

Rethinking Bullying Awareness Among Adolescents: Gender Bias, Sociocultural Normalisation and School-Based Prevention

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Abstract: Bullying is a social phenomenon that remains widespread among adolescents. The problem with bullying lies not only in its frequency but also in adolescents' lack of awareness about recognising and interpreting it as a form of violence. This study aims to examine differences in bullying awareness levels among adolescents based on gender and to re-evaluate the relevance of the male resilience vs. female sensitivity narrative. The study employs a quantitative approach using a survey design targeting adolescent. Data were analysed both descriptively and inferentially using the chi-square test to examine the relationship between gender and bullying awareness levels. The results indicate that the majority of adolescents fall into the low awareness category (60.0%), followed by the moderate category (39.4%), and only a small proportion fall into the high category (0.6%). Descriptively, females tended to have a higher proportion of low awareness compared to males. However, the results of the inferential test showed that there was no significant relationship between gender and the level of bullying awareness ($p = 0.489$; Cramer's $V = 0.094$). These findings indicate that bullying awareness among adolescents cannot be adequately explained by gender constructs alone but is more influenced by contextual factors such as social normalisation and peer group dynamics. Consequently, bullying prevention interventions should be designed universally, emphasising the cultivation of critical awareness, empathy, and the courage to act, without relying on gender-stereotype-based approaches.

Keywords: Adolescents, Bullying, Bullying Awareness, Gender

Abstrak: Perundungan merupakan fenomena sosial yang masih banyak terjadi di kalangan remaja. Permasalahan perundungan tidak hanya terletak pada frekuensinya, tetapi juga pada rendahnya kesadaran remaja dalam mengenali dan memaknai perundungan sebagai salah satu bentuk kekerasan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji perbedaan tingkat kesadaran terhadap perundungan pada remaja berdasarkan jenis kelamin serta meninjau kembali relevansi narasi resiliensi laki-laki versus sensitivitas perempuan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain survei yang melibatkan remaja sebagai responden. Data dianalisis secara deskriptif dan inferensial menggunakan uji chi-square untuk menguji hubungan antara jenis kelamin dan tingkat kesadaran terhadap perundungan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar remaja berada pada kategori kesadaran rendah (60,0%), diikuti kategori sedang (39,4%), dan hanya sebagian kecil berada pada kategori tinggi (0,6%). Secara deskriptif, perempuan memiliki proporsi kesadaran rendah yang lebih tinggi dibandingkan laki-laki. Namun, hasil uji inferensial menunjukkan bahwa tidak terdapat hubungan yang signifikan antara jenis kelamin dan tingkat kesadaran terhadap perundungan ($p = 0,489$; Cramer's $V = 0,094$). Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa kesadaran remaja terhadap perundungan tidak dapat dijelaskan secara memadai hanya melalui konstruksi gender, tetapi lebih dipengaruhi oleh faktor kontekstual, seperti normalisasi sosial dan dinamika kelompok sebaya. Oleh karena itu, intervensi pencegahan perundungan perlu dirancang secara universal dengan menekankan

pengembangan kesadaran kritis, empati, dan keberanian untuk bertindak tanpa bergantung pada pendekatan berbasis stereotip gender.

Kata Kunci: Remaja, Perundungan, Kesadaran terhadap Perundungan, Gender

Introduction

Bullying is a serious global issue as it has a direct impact on the psychosocial development of adolescents and is a concern for various stakeholders, including parents, educators and policymakers (Johander et al., 2024; Khateeb et al., 2022; Sabramani et al., 2021). Despite its prevalence, bullying is not always recognised as a serious form of violence because adolescents may perceive teasing, ostracism, and social pressure as ordinary aspects of peer interaction (Harsono & Febriyana, 2026; Hymel et al., 2015). Nevertheless, bullying is often not regarded as an urgent issue because it is still seen as part of adolescent social development (Chen et al., 2022; Teng & Zhu, 2025). This normalisation is particularly concerning because it can make harmful behaviours difficult to distinguish from acceptable social interaction. In Indonesia, violence among adolescents, including bullying, frequently occurs within peer relationships (KPPPA & BPS, 2019), while national evidence indicates that violence remains a substantial concern among adolescents (UNESCO, 2019). The high prevalence of bullying among adolescents indicates that bullying is not merely an individual phenomenon, but a systemic social problem (Dhami & Sharma, 2023; Farrugia, 2014), so that the crux of the matter shifts from merely an “incident” to a question of “awareness.”

Adolescents tend to view bullying as normal (Carretero Bermejo et al., 2022), thereby exacerbating this phenomenon. Teasing, ostracism and social pressure are often regarded as normal social interactions (Aryani, 2021). Thus, the main issue lies not only in the high prevalence of bullying, but also in adolescents' low critical awareness of this phenomenon. This situation can also be understood through psychosocial mechanisms such as the *bystander effect* and moral disengagement, which explain how a person may remain passive or justify bullying despite being aware of its consequences (Sujadi et al., 2021). This can exacerbate the effects of bullying (Ng et al., 2022).

Although various studies have examined the prevalence and impact of bullying, there remains a significant conceptual gap, particularly in testing whether the long-held assumptions about gender constructs truly provide an explanatory framework for awareness of bullying. Some studies suggest that women tend to have higher levels of empathy and social sensitivity, which are believed to contribute to greater awareness of bullying, whilst men are more frequently associated with aggressive behaviour (Khoirunnisa et al., 2025; Novitasari et al., 2023). However, this assumption is not always supported by empirical evidence, raising the question of whether gender differences actually play a role in shaping awareness, or whether this is merely a normative construct that has not yet been directly tested. Other findings suggest that the role of gender in bullying is dynamic and not always consistent, particularly in the context of cyberbullying, indicating that both men and women have the potential to be both perpetrators and victims (Cabrera et al., 2022; Winoto, 2019). This situation shows that awareness of bullying cannot be explained solely by gender differences, but must be understood as the result of more complex social constructs (Kim & Han, 2020; Marjuni & Ulwani, 2021). This situation shows that awareness of bullying cannot be explained solely by gender differences, but must be understood as the result of more complex social constructs.

Nevertheless, there remains a conceptual and empirical gap concerning whether gender is significantly associated with adolescents' overall level of bullying awareness. Existing studies

have addressed gender differences in bullying experiences, victimisation, aggression, and specific forms of bullying, but the relationship between gender and general bullying awareness remains insufficiently established. Examining this relationship is important because assumptions about gender-based sensitivity may lead schools to design prevention strategies around stereotypes rather than shared social and contextual factors. Therefore, this study aims to examine the level of bullying awareness among adolescents and determine whether there is a significant relationship between gender and bullying awareness. The findings are expected to contribute to a more context-sensitive understanding of bullying awareness and provide a basis for universal school-based prevention strategies that emphasise critical awareness, empathy, and active responses to bullying rather than gender-specific assumptions.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach using an explanatory sequential design. The study was conducted in two sequential phases. The first phase employed a quantitative survey to identify adolescents' levels of bullying awareness and to examine the relationship between gender and bullying awareness. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential analysis to determine the distribution of awareness levels and whether differences in awareness were statistically associated with gender.

The second phase employed a qualitative approach to provide contextual explanations for the quantitative findings, particularly the finding of generally low levels of bullying awareness among adolescents. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with Guidance and Counselling teachers who had experience in addressing student behavioural problems, including bullying. The qualitative phase focused on exploring how bullying was perceived and addressed in school settings, as well as contextual factors that may contribute to the normalisation of bullying behaviour.

The two phases were connected at the interpretation stage, in which the qualitative findings were used to contextualise and explain the patterns identified in the quantitative analysis. This explanatory sequential design was therefore intended to provide both a statistical description of bullying awareness and a contextual understanding of factors underlying the observed patterns.

Participants

The population of the quantitative phase comprised secondary school students who were within the adolescent age range and were actively enrolled in school. Secondary school students were selected as the target population because adolescence is a developmental period in which peer relationships become increasingly influential in students' social interactions. This context is particularly relevant to bullying awareness because bullying may be embedded in everyday peer interactions and may be perceived by students as joking, teasing, or other forms of normal social behaviour. Examining bullying awareness among secondary school students therefore provides an appropriate context for investigating how adolescents recognise and interpret bullying behaviour.

A sample of 160 secondary school students participated in the quantitative phase. The participants were selected using purposive sampling based on predetermined inclusion criteria. The sample consisted of 73 male students (45.6%) and 87 female students (54.4%). Participants were eligible if they were actively enrolled in secondary school, were within the adolescent age range, participated voluntarily, and completed the research instrument in full. Students who did

not complete the questionnaire or provided incomplete responses were excluded from the analysis.

The sample was used to describe the level of bullying awareness among adolescents and to examine the relationship between gender and bullying awareness. The inclusion of both male and female students enabled the study to examine whether the observed level of bullying awareness varied according to gender.

Table 1. Responden Demographics

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	87	54.4	54.4	54.4
Male	73	45.6	45.6	100.0
Total	160	100.0	100.0	

In the qualitative phase, the study involved five Guidance and Counselling teachers from five different lower secondary schools. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their professional experience in handling bullying cases and providing counselling services to pupils. Inclusion criteria included Guidance and Counselling teachers who were currently working in schools and had experience in dealing with pupil behavioural issues, particularly those relating to bullying.

The involvement of guidance counsellors from different schools was intended to provide a more diverse perspective on the forms of bullying occurring in school settings, pupils' awareness of bullying, and the challenges faced in preventing and addressing bullying cases. Qualitative data was used to provide a contextual explanation of the quantitative findings, particularly regarding the low level of awareness of bullying among adolescents.

Participant Recruitment Procedure

The research was conducted in accordance with the principles of research ethics, which include informed consent, confidentiality of identity, data anonymity, and the use of data solely for academic purposes. The data collection procedure involved the following: (1) The researcher sought permission to conduct the research from the school administration; (2) The researcher coordinated with teachers or relevant parties; (3) The researcher explained the purpose of the research and asked respondents to complete the informed consent form (4); Respondents completed the questionnaire independently in the classroom; (5) The questionnaires were collected and checked for completeness.

Research Instruments

Quantitative data were collected using the Anti-Bullying Attitude. The scale consists of 38 items designed to assess adolescents' awareness and attitudes toward bullying behaviour. The instrument covers three main aspects: cognitive, affective, and conative.

The cognitive aspect consists of five sub-aspects: knowledge of verbal bullying (4 items), knowledge of non-verbal bullying (4 items), knowledge of cyberbullying (4 items), knowledge of the negative impacts of bullying (6 items), and knowledge of appropriate responses to prevent or counter bullying (6 items). The affective aspect consists of one sub-aspect, namely understanding the feelings of victims of bullying (4 items). The conative aspect consists of two sub-aspects: assertive behaviour (4 items) and empathic behaviour (6 items). Thus, the scale comprises 38 items in total, consisting of 19 favourable and 19 unfavourable items.

Each item was rated using a four-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating a higher level of anti-bullying awareness/attitude. The favourable and unfavourable items were scored according to the direction of the item. The total score was subsequently used to classify respondents' levels of bullying awareness into the categories used in the analysis.

Qualitative data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide developed by the researchers. The interview guide was designed to explore Guidance and Counselling teachers'

perspectives on the prevalence and forms of bullying in schools, students' awareness of bullying, factors contributing to bullying behaviour, strategies used to address bullying, and challenges in increasing students' awareness. The interview guide was used to provide contextual explanations for the quantitative findings, particularly the finding of low levels of bullying awareness among adolescents.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics in SPSS. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the distribution of bullying awareness levels across the low, medium and high categories. Furthermore, the relationship between gender and the level of awareness of bullying was tested using the Chi-Square test, as both variables are categorical. The strength of the relationship was evaluated using Cramer's V coefficient. All analyses were conducted at a significance level of 0.05.

Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis. The analysis process involved several stages: repeatedly reading the interview transcripts, carrying out initial coding, identifying emerging themes, reviewing the alignment of the themes with the data, and formulating interpretations that explain the quantitative results. The qualitative findings were used to enrich our understanding of the low level of awareness regarding bullying and the factors that lead to bullying behaviour often being perceived as a form of banter or normal behaviour amongst adolescents.

Result and Discussion

Quantitative Findings: A Profile of Adolescents' Awareness of Bullying and an Examination of the Relationship with Gender Context

Table 2. Profile of Awareness Levels Regarding Bullying Among Adolescents

Bullying Awareness Category	Female		Male		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very Low	34	39.1%	26	35.6%	60	37.5%
Low	45	51.7%	36	49.3%	81	50.6%
Moderate	8	9.2%	10	13.7%	18	11.3%
Very High	0	0.0%	1	1.4%	1	0.6%
Total	87	100.0%	73	100.0%	160	100.0%

Table 2 presents the distribution of adolescents' awareness levels regarding bullying by gender. The results of the descriptive analysis reveal a worrying trend, with the vast majority of respondents (88.1%) falling into the low awareness categories (*Low* = 50.6%; *Very Low* = 37.5%). Only a small proportion of adolescents reached a moderate level of awareness (11.3%), and the very high category was almost entirely unrepresented (0.6%).

When analysed by gender, the same patterns of vulnerability were found in both groups. Although the proportion of women was slightly higher than that of men in the low and very low awareness categories, this variation did not indicate a marked difference in patterns in relative terms. These descriptive findings underscore the fact that low sensitivity to identifying bullying is a cross-gender phenomenon.

Table 3. Chi-Square Test Result

	Value	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square	2.080 ^a	3	.556
Likelihood Ratio	2.454	3	.484
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.188	1	.276
N of Valid Cases	160		

a. 2 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .46.

Given that the data distribution produces cells with an expected count (*expected count*) of less than 5 that exceed the 20% tolerance limit, statistical decision-making is based on the value of the *Likelihood Ratio*. The test results show a *Likelihood Ratio* value of 2.454 with a significance level of $p = 0.484$ ($p > 0.05$). This figure indicates that there is no statistically significant relationship between gender and the level of awareness of bullying.

The absence of a significant correlation provides important insights into the fact that vulnerability to blind spots in recognising bullying behaviour occurs equally among both men and women. This empirical finding effectively deconstructs the traditional narrative that often assumes differences in sensitivity to violence based on gender constructs—such as the stereotype of masculine resilience versus feminine sensitivity.

Qualitative Findings: A Contextual Exploration of Low Awareness of Bullying

The qualitative analysis identified three main themes that help explain the low levels of bullying awareness found in the quantitative phase: (1) bullying perceived as a joke and limited behavioural literacy, (2) family and peer-group normalisation of verbal bullying, and (3) school-based responses and implementation challenges. These themes provide contextual explanations for why adolescents may have difficulty recognising verbal aggression and other forms of bullying as problematic behaviour.

Theme 1: Bullying as a Joke and Limited Behavioural Literacy

The first theme concerns students' difficulty in recognising when everyday interactions cross the boundary between joking and bullying. According to the interview participants, verbal abuse was one of the most frequently observed forms of bullying, yet it was not always immediately recognised as bullying by students. Insults and hurtful comments were often framed as jokes, which made it difficult for students to identify the potential harm caused by their behaviour. This was illustrated by one Guidance and Counselling teacher who highlighted how ignorance leads to clinical conflict:

"The problem stems from the children's lack of awareness, as they see it as a joke. Although this sometimes leads to arguments because they feel hurt by the insults." (R2).

The statement indicates that students' low awareness is not necessarily limited to a lack of knowledge about the term bullying, but also involves difficulty in interpreting the meaning and consequences of everyday verbal interactions. Behaviour that causes discomfort or conflict may continue to be perceived as ordinary joking when students lack sufficient behavioural literacy to distinguish between acceptable interaction and harmful behaviour.

Theme 2: Family and Peer-Group Normalisation of Verbal Bullying

The second theme concerns the influence of students' social environments, particularly family and peer groups, on the normalisation of verbal aggression. Participants reported that some students did not receive sufficient behavioural guidance at home to help them distinguish between appropriate social interaction and bullying. One participant explained:

"Many pupils do not receive basic education at home, so they find it difficult to tell whether their behaviour constitutes bullying or not." (R1)

The normalisation of verbal aggression was also associated with peer-group practices. Behaviours such as insulting others or using parents' names as nicknames could become part of everyday interaction and were subsequently interpreted as normal or humorous rather than harmful. As described by another participant:

“The problem lies more in the lack of education outside school as well. Perhaps they have come to regard insulting others and using parents’ names as nicknames as perfectly normal, so they don’t see it as bullying.” (R4)

These accounts suggest that students’ understanding of bullying is shaped not only by what is taught at school but also by the social norms that operate within their everyday environments. When verbal aggression is repeatedly treated as a form of humour or friendship, students may have difficulty recognising that the same behaviour can constitute bullying.

Theme 3: School-Based Responses and Implementation Challenges

The third theme concerns the ways in which schools respond to bullying and the challenges of implementing preventive interventions consistently. Participants described a tiered response in which minor cases were generally addressed by the form tutor and more serious or complex cases were referred to Guidance and Counselling teachers. Preventive and curative approaches included the use of posters and other visual media, announcements concerning behavioural consequences, informal discussions, group guidance, and group counselling.

However, the availability of procedures and intervention strategies did not necessarily guarantee their consistent implementation. One participant explicitly noted:

“The procedures exist but have not been fully implemented.”

This finding indicates that schools have established mechanisms for responding to bullying, but implementation may remain inconsistent. The challenge is therefore not simply the availability of intervention procedures but also their consistent application within the broader social environment of students. The qualitative findings consequently suggest that efforts to improve bullying awareness need to extend beyond responding to individual incidents and should address the social norms that allow verbal aggression to be perceived as ordinary behaviour.

Overall, the qualitative findings provide contextual support for the quantitative finding of generally low bullying awareness among adolescents. The three themes indicate that low awareness is associated with difficulties in distinguishing jokes from harmful behaviour, the normalisation of verbal aggression within family and peer environments, and inconsistencies in the implementation of school-based responses. These findings help explain why low awareness may persist across gender groups and why bullying prevention requires a broader school and social-environmental approach.

Deconstructing Gender Bias in Awareness of Bullying

The quantitative findings of this study empirically refute the traditional assumption that often links sensitivity to violence with gender identity. The results of the inferential tests demonstrate the absence of a significant correlation between gender and levels of awareness of bullying. This indicates that the blind spot in recognising aggressive behaviour is a cross-gender phenomenon. The absence of these differences confirms that adolescents’ low levels of awareness are not a function of biological attributes or constructions of masculinity and femininity, but rather a product of broader environmental variables.

The low level of awareness regarding bullying among Adolescents suggests that this phenomenon is not yet fully recognised as a serious issue that affects psychosocial development (Khateeb et al., 2022). These findings do not merely illustrate the distribution of the data; rather, they point to structural issues in the way young people view bullying in their social lives (Gini et al., 2014; Nejad & Nikmanesh, 2024; Teng & Zhu, 2025). The dominance of the ‘low awareness’ category suggests that bullying is not generally regarded as a breach of social norms, but has instead become commonplace in Adolescents’ everyday interactions. This may

be influenced by a misperception of peer group norms, whereby peers tend to view bullying behaviour as more socially acceptable than it actually is (Dillon & Lochman, 2022). Research shows that Adolescents tend to overestimate their peers' support for bullying behaviour and underestimate prosocial behaviour such as standing up for victims (Camacho et al., 2025). This misperception encourages a passive attitude and the normalisation of bullying, with the result that such behaviour is no longer viewed as a serious offence. In this context, low awareness does not imply a lack of knowledge, but rather an inability to translate that knowledge into critical awareness. This finding is consistent with research showing that an understanding of bullying does not always correlate with a proactive response to it (Íñiguez-Berrozpe et al., 2021). Consequently, the concept of bullying in this study is more appropriately positioned as a reflective-critical construct, rather than merely a cognitive-informative one.

This indicates that the main problem lies in the mismatch between cognition and social behaviour. This situation is exacerbated by psychosocial mechanisms such as the effect (*bystanders*), di mana individu cenderung bersikap pasif akibat penyebaran tanggung jawab dan persepsi bahwa intervensi bukanlah peran pribadi (António et al., 2022; Nuha et al., 2025; Sjögren, 2020). Consequently, adolescents' passive response to bullying should be understood as the result of an interplay between cognitive, emotional and contextual factors, including low self-esteem and concerns about social judgement (Carretero Bermejo et al., 2022; Sabramani et al., 2021). This suggests that the failure of interventions is not solely due to a lack of knowledge, but rather to the weak internalisation of moral values within the real-world social context (Camacho et al., 2025).

The findings of this study suggest that awareness of bullying is a complex construct and is not solely influenced by demographic factors such as gender. Various studies indicate that, although there are differences in the ways in which male and female adolescents interpret bullying, these differences tend to be specific to certain types of bullying and are not always reflected in overall levels of awareness (Choi & Park, 2025; Hellström & Beckman, 2020). This suggests that gender is not a universal, determinative factor; therefore, awareness of bullying must be viewed within a broader social context (Cosma et al., 2022). Factors such as social normalisation, group conformity, and *moral disengagement* play a more dominant role in shaping individuals' perceptions and responses (Choi & Park, 2025; Zhao & Yu, 2021). This highlights the need to shift analytical approaches and interventions from those focused on gender differences towards strategies that target collective social dynamics.

Sociocultural Normalisation: The Fine Line Between 'Jokes' and Aggression

The high percentage of adolescents in the low and very low awareness categories can be explained through a contextual analysis of the qualitative findings. Field data confirms that the root of this low sensitivity lies in the sociocultural normalisation of verbal violence. Degrading behaviour, such as using parents' names as comedic nicknames, is often adopted as part of peer group culture and reframed as a 'joke'. Peer pressure, group conformity, and cultural biases that view violence as a "joke" or a form of friendship contribute to the blurring of boundaries between social interaction and bullying (Dewi & Valentina, 2020; Dillon & Lochman, 2022; Wuryaningsih et al., 2022). When these cognitive distortions are not addressed by the family environment, students lose the essential framework for distinguishing between healthy social interaction and verbal aggression. However, a lack of warmth in parenting also contributes to increased negative emotions and moral disengagement, which ultimately leads adolescents to view bullying as a less serious offence (Wang & Liu, 2025). When these cognitive distortions are not addressed by the family environment, students lose the essential framework for distinguishing between healthy social interaction and verbal aggression. However, a lack of

warmth in parenting also contributes to increased negative emotions and moral disengagement, which ultimately leads adolescents to view bullying as a less serious offence (Shin & Gyeong, 2025).

Furthermore, perceptions of teachers' attitudes and responses to bullying also play a significant role in shaping adolescents' responses. When teachers are perceived as being too lenient or unresponsive, pupils' motivation and confidence to stand up against bullying are undermined, with the result that bullying behaviour tends to be normalised and is not viewed as a serious problem (Firmawati et al., 2023; Herlyssa et al., 2022). In other words, the low level of awareness regarding bullying reflects the failure of the social system to establish collective moral standards that consistently reject aggressive behaviour (Farina, 2019; Johander et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2021). In this context, it is important to examine whether similar social constructs, including gender norms, also contribute to these differences in awareness between male and female adolescents.

Research shows that teenage girls are more likely to engage in indirect forms of relational bullying (Iossi Silva et al., 2013); such as social exclusion, the spreading of rumours, and gossip, which are seen as part of the dynamics of friendship (Hellström & Beckman, 2020). such as social exclusion, the spreading of rumours, and gossip, which are seen as part of the dynamics of friendship (Assom & Noor, 2024). This is generally done to isolate the victim, humiliate them in front of their friends, or damage their social standing (Alipieva, 2019). The characteristics of relational bullying tend to remain relatively stable over time, which has the potential to reinforce normalisation in social interactions (Choi & Park, 2025); The characteristics of relational bullying tend to remain relatively stable over time, which may reinforce their normalisation in social interactions (Arslan, 2021; Aydın & Arslan, 2021; Harrison et al., 2025; Longobardi et al., 2020). Although some studies suggest that teenage girls are better at identifying bullying, this does not necessarily correspond to their level of awareness of bullying in everyday life (Mehboob, 2025). This discrepancy suggests that the emotional sensitivity often associated with women does not automatically imply greater social awareness, thereby revealing a gap between gender stereotypes and empirical reality in the field. In other words, emotional sensitivity is not always a predictor of moral awareness in complex social contexts such as bullying (Bjärehed, 2021; Eilts & Wilke, 2025).

In this context, both men and women operate within the same system of norms, meaning that sensitivity is no longer a significant distinguishing factor in shaping awareness. Furthermore, the dynamics of the *bystander* effect reinforce this situation, in which individuals, regardless of their gender, tend to adopt a passive stance due to the diffusion of responsibility and social pressure to conform to the group (António et al., 2022; Nuha et al., 2025; Sjögren, 2020). Individuals may still feel emotionally 'sensitive', yet at the same time fail to recognise bullying as an act that requires a moral response (García-Carrera et al., 2025; Ng et al., 2022). Thus, the differences observed at the descriptive level are not strong enough to be understood as inherent gender characteristics; rather, they are more accurately viewed as a reflection of the social context that affects both groups equally.

Reorienting School Ecosystem Interventions and the Role of Guidance Counsellors

The findings of this study indicate that the low level of awareness of bullying among adolescents cannot be adequately addressed through the handling of individual cases alone. The main challenge in preventing bullying is not merely to reduce bullying behaviour, but to help students recognise that behaviour which has hitherto been regarded as a joke, a group tradition, or normal interaction is in fact a form of violence that can harm others. In this regard, a negative school climate is characterised by tolerance of bullying and is associated with an increase in

various problematic student behaviours. Conversely, a positive school climate contributes to the safety and well-being of pupils (Bochaver et al., 2022). This situation highlights the need for a preventive approach involving the entire school community.

Bullying prevention programmes that involve the entire school community have been shown to raise awareness of bullying, improve the school environment and reduce conflicts between pupils (Sainz & Martín-Moya, 2023). In this regard, guidance and counselling teachers play a strategic role as facilitators of social awareness through preventive and psychoeducational services. Through anti-bullying programmes, schools can effectively reduce bullying behaviour by around 18–19% and victimisation by around 15–16% (Gaffney et al., 2021). The aim of the intervention is not only to reduce bullying behaviour, but also to change the social norms that make such behaviour acceptable. Furthermore, a school environment with clear, fair and consistently enforced rules contributes to a reduction in bullying and victimisation (Ivaniushina & Alexandrov, 2022). Consequently, the focus of interventions needs to shift from merely managing individual cases to fostering collective awareness and changing social norms through a cohesive school ecosystem.

Conclusion

Awareness of bullying behaviour among adolescents remains very low across the board, with the majority of students (88.1%) failing to identify forms of violence accurately. Empirical statistical analysis confirms that there is no significant correlation between gender and the level of awareness of bullying. This finding effectively deconstructs the traditional assumption that often links sensitivity to violence with specific gender stereotypes. This blind spot in recognising aggressive behaviour has proven to be a crisis of identification that occurs equally among both male and female students. This low level of awareness stems from cognitive distortions resulting from a lack of basic behavioural education for adolescents. Consequently, verbal aggression—such as mutual insults or using parents' names as nicknames—loses its threatening nature and is mistakenly normalised as mere 'banter' within peer group dynamics.

Based on these findings, the system of support and preventive interventions against bullying in schools requires a strategic reorientation. Guidance and Counselling practitioners (BK teachers) within the school ecosystem play a strategic role in delivering universal and proactive clinical psychoeducational interventions. Intervention programmes need not be segregated by gender, but should instead focus comprehensively on dismantling the normalisation of verbal violence, enhancing emotional literacy, and reaffirming clear boundaries between healthy social interaction and aggressive behaviour.

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