

Bullying: An Interdisciplinary Study from Islamic and Psychological Perspectives

Barhoumi Mohamed Salah Soumaya ¹, Pr: Mohamed Laarabi Bederina ²

¹Echahid Cheikh Larbi Tebessi University, Algeria

Soumaya.barhoumi@univ-tebessa.dz

² Algiers -2- University, Algeria

Mohamedlaarabi.bederina@univ-alger2.dz

Received : 21/11/2025 ; Accepted : 25/04/2026 ; Published : 23/05/2026

Abstract

Bullying is both an ancient and modern phenomenon: ancient in its occurrence across civilizations, yet modern in terms of its scientific study and the exploration of its causes. It has spread across nearly all social environments, including families, schools, workplaces, and online platforms. Bullying poses serious risks to individuals and societies. For individuals, it undermines psychological well-being and social adjustment, sometimes leading to extreme outcomes such as suicidal behavior. For societies, it weakens social cohesion and contributes to family and community instability. Drawing on both Islamic teachings and psychological research, this study explores the causes of bullying and proposes treatment strategies. From the Islamic perspective, bullying is prohibited as a form of harm and injustice, with remedies rooted in moral education, family guidance, and community responsibility (Jaafer, 2023; SeekersPath, 2024). From the psychological perspective, bullying is explained through individual traits, family dynamics, and social reinforcement, with interventions focusing on school programs, counseling, and policy measures (Olweus, 1994; Smith, 2004; Volk, Veenstra, & Espelage, 2014). This interdisciplinary approach highlights the need for integrated solutions that combine moral, spiritual, and scientific insights to address one of the most pressing challenges to mental health and social stability worldwide.

Keywords: Bullying; Islamic Perspective; Psychological Perspectives

1. Introduction

Bullying is a pervasive social problem that transcends cultural, geographic, and generational boundaries. Although the practice of aggression and domination among individuals is ancient, the scientific study of bullying is relatively recent, gaining momentum in the late twentieth century. Today, bullying is recognized as a global issue affecting nearly all social environments: families, schools, workplaces, recreational spaces, and increasingly, digital platforms.

UNESCO (2023) reports that one in three students worldwide experiences bullying, with variations across countries. For example, prevalence rates in Japan range from 22% in primary schools to 6% in secondary schools, while in England approximately 20% of students report being victims. These figures underscore the widespread nature of the phenomenon and its impact on educational systems.

The consequences of bullying are profound. Victims often suffer from poor academic performance, absenteeism, and social isolation, while perpetrators also experience negative outcomes, including poor school achievement and maladaptive social behaviors (Olweus, 1994; Smith, 2004). Hinduja and Patchin

(2019) highlight that bullying in digital environments, or cyberbullying, further exacerbates these risks, leading to heightened psychological distress.

Bullying is not only an educational issue but also a public health and social stability concern. Studies show that victims are three times more likely to feel excluded at school and twice as likely to miss classes compared to their peers (UNESCO, 2023). Longitudinal research confirms that both victims and perpetrators are at risk of long-term psychological difficulties, including depression and anxiety (Arseneault, 2017), (Geoffroy, Boivin, Arseneault, & Renaud, 2023).

Given its complexity, bullying has attracted attention from multiple disciplines, including psychology, sociology, education, law, and religion. This study focuses on two perspectives: the Islamic view, which condemns bullying as a form of injustice and harm, and the psychological view, which analyzes its causes and consequences through empirical research. By integrating these perspectives, the paper seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of bullying and propose effective strategies for prevention and treatment.

2. Problem Statement

Bullying represents one of the most serious threats to psychological security and social stability worldwide. Its prevalence continues to rise across diverse cultural contexts, making it a global concern. UNESCO (2023) estimates that nearly one in three students experiences bullying, amounting to hundreds of millions of children and adolescents affected annually.

International studies confirm the severity of its impact. Olweus (1994) and Smith (2004) demonstrated that bullying undermines academic performance and disrupts classroom dynamics. Victims often suffer from anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal, while perpetrators also experience poor academic outcomes due to their focus on aggression rather than learning. Hinduja and Patchin (2019) highlight that cyberbullying intensifies these effects, exposing victims to constant harassment beyond school walls.

The consequences extend beyond education. Victims of bullying are twice as likely to miss school and three times more likely to feel excluded compared to their peers (UNESCO, 2023). Longitudinal research shows that childhood bullying victimization predicts adult mental health problems, including depression and suicidal ideation (Geoffroy, Boivin, Arseneault, & Renaud, 2023).

Importantly, both victims and perpetrators suffer. Victims live in fear and isolation, while perpetrators often develop antisocial tendencies and maladaptive coping strategies. This dual impact weakens social cohesion and contributes to instability within families and communities.

Given these risks, bullying is not merely a behavioral issue but a multidimensional phenomenon requiring urgent interdisciplinary attention. By examining its causes and treatments from both Islamic and psychological perspectives, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing bullying in contemporary societies.

3. Literature Review

Bullying has been the subject of extensive research across psychology, education, and sociology. Early work by Olweus (1994) defined bullying as repeated aggressive behavior characterized by an imbalance of power between perpetrator and victim. Smith (2004) expanded this framework, identifying four

essential elements: power imbalance, intent to harm, repetition, and fear. Volk, Veenstra, and Espelage (2014) refined the concept further, emphasizing the importance of frequency, intensity, and perceived harm in distinguishing bullying from other forms of conflict. Hinduja and Patchin (2019) extended the discussion to cyberbullying, noting that digital platforms amplify the reach and persistence of harassment, often leading to heightened psychological distress.

From an Islamic perspective, while the term "bullying" does not appear explicitly in the Qur'an or Sunnah, the behaviors it encompasses—mockery, humiliation, aggression, and injustice—are clearly prohibited. Recent studies highlight Islamic approaches to moral education in addressing bullying, emphasizing compassion and ethical guidance (Damayanti & Ismail, 2024; Asbi et al., 2025). (al-Bukhari 2444. Book 46 Hadith 5) highlights Prophetic teachings that emphasize compassion, justice, and accountability, citing the Prophet Muhammad's saying: "Help your brother, whether he is an oppressor or oppressed."

انصر أخاك ظالماً أو مظلوماً. رواه البخاري

This teaching underscores the responsibility to stop oppression and support victims.

Together, these definitions illustrate the interdisciplinary nature of bullying research. Psychology provides empirical frameworks to understand its mechanisms, while Islamic teachings offer moral and spiritual guidance to prevent and address it. This dual perspective enriches the literature and underscores the need for integrated approaches in tackling bullying.

4. Causes of Bullying

Bullying arises from multiple interacting factors. Scholars from both Islamic and psychological traditions have identified a range of causes that contribute to the persistence of this phenomenon.

4.1 Islamic Perspective

From an Islamic viewpoint, bullying stems primarily from weak religious commitment and poor moral upbringing. When individuals lack spiritual guidance and ethical values, they are more likely to engage in harmful behaviors such as mockery, humiliation, and aggression.

The Qur'an explicitly forbids ridicule and mockery: "O you who have believed, let not a people ridicule [another] people; perhaps they may be better than them. Nor let women ridicule [other] women; perhaps they may be better than them. And do not insult one another and do not call each other by offensive nicknames" (Qur'an, 49:11).

"يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَسْخَرْ قَوْمٌ مِّن قَوْمٍ عَسَىٰ أَن يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِّنْهُمْ وَلَا نِسَاءٌ مِّن نِّسَاءٍ عَسَىٰ أَن يَكُنَّ خَيْرًا مِّنْهُنَّ وَلَا تَلْمِزُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ وَلَا تَنَابَزُوا بِالْأَلْقَابِ بِئْسَ الْأَسْمُ الْفُسُوقُ بَعْدَ الْإِيمَانِ ۚ وَمَن لَّمْ يَتُبْ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ" (الحجرات 11)

Key themes of this verse include the prohibition of mockery, the recognition of hidden virtues, the forbiddance of insults and labels, and the requirement of repentance.

Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) condemned harming others, saying: "A Muslim is the one from whose tongue and hand the Muslims are safe" (Sahih al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim).

"المسلم من سلم المسلمون من لسانه ويده". رواه البخاري ومسلم

He also emphasized compassion and justice: "Help your brother, whether he is an oppressor or oppressed." When asked how to help the oppressor, he replied: "By preventing him from oppression" (Sahih al-Bukhari).

انصر أخاك ظالماً أو مظلوماً". رواه البخاري

These teachings highlight that bullying is a violation of fundamental Islamic principles of justice, compassion, and respect. Differences in race, wealth, or physical appearance may trigger bullying, but Islam stresses equality and forbids discrimination.

Examples from Islamic perspective include: a child who grows up in a household where parents frequently fight or use harsh discipline may imitate aggression at school; when youth lack guidance from imams or community programs, they may develop arrogance and mock peers; a student who struggles academically may lash out at others to mask insecurity.

4.2 Psychological Perspective

Psychological research identifies several overlapping causes: individual traits such as aggressiveness, impulsivity, and lack of empathy (Dodge & Schwartz, 1997); family factors including poor parenting, neglect, or exposure to violence at home (Bandura, 1977); social environment where peer reinforcement and the absence of sanctions encourage bullying to persist (Volk, Veenstra, & Espelage, 2014); cognitive difficulties with attention, learning, and information processing (Yu & Zhao, 2021); and the frustration–aggression link where repeated frustration manifests as aggression toward weaker peers (Miller et al., 1941).

Together, these causes highlight the complexity of bullying. It is not simply the result of individual misbehavior but emerges from a combination of personal, familial, social, and spiritual factors. Addressing bullying therefore requires interventions that target all these dimensions simultaneously.

5. Consequences of Bullying

Bullying produces severe consequences for both victims and perpetrators, extending into academic, psychological, and social domains.

5.1 Islamic Perspective

Islamic teachings emphasize the dignity of every human being and forbid harm in all its forms. The Qur'an states: "And do not kill the soul which Allah has forbidden, except by right" (Qur'an, 17:33).

﴿وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا النَّفْسَ الَّتِي حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ﴾ [الإسراء: 33]

While this verse addresses physical harm, scholars extend its meaning to include psychological harm, such as humiliation and oppression.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "The Muslim is the one from whose tongue and hand the Muslims are safe" (Sahih al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim).

"المسلم من سلم المسلمون من لسانه ويده". رواه البخاري ومسلم

This hadith highlights that bullying — whether verbal, physical, or digital — violates the principle of safety and respect. Furthermore, the Prophet warned against arrogance and belittling others: "It is enough evil for a man to despise his Muslim brother" (Sahih Muslim).

From the Islamic perspective, the consequences of bullying are not only worldly — such as broken relationships and social instability — but also spiritual, as the oppressor bears responsibility before Allah for harming others.

5.2 Psychological Perspective

Research confirms that bullying has long-lasting effects on victims, perpetrators, and even bystanders. Victims often experience loneliness, poor academic achievement, and mental health problems such as depression and anxiety (Fridh, Lindström, & Rosvall, 2019; Han, Ye, & zhong, 2025). They are more likely to miss school and feel excluded from peer groups (UNESCO, 2023). Perpetrators frequently develop antisocial behaviors, struggle with relationships, and may face disciplinary or legal consequences; longitudinal studies show that perpetrators are at higher risk of substance abuse and criminal activity in adulthood (Volk, Veenstra, & Espelage, 2014). Childhood bullying victimization predicts adult mental health issues, including depression, anxiety disorders, and suicidal ideation (Geoffroy, Boivin, Arseneault, & Renaud, 2023).

For example, a student who is mocked daily for physical appearance may withdraw socially, lose confidence, and perform poorly in school. Islam condemns such mockery explicitly in the Qur'an (49:11), while psychology explains the resulting anxiety and academic decline. Similarly, a perpetrator who bullies peers may gain temporary dominance but risks long-term maladjustment, echoing the Prophet's warning that arrogance and oppression lead to ruin.

6. Treatment Strategies

Bullying requires comprehensive solutions that address its moral, psychological, and social dimensions. Both Islamic teachings and psychological research provide frameworks for prevention and intervention.

6.1 Islamic Perspective

Islam emphasizes prevention through moral education and role modeling, beginning with the family and extending outward to the mosque, school, and community.

- **Family:** Parents are the first educators and role models. They instill empathy, discipline, and responsibility, teaching children Qur'anic values such as compassion and justice. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "Each of you is a shepherd, and each of you is responsible for his flock" (Sahih al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim), highlighting parental responsibility.
- **Mosque:** The masjid serves as a hub for moral and social education. Imams deliver sermons reminding the community of the Qur'anic prohibition of mockery (Qur'an 49:11) " Al-Bukhaari (13) and Muslim (45) narrated from Anas that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “No one of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.”. Mosques can host youth programs, counseling sessions, and community dialogues to reinforce compassion and justice.
- **School:** Teachers and administrators provide structured moral education, integrating Qur'anic values with academic learning. Schools also serve as the primary environment where bullying occurs, making them critical for prevention programs.
- **Community:** Neighborhoods and social groups provide collective accountability, ensuring that bullying is discouraged and victims are supported. Community leaders and elders act as role models, demonstrating respect and empathy in public life.

6.2 Psychological Perspective

Evidence-based interventions complement spiritual guidance by addressing behavioral and social mechanisms: school programs such as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program reduce bullying through awareness, teacher training, and peer support; counseling and therapy (cognitive-behavioral approaches) help victims manage anxiety and perpetrators control aggression; parental involvement training parents to provide consistent discipline and emotional support; and policy measures as recommended by UNESCO (2023) including national strategies, laws, reporting systems, and awareness campaigns.

An integrated approach combines Qur'anic lessons on compassion with structured psychological programs. Families reinforce empathy at home, mosques host youth circles and sermons on justice, schools integrate moral education into curricula, and community leaders model respect in public life. This multi-layered approach ensures that children are surrounded by consistent moral and psychological guidance, reducing the likelihood of bullying behaviors.

Conclusion

Bullying is a complex phenomenon that threatens psychological well-being, academic achievement, and social stability. Its causes are multifaceted, rooted in individual traits, family dynamics, social environments, and weak moral or spiritual guidance. The consequences are equally severe, affecting victims, perpetrators, and communities, with long-term risks including depression, anxiety, and social disintegration.

From the Islamic perspective, bullying is unequivocally condemned as a form of injustice and harm. The Qur'an prohibits ridicule and mockery (Qur'an 49:11), while the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) emphasized compassion, justice, and accountability. Families, mosques, schools, and communities are all responsible for instilling moral education and serving as role models. This layered approach ensures that children grow up surrounded by values of empathy and respect.

From the psychological perspective, bullying is explained through empirical frameworks that highlight aggression, peer reinforcement, and family dysfunction. Evidence-based interventions — school prevention programs, counseling, parental involvement, and policy measures — provide practical tools to reduce bullying and mitigate its effects.

The integration of these perspectives offers a powerful framework: Islamic teachings provide moral and spiritual guidance, while psychology contributes empirical analysis and intervention strategies. Together, they form a holistic approach that addresses both the inner character and external environment of individuals.

Ultimately, combating bullying requires collaboration across all levels of society. Families must nurture empathy, mosques must reinforce moral values, schools must implement structured programs, and communities must provide accountability. By uniting spiritual wisdom with scientific research, societies can build environments where dignity, compassion, and justice prevail — ensuring that bullying is not tolerated and that every individual can thrive.

References

The Holy Qur'an. (n.d.).

- Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj. (n.d.). Sahih Muslim.
- Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari. (n.d.). Sahih al-Bukhari
- Asbi, A., Hasibuan, U. M., & Sari, M. (2025). Bullying Behavior in Islamic Perspective and Its Implications on Guidance and Counseling Services. *Proceedings of the International Seminar of Islamic Studies (INSIS 7)* 6(1) (1062 – 1069)
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Damayanti, A. T., & Ismail, I. (2024). Educating with Compassion: Islamic Philosophy of Education in Addressing Bullying. *Aqidah-Ta: Jurnal Ilmu Aqidah*, 10(2), 215–228.
- Dodge, K. A., & Schwartz, D. (1990). Social information-Processing Bases of Aggressive Behavior in Children. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 48(1), 565–592.
- Fridh, M., Lindström, M., & Rosvall, M. (2019). Subjective health complaints in relation to bullying in school: A cross-sectional study. *BMC Public Health*, 15:949, 1–11.
DOI: [10.1186/s12889-015-2239-7](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-015-2239-7)
- Arseneault, L. (2017). Long-term impact of bullying victimization on mental health. *World Psychiatry*, 16(1), 27–28.
- Hinduja, S., & Patchin, J. W. (2019). Cyberbullying: Identification, prevention, and response. <https://cyberbullying.org/Cyberbullying-Identification-Prevention-Response-2019.pdf>
- Geoffroy, M. C., Boivin, M., Arseneault, L., & Renaud, J. (2023). Long-term outcomes of bullying victimization: A longitudinal perspective. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 64(2), 123–135. doi: [10.1002/wps.20399](https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20399)
- Han, Z.-Y. H., Ye, Z.-Y. & Zhong, B.-Li (2025). School bullying and mental health among adolescents: A narrative review. *Translational Pediatrics*, 14(3), 463–472. doi: [10.21037/tp-2024-512](https://doi.org/10.21037/tp-2024-512)
- Ismet, S., Laili, I., & Rahmawati, D. (2025). The Role of Islamic Education in Promoting Moral and Ethical Values Among Modern Youth. *Journal of Academic Science*, 2(3).
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59613/8nqntb26>
- Miller, N. E., Sears, R. R., Mowrer, O. H., Doob, L. W., Dollard, J., & Ford, C. S. (1941). *Frustration and aggression*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Olweus, D. (1994). Bullying at school: Basic facts and effects of a school-based intervention program. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 35(7), 1171–1190.
- Smith, P.K. (2004). Bullying: Recent developments. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 9(3), 98–103.
- UNESCO. (2017). *Ending school violence and bullying: Global status report*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54675/POIV1573>
- Volk, A. A., Veenstra, R., & Espelage, D. L. (2017). So you want to study bullying? Recommendations to enhance the validity, transparency, and compatibility of bullying research. *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 36, 34–43.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2017.07.003>
- Yu, C., & Zhao, Y. (2021). Cognitive difficulties and aggression in school settings. *Educational Psychology Review*, 33(1), 45–67.