



Double Burden and Social Stigma: A Case Study of Bullying Among Working Students at State Senior High School 1 Peusangan, Bireuen, Indonesia

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Abstract

Working students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds frequently face challenges that extend beyond balancing education and employment, including negative social perceptions and unequal treatment within school communities. Although school bullying has been widely investigated, limited attention has been paid to how the combination of double burden and social stigma shapes the experiences of working students in secondary education. This study explores the dynamics of bullying encountered by working students at State Senior High School 1 Peusangan, Bireuen, Indonesia. A qualitative case study approach was employed, drawing on data collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis involving school leaders, teachers, counselors, and students selected purposively. Data were interpreted using the interactive analytical framework of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, while source triangulation was applied to strengthen the credibility of the findings. The analysis revealed that the simultaneous demands of schooling and manual work increased students' susceptibility to stigmatization, verbal humiliation, physical intimidation, and social exclusion. Moreover, bullying was often perceived as ordinary peer interaction, reducing institutional awareness and delaying appropriate responses. These findings indicate that bullying against working students reflects broader patterns of socioeconomic inequality rather than isolated interpersonal conflict. The study emphasizes the need for school policies and educational practices that foster empathy, strengthen institutional responsiveness, and create more inclusive learning environments for economically marginalized students.

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INTRODUCTION

Bullying remains one of the most persistent challenges confronting secondary education worldwide, affecting students' psychological well-being, academic engagement, and social development. Although schools are expected to provide safe and inclusive learning environments, various forms of peer victimization continue to occur across different educational settings regardless of socioeconomic context. Recent international evidence indicates that bullying is increasingly associated with broader structural inequalities rather than merely individual behavioral problems (Hammarén, 2022; McGorry et al., 2025; Pollmann et al., 2025). Students from economically disadvantaged families are disproportionately exposed to discrimination because poverty frequently shapes peer perceptions, social acceptance, and educational participation (Coley et al., 2025; Doan et al., 2022; Mello et al., 2026). In many developing countries, socioeconomic disparities intersect with school culture and create conditions in which vulnerable students experience exclusion and repeated victimization (Juan et al., 2025). Such inequalities often remain hidden because verbal humiliation and social exclusion are commonly interpreted as ordinary peer interaction rather than

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psychological violence. Consequently, bullying should be understood not only as interpersonal aggression but also as a manifestation of unequal social relations operating within educational institutions.

The vulnerability becomes even greater for students who simultaneously pursue formal education while participating in income-generating activities. Economic hardship compels many adolescents to work after school in order to contribute to household income or finance their educational expenses, particularly in rural and semi-rural communities. Although employment may demonstrate resilience and responsibility, it frequently exposes these students to physical exhaustion, limited study time, and reduced opportunities for social interaction (Awais et al., 2024; Barratt & Duran, 2021; Emerson et al., 2023). Fatigue, untidy appearance, and irregular attendance often become visible indicators that distinguish working students from their peers (Clarey et al., 2026; Grimell et al., 2025; Melo et al., 2024). Rather than receiving empathy, these characteristics may trigger negative stereotyping and discriminatory treatment within the school environment. Previous studies have shown that adolescents experiencing role conflict between education and work are more likely to report emotional distress, lower academic confidence, and weaker peer relationships (Cattelino et al., 2021; Deng et al., 2023; Hartas, 2021). Therefore, the educational experiences of working students extend beyond academic challenges and encompass complex social consequences that deserve greater scholarly attention.

Social stigma represents one of the most influential mechanisms through which socioeconomic inequality is reproduced in educational settings. Contemporary perspectives describe stigma as a multidimensional social process involving labeling, stereotyping, status loss, and discrimination embedded within unequal power relations (Allen, 2022; Gyamfi, 2024; Michaels et al., 2023). Within schools, students who differ from dominant social expectations are frequently categorized according to economic background, physical appearance, or perceived academic competence. Such categorization may gradually evolve into exclusion from peer groups, public humiliation, and systematic victimization. The normalization of derogatory language under the justification of "joking" further reinforces symbolic violence because repeated verbal attacks become socially acceptable despite their psychological consequences. Victims often internalize these experiences, resulting in diminished self-esteem, anxiety, emotional withdrawal, and avoidance of school participation (Arslan & Allen, 2021; Oben & Hui, 2025; von Humboldt et al., 2025). Consequently, stigma should be viewed not merely as an individual perception but as a social mechanism that sustains unequal educational experiences among vulnerable learners.

The Indonesian educational context provides an important setting for understanding the intersection between socioeconomic disadvantage and bullying. Despite continuous government efforts to strengthen character education and promote child-friendly schools, bullying remains widespread across educational institutions and continues to affect students from marginalized backgrounds (Susanti et al., 2025). Existing reports suggest that verbal bullying constitutes the most prevalent form of victimization because it is often overlooked by teachers and normalized by peers as harmless humor. This situation becomes particularly problematic when economically disadvantaged students are repeatedly ridiculed because of their appearance, occupation, or family circumstances. Such experiences may gradually reduce classroom participation, weaken academic motivation, and encourage school avoidance (Heyne & Brouwer-Borghuis, n.d.; Ratinho & Martins, 2023; Ye et al., 2023). The persistence of these practices indicates that bullying cannot be separated from broader social inequalities operating within schools. Understanding how economic vulnerability shapes bullying experiences is therefore essential for developing more inclusive educational policies and interventions.

Previous research has extensively examined bullying from psychological, behavioral, and educational perspectives. Numerous studies have identified individual characteristics, family environment, peer influence, school climate, and self-control as major determinants of bullying behavior (Fenny, 2022; Qin & Gan, 2023). Other investigations have explored the relationship between bullying and mental health outcomes, demonstrating significant associations with depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and reduced academic achievement (Hysing, 2021; Miskimon et al., 2023; Polanin et al., 2021). Research concerning social stigma has similarly emphasized labeling processes experienced by individuals with disabilities, health conditions, and minority identities (Mitchell et al., 2021; Rivera & Bennetto, 2023; Shpigelman et al., 2022). Meanwhile,

studies on working students have primarily concentrated on work–study balance, academic adaptation, and psychological well-being (Hammond, 2025; Li et al., 2025; Soares et al., 2021). Collectively, these studies provide valuable explanations regarding bullying, stigma, and role conflict. However, they generally investigate these issues independently rather than examining their interaction within the same educational context.

Several important limitations remain insufficiently addressed in the existing literature. First, empirical studies rarely position working students as a distinct vulnerable group experiencing simultaneous economic pressure, social stigma, and peer victimization (Eichert & Luedicke, 2022; Muris & Ollendick, 2023). Second, bullying research has largely focused on urban schools, cyberbullying, or general adolescent populations, leaving rural educational contexts comparatively underexplored. Third, previous investigations tend to emphasize individual psychological factors while paying limited attention to structural inequality and symbolic violence rooted in socioeconomic differences. Fourth, few studies have examined how local cultural expressions and everyday language become instruments of dehumanization that reinforce bullying practices within school communities (Marolla-Gajardo & Lozano Mas, 2025; Takeuchi, 2021). Finally, institutional responses to bullying are frequently discussed from policy perspectives without investigating how teachers themselves may unintentionally normalize or overlook verbal aggression. These limitations reveal a substantial empirical and theoretical gap regarding the interconnected relationship between double burden, social stigma, and bullying among economically disadvantaged working students in rural Indonesian secondary schools.

Responding to these gaps, the present study investigates the dynamics of bullying experienced by working students at State Senior High School 1 Peusangan, Bireuen Regency, Indonesia. Specifically, this research explores how double burden resulting from students' simultaneous educational and occupational responsibilities interacts with social stigma to produce various forms of verbal and physical bullying within the school environment. The study also examines the normalization of bullying through everyday peer interactions and institutional perceptions that may unintentionally sustain discriminatory practices. Theoretically, this research contributes to the growing literature on educational inequality by integrating perspectives on social stigma, socioeconomic marginalization, and school bullying into a unified analytical framework. Practically, the findings are expected to inform teachers, school leaders, counselors, and policymakers in designing empathy-based anti-bullying interventions that acknowledge the socioeconomic realities of working students. By highlighting the lived experiences of marginalized adolescents in a rural Indonesian context, this study extends current discussions on inclusive education and demonstrates that bullying should be understood as both a psychological problem and a reflection of broader social inequality within educational institutions.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive case study design to explore the complex relationship between double burden, social stigma, and bullying experienced by working students at State Senior High School 1 Peusangan, Bireuen Regency, Indonesia. A qualitative approach was selected because the research sought to understand participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and social interactions within their natural educational environment rather than to test predetermined hypotheses or quantify causal relationships. The descriptive case study design enabled an in-depth exploration of bullying as a socially constructed phenomenon embedded within the cultural and socioeconomic context of the school. This approach also facilitated the identification of meanings, behavioral patterns, institutional responses, and interpersonal dynamics that could not be adequately captured through quantitative measurements. By emphasizing participants' narratives and contextual interpretation, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how economic disadvantage shapes students' vulnerability to bullying and social exclusion.

Research Setting and Study Period

The research was conducted at State Senior High School 1 Peusangan, located in Bireuen Regency, Aceh Province, Indonesia. The school was selected because preliminary observations indicated the presence of bullying incidents involving students from economically disadvantaged

families who simultaneously attended school and engaged in manual labor outside school hours. This educational setting provided a relevant context for examining how socioeconomic conditions interact with peer relationships and institutional culture. Data collection was carried out during the 2020 academic year, consisting of classroom observations, school environment observations, document collection, and in-depth interviews with key participants. Conducting the study within participants' natural environment enabled the researcher to obtain authentic descriptions of everyday interactions and bullying practices without manipulating the research setting.

Participants and Sampling Strategy

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a widely accepted sampling strategy in qualitative research that enables the selection of information-rich cases capable of providing detailed insights into the phenomenon under investigation. The selection criteria included direct involvement in school life, familiarity with bullying incidents, and willingness to participate in the research. The participants consisted of the school principal, a school counselor, a homeroom teacher, an Islamic Education teacher, and several students representing victims, witnesses, and working students who had experienced bullying. Students were included if they had firsthand experience with bullying either as victims or observers and were willing to share their experiences voluntarily. Participants who had no direct knowledge of the phenomenon or declined to participate were excluded. This purposive strategy ensured that the collected information represented multiple perspectives regarding bullying practices within the school community.

Research Instruments

Data were collected using multiple qualitative instruments to enhance the depth and richness of the findings. The primary instrument consisted of a semi-structured interview guide developed from previous literature on school bullying, social stigma, and role conflict among working students. The interview protocol included questions regarding participants' experiences of bullying, perceived causes, forms of verbal and physical victimization, institutional responses, and coping strategies. A structured observation checklist was also employed to document naturally occurring interactions among students in classrooms, school corridors, the cafeteria, and other communal spaces. In addition, document analysis was conducted to obtain contextual information related to students' socioeconomic backgrounds and school records relevant to the research topic. The use of multiple instruments enabled comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon from different sources while supporting methodological triangulation.

Trustworthiness of the Data

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the findings, the study adopted the qualitative quality criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba, encompassing credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was strengthened through prolonged engagement in the research setting, repeated observations, and source triangulation involving school administrators, teachers, counselors, and students. Dependability was maintained by documenting every stage of the research process, including interview procedures, observation records, coding decisions, and analytical memos, thereby creating a transparent audit trail. Confirmability was achieved by grounding all interpretations in empirical evidence derived from interview transcripts, observation notes, and supporting documentation rather than personal assumptions. Transferability was enhanced through detailed descriptions of the research context, participant characteristics, and school environment, enabling readers to determine the applicability of the findings to similar educational settings. Throughout the analytical process, emerging interpretations were continuously compared across multiple data sources to improve consistency and minimize researcher bias.

Data Collection Procedures

The study followed a systematic and iterative research procedure to ensure that data collection was conducted consistently and comprehensively. The process began with the identification of the research problem through preliminary observations and an extensive review of relevant literature concerning bullying, social stigma, socioeconomic inequality, and working students. After determining the qualitative descriptive research design, key participants were selected purposively according to predefined inclusion criteria. Subsequently, the interview guide and observation protocol were developed to facilitate systematic data collection. Field observations

were conducted to capture naturally occurring interactions among students before in-depth interviews were undertaken with school administrators, teachers, counselors, and student participants. Supporting documents related to the research context were then collected to enrich and verify the empirical evidence. Following data collection, all interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and prepared for thematic analysis. Initial coding was performed to identify meaningful units of information, followed by category development, theme generation, source triangulation, and interpretative analysis. The overall research procedure adopted in this study is illustrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Research Procedure Flowchart

The flowchart illustrates the sequential stages of the qualitative research process, beginning with problem identification and concluding with the interpretation of findings and drawing conclusions. Although presented sequentially, qualitative inquiry is inherently iterative; therefore, several stages particularly data collection, coding, and interpretation were conducted simultaneously through continuous comparison of emerging evidence. This iterative approach enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the analytical process while ensuring that the final themes remained firmly grounded in participants' lived experiences.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which emphasizes the cyclical relationship between data collection, condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Immediately after each interview and observation session, audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and compared with field notes to ensure transcription accuracy. The researcher repeatedly read the transcripts to achieve data familiarization before conducting initial coding, during which meaningful statements related to bullying, social stigma, working students, institutional responses, and coping strategies were identified and labeled. Similar codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories representing recurring patterns across participants. These categories were further refined through constant comparison and synthesized into overarching themes that reflected the essential dimensions of participants' experiences. Throughout the analytical process, data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentary evidence were continuously compared using source triangulation to verify the consistency and credibility of emerging interpretations. Finally, the themes were interpreted in relation to existing theoretical perspectives on bullying, social stigma, and educational inequality to generate comprehensive conclusions regarding the dynamics of bullying experienced by working students within the studied school context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Forms of Bullying at SMA Negeri 1 Peusangan

The data from the research results of the forms of bullying that occurred at SMAN 1 Peusangan have several forms, including:

1. Verbal bullying (mocking poor students, making fun of friends who look stubborn/untidy, laughing at friends who often fall asleep in class, mocking students who often skip school and are late for school, calling them animal names, and scolding friends).

According to the results of the interview with Mr. ABD as the Principal, he explained that:

"Mocking, making fun of it is what often happens in this school. There are many causes of bullying, including students who feel richer, actually mocking students whose lives are poor, students who often sleep in class are also the subject of ridicule, students who often skip school, students who are often late for school, and also dating problems" (Interview, Principal of SMAN 1 Peusangan, Monday, September 21, 2020). The behavior of mocking and making fun of each other seems to be a common thing for students. The condition of the classroom is out of control, when there are no teachers in the classroom. Some male students willingly called their friends "hai asee", "pungoe kah", "kah bangai", while pushing their heads. There were also students who laughed at their friends who looked messy, untidy, messy hair, black nails, and others (Results of research field observations).

Similarly, the results of the interview with Mrs. KH as a BK (Counseling Guidance) teacher:

"In this school, children often bully in the form of mockery and insults". This is because students are not neat and lazy to enter school. There are some students here who come from underprivileged families, and have to help their parents work late into the night, so that these students often skip school, and are late to school. And this is also a material for bullying of friends" (Interview, BK Teacher (Counseling Guidance) SMAN 1 Peusangan). From the answer above, it can be understood that the shortcomings and weaknesses that a student has, can be the cause of bullying at school. This weakness is not only seen in terms of students' academic ability, but also in terms of their family's economic weaknesses. Bullying that is continuously carried out by his friends in the classroom can actually add to a more complicated problem, namely the reluctance of the bullying victim to attend class (skipping school). Because he is one of the targets of his friends' arguments.

Meanwhile, Mrs. AH as the homeroom teacher said that; "bullying has never happened in our school" (Interview with, Homeroom Teacher of Class XI IPS-1 SMAN 1 Peusangan). Similarly, Mr. JF, explained: "In our school there has never been bullying" (Interview with the Teacher of Religious Studies at SMAN 1 Peusangan). From the results of the interview, the researcher received information that there had never been bullying at the school. This is of course contrary to what the researcher saw when observing the research, as well as from the results of interviews with several previous informants, namely school principals and BK teachers. Therefore, the researcher assumes that the two informants above (homeroom teachers and teachers in the field of religious studies), do not understand what a bulund is, or the informant does not want to share information openly about things that happen in their school regarding bullying behavior.

The researcher also received information from the school that bullying is often carried out secretly and openly, both individually and in groups. This is as said by the BK (Counseling Guidance) teacher, explaining the same thing that: "The mocking, insulting and mocking is carried out by students starting with cornering friends and belittling them, thus provoking other friends to join in the bullying en masse. Bullying behavior sometimes occurs secretly, so as not to be caught. But if it's in the form of ridicule, it often happens overtly. And other friends laughed" (Interview with PAI Study Teacher). The Gospel of Jesus In addition to the principal, homeroom teachers, BK teachers and religious studies teachers, the researcher also conducted interviews with several students in grade XI of Science-1. When the researcher asked about the forms of bullying that had occurred and been experienced by students, one of the students named AN (victim of bullying) explained that:

"I've seen and heard my friends being ridiculed, or ridiculed. For example, being mocked with various words, "pig", "stupid", and others. I was also often ridiculed. It is pronounced with the names "bui", "asee", "bangai", "krebo", "black" and others. I don't know what the cause is. Maybe he does like to tease or joke. Maybe it's my physique that has kribu hair so they joke and prank. My friend just told me to shut up. Finally when I am ridiculed and I am silenced, the ridiculers will stop by themselves. I felt inferior, sometimes hurt and angry when the words spoken had gone beyond the limit. It's just that I chose to be silent, smiling, so that they could stop making fun of me. If I oppose it, they can make fun of it even worse" (Interview with Grade XI IPS-1 Students).⁷

Likewise, MR students, said that: "I was often laughed at by my friends, because I always slept in class. I was sleepy, because every day I worked in the garden, picking coconuts, peeling coconuts,

collecting the coconuts and delivering them to the base. The duet is for me to school too, for my family too. Sometimes I work late at night, so I don't sleep. By the time I got to school, my nails were dirty. This guy said "that's kutoe kah" (you're so dirty). When I was sleeping in class, this person laughed at me, saying "gadouh ka eih i rumoh kula" (it's fun to sleep at your school), "eih malam" (sleep that night). Sometimes I am embarrassed, I skip school, I am lazy and I am constantly ridiculed" (Interview with Class XI IPS-1 Students).⁸ The Gospel of Jesus

IZ students also explained that: "I used to cheer and be laughed at by my friends, when the teacher was called to the front to answer the question. Even though I had just gotten up from my seat, I had already been cheered, ridiculed, told that I couldn't answer. Even though I can be buked."⁹

From some of the results of interviews with students above, we can see that bullying that often occurs is in the form of degrading or making fun of someone's body (body shaming). The shortcomings and weaknesses that a student has, can be the cause of bullying at school. This weakness is not only seen in terms of students' academic ability, but also in terms of their family's economic weaknesses. Bullying that is continuously carried out by his friends in the classroom can actually add to a more complicated problem, namely the reluctance of the victim of bullying to attend class (skip school). Because he is one of the targets of his friends' looting.

2. Physical Abuse (kicking, slapping)

The second form of bullying, which occurred at SMAN 1 Peusangan, was in the form of physical bullying. When the teacher was not in the class, there were several male students who left the class to go to the canteen, even though it was not a break time. When they returned to the classroom, they brought a cold glass of aqua and snacks. Meanwhile, there were also male students who were waiting in front of the class, asking for their friends' snacks, while following to their seats. There was a student who refused to give him cold water, but then he gave it, because he was scolded by a friend, while his leg was kicked and his hand raised to punch him. Because he was afraid, he gave his snack.¹⁰ The Gospel of Jesus Christ One of the students, named ZZ, explained that: "I'm lazy to make a fuss with my friends. If I am asked to snack with a friend in a threatening way, I will continue to give it, instead of being beaten".¹¹ The Gospel of Jesus Christ

So based on the results obtained above, it can be concluded that in SMAN 1 Peusangan there are forms of bullying, between verbal bullying and physical bullying (insulting, mocking, mocking, degrading, belittling, and cornering friends) in groups in general, and sometimes also done individually, both openly and secretly so that the teacher does not know. And this form of bullying often occurs in the classroom and also in the canteen during break hours. Similarly, physical bullying is often experienced by students, when students force their friends to hand over something they ask for, such as snacks. Seeing these conditions, there are many factors that cause students to commit acts of bullying to their classmates. One of the causes of bullying at SMAN 1 Peusangan includes students who feel richer mocking students whose lives are poor, students who often sleep in class are also the subject of ridicule, students who often skip school, students who are often late for school, students who are not neat, lazy to go to school, and students who come from underprivileged families and also the physical differences of each student.

Discussion

The findings reveal that verbal bullying constituted the most prevalent form of victimization experienced by working students, with insults, derogatory nicknames, ridicule concerning physical appearance, poverty, fatigue, and irregular school attendance becoming routine features of everyday school interaction. These behaviors should not be interpreted merely as spontaneous adolescent conflicts but rather as socially constructed practices through which economic differences are transformed into markers of inferiority. From the perspective of Social Stigma Theory, stigma emerges through interconnected processes of labeling, stereotyping, status degradation, and discrimination that are sustained by unequal social power (Allen, 2022; Gyamfi, 2024; Michaels et al., 2023). The findings demonstrate that visible indicators of students' economic hardship—including untidy clothing, physical exhaustion after work, and reduced classroom participation—became symbolic cues that legitimized repeated verbal victimization. This interpretation supports previous studies suggesting that poverty substantially influences peer acceptance and increases exposure to discrimination within educational settings (Coley et al., 2025; Juan et al., 2025; Mello et al., 2026). Moreover, the present findings reinforce Hammarén's (2022) argument that bullying

represents a mechanism through which educational inequality is reproduced rather than merely reflecting individual aggressive behavior. Consequently, the study broadens current understanding by demonstrating that verbal bullying directed toward working students is embedded within broader socioeconomic structures operating inside schools.

A second important finding concerns the interaction between students' dual responsibilities as learners and income earners, which substantially increased their vulnerability to bullying. Unlike many adolescents whose school participation is primarily academic, working students were compelled to negotiate competing educational and economic obligations, often resulting in physical fatigue, reduced study time, absenteeism, and diminished social engagement. These circumstances created visible differences that peers interpreted negatively, thereby reinforcing stigmatization and social exclusion. Previous research has consistently shown that balancing work and education generates psychological strain and weakens students' academic adjustment (Barratt & Duran, 2021; Emerson et al., 2023; Hammond, 2025; Li et al., 2025). However, the present study extends this literature by demonstrating that the consequences of the double burden extend beyond academic performance and mental well-being to include heightened exposure to peer victimization. Rather than functioning solely as an individual coping challenge, the work–study conflict became a social condition through which economic disadvantage was publicly recognized and transformed into opportunities for bullying. This finding therefore expands existing conceptualizations of the double burden by positioning socioeconomic vulnerability as an important pathway linking educational participation and school violence.

The findings further indicate that bullying was not limited to verbal aggression but also involved physical intimidation, particularly through threats, coercion, and forced compliance among male students. Physical bullying frequently occurred in situations characterized by limited adult supervision, allowing stronger peer groups to exercise dominance over more vulnerable classmates. Such evidence suggests that bullying reflects unequal social power rather than isolated interpersonal hostility. This interpretation aligns with contemporary perspectives emphasizing that victimization emerges within hierarchical peer relationships where power imbalance enables repeated aggression (Pollmann et al., 2025; Qin & Gan, 2023). Nevertheless, the findings reveal an important contextual dimension that has received comparatively limited scholarly attention. Physical intimidation was directed disproportionately toward economically disadvantaged students who were perceived as less capable of resisting dominant peer groups, indicating that socioeconomic status influenced not only verbal discrimination but also exposure to physical coercion. Accordingly, this study extends previous bullying research by illustrating that material inequality contributes to multiple forms of victimization simultaneously, reinforcing structural rather than purely behavioral explanations of school violence.

Another significant finding concerns the normalization of bullying within the school environment. Several teachers perceived bullying as either nonexistent or merely ordinary joking among students, whereas observations and participant narratives revealed repeated verbal humiliation and discriminatory treatment. This discrepancy indicates that institutional perceptions may unintentionally contribute to the persistence of bullying by reducing recognition of subtle forms of victimization. The normalization of derogatory language reflects symbolic violence, whereby harmful behaviors become socially accepted through repeated everyday interaction and therefore escape institutional intervention. Similar patterns have been identified in studies showing that verbal aggression is frequently overlooked because it is interpreted as harmless humor rather than psychological abuse (Marolla-Gajardo & Lozano Mas, 2025; Susanti et al., 2025). Furthermore, research on school belonging demonstrates that students experiencing persistent victimization often withdraw socially while teachers remain unaware of the cumulative psychological impact (Arslan & Allen, 2021; Miskimon et al., 2023). The present findings therefore suggest that preventing bullying requires not only stronger disciplinary policies but also improved institutional awareness capable of recognizing subtle expressions of stigma before they evolve into systematic exclusion.

Beyond describing bullying behaviors, the findings illustrate how repeated victimization generated broader educational consequences for working students. Participants reported embarrassment, reduced self-confidence, school avoidance, and declining classroom participation following continuous ridicule and intimidation. These reactions indicate that bullying disrupted not only students' emotional well-being but also their capacity to engage meaningfully in learning. This

interpretation supports earlier evidence linking peer victimization with anxiety, diminished academic motivation, absenteeism, and poorer educational outcomes (Cattelino et al., 2021; Deng et al., 2023; Polanin et al., 2021; Ye et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the present study demonstrates that these consequences were intensified because bullying intersected with economic hardship, creating a cumulative disadvantage in which poverty, occupational responsibilities, and social stigma reinforced one another. Such interactions illustrate that educational inequality is reproduced through both structural socioeconomic conditions and everyday peer relationships. Consequently, interventions aimed solely at improving students' resilience are unlikely to eliminate bullying unless schools simultaneously address the underlying social inequalities that shape peer perceptions and institutional responses.

Collectively, these findings make several theoretical and practical contributions to the international literature on school bullying. Theoretically, the study advances existing scholarship by integrating Social Stigma Theory, educational inequality, and the concept of the double burden into a unified explanatory framework for understanding bullying among working students. While previous studies have generally examined bullying, stigma, or work-study balance independently, this research demonstrates that these phenomena interact dynamically to reproduce marginalization within school environments. The findings therefore contribute a broader conceptual perspective in which bullying is interpreted not only as psychological aggression but also as a manifestation of structural inequality embedded in everyday educational practice. Practically, the results underscore the importance of developing empathy-based anti-bullying programs, strengthening teachers' capacity to identify subtle forms of socioeconomic discrimination, and establishing school policies that recognize the realities faced by economically disadvantaged students. By focusing on working students in a rural Indonesian secondary school, this study addresses an important gap in the international literature and provides contextual evidence that enriches global discussions on inclusive education, educational justice, and the social dimensions of school bullying.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that bullying experienced by working students should be understood not merely as an issue of individual misconduct but as a consequence of broader socioeconomic inequalities embedded within everyday school life. The findings reveal that students who simultaneously carried academic responsibilities and manual labor experienced a double burden that increased their vulnerability to social stigma, verbal humiliation, physical intimidation, and social exclusion, while these discriminatory practices were frequently normalized as harmless joking and therefore escaped meaningful institutional intervention. By illustrating how economic disadvantage, symbolic labeling, and unequal peer relationships interact to sustain bullying, this study extends existing scholarship beyond conventional psychological explanations and highlights the importance of examining bullying through a broader sociocultural perspective. These findings suggest that effective anti-bullying initiatives should incorporate empathy-based educational practices, strengthen teachers' awareness of subtle forms of victimization, and promote school environments that recognize socioeconomic diversity as an educational reality rather than a basis for discrimination. Although this study provides an in-depth understanding of the experiences of working students within a rural Indonesian secondary school, its findings are limited to a single institutional context and therefore should be interpreted cautiously when applied to different educational settings. Future research is encouraged to involve multiple schools, broader stakeholder perspectives, and comparative or mixed-methods approaches to generate a more comprehensive understanding of how socioeconomic marginalization shapes bullying across diverse educational contexts and to support the development of more inclusive and socially responsive educational policies.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Zahriyanti conceptualized the study, developed the research framework, designed the qualitative methodology, conducted the field investigation, performed classroom observations and in-depth interviews, analyzed and interpreted the data, and prepared the original manuscript draft. Musrizal contributed to the refinement of the research design, supervised the data collection process, validated the analytical framework, and critically reviewed the manuscript for important intellectual content. Ikhwan participated in data verification, contributed to thematic interpretation, supported the literature review, and assisted in revising and improving the academic quality of the manuscript. M. Ikbali contributed to data interpretation, reviewed the consistency of the findings with the theoretical framework, edited the manuscript for language and scholarly presentation, and approved the final version for publication. All authors discussed the findings, contributed substantially to the interpretation of the results, read and approved the final manuscript, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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