

## *Moral Disengagement as a Predictor of Bullying Behavior of Adolescent Students*

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### **Abstract**

Moral development in adolescents is crucial for individuals to make behavioral decisions. Moral disengagement involves eight mechanisms considered a form of self-defense in violating ethical standards. The moral release mechanism that teenagers create makes them quickly engage in immoral behavior with peer groups, such as bullying. This research aims to determine whether moral disengagement can predict bullying behavior among teenage students in Surakarta. The method used in this research is quantitative, employing multiple linear regression analysis. The sample in this study consisted of 60 adolescent students aged 15 to 17 years. The results of this research indicate that the hypothesis using the F test shows that the eight Moral Disengagement mechanisms have a value of  $F = 5.062$  and a significance of 0.000. The coefficient of determination value  $R^2$  is 0.34, and the Adjusted R Square is 35.6%. The results of the multiple linear regression analysis show that the Moral Disengagement mechanisms of bullying behavior as predictors are the variables (X3) Advantageous comparison, (X5) Diffusion of responsibility, (X6) Distorting consequences, and (X8) Attribution of blame.

Keywords: Moral Disengagement, Bullying, Students, Teenager

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## Introduction

Morals originate from the etymological terms "mos," which means habit, and "ethos," which means habit or custom in behavior, expressing it with excellent and suitable expressions. According to (Wantah, 2005), morals are related to a person's ability to determine right or wrong, good or bad behavior, and make decisions. Good and bad behavior can be observed from early life when an individual is treated in an environment, which becomes part of the factors of moral formation. Moral values have specific benchmarks and roles in determining whether someone's behavior is right or wrong and what limits exist. Morals are a societal standard regarding what can be considered reasonable and healthy. Morality is an essential foundation in guiding human behavior. However, in some cases, individuals may disregard their moral principles to engage in unethical behavior, such as bullying. Humans should have moral principles in social life as guidelines to help them make decisions before acting and feeling. Morals consist of three essential parts: moral knowledge, feelings, and behavior. Feeling morals involves conscience, trust, empathy, self-control, and humility. Meanwhile, moral behavior is the intention, desire, and habit of doing something (Sarhini et al., 2019).

Individuals with strong moral values can be wise in responding to all events within them. Values in social morals contain goodness and healthy behavior to determine good and bad behavior in society. The guidelines that individuals adhere to will refrain from selfish behavior and prevent manipulation, cheating, stealing, and lying (Elliemiers, Toorn, Paunov & Leuwen, 2019). Morals play a significant role in a person's life in society. Still, several researchers discovered deviant behavior carried out by several individuals who were caught based on CNN data from the 19 December 2018 edition by carrying out a tier operation to see 28 cases with a total of 108 suspects. Based on data from the 2019 edition of the 14th edition of the *Mind of the People*, it is shown that the number of two-wheeled motorbike riders who violate traffic in Cimahi is 12,679, and 3,276 of them are students. This data shows quite a large number of immoral cases. For example, a child's experience at school with his friends over the years helps the student develop social skills, self-confidence, and experiences that strengthen his social life. On the other hand, students who fail to develop social competence will be rejected by their peers and potentially have problematic developmental impacts on their adult behavior (Parkier & Ashier, 1993). Moral disengagement is the ability to control behavior that allows someone to engage in unhealthy behavior. Bandura (2016) identified several ways individuals justify or rationalize their behavior that violates moral norms. These include dehumanization, where the victim is considered an object or non-human, and denial of personal responsibility. They blame situations or external factors for lousy behavior and reduce sensitivity to acts of violence or downplay their negative impacts. Bandura et al. (2006) Explain that there are eight mechanisms in moral disengagement to maintain behavior without intentionally looking at responsibility, namely Moral Justification, Euphemistic Labeling, Advantageous Comparison, Displacement of Responsibility, Diffusion of Responsibility, Distortion of Consequences, Dehumanization, and Attribution of Blame.

There are various mechanisms used to maintain unhealthy behavior, namely redefining a behavior and individuals taking responsibility beyond their abilities by behaving as if the behavior is considered correct with defense (Feist & Robert, 2017). The comparison is calming to benefit the behavior, which is justified by softening the reprehensible behavior to appear friendly and harmless. According to research (Siregar, 2020), it has been studied that the influence of moral disengagement plays a vital role in providing space for unhealthy adolescent behavior, such as bullying behavior. Malfunctioning self-regulation in the sense of moral disengagement in decision-making has an influence that tends to be unethical. A

student needs good standards or principles in their development to support excellent and wrong, a moral compass that can be used as a guide so that student development can run in a balanced manner. This means that cognitive development that is not running in balance has the potential to give rise to deviant behavior, hurtful actions, and involvement in unhealthy peer relationships, one of which is bullying.

Bullying is a phenomenon that often occurs in adolescence. This phenomenon has been proven to be prevalent among adolescents (Nansel et al., 2004). According to Due and colleagues (2005), 123,227 students aged 13-15 years in Western Europe were found to have a relationship with bullying, leading to psychological symptoms such as nervousness, low self-esteem, and loneliness. Research conducted on students aged 13-16 years in England Smith et al. (2004) revealed that the perpetrators of bullying were students who struggled to adjust well, had low self-understanding, and uncertain moral standards. The influence of unhealthy peer relationships becomes crucial during early adolescence, where developmental tasks, adjustment, and positive peer relationships take precedence over individualism (Hurlock, 1991). Adolescents may feel supported by the group when engaging in bullying behavior, disregarding morals for conformity, and unhealthy group behavior. Slonje (2013) discovered that there were more bullying perpetrators aged 15-18 years compared to those aged 20 years and older, indicating that individuals in this age group may feel emboldened by group relationships with friends at school, providing a sense of protection. Meter and Bauman (2018) explain that moral disengagement creates a space for individuals to engage in harmful actions, increasing hurtful behavior. Conversely, low moral disengagement suggests that individuals who can regulate themselves effectively are less likely to engage in bullying behavior.

Based on the explanation mentioned above, this research aims to determine whether bullying behavior carried out by teenagers affects the eight mechanisms of moral disengagement. This research seeks to combine empirical and recent evidence about bullying behavior towards adolescents, which is influenced by moral disengagement. This research hypothesizes that bullying behavior carried out by teenagers influences morals. It is important to note that moral disengagement is only one factor influencing bullying behavior. However, understanding this concept can provide valuable insight into efforts to prevent and intervene against bullying behavior among adolescent students.

## **Method**

This research is quantitative research with a multiple linear regression model to find additional information or data for researchers. The sampling technique used by researchers for the targeted sample is purposive sampling. The researcher first determines the shape and characteristics of the sample. The characteristics of the sample in this study were teenagers aged between 15 and 17 years. This study included a total of 60 subjects aged 15-17 years. Analysis with more than one independent variable is called multiple linear regression. The multiple linear regression technique determines whether there is an influence between two or more independent variables (multicollinearity and normality test). The hypothesis in this research was carried out using the F and T-test.

The data results were obtained by distributing scale instruments to students, and the assessment used a Likert scale. Two scales are used: the Bullying Behavior Scale and the Moral Disengagement Scale. The Bullying Scale is based on the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (OBVQ) scale, which identifies bullying by perpetrators and has been adapted

into Indonesian. Bandura (2002) created a moral disengagement scale. This instrument was assessed using a Likert scale. The Cronbach Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) reliability test measures this scale. If the intercept value is reliable, the level is considered trustworthy.

## Results and Discussion

### 1. Normality Test

The normality test results using the Kolmogorov Smirnov one sample statistical method are as follows.

Table 1: Normality Test Results

		Unstandardized Residuals
N		61
Normal Parameters <sup>a, b</sup>	Mean	.0000000
	Std. Deviation	7.30990264
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.070
	Positive	.065
	Negative	-.070
Statistical Tests		.070
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.200 <sup>c, d</sup>
a. Test distribution is Normal.		
b. Calculated from data.		

Table 1 shows that the output results have a significance value of 0.20. The data is standard because the significance is more than 0.05 ( $0.20 > 0.05$ ). The regression model is suitable for use because it meets the normality assumption.

### 2. Simultaneous Test (F Test)

To determine the test by creating a hypothesis formula as follows:

H0:  $\beta_i =$  means variable (X1) Moral Justification, (X2) Euphemistic language, (X3) Advantageous comparison, (X4) Displacement of responsibility, (X5) Diffusion of responsibility, (X6) Distorting consequences, (X7) Dehumanization and (X8) Attribution of blame. It does not have a joint significant influence on the Bullying variable (Y).

H0:  $\beta_i \neq$  means variable (X1) Moral Justification, (X2) Euphemistic language, (X3) Advantageous comparison, (X4) Displacement of responsibility, (X5) Diffusion of responsibility, (X6) Distorting consequences, (X7) Dehumanization and (X8) Attribution of blame. It has a significant influence on the bullying variable (Y).

In determining significance:

- The significance value ( $Pvalue$ )  $< 0.05$  means H0 is rejected and H1 is accepted
- The significance value ( $Pvalue$ )  $> 0.05$  means H0 is accepted and H1 is rejected

So it can be concluded if:

- ( $Pvalue$ )  $< 0.05$  then H0 is rejected and H1 is accepted. This means that the independent variables simultaneously influence the dependent variable.
- ( $Pvalue$ )  $> 0.05$  then H0 is accepted and H1 is rejected. This means that the independent variable simultaneously does not influence the dependent variable.

The F Test results in Table 2 are as follows:

Table 2: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	1024.066	8	128,008	5,062	,000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	1315.016	52	25,289		
Total	2339.082	60			

a. Dependent Variable: Bullying

b. Predictors: (Constant), Attribution of blame, Diffusion of responsibility, Distorting consequences, Moral Justification, Advantageous comparison, Dehumanization, Displacement of responsibility, Euphemistic language

Based on the F-test results above, it can be seen that the calculated F-value is 5.062 with a significance level of 0.00. The significance level is 95% ( $\alpha=0.05$ ),  $0.00 < 0.05$  for this comparison. Therefore,  $H_0$  is rejected, which means the variables (X1) Moral Justification, (X2) Euphemistic language, (X3) Advantageous comparison, (X4) Displacement of responsibility, (X5) Diffusion of responsibility, (X6) Distorting consequences, (X7) Dehumanization, and (X8) Attribution of blame have a jointly significant influence on the Bullying variable (Y) with the equation:

$$Y = 35,130 - 0,391 X_1 - 0,203 X_2 - 0,706 X_3 - 0,447 X_4 + 0,740 X_5 + 1,132 X_6 + 0,041 X_7 + 1,482 X_8$$

### 3. t-Test Results

Table 3. t-Test Results

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
1 (Constant)	35,130	4,685		7,499	,000
Moral Justification	-.396	,346	-.152	-	,259
Euphemistic language	-.203	,387	-.072	-	,603
Advantageous comparison	-.706	,324	-.272	-	,034
Displacement of responsibility	-.447	,354	-.162	-	,213
Diffusion of responsibility	,740	,332	,309	2,228	,030
Distorting consequences	1,132	,359	,409	3,150	,003
Dehumanization	,041	,388	,013	,105	,917
Attribution of blame	1,482	,435	,501	3,407	,001

a. Dependent Variable: Bullying

Based on the results in Table 3, it can be explained from the t-test results:

1. Moral Justification (X1)

The Moral Justification Hypothesis is:

H0:  $\beta_i = 0$ , meaning that the variable (X1) Moral Justification does not have a joint significant influence on Bullying behavior.

H0:  $\beta_i \neq 0$ , meaning that variable (X1) Moral justification, has a significant influence on bullying behavior.

The test results obtained variable X1 with a calculated t value = 1.142 with a significance of 0.259 and a significance limit of 0.05, meaning that it is rejected that moral justification does not influence to be a predictor of bullying behavior.

2. Euphemistic language (X2)

Hypothesis as follows:

H0:  $\beta_i = 0$ , meaning that the Euphemistic language variable (X2) does not have a joint significant influence on bullying behavior.

H0:  $\beta_i \neq 0$ , meaning that the Euphemistic language variable (X2) has a significant influence on bullying behavior.

The test results obtained variable X2 had a calculated t value of 0.63 and a significance of 0.05, meaning that euphemistic language has no influence as a predictor of bullying behavior.

3. Advantageous comparison (X3)

Hypothesis as follows:

H0:  $\beta_i = 0$ , meaning that the Advantageous comparison variable (X3) does not have a joint significant influence on Bullying behavior.

H0:  $\beta_i \neq 0$ , meaning that the Advantageous comparison variable (X3) has a significant influence on Bullying behavior.

The test results obtained variable X3 with a calculated t value = 2.17 with a significance of 0.034, a significance limit of 0.05, meaning that H0 is rejected and H1 is accepted. Advantageous comparison has an influence to be a predictor of bullying behavior.

4. Displacement of responsibility (X4)

Hypothesis as follows:

H0:  $\beta_i = 0$ , meaning that the Displacement of responsibility variable (X4) does not have a jointly significant influence on Bullying behavior.

H0:  $\beta_i \neq 0$ , meaning that the Displacement of responsibility (X4) variable has a significant influence on bullying behavior.

The test results obtained variable X4 with a calculated t value = 1.26 with a significance of 0.21, a significance limit of 0.05, meaning that H0 is accepted and H1 is rejected. Displacement of responsibility has no influence as a predictor of bullying behavior.

## 5. Diffusion of responsibility (X5)

Hypothesis as follows:

H0:  $\beta_i = 0$ , meaning that the Diffusion of responsibility variable (X5) does not have a joint significant influence on Bullying behavior.

H0:  $\beta_i \neq 0$ , meaning that the Diffusion of responsibility (X5) variable significantly influences Bullying behavior.

The test results obtained variable X5 with a calculated t value = 2.22 with a significance of 0.030, the significance limit is 0.05, meaning that H0 is rejected and H1 is accepted. Diffusion of responsibility has an influence to be a predictor of bullying behavior.

## 6. Distorting consequences (X6)

Hypothesis as follows:

H0:  $\beta_i = 0$ , meaning that the Distorting consequences variable (X6) does not have a jointly significant influence on Bullying behavior.

H0:  $\beta_i \neq 0$ , meaning that the Distorting consequences (X6) variable significantly influences Bullying behavior.

The test results obtained variable X6 with a calculated t value = 3.15 with a significance of 0.003, a significance limit of 0.05, meaning that H0 is rejected and H1 is accepted. Distorting consequences have an influence to become a predictor of bullying behavior.

## 7. Dehumanization (X7)

Hypothesis as follows:

H0:  $\beta_i = 0$ , meaning that the Dehumanization variable (X7) does not have a joint significant influence on bullying behavior.

H0:  $\beta_i \neq 0$ , meaning that the Dehumanization variable (X7) significantly influences bullying behavior.

The test results obtained variable X7 with a t-value of 0.10 with a significance of 0.91, a significance limit of 0.05, meaning that H0 is accepted and H1 is rejected. Dehumanization has no influence as a predictor of bullying behavior.

## 8. Attribution of blame (X8)

Hypothesis as follows:

H0:  $\beta_i = 0$ , meaning that the Attribution of Blame (X8) variable does not have a joint significant influence on bullying behavior.

H0:  $\beta_i \neq 0$ , meaning that the Attribution of Blame (X8) variable significantly influences bullying behavior.

The test results obtained variable X6 with a calculated t value = 3.40 with a significance of 0.001, a significance limit of 0.05, meaning that H0 is rejected and H1 is accepted. Attribution of blame has an influence to become a predictor of bullying behavior.

#### 4. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Based on the regression results with SPSS, the regression coefficient in Table 4 can be seen as follows:

Table 4: Regression Test Results (Regression Coefficient)

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	31,759	3,852		8,245	,000
X3	.728	,320	.280	2,276	,027
X5	,552	,263	,231	2,100	,040
X6	1,017	,318	,368	3,198	,002
X8	1,121	,374	,379	3,000	,004

a. Dependent Variable: Y

Based on Table 4 In the SPSS results above, the multiple linear regression equation can be seen as follows:

$$Y = 31.759 + 0.728 X_3 + 0.552 X_5 + 1.017 X_6 + 1.121 X_8$$

The results of the equation above are explained as follows:

1. If a student's Advantageous Comparison (X3) level increases by one, bullying will increase by 0.728.
2. If a student's Diffusion of responsibility (X5) increases by one, Bullying behavior will increase by 0.552.
3. If a student's Distorting Consequences (X6) increases by one, Bullying behavior will increase by 1.017.
4. If a student's Attribution of Blame (X8) increases by one, bullying behavior will increase by 1.121.

Meanwhile, the results of the coefficient of determination from the table equation above are:

Table 5: Coefficient of Determination Test Results

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.632 <sup>a</sup>	,399	,356	5.00892

a. Predictors: (Constant), X8, X5, X6, X3  
b. Dependent Variable Y

The adjusted R Square value is 35.6% based on the data results above.

$$Y = 31.759 + 0.728 X_3 + 0.552 X_5 + 1.017 X_6 + 1.121 X_8$$

Looking at the results of the statistical data analysis above, it can be concluded that the hypothesis in this research using the F test is that the variables (X1) Moral Justification, (X2) Euphemistic language, (X3) Advantageous comparison, (X4) Displacement of responsibility, (X5) Diffusion of responsibility, (X6) Distorting consequences, (X7) Dehumanization and (X8) Attribution of blame have a significant influence together on the Bullying variable (Y) with the equation. With a value of  $F = 5.062$  and a significance figure of 0.000. The coefficient of determination value is 0.399, and the Adjusted R Square is 0.356 or 35.6%.



The results of the multiple linear regression analysis indicate that the variables that significantly predict bullying behavior are (X3) Advantageous Comparison, (X5) Diffusion of Responsibility, (X6) Distorting Consequences, and (X8) Attribution of Blame, with the following equation:

$$Y = 31.759 + 0.728 X_3 + 0.552 X_5 + 1.017 X_6 + 1.121 X_8$$

The results of this research align with (Istiqomah & Madiun, 2023) that moral disengagement with its eight aspects can make an individual easily justify maladaptive behavior such as bullying as normal behavior. Bandura's social-cognitive theory regarding the concept of Moral disengagement leads to a psychological scheme regarding immoral behavior and bullying as detrimental behavior by changing the bullying behavior with self-defense mechanisms to justify bullying as acceptable behavior. This research has shown that eight moral disengagement mechanisms can predict bullying behavior: advantageous comparison, Diffusion of responsibility, distortion of consequences, and Attribution of blame.

Bandura (1997) describes the psychological concept that moral values can be separated from immoral behavior, making others feel disadvantaged by accepting harmful behavior and allowing aggressive and immoral behavior to be carried out. With the help of this process, a person can engage in self-serving behavior inconsistent with their moral principles. They can continue to use these defenses as principles without causing cognitive self-evaluation (such as cognitive dissonance) or emotional reactions (such as guilt and shame), which in their partners can help them avoid making mistakes. Understanding moral disengagement is essential for designing bullying prevention strategies. Intervening at the level at which individuals use these mechanisms can help reduce levels of bullying behavior. This can be done through strong moral education, anti-bullying programs that involve awareness of the consequences of these actions, and fostering a school environment that supports and encourages positive norms. The results of this research emphasize the importance of paying attention to the role of each mechanism of Moral disengagement in understanding and preventing bullying behavior. Using this mechanism is a strong indicator of a person's likelihood of being involved in bullying.

Based on the results of the data above show that moral disengagement, such as Advantageous comparison, Diffusion of responsibility, Distorting consequences, and Attribution of blame, tend to influence teenagers involved in bullying behavior significantly. This can be explained as:

- a. Advantageous comparison: Bullies may compare their actions with actions considered worse to make their behavior more acceptable. For example, a student might think, "At least I didn't hit him, just made fun of him."
- b. Diffusion of Responsibility: Bullies may feel less responsible if the actions are carried out in a group. They may think responsibility is distributed among all group members, so they feel less guilty. For example, students might think, "We're all in this together, so it's not just my fault."
- c. Distorting Consequences: Bullies may minimize or ignore the negative impacts of their actions. They may assume that the victim was not truly hurt or that their actions were not as bad as they were. For example, a student might think, "It was just a joke, he wasn't hurt."
- d. Attribution of Blame: Bullies may blame the victim for their actions, assuming that the victim deserves terrible treatment. They may think that the victim has provoked or

deserved the treatment. For example, a student might think, "He deserves it because he always acts weird."

Understanding these mechanisms can help in developing more effective interventions to prevent and address bullying among adolescent students. By identifying and addressing how bullies disable their moral constraints, educators and counselors can work to strengthen moral norms and empathy among students.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the results of the statistical data analysis above, it can be concluded that the hypothesis in this research using the F-test is that the variables (X1) Moral Justification, (X2) Euphemistic language, (X3) Advantageous comparison, (X4) Displacement of responsibility, (X5) Diffusion of responsibility, (X6) Distorting consequences, (X7) Dehumanization, and (X8) Attribution of blame have a significant influence together on the Bullying variable (Y) with the equation. The F-value is 5.062, with a significance level of 0.000. The coefficient of determination value shows 0.34, and the Adjusted R Square is 0.356, representing 35.6% of multiple linear analysis. Regression analysis showed that the variable.

$$Y = 31.759 + 0.728 X_3 + 0.552 X_5 + 1.017 X_6 + 1.121 X_8$$

It can be concluded that there are moral disengagement mechanisms, namely Advantageous comparison, Displacement of responsibility, Diffusion of responsibility, Distorted consequences, Dehumanization, and Attribution of Blame, which are predictors of student bullying behavior by as much as 35.6%. And 64.4% comes from other factors.

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