

The role of parental parenting styles in preventing children from becoming victims of bullying

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Abstract

Bullying is a serious problem in educational settings that can have long-term impacts on children's psychological development. Although many studies have examined risk factors for bullying, research specifically exploring the role of parenting styles from a qualitative perspective in Indonesia remains limited. This study aims to understand the meanings, experiences, and strategies of parents in preventing children from becoming victims of bullying. This qualitative study with a phenomenological approach involved five parents of children aged 7-15 years in Kapanewon Sentolo, Kulon Progo. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed five main themes: meaning of the parental role as a safe place, authoritative parenting strategies through advice and role modeling, responsive routine communication, spousal and school support as facilitating factors, and work busyness and economic limitations as inhibiting factors. The findings indicate that the quality of emotional relationships and parental commitment, not merely material factors, are the main determinants in preventing bullying. This study contributes to strengthening attachment theory and authoritative parenting within the Indonesian context. Practical implications encourage the need for parental capacity-building programs, family-school collaboration, and special attention to vulnerable families such as single parents and families with economic limitations.

Introduction

Bullying is one of the most concerning forms of aggressive behavior in educational settings, fundamentally defined as negative actions deliberately and repeatedly carried out by one or more individuals against a weaker party, accompanied by an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim (Norman et al., 2025). The essential characteristics of this behavior include three main elements: intentional harm, repetition, and power imbalance, whether physical, psychological, or social (Dardiri et al., 2020). Bullying can manifest in various forms, ranging from physical, verbal, relational or social bullying to cyberbullying that occurs through digital platforms (Ilham et al., 2026).

Interviews with several students at State Junior High School 1 Sentolo and State Junior High School 3 Sentolo found that bullying in the school environment occurs in various forms and has had a significant psychological impact on its victims. The students revealed that verbal

bullying was the most common form they experienced or witnessed, such as mocking physical appearance, giving degrading nicknames, and insults directed at them in front of their peers. One student admitted that he was often called by a name referring to his physical weakness, causing him to feel ashamed and reluctant to interact in the classroom. Social bullying was also widely experienced by students, such as being excluded from friendship groups, not being invited to join in activities, or deliberately not being included in study groups without any clear reason. All of these student accounts indicate that bullying in Kapanewon Sentolo occurs in verbal and social forms, and has an impact on decreasing students' self-confidence, creating fear of coming to school, and disrupting the learning process.

Given the data and facts presented above, this study aims to investigate the role of parenting styles in preventing children from becoming victims of bullying, specifically by exploring how parenting styles contribute to children's resilience, emotion regulation, and social skills. The significance of this research lies in the rising prevalence of bullying in schools and the pressing need for evidence-based prevention strategies that involve families, as understanding how parenting styles serve as protective factors is crucial for developing effective family-based intervention programs.

The family is the smallest social unit with a fundamental role in shaping an individual's personality, values, and behavior from early childhood (Erjanova et al., 2025). According to Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological perspective, the family serves as the primary socialization context where children acquire interpersonal skills later transferred to peer relationships (Jazuli et al., 2025). Families ensure optimal child development through safe, responsive, and supportive parenting (UNICEF, 2021). Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model further explains that interactions within the immediate environment, particularly the family as a microsystem, crucially determine children's social and emotional development (Al-Salhi et al., 2025). Family interactions, including parenting styles and communication, also affect children's and adolescents' mental health and well-being (Indrianti et al., 2025). Thus, the family functions not only to meet physical needs but also as the primary foundation for character formation, mental health, and social development. These essential family functions and roles are realized through the parenting style parents apply in daily life.

Parenting style is a relatively consistent pattern of parent-child interaction reflecting the attitudes, behaviors, and strategies used to guide and raise children. Contemporary studies understand parenting style as a multidimensional construct encompassing control, warmth, communication, and developmental demands (Vasiou et al., 2023). Parenting style describes both how parents discipline children and the quality of emotional relationships and responsiveness to children's needs (Cumsille et al., 2025). Authoritative parenting styles, characterized by a balance between control and support, correlate with more positive psychosocial development than other styles (Kaniusonyte & Laursen, 2020). Recent studies confirm that parenting style serves as both a protective and risk factor for children's behavioral development, including emotional regulation and aggression tendencies (Rademacher et al., 2025). Thus, parenting style is crucial for character formation, socio-emotional abilities, and children's daily adjustment.

Parenting styles play a crucial role in preventing bullying behavior in children, as the family is the primary environment shaping children's values, attitudes, and ways of interacting with others. Parenting styles characterized by warmth, open communication, and consistent limit-setting help children develop empathy, self-control, and positive conflict resolution skills. Conversely, harsh, neglectful, or overly permissive parenting styles can increase the risk of children displaying aggressive behavior, including bullying (Lestari, 2020).

One of the most relevant studies on this topic was conducted by Mushaddiq et al. (2025), which analyzed the determinants of bullying tendencies among urban and rural adolescents in Aceh. This quantitative study with a cross-sectional design involving 167 students aged 12-15 years found that authoritarian parenting had the strongest influence on bullying tendencies,

meaning that adolescents raised with authoritarian parenting were 13.78 times more likely to engage in bullying compared to adolescents with other parenting styles (Mushaddiq et al., 2025). Permissive parenting also had a significant effect. Furthermore, this study found that male adolescents had a higher tendency to engage in bullying, and adolescents with low self-esteem also had a higher tendency. Interestingly, this study also revealed that students in rural areas exhibited higher bullying behavior (25.61%) compared to students in urban areas (12.94%). These findings confirm that parenting styles, particularly authoritarian and permissive parenting, are significant risk factors for bullying behavior among adolescents (Mushaddiq et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, the study by Mushaddiq et al. (2025) has several limitations. First, its quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design only captured static relationships between parenting styles and bullying, failing to explain the dynamics of behavioral change over time or why and how certain parenting styles affect children's vulnerability to bullying. Second, the study focused more on the tendency to become bullying perpetrators rather than on how parenting styles can prevent children from becoming victims. Third, the study was conducted in Aceh and therefore does not represent other regions of Indonesia, such as Kapanewon Sentolo, Kulon Progo, which have different cultural and social characteristics. Fourth, the study has not deeply explored parents' subjective experiences in carrying out their parenting role to protect children from the risk of becoming bullying victims.

In this study, parenting style is defined as a relatively consistent pattern of parent-child interaction that reflects the attitudes, behaviors, and strategies parents use to guide and raise their children, encompassing the dimensions of control, warmth, communication, and developmental demands. Vulnerability to bullying victimization is defined as a child's experience of receiving negative actions deliberately and repeatedly carried out by one or more peers, accompanied by a power imbalance. Theoretically, this study is expected to enhance understanding of attachment theory and authoritative parenting within non-Western contexts. Practically, the findings can serve as a foundation for developing family-based bullying prevention programs tailored to the needs of Indonesian society, particularly in regions where bullying problems in schools are evident.

Methods

Design

The research design employed is qualitative with a phenomenological approach. This approach was chosen because it aims to understand the meanings, experiences, and strategies experienced by parents in carrying out their role of preventing children from becoming victims of bullying. Phenomenology is a qualitative approach that focuses on the lived experiences of individuals regarding a particular phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2024). This phenomenological approach examines lived experiences by focusing on interpretation and meaning, prioritizing description over explanation of all matters, while maintaining a perspective free from hypotheses or presuppositions (Watson, 2025). Thus, the phenomenological approach is highly appropriate for exploring the subjective experiences of parents in their efforts to prevent bullying in children.

Participants

The participants in this study are parents who have children aged 7 to 15 years (elementary to junior high school level) in Kapanewon Sentolo, Kulon Progo. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, which is a sampling method where participants are chosen based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The inclusion criteria for participants include: (1) parents who have children aged 7-15 years currently attending elementary or junior high school; (2) children who have experienced or are at high risk of experiencing bullying in the school or social environment; (3) parents who

are willing to participate and sign an informed consent form; and (4) parents who are able to communicate well and provide the required information. The number of participants in qualitative phenomenological research is not determined by statistical formulas, but rather by the principle of data saturation, which is the condition where no new information or themes emerge from the interviews conducted (Creswell & Poth, 2024). This study targets 5 to 10 parents who meet the inclusion criteria. Participants will be contacted through the schools where their children study or through recommendations from classroom teachers.

Instruments

The main instrument of this study is the researcher herself as the human instrument. According to Creswell and Poth (2024), in qualitative research, the researcher serves as the key instrument, collecting data through interviews, observation, and documentation. To support data collection, the researcher utilizes complementary instruments including a semi-structured interview guide, a digital voice recorder, and field notes.

The interview guide was designed based on indicators relevant to the research focus, which encompass: (1) parents' interpretation of their role in protecting children from bullying; (2) the parenting strategies and practices they employ; (3) factors that facilitate or hinder prevention efforts; and (4) parents' experiences in identifying and responding to signs of bullying in their children. The questions in the interview guide are open-ended and flexible, enabling participants to freely articulate their subjective experiences.

Prior to implementation, the interview guide underwent pilot testing with 1-2 parents who shared similar characteristics with the research participants to verify the clarity, relevance, and comprehensibility of the questions (Wulandari et al., 2025). The results of the pilot test were used to revise and refine the interview guide before the actual data collection commenced.

Procedure

Participants were invited to participate in this study through the schools where their children studied as well as recommendations from classroom teachers. The researcher explained the aims, benefits, and potential risks of the study both orally and in writing to prospective participants before they signed an informed consent form as evidence of their voluntary participation. This study was conducted at each participant's home or at a school meeting room as mutually agreed, while still paying attention to participant comfort and privacy. This study is a qualitative observational study without any intervention, therefore there were no intervention sessions or baseline assessments as found in experimental studies.

The sequence of research activities included: (1) introduction and re-explanation of the research objectives; (2) completion of participant demographic data; (3) conducting in-depth interviews lasting 45-60 minutes per participant using a semi-structured interview guide; (4) taking field notes by the researcher during and after the interview process; and (5) conducting member checking with participants to verify the accuracy of the collected data. The entire interview process was recorded using a digital voice recorder after obtaining written permission from participants.

The ethical procedures applied in this study included: (a) maintaining the confidentiality of participant identities by using codes (P1, P2, P3, and so on) in interview transcripts and research reports; and (b) ensuring that participation was voluntary without coercion, with the right to withdraw at any time without any consequences.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022). Thematic analysis was selected due to its compatibility with the phenomenological research design and the research questions, which aim to understand the meanings,

experiences, and strategies of parents in preventing children from becoming victims of bullying. The entire data analysis process was assisted by NVivo 14 software to systematically organize codes and themes.

The data analysis process was conducted in six stages as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022). The first stage was data familiarization, in which the researcher read and re-read all interview transcripts and listened again to the audio recordings to capture nuances of meaning that might have been missed. The second stage was initial coding, in which the researcher labeled units of meaning relevant to the research focus, such as parental roles, parenting strategies, communication, and supporting and inhibiting factors. The third stage was searching for themes, in which codes with similarities or interconnections were grouped into potential themes. The fourth stage was reviewing themes, in which the identified themes were checked for consistency with the data and existing codes, with adjustments made as necessary. The fifth stage was defining and naming themes, in which each theme was given an operational definition and an appropriate name reflecting the essence of the data represented. The sixth stage was producing the report, in which the analysis results were presented in narrative form supported by quotations from participant statements.

In this study, there was no missing data as all interview sessions were successfully recorded and fully transcribed. Every participant completed the interview session without any missed or unanswered questions.

To ensure the rigour and trustworthiness of the data, the researcher applied four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). First, credibility was achieved through source triangulation (comparing data from fathers and mothers of same-age children), member checking (confirming the accuracy of transcripts with participants after the interviews), and prolonged engagement in the field. Second, transferability was achieved by providing a thick description of the research context, participant characteristics, and research setting so that readers can assess the extent to which the findings may be transferred to other contexts. Third, dependability was achieved through an audit trail, namely systematic documentation of the entire research process from data collection to final analysis. Fourth, confirmability was achieved through peer debriefing (discussions with fellow researchers not involved in the study to avoid researcher bias) and a reflexivity journal maintained by the researcher throughout the research process.

Results

This section presents findings derived from in-depth interviews with five parents of children aged 7 to 15 years residing in Kapanewon Sentolo, Kulon Progo. Data collection was carried out systematically using an interview guide developed based on the research focus. The findings are presented objectively and in a structured manner, following the order of the research questions, without any interpretation or discussion from the researcher. The data were analyzed and classified into main themes that emerged inductively from the interview results. Each theme is described in detail and supported by direct quotations from participants as empirical evidence, thus providing a clear and contextual description of the phenomenon under investigation.

Participant Characteristics

This study included five parents (four mothers and one father), ranging in age from 35 to 45 years. Participants came from various occupational backgrounds, including a homemaker, an elementary school teacher, a private employee, a farmer, and a merchant. Their educational attainment varied from junior high school to a bachelor's degree. All participants had children between the ages of 9 and 14 who were enrolled in elementary or junior high school in the Kapanewon Sentolo area. A complete summary of participant characteristics is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Code	Age	Jobs	Education	Child's Age	Status
P1	38 years old	Housewives	High School	11 years old	Married
P2	42 years old	Elementary School Teacher	S1	13 years	Married
P3	35 years old	Private employees	S1	9 years	Married
P4	45 years old	Farmer	Junior High School	14 years	Married
P5	40 years	Merchant	High School	12 years	Divorce

Interview Findings

Based on the thematic analysis of the interview transcripts, five major themes were derived that describe the role of parenting styles in protecting children from bullying victimization. These five themes are displayed in Figure 1.

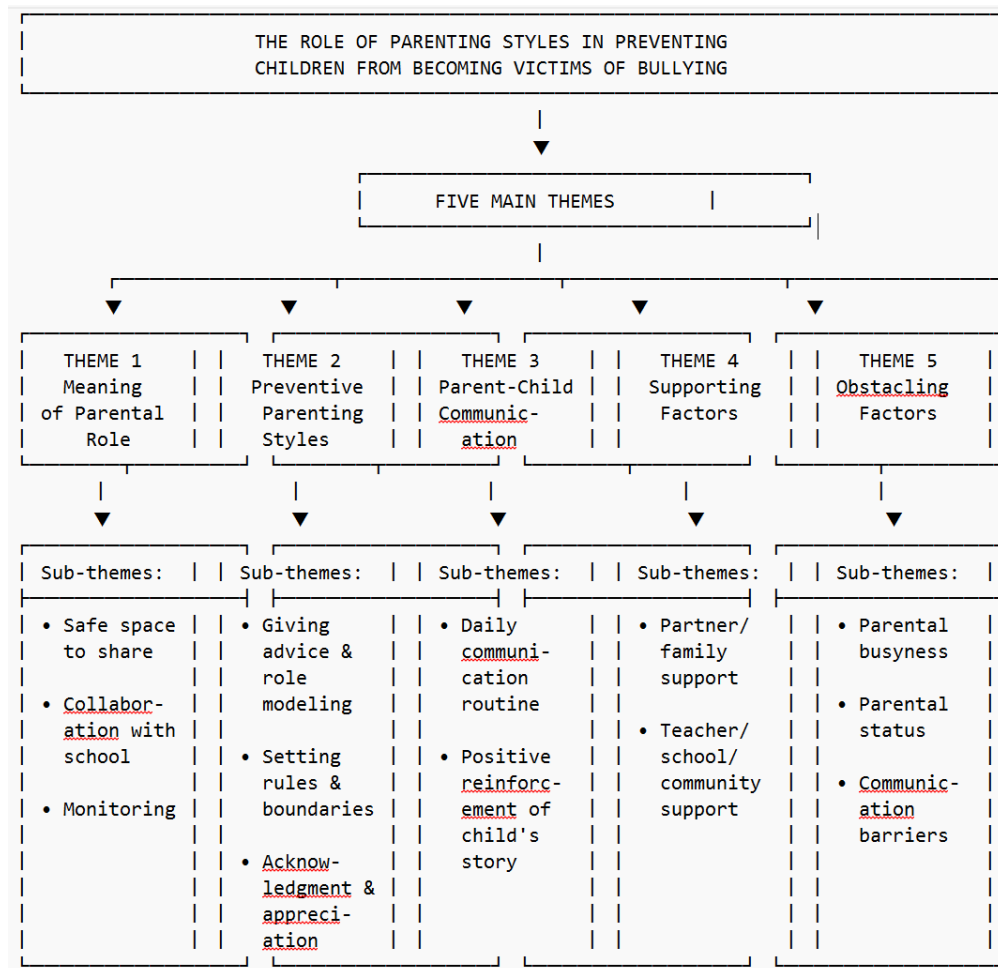


Figure 1. Map of Main Interview Themes

Theme 1: Meaning of the Parental Role

This theme describes how participants interpret their role as parents in efforts to prevent children from becoming victims of bullying. All participants (5 out of 5 or 100%) stated that the primary role of parents is to be a safe place for children to share their stories. P1 stated:

"The role of parents is to be a place for children to confide. Children must feel safe to tell their parents anything. If a child is close to their parents, they will definitely tell them if there is a problem at school." (P1)

A similar statement was also expressed by P3:

"The role of parents is very important. We must be good listeners for our children. My child always tells me if there is a problem because I have accustomed them to do so from an early age." (P3)

Some participants (3 out of 5 or 60%) also recognized the importance of collaboration with the school. P2, who works as a teacher, stated:

"Both are equally important. As a teacher, I also know that the role of parents cannot be replaced. Collaboration between parents and the school is the best approach." (P2)

P4 expressed a similar sentiment:

"Both are important, but parents know their children best. If any problems arise, teachers respond quickly and resolve them." (P4)

Theme 2: Preventive Parenting Strategies

This theme describes the strategies and parenting practices implemented by participants to prevent children from becoming victims of bullying. All participants (5 out of 5 or 100%) applied preventive strategies through daily advice and role modeling. P1 stated:

"I often talk to my child about how to behave with friends. I say, do not mock, do not engage in physical aggression, and if there is a problem, tell me immediately." (P1)

P2 provided advice through television programs:

"I give examples through stories or shows. For example, if there is a TV program about a child being bullied, I watch it with my child and discuss it afterward." (P2)

All participants (5 out of 5 or 100%) also applied rules at home regarding children's social interactions. The commonly applied rules included the obligation to ask permission when playing, time limits for playing, prohibition from playing with children who like to fight, and monitoring gadget use. P2 stated:

"I limit gadget use, especially social media. My 13-year-old child's phone I monitor. I say that if anything is wrong, tell me immediately." (P2)*

P4 conveyed the rules applied in his family:

"The rules are, don't play until late in the afternoon, always ask for permission first, and be respectful to parents. If these rules are broken, there will be consequences." (P4)

Theme 3: Parent-Child Communication

This theme describes the communication patterns between parents and children in the context of bullying prevention. All participants (5 out of 5 or 100%) engaged in routine daily communication with their children, whether during dinner, before bedtime, or when picking up children from school. P1 stated:

"Every day. Usually during dinner or before bed. I ask, 'How was school today? Anything interesting?'" (P1)

P3 conveyed:

"Every day. I pick up my child from school, and on the way home, I ask how they are doing. This also becomes our bonding time." (P3)

All participants (5 out of 5 or 100%) reported that their children had told them about unpleasant experiences with friends. Participants' responses varied, from providing emotional support to reporting to the school. P5, whose child was teased as a "child of divorce," stated:

"I immediately hugged them and said it wasn't their fault." (P5)

P2, whose child experienced having their photo taken without permission, stated:

"I immediately communicated with the homeroom teacher." (P2)

However, some participants (2 out of 5 or 40%) acknowledged communication barriers when children did not want to talk. P1 stated:

"The obstacle is that sometimes the child doesn't want to talk. I have to be patient and wait until they are ready to tell me." (P1)

P2, who has a teenage daughter, stated:

"Teenagers sometimes feel that parents interfere too much. So I have to be wise in my approach." (P2)

Theme 4: Supporting Factors

This theme describes the factors that facilitate participants in carrying out their bullying prevention roles. The majority of participants (4 out of 5 or 80%) stated that spousal support was the primary facilitating factor. P1 stated:

"What helps is my husband. We are united in raising our children." (P1)

In addition to spousal support, support from teachers, schools, and the community was also mentioned by several participants (3 out of 5 or 60%). P4 stated:

"Getting along well with friends and teachers really helps. If there is a problem, the teacher responds quickly." (P4)

P5 conveyed:

"Neighbors and family. I also have a WhatsApp group of parents, so we share information with each other." (P5)

P2, with her profession as a teacher, stated that her understanding of the school system helped her protect her child:

"My profession as a teacher really helps. I know how the school system works, so I know who to report to if there is a problem." (P2)

Theme 5: Inhibiting Factors

This theme describes the factors that make it difficult for participants to carry out their bullying prevention roles. The majority of participants (4 out of 5 or 80%) stated that work busyness was the main obstacle. P3 stated:

"Work busyness. I cannot always accompany my child throughout the day. But I try to have quality time every weekend." (P3)

P4, who works as a farmer, stated:

"The obstacles are work busyness and economic conditions. Sometimes children are not asked because parents don't have time." (P4)

Economic limitations were mentioned by two participants (P4 and P5) as an inhibiting factor. P5, who is a single parent, stated:

"As a single parent, I have to divide my time between working and taking care of my children. It is very exhausting. Also, financial limitations." (P5)

Single parent status was also a challenge in itself, as expressed by P5:

"My son I am stricter with. I set his playtime limits, and I also ask for his friends' phone numbers so I can contact them if needed. But sometimes there is not enough time because I am alone." (P5)

Discussion

Meaning of the Parental Role as a Foundation for Bullying Prevention

The results of this study indicate that all participants (100%) interpreted the primary role of parents as a safe place for children to share their stories. This finding confirms that the quality of emotional attachment within the family serves as an important foundation for children's psychological development, aligning with attachment theory proposed by Bowlby (as cited in Holmes, 2020). This theory states that a secure relationship between child and parent fosters trust, comfort, and the courage for children to express their experiences and feelings. Furthermore, a warm, responsive, and open family environment encourages children to be more communicative and capable of developing optimal emotional regulation (Berk, 2022). Moreover, Gottman's concept of emotion coaching demonstrates that parents who act as a safe place for children not only listen but also help children understand and manage their emotions constructively (Havighurst et al., 2023).

More profoundly, the presence of parents as a safe place also functions as a protective factor in preventing children from becoming victims of bullying. A meta-analysis involving 158 studies found that parental warmth is one of the most consistent protective factors against bullying, both traditional and cyber (Grama et al., 2024). Children who have emotional closeness with their parents tend to be more open in reporting negative experiences they have encountered, including acts of bullying, thereby enabling faster and more appropriate intervention. In addition, supportive relationships help children develop self-confidence, social skills, and assertive abilities, which are important aspects in dealing with peer pressure (Rahmawati, 2022). Thus, the role of parents as a safe space not only impacts children's emotional well-being but also serves as a significant preventive strategy in minimizing the risk of children becoming victims of bullying.

Preventive Parenting Strategies

The results of this study indicate that all participants (100%) implemented preventive strategies through providing advice, role modeling in daily life, and establishing rules regarding social interactions and gadget use. This finding reflects a tendency toward the application of authoritative parenting, which in contemporary studies is characterized by a balance between emotional warmth and structured control. Gera et al. (2025), in a cross-

sectional observational study involving 120 children aged 4-8 years, found that children of parents with an authoritative parenting style were more easily managed using communicative approaches, while children of authoritarian parents tended to require stricter external control such as parent separation or voice control. This finding indicates that advice and role modeling not only function as instruments of external control but also as means of internalizing values that shape children's self-regulation on an ongoing basis.

Empirically, these findings align with Kaniušonytė and Laursen (2020), who in their meta-analysis showed that authoritative parenting correlates with lower levels of children's involvement in aggressive behavior, including bullying, because children possess better emotional regulation abilities and empathy. This indicates that the effectiveness of strategies such as providing advice and role modeling depends heavily on the quality of warm and communicative parent-child relationships. In other words, these strategies do not stand alone; rather, they work through psychological mechanisms of emotional attachment and behavioral modeling processes.

In the context of gadget use monitoring, these findings can be explained through the concept of internal control that develops from supportive relationships. Hinduja and Patchin (2023), in the third edition of their book *Bullying Beyond the Schoolyard* published by Corwin, emphasize that parental involvement and closeness play a role in reducing the risk of children's involvement in cyberbullying, both as perpetrators and as victims. They underscore that effective gadget monitoring is not merely about restriction but is also built through open communication, trust, and the development of empathy and resilience in children. Research in Indonesia by Prihantanti and Nurmasitah (2025) also found that child development is more strongly influenced by external factors such as family support, socio-economic conditions, and cultural values, confirming that parenting cannot be separated from the quality of relationships and environmental context.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the effectiveness of parenting is not determined solely by the existence of rules but by the quality of the relationship underlying them. Gera et al. (2025) showed that children of authoritarian parents tend to be managed using external control techniques such as parent separation (40%) or voice control (32.5%), indicating the potential for resistance when control is not balanced with warmth. Therefore, these findings affirm that effective bullying prevention strategies lie in the integration of consistent discipline and supportive emotional relationships, so that children not only obey rules but also possess the awareness and ability to protect themselves in various social situations, including interactions in the digital world.

Parent-Child Communication as a Key Protective Factor

The results of this study indicate that all participants (100%) engaged in routine daily communication with their children and provided positive responses when children told them about unpleasant experiences with peers. This finding confirms that parent-child communication plays a significant role as a protective factor in preventing bullying.

Theoretically, this finding can be understood through the perspective of family communication as a foundation for internalizing social values. The family is the center of value transmission, where the quality of communication plays an important role in shaping the mental and spiritual well-being of family members. Effective communication builds healthy social character, while less optimal communication has the potential to give rise to antisocial behavior, including bullying (Lusiawati, 2024).

This finding is also reinforced by research conducted by Putri (2024) at SMP Kartika IV-11 Surabaya involving 195 students. The results showed that the majority of respondents who were raised in an authoritarian parenting style tended to engage in bullying behavior. The study emphasized the importance of the parental role in helping children understand and manage emotions through intensive communication, so that children have better self-control

and are able to minimize bullying behavior. Thus, communication not only functions as a means of interaction but also as a medium for emotional learning and social behavior.

Furthermore, interventions involving collaboration between schools and parents, such as teacher counseling combined with active parental participation, can reduce the pressure of bullying behavior in early childhood. This approach demonstrates that communication is not limited to the parent-child relationship but also needs to be extended through synergy with the school environment (Rahayu et al., 2025). In addition, the role of institutions such as PUSPAGA (Family Learning Center) is very important in strengthening family capacity through counseling services, parenting classes, and education on violence prevention in children. The role of facilitators as mediators, motivators, and educators shows that bullying prevention efforts require support from broader systems beyond the nuclear family (Zahroh & Reviandani, 2024).

Research by Arditha et al. (2025) identified that external factors such as family parenting styles, peer pressure, a weak school climate, and ineffective family communication can reinforce bullying behavior. Therefore, effective prevention needs to be carried out multidimensionally, involving the strengthening of family communication, character education, and collaboration between schools and parents (Arditha et al., 2025).

Thus, open and responsive communication not only functions as a means of information exchange but also as an effective preventive strategy in strengthening children's social-emotional resilience and minimizing the risk of bullying. Active parental involvement through intensive communication increases the likelihood of children seeking support when facing problems, thereby preventing social isolation that can increase children's vulnerability to becoming victims of bullying.

Supporting Factors

The results of this study indicate that the majority of participants (80%) identified spousal support as the main supporting factor in bullying prevention efforts. This finding confirms that the quality of the inter-parental relationship (coparenting) directly contributes to the creation of a consistent, stable, and responsive parenting environment. Spousal support enables alignment in the application of rules, supervision, and responses to children's problems, thereby minimizing inconsistencies in parenting.

Spousal support as a supporting factor cannot be separated from the important role of the family in bullying prevention. Parenting styles have a significant negative influence on bullying behavior among adolescents in rural areas, where the regression model explains 35.4% of the variance in bullying behavior (Hadiyanti et al., 2026). This finding indicates that the more positive the parenting style applied by parents—which is strongly influenced by mutual spousal support the lower the tendency for children to be involved in bullying.

In addition to support from within the family, the research findings also identified that support from teachers and schools (60%) as well as the community are significant supporting factors. This indicates that bullying prevention requires the involvement of various social systems. A study found that a school-parent collaboration program through the SOBAT Program (Sekolah Orang Tua Hebat/Great Parents School) successfully created synergy in shaping student character, improving early detection of bullying behavior, and strengthening the family's role in positive parenting (Rachmawati et al., 2025). The impact of this program was evident in the reduction of bullying cases and increased student openness as well as parental concern for children's psychosocial conditions.

From the perspective of community and official institutions, the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) emphasizes that the prevention and handling of bullying in schools must be carried out collaboratively through the strengthening of the Four Centers of Education (Catur Pusat Pendidikan), which involve families, educational institutions, communities, and media. KPAI stresses that schools cannot be left to handle bullying

problems alone; prevention efforts must involve the active role of all parties so that children feel safe, protected, and supported in the educational environment (KPAI, 2026).

Parental involvement is not merely a supporting element but a strategic key in the transformation of character education. Programs such as parenting classes, family discussion forums, counseling services, and digital communication have proven effective in building partnerships between schools and parents (Rachmawati et al., 2025). Family-based interventions including improving parenting styles, family education, counseling, conflict management, and school-family collaboration—have proven effective in reducing bullying behavior in children and adolescents (Yosep et al., 2025). These interventions improve family communication, relationships among family members, and children's emotional resilience. These findings reinforce the argument that support for families, including mutual spousal support, is an important foundation in bullying prevention.

The synergy between family, school, and community forms a mutually reinforcing social ecosystem in bullying prevention efforts. Teacher involvement in supervision and guidance, as well as community support in providing education and strengthening social values, expands the protection network for children beyond the family. Thus, these research findings affirm that effective bullying prevention cannot be carried out partially but requires a holistic and integrative approach that prioritizes the role of the family as the main foundation, reinforced by the support of schools and the community.

Inhibiting Factors

The results of this study indicate that the majority of participants (80%) identified work busyness as the main obstacle in carrying out preventive parenting roles, while economic limitations (40%) and single parent status (20%) also served as inhibiting factors. This finding reflects the social reality faced by many families in Indonesia, where economic demands often result in limited time for interaction between parents and children. Such conditions potentially reduce the intensity of parental supervision, communication, and emotional involvement, which in turn can increase children's vulnerability to various social risks, including bullying.

Lack of parenting due to parental work busyness has the potential to affect the quality of parent-child relationships in the long term. Limited interaction that shapes parenting can have negative impacts on children's emotional, social, and cognitive development, including decreased academic achievement, behavioral problems, and a tendency to neglect their surroundings (Fitriyah et al., 2024). Parenting errors resulting from work busyness have serious consequences for child development, thus requiring collaborative efforts from families, communities, and relevant parties to ensure that children receive adequate attention and care.

In the context of economic status, the main challenges faced by single parents in carrying out their parenting roles include time constraints and economic pressure (Azizah et al., 2025). There are unique challenges in single-parent families; however, supportive parenting that focuses on child empowerment can effectively foster children's independence. Supportive social and economic contexts also play an important role in facilitating positive child development in single-parent families.

Furthermore, individual psychological factors, various coping strategies, and socio-cultural support including the role of gender-based social stigma significantly influence the resilience of single-parent families in Indonesia. This means that a holistic approach that considers the unique characteristics of the Indonesian cultural context is very important in efforts to support the resilience of single-parent families, which in turn contributes to the family's ability to protect children from various social risks, including bullying (Qonita et al., 2025).

Participants with single parent status still need to demonstrate optimal efforts in protecting their children, such as increasing supervision of social interactions and establishing

more intensive communication. The obstacles faced by parents in implementing effective parenting styles include work busyness and a lack of understanding about the importance of parenting in children's education (Masitoh et al., 2024). Therefore, for single parents, educational programs are needed to improve their understanding of parenting styles that support child development.

Thus, this study affirms that although economic factors and work busyness are real obstacles in parenting, they do not entirely determine the quality of protection for children. The quality of emotional relationships and parental commitment remain the main factors in creating an effective parenting environment. This can be strengthened through adaptive communication strategies and adequate social support to prevent bullying.

Implications

This study has several theoretical, practical, policy, and future research implications. Theoretically, the findings of this study reinforce the validity of Bowlby's attachment theory (secure base), Bandura's social learning theory (modeling), Baumrind's authoritative parenting style (balance between emotional warmth and structured control), and Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological theory (involvement of interrelated systems) within the Indonesian cultural context. Practically, this study recommends that parents build open and routine communication with children from an early age, apply authoritative parenting that balances warmth with clear rule-setting and boundaries, and conduct gadget monitoring based on trust and open communication. Furthermore, mutual spousal support in parenting (coparenting) needs to be strengthened to create consistency and stability in the parenting environment. For schools, this study recommends the need for collaborative programs with parents, such as parenting classes, family discussion forums, and the provision of safe and objective bullying reporting systems. In the policy realm, this study recommends strengthening the Four Centers of Education (Catur Pusat Pendidikan) (family, school, community, media) in bullying prevention, developing family capacity-building programs through PUSPAGA (Family Learning Center) that provide counseling services, parenting classes, and violence prevention education, as well as providing special attention to vulnerable families (single parents and families with economic limitations) through assistance programs and parenting support tailored to their specific needs. Anti-bullying regulations also need to be developed participatively by involving students, teachers, parents, and the community in the formulation process. For future research, it is recommended to involve larger and more diverse participants (across regions, educational backgrounds, and socio-economic statuses), include child and teacher perspectives as data triangulation, use longitudinal designs to capture the dynamics of bullying behavior changes over time, conduct quantitative research with standardized instruments to statistically test relationships between variables, test the effectiveness of family-based intervention programs using experimental designs, and conduct cross-cultural research in various regions of Indonesia that have diverse cultural values and local customs.

Limitations and future directions

This study has several limitations. First, the number of participants was limited (5 parents) in one region (Kulon Progo), so the findings cannot be generalized broadly. Second, the study only focused on the parents' perspective, without involving children or teachers. Third, the cross-sectional design was only able to capture a static picture, not the dynamics of behavioral change over time. Fourth, time constraints meant that there was no follow-up to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of the parenting strategies implemented.

Based on these limitations, future research is recommended to: (1) involve larger and more diverse participants across regions and backgrounds; (2) include the perspectives of children and teachers as data triangulation; (3) use a longitudinal design to capture the dynamics of change; (4) conduct comparative cross-regional research in various areas of

Indonesia; (5) develop intervention research with experimental designs to test the effectiveness of family-based bullying prevention programs; and (6) explore in depth vulnerable families (single parents, economic limitations) to identify effective adaptive strategies.

Conclusion

The role of parents in preventing children from becoming victims of bullying remains an important research gap, considering that most previous studies have focused more on school factors and peers. This qualitative study with a phenomenological approach addressed this gap by exploring in depth the experiences, meanings, and strategies of five parents in Kapanewon Sentolo, Kulon Progo in carrying out their preventive role against bullying. The main findings indicate that all participants interpreted the parental role as a safe place for children to share their stories, implemented authoritative parenting strategies through advice, role modeling, and rule-setting balanced with warmth, and engaged in daily routine communication with positive responses to unpleasant experiences shared by their children. Spousal, teacher, school, and community support were identified as supporting factors, while work busyness, economic limitations, and single parent status were identified as inhibiting factors. The importance of these findings lies in strengthening the evidence that the quality of emotional relationships and parental commitment, not merely material factors, are the main determinants in creating effective parenting that prevents bullying. Practically, these findings encourage the need for parental capacity-building programs, family-school collaboration, and special attention to vulnerable families. More broadly, this study contributes to the understanding that adolescence and child development are strongly determined by the foundation of emotional attachment built from an early age within the family, so that bullying prevention cannot be carried out partially but requires a holistic approach involving various social systems. Thus, this study affirms that the family is the first and foremost fortress in protecting children from the risk of bullying.

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Author Contribution Statement

NS, ER, NRDM contributed to the study conception and design. NS as the first author and corresponding author was responsible for the overall research process, including study coordination, data collection through in-depth interviews and field observations, data analysis using thematic analysis, coding of interview transcripts, interpretation of findings, and manuscript writing. AB also had full responsibility for the final version of the manuscript. ER contributed to data interpretation, manuscript revision, and literature review. NRDM assisted in data collection and reviewed the manuscript. All authors reviewed, revised, and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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