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Legal Protection of Students Who Are Victims of Bullying in Higher Education: A Study at Universitas Muhammadiyah Magelang

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Abstract

Ministerial Regulation No 55 of 2024 obliges every Indonesian university to prevent and handle violence, including bullying, through a task force, confidential reporting, protection and recovery of victims and administrative sanctions, but little is known about whether these duties reach student victims. This study asks what protection the Regulation gives a student victim of bullying and how far that protection operates at Universitas Muhammadiyah Magelang. It combines a statute approach with an exploratory online questionnaire answered by 15 self-selected students in August 2025. Fourteen respondents reported having been bullied, mostly verbally and by peers of the same year; ten said witnesses were present, but only three said a witness helped. Victims relied on self-help, such as confronting or ignoring the perpetrator, and only one made a report to the campus. Seven respondents did not know that the task force existed. The acts reported, such as mockery, insults, rumours and exclusion, fall within the Regulation's definition of psychological violence and, when repeated within an unequal relationship, of bullying, whereas most of them lie outside criminal law. Protection therefore depends on the university's administrative system. The findings are descriptive and cannot be generalised, but they indicate that the university should publish its task-force decree, procedure and annual statistics, provide an anonymous reporting channel, and link reporting to counselling and recovery.

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Keywords

Bullying; Students; Victims; Protection; University; Violence

Introduction

Bullying (perundungan) among university students is often treated as a matter of personal conflict or of campus culture, yet it harms the victim's health and studies. In the literature it is described as aggressive behaviour, verbal or physical, directed repeatedly at a weaker person, which causes stress, fear and a sense of threat;[1] students who are bullied report anxiety, sleeplessness, low self-worth and withdrawal, and some go on to self-harm.[2] In Indonesian universities a common source is the hierarchy between seniors and juniors, visible in orientation programmes (OSPEK), student organisations and everyday peer relations,[3] and victims tend to stay silent and cope alone.

Since October 2024 the legal frame for this problem has been Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology No 55 of 2024 on the Prevention and Handling of Violence in Higher Education. It replaced Regulation No 30 of 2021, which dealt only with sexual violence,[4] and it now covers six forms of violence: physical violence, psychological violence, bullying, sexual violence, discrimination and intolerance, and policies that contain violence, whether committed directly or through electronic media. Bullying is defined as a pattern of physical or psychological violence carried out repeatedly and within an imbalance of power; psychological violence includes exclusion, rejection, neglect, insult, spreading rumours, mocking names, intimidation, public humiliation and extortion. The Regulation places the duty to act on the university: it must form a task force for the prevention and handling of violence (Satgas PPKPT), provide reporting channels, protect victims and witnesses, provide assistance and recovery, impose administrative sanctions on perpetrators and report on its monitoring to the Ministry.[5] Orientation is not prohibited as such; an orientation practice is unlawful under the Regulation when it meets one of these definitions, for instance when seniors repeatedly humiliate, intimidate or insult new students.

Criminal law offers victims of campus bullying far less than is often assumed. Article 335(1) point 1 of the Criminal Code, sometimes cited as a basis for punishing bullying, was narrowed by the Constitutional Court, which struck out the words 'a further act or an unpleasant treatment' (sesuatu perbuatan lain maupun perlakuan

[1] H Asnawi, "Pengaruh Perundungan terhadap Perilaku Mahasiswa" (2019) 9:1 *Jurnal Sinestesia* 33.

[2] Dendy Suma Pratama, Balqis Dwi Ananda Putri & Asmak Ul Hosnah, "Dampak Bullying bagi Kesehatan Mental di Universitas" (2024) 2:3 *Interdisciplinary Explorations in Research Journal* 1539, DOI: <10.62976/ierj.v2i3.745>.

[3] AI Ningrum, *Bullying dan Kekerasan (Studi Kualitatif Ospek Fakultas di Universitas Airlangga)* (Undergraduate thesis, Universitas Airlangga, 2018).

[4] Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology No 30 of 2021 on the Prevention and Handling of Sexual Violence in Higher Education (Indonesia).

[5] Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology No 55 of 2024 on the Prevention and Handling of Violence in Higher Education (Indonesia).

yang tak menyenangkan);[67] since then the offence covers only coercion by violence or the threat of violence, and its successor in the 2023 Criminal Code, in force since 2 January 2026, is drafted the same way.[8] Physical bullying may amount to assault,[9] and insults and defamation are offences prosecuted only on the victim's complaint,[10] with a parallel complaint offence for attacks on a person's honour by electronic means.[11] Mockery, gossip and exclusion, the most common forms of bullying among students, are therefore largely outside criminal law or reachable only through a complaint that few students would make against a classmate. For most victims the effective legal protection is the administrative system that the Regulation requires the university to run.

Earlier studies have documented bullying at university level. A survey of 305 students at a Jakarta university found that about one in five had been bullied, that verbal bullying was the most common form and that victims mostly responded passively and rarely sought help;[12] a qualitative study of young people with depression identified appearance-based and sexual bullying and abusive seniority at school and university as sources of lasting harm;[13] and studies of hazing and orientation have examined law enforcement against seniors and the symbolic violence of orientation programmes.[1415] Others argue that students themselves should take part in prevention and that firm sanctions are needed.[16] These studies describe prevalence, effects and causes, but they were written before Regulation No 55 of 2024, and none measures what students experience against the duties the Regulation now imposes on the university. This article does so for one university. It asks two questions: (1) what legal protection does Regulation No 55 of 2024 give a student who is a victim of bullying; and (2) how far does that protection reach students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Magelang, judged by their experience of bullying, their responses and their knowledge of the task force? Its purpose is to

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[6] Kitab Undang-Undang Hukum Pidana [Criminal Code], as enacted by Law No 1 of 1946 (Indonesia), art 335(1).

[7] Constitutional Court, Decision No 1/PUU-XI/2013 (16 January 2014).

[8] Law No 1 of 2023 on the Criminal Code (Indonesia), art 448.

[9] *Ibid*, art 466.

[10] *Ibid*, arts 433–436.

[11] Law No 1 of 2024 on the Second Amendment to Law No 11 of 2008 on Electronic Information and Transactions (Indonesia), art 27A.

[12] Deasyanti & Fellianti Muzdalifah, "Students' Bullying Experiences at University Level" (2021) 10:1 *Psikopedagogia: Jurnal Bimbingan dan Konseling* 23, DOI: <10.12928/psikopedagogia.v10i1.19925>.

[13] Lafi Munira, Pranee Liamputtong & Pramon Viwattanakulvanid, "Feeling Psychologically Unsafe at School and University: Bullying and Youth Living with Depression in Indonesia" (2023) 12:2 *International Journal of Public Health Science* 909, DOI: <10.11591/ijphs.v12i2.22571>.

[14] Aldi Putra, "Penegakan Hukum Pelaku Pelonco Bullying terhadap Mahasiswa Baru (Perspektif Sosiologi Hukum)" (2021) 8:2 *Jurnal Hukum dan Pembangunan Ekonomi* 74, DOI: <10.20961/hpe.v8i2.49758>.

[15] Ningrum, *supra* note 3.

[16] Prisko Yanuarius D Pare et al, "Peran Strategis Mahasiswa dalam Pencegahan dan Penanganan Perundungan di Lingkungan Kampus" (2024) 9:2 *Jurnal PEKAN: Jurnal Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan* 175, DOI: <10.31932/jpk.v9i2.4153>.

identify the gaps between the duties and the practice and to propose concrete measures for the university.

Research Method

This is exploratory socio-legal research that combines a statute approach with a small survey. The legal materials are Regulation No 55 of 2024 and the regulation it replaced, the Criminal Code of 1946 and Law No 1 of 2023, the Electronic Information and Transactions Law as amended, and Constitutional Court Decision No 1/PUU-XI/2013; secondary materials are journal articles and theses on bullying in higher education. The field data come from an online questionnaire distributed to students of Universitas Muhammadiyah Magelang and open for one week, from 24 to 31 August 2025. It asked mainly closed questions on whether the respondent had been bullied, the form and effects of the bullying, the perpetrator, the presence and reaction of witnesses, the respondent's response, whether the case was dealt with, and the respondent's knowledge of and access to the task force. Fifteen students answered. The university was chosen because of information that a student had been bullied and did not know where to report it, and respondents chose themselves, so the sample is non-random and probably over-represents students who have experienced bullying. Responses are reported as counts, not percentages, with the number answering each question; where the counts are inconsistent they are reported as recorded and the inconsistency is stated. The acts reported were then classified against the Regulation's definitions, and the university's practice, as far as the survey reveals it, was assessed against the duties the Regulation imposes. No case file was analysed and no information was obtained from the task force itself. The findings describe 15 respondents at one university and cannot be generalised.

Results and Discussion

Respondents

Fifteen students answered: 10 women and 5 men, aged 20 to 21, in their third (3 students), fourth (1), fifth (3), sixth (2) and seventh (6) semesters. All were students of Universitas Muhammadiyah Magelang. Because the questionnaire was self-selected and the site was chosen on information that bullying had occurred, the respondents should be read as a group of students willing to report their experience, not as a sample of the student body.

Forms of Bullying Measured against the Regulation

Table 1 sets out what the respondents reported. Fourteen of the 15 said they had been bullied. Twelve named verbal bullying (mockery, insults and gossip), two social or relational bullying (being excluded or avoided) and one cyberbullying (negative comments and indecent images or videos). The perpetrators were peers of the same year or classmates, and bullying took place in classrooms, canteens, corridors and on social media.

Table 1. Bullying experienced by respondents (n = 15)

Item	Reported counts	Respondents answering and consistency
Experienced bullying	14 yes; 1 no	15
Main form of bullying	12 verbal; 2 social or relational; 1 cyberbullying	15 answers, although only 14 reported being bullied; no physical bullying reported
Main effect	7 sleeplessness; 5 anxiety or fear of being attacked or followed; 3 frequent headache or migraine	15 answers; apparently one answer each, so effects that occurred together are not captured
Perpetrator	9 peers of the same year; 6 classmates	15 answers, although only 14 reported being bullied
Witnesses present	10 yes; 5 no	15
Witness reaction	7 laughed; 5 stayed silent; 3 helped	15 answers, although only 10 reported that witnesses were present
Comfort on campus	7 uncomfortable; 4 hesitant; 2 neutral	13 answers

Source: questionnaire, 24–31 August 2025. Counts as recorded; inconsistencies are noted in the last column.

Three rows give more answers than the questions could logically receive, which suggests that respondents who had not been bullied or had seen no witness still answered the follow-up questions. The table should therefore be read for the pattern, not the exact figures: verbal and relational bullying by peers predominates, and when others are present they more often laugh or stay silent than help. Seven respondents said witnesses treated the act as a joke among friends.

Measured against the Regulation, the acts reported are psychological violence: mockery and demeaning names, insults, rumours and exclusion are all named in its list, and negative comments online are covered because the Regulation applies to violence through electronic media. They become bullying in the Regulation's sense when they are repeated and occur within an imbalance of power.[17] The questionnaire did not ask how often the acts occurred or whether the perpetrator held a position of power, so the classification of each case as bullying rather than single acts of psychological violence cannot be confirmed. The distinction matters less than it appears, because both are forms of violence the university must handle. A different boundary does matter: the respondent who received indecent images or videos may have experienced sexual violence, which the Regulation defines by reference to an attack on a person's body or reproductive function and which carries

[17] Ministerial Regulation No 55 of 2024, *supra* note 5.

its own handling requirements. Bullying and sexual violence are dealt with by the same task force, but a report must be classified correctly because the protection and recovery measures differ.

Victims' Responses and Institutional Handling

Table 2 shows how victims responded. Fourteen tried to stop the bullying, which matches the 14 who reported being bullied. Their means were almost all informal: nine spoke directly to the perpetrator, four ignored the perpetrator and one asked a friend for help. Only one made a report to the campus, to the vice-dean or the task force. These are acts of self-help, not legal action; legal action in the proper sense means a report to the task force or the police or a claim before a court, and only one respondent took that step.

Table 2. Responses of victims and handling of cases (n = 15)

Item	Reported counts	Note
Tried to stop the bullying	14 yes; 1 no	Consistent with the 14 who reported being bullied
Means used	9 spoke to the perpetrator; 4 ignored the perpetrator; 1 asked a friend; 1 reported to the campus (vice-dean or task force)	15 answers, although only 14 tried to stop the bullying; only 1 formal report
Case dealt with	6 yes; 9 no	'Dealt with' was not defined; at most one case reached the task force

Source: questionnaire, 24–31 August 2025.

Six respondents said their case was dealt with, yet only one made a formal report. The other five presumably refer to informal outcomes, such as the bullying stopping after the victim confronted the perpetrator or after a lecturer or friend intervened; the questionnaire did not define the term, so these answers say nothing about the task force. The one formal report was answered by the task force, but the reporter did not respond further and the case went no further. A single report that the reporter did not pursue is not evidence that the task force failed; it may reflect the reporter's choice, fear of exposure or doubt that reporting would help. The questionnaire did not ask why victims did not report, and that is the question the data most need.

What the data do show is that protection depended on the victims themselves. It would be wrong to conclude that victims should simply be braver. The Regulation does not make protection conditional on the victim's courage; it requires the university to make reporting safe and worthwhile, through accessible and confidential channels, protection of the reporter's identity and studies, protection from threats, assistance and recovery, and administrative sanctions graded by

seriousness.[18] When thirteen of fourteen victims rely on self-help, the question is whether the university has made the formal route visible and trusted, not whether victims lack courage.

The Task Force and the University's Duties under the Regulation

Under Regulation No 30 of 2021 universities were required to form a task force on sexual violence (Satgas PPKS),[19] and at Universitas Muhammadiyah Magelang students could report to lecturers sitting on that task force or through a WhatsApp number on its website. Regulation No 55 of 2024 replaced that regime with a single task force for all forms of violence, composed of lecturers, staff and students, whose functions are to receive and verify reports, examine cases, recommend measures and sanctions to the university leadership, support victims and witnesses and educate the campus about the anti-violence policy.[20] Whether the earlier body has been reconstituted as the PPKPT task force, and under which rector's decree, is not documented in the sources available to this study. The ambiguity is itself a barrier: a student who sees the name 'PPKS' may assume that the body deals only with sexual violence. Table 3 shows the respondents' knowledge of the task force.

Table 3. Respondents' knowledge of the task force (n = 15)

Item	Reported counts
Knew that the task force exists	8 yes; 7 no
Aware of socialisation by the task force	7 yes; 8 no
Considered the task force easy to access	8 yes; 7 no

Source: questionnaire, 24–31 August 2025.

About half the respondents did not know the task force existed, and about half were unaware of any socialisation. Lack of awareness is a plausible barrier, but it does not explain the pattern on its own: eight respondents knew of the task force, and still only one reported. Fear of exposure, doubts about confidentiality and the sense that peer mockery is too minor to report may weigh as heavily. The task force's socialisation is said to have begun with the 2024 orientation of new students and to be less intensive at faculty level, but no document or statement from the task force was obtained to confirm this. Table 4 therefore sets the university's duties under the Regulation against the evidence this study can offer.

Table 4. The university's duties under Regulation No 55 of 2024 and the evidence from this study

Duty of the university	Evidence from this study	Assessment
Form a task force and facilitate its work	A task force exists; 8 of 15 knew of it; 8 of 15 found it easy to access	Formed, but known to about half the respondents; decree and name not clarified

[18] *Ibid*.
[19] Ministerial Regulation No 30 of 2021, *supra* note 4.
[20] Ministerial Regulation No 55 of 2024, *supra* note 5.

Periodic socialisation of the anti-violence policy	7 of 15 aware of any socialisation	Coverage incomplete
Accessible and confidential reporting, including anonymous reporting	Reports to task-force lecturers or by WhatsApp; 1 formal report among 14 victims	Confidentiality and anonymity of the channel not documented
Protection of victims and witnesses (identity, studies, freedom from threats)	Not tested; the only reporter did not continue	Cannot be assessed
Assistance and recovery (counselling, health care, legal aid)	7 reported sleeplessness, 5 anxiety; no data on services used	Possible unmet need; no link between reporting and services shown
Administrative sanctions on perpetrators	No information	Cannot be assessed
Monitoring, evaluation and reporting to the Ministry	No task-force statistics obtained	Accountability not visible to students

Source: compiled from Regulation No 55 of 2024 and the questionnaire.

The table shows where the university's protection is visible and where it is not. The structure exists, but the elements that would make students trust it are either not visible to them or were not examined. Wider publicity through the task force's and student affairs' social media accounts and brochures on faculty notice boards would help, but publicity alone does not create trust. The university should publish the decree establishing the task force under its current name, a reporting procedure with timelines, an explanation of how the reporter's identity is protected, the recovery services available and the range of administrative sanctions, together with annual anonymised statistics on reports received and their outcomes. Those statistics, which the university must in any case compile for its report to the Ministry,[21] are also the data a follow-up study would need.

Comparison with Earlier Research

The pattern agrees with earlier studies. The Jakarta survey also found verbal bullying to be the most common form and victims to respond passively and rarely seek help, and it recommended formal university regulation;[22] the qualitative study of youth with depression links bullying by peers and seniors to lasting mental harm,[23] which is consistent with the sleeplessness and anxiety reported here. The proportion of respondents who had been bullied, 14 of 15, is far higher than the one in five found in the Jakarta random sample, but the difference reflects the self-selected sample and should not be read as a measure of prevalence. Studies of orientation and hazing locate the cause in seniority,[24][25] whereas the perpetrators here were mostly peers of the same year, which suggests that campus bullying is not confined to orientation and that prevention aimed only at orientation will miss

[21] *Ibid*.
[22] Deasyanti & Muzdalifah, *supra* note 12.
[23] Munira, Liamputtong & Viwattanakulvanid, *supra* note 13.
[24] Ningrum, *supra* note 3.
[25] Putra, *supra* note 14.

much of it. Where earlier work called for regulation and sanctions,[26] this article examines the regulation now in force and shows that, at least for this group of students, the gap lies less in the rules than in their visibility and in the trust that reporting requires.

Conclusion

Regulation No 55 of 2024 gives a student victim of bullying a right to protection that rests on the university: a task force, accessible and confidential reporting, protection of identity and studies, assistance and recovery, and administrative sanctions against the perpetrator. Criminal law protects victims of the commonest forms of student bullying only weakly, because coercion requires violence or threats and insult is prosecuted only on complaint, so the administrative system is the effective remedy. At Universitas Muhammadiyah Magelang the survey suggests that this protection has not yet reached most victims: 14 of 15 respondents reported bullying, mostly verbal and by peers, witnesses seldom helped, victims relied on self-help, only one reported to the campus, and about half did not know the task force existed. The university should clarify the task force's name and decree, provide an anonymous and confidential reporting channel, publish its procedure and timelines, link reporting to counselling and recovery, train task-force members and witnesses to intervene, and publish annual statistics on reports and outcomes. The study is limited: it rests on 15 self-selected respondents at one university, answering in one week, on self-report and with some inconsistent counts, and it obtained no information from the task force. Further research should use a random sample, ask why victims do not report and examine the task force's own records.

Ethics and Data Availability

Participation in the questionnaire was voluntary and anonymous, and completing it was treated as consent. Results are reported only as aggregate counts, and no respondent, perpetrator or witness is identified. The anonymised responses are held by the authors and are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Use of Generative AI

[26] Pare et al, *supra* note 16.

Generative AI was used only to improve the language of this article (grammar, clarity and style). The authors reviewed the output and are responsible for the content of the article.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest. This research received no external funding.

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