

## **From Bystanders to Upstanders: Evaluating the Impact of CEMBUNGS Empowerment Program on Bullying Prevention in Indonesian Senior High Schools**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Cases of bullying in high schools are increasingly concerning. Many prevention programs have been carried out but are still not optimal. This is due to the low level of awareness of students to act proactively in stopping bullying. The CEMBUNGS Empowerment Program was designed with the aim of increasing students' understanding and awareness of bullying prevention and equipping them with social skills and empathy to create a safe and comfortable school environment. This service activity was carried out by taking a mixed-methods approach, combining a quantitative approach (health education) through pre-test and post-test on 37 students and a Qualitative approach on 10 students through an FGD conducted at one of the State High Schools in Pangandaran Regency. Based on the results of the pre-test and post-test analysis it showed an increase in understanding of 0.62 points. These results indicated that an educational approach with the lecture method was effective in increasing students' knowledge related to bullying. Meanwhile, the FGD activities carried out can provide a space to explore students' understanding and discuss ideas to create a safe environment. The program was quite effective in increasing students' knowledge, fostering awareness of the importance of bullying prevention, and providing space for students to be involved in creating a conducive school environment. Recommendations for follow-up programs can be conducted to assess long-term evaluations and measure the impact of previously implemented programs on student behavior in the school environment.

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## INTRODUCTION

Bullying is one of the most frequent forms of violence against children in the school environment and can have a serious impact on children's growth and development, both physically, emotionally, and socially (Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia, 2023). Bullying is not only an aggressive act, but also a deliberate and repeated behavior by an individual or group to hurt or dominate others who are considered weaker. Forms of bullying can be in the form of physical violence, verbal insults, social exclusion, to digital-based violence such as cyberbullying (Fajar Kurniawati et al., 2024). In the context of schools, bullying is often not directly visible because it takes place quietly or is instead perceived as a joke among peers, thus normalizing violence and creating an unsafe learning environment (Tambunan et al., 2024).

Bullying at school is a global problem experienced by one in three students worldwide, both physically, verbally, socially, and online (UNICEF Indonesia, 2021). In the Southeast Asian region, nearly 40% of students are reported to have experienced bullying, which has an impact on mental health and learning achievement (UNESCO, 2020). Indonesia itself recorded a fairly high level of bullying. Throughout 2023, around 3,800 cases of bullying were recorded in Indonesia, consisting of physical (55.5%), verbal (29.3%), and psychological/social (15.2%) bullying, with almost half occurring in educational institutions such as schools and Islamic boarding schools (Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia, 2024). Based on national data, it was found that bullying is the most common form of violence in schools, especially in the form of verbal and social exclusion (Komisi Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak, 2021). A study at the end of 2023 revealed that around 30.6% of students in West Java had experienced bullying at school, including in Pangandaran Regency, which recorded a figure of 27.4% for cases of verbal bullying with intense frequency, making it the highest among other regions in the province of West Java (Aisyah et al., 2025).

Bullying in schools is influenced by various factors, including those from individuals, families, schools, and social environments. Individual factors include low empathy, impulsivity, and aggressive tendencies that make it easier for children to commit acts of violence against their peers (Firmansyah, 2022). From the family side, authoritarian parenting, lack of emotional attention, and lack of parental supervision can encourage children to channel emotions negatively in the form of bullying (Setyowati, 2019). A school environment that does not have a strong supervision system and policies on bullying also exacerbates the situation, especially if teachers are not active in preventing and handling cases that occur (Sakila et al., 2024). In addition, peer factors such as peer pressure and support for deviant behavior can strengthen children's involvement in bullying (Wulandari et al., 2024).

Bullying has a serious and long-term impact on the victim, both psychologically, physically, and socially. Victims of bullying often experience anxiety disorders, depression, low self-esteem, and the desire to harm themselves or commit suicide (Kamilla et al., 2025). Victims of cyberbullying are more at risk of adopting unhealthy lifestyles, such as smoking, alcohol consumption, and risky sexual behavior (Kurniawan et al., 2024). Additionally, bullying can decrease motivation to learn, academic achievement, and lead to absenteeism from school due to fear and insecurity (Sakila et al., 2024). Physical impacts also often occur, such as sleep disturbances, headaches, and other psychosomatic complaints that arise due to prolonged psychological stress (Setyowati, 2019). Not only does it have an impact on victims, but bullying can also damage the school climate and affect students' social relationships in general, making this issue an important issue that requires serious attention from various parties (Wulandari et al., 2024).

Various studies show that bullying prevention efforts in the school environment can be carried out

through an integrated educational, social, and structural approach. Anti-bullying education has been proven to be effective in raising students' awareness of the dangers of bullying and equipping them with ways to prevent it through educational sessions in high schools in Indonesia (Subroto, 2021). Teachers' strategies in managing the classroom, providing moral training, and building positive interactions also play an important role in preventing bullying, including for students with special needs (Purandina & Juliari, 2021). Other efforts, such as the integration of character values into the Independent Curriculum in Child-Friendly Schools, are also strategic steps in preventing violence from an early age (Damayanti et al., 2025). In addition, the approach through socialization, legal education, and strengthening character values can reduce the number of bullying incidents, both verbal, social, and physical (Subroto, 2021).

Various school-based interventions have been implemented to prevent bullying, ranging from psychoeducational programs, whole-school approaches, to collaboration with nursing staff and the physical environment of the school. Psychoeducation, consisting of empathy training, emotion management, and counseling, is effective in reducing social isolation and aggressive behavior of students (Mustikaningtyas et al., 2024). Comprehensive interventions such as the KiVa and Olweus programs involving all elements of the student's school, teachers, curriculum, and parents have been proven to reduce bullying incidences and significantly improve the school climate (Borualogo et al., 2022). In addition, the integration of nursing staff as mediators in school-based programs presents a new approach through educational play activities, peer group training, and physical activity, proven to reduce the frequency of bullying (Yosep et al., 2023). However, these approaches have limitations. The effectiveness of psychoeducational interventions is often limited by small to very small effect sizes. Whole-school programs such as KiVa and OBPP require consistent implementation and adequate resources, and nursing-based interventions face the constraints of staff training and overall institutional coordination.

Bullying is a worrying problem in the school environment, especially in high schools (SMA) in Pangandaran Regency. Based on the results of observations and interviews, it shows that students do not fully understand what bullying is, its forms, and its long-term impact, so this behavior is often considered an ordinary joke. In addition, the lack of special education, the absence of a sustainable prevention program, and the lack of a safe and clear reporting mechanism make this problem difficult to deal with effectively. Teachers and students have not been actively involved in bullying prevention and handling efforts, so cases that occur often go undetected or are not followed up on seriously.

As a solution to the problem of bullying in schools and various limitations of previous interventions, the CEMBUNGS (Prevent the Spread of Bullying in the School Environment) program comes with an educational, participatory, and community-based approach to schooling. The program is designed not only to provide counseling on the types of bullying and its impacts, but also to engage students and teachers as the main actors of change through training and discussion. CEMBUNGS utilizes interesting educational media such as posters, booklets, and videos, which are adjusted to the age and characteristics of students so that the message conveyed is easily accepted. In addition, the program encourages the creation of a child-friendly and responsive reporting system, so that students feel safe to report bullying cases they have experienced or witnessed. The main strength of CEMBUNGS lies in the sustainability and active involvement of all school residents, making it a more applicable solution than other anti-bullying programs that are often only theoretical and do not touch the root of the problem in the school environment. Therefore, the purpose of this activity is to increase students' understanding and awareness of bullying prevention and equip them with social skills and empathy to create a safe and comfortable school environment.

## **METHOD**

This service activity was carried out in the form of health education with the theme "CEMBUNGS: Prevent the Rampant Bullying in the School Environment," which took place on May 22, 2025, at SMA Negeri 1 Parigi, Pangandaran Regency. Participants in the activity consisted of 37 XI-grade students from various departments. This service used a mixed-method approach, namely quantitative and qualitative. A quantitative approach was used to evaluate the effectiveness of health education by comparing the results of the pre-test and post-test. Meanwhile, a qualitative approach was carried out through a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to explore students' experiences and perceptions of bullying.

### **Preparation**

The preparation stage began with coordination with SMA Negeri 1 Parigi to obtain permits, determine the time, and understand the characteristics of the participants. The team drafted permits, reviewed the location to ensure facility readiness, and prepared bullying education materials that included the definition, form, causes, impact, and prevention strategies. The material was prepared based on scientific literature and adapted to students' learning styles interactively. In addition, the team also prepared pre-test and post-test instruments for evaluation and FGD discussion guidelines.

### **Implementation of Health Education**

The core activity began with remarks from the school and the service team, then continued with filling out a pre-test by participants to find out the extent of their initial understanding of bullying. Afterwards, educational sessions took place interactively through lectures, group discussions, short videos, and light case studies that encourage active student participation. The goal was to foster awareness and empathy. After the material was completed, participants fill out the post-test with the same questions to see an increase in knowledge. All activities were facilitated by the committee and supervisors in a comfortable and inclusive atmosphere.

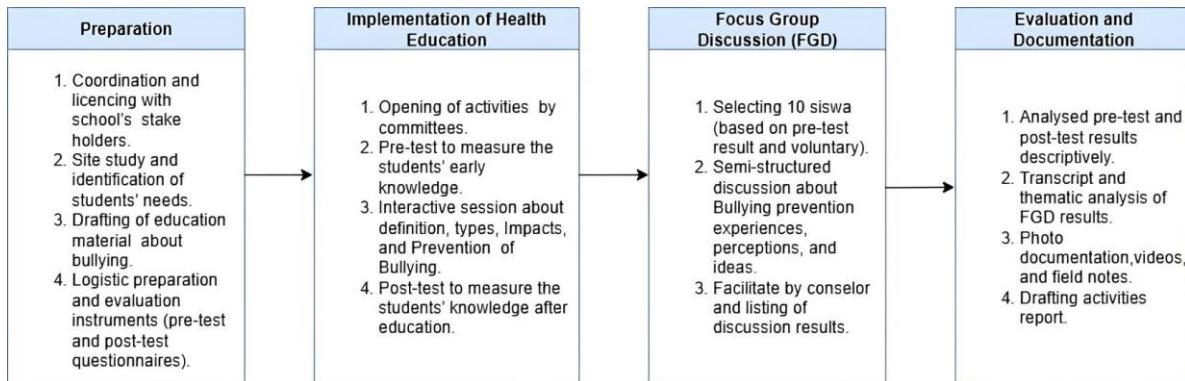
### **Focus Group Discussion (FGD)**

After the education, the activity continued with a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with 10 selected students who had direct or indirect experience related to bullying. Some were selected based on the results of the questionnaire, and some participated voluntarily. The discussion was guided by the implementation team and supervisors so that they remained directed but still comfortable. The goal was to explore students' views on bullying at school, the emotional impact they experience, and the need for support from the surrounding environment. These sessions provided a safe space for students to share bullying prevention stories and ideas. The FGD lasts about 60–90 minutes and provides deeper insights than just numbers or data.

### **Evaluation and Documentation**

All activities were neatly documented for evaluation purposes, and reports, photos, and voice recordings of the FGD (with the permission of the participants). The results of the pre- and post-test were analyzed descriptively to see the increase in students' knowledge, while the results of the FGD were transcribed and analyzed thematically to capture the pattern of their experiences and inputs about bullying. This documentation was not only the material for the report, but also the basis for formulating

recommendations for schools. The team also made internal reflections to assess the success of the program and devise sustainable follow-up steps.



**FIGURE 1.** CEMBUNGS activity process flow diagram

## RESULTS

The health education activity with the theme of "CEMBUNGS: Prevent the Rise of Bullying in the School Environment" was held on Thursday, May 22, 2025, at SMA Negeri 1 Parigi, involving 37 grade XI students from the science and social studies departments. This activity was carried out with the aim of increasing students' knowledge and awareness about bullying and creating a safe environment at school.

The implementation of this activity began with an opening session and remarks from the organizing committee and the school. After that, students were asked to fill out a pre-test to measure the participants' initial understanding using the instruments that had been prepared. Furthermore, material on bullying was delivered, which included the definition, forms, impact on the victim's mental health and social relationships, as well as measures to prevent bullying in the school environment. After the presentation of the material was completed, participants were asked to fill out a post-test to evaluate the participant's understanding.

**TABLE 1.** Analysis of Student Pre-Test Results

Students' score	Frequency	Percentage
Score < 7	2	5,4 %
Score 7 < x < 10	4	10,8 %
Score 10	31	83,7%

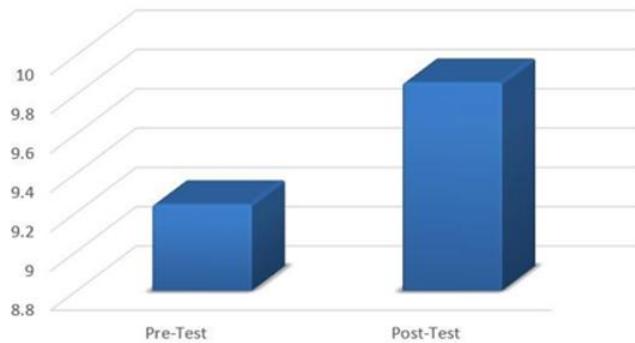
Based on Table 1, it showed that students with pre-test scores of 10 are 83.7%.

**TABLE 2.** Analysis of Student Post-Test Results

Students' scores	Frequency	Percentage
Score < 7	0	0 %
Score 7 < x < 10	5	13,5%

Score 10	32	86,4%
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Based on Table 2, it showed that students with post-test scores of 10 are 86.4%



**FIGURE 2.** Average Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores of Students

Based on Figure 2, it showed that the mean of students' pre-test scores regarding bullying was 9.28/10. Meanwhile, the mean of the post-test score was 9.89/10. This showed that there was an increase in students' understanding of bullying by 0.62 points after having an education.



**FIGURE 3.** Activities of Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Besides counseling, this activity also held a Focus Group Discussion (FGD), which was attended by 10 selected participants. This FGD aimed to discuss and explore students' perceptions and encourage students to give ideas to create a safe and comfortable school environment.

Overall, this activity ran smoothly and had a positive impact on increasing students' knowledge about bullying. Involvement and high enthusiasm were also shown in the discussion session where students actively asked questions. Through this activity, it is hoped that it can be the first step to create a safe school environment that is free from bullying.

## DISCUSSIONS

Bullying is a complex issue that can impact students' mental health, social relationships, and academic achievement (Bachri et al., 2021). Therefore, there is a need for intervention to reduce the impact of bullying. Interventions that can be carried out are in the form of improving students' skills, strengthening social skills, and providing counseling services. The implementation of the intervention can be carried out independently or in collaboration with both the school and psychologists (Yosep et al., 2023).

The results of the activity showed that there was an increase in students in understanding the concept of bullying. Based on the results of the pre-test and post-test analysis, the number of students who managed to get a perfect score (10) increased from 83.7% to 86.4%. In addition, there was also an increase in the average student score from 9.28 to 9.89, which showed an increase in understanding by 0.62. These results indicate that an educational approach with the lecture method is effective in increasing students' knowledge related to bullying. This is the main indicator of the success of this activity.

This is in line with previous research, which stated that the delivery of material with the lecture method was able to increase students' understanding of the concept of bullying by 85% and the impact that occurs due to bullying (Cahyani et al., 2024). And it is also strengthened by research that states that after counseling with the lecture method, there is an increase in knowledge in students by 35% (Prastiwi et al., 2025).

Besides delivering material, the implementation of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is an important part of student involvement in preventing and overcoming bullying. FGD is a qualitative method in the form of small groups that gather to discuss a topic with the guidance provided (Manoranjitham & Jacob, 2007). The FGD activities carried out can provide space to explore students' understanding and discuss ideas to create a safe school environment.

This is supported by previous research that states that group guidance is effective in improving social and communication skills, providing emotional support, problem-solving and decision-making, improving psychological well-being, and diversity of perspectives can provide a diversity of discussion results and alternative solutions that are applicable (Siampa et al., 2024).

Therefore, this activity not only increases students' understanding of the negative impact of bullying but also increases student awareness in preventing bullying. In addition, students also participate in FGD activities by discussing and providing ideas for solutions to create a safe and comfortable school environment.

## CONCLUSION

The results of the activity showed that there was an increase in the average score from pre-test to post-test by 0.62 points, which means that students' understanding of bullying has increased. This shows the effectiveness of an educational approach with an effective lecture method in increasing students' knowledge about bullying prevention. In addition, through FGD, it can increase student participation in discussing preventive efforts to create a safe and comfortable environment at school. Thus, these activities are effective in increasing student knowledge, fostering awareness of the importance of bullying prevention, and providing space for students to be involved in creating a conducive school environment. However, the limitations of this activity are that there is no long-term evaluation of behavior change, and the limited number of participants can affect the generalization of perceived outcomes. Therefore, there is a need for a follow-up program to assess long-term evaluations and measure the impact of previously implemented programs on student behavior in the school environment.

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