



## The Role of Opinion Leaders in Bullying Prevention: Evaluating the Roots Program in SMA Negeri 19 Medan Through the Lens of Two-Step Flow Communication Theory

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### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menilai efektivitas Program Roots dalam mencegah perundungan melalui sudut pandang Teori two step flow, dengan menekankan peran opinion leader siswa dalam memengaruhi perilaku teman sebaya dan membina lingkungan sekolah yang lebih aman. Pendekatan penelitian kualitatif dengan metode deskriptif analitis digunakan. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan tiga informan utama: kepala sekolah, seorang fasilitator guru, dan agen anti-perundungan siswa. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Program Roots telah berkontribusi pada pengurangan yang nyata dalam insiden perundungan dengan memanfaatkan pengaruh teman sebaya. opinion leader siswa memainkan peran penting dalam membentuk norma anti-perundungan melalui diskusi teman sebaya, advokasi, dan pemodelan sosial. Penelitian ini menyoroti bahwa siswa lebih reseptif terhadap pesan anti-perundungan yang disampaikan oleh teman sebaya daripada otoritas institusional, yang sejalan dengan Teori two step flow. Namun, tantangan seperti memastikan partisipasi siswa aktif dan mengatasi keengganan untuk melaporkan perundungan tetap menjadi kendala yang signifikan. Studi ini juga menemukan bahwa dukungan kelembagaan, termasuk fasilitasi guru dan kolaborasi dengan organisasi eksternal, meningkatkan efektivitas intervensi yang dipimpin oleh rekan sejawat.

**Kata kunci:** *Opinion leader, Bullying, Roots Program, Two step flow*

### ABSTRACT

This study aims to assess the effectiveness of the Roots Program in preventing bullying through the lens of the Two-Step Flow Communication Theory, emphasizing the role of student opinion leaders in influencing peer behavior and fostering a safer school environment. A qualitative research approach with an analytical descriptive method was used. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with three key informants: the school principal, a teacher facilitator, and a student anti-bullying agent. The findings indicate that the Roots Program has contributed to a noticeable reduction in bullying incidents by leveraging peer influence. Student opinion leaders played a crucial role in shaping anti-bullying norms through peer discussions, advocacy, and social modeling. The research highlights that students are more receptive to anti-bullying messages delivered by peers rather than institutional authorities, aligning with the Two-Step Flow Communication Theory. However, challenges such as ensuring active student participation and overcoming reluctance to report bullying remain significant obstacles. The study also found that institutional support, including teacher facilitation and collaboration with external organizations, enhances the effectiveness of peer-led interventions.

**Keywords:** *Opinion leader, perundungan, Program roots, two step flow*



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## **1. Introduction**

Bullying remains a pervasive issue in educational institutions worldwide, affecting students' psychological well-being, academic performance, and social relationships (UNESCO, 2019). According to a report by UNICEF (2021), approximately one in three students globally has experienced bullying, with significant consequences on their mental health and future development. In Indonesia, a survey conducted by KPAI (Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia) in 2022 revealed that 41% of students reported being victims of bullying, while 25% admitted to being perpetrators. The prevalence of bullying in schools highlights the urgent need for effective intervention strategies. One approach that has gained attention is leveraging peer influence, particularly through student opinion leaders, to drive social change within school environments. The Roots Program, implemented in various educational institutions, operates on this premise by identifying and empowering influential students to act as agents of anti-bullying advocacy. This strategy aligns with the Two-Step Flow Communication Theory, which suggests that opinion leaders play a crucial role in mediating the spread of information and shaping behavioral norms within a community.

The significance of opinion leaders in influencing social behavior has been widely discussed in the literature. The Two-Step Flow Communication Theory, initially developed in political communication, posits that information flows from mass media to opinion leaders, who then disseminate and interpret it for the wider audience. This model has since been applied to various domains, including public health campaigns, marketing strategies, and social change initiatives (Rogers, 2003). Recent studies have shown that peer influence plays a significant role in shaping adolescent behavior, particularly in school settings (Paluck & Shepherd, 2012). Research by Valente & Pumpuang (2007) indicates that opinion leaders within a social network can accelerate behavior change, making them valuable assets in anti-bullying interventions. The Roots Program, which integrates peer-led interventions, aligns with these findings by strategically engaging influential students to promote anti-bullying norms. Despite the theoretical foundation supporting this approach, empirical studies assessing the effectiveness of the Roots Program within the framework of Two-Step Flow Communication remain limited. Therefore, an in-depth evaluation is necessary to determine how opinion leaders influence bullying prevention efforts in schools.

This study aims to assess the effectiveness of the Roots Program in preventing bullying through the Two-Step Flow Communication lens, emphasizing the role of anti-bullying as opinion leaders within school communities. Specifically, this research seeks to examine how these identified opinion leaders—students recognized as influential among their peers—disseminate anti-bullying messages, foster behavioral change, and contribute to the creation of a safer school environment. By understanding the mechanisms through which these agents influence their peers, this study aims to provide empirical evidence on the power of peer-driven interventions in shaping school culture and promoting positive social norms.

The roots program is a form of collaboration carried out by UNICEF with the Indonesian government as a form of prevention of bullying and in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Culture (Prasetyarini et al, 2022; Devi & Yulianandra, 2023; Swastikaningsih et al, 2023). A critical component of this study is analyzing the extent to which anti-bullying agents affect student behavior, either by directly intervening in bullying situations or by altering the perceptions and attitudes of their peer groups towards bullying. Opinion leaders, as conceptualized by the Two-Step Flow Communication Theory, do not simply act as passive conduits of information but actively interpret, adapt, and reinforce messages in ways that resonate with their social networks. In the

context of bullying prevention, these student leaders are strategically selected based on their social standing, communication skills, and ability to influence their peers. This research will explore the specific strategies employed by anti-bullying agents within the Roots Program, such as peer discussions, social modeling, and advocacy efforts, to understand how these mechanisms contribute to behavior modification and bullying reduction. This research will be conducted at SMA Negeri 19 Medan, considering the existence of SMA Negeri 19 Medan which has been determined by the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology as one of the schools that drives anti-bullying.

Given the theoretical foundation and the empirical gaps identified, this research argues that opinion leaders play a pivotal role in shaping student perceptions and behaviors related to bullying. The Two-Step Flow Communication Theory suggests that information is more effectively internalized when mediated by trusted peers rather than direct institutional messaging (Jabeen et al., 2020). Accordingly, we hypothesize that the Roots Program, by leveraging student opinion leaders, significantly reduces bullying incidents by fostering a culture of peer accountability and positive social reinforcement. Furthermore, this study posits that the effectiveness of the program is contingent on factors such as the credibility of opinion leaders, the level of institutional support, and the consistency of message dissemination. Understanding these dynamics will provide valuable insights into the mechanisms of peer influence and inform future strategies for bullying prevention in educational settings.

## **2. Methods**

This study uses a qualitative approach using the analytical description method. Qualitative research is a study that aims to understand the phenomena experienced by the subject directly in the field. This study also has characteristics that are found in its objectives: describing special needs by providing an understanding that has meaning and symptoms and compiling data obtained in the field (Moustakas, 2011; Van Manen, 2014). Qualitative research also focuses more on general principles and the manifestation of symptom units found in human/community life. In this approach, social reality is holistic/comprehensive, complex, dynamic and full of meaning (Creswell, 2014). The location of the study is at SMA Negeri 19 Medan, Jalan Seruwai No.1, Sei Mati, Kec. Medan Labuhan, Medan City, North Sumatra 20253. The research will be carried out in stages according to the research design. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with three informants who best understood the implementation and utilization of the Roots program at SMA Negeri 19 Medan. The three informants were; Principal, Teacher Facilitator, and Student who acted as anti-bullying agents in the Roots program at SMA Negeri 19 Medan. The principal, teacher facilitator, and head of the anti-bullying change agent have different roles in the context of implementing the program, so their understanding is very much needed to express diverse views.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

### **3.1. Implementation of the Roots Program at SMA Negeri 19 Medan**

The Roots Program at SMA Negeri 19 Medan has been implemented as an anti-bullying intervention strategy, leveraging peer influence to foster a safer and more inclusive school environment. Based on interviews with the principal, teacher facilitator, and student anti-bullying agent, the findings indicate that the program has made significant progress in raising awareness and altering student behavior. The principal emphasized that since the implementation of the program, there has been a noticeable reduction in reported bullying incidents. The Roots Program has been

integrated into school activities through periodic workshops, peer discussions, and social campaigns facilitated by student opinion leaders.

The teacher facilitator highlighted that the most effective component of the program is the involvement of students who serve as anti-bullying agents. These students are strategically selected based on their influence within peer groups, allowing them to effectively spread anti-bullying messages and encourage behavioral change. The peer-led approach aligns with the Two-Step Flow Communication Theory, reinforcing the idea that information is more persuasive when conveyed by trusted peers rather than direct institutional authority.

*“Overall, the Roots program has been going quite well in our school. The program has succeeded in raising students' awareness of the dangers of bullying and how to deal with it. However, the biggest challenge is ensuring that all students are actively involved in the activities held. Not all students feel comfortable discussing bullying issues openly, so there are some obstacles in its implementation. Even so, the program has had a positive impact, especially in reducing cases of direct bullying in the school environment.”*

This interview excerpt provides an overview of the effectiveness of the Roots Program in addressing bullying issues in schools. Overall, the program is considered to be going well, particularly in increasing students' awareness of the dangers of bullying and how to handle it. This indicates that the Roots Program has successfully fulfilled its role as an educational platform that strengthens students' understanding of bullying, both in terms of prevention and response.

The main challenge in implementing this program is ensuring active participation from all students. Some students still feel uncomfortable discussing bullying issues openly, which creates obstacles in carrying out program activities (Nengsi, 2024). This reluctance could be due to several factors, such as fear of social consequences, a lack of trust in the school environment, or a strong culture of silence among students. The program has had a positive impact, particularly in reducing direct bullying cases within the school environment. This shows that even though there are difficulties in engaging all students, the program has successfully influenced students' social behavior and helped create a safer environment for them.

To enhance the effectiveness of the Roots Program, it is necessary to implement more inclusive and adaptive strategies to encourage student participation. Approaches such as personalized engagement, interactive communication methods, or integration with extracurricular activities could help attract more students to take part actively (Sikumbang et al., 2024; Indainanto et al., 2023). Additionally, support from teachers, school staff, and parents plays a crucial role in fostering an environment that encourages students to speak openly about bullying. Despite these positive developments, challenges remain in ensuring consistent participation and engagement among students (Humaizi et al., 2024; Ritonga et al., 2025). Some students are hesitant to report bullying due to fear of retaliation or social stigma. However, the principal noted that the program's emphasis on confidentiality and peer support has gradually helped overcome these barriers.

### **3.2. Role of Opinion Leaders in Anti-Bullying Advocacy**

Opinion leaders in the Roots Program play a critical role in shaping student perceptions and behaviors regarding bullying. The anti-bullying agents interviewed provided insights into their experiences in advocating for positive social norms within their school environment. They reported utilizing several strategies, including peer-to-peer discussions, conflict mediation, and active monitoring of school spaces where bullying incidents are more likely to occur.

The teacher facilitator explained that the selection process for opinion leaders is based on social network mapping, ensuring that the chosen students hold significant influence among their

peers. This method aligns with previous studies (Valente & Pumpuang, 2007) suggesting that leveraging social influence can accelerate behavior change. In practice, these opinion leaders serve as role models, demonstrating inclusive behaviors and encouraging other students to challenge bullying behavior.

*"Anti-bullying agents act as role models for other students. They not only provide education, but also become listeners for friends who experience or witness bullying. These agents are also quite active in holding discussions and socialization, both in class and through school social media. The obstacle they face is that there are still some students who are reluctant to report bullying cases because they are afraid of getting retaliation from the perpetrators. However, with the support of teachers and the school, they continue to carry out their roles well."*

This interview excerpt highlights the important role of anti-bullying agents in fostering a supportive and safe school environment. These agents not only serve as role models for their peers but also take on multiple responsibilities, including educating students about bullying, providing emotional support, and being active listeners for those who experience or witness bullying. Their presence helps create an atmosphere where students feel more comfortable discussing their concerns, which is a crucial step in bullying prevention and intervention.

The excerpt emphasizes the proactive efforts of these agents in spreading awareness through classroom discussions and social media outreach. This approach is effective in ensuring that anti-bullying messages reach a wider audience, engaging students both inside and outside of formal learning settings. Utilizing social media as a platform for advocacy demonstrates an adaptive strategy that aligns with the habits of modern students, making the campaign more relatable and impactful.

The excerpt also identifies a key challenge—the reluctance of some students to report bullying cases due to fear of retaliation from perpetrators. This fear can hinder the effectiveness of anti-bullying initiatives, as cases may go unreported, leaving victims without necessary support. This issue highlights the need for stronger protective measures to ensure that students feel safe when speaking up about bullying incidents.

The support from teachers and the school plays a vital role in maintaining the effectiveness of anti-bullying agents (Bowes et al., 2019). This institutional backing provides these agents with the necessary authority and encouragement to continue their work, even in the face of obstacles. Strengthening collaboration between students, educators, and administrators can further enhance the impact of these initiatives. However, the effectiveness of these opinion leaders is contingent on factors such as their credibility, communication skills, and ability to engage with diverse student groups. Some students perceive anti-bullying agents as authoritative figures rather than peers, which can create resistance to their messages. To address this, the Roots Program has integrated training sessions to enhance the agents' interpersonal skills and equip them with strategies to foster peer trust.

The Roots Program also contributed to a gradual shift in school culture at SMA Negeri 19 Medan. The interviews revealed that students are becoming more aware of the harmful effects of bullying, and there is a growing willingness to support peers who are victims. The student anti-bullying agent noted that informal peer interventions—such as addressing inappropriate jokes, discouraging exclusionary behavior, and promoting respectful communication—have been instrumental in changing attitudes towards bullying. Students are more likely to adopt anti-bullying behaviors when they see influential peers actively promoting these values. Additionally, the research suggests that the program's success is reinforced by institutional support, such as teacher facilitation, school-wide campaigns, and collaboration with external organizations like UNICEF.

However, challenges persist in ensuring the sustainability of these behavioral changes. Some students remain passive bystanders in bullying situations, indicating the need for further engagement strategies. Moreover, the perception of anti-bullying agents varies among students; while some view them as allies, others perceive them as enforcing school rules rather than promoting a collective movement.

### **3.3. Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Roots Program Through the Two-Step Flow Communication Theory**

The empirical evidence from this study supports the theoretical premise that opinion leaders significantly influence bullying prevention efforts. The Two-Step Flow Communication Theory posits that messages are internalized more effectively when mediated by trusted peers rather than through direct institutional messaging (Rambe et al., 2023). This principle is reflected in the findings, as students are more receptive to anti-bullying messages when communicated by fellow students rather than by teachers or administrators.

*"In the student environment, anti-bullying agents emphasize more on persuasive approaches and group discussions. They often hold seminars and campaigns on social media to raise awareness about the impacts of bullying, both physical and verbal. The difference with schools is that students are more independent and critical in responding to this issue. The biggest challenge is to eliminate the stigma that reporting bullying is a weak act. Therefore, these agents emphasize the concept of solidarity and empathy in building a safer and more inclusive campus environment."*

The results also suggest that the credibility and relatability of opinion leaders play a crucial role in the program's success. When anti-bullying agents are perceived as genuine and approachable, students are more likely to engage with their messages and participate in intervention efforts. Additionally, the presence of structured peer-led discussions and advocacy campaigns enhances the overall impact of the program.

Nevertheless, certain limitations must be addressed. The consistency of message dissemination among opinion leaders varies, and their ability to maintain peer engagement over time remains a challenge. To strengthen the program, there needs to be ongoing training and mentorship for student opinion leaders, ensuring that their influence remains impactful and that they have the necessary skills to mediate bullying-related conflicts effectively.

*"Most students consider anti-bullying agents to be quite effective in creating a more comfortable school environment. They are considered a safe place to talk if they experience problems related to bullying. However, there are also some students who feel that this program is still lacking in terms of enforcing sanctions against bullies. They hope that there will be stricter actions so that a deterrent effect can be felt. Overall, the existence of anti-bullying agents is very helpful, but still needs some improvements, especially in the approach to students who are reluctant to open up."*

This interview excerpt shows students' evaluations of the effectiveness of anti-bullying agents in their school environment. In general, this program is considered useful in creating a more comfortable and safe school environment. Students appreciate the role of anti-bullying agents as a safe place to talk and seek help when facing bullying problems. This shows that the existence of these agents has succeeded in building trust among students who experience or witness bullying.

There are some critical notes conveyed by some students regarding the implementation of this program, especially in terms of enforcing sanctions against bullies. Some students felt that the existing policies were not firm enough, so they did not provide enough deterrent effect for bullies

(Demir & Kucuk, 2022; Tseng et al., 2014). This shows that although anti-bullying agents have provided emotional and psychological support to victims, the aspect of enforcing the rules against perpetrators still needs to be improved so that the objectives of this program are more optimal.

This quote also reveals challenges in approaching students who are reluctant to open up about their experiences related to bullying. This can be caused by various factors, such as fear of revenge, lack of trust in the existing system, or minimal understanding of the role of anti-bullying agents. Therefore, a more inclusive and empathetic strategy is needed in approaching students who are still hesitant to speak up, such as a more personal counseling-based approach or through educational programs that can increase students' awareness and courage to report bullying.

#### 4. Conclusion

The Roots Program at SMA Negeri 19 Medan demonstrates the potential of leveraging peer influence as an effective strategy for bullying prevention. The findings confirm that student opinion leaders play a critical role in disseminating anti-bullying messages and fostering a culture of peer accountability. By applying the Two-Step Flow Communication Theory, this research highlights the importance of using trusted peers as agents of social change, rather than relying solely on institutional authority. However, the study also identifies areas for improvement, particularly in addressing the challenges of message consistency, student participation, and the perception of anti-bullying agents. Future interventions should focus on strengthening the training and support provided to opinion leaders while exploring additional engagement strategies to encourage wider student involvement. Ultimately, this study contributes to the broader discourse on bullying prevention by providing empirical evidence on the mechanisms of peer-driven interventions. The results emphasize the need for continued collaboration between schools, students, and external stakeholders to sustain and enhance the impact of the Roots Program.

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