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Trends of Abuse Among Students in West Sumatra, Indonesia

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Research Article

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Abstract

Background/purpose. Harassment among students is a critical issue that affects adolescent well-being and social development. Despite growing awareness, there is limited empirical evidence on the prevalence and gender differences of harassment tendencies in Indonesian schools. This study aimed to identify trends in harassment among students in West Sumatra, Indonesia, and to examine whether gender differences significantly influence these trends.

Materials/methods. This study employed a quantitative research design with a cross-sectional survey. A total of 732 students from Senior High Schools in Padang City were recruited using simple random sampling. Data were collected using the Harassment Behavior Tendency Scale (HBTS), which consists of 42 Likert-scale items. Scores were categorized into low, medium, and high harassment tendencies based on percentile distribution. Frequency distribution tables and graphical analyses, including histograms and boxplots, were used to examine the prevalence, distribution, and gender differences of harassment behaviors.

Results. The findings revealed that overall harassment tendencies were generally low. The mean HBTS score was 125.58 (SD = 9.01), with scores ranging from 98 to 156. Categorization of harassment tendencies indicated 275 students in the low group, 218 in the medium group, and 239 in the high group, showing a balanced distribution around the median. Further analysis demonstrated no significant gender differences, with median scores of 120 for male students and 118 for female students, and an interquartile range (IQR) of approximately 20 points for both. The distribution of categories by gender was also balanced, with nearly equal numbers of male and female students in each level.

Conclusion. The results challenge the assumption that harassment behaviors are more strongly associated with one gender. Instead, the findings highlight the need for educational and intervention programs that foster interpersonal skills and empathy. Integrating behavioral education into school curricula may serve as an effective strategy to prevent and address harassment among students, the main conclusion presented and verified in the study.

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1. Introduction

The tendency to commit acts of harassment among students is one of the problems that occurs among students (Coker et al., 2017; da Silva et al., 2022; Michael Hand, 2020). This act is defined as an abuse of power or domination carried out by a person or group. This can occur in various environments, including home, school, and society. Harassment has been in the spotlight in recent years, seen as a problem that not only impacts victims but also perpetrators (Basile et al., 2016; Bonar et al., 2022; Feszterova & Jomova, 2015; Tillson & Oxley, 2020). Harassment involves intentionally hurting another person through verbal, physical, or psychological means, which causes the victim to feel distressed (Aslan et al., 2022; Bloom et al., 2023; Duque Monsalve et al., 2022). This behavior often occurs in the school environment, a place that should be a forum for students to understand life and manage their negative behavior (Bentri & Hidayati, 2023).

Research conducted in various countries shows that harassment often occurs among teenagers, and this problem does not only occur in Indonesia (OECD, 2017, 2018, 2019). Harassment can have a negative impact on victims, namely inhibiting their ability to achieve developmental tasks, causing withdrawal from social environments, increasing sensitivity to people's reactions and comments, and causing excessive internal thoughts and fears. (Hollister, 2018; Ramos & Schleicher, 2018). Fear of negative attention and social isolation can lead to withdrawal from social interactions (Edling et al., 2020; H. Tang & Wang, 2021; Y. Tang, 2022). Harassment is an important problem that needs attention because it can negatively impact many students, such as social isolation and a lack of close friends, and can even result in deep trauma (Gautam et al., 2019; Hébert et al., 2019; Lysova et al., 2020).

In more severe cases, victims of these acts may feel depressed, traumatized, and powerless towards others. This highlights the loss of human values in teenagers (Bamkin, 2018; Gao & Wang, 2021; Prentice et al., 2019). Specific forms of aggressive behavior demonstrate the characteristic intention to harm another person repeatedly over a specific period of time (Bongiorno et al., 2020; Dyar et al., 2021; Edwards et al., 2023). Students who experience harassment are those who are vulnerable to frightening situations, while perpetrators of harassment refer to parties who play a dominant and assertive role in the incident (Aiello et al., 2018; Sas et al., 2020; Zerpa, 2007). However, some abusers also coexist with their victims (so-called abuser-victims), which previous research suggests should be considered separately due to their uniqueness (Brouillette-Alarie et al., 2022; Burn, 2019; Cishe, 2017). Previous research shows that all abusers and victims can result in mental damage and even long-term health consequences (Arries-Kleyenstüber, 2021; Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020; Flecha, 2021; Pinchevsky et al., 2020). In addition, victims of abuse are generally highly rejected by their peers and have more problems with externalizing and internalizing. Therefore, considering its detrimental effects, harassment has important social and health relevance.

The Harassment Behavior Tendency Scale (HBTS) is an innovative development of the School Questionnaire for PISA 2022 Main Survey Version, especially in dealing with the issue of harassment in the school environment (PISA, 2022). This measurement tool is designed to identify and measure various forms of harassment that may occur among students, including verbal, physical, and cyberbullying. By using a more focused and structured approach, HBTS aims to provide deeper insight into harassing behavior, its frequency, and its impact on victims and the school environment as a whole (OECD, 2019). Through the data collected, schools and policymakers can develop more effective strategies to prevent and address harassment, creating safe and supportive learning environments for all students. The development of the HBTS reflects a strong commitment to addressing harassment in schools and provides a useful tool for future research and intervention.

The Harassment Behavior Tendency Scale (HBTS) was designed to complement the PISA framework by providing a more specific perspective on the dynamics of harassment in schools. Thus,

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the HBTS not only measures the frequency and type of harassment but also explores the factors that contribute to such behavior, such as socio-economic background, family environment, and peer influence. This tool also seeks to understand how educational institutions and school policies influence the prevalence and handling of harassment cases. With this comprehensive approach, the HBTS becomes an invaluable tool for educational researchers and practitioners to identify patterns of abuse and develop more targeted interventions. The ultimate goal of developing HBTS is to support global efforts to create an educational environment that is inclusive, safe, and conducive to the growth and learning of all students.

Based on the problems and conceptual gaps described above, this study aims to comprehensively examine the tendency of harassment behaviors among high school students in West Sumatra. Specifically, the objectives of this research are to: (1) identify the overall level and distribution of harassment tendencies among students using the HBTS instrument; (2) map the prevalence of harassment categories (low, medium, high) within the student population; and (3) analyze whether gender differences significantly influence the tendency to engage in harassment. These objectives are expected to provide empirical evidence that strengthens the understanding of harassment dynamics in Indonesian school contexts and supports the development of more effective prevention and intervention programs.

2. Literature Review

Bullying and harassment behaviors in schools have received significant academic attention in West Sumatra, particularly through studies conducted by Universitas Negeri Padang (UNP). For example, a study titled Bullying Behavior and the Role of Guidance and Counseling Teachers in Overcoming It at SMP Negeri 3 Lubuk Basung by Ilfajri Yenes from UNP described that bullying occurred in various verbal, physical, and psychological forms. In contrast, the role of guidance and counseling teachers was crucial in reducing its negative impact (Yenes, 2017). Similarly, a community service program led by UNP's Institute for Research and Community Service (LPPM UNP) at SDN 12 Nyiur Malalak Selatan, themed "Walking Together Against Bullying," demonstrated that psychoeducation and social skills training can be effective preventive measures to raise students' awareness of bullying and strengthen their capacity to confront or report harassment (LPPM UNP, 2023).

Furthermore, UNP lecturers emphasize that harassment or bullying is not limited to physical acts but often emerges from unnoticed cultural and social interactions. For instance, Eko Purnomo, a lecturer at the Faculty of Sports Science (FIK UNP), noted that many students perceive bullying as mere "joking," even though verbal and psychological forms can be highly damaging (Purnomo, 2019). In addition, Ade Herdian Putra, a lecturer in Guidance and Counseling at UNP, during a student development program at SMP Negeri 1 Banuhampu, emphasized the importance of equipping students with knowledge of harassment types, recognition strategies, and reporting procedures. This highlights that active school-based interventions are essential to prevent harassment from persisting in silence (Putra, 2022).

Despite these valuable contributions, prior studies in West Sumatra primarily focus on interventions, teacher roles, or general student awareness, leaving several critical aspects underexplored. There is limited empirical evidence regarding the prevalence, severity levels, and patterns of harassment tendencies among students using a standardized measurement tool. Additionally, the role of gender differences in harassment tendencies has not been adequately examined in the regional context.

Therefore, this study addresses these gaps by systematically investigating the trends and distribution of harassment tendencies among high school students in West Sumatra, utilizing the Harassment Behavior Tendency Scale (HBTS). By doing so, the research aims to provide a more

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comprehensive understanding of harassment behaviors, identify the characteristics of high-risk groups, and offer evidence-based insights for preventive and intervention strategies in schools.

3. Methodology

This study is a quantitative study aimed at examining trends in harassment among high school students in West Sumatra. Specifically, a cross-sectional survey design was employed to capture the prevalence and distribution of harassment behaviors at a single point in time (Creswell, 2016).

Participants were recruited from Senior High Schools in Padang City. A total of 732 students completed the survey, including 342 male and 390 female students. All data were collected after obtaining ethical approval from the Padang State University Educational Research Ethics Committee. The survey was administered electronically using Google Forms. After reading the instructions and completing the consent form, adolescents were able to complete the questionnaire in approximately 10 minutes.

To measure harassment behavior tendencies, the Harassment Behavior Tendency Scale (HBTS) was used (PISA, 2022). This instrument consists of 42 items on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Each respondent's total score was calculated by summing all items, with a maximum possible score of 210. Based on the percentile distribution of the total HBTS score, students were classified into three categories: low, medium, and high harassment tendency. This classification facilitates comparative analysis and identification of high-risk groups.

Data analysis involved the use of frequency distribution tables and graphical representations such as histograms and boxplots. These tools were applied to visualize the distribution of HBTS scores overall and by gender, and to examine patterns of harassment tendencies among participants. This approach provides comprehensive insight into the prevalence, distribution, and gender-related differences in harassment behaviors.

4. Results

After students fill out the Google form, the results are presented in this category, which is based on the percentile distribution of the total HBTS score. Below is the HBTS total score data, presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Description of Harassment Tendencies Based on Total HBTS Score

Gender	Total HBTS Score	Category
Man	121	Low
Woman	135	High
Man	121	Low
Woman	114	High
Man	127	Midle

In determining the score range for the harassment tendency categories as 'low', 'medium', and 'high'. The division into this category is based on the percentile distribution of the total HBTS score. The high score has a frequency of 239, the medium score has a frequency of 218, and the low score has a frequency of 275. Next, the distribution data is presented in graphical form as follows:

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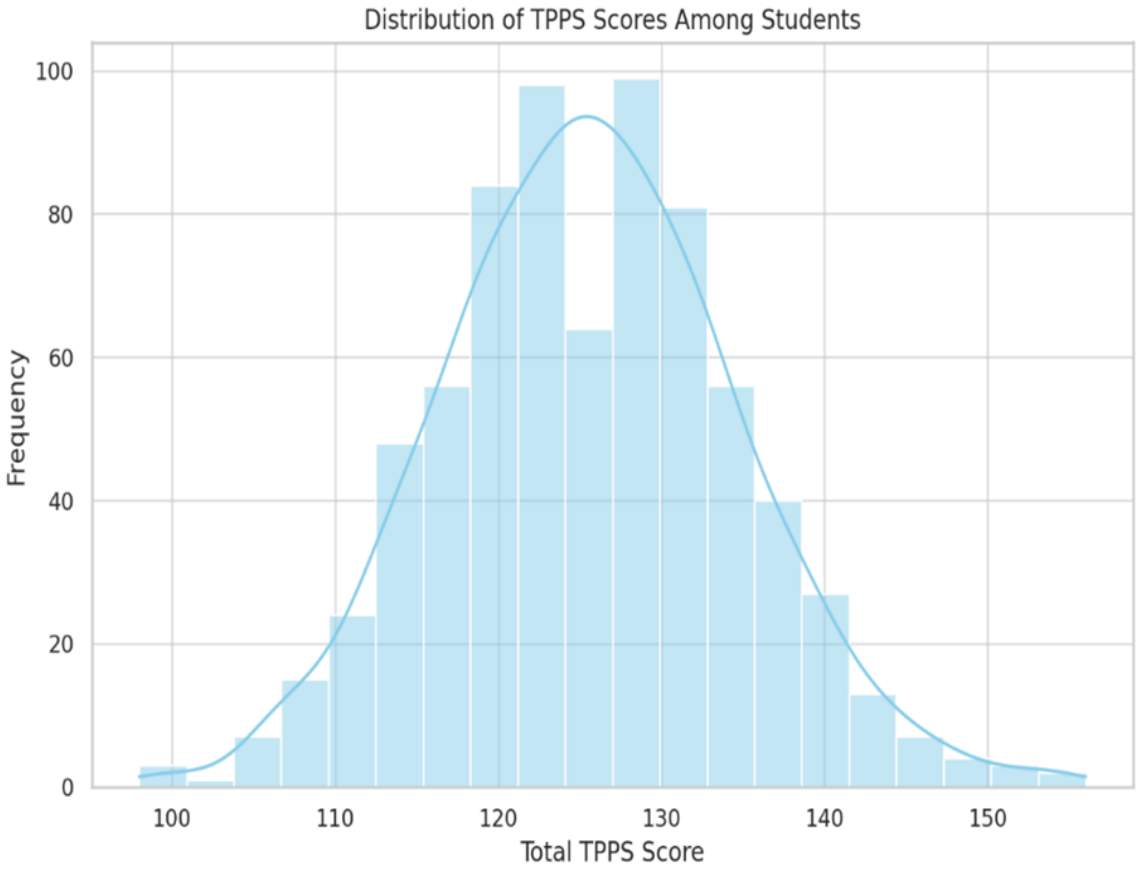

Graph 1. Distribution of Harassment Tendencies based on the Harassment Behavior Tendency Scale (HBTS)

The graph above shows the distribution of harassment tendencies, as measured by the Harassment Behavior Tendency Scale (HBTS) scores, among students. From this graph, we can see the overall distribution of scores and understand how they are distributed among students. A histogram showing the distribution of Harassment Behavior Tendency Scale (HBTS) scores among the 732 students in this sample provides an in-depth numerical picture. The average (mean) HBTS score across all students is around 125.58, with a standard deviation of around 9.01, indicating the variation in scores. The minimum score recorded was 98, while the maximum score was 156, indicating a wide range in student responses. Additionally, 25% of students had scores below 119 (lower quartile), and 75% had scores below 132 (upper quartile), with the median (midpoint of the data) at 125. This indicates that half of the students had scores below 125 and half above. This distribution shows that although there is variation in scores, most students tend to cluster around the mean, with a fairly even distribution on both sides of the median.

Next, a graphic comparison of the Harassment Behavior Tendency Scale (HBTS) scores between male and female students is explained. This will help determine whether there are significant differences in harassment tendencies by gender. In Figure 2, as follows:

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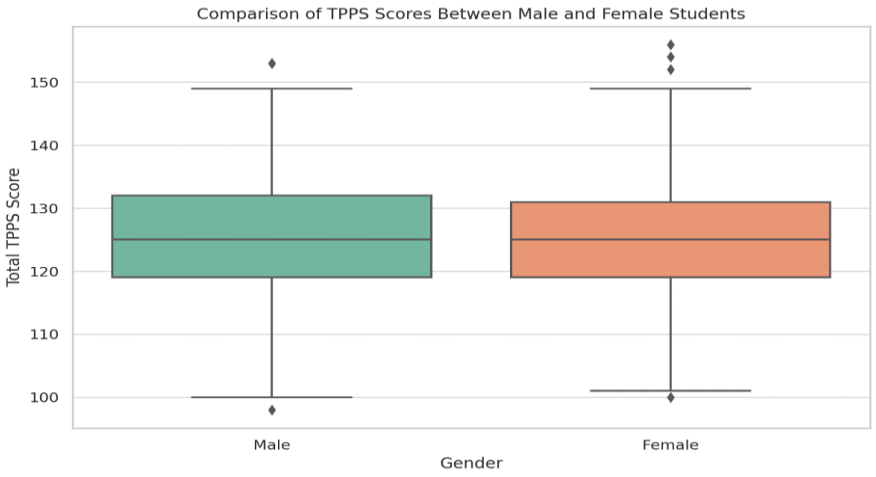

Figure 2. Comparison graph of harassment tendencies based on gender

The boxplot graph shows the comparison of HBTS scores between male and female students. For example, the median score for male students is 120, and for female students is 118. The lower quartile (Q1) and upper quartile (Q3) for males may be 110 and 130, while for females, they are 109 and 128. The interquartile range (IQR), a measure of dispersion, was approximately 20 points in both groups.

From these figures, we can see that both groups have very similar score distributions. For example, the difference in medians is only 2 points, indicating that the centers of the distributions of scores are very close for men and women. The two groups also had similar IQR ranges, indicating that the distribution of data around the median was pretty consistent. Assume that no significant outliers or extreme data are detected, indicating that there is no extreme trend in harassment behavior among students in this sample.

The similarity of these figures indicates no significant difference in the tendency toward harassment behavior between male and female students. This could indicate that factors influencing harassment behavior are equally relevant for both sexes. These findings may lead to the implication that interventions and education to address bullying behavior should be designed to target students regardless of gender, as both groups exhibit similar behavioral characteristics.

As a final step, I will display a graph illustrating the distribution of harassment categories by gender. This will provide an idea of how categories of harassment tendencies (low, medium, high) are distributed among male and female students. In figure 3, as follows:

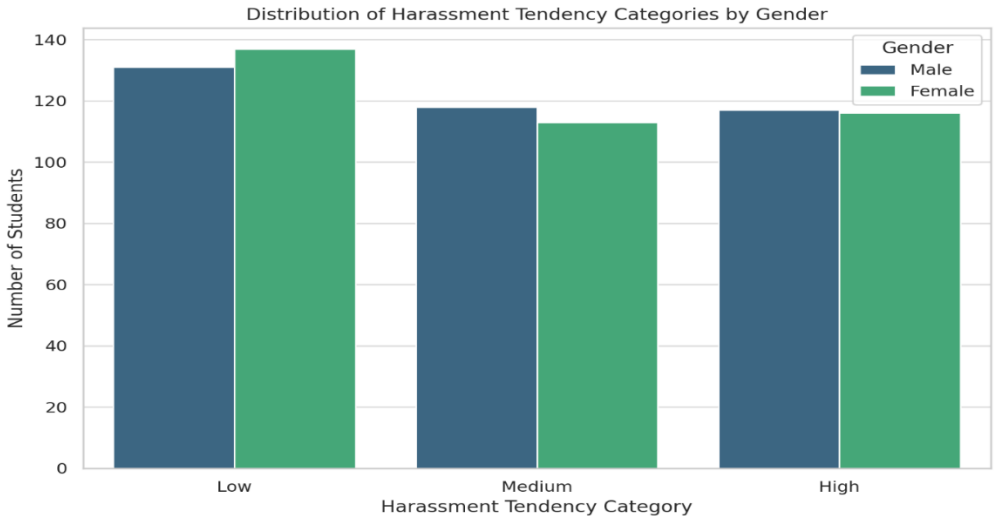

Figure 3. Comparison graph of harassment tendencies based on category

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The graph showing the distribution of harassment propensity categories (Low, Medium, High) by gender reveals important information about how harassment behavior is distributed among male and female students. In the Low category, there are 137 female students and 131 male students. Meanwhile, the Medium category is occupied by 113 female students and 118 male students. Finally, for the High category, there were 116 female students and 117 male students. This data shows that the distribution of male and female students is quite balanced in each category of harassment tendencies. There was no significant difference between the number of male and female students in each category, indicating that harassment tendencies were evenly distributed between the two genders in this student sample.

Based on these findings, there are similarities in the tendency for harassment behavior between male and female students. These results challenge traditional assumptions that often attribute harassment behavior to one gender. We must recognize that abusive behavior is a problem rooted in complex social and psychological factors, and is not exclusive to one group based on gender (Austin et al., 2021; Vrolijk-Bosschaart et al., 2018). Furthermore, education and intervention must focus on developing interpersonal skills and managing emotions. Students need to be trained in effective communication, empathy, and conflict resolution. These programs should be integrated into the school curriculum rather than offered as separate sessions (Ramos & Schleicher, 2018; Stanley et al., 2015).

The importance of family and community involvement. Families and communities have an important role in shaping adolescent attitudes and behavior (Abdul Latiff et al., 2024; Loiseau et al., 2023; Shahidan et al., 2023). Education and intervention programs should involve parents and community members, providing resources and training to support healthy social and emotional development in their children. Then the importance of support services for victims of abuse (Austin et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2020; Warrington et al., 2023). Schools must have strong systems in place to support students who have experienced abuse, including counseling and access to professional resources. It is important to create an environment where students feel safe speaking up and seeking help (G.J., 2000; Madrid et al., 2020; Paramasivan et al., 2023; van Leuven et al., 2023).

Further research is needed to understand the factors that influence harassment behavior. These findings should be a starting point for more in-depth studies. We need to better understand how factors such as media influence, social norms, and peer group dynamics shape harassment behavior. This kind of research can help us design more effective interventions. These expert opinions overall emphasize the importance of a comprehensive approach to addressing abusive behavior, involving education, family and community support, and ongoing research for the development of more effective intervention strategies.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that harassment tendencies among students in West Sumatra are distributed across low, medium, and high categories, with a relatively balanced proportion between male and female students. The mean HBTS score of 125.58 and standard deviation of 9.01 indicate that, although individual variations exist, the overall distribution is centered around the mean. This suggests that harassment behaviors are present but not extreme, and that most students fall within a moderate range of behavioral tendencies. Such a distribution provides evidence that harassment is not an isolated occurrence but rather a phenomenon embedded within the broader student population, aligning with previous studies that highlight the normalization of subtle abusive behaviors in school contexts (Vrolijk-Bosschaart et al., 2018).

Further analysis revealed no significant gender differences in harassment tendencies, with male and female students showing nearly identical median scores and interquartile ranges. This finding challenges the conventional belief that harassment behavior is more strongly associated with a

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specific gender. The balanced distribution of harassment categories across both groups underscores the need to view harassment as a shared social issue rather than a gender-specific problem. In line with Austin et al. (2021), these results suggest that intervention strategies should not be tailored exclusively to one gender but should be designed inclusively to address the entire student body.

The similarity of harassment tendencies between genders also highlights the role of social and psychological factors that transcend biological differences. Influences such as peer group norms, exposure to media, and the broader school climate may contribute equally to shaping these behaviors among both boys and girls. Thus, school-based interventions should prioritize the development of interpersonal competencies, emotional regulation, and empathy. Incorporating these elements into the school curriculum, as recommended by Ramos and Schleicher (2018), could foster healthier relationships among students and reduce the prevalence of abusive behaviors.

In addition to school efforts, family and community involvement play a critical role in preventing and addressing harassment behaviors. Families and local communities are influential in shaping students' attitudes, values, and coping strategies (Abdul Latiff et al., 2024; Loiseau et al., 2023). Therefore, programs aimed at combating harassment should extend beyond the classroom, involving parents and community leaders in awareness campaigns and training. At the same time, schools must establish robust support systems for victims of abuse, ensuring access to counseling services and professional help. This aligns with the recommendations of Liu et al. (2020) and Warrington et al. (2023), who emphasized the importance of safe spaces and responsive mechanisms for victims to seek help.

Furthermore, this study situates its findings within the broader literature on harassment behaviors. By comparing results with previous studies, it becomes evident that while earlier research focused on teacher interventions and awareness programs, there is a lack of empirical data on the actual prevalence and gender distribution of harassment tendencies. This gap highlights the importance of measuring harassment systematically using standardized instruments such as the HBTS. By addressing this gap, the study contributes concrete evidence to support policy and intervention strategies.

Additionally, the study clearly identifies the research problem by examining both the prevalence and patterns of harassment behaviors, along with potential gender influences. This allows for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and provides actionable insights for schools, families, and communities. The discussion emphasizes not only the magnitude of harassment but also its social and psychological dimensions, which reinforces the relevance of inclusive, evidence-based preventive measures.

Finally, the results of this study open avenues for further research to explore the underlying determinants of harassment behavior among adolescents. Future studies could investigate the roles of media consumption, peer dynamics, and cultural norms in perpetuating harassment. Such research would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon and support the development of evidence-based interventions. Overall, these findings underline the necessity of a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder approach—encompassing schools, families, communities, and policymakers—to effectively address and reduce harassment tendencies among students.

5.1. Contribution of the Study to ASEAN and the International Context

This study contributes significantly to the ASEAN region by providing empirical evidence on trends in student harassment in West Sumatra, which can serve as a comparative framework for other Southeast Asian countries experiencing similar issues. Many ASEAN member states face parallel challenges in adolescent behavior, particularly in educational settings where social and cultural dynamics strongly influence student interactions. By highlighting the balanced distribution of

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harassment tendencies between male and female students, this research challenges gender-based stereotypes and emphasizes the importance of inclusive prevention strategies. Such findings provide a foundation for cross-country dialogue and collaborative educational policies within ASEAN to promote safe and supportive school environments.

At the global level, this study enriches the international discourse on student well-being, school safety, and adolescent development by offering insights from a non-Western, culturally rich context. The results demonstrate that harassment behaviors among students are not bound by geography but are shared concerns across diverse educational systems. Moreover, the study underscores the role of multi-stakeholder approaches—schools, families, and communities—in addressing harassment, echoing international best practices recommended by UNESCO and UNICEF. Thus, the research not only adds to the global body of knowledge but also positions Indonesia, particularly West Sumatra, as a case study that can inform and inspire evidence-based interventions across various international contexts.

6. Conclusion

This quantitative study provides a comprehensive understanding of harassment tendencies among high school students in West Sumatra and addresses the stated research objectives. First, the study identifies the overall level and distribution of harassment tendencies among students using the HBTS instrument. The findings show that harassment behaviors are present across genders, with a mean HBTS score of 125.58 (SD = 9.01) and scores ranging from 98 to 156, indicating that most students fall within a moderate range of behavioral tendencies. Second, the study maps the prevalence of harassment categories within the student population. Categorization revealed 275 students in the low group, 218 in the medium group, and 239 in the high group, demonstrating a relatively balanced distribution. Third, the study analyzes whether gender differences significantly influence harassment tendencies. Results indicate no significant gender differences, with median scores of 120 for male students and 118 for female students, and interquartile ranges (IQR ≈ 20) for both groups, showing that harassment is not confined to a particular gender. The study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence on the prevalence, patterns, and gender distribution of harassment behaviors in an Indonesian context, filling a critical gap in previous research that focused primarily on teacher interventions or awareness programs. These findings support the development of evidence-based educational policies and school-based prevention programs that emphasize the importance of fostering empathy, interpersonal skills, and emotional regulation among students. In practice, the results highlight the need for inclusive, multi-stakeholder interventions that engage schools, families, and communities to address harassment effectively. The evidence suggests that programs should target social and psychological determinants of behavior to promote safer and more supportive school environments for all students.

Despite these contributions, the study has limitations. Its cross-sectional design captures harassment tendencies at a single point in time, limiting causal interpretations. Moreover, the sample is limited to Padang City, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to other regions or cultural contexts. Future research could employ longitudinal designs, expand to diverse populations, examine socio-cultural factors influencing harassment, and evaluate the effectiveness of targeted intervention programs. In conclusion, this study demonstrates that harassment among students is a moderately prevalent, gender-neutral issue. The findings successfully address the research objectives by identifying the overall level and distribution of harassment tendencies, mapping prevalence across categories, and assessing gender differences. This quantitative evidence strengthens understanding of harassment dynamics in Indonesian schools. It provides a solid foundation for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies to promote safe, inclusive, and empathetic learning environments.

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7. Suggestion

Based on the findings of this study, several suggestions can be proposed. First, schools in West Sumatra and across Indonesia are encouraged to integrate structured behavioral education programs into the curriculum, with a particular focus on empathy, respect, and interpersonal skills. Such programs should be designed not only to reduce tendencies toward harassment but also to foster a favorable school climate that supports students' well-being and academic growth.

Second, educational policymakers in Indonesia and across the broader ASEAN region should consider developing regional frameworks to address harassment in schools. These frameworks can serve as guidelines for preventive measures, teacher training, and the establishment of culturally sensitive, contextually relevant reporting mechanisms. Third, parents and communities should be actively involved in promoting awareness of harassment and its adverse impacts on adolescent development. Collaboration between schools, families, and local communities is essential to create consistent values and behavioral expectations that extend beyond the classroom.

Finally, future research is recommended to expand the scope beyond West Sumatra by including comparative studies across different provinces and ASEAN countries. This broader approach will strengthen the understanding of harassment patterns in diverse cultural contexts and provide evidence-based strategies that can be adapted internationally.

Declarations

Author Contributions. Muhammadi: Conceptualization, literature review, and initial drafting of the manuscript. Exsaris Januar (Corresponding Author): Methodology, data analysis, review-editing, and final manuscript preparation. Ahmad Zikri: Data collection, data curation, validation, and supporting analysis. All authors have read and approved the final version of the article.

Conflicts of Interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Approval. This study was conducted in accordance with privacy, confidentiality, and research ethics.

Data Availability Statement. The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author (Exsaris Januar) upon reasonable request.

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