

Cultivating Ethics and Empathy through Character Building to Prevent Acts of Sexual Violence and Bullying

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Abstract

This community service aimed to develop a character-building program at SMPN 15 Kota Malang to prevent sexual violence and bullying among students by fostering ethics and empathy. The service involved several activities, including initial surveys to identify risk factors, curriculum development, training for teachers and staff, and workshops for parents. The implementation focused on cultivating students' understanding of ethics and empathy through interactive learning and group discussions. The program evaluation indicated significant improvements: 85% of students reported increased awareness of empathy, while bullying and sexual violence cases decreased by 35%. Additionally, parental involvement in school activities increased by 50%. These results suggest that the program effectively fostered a safer, more inclusive school environment and should be expanded to other schools.

Keywords: character building, ethics, empathy, Sexual Violence, bullying

INTRODUCTION

Bullying and sexual harassment in schools are persistent and complex problems that affect the well-being of students worldwide, including Indonesia. At SMPN 15 Kota Malang, like many schools in the region, incidents of sexual violence and bullying have caused significant negative impacts on both the victims and the broader school environment. These issues require comprehensive and proactive solutions to mitigate their prevalence and ensure a safe, inclusive learning environment for students. Studies have demonstrated that implementing character education programs focusing on ethical values and empathy can effectively prevent bullying and sexual harassment in schools (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2004).

SMPN 15 Kota Malang, with a diverse student population from various cultural, social, and economic backgrounds, has been facing challenges related to insufficient supervision of students' behavior outside class hours, and a lack of understanding of empathy and ethics in interpersonal relationships. These factors,

combined with the lack of involvement from parents in monitoring and supporting their children, have exacerbated the situation. Previous research has highlighted the importance of character education that promotes ethical behavior and empathy to prevent bullying and sexual violence among students (Dean, 1990). Such programs encourage positive attitudes and teach students to value diversity while understanding the consequences of their actions on others.

In recent years, character-building programs focusing on ethics and empathy have gained momentum as effective tools in preventing school-based violence. These programs emphasize the role of moral values in shaping student interactions and promote a culture of respect and understanding (Awwaliansyah, 2021). Given the continued rise in cases of bullying and sexual harassment, SMPN 15 Kota Malang adopted a proactive approach by implementing a character-building program tailored to the school's specific needs and challenges. The

program aims to foster a culture of empathy and ethical behavior among students while involving teachers and parents in the overall strategy to reduce instances of violence.

The objective of this community service program is to raise awareness among students regarding the importance of ethics and empathy in interpersonal relationships, thereby fostering a positive moral framework. Additionally, it aims to reduce the occurrence of sexual violence and bullying by creating a safer, more inclusive learning environment. The program also seeks to increase parental involvement in supporting the school's efforts and to enhance the quality of social interactions among students, promoting empathy, cooperation, and tolerance to prevent conflict and violence.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This study employed a **qualitative** method with a descriptive approach to understand and evaluate the effectiveness of the character-building program in preventing sexual violence and bullying at SMPN 15 Kota Malang. The qualitative method was chosen based on the need to explore the subjective experiences of participants and gain deeper insights into how the values of ethics and empathy were internalized by students, teachers, and parents.

Data Collection

Data was collected through several techniques:

1. **Qualitative Survey.** A qualitative survey was conducted to identify the students' initial understanding of ethics and empathy before the program began and to assess changes in attitudes and behaviors after the program was implemented. This survey used open-ended questions, allowing students to provide detailed responses about their experiences with the program. The survey also gauged the perceptions of parents and teachers regarding changes in student behavior post-program.
2. **Participatory Observation.** The research team carried out participatory observation at the school during the implementation of the character-building program. This observation aimed to record

the dynamics of interactions between students, as well as the relationships between students and teachers and school staff in the context of learning ethics and empathy. The team also observed various learning activities that supported the internalization of these values.

3. **In-Depth Interviews.** In-depth interviews were conducted with students, teachers, and parents to further understand how the character-building program influenced students' mindsets and actions related to sexual violence and bullying. These interviews aimed to explore changes in attitudes and how learning about ethics and empathy was applied in everyday life.

Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using **thematic analysis**. In this process, data from the surveys, observations, and interviews were identified and categorized into key themes, including awareness of ethics, empathy, and the prevention of violence. This analysis helped to uncover common patterns and variations in participants' experiences with the program.

The thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility in capturing the meaning of diverse qualitative data and its ability to connect individual experiences to broader social phenomena, such as violence and bullying in schools.

By employing a qualitative method, this study successfully revealed significant changes in students' awareness regarding ethical and empathetic values and their impact on reducing incidents of sexual violence and bullying in the school.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The community service program titled Fostering Ethics and Empathy: Character Building Program Development as a Proactive Step in Preventing Sexual Violence and Bullying at SMPN 15 Kota Malang has yielded significant results in both character education and reducing incidents of violence and bullying among students. This section presents an integrated discussion of the program's results and its broader implications.

Results of Community Service Program

The implementation of the character building program was based on the identification of key issues, including a high rate of sexual violence and bullying incidents among students. The program aimed to address these issues by cultivating empathy and ethical behavior through a series of structured activities, including teacher training, student workshops, and parental involvement sessions.

Impact on Student Behavior and Awareness The program successfully increased students' awareness of empathy and ethics. Data collected from pre- and post-program surveys indicate a notable rise in student understanding of these values. Prior to the program, approximately 70% of students showed limited awareness regarding the importance of empathy and ethical interactions with their peers. However, post-program surveys revealed that 85% of the students had developed a deeper understanding of empathy and its practical applications in their daily interactions.

Reduction in Sexual Violence and Bullying Cases

One of the most significant outcomes of the program was the reduction in cases of sexual violence and bullying. School records demonstrated a 35% decrease in reported incidents six months after the program's completion. This is a testament to the effectiveness of the character education approach in fostering a safer and more inclusive school environment. The combination of student workshops, teacher training, and parental engagement created a multi-stakeholder approach to preventing harmful behaviors.

Teacher and Parent Involvement

Teachers and staff played a pivotal role in the program's success. Through specialized training sessions, they learned how to detect early signs of bullying and sexual violence and how to intervene effectively. In addition, parents were actively involved in workshops designed to synchronize values taught at home with those introduced at school. Their involvement increased by 50%, as

evidenced by their attendance at school meetings and their active participation in follow-up discussions.

Discussion: Implications for Replicability and Broader Community Impact

The success of this program offers several insights that could be beneficial for replication in other educational settings. First, the holistic approach of involving students, teachers, and parents proved essential in ensuring the program's effectiveness. By engaging all stakeholders, the program was able to address the root causes of sexual violence and bullying, such as lack of empathy and ethical awareness, rather than merely responding to the symptoms of these issues.

The integration of empathy and ethics into daily school activities created an environment conducive to sustained behavioral change. This highlights the importance of embedding character education into the core curriculum, as opposed to treating it as a supplementary activity. Such integration not only prevents violence but also promotes a more supportive and cooperative school culture.

In terms of broader community development, this model of character education can be adapted to other schools and even community organizations to promote inclusivity, safety, and mutual respect. The reduction in violence and bullying is an indicator that this program can be scaled to different educational contexts with similar challenges. Schools facing high incidences of conflict or disruptive behavior can benefit from adopting a proactive character-building approach to foster a positive school climate.

IMPACT OF ACTIVITIES

The "Character Building Program" implemented at SMPN 15 Kota Malang aimed to address the prevalent issues of sexual violence and bullying among students by promoting ethics and empathy. Prior to the program, several challenges were identified, including low awareness of ethical behavior and empathy among students, insufficient supervision of student behavior

outside of class hours, and minimal parental involvement. This environment contributed to the high incidence of bullying and sexual violence within the school.

Before the Program:

- **Low Awareness of Empathy and Ethics:** A pre-program survey revealed that 70% of students lacked understanding of the negative impacts of bullying and sexual violence. There was also limited awareness of the importance of empathy and respect in interpersonal relationships.
- **High Incidence of Bullying and Sexual Violence:** School records indicated frequent cases of bullying and sexual harassment, which negatively affected the school environment and student well-being. This issue was exacerbated by a lack of strong monitoring and interventions.
- **Limited Parental Involvement:** Parents were generally not actively involved in supporting the school's efforts to reduce bullying and promote positive behavior among students, contributing to ongoing challenges in addressing the issue effectively.

After the Program:

The implementation of the Character Building Program resulted in significant positive changes within the school community, addressing both behavioral issues and fostering a safer, more inclusive environment.

1. **Increased Awareness Among Students:** After the program, 85% of students reported having a better understanding of the importance of empathy and ethical behavior. The program's interactive approach, including role-playing and discussions, successfully helped students internalize the consequences of their actions on others. This awareness shift was a critical step in reducing instances of violence.
2. **Reduction in Bullying and Sexual Violence:** The school recorded a 35% reduction in cases of bullying and sexual harassment six months post-program implementation. This substantial decrease demonstrates the program's effectiveness in fostering positive behavior and curbing violence

through the cultivation of empathy and ethical values.

3. **Improved Parental Involvement:** There was a 50% increase in parental participation in school activities, including workshops and counseling sessions focused on preventing violence and supporting ethical behavior. Parents became more engaged in monitoring and guiding their children's behavior, both at home and in school settings.
4. **Enhanced Collaboration and School Environment:** Teachers and staff reported an improvement in students' ability to resolve conflicts peacefully and engage in cooperative behavior. This development was supported by the formation of discussion groups, which provided students with a safe space to talk about their experiences and solutions for preventing violence.

Overall, the program had a profound impact on reducing violence and improving the school climate. By addressing root causes such as low empathy and ethical awareness, the program fostered a more respectful and empathetic student body, contributing to a safer and more supportive learning environment. The involvement of all stakeholders, including students, teachers, and parents, was key to the program's success.

This case demonstrates that proactive, structured interventions that focus on ethics and empathy can effectively resolve issues of bullying and sexual violence in schools, offering a model for other institutions facing similar challenges.

CONCLUSION

The program implemented at SMPN 15 Kota Malang has successfully demonstrated the potential of character education programs to foster empathy, reduce bullying, and prevent sexual violence. The results show that with a structured and multi-stakeholder approach, significant behavioral changes can be achieved. Moreover, the integration of ethics and empathy into the curriculum offers a replicable model for

other schools and educational institutions aiming to create a safer, more inclusive environment for students. This program not only addresses immediate issues but also lays the foundation for long-term community development, making it a valuable contribution to educational practices in Indonesia.

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