

Heterogeneity of Bullying Roles Among Indonesian Adolescents: A Latent Profile Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Background. Bullying represents a multifaceted and heterogeneous social phenomenon.

Purpose. Within this context, the present study seeks to identify the heterogeneity of student involvement in bullying situations through latent profile analysis (LPA).

Method. Data were collected from 847 junior and senior high school students in East Java, aged 12 to 18 ($M=15.01$, $SD=0.81$). The measurement utilized five indicators of roles in bullying: perpetrator, accomplice, victim, defender, and bystander (passive observer). Latent class analysis was conducted using the Python programming language via Google Colaboratory, taking into account model fit indices such as the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), entropy values, and minimum class size.

Results. As a result of this analysis, Latent class analysis successfully identified six profiles (entropy value=0.779): two profiles involving active participation in bullying (Profile 1 – aggressor-reinforcer at 11%, Profile 5 – pure bully at 12.2%); three normative profiles with low to no involvement (Profile 2 – normative low involvement at 14.5%, Profile 3 – Truly Normative at 25.7%, Profile 4 – Normative Non-Involved at 22.9%), and Profile 6 (Victim-Outsider), which has a prevalence of 13.7% and is characterized by high levels of victimization and passive responses.

Conclusion. These findings indicate that the role of bullying can manifest in diverse forms. This study underscores the importance of understanding bullying as a heterogeneous phenomenon based on profiles and supports the development of more specific, student-needs-based bullying interventions.

KEYWORDS

Bullying Role, Indonesian Adolescents, Profile Analysis

INTRODUCTION

Bullying is regarded as a serious issue with far-reaching implications for pupils' social, emotional, and academic development. Cross-national research indicates that involvement in bullying is associated with various

Citation: Khoirot, U., Dzikrullah, F., Astutik, F., Fahmi, E. F. F. E., & Fiaunillah, H. S. (2026). Heterogeneity of Bullying Roles Among Indonesian Adolescents: A Latent Profile Analysis. *International Journal of Educational Narrative*, 4(3), 1202–1218.
<https://doi.org/10.70177/ijen.v4i3.3663>

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Received: January 16, 2026

Accepted: March 15, 2026

Published: June 30, 2026



long-term negative consequences, including mental health issues, reduced psychological well-being, and difficulties with social adjustment (Arseneault et al., 2006; Cook et al., 2010). Victims of bullying are reported to experience severe emotional distress, including anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, with long-term effects extending into adulthood (Astor et al., 2013; Ortega et al., 2012; Pells et al., 2016). Furthermore, the bully-victim phenomenon is also reported to be associated with poor academic performance and issues of loneliness and a lack of belonging (Yu & Zhao, 2021). Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the patterns of involvement in bullying is a crucial foundation for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies.

Bullying in the school environment is no longer understood as a simple interaction between the perpetrator and the victim, but rather as a social process involving various roles within a social context. This paradigm shift emphasises that bullying is driven by ecological dynamics characterised by rigid hierarchies and competitive norms (Hamsah et al., 2024), the pursuit of status and status elevation (Evans & Smokowski, 2016), and social hierarchical structures in which individuals assume specific roles (Kim et al., 2020) to maintain their positions (Branch et al., 2018; Hamsah et al., 2024). Farrell et al. (2026) & Salmivalli, Karhunen, et al. (1996) demonstrated that the majority of students do not remain neutral in bullying situations; they are distributed and may act as assistants, enablers, defenders, or passive bystanders (outsiders). Furthermore, group leaders and observers hold significant influence, as their responses can either mitigate or exacerbate the dynamics of bullying (Hamsah et al., 2024). This perspective reinforces Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological approach, which views behaviour as the result of interactions between individual characteristics and the social context in which they interact (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Despite the dominance of the digital era, research on traditional bullying remains important as offline school dynamics directly real-life aggression. Physical and relational violence creates concrete physical threats and profound social isolation (Astor et al., 2013; Sklavou, 2024), which acts as root cause of online aggressive behavior (De Luca Picione et al., 2022) and escalates cyber victimization through digital exclusion or rumor (Holfeld & Leadbeater, 2018). This cross-contextual spillover creates overlapping roles, making traditional victim highly vulnerable to cyberbullying (Carmona-Rojas et al., 2023), which inherently mirrors traditional dynamics like power imbalances and repetition (Espelage et al., 2013). Furthermore, covert traditional bullying, such as exclusion, fosters a vicious cycle of victimization that directly predicts adolescent clinical depression due to a fractured need to security and group acceptance (Hodges & Perry, 1999; Hu et al., 2025). Latent class analysis further confirm that cyberbullying aligns with general engagement patterns, allowing behavioral roles to manifest fluidly across both online and offline contexts (No et al., 2026; Peras et al., 2025). Consequently, unraveling the mechanisms of school-based traditional bullying is an absolute prerequisite before any cyberbullying mitigation can be effectively achieved.

Although theoretical frameworks expand our understanding of the complexity of bullying, most empirical research is still dominated by variable-centered approaches. This dominant tradition focuses on the relationships between variables in isolation, such as predictors or consequences of bullying, across the population, rather than on how various characteristics combine within a single individual (Nylund-Gibson & Choi, 2018). Consequently, researchers tend to view the roles of perpetrators, victims, and uninvolved students homogeneously, making it difficult to capture the diverse configurations of bullying roles within individuals. The variable-centered limitation is particularly problematic when attempting to model complex social phenotypes that do not fit into rigid, monolithic roles of pure aggressors.

To bridge this gap, Clark et al. (2020) & Hawley (2003) introduces the concept of "bistrategic controllers". Theoretically grounded in resource control theory, these individuals are socially highly

intelligent and adaptive, they successfully monopolize social status and resources by dual-wielding contradictory behavioral repertoires. Specially, they employ coercive strategies (such as bullying and aggressor) to neutralize social competitors, while simultaneously deploying prosocial strategies (such as defending and helping behaviors) to manipulate the perceptions of peers and teachers, thereby maintaining high friendship quality, popularity, and social legitimacy. Because these contradictory behaviors coexist fluidly within the same person, a person-centered approach utilizing latent profile analysis (LPA) is strictly necessary to empirically extract these hidden subgroups based on their holistic, shared patterns of social interaction.

Previous studies have confirmed the existence of profiles in bullying other than perpetrators and victims. Research by Cook et al. (2010) & Juvonen et al. (2003) explains that students can be classified into various involvement profiles, including the bully-victim profile, the dominant bully profile, and the passive victim profile, each of which has different psychosocial implications. Cross-context studies have also identified recurring categories such as non-involved groups, perpetrators, victims, bully-victims, defenders, enablers/assistants, as well as categories involving both cyber and traditional bullying (Antoniadou et al., 2019; Marraccini et al., 2018; Pouwels et al., 2016; Strohmeier et al., 2024). These findings confirm that involvement in bullying is heterogeneous and cannot be reduced to rigid categories of perpetrators.

The bully-victim group is also reported to not only be perpetrators but also victims, who often exhibit severe psychosocial problems, including depression and high anxiety (Kennedy, 2021). They exhibit the most severe maladaptive profiles and high levels of anger rumination (Kennedy, 2021; No et al., 2026). Dominant perpetrators are the group typically involved in aggressive behavior (No et al., 2026) and low empathy or social skills in some samples (Kennedy, 2021; Peras et al., 2025), which is often associated with higher social status among their peers (No et al., 2026). Passive victims are those who are less involved in bullying behavior and tend to experience low self-esteem and social isolation (Dias et al., 2020; Peras et al., 2025). Meanwhile, defenders and outsiders emerge as bystanders with distinct prosocial features and low levels of involvement (Beggs, 2017; Duy & Yildiz, 2014).

Although there has been extensive research on latent profiles, significant gaps remain in the literature. First, LPA research on bullying remains relatively limited, particularly studies that simultaneously integrate all primary roles in bullying into a single model. Second, student groups often categorized as “uninvolved” or normative are frequently treated as homogeneous groups, even though early studies indicate the presence of subtle yet systematic variations in the degree of involvement. There is a scarcity of research explicitly emphasizing profile-based practical implications for designing bullying interventions tailored to specific conditions. Latent profile clustering helps identify subtypes of perpetrators and bystanders, enabling interventions to be targeted according to mechanisms relevant to each class (Balan et al., 2023).

This study aims to identify and map latent profiles of bullying involvement among students using latent profile analysis (LPA). The study involves five indicators of bullying roles (perpetrator, accomplice, victim, defender, and outsider). The explicit theoretical justification for employing LPA over traditional statistical methods lies in the fundamental distinction between variable centered approach (e.g., linear regression, correlation, or structural equation modelling) operate under rigid assumption of population homogeneity. By focusing strictly on the relationships between variables in isolation across an entire sample, traditional view treat distinct participant roles as mutually exclusive or static categories (Ferguson & Hull, 2018; Nylund-Gibson & Choi, 2018). This approach is inherently insufficient for capturing the complex heterogeneity of bullying, as it completely overlooks how multiple, seemingly contradictory behavioral characteristics combine

and interact within a single individual. This methodological blind spot fails to account for complex social phenotypes, such as individuals who concurrently exhibit high patterns of both aggression and defending.

In contrast, the person centered framework of LPA shifts the analytical focus from the variables to the individuals by grouping students based on their unique, intra-individual configurations of shared response patterns. By treating population heterogeneity as an unobserved latent variable, LPA allows for the empirical extraction of hidden subgroup, thereby providing a more realistic and mathematically evaluable representation of how bullying roles manifest in real life.

Conceptually, this study occupies a strategic position in the bullying literature by integrating salmivalli's classic theoretical framework of bullying roles with this person-centered approach. The novel theoretical contribution of this study to the existing literature lies in its capacity to deconstruct and refine the traditional, rigid boundaries of the bullying circle into fluid, and overlapping behavior typologies. Empirically, this study contributes by revealing latent profiles that reflect highly complex configurations of bullying roles, including variations and distinct sub-types within normative groups that have previously received little attention due to the constraints of variable-centered modeling. Practically, the findings of this study have important implications for the development of profile-based bullying interventions that are more precise and responsive to the needs and characteristics of different students. Thus, this study not only enriches the theoretical understanding of bullying as a complex social phenomenon but also provides a strong empirical foundation for designing more effective, tailored and impactful bullying prevention policies and programs in school settings.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Design

This study uses a quantitative cross-sectional design aimed at identifying the latent profiles of student involvement in bullying situations based on bullying roles (bully, reinforcer, victim, defender, outsider) using latent profile analysis with the assistance of the Python Google Collab application.

Participant

The study participants consisted of 847 students (34% male, 66% female) aged between 12 and 18 years ($M=15.01$, $SD=0.81$). Sampling was conducted using random sampling, this method provides equal opportunity for all junior and senior high school students in East Java, Indonesia, to participate in the study. Prior to data collection, formal ethical approval was obtained from the research ethical committee of Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang (approval no. 1041/LP2M/TL.00/02/2026). Official administrative permission was granted by the school administrations, which acted in loco parentis (in the place to parent) to oversee the institutional ethical standards within the school setting. Given the adolescents' developmental capacity to comprehend the research implication, a passive parental consent procedure was implemented via the school communication network, following by obtaining explicit written informed assent directly from the students prior to questionnaire administration. All participants were provided with comprehensive explanation regarding the study's objectives, data confidentiality, anonymity, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

Table 1. Participant distribution

	Total	Percentage
Based on gender		
Male	287	34%
Female	560	66%
Base on Age		
12 years	4	0.5%
13 years	11	1.3%
14 years	132	15.6%
15 years	495	58.4%
16 years	163	19.2%
17 years	36	4.3%
18 years	6	0.7%
Based on Education Level		
Junior high school	282	33%
Senior high school	565	67%

Instrument

The research instrument used the Bullying Participant Behavior Questionnaire (BPBQ) from Demaray et al. (2016), which was designed to measure student involvement in various bullying roles. The BPBQ consists of five main subscales that measure five roles, namely bully, bully's assistant, victim, defender, and passive observer (outsider). The version of the BPBQ used in this study is an Indonesian-language adaptation that has been validated for validity and reliability within the Indonesian cultural context (Coefficient ω for the bully scale = 0.79, bully's assistant = 0.78, victim = 0.82, defender = 0.86, outsider = 0.86). Each item in the BPBQ is rated using a Likert scale (1 = never to 5 = very often), where a higher score indicates greater involvement in a specific bullying role.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted collectively in the classroom under the supervision of the researcher and research assistants. Before completing the questionnaire, the researcher explained the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of the data, and the anonymity of the responses. The time required to complete the questionnaire ranged from 20 to 30 minutes. To ensure data quality, participants were asked to complete the questionnaire independently and honestly, without discussing it with peers. All collected data were stored anonymously and used solely for research purposes.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the Python programming language on the Google Colaboratory platform. To estimate latent profile analysis (LPA) model, a Gaussian Mixture Model (GMM) algorithm was implemented utilizing the Gaussian mixture module from scikit-learn libraries. Prior to performing LPA, score standardization was conducted by converting all BPBQ scores to Z-scores ($M=0$, $SD=1$) to ensure scale equivalence across all variables. Next, LPA was applied to identify latent profiles of bullying involvement based on five bullying roles.

The models were tested sequentially, starting with solutions ranging from one to six latent profiles. To ensure transparency and the rigor of statistical decisions in selecting the best model, the following fit criteria were considered simultaneously (Ferguson & Hull, 2018; Nylund-Gibson & Choi, 2018): 1) The Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) and the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), where the lowest combined value indicates a superior and more efficient model. 2) An entropy value approaching or greater than 0.80 is used as an indicator of the stability of individual classifications within a class. 3) the minimum class size with a sample distribution threshold of $\geq 5\%$ to ensure the stability and interpretability of the theory behind the resulting profiles

To ensure that the model estimates reach the global maximum and avoid local maxima, this analysis employs 500 random starts and 100 full optimizations. Comparisons between models (K classes vs. K-1 classes) were evaluated using the Bootstrap Likelihood Ratio Test (BLRT) and the Lo-Mendell-Rubin (LMR-LRT), where a p-value < 0.05 indicates a significant improvement in fit for the model with a higher number of classes. The best model is determined based on the lowest AIC and BIC information criteria, adequate entropy values, stable class sizes, and positive LMR/BRT significance tests (Ferguson & Hull, 2018; Nylund-Gibson & Choi, 2018). The selected profile is then interpreted to describe patterns of student involvement in bullying.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive analysis

Table 2 presents all variables that have been normalized into Z-scores (Mean=0, Std=1). These results indicate that the standardization process was successful. The range of Z-scores for each variable demonstrates a fairly wide range of individual variation, indicating heterogeneity in student involvement across various bullying roles and supporting the validity of profile-based analysis.

Table 2. Statistik Z-Score

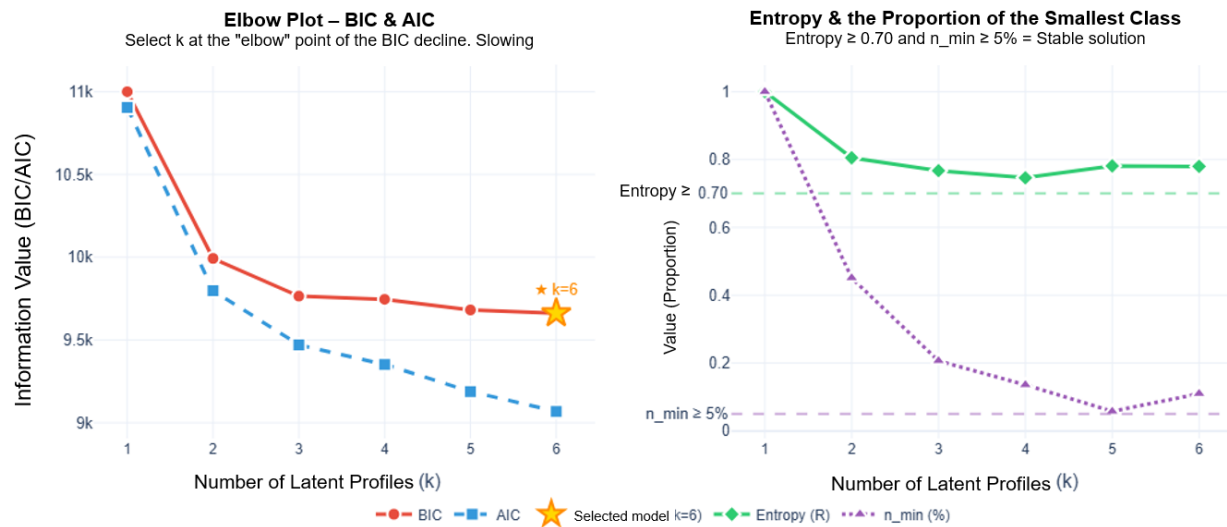
index	Bully	Assistance	Victim	Defender	Outsider
count	847	847	847	847	847
mean	-1.09E-16	6.08E-17	8.39E-18	6.71E-17	2.10E-18
std	1.000590842	1.000590842	1.000590842	1.000590842	1.000590842
min	-1.010775745	-0.9925844	-1.09933222	-1.574897156	-1.072711244
0.25	-0.797064548	-0.774950699	-0.799063148	-0.671494946	-0.753011587
0.5	-0.369642153	-0.339683297	-0.198525006	-0.155265112	-0.113612275
0.75	0.485202635	0.313217806	0.402013137	0.49002218	0.525787038
max	4.759426579	7.059862536	4.005241992	3.587401184	4.8417324

Determination of the Number of Latent Profiles

The models were tested incrementally from one to six latent profiles using the AIC, BIC, entropy, and minimum class size metrics. Table 3 shows that the 6-profile model had the lowest values, indicating that the 6-profile model provides the best balance between model complexity and stability. The entropy score (0.779) and minimum class size (11%) indicate that the classification of individuals into profiles is relatively clear and stable. This percentage remains above the general threshold ($\geq 5\%$), meaning that each profile is statistically and practically significant. Based on considerations of model fit indices, classification clarity, and class size feasibility, the 6-profile latent model was selected as the most optimal model to describe bullying involvement in the study sample.

Table 3. Evaluasi Fit Indices

index	Profile Count	BIC	AIC	Entropy	Min Class Size (%)
0	1	11000.10984	10905.27582	1	100
1	2	9992.492488	9798.08276	0.805044927	45.10035419
2	3	9764.65637	9470.670927	0.76722715	20.66115702
3	4	9745.860064	9352.298907	0.746077416	13.57733176
4	5	9681.732566	9188.595694	0.781282653	5.785123967
5	6	9661.661951	9068.949364	0.779654743	10.97992916

**Figure 1.** Model Fit evaluation

Description of Latent Bullying Profiles

The LPA analysis yielded six latent profiles representing patterns of student involvement in various bullying roles. Figure 2 illustrates the proportion of the population for each latent variable in the 6-profile model. These results confirm that bullying is not a single phenomenon, but consists of diverse social role profiles.

Table 4. Summary of Mean Z-Scores by Latent Profile for the Five Bullying Indicators

Profile	Profile Label	n	% Sample	A (Bullies)	B (Reinforcer)	C (Victim)	D (Defender)	E (Outsider)
P1	Aggressor-Reinforcer	93	11	1.34	1.532	1.895	0.861	0.888
P2	Low Involvement	123	14.5	-0.814	-0.895	-0.633	-0.347	-1.012
P3	Normative / Average	218	25.7	0.419	0.392	-0.066	-0.335	0.031
P4	Low Involvement	194	22.9	-0.738	-0.601	-0.573	-0.381	-0.375
P5	Pure Bully	103	12.2	0.529	0.142	-0.327	1.234	-0.098
P6	Victim-Outsider	116	13.7	-0.233	-0.137	0.524	-0.152	1.016

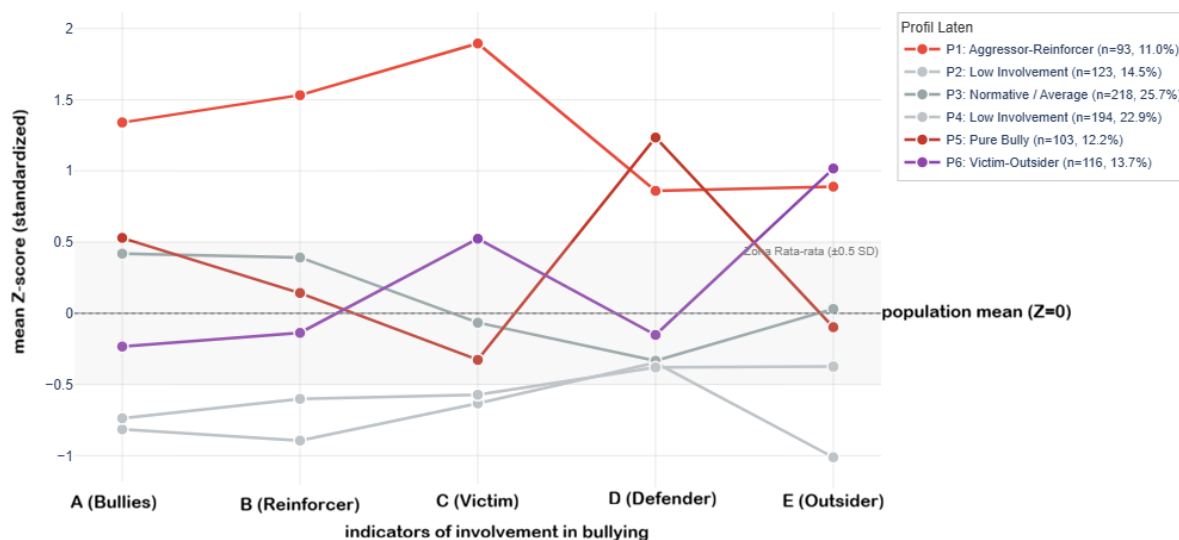


Figure 2. Graph of Bullying Role Indicators

Figure 3 and table 4 explains the bullying profiles in greater detail. Profile 1 shows a complex involvement pattern (Aggressor-reinforcer) with a prevalence of 11.0% (93 students). Individuals in this group are characterized by scores dominated by Aggressor (Very High, $Z=1.34$), Aggressor's Assistant (Very High, $Z=1.53$), Victim (Very High, $Z=1.90$), Defender (High, $Z=0.86$), and Outsider (High, $Z=0.89$). This group poses a high risk of creating and perpetuating a bullying climate at school.

Profiles 2, 3, and 4 represent normative student groups that do not show involvement in bullying, with a total prevalence of 63.1% of students. The differences among the three profiles reflect relatively small quantitative variations in the level of involvement, not qualitative differences in bullying roles. Thus, these three profiles can be understood as variations of student subtypes who are generally not actively involved or are only situationally involved in bullying dynamics.

Profile 2 describes the low-involvement group (14.4%, 123 students), consisting of students with scores close to the mean across all indicators, and no indicator scores that stand out (> 0.5 SD). However, this profile exhibits relatively greater internal variability compared to Profile 4. Generally, scores on the perpetrator, accomplice, victim, and bystander indicators are at a low level. Students in this group rarely engage in bullying but may still be involved situationally, for example, by laughing or remaining silent when witnessing a bullying incident. In other words, their involvement is minimal but not entirely neutral.

Profile 3 represents a group of students who are truly normative (all indicators are very close to the standard value $Z=0$), with a prevalence of 25.7% (218 students). This profile can serve as a baseline for the population because students in this group do not consistently show a specific tendency to be perpetrators, victims, or defenders. They are at the most neutral level of involvement in bullying dynamics.

Profile 4 describes the non-involved group (characterized by low scores for perpetrators, perpetrator assistants, and victims), with a prevalence of 22.9% (194 students). Students in this group do not exhibit aggressive tendencies, are not targets of bullying, and are not at the center of bullying interaction dynamics in their social environment.

Profile 5 (pure bully) is a theoretically interesting group because students can act as both perpetrators and defenders. This group demonstrates moral ambiguity or social strategies (e.g., aggressive in certain contexts and prosocial in others). This group scored high ($Z=0.53$) on the perpetrator scale and very high on the defender scale ($Z=1.23$), with a prevalence of 12.2% (103

students). They require behavioral intervention and emotional regulation, not merely a disciplinary approach.

Profile 6 (victim-outsider) is a group of victims who tend to withdraw, are passive, and lack strong social support. They scored high on the victim scale ($Z=0.52$) and very high on the outsider scale ($Z=1.02$), with a prevalence of 13.7% (116 students). They are at high risk of social isolation, psychological distress, and long-term consequences.

Overall, the analysis results indicate that the majority of students fall into the normative profiles (profiles 2–4), while the remainder are classified into profiles involving active participation as perpetrators, victims, or a combination of both. This distribution confirms the existence of significant variations in bullying involvement patterns within the student population, which cannot be reduced to mere perpetrator and victim categories.

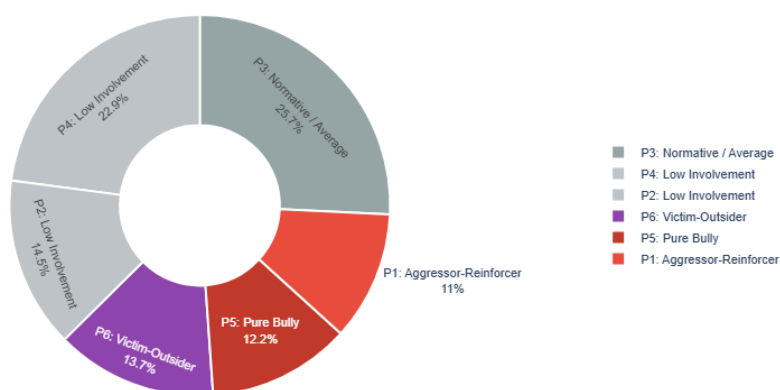


Figure 3. Population proportions for the 6-profile model

This study aims to identify the heterogeneity of bullying roles among students, which includes perpetrators, accomplices, victims, defenders, and passive observers (outsiders), using latent profile analysis. By adopting a person-centered approach, this study seeks to uncover bullying profiles that cannot be captured by conventional variable-based approaches and to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how various bullying roles can coexist within an individual.

The results of the latent profile analysis identified six distinct role profiles. These findings confirm a paradigm shift in the global literature from rigid dichotomous labels (perpetrator and victim) toward an understanding of bullying as a fluid and multidimensional behavioral configuration (Carmona-Rojas et al., 2023; Carrera et al., 2011; Demaray et al., 2021), or based on patterns of aggression and victimization (Peras et al., 2025). From this study, we can see that individual behavior and roles can shift between being a bully, a victim, and an observer, depending on the social context and peer dynamics (Swearer & Hymel, 2015; Wójcik & Flak, 2021). More importantly, these six emerging profiles expand and refine salmivalli's traditional bullying circle (Salmivalli, 1999, 2010) by demonstrating that participant roles are mutually exclusive social niches, but complex intra-individual behavioral configurations. In contemporary school setting, the social architecture of bullying is no longer defined by fixed, singular roles, but by overlapping behavioral repertoires where students navigate aggression, defense, and victimization simultaneously. These findings are also consistent with previous literature emphasizing that bullying emerges within peer group dynamics and social status structures, rather than as isolated individual behavior (Cook et al., 2010; Salmivalli, 1999, 2010).

An in-depth analysis of the emerging profiles revealed three main dynamics: 1) the emergence of dual roles or strategies, 2) the existence of high-risk groups, and 3) isolation mechanisms among victims. One of the most significant and novel findings in this study was the identification of Profile 5 (pure bully), which represent bistrategic profile. This group exhibits a contradictory pattern of high bully scores and high defender scores. Theoretically, they demonstrate both aggressive tendencies and a defender role in certain situations (Schultze-Krumbholz et al., 2018). This finding challenges the classical assumption that bullies always exhibit a deficit in empathy (Noorden, 2016; van Noorden et al., 2015) and social skills (de Sousa et al., 2021). Using the Resource Control Theory (RTC) framework from Hawley (2003) & Clark et al. (2020), this profile can be described as "strategic controllers." Unlike conventional perpetrators, students in this group are socially intelligent individuals. It turns out that this high quality of friendship is also associated with a high tendency toward bullying behavior (Hartl et al., 2020; Hawley et al., 2007; Kusumaningsih, 2020). They employ coercive strategies—specifically aggression—to defeat competitors, yet alternately use prosocial strategies (defending) to manipulate the perceptions of peers and teachers, as well as to maintain their social status and popularity (Clark et al., 2020; Goodboy et al., 2016; Hawley, 2003; Hawley et al., 2007).

This operationalizes a profound shift in the macro-level peer group dynamics: defensive behavior in the contemporary bullying circle can be subverted into a mechanism for status preservation. It is likely that the defensive behavior exhibited by this group is not driven by affective empathy but rather influenced by situational factors such as the perpetrator's popularity (Salmivalli, 1999; Choi & Park, 2021; Thornberg et al., 2021), which may lead to defending the victim to assert dominance or to cover up their previous aggression. They possess high levels of assertiveness, but do not use it to protect the victim, rather to attack the victim (Jenkins et al., 2016). Tennant et al. (2019) explain that this profile leads to the "bully-victim-defender" type, where some students occupy a central position in school social life by acting as both "heroes" and "villains," depending on the situation that benefits them. They defend selectively to maintain their social legitimacy or dominance. These findings align with social dominance theory, which states that aggression and prosocial behavior can function as strategic tools in achieving social status (Hawley, 1999). Thus, defensive behavior in this context does not always reflect pure empathy but can serve as a social strategy.

In addition to Profile 5, Profile 1 (aggressor–reinforcer, 11% or 93 students) represents the most maladaptive group in this sample. By applying our data to salmivalli's framework, this profile breaks the traditional boundaries of the peer architecture; instead of being just a perpetrator or an assistant, this group encapsulates an all negative involvement. They scored high on nearly all negative indicators (bully, assistant, victim, and outsider) and very low on defensive behavior, reflecting the characteristics of an aggressive victim or bully-victim. This pattern supports previous findings that some adolescents may shift between the roles of perpetrator and victim, which is likely due to unstable social positions or the use of aggression as a form of retaliation (Juvonen et al., 2003; Juvonen & Graham, 2014). Based on the study by Salmivalli & Nieminen (2002), this group is viewed as unique because it scores high on both proactive aggression (initiating conflicts) and reactive aggression (exploding when provoked). The coexistence of aggressive behavior and victimization in this profile reinforces a developmental perspective that views bullying as a dynamic and reciprocal process, rather than a static role identity (Salmivalli, 1999; Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, et al., 1996).

Students in this group have the potential to use aggression as a strategy to negotiate social status, yet at the same time remain vulnerable to aggression from peers, placing them at high risk

for prosocial issues. Their inability to control impulses leads them to attack others; conversely, their social awkwardness prevents them from gaining support, causing them to become victims. They tend to be rejected by the “good kids” group due to their aggressiveness and by the “popular group” due to their social awkwardness. This situation consistently places them at high risk for future psychological disorders, including major depression, antisocial personality disorder, and suicidality (Cook et al., 2010; Copeland et al., 2013).

On the other end of the social spectrum, Profile 6 – Victim-Outsider (13.7%) is the next profile identified in this study, unveils the systematic failure of classroom’s ecological defense. This profile is characterized by high levels of victimization coupled with a tendency to act as a passive observer. This profile represents a group of students who experience bullying but respond by withdrawing from social interactions. This pattern is consistent with previous research findings linking passive coping strategies to an increased risk of chronic victimization (Hodges & Perry, 1999). Withdrawal behavior is not a protective factor but rather a risk factor. They become targets because they lack peer support, leading them to withdraw further, which in turn invites more attacks. Within the macrosystem of the peer group dynamics, the ‘outsider’ behavior of these victims acts as a structural feedback loop that reinforces their victimization, effectively removing them from any potential network of active defense. The low level of defensive behavior in this profile also indicates limited peer support, reinforcing the ecological nature of bullying, where individual vulnerability interacts with peer group responses. According to Hu et al., (2025), this condition it triggers feelings of being cast out. This condition is more dangerous than physical victimization because it undermines the need for self-belonging, thereby placing them at high risk of experiencing internalizing problems, such as anxiety, depression, and long-term adjustment difficulties (Arseneault et al., 2006).

Another contribution of this study is the identification of three distinct normative profiles (profiles 2–4), characterized by the absence of a prominent bullying role (63.1%). Although they appear similar at first glance, these three profiles actually differ in the level and consistency of their involvement. Profile 2 represents students with low and inconsistent involvement. They may occasionally be exposed to and passively involved in bullying situations, but this does not occur continuously. Profile 3 reflects the typical condition of students in general, thus serving as a general reference for comparison with the other profiles. Meanwhile, Profile 4 is characterized by low involvement in various roles (whether as perpetrators, supporters, or victims), reflecting a group of students who are truly uninvolved in bullying dynamics. In term of salmivalli’s social architecture, these three normative profiles represent the silent engine of the classroom climate. Although individually they do not appear to exhibit aggressive behavior, from the perspective of the school ecological model (Farrell et al., 2026; Salmivalli et al., 2011), this group is a key determinant of school culture. When the majority of this group is passive (low defending), they can foster a norm of indifference that allows Profiles 1 and 5 to act without social consequences. The primary potential for intervention lies in efforts to mobilize the majority group to increase defender self-efficacy (Sjögren et al., 2024), so that they can transition from passive bystanders to active defenders.

Overall, the identified latent profiles align with the concept of participant roles in bullying (Salmivalli, Karhunen, et al., 1996), while expanding the model by demonstrating that bullying roles do not exist in isolation but form overlapping behavioral configurations. The answer to the “so what?” question lies in this collective structural realization: peer intervention programs cannot target ‘bullies’ and ‘victim’ as monolithic entities. Instead, anti bullying effort must target the structural relationships between these six configurations, such as transforming the passive

normative majority into active defender to structurally suffocate the strategic manipulation of bistrategic bullies. Furthermore, the findings of this study are consistent with the social ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which emphasizes that individual behavior is influenced by the social context in which they are situated. The emergence of mixed profiles, such as perpetrator-victim and perpetrator-defender, also supports the developmental psychopathology perspective, which emphasizes role flexibility, multifinality, and changes in social developmental trajectories among adolescents (Frick & Viding, 2009; Karen D Rudolph et al., 2014).

The findings of this study have important implications as a basis for both preventive and curative interventions regarding bullying in schools. The existence of various latent profiles indicates that a generalized intervention approach tends to be less effective. Instead, interventions must be profile-based, tailoring strategies to students' distinct patterns of involvement. For instance, students in Profile 5 (bistrategic) do not require social skills training; rather, they need interventions focused on cognitive-moral interventions to dismantle the mechanisms of moral disengagement (Jeong et al., 2024) and reconstruct their status goals. Those in Profile 1 require clinical interventions focused on emotional regulation and anger management, not merely school disciplinary punishments. As for victims, schools need to connect isolated victims with peers who have high social status, not merely pair them with other victims (Sainio et al., 2011). Normative groups, particularly those with situational involvement, are strategic targets for preventive interventions aimed at strengthening social norms and a school climate that rejects bullying.

Although it possesses methodological strengths and provides valuable insights, this study has several limitations. The cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal conclusions and understand the stability of profiles over time. Crucially, this study is limited by the absence of multi level contextual variables, such as classroom climate, teacher instruction style, and overarching school policies, which heavily moderated peer ecologies. Without accounting for these micro and macro systemic factors, our capacity to determine what explicitly drives or moderates the formation of these bullying profiles remains constrained, and any causal interpretations regarding their emergence of mixed or strategic behaviors must be approached with caution. Future research is strongly recommended to utilize a longitudinal design combined with latent transition analysis (LTA) to explore individual transitions between profiles throughout development. Additionally, integrating these omitted contextual variables will be essential to enrich our understanding of environmental factors influencing the formation and stability of bullying profiles across different school settings.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that involvement in bullying situations is not a monolithic or rigid dichotomous phenomenon (perpetrator vs. victim) but is best understood as a heterogeneous, profile-based configuration. Utilizing a person-centered latent profile analysis on junior and senior high school students in East Java, Indonesia, this research empirically extracted six distinct behavioral profiles. These profiles include three normative groups with situational or low involvement (profiles 2, 3, and 4), and three highly distinct, clinically and pedagogically significant profiles: the aggressor-reinforcer (profile 1), characterized by an all-negative maladaptive overlap of active aggression and victimization; pure bully (profile 5), a socially intelligent group that dual-wields aggression and defensive behaviors to manipulate status; and the victim-outsider (profile 6), defined by high victimization coupled with passive, socially withdrawn responses. By shifting the focus from isolated variables to how these diverse roles coexist within an individual, this study provides a more nuanced framework for school-based anti-bullying intervention.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this work the author(s) used SciSpace and AI-Based language model in order to literature exploration, summarization, and improving language clarity. The author(s) independently conducted all analyses, interpretation, and conclusion presented in this work. After using this tool, the author(s) critically reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to thank all participant who took part in this study and the institutions that facilitated data collection. Appreciation is also extends to research assistants for their support during the data collection process.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

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

Author 2: Formal Analysis; Other contribution; Resources; Visualization.

Author 3: Review and Editing; Investigation; review.

Author 4: Formal analysis; Data Curation; Methodology.

Author 5: Review and Editing

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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