Fostering Safe Spaces: A Conceptual Framework of Bullying Intervention

Ya-Wen Melissa Liang[1] [*], Rachel N. Lopez[1], Casey M. Rodriguez[1], Lynsie A. Fike[1], and Kathryn E. Kazmierski[1]

[1]Department of Educational Leadership and Counseling, Texas A&M University-Kingsville, MSC 233, 700 University Blvd, Kingsville, TX, 78363-8202, USA.

*Email: ya-wen.liang@tamuk.edu

Abstract

This conceptual study reviewed nine investigations comprising a total of 77,890 participants, in addition to one systematic review that synthesized findings from 51 studies, which did not include the cumulative participant data. The included studies represented diverse educational levels, age groups, and global contexts, with samples drawn from the United States, Europe, South America, Asia, Brazil, South Africa, Turkey, Iran, Indonesia, and Nigeria. Across these studies, bullying was consistently associated with adverse mental health outcomes, highlighting the critical need for trauma-informed, gender-sensitive, and contextually responsive interventions. Findings also emphasize the importance of integrating social reasoning and peer support into school-based prevention and intervention strategies. This review identifies a gap in the existing literature regarding bullying among middle-aged and older populations and calls for the need for timely, proactive, and sustained implementation of anti-bullying interventions and anti-bullying policies. Implications for practice and policy development in educational settings are discussed.

Keywords:Bullying, Prevention, Bystanders, School Intervention, Educational Policies

1 Introduction

Over the past two decades, bullying has emerged as a growing concern for students, educators, policymakers, parents, and mental health professionals (Smith & Caron, 2023). Bullying is defined as unwanted, hostile, and repetitive behavior that reinforces existing power imbalances between the perpetrator and the victim, which has garnered increasing scholarly and societal attention (Smith & Caron, 2023). Although traditionally underestimated as a social issue, bullying is now recognized for its widespread and harmful effects (Smith & Caron, 2023). Notably, the World Health Organization classified bullying as a serious public health concern in 2012, underscoring its global significance (as cited in Smith & Caron, 2023). This article explored the complex and multifaceted impact of bullying and cyberbullying, evaluated effective intervention strategies, and discussed implications for counselors, educators, and researchers. It further examines how collaboration among school professionals, mental health practitioners, and community stakeholders can foster more effective prevention and response efforts. The review synthesizes current research findings, highlights existing gaps in the literature, and proposes conceptual directions with practical implications for clinical practice and educational policy.

1.1 Forms and Prevalence of Bullying

Bullying is widely recognized as a form of intentional and repeated aggression that targets individuals perceived as vulnerable, often involving an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim (American Educational Research Association [AERA], 2013). Bullying behaviors generally fall into four primary categories: physical (e.g., hitting, pushing), verbal (e.g., name-calling, threats), social or relational (e.g., exclusion, rumor spreading), and cyberbullying (Alisheva & Mandal, 2023; Bascili et al., 2022; Gladden et al., 2014; Smith & Caron, 2023). These varied forms of aggression often intersect and manifest differently across developmental stages and sociocultural contexts. Prevalence rates of bullying vary across cultures and demographics. A large-scale international study found that between 8.6% and 45.2% of boys and 4.8% to 35.8% of girls reported experiencing bullying victimization (Craig et al., 2009). Additionally, boys are more frequently identified as perpetrators of bullying, while girls tend to be victimized more often, particularly in relational and verbal forms (Craig et al., 2009). These gendered patterns underscore the need for nuanced prevention and intervention strategies that account for the diverse expressions and experiences of bullying among youth.

1.2 The Rise of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying, often considered an extension of traditional bullying into digital spaces, involves repeated, aggressive behavior conducted via electronic communication platforms such as text messaging, social media, or online gaming (Özgür, 2020). Studies have shown that 13.99% to 57.5% of youth report experiencing cyberbullying (Zhu et al., 2021), and such experiences are associated with increased anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and suicidal ideation (Laith & Vaillancourt, 2022; Takizawa et al., 2014). During the COVID-19 pandemic, Lee et al. (2023) observed heightened psychological distress among college students exposed to cyberbullying. The above findings underscore the necessity of digital literacy and targeted prevention efforts within virtual environments.

1.3 Ethnic Bullying

Ethnic bullying refers to harassment rooted in racial, ethnic, or cultural identity, manifesting through verbal abuse, stereotyping, or exclusion (Bascili et al., 2022). The relationship between ethnic diversity and bullying outcomes is complex. While diversity may reduce prejudice in some contexts, it may exacerbate social tensions in others. Further research is needed to identify moderating variables that influence these outcomes and to develop culturally informed prevention strategies (Bascili et al., 2022).

1.4 Psychological and Social Consequences

Bullying has extensive psychological and social repercussions. Victims are at increased risk for depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and suicidal ideation (Alisheva & Mandal, 2023; Laith & Vaillancourt, 2022; Leegstra et al., 2024). These consequences often persist into adulthood, affecting long-term emotional well-being and interpersonal functioning (Takizawa et al., 2014). Beyond psychological outcomes, bullying also undermines academic engagement, impairs social functioning, and diminishes support networks (Hamstra & Fitzgerald, 2022). Victims may experience lower educational attainment and economic challenges later in life. Those classified as "bully victims"—individuals who are both perpetrators and victims—face particularly severe risks, including delinquency, substance use, and emotional dysregulation (Nansel et al., 2004).

Qualitative research provides further insight into these dynamics. For example, Smith and Caron (2023) examined college-aged women who experienced adolescent bullying and found long-term impacts, including emotional avoidance, reliance on mental health services, and, in some cases, increased resilience. Findings emphasize the need for both preventative and reparative interventions (Smith & Caron, 2023).

1.5 Adverse Childhood Experiences and Bullying Risk

Bullying often intersects with early life adversity. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)—including abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction—are prevalent, with approximately two-thirds of individuals reporting at least one ACE (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2024). These experiences significantly increase the likelihood of involvement in bullying, either as victims or perpetrators (Hong & Espelage, 2012). According to Bandura (1978), social learning explains the connection that children exposed to violence may replicate aggressive behaviors in peer relationships. Additionally, harmful parenting practices, such as neglect and emotional maltreatment, are strongly associated with later bullying involvement (Lereya et al., 2013). According to Lee et al. (2023), individuals with a higher sense of purpose were more resilient to the adverse outcomes of both bullying and ACEs. A sense of purpose in life has emerged as a potential protective factor, suggesting important directions for intervention and resilience-building (Lee et al., 2023).

1.6 Prevention and Intervention Strategies

Bullying prevention can take place at school or within the community (Leegstra et al., 2023). Teachers, counselors, and parents can provide anti-bullying interventions (Hikmat et al., 2024). Reducing the prevalence of bullying can reduce the amount of trauma to victims (Hikmat et al., 2024).

1.6.1 School-Based Interventions

Bullying prevention requires a multi-systemic approach. Programs that involve students, educators, and families are most effective when they incorporate emotional regulation, positive peer interactions, and social-emotional learning (Chicote-Beato et al., 2023). Comprehensive interventions that address classroom climate, promote empathy, and include role-playing and group discussions have successfully reduced bullying behavior (Maya et al., 2018). Multi-tiered approaches that span individual, classroom, and school-wide levels effectively address both traditional and cyberbullying (Leegstra et al., 2024).

1.6.2 Counseling Approaches

Counselors are uniquely positioned to implement prevention and intervention strategies. Waseem and Nickerson (2024) advocate for systemic interventions that engage all parties involved, including victims, perpetrators, and bystanders. Culturally responsive practices are also essential to ensure equity across diverse student populations (Mulvey et al., 2021). Researchers suggested incorporating behavioral and family-based counseling interventions, including assertiveness training and parental skills development, to support emotional regulation, resilience, and prosocial behavior (Maya et al., 2018; Yosep et al., 2024). These approaches enhance communication, reduce familial conflict, and build protective relational networks that buffer youth against bullying.

2 Methods

This study employed a conceptual article methodology, a well-established and respected form of scholarly contribution within counseling and related disciplines. Conceptual articles are recognized as empirical scholarship in American Counseling Association (ACA) journals and have consistently appeared in their publication records (Watts, 2011; Yadav, 2010). Rather than collecting new data, conceptual research involves synthesizing, integrating, and critically examining existing literature to generate new insights, propose theoretical directions, identify inconsistencies, and outline implications for research, practice, and policy (Watts, 2011).

The literature review serves as the primary vehicle for analysis in conceptual inquiry, enabling the identification of patterns, contradictions, and gaps within the body of knowledge (American Psychological Association [APA], 2020). Through this integrative approach, researchers aim to generate fresh insights, reframe existing issues, and suggest innovative directions for future inquiry and practical application (Watts, 2011). As such, the present study employs this methodological orientation to critically examine relevant scholarly work, define the core issue under investigation, and propose a conceptual approach informed by an integrative analysis.

Solomone (1993) delineated three essential stages in developing a conceptual article. First, the author engages in a creative synthesis process by immersing in an extensive body of literature, allowing novel insights to emerge. The author elucidates the practical and theoretical significance of the proposed ideas, thereby facilitating broader scholarly discourse and

potential applications in counseling contexts. The author systematically refines and expands these initial ideas, striving for conceptual clarity and theoretical coherence. The author promotes the discovery, understanding, and discussion of the practical implications of these new ideas. This final stage involves articulating the relevance and utility of conceptual contributions for diverse stakeholders in the counseling profession.

To support the development and organization of conceptual manuscripts, Watts (2011) further emphasizes the importance of structure in conceptual writing, including developing an annotated outline, articulating a clear purpose or research position, discussing practical interventions and implications, and providing a conclusion. Conclusions may vary in length and depth depending on the complexity of the content, but they should offer a coherent synthesis of the article's core contributions (Watts, 2011). Aligned with these methodological principles, this article synthesizes and evaluates existing literature to illuminate the nature of the problem, reviews current findings, identifies limitations in the literature, and proposes conceptual propositions with implications for research and practice.

3 Results

This section synthesizes findings from nine carefully selected research studies representing the most recent and rigorous contributions to bullying and cyberbullying research. These articles were chosen for their methodological soundness, relevance to contemporary school-based and clinical settings, and focus on diverse yet interconnected dimensions of peer victimization. Together, they examined the effectiveness of intervention and prevention programs, the long-term psychological and behavioral consequences of bullying, and the complex interplay between cyberbullying, mental health, identity development, and bystander involvement to synthesize a multidimensional understanding of bullying. These studies included evidence-based interventions and also highlighted gaps in the literature. This section aims to advance the field by informing clinical practice and educational policy.

3.1 Participants and Population Studied

This review included nine studies encompassing 77,890 participants, excluding one systematic review that reviewed 51 research studies but did not report cumulative participant numbers. The studies spanned a range of educational levels, age groups, and international contexts. Mulvey et al. (2021) examined 815 adolescents, including 423 sixth graders and 392 ninth graders, from five low- to middle-income public schools in the Southeastern United States. Lee et al. (2023) surveyed 314 college students aged 18–24 and older across the Midwest and South-central U.S., all with a history of bullying or cyberbullying victimization. Alisheva and Mandal (2023) analyzed longitudinal data from a nationally representative U.S. youth sample, initially comprising 8,984 participants aged 12–16, with a final analytic sample of 4,986 by 2009 due to attrition. Özgür (2020) synthesized findings from 28 studies involving participants aged 4 to 30 years (n = 61 to 18,412 per study), focusing on cyberbullying interventions in school and youth populations. Similarly, Merrin et al. (2024) systematically reviewed 51 studies involving adolescents aged 10–19 across 22 countries, incorporating both school-based and community samples. Amedu et al. (2025) investigated 18,439 participants across 28 studies, encompassing primary, secondary, and tertiary students from various countries, including the U.S., South Africa, Turkey, and Brazil. Chicote-Beato et al. (2024) included 48,794 participants across 17 studies, primar-

ily targeting primary students aged 6–12, with several studies also involving secondary students from diverse international contexts. Yosep et al. (2024) reviewed 10 studies with sample sizes ranging from 20 to 885 adolescents aged 10–19, with data mainly drawn from developing countries such as Iran, Indonesia, and Nigeria. Smith and Caron (2023) conducted qualitative interviews with 12 undergraduate women (ages 18–23) at a Northeastern U.S. university, all of whom had experienced bullying in middle or high school.

3.2 Bullying and Cyberbullying

This literature review synthesizes contemporary research examining the multifaceted dimensions of bullying and cyberbullying. The selected studies highlight the efficacy of school-based prevention and intervention programs, elucidate the long-term psychological and behavioral impacts of victimization, and explore the complex relationships among cyberbullying, mental health, identity development, and bystander behavior. Together, these findings inform clinical practice, guide educational policies, and identify gaps in current research.

3.3 Cyberbullying Interventions in Educational Settings

Özgür (2020) systematically reviewed 28 studies involving 61 and 18,412 participants aged 4 to 30 from diverse international contexts. The review concluded that most school-based cyberbullying prevention programs were effective, regardless of their underlying theoretical frameworks, delivery technologies, or specific strategies. Eleven programs demonstrated reductions in perpetration and victimization. These results emphasized the need for schools and policymakers to adopt and regularly evaluate theoretically grounded, evidence-based approaches. Özgür (2020) also identified limitations in the literature, including a lack of consensus on best practices, limited use of theoretical models, inconsistent measurement tools, and restricted geographic and linguistic diversity. The absence of internationally validated assessment instruments further impedes the generalizability and replicability of findings.

3.4 Cyberbullying Prevention in Primary Education

Chicote-Beato et al. (2024) systematically reviewed 17 international studies involving 48,794 children aged 6 to 12. Their review focused on the effectiveness of cyberbullying interventions in primary education and found that programs incorporating family engagement, teacher training, emotional education, and bystander training were most successful. These interventions improved students' online safety behaviors, emotional regulation, and social skills in the short and long terms. Despite these successes, limitations remain. The review noted a lack of standardized instruments, minimal use of qualitative methodologies, and limited differentiation between primary and secondary students in reported outcomes. Furthermore, the duration of interventions for younger populations remains unclear. Chicote-Beato et al. (2024) advocated for the implementation of mandatory cyberbullying prevention curricula in primary schools, calling for the development of age-specific assessment tools and long-term evaluations to enhance the program's efficacy.

3.5 Protective Factors and Psychological Outcomes of Cyberbullying

In a regional study of 314 college students from the Midwest and South-Central United States, Lee et al. (2023) investigated the effects of cyberbullying and past traditional bullying experiences. Victimization was significantly associated with elevated depressive symptoms but not with suicidal ideation or behaviors. The study identified "purpose in life" as a protective factor against depressive symptoms. The findings suggest that mental health professionals and educators incorporate purpose-building components into interventions for cyberbullied students.

3.6 Retrospective Narratives and Participant-Informed Recommendations

Smith and Caron (2023) conducted a qualitative study exploring the long-term effects of school-based bullying through retrospective interviews with 12 undergraduate women aged 18–23 at a public university in the Northeastern United States. Participants were selected based on their bullying experiences during middle or high school. All participants reported experiencing verbal bullying, while half also endured physical aggression such as pushing or spitting. A third faced exclusion and cyberbullying. The bullying, predominantly perpetrated by female peers and often in group settings, typically began in middle school and continued for 1.5 to 5 years. Though peers were generally aware of the bullying, participants believed school staff rarely intervened effectively. Only four parents reported incidents to the school, and no participants reported bullying to teachers. The reported emotional consequences included anxiety, social withdrawal, low self-esteem, trust issues, suicidal ideation, and self-harm. Avoidant behaviors were common, such as skipping classes or events, avoiding lunchrooms, and disengaging from classroom participation. In college, all participants experienced lingering effects such as social anxiety and low confidence. Despite these challenges, participants described developing resilience, empathy, and a sense of pride in overcoming adversity. However, two women continued to experience severe psychological impacts, underscoring the heterogeneous nature of recovery trajectories.

Findings indicate that anti-bullying policies were inconsistently enforced and largely ineffective. Participant narratives emphasized the need for comprehensive prevention strategies, including mandatory bystander intervention training, increased teacher accountability, transparent and accessible reporting mechanisms, more substantial consequences for aggressors, and enhanced parental monitoring of online activity and emotional well-being. This study addresses several underexplored areas in bullying research, including the prevalence of physical bullying among girls, challenging national trends suggesting it is rare, Barriers to reporting, including fear and perceived futility, the enduring emotional toll, and developmental consequences extending into young adulthood. By centering the voices of college women reflecting on past victimization, Smith and Caron (2023) contributed valuable insights into how bullying is internalized and carried forward. Their findings offer participant-informed recommendations that can guide revisions to school-based intervention frameworks and support systems (Smith & Caron, 2023).

3.7 Psychological and Behavioral Consequences of Chronic Bullying

Alisheva and Mandal (2023) analyzed data from 4,986 adolescents aged 12 to 16, finding that chronic bullying victimization was associated with poorer mental and general health outcomes. These included increased substance use such as cigarettes and marijuana, greater reliance on mental health services, and lower rates of educational attainment in high school and college. The findings underscore the need for early, sustained interventions to mitigate the long-term effects of repeated victimization and inform public health and educational policies.

3.8 Discrimination and Moral Judgments in Bullying

Mulvey et al. (2021) examined the intersection of discrimination and bullying among 815 sixth- and ninth-grade students in public schools in the Southeastern United States. Adolescents who experienced discrimination, especially those who also engaged in bullying, were more likely to perceive aggression as acceptable and to view bystander intervention less favorably. Conversely, younger students demonstrated a greater willingness to intervene in bullying incidents. The study reveals how experiences of discrimination shape adolescents' social reasoning and moral evaluations of aggressive behavior. Mulvey et al. (2021) emphasized the need for school-based programs that address both bullying and broader equity issues, particularly for youth marginalized by race or peer dynamics. They advocated for subgroup analyses exploring how identity, moral reasoning, and bystander behavior influence developmental outcomes.

3.9 Trauma Exposure and Mitigating Role of Social Support

Amedu et al. (2025) systematically reviewed 28 studies involving 18,439 participants across educational levels. Among these, 4,386 were from primary and secondary schools, and 14,054 were from higher education institutions. The participants reported various traumatic experiences, including bullying, exposure to violence, natural disasters, and academic pressures. Social support from peers, families, and institutions was found to mitigate trauma-related symptoms significantly. The review identified gender-based differences in trauma exposure, with female students reporting higher rates of sexual violence and male students more likely to experience physical assault. Amedu et al. (2025) emphasized the need for school-based programs that incorporate trauma-informed care, emotional resilience strategies, and comprehensive social support systems. Additionally, the authors highlighted a gap in research addressing trauma caused by school-specific stressors such as academic overload, bullying, and school shootings, calling for greater methodological diversity in future research.

3.10 Trauma-Informed Approaches to Bullying Prevention

Merrin et al. (2024) systematically reviewed 51 empirical studies spanning 22 countries and two decades, focusing on global bullying prevention strategies. Their analysis underscored the necessity of trauma-informed approaches to avoid retraumatizing youth and highlighted the value of involving families in prevention efforts as early as preschool. The review identified several key research gaps, including limited exploration of bystander behavior, cumulative bullying exposure, and victim experiences of psychological distress and post-traumatic stress disorder. Merrin et al. (2024) recommended more longitudinal, developmentally sensitive research and called for collaborative partnerships between schools and communities to identify and support at-risk youth through comprehensive, trauma-informed programming.

3.11 Assertiveness Therapy for Adolescent Bullying

Yosep et al. (2024) reviewed 10 studies involving adolescents aged 10 to 19 from junior and senior high schools in developing countries. The review investigated the use of assertiveness therapy in reducing bullying behavior. Findings revealed that assertiveness training significantly decreased bullying while improving interpersonal skills, self-confidence, and emotional regulation. The reviewed interventions were delivered using both online and offline platforms, including educational, counseling, and game-based formats. Yosep et al. (2024) highlighted the importance of early, professional-led interventions by educators, counselors, and healthcare providers. They recommended integrating assertiveness training into school curricula and leveraging multimedia and game-based tools to enhance student engagement. The authors also identified a need for comparative research evaluating the effectiveness of diverse delivery formats and for more comprehensive reviews of assertiveness-based interventions.

4 Discussion

4.1 Developmental Vulnerability Among Youth Facing Bullying

The reviewed literature consistently centers on adolescents and young adults, underscoring bullying's prevalence during developmental transitions (Mulvey et al., 2021; Yosep et al., 2024). Participants were primarily middle and high school students, with some studies extending to college-aged populations to assess long-term effects (Lee et al., 2023; Smith & Caron, 2023). Several studies also intentionally sampled marginalized groups, reflecting an intersectional awareness of risk factors (Alisheva & Mandal, 2023; Lee et al., 2023).

4.2 Psychological Impacts and Social Buffering

A dominant theme is the strong association between bullying and adverse mental health outcomes. Victims reported increased depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and academic disengagement (Alisheva & Mandal, 2023; Smith & Caron, 2023). Gender differences were observed, with females more frequently subjected to relational and verbal bullying and males to physical aggression (Amedu et al., 2025; Smith & Caron, 2023). Several studies identified protective factors, such as peer support and a sense of life purpose, which help mitigate psychological distress (Amedu et al., 2025; Lee et al., 2023; Merrin et al., 2024; Mulvey et al., 2021).

4.3 Intervention Effectiveness and Limitations

Interventions reported success in reducing bullying and improving psychosocial functioning when strategies were comprehensive and developmentally appropriate (Chicote-Beato et al., 2024; Özgür, 2020). Assertiveness training is practical among adolescents (Yosep et al., 2024). Interventions involving educators, caregivers, and peers enhanced outcomes, especially when tailored to the participants' developmental level (Chicote-Beato et al., 2024). However, institutional shortcomings were evident in participants' dissatisfaction with school responses (Smith &

Caron, 2023), emphasizing the need for contextually responsive and sustainable programming.

4.4 Moral Dimensions of Bullying

Peer cognition and moral reasoning play critical roles in perpetuating or disrupting bullying behaviors. Mulvey et al. (2021) found that adolescents who experienced discrimination and engaged in bullying often exhibited reduced empathy and greater acceptance of aggression. The findings align with Smith and Caron's (2023) observation of bystander inaction, reinforcing the need to incorporate social reasoning into intervention frameworks to promote ethical peer responses.

4.5 Complexity of Roles and Resilience Factors

Youth often occupy complex roles in bullying scenarios, simultaneously as victims and aggressors. Mulvey et al. (2021) noted distinct cognitive profiles shaped by discrimination and peer dynamics. Similarly, Merrin et al. (2024) linked victimization and perpetration to shared developmental vulnerabilities. Protective factors, such as a sense of purpose in life and institutional support, were found to moderate emotional distress (Amedu et al., 2025; Lee et al., 2023), suggesting potential pathways for fostering resilience through targeted interventions.

4.6 Longitudinal Risks and Gendered Trajectories

Long-term studies highlighted the enduring psychological and behavioral consequences of bullying. College students continued to experience low confidence and anxiety years after victimization, though some also demonstrated post-traumatic growth (Smith & Caron, 2023). Chronic exposure was associated with adverse outcomes such as lower educational attainment and substance use (Alisheva & Mandal, 2023). These results point to the need for gender-sensitive and trauma-informed interventions to address various bullying typologies effectively.

4.7 Gaps of Victim Voice, Mechanisms, and Adulthood Studies

Several studies identified a lack of qualitative exploration into victim narratives. Smith and Caron (2023) offered a rare insight into persistent psychological harm from school-based victimization, a theme echoed by Amedu et al. (2025) and Yosep et al. (2024). Furthermore, mediators such as life purpose (Lee et al., 2023) and psychological distress (Merrin et al., 2024) remain underexamined in explaining how bullying leads to particular outcomes. This gap calls for a deeper inquiry into the mechanisms that translate bullying into long-term trauma.

All nine studies focused on bullying among youth or young adults, highlighting a gap in research on bullying during adulthood, particularly in middle-aged and elderly populations. Research is needed to examine how bullying victimization and perpetration may affect individuals later in life, including their potential impact on mental health, interpersonal functioning, and overall well-being. Future research could explore and compare bullying prevention strategies across young adulthood and older age groups.

4.8 Policy-Practice Discrepancies and Systemic Gaps

Discrepancies between anti-bullying policies and their implementation were frequently reported. Smith and Caron (2023) documented systemic failures in detecting and addressing bullying, while Mulvey et al. (2021) emphasized sociocultural influences such as peer discrimination. The findings suggest that existing policies often lack practical applicability, especially in diverse school environments. Preventive programs that integrate empathy-building, family engagement, and digital safety were recommended as more effective alternatives (Chicote-Beato et al., 2024; Yosep et al., 2024).

4.9 Advocate for Practice and Policy

Narrative evidence underscores the limitations of current school systems in addressing bullying with emotional intelligence and structural accountability (Smith & Caron, 2023). Several studies called for trauma-informed practices, cross-sector collaboration, and teacher training to enhance school climate (Amedu et al., 2025; Yosep et al., 2024). In the studies of Chicote-Beato et al. (2024) and Özgür (2020), the importance of culturally responsive programming was emphasized, particularly in cyberbullying prevention. Integrating student voices and real-world application remains essential for sustainable policy transformation.

The reviewed studies underscore the association between bullying and adverse mental health outcomes, reinforcing the need for trauma-informed, gender-sensitive, and contextually responsive interventions. The prevalence of bystander inaction highlights the importance of embedding social reasoning into interventions to foster ethical peer engagement. Additionally, targeted strategies may promote resilience among youth affected by bullying. Despite these advances, existing policies often lack practical implementation, particularly in educational settings. Integrating victim voices, fostering cross-sector collaboration, and providing teacher training remain critical to improving school climate and ensuring policy relevance. Most research studies focused on youth and young adults, revealing a significant gap in research on bullying in middle-aged and older populations. Future studies should investigate age-specific prevention strategies to inform a lifespan approach that alleviates the adverse effects of bullying.

5 Implications

The findings of this literature review yield several critical implications for clinical practice, educational policy, and future research. First, the consistent effectiveness of school-based intervention programs across diverse cultural and developmental contexts underscores the need for the implementation of evidence-based, age-appropriate anti-bullying curricula. Programs that integrate emotional education, teacher training, and family involvement, highlighted by Chicote-Beato et al. (2024) and Özgür (2020), reinforce recent policy shifts advocating for mandatory bullying and cyberbullying prevention initiatives in primary and secondary education. Second, the psychological, emotional, and behavioral consequences of chronic bullying demand that mental health professionals screen for past victimization during assessments. Long-term impacts, such as depression, social withdrawal, academic disruption, and substance use, were documented in several studies (Alisheva & Mandal, 2023; Lee et al., 2023; Smith & Caron, 2023). Clinicians can integrate purpose-building exercises, peer support facilitation, and resilience-

based interventions as protective strategies, consistent with findings from Amedu et al. (2025) and Lee et al. (2023). Third, systemic barriers to reporting, such as fear of retaliation, stigma, and perceived institutional inaction, remain prevalent (Mulvey et al., 2021; Smith & Caron, 2023). Schools must develop transparent, student-centered reporting systems and strengthen staff accountability. Bystander education, identity-affirming practices, and strategies that address moral disengagement should be embedded into intervention efforts to promote inclusive and responsive school cultures.

Integrating trauma-informed care across educational and clinical settings emerged as a recurring recommendation. Amedu et al. (2025) and Merrin et al. (2024) noted that failing to address trauma and cumulative stress may retraumatize youth. Therefore, educators, school psychologists, and counselors must receive training in trauma-sensitive practices aligned with developmental stages and cultural identities. This also involves a shift toward community-wide approaches that extend beyond individual counseling to incorporate families and peer networks.

Assertiveness training also appears to be a scalable and impactful approach. Yosep et al. (2024) validated that assertiveness training enhances emotional regulation and confidence in adolescents, suggesting its integration into health education and social-emotional learning curricula. Multimedia tools and digital platforms can further enhance the accessibility and engagement of these interventions.

While current research predominantly focuses on youth and adolescents, there is a lack of empirical data on bullying experiences across the lifespan. The exploration of bullying in adulthood, including its manifestations in higher education and workplace settings, remains underdeveloped. Future research should adopt a lifespan developmental framework to explore how early experiences of bullying impact psychological functioning and relational health later in life.

Several research gaps also remain. There is a need to develop standardized, culturally responsive tools to measure cyberbullying and assess the outcomes of interventions (Chicote-Beato et al., 2024; Özgür, 2020). Longitudinal and mixed-methods studies are necessary to examine the evolution of bullying experiences, identity development, and trauma recovery over time (Merrin et al., 2024; Smith & Caron, 2023). Additionally, future investigations may prioritize intersectional analyses of bullying among marginalized populations, particularly related to gender, race, disability, and socioeconomic status. Collectively, these implications reinforce that bullying is not merely a behavioral issue but a public health, educational, and developmental concern. Effective responses require interdisciplinary collaboration, sustained policy commitment, and culturally competent, trauma-informed practices tailored to the lived experiences of diverse youth populations.

6 Conclusion

This review synthesizes participant-informed strategies to strengthen school-based interventions for bullying. Key recommendations include implementing trauma-informed care, providing emotional resilience training, adopting gender-sensitive approaches, promoting bystander support, and conducting developmentally appropriate longitudinal research to prevent and address bullying. Effective collaboration among families, schools, and communities remains vital. Incorporating asser-

tiveness training and multimedia tools may further promote student engagement. Protective factors, particularly peer support and a sense of purpose, emerged as essential buffers against psychological distress, underscoring their relevance for resilience-based programming. Research is needed to investigate the impacts of bullying victimization and perpetration on middle-aged and older adults, as well as participant-voice perspectives. Future research may prioritize longitudinal, culturally grounded, and lifespan-oriented approaches to better understand and mitigate the long-term consequences of bullying across diverse populations, thereby enhancing the implementation of evidence-based policy and practice.

Conflict of Interest: none declared.

References

Alisheva, Z., & Mandal, B. (2023). The differential effects of childhood and chronic bullying victimization on health and risky health behaviors. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma, 16*(4), 1005–1015. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-023-00542-0

Amedu, A. N., Dwarika, V., & Aigbodion, V. V. (2025). Addressing students' traumatic experiences and impact of social supports: Scoping review. *European Journal of Trauma & Dissociation, 9*(1). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejtd.2025.100512

American Educational Research Association. (2013). *Prevention of bullying in schools, colleges, and universities: Research report and recommendations*. American Educational Research Association.

American Psychological Association. (2020). *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

Bandura, A. (1978). Social learning theory of aggression. *Journal of Communication, 28*, 12–29.

Basilici, M. C., Palladino, B. E., & Menesini, E. (2022). Ethnic diversity and bullying in school: A systematic review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 65*, 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2022.101762

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, May 16). *Risk and protective factors*. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://www.cdc.gov/aces/risk-factors/

Chicote-Beato, M., González-Víllora, S., Bodoque-Osma, A. R., & Navarro, R. (2024). Cyberbullying intervention and prevention programs in primary education (6 to 12 years): A systematic review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 77*, 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2024.101938

Craig, W., Harel-Fisch, Y., Fogel-Grinvald, H., Dostaler, S., Hetland, J., Simons-Morton, B., et al. (2009). A cross-national profile of bullying and victimization among adolescents in 40 countries. *International Journal of Public Health, 54*, 216–224.

Gladden, M. R., Vivolo-Kantor, A. M., Hamburger, M. E., & Lumpkin, C. D. (2014). *Bullying surveillance among youths: Uniform definitions for public health and recommended data elements*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/Bullying-Definitions-FINAL-a.pdf.

Hamstra, C., & Fitzgerald, M. (2022). Longitudinal effects from childhood abuse to bullying perpetration in adolescence: The role of mental health and social problems. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Trauma, 15*, 869–881. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-021-00409-2

Hikmat, R., Yosep, I., Hernawaty, T., & Mardhiyah, A. (2024). A scoping review of anti-bullying interventions: Reducing traumatic effect of bullying among adolescents. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare, 17*, 289-304. https://doi.org/10.2147/JMDH.S443841

Hong, J. S., & Espelage, D. L. (2012). A review of research on bullying and peer victimization in school: An ecological system analysis. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 17*(4), 311–322. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2012.03.003

Laith, R., & Vaillancourt, T. (2022). The temporal sequence of bullying victimization, academic achievement, and school attendance: A review of the literature. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 64*, 101722. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2022.101722

Leegstra, L. M., Damian, D., & Maxwell, L. (2024). What effects do mental health policies have on adolescent suicidal ideation or behavior, suicide, and bullying?

A systematic review. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open, 10*, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.101057

Lee, J. M., Choi, H. H., Lee, H., Park, J., & Lee, J. (2023). The impact of cyberbullying victimization on psychosocial behaviors among college students during the COVID-19 pandemic: The indirect effect of a sense of purpose in life. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma, 32*(9), 1254–1270. https://doi.org/10.1080/10926771.2022.21365

Lereya, S. T., Samara, M., & Wolke, D. (2013). Parenting behavior and the risk of becoming a victim and a bully/victim: A meta-analysis study. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 37*(12), 1091–1108. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2013.03.001

Maya, J., Lorence, B., Hidalgo, V., & Jimenez, L. (2018). The role of psychosocial stress on a family-based treatment for adolescents with problematic behaviors. International *Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 15*, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph15091867

Merrin, G. J., Wang, J. H., Kiefer, S. M., Jackson, J., Pascarella, L. A., Huckaby, P. L., Blake, C. L., Gomez, M. D., & Smith, N. D. W. (2024). Adverse childhood experiences and bullying during adolescence: A systematic literature review of two decades. *Adolescent Research Review, 9*(3), 513–541. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40894-023-00229-5

Mulvey, K. L., Gönültaş, S., Hope, E. C., Hoffman, A. J., DiStefano, C., Irvin, M. J., & Carlson, R. (2021). The complex nature of youth aggression: Relations between cognition, discrimination, peer perceptions of bullying involvement. *Youth & Society, 53*(6), 979–1000. https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X20920085

Nansel, T. R., Craig, W., Overpeck, M. D., Saluja, G., & Ruan, W. J. (2004). Cross-national consistency in the relationship between bullying behaviors and psychosocial adjustment. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, 158*(8), 730–736.

Özgür, H. (2020). A systematic review on cyberbullying interventions and preventions. Shanlax International *Journal of Education, 9*(1), 11–26. https://doi.org/10.34293/education.v9i1.3373

Salomone, P. R. (1993). Trade secrets for crafting a conceptual article. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 72*, 12–16.

Smith, K. F., & Caron, S. L. (2023). Exploring the experiences and impact of middle school and high school bullying: A qualitative analysis of interviews with college women. *Current Psychology, 42*(25), 21505. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-03267-9

Takizawa, R., Maughan, B., & Arseneault, L. (2014). Adult health outcomes of childhood bullying victimization: Evidence from a five-decade longitudinal British birth cohort. American *Journal of Psychiatry, 171*(7), 777–784. https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.2014.13101401

Waseem, M., & Nickerson, A. B. (2024). Bullying: Issues and challenges in prevention and intervention. *Current Psychology, 43*, 9270–9279. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-023-05083-1

Watts, R. E. (2011). Developing a conceptual article for publication in counseling journals. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 89*(3), 308–312.

Yadav, M. S. (2010). The decline of conceptual articles and implications for knowledge development. *Journal of Marketing, 74*, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.74.1.1

Yosep, I., Suryani, S., Mediani, H. S., Mardhiyah, A., Maulana, I., Hernawaty, T., & Hazmi, H. (2024). A scoping review of assertiveness therapy for reducing bullying behavior and its impacts among adolescents. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare, 17*, 1777–1790. https://doi.org/10.2147/JMDH.S460343

Zhu, C., Huang, S., Evans, R., & Zhang, W. (2021). Cyberbullying among adolescents and children: A comprehensive review of the global situation, risk factors, and preventive measures. *Frontiers in Public Health, 9*, 1–12. https://doi.org/10.3389/ fpubh.2021.634909