

Youth Against Bullying: Empower, Advocate, Transform!
(*Belia Menentang Buli: Pemerkasaan, Advokasi, Perubahan*)

AFIF HAKIMI BIN AZHAR & HAZIQAH ZULAIKHAARIS

ABSTRACT

This study aims to develop an effective student-led advocacy program on the legal aspects of bullying, addressing the rising prevalence of bullying due to low awareness among students regarding relevant laws and their consequences. Using a qualitative approach, data are collected through semi-structured interviews with law students and members of law-related societies, who possess relevant knowledge and leadership experience. The study explores participants' perceptions, feedback, and suggestions on the program's content, structure, delivery, and feasibility, as well as their expectations of its effectiveness in raising awareness and promoting responsible peer behaviour. The study is significant for its potential to raise legal awareness among youth regarding bullying and its consequences, while promoting leadership and civic responsibility through student-led facilitation. By involving subject matter experts such as lawyers, prosecutors, and police officers, the program provides practical exposure and ensures accurate dissemination of legal knowledge. Furthermore, it aims to reduce bullying behaviour through informed peer engagement, proactive leadership, and understanding of legal consequences, while demonstrating the capacity of law students to contribute to social and legal education initiatives. Overall, the research emphasizes the importance of combining legal literacy with student-led initiatives to create a practical, sustainable, and impactful strategy for curbing bullying, ultimately fostering safer, more informed, and responsible educational environments.

Keywords: Bullying; Advocacy; Empower, Development Law awareness

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk membangunkan suatu program advokasi yang dilaksanakan oleh pemimpin belia mengenai aspek undang-undang tentang buli dengan menekankan isu peningkatan kes buli disebabkan oleh kurangnya pengetahuan para pelajar mengenai undang-undang yang berkaitan serta kesan dan akibatnya. Menggunakan kaedah kualitatif, kutipan data telah dijalankan melalui temubual dengan para pelajar jurusan undang-undang serta ahli persatuan yang berkaitan. Kajian ini dijalankan bagi mendapatkan persepsi, maklum balas dan cadangan peserta mengenai kandungan, struktur, kaedah pelaksanaan dan jangkaan mereka terhadap tahap keberkesannya dalam meningkatkan pengetahuan mengenai undang-undang tentang buli serta memupuk sifat tanggungjawab dalam diri peserta. Kajian ini berpotensi untuk meningkatkan kesedaran perundangan dalam kalangan belia mengenai isu buli dan implikasinya, di samping menggalakkan kepimpinanan serta tanggungjawab sivik melalui program yang dikendalikan oleh pelajar. Penglibatan pakar seperti peguam, pendakwa raya serta pegawai polis dalam program ini dapat menyediakan pendedahan yang praktikal melalui kajian kes sebenar serta memastikan penyampaian maklumat undang-undang yang tepat. Selain itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengurangkan tabiat buli melalui penglibatan rakan sebaya yang memahami implikasi dari sudut undang-undang. Secara keseluruhannya kajian ini menekankan kepentingan untuk menggabungkan pengetahuan undang-undang serta penglibatan pelajar dalam mewujudkan satu rangka program advokasi yang praktikal serta berimpak tinggi dalam membendung isu buli.

Kata Kunci: Buli, Advokasi, Pemerkasaan, Pembangunan, Kesedaran Undang-undang

INTRODUCTION

Bullying among students and youth in Malaysia has become a serious social and legal concern. According to the Ministry of Education Malaysia, over 7,600 bullying cases were reported in schools in 2024, an increase from 6,528 cases in 2023 (*The Star*, 2025). Bullying is commonly defined as repeated aggressive behaviour that creates an imbalance of power and may take physical, verbal, relational, or cyber-based forms (MDPI, 2021). These trends highlight the growing need for more effective and comprehensive prevention strategies that move beyond disciplinary measures and moral education alone.

Empirical evidence suggests that the effectiveness of anti-bullying initiatives varies significantly across institutional contexts. The implementation of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme in Malaysian schools demonstrated uneven outcomes across different school settings. The most positive results were observed in an all-girls experimental school, where bullying rates declined across physical, verbal, and relational categories. In contrast, only partial improvement was recorded in an all-boys school, limited primarily to Form 2 students, while no meaningful improvement was observed in a co-educational school, where some forms of bullying and victimization even increased (Yaakub, Haron, & Goh, 2010). These findings indicate that program success is closely linked to the level of institutional commitment, including active teacher involvement, consistent policy enforcement, and sustained engagement within the school community.

Despite existing interventions, bullying incidents—particularly in online environments—continue to rise. One contributing factor is the limited awareness among students of the legal implications of bullying under Malaysian law, including the Penal Code, the Child Act 2001, and the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998. Legal scholarship further notes the absence of a clear statutory definition of bullying and the fragmented nature of legal remedies, especially for non-physical and cyber-based forms of harassment (Rajamanickam et al., 2019). Studies on cyberbullying similarly reveal a gap between the existence of legal frameworks and the level of understanding among students and educators regarding legal boundaries, rights, and consequences (Razali & Nawang, 2022).

In light of these challenges, this study is guided by the need to explore how legal education can be meaningfully integrated into anti-bullying initiatives through a student-led advocacy approach. It examines how law students and members of the legal community

perceive the necessity of such programs, identifies the key legal topics and pedagogical methods required to ensure effectiveness and engagement, and considers how legal literacy can promote leadership values such as responsibility, empathy, and civic participation. The study also seeks to assess the perceived impact of this approach on raising awareness and reducing bullying behaviour, while critically evaluating the potential challenges and limitations associated with program implementation.

To address these objectives, the study proposes a student-led advocacy program framework in which student leaders facilitate peer engagement and serve as catalysts for behavioural change, supported by subject matter experts such as lawyers, prosecutors, and police officers who provide legal and practical insights. By integrating legal knowledge with leadership development and civic responsibility, the program aims to empower students not only to understand the law, but also to act as informed, ethical, and proactive agents in fostering safer and more accountable educational environments.

ISSUE

First issue addressed in this study is there is low level of awareness regarding the laws governing bullying and the legal penalties involved. Many young individuals do not understand the legal consequences or procedural sequence that follows once a person is convicted of bullying, including police investigation, court proceedings, and potential sentencing. This lack of knowledge often leads them to underestimate the severity of their actions, assuming that bullying is merely a simple disciplinary matter rather than a criminal offence. Furthermore, the lengthy legal process from initial reporting to trial may significantly affect the future of those involved, especially young offenders, who risk losing educational opportunities and long-term prospects due to limited understanding of the implications of their conduct. Low awareness among youth/students on the law on bullying and its sentences. Many students view bullying as minor misbehaviour rather than a punishable offence.

Another pressing issue is the low effectiveness of current bullying prevention programs, which often fail to produce lasting behavioural change. Many existing interventions lack consistent implementation, resulting in fragmented efforts that do not address the root causes of bullying. Effective prevention requires serious and sustained commitment from all stakeholders, including teachers, school administrators, parents, and students.

However, outcomes frequently vary depending on the willingness, readiness, and seriousness of the parties involved. Even evidence-based models such as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) have shown that their success is highly dependent on strong institutional support, continuous monitoring, and proper execution. Without collective responsibility and consistent practice, the effectiveness of any anti-bullying initiative becomes limited.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The findings of this study point to several significant implications that can strengthen future anti-bullying efforts across educational institutions. First, the program aims to raise legal awareness among youth by providing structured knowledge on what constitutes bullying under Malaysian law and the potential consequences under statutes such as the Penal Code, Child Act 2001, and Communications and Multimedia Act 1998. By understanding that bullying has legal dimensions beyond school discipline, students become more conscious of the seriousness of their actions and are better equipped to identify, prevent, and report harmful behaviour. This heightened awareness also cultivates a more legally informed student community capable of advocating for safer learning environments.

Second, the study demonstrates how student-led facilitation contributes to the development of leadership skills and civic responsibility. When students lead discussions, manage group activities, and deliver peer education, they become active participants in community-building rather than passive recipients of information. This approach not only strengthens their confidence and communication skills but also nurtures a sense of ownership over collective well-being. Such leadership exposure prepares them for future roles as responsible citizens who understand their legal and social responsibilities.

Furthermore, the program's design which particularly involves subject matter experts such as lawyers, prosecutors, police officers, and counsellors could provide students with valuable practical exposure. Hearing real experiences and case examples from practitioners enhances the relevance of the program and bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and actual legal processes. This engagement deepens students' understanding of how bullying cases are investigated, prosecuted, and resolved, thereby reinforcing the message that bullying has tangible legal implications.

In addition, the study indicates that bullying

behaviour can be reduced when students are equipped with legal knowledge, supported by proactive peer leadership, and encouraged to engage in meaningful dialogue about the consequences of harmful conduct. The combination of legal literacy, peer influence, and participatory activities creates an environment where students feel empowered to intervene and support one another. Finally, the findings highlight the significant capacity of law students to contribute to broader social and legal literacy initiatives. Their involvement demonstrates that university students particularly those with legal training, can play an influential role in educating their peers, promoting civic engagement, and fostering a culture of accountability and respect within educational settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bullying among adolescents is affected by several personal, peer, family, and school factors. At the individual level, younger students and boys are more likely to bully others. Increased use of social media and feelings of distress can further raise this risk (Sabramani et al., 2021). Peer relationships are also important; students with fewer supportive friends or who have frequent conflicts with others are more likely to get involved in bullying. Family issues, such as not enough parental supervision, frequent conflicts at home, and limited support for schoolwork, also make children more vulnerable. School-related factors, like weak relationships with teachers, feeling disconnected from the school, skipping classes, and misbehaving in class, are linked to higher bullying behaviour (Sabramani et al., 2021). These findings show that bullying is a complex issue. It is shaped not only by individual traits but also by social, family, and school environments. This highlights the need for effective prevention strategies that address all these areas.

Shariff, Yahya, Zahir, and Yusro (2021) examine the issue of bullying in Malaysian primary and secondary schools from the perspective of Islamic law (*syariah*), highlighting that bullying is not only a social problem but also a moral and legal concern. According to the authors, bullying behaviour reflects a deterioration in students' *akhlak* (morality), *'aqidah* (faith), and *taqwa* (piety), suggesting that weakened religious and ethical grounding can contribute to aggressive and harmful conduct among youth. They argue that addressing bullying requires both preventive and corrective measures, including the implementation of structured intervention modules and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) within

schools, designed to guide both educators and students in managing and reducing incidents of bullying. Shariff et al. (2021) emphasize that such interventions should be aligned with syariah principles, which aim to protect individual dignity, uphold social harmony, and promote accountability, thereby framing bullying as a violation of both moral and religious obligations. Additionally, the study highlights the role of educational institutions in fostering ethical and spiritual development, suggesting that awareness programs and guidance based on religious values can be effective in cultivating empathy, responsibility, and restraint among students. By integrating moral education with structured preventive mechanisms, the authors contend that schools can create an environment that discourages bullying while promoting social cohesion and respect for others. Overall, Shariff et al. (2021) underscore the importance of a holistic approach that combines religious, ethical, and procedural strategies to address bullying comprehensively in Malaysian schools.

Agosmustaram and Cheang (2023) explore the experiences of young adults in Malaysia who successfully overcame school bullying, emphasizing the long-term psychological and social effects of such experiences. Their qualitative study, involving 13 participants aged 19 to 28, revealed that bullying has enduring consequences, including social anxiety, depression, and difficulties in educational and occupational functioning. The study identified key processes in overcoming bullying, including cognitive reappraisal, adaptive coping strategies, and deliberate letting go, highlighting that immediate coping mechanisms during bullying are often maladaptive. The authors further emphasized the role of catalysts, such as supportive peers or mentors, in helping victims recognize control over their experiences and develop resilience. Agosmustaram and Cheang (2023) also pointed out that structured interventions in schools are crucial, as spontaneous coping alone may be insufficient to mitigate long-term effects. Overall, their findings suggest that understanding the subjective experiences of bullying survivors can inform the design of student-led advocacy programs and preventive initiatives, ensuring they address both immediate intervention and long-term coping strategies for youth at risk.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design utilizing semi-structured interviews to gain in-depth insights into the development of a student-led advocacy program for curbing bullying. A purposive sampling strategy is

employed to select participants who possess relevant experience and familiarity with legal frameworks and student leadership. The sample comprises 30 participants, including 20 law students, of whom several hold student leadership positions, and 10 law lecturers with academic and professional expertise in legal education. These participants were selected due to their capacity to provide informed perspectives on legal literacy, advocacy initiatives, and leadership development within educational settings.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 30 to 45 minutes each, guided by a set of open-ended questions exploring participants' perceptions of the program's necessity, proposed content, integration of leadership components, and overall feasibility. With the informed consent of participants, all interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate documentation and reliability of the data collected. List of interview questionnaires can be found in the Appendix A.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The analysis of participants' responses reveals a strong consensus on the urgent need for a student-led advocacy program focusing on bullying laws. Participants consistently indicated that, while students generally recognise bullying as a behavioural, social, or disciplinary issue, many lack awareness of its legal dimensions. This knowledge gap includes limited understanding of how Malaysian legislation defines, regulates, and penalises bullying-related misconduct. As a result, participants viewed a structured advocacy program as necessary to enhance legal literacy, promote accountability, and reinforce the seriousness of bullying offences within educational settings.

Participants also placed high importance on integrating both legal and psychological components into the proposed program. They emphasised the inclusion of key content such as statutory definitions of bullying, the emotional and psychological impact on victims, and the legal mechanisms available for reporting and seeking redress. There was a strong preference for interactive and participatory delivery methods, including case studies, guided discussions, role-plays, and simulations, rather than traditional lecture-based approaches. This reflects a desire for learning experiences that enable students to contextualise legal principles and apply them in realistic and practical scenarios.

Furthermore, the data indicate that participants perceive legal literacy as instrumental in shaping

effective student leadership. They reported that understanding rights, duties, and legal consequences fosters empathy, responsibility, and civic mindedness among students. Such knowledge empowers students to intervene constructively, make informed and ethical decisions, and contribute to cultivating a safe, respectful, and accountable campus culture. These findings suggest that legal education plays a critical role not only in influencing behaviour but also in strengthening students' leadership identity and ethical awareness.

Despite the strong support for the program, participants also identified several challenges that may hinder effective implementation. These include limited financial and human resources, inconsistent student participation, and difficulties in sustaining long-

term engagement. These structural and operational constraints were viewed as potential threats to the program's effectiveness and continuity. To address these concerns, participants recommended securing stronger institutional backing, implementing strategic promotional initiatives to enhance student involvement, and collaborating with relevant experts such as lawyers, counsellors, and law enforcement officers to ensure the credibility, sustainability, and accuracy of the legal content delivered.

All concerns and challenges highlighted by the participants have been systematically reviewed and addressed, with the corresponding actions and explanations clearly presented in the table below.

TABLE 1. Student-Led Advocacy Program Framework

Item	Details	Relevancy
Duration of program	Two days program	Optimum duration since it does not
Topic to be emphasized	Law governing bully	To increase awareness on law governing bully among participants
Activities to be done	Psychological effect on the victim	To make the participant understand the emotional effect on the bully and victim
	Role-play Simulation	To make the program engaging
	Guided discussion	Avoid boredom among participants
Personnel involved	Student leader Lawyers	Can influence peers and promote active participation
Values to be instilled	Counsellor	Provide accurate legal knowledge and practical understanding of bullying laws To offer insight on the psychological and emotional impact of bullying
	Legal literacy Empathy	Helps student understand the effect and consequence of their action
	Responsibility	Encourages students to recognise and respond appropriately
	Civic mindedness	Instils a sense of personal and social accountability Develop awareness of the broader impact of actions on the community
Issues to be addressed	Specific training for facilitators	To make sure that the facilitators know the objectives of the program
	Sustainable resources	Organizer should secure recurring funding, optimizing the materials used and efficiently used volunteer support
	Follow-up event	To strengthen continuity, measures the impact and reinforces the skills gained in the initial program.

RESEARCH IMPLICATION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study proposes a law-informed, student-led framework for bullying prevention that integrates legal literacy with peer engagement and leadership development. By defining clear program components, roles for student leaders, and mechanisms for collaboration with legal professionals, the framework provides a practical blueprint for educational institutions to implement structured, credible, and socially impactful advocacy initiatives. Collaboration with lawyers, police officers, counsellors, and other experts enhances the accuracy of legal knowledge, strengthens program credibility, and offers mentorship that fosters civic responsibility, ethical awareness, and leadership skills among students.

The framework is designed to be scalable and sustainable across schools and universities through standardized guidelines, training modules, and evaluation protocols, allowing consistent quality while extending benefits to larger student populations. It also supports adaptability to other social issues, such as cybercrime, environmental responsibility, and community safety, positioning students as legally literate and socially engaged change agents.

It is recommended that the program be implemented in a structured two-day format, with clear learning outcomes for each session. Day One should focus on foundational knowledge, including an overview of bullying laws, relevant statutes, legal remedies, reporting mechanisms, and the roles of educational institutions and enforcement agencies. This session should be supported by simplified legal handouts, case summaries, and visual flowcharts that guide students through the legal process from complaint to resolution. Day Two should emphasize practical application through roleplays, mock hearings, simulations of reporting procedures, and scenario-based group discussions to strengthen problem-solving, communication, and ethical decision-making skills.

To enhance engagement, interactive pedagogical tools such as pop quizzes, peer-led discussions, and reflective journals should be incorporated to reinforce understanding and encourage critical thinking. The involvement of legal practitioners, police officers, counsellors, and social workers should be formalized through panel sessions, Q&A forums, and small-group mentoring, allowing participants to connect legal theory with real-world experiences and professional pathways.

The program should also establish structured avenues for civic engagement, including student-led

awareness campaigns, pro bono legal literacy workshops for schools or communities, and participation in institutional policy reviews related to student welfare and safety. These activities help translate learning into sustained social impact beyond the program itself.

For evaluation, a comprehensive monitoring and assessment system is recommended. This should include pre- and post-program surveys using identical case scenarios, rubrics to assess changes in legal knowledge, empathy, and response strategies, and qualitative feedback through focus groups or reflective essays. Data collected should be used to refine program content, teaching methods, and resource allocation.

Finally, long-term sustainability requires thorough facilitator training, standardized teaching materials, and secure funding for logistics, expert honorariums, and program resources. Institutions should establish a coordinating committee or student leadership council to oversee continuity, maintain partnerships with external stakeholders, and organize periodic refresher sessions or annual follow-up programs to reinforce learning and ensure the initiative remains relevant and effective over time.

CONCLUSION

The study addresses the rising bullying cases in Malaysia by proposing a student-led advocacy program enriched with legal knowledge and leadership development. By combining peer leadership with expert guidance, the program aims to increase awareness of the laws governing bullying, empower youth to act responsibly, and contribute to safer learning environments. This research highlights the potential for law students and student leaders to actively participate in addressing social issues through knowledge, leadership, and civic engagement.

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Afif Hakimi Azhar*
 Universiti Malaya
 50603 Kuala Lumpur,
 Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur

*Corresponding author: fifazhar.work@gmail.com