Review

The Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Bullying in Adolescents: A Scoping Review

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Abstract

Bullying is a serious problem among adolescents with broad negative impacts on psychological and social well-being. Factors that influence bullying are individual and environmental. Emotional intelligence has been identified as an essential factor influencing bullying behavior, but its relationship is not fully understood. This research aims to conduct a scoping review of the relationship between emotional intelligence and adolescent bullying behavior. A scoping review approach was used in this research. Search for articles using three databases (Scopus, PubMed, and CINAHL) and the search engine, namely Google Scholar. Keywords used included "emotional intelligence", "bullying", and "adolescents". Data analysis was carried out using a qualitative descriptive approach. The results of this study showed that 7 articles met the inclusion criteria that discussed the relationship between emotional intelligence and bullying in adolescents. The 7 articles show a negative relationship between emotional intelligence

and bullying behavior, where individuals with low emotional intelligence tend to be more involved in bullying behavior. Variables influencing this relationship include emotional awareness, management, and understanding other people's emotions. The involvement of emotional intelligence plays a vital role in understanding and overcoming the phenomenon of bullying in adolescents.

Keywords
Adolescents; bullying; emotional intelligence

1. Introduction

Bullying is a deliberate act that inflicts harm, characterized by the use of aggression and intimidation, manifesting in various forms such as verbal threats, physical violence, and psychological manipulation [1]. Central to bullying behavior are elements of aggression, verbal hostility, and physical attacks, which are often executed with intent [2]. Defined as a series of aggressive actions, verbal, physical, or psychological bullying typically involves repeated offenses perpetrated by individuals or groups against those who are perceived as weaker or more vulnerable [3]. The manifestations of bullying include verbal intimidation (e.g., teasing or threats), physical aggression (e.g., hitting or pushing), and psychological tactics (e.g., social isolation or spreading malicious rumors) [4]. Such behaviors occur within unequal power dynamics aimed at dominating or controlling the victim [5].

Recent studies indicate a concerning rise in bullying incidents among adolescents. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports bullying rates of 72.5% in Japan and 71.2% in the United States [6]. In Indonesia, the incidence of bullying increased by 70% from 2013 to 2019 [7]. In the United States, data from the National Center for Educational Statistics in 2015 revealed that 20.8% of students aged 12-18 reported being bullied [8]. Similarly, the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) documented 369 bullying complaints from 2011 to 2014, with 25% stemming from the educational sector, reflecting a broader societal concern [9].

The causative factors for bullying among adolescents are multifaceted, encompassing individual traits and environmental influences. Personal characteristics such as low emotional intelligence, limited empathy, and a propensity for aggressive or dominant behavior serve as critical predictors of bullying [10]. Experiences of trauma and emotional instability further exacerbate the likelihood of engaging in such behavior. From an environmental perspective, factors such as school cultures that condone aggression, inadequate supervision, and social norms that marginalize victims contribute significantly to the prevalence of bullying [11]. Moreover, the pervasive influence of media and technology has intensified bullying behavior, primarily through online platforms.

Victims of bullying endure a spectrum of severe consequences that significantly impair their physical, mental, and social well-being [12]. Psychologically, victims may experience diminished self-esteem, heightened anxiety, and depression stemming from the relentless pressure associated with bullying [13]. This may lead to school-related fears, difficulties concentrating, and sleep disturbances. Socially, victims often face isolation and struggle to establish healthy relationships

with peers [14, 15]. Physically, the stress induced by bullying can manifest in health issues such as headaches, stomachaches, and decreased appetite [5, 16].

Emotional intelligence (EI) encompasses an individual's capacity to recognize, understand, and manage their own emotions while effectively navigating interpersonal relationships [17-19]. Core components of emotional intelligence include emotional awareness, the ability to regulate and manage emotions effectively, and social skills that foster positive interactions and healthy relationships [20]. During adolescence, a critical period of emotional development, enhancing emotional intelligence can equip individuals to handle complex emotional challenges better, manage stress, resolve interpersonal conflicts, and cultivate social connections-all, essential skills for future personal and professional success [21, 22].

Individuals with low emotional intelligence may struggle to manage negative emotions constructively, increasing the likelihood of resorting to bullying as an unhealthy outlet for these feelings [23]. Existing research highlights a relationship between emotional intelligence and bullying behaviors among adolescents [8]. While findings are not universally consistent, many studies indicate a negative correlation between emotional intelligence levels and the propensity for engaging in bullying behavior.

To address the gaps in existing literature, this scoping review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the relationship between emotional intelligence and adolescent bullying behavior. While previous research has suggested a potential link between low emotional intelligence and increased bullying tendencies, the evidence remains inconclusive and fragmented across studies with varying methodologies and sample populations. This review will systematically map out the current research landscape, highlighting the specific emotional intelligence components (e.g., emotional awareness, self-regulation, empathy) that may be protective factors against bullying. This underscores the importance of examining emotional intelligence as a protective factor against bullying. Given this context, the authors are interested in conducting a scoping review to explore the intricate relationship between emotional intelligence and bullying behavior in adolescents, emphasizing identifying mechanisms through which emotional intelligence may mitigate bullying dynamics.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Study Design

This study used a scoping review approach in accordance with the model proposed by Arksey and O'Malley [24]. This approach involves five main stages, namely (1) identifying research objectives, (2) identifying relevant studies, (3) selecting studies, (4) extracting data, and (5) presenting results. The first stage involves formulating the research question and determining the scope of the review. The second stage includes a comprehensive and systematic literature search. The third stage involved study selection based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The fourth stage is the extraction of data from the selected studies, while the fifth stage consists of the analysis and presentation of the findings in the review. The authors used the PRISMA Flow Diagram to describe the article selection process regarding the relationship between emotional intelligence and adolescent bullying (Figure 1).
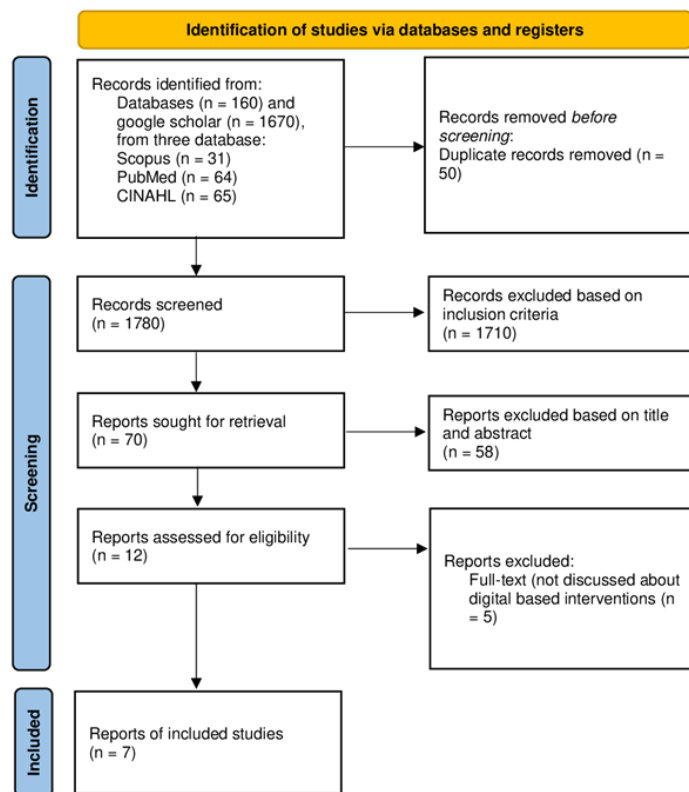
Figure 1 PRISMA Flow Diagram.

2.2 Search Strategy

Databases used in this study include Scopus, PubMed, and CINAHL. This database was selected based on extensive coverage in the multidisciplinary and specific scientific literature related to adolescent health and psychology. The keywords used included a combination of "emotional intelligence", "bullying", and "adolescents", and utilized boolean operators (AND, OR) and mesh terms to increase search accuracy. The research question asked was: "Is there a relationship between emotional intelligence and bullying behavior in adolescents?"

2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The authors used PCC's framework in this research (Population, Concept, and Context). In this research, the study focuses on adolescents as a population, involving the concepts of emotional intelligence and bullying behavior, and is relevant to the context of this research. The inclusion criteria in this research were articles in English and Indonesian, full text, publication period 2014-2024 to obtain the latest articles, and discussion of the relationship between emotional intelligence and adolescent bullying behavior. Exclusion criteria included studies that were not available in English or not available in full text, as well as studies that did not explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and bullying behavior.

2.4 Data Extraction

Data were extracted using manual tables, including information about the authors, research objectives, country, primary findings, and study sample. The data extraction process will be carried

out by two researchers independently, and differences of opinion will be resolved through discussion and consensus between the two researchers. A third researcher was invited to extract data if there was still no agreement.

2.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted descriptively and qualitatively using a content analysis approach, explicitly focusing on thematic analysis to systematically identify, code, and interpret themes that emerged from the literature on the relationship between emotional intelligence and adolescent bullying behavior. Thematic analysis followed several vital steps. First, familiarization with the data involved a thorough review of the literature, during which the researcher immersed themselves in the material to gain a comprehensive understanding of its content. Next, initial coding was carried out, where critical text segments were highlighted and assigned descriptive codes. This process was conducted inductively, meaning that the codes emerged naturally from the data rather than being pre-determined. These codes captured ideas or patterns relevant to the relationship between emotional intelligence and bullying dynamics.

After coding, similar codes were grouped to form broader themes. These themes represented recurring concepts that provided insights into how emotional intelligence, mainly through its components of emotional awareness, regulation, and empathy, plays a role in bullying behavior. The identified themes were then reviewed for relevance and consistency across the data set. The themes that overlapped or lacked sufficient support were merged or excluded to ensure a coherent representation of the findings. Once the final themes were defined and named, they were used to illustrate the complex relationship between emotional intelligence and different forms of bullying behavior, such as physical, verbal, and cyberbullying.

Finally, the findings were interpreted and presented narratively, highlighting key themes and implications. This synthesis of patterns and relationships between emotional intelligence and bullying behavior provided valuable insights into how the various dimensions of emotional intelligence can either mitigate or exacerbate bullying. By adhering to this structured thematic analysis process, the relationships between emotional intelligence and bullying were explored with greater transparency, ensuring that the findings were methodologically sound and grounded in the data, thus enhancing the credibility of the analysis.

3. Results

The reviewed articles include one from Italy, three from Spain, one from Australia, and one from Indonesia, all involving adolescent samples. The sample sizes across the seven studies ranged from 40 to 2,806 adolescents. To assess emotional intelligence (EI), various questionnaires were employed: the Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS), the Trait Meta Mood Scale-24 (TMMS-24), the 7-item Adolescent Swinburne University Emotional Intelligence Test (SUEIT), the Social and Emotional Competencies Questionnaire (SEC-Q), and an emotional intelligence questionnaire. Regarding bullying assessment, tools included the Violent Behavior Scale, Peer Victimization Scale, European Bullying Intervention Project Questionnaire, and other scales that evaluated both traditional and cyberbullying behaviors (Table 1).

Table 1 Extraction Data.

No	Authors & Year	Aim	Country	Samples	Measurements	Results
1.	(Baroncelli & Ciucci, 2014) [25]	Knowing the relationship between trait emotional intelligence and traditional bullying and cyberbullying	Italy	529 adolescents (53.31% girls)	Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) 11-item self-report questionnaire	There is a negative relationship between emotional intelligence with traditional bullying and cyberbullying behavior
2.	(Cañas et al., 2020) [8]	Analyzing the relationship between emotional adjustment and cyber- and traditional bullying	Spain	1318 adolescents (47% boys), aged between 11 and 17 years	Trait Meta Mood Scale-24 (TMMS-24) Violent Behavior Scale Peer Victimization Scale	Perpetrators and victims of bullying have emotional repair than uninvolved adolescents. However, bullies have lower emotional intelligence than victims.
3.	(Casas et al., 2015) [26]	Analyzing the relationship between trait emotional intelligence and bullying and violence	Spain	2,806 children (51.8% girls; Age M = 15.44; SD = 1.79)	Trait Meta Mood Scale-24 (TMMS-24) School-wide Climate Scale	The three dimensions of EI correlate negatively with bullying: Attention, Repair, and Clarity
4.	(Estévez et al., 2019) [27]	Analyzing the relationship between emotional intelligence and bullying and cyberbullying	Spain	1318 adolescents aged between 11 and 18 years	Trait Meta Mood Scale-24 (TMMS-24) Peer Victimization Scale Violent Behavior Scale	Victims show greater attention and lower comprehension and emotion regulation. Bullies only have deficits in emotion regulation.
5.	(Schokman et al., 2014) [28]	Investigating the relationship of Emotional Intelligence with bullying	Australia	284 adolescents between the ages of 11 and 18	57-item Adolescent Swinburne University Emotional Intelligence Test (SUEIT) Shortened Version Provictim Scale	Significant associations between bullying, victimisation, pro-victim attitudes and the EI dimensions Emotion Recognition and Expression, Emotion Management and Control, Understanding the Emotions of Others and Emotions Direct Cognition.

6.	(Zych et al., 2018) [29]	Knowing the relationship between Emotional Competencies and bullying	Spain	2139 adolescents enrolled in 22 schools	Social and Emotional Competencies Questionnaire (SEC-Q) European Bullying Intervention Project Questionnaire	There is a negative relationship between emotional intelligence and bullying behavior
7.	(Faaradila et al., 2023) [30]	To find out the relationship between emotional intelligence and verbal bullying in adolescent bullies	Indonesia	40 respondents	Emotional intelligence and verbal bullying questionnaire	There is a relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Verbal Bullying with a value of p = 0.00 so that p = 0.00 < α = 0.05

The research consistently demonstrated a negative relationship between emotional intelligence and both traditional and cyberbullying behavior. Adolescents involved in bullying, whether as perpetrators or victims, displayed lower levels of emotional intelligence than those not involved. Notably, bullies had lower emotional intelligence compared to victims, indicating that perpetrators struggle more with emotional regulation. The study identified that three key dimensions of emotional intelligence, clarity, and emotional regulation were negatively correlated with bullying behaviors. Victims tended to show higher emotional attention but lower emotional understanding, while bullies exhibited deficits primarily in emotional regulation.

The findings also revealed that emotional intelligence plays a significant role in various aspects of bullying, including the recognition, expression, management, and understanding of emotions. Statistical analysis further supported these findings, showing a significant negative relationship between emotional intelligence and bullying, particularly in verbal bullying, with a p-value of 0.00. These results underscore the importance of focusing on emotional intelligence in both bullying prevention and intervention efforts among adolescents.

The studies reviewed consistently show a negative correlation between emotional intelligence and various forms of bullying, including traditional bullying (e.g., physical and verbal aggression) and cyberbullying. Specifically, emotional regulation is a critical component of emotional intelligence, which plays a pivotal role across different bullying contexts. Bullies, especially those involved in traditional forms of bullying, tend to exhibit significant deficits in emotional regulation, indicating a struggle to manage their emotions effectively, leading to aggressive behaviors. In contrast, victims of bullying demonstrate higher emotional attention but lower emotional clarity and regulation, suggesting that while they are more attuned to their emotions, they may have difficulty understanding and managing them constructively.

Cyberbullying, as an extension of traditional bullying, reveals similar patterns, with bullies again displaying lower emotional regulation. However, emotional intelligence also appears to influence the ability to empathize with others online, highlighting that deficits in understanding and controlling emotions may exacerbate aggressive behavior in digital spaces. Victims of cyberbullying, similar to victims of traditional bullying, often struggle with emotional clarity and regulation. These findings emphasize that while all components of emotional intelligence are important, emotional regulation is particularly crucial in understanding the perpetration and bullying experience. This suggests that interventions aimed at improving emotional regulation skills may be particularly effective in addressing various types of bullying, both online and offline.

4. Discussion

The results of this study reveal a clear negative relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and both traditional and cyberbullying behavior, underscoring the significance of psychological factors in the bullying dynamics among adolescents. This finding aligns with theories that emphasize the critical role of emotional regulation in mitigating aggressive behaviors and fostering healthy social relationships [31]. Specifically, low emotional intelligence, which manifests as challenges in recognizing, understanding, and managing emotions, may serve as a primary predictor of bullying behavior in both offline and online contexts [32, 33].

The differential levels of emotional intelligence between bullying perpetrators and victims indicate complex psychological dynamics underpinning these behaviors [34]. Bullies demonstrated

lower emotional regulation capabilities than their victims, highlighting the intricate vulnerabilities of individuals in different roles within bullying scenarios [35, 36]. This suggests that perpetrators may struggle more with managing their emotions, contributing to their aggressive tendencies, while victims, despite enduring significant emotional distress, might possess better emotional recovery abilities [32].

Additionally, the negative correlation observed among three critical dimensions of emotional intelligence-attention, clarity, and emotional regulation further elucidates the role of EI in the interpersonal dynamics related to bullying [37]. Higher levels of emotional intelligence, particularly in terms of emotional awareness and effective emotional management, correlate with a diminished likelihood of engaging in bullying behavior [38]. This underscores the notion that individuals with greater emotional intelligence are likely to resolve interpersonal conflicts constructively and navigate negative emotions without resorting to aggression [39-41]. Thus, fostering emotional intelligence skills could be a viable strategy for preventing and intervening in adolescent bullying behaviors [42].

Furthermore, the research indicates distinct emotional engagement patterns between victims and bullies. Victims exhibited higher emotional concern but lower emotional understanding, whereas bullies primarily faced challenges in emotion regulation [43]. This distinction suggests that victims might be more attuned to their emotional environment, rendering them vulnerable to adverse emotional experiences. At the same time, bullies often struggle to manage their emotions healthily [44]. Supporting existing literature, this finding highlights that victims tend to possess higher empathy levels than perpetrators [45].

The significant relationship between emotional intelligence and aspects of bullying, including emotional recognition and management, underscores the crucial role of psychological factors in bullying dynamics [46]. The positive correlation between EI and the ability to recognize and express emotions suggests that individuals with higher EI are more adept at fostering positive social interactions [47]. Additionally, the findings indicate that individuals with enhanced emotional intelligence are better equipped to handle stress and understand others' feelings and perspectives, reinforcing that developing emotional intelligence skills is essential for improving emotional health and reducing bullying incidents among adolescents [48].

The implications of this research highlight the urgent need to prioritize emotional intelligence as a vital component in bullying prevention and intervention strategies for adolescents [34]. By understanding the negative correlation between emotional intelligence and bullying behavior, stakeholders, schools, and policymakers can integrate EI training into educational curricula and counseling programs. For instance, schools can implement EI-focused workshops, peer mediation programs, and conflict resolution training within existing curricula or extracurricular activities [49]. Collaboration between educators, counselors, and mental health professionals can enhance the sustainability of these interventions, ensuring that emotional intelligence development becomes an integral part of the educational experience [50].

Grounding these findings within established adolescent psychology and emotional development frameworks further strengthens the discussion. Theories such as Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence framework and the developmental model of social-emotional learning can provide valuable context for interpreting the observed relationships between emotional intelligence and bullying behavior [17]. These theoretical underpinnings affirm the significance of emotional intelligence in fostering healthy interpersonal relationships and offer a robust conceptual

foundation for future research and interventions aimed at reducing bullying among adolescents [51]. By emphasizing the importance of emotional intelligence in educational settings, this research advocates for a proactive approach to creating supportive environments that cultivate resilience and emotional well-being among young people [50].

The study on digital addiction highlights the intersection of emotional control and behavioral challenges, such as addiction to digital platforms, which can exacerbate negative social interactions, including bullying [52]. Similarly, previous research draws attention to the psychological impacts of over-reliance on digital technologies, where lower emotional regulation can contribute to both digital addiction and negative interpersonal behaviors, including bullying in online spaces [53]. These findings suggest that the inability to manage emotions effectively in physical or digital environments can lead to adverse social outcomes, further emphasizing the need for emotional intelligence interventions.

The limitations of the studies reviewed are the variability in the tools used to assess emotional intelligence (EI) and bullying behavior. While all the studies measured emotional intelligence, the instruments used, such as the Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS), Trait Meta Mood Scale-24 (TMMS-24), and Social and Emotional Competencies Questionnaire (SEC-Q), differ in their conceptualization of EI. This variation may lead to inconsistencies in how emotional intelligence is operationalized across studies, affecting the comparability of results. Additionally, the sample sizes ranged from relatively small groups (e.g., 40 adolescents) to large-scale surveys (up to 2,806 participants), which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research should aim to standardize EI measurement tools and use more consistent methodologies to ensure better comparability and more substantial external validity.

Another limitation is the reliance on self-reported data, which can introduce biases, such as social desirability bias, where participants may underreport their involvement in bullying or overreport their emotional intelligence abilities. Longitudinal designs could address this by tracking changes in emotional intelligence and bullying behavior over time, offering more robust insights into the causal relationship between these variables.

5. Conclusions

The authors found 7 articles that discussed the relationship between emotional intelligence and bullying in adolescents. The authors found that there was a negative relationship between emotional intelligence and bullying behavior in adolescents. These findings emphasize the importance of paying attention to psychological factors, such as the ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotions, in understanding and overcoming the phenomenon of bullying among adolescents. The reason there is a negative relationship is that individuals with low emotional intelligence tend to have difficulty managing their emotions in a healthy way, which can increase the risk of engaging in bullying behavior as an unhealthy form of expression of these emotions.

Moving forward, one promising intervention strategy is the implementation of **school-based emotional intelligence (EI) training programs**. These programs could provide adolescents the necessary skills to manage conflict, regulate emotions, and foster positive social interactions. Future research should focus on developing and testing the effectiveness of these EI programs within school settings, assessing their impact on bullying behaviors and emotional well-being. Schools could play a critical role in preventing bullying and creating safer, more supportive environments

for adolescents by equipping students with emotional intelligence skills. Additionally, integrating emotional intelligence training into digital literacy programs can help foster healthier and more empathetic interactions in online environments.

Suggestions for further research are the need to analyze the psychological mechanisms underlying the relationship between emotional intelligence and bullying behavior. Additional studies also need to investigate the role of other factors in bullying, such as family environment, school culture, and social pressure, in moderating the relationship between emotional intelligence and bullying behavior. In addition, further research can develop and test the effectiveness of interventions based on emotional intelligence in reducing the incidence and negative impacts of bullying. Prevention and intervention programs designed with emotional intelligence skills in mind can be proactive in creating a safe and supportive environment for adolescents.

Author Contributions

Iyus Yosep: Conceptualization, writing – original draft, formal analysis, writing – review and editing. Ai Mardhiyah: Software, writing – review and editing. Kurniawan Kurniawan, Indra Maulana: Conceptualization, writing – original draft, writing – review and editing. All authors have read and approved the published version of the manuscript.

Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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