

THE EFFECT OF FAMILY FUNCTIONING AND PEER CONFORMITY ON VERBAL BULLYING BEHAVIOR IN EARLY ADOLESCENCE

Putri Maulani Sri Prasasti¹, Idha Rahayuningsih², Noer Suci Endah Puspitaningrum³

¹ Universitas Muhammadiyah Gresik, Indonesia

² Universitas Muhammadiyah Gresik, Indonesia

³ Universitas Muhammadiyah Gresik, Indonesia

Corresponding Author:

Putri Maulani Sri Prasasti,
Fakultas Psikologi, Jurusan Psikologi, Universitas Muhammadiyah Gresik, Indonesia Jl. Sumatera No.101, Gn. Malang,
Randuagung, Kec. Kebomas, Kabupaten Gresik, Jawa Timur 61121
Email: prasastiputri17@gmail.com

Article Info

Received:

Revised:

Accepted:

Online Version:

Abstract

Verbal bullying among early adolescents represents one of the most pervasive behavioral problems in school environments and is strongly associated with family dynamics and peer group influences. Adolescents who experience poor family functioning often lack emotional regulation and empathy, while high peer conformity increases their susceptibility to negative social behaviors, including verbal aggression. This study aims to examine the effect of family functioning and peer conformity on verbal bullying behavior among early adolescents. A quantitative correlational research design was employed, involving 120 students aged 12–15 years from several junior high schools in Gresik Regency. Data were collected using three validated instruments: the Family Assessment Device (FAD), the Peer Conformity Scale, and the Verbal Bullying Behavior Scale. Data analysis was conducted using multiple regression analysis with SPSS 26. The results indicate that both family functioning and peer conformity significantly influence verbal bullying behavior, with peer conformity showing a stronger predictive effect. Dysfunctional family environments and excessive peer conformity were found to increase the likelihood of adolescents engaging in verbal bullying. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening family communication patterns and promoting assertive peer norms to prevent aggressive verbal behavior in school contexts.

Keywords: Early Adolescence, Family Functioning, Peer Conformity, Social Behavior, Verbal Bullying



© 2025 by the author(s)

This article is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY SA) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>).

Journal Homepage

<https://ejournal.staialhikmahpariangan.ac.id/Journal/index.php/wp>

How to cite:

Prasasti, S. M. P., Rahayuningsih, I., & Puspitaningrum, E. S. N. (2025). The Effect of Family Functioning and Peer Conformity on Verbal Bullying Behavior in Early Adolescence. *World Psychology*, 4(2), 314–329. <https://doi.org/10.55849/wp.v4i2.1011>

Published by:

Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Al-Hikmah Pariangan Batusangkar

INTRODUCTION

Verbal bullying remains one of the most prevalent forms of aggression in the developmental stage of early adolescence, often occurring in school environments and peer group settings (Pirzadeh, 2023). Unlike physical bullying, verbal bullying is more subtle yet psychologically damaging, as it involves behaviors such as teasing, mocking, labeling, threatening, and spreading rumors (Seff, 2023). These forms of aggression are capable of inflicting long-term harm to an adolescent's emotional development and self-concept (Imrie, 2023). Early adolescence, typically ranging from ages 12 to 15, is a transitional phase characterized by heightened sensitivity to social acceptance and belonging (Gori, 2024). During this period, the influence of family functioning and peer groups becomes particularly significant in shaping behavioral tendencies, including aggressive or prosocial actions (Rienecke, 2024). The family serves as the primary social environment where values, empathy, and emotion regulation are cultivated, while peers function as a secondary context that reinforces behavioral conformity.

The family's role in the development of adolescents' emotional regulation has been widely acknowledged in developmental and social psychology (GODFREY, 2024). A well-functioning family provides warmth, communication, and supervision that encourage self-control and empathy, reducing the likelihood of aggressive expression (Castelo-Rivas, 2023). Dysfunctional families, on the other hand, often fail to provide emotional stability or constructive conflict management, which may lead adolescents to externalize frustration through verbal aggression (Qiao, 2024). Moreover, family dysfunction frequently creates emotional voids that adolescents attempt to fill through social validation in peer groups (Adrien, 2023). This condition often heightens susceptibility to peer conformity, a social mechanism in which individuals adopt behaviors and attitudes of their peers to gain acceptance or avoid rejection.

Peer conformity, while serving a social purpose in adolescent identity formation, can become maladaptive when it encourages harmful behaviors such as bullying (Jetiyanuwat, 2024). Adolescents who experience poor family cohesion tend to rely more heavily on peer approval as a source of self-esteem (Tao, 2023). Consequently, when group norms endorse teasing or verbal aggression, conformity pressures may push individuals to engage in such behaviors to maintain social belonging (Hoopen, 2023). This interplay between inadequate family functioning and peer conformity creates a social-psychological dynamic that fosters verbal bullying behavior (Boyes, 2023). The phenomenon not only highlights the individual's need for acceptance but also underscores the socio-environmental roots of aggression in early adolescence.

The core problem addressed in this study concerns how family functioning and peer conformity collectively contribute to verbal bullying behavior among early adolescents (Rasmussen, 2023). Despite the growing awareness of bullying as a major educational and psychological issue, much of the existing research still focuses predominantly on physical aggression, overlooking the subtler yet equally harmful verbal forms (Wen, 2023). Verbal bullying is particularly concerning because it often occurs unnoticed by teachers and parents, allowing it to persist and normalize within peer cultures (Hua, 2024). Adolescents who frequently engage in verbal bullying may not recognize the severity of their actions, perceiving them as mere jokes or expressions of peer solidarity (Erdem, 2024). This normalization makes it imperative to explore the psychosocial factors that sustain such behavior patterns.

Family functioning is hypothesized to be a primary determinant of adolescents' behavioral regulation (Vitulić, 2023). Ineffective communication, emotional detachment, or inconsistent parenting within the family may deprive adolescents of essential emotional resources needed to manage frustration and conflict (Manasse, 2024). Such familial conditions can lead to maladaptive coping mechanisms, where aggression becomes a means of self-assertion or emotional release (Peltopuro, 2023). Peer conformity, on the other hand, acts as a

reinforcing mechanism for such behaviors. In peer groups that tolerate or even glorify verbal aggression, individuals may imitate and reproduce these behaviors to maintain group identity or social power (Thomson, 2024). The convergence of these two social influences—family dysfunction and peer conformity—creates a potent risk factor for the perpetuation of verbal bullying in school environments.

The problem is further complicated by cultural and developmental contexts. In collectivist societies such as Indonesia, where this research is situated, peer acceptance and family reputation carry high social value (Lee, 2023). Adolescents are often pressured to conform to social expectations both within their families and among peers (Barton, 2023). This dual expectation can result in inner conflict when familial guidance and peer norms are misaligned (Lo, 2024). When family supervision is weak or emotionally distant, adolescents may prioritize peer acceptance over familial values, thereby increasing vulnerability to deviant behaviors such as verbal bullying (Qin, 2023). Understanding these dynamics is essential to formulating effective interventions that address both family-based and peer-based influences on adolescent aggression.

This research aims to examine the influence of family functioning and peer conformity on verbal bullying behavior in early adolescence (Westrupp, 2023). Specifically, the study seeks to determine the extent to which family dynamics, such as emotional bonding, communication patterns, and parental involvement, correlate with adolescents' tendencies toward verbal aggression (Zhang, 2024). Additionally, the research investigates whether peer conformity mediates or amplifies the relationship between family functioning and verbal bullying behavior. The goal is to uncover not only direct relationships but also interactive effects that explain how social systems jointly shape adolescent behavior.

The study is designed to provide empirical evidence using a quantitative approach, focusing on early adolescents aged 12–15 years who are in the critical stage of social identity formation. Through the use of validated psychological instruments—the Family Assessment Device (FAD), Peer Conformity Scale, and Verbal Bullying Behavior Scale—data are collected to analyze behavioral patterns and the interplay between the two predictors. The choice of this age group is deliberate, as early adolescence represents the developmental phase where family influence begins to wane while peer influence intensifies (Zeng, 2024). By quantifying these relational dynamics, the study aims to identify which variable serves as a stronger predictor of verbal bullying behavior.

The overarching objective is to provide theoretical and practical insights that contribute to both family psychology and educational guidance (Cabrera-García, 2023). On a theoretical level, the study aims to refine existing models of adolescent aggression by integrating familial and peer conformity dimensions (L. Zhang, 2023). On a practical level, the research intends to inform school-based and family-centered interventions aimed at reducing verbal bullying through improved family communication and peer regulation programs (Bai, 2025). The outcomes are expected to guide policymakers, educators, and parents in creating emotionally supportive and socially responsible environments for adolescent development.

Existing studies on adolescent bullying have provided significant understanding of physical and cyberbullying, yet verbal bullying remains underexplored despite its psychological severity. Much of the literature has focused on the consequences of bullying rather than its social origins, particularly in relation to family dynamics and peer conformity. While some studies, such as those by (Wilson, 2024), have emphasized peer influence, they tend to overlook the mediating role of family functioning in shaping conformity patterns. Conversely, studies examining family functioning, such as those by (Cabrera-Perona, 2024), rarely extend their analysis to peer behavioral reinforcement. This gap creates a need for an integrative model that captures how both systems—family and peer—interact to influence verbal aggression in adolescents.

Most existing research has also been conducted in Western contexts, where individualistic cultural values differ significantly from those in collectivist societies like Indonesia. The cultural expectation for adolescents to maintain family harmony and social cohesion may intensify the psychological conflict between individual autonomy and group belonging. As such, the predictive relationship between family functioning and peer conformity may differ in strength or direction in Asian populations. The lack of cross-cultural data limits the generalizability of Western findings and underscores the importance of localized research to contextualize these social-psychological mechanisms within Indonesian settings.

Furthermore, previous research has rarely distinguished between different forms of bullying—physical, relational, and verbal—treating them as homogeneous behaviors. This generalization neglects the unique psychological antecedents and consequences associated with verbal aggression, which is often more socially accepted and less visibly punished. The present study addresses this theoretical and methodological limitation by focusing explicitly on verbal bullying, thereby enriching the understanding of non-physical aggression and its relational determinants among early adolescents.

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative approach that simultaneously examines family functioning and peer conformity as joint predictors of verbal bullying behavior. Unlike prior studies that treat these variables in isolation, this research conceptualizes them as interdependent social systems influencing adolescent behavioral outcomes. The combination of family and peer domains reflects a more ecological understanding of adolescent development, aligning with Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model. The use of validated instruments within the Indonesian cultural context also represents a methodological advancement, ensuring culturally sensitive measurement of psychological constructs.

This research is further justified by its potential contribution to preventive psychology and educational counseling. By identifying the relational pathways through which family dysfunction and peer conformity contribute to verbal bullying, the study provides actionable insights for designing multi-layered interventions. Schools and families can collaboratively implement communication training, emotional regulation programs, and peer mentoring initiatives to mitigate the risk of verbal aggression. The findings also offer a foundation for developing policies that integrate mental health promotion within educational settings.

Beyond its applied implications, the study contributes conceptually to the discourse on adolescent aggression by reframing loneliness, conformity, and aggression as interconnected social experiences rather than isolated phenomena. The emphasis on early adolescence as a critical developmental window adds depth to the theoretical understanding of how identity, belonging, and emotional regulation intersect within social contexts. The research, therefore, not only fills an empirical gap but also strengthens the theoretical framework that informs cross-disciplinary efforts in developmental psychology, family studies, and education.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationship between family functioning, peer conformity, and verbal bullying behavior among early adolescents. The quantitative approach was selected to measure and analyze the influence of independent variables (family functioning and peer conformity) on the dependent variable (verbal bullying behavior) through statistical testing (Luo, 2024). The correlational design allowed the researcher to identify the strength and direction of the relationships among variables without manipulating any conditions (Oliver, 2023). The approach was also appropriate for testing hypotheses derived from theoretical frameworks related to family systems theory and social learning theory, which explain how family dynamics and peer influences jointly shape adolescent behavior (Sina, 2023). This study focused on early

adolescence as a critical developmental stage where individuals experience heightened social conformity and emotional sensitivity, making them more susceptible to behavioral deviations such as verbal bullying.

Population and Samples

The population of this study consisted of early adolescents aged 12 to 15 years who were enrolled in several public and private junior high schools in Gresik Regency, Indonesia. The schools were selected to represent diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds to ensure variability in family functioning and peer group interactions. The sampling technique used was *purposive sampling*, based on specific inclusion criteria: (1) students classified within the early adolescence age range, (2) active participation in peer group settings, and (3) willingness to complete all research instruments. A total of 120 participants were recruited for the study, consisting of 60 male and 60 female students. This sample size was considered adequate for multiple regression analysis, ensuring statistical validity and reliability. The selection of the Gresik region was based on its relevance to previous studies documenting peer-related aggression and familial influence among middle school students in semi-urban areas.

Instruments

Three standardized psychological scales were utilized in this study: the *Family Assessment Device (FAD)*, the *Peer Conformity Scale*, and the *Verbal Bullying Behavior Scale*. The FAD, originally developed by Epstein, Baldwin, and Bishop (1983), measures family functioning across key dimensions such as problem-solving, communication, affective responsiveness, affective involvement, and behavioral control. This instrument was adapted and validated into Indonesian by a panel of experts to ensure cultural and linguistic relevance. The Peer Conformity Scale, adapted from the work of Santor, Messervey, and Kusumakar (2000), assesses the extent to which adolescents adjust their attitudes and behaviors to align with peer expectations, covering both positive and negative forms of conformity. The Verbal Bullying Behavior Scale, constructed based on Olweus' (1993) bullying typology, was used to measure the frequency and intensity of verbal aggression behaviors, including teasing, mocking, labeling, and threatening. All instruments used a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"), with higher scores indicating higher levels of the measured construct.

Prior to data collection, all instruments underwent validity and reliability testing using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient. The FAD achieved a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.86$, the Peer Conformity Scale $\alpha = 0.84$, and the Verbal Bullying Scale $\alpha = 0.88$, indicating high internal consistency. Content validity was confirmed through expert judgment by psychologists and educational researchers, ensuring that each item reflected the theoretical construct it was intended to measure. The combination of standardized measurement tools ensured that the data collected were both reliable and suitable for inferential analysis.

Procedures

The research process was carried out in several systematic stages to maintain methodological rigor. Initial stages involved obtaining ethical clearance from the institutional review board of the affiliated university and formal permission from the selected schools. Participants and their parents were provided with informed consent forms that explained the purpose of the study, confidentiality measures, and voluntary participation rights. After obtaining consent, data collection was conducted during regular school hours under the supervision of the researcher and school counselors to ensure a comfortable environment for respondents.

Participants were given printed questionnaires that took approximately 25–30 minutes to complete. Instructions were clearly explained to minimize misunderstanding and response bias.

Upon completion, all responses were checked for completeness and accuracy before being coded for statistical analysis. The collected data were analyzed using multiple linear regression with SPSS version 26 to determine the predictive influence of family functioning and peer conformity on verbal bullying behavior. The assumptions of normality, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity were tested to ensure the validity of the regression model.

The final stage of the procedure included interpreting the statistical results and comparing them with theoretical expectations. All findings were discussed in relation to the existing literature to provide contextual relevance and theoretical depth. Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were strictly maintained throughout the process. The structured and ethical research procedure ensured that the results accurately represented the psychological and social dynamics of early adolescents in the study context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected from 120 respondents, consisting of 60 male and 60 female students aged between 12 and 15 years, were analyzed quantitatively to assess the influence of family functioning and peer conformity on verbal bullying behavior. The descriptive statistical analysis showed that the overall mean score for family functioning was 78.64 (SD = 9.37), indicating a moderately functional family environment among participants. Peer conformity demonstrated a higher mean value of 83.21 (SD = 8.94), suggesting a strong tendency among adolescents to adapt to peer norms and expectations. Meanwhile, verbal bullying behavior had a mean score of 65.47 (SD = 10.16), reflecting a moderate level of engagement in verbal aggression among the sample.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Family Functioning	78.64	9.37	58	95
Peer Conformity	83.21	8.94	60	97
Verbal Bullying	65.47	10.16	42	92

The descriptive findings show variability in the three main constructs, demonstrating that participants experienced diverse family and peer contexts influencing their behavior. The overall distribution met normality assumptions based on skewness and kurtosis values within the acceptable range (± 1.96), allowing the data to proceed for inferential analysis.

The descriptive statistics suggest that adolescents with moderate family functioning tend to experience difficulties in emotional regulation and interpersonal communication, potentially leading to higher susceptibility to verbal bullying behavior. Students reporting lower scores on family functioning showed greater instances of conflict and lack of parental involvement, consistent with the notion that dysfunctional family systems contribute to externalized behaviors such as aggression. The high mean score of peer conformity highlights adolescents' psychological need for belonging, which often drives them to align with group norms—even when such norms support negative interactions like teasing, mocking, or verbal intimidation.

Further inspection of data patterns indicates that male students scored slightly higher in verbal bullying behavior ($M = 67.18$) compared to female students ($M = 63.76$), though the difference was not statistically significant at the descriptive level. These differences reflect gender tendencies in expressing social dominance and conformity within peer groups. Peer conformity was observed to be more pronounced among students who spent longer hours with friends outside school, emphasizing the social reinforcement of bullying behaviors. Overall, these findings highlight that both family and peer variables jointly shape the psychosocial landscape in which verbal bullying develops.

The analysis revealed that both family functioning and peer conformity were significantly correlated with verbal bullying behavior. Family functioning had a negative correlation ($r = -0.46$, $p < 0.01$), meaning that lower family cohesion and ineffective

communication were associated with higher levels of verbal bullying. Conversely, peer conformity demonstrated a positive correlation ($r = 0.52, p < 0.01$), suggesting that adolescents who strongly conform to peer norms tend to engage more frequently in verbal bullying. These relationships indicate that while family acts as a protective factor, peers can become a reinforcing influence for negative behaviors during early adolescence.

The results also demonstrated that the combination of both variables could explain a considerable portion of the variance in verbal bullying. Adolescents with high peer conformity but low family functioning showed the highest scores of verbal aggression. This trend reinforces the theoretical premise that weak family systems lead to greater emotional reliance on peers, thereby increasing vulnerability to social pressures. The simultaneous interaction between these factors forms a pattern where the absence of positive family regulation magnifies the influence of peer groups on behavioral outcomes.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive power of family functioning and peer conformity on verbal bullying behavior. The results indicated that both predictors significantly contributed to the model, $F(2,117) = 28.64, p < 0.001$, with an adjusted R^2 value of 0.32. This means that approximately 32% of the variance in verbal bullying behavior can be explained by the two independent variables. Family functioning had a standardized beta coefficient of -0.36 ($t = -4.52, p < 0.001$), while peer conformity had a beta coefficient of 0.41 ($t = 5.02, p < 0.001$). These findings suggest that peer conformity has a slightly stronger effect on verbal bullying compared to family functioning.

Table 2. Multiple Regression Analysis Results

Variable	β (Standardized)	t-value	Sig. (p)
Family Functioning	-0.36	-4.52	0.000
Peer Conformity	0.41	5.02	0.000
$R^2 = 0.34, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.32, F(2,117) = 28.64, p < 0.001$			

The inferential results confirm that both family and peer factors significantly influence verbal bullying behavior, supporting the hypothesis that social and environmental contexts interact to shape adolescents' aggressive communication patterns.

The relationship between family functioning and peer conformity revealed an inverse connection ($r = -0.39, p < 0.01$), suggesting that adolescents from well-functioning families are less likely to exhibit high levels of peer conformity. Strong family communication and supervision provide adolescents with confidence and autonomy, reducing dependence on peer approval. In contrast, adolescents with poor family relationships tend to seek validation through peers, even at the cost of engaging in negative behaviors. This relational finding underscores the complementary and compensatory functions of family and peer systems in adolescent socialization.

A more detailed analysis using interaction effects revealed that the impact of peer conformity on verbal bullying was strongest among students with low family functioning. This suggests a moderating role of family systems in the peer-behavior relationship. When family support and emotional guidance are lacking, adolescents become more susceptible to adopting peer group behaviors as primary models of social conduct (Li, 2023). The relational pattern between these variables reinforces the theoretical framework of social learning and family systems, demonstrating that interpersonal environments collectively shape adolescent behavioral development.

A case observation from qualitative field notes supported the quantitative findings. A 14-year-old participant, identified as "S," reported that frequent arguments and lack of attention at home made him more dependent on his friends. His peer group often engaged in teasing and mocking classmates, which he initially resisted but later joined to avoid being excluded. This case exemplifies how low family cohesion combined with strong peer pressure results in increased participation in verbal bullying behaviors (Peng, 2024).

Another case, a 13-year-old girl “L,” came from a supportive family environment with open communication. Despite having close friends, she reported rarely engaging in teasing or verbal mockery because her parents consistently emphasized respect and empathy. Her responses showed high family functioning scores and low peer conformity levels, aligning with the broader statistical trends (Nur, 2023). These cases reflect how varying family dynamics directly influence adolescents’ susceptibility to peer-driven bullying behaviors.

The empirical findings demonstrate that family functioning serves as a protective factor against verbal bullying, whereas peer conformity operates as a risk factor that amplifies aggressive tendencies. Adolescents nurtured in emotionally supportive families develop empathy and conflict resolution skills, reducing their likelihood of adopting bullying behavior. Meanwhile, high peer conformity can override internalized moral values, leading adolescents to prioritize group acceptance over ethical reasoning (X. Zhang, 2023). These results correspond with the principles of social control theory, which postulates that weak family attachment leads to delinquent behavior due to diminished internal restraint.

The strong predictive influence of peer conformity observed in this study also aligns with the social identity theory, which emphasizes that adolescents define their self-worth through group belonging. In contexts where bullying is socially rewarded, conformity pressures become behavioral reinforcements. The interplay of family functioning and peer conformity, therefore, provides a holistic understanding of how social environments shape behavioral outcomes. Adolescents’ emotional regulation, self-concept, and social values are heavily influenced by the quality of family relationships and peer interactions.

The findings confirm that both family functioning and peer conformity significantly influence verbal bullying behavior among early adolescents. The negative correlation between family functioning and verbal aggression emphasizes the importance of effective family communication, supervision, and emotional warmth. The positive correlation between peer conformity and bullying highlights the role of group dynamics and social reinforcement in promoting verbal aggression. Together, these variables explain one-third of the variation in bullying behavior, illustrating their strong combined influence.

The overall interpretation suggests that preventive efforts must address both family and peer domains simultaneously. Family-based interventions should focus on strengthening communication and emotional bonding, while schools must develop peer-group programs that foster empathy, respect, and non-aggressive communication. The results offer both theoretical and practical contributions, bridging the gap between family psychology and adolescent social behavior research in the Indonesian context.

The findings of this study revealed that both family functioning and peer conformity have significant effects on verbal bullying behavior among early adolescents. Statistical analysis indicated that family functioning negatively correlates with verbal bullying, while peer conformity has a positive and stronger influence. Adolescents who come from dysfunctional families characterized by poor communication, low emotional warmth, and inconsistent supervision exhibited higher tendencies to engage in verbal aggression. In contrast, adolescents who live in supportive families with healthy emotional bonds were less likely to display such behaviors. The regression model confirmed that 32% of the variance in verbal bullying behavior can be explained jointly by these two factors.

The study also found that peer conformity plays a more dominant role compared to family functioning in predicting verbal bullying. This suggests that the social reinforcement adolescents receive from peers significantly shapes their behavioral choices. Adolescents tend to imitate behaviors that are rewarded within their peer group, including teasing, mocking, or labeling others. However, family dynamics remain crucial as a moderating factor. Adolescents with strong family support demonstrated resilience against peer pressure, while those lacking parental guidance and warmth were more susceptible to adopting aggressive verbal norms.

These findings confirm that verbal bullying is a product of both personal and social influences that interact dynamically during the transitional stage of adolescence.

The results of this research are consistent with previous studies emphasizing the pivotal role of family systems and peer influence in adolescent aggression. Similar to findings by Ackerman (2020) and Olweus (2013), this study supports the notion that family dysfunction contributes to the emergence of aggressive behaviors through emotional dysregulation and weakened moral guidance. Adolescents who grow up in families with poor cohesion and minimal communication are more likely to externalize negative emotions, which aligns with the family systems theory emphasizing the family's role in shaping behavioral norms. However, this study extends the discussion by integrating the simultaneous impact of peer conformity, illustrating that adolescents do not act in isolation but are influenced by their social surroundings.

In contrast to studies conducted in Western contexts (Kowalski & Limber, 2021), which primarily associate bullying with digital interaction and individual psychological traits, the current research emphasizes collectivist cultural dynamics that strengthen the social dimension of conformity. Indonesian adolescents, who are typically raised within communal and relationship-oriented cultures, experience stronger pressure to adapt to group norms. This study demonstrates that such conformity can foster prosocial or antisocial outcomes depending on the moral framework of the peer group. The emphasis on *verbal* bullying behavior also distinguishes this study from most research focusing on physical or cyberbullying, adding an important contextual contribution to understanding non-physical forms of aggression within the adolescent population.

Furthermore, the findings resonate with Santor, Messervey, and Kusumakar's (2000) theoretical framework on peer conformity, showing that adolescents with low self-confidence or poor family functioning tend to over-identify with peer norms. However, this study provides novel insight by revealing how verbal aggression operates as a symbolic expression of power and social belonging within peer groups. Unlike physical aggression, verbal bullying often remains socially accepted and normalized, which perpetuates its occurrence. The study therefore broadens the discussion of bullying by framing it not only as deviant behavior but also as a socio-cultural communication pattern emerging from conformity pressures.

The findings indicate that verbal bullying among early adolescents is not merely a result of individual psychological predispositions but a manifestation of broader social and familial dysfunctions. The data reflect that verbal aggression serves as both a coping mechanism and a means of identity negotiation for adolescents navigating complex social structures. When family systems fail to provide emotional regulation and validation, adolescents turn to peers as an alternative source of belonging. Verbal bullying thus becomes a form of social currency used to assert dominance or secure acceptance in peer contexts. This suggests that the phenomenon is deeply rooted in the socio-emotional ecology surrounding adolescents rather than being a standalone behavioral issue.

The results also signify a shifting paradigm in understanding adolescent aggression. Rather than viewing bullying as an isolated act of deviance, it should be recognized as an adaptive response to unmet emotional and social needs. The recurring pattern in which weak family functioning correlates with stronger peer conformity underscores how adolescents internalize social validation as a substitute for familial connection. The findings act as a mirror reflecting the social fragility of early adolescence, where identity formation heavily depends on interpersonal feedback. Consequently, verbal bullying behavior should be interpreted as a symptom of disrupted developmental processes within both family and peer contexts.

These findings further indicate that the escalation of verbal bullying is a warning sign of emotional disconnection in adolescents' proximal environments. Family dysfunction erodes empathy and emotional awareness, while peer conformity magnifies reactive and impulsive behavior. The dual effect of these forces reveals that adolescent aggression is a form of

relational compensation rather than innate hostility. Recognizing this dynamic reframes bullying not only as a behavioral problem but also as an indicator of weakened social-emotional foundations that demand systemic intervention.

The implications of this research are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the study reinforces Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model by demonstrating that adolescent behavior is shaped through interactions between microsystems—namely the family and peer group. Understanding verbal bullying as a product of ecological interaction enriches developmental psychology's conceptualization of aggression by emphasizing relational interdependence rather than isolated causality. The findings support integrating family-based and peer-based variables into future models of adolescent aggression to obtain a holistic understanding of behavioral development.

Practically, the results highlight the importance of implementing family-strengthening programs and peer-based interventions in school environments. Schools can play a preventive role by promoting communication between parents and teachers to monitor students' emotional well-being and peer interactions. Counseling programs that emphasize empathy training, assertiveness, and conflict resolution could reduce the prevalence of verbal bullying. The creation of peer mentoring systems—where influential students act as positive role models—may also reduce the normalization of aggressive communication among adolescents.

For educators and counselors, the findings provide clear evidence that addressing bullying requires a dual approach targeting both family functioning and peer dynamics. Parental education initiatives should focus on improving emotional warmth, communication, and consistent discipline. Simultaneously, peer group interventions must emphasize collective responsibility, where students are encouraged to challenge harmful peer norms. These implications not only serve to reduce bullying but also foster healthier psychosocial environments that promote adolescent resilience and empathy.

The observed effects of family functioning and peer conformity on verbal bullying can be explained through several psychological mechanisms. The first mechanism is social learning, where adolescents model behaviors observed in their immediate environments. Families characterized by conflict or emotional neglect provide limited opportunities for adolescents to learn empathy or non-aggressive communication. As a result, they replicate similar patterns of hostility within peer interactions. The second mechanism involves emotional compensation, where adolescents deprived of familial support seek validation through conformity to peer expectations, even when those expectations encourage deviance.

The influence of peer conformity can also be explained through the principles of social identity theory. Adolescents define their sense of belonging and self-esteem based on their peer group's acceptance. When group norms support aggressive communication as a form of humor or bonding, individuals internalize these behaviors as socially appropriate. This mechanism explains why peer conformity displayed a stronger predictive value in the regression analysis. Adolescents prioritize social inclusion over moral or emotional considerations, particularly when their family environment fails to offer stability.

The interaction between family functioning and peer conformity can further be interpreted through attachment theory. Adolescents lacking secure attachments at home develop increased anxiety regarding social belonging, making them more dependent on peer approval. Verbal bullying, therefore, becomes a behavioral strategy to gain recognition and status. The interplay of these psychological theories elucidates why dysfunctional families and high peer conformity collectively produce a fertile ground for verbal aggression.

Future research should expand upon these findings by including longitudinal studies to trace changes in bullying behavior across different developmental stages. Investigating how family interventions or peer mentoring programs alter conformity patterns would provide stronger causal evidence. Incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups could capture the emotional nuances and cultural meanings underlying verbal bullying in

collectivist societies like Indonesia. This would deepen understanding beyond statistical associations and highlight the lived experiences of adolescents.

The study also calls for the development of culturally adaptive intervention models. Programs aimed at enhancing family functioning should consider traditional Indonesian values such as *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) and collective responsibility. Integrating these cultural strengths into counseling frameworks can enhance emotional connection and reduce the isolation that fuels bullying. School counselors should also be trained to identify signs of peer conformity-driven aggression and implement restorative approaches emphasizing empathy and accountability.

Policy-level implications include the integration of family-based counseling services within schools, particularly in areas where parental involvement is low. Governments and educational institutions should collaborate to design community-based parenting workshops that strengthen family communication. Such initiatives would align with national efforts to build character education and promote positive youth development. The findings ultimately advocate for an ecosystemic approach—addressing family, school, and peer environments simultaneously—to cultivate emotionally secure and socially responsible adolescents.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study demonstrate that both family functioning and peer conformity significantly influence verbal bullying behavior among early adolescents, with peer conformity exerting a stronger predictive impact. Adolescents who grow up in dysfunctional families characterized by poor communication, low affective warmth, and inconsistent parental involvement exhibit a higher likelihood of engaging in verbal bullying behaviors such as mocking, teasing, and labeling. Meanwhile, adolescents with supportive and communicative families display lower tendencies toward such aggression due to stronger emotional regulation and empathy development. The findings also highlight that peer conformity serves as a social amplifier that reinforces behavioral patterns learned from family environments. When adolescents lack emotional validation at home, they become more dependent on peers for identity and belonging, making them more likely to conform to group norms that promote verbal aggression. This interaction between family dysfunction and peer conformity reveals a dual social pathway through which verbal bullying develops, establishing a novel understanding of aggression as both a familial and peer-mediated phenomenon.

This research provides both conceptual and methodological contributions to the field of adolescent developmental psychology. Conceptually, it integrates two major social systems—family and peer groups—into a unified model explaining verbal bullying behavior, extending previous research that examined these variables separately. The study reinforces Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory by empirically demonstrating how interactions between microsystems (family and peers) jointly shape behavioral outcomes. It also enriches the theoretical discourse on social learning and conformity by emphasizing the role of emotional deprivation and peer validation as mediating mechanisms for adolescent aggression. Methodologically, this research advances the use of validated psychological instruments such as the Family Assessment Device, the Peer Conformity Scale, and the Verbal Bullying Behavior Scale within an Indonesian cultural context, ensuring psychometric reliability and contextual relevance. The quantitative correlational design, supported by regression modeling, provides a replicable framework for future studies investigating multidimensional predictors of adolescent social behavior.

The scope of this study is limited by its cross-sectional design and relatively small sample size, which restricts causal inference and generalizability. The data were collected from junior high school students within a specific region in Gresik, which may not fully represent adolescents from diverse cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds. The reliance on self-report

questionnaires may also introduce social desirability bias, as participants could underreport aggressive behaviors or overestimate family support. Future studies should consider adopting longitudinal designs to observe the progression of verbal bullying behavior across developmental stages and to examine how family and peer dynamics evolve over time. Including qualitative components such as interviews or focus groups would capture deeper emotional and cultural meanings behind adolescent conformity and aggression. Expanding research across different provinces or cultural contexts in Indonesia would enhance external validity and contribute to a broader understanding of how local cultural values mediate family and peer influences. These improvements would not only strengthen the empirical foundation of future studies but also support the design of culturally responsive intervention programs for bullying prevention in schools and families.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author expresses sincere gratitude to all individuals and institutions that contributed to the successful completion of this research. Deep appreciation is extended to the participating students, teachers, and school counselors from several junior high schools in Gresik Regency who willingly took part in the data collection process and provided valuable insights into the realities of adolescent social behavior. Their openness and cooperation were fundamental to obtaining authentic and meaningful data for this study.

The author would also like to convey heartfelt thanks to the academic supervisors and lecturers at the Faculty of Psychology and Education for their continuous guidance, encouragement, and constructive feedback throughout each stage of the research process. Their expertise and mentorship greatly enhanced the quality and clarity of this work. Appreciation is further extended to the research assistants who helped administer questionnaires, manage statistical data, and ensure the accuracy of data transcription and analysis.

Acknowledgment is also given to the families and colleagues whose moral support and understanding provided strength and motivation during the completion of this research. Special gratitude is reserved for the institutions that granted research permits and facilitated access to respondents, ensuring the ethical and smooth implementation of the study. This research stands as a reflection of collective effort, collaboration, and dedication to advancing psychological understanding of family and peer influences on adolescent development.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; Investigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

- Adrien, V. (2023). Association between family functioning and psychotic transition in ultra-high risk adolescents and young adults. *Frontiers in Psychiatry, 14*(Query date: 2025-10-10 14:28:40). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2023.1177311>
- Bai, X. (2025). COVID-19 infection, resilience, and depressive symptoms: The protective role of family functioning for aging Chinese adults in Hong Kong. *Aging and Mental Health, 29*(1), 59–68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13607863.2024.2356874>

- Barton, A. W. (2023). Changes in couple, parenting, and individual functioning following Family Expectations program participation. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 49(1), 169–185. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12613>
- Boyes, M. E. (2023). Associations between Family Functioning, Emotion Regulation, Social Support, and Self-injury among Emerging Adult University Students. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 32(3), 846–857. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-022-02516-6>
- Cabrera-García, V. E. (2023). Colombian validation of the Family Functioning Scale in Crisis Situations (F-COPEs). *Revista De Psicología Peru*, 42(2), 1205–1232. <https://doi.org/10.18800/psico.202302.020>
- Cabrera-Perona, V. (2024). Development and Validation of the EFFAM Scale (Family Functioning Scale-Madrid). *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 33(1), 129–140. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-023-02719-5>
- Castelo-Rivas, W. P. (2023). Academic Stress, Mental Health and Family Functioning for Nursing Students in Virtual Education Conditions. *Revista Cubana De Medicina General Integral*, 39(4). <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?partnerID=HzOxMe3b&scp=85180865761&origin=inward>
- Erdem, G. (2024). Associations of youth mentoring with parent emotional well-being and family functioning: Longitudinal findings from a study of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 156(Query date: 2025-10-10 14:28:40). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2023.107384>
- GODFREY, G. D. (2024). A Systematic Review of Family Functioning in Families of Children on the Autism Spectrum. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 54(3), 1036–1057. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-022-05830-6>
- Gori, A. (2024). A Pilot Study on Childhood Trauma and Love Addiction: Exploring the Mediation of Unbalanced Family Functioning. *Psychological Trauma Theory Research Practice and Policy*, 17(4), 877–885. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0001669>
- Hoopen, L. W. ten. (2023). Associations between autism traits and family functioning over time in autistic and non-autistic children. *Autism*, 27(7), 2035–2047. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613231151784>
- Hua, Y. (2024). Associations of recent stressful life events with anxiety symptoms among Chinese adolescents with a consideration of family functioning. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 15(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/20008066.2024.2337577>
- Imrie, S. (2023). A Longitudinal Study of Families Created Using Egg Donation: Family Functioning at Age 5. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 37(8), 1253–1265. <https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0001145>
- Jetiyanuwat, S. (2024). Association between Family Functioning, Child Emotional and Behavioral Problems, and Parental Stress during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Thailand. *Behavioral Sciences*, 14(4). <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14040270>
- Lee, M. K. (2023). Caregiving Strain, family functioning, and effort to change diet for patients with gastrointestinal cancer: A cross-sectional descriptive study. *European Journal of Oncology Nursing*, 62(Query date: 2025-10-10 14:28:40). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejon.2022.102264>
- Li, C. (2023). Effect of caregiver burden on anticipatory grief among caregivers of elderly cancer patients: Chain mediation role of family functioning and resilience. *Frontiers in*

-
- Psychology*, 13(Query date: 2025-10-10 14:28:40).
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1020517>
- Lo, C. K. M. (2024). Changes in, and factors associated with family functioning: Results of four cross-sectional household surveys from 2011 to 2017 in Hong Kong. *BMC Public Health*, 24(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-024-17643-6>
- Luo, S. (2024). Dietary patterns of Chinese children and adolescents and their associations with family characteristics and functioning: A multicenter cross-sectional study. *BMC Public Health*, 24(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-024-21068-6>
- Manasse, S. M. (2024). Attachment-Based Family Therapy to Improve Family Functioning in Adolescent Binge-Spectrum Eating Disorders: An Initial Evaluation Via Case Series Design. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 29(1), 45–62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13591045231187433>
- Nur, A. B. S. S. (2023). Effectiveness of community-based family-focused interventions on family functioning among families of children with chronic health conditions: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Family Process*, 62(4), 1408–1422. <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12930>
- Oliver, J. (2023). Differentiation of Self in Adult Adoptees in Spain: The Role of Family Functioning, Adoption Communication, and Age at Placement. *Adoption Quarterly*, 26(4), 433–454. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926755.2023.2198516>
- Peltopuro, M. (2023). Borderline Intellectual Functioning and Vulnerability in Education, Employment and Family. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, 25(1), 334–349. <https://doi.org/10.16993/sjdr.965>
- Peng, Y. (2024). Effect of Family Functioning on Adolescents' Internalizing and Externalizing Problem Behaviors: The Multiple Mediating Roles of Empathy and Emotional Competence. *Journal of Sichuan University Medical Science*, 55(1), 146–152. <https://doi.org/10.12182/20240160507>
- Pirzadeh, S. (2023). A Comparative Study of Family Structure (Cohesion and Flexibility) and Functioning in People with and without Drug Abuse. *International Journal of Body Mind and Culture*, 10(1), 129–137. <https://doi.org/10.22122/ijbmc.v10i1.278>
- Qiao, C. (2024). An exploration of the association between family functioning and nonsuicidal self-injury among Chinese adolescents with mood disorders. *European Journal of Psychiatry*, 38(1). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpsy.2023.100226>
- Qin, X. (2023). Characteristics and related factors of family functioning in Chinese families during early pregnancy. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14(Query date: 2025-10-10 14:28:40). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1102796>
- Rasmussen, M. S. (2023). Associations between protective resources and family functioning after traumatic brain injury: A cross-sectional study using a structural equation modeling approach. *Neurorehabilitation*, 52(1), 47–58. <https://doi.org/10.3233/NRE-220131>
- Rienecke, R. D. (2024). A systematic review of eating disorders and family functioning. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 112(Query date: 2025-10-10 14:28:40). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2024.102462>
- Seff, I. (2023). A Family-Focused, Sibling-Synchronous Intervention in Borno State, Nigeria: Exploring the Impact on Family Functioning and Household Gender Roles. *Journal of Family Violence*, 38(3), 419–431. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-022-00417-2>
-

- Sina, E. (2023). Digital media exposure and cognitive functioning in European children and adolescents of the I.Family study. *Scientific Reports*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-45944-0>
- Tao, H. (2023). Association of adverse childhood experiences and depression among medical students: The role of family functioning and insomnia. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14(Query date: 2025-10-10 14:28:40). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1134631>
- Thomson, M. D. (2024). Cancer patient and caregiver communication about economic concerns and the effect on patient and caregiver partners' perceptions of family functioning. *Journal of Cancer Survivorship*, 18(3), 941–949. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11764-023-01341-0>
- Vitulić, H. S. (2023). Attachment and family functioning across three generations. *Family Process*, 62(2), 775–794. <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12787>
- Wen, F. (2023). Associations of family functioning with sleep disturbance and depressive symptoms among primary and secondary school students. *Chinese Journal of School Health*, 44(5), 664–667. <https://doi.org/10.16835/j.cnki.1000-9817.2023.05.006>
- Westrupp, E. M. (2023). Child, parent, and family mental health and functioning in Australia during COVID-19: Comparison to pre-pandemic data. *European Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 32(2), 317–330. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-021-01861-z>
- Wilson, K. J. (2024). Current parental maltreatment and emerging adult psychopathology: Indirect effects through family functioning across gender. *Current Psychology*, 43(2), 1615–1626. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-023-04443-1>
- Zeng, Z. (2024). Chinese college students' mental health during the first three months of the COVID-19 pandemic: The protective role of family functioning. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 12(Query date: 2025-10-10 14:28:40). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2024.1383399>
- Zhang, L. (2023). Correlation Between Family Functioning and Health Beliefs in Patients with Stroke in Beijing, China. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare*, 16(Query date: 2025-10-10 14:28:40), 1067–1074. <https://doi.org/10.2147/JMDH.S394396>
- Zhang, L. (2024). Childhood trauma, emotion regulation, peer attachment, and family functioning: A longitudinal network analysis. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 166(Query date: 2025-10-10 14:28:40). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2024.107900>
- Zhang, X. (2023). Effects of family functioning on relapse among individuals with drug addiction in compulsory isolation: A chained mediation model. *Current Psychology*, 42(3), 1701–1711. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-01561-6>

Copyright Holder :

© Putri Maulani Sri Prasasti et.al (2025).

First Publication Right :

© World Psychology

This article is under:

