

Does Bystanders' Psychological Well-being and Attribution towards Victims Matters in Helping a Bullying Victim?

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Abstract

Previous studies showed that psychological well-being plays an important role towards prosocial behavior, but it is unclear how bystanders' psychological well-being together with their attribution (the extent to which the victim was considered guilty of becoming a victim) influence their willingness to help in bullying situation. 1.868 participants consisted of students and school completed a self-report measurement about bullying vignettes. High scores on psychological well-being and low score on attribution was found to be related in helping behavior. On the opposite, participants with low psychological well-being and high score on attribution tended to support the perpetrator. The findings of SEM analyses also demonstrated that moderation pattern of attribution on psychological well-being was evident only for supporting the perpetrator behavior and not for helping the victim. In other words, even at high levels of psychological well-being, bystanders tend to support a perpetrator when they attributed a victim as guilty for their condition. The implication of this study suggests the importance of maintaining positive psychological well-being for individuals who study or work in schools and also the need to explain about bullying to all stake holders of the school.

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Introduction

Children are affected by events that happen in social and physical context where they live (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; 2009). Therefore, family, school, and the whole surrounding where the children live, are important factors in children's lives. According to Berns (2012), school plays an important role in academic, psychological, emotional, and social development of a child.

One of the important issues that often happens in schools is bullying (Carrera, DePalma, Lameiras, 2011). Since 2011, bullying in Indonesia has increased every year (Rostanti & Hazliansyah, 2015). Bullying is an aggressive behavior that has been done by someone or group to hurt, humiliate, or shut out an helpless victim and who perceives that the act would be repeated for a long term (Frisén, Jonsson & Persson, 2007; Salmivalli, 2010). Bullying cannot be seen as a simple issue because it could cause many negative impacts. The negative impact would affect the victim, the perpetrator, other students, family, even the school, itself (Hernández, & Seem, 2004; Juvonen, & Espinoza, 2010).

By considering the various negative impacts from bullying, prevention and intervention to end bullying become very important. The key to prevent and end bullying is by bringing out the prosocial behavior, because the prosocial behavior is an antidote of various forms of violence (Hoover & Anderson, 1999). Studies showed that if there is an intervention from other parties who are not involved (referred to as bystander) when bullying happens, then the success rate of bullying prevention could reach until 50% (Hawkins, Pepler, & Craig, 2001; Fekkes, Pijpers, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2005). Thus, the key to stop bullying is by influencing bystander to be more willing to help the victim.

Based on research findings, prosocial behavior is correlated with emotional state or someone's well-being, but the results are still contradictive. Balliet dan Joireman (2010), for example, have found that when someone's well-being is low, then their tendency in helping would decline. But, other researches also show that negative emotional state could increase helping behavior (Cialdini & Kenrick, 1976; McGinley et. al., (2010). Our literature study suggests that there are no studies yet, linking psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989) and helping behavior in bullying situation. With this consideration, we want to understand more about the role of bystanders' psychological well-being in helping the victim or supporting the bully perpetrator.

Other factor that considered to have a role in bystander's prosocial behavior when bullying happens is the bystander's attribution toward the victim. That means, how the bystander perceives the victim, whether the victim is to blame being bullied because of his/her own fault, or the perpetrator's fault, would determine whether the bystander would help the victim or not (Gini, Pozzoli, Borghi & Franzoni, 2008). Bystander tends to feel reluctant in helping the victim if the victim is perceived to be responsible of his own condition. As we know, most of bullying studies took place in western countries and students who participated in these studies, commonly do not agree with bullying and they sympathize towards the student who helps the victim (Rigby & Johnson, 2006). But, we believe that this perception is could be different than the bullying bystander in Indonesia.

Therefore, we are interested to see the role of the psychological well-being and bystanders' blaming attribution towards bystanders' helping response.

Research Question

Does bystanders' psychological well-being and attribution towards victims matters in helping a bullying Victim?

Methods

Researcher has succeeded in obtaining data from 1.892 respondents consisted of students and non-students (teacher, employers, and other adults who were in schools) from 18 senior high schools in Jakarta, Bogor, and Bandung. The data collection has been done by distributing questionnaires and doing focus group discussion. The quantitative data has been analyzed by using Structural Equation Model (SEM).

Results

Our analysis showed that psychological well-being (PWB) and blame attribution played a significant role towards bullying bystanders (Model fit $\chi^2(1892) = 1143.6, p = 0.00$; RMSEA = 0.034 $p \leq 0.05$ 0.000; CFI = 0.950; TLI = 0.944). Simultaneously psychological well-being and blame attribution explained 9% of defending behavior and 26% of bully supporting behavior. The higher the psychological well-being of a bystander is, the higher his/her tendency to help a bullying victim is. On the contrary, the lower the psychological well-being, the lower his/her tendency to help a bullying victim. Surprisingly, the blame attribution variable towards the bullying victim has a significant positive impact towards helping the victim and supporting the perpetrator. Psychological well-being also function as the moderator of the helping behavior. Psychological well-being significantly roles as the moderator of the victim's blame attribution towards the perpetrator's supportive behavior. In other words, even at high levels of psychological well-being, bystanders tend to support a perpetrator when they attribute a victim as being guilty for their condition. But, psychological well-being doesn't act as a moderator when the victim's attribution is not to be blamed.

The focus group discussion data revealed that bullying does happen in most of the school that have been the research location. The school characteristic where bullying does not happen is a school that is moderately small and has good relations between the students, teachers, and parents. Most of the students blame the victim to provoke the perpetrator by being different from others, even it is something physical. Most of the students chose to help the bullying victim indirectly (like, reporting it to the teachers) because they concerned that they would be the next victim. They considered that helping directly is a provoking action and they do not want to interfere in other students' problem. On the other side, adults like teachers and school staffs chose to help the bullying victim directly.

Discussion and Conclusion

The research result showed that bullying happens in most of the schools that have been the research sample. The average student respondents revealed that they preferred to help bullying victim indirectly by reporting it to teachers, then helping

directly. And most of the adults' respondents said that they would help directly if they face a bullying situation. This result is in line with the results of previous study, and this also indicate how important is the role of adults who are in the school in reducing bullying (Fekkes, Pijpers, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2005; Georgiou, 2008; Sawyer, Mishna, Pepler, & Wiener, 2011; Stueve et al., 2006)

As hypothesized, bystanders' psychological well-being and blaming attribution will determine their helping behavior in a bullying situation. Bystanders' psychological well-being have a significant positive impact toward the helping behavior to bullying victims and significant negative impact toward the supportive behavior of the perpetrators. This result also supports previous study that was conducted by Jennings and Greenberg (2009), which showed that someone with a good well-being would be more prosocial, because a good well-being will influence a stable emotional state and this in turn will affect willingness to help. This finding has given an insight that schools need to pay attention in individual's psychological well-being to create a prosocial climate, that could decrease bullying. Schools also need to be aware of ways to increase students' well-being and besides paying attention on the problems which are happening in schools. When the majority of students have a high psychological well-being, then the school atmosphere would be positive as well, and automatically the students would help bullying victim. This prosocial climate will then decrease bullying.

In our study, students suggest that bullying happens because the victim's fault: being a coward, cannot socialize well, has a low self-esteem or too high, doesn't respect the seniors at school, breaking the senior's rules, nor the victim's appearance that is considered to be inappropriate. This study shows a different result comparing to studies in Western countries, which showed most of the students perceive the victims are not guilty (Gini et al, 2008). This paradigm needs to be changed in Indonesian schools because, whatever the reason is, bullying is an unjustified action. Anti-bullying socialization needs to be given for everyone in school: students and adults: so they would understand that bullying is a harmful act for everybody in the school, and hopefully they will be more willing to do something to stop bullying.

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