

# The Role of Personality Traits in Predicting School Bullying among Adolescents

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**Abstract.** Bullying, a recurring aggressive behavior, is a prevalent phenomenon in schools. This study investigates the correlation between bullying behavior—both victimization and perpetration—and personality traits. Online surveys were administered to middle and high school students in West Java, Indonesia, using adapted Indonesian versions of the Forms of Bullying Scales (FBS) and the Five-Factor Personality Inventory (FFPI). A total of 792 respondents, including 244 boys and 548 girls aged 11 to 19, participated in the study. The research results indicate that not all personality traits predict bullying victimization and perpetration. Agreeableness predicts both bullying victimization and perpetration, while Emotional Stability significantly predicts bullying victimization, and Autonomy has a significant prediction on bullying perpetration. These findings provide valuable insights into the specific personality traits that contribute to bullying behaviors in adolescence, highlighting the need for targeted interventions, such as social-emotional learning programs and peer support initiatives, to effectively prevent and address bullying in schools.

**Keywords:** Adolescent, bullying, school bullying, five-factor model of personality

## 1 Introduction

Bullying is a common phenomenon, especially in the school environment. There is a hierarchy of power where some children feel they have a higher level of power compared to others, leading them to misuse that power in various ways [1]. In cases they use it intentionally in the form of negative and repeated action, the action is considered bullying [2]. Being bullied is linked to poorer mental health, including increased anxiety, depression, and decreased life satisfaction as shown by Guo, Tan and Zhu [3], Varela et al [4], Miranda, Oriol, Amutio, & Ortúzar [5], and Espelage, Hong, & Mebane [6]. While study by Jones et al [7], Turcotte Benedict, Vivier, & Gjelsvik [8] and Da Silva et al [9] linked being a bully perpetrator with diagnosis of mental health disorder such as depression, anxiety, ADHD and with having suicidal thoughts. According to a UNESCO report [10] globally, one in three children experiences bullying in the school environment. Global School-based Student Health Survey (GSHS) conducted in Indonesia in 2015 recorded that 19.9% of middle school students experienced bullying [11]. Bullying cases in schools have increased nationally over time. The Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) reported that they received 37,381 reports of child-on-child violence from 2011 to 2019 [12]. While UNICEF data from 2014 showed that bullying ranked fourth among

the types of violence occurring in Indonesia [13]. The 2018 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey reported that Indonesia ranked 5th out of 79 countries, with a score of 41%, indicating that students experienced bullying at least a few times a month [14].

Bullying behavior and tendency is not only influenced by external factors, such as school environment and peer dynamics, but also by internal factors, including personality traits. Personality traits represent individuals' distinctive patterns of thoughts, emotions and behaviors [15]. The most commonly utilized framework for understanding these traits is known as the Five-Factor Model introduced by Costa and McCrae. The Five-factor Model of personality conception claimed that personality traits can be factorized into five broad dimensions, namely Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness [16]. Another well-known personality trait theory is Goldberg's Big-Five Factor consisting of Surgency, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Intellect [17].

Several studies have explored the relationship between personality traits and bullying in schools. Study by Volk et al [18] found that lower levels of Honesty-Humility and lower Conscientiousness were linked to higher instances of bullying in Canadian and Chinese adolescents. Study by Zhang et al [19] revealed that neuroticism increased the likelihood of being bullied among adolescents at two high schools in Chongqing and Shandong, while extraversion and agreeableness were associated with lower chances of both bullying and victimization. Study by Pabón-Carrasco et al [20] involving sample of 93 students aged 14 to 16, recruited from three different centers in the province of Seville, Spain showed that bullies, typically males, had high scores in neuroticism and antisocial behavior, often engaging in social dissimulation, whereas victims, more likely to be female, scored lower on antisocial behavior. Study by Kodžopeljić et al [21] involving 397 high school students from Serbia found that distinct personality profiles were linked to specific bullying roles. Bullies were characterized by high aggressiveness and manipulative tendencies, while victims displayed high neuroticism and introversion.

Previous studies explored the relationship between personality and bullying using models like HEXACO, the Big Five Plus Two and moderated mediation models, alongside tools such as the EPQ-J, BFI and Bull-S tests. In contrast, this study employs the Indonesian-adapted versions of the Forms of Bullying Scale (FBS) and the Five-Factor Personality Inventory (FFPI) to provide a distinct analysis of personality traits in relation to bullying behavior. The Forms of Bullying Scale (FBS) reliably measures various forms of bullying—verbal, relational, social, physical, and threatening—through separate victimization and perpetration scales. With high internal consistency and strong validity correlations to mental health and social outcomes, the FBS is concise enough for broader surveys and adaptable to gender differences, making it an effective tool for assessing adolescent bullying behaviors [22]. FFPI was selected because it is easy to understand and takes only 10-15 minutes to complete, besides a good reliability and validity score for measuring Big Five personality traits [23], [24]. This study will contribute to the existing literature by comparing its findings with studies conducted using different scales, enriching the global discourse on bullying and personality. Ultimately, the research has the potential to enhance practical applications that foster a safer and more supportive school environment.

## 2 Methods

Data for bullying behavior (victimization and perpetration) and personality traits were collected using the FBS (Forms of Bullying Scale) and Five-Factor Personality Inventory (FFPI) respectively. The FBS (Forms of Bullying Scale) is a scale developed by Shaw to measure bullying victimization and perpetration behavior in adolescents. It consists of ten self-rating items each for FBS-V (Forms of Bullying-Victimization) and FBS-P (Forms of Bullying-Perpetration) which measure bullying behavior [22]. Respondents were asked to rate on a Likert-scale to indicate the frequency of bullying behavior received or done in the past semester (*tidak pernah*/this did not happen to me/I did not do this, *sekali atau dua kali*/once or twice, *kadang-kadang*/every few weeks, *sekali seminggu*/about once a week, *beberapa kali dalam satu minggu*/several times a week or more).

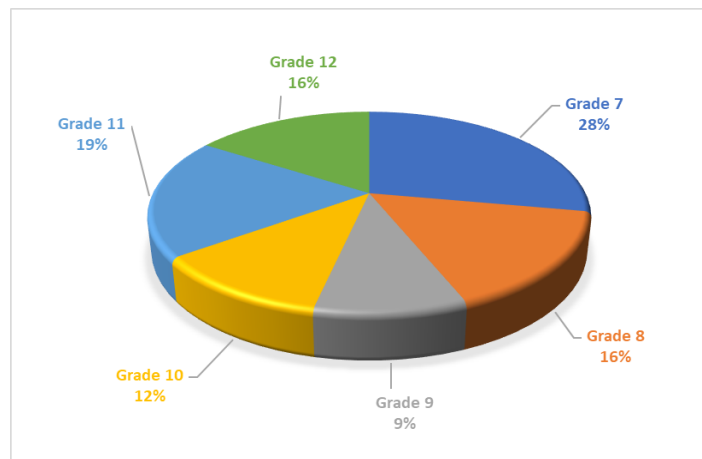
The Five-Factor Personality Inventory (FFPI) is a questionnaire developed by Hendriks, Hofstee and De Raad to measure the Big Five personality traits: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Autonomy [25]. In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to do self-rating about their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement on a Likert scale (*tidak sesuai*/inaccurate, *kurang sesuai*/moderately inaccurate, *netral*/neither accurate nor inaccurate, *cukup sesuai*/moderately accurate, and *sangat sesuai*/very accurate). For this research, both the FBS and FFPI questionnaires were adapted from their English version into Bahasa Indonesia through translation and expert validation.

The questionnaires were made into Google Form format and distributed to middle and high school students in Jawa Barat province. A total of 792 responses were collected, with 424 respondents being from middle school students and 368 from high school students. Respondents were 244 boys and 548 girls ranging from 11 to 19 years old ( $M = 14.65$ ,  $SD = 1.87$ ), from 18 cities in Jawa Barat. Data was then analyzed using SPSS to understand the relation between bullying behavior (victimization and perpetration) with the five personality factors.

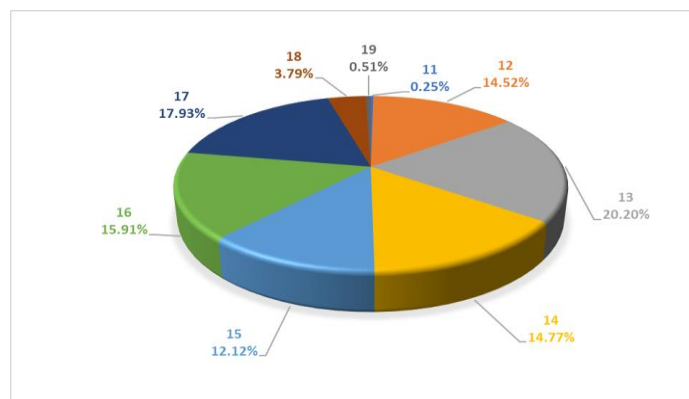
**Table 1** Respondents' Demographic

Category		n	n (%)
Gender	Boys	244	30.81
	Girls	548	69.19
Level	Middle school	424	53.54
	High school	368	46.46
Grade	7	221	27.90
	8	127	16.04
	9	75	9.47
	10	91	11.49
	11	153	19.32
	12	125	15.78
Age	11	2	0.25
	12	115	14.52

Category	n	n (%)
13	160	20.20
14	117	14.77
15	96	12.12
16	126	15.91
17	142	17.93
18	30	3.79
19	4	0.51



**Fig. 1** Respondents' Profile by Grade



**Fig. 2** Respondents' Profile by Age

### 3 Results and Discussion

Our study performed descriptive statistics and correlation analysis on the Five-Factor Personality Inventory (FFPI) and the Forms of Bullying Scale (FBS) for both the Forms of Bullying-Victimization (FBS-V) and the Forms of Bullying-Perpetration (FBS-P). We found that not all personality traits significantly predict bullying victimization and perpetration. Agreeableness predicts both bullying victimization and perpetration, while Emotional Stability significantly predicts bullying victimization, and Autonomy has a significant prediction on bullying perpetration.

This finding is intriguing due to its positive correlation, suggesting that as Agreeableness increases, so does the likelihood of someone becoming both a bully and a victim of bullying. Higher Emotional Stability is also associated with an increased likelihood of becoming a bullying victim, while higher Autonomy is linked to an increased likelihood of someone becoming a bully. The specific results are shown in **Table 4** and **Table 7**.

**Table 2** Regression Statistics for Bullying Victimization

R	R square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.333	.111	.105	8.27184

Dependent variable: Bullying victimization, Predictors: Autonomy, Extraversion, Emotional Stability, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness

**Table 3** ANOVA for Bullying Victimization

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	6691.891	5	1338.378	19.560	.000
Residual	53780.734	786	68.423		
Total	60472.625	791			

Dependent variable: Bullying victimization, Predictors: Autonomy, Extraversion, Emotional Stability, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness

**Table 4** Correlation for Bullying Victimization

Variable	Unstandardized $\beta$	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized $\beta$	t	Sig.
Dependent variable: Bullying victimization					
Independent variables:					
Extraversion	.121	.079	.053	1.536	.125

Variable	Unstandardized $\beta$	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized $\beta$	t	Sig.
Agreeableness	.427	.095	.165	4.492	<b>.000</b>
Conscientiousness	.051	.092	.021	.551	.582
Emotional Stability	.504	.073	.249	6.913	<b>.000</b>
Autonomy	-.186	.095	-.069	-1.957	.051

$n = 792$

The significance level (Sig.) of the regression model is 0.000, which is less than 0.05, allowing us to conclude that the regression model as a whole is significant. This means that at least one independent variable in the model significantly affects bullying victimization (FBS-V). Among these variables, Agreeableness (Sig. = 0.000) and Emotional Stability (Sig. = 0.000) show a significant influence on bullying victimization, indicating that these two variables significantly impact the likelihood of a person becoming a victim of bullying. In contrast, Extraversion (Sig. = 0.125), Conscientiousness (Sig. = 0.582), and Autonomy (Sig. = 0.051) do not show significance ( $p > 0.05$ ), although autonomy approaches the significance threshold with  $p = 0.051$ , leading us to accept the null hypothesis for these three variables. This suggests that the effects of these three variables on bullying victimization are either weak or statistically insignificant.

**Table 5** Regression Statistics for Bullying Perpetration

R	R square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.371	.137	.132	4.02536

Dependent variable: Bullying perpetration, Predictors: (Constant), Autonomy, Extraversion, Emotional Stability, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness

**Table 6** ANOVA for Bullying Perpetration

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	2026.732	5	405.346	25.016	.000
Residual	12735.984	786	16.204		
Total	14762.716	791			

Dependent variable: Bullying perpetration, Predictors: Autonomy, Extraversion, Emotional Stability, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness

**Table 7** Correlation for Bullying Perpetration

Variable	Unstandardized $\beta$	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized $\beta$	t	Sig.
Dependent variable: Bullying perpetration					
Independent variables:					
Extraversion	.053	.038	.047	1.373	.170

Variable	Unstandardized $\beta$	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized $\beta$	t	Sig.
Agreeableness	.390	.046	.305	8.416	.000
Conscientiousness	.079	.045	.066	1.760	.079
Emotional Stability	-.003	.035	-.003	-.081	.936
Autonomy	.097	.046	.072	2.098	.036

$n = 792$

The F-value for the regression model is 25.016, with a  $p$ -value (Sig.) of 0.000, indicating that the overall regression model—which includes predictors such as Autonomy, Extraversion, Emotional Stability, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness—significantly affects bullying perpetration (FBS-P). Among these predictors, Agreeableness shows a significance value of 0.000, leading us to reject the null hypothesis, which means this variable significantly influences bullying perpetration; higher levels of Agreeableness are associated with a lower tendency to engage in bullying behaviors, as reflected by the negative coefficient. Additionally, autonomy is significant, with a significance value of 0.036, also resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis, indicating that this variable significantly affects bullying perpetration. In contrast, Extraversion (Sig. = 0.170), Conscientiousness (Sig. = 0.078), and Emotional Stability (Sig. = 0.936) do not demonstrate a significant effect on bullying perpetration ( $p > 0.05$ ), leading us to accept the null hypothesis for these variables.

Olweus in Moore et al [26] defines bullying victimization as repeated exposure to harmful actions over a period, involving one or more individuals and characterized by an imbalance of power between the aggressor(s) and the victim. Chen & Wei in [27] describe bullying perpetration as aggressive or violent actions directed at an individual. Hendriks [24] defined the personality traits on the construct of FFPI. Extroversion is characterized by traits like sociability, assertiveness and enthusiasm, indicating a person's inclination towards social engagement and a lively approach to activities. Agreeableness is a personality trait that reflects how individuals interact with others, where people high in Agreeableness tend to be gentle, considerate, and tolerant towards others. Conscientiousness is outlined as involving traits such as diligence, dependability and organization, highlighting a tendency to be disciplined, responsible and systematic in completing tasks. Emotional Stability reflects how well a person handles stress and negative emotions, where people high in Emotional Stability tend to be calm, focused, and emotionally balanced, even in difficult situations. Autonomy traits relate to independence and self-direction; people high in autonomy are likely to be self-reliant and independent.

Related to Agreeableness, Buss [28] states that high agreeableness can foster strong social bonds and valued partnerships, it can also make individuals more susceptible to being taken advantage of. In line with this statement, this study found that the higher a person's agreeableness, the more likely they are to become both a victim and a perpetrator. This seems counterintuitive, but people high in agreeableness, known for being cooperative and conflict-averse, may become victims because they avoid confrontation, making them easy targets for bullying. However, in certain group dynamics, they might also become perpetrators, engaging in subtle forms of bullying or assisting to maintain social harmony or avoid exclusion. This dual vulnerability highlights how social pressures can influence agreeable individuals in complex ways. The findings in this study contradict those of [29] which included 910 adolescents aged 12 to 19 years old in Spain and indicated that higher levels of Agreeableness were associated with a

decreased likelihood of involvement in aggression, either as a victim or a perpetrator because they tend to be cooperative empathetic, well-organized and responsible which may help to prevent both victimization and perpetration. Studies with 1,631 middle and high school students by Zhang et al [19] and 432 adolescents aged 12 to 18 years by Jegede et al [30] found that bullying behavior, both as a perpetrator and a victim, is closely associated with low levels of Agreeableness.

On Emotional Stability traits, the data found that the higher a person's emotional stability, the more likely they are to become a bullying victim. There are some possible explanations for this finding, one of them is because their calm and non-reactive nature even in a stressful situation [31], [32] makes them easy targets for bullies. This is because bullies thrive on power and control, and they are drawn to individuals who they believe they can easily dominate or manipulate. Second possible explanation may be that because bullying is a show of social dominance [33], [18] the composed demeanor of the victim might invite aggressive behavior from bullies to exercise dominance. A composed and non-reactive demeanor can be perceived as a challenge to the bully's authority or a lack of respect for their dominance. In response, the bully may resort to aggressive behavior to assert their power and control over the situation. While research on the link between emotional stability and bullying is limited, we can look at emotional stability as the opposite of neuroticism [34], [31], [32]. Past studies about neuroticism and bullying victimization found positive correlation between the two, which is contradictory with the result of this study. In the above-mentioned [29] study of 910 adolescents in Spain, it is found that bullying victims tend to score high in neuroticism facets such as anxiety and depression. A similar pattern emerged in a study of 2,883 seventh-graders (average age 15.4 years old,  $SD = 0.54$ ) in Kentucky, USA: higher levels of neuroticism were associated with increased likelihood of victimization [35]. Study of 604 middle school students aged between 12 and 15 ( $M = 13.3$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ) in Spain by Machimbarrena et al [36] also stated that neuroticism is identified as a significant predictor of bullying victimization. Finally, a comprehensive meta-analysis by Mitsopoulou & Giovazolias [37] studied a relationship between high neuroticism and bullying victimization and found a positive association between the two, suggesting that children who exhibit extensive angry emotions or anxiety are more likely to be bullied.

This study found that the higher a person's autonomy, the greater the likelihood that they will engage in bullying perpetration. In contrast to this study, Beiranvand et al's study [38] involving 390 secondary high school students from Bahar City, Hamadan Province, Iran, found that although Autonomy is part of the Basic Psychological Needs scale, it did not demonstrate a significant connection with bullying behavior or personality traits such as perspective-taking. Consequently, autonomy was excluded from the final model and analysis. Study by Srivastava, Sehgal, & Singh [39] conducted with 40 children aged 8-11, revealed that Autonomy is a prominent need among school bullies. Results indicate that 90% of these bullies showed a strong drive for Autonomy, expressed not only as a wish for independence but also through behavior that frequently included rule-breaking and resistance to authority. This need for Autonomy was also associated with conflicts involving abasement (submitting or yielding under pressure) and punishment, highlighting the difficulties they face in balancing independence with adherence to rules in their surroundings. There are several sources that discuss Autonomy as a personality trait and explore its mechanisms within social and psychological contexts. Feist [40] outlines that Autonomy, in various aspects, is a characteristic closely linked with other social tendencies, such as introversion, a strong internal locus of control, intrinsic motivation, self-assurance (or



even arrogance), nonconformity, a preference for solitude and asocial or antisocial behaviors. These qualities are considered social because they each reflect a person's distinct and consistent ways of relating to others. Autonomy can be a stable personal trait, reflecting an individual's general feeling of alignment with their goal and actions. However, autonomy is also situational and may vary across specific domains (such as work, school or family) and specific task (like cooking or making decisions). Thus, while Autonomy can be stable on a personal level, it fluctuates depending on the context and moment. Autonomy is subjective and depends on 3 main elements: an internal perceived locus of causality (where one feels as the source of their actions), volition (feeling free and willing to engage) and perceived choice (having the flexibility to make decisions without pressure). When an individual's motivation is internally driven, they experience a higher sense of autonomy, as opposed to externally driven actions where one may feel obligated by external pressures or expectations [41]. When the need for Autonomy is fulfilled, people tend to feel more interested, engaged and happy [42]. Conversely, if this need is neglected or blocked, people often feel alienated, helpless and even sometimes become hostile or destructive [43]. Since people cannot be separated from the environment in which they live, an individual's well-being is strongly influenced by the extent to which the environment can provide opportunities to meet their need for Autonomy.

Based on those, we can understand that High Autonomy is associated with traits like a strong internal locus of control, self-assurance and nonconformity, which can foster a sense of entitlement or superiority, potentially leading to dominance over others. Additionally, while Autonomy can empower individuals, it may also result in a disregard for social norms and the feelings of others, especially when their own Autonomy feels threatened. This psychological distress from thwarted Autonomy can manifest as hostility or aggression and individuals with high Autonomy may also exhibit asocial or antisocial tendencies prioritizing their own needs over social connections. Thus, the relationship between Autonomy and bullying behavior is complex, reflecting both personal empowerment and potential social disregard.

This study also found that some personality traits do not significantly predict bullying victimization or perpetration: Extraversion and Conscientiousness. However, some prior studies do find correlation between the two personality traits with bullying behaviors. Extraversion has been primarily associated with bullying perpetration rather than victimization. Zhang et al [19] found that extraversion has a significantly negative predictive impact on the likelihood of being bullied. Mazzone & Camodeca's study [44] involving 102 early adolescents found a positive association between extraversion and bullying behavior. Extraverted adolescents might be more inclined to engage in bullying due to their tendency to seek social dominance. However, Mitsopoulou & Giovazolias [37] suggests that extraverted individuals could also experience victimization. This finding implies that highly extraverted children, although often assertive, may sometimes attract negative attention from peers, potentially leading to conflict or even victimization.

Conscientiousness was found in this study to have no significant effect on bullying perpetration and victimization. In contrast to this study, study by Volk et al [18] which included 440 Chinese and 350 Canadian adolescents, identified low levels of Conscientiousness as significant predictors of bullying perpetration. This implies that lower Conscientiousness, which includes traits like disorganization and impulsiveness, may increase the tendency to engage in bullying. Similarly, Mitsopoulou & Giovazolias [37] also reported that lower Conscientiousness levels were linked to both bullying and victimization. Additionally, Jegede et al [30] found that

bullying behavior is associated with lower levels of Conscientiousness and a tendency towards more exploitative personality traits. Furthermore, Mazzone & Camodeca [44] demonstrated that Conscientiousness is negatively associated with bullying and higher levels of Conscientiousness are positively linked to defending behavior.

The findings of this study offer school authorities with an understanding of bullying as a complex phenomenon involving various personality traits. It is essential to implement appropriate, effective and efficient counseling, prevention and intervention programs, with a particular focus on building resilience, promoting assertiveness and addressing the implications of autonomy-driven tendencies in bullies. For instance, resilience-based anti-bullying programs have been shown to prevent bullying behavior [45] while assertiveness training has been proven to effectively decrease bullying behaviors among secondary school students [46]. Additionally, the A-Judo Programme for the Reduction of Bullying and Improvement of Prosocial Behavior at School, grounded in Self-Determination Theory, demonstrated significant positive changes in participants' basic psychological needs, motivation, tolerance-respect, moral identity and bullying behavior, with moderate to high effect sizes [47].

This study involved a large sample of adolescents in West Java, Indonesia and provided interesting new findings that highlight the complexity of the school bullying phenomenon. Despite its strengths, the study has certain limitations, particularly the reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce bias as respondents often respond according to social norms rather than actual experiences. Additionally, the data is presented solely in ordinal scale format, which limits statistical analysis precision. To address this, we propose transforming the ordinal data into interval data using methods such as the Rasch model, allowing for more robust statistical analyses. Further research on school bullying among adolescents may include longitudinal studies to track changes in behaviors and personality traits over time, qualitative approaches to explore personal experiences of victims and perpetrators and investigations into cultural variations in bullying dynamics.

## **4 Conclusions**

In conclusion, the findings of this study demonstrate the nuanced role that personality traits play in school bullying behaviors among adolescents. Agreeableness was associated with both increased victimization and perpetration, indicating that social pressures can lead agreeable individuals to experience complex and conflicting roles in bullying dynamics. Similarly, higher levels of Emotional Stability were linked to greater likelihood of being victimized, while increased Autonomy predicted a higher tendency to engage in bullying behavior. These results highlight the importance of considering personal traits in designing interventions to reduce bullying. Specifically, the findings emphasize the need for targeted strategies that build resilience in emotionally stable students, promote assertiveness among agreeable individuals and address the implications of autonomy-driven tendencies in bullies. Overall, this research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on personality and bullying, offering valuable insights for educators, psychologists and policymakers in developing effective anti-bullying programs tailored to individual personality profiles.

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