

Preventing Bullying in Schools: A Case Study of Restorative Justice Implementation and Counseling Service Management

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Article History: Received on 31 January 2026, Revised on 2 February 2026,
Published on 7 April 2026

Abstract: This study examines efforts to prevent bullying cases in junior high schools through the implementation of restorative justice approaches and guidance and counseling (GC) service management. The aim is to investigate the factors causing bullying, the effectiveness of GC service management, the applicability of restorative justice, and challenges faced by schools in preventing bullying. Using a qualitative case study method, data were collected from SMP Negeri 1 Kepahiang, Indonesia, through open-ended questionnaires, observations, and document analysis involving principals, GC teachers, students, and parents. Results revealed that bullying stems from both internal factors (personality, emotional intelligence) and external factors (family environment, peer pressure, social media influence). The GC service management system effectively implements preventive services through classroom guidance and responsive services through individual counseling and mediation. Restorative justice successfully resolves verbal, social, and minor cyberbullying cases by fostering dialogue and reconciliation between perpetrators and victims. However, severe physical bullying, sexual harassment, and severe cyberbullying require legal intervention beyond restorative approaches. The novelty of this research lies in examining the integration of restorative justice within Indonesian school counseling systems. Practical implications suggest that schools should strengthen anti-bullying policies, enhance GC teacher competencies, establish safe reporting mechanisms, and develop clear standard operating procedures distinguishing cases suitable for restorative justice from those requiring legal action. This study contributes to educational administration literature by providing empirical evidence on holistic bullying prevention strategies in the Indonesian context.

Keywords: Bullying Prevention, Counseling Service Management, Restorative Justice, School Safety

A. Introduction

Bullying in schools represents a persistent global concern affecting students' psychological, emotional, and academic development. Research demonstrates that bullying victimization during adolescence significantly impacts psychosocial outcomes and academic achievement across the adolescent period (Halliday et al., 2021; Hysing et al., 2021). Despite widespread recognition of its harmful effects, bullying continues to occur in educational settings worldwide, necessitating effective prevention and intervention strategies. While extensive research has documented the prevalence and consequences of bullying, less is known about the effectiveness of integrated prevention approaches combining restorative justice principles with comprehensive counseling service management, particularly in Indonesian contexts. Traditional disciplinary approaches often fail to address the root causes of bullying or repair harm caused to victims (Lodi et al., 2021). Restorative justice offers an alternative framework emphasizing dialogue, accountability, and relationship restoration rather than punitive measures alone.

Current state-of-the-art research indicates that comprehensive school-based programs effectively reduce bullying perpetration and victimization when implemented systematically (Gaffney et al., 2021; O'Higgins Norman et al., 2022). These programs typically incorporate multiple components including policy development, staff training, curriculum integration, and student empowerment. However, the integration of restorative justice approaches within guidance and counseling service management systems remains underexplored, particularly regarding which types of bullying cases are most appropriately resolved through restorative versus punitive approaches.

The novelty of this research lies in examining how schools implement integrated bullying prevention strategies that combine restorative justice principles with systematic guidance and counseling service management. This study extends current knowledge by identifying which bullying cases can be effectively resolved through restorative approaches and which require alternative interventions. Additionally, it contributes to understanding the specific challenges Indonesian schools face in implementing comprehensive bullying prevention programs and the solutions employed to overcome these obstacles.

This study makes both theoretical and practical contributions to educational administration and school counseling literature. Theoretically, it advances understanding of how restorative justice principles can be integrated within school counseling systems to address bullying holistically. Practically, findings inform school administrators and policymakers about effective bullying prevention strategies,

including the development of clear protocols distinguishing cases suitable for restorative approaches from those requiring legal intervention.

Based on the background explained above, this research aims to explore more deeply the problems of bullying in schools and prevention efforts. Therefore, the research questions forming the basis of this study are: 1) What factors are the main causes of bullying at SMP Negeri 1 Kepahiang? 2) How is the guidance and counseling (GC) service management system implemented at SMP Negeri 1 Kepahiang in efforts to prevent bullying? 3) What types of bullying can be resolved using the restorative justice approach? 4) What types of bullying cannot be resolved using the restorative justice approach? 4) What obstacles does the school face in preventing bullying cases and how can they be overcome?

B. Methods

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine bullying prevention efforts at SMP Negeri 1 Kepahiang, Indonesia. The case study approach was selected because it allows in-depth exploration of complex phenomena within their real-world contexts, particularly when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Martinsuo & Huemann, 2021). The research was conducted during the 2025-2026 academic year.

Research participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation of key stakeholders involved in bullying prevention. Participants included the school principal, two guidance and counseling teachers, four classroom teachers, six students who had been involved in bullying incidents (as perpetrators, victims, or witnesses), and four parents. Sample size was determined based on saturation principles, where data collection continued until no new themes emerged (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

We conducted observations in several areas of the school, such as classrooms, the guidance counseling room, and student interaction areas. These observations aim to gain a firsthand understanding of the dynamics of bullying, interactions between students, and how the restorative justice approach is implemented in daily school practice. Participatory observation also allows us to gain a firsthand understanding of conditions and situations that cannot be obtained through interviews alone (Lim, 2025). The questionnaire used in this study was open-ended, allowing respondents to freely and narratively express their answers based on their individual experiences and perspectives (Pitura, 2023). The language used in the questionnaire is communicative, clear and contextual, so that it is easy for respondents to understand and does not give rise to multiple interpretations.

We collected data from documents relevant to the research topic, such as school policies on bullying, reports of bullying incidents, and records related to the implementation of restorative justice in schools. This documentary study is important to provide context and additional information regarding the school's efforts to address bullying (Bingham, 2023). The use of questionnaires in qualitative research aims to explore respondents' subjective meanings, perceptions, experiences, and perspectives in depth, rather than to obtain quantitative data that can be calculated statistically. The questions in the questionnaire were structured based on: 1) the research problem formulation; 2) the research objectives; and 3) the research focus and indicators.

Data collection employed triangulation through three methods: (1) open-ended questionnaires administered to all participants to gather perspectives on bullying causes, counseling services, restorative justice implementation, and prevention challenges; (2) participant observation of school environments, classroom guidance sessions, and mediation processes to observe bullying prevention practices in action; and (3) document analysis of school policies, counseling records, mediation agreements, and student conduct reports. This multi-method approach enhanced data credibility and provided comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Jain, 2021). Data analysis followed thematic analysis procedures involving five phases: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining and naming themes (Bingham, 2023; Naeem et al., 2023). All questionnaire responses, observation notes, and documents were coded systematically. Codes were then grouped into potential themes representing patterns across the dataset. Themes were reviewed to ensure they accurately represented the data and were distinct from one another. Member checking was conducted with selected participants to verify interpretation accuracy (Erdmann & Potthoff, 2023).

Research trustworthiness was established through multiple strategies. Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement at the research site, triangulation of data sources and methods, and member checking. Transferability was addressed by providing thick description of the research context and participants. Dependability and confirmability were established through maintaining detailed audit trails of the research process and decisions. Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and securing approval from relevant school authorities and the university ethics committee.

C. Results and Discussion

Based on the questionnaire answers (Tuesday, December 2, 2025) conducted on the Principal, representatives of BK Teachers, student representatives, representatives of parents/guardians of students regarding the factors causing bullying at SMP Negeri 1

Kepahiang, including 1) the definition of bullying; 2) bullying that has occurred at school; 3) bullying that occurs most frequently at school; 4) factors that most often cause bullying at school; 5) the influence of the peer environment; 6) the role of family background; 7) the role of social media in triggering bullying cases.

Table 1. Root Causes of Bullying Occurrence in Schools

Research Focus	Research Findings
Primary factors causing bullying	School Principal
	a. Internal: Student personality traits, such as being excessively quiet or socially withdrawn, often make them targets for bullies.
	b. External: Family parenting styles and environmental influences significantly impact a student's personality.
	Guidance and Counseling Teacher
	a. Stronger groups testing their power or being challenged by peers to harass a victim.
	b. Peers/Social groups. During adolescence, students highly prioritize their peer groups. They tend to follow their friends' influence more than adult advice.
	Students
	a. The individuals themselves (e.g., being aware of a negative habit but refusing to change, which eventually irritates or disturbs their peers).
	b. Peer groups; in order to be accepted into a specific clique, students must conform to the group's rules.
	Parents/Guardians
a. Diverse student characters; these differences often prompt teenagers to engage in "dare-like" behavior or tests of bravery.	
b. Family background; individuals who were previously bullied may tend to repeat the same behavior toward others once they gain more power.	

Based on the questionnaire answers (Tuesday, December 2, 2025) conducted on the Principal, representatives of BK Teachers, student representatives, representatives of parents/guardians regarding the role of the school and guidance and counseling

services at SMP Negeri 1 Kepahiang, including 1) the role of teachers and the school in preventing bullying; 2) how effective BK services are in handling bullying cases; 3) the form of BK services that are most helpful in preventing bullying; 4) the involvement of homeroom teachers and subject teachers in supporting bullying prevention

Table 2. Guidance and Counseling Management System in Schools

Research Focus	Research Findings
Types of Guidance and Counseling (BK) services most effective in preventing bullying	School Principal
	There are several counseling services available at the school, namely: Mediation Services (for existing problems), Consultation Services (for preventive measures/before problems arise), and Individual Counseling Services (for conflict resolution).
	Guidance and Counseling Teacher
	a. The most helpful service in preventing bullying is the Consultation Service. Both parents and students can consult with the counselor, specifically during school working hours.
	b. Consultation services are extremely beneficial to us; through these sessions, we can detect the early signs or symptoms of bullying sooner.
	Students
a. Consultation and Mediation services.	
b. Individual counseling services.	
Parents/Guardians	
a. Consultation services; we are provided with a dedicated space to inquire about our children's development at school.	
b. Consultation services.	

Based on the questionnaire answers (Tuesday, December 2, 2025) conducted on the Principal, representatives of BK Teachers, student representatives, representatives of parents/guardians regarding bullying that can be resolved with a restorative justice approach at SMP Negeri 1 Kepahiang, among others, are 1) the definition of a restorative justice approach in handling bullying cases; 2) what bullying can be resolved through a restorative justice approach; 3) your views on the mediation process between

the perpetrator and the victim; 4) the benefits of a restorative justice approach for victims and perpetrators.

Table 3. Bullying Cases Resolvable Through a Restorative Justice Approach

Research Focus	Research Findings
Definition of the Restorative Justice approach	School Principal
	Minor bullying cases that can be resolved through mediation and discussion, where the perpetrator makes a formal agreement and the victim offers forgiveness. Restorative justice aims to help perpetrators understand the impact of their actions, provide space for victims to express their feelings and needs, and encourage the development of responsibility, empathy, and peace so that social relationships can be restored fairly and with dignity.
	Guidance and Counseling Teacher
	a. Problem-solving through joint discussions between the perpetrator, victim, and witnesses to reach a mutual agreement for resolving the issue.
	b. This approach does not focus on punishment, but rather on the recovery and healing of both parties – the perpetrator and the victim.
Students	
a. Group discussions to provide statements or information.	
b. Teachers providing advice and guidance to students.	
Parents/Guardians	
a. Resolving issues by listening to accounts and testimonies from all parties involved.	
b. Problem-solving that focuses on counseling.	

Based on the questionnaire responses (Tuesday, December 2nd, 2025) obtained from the School Principal, Guidance and Counseling teacher representatives, student representatives, and parent/guardian representatives regarding bullying cases that cannot be resolved through a restorative justice approach at SMP Negeri 1 Kepahiang, the findings include: 1) types of bullying that are unsuitable for restorative justice resolution; 2) the most appropriate steps for handling bullying cases; and 3) the differences in impact between minor and severe bullying on the victims.

Table 4. Bullying Cases Unsuitable for Restorative Justice Intervention

Research Focus	Research Findings
Bullying cases that cannot be resolved through the Restorative Justice approach	School Principal
	Severe bullying (physical, sexual, and severe psychological distress that results in trauma for the victim).
	Guidance and Counseling Teacher
	a. Physical bullying, sexual harassment, severe cyberbullying, and chronic/recidivist bullying (cases where an agreement was made but the perpetrator repeats the offense).
	b. Bullying that has a massive or profound impact on both the victim and the perpetrator.
	Students
a. Bullying that endangers someone's safety (physical assault resulting in injury).	
b. Bullying involving terrifying or severe threats.	
Parents/Guardians	
a. Bullying that causes widespread public unrest or disturbs the community.	
b. All forms of bullying must be resolved thoroughly and conclusively.	

Based on the questionnaire responses (Tuesday, December 2nd, 2025) collected from the School Principal, Guidance and Counseling teacher representatives, student representatives, and parent/guardian representatives regarding the obstacles and prevention strategies for bullying at SMP Negeri 1 Kepahiang, the findings include: 1) challenges and obstacles in preventing bullying cases within the school environment; and 2) strategic approaches to prevent bullying in school.

Table 5. Obstacles Encountered in Preventing Bullying Cases

Research Focus	Research Findings
Obstacles in preventing bullying cases in school	School Principal
	<p>Limited supervision. The large number of students is not always proportional to the number of teachers and staff, making it difficult to monitor all student interactions optimally. Furthermore, there is still a perception that bullying is a trivial matter or a normal conflict among students, which often leads to delayed handling. The principal also acknowledges that coordination between the school and parents is not yet consistently effective in preventing and following up on bullying cases.</p>
	Guidance and Counseling Teacher
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Low level of student openness in reporting bullying cases. Many victims choose to remain silent for fear of retaliation, being ostracized, or being perceived as weak. b. Counselors face time constraints and a high workload, which prevents prevention services from being conducted intensively and sustainably. Additionally, not all teachers and school members share the same understanding of bullying, particularly regarding non-physical forms and cyberbullying.
	Students
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Misconceptions regarding the "culture of mutual teasing," which is considered normal in social circles. Many students do not realize that jokes, insults, or exclusion carried out repeatedly can hurt their peers' feelings. b. Students are hesitant to report because they fear being labeled as a "snitch" or becoming targets of even more severe bullying.
	Parents/Guardians
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Lack of intensive communication between the school and families. Not all parents are aware of their child's social and psychological condition at school, especially regarding social circles and social media use. Some parents also do not yet recognize the signs of their child being a victim or a perpetrator of bullying. b. Differences in parenting styles at home mean that prevention efforts at school do not always receive optimal support within the family environment.

Table 6. Strategic Measures for Preventing Bullying Cases

Research Focus	Research Findings
Strategies for preventing bullying cases in school	School Principal
	Bullying prevention must be implemented through firm and consistent school policies, accompanied by the cultivation of a school culture that upholds the values of mutual respect. The school is committed to strengthening supervision, increasing the socialization of anti-bullying regulations, and encouraging collaboration between teachers, counselors, and parents.
	Guidance and Counseling Teacher
	a. Enhancing preventive and sustainable counseling services, such as classroom guidance, group guidance, and individual counseling. Counselors emphasize the importance of character education, social-emotional learning, and the restorative justice approach for minor cases.
	b. There is a need to improve safe reporting systems so that students feel brave enough to voice the issues they are experiencing.
	Students
a. The school should create a comfortable and non-judgmental environment.	
b. Install comprehensive CCTV coverage.	
Parents/Guardians	
a. Strong cooperation between the school and the family is required. Parents hope the school will actively provide information, guidance, and mentoring, while families play a role in instilling moral values, empathy, and monitoring social media use at home.	
b. Improving open and sustainable communication is the primary key to preventing bullying.	

Analysis revealed multiple interrelated factors contributing to bullying in the school. Internal factors included individual personality characteristics, low emotional intelligence, and poor impulse control among perpetrators, while victims often exhibited low self-confidence, social skill deficits, and physical or social differences. These findings align with research demonstrating that individual differences often trigger bullying in schools. Students with dominant personalities or low empathy were more likely to become perpetrators, while those experiencing social isolation or anxiety exhibited aggressive behaviors as coping mechanisms.

External factors identified included family environment, parenting styles, and peer pressure. Students from families with authoritarian or permissive parenting, exposure to domestic violence, or inadequate parental communication showed higher risks of bullying involvement. This corroborates findings by Wang and Chen (2023) that emotional support from parents significantly reduces bullying risk. Additionally, peer group dynamics, including exclusivity, seniority culture, and social status pursuit, strongly influenced bullying behaviors, as documented (Huang et al., 2024; Wang & Chen, 2023).

The school climate also emerged as crucial. Inadequate supervision, weak enforcement of discipline policies, and insufficient counseling services contributed to bullying prevalence. Schools lacking clear anti-bullying policies provided spaces for bullying to persist (Meriläinen et al., 2022). Furthermore, social media and technology facilitated cyberbullying, with students using anonymous platforms to harass peers without accountability (Siddiqui & Schultze-Krumbholz, 2023).

The guidance and counseling service management system implemented three main components: planning, implementation, and evaluation. Planning involved needs assessment, program design, and resource allocation for bullying prevention. Implementation included both preventive services (classroom guidance on empathy, conflict resolution, and character development) and responsive services (individual counseling, group counseling, and mediation for reported cases). These findings support research by Lubis on effective counseling service management.

Key stakeholders reported that consultation services were most helpful for early detection and prevention. Parents and students valued opportunities to discuss concerns with counselors during school hours. The school principal emphasized collaboration among all staff members, not just counseling teachers, in creating safe environments. Regular briefings during flag ceremonies and religious activities reinforced anti-bullying messages. This collaborative approach aligns with recommendations for comprehensive school-wide responses to bullying (Creswell et al., 2021).

Evaluation and follow-up mechanisms ensured program quality and continuous improvement. Regular monitoring assessed intervention effectiveness and informed program adjustments. However, challenges included limited trained personnel, minimal parental participation, and inconsistent policy enforcement, requiring ongoing attention and resource allocation.

Research findings demonstrated that restorative justice approaches effectively resolved verbal bullying, social exclusion, minor cyberbullying, and relational conflicts. These

cases involved teasing, name-calling, rumor-spreading, and minor online harassment. The restorative process facilitated open dialogue between perpetrators and victims, allowing both parties to express perspectives and understand impacts. Mediation sessions enabled perpetrators to acknowledge harm caused and commit to behavioral change, while victims felt heard and validated.

Participants reported that restorative justice provided benefits beyond traditional punishment. For perpetrators, it increased awareness, encouraged behavioral change, and fostered accountability. For victims, it created feelings of safety, justice, and validation. Parents appreciated that students were not merely punished but received proper guidance to understand their actions. These outcomes support research restorative justice effectiveness in school settings (Fulham et al., 2023; Marcucci, 2021). However, stakeholders acknowledged challenges in mediation processes. Perpetrators and victims often defended themselves while blaming others, requiring mediators to remain neutral and calm. Success depended heavily on neutral witnesses providing honest testimony. Despite these challenges, when properly facilitated, restorative approaches successfully restored relationships and prevented recurrence in minor to moderate bullying cases.

Analysis revealed specific bullying types unsuitable for restorative justice resolution. Severe physical violence, sexual harassment, systematic and repeated bullying, severe cyberbullying, and cases causing severe psychological trauma required interventions beyond restorative approaches. These cases involved power imbalances, serious harm, and potential legal violations necessitating protection mechanisms aligned with child protection regulations.

Physical bullying causing injury, sexual harassment, and severe cyberbullying involving distribution of explicit content or massive reputation damage required legal intervention, professional psychological support, and formal reporting to authorities. Systematic bullying patterns indicated deeply ingrained aggressive behaviors unlikely to change through mediation alone (Nengsi & Subaedah, 2024). Cases causing severe psychological trauma, including anxiety disorders, depression, or self-harm ideation, demanded intensive professional mental health treatment, with restorative approaches serving only as supplementary interventions at appropriate stages (Idsoe et al., 2021; Wall, 2021).

These findings emphasize the need for clear classification systems distinguishing cases suitable for restorative justice from those requiring legal or intensive psychological interventions. Schools must develop standard operating procedures ensuring victim protection, justice, and legal certainty while leveraging restorative approaches where appropriate (Pyżalski et al., 2022).

Research identified multiple challenges in bullying prevention implementation. Limited understanding of bullying concepts among students and some educators led to normalization of behaviors like teasing and excessive joking. Low reporting rates stemmed from victims' fear of retaliation, shame, or doubts about follow-up actions. These findings align regarding underreporting factors. Solutions included increasing anti-bullying literacy through regular socialization, character education integration, and teacher training ensuring consistent identification and response (Man et al., 2022).

Resource limitations, particularly high student-to-counselor ratios, constrained intervention quality. Schools addressed this by optimizing classroom teacher and subject teacher roles in early detection and collaborating with external professionals like psychologists and child protection agencies. Inadequate supervision and weak policy enforcement were tackled through forming anti-bullying teams, establishing safe reporting mechanisms, and developing clear standard operating procedures (Diac et al., 2025).

These findings demonstrate that effective bullying prevention requires comprehensive, systematic, and sustained approaches involving the entire educational ecosystem. Prevention must address not only perpetrators and victims but also school culture, policies, and social relationships among all school members (Bradshaw et al., 2021). Success depends on strengthening institutional capacity through clear policies, adequate resources, and collaborative engagement of all stakeholders.

D. Conclusions

This study reveals that bullying in junior high schools stems from complex interactions between internal factors (personality, emotional intelligence) and external factors (family environment, peer pressure, social media influence). The key finding demonstrates that integrating restorative justice approaches within comprehensive guidance and counseling service management systems effectively addresses certain bullying types while requiring alternative interventions for severe cases. Specifically, restorative justice successfully resolves verbal, social, and minor cyberbullying through dialogue and reconciliation, but severe physical violence, sexual harassment, and cases causing severe trauma necessitate legal and psychological interventions. Practical implications suggest that schools should develop multi-tiered bullying prevention systems incorporating strengthened anti-bullying policies with clear classification criteria, enhanced counseling teacher competencies through specialized training in restorative justice facilitation and trauma-informed approaches, established safe and confidential reporting mechanisms encouraging victim disclosure, optimized collaboration among all school staff in early detection and intervention, and systematic parental engagement programs building shared understanding of bullying prevention.

Additionally, schools must develop standard operating procedures clearly distinguishing cases appropriate for restorative approaches from those requiring legal or intensive psychological intervention, ensuring both educational and protective responses are available as needed. Future research should examine longitudinal outcomes of restorative justice interventions to assess long-term effectiveness in preventing bullying recurrence and supporting positive behavioral change. Comparative studies across diverse school contexts would illuminate how institutional factors, community characteristics, and cultural values shape bullying prevention program implementation and effectiveness. Investigation of specific training models for counseling teachers in integrating restorative justice within comprehensive counseling programs would inform professional development initiatives. Additionally, research exploring student perspectives on restorative processes could enhance understanding of factors promoting genuine reconciliation versus superficial compliance. Finally, studies examining the intersection of traditional school discipline and restorative approaches could inform development of balanced systems maintaining accountability while prioritizing relationship restoration and educational growth.

E. Acknowledgement

The authors would like to express gratitude to Universitas Bengkulu for supporting this research, SMP Negeri 1 Kepahiang for granting research access and facilitating data collection, the Head of the Ministry of Religious Affairs Office of Kepahiang Regency for providing necessary permissions, and all participants who generously shared their experiences and perspectives. Special thanks to family members and colleagues, particularly Silvia Megawati and Efi Yanita Situmorang, for their encouragement and support throughout this research journey.

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