Overweight Students' Experiences of School Bullying and Psychological Distress

Shanaz Ramadhini[1], Sri Nurhayati Selian[2*]
[1,2]Universitas Muhammadiyah Aceh, Banda Aceh, 23248, Indonesia
* Corresponding Email: seliansrinurhayati@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aims to understand the experiences of students subjected to weight-based bullying in the school environment and the significance of these experiences for their psychological well-being, self-acceptance, and social and academic lives. A qualitative method employing a phenomenological approach was used to explore participants' subjective experiences based on narratives shared during interviews. Data were derived from interview transcripts of three participants and analyzed by identifying relevant statements, coding based on meaning, and clustering data into experiential themes. The findings reveal that weight-based bullying manifested through verbal taunts, derogatory nicknames, comments on physical appearance, and treatment that caused discomfort within the school setting. These experiences were linked to body dissatisfaction, doubts regarding self-worth, sadness, and a tendency to avoid specific social situations. Impacts were also evident in the learning experience, including difficulty concentrating and reduced comfort when participating in school activities. However, the participants' experiences were not entirely uniform; support from friends and family helped some cope with the pressure, whereas responses from the environment such as dismissing taunts as mere jokes or failing to provide adequate assistance exacerbated the psychological burden. These findings underscore the importance of addressing bullying by considering the victim's subjective experience, supported by school policies that explicitly cover weight-based insults, safe reporting mechanisms, and non-victim-blaming emotional support.

Keywords: *Body image; Bullying; Psychological condition; Students; Overweight.*

A. INTRODUCTION

Schools have an important role in supporting the development of students, not only through learning activities, but also by providing a safe environment for their social and emotional growth. Within the school setting, students interact with peers, build social relationships, and learn to recognize and respect differences. However, the environment intended to provide this sense of security is not always free from bullying. According to Aminudin (2019), bullying is aggressive behavior that aims to hurt other people physically, verbally, or psychologically, which is carried out repeatedly due to a difference in power between the perpetrator and the victim. Bullying can manifest as physical violence, verbal abuse, or social actions such as ostracizing, humiliating, or deliberately ignoring someone (Selian & Restya, 2024). The gravity of this issue is evident in data regarding violence within Indonesia's educational landscape. The Indonesian Education Monitoring Network (JPPI) recorded 285 cases of violence in educational institutions in 2023, a figure that rose to 573 cases in 2024. Of the total cases recorded in 2024, approximately 31 percent were related to bullying (Pusat Informasi Kriminal Nasional, 2025). These data indicate that violence in educational settings remains a serious issue requiring attention. While these figures reflect only monitored cases and do not necessarily represent the full extent of actual incidents, the upward trend remains a concern in efforts to create safe school environments. Bullying should not simply be dismissed as ordinary conflict between students because repeated experiences of victimization can influence how individuals perceive themselves, establish social relationships, and engage in academic activities (Ariani et al., 2025).

One form of bullying that deserves particular attention is negative treatment based on body shape and size. Bullying that focuses on physical appearance, such as teasing or belittling someone based on their weight, height, or body shaming, is one of the most common forms of bullying that occurs in schools (Ghania, 2026). Students with larger bodies or those perceived as different from their peers may become targets of demeaning comments, particularly when physical appearance becomes a basis for social comparison. Such treatment is closely associated with body shaming, which involves negative comments, criticism, or insults directed at an individual's physical appearance. Aminudin (2019) explains that body shaming or fat shaming is behavior that demeans someone through insults, criticism, or negative

comments aimed at physical conditions, especially those related to being overweight. Furthermore, the physical changes that occur during adolescence may increase individuals' sensitivity to social evaluation, particularly the opinions and responses of their peers.

Consequently, verbal aggression like body shaming can easily disrupt psychological well-being, hinder self-acceptance, induce anxiety, and trigger various mental health issues among adolescents (Cahyani et al., 2024). Students who are overweight may face challenges that extend beyond mere comments about their weight. Repeated teasing can leave students feeling ashamed, lacking in self-confidence, uncomfortable around peers, or anxious about attracting negative attention. However, responses to bullying may differ from one individual to another. Some students may remain silent, avoid particular situations, or limit their social interactions, whereas others may seek support from friends, family members, or school personnel. In a literature review on interventions to reduce bullying-related anxiety among overweight adolescent girls, Firdaus et al. (2023) identified the importance of social support, boosted self-esteem, and coping strategies in addressing the impact of bullying. These findings demonstrate the importance of examining victims' psychological experiences in relation to their social environments and the ways they respond to and cope with bullying.

The impact of bullying is not always immediately apparent. Students may continue to attend school and participate in lessons yet experience anxiety, sadness, anger, diminished self-confidence, or difficulty concentrating on their studies. They may also experience discomfort in particular school settings, during social activities, or when interacting with individuals associated with previous experiences of humiliation. Verbal bullying can be linked to low self-esteem among adolescents. Nursaharah et al. (2023) found a significant relationship between verbal bullying behavior and adolescent self-esteem levels. The psychological consequences of bullying may develop over time, making it important to understand not only the incidents themselves but also how victims interpret and respond to these experiences. Therefore, the impact of bullying must be understood by considering the victim's subjective experience, the context of the incident, and the support or response received from their surrounding environment. Research on bullying should consequently extend beyond identifying the forms of aggressive behavior or measuring its effects, but also examine how victims interpret and experience these events in their everyday lives.

Previous studies have explored the links between body shaming, mental health, self-esteem, social interaction, and anxiety resulting from bullying. Cahyani et al. (2024) highlighted efforts to prevent body shaming among adolescents and discussed its connection to mental health, while Firdaus et al. (2023) reviewed interventions aimed at reducing bullying-induced anxiety in overweight adolescent girls. Furthermore, Nst dan Selian (2026) examined the impact of body shaming on the development of self-esteem, highlighting psychological experiences associated with emotional distress and self-acceptance. These studies establish a foundation for understanding that negative comments regarding one's body are not merely issues of appearance but are also linked to psychological well-being and social relationships. Nevertheless, further exploration is needed to understand how overweight students experience bullying in school settings, how they interpret and assign meaning to these experiences, and how they respond within their relationships with peers, teachers, and family members.

Addressing this gap, this study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences of overweight students who face bullying at school. In a phenomenological approach, individual experiences are understood through narratives describing the events undergone and the meanings attributed to those experiences (Bado, 2022; Hadi et al., 2021). Accordingly, this study does not focus solely on identifying the forms of bullying experienced by students but also explores their feelings and interpretations regarding their bodies, changes in self-confidence, social relationships, experiences during school activities, and strategies for coping with bullying. In addition, understanding the responses of friends, family members, and teachers is essential because the social environment may function either as a source of pressure or as a source of support for students experiencing bullying.

The novelty of this study lies in its emphasis on the subjective experiences of overweight students who experience bullying in the school environment. Specifically, it connects the forms of bullying encountered, the meanings students attribute to these experiences, the psychological and social impacts they perceive in their everyday lives, and the strategies they employ to cope with such experiences. This focus distinguishes the study from research that primarily examines variable relationships or summarizes intervention methods, as it seeks to understand students' experiences as they themselves

recount and interpret them. The study also considers the responses of the school and family environments as integral to the victims' experiences, rather than framing psychological impact solely as an individual issue. Consequently, this research aims to explore the experiences of overweight students subjected to school-based bullying and to understand the impact on their psychological well-being. The findings are expected to contribute to a more contextual understanding of weight-based bullying and provide insights for developing bullying prevention efforts and support systems that are more responsive to students' psychological and social needs.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Weight-Based Bullying

Bullying is a social experience that can manifest through verbal, physical, or relational actions, leaving an individual feeling belittled or excluded. In the context of this research, the focus is on weight-based bullying demeaning treatment related to an individual's body size or physical appearance. Such behavior may take the form of teasing, name-calling, comments about body shape, or repetitive *"jokes"* that cause discomfort to the person on the receiving end. The significance of an action cannot be judged solely by the perpetrator's intent; one must also consider the pattern of behavior and the subjective experience of the individual who is targeted. The relationship between weight status and experiences of bullying has been explored in previous research. In a meta-analysis of studies concerning children and adolescents in school settings, Cheng et al. (2022) found that individuals who are overweight or obese are more likely to experience bullying compared to those with a healthy weight. These findings suggest that body weight can be a characteristic associated with an increased vulnerability to bullying.

Weight-related bullying should also be understood as an experience that can occur repeatedly and across various social contexts. Students may face demeaning comments from peers as well as adults within the school environment. Consequently, this research examines not only the specific forms of teasing experienced by participants but also the circumstances under which the bullying occurs, the reactions of those around them, and the meaning these experiences hold for their lives. It is crucial to move beyond viewing such bullying merely as *"joking"* between students especially when these actions induce shame, discomfort, or a desire to avoid the school environment altogether.

Body Image and Self-Esteem

Body image relates to how individuals perceive, evaluate, and feel about their own bodies. During adolescence, one's view of their body is often linked to self-acceptance and the nature of their interactions within their social environment. Weight-related bullying can significantly influence how adolescents perceive and accept their own bodies. Day et al. (2022) identified a connection between being teased or bullied and the development of a negative body image and disordered eating behaviors among adolescents. Furthermore, Mullan et al. (2023) demonstrated that experiencing bullying is associated with lower self-esteem and emotional difficulties. These findings provide a framework for understanding how individuals evaluate themselves and cope with negative comments directed at their bodies.

Psychological Impact and Social Support

Experiences of bullying can lead to feelings of sadness, a lack of self-confidence, discomfort in social interactions, and an inability to feel at ease while participating in school activities. However, the experience varies from one student to another. Support from family, friends, and teachers plays a crucial role in navigating such situations. A study by Lusiagama et al. (2025) involving middle school students in Sorong indicates that the school climate and prosocial behavior are linked to the prevalence of bullying. This underscores the importance of fostering a supportive school environment and ensuring an appropriate response to reports of bullying. Based on this review, this study focuses on the experiences of students who have been bullied due to their weight, the significance of these experiences for their psychological well-being and school life, and the role of social support in coping with such bullying. A phenomenological approach is employed to understand the participants' subjective experiences, based on the accounts shared during interviews.

C. METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. A qualitative approach is used to understand individuals' experiences of a social phenomenon based on their own perspectives and the meanings they attribute to those experiences. Hadi et al. (2021) explain that qualitative research seeks to understand phenomena experienced by research subjects through descriptions in the form of words and language, whereas phenomenology focuses on an individual's conscious experience of a phenomenon and the meaning derived from that experience. In this study, Bado (2022) explains that phenomenology seeks to understand the meaning of an individual's lived experience of a particular phenomenon or symptom.

In this study, the phenomenological approach was selected to explore how overweight students experience weight-related bullying in their school environment and how they interpret its psychological, social, and academic consequences. The research focus encompasses two aspects: the experiences undergone by the students and how they perceived and interpreted those experiences. This division is in line with the concept of textural description, which describes what the subject experiences, and structural description, which explains how the experience is experienced and interpreted by the subject (Hadi et al., 2021). The choice of a qualitative approach is also grounded in the philosophical foundations of phenomenology, which allow psychology researchers to explore human subjective reality holistically while remaining aware of the limitations posed by researcher bias during the process of interpreting meaning (Rizkiyani & Selian, 2025).

Participants

The participants in this study are students who have experienced weight-based bullying in the school environment. Research data were obtained through observations and interviews with three participants, designated by the codes P1, P2, and P3. These codes are used to maintain confidentiality regarding the participants' identities during data presentation. Participants were selected using a non-probability sampling technique based on the relevance of their experiences to the research objectives. The selection criteria included students who had experienced bullying related to body weight or physical appearance in the school environment, had experiences relevant to the research focus, and were willing to participate in the interviews.

The selection of participants was based on non-probability sampling techniques (non-random sampling), which is essential in qualitative research with a specific focus on ensuring that the selected subjects truly possess a wealth of information and empirical experience related to the phenomenon being studied, not merely a statistical representation (Khalefa & Selian, 2021). Employing a phenomenological approach enabled the researchers to examine participants' experiences in depth, focusing on the experiences recounted and the meanings attributed to those events (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022).

The characteristics of the three participants are presented in Figure 1, using participant codes to protect their identities.

Table 1. Participant characteristics

Participant Code	Age	Gender	Educational Level
P1	17 Years	Female	Grade 12
P2	16 Years	Female	Grade 11
P3	16 Years	Female	Grade 11

Data Collection

Research data were obtained through observations and interviews capturing participants' experiences regarding weight-based bullying in the school environment. Qualitative interviews were used to explore participants' experiences and perspectives on the phenomenon under study. Through this technique, the researcher could understand individual experiences based on the participants' own viewpoints and life contexts (Indah, 2022). Information gathering in this study focused on participants' experiences of being bullied, the forms of treatment received, emotional responses, the impact on their school lives, and the social support they received. This information was used to understand participants' experiences as recounted during the interviews, without making judgments or psychological diagnoses unsupported by the data.

Observations were conducted as a complementary data collection technique alongside the interviews. The observations provided contextual information relevant to understanding the participants' experiences during the data collection process. The researcher documented relevant observations and important information in field notes, which were subsequently considered alongside the interview transcripts during data interpretation. Thus, observations served to complement the participants' verbal accounts rather than replace or independently determine the research findings. Interviews were recorded with the participants' consent, and the results were subsequently transcribed to reflect the interview content. The researcher also kept field notes to document the situation and key points during the interview process. This aligns with Yenrizal (2023), who explains the importance of field notes in documenting the qualitative research data collection process.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed qualitatively by examining participants' experiences regarding weight-based bullying. The researcher read the interview transcripts, highlighted key statements, applied codes, and grouped them into themes that described the participants' experiences. Febriandiela et al. (2023) explain that coding helps researchers identify patterns and themes within qualitative data. The data analysis process involved several stages. First, the researcher read the interview transcripts repeatedly to gain an overall understanding of the participants' experiences. Second, significant statements related to weight-related bullying and its consequences were identified and assigned initial codes. Third, similar codes were grouped into subthemes based on recurring patterns and similarities across participants' accounts. Fourth, the subthemes were organized into four main themes representing the central findings of the study.

The four themes identified through this process were: (1) Forms and Patterns of Weight-Related Bullying; (2) The Impact of Bullying on Psychological Well-being and Self-Perception; (3) The Influence of Bullying on School Activities and Learning Experiences; and (4) Strategies for Coping with Bullying and the Role of Social Support. These themes were developed from the participants' interview accounts and represent different aspects of their experiences, ranging from the forms of bullying encountered to their psychological responses, school experiences, and coping strategies. Observational notes were also considered as complementary information during the interpretation process. The researcher subsequently reviewed the identified codes, subthemes, and themes against the original interview transcripts to maintain consistency between the participants' statements and the research findings. The final analysis was presented descriptively through the four main themes, supported by relevant interview excerpts from P1, P2, and P3.

Ethical Considerations

This study adheres to research ethics, particularly regarding the protection of identity confidentiality, obtaining participant consent, and ensuring participant comfort during interviews. Yulianto et al. (2024) emphasizes that psychological research must respect participants' rights, including the right to withdraw and the protection of data confidentiality. Prior to the interview, participants are informed about the research objectives, procedures, and data usage. Participation is voluntary, and participants have the right to discontinue their involvement without consequence. Participant identities are masked using codes, while irrelevant personal information is excluded from the research report. Because the study discussed experiences of weight-related bullying that can cause emotional discomfort, interviews were conducted with attention to the participants' conditions. Participants are given the option to decline answering specific questions or to stop the interview if they feel uncomfortable. Data and interview excerpts are presented carefully to avoid harming participants or revealing the identities of

other parties. In cases involving minors, parental or guardian consent, as well as the child's assent, must be obtained in accordance with applicable regulations.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The findings of this study were derived from interviews with three participants (P1, P2, and P3) who had experienced weight-related bullying in the school environment. Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts identified four main themes: (1) forms and patterns of weight-related bullying, (2) the psychological impact of bullying and self-perception, (3) the influence of bullying on school activities and learning experiences, and (4) coping strategies and the role of social support. These themes illustrate that weight-related bullying extended beyond comments about physical appearance and was associated with participants' emotional experiences, self-perception, school engagement, and relationships with others.

Table 2. Research Themes Based on Participant Interviews

Theme	Subtheme	based on interviews
Forms and patterns of weight-related bullying	Verbal teasing and nicknames	P1 and P3 received direct comments about their body size. P3 recounted being called a *"bloated elephant"* and a *"buffalo elephant."*
	Bullying in various school environments	P1 experienced teasing in the cafeteria, hallways, and parking area. P3 recounted incidents occurring in various locations around the school, including during school activities.
	Peer and teacher involvement	P1 and P3 recounted disparaging comments that were also made by the teacher.
Psychological impact and self-evaluation	Sadness, shame, and emotional distress	All three participants described experiences of sadness or depression. They tended to suppress their feelings, sometimes crying in private or laughing with their perpetrators despite feeling hurt.
	Confidence and self-acceptance	P1 felt that the bullying experience damaged his self-confidence and made him doubt his worthiness to be loved. P3 felt uncomfortable wearing certain clothes and viewed their physical appearance negatively.
	Intrusive thoughts and sleep disturbances	P1 and P2 recounted incidents of bullying that they kept thinking about until it disturbed their sleep time.
Impact on learning activities and experiences	Avoiding the school environment or school activities	P1 reduces visits to the canteen and certain school areas. P2 avoided school activities and missed school due to the fear of being bullied.
	Concentration and academic	P1 had difficulty concentrating on

	activities	certain lessons, while P2 described being late in submitting assignments due to absences. P3 states that their concentration and learning motivation are impaired.
Coping strategies for bullying and social support	Be silent, bottle up feelings, and withdraw	P1 tends to remain silent and keep their sadness to themselves. P3 sometimes withdraws or laughs along with the perpetrator to cope with the situation.
	Support from those closest to you	P2 and P3 mentioned friends' support as something that helped. P3 also mentioned parents and partners as sources of emotional support.
	School response to complaints	P2 and P3 described teacher responses that tended to dismiss the teasing as a joke or failed to provide what was perceived as an adequate intervention. P1 also recounted an experience of receiving demeaning comments from a teacher.

Theme 1. Forms and Patterns of Weight-Related Bullying

Participants' experiences of bullying primarily took the form of verbal teasing, using body size as a subject of jokes or insults. Such treatment occurred not only in interactions with peers but also in situations involving older students and teachers. The taunts were delivered either directly or when the participants were in an environment where the words could be heard. P1 recounted experiencing bullying since elementary school, a pattern that persisted into subsequent levels of schooling. Taunts frequently occurred when leaving the classroom, particularly when heading to the canteen or passing through the parking area. These experiences led P1 to limit activities outside the classroom. P1 explained: *"I rarely go to the canteen or go downstairs anymore. I only go down if there's a scheduled briefing, a change of classrooms, or a lesson in the lab."*

This statement reveals that the taunting was not merely an unpleasant experience, it also influenced how P1 navigated the school environment. Areas that should be part of daily activities, such as the canteen and the path to the study room, are avoided because they are associated with the possibility of being teased. The bullying P1 experienced was not limited to comments from peers, P1 recounted instances where teachers linked their body size to laziness and limited physical activity. In reality, however, P1 had long suffered from leg-related ailments. One teacher's comment that stood out in P1's memory was: *"You should just make your body even bigger, so you won't be able to walk at all."* P1 felt that such comments failed to take the actual medical condition into account. P1 also felt misunderstood when mobility difficulties were attributed to laziness. These experiences demonstrate that body-related comments were particularly hurtful to P1 when voiced by individuals at school from whom understanding and support were expected.

P3 recounted a similar experience, noting that their weight became a topic of conversation upon entering junior high school. P3 was subjected to derogatory nicknames regarding their body shape, such as *"bloated elephant"* and *"buffalo elephant."* They also described an incident where a teacher drew attention to their physical condition after they appeared exhausted during a school activity. In another instance, P3 felt humiliated when they were served an oversized portion of food, simply because it was assumed that someone of their large size would naturally eat a large amount. Bullying also occurred in P3's interactions with peers and older students, they recalled an incident where they were denied space on public transport alongside other students because their body was deemed too large. During school activities, their body size was even used as a reason to assign them to specific positions in competitions. These various incidents left P3 feeling that their physical appearance was constantly being judged by others. Unlike experiences confined to specific locations, the intensity of the treatment described by the

participants was also linked to particular social situations. P1 felt more vulnerable to mockery when walking alone in the canteen or parking areas, whereas P3 described incidents occurring across various parts of the school environment. Thus, the bullying experienced by both participants was not limited to a single setting or type of interaction but manifested throughout their daily school activities.

Theme 2. The Impact of Bullying on Psychological Well-being and Self-Perception

All three participants described experiencing unpleasant emotional responses following incidents of bullying. Feelings of sadness, shame, anger, and distress manifested in their accounts in various ways. For some participants, these emotions were not always outwardly expressed instead, they were internalized until the emotional burden became overwhelming. P1 explained that she usually tried to appear unaffected when subjected to teasing. However, when the hurtful words kept playing on her mind, she would choose to cry or withdraw into solitude. She stated: *"When I'm sad, I just bottle it up for the time being perhaps only when it reaches a breaking point does the anger come out."* P1 also revealed that she found it difficult to share her sadness with certain family members because they were dealing with their own problems. Consequently, she tended to keep these experiences to herself or share them only with people she felt could offer comfort. While this approach allowed her to cope with situations in public, it did not necessarily alleviate the emotional pain she felt.

The impact on self-confidence was evident in P1's experience. Comments regarding her weight led her to feel that she was not fully accepted by others. This negative self-assessment extended to her views on romantic relationships and the possibility of being loved by someone. P1 expressed: *"I feel like I'm not worthy of anyone, perhaps. Especially regarding a partner like I'm unworthy, you could say unworthy of marriage or being in a relationship."* This statement indicates that the bullying experience not only affected how P1 felt about her physical appearance but also influenced her perception of her own worthiness regarding relationships. She shared the same desire as anyone else to be loved and treated well, yet the comments about her body caused that desire to be overshadowed by self-doubt. P1 also recounted how comments about dieting made the effort to change her weight feel increasingly arduous. Just as she began her efforts, she would face questions about results that were perceived as not yet visible. This situation caused a loss of morale. For this individual, comments intended as encouragement could be perceived as insults when delivered in a demeaning manner. In the case of P3, body-related discomfort was evident in how they evaluated their own appearance. P3 said: *"I don't have the confidence to wear any clothes that don't suit me."* P3 compared their appearance to that of others with a similar body size who, in their view, still looked good in various types of clothing. Although they saw others appearing confident, they did not feel the same way about themselves. The experience of receiving teasing since junior high school was also related to the emergence of the idea that he was less attractive and not easily liked by others.

P2's experience illustrates a form of emotional distress linked to past fear and anxiety. P2 recounted a period when they missed five days of school, noting that two of those absences were due to a fear of bullying. They explained: *"Back then, I was so anxious that I didn't dare go to school."* P2 also revealed that these past experiences frequently crossed their mind, especially when trying to sleep. Although they had become accustomed to the teasing, this familiarity did not mean the experience was no longer painful, they continued to dwell on these events and suffered from sleep disturbances. In addition, P2 said that during his junior high school years up to grade 10, he had thoughts of ending his life and committed self-harm by scratching his body until he was injured when his emotions felt difficult to control. According to P2, this behavior ceased in the eleventh grade after they found a friend who provided genuine support. While these experiences cannot be used to establish a specific clinical diagnosis, they form a crucial part of P2's account regarding the severity of the pressure they endured. Overall, the experiences of the three participants reveal that weight-related bullying is associated with a range of psychological responses, extending from sadness and shame to negative self-evaluation. While the nature and intensity of these experiences varied among the participants, all three expressed a sense of hurt when their bodies were made the subject of ridicule.

Theme 3. The Influence of Bullying on School Activities and Learning Experiences

The impact of bullying is also evident in the participants' engagement with school activities. A sense of discomfort regarding certain environments leads participants to adjust their behavior, such as avoiding areas perceived as risky, limiting interactions, or opting out of group activities. These experiences demonstrate that bullying affects not only social relationships but also the participants' ability to enjoy school activities. P1 chose to visit the canteen less frequently or avoid passing through specific areas for fear of being mocked again. Even when compelled to pass through these locations, P1

remained at risk of hearing comments about their body. Meanwhile, P2 recounted choosing to stay in the classroom during school competitions or events involving large numbers of students.

For certain activities, P2 even chose not to attend at all, lacking the confidence to be in a crowd. Such avoidance was not always justified by citing reasons directly related to the bullying. P2 mentioned once requesting permission to be absent on the grounds of illness. P2 also struggled to participate in group work, feeling unwelcome by other group members. According to P2, there were situations where it seemed their only value lay in contributing funds for activities, rather than being treated as an equal group member. These experiences affected P2's academic activities, P2 explained that while assignments were still completed, submissions were sometimes delayed due to absences in the preceding weeks. Nevertheless, P2 did not report a decline in overall academic performance, stating that most grades remained stable and above the passing threshold. These findings indicate that the impact of bullying on learning activities does not always manifest as a drop in grades across all subjects but can instead appear through absenteeism and delays in completing assignments.

For P1, difficulties with concentration were also not uniform across all subjects, P1 found it harder to focus when studying under teachers who had previously made demeaning comments. Conversely, the student was able to follow lessons well when the classroom atmosphere felt comfortable and the teacher provided support. Thus, P1's experience indicates that the relationship with the teacher is a factor linked to their comfort and concentration while learning. P3 also stated that thoughts regarding bullying significantly disrupted their concentration and motivation. They sometimes felt reluctant to go to school, particularly when facing sports-related activities or situations that drew attention to their physical condition. P3 also recounted that teachers who dismissed taunts as mere jokes made them feel they had no one to rely on when facing problems.

In the experiences of P1 and P2, the impact of bullying also extended to sleep patterns. P1 described a period of difficulty sleeping at night, often unable to fall asleep until just before dawn. P2 mentioned that thoughts about the incidents they had experienced frequently surfaced when trying to sleep. Both experiences demonstrate that the pressure felt at school could carry over into their rest time at home. Findings from the three participants reveal varied impacts on their school lives. These included restricted social activities, avoidance of specific activities, absenteeism, delayed assignments, and disruptions to concentration and rest. However, these impacts did not manifest in exactly the same way for every participant.

Theme 4. Strategies for Coping with Bullying and the Role of Social Support

Participants employed different methods to cope with bullying. P1 tended to remain silent when taunted and tried not to show their feelings in front of the perpetrators, believing that responding sometimes only fueled further teasing. Although silence helped them get through the immediate situation, feelings of sadness and distress persisted after the incident. P3 recounted sometimes choosing to walk away, cry alone, or laugh along with the person taunting them, despite actually feeling hurt. They explained: *"Yeah, I'd just join in the laughter, even though I'd gone numb from their taunts."* The statement illustrates the discrepancy between outward reactions and internal feelings. Laughing along with the person doing the teasing does not necessarily mean that P3 finds the remarks funny or harmless in some situations, that reaction arises as a way to cope with an interaction that makes her uncomfortable. Over time, P3 began trying to respond to the teasing more assertively. Support from her parents and closest friends helped her convey that her body size was no reason for anyone to belittle her. She also start views her self-worth through her abilities and achievements.

P3 recounted being a top-ranking student, this experience serves as a reminder that she possesses capabilities that cannot be judged solely by physical appearance. Support from close friends emerged as a crucial source of help for both P2 and P3. P2 shared that she has only a few people she truly trusts to confide in, including close friends and friends met online, these friends provide both advice and emotional support. P2 also attributes her cessation of self-harming behavior to the presence of a friend who has consistently supported her since the eleventh grade. For P3, support comes not only from friends but also from parents and a partner. Her closest friends sometimes stand up for her, reminding her that body weight does not negate one's beauty, intelligence, or inherent value. This support helped P3 build the courage to speak out against the mistreatment she faced. P1's experience demonstrates that the necessary social support does not always take the form of lengthy advice or calls to confront the perpetrator, she emphasizes the importance of a calming response that avoids victim-blaming. P1 explained that when sharing her problems, she needed someone willing to listen and offer support, rather than a response that made her feel even worse about herself.

Meanwhile, experiences with reporting bullying to school authorities have not always yielded adequate responses. P2 recounted that when she reported the issue to a guidance counselor, she was advised to be patient and let the perpetrator face divine retribution. When she raised the matter with her homeroom teacher, she was asked to provide a recording or video as evidence. P2 found this request difficult to fulfill, as bullying incidents can occur unexpectedly, she believes that witness testimony should also be taken into account. P3 also encountered a situation where a teacher dismissed the taunting she faced as merely friendly banter. This experience left them feeling that the very people who should have listened to their complaints failed to fully grasp the impact of what they were going through. Conversely, when close friends or family members stood up for them, P3 felt more empowered to assert that they did not deserve to be belittled because of their body size. All three participants expressed a hope that schools would handle reports of bullying more seriously. P1 hoped teachers would summon the parties involved, gather witness statements, and resolve issues without relying solely on video recordings as the basis for action.

P3 emphasized that teachers should act as wise mediators rather than joining in on comments or disparaging students' physical appearance. P2's experience highlighted the importance of support that goes beyond simply telling the victim to ignore the incident, instead, it must provide space for them to seek and receive help. Amidst these experiences, the participants also shared what helped them persevere and view themselves more positively. P1 cited the future and the desire to bring happiness to their parents as reasons to keep moving forward. P3 strove to improve self-care and evaluate themselves based on their abilities and personal values. P2 experienced a shift after finding supportive friends. These experiences demonstrate that interpersonal support and efforts to rebuild self-worth are crucial elements of the participants' stories regarding how they coped with bullying. In summary, the findings indicate that the weight-related bullying experienced by the three participants extended far beyond the actual incidents of teasing. These experiences influenced how they perceived their bodies and self-worth, managed their emotions, and determined their level of engagement in school life. Support from close associates helped some participants cope with these experiences, whereas school responses perceived as passive or dismissive led to a sense that the handling of the bullying was inadequate.

Discussion

Weight-Related Bullying as a Form of Social Stigma

The findings indicate that participants' body weight was used as a basis for ridicule, derogatory nicknames, and humiliating treatment. These experiences occurred in interactions with peers and, in some cases, involved teachers. The involvement of teachers is particularly important because students may expect teachers to provide protection and create a respectful learning environment. Hafiqly et al. (2025) explain that school-based bullying can manifest as verbal, physical, or psychological abuse. Bullying experienced at school frequently impacts students' emotional, psychological, social, and academic experiences. The present findings provide further insight into how weight-related bullying was experienced by the participants, particularly through repeated verbal comments and treatment that made them feel uncomfortable or humiliated. One of the important findings of this study is that there is a tendency to consider comments about weight as something normal or just a joke. However, the speaker's intent does not necessarily align with the recipient's lived experience. When comments about physical appearance are experienced as humiliating and contribute to feelings of shame or insecurity, their impact should not be dismissed solely because the speaker considers them humorous. Derogatory remarks about physical appearance can lead to feelings of inferiority and a loss of self-confidence (Suherman et al., 2024). This is evident in the participants' experiences, they remained hurt even when, in certain situations, they chose to remain silent or laugh along with those mocking them.

The experiences of P1 and P3 also demonstrate the importance of school involvement in addressing weight-related bullying. Sitanggang et al. (2024), in their study of bullying and school responses at SMP Negeri 14 Medan, highlight the importance of recognizing different forms of bullying and the role of schools in responding to such incidents. The present study adds to this discussion by showing how participants experienced comments about body size in everyday school interactions and how responses perceived as dismissive could contribute to feelings of being unsupported. Therefore, weight-related insults should receive appropriate attention, particularly when they are repeated or cause students to feel humiliated or unsafe.

The Relationship Between Bullying Experiences, Body Image, and Psychological Well-being

The participants' accounts show that negative comments about body weight were associated with how they evaluated their own physical appearance and personal worth. Comments from one's social environment are not merely perceived as the judgments of others, they can also be internalized into one's own self-assessment. When an individual repeatedly receives messages that their body does not meet perceived ideal standards, they may begin to question their attractiveness, capabilities, or worthiness of acceptance. At this stage, body image issues extend beyond mere satisfaction with one's appearance to affect self-worth. This is in line with research by Rizqiyah and Maryam (2023) and Zuroida and Kusnadi (2022) which discussed the relationship between body image and bullying behavior in adolescents. The present findings illustrate this relationship through participants' accounts of discomfort with their appearance, hesitation when choosing clothes, and doubts about being accepted by others. Nevertheless, the relationship between body image and bullying must not be interpreted as suggesting that victims are responsible for the mistreatment they experience. The focus should remain on the behavior of those who ridicule or demean others because of their physical appearance.

Participant experiences also reveal that psychological distress is not always outwardly apparent. Some participants chose to remain silent, suppress their sadness, or weep only after they were no longer in the presence of their tormentors. Such responses demonstrate that a person's outward appearance does not necessarily reflect their underlying emotional state. Astifionita (2024) discusses the various impacts of bullying on secondary school students, including emotional, psychological, and academic consequences. For one participant, the experience of bullying was linked to feelings of being unlovable and a fear that their physical appearance made it difficult for others to accept them. For other participants, body-related discomfort manifested as hesitation when choosing clothing and a tendency to compare themselves with others. These experiences demonstrate that appearance-based bullying can affect aspects of the self that extend beyond mere physical appearance (Ramahardhila & Supriyono, 2022). Negative judgments from others can become a source of rumination, persisting long after the interaction with the bully has ended.

Bullying can also place severe emotional strain on certain individuals. One participant recounted past thoughts of suicide and instances of self-harm during times when they struggled to regulate their emotions. Such experiences must be understood sensitively as part of the participant's personal narrative, rather than as a basis for a psychological diagnosis. These findings underscore the importance of schools and families paying attention to signs of severe emotional distress, especially when students express feelings of worthlessness, difficulty coping, or self-harming behavior. The book Bullying: Mengubah Luka Menjadi Asa (Ulfa et al., 2025) serves as a valuable supplementary resource for understanding bullying from the victim's perspective, including the emotional wounds that may remain invisible to others. In the context of this study, the participants' experiences reveal that words appearing trivial to others can hold profound significance for the students who receive them. Consequently, responses to bullying must take into account the victim's subjective experience and avoid downplaying their suffering simply because the bullying did not involve physical violence. Nevertheless, this study does not imply that every student who experiences bullying will suffer the same psychological consequences. Interview data revealed a range of experiences, from sadness, shame, and decreased self-confidence to sleep disturbances and more severe psychological experiences in one participant. This diversity highlights the importance of understanding each student's situation within the context of their experiences and social support.

The Impact of Bullying on Feelings of Safety and School Engagement

Participants' experiences reveal that a lack of safety can alter how students participate in school activities. Behaviors such as avoiding the cafeteria, limiting activities outside the classroom, skipping group events, or fearing school attendance can be understood as responses to situations perceived as potentially leading to further humiliation. Thus, avoidance behavior does not necessarily indicate a lack of desire to socialize or a lack of interest in school activities. For the participants, such actions were also linked to efforts to minimize the likelihood of enduring painful treatment. In this study, disruptions to the learning experience were evident through difficulties with concentration, delays in submitting assignments, and reduced engagement in school activities. However, these impacts did not always manifest as a drop in grades across all subjects. One participant managed to maintain most of their academic grades despite experiencing absences and delays in assignment submissions. This suggests that the academic impact of bullying can manifest as obstacles to the learning process itself, without necessarily being reflected in an overall decline in grades (Astifionita, 2024). These findings also highlight

the importance of the student-teacher relationship within the learning experience. One participant found it harder to concentrate during lessons with a teacher who had previously belittled them, whereas a pleasant learning atmosphere made it easier to focus. Such experiences demonstrate that the quality of school interactions is linked to students' sense of safety during the learning process. Teachers play a role not only in delivering course material but also in shaping the classroom's social atmosphere through their manner of speaking, how they issue reprimands, and how they respond to individual differences.

Research by Lusiagama et al. (2025) involving 370 junior high school students in Sorong found that the school environment and prosocial behavior collectively accounted for 35.9% of the variation in bullying tendencies within their research model. These results underscore the relevance of the school environment and mutually supportive behavior in understanding the dynamics of bullying. The findings of this study complement that perspective by highlighting participants' experiences, which show that the responses of teachers and peers can either foster a sense of acceptance or exacerbate feelings of isolation. Consequently, efforts to prevent bullying should not focus solely on changing the behavior of the perpetrators, they must also encompass the creation of a school environment where students feel safe to learn and interact. When students report bullying, dismissive responses to their experiences can make the act of reporting feel futile. On the other hand, a teacher's willingness to listen, ask for information fairly, and follow up on reports can be an important part of building student trust in the school.

Social Support as Part of Resilience

Research findings indicate that social support is important for participants in dealing with bullying. The support perceived as helpful does not always take the form of lengthy advice or encouragement to fight back against the perpetrator. For one participant, the most important factor was simply the willingness of others to listen, offer reassurance, and refrain from assigning blame. Another participant recounted how the presence of a close friend helped them navigate a period of severe emotional distress. Meanwhile, some participants felt empowered to stand up for themselves after receiving support from their parents and close friends. This can be understood through the concept of resilience, namely the ability of individuals to face pressure and adapt when experiencing difficult situations. Social support, emotional regulation skills, self-esteem, and the school environment are key aspects in building resilience among adolescents who have experienced bullying (Jafni & Nur, 2025). It is also important to view survivors as individuals who require support and opportunities to restore their self-worth (Ulfa et al., 2025). In this study, resilience did not manifest as an ability to always appear strong or to avoid feeling sadness. Some participants continued to feel hurt even when they chose to remain silent, avoid the perpetrator, or display a seemingly composed exterior. These experiences demonstrate that enduring bullying does not mean its impact has vanished.

The support received by participants is best understood as a factor that aids them in coping with the experience, rather than a guarantee that all psychological difficulties can be immediately resolved. With a supportive school environment, mutual assistance, empathy, and the courage to resist teasing can play a role in creating safer interactions. In this context, a friend who stands up for the victim not only provides direct emotional support but also helps affirm that body-shaming is not behavior that should be normalized. Therefore, strengthening resilience should not be viewed solely as the victim's responsibility. Students need opportunities to develop self-confidence and problem-solving skills, but they also need an environment that does not continually degrade their physical condition. Individual counseling may be considered based on student needs, while schools must ensure that recovery efforts go hand-in-hand with measures to prevent recurring bullying. Overall, this discussion underscores that weight-based bullying must be viewed as an issue concerning student well-being and the school environment, rather than merely a matter of appearance or peer banter. The participants' experiences highlight the importance of acknowledging the impact on victims, ensuring a responsible school response, and providing social support to help students regain a sense of safety and self-worth.

E. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the experiences of students who had experienced weight-related bullying in the school environment and to understand its perceived impact on their psychological well-being. Based on interviews with three participants, the findings identified four main themes: forms and patterns of weight-related bullying; psychological impact and self-perception; the influence of bullying on school activities and learning experiences; and coping strategies and the role of social support. The

findings indicate that weight-related bullying occurred through verbal teasing, derogatory nicknames, and other forms of humiliating treatment related to body size. These experiences were associated with sadness, shame, emotional distress, reduced self-confidence, negative body evaluation, and, for some participants, recurrent thoughts and sleep disturbances. The participants also described changes in their school engagement, including avoiding certain areas, limiting participation in activities, experiencing absences, and having difficulties with concentration or assignment completion.

The ways participants coped with bullying varied, including remaining silent, withdrawing, concealing emotions, and seeking support from significant others. Support from friends and family members helped some participants feel heard and regain confidence. Conversely, school responses perceived as dismissive or insufficient contributed to participants' feelings of being unsupported. These findings highlight that the consequences of bullying extend beyond the immediate incidents and may influence students' perceptions of themselves and their experiences within the school environment. Therefore, schools need to recognize weight- and appearance-based insults as issues that require appropriate attention. Efforts to prevent and address bullying should include clear and accessible reporting mechanisms, fair consideration of witness accounts, appropriate follow-up procedures, and teacher-student interactions that respect students' dignity and physical differences. Families and peers also have an important role in providing emotional support, while students experiencing severe emotional distress should be directed to appropriate professional services.

This study is based on the accounts of three participants; therefore, its findings provide an in-depth understanding of their experiences rather than representing all students who experience weight-related bullying. Future research could involve participants from different school levels and backgrounds to explore variations in bullying experiences, psychological responses, and the role of school support. Further studies could also examine how school policies and intervention practices address weight-related bullying.

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