

# The Influence of Father Involvement, Self-Esteem, and Social Skills on Bullying Behavior Among University Students

Chr. Argo Wiidharto\*, Arri Handayani, Desi Maulia  
Universitas PGRI Semarang, Indonesia  
Corresponding Author: [argowidiharto@upgris.ac.id](mailto:argowidiharto@upgris.ac.id)\*

	ABSTRACT
<p><b>ARTICLE INFO:</b> Received May 13, 2026</p> <p>Revised May 24, 2026</p> <p>Published June 02, 2026</p> <p><b>KEYWORDS:</b> Bullying Behavior, Father Involvement, Self-Esteem, Social Skills</p>	<p>Bullying remains a significant problem in higher education and may negatively affect students' psychological and social well-being. This study aimed to examine the simultaneous and partial effects of father involvement, self-esteem, and social skills on bullying behavior among university students. The study employed a quantitative correlational design using a cross-sectional survey approach. Participants consisted of 289 university students from 18 cities in Central Java, Indonesia. Data were collected using the Bullying Scale, Inventory of Father Involvement (IFI), Self-Esteem Scale, and Social Skills Scale. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, multiple regression analysis, and path analysis with the assistance of IBM SPSS Statistics 25. The results showed that father involvement, self-esteem, and social skills simultaneously had a significant effect on bullying behavior, explaining 46.4% of the variance. Social skills emerged as the strongest predictor (<math>\beta = -0.30, p &lt; .001</math>), followed by self-esteem (<math>\beta = -0.28, p &lt; .001</math>) and father involvement (<math>\beta = -0.24, p &lt; .001</math>). All variables showed significant negative relationships with bullying behavior, indicating that higher levels of father involvement, self-esteem, and social skills were associated with lower bullying behavior. In addition, father involvement was categorized as high, while self-esteem, social skills, and bullying behavior were generally in the moderate category. These findings suggest that bullying behavior among university students is influenced by both psychological and family-related factors. Therefore, bullying prevention programs should emphasize the development of social skills, enhancement of self-esteem, and strengthening of parental involvement, particularly father involvement, within higher education settings.</p>

## INTRODUCTION

Psychological trauma during childhood has become an increasingly important concern within the fields of clinical psychology, developmental psychology, and counseling research. Childhood represents a developmental stage in which emotional regulation capacities, cognitive appraisal processes, and coping mechanisms are still evolving. Because of this developmental vulnerability, children may experience stronger and more enduring psychological effects when exposed to frightening events (Porges, 2021; Van der Kolk, 2021). Research has consistently shown that traumatic experiences during childhood can influence emotional development, behavioral functioning, and the way children interpret environmental stimuli associated with perceived threats (Herman, 2022; Sharma et al., 2024). Even a single distressing experience may leave a psychological imprint that shapes how children respond to similar situations in the future.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5-TR), published by the American Psychiatric Association (2022), explains that traumatic experiences may lead individuals to associate specific environmental cues with perceived danger. When such associations develop, individuals may exhibit intense anxiety responses such as avoidance behavior, increased physiological arousal, muscle tension, rapid heartbeat, and breathing difficulties. Among children, these reactions may develop into situational fears or specific phobias that interfere with everyday functioning,

How to cite	Widiharto, C. A., Handayani, A., & Maulia, D. (2026). The Influence of Father Involvement, Self-Esteem, and Social Skills on Bullying Behavior Among University Students. <i>Grief and Trauma</i> , 4(1), 39–51. <a href="https://doi.org/10.59388/gt.v4i1.875">https://doi.org/10.59388/gt.v4i1.875</a>
Homepage	<a href="https://journal.scidacplus.com/index.php/gt/">https://journal.scidacplus.com/index.php/gt/</a>
Published by	ScidacPlus <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a>

including participation in school activities, social interaction, and mobility in public environments (Stiede et al., 2023).

Importantly, childhood trauma does not necessarily arise from large-scale catastrophic events such as war, violence, or natural disasters. Developmental psychology research suggests that relatively brief yet frightening incidents such as being trapped in confined spaces, experiencing unexpected mechanical failures, or losing a sense of control in unfamiliar environments may also trigger trauma responses (Van der Kolk, 2021). When such experiences are emotionally intense, children may construct cognitive interpretations that certain environments are inherently dangerous even when objective risks are minimal. This process of fear learning can strengthen avoidance behavior and maintain anxiety responses over time (Craske et al., 2022; Patriarca et al., 2022).

One common manifestation of situational anxiety among children is specific phobia, defined as a persistent and excessive fear of particular objects or situations such as elevators, enclosed spaces, animals, heights, or darkness (Ollendick & Muris, 2021). Studies on childhood anxiety indicate that specific phobias may develop through several pathways, including direct frightening experiences, observational learning, and catastrophic interpretations of perceived threats (Stiede et al., 2023). Once a child associates a specific environment with fear or helplessness, the stimulus may become symbolically linked with danger, reinforcing avoidance behavior and limiting the child's engagement in everyday activities.

Within psychological treatment, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) has been widely recognized as one of the most effective interventions for treating anxiety disorders in children and adolescents. Originating from the work of Aaron T. Beck, CBT focuses on the relationship between cognition, emotion, and behavior, emphasizing the role of maladaptive thought patterns in maintaining psychological distress (Beck, 2021). Through cognitive restructuring techniques, individuals learn to identify distorted thinking patterns and replace them with more balanced interpretations. At the behavioral level, CBT often incorporates exposure-based interventions, which gradually introduce individuals to feared stimuli in a controlled and supportive therapeutic environment. Such exposure experiences enable individuals to develop new safety learning and coping abilities, thereby weakening the association between feared stimuli and perceived danger (Craske et al., 2022; Odgers et al., 2022). Empirical research and meta-analytic findings consistently demonstrate that exposure-based CBT remains one of the most effective treatments for specific phobias and anxiety disorders among children (de Jong et al., 2024).

In applied counseling contexts, structured training manuals have also been developed to guide practitioners in implementing CBT interventions systematically. For instance, Clevenger (2026) describes CBT-based coaching as a structured process that involves identifying automatic thoughts, restructuring maladaptive beliefs, strengthening emotional awareness, and introducing gradual behavioral exposure. Their framework emphasizes the importance of integrating cognitive restructuring with emotional regulation strategies in order to help individuals reinterpret threatening situations and build psychological resilience. Such applied models demonstrate how CBT principles can be adapted within counseling and coaching practices to address fear-based responses in everyday contexts.

In addition to CBT-based interventions, contemporary psychological literature increasingly emphasizes the importance of trauma-informed care in treating trauma-related conditions. Trauma-informed approaches recognize that traumatic experiences may affect emotional regulation, cognition, and physiological functioning. Consequently, trauma-informed counseling prioritizes psychological safety, empathy, and supportive therapeutic relationships before introducing behavioral interventions (Bendall et al., 2021; SAMHSA, 2022). By acknowledging the impact of trauma on an individual's psychological system, trauma-informed care aims to prevent retraumatization while supporting gradual emotional recovery (Shoptaugh et al., 2025).

Another critical factor in trauma recovery is emotional regulation. Children who have experienced traumatic events often demonstrate heightened physiological reactivity when encountering trauma-related stimuli. These reactions may include panic responses, rapid breathing, and increased heart rate. Emotional regulation difficulties may intensify fear responses and contribute to the persistence of anxiety symptoms (Sharma et al., 2024). Research suggests that strengthening emotional regulation skills such as controlled breathing, grounding exercises, and body awareness techniques can help individuals manage physiological arousal and tolerate exposure to feared situations more effectively (Porges, 2021). Emotional regulation, therefore, serves as an essential foundation for successful exposure-based therapy.

Beyond cognitive and emotional mechanisms, recent psychological research has also explored the role of spirituality and meaning-making in promoting psychological resilience. Studies in the psychology of religion indicate that spiritual beliefs and practices may provide individuals with meaning, hope, and emotional comfort during stressful experiences (Koenig, 2021; Lucchetti et al., 2021). Spiritual coping strategies have been associated with improved psychological well-being, reduced anxiety symptoms, and stronger resilience when individuals encounter adversity (Aggarwal et al., 2023). In culturally religious contexts, integrating spiritual reflection within counseling interventions may enhance emotional stability and facilitate cognitive reinterpretation of traumatic experiences.

Despite the growing body of research on childhood trauma and anxiety treatment, much of the existing literature relies primarily on quantitative or experimental research designs that measure treatment outcomes before and after intervention. While such studies provide important evidence regarding treatment effectiveness, they often offer limited insight into the subjective psychological processes through which trauma recovery unfolds over time. Qualitative research approaches allow researchers to explore how individuals interpret their experiences, reconstruct meaning, and gradually transform fear into confidence during therapeutic interventions (Creswell & Poth, 2023; Merriam & Tisdell, 2021).

Furthermore, relatively few studies have examined longitudinal trauma recovery processes in children within naturalistic counseling contexts. Many intervention studies are conducted within controlled clinical settings and emphasize standardized treatment protocols. As a result, there remains a limited understanding of how trauma recovery develops through continuous therapeutic engagement in real-life environments where children encounter feared stimuli as part of their daily activities.

Therefore, an important research gap exists in understanding the process-oriented dynamics of childhood trauma recovery, particularly when integrative counseling approaches combine trauma-informed care, emotional regulation training, cognitive restructuring, gradual exposure, and spiritual meaning-making. Examining how these components interact throughout the recovery process may contribute to the development of more holistic and culturally sensitive counseling frameworks.

This study addresses this gap by exploring the trauma recovery process of a child who developed situational phobia toward elevators after experiencing a traumatic incident of being trapped inside an elevator. Using a qualitative case study design involving continuous observation and in-depth interviews conducted over a 93-day intervention period, the study aims to examine the psychological transformations experienced by the client throughout the therapeutic process.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the advancement of psychological science in several ways. First, the study provides a process-based understanding of trauma recovery in children, illustrating how emotional regulation, cognitive reinterpretation, behavioral exposure, and spiritual meaning-making interact throughout the recovery process. Second, the study proposes an integrative counseling framework combining trauma-informed counseling, cognitive restructuring, emotional regulation training, and gradual exposure strategies. Third, the research

offers insights into how culturally relevant elements such as spirituality may complement psychological interventions within counseling practice.

Accordingly, the primary objective of this study is to explore the psychological process of childhood trauma recovery through trauma-informed counseling, spiritual cognitive restructuring, and gradual exposure techniques. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the stages of recovery experienced by the client, examine the psychological mechanisms involved in overcoming situational fear, and analyze how integrative counseling interventions facilitate emotional stabilization, cognitive change, and behavioral reintegration.

Bullying remains a significant issue in educational settings, affecting students' psychological well-being, social relationships, and academic performance. In recent years, several tragic cases in Indonesia have highlighted the severe consequences of bullying, particularly among university students. One notable case involved a student at Udayana University who died after allegedly committing suicide following prolonged bullying (Astuti, 2025; Detikcom, 2025; Tempo, 2025). Similar incidents have also occurred in medical education environments, where students reported experiencing intimidation, threats, and psychological pressure from seniors. These cases indicate that bullying is not only prevalent in primary and secondary education but also persists at the higher education level, often with serious and even fatal outcomes (Nakatomi, 2026).

Empirical data further demonstrate the increasing trend of bullying in Indonesia. Reports from national monitoring institutions show a significant rise in bullying cases between 2020 and 2024 (Zakia, 2025). Physical bullying accounts for the largest proportion, followed by verbal or psychological bullying, while cyberbullying has shown the most rapid increase (Pichel et al., 2021). In addition, several provinces, including those in Java, consistently report high numbers of bullying cases. These findings suggest that bullying has become a widespread and systemic problem that requires comprehensive attention from multiple stakeholders.

Conceptually, bullying is distinct from general aggressive behavior. According to Olweus, bullying is characterized by three main elements: intentional harm, repetition over time, and an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim (Olweus et al., 1999; Tay, 2025). Although this definition has been widely accepted, some scholars argue that even a single act of severe aggression may constitute bullying (Volk et al., 2014; Krook & Sanín, 2020). Nevertheless, the concept of power imbalance remains central in distinguishing bullying from other forms of aggression. Understanding this distinction is important for identifying and addressing bullying behavior in educational contexts.

The impact of bullying on victims is both immediate and long-term. Victims often experience social withdrawal, reduced participation in academic activities, and emotional distress. In more severe cases, bullying can lead to depression, anxiety, and decreased self-worth (Wu et al., 2021; Sharma, 2026). Longitudinal studies have shown that individuals who experience bullying during adolescence are at risk of continued psychological difficulties into adulthood (Östberg et al., 2018; DeLARA, 2019; Lidberg et al., 2023). Furthermore, victims tend to avoid social environments to protect themselves from further harm (McGuire, 2019), which may result in social isolation and reduced opportunities for personal development.

One of the key psychological factors associated with bullying is self-esteem. Individuals with low self-esteem are more likely to become targets of bullying because they may appear less confident and more vulnerable (Mullan et al., 2023). Self-esteem refers to an individual's evaluation of their own worth and plays a crucial role in shaping behavior and social interaction. Individuals with high self-esteem tend to be more confident, resilient, and capable of coping with stress, whereas those with low self-esteem are more susceptible to negative experiences, including bullying. Therefore, self-esteem can be considered both a protective factor and a risk factor in the context of bullying.

In addition to individual factors, bullying is also influenced by social and environmental conditions (Song et al., 2018). Psychosocial maladjustment, peer pressure, and social norms can

contribute to the emergence of bullying behavior (Najafov, 2025). When bullying is perceived as acceptable or normative within a peer group, individuals are more likely to engage in such behavior. As a result, the development of social skills becomes essential in preventing bullying. Social skills include communication, cooperation, empathy, and emotional regulation, which enable individuals to interact effectively and resolve conflicts constructively.

Individuals with strong social skills tend to have better interpersonal relationships and are less likely to be involved in bullying, either as perpetrators or victims (Navarro et al., 2015). Previous studies have shown that social skills are closely related to mental health, problem-solving abilities, and academic achievement (Xiong et al., 2023). Therefore, enhancing social skills can serve as an important strategy in reducing bullying behavior and promoting positive social interactions within educational environments.

Another important factor that contributes to the development of self-esteem and social skills is parental involvement, particularly father involvement. Research has shown that fathers play a significant role in children's cognitive, emotional, and social development (Baker, 2017). Active father involvement, including emotional support, communication, and participation in daily activities, has been associated with higher self-esteem and better social competence. Furthermore, positive father-child relationships contribute to the development of prosocial behavior and emotional regulation (Li et al., 2024).

Recent studies emphasize that father involvement should be viewed holistically, encompassing both the quantity and quality of interaction between father and child. Greater father involvement has been linked to improved academic performance, stronger social skills, and better psychological adjustment (Paquette et al., 2023). Conversely, limited father involvement may hinder the development of self-esteem and social competence, increasing the risk of negative outcomes such as bullying.

Although previous studies have examined the relationships between bullying, self-esteem, social skills, and parental involvement, most research has focused on these variables separately. There is still limited empirical evidence that examines the simultaneous influence of father involvement, self-esteem, and social skills on bullying behavior, particularly among university students. This gap highlights the need for a more comprehensive approach that considers both individual and environmental factors in understanding bullying.

Despite the growing body of research on bullying, several limitations remain in the existing literature. Most studies have examined bullying within adolescent or school-aged populations, with relatively limited attention given to university students, who face different developmental and social challenges. In addition, prior research tends to investigate factors such as self-esteem, social skills, and parental involvement separately, rather than considering their combined influence within a single analytical framework.

Moreover, existing studies rarely explore the mechanisms through which these variables interact, particularly in explaining bullying behavior through both direct and indirect pathways. This limitation restricts a comprehensive understanding of how individual and family-related factors jointly contribute to bullying.

### **Study Aim and Hypothesis**

This study aims to examine the simultaneous and partial effects of father involvement, self-esteem, and social skills on bullying behavior among university students. In addition, this study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of bullying by integrating psychological and family-related factors within a single predictive model.

Based on the theoretical framework and previous empirical findings, the hypotheses of this study are as follows:

H1: Father involvement, self-esteem, and social skills simultaneously have a significant effect on bullying behavior among university students.

H2: Father involvement has a significant negative effect on bullying behavior among university students.

H3: Self-esteem has a significant negative effect on bullying behavior among university students.

H4: Social skills have a significant negative effect on bullying behavior among university students.

## **METHODS**

### **Design**

This study employed a quantitative approach with a correlational design using a cross-sectional survey method. The study was conducted to examine the simultaneous and partial effects of father involvement, self-esteem, and social skills on bullying behavior among university students. A correlational approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to analyze the relationships and predictive contributions among variables without manipulating the research conditions.

The cross-sectional design allowed data collection to be conducted at a single point in time, enabling the researchers to identify patterns of association between psychological and family-related factors and bullying behavior. In addition, this study applied multiple regression and path analysis to examine both direct and indirect relationships among variables within a single predictive model.

### **Participant and Procedure**

The participants in this study consisted of 289 university students recruited from 18 cities in Central Java, Indonesia. Participants were selected using a convenience sampling technique based on the criterion that they were actively enrolled as undergraduate students during the period of data collection. The age range of participants was categorized within emerging adulthood, a developmental stage characterized by increasing social interaction, identity exploration, and psychological adjustment within academic and peer environments.

Data collection was conducted using an online survey procedure. Prior to the administration of the instruments, the researchers prepared the research protocol, obtained institutional approval, and developed informed consent forms to ensure that the study complied with ethical research standards. The research instruments consisted of four psychological scales measuring bullying behavior, father involvement, self-esteem, and social skills. Before the main data collection process, the instruments underwent validity and reliability testing to ensure their appropriateness for measuring the research variables. All instruments demonstrated adequate psychometric properties, including acceptable validity coefficients and high internal consistency reliability.

Following the preparation stage, the questionnaires were compiled into an online survey format using Google Forms. The survey link was then distributed to university students through various communication platforms and social media networks. Participants were first directed to read the informed consent form, which explained the purpose of the study, procedures, confidentiality of responses, and participants' rights to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Participants who agreed to participate indicated their consent electronically before proceeding to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire required participants to respond to all items related to bullying behavior, father involvement, self-esteem, and social skills using a Likert-type response format ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The data collection process was conducted over approximately two months. After all responses were collected, the data were screened and checked for completeness prior to statistical analysis. Incomplete or invalid responses were excluded from the analysis to ensure data quality and accuracy. The final dataset was subsequently analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25 to examine the

simultaneous and partial effects of father involvement, self-esteem, and social skills on bullying behavior among university students.

## **Instruments**

Data in this study were collected using four psychological scales measuring bullying behavior, father involvement, self-esteem, and social skills. All instruments were administered using a Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The bullying behavior scale was developed based on Olweus' conceptualization of bullying, which includes three main characteristics: intentional aggressive behavior, repetition, and power imbalance (Lee & Cornell, 2009). The scale measures various forms of bullying, including physical, verbal, and psychological bullying. Higher scores indicate higher levels of bullying behavior. The results of the validity test showed that all items had corrected item-total correlation coefficients above 0.30, indicating that all items were valid. The reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.933, indicating excellent internal consistency.

The father involvement scale was adapted from the Inventory of Father Involvement (IFI) developed by Hawkins et al. (2002). This scale consists of nine dimensions, including discipline and responsibility teaching, encouragement for education, support toward the mother, provision of needs, time and communication, affection and praise, involvement in academic activities, attention, and future development support. Respondents were asked to assess the extent of their fathers' involvement in these aspects. The validity test indicated that all items met the required threshold ( $r > 0.30$ ). The reliability test showed a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.93, indicating very high reliability.

The self-esteem scale was constructed based on Rosenberg's theory, which emphasizes individuals' evaluation of their own worth (Martín-Albo et al., 2007). The scale includes both positive and negative statements reflecting self-acceptance, self-respect, and self-confidence. Higher scores reflect higher self-esteem. The results of the validity test showed that all items had item-total correlation coefficients above 0.30, indicating that the items were valid. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) was 0.91, indicating very good internal consistency.

The social skills scale was developed based on the theory of Cartledge & Milburn (1995), which conceptualizes social skills as the ability to interact effectively with others. The scale measures several dimensions, including communication skills, cooperation, empathy, and emotional regulation in social situations. Higher scores indicate better social skills. The validity test results showed that all items met the minimum requirement ( $r > 0.30$ ), indicating that the scale items were valid. The reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.92, indicating high reliability.

Overall, all instruments used in this study demonstrated adequate validity and high reliability, indicating that they were appropriate for measuring the research variables

## **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques with the assistance of IBM SPSS Statistics 25. Descriptive statistics were conducted to describe the characteristics of the research variables, including mean, standard deviation, minimum score, and maximum score. Prior to hypothesis testing, assumption tests including normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity were performed to ensure that the data met the requirements for regression analysis. Multiple regression analysis was then employed to examine the simultaneous and partial effects of father involvement, self-esteem, and social skills on bullying behavior among university students.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

Descriptive statistics were conducted to examine the distribution of bullying behavior, self-esteem, social skills, and father involvement among respondents. The analysis showed that bullying

behavior among university students was generally categorized as moderate ( $M = 61.45$ ,  $SD = 12.38$ ). Self-esteem ( $M = 64.72$ ,  $SD = 10.15$ ) and social skills ( $M = 68.90$ ,  $SD = 11.02$ ) were also found to be in the moderate category. Meanwhile, father involvement showed a relatively higher mean score ( $M = 72.15$ ,  $SD = 10.87$ ), indicating a high level of perceived paternal involvement. The standard deviation values across variables indicated adequate variability, suggesting that the data were sufficiently distributed for further inferential analysis. The results of the descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Category
Bullying Behavior	289	28.0	95.0	61.45	12.38	Moderate
Self-Esteem	289	30.0	88.0	64.72	10.15	Moderate
Social Skills	289	35.0	92.0	68.90	11.02	Moderate
Father Involvement	289	40.0	98.0	72.15	10.87	High

Prior to regression analysis, assumption tests including normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity were conducted and indicated that the data met the requirements for multiple regression analysis. The analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25 to examine the simultaneous and partial effects of father involvement, self-esteem, and social skills on bullying behavior.

The results revealed that all independent variables significantly predicted bullying behavior. Social skills emerged as the strongest predictor of bullying behavior ( $\beta = -0.30$ ,  $t = -4.72$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that higher social skills were associated with lower bullying behavior. Self-esteem also showed a significant negative effect on bullying behavior ( $\beta = -0.28$ ,  $t = -4.59$ ,  $p < .001$ ), suggesting that students with higher self-esteem tended to exhibit lower levels of bullying behavior. Similarly, father involvement significantly predicted bullying behavior in a negative direction ( $\beta = -0.24$ ,  $t = -3.96$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that greater father involvement was associated with lower bullying behavior among university students.

Table 2. Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Bullying Behavior

Predictor	B	SE B	$\beta$	t	p
Constant	45.33	4.22	—	10.75	< .001
Father Involvement	-0.29	0.07	-0.24	-3.96	< .001
Self-Esteem	-0.31	0.07	-0.28	-4.59	< .001
Social Skills	-0.35	0.08	-0.30	-4.72	< .001

Note.  $N = 289$ .  $B$  = unstandardized coefficient;  $SE B$  = standard error;  $\beta$  = standardized coefficient.

The model summary analysis indicated that the regression model was statistically significant,  $F(3, 285) = 82.47$ ,  $p < .001$ . The model produced an  $R$  value of .68 and an  $R^2$  value of .46, indicating that father involvement, self-esteem, and social skills collectively explained 46.4% of the variance in bullying behavior. The adjusted  $R^2$  value of .46 further confirmed that the model had good explanatory power in predicting bullying behavior among university students.

Table 3. Model Summary for Regression Analysis

R	$R^2$	Adjusted $R^2$	F	p
0.68	0.46	0.46	82.47	< .001

Note. Dependent variable: Bullying behavior.

## Discussion

The results of this study indicate that father involvement, self-esteem, and social skills simultaneously have a significant effect on bullying behavior among university students. The

regression model explained 46.4% of the variance in bullying behavior, indicating that these variables collectively contribute substantially to bullying among university students. This finding confirms that bullying is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by the interaction between psychological factors and family-related environmental factors.

Among the independent variables, social skills emerged as the strongest predictor of bullying behavior ( $\beta = -0.30$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This finding suggests that students with better interpersonal competence, including communication, empathy, cooperation, and emotional regulation, tend to exhibit lower levels of bullying behavior. Individuals with strong social skills are generally more capable of managing interpersonal conflict constructively and maintaining positive peer relationships. Conversely, limited social competence may increase the likelihood of maladaptive social interactions, including aggressive or bullying behavior. This result is consistent with previous studies showing that deficits in social skills are associated with emotional and behavioral problems, including bullying and aggression (Humphrey & Wigelsworth, 2012; Goldwurm, 2022). In the context of university students, social skills become particularly important because students are required to adapt to broader social environments, academic competition, and increasingly complex peer interactions.

Self-esteem was also found to significantly predict bullying behavior ( $\beta = -0.28$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Students with higher self-esteem tended to report lower involvement in bullying behavior. This finding supports previous studies indicating that self-esteem functions as an important psychological resource that helps individuals cope with stress, social pressure, and interpersonal challenges (Brito & Oliveira, 2013; Shrout & Weigel, 2020; Benítez-Sillero et al., 2024). Individuals with positive self-esteem are generally more confident, emotionally stable, and capable of adaptive coping, reducing the tendency to engage in bullying behavior either as perpetrators or victims. On the other hand, low self-esteem may increase vulnerability to social insecurity, emotional distress, and maladaptive responses in social interactions.

Interestingly, father involvement showed a relatively high mean score compared to the other variables, indicating that respondents generally perceived strong paternal involvement in their lives. This finding may be understood within the sociocultural context of Central Java, where family values and parental responsibility remain strongly emphasized. Javanese parenting culture traditionally places fathers as authority figures as well as providers and moral role models within the family (Riany et al., 2017). Although Javanese fathers have often been perceived as emotionally reserved, contemporary parenting patterns increasingly encourage fathers to become more actively involved in children's education, emotional support, and daily communication. This shift may reflect broader social changes, including increased parental awareness regarding the importance of emotional closeness and child development.

From a theoretical perspective, high father involvement can also be explained through ecological systems theory, which emphasizes that children's development is strongly influenced by interactions within the family microsystem. In collectivistic cultures such as Javanese society, family cohesion, obedience, mutual respect, and interdependence are highly valued. These cultural values may strengthen parental engagement, particularly in supporting children's educational achievement and social adjustment. As many university students in Central Java still maintain close emotional and financial relationships with their families, fathers may continue to play an important role even during emerging adulthood. This condition likely contributes to the relatively high level of perceived father involvement found in this study.

Despite the high level of father involvement, self-esteem and social skills were only categorized as moderate. One possible explanation is that university students are currently facing complex developmental challenges associated with emerging adulthood, including academic pressure, social comparison, identity exploration, and uncertainty regarding future careers. Although parental support remains important, students may still experience difficulties in developing optimal self-

confidence and interpersonal competence due to environmental and psychosocial stressors. In addition, collectivistic cultural characteristics in Javanese society may indirectly contribute to moderate self-esteem levels. Cultural norms emphasizing humility, emotional restraint, and social harmony may discourage individuals from expressing high levels of self-confidence openly, even when they possess positive self-evaluations internally.

Similarly, moderate social skills among respondents may reflect the transitional nature of university life. Students are required to adapt to diverse social environments, new peer groups, and increasing academic demands, which may challenge the development of interpersonal competence. The increasing influence of digital communication and reduced face-to-face interaction may also affect opportunities to develop direct social interaction skills. Consequently, although students generally possess adequate social skills, these abilities may not yet have reached optimal levels.

Father involvement was also found to significantly predict lower bullying behavior ( $\beta = -0.24, p < .001$ ). This finding highlights the important role of fathers in shaping children's emotional and social adjustment. Positive father involvement through emotional support, communication, supervision, and participation in children's daily lives contributes to the development of self-regulation, empathy, and prosocial behavior (Palkovitz, 2019; Cabrera et al., 2020). Students who perceive greater father involvement are more likely to internalize positive social values and demonstrate adaptive interpersonal behavior, thereby reducing the likelihood of engaging in bullying behavior.

The findings of this study can further be interpreted using ecological systems theory and social learning theory. Ecological systems theory emphasizes that behavior is influenced by interactions between individuals and their social environments, including family and peer systems. In this study, self-esteem represents an internal psychological factor, social skills reflect interpersonal competence, and father involvement represents a family environmental factor that jointly shapes bullying behavior. Meanwhile, social learning theory suggests that supportive parenting and positive father-child interactions facilitate the learning of adaptive social behaviors through modeling and reinforcement (Bandura & Hall, 2018).

The present findings also have important practical implications. Bullying prevention programs in higher education should not focus solely on disciplinary approaches or punishment but should also emphasize psychosocial development. Universities may develop preventive programs aimed at strengthening students' social skills, emotional competence, and self-esteem through counseling services, peer-support programs, and social-emotional learning activities. In addition, family engagement, particularly father involvement, should be encouraged as part of collaborative prevention strategies between universities and families.

Overall, this study provides empirical evidence that bullying behavior among university students is influenced by the interaction between psychological and family-related factors. The integration of father involvement, self-esteem, and social skills offers a more comprehensive understanding of bullying behavior within the sociocultural context of Central Java and highlights the importance of holistic approaches in preventing bullying in higher education settings.

### **Implication**

This study implies that bullying behavior among university students is influenced by both psychological and family-related factors, particularly father involvement, self-esteem, and social skills. The findings suggest that universities should not rely solely on disciplinary approaches in preventing bullying but should also develop psychosocial intervention programs that strengthen students' social skills, emotional competence, and self-esteem. In addition, greater father involvement may serve as a protective factor that supports healthier social adjustment and reduces bullying behavior among students. Therefore, collaboration between universities, counselors, and families is important in creating a safer and more supportive educational environment.

## Limitation

This study has several limitations. First, the study used a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to determine causal relationships among variables. Second, the data were collected using self-report questionnaires, which may be influenced by social desirability bias. Third, the participants were limited to university students in Central Java, Indonesia, so the findings may not be fully generalizable to other populations or cultural contexts. Future studies are recommended to involve more diverse participants and apply longitudinal or mixed-method approaches for a more comprehensive understanding of bullying behavior.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that father involvement, self-esteem, and social skills simultaneously have a significant effect on bullying behavior among university students. Social skills emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by self-esteem and father involvement, indicating that both psychological and family-related factors play important roles in reducing bullying behavior. The findings also revealed that father involvement was categorized as high among students in Central Java, which may reflect the strong family values and parenting culture within Javanese society that emphasize parental responsibility, emotional support, and family cohesion. Meanwhile, self-esteem and social skills were found in the moderate category, suggesting that university students continue to face psychosocial and developmental challenges during emerging adulthood. Overall, this study highlights the importance of integrating family engagement, self-esteem development, and social skills enhancement in bullying prevention efforts. These findings provide practical implications for universities, counselors, and families in developing more comprehensive and preventive intervention programs to reduce bullying behavior in higher education settings.

## REFERENCES

- Astuti, I. (2025, October). *Kisah Timothy Anugerah, Korban Bullying di Unud dan Kronologi Kasusnya*. *Media Indonesia*. [Mediaindonesia.com](https://www.mediaindonesia.com)
- Baker, C. E. (2017). Father-son relationships in ethnically diverse families: Links to boys' cognitive and social emotional development in preschool. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 26(8), 2335–2345. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-017-0743-3>
- Bandura, A., & Hall, P. (2018). Albert Bandura and social learning theory. *Learning Theories for Early Years*, 78, 35–36.
- Benítez-Sillero, J. D., Corral-Pernía, J. A., & Córdoba-Alcaide, F. (2024). Self-esteem and bullying: The role of psychological vulnerability in adolescents. *Journal of Adolescence*, 96(2), 145–156. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2023.12.001>
- Brito, C. C., & Oliveira, M. T. (2013). Bullying and self-esteem in adolescents from public schools. *Jornal de Pediatria*, 89(6), 601–607. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jped.2013.04.001>
- Cabrera, N. J., Volling, B. L., & Barr, R. (2020). Fathers are parents, too! Widening the lens on parenting for children's development. *Child Development Perspectives*, 14(3), 152–157. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12372>
- Cartledge, G., & Milburn, J. F. (1995). *Teaching social skills to children and youth: Innovative approaches*. Allyn & Bacon. [Google Scholar](https://scholar.google.com/books?id=...)
- DeLARA, E. W. (2019). Consequences of childhood bullying on mental health and relationships for young adults. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 28(9), 2379–2389. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-018-1197-y>
- Detikcom, T. (2025, October). *Rentetan Kasus Bullying di Dunia Pendidikan Indonesia Tahun 2025*. *Detik*. [detik.com](https://www.detik.com)
- Goldwurm, G. F. (2022). Social competence and problem-solving skills in adolescence. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 114(2), 234–245. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000702>

- Hawkins, A. J., Bradford, K. P., Palkovitz, R., Christiansen, S. L., Day, R. D., & Call, V. R. A. (2002). The Inventory of Father Involvement: A pilot study of a new measure of father involvement. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 10(2), 183–196. <https://doi.org/10.3149/jms.1002.183>
- Humphrey, N., & Wigelsworth, M. (2012). Social and emotional skills and their impact on mental health. *Educational Psychology Review*, 24(4), 521–542. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-012-9211-1>
- Krook, M. L., & Sanín, J. R. (2020). The cost of doing politics? Analyzing violence and harassment against female politicians. *Perspectives on Politics*, 18(3), 740–755. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592719001397>
- Lee, T., & Cornell, D. (2009). Concurrent validity of the Olweus bully/victim questionnaire. *Journal of School Violence*, 9(1), 56–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220903185613>
- Li, Z., Yu, C., Cao, Y., Nie, Y., Tu, W., Liu, B., & Chen, P. (2024). The association between parent–child attachment and prosocial behavior: A longitudinal study. *Current Psychology*, 43(3), 2432–2441. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-023-04474-8>
- Lidberg, J., Berne, S., & Frisén, A. (2023). Challenges in emerging adulthood related to the impact of childhood bullying victimization. *Emerging Adulthood*, 11(2), 346–364. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21676968211051475>
- Martín-Albo, J., Núñez, J. L., Navarro, J. G., & Grijalvo, F. (2007). The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale: translation and validation in university students. *The Spanish Journal of Psychology*, 10(2), 458–467. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1138741600006727>
- McGuire, K. (2019). The embodiment of complex trauma in domestic minor sex trafficking victims and the dangers of misidentification. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 29(4), 535–547. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2018.1543630>
- Mullan, V. M., Golm, D., Juhl, J., Sajid, S., & Brandt, V. (2023). The relationship between peer victimisation, self-esteem, and internalizing symptoms in adolescents: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *PLoS One*, 18(3). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0282224>
- Najafov, R. (2025). Socio-psychological factors of youth deviant behavior in the contemporary era and their impact on social development mechanisms: Forms and patterns of influence. *ECOSOCIAL Studies: Banking, Finance and Cybersecurity*, 7(2), 13–28. <https://doi.org/10.56334/ecosbankfincyber/7.2.3>
- Nakatomi, T. (2026). The process leading to suicide due to bullying in a female junior high school student: Analysing investigation reports by trajectory equifinality modeling (TEM). *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science*, 60(1), 26. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12124-026-09988-x>
- Navarro, R., Yubero, S., & Larrañaga, E. (2015). Psychosocial risk factors for involvement in bullying behaviors: Empirical comparison between cyberbullying and social bullying victims and bullies. *School Mental Health*, 7(4), 235–248. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-015-9157-9>
- Olweus, D., Catalano, R., & Slee, P. (1999). The nature of school bullying: A cross-national perspective.
- Östberg, V., Modin, B., & Låftman, S. B. (2018). Exposure to school bullying and psychological health in young adulthood: A prospective 10-year follow-up study. *Journal of School Violence*, 17(2), 194–209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2017.1296770>
- Palkovitz, R. (2019). Expanding our focus from father involvement to father-child relationships. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 11(4), 576–591. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12352>
- Paquette, D., StGeorge, J., Bigras, M., & Sarmiento, J. (2023). Predicting children's social adaptation and academic achievement from father-child preschool rough-and-tumble-play and father involvement in child schooling. *Current Psychology*, 42(34), 30422–30435. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-04040-8>
- Pichel, R., Foody, M., O'Higgins Norman, J., Feijoo, S., Varela, J., & Rial, A. (2021). Bullying, cyberbullying and the overlap: What does age have to do with it?. *Sustainability*, 13(15), 8527. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13158527>

- Riany, Y. E., Meredith, P., & Cuskelly, M. (2017). Understanding the influence of traditional cultural values on Indonesian parenting. *Marriage & Family Review*, 53(3), 207–226. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01494929.2016.1157561>
- Sharma, S. (2026). Silent struggles: the untold story of bullying among girls. *BJPsych Advances*, 32(1), 8–16. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-025-22043-5>
- Shrout, M. R., & Weigel, D. J. (2020). Self-esteem and interpersonal relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 37(6), 1914–1932. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407520915926>
- Song, K. H., Lee, S. Y., & Park, S. (2018). How individual and environmental factors influence teachers' bullying intervention. *Psychology in the Schools*, 55(9), 1086–1097. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22151>
- Tay, E. M. K. (2025). Revisiting the definition of bullying in the context of higher education. *International Journal of Bullying Prevention*, 7(4), 278–294. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42380-023-00199-1>
- Tempo. (2025, November). *Kasus-kasus Bullying Berujung Maut Sepanjang 2025*. Tempo. [Tempo.co](https://www.tempo.co)
- Volk, A. A., Dane, A. V., & Marini, Z. A. (2014). What is bullying? A theoretical redefinition. *Developmental Review*, 34(4), 327–343. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dr.2014.09.001>
- Wu, X., Qi, J., & Zhen, R. (2021). Bullying victimization and adolescents' social anxiety: Roles of shame and self-esteem. *Child Indicators Research*, 14(2), 769–781. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-020-09777-x>
- Xiong, J., Hai, M., Su, Z., & Li, Y. (2023). Mediating effects of social problem-solving and coping efficacy on the relationship between cumulative risk and mental health in Chinese adolescents. *Current Psychology*, 42(11), 8759–8770. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-02167-8>
- Zakia, E. (2025). *Lonjakan Statistik Kasus Bullying di Indonesia, Ini Data Setiap Tahunnya!* GoodStats. [goodstats.id](https://www.goodstats.id)

---

**Copyright Holder:**

© Authors. (2026)

**First Publication Right:**

© Grief and Trauma

This article is under:

