragen), and outside Java (Makassar, Samarinda, Lampung). The perpetrators are dominated by friends and seniors with various problem factors. A case study of bullying in Central Java reveals a specific incident in which eight individuals between the ages of 12 and 17 engaged in synchronized bullying against a victim under suspicion of theft (Susanto, 2023). This violence exemplifies a pattern of bullying rooted in a power imbalance, perpetrated by a group of individuals directly and precipitated by the victim's alleged theft (Damanik & Djuwita, 2019; Salmivalli et al., 2021). Concurrently, extant geographical data indicate a paucity of research concerning bullying in boarding school environments, with limited discourse on the subject. This impels researchers to explore the phenomenon of bullying in under-researched domains.

The Indonesian Federation of Teachers' Unions has reported 36 cases of violence involving 144 student victims in the education environment in 2024. Of these cases, 33.33 percent occurred in education units under the Ministry of Religion (Ashari, 2024). Furthermore, the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection recorded 8 cases with 101 victims throughout 2024. In the last three months, violence in the boarding school environment continued to occur in several locations, including 1) the death of a student due to mistreatment by seniors (Central Java); 2) physical violence against a student who was smeared with chili all over his body (West Aceh); 3) 40 male students as victims of sexual violence (West Sumatra); and 4) female students who were also victims of sexual violence (West Java). The data indicates that the most prevalent forms of violence are physical (55.5%), sexual (36%), psychological (5.5%), and policy-related (3%). However, it is noteworthy that boarding schools may not prioritize identifying and addressing the social factors that contribute to violence among students (Caniago, 2024). The reported cases are nothing compared to what happens in the field, where the same phenomenon is still happening.

The occurrence of violence in the boarding school environment has prompted policymakers, including the Ministry and educational institutions, to present findings

in the form of preventive and solution efforts. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, in collaboration with the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, officially launched a child-friendly parenting regulation in the boarding school environment through the Decree of the Director General of Islamic Education number 1262 of 2004, in the form of a technical regulation, which comprises seven chapters. The policy aims to promote child-friendly parenting practices in boarding school settings, address child protection procedures, and provide support resources and monitoring mechanisms (Maula, 2024; Wulandari, 2025). It also includes evaluation and reporting mechanisms targeting caregivers, boarding school managers, teachers, and supervisors at the city or district level (Abdurrohim et al., 2024; Maula, 2024). On the other hand, Abdurrohim et al (2024) examined the trends of anti-bullying education models in boarding schools through a systematic literature review from 2019 to 2024. His findings show that community services are divided into two models, namely 1) early prevention through supervision, instilling Islamic values, knowing the factors or behaviors of bullying, and 2) intervention against perpetrators through counseling, an inclusive school culture, student participation, and so on. Another study also presented the issue of physical bullying in one specific boarding school, which led to several solutions and prevention models in the form of forming an internal supervisory team, using technology support such as CCTV, providing counseling and complaint services, including parenting programs, and creating safe and comfortable boarding designs (Sumawiharja et al., 2024).

Based on previous research and data, the strategies have offered a variety of targets for both educators and students. However, the identification of causal factors and perpetrators of bullying is still explained in general terms, where the perpetrators are friends or seniors, without specific mapping of events carried out individually or in groups. Although numerous studies have examined bullying in boarding schools, ranging from reviews of bullying phenomena, event organizations, and perception analysis to individual interventions by teachers and students, these efforts still reflect an inconsistent understanding of bullying. Many of these studies also explore prevention strategies, solution programs, and attempts to reinforce values and roles within the school community. However, there is still a gap in research that specifically focuses on mapping participants' roles within the bullying cycle, such as victims, perpetrators, or those who experience both roles (Prasetyo et al., 2023; Rahman et al., 2023; Zahid, 2024).

Nevertheless, understanding the phenomenon of school bullying among adolescents is an effective first step in addressing violence in the school environment (Hu et al., 2021). As noted in Strohmeier (2023), many anti-bullying programs are successful because they design interventions according to different targets, where individuals in bullying events are more closely classified as bullies, victims, bully victims, or uninvolved. This is because there is a shift in focus from a dyadic perspective that focuses on the perpetrator and the victim to the inclusion of witnesses who witnessed the incident (Campbell et al., 2020). This is in line with the statement that bullying is not perpetrated by one individual but involves several individuals who participate, with some friends helping to analyze the situation to those who allow the event to occur (Salmivalli, 2010; Salmivalli et al., 2021).

Existing studies on bullying in boarding schools have widely explored its forms, characteristics, and dynamics, such as the transformation of victims into perpetrators, and the social environment that supports the bullying cycle (Olweus, 1994; Jewett et al., 2019; Nugroho et al., 2020; Aminah et al., 2023; Maulana et al., 2024). Several scholars have examined these aspects specifically in the boarding school context (Keletsositse, 2021; Lester et al., 2014; Natsir & Rohman, 2024), while others emphasize the importance of educational and cultural intervention strategies (Zahid, 2024; Arif et al., 2024; Prasetyo et al., 2023). Additionally, a growing number of studies have focused on the role of bystanders and the importance of empathy activation to influence bullying outcomes (Salmivalli et al., 1998; Rizkyanti et al., 2021; Steinvik et al., 2024). These trends reflect a rich development in thematic focus, but also show a tendency to analyze behaviors and roles in general without deeper examination of participants' internal reflections or subjective perspectives on the bullying cycle.

In terms of methodology, most of these studies employed conventional qualitative and quantitative approaches, including surveys, phenomenological studies, case studies, and narrative interviews. However, vignette-based narrative methods, which present participants with constructed story scenarios to evoke emotional and cognitive engagement, remain underutilized, especially in bullying research in Indonesian boarding school. Demezier & Longo (2019) emphasize that vignette-based narrative transportation is effective for capturing participants' deep emotional states, while Erfanian et al (2020) argue that vignettes are valuable tools for addressing complex and sensitive social issues. In Indonesia, Halimah et al. (2021) employed a vignette-based story to investigate bystander roles, although their primary focus was on

categorization rather than reflective engagement. Likewise, Zulfikar's (2023) use of empathy-based stories bears some resemblance but lacks the structured narrative immersion and layered role-taking design of vignette methodology.

Given this context, a significant methodological gap remains specifically in exploring how students reflect on and internalize bullying roles (e.g., bully, victim, reinforcer, bystander) through structured, story-driven scenarios. Despite its potential, the application of vignette-based narrative methods in bullying studies remains limited, particularly in Indonesia. To date, only a few studies have touched upon this approach, and most have focused on role categorization or empathy evocation rather than eliciting participants' subjective interpretations of bullying experiences. In boarding school settings, where social hierarchy and collective identity shape interpersonal dynamics, vignette narratives offer a powerful entry point to examine students' moral reasoning, emotional positioning, and role fluidity in the bullying cycle. This study seeks to fill this gap by employing a vignette-driven narrative inquiry to investigate how boarding school students perceive, imagine, and reflect on their roles in bullying incidents, capturing not just what happened but how it is felt, interpreted, and morally navigated by those involved.

Although it looks the same through a story scenario that constructs the scene, there are fundamental differences, such as the **main purpose of the vignette to explore the informant's response and reflection on the attitude or emotion contained in the story, specifically intending the role of victims and bystanders**. Vignette's research focuses more on descriptive showing rather than descriptive explaining, so the reader's response to placing themselves in a certain situation is the main purpose, in addition to digging out related information during discussion forums and interviews. Thus, I am interested in exploring the role of individuals in the bullying cycle at the boarding school environment.

1.2 Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to capture bullying incidents in boarding schools through three specific questions.

1. How do students perceive the victim's position in the bullying cycle at boarding schools?
2. How do students perceive the bystander's position in the bullying cycle at boarding schools?
3. How do power relations shape students' roles in bullying incidents within the boarding school social environment?

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To explore students' reflections on perceiving victims' roles in bullying incidents at boarding school
2. To explore students' reflections on perceiving bystanders' roles in bullying incidents at boarding school
3. To explore the power relation in shaping students' social interaction in particular roles within the boarding school circumstances

1.4 Research Significance

This research offers both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of educational research, particularly in addressing bullying issues within the unique environment of Islamic boarding schools.

1.4.1. Theoretical Contribution

This study makes a significant theoretical contribution through the methodological novelty of using a narrative-based vignette approach. Unlike traditional surveys or quantitative methods, this approach allows for the exploration of students' lived experiences, capturing the emotional, moral, and social dimensions of bullying that often go unrecognized. It contributes to bullying literature by unpacking the complexity of student roles beyond the binary of victim and perpetrator, to include bystanders such as reinforcers, defenders, and role switchers. These insights advance theoretical understanding of how bullying operates as a social process, particularly within the unique sociocultural context of Islamic boarding schools. Moreover, the research addresses a significant gap in the literature by highlighting how power relations, institutional culture, and communal dynamics shape students' engagement with bullying, which remains underexplored in existing frameworks.

1.4.2. Practical Contribution

Practically, the study provides valuable insights for designing context-sensitive anti-bullying interventions in boarding schools. By foregrounding student narratives, the findings provide culturally relevant evidence to inform school policies, staff training, and student programs that go beyond one-size-fits-all solutions. The approach creates a safe space for student expression,

which can enhance awareness among educators, administrators, and peers about the hidden norms and hierarchies that sustain bullying. These insights can guide policy-makers and school leaders in developing strategies that are both responsive to the specific realities of boarding school life and empowering for students. Ultimately, the study aims to foster a safer, more inclusive school climate, contributing to students' wellbeing and social development.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

This research consists of two parts: a literature review covering previous related research and a theoretical framework that limits the focus of the research to bullying in general, followed by bullying actors and factors in a more specific context. In addition, there is also an explanation of a vignette-based narrative to capture the bullying phenomenon in an educational context.

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1 Bullying in Boarding School: Indonesia context and several countries

Aggressive behavior among or towards adolescents, including violence and bullying, is a global health problem that cannot be ignored (Bowes et al., 2019; Noboru et al., 2021). This is a concern because of its physical and psychological impact, from poor school adjustment to mental symptoms (Waliyanti & Swesty, 2021). Especially in the boarding school environment, it is controversial because it contradicts the original purpose of its education in fostering noble character, upholding social solidarity and brotherhood, and practicing Islamic religious values.

In Indonesia, these global concerns manifest in unique ways, particularly within the boarding school context, where bullying takes on distinct forms and dynamics such as physical, verbal, and relational. These include overt acts such as hitting or pushing, verbal assaults like mocking or name-calling, and relational aggression such as exclusion or silent treatment, which caused of difference in economic level, family background, group, and character (Waliyanti & Swesty, 2021; Zulfikar, 2023; Barus et al., 2023). Notably, practices such as senior “hazing”, group ostracism, and the use of informal sanctions can become normalized within the boarding school environment. Power abuse can stem not only from seniors but also from friends, teachers, or ustadz, sometimes leading to covert bullying or even sexual harassment (Prasetyo et al., 2023)

Understanding the diverse forms of bullying also requires attention to the factors that contribute to its emergence and persistence, which are shaped by a complex interplay of internal and external factors. Internal influences include personality traits, prior experiences with violence, and self-esteem, while external factors encompass school climate, peer dynamics, group norms, and the presence

or absence of supportive teachers (Rahman et al., 2023). Cultural traditions such as *ta'zim* (deference to seniors and teachers) and hierarchical dormitory life unintentionally foster environments where bullying is tolerated or rationalized as character-building (Waliyanti & Swesty, 2021).

The complex interplay of these factors inevitably shapes the lived experiences and psychological outcomes for students. Victimization among adolescents in boarding schools has been consistently linked to profound psychological consequences, anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, sleep disturbance, and even self-harm (Kusumawaty et al., 2022; Skarstein et al., 2020). Recent studies also highlight the fluidity of participant roles: under certain circumstances, victims themselves may transition into perpetrator roles, reinforcing the cyclical nature of bullying and complicating attempts to categorize individuals as either 'victim' or perpetrator (Kusumawaty et al., 2022).

These impacts are often intensified by the unique social structure of boarding schools, especially in the absence of adequate support systems. A lack of school belongingness and psychological resilience significantly amplifies the risk and impact of bullying among boarding school students (Liu et al., 2025). The absence of immediate family support, coupled with prolonged peer interactions in a closed environment, can intensify feelings of isolation and vulnerability. When both peer and adult support are inadequate, students may feel they have nowhere to turn, which exacerbates the psychological and social consequences of victimization (Astipa et al., 2025).

Social isolation and lack of support not only worsen the victim's condition but also create opportunities for those who witness bullying behavior to become decisive in this situation. Bystanders play a critical role in the dynamics of bullying. Jungert et al. (2021) identify multiple motivational profiles among bystanders, from prosocial and intrinsic motivations rooted in a genuine desire to help to extrinsic or passive motivations. Bystanders with prosocial motivation, particularly those with positive relationships with teachers and peers, are more likely to become defenders. In contrast, those with low intrinsic motivation or extrinsic incentives often remain passive outsiders or even become reinforcer bullies. The broader school climate and quality of teacher-student relationships further mediate bystander responses and defending behaviors.

The motivation of bystanders to intervene or remain passive is closely linked to the empathy they feel toward victims. Recent research has emphasized

the importance of empathy in shaping anti-bullying behaviors among adolescents. Rizkyanti et al. (2020) distinguish between affective empathy as the ability to emotionally resonate with victims and cognitive empathy as the ability to intellectually understand others' feelings. They found that affective empathy, particularly when combined with active parental involvement, is much more effective in motivating students to intervene and defend victims. Cognitive empathy itself, while helpful for understanding, is less likely to translate into real action. Support with the study by Song (2022) that affective empathy and prosocial motivation are essential for reducing victimization and fostering defending roles among adolescents while Rizkyanti et al. (2025) focused more in the Indonesian boarding school context by developing an empathy scale that assessing those cognitive and affective empathy which can links to students' tendencies either to sustain or interrupt bullying dynamics.

Yet, even when empathy and motivation are present, systemic barriers and stigma often lead to additional layers of suffering for victims. Secondary victimization, a phenomenon in which victims' suffering is compounded by inadequate or dismissive responses from adults or peers, remains a serious concern (Tholander, 2019; Corby et al., 2014). When teachers or parents fail to recognize or validate students' reports of bullying, victims can experience additional trauma, often manifesting as emotional invalidation, withdrawal, or self-blame. Furthermore, many adolescents are reluctant to seek help due to stigma, low mental health literacy, or a lack of available support structures, often resulting in solitary coping or reliance on peers who may be ill-equipped to provide adequate assistance (Astipa et al., 2025). These dynamics underscore the importance of validating youth perspectives and actively incorporating 'youth voice' in intervention design (Corby et al., 2014).

While much literature has focused on the Indonesian context, similar complexities have been observed in boarding schools internationally. Studies in Zimbabwe and Botswana, for instance, highlight that bystanders are often caught between wanting to help and fears for their safety; likewise, the fluidity between victim and perpetrator roles is evident across contexts (Rojas, 2023; Gomba & Zindonda, 2021; Keletsositse, 2021). These studies affirm that while the challenge of bullying in boarding schools is universal, the social, cultural, and institutional dynamics in Indonesia present unique dimensions that warrant closer attention.

Despite the insights above, research specifically examining narrative reflections and motivations of both victims and bystanders in Indonesian boarding schools remains scarce. This study seeks to address these gaps by exploring students' reflections on the specific roles of victims and bystanders in bullying situations, investigating the factors influencing their decisions. In doing so, this research aims to broaden the understanding of bullying beyond the binary of victim and perpetrator, foregrounding the complex interplay of individual, social, and cultural factors in adolescent victimization.

2.1.2 Islamic Boarding School as Social Agency: Educational System, Model, and Characteristic

Islamic boarding school is one of the oldest Islamic educational heritages in Indonesia, with the core characteristics of emphasizing Islamic religious teachings (Isbah, 2020; Ni'am, 2015; Safiudin et al., 2023). The signs of its spread and rapid expansion of Islamic civilization prove its existence (Azizah et al., 2022). This is because, historically, boarding schools originated from educational and teaching activities in Surau, where students studied with a kyai (Islamic preacher) regarding religious knowledge (Assa'idi, 2021). Over time, boarding schools moved to face the modernization of the times by teaching social sciences, science, and technology to equip students as good and useful citizens (Assa'idi, 2021; Ni'am, 2015).

As one of the pioneers in the nation's education, boarding schools have a long historical record of social, educational, and governmental contributions (Azizah et al., 2022; Zuhdi, 2006). Starting from the non-formal education system, shifting the curriculum with the government, upholding the original curriculum, to grouping boarding schools into traditional and modern types, which still preserve traditional values in daily life (Zarkasyi, 2015). The variation of boarding school learning characteristics is precisely the uniqueness of their educational style, whereas traditional boarding schools focus on the study of classical books (*kitab kuning*) with Sorogan, *bandongan*, *halaqah*, and *mudhakarrah* methods. Whereas modern boarding schools integrate the subject of Islamic studies with general learning, emphasizing practical, not only theoretical, with holistic modern teaching methods (Yapono, 2015).

Boarding schools are often considered as community learning centers (Royani, 2018). This is because the boarding school does not only focus on religious learning but also teaches general, social, and ethical, life skills to equip

students with social life in a moderate manner (Assa'idi, 2021; Islam & Aziz, 2020; Ritchey & Muchtar, 2014; Roqib, 2021; Zulkarnain, 2015). This is realized through education that upholds social values regardless of economic or social status (Roqib, 2021; Azizah, 2022). In the boarding school curriculum introduced by KH Imam Zarkasyi (1910-1985) includes *intracurricular* (formal curriculum of Kuliyyatul Mu'allimin Al-Islaamiyyah (KMI) and Darussalam Gontor University), *co-curricular* (skill-based lessons such as language skills, hard skills, and soft skills), *extracurricular* (organization such as *Pondok Modern* Student Organization, scouting, or region council), not less important, the hidden curriculum refers to unwritten lessons, such as the value of life, the space for students to move in activities, social closeness, friendship, cultural systems so that the education program is carried out in an integrated manner for 24 hours (Yapono, 2015). Concerning ethics, Kiai Zarkasyi then launched a written book called *The Etiquette Book*, which is a socio-drama lesson on manners associated with managed life activities. In line with Imam Suprayogo who quotes from Hendry Giroux in 'Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope: Theory, Culture, and Schooling' explains that in addition to school culture, social relations between educators and students contribute to the effectiveness of social skills formed through exemplary, habituation aimed at character building, leadership, and others.

Not less important to mention, boarding school is defined as an Islamic educational institution, where students live 24 hours in a disciplined dormitory, the mosque is the central point of activity, and Kyai is a daily role figure. These components are the basic things with common boarding schools in Indonesia (Roqib, 2021). The sentence 'living in a disciplined dormitory', is still related to social skills in the hidden curriculum, where generally students will live in a dormitory that is changed every semester, where the existing regulations design that each room may not be occupied by a maximum of 3 people from the same area. This is a boarding school teaching related to multicultural education, which is intended to teach how to respect cross-cultural differences and uphold equality in the educational environment (Zulkarnain, 2015). One of the philosophical foundations that is often taught in the boarding school environment is 'above and for all groups' as an emphasis that unites the social hierarchy of society in one education. Live in a heterogeneous society, because each child comes with a different ethnicity, character, and parenting style (Asfiya, 2022).

Thus, a boarding school in Imam Zarkasyi's meaning summarizes the tri-center of education, which is one dimension of unity between household (family), school life, and community environment (Yapono, 2015). The curriculum introduced is often adopted in many traditional and modern boarding schools in Indonesia. Understanding the history, system, and curriculum of boarding school, becomes a turning point later, where in the development of the current era, several violent phenomena occur in the boarding school environment with factors of power relations (*kyai-santri*, senior-junior), differences in social status, age, lack of supervision reviewing one room with more than 10 members, family background. The violence that occurs is also contrary to the main mission of boarding school, which upholds the values of togetherness, exemplary, compassion, character, and religious values.

2.1.3 Exploring Bullying through Vignette

Research related to bullying has prompted many academics to participate in examining it through various methodological approaches. The majority of research is conducted using participatory approaches, case studies, interviews, phenomenological, story-based narratives, and quantitative non-experimental surveys. Researching bullying using vignettes was originally used in the world of nursing as it was noted that healthcare workers experienced a lot of inappropriate treatment that could have implications for the patient's condition (Longo & DeDonno, 2018). So one of the efforts used is to construct scenarios according to conditions that are close to the conditions called the 'Vignettes method'. Previously, the vignette method has been successfully used in recording the responses of youth who experienced bullying by both peers and relatives (Longo & DeDonno, 2018). In practice, descriptive vignettes are developed by engineering scenes of horizontal violence (a type of bullying perpetrated by peers in the same hierarchy) and then going through a validity test.

Vignettes are increasingly used to examine workplace bullying (Demezier & Longo, 2019). The use of vignettes is intended to reveal sensitive matters based on short scenarios that involve respondents in cognition, emotion, and attention without having to hurt their feelings (Demezier & Longo, 2019). In this study, the story used is titled Workplace Bullying, which uses the second-person point of view by making the reader a victim and bully named Betsy. In sketching the bullying scenario, the focus of the story is sorted from the lowest to the highest level with great care to target the object of research focus. The study also employed

a quantitative approach, utilizing specific scales to measure negative emotions following the reading of the bullying vignettes. The initial hypothesis set was successfully proven, where high transportation scores have a strong relationship with negative affect, which explains the existence of negative emotion. The reflections obtained also explain that the use of second-person perception can stimulate deeper feelings in readers when fabricating events.

Vignettes are often interpreted as a brief hypothesis that reflects the real situation by allowing participants to reflect on the meaning of the sensitive topics discussed (Tremblay et al., 2022). According to Tremblay (2019), the use of vignettes in qualitative research is aimed at exploring individual meanings of sensitive experiences happened or responding to critical situations in generating certain stimulus reactions. In this case, researchers usually design a special story as a hypothetical event that invites the audience to reflect or discuss perceptions, reactions, or reflections from the existing scenario snippets. In this case, the snippet of the event scenario should be specific to the sensitive event but natural and able to invite reactions to attitudes, beliefs, or perceptions of the experience, as the basic purpose of the vignette.

Vignettes in research are intended to explore a person's understanding and perspective of an event. In the basic framework, vignettes must be tailored to the initial research objectives and research needs with 3 basic components, namely concept, design, and administration (Skilling & Stylianides, 2020). In the conceptualization stage, it is necessary to understand the initial conditions to interpret the events to be transformed in a short scenario, capture representative moments according to the issues highlighted, and reflect the initial research objectives aimed at problem-solving. In the design stage, it is necessary to pay attention to short and not too long narratives, use of language, open or closed questions, consideration of the reader's point of view, and piloting as a validity test. Meanwhile, in the administration stage, instructions, timelines, and clear ways of delivering the research approach are needed.

The use of vignettes is very diverse, with some studies using them as the only measurement tool, while others use them as a warm-up before core data collection, even in interview questions. The use of vignettes as a clue or provoker typically requires a more comprehensive description than just a question, such as a story, picture, or a step-by-step process of a particular experience. In this case, often the use of vignettes as a clue or provoker is associated with alternative active

role-playing or non-active role-playing (Erfanian et al., 2020). In the first situation, the researcher reads out certain situations and characters, and the audience is asked to demonstrate, while in the second situation, role playing is carried out in the form of continued writing-based stories (Torronen, 2018).

Similarly, research conducted by Halima, et al (2021) with the title *Sipakatau, Sipakainge, Sipakalebbi: A Cultural values for bullying prevention with optimized bystanders role* which also uses vignettes in sociometry and illustrations of bullying roles in the screening stage through story scenes that illustrate bullying incidents of 5 roles with a focus on the bystander role as the object of research. In this study, vignettes were not used as the only way of data collection. In this case, my reason for using the vignette method in this research as there is still a lack of discussion of vignettes to capture illustrations of bullying incidents in Indonesia, as the only research found is located in Sulawesi on high school students.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Bullying and the Participant's Role

Bullying is a pervasive social issue characterized by repeated aggressive behaviour with the intent to harm, where there is an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim (Olweus, 1994; Salmivalli et al., 2021). It is important to understand the forms or types of bullying to address the negative outcomes related to bullying (Coyle et al., 2021). Bullying behaviors can be classified based on their mode (direct or indirect) and type (physical, verbal, relational, or cyber) (Salmivalli et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2009). Physical bullying involves acts of physical aggression such as hitting, shoving, stealing, damaging property, or pushing (Shams et al., 2017). In contrast, verbal bullying includes name-calling, mocking, hurtful teasing, sexist or racist comments, and threats. Not least to mention, relational bullying, often subtle, involves manipulating relationships, such as exclusion or spreading rumors, and cyberbullying leverages digital platforms to harm victims remotely (Smith et al., 2008).

Beyond categorizing the forms of bullying, it is equally crucial to understand the social roles students assume within bullying incidents. Salmivalli et al. (1996;2014) conceptualized bullying as a group process, where classmates often assume different roles: the main bully, reinforcers (those who encourage the bully), assistants (who help with bullying acts), defenders (those who help the victim), and bystanders or outsiders who remain passive. Among these roles, victims are typically characterized by low social standing, few defenders, social

withdrawal, and a perceived lack of support or social competence (Salmivalli et al., 2014; Thornberg & Wanstrom, 2018). The effect of this victimization leads to long-term psychological effects such as anxiety, depression, and a diminished sense of school belonging (Tholander, 2019; Corby et al., 2014). Some of the victims are afraid of reporting their experiences due to fear of worsening the situation.

On the other hand, one of the roles that plays a pivotal role is bystanders. Their actions or inactions are influenced by multiple factors, including empathy, perceived group norms, self-efficacy, and fear of retaliation (Salmivalli, 2010; Thornberg et al., 2022). Research shows that bystanders with a high level of affective empathy and strong relationships with the teachers or peers are more likely to take defensive actions (Rizkyanti et al., 2020; Jungert et al., 2021). However, many students feel caught in a moral and social dilemma, while disapproving of the bullying, they remain passive due to fear of social exclusion or being targeted themselves (Keletsositse, 2021). Thus, fostering prosocial norms and empowering bystanders are critical strategies to shift school climates from passive tolerance and activate the action to defend against bullying.

It is important to state, as this study later will focus on female dormitories, though some of the results did not represent all female school bullying, yet it provides the characteristics of female bullying. Research by Wang et al. (2009) shows a consistent number that boys are more involved in direct bullying, whilst girls are more involved in indirect bullying. As mentioned by Jewett et al (2019) in (Rilveria, 2023), female bullying refers to separation from teams, lower self-esteem, and produces negative emotions such as sadness, shame, and fear, which affect academic or social performance. Lighter attacks are more common among female bullies, such as social bullying, verbal bullying, even if it happened physically, it used to be pushing and shoving, stealing or damaging personal belongings, offensive gestures, and tripping (Keletsositse, 2021; Rilveria, 2023). Each type of bullying contributes to the cycle of aggression and victimization in a communal environment and will have both short-term and long-term impacts on individuals and their social environments (Smith et al., 2008).

In school settings, bullying has far-reaching consequences, affecting not only those directly involved but also the broader school climate (Caliskan et al., 2019; Coyle et al., 2021). School bullying has been recognized as a harmful behavior among teenagers and peer relationships, impacting their academic performance, prosocial abilities, and psychological health, both the victims and

perpetrators (Wang et al., 2009). More specifically, in boarding school contexts, students live and interact in close quarters, and the dynamics of bullying can become deeply entrenched, forming complex cycles of aggression and victimization (Nugroho et al., 2020).

Some research agreed that bullying in boarding school experience might be higher due to the severity of interaction, a closed environment, and separation from parents (L. Lester et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2025). In the Indonesian context, boarding schools are believed as institutions that intend to foster noble character and instill Islamic values, claimed as a safe place to support students' moral growth (Maulana et al., 2024). The fact shows that bullying still occurs, where the highest number is verbal bullying (45%), followed by physical bullying (35%), and social bullying (20%). In the tightly knit social environment of boarding schools, the bullying cycle is further reinforced by group dynamics, cultural norms, and power hierarchies such as seniority, imitation, past experiences, and the students' dormitory system.

Bullying is not a dyadic interaction but a group process that involves multiple roles. Salmivalli et al. (1996, 2010) proposed a model identifying key participants in bullying, including bullies, victims, assistants, reinforcers, defenders, and bystanders. Bullies initiate and lead aggressive actions, often motivated by a desire for dominance or power, while assistants actively participate in bullying acts. Reinforcers indirectly support the bully, for instance, by laughing or encouraging the behavior. Defenders intervene to protect victims and challenge bullying, whereas bystanders remain passive, either out of fear or indifference. Victims are the targets of bullying, experiencing repeated harm and social exclusion. Salmivalli et al. (2011) further demonstrated that empowering bystanders to adopt defending roles can significantly reduce bullying incidents, highlighting the importance of understanding these roles within the bullying ecosystem. Nugroho et al. (2021) expand on this by illustrating how the boarding school context, with its unique social structures and power dynamics, creates opportunities for victims to adopt aggressive roles in their quest for belonging or status.

Research by Salmivalli (2010) highlights that the roles are not static; individuals may shift roles based on social contexts and peer influences. (Maulana et al., 2024) also stated that adolescents are more influenced by what their peers have done in their friendship; through this, it also provides power, attention, and

even aggression. The bullying cycle perpetuates aggression through reciprocal reinforcement among participants. For example, a bystander might become a reinforcer when they fail to intervene, or a defender might experience backlash, becoming a victim themselves. This fluidity underscores the need to analyze bullying as a dynamic social process rather than an isolated incident. Moreover, Pepler and Craig (2000) argue that bullying cycles are sustained by group norms, which normalize aggression and marginalize victims.

By focusing on the roles within the bullying cycle, this study aims to deepen understanding of how group dynamics and social roles influence the perpetuation of bullying in boarding schools. Integrating Salmivalli's model with Nugroho et al.'s exploration of the psychological dynamics in boarding schools, this study seeks to examine how the roles within the bullying cycle interact to perpetuate or disrupt aggression. Understanding the transformation of roles and the social mechanisms behind them is critical to designing interventions that address bullying in communal educational settings.

2.2.2 Foucault's Power Relation Theory

Understanding bullying through the lens of power relations provides a nuanced framework that highlights the complexities of social interactions and institutional practices. Many researchers used Foucault's theory to understand the notion of bullying. However, this discourse is not specifically talking about school bullying, but it is a broader theory that views power relations in social structures (Nassem, 2025). Foucauldian theory posits that power is not a static entity held by individuals but rather a dynamic and omnipresent force embedded into daily interaction, social norms, and institutional frameworks, which create hierarchies, define acceptable behaviors, and marginalize those who do not conform (Nassem, 2025). Foucault also emphasizes that while power is pervasive and often invisible, it is never absolute-resistance always exists, although it can be difficult for those most marginalized to enact.

Building upon Foucault's conceptualization, Walton (2005) applies the theory of power relations to analyze bullying as individual misbehavior. There are key elements of this theory: 1) Power is not a static entity, as Foucault rejects the idea that power is simply held by individuals or groups; instead of power is dynamic, distributed across networks of relationships that exist in social structures. Power is also defined as the shift from sovereign power (centralized, top-down) to disciplinary power (Nassem, 2025), 2) Power is exercised through discourse,

which includes language, knowledge, and social practices as a key site where power operates, 3) Power and knowledge are intertwined as power produces knowledge, and knowledge reinforces power, 4) Power is relational and productive as it creates and shapes individuals, behaviors and social norms. Another study also stated that normalization is the process of certain behaviors, attitudes, and identities within several contexts that often involves the enforcement of social norms (Nassem, 2025). Last but not least, 5) Power operates at micro and macro levels as an interconnected whole wherein Foucault views everyday interactions (micro) and in broader social structures (macro). Thus, according to this theory, power is being exercised in the interaction between individuals wherein one group is influencing or controlling another.

2.2.3 Narrative-based Vignette

First in first, the explanation begins with understanding the historical background of vignette methodology. According to Sampson & Johannessen (2019), in Cheah et al (2023) vignette is a short story introducing a hypothetical scenario which close to the real cases in investigating some attitudes or behaviors. Whilst Bloor and Wood (2006) in Wiegmann et al (2024) explained that a vignette is one of the research approaches used in structured and in-depth interviews, followed by focus groups, by providing sketches and fictional scenarios related to some specific human behaviors or attitudes. There are many types of vignettes, such as art-based vignettes, vignettes with video, vignette-based stories or narratives, and so on (Khanolainen & Semenova, 2020). However, Vignettes are used in both quantitative and qualitative even though they rely on the phenomenological paradigm. When talking about phenomenology, it will rely on human experience as the starting point of phenomenological perception. This paradigm requires attentiveness to sensory, emotional, and relational dynamics. It is also able to intertwine narrative depth with empirical rigor, offering a unique methodological approach (Agostini et. al.2024). The main purpose of this approach is to gain their response to certain experiences.

The purpose of using vignettes in social research is at least three points: 1) exploring specific actions in a certain context, 2) investigating people's judgments, and 3) providing a less personal way of diving into sensitive topics. Narrative vignettes have been implemented in the context of education, nursing, social work, or workplaces. This approach allows researchers to capture not just observable behaviors but the sensory and emotional dimensions of human existence. Vignettes

aim to create a vivid portrayal of a scene, engaging readers as though they are present within the researched moment. By doing so, they move beyond mere description to evoke a profound connection with the experience. The use of vignettes in qualitative research is interpreted as a study that presents a brief scenario in written or visual form to obtain responses from the subjects. In this case, individual stories, situations, and structures can serve as important references in eliciting perceptions, opinions, attitudes, comments, or responses that capture a particular situation.

In general research, vignettes can be used as a single method or combined with other methods. In a qualitative context, participants are asked to respond to certain situations by commenting on what they would do, how they would give a third-person account to respond to certain situations or events, or both. Vignette also offers the possibility to observe interpretations from different groups because the method involves commenting on the story and is often considered less personal and non-threatening. But in fact, it can serve as a trigger for respondent to share their own experiences (Barter & Renold, 1999).

The flexibility of vignette shows in the implementation of this method, for instance, some of the studies perform vignettes in interviews, discussions, or even screening respondents. In line with what was conveyed by Rizvi (2019) in her research, vignettes are often developed with interviews regarding certain dilemmatic situations where the short story is constructed not in too much detail so that the respondents can interpret and supplement it with their own experiences. Vignettes can also be conducted by means of Focus Group Discussion, which has recently been widely used where it stimulates everyone to warm up and talk to each other, exploring deeper perspectives, including different opinions (Barter & Renold, 1999).

In applying the vignette method, it should pass three criteria. Firstly, it should be close to the real situation. Secondly, the stories given are related to respondents' experiences, so they can give a judgment. Thirdly, the vignette story should consist of a third-party perspective regarding specific attitudes and behaviors to encourage reflective responses. Implementing a vignette method, aside from an interview, can be combined. Meanwhile, it is also important to mention that four elements should be considered there are: internal consistency, appropriateness, fit, and engagement. Besides its creative capability in uncovering sensitive responses through counter narratives, the responses that emerge can be

revealed in two forms: imaginary reflection as a response to the story and reflection on personal experience. Therefore, this needs to be taken into consideration when constructing follow-up questions that can escalate the data sources (Rizvi, 2019).

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methods play an important role in the research process. In exploring the participants' roles in the bullying incident, several things, including methods, approaches, data analysis, and research ethics, will be explained in the following sub-chapters. This chapter also describes how research instruments will be delivered to respondents during the research process.

3.1 Research Approach and Design

The research steered by the social-constructivist perspective aims to find participants' subjective meaning of their experiences in social dynamics within the bullying incidents by investigating their reflections on participants' roles (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By using a qualitative approach, this study prioritizes depth and context over generalizability, allowing for an in-depth investigation of the roles, behaviors, and cultural influences in one boarding school (Yin, 2018). This study adopts a qualitative research paradigm that seeks to explore and understand complex social phenomena in their natural contexts, as the goal of qualitative is to understand what is happening and why the situation can happen (Creswell & Poth, 2018, Gay et al., 2012).

According to Gay et al. (2012), this study employs narrative research, which enables people to communicate their meanings and experiences in a complicated world by telling their stories. Some characteristics in implementing narrative research are focus on individual experience, concern to the chronology of individuals' experiences, and focus on the life stories based on data collected. In addition to the narrative story-based vignettes, the researcher gathers descriptions in this section through preliminary study in the research object and collecting some information related to the condition wherein vignettes are used as a methodological tool to gently elicit participants' opinions and sentiments. Vignettes allow participants to contemplate hypothetical or actual situations, offering insights into their perceptions without conflict (Agostini et al, 2015). This strategy promotes openness and helps avoid intimidation, particularly in delicate situations like bullying. To verify validity and reliability, the data will be triangulated with information from focus group discussions and interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Exploratory vignette narratives must incorporate interactions, moods, gestures, facial expressions, and perspectives that represent experiences in the field in addition to verbal expressions (Agostini et al., 2024). The vignette narratives are not shown in

detail to arouse curiosity regarding the response to a moment. With that, the experience of bullying that occurred in boarding schools, which came from the researcher's personal experience as a student and a teacher (both victims and bystander), bullying issues encountered in dormitory life, as well as the results of literature reviews related to bullying in boarding schools, were accumulated to become the basis for creating vignette stories. As stated in Agostini et al (2024) where life experience is the starting point that becomes a textual expression to foster reflection on meaning. Narrative-based vignettes need to pay attention to some basic elements, such as time, place, plot, scene, and orientation (location and participants) that emphasize individual experiences. In addition, vignettes are known to borrow the phenomenological paradigm, where the focus of the existing approach is to explain events to draw responses and individual experiences rather than revealing events.

3.2 Data and Data Sources

In this study, data were collected using three main qualitative approaches to ensure a comprehensive exploration of students' perceptions regarding bullying in the boarding school context. These approaches included narrative-based vignettes, interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). The use of multiple data sources not only enhances the depth of understanding but also allows for triangulation, thus increasing the trustworthiness and validity of the findings.

3.2.1 Narrative-based Vignettes

Participants will be presented with scenarios depicting bullying situations to elicit their initial thoughts and feelings. Agostini et al. (2015) note that vignettes can serve as an effective tool to access participants' perspectives while minimizing the risk of defensiveness or social desirability bias. Two frame-up stories illustrate incidents of bullying in Islamic boarding schools. The vignette scene emphasized the involvement of roles in different bullying incidents. The first story depicts a victim who made a mistake and was then bullied and ridiculed, which constitutes verbal and relational bullying. The second story is a continuation of the episode, depicting a small part of the movement that leads to physical bullying.

The vignette's inspiration for the story content was explored by reviewing research on bullying in Islamic boarding schools, connecting it to early interview data regarding the conditions of the boarding schools, and considering the author's personal experience of attending an Islamic boarding school for nine years. In order to investigate students' reactions to bullying incidents both actual and imagined, the vignette sheet was technically given to them along with eight reflective essay

questions. Additionally, Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) and interviews are prompted by the vignette narrative sheet. Adapting to research needs as outlined in the previous theoretical presentation, the vignette's field application is quite flexible.

Vignette 1 : The Corner of Kamila's Cupboard

Teng.. Teng.. Teng..

The bell rang, signaling a change of activities, and the students had to hurry. Little Kamila ran hurriedly, her tired eyes scanning the path against the flow of people heading from the mosque. She had just finished the punishment report assigned by the Security Teacher. Quickly, she grabbed her prayer shawl and rushed out.

"Thousand!! Remember rule number 1 of this room: keep your own belongings. Already, the dirty clothes are scattered everywhere!" Nisa's sharp voice, the most vocal and respected resident of the room, echoed before she left the door.

Shafa, who was already outside the room, chimed in, "No wonder it's been smelling so bad."

Lintang responded with a small laugh, "Lucky there's room freshener, otherwise, it'd be unbearable, haha."

Similar remarks had been heard frequently in recent days. The ceilings of the room bore witness to how the majority's voices dominated, leaving her cornered alone. Fani, who witnessed the scene, remained silent with a hint of guilt. There was pity in her eyes, but she could do nothing. If she made a wrong move, she might become the next target.

Kamila returned to the room. Her eyes were teary as she quickly gathered her clothes. She held back her anger and swallowed the sadness that came more frequently. One mistake had erased all the good memories with her roommate. From the corner of the room, Aulia stood up, approached her, and helped tidy her clothes.

"Mil, just go to the mosques. Don't listen to what they say. I'll help you clean up later. If you're late, you'll get punished again!" she said softly but warmly

Kamila bowed her head, smiling slightly. In such an oppressive environment, a single outstretched hand felt so comforting. There are still good people out there. If it weren't for knowledge and people like Aulia, I might not have survived, she murmured.

Vignette 2: The Cycle that Continues

Five days have passed, but for Kamila, time seems to be moving slowly. The punishment from the security teacher is still in effect: the memorization stamp and cleaning duties are still waiting for her. This has disrupted her daily schedule several times, bringing her back to a new set of problems.

One morning, after sweeping the front yard of the boarding school, she bumped into her three roommates in the hallway leading to their room. She had intended to greet them to lighten the mood, but instead received a shoulder bump that caused her body to shift slightly toward the wall.

"Oh, sorry... it was an accident, ehhehe" said Nisa, her tone carrying a hint of sarcasm.

He added, "Yes, as usual,... busy with the teacher's punishment so forgot about the room duty"

Without any word of farewell, the three of them slowly walked away without a hint of guilt. Kamila looked down, clenching her hands tightly. No words came out of her mouth. But this was the third time she had been bumped like that in the hallway. Once might be an accident, but three times in a week?

Moving to the communal kitchen, a large slogan read, "Above and for all groups," emphasizing the values of unity and non discrimination. But it felt like those values were at odds with Kamila. After waiting in line, she walked to table number 10." The seat is still empty, right?" she boldly started the conversation in front of her roommate

Shafa and Lintang exchanged glances at Nisa, who acted as if she hadn't heard, while Fani, as usual, couldn't make up her mind.

"Oh, this is Aulia's spot; she asked me to book it for her!" Lintang said quickly, but it seemed like she was making it up. Moments later, Aulia arrived, and the last conversation at the table was overheard by her.

"I didn't ask anyone to book anything, did I? Alright, let's just eat together at the next table!" The statement was made with clarity.

As usual, Aulia always dared to speak her mind. It seems the boarding school needs more students like Aulia

After collecting narrative responses through the vignette method, I analyzed students' answers using a thematic analysis approach. The responses gained from 8 follow-up reflective questions elicit students' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reflection related to the scene. The questions consist of:

- 1) What do you think is happening in this situation? Please explain who is involved and how their relationships are.
- 2) In your opinion, who is experiencing a problem and why?
- 3) If you witnessed an incident like the one in the story, would you do anything? (yes/no/not sure)
- 4) If you were in Kamila's position, how would you feel? What would you hope from your friends?
- 5) If you were in that story, what would you do? Please explain your reasons for choosing that action
- 6) In your opinion, what should the other friends who were around the incident but did not directly bully do?
- 7) Try to imagine if you were in their position (you can elaborate from each role) – how would you feel?
- 8) In your opinion, what should be done so that incidents like this case do not happen again in the future?

After getting the students' answers, each reflection will be transcribed and reviewed to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences and perspectives. The researcher then does axial and open coding through the narratives, identifying meaningful statements or phrases, or expressions that relate to the roles, emotions, and social dynamics described in the vignette scenarios. The initial codes were then grouped into broader themes such as negative emotional reactions, social rejection, lack of support, and so on.

3.2.2 Interviews

These interviews will explore participants' experiences and perceptions of their roles in the bullying cycle. Open-ended questions will allow participants to narrate their experiences freely, aligning with the flexible nature of qualitative

inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interview was intended to build personal interaction in a one-on-one session to explore in-depth data in depth information, which could not be done in a communal process. At this stage, the researcher used structured and unstructured interviews, where in structured interviews, open-ended questions were specifically designed based on the research plan, theoretical framework, screening, and pilot test on groups with similar characteristics. Unstructured interviews, on the other hand, are casual conversations aimed at understanding the circumstances and experiences of participants (Gay et al., 2012). Unstructured interviews are combined with structured interviews to enrich information related to the research setting. The purpose of unstructured interviews is not to gain answers to previous questions but to further explore information related to the circumstances of the participants. However, it is not uncommon for the relevant information to be obtained through this conversation.

As mentioned in Gay et al (2012), there are several things that need to be considered to maintain the quality of interview data. It is necessary to convey the technical implementation, which involved 16 students from two different rooms who were selected purposively through research criteria. The interviews were conducted before the Focus Group Discussion process to ensure that the students' answers were not influenced and to maintain the purity of their responses. The timing of the interviews was conducted over three days in several stages to accommodate the boarding school's schedule. The researcher ensured that the interview sessions were conducted during the students' free time. If conducted at night, it was done after obtaining permission from the boarding school administration. The final day was conducted on a holiday to avoid burdening or disrupting the students' daily routines. Each student interviewed was limited to a duration of 25-30 minutes to align with the boarding school's schedule. The interview questions were developed based on theoretical constructs and indicators, and were aligned with the research problems. Here are some samples of the interview questions:

- 1) Do you think bullying in Islamic boarding schools often involves several people within a circle of friendship
- 2) In your view, when a bullying incident occurs, how do bystanders usually behave? Do they tend to take on a specific role, or do they prefer to remain silent? Concerning this, how do you think they should respond?

- 3) In your opinion, are people who merely watch or laugh during a bullying incident considered part of the bullying? Why do you think so?

3.2.3 Focus Group Discussion

A focus group as part of an interview technique, which involves several individuals, aims to collect shared understanding in a specific context posed by the moderator (Gay et al., 2012). In conducting a focus group, researchers have to maintain the fairness of each respondent within the group activity to avoid the dominant participant. To begin the discussion, a narrative vignette was used to gain participants' responses before eliciting from real-life experience. The group was divided by room to ensure the effectiveness of the discussion. Researcher ensure that everyone has the chance to speak or voice their argument. Not to mention, it always begins with the statement that there is no wrong or true answer through this conversation to imply that everyone is arguing their opinions. Each student will be driven to a safe place, such as a specific class, to maintain the confidentiality and security of the information given. In preventing suspicion among students, interviews will be conducted with all members of the room, so they are considered informant respondents who support data collection and know the main purpose of the study. The researcher posed 12 questions, and the following are some sample items designed to prompt discussion:

- 1) Who do you think is involved as a bully? Please explain your reasoning.
- 2) Is a bully only someone who directly harms others, or does it also include those who isolate or ignore the victim?
- 3) If you were in that situation, which role would you take and why?
- 4) What do you think usually causes someone to treat a victim in such a way?

3.2.4 Data analysis

Yin (2018) emphasizes triangulation as a critical strategy for enhancing the credibility of case study research. In this study, data will be corroborated from three sources for triangulation there are narrative vignettes, interviews with students, and Focus Group Discussion, before proceeding to the thematic analysis. In analyzing the data, Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend using a combination of coding and thematic analysis to construct a comprehensive understanding of qualitative data. At first, the analysis will follow a deductive method, which means theory provides an interpretative lens to identify the codes and make meaning of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In categorizing the answers, it is based on the theoretical framework and

research questions to gain specific and fit findings according to the research objectives. However, I pay attention to several points in theme development where I am not capturing the whole data, just pinpointing the important ones that represent the dataset. The theme used is based on a concept (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In the Inductive part, which brings the concept of data-driven or bottom-up, will be used at the second stage to know what kind of information can contribute to the findings of the research, especially in the research that captures human experience and reflection.

3.3 Subjects of Research

This study will focus on the context of daily life at the dormitory because the environment intensively involves social interactions that can trigger conflicts, including bullying behavior. This research was conducted at a modern private boarding school in Jakarta where an integrated curriculum system is implemented, combining the boarding school curriculum with intensive Arabic and English language instruction. The selection of the research site and participants was done through purposive sampling, guided by the specific criteria that aligned with the research objectives. The study focused on a modern Islamic boarding school characterized by a comprehensive structure that includes intracurricular, co-curricular, extracurricular, and hidden curriculum. This context was deemed particularly relevant for investigating the social roles and behavioral patterns of students in bullying dynamics, as student interaction is part of the hidden curriculum. The selection of the place is not only based on its curriculum profile but also due to its responsiveness and openness toward the research process, as many boarding schools tend to be reluctant or closed to studies that address sensitive issues like bullying. Therefore, a convenient sampling strategy was also adopted to ensure access while maintaining the integrity of purposive selection.

In terms of educational goals, students are guided to become skilled and morally upright members of society. It is stated that in the continuity of education, teaching, and daily activities, all teachers reside within the boarding school environment to collectively oversee and guide the learning process and student supervision. Learning is supported by adequate tangible and intangible facilities to support the educational process, including a counseling room (BK) that addresses various issues faced by students. However, in reality, this boarding school continues to strive and address the issue of bullying, which still occurs even in relational, verbal, and physical forms. Incidents of bullying in the dormitory environment also indicate that the 24-hour supervision by teachers and the presence of a school counselor around the boarding school need to be improved. I used the purposive sampling method to obtain the targeted research participants, which began by constructing

the research target, addressing the demographic profile, age, and dormitory level of the intended respondents, and afterwards gaining detailed information from the school administration, which connected me to the dormitory supervisor in identifying the targeted informants. The study focused on the female dormitory, considering several limitations imposed between males and females in the boarding school context, as well as ease of access, freedom of communication, and other research considerations.

Once all roles are identified, follow-up interviews in the preliminary study will be conducted to understand the research setting before delving deeper into the field. This study targets early adolescent students who are in a period of emotional transition, experiencing drastic changes both psychologically and biologically, which also affect their ability to adapt to the boarding school environment. Involving 16 students from two different rooms, each student will undergo three stages of data collection there are narrative vignettes with written responses, interview sessions, and focus group discussions (FGD). The first two sessions will be conducted individually, while the FGD session will bring together several students to explore and observe the consistency of their answers or new patterns that emerge.

3.4 Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability will be applied. Ethical considerations include obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality, and minimizing harm, particularly given the sensitive nature and purpose of the research. This research was conducted voluntarily, without coercion, and with approval from the boarding school administration, which acted as the guardian or parental substitute for the students. Out of 16 students involved, only 12 interviews were analyzed in the final data set due to reasons such as illness and data reduction for analytic clarity and relevance.

Regarding the researcher's positionality, I acknowledge my status as an outsider in this specific school community. I also situate myself due to my background as an alumnus of a modern boarding school. This experience has equipped me with an insider's cultural understanding and familiarity with boarding school norms, values, and learning patterns. To minimize the risk of bias arising from my prior experience, I maintained a reflexive stance throughout the research process, continuously questioning my assumptions, maintaining analytical distance, and relying on systematic coding, criteria, procedures, and participant validation where applicable, especially when participants reflected on emotionally complex experiences. I acknowledged my past familiarity as a contextual lens

rather than a determining frame. However, my experience equipped me with an understanding of various learning patterns and the vibrant environment to serve as a qualitative researcher who is considered part of the main data in understanding the research setting.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter consists of two main parts—research findings and discussion—that structurally answer the three research questions through analysis of narrative vignettes, interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). The research questions addressed in this chapter are: (1) How do students perceive the victim’s position in the bullying cycle at boarding schools? (2) How do students perceive the bystander’s position in the bullying cycle at boarding schools? (3) How do power relations shape students' roles in bullying incidents within the boarding school social environment?

Three major themes that emerge from the first research question are: first, students view victims as individuals experiencing negative emotional reactions; second, victims are characterized by low social acceptance, lack of support, passive individuals; third, victims become targets due to specific reasons, that lead to social exclusion such as differences in character, behaviour, or physical traits. For the second research question, we explore the bystander position from the perspective of students, distinguishing sub-roles such as reinforcer, defender, assistant, and outsider, while analyzing their tendencies (pro-bully, pro-social, or passive) and the sociological or psychological factors behind these roles.

The third research question is addressed by examining how power relations manifest through group superiority, seniority, and broader social structures, shaping social dynamics and influencing the bullying cycle in boarding schools. Through the narrative vignette approach, this chapter presents students’ honest and in-depth reflections on each role, offering a comprehensive understanding of how victims, bystanders, and power relations interact in the context of bullying at boarding schools, as framed by Salmivalli’s and Foucault’s theory.

4.1. Research Results

This chapter presents the research findings from three data sources there are text narratives, interviews, and focus group discussions. All data are used to address the formulation of the problem regarding students' reflections on the roles of victims and bystanders in bullying incidents, as well as to review the role of power relations in bullying dynamics in boarding school circumstances. Vignette narratives were used to explore students' imaginary responses and real experiences, that is, how they view victims and bystanders. Interviews and FGDs enriched the reflections with in-depth descriptions, both as direct victims and witnesses in the bullying circle at boarding school. It also delves deeper to understand how this environment contributes to the

development of a bullying culture through a lens of power relations. This study involved 12 participants, they are students from a modern boarding school in Jakarta. Each finding will be described systematically in sub-chapters according to the formulation of the problem that has been stated.

4.1.1. Students' Reflections on Victims in Bullying Situations at Boarding School

This sub-chapter addresses the first research question: *How do students perceive the role of victims in bullying incidents at boarding schools?* Field finding results drawn from reflection as imaginary, and real experience emerged as three major themes: (1) Negative emotions experienced by victims, (2) Victims experienced high social rejection, lack of support, (3) The reasons victims are targeted, whether due to character, behavioral traits, or physical differences. (4) Discussion, (5) Suggestions.

1. Negative Emotions Experienced by Victims

The first question in the vignette:

I'd love to know how you'd feel if you were in Kamila's position. Tell me, if you were in her shoes, how would you feel? What would you expect from your friends?

These are some samples of the responses collected:

What would you do in the story's setting? Give a justification for your decision!

I feel sorry for Kamila, so I will help her like Aulia. I know the feeling as I've been bullied. Back then, I was lucky to have a friend like Aulia who increased my encouragement. Later on, if a case like this comes up, I would like to help the victims.

Source: Vignette Student 2, May 26, 2025

I will inform my mother, as I perceive a lack of friends here to confide in. I decided to make a call for support and subsequently informed Ustadzah Dzikra and Ustadzah Azizah to help in finding solutions.

Source: Vignette Student 11, May 26, 2025

How would you feel if you were Kamila? What do you think your friends would do?

I'm sad because I used to be Kamila, and I am still in that position. I used to cry and ask to transfer schools, but now I choose to focus on my studies. I still feel sad sometimes, but I'm hoping they'll forgive me soon.

Source: Vignette Student 11, May 26, 2025

Most of the negative emotions toward the victim's feelings are caused by low social acceptance, hopelessness, and a lack of social support. This shared experience is intensified by the unique environment of a boarding school, where daily life is in close quarters and victims must continually face their perpetrators and their assistants. This situation can put a strain on the victim's mental state, especially when they're trying to seek out social support.

If I were in Kamila's position, I'd be hurt because I don't know who to talk to. I'm worried that if I tell someone else, they'll tell the people who are already avoiding her. I'm thinking of telling my parents, but I'm worried that it might make things worse. I hope I can have a friend like Aulia because she cares, even though she might be avoided if she mingles with Kamila.

Resource: Interview with Student 8 from May 26, 2025

I can only imagine how challenging it must be for Kamilah, having to face them every day. I bet she'd just like to get back home and have a chat with her parents, but I understand that they'd be worried. If she can't take it anymore, it would be really helpful for her to find a friend who is kind and always there to listen.

Resource: Interview with Student 7 from May 26, 2025

If I'm ignored, my basic principle is: those who are wronged by others will be repaid. Besides, my friends aren't just in the dorm; there are still others who want to be friends with me.

Resource: Interview with Student 7 from May 26, 2025

It's so heartening to see how the students came together to speak out against bullying. Their words paint a clear picture of the profound emotional impact it has on victims. They used words like "really hurt," "very heavy," sad, challenging, anxious, upset, and confused to express the depth of their feelings on the matter. The students also share the same view of Kamila as a victim who is in the lowest position in her environment.

Interestingly, these reflections often blur the line between fiction and reality. As students put themselves in Kamila's point of view, many spontaneously recall moments from their own lives:

I feel sorry for Kamila, so I will help her like Aulia. I know the feeling as I've been bullied. Back then, I was lucky to have a friend like Aulia who increased my encouragement. Later on, if a case like this comes up, I would like to help the victims.

Resource: Student 8 from May 26, 2025

This highlights how the vignette does not merely measure imagination but opens the way for honest personal testimony. The narrative tool thus enables students to access their 'inner world', making suffering visible that is otherwise hidden in the day-to-day routine of boarding school life, as well as diving into readers' feelings, perspectives, and reflections. However, this contrasts with the field reality, where students experience greater difficulty in expressing their emotions narratively compared to verbally. The language employed by the students in the narrative is predominantly direct and sincere, with minimal reliance on metaphors or hyperbole. As stated in Astipa et al. (2025) adolescents are more likely to convey their emotions and melancholy through nonverbal communication.

In real-life emotional experiences, the negative emotional impact of bullying is not only imagined but lived and remembered in detail. Students

shared stories of being victims in the boarding school setting, illustrating the negative emotional burden of being victims of bullying in a boarding environment. The findings reflect non-verbal signals and social withdrawal as the main causes for such sadness, both long-term and short-term. It highlights the urgent need for supportive intervention and greater awareness in the boarding school community.

If I were in Kamila's position, I would be sad, but I have to look strong and cheerful in front of others, while hoping someone would want to accompany me

Source: Student1, Interview May 26th, 2025

I'm sad because I used to be Kamila, and I am still in that position. I used to cry and ask to transfer schools, but now I choose to focus on my studies. I still feel sad sometimes, but I'm hoping they'll forgive me soon

Source: Student1, Interview May 26th, 2025

2. Victims Experienced High Social Rejection and Lack of Support

A major theme emerging from the data is that victims of bullying at Islamic boarding schools often hold a position of low power and acceptance within their peer groups. Social rejection is often caused by seemingly minor mistakes, personality traits, or behaviors that differ from the group's norms. When a student makes a mistake or is seen as different, rumors quickly spread, and classmates tend to ignore or isolate the victim. This social exclusion is not only damages students' sense of belonging but also weakens their support networks. Over time, even friends who once offered support may distance themselves, leaving the victim feeling deeply alone.

Kamila is too afraid to speak up, doesn't dare say anything, because in the dorm, if there's a problem, you just keep quiet so it doesn't get worse

Resources: Interview with Student 1 on May 26, 2025

I was isolated by my roommates. They said I was picky about friends, that I was exclusive. They left me behind when we went to class, made fun of me, and ignored me for almost two months. At first, I cried and was sad. I wanted to transfer schools, but my mom told me to wait and see if they'd change. Now, I don't care anymore. Whatever, you guys can isolate me—I have lots of friends, not just you

Resources: Interview with Student 11 on May 28, 2025

This fieldwork, which included both narrative vignettes and in-depth interviews, revealed that students' emotional reactions to social rejection are intense and multi-layered. Almost all students were able to express their emotional feelings such as sadness, fear, shame, anger, despair, and longing to escape, when discussing both imagined and real experiences. In a few interview moments, at least four students

were visibly moved to tears while describing their stories or responding to vignette prompts. The continuous and close environment of a boarding school means victims are confronted daily with the bullies and must endure rumors as well as social exclusion that can last for weeks or even months.

What makes the findings even more nuanced is the variety in how victims respond to such experiences. Some students describe passively accepting their fate, staying silent or withdrawing because they feel powerless to change the group dynamic or fear further victimization.

It's just sad, you know, because I'm a bit scared to tell my parents or the teacher. If I tell them, I'm afraid they'll just push me away or something, so it's better to keep it to myself

Source: Interview with Student 8, May 26, 2025

Kamila just doesn't have anyone, so when she is ignored, she ends up even more alone. If in my case, I just stay quiet so it doesn't get worse

Source: Interview with Student 1, 2025

There was a friend who was ignored by the entire cohort. Some people tried to defend her, but no one would accompany her anywhere because she tended to keep to herself. Sometimes, the ones who get ignored are those who seem a bit strange, like talking to themselves or not liking to join in with others

Source: Interview with Student 10, May 28th 2025

Difficulties in finding social support are a pervasive challenge for victims in the boarding school environment. Even when victims have no personal conflict with some of their peers, group bullying dynamics can pressure other students to side with the perpetrators or remain silent, often to protect their social position. In such cases, the victim's marginalization is not only about their behavior but also about how the broader peer group collectively defines what is 'normal' or acceptable. Social rejection becomes a reflection of these unwritten social codes, where students are constantly negotiating between tolerance, mindful living, and the risk of being judged or ostracized themselves.

This context means that victims often struggle to access social support, not only because others actively avoid helping, but the victims themselves may internalize their exclusion. Some students prefer to become passive bystanders in their own lives, letting the situation unfold without resistance. This passivity may stem from a sense of helplessness or a fear of worsening their status. Consequently, social rejection is closely correlated with how victims attempt to seek support and results in spectrum responses.

However, not all victims react the same way. A minority, sometimes referred to as defended victims, manage to find strength, either by seeking out new friends, drawing on family support, or even reframing the experience in a more resilient or spiritual way:

If I'm being shunned, my principle is that those who wrong me will be repaid. Besides, my friends aren't just in my room; there are still others who want to be friends with me

Source: Interview with Student 10, May 28th 2025

Some victims, despite being rejected, actively seek support, whether by reaching out to a trusted adult or finding new friends to rebuild their confidence.

Summary of FGD & interviews

Table 4. 1 The Explanation of Victims' Conditions

No	Student	Victim Category	Indicators	Verbatim Statement
1	Student 1	Passive/Rejection	No support, tend to withdraw, keeps problems to oneself	Sad, but have to look strong and happy in front of others, and hope there's someone who will accompany me
2	Student 2	Passive/Rejection	Low social acceptance, rarely interacts, wants to transfer schools	Another effect was that I even asked to transfer schools."
3	Student 3	Passive/Rejection	No circle of friends, often excluded, hope friends will change	If I were in Kamila's position, I'd be sad. I hope they can change their attitude."
4	Student 4	Defended Victim	Receives at least one support from a friend, feels helped	It's sad to see Kamila because I feel it. I've been through something similar, but thankfully, I have supportive friends like Aulia, then I'm more motivated."
5	Student 5	Passive/Rejection	Often excluded, no support, feels deeply sad	I would feel sad and hope that my friends would stay and not bully at me"

6	Student 6	Passive/Rejection	Feels unsupported, experiences social sanction, spends more time alone	At that time, I felt like no one cared or helped me. Some people listened to my stories, but over time they forgot and drifted away..."
7	Student 7	Defended Victim	Has one supportive friend who accompanies them, and feels stronger	Luckily, there was one friend who truly cared and was willing to be there for me."
8	Student 8	Passive/Rejection	Crying, wanting to transfer, minimum support system, prefers to stay quiet/focus on studying	I feel sad because I used to be like Kamila, even until now. Back then, I cried asking to transfer schools, but now I choose to focus on studying..."
9	Student 9	Defended Victim	Has hope for a defender, occasionally receives support from friends	I just hope I can have a friend like Aulia because she cares, and eventually, people will avoid me if I'm friends with Kamila."
10	Student 10	Passive/Rejection	Feels isolated, eventually builds a new support circle	I was avoided by my roommate, who said I was picky about friends, and making a circle. Turn out, I was left alone when they went to class, mocked, ignored for almost two months..."
11	Student 11	Passive/Rejection	Receives no support, only confides in family, and no solution is found at the boarding school	If I tell them, I'm afraid they'll just avoid me more or something, so it's better to keep it to myself."
12	Student 12	Defended Victim	Has received some defense from friends, though minimal	Sometimes there's one or two friends who stand up for me, so I don't feel completely alone and lonely."

When compared to non-boarding schools, these findings also reveal fundamental differences, where victims of bullying in public schools can access counseling services and receive intervention from guidance counselors or homeroom teachers. In the context of boarding schools, students can share their problems with the *mudabbir* (an older mentor around the 11th grade level), who is often referred to as a peer counselor, or with their dormitory supervisors. Considering that *Mudabbir* also has academic and social activities, *Ustadzah* also has sectoral responsibilities, sometimes responses to problems cannot be resolved on a large scale. This is confirmed by the following statement from a student.

Mudabbir knows, Ustadzah knows, they have been told, but they are stubborn. They are nice in front of ustadzah and mudabbir, but behind their backs, they are different.

Resource: Student 11, 28 May 2025

The main recommendations for these findings are the need for special assistance in creating positive communication and involvement of all parties, anti-bullying education, and active participation of every dormitory and room to create a safer and more inclusive pesantren environment. The table below summarizes the various forms of bullying experienced by students in the boarding school environment based on the results of vignette narratives, in-depth interviews, and FGDs. Based on field findings, three main types of bullying are most frequently reported, namely **verbal, relational, and physical**. **Verbal bullying** includes actions such as mockery, sarcasm, name-calling, gossip, and verbal threats. **Relational bullying** occurs through exclusion, social rejection, cliques, spreading rumors, or deliberate neglect. **Physical bullying**, although relatively rare, still occurs in the form of pushing, light hitting, or destruction/hiding of the victim's belongings. These results show that **verbal and relational bullying are far more dominant** than physical bullying, indicating that psychosocial pressure in Islamic boarding schools is very strong and often indirect. These findings are also in line with Salmivalli's theory, which highlights the importance of relational aggression and social exclusion in shaping victim dynamics in adolescent groups.

3. The Reasons Victims Are Targeted

Analysis of narrative and FGD data reveals a strong tendency for students in boarding schools to ostracize peers who are perceived as “different.” These differences often involve character traits such as being annoying, attention-seeking, dirty or careless, or simply “weird” or introverted. Victims are not always targeted because of a clear wrongdoing; often, exclusion stems from social labeling and the powerful influence of group norms.

As one student described:

People will avoid those kind of person because they're annoying, dirty, make others uncomfortable, or just not liked

Source: Interview, Student 2, May 28th 2025

Sometimes the one who gets ignored by the whole group is the one who seems strange, likes talking to themselves, or doesn't like to join in with others

Source: Interview, Student 10, May 26th 2025

I will help my friend if they didn't do anything wrong. If they are at fault, well, that's the consequence.

Source: Focus Group Discussion, June 17th 2025

The process of victimization in the boarding school context is rarely the result of a single incident or individual conflict. Instead, it unfolds through collective group dynamics, powerful social labelling, and the subtle, ongoing negotiation of who belongs and who does not. When a student is perceived as different—whether due to personality, appearance, or a simple mistake—this difference becomes magnified through group discussion, gossip, and shared narratives.

Social labeling plays a central role: a student described as “annoying,” “dirty,” or “strange” is marked as an outsider.

Sometimes, the one who gets ignored by the whole group is the one who seems strange, likes talking to themselves, or doesn't like to join in with others

Source: Interview Student 10, May 28 2025

This label, once attached, is difficult to shed, and the group's behavior toward the victim becomes a self-reinforcing cycle—continued exclusion justifies the initial label, and the label justifies ongoing exclusion. The group's interpretation of justice is also one of the factors. Crucially, some victims begin to accept the group's judgment and internalize the belief that they deserve mistreatment. In the context of choosing a friend who deserves to get help is not correct.

As the student's statement said, *'I will help my friend if they didn't do anything wrong. If they are at fault, well, that's the consequence.*

There is are collective moral logic that blurs the lines between holding someone accountable and inflicting social punishment. As a result, victims may not only be isolated for an initial misstep but find that their efforts to apologize or improve are met with continued coldness. This group response reveals a subtle but critical shift from correcting behavior to reinforcing group boundaries and hierarchy.

The process of victimization often escalates as small grievances are amplified through group action and social sanction. Students who violate group expectations, such as refusing to share belongings, being too quiet, or being “different” in any way, may find themselves ostracized not just by individuals but by entire dorm rooms or cohorts. One example described how a student who was returning from illness was shunned by her roommates, her belongings used without permission, and her difficulties were reported to the dormitory mentor, further isolating her. Even attempts at intervention are sometimes discouraged: *“When someone tried to help, they were pushed away and told not to get involved, that it wasn’t their business,”* revealing the strength of group conformity and the risk for bystanders who break ranks.

Victim status, as theorized by Salmivalli, is mapped along a spectrum of indicators, including low social status, submissiveness, high social rejection, passivity, and a lack of support. These dynamics are clearly reflected in student testimonies, where some acknowledge, *“I was once shunned just because of a trivial matter; I didn’t want to lend my clothes to that person. Eh, the person got angry and asked others to join in, ignoring me.”* Others point out that victimization not only affect the quiet or passive; sometimes those who are outspoken, moody, or even high-achieving can also be targeted, depending on group perceptions and momentary conflicts.

Importantly, the making and unmaking of victimization is both a social and individual process. Students who are labeled as different may come to internalize the group’s judgment, sometimes even accepting exclusion as deserved, thus blurring the line between fair accountability and secondary victimization. The boarding school environment, with its communal living and intense peer interaction, often reinforces these patterns, as intervention from adults may be limited or ineffective.

As one student reported, *‘Mudabbir knows, Ustadzah knows, they have been told, but they are stubborn. They are nice in front of ustadzah and mudabbir, but behind their backs, they are different’*. The resulting picture is one where victimization is not only pervasive, but also persistent, shaped and maintained by group norms, social labeling, and the fragile boundaries between belonging and exclusion. Through the study of Tholander, (2019) recognizing this dynamic is essential for any intervention.

Table 4. 2 Bullying Behaviors in Boarding School X, Jakarta

Types of Bullying	Types of Bullying
Verbal (N=12)	Teasing
	2. Mocking
	3. Name-calling
	4. Insulting
	5. Threats
	6. Gossip/rumors
	7. Excessive joking
	8. Being blamed
	9. Yelling/being shouted at
Relational (N=11)	1. Exclusion (being left out)
	2. Ignored by the group
	3. Make a circle
	4. Social rejection
	5. Withholding friendship
	6. Spreading rumors
Physical (N=2)	7. Isolated from activities
	1. Pushing
	2. Hitting
	3. Pulling hair
	4. Taking or hiding belongings (rare)

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that negative emotions such as sadness, loneliness, and helplessness are experienced deeply by victims of bullying in boarding schools. According to Astipa et al. (2025), the high emotional vulnerability of adolescents, especially when left unsupported, can have long-term consequences for their mental health, including heightened risks of stress, depression, and decreased academic performance, as mentioned all those things by the students. The absence of support from peers and the dormitory environment not only intensifies this distress but also reinforces the victims' feelings of worthlessness and isolation.

These findings align closely with Salmivalli's (2010) participant roles theory in bullying. Salmivalli highlights that bullying is rarely an individual act, but rather a group

phenomenon where several distinct social roles emerge: the bully, assistants, reinforcers, defenders, outsiders, and victims. In this group dynamic, the behavior and emotional experience of victims are heavily shaped by the reactions and positions of their peers. For instance, when bystanders choose to remain passive or even support the bullying indirectly, they not only fail to provide support but also help normalize the exclusion of the victim. Many students in this study admitted they did not stand up for victims, either out of fear of becoming the next target or simply to maintain their own social standing, showing how group conformity can sustain cycles of bullying and isolation.

Victims are also characterized as having little social acceptance and influence with their peer group, being rejected frequently, and having no support network. This theory is in line with the study by (Sumitro et al., 2023) who discovered that verbal bullying and exclusion are common among junior high school students in Indonesian boarding schools, moreover, it is strongly linked to higher stress and anxiety level of the students. The absence of support systems for victims, in the form of friendship, empathy, or meaningful intervention, serves to worsen the emotional fallout of bullying. Many students describe how, when they were ostracized or targeted, even friends who initially offered comfort eventually distanced themselves, leading to deeper feelings of isolation and worthlessness. This supports the argument that social support is a critical protective factor in mitigating the impact of bullying, and its absence can turn a distressing incident into a prolonged emotional crisis.

Salmivalli's theory also explains how the social environment constructs and maintains victim status: victims are often those with lower power, lower social acceptance, and higher rates of rejection within the peer group. This is reflected in the field findings, where students who were considered 'different' (in personality, habits, or social status) became targets of both relational and, at times, physical aggression. Their lack of social allies or defenders places them in a more vulnerable position, intensifying their negative emotional reactions and further isolating them.

Building on Tholander's (2019) concept of making and unmaking victimization, the process of victimhood is negotiated through both collective labelling and the victim's own acceptance (or rejection) of their status. Social recognition and group narratives play a central role: when exclusion or mistreatment is normalized and justified as the victim's 'fault', it becomes easier for the group to deny responsibility and for the victim to internalize blame. This normalization of harm not only perpetuates cycles of bullying but also creates the conditions for secondary trauma, where victims come to see themselves as deserving of their mistreatment.

Suggestion

Notably, these findings suggest a critical difference from non-boarding school settings: in many public schools, formal support structures like counseling are more accessible and expected. In contrast, boarding school students rely on informal peer counselors (*mudabbir*) and supervisors (*ustadzah*) who have a double job while also supervising the members. This phenomenon is not only a reflection of personal coping or resilience but broader group dynamics that shape how harm is understood, justified, or denied. These findings also underscore the urgent need for multi-level interventions in boarding schools. On an individual level, emotional support and access to trusted adults or peer defenders must be improved. On a group level, the culture of labelling and collective exclusion must be addressed through explicit anti-bullying education and by shifting group norms toward empathy and inclusion. Whilst at the institutional level, dormitory and school leadership must be empowered and held accountable for monitoring, detecting, and responding to relational aggression not just physical or overt acts.

In summary, the interplay of emotional distress, lack of support, and group dynamics constitutes a powerful social environment where victimization can become both routine and invisible. Effective prevention and intervention must therefore address not only the individual's emotional needs, but also challenge the group norms and social structures that sustain and normalize exclusion and harm. By fostering more inclusive and empathetic dormitory culture, schools can disrupt these cycles and provide safer, more supportive spaces for all students.

4.1.2. Student Reflection of Bystander in Bullying Incident at Boarding School

In answering the second research question, there were two major findings) Students who chose to be outsiders because of peer pressure and 2) Empathy reasons that drove defenders to defend.

1. Students who chose to be outsiders because of peer pressure

Based on qualitative analysis, the first theme that emerged was the strong peer pressure that triggered a moral dilemma for bystanders to remain passive or even support bullying behaviour. Students who witnessed bullying often faced hesitation between the desire to help the victim and the fear of social consequences if they intervened. They realized that bullying was wrong, but the fear of being ostracized or becoming the next target made many bystanders choose to remain silent.

One participant described this:

.. friends who originally wanted to defend didn't defend because they were afraid of a certain circle

Source: Interview, Student 1 May 28th 2025

This statement highlighted that potential helpers also changed their minds because they were afraid of the perpetrator's influential clique in the boarding school environment. Passive bystanders often tried to "play it safe" by following the flow of the group. Some students admitted to avoiding or bullying victims solely because they were influenced by their peers (especially dominant friends) or so as not to be seen as being at odds with the majority. They felt the pressure to conform was very high – if the majority was silent or supported the perpetrator, they would be reluctant to act.

In my daily life, I often act like Fani because I'm afraid of getting involved in her problems

Source: Interview, Student 3, May 28 2025

Some students also described internal conflict and uncertainty about their position within social circles:

Sometimes I join the circle, sometimes I stay silent, depending on the situation and friends

Source: Student 10 interview, May 26, 2025

In reality, most students are aware that their actions are wrong, but the reality of life in a boarding school often confronts students with feelings of fear of being ostracized, worry about becoming the next target, leading them to choose the safe option of staying silent, being passive, following along, or pretending not to know. Thus, although most students understand the importance of defending victims in theory, in practice, this attitude often shifts to align with group dynamics and peer pressure within the boarding school environment

In some cases, bystanders even justified their bullying behavior by blaming the victim's character. For example, the victim was considered "annoying" or had bad habits so that they were "a butt to be bullied", which made bystanders feel innocent when they did not help. This kind of rationalization shows moral disengagement in bystanders, where they marginalize empathy to protect themselves. By being neutral or cornering the victim, these passive bystanders ultimately contribute to the continuation of bullying incidents because their lack of courage to speak up provides implicit support for the perpetrator.

I once experienced and acted like Safa, joining in on the bullying because the person was wrong and annoying. I only realized that what I did was also wrong after these things happened

Source: Interview Student 2, 2025

In line with the results of the Focus Group Discussion, which gathered students' voices at the same time

*Usually, when someone is being bullied, others just watch, afraid of becoming victims too
Some even laugh along so they won't be labeled as odd by the group
Those who stay silent usually know it's wrong, but are afraid to speak up
If one person in the group stands up for someone, others usually follow and stand up too*
Source: Focus Group Discussion, June 15, 2025

Interestingly, 10 out of 12 students stated they would take on the role of Aulia, the brave savior who helps the victim. This choice was expressed in empathetic responses through narrative vignette responses:

If I were in that story, I would help Kamila so her problem doesn't escalate

Source: Vignette, Student 6, May 26, 2025

I would help and accompany a friend who is facing problems, because those are the most unpleasant things. Accompanying a friend because that position is very undesirable and remember that someday we will need friends.

Source: vignette, Student 1, May 26 2025

Many students showed emotional sensitivity toward the victim, highlighting the discomfort of experiencing something similar and recognizing the importance of support from a defender.

I would help and accompany a friend who is facing problems, because those are the most unpleasant things. Accompanying a friend because that position is very undesirable and remember that someday we will need friends.

Source: vignette, Student 1, May 26 2025

The vignette reflection also shows that the responses given were not only about defending the victim but also about their understanding of the bullying incident that occurred at the boarding school – that by not taking a role, it is definitely normalizing the cycle of bullying to be continued. On the other hand, some students also included critical assessments of the victim's character. They wanted to defend, but at the same time reminded the victim the importance of self-reflection.

It is better to help and defend than to remain silent and not help, because silence is also a form of indirect bullying

Source: vignette, Student 9 May 2025

We have to be brave enough to defend her, even though Kamila also needs to reflect on herself, keep her own belongings clean and take care of her things

Source: Vignette, Student 2, May 26, 2025

However, this ideal situation does not fully reflect the daily reality of students. When reflecting on real experiences, many students face complex dilemmas between the intention to help and the very real social pressures of boarding school. Instead of consistently being Aulia, some students honestly

revealed that Fani tends to be the safe choice to avoid getting involved in some problems, while Safa and Lintang are also choices to simply follow along and secure their positions from group pressure.

Table 4. 3 Presentation of Student Involvement as a Third Party

No	Name	Role Tile	Real Experience	Some of Verbatim	Role
1	Student 1	Aulia (Defender)	Aulia (Defender), Fani (Outsider)	If I see a similar situation, I'll be like Aulia, brave with all the consequences Sometimes I defend, sometimes I just keep quiet.. usually when my circle is solid, I'm brave, but if not, I keep quiet too	Defender/ Outsider
2	Student 2	Aulia (Defender)	Safa (Reinforcer), Fani (Outsider)	I used to be like Safa, joining in on the bullying because the person was wrong and annoying, and only realizing my mistake after things had calmed down	Assistant
3	Student 3	Fani (Dilemmatic)	Fani (Outsider)	I would choose Fani because I've been in her position before, and I'm little afraid to take action because I know I'll be bullied	Outsider/ Defender
4	Student 4	Aulia (Defender)	Aulia (Defender)	I consistently defend victims, and I have also helped friends who have been bullied.	Defender
5	Student 5	Aulia (Defender)	Fani (Outsider)	In my daily life, I am more often becoming Fani, because I am	Outsider

				afraid of getting involved in someone's problems	
6	Student 6	Aulia (Defender)	Fani (Outsider), sometimes Lintang (Reinforcer)	I am more often silent, afraid of getting involved in my friend's problems	Outsider
7	Student 7	Aulia (Defender)	Fani (Outsider)	I tend to be like Aulia, because I feel sorry for her being bullied alone	Defender
8	Student 8	Aulia (Defender)	Lintang (Assistant), Fani (Outsider)	I want to be like Aulia, helping Kamila, but sometimes I don't dare to. (still predominantly wanting to defend, though there is a little doubt) Right now, I'm in Safa's position, going along with the silence but also feeling angry at the victim who is being ignored. On the one hand, I feel wrong too	Outsider/ Assistant
9	Student 9	Aulia (Defender)	Aulia (Defender), Fani (Sometimes silent)	It's better to help and defend rather than to remain silent and not help those who need help, because silence is also a form of bullying, albeit indirectly Sometimes I defend, sometimes I just stay silent and observe the situation	Active Defender

In everyday life, if I see a similar case, I would choose to be Aulia, even if it means being bullied, but there are still other friends to mingle with.

10	Student 10	Aulia (Defender)	Fani (Outsider, Lintang (Assistant)	I choose Aulia because I have experienced being bullied before, and it was really unpleasant, so I want to offer help Usually I used to prefer silent, sometimes defending if there is a support system	Defender, Outsider
11	Student 11	Fani (Dilemmatic)	Fani (Outsider)	If I don't join in, I'll be bullied,, but sometimes I defend too if I dare.	Outsider, Passive Defender
12	Student 12	Aulia (Defender)	Safa (Assistant)	Become Aulia, because I prefer to help people rather than just stay silent I've also been part of the silent group or joined the circle, because I'm afraid that if I defend, I'll be the one who gets hurt	Passive Defender, Assistant

2. Empathy reasons that drove defenders to defend

In contrast, the second theme centers on the presence of empathy and moral courage that drives some bystanders to take on the role of defenders. A minority of students demonstrated a strong empathetic response to victims and firmly held moral

principles that bullying should be stopped, even if it means standing apart from the crowd. These individuals engage in **pro-social bystander behavior**: comforting or consoling the victim, verbally or physically intervening to confront the bully, or reporting the incident to authority figures at the school. Such defender-bystanders are willing to incur social risks to do what they feel is right.

I'm not afraid of being hated because I am in the right,

Source: Interview Student 5, May 28th 2025

This indicates that she prioritizes doing the right thing over fear of social backlash. Another student similarly stated that she would help the victim

Even if the consequence is being shunned by others

Source: Interview Student 4, May 28th 2025

Exemplifying a commitment to intervene despite knowing it could lead to her own exclusion from certain peer groups. Empathy clearly plays a key role for these defender bystanders. They often put themselves in the victim's position and **cannot bear** to watch the suffering without taking action. Some described intervening to support a bullied friend in order to "*keep the problem from escalating,*" reflecting a sense of responsibility to protect others and maintain a just environment. This courageous intervention is also fueled by intrinsic moral conviction and sometimes by the assurance of alternative social support. For example, one student explained that she did not fear being ostracized by the bullies' clique because she believed she had other friends outside that group who would stand by her – including, potentially, the victim she helped.

In essence, these students possess a strong personal principle and confidence that empower them to resist peer pressure. Though there are few, the presence of such pro-social bystanders in the boarding school community provides crucial support for victims (who realize they are not entirely alone) and sends a message to perpetrators that their behaviour is not universally condoned. After mapping the gap between idealism in the vignette and students' daily practices, in this subchapters the researcher will examine in more depth the classification of bystander roles taken by student based on the following indicators: defender (pro-social), reinforcer/assistant (pro-bully), and outsider (passive bystander), including the reasons students chose their positions. In line with the statement in Howard et al. (2014) that internal motivation influences defenders in taking the stance expected by victims to break the cycle of bullying. In this study's findings, students who chose to be defenders generally provided moral justifications, empathy, and reflections on personal experiences. Some of them admitted to being driven by conscience, the hope of mutual assistance, or even spiritual reasons (*karma*, reciprocity of kindness). As expressed by one student

I defend victims because who knows, someday I might need help too, and I believe that life is about helping one another.

Source: Interview Student 4, May 28th 2025

An interesting finding related to the reasons for providing assistance is also influenced by who the victim is, whether they are guilty, different, or deserve to be bullied

Source: Interview, Student 3, May 28th 2025

The decision made by the students is not entirely wrong, considering that the students are still at an emotionally unstable age. This is related to what Salmivalli (2010) stated, that one of the reasons victims are shunned is due to social sanctions such as making a mistake or having fundamental differences. However, this cannot be normalized. In facing complex situations, there needs to be collective awareness in promoting a positive educational environment in boarding schools. This is because the role of a defender often places students who choose this role in a risky position, as they go against the normative group norms.

In Salmivalli (2010), defenders are typically roles that receive recognition and good social support. However, in reality, students with a positive social environment are not guaranteed to avoid being ostracized if they defend victims who are being ignored. This creates a dilemma for defenders: whether to uphold values of empathy and justice or to maintain comfort and their position within the social circle. In line with the statements of some students

Sometimes I defend, sometimes I just stay silent and observe the situation. I have defended friends before, but I still ended up being shunned by the circle.

Source: Interview, Student 9, May 26, 2025

In everyday life, if I see a similar case, I would choose to be Aulia, even though I would have to be shunned, but I think I still have other friends.

Source: Interview, Student 8, May 26, 2025

If I don't join in, I will be the one who is shunned... but sometimes I also defend them if I dare.

Source: Interview, Student 11, May 26, 2025

Through these three quotes, two different responses are highlighted: one student remains steadfast in their role despite the challenges, while the other shows hesitation in their concern, influenced by the responses of those around them. When linked to the study conducted by Jungert et al. (2021), which highlights various motivations for bystanders to defend victims, there are four types: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, moderate motivation influenced by the environment, and combined motivation driven by a desire to be a good person and other moral reasons. Meanwhile, Song's (2022) research places empathy as the foundational basis for prosocial reasons. Related to this, students with

prosocial motivation tend to be consistent defenders, as can be interpreted from the imaginary reflections of students 1 and 4. On the other hand, bystanders with external motivation tend to be passive defenders and are even prone to becoming pro-bullies.

In short, having a lot of social connections is not enough to change the opinion of most students who have a negative view of the victim. This is because student motivation to defend victims is strongly influenced by internal factors (e.g., empathy and conscience) and external factors (e.g., environment, social pressure, and relationships). Therefore, it is necessary to rebuild the concept and share the understanding of collective intervention in order to create a healthy social environment. In this case, empathy is the foundation for prosocial behavior, but weak empathy will be overpowered by group norms, creating individuals who are still hesitant.

3. Pro Bully: The Reason for Avoiding Victims

For teenagers, the need to be accepted by their peers is strong, especially in a boarding school environment where social identity and a sense of belonging are important parts of daily life. This ultimately leads to a tendency to "follow the crowd" and ultimately take on the role of a pro-bully, either consciously or unconsciously, which strengthens the position of the main perpetrator in deeming the victim inferior. Based on facts from the field, the pro-bully role was found in daily reflections, as most students' answers leaned towards becoming defenders in imaginary situations, as revealed through focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviews.

The main reason for pro-bullying is not that students have malicious intent towards the victim, but rather as a form of adaptation and an effort to maintain social status within the group. Peer pressure, the desire to be accepted, and the fear of being ostracized make it safer for some students to go along with the crowd than to defend the victim. Further analysis reveals that pro-bully roles are often played without full awareness of their impact on victims.

Reinforcing

Sometimes I follow the circle, sometime I prefer to be quiet, based on the friends and situation

Source: Interview, Student 10

I used to follow my friends, so I didn't talk to the victim, even though I felt sorry for them

Source: Interview, Student 11

Students also responded to each other during the focus group discussion. However, when discussing daily activities, students tended to answer briefly. I interpreted this as a fear of being considered a tattletale, even though they did not mention names.

I was being Lintang, and I just followed along because I was angry with the victim for making a mistake.

Some even laughed along so they wouldn't be seen as weird by their circle.

They often stayed silent, joined in, and did not dare to defend themselves for fear of being ostracized.

Source: Focus Group Discussion

Assistant

Currently, I'm in Safa's position. I'm following along with the silence, but I'm also upset with the victim who is being silenced. At other side, I also feel guilty

Source: Interview, Student 8

I once became Safa who joined in on the fun and silenced the person because she was wrong and annoying. But I realized that I was wrong too when I got better

Source: Interview Student 2

The following quote shows the guilt at the end and the attitude taken when momentary emotions or influenced by the social sphere. Many students only realized that their attitude prolonged the victim's suffering after reflection or when the situation had passed. This is what Salmivalli (2010) and Howard et al. (2014) found, reinforcement of bullying behavior does not only occur by the main perpetrator, but also by the social ecosystem that provides validation and support, either actively or passively.

In the discussion forum, students were also more open to sharing experiences related to bullying that occurred in large groups, especially the sensitivity between classes, which they referred to as 'odd-even'. The practice of seniority can be seen through unwritten rules, one of which is the phenomenon when the scout breaks, the form of bullying looks more extreme with insinuations because of fighting over yells (Force song) until it ends in throwing animal *feces*. This phenomenon shows how strong the boarding school's social norms are, so personal cases tend to be covered up, while macro events are easier to criticize together. The role of students who see the incident is also classified as outsiders or passive bystanders, where their silence seems to normalize the situation.

To conclude, students who choose to be reinforcers and assistants are basically included in the pro-bully category, both actively (laughing, insinuating) and passively (just joining in, even without their own initiative). Support for the perpetrator arises for various reasons in the form of group pressure, the need to be accepted, or even just wanting to avoid social risk.

No	Role	(N=12) Student	Status
1	Outsider	5	
2	Assistant	3	Pro-Bully

3	Reinforcing	1	
4	Defender	3	Pro-Social

Table 4. 4. Presentation of the number of pro-social/pro-bully role engagements

Discussion

The above findings can be explained by Salmivalli's bystander role participation theory framework. In general, two major patterns emerge, namely passive/pro-bully bystanders and defender/pro-social bystanders, which are in line with the outsider or reinforcer versus defender role categories. The phenomenon of bystanders who choose to remain silent or even strengthen the perpetrator due to social pressure supports previous findings. Salmivalli (2014) stated that bullying witnesses are often caught in a dilemma: on the one hand, they know that bullying is wrong and want to help the victim, but on the other hand, they are worried about maintaining their status and social acceptance in their group.

In this study, students in Islamic boarding schools also experienced a similar moral dilemma - they were afraid that if they defended the victim, their position in the group would be threatened. Fear of becoming the next victim proved to be a strong reason that prevented bystanders from acting. As a result of this dilemma, many bystanders ended up choosing to remain passive (outsiders) or even provide covert support to the perpetrator as a reinforcer/assistant. Local findings by Halimah et al. (2015) in Makassar also showed that when bystanders remain silent, the perpetrators feel that their behaviour is supported and considered normal, thus increasing the possibility of bullying continuing. Lack of intervention or support from witnesses encourages repeated bullying behavior. Passive responses like this are often accompanied by a release of moral responsibility.

Thornberg and Jungert (2013) found that moral disengagement is positively related to the tendency of bystanders to act pro-bullying. This means that the more bystanders turn off empathy and actually justify bullying, the greater the chance that they will actively or passively support the perpetrator. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, the need for group acceptance makes the role of reinforcer/assistant quite prominent. Salmivalli (2012) noted that protecting one's own social status is an important motivation for bystanders who reinforce bullying, for example, by "riding on" the popularity of dominant perpetrators. Several participants in this study admitted to participating in bullying because they did not want to be left behind (FOMO) or to be considered part of a popular group, supporting this explanation. In addition, the victim-blaming attitude that emerged in some bystanders reflects a justification mechanism for not helping. The belief that the victim deserves to be

treated badly (for example, because of his/her nature or behavior) makes bystanders feel that bullying is not their responsibility. This finding is consistent with the literature that attribution of blame to the victim is often used to reduce the guilt of the negligent bystander (Slee, 1994). Overall, the first theme of this study confirms that group norms and pressures for conformity can override individual empathy, so that many bystanders are trapped in a dilemma and ultimately do not take action to help.

4.1.3. The Interconnection of Power Relation, Social Hierarchies, and Bullying Dynamics

1. Power is everywhere

Research findings show that the dynamics of bullying in Islamic boarding schools are greatly influenced by the power relations inherent in their social structure. Foucault's concept of power is everywhere is clearly reflected in the Islamic boarding school environment: power flows not only vertically (for example from seniors to juniors, or *ustadzah*/teachers to students) but also horizontally among fellow classmates. Every individual -perpetrators, victims, or bystanders (witnesses who see but are not directly involved) - is connected in this network of power relations and is able to realize their power in positive or negative actions. This is in line with Foucault's view that power is everywhere, emerging from all directions of daily social relations, not only owned by formal authorities (Taylor, 2011).

Islamic boarding school circumstances that are collide students from diverse background in full daily life strengthens this phenomenon: intense interaction between students creates a hierarchy and peer group whose rules are often unwritten but very binding. The above conditions have a direct impact on the roles taken by students when facing bullying behavior. The culture of Islamic boarding schools shapes students' choices of actions, whether they will remain silent, support the perpetrator, or try to defend the victim. For example, in one interview it was revealed that there was peer pressure that prevented students from helping victims.

People here do make a gang. someone got into a fight over a trivial matter and was beaten – their stomachs were kicked, their hair was shaved. The others wanted to help, but were urged not to interfere, 'it's none of your business',”

(Source: Interview, Student 5, May 26, 2025)

A similar statement was made by another student:

Sometimes the circle of friends forces others to remain silent because they are afraid of being blamed

(Interview, S9, May 26, 2025)

These two quotes show how power relations in peer groups can silence bystanders who actually intend to help. Instead of acting as advocates for victims, many students end up choosing a passive role as outsiders (remaining silent) because they are worried about getting pressure or social sanctions from their group. This finding is consistent with the results of the previous discussion in RQ 2 that most students tend to be passive bystanders and are reluctant to get directly involved in stopping bullying in order to avoid risk to themselves. The “*odd-even (ganjil-genap)*” phenomenon revealed in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) provides a real illustration of how informal hierarchies work in Islamic boarding schools. The term *odd-even* is used by students to describe the sensitivity and tension between classes.

It was revealed during Focus Group Discussion

When we pray in congregation, our class must leave last. For example, when the bell rings, the first to leave is class 5 (the most senior), followed by class 3, class 2, and so on. Once, class 2 was naughty and left first or shouted first, in the end our class was angry and messed with. Sometimes we were pranked, pulled, and even pelted with feces when we had the opportunity

(Source: FGD, June 15, 2025)

This example of an unwritten rule based on seniority demonstrates how senior groups dominate junior groups in daily life. Collective social anger frequently results from violations of these hierarchical standards as a kind of "punishment." This episode demonstrates that power exists everywhere, not just in the shape of official structures (like boarding school regulations), but also in the form of unofficial student conventions and social interactions. According to "standards" or "customs" that are deemed widespread, each senior class has the unwritten right to control, chastise, and even punish juniors. The boarding school culture is so ingrained with power dynamics that bullying behavior is frequently viewed as a function of upholding group norms rather than just the mischievous behavior of a few bad actors. This is in accordance with Walton's (2005) view, which emphasizes that violence in schools should be understood within a social and institutional framework, not simply as pathological individual behavior – bullying is born from the configuration of power and culture in the environment.

2. Power Relations and Knowledge: Collective Norms in Heterogeneous Communities

The boarding school life unites students from various regions and character backgrounds, so that the spirit of togetherness is highly respected. However, this value of togetherness sometimes develops into a new norm that is agreed upon collectively and unwritten. A group of students in a room can form shared knowledge about what is considered normal or acceptable. In Foucault's framework, power relations are always related to the production of knowledge, namely definitions or labels created by dominant groups and then considered as shared truths. In the boarding school environment, this kind of "social knowledge" can trigger the labeling of certain individuals and ultimately justify

bullying them. A real example was given by a student regarding the treatment of his friend who was considered not conforming to the norms of sharing in the dormitory:

At that time, my roommate came home sick. Then he became disliked by his roommates, because he liked to beg from people but when his friends asked him to return it, he wouldn't give it. His towel was even sprayed with air freshener until it was heavy [wet] and finished. His wardrobe was also opened, his belongings were taken and used without permission – even though they were eventually returned. Poor thing, he had just come home sick, but he had to wash all his towels and clothes himself

(Source: Interview, Student 5, May 26, 2025)

Another student who turned out to be the person in question, confirmed the experience:

I was once in that position. Because I often asked for food from my friends, they even said, 'don't just ask, but share it too!'. So when I had the fortune to bring cake, I gave him pieces," recalled the student

(Interview, S7, May 26, 2025)

The story above shows how a group creates their own version of knowledge or “truth” about who deserves to be treated badly. The student is labeled as “stingy” and “only wants to ask but doesn’t want to share.” This label does not arise solely from objective facts, but rather the result of social construction – a shared perception of the room’s occupants that is spread by word of mouth. This collective knowledge that is formed becomes a justification for giving social sanctions (or even violence) to the target, as if their actions are legitimate because “the victim deserves to be punished.” In the example above, the unwritten norm “living in a dormitory requires sharing” has become a biased standard: students who are deemed not to meet this standard are ultimately cornered. In fact, the victim’s personal reality may not be understood by the group (for example, it could be that he rarely receives money or family visits because he comes from a far away area, or his economic condition is limited, so he often asks friends).

Instead of being empathetic by the diversity conditions, what happens is pseudo-knowledge: the group generalizes that he is selfish and deserves to be avoided. In this context, we see the close relationship between power and knowledge. The dominant “powerful” room group forms a definition of goodness (generous vs. stingy) and then imposes that definition on members who are considered deviant. The victim does not have much power to reject the label, especially if the majority agrees. This is related to Walton's (2005) findings regarding the importance of multicultural education that emphasizes tolerance of differences: in large, heterogeneous communities such as Islamic boarding schools, it is very vulnerable to the application of unilateral standards by one group to another. Differences in background or individual characteristics can clash with the standards of the majority, and without a culture of tolerance, these differences are used to justify oppression.

The standard of “sharing,” which was initially positive, can turn into a tool of group power to control members who are considered not in accordance with their norms. The previous finding on RQ1 regarding victims of bullying in Islamic boarding schools are also related here: many victims feel they have no support and are reluctant to speak up because they feel that their surroundings have simply accepted the negative label about them. The collective norms that are formed (for example the label “stingy” above) make victims feel as if they are “accepted” as the wrong party, so that they lose the courage to speak up. The culture of Islamic boarding schools and the norms of the surrounding community (such as teachings to always share, obey the group, etc.) affect the victims: instead of defending themselves, they tend to accept the stigma and withdraw. The lack of formal and informal support systems makes things worse – victims feel like there is no one to complain to who will side with them.

3. Normalization of Violence and Peer Supervision

The strict and communal culture of Islamic boarding schools can create a normalization of aggressive actions as part of group discipline. This means that forms of treatment that are actually bullying are sometimes no longer recognized as deviations, but are instead considered normal or “*traditional*”. In the case above, *spraying a friend’s towel with perfume until it is wet, opening the cupboard and taking things without permission* – such anarchic actions are carried out as unofficial punishment and are considered normal by the room’s occupants. An informal norm is formed that “*if there are members who violate the rules of the room, they can be taught a lesson in any way*”. Here, violence has been normalized as part of the group’s mechanism to enforce compliance. This is in line with Foucault’s concept of normalization, where disciplinary power makes people accustomed to certain practices until they are considered normal. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, aggressive actions by seniors towards juniors or by groups towards individuals are sometimes seen as a “maturation process” or “appropriate punishment”, no longer a serious violation. In addition to the normalization of violence, the collective dormitory environment creates strict horizontal supervision among fellow students.

Interview findings support this:

Sometimes I feel like my movements are being watched; if I’m just a little different from the gang, I’ll be teased,

(Interview, S2, May 26, 2025)

This sentence highlights the constant monitoring by peers – any behavior that deviates even slightly from group habits will be immediately corrected, either through direct reprimands, teasing, or unpleasant treatment. The students observe and control each other, so that individual freedom of movement is very limited by the social expectations of

the room or class. The impact of this normalization and peer supervision on the dynamics of bullying is significant, especially for victims and bystanders. For victims, normalization makes it difficult for them to distinguish between treatment that truly violates their rights and which is “normal” as a social consequence. When harsh treatment is considered normal, victims may feel that their complaints will not be valid or will end up being considered weak.

Meanwhile, bystanders are also trapped in group surveillance: they know that if they step out of line (for example, by speaking up for the victim or reporting to the *ustadzah*), the group surveillance will turn on them. Bystanders are afraid of being labeled as defenders of the excluded, which could lead to them being shunned as well. This bystander dilemma is what causes many students to choose to remain silent even though in their conscience they disagree with the bullying that is happening. The fear of social punishment is much greater than the urge to uphold justice. This condition is parallel to Foucault's concept- where discipline is created because everyone feels they are always being watched, so they submit to collective norms without direct coercion. More broadly, the normalization of bullying and the strong social control in this Islamic boarding school have made a culture of silence ingrained. The students learn that voicing their disapproval of aggressive actions can actually backfire on them. Previous research has confirmed this: the hierarchical structure and seniority in Islamic boarding schools do create conditions prone to bullying, where junior students are often the arbitrary targets of senior students, and students are reluctant to report for fear of retaliation and minimal support from the management of the boarding school.

4. Limitations of Individual Agency and Resistance Efforts

Despite the strong dominance of group power, there is always room – no matter how small – for individual agency to carry out resistance. However, field findings show that the space for personal agency is very narrow in the context of Islamic boarding schools. The collective pressures described above make the choice of resistance to bullying limited and high-risk. Theoretically, students have several resistance options: for example, speaking up to reprimand the perpetrator, reporting the incident to the authorities (*ustadz/ustadzah* or *mudabbir*), or at least refusing to participate in the action of bullying the victim.

However, in reality, most individuals do not use this agency because the social sanctions that await are considered much heavier than the expected benefits. Several students admitted that they finally gave in to going with the flow rather than bearing the consequences alone.

Sometimes people who are ostracized just give up; maybe the perpetrator and victim have different thoughts. Rather than making the fight bigger, I'd rather just go along with it," said a victim regarding her choice not to fight back

(Source: Interview, Student 9, May 26, 2025)

This statement reflects the victim's fatalistic attitude: aware of injustice but feeling powerless in the face of group norms, so they choose to give in to avoid a bigger conflict. Something similar happens to bystanders who actually have a conscience to reject bullying. They often refrain from getting directly involved or reporting it. One student told about the "two-faced" phenomenon among the perpetrators:

They are... in front of the ustadzah they are kind, in front of the mudabbir they are polite, but behind their backs they behave differently,

(Interview, S11, May 26, 2025)

This statement shows that bystanders are also aware of the perpetrators' improper behavior, but the situation becomes complex because the perpetrators are good at acting sweetly in front of the authorities. Bystanders who want to fight back become hesitant, because access to support from the authorities is limited – it could be that the female teacher/teacher does not fully know what is really happening "behind" them. As a result, the space to report and complain about bullying behavior is closed by doubts about whether the complaint will be believed or followed up on. The absence of guaranteed protection for whistleblowers is what further constrains the pro-social agency of bystanders. However, this study also found a glimmer of an example of personal resistance amidst strong peer pressure. In the previous "closet raid" case, it turned out that there were students who were moved by empathy to help the victim. Students who saw their friend was sick but still had to face bullying finally dared to take action:

Poor her, she just came home sick and had to wash himself, so we reported the incident to mudabbir

(Source: Interview, S5, May 26, 2025)

This act of reporting shows that moral and empathetic motivation can encourage individuals to overcome fear, at least to seek help even if not directly from formal authorities (he chose to tell the victim's juniors, perhaps so that the information could be passed on to those who could help). Another example was given by a student who consistently befriended those who were excluded:

have always been friends with people who are excluded, even though I know the risk of being excluded too. But it's okay, I feel sorry for them,

(Source: Interview, S9, May 26, 2025)

This is a form of internal agency as a defender – the student tries to provide social support to the victim while being aware that his actions could also cause him to be excluded. This kind of courage is very rare, but its existence is important as an indication that

dominant power is not truly absolute. There is always the potential for resistance, even if it is small, according to Foucault's thinking that wherever there is power, there is the possibility of resistance. However, in general, it must be acknowledged that the capacity for individual resistance in Islamic boarding schools is still very limited by collective pressure. The culture and structure of Islamic boarding schools do not fully provide a safe space for students to openly oppose bullying.

In fact, small to large violence still occurs, which shows that there is not enough space to support student agencies, in other words it is often a challenge for boarding school education to provide a safe speaking up space without having to isolate the person concerned.

Sometimes the person who is shunned just surrenders, maybe the perpetrator and the victim think differently. Instead of trying to make a mistake, I decided to give it a go.

Source: Interview Student 9, May 26, 2025

And you know, I know, I know, but it's a bit of a stretch. The front of the ustadzah is good, the front of the young is good, the other is behind (Another incident)

Source: Interview Student 11, May 26, 2025

As an institution that upholds high discipline with a central authority figure (*Kyai, ustadz/ustadzah*), Islamic boarding schools are sometimes less sensitive or late in responding to "minor" violence between students, so that victims and defenders at the grassroots level feel like they are fighting alone. In fact, as previously revealed, the fear of revenge from the perpetrators and the lack of support from the boarding school administrators make students choose to remain silent. This is a challenge for Islamic boarding schools in their efforts to create a safe environment: there needs to be a mechanism that protects victims and reporters, so that students' agency to speak is not continuously restricted.

At this point, it can be concluded that the power relations that surround the life of Islamic boarding schools shape the role and behavior of students in bullying incidents through at least three main mechanisms: **First**, through the production of shared knowledge (social values and labels) that are used to justify certain norms, punishments or sanctions. **Second**, through group discourse (gossip, teasing, stories) that reinforce these norms and emphasize role boundaries (who is "allowed" to be punished/excluded versus who has the power to determine the rules). **Third**, through horizontal discipline and supervision that makes each group member reluctant to speak out for fear of social sanctions and loss of solidarity.

The combination of these three mechanisms creates a very narrow space for agency and resistance. The children in the room prefer to remain silent and go with the flow,

because rationally, the social risks are considered much greater than the benefits of resisting. This kind of culture shows the truth of Foucault's concept that power does not only come from above, but is rooted and emerges in everyday social practices (Taylor, 2011; Walton, 2005). Power relations in Islamic boarding schools are so deep-rooted that they affect every aspect of interaction - from how students socialize, how they obey or violate norms, to how they react when they witness injustice. Finally, the findings above confirm that Islamic boarding school culture significantly influences how students choose their roles or actions in bullying situations.

The senior-junior hierarchy, norms of togetherness, and a culture of silence form a pattern where victims tend not to dare to speak up and lack support, while many witnesses choose to be passive bystanders rather than defend the victim. This is consistent with the previous findings of RQ1 and RQ2: victims feel silenced by norms and are afraid of being sanctioned, while bystanders are trapped in a dilemma between conscience and loyalty to the group. This discussion shows that these dynamics are not merely a matter of "good" or "bad" individuals, but rather a product of power relations and social order in Islamic boarding schools. For this reason, future interventions need to consider changes at the level of institutional culture and support systems, so that every student has a safe space to speak up and dare to act correctly without being haunted by the risk of being ostracized.

In this case, it can be understood that power relations shape the participation of individual roles in the incident through three main mechanisms:

1. The production of shared knowledge that justifies social norms, punishments or sanctions
2. Group discourse that reinforces norms and role boundaries
3. Horizontal discipline and surveillance that makes anyone reluctant to speak up for fear of social sanctions and loss of group solidarity

Such a culture results in narrow agency space and resistance, so that the children of the room prefer to remain silent, because they know that social risks are much heavier than just 'going with the flow'. This is proof that power, as Foucault said does not only come from above, but also takes root and bursts into the form of daily social practices (Taylor, 2011; Walton, 2005). The following is a grouping of some student statements related to their daily reflections which are part of the strong power relations in the boarding school

Table 4. 5 Power Relation in Boarding School

Indicator	Verbatim Choice (Victim)	The Meaning of Power Relations
1. Power is Everywhere	I was shunned, he said because I talked too much and was considered insensitive to other people's feelings. Roommates rarely talk Student 3	The power of the chamber group spreads and plays a direct role in shaping the position of the victims collectively.
2. Power/Knowledge	People are shunned because maybe their nature is not in accordance with those in power and make rules in the room. Student 9	Victim status is formed by the social consensus of the group, not by objective facts or formal rules.
3. Discursive Practices	If something is wrong or disliked, it is usually immediately talked about or sarcastic, sometimes until the whole room knows. Student 7	The practice of gossip, satire and labeling reinforces the stigma of victims and normalizes exclusion.
4. Normalization & Discipline	"The towels were also sprayed with room deodorizer until it was heavy and ran out. The closet was also opened, the things were taken, used, although it was finally turned over again, only it was made without permission. I just came home sick and even had to wash myself. Student 5	Social punishment, anarchism, and exclusion became informal disciplines that were considered 'ordinary'.
5. Monitoring	Sometimes I feel like my every move is being monitored, if it's just a little different from the circle, it can be immediately insinuated. Student 2	Strict supervision between friends limits the victim's expression and prevents them from speaking up.
6. Resistance	I've always been friends with people who are shunned, even though I know the risk of being shunned too. But it's resistance, at least by building okay, I'm sorry." Student 9 , although new alliances or small support a defender, is important in the victim's systems. story)	Victims can find space for the risk of being shunned too. But it's resistance, at least by building okay, I'm sorry." Student 9 , although new alliances or small support a defender, is important in the victim's systems.

CHAPTER V CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the main conclusions drawn from the study, synthesizing the findings for each research question on the roles of victims, bystanders, and the influence of power relations in bullying incidents at boarding schools. In addition, this chapter offers practical suggestions and recommendations targeted at various stakeholders, including school leaders, teachers, students, policy makers, and further researchers to help address and prevent bullying within the boarding school environment.

5.1 Conclusion

Students perceived that bullying victims in boarding schools occupied a vulnerable and powerless position characterized by strong negative emotions and social isolation. The findings suggest two types of victims: defended victims, who receive some support or friendship that helps them demonstrate resilience, and passive victims, who receive little support and tend to accept their marginalized status. Victims often experience deep sadness, fear, and helplessness due to being excluded by peers. They generally have low social acceptance within the group and are targeted for reasons such as personal differences (e.g., temperament, behavior, or appearance) that deviate from the dominant group norm. In the close-knit environment of boarding schools, being labeled as “different” can quickly lead to collective exclusion and ongoing bullying, especially when there is no effective support or intervention available to victims.

Students’ reflections revealed that bystanders often face moral and social dilemmas when witnessing bullying. In theory, many express empathy for the victim and know that bullying is wrong, as seen in the short story where the majority initially choose the role of defender (such as “Aulia,” who helps the victim). In practice, however, pro-social bystanders (those who actively defend or comfort the victim) are relatively few, while pro-bully or passive bystanders are common. Due to strong peer pressure and fear of social repercussions, many bystanders remain passive outsiders, remaining silent or pretending not to notice the bullying to avoid becoming targets themselves. Others may even become assistants (indirectly encouraging the bully or joining in), often rationalizing that the victim “deserves” it for being annoying or different. This highlights that bystander indifference (or tacit support for the bully) is largely driven by fear of losing status or provoking a backlash from peers within the tight-knit social circle of the boarding community.

Power relations within the boarding school environment profoundly shape and maintain the roles of victims and bystanders in bullying incidents. The study found that hierarchical structures (such as senior-junior relationships and dominant peer groups), everyday practices, and collective norms work together to normalize the bullying cycle. Consistent with Foucault's concept of power, "power is everywhere" in boarding schools: it is manifested through seniority rules, peer surveillance, language, and unwritten codes of behavior. For example, older or socially dominant students often assert power over younger or weaker students, and peer groups enforce conformity by gossiping about or excluding anyone perceived to violate shared norms. Such power/knowledge dynamics lead to labeling individuals as deserving victims (e.g., calling someone "weird" or "cheap") and justifying their exclusion. Victims often feel too intimidated to speak up or seek help, knowing that the group consensus is against them, and bystanders fear social sanctions if they rebel against the prevailing power structure. This means that the space for individual resistance is extremely limited: only a few brave students try to defend victims or report incidents, sometimes at the expense of isolating themselves. In short, the social power relations in residential schools – their hierarchical authority, peer group influence, and culture of obedience/solidarity – strongly influence how bullying occurs, often favoring bullies, silencing victims, and preventing bystander intervention.

5.2 Limitation

Despite its contributions, this study also faced several limitations. **The first** challenge was related to data collection constraints caused by the fixed daily schedule of the boarding school. Religious obligations, academic activities, and communal duties left limited time windows for conducting interviews and group discussions, which required careful coordination and flexibility. **Second**, the students' written responses to the vignette scenarios averaged only 250 to 295 words, slightly below the intended word target. This limitation is likely influenced by adolescents' communication habits in the digital age, where brief and device-mediated expression is more common than extended, handwritten reflection (Warner, 2016). Additionally, cultural factors may have played a role in many Asian societies, including Indonesia, where openly expressing negative emotions is often discouraged, making it more difficult for young people to articulate personal feelings in writing (Kyeong et al., 2021). These limitations highlight important considerations in interpreting the depth of

student narratives and suggest opportunities for future research to opt for multimodal methods that may better align with students' expressive preferences.

5.3 Suggestion

Based on the above conclusions, several recommendations are proposed to address the bullying dynamics at the boarding school, directed at different stakeholders:

1. **School Administration (Boarding School Management):** The school should develop and enforce a comprehensive anti-bullying policy that explicitly addresses not only physical bullying but also verbal and relational forms of bullying. Clear rules and consequences against bullying (including group-based ostracism and seniority abuse) must be established and socialized to all students and staff. By that, victims or witnesses can report bullying without fear of retaliation. The school management should also regularly monitor the dormitory social climate, for instance, by conducting periodic surveys or check-ins to identify isolated students or toxic group behaviors early. Furthermore, incorporating anti-bullying education into the curriculum or regular school programs is crucial. This could include seminars or workshops on empathy, respect for diversity, and healthy peer relationships, possibly framed within Islamic values and teachings to resonate with students. By taking a clear stand and proactive measures, the institution sets a tone that bullying is unacceptable and will be addressed seriously, rather than being seen as a “normal” part of boarding school life.
2. **Teachers, Counselors, and Dormitory Mentors (*Ustadz/Ustadzah & Mudabbir*):** Educators and boarding mentors play a frontline role in detecting and intervening in bullying. They should receive training to recognize less-visible forms of bullying, such as social exclusion, persistent teasing, or subtle power plays among students. Dorm supervisors (*ustadzah*) and student mentors (*mudabbir*) need to be approachable and attentive so students feel safe confiding in them. It is advisable to strengthen the mentorship system: assign each student (especially new or younger ones) a mentor or “buddy” who checks on their well-being. When problems arise, mentors and teachers should act quickly – for example, by mediating conflicts, calling group meetings to address issues, or alerting school counselors rather than waiting until a situation escalates. They should promote an inclusive dorm culture by discouraging cliques or “gangs” from enforcing their own unwritten rules. Regular discussions or guidance sessions can be held to remind students about empathy, friendship, and the harmful effects of bullying. Importantly, any reports of bullying must be taken seriously by staff;

consistent responses (such as counseling bullies, restorative justice meetings, or appropriate disciplinary action) will show students that adults will support them and not let power abuses slide. By actively supervising student interactions and modeling respectful behavior, teachers and dormitory staff can break the culture of silence and provide much-needed support to victims and defender-bystanders.

- 3. Students (Peer Group and Individuals):** Students themselves are key to creating a caring school community. It is suggested to empower students to become part of the solution through peer education and leadership. For instance, the school can form a student anti-bullying committee or peer counselor team, including respected student leaders from various grade levels, to spread awareness and serve as approachable allies for victims. All students should be encouraged to practice empathetic bystander behavior: through role-playing activities or campaigns, teach them practical ways to safely intervene (like refusing to spread rumors, privately checking on a classmate who was bullied, or anonymously reporting incidents). Emphasize that choosing silence perpetuates harm, and helping someone in need is a brave and positive act that many peers quietly admire. The student body should also be involved in defining positive norms; for example, creating a dorm charter that highlights inclusion, respect, and mutual help can give students a sense of ownership over their community values. Senior students in particular must be guided to use their influence responsibly; they can be mentors and protectors of younger ones rather than enforcers of harmful traditions. By fostering solidarity among students and showing that kindness is “cool,” the peer pressure can be shifted from supporting bullies to supporting victims. Over time, this can cultivate a culture where bullying is actively rejected by the majority, making it much harder for aggressive behavior to go unchecked.
- 4. Parents and Guardians:** Even in a boarding school setting, parents and family members remain critical support systems for students. Parents should be informed about the prevalence and forms of bullying that can occur in boarding schools so they can better prepare and support their children. It is recommended that parents maintain regular, open communication with their child, encouraging them to share their daily experiences, challenges, and feelings. By showing understanding and not immediately reacting with panic or anger, parents can make children feel safe to talk about issues like being bullied or seeing a friend bullied. If a child reports bullying (either as a victim or witness), parents should take it seriously and collaborate with the school rather than telling the child to “just put up with it.”

They can reach out to school counselors, homeroom teachers, or dorm supervisors to seek solutions or mediation early on. Additionally, parents can help build their child's resilience and empathy at home. Discussing values like kindness, respect for others who are different, and how to stand up for what's right can reinforce the messages the school is trying to instill. If possible, parents might also advocate for the school to improve its anti-bullying measures, for example, through the parent committee or meetings with school leadership. In short, by staying engaged and supportive, parents and guardians can empower their children to cope with or confront bullying and ensure they do not feel alone in addressing the problem.

5. **Future Researcher:** Researchers are encouraged to carefully consider the type of vignette design they plan to use. While this study employed narrative-based vignettes, future research could explore the use of *art-based* or discussion-based vignettes. It should be considered that the description does not meet the minimum standard of narrative. They also have to schedule time and follow the timing of school. Moreover, future researchers can also consider implementing vignettes through a quantitative design or approach, which enables researchers to collect data in a larger sample, identify patterns across different demographics, and maintain context-rich insight from the vignette scenarios.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Guide to Interview Questions for Students

Interview Sheets for Students

No	Interview Question	Theory	Indicator
1	In your opinion, does bullying frequently occur in pesantren? Can you share your experience?	Bully: those who start bullying, make others follow, and create the situation.	Bystander: Awareness of bullying incidents.
2	In your view, who are usually involved when a bullying incident happens?	Reinforcers: those who come around to see the bullying and encourage the bully by their attention.	Types of involvement in bullying.
3	What do you think about people who only watch or know about bullying but do not help the victim?	Defenders: those who comfort the victim in a bullying situation.	Role of passive bystanders.
4	In your opinion, what are the characteristics of students who defend the victims?	Assistants: those who assist or join the bullying actively.	Defender/assistant role in bullying.
5	Why do you think someone chooses not to get involved or just stay silent when bullying occurs?	Outsiders: those who withdraw from bullying situations, neither defending nor assisting.	Outsider/non-involvement behavior.
6	Have you ever known someone around you who was a victim of bullying? What do you think about the condition of the victim?	Victims: those victimized by being pushed around, excluded, hit, called, mocked by their names, etc.	Characteristics/condition of the victim.
7	In your opinion, what are the reasons someone gets bullied by their peers?	Social acceptance low, social rejection high.	Causes/factors of victimization.
8	According to you, what kind of characteristics are usually found in friends who become victims of bullying?	There are victims who have supportive friends that reduce the level of depression.	Support system for victims.
9	Have you ever seen a victim who does not have a support system?	Victims become targets of bullying because there is a striking difference, or mistakes are made that become social sanctions.	Victimization due to social difference or sanctions.

No	Interview Question	Theory	Indicator
10	In your experience, have you ever met a victim who does not realize that they are being bullied? What do you think about this?	Some victims do not realize that they are victims; they are passive individuals.	Unawareness of victim status/passive victim.
11	In your opinion, how do the environment and dynamics of social interaction, or certain factors, influence the emergence of bullying behavior?	Power is not a possession or static entity, it is a dynamic network that permeates social institutions and practices.	Environmental and social interaction factors influence bullying; power as a dynamic network.
12	In your opinion, do all students already know well what behaviors are considered bullying and what are not?	There is no inseparable power and knowledge. Knowledge is not neutral, it is produced between power relations that define what is considered true and legitimate.	Power and knowledge are intertwined; normalization of what is considered bullying.
13	—	Normalization creates boundaries and tends to make those who are different become marginalized.	Marginalization of those who are different through normalization.
14	In your opinion, is the involvement or indifference of friends in bullying incidents influenced by the presence of certain groups that are more dominant or influential in the environment?	Power shapes social roles, norms, and determines individual agency, dynamic reproduction in social agency.	Influence of dominant groups on agency and roles in bullying.
15	Are there specific programs designed to build positive communication in the pesantren environment? In your opinion, are these programs already effective in addressing the existing problems? Why or why not?	—	Effectiveness of intervention/communication programs in pesantren.

Appendix 2 Vignette Instruments

Vignette 1 : The Corner of Kamila's Cupboard

Teng.. Teng.. Teng..

The bell rang, signaling a change of activities, and the students had to hurry. Little Kamila ran hurriedly, her tired eyes scanning the path against the flow of people heading from the mosque. She had just finished the punishment report assigned by the Security Teacher. Quickly, she grabbed her prayer shawl and rushed out.

"Thousand!! Remember rule number 1 of this room: keep your own belongings. Already, the dirty clothes are scattered everywhere!" Nisa's sharp voice, the most vocal and respected resident of the room, echoed before she left the door.

Shafa, who was already outside the room, chimed in, "No wonder it's been smelling so bad."

Lintang responded with a small laugh, "Lucky there's room freshener, otherwise, it'd be unbearable, haha."

Similar remarks had been heard frequently in recent days. The ceilings of the room bore witness to how the majority's voices dominated, leaving her cornered alone. Fani, who witnessed the scene, remained silent with a hint of guilt. There was pity in her eyes, but she could do nothing. If she made a wrong move, she might become the next target.

Kamila returned to the room. Her eyes were teary as she quickly gathered her clothes. She held back her anger and swallowed the sadness that came more frequently. One mistake had erased all the good memories with her roommate. From the corner of the room, Aulia stood up, approached her, and helped tidy her clothes.

"Mil, just go to the mosques. Don't listen to what they say. I'll help you clean up later. If you're late, you'll get punished again!" she said softly but warmly

Kamila bowed her head, smiling slightly. In such an oppressive environment, a single outstretched hand felt so comforting. There are still good people out there. If it weren't for knowledge and people like Aulia, I might not have survived, she murmured.

Vignette 2: The Cycle that Continues

Five days have passed, but for Kamila, time seems to be moving slowly. The punishment from the security teacher is still in effect: the memorization stamp and cleaning duties are still waiting for her. This has disrupted her daily schedule several times, bringing her back to a new set of problems. One morning, after sweeping the front yard of the boarding school, she bumped into her three roommates in the hallway leading to their room. She had intended to greet them to lighten the mood, but instead received a shoulder bump that caused her body to shift slightly toward the wall.

"Oh, sorry... it was an accident, ehhehe" said Nisa, her tone carrying a hint of sarcasm.

He added, "Yes, as usual,... busy with the teacher's punishment so forgot about the room duty"

Without any word of farewell, the three of them slowly walked away without a hint of guilt. Kamila looked down, clenching her hands tightly. No words came out of her mouth. But this was the third time she had been bumped like that in the hallway. Once might be an accident, but three times in a week?

Moving to the communal kitchen, a large slogan read, "Above and for all groups," emphasizing the values of unity and non discrimination. But it felt like those values were at odds with Kamila. After waiting in line, she walked to table number 10. "The seat is still empty, right?" she boldly started the conversation in front of her roommate

Shafa and Lintang exchanged glances at Nisa, who acted as if she hadn't heard, while Fani, as usual, couldn't make up her mind.

"Oh, this is Aulia's spot; she asked me to book it for her!" Lintang said quickly, but it seemed like she was making it up. Moments later, Aulia arrived, and the last conversation at the table was overheard by her.

"I didn't ask anyone to book anything, did I? Alright, let's just eat together at the next table!" The statement was made with clarity.

As usual, Aulia always dared to speak her mind. It seems the boarding school needs more students like Aulia

Vignette Follow-Up Questions:

1. What do you think is happening in this situation? Please explain who is involved and how their relationships are.
2. In your opinion, who is experiencing a problem and why?
3. If you witnessed an incident like the one in the story, would you do anything? (yes/no/not sure)
4. If you were in Kamila's position, how would you feel? What would you hope from your friends?
5. If you were in that story, what would you do? Please explain your reasons for choosing that action
6. In your opinion, what should the other friends who were around the incident but did not directly bully do?
7. Try to imagine if you were in their position (you can elaborate from each role) – how would you feel? In your opinion, what should be done so that incidents like this case do not happen again in the future?