



Silent Suffering: A Phenomenological Study of the Life Experiences of Students Victims of Culture-Based Bullying in a Multicultural Elementary School in Jambi City

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ABSTRACT

Culture-based bullying in the context of multicultural elementary schools is a phenomenon that involves psychosocial factors that not only influence students' social interactions but also shape their self-identity and emotional well-being. Most previous studies focus on prevalence and risk factors quantitatively, thereby not delving into victims' subjective experiences, especially regarding the phenomenon of silent suffering. This study aims to explore and interpret the meaning of experience. subjective elementary school students who are victims of culture-based bullying, as well as construct a conceptual understanding of silent suffering. The research uses an interpretive phenomenological approach, involving students in Jambi City who have direct experience as victims. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The results of the study show that bullying is interpreted as an experience of rejection of one's own identity, which brings up hidden emotional wounds in the form of sadness, fear, social alienation, and helplessness. Silence serves as a protective coping mechanism, but it also strengthens emotional isolation. This study concludes that silent suffering is the construction of the victim's main psychological experiences. The implication is that guidance and counseling services Needneed to develop an empathetic approach grounded in the subjective meaning of experiences to help restore students' psychological well-being.

INTRODUCTION

Bullying in elementary schools is a global problem that seriously impacts students' psychological, social, and academic development. Various studies have shown that bullying experiences are correlated with anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and impaired psychological well-being in children (Zhao et al., 2023). In the context of elementary education, bullying is not

only physical and verbal but also often related to social and cultural identity, particularly in multicultural schools. Culturally based bullying can reinforce experiences of social alienation and leave long-term psychological impacts on victims.

Nationally, bullying among school-aged children remains a significant educational and mental health issue. Many cases go unreported because victims choose to remain silent due to fear, stigma, and powerlessness. This situation demonstrates that bullying is not simply aggressive behavior, but a psychological experience that shapes the victim's sense of self. A phenomenon that often goes unnoticed is silent suffering, a condition where victims of bullying endure their suffering internally without expressing their emotional experiences. In elementary school-aged children, silence becomes a psychological defense mechanism against social threats, so victims' emotional suffering often goes undetected by teachers or guidance and counseling services.

Locally, bullying has also been found in Jambi City. Data from the Jambi Province Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Agency (DPPPA) recorded 52 cases of bullying against children in 2024, with the highest concentration in East Jambi. Furthermore, regional education reports indicate that bullying still occurs in elementary school student interactions, with perpetrators tending to be peers and incidents predominantly occurring in classrooms. These findings demonstrate that bullying is a relational phenomenon that occurs in students' daily social dynamics and emphasize the importance of understanding victims' subjective experiences within the context of local culture.

A frequently overlooked phenomenon is silent suffering, a condition where victims of bullying endure their suffering internally without expressing their emotional experiences. In elementary school-aged children, silence becomes a psychological coping mechanism against fear, social stigma, and helplessness. As a result, victims' emotional suffering often goes undetected by teachers or guidance and counseling services, resulting in ineffective interventions. This underscores the importance of understanding victims' subjective experiences from their own perspective.

Research shows that bullying in elementary schools significantly impacts students' social and emotional development and creates a sense of insecurity in the school environment (Kasheem et al., 2025). Multicultural bullying often manifests itself in the form of teasing about cultural identity, language, or physical characteristics, which reinforces the victim's experience of social alienation (Ferdiansyah et al., 2026). Multicultural education is known to play a role in reducing bullying behavior, yet most research continues to focus on behavioral prevention rather than on victims' subjective experiences (Ihda et al., 2025). From a phenomenological perspective, the experience of unspoken suffering is understood as a subjective construction of meaning that shapes an individual's self-awareness. The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach allows researchers to explore how individuals deeply interpret their life experiences, including traumatic experiences such as bullying. However, phenomenological research on silent *suffering* among elementary school students, especially in the context of local Indonesian culture, particularly in Jambi society, remains very limited.

This study aims to uncover and interpret the lived experiences of students who are victims of culture-based bullying in a multicultural elementary school in Jambi City through an interpretive phenomenological approach. Specifically, this study seeks to define the essence of silent suffering, understand the psychological dynamics of victims, and identify their emotional needs as a basis for developing an empathetic, contextually informed guidance and counseling approach.

Although numerous studies have been conducted on bullying in elementary schools, most research focuses on the incidence rate or number of cases, risk factors, and quantitative approaches, and has not yet deeply explored the subjective experience of victims in a multicultural context based on local culture. To date, there is limited research using an interpretive phenomenological approach to explore the meaning of bullying. *silent suffering among elementary*

school students in the Sumatra region, especially in Jambi City, thereby presenting conceptual and contextual novelty in the development of cultural sensitivity-based guidance and counseling services.

METHODS

Research Design

This study uses an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach to deeply understand the meaning of the lived experiences of students who are victims of culture-based bullying in a multicultural elementary school in Jambi City. The IPA approach was chosen because it allows for idiographic exploration of how individuals interpret their subjective experiences, particularly the experience of hidden psychological suffering. IPA is rooted in the phenomenological tradition that emphasizes understanding the meaning of individual life experiences through a process of reflective interpretation (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Philosophically, this approach is based on Edmund Husserl's phenomenological thinking, which emphasizes returning to conscious experience as directly experienced to understand the essence of human experience (Husserl, 1970).

From a psychological phenomenological perspective, this study also draws on Moustakas's (1994) view, which emphasizes that phenomenology aims to uncover the essential meaning of human experience through in-depth reflection, phenomenological reduction, and the description of participants' subjective experiences. Accordingly, this study focuses on reconstructing the meaning of experience, rather than on measuring variables, thus emphasizing a contextual, reflective, and interpretive understanding of the phenomena studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The research participants were elementary school students from three schools in Jambi City who had direct experience as victims of culture-based bullying. The participants were selected using purposive sampling with the following criteria: (1) elementary school students in grades I–VI, (2) having experienced bullying based on cultural, language, or social identity differences, (3) willing to share their experiences voluntarily with the consent of their parents/guardians, and (4) able to express their experiences verbally. Number of participants

Following the idiographic principle in science, namely focusing on the depth of understanding of individual experiences, not statistical representation, with a total of six participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Research data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews designed to explore the lived experiences (life experiences), emotional meanings, and psychological responses of informants to culturally based bullying experiences. The semi-structured format was chosen to provide flexibility in data collection, enabling researchers to explore each participant's subjective dynamics and personal context comprehensively. The interview guide was developed based on the research focus and the principles of an interpretive phenomenological approach. It included open-ended questions that allowed participants to reflect on and articulate their experiences in depth. The interview guideline outlines the following:

Table 1. Interview guidelines

No	Aspect	Main Question	Purpose
1	Lived Experience	Can you describe an experience when you received unpleasant treatment related to your culture or ethnic background at school?	To explore the context and forms of culture-based bullying experiences
2	Personal Meaning	What does that experience mean to you personally?	To understand the victim's subjective meaning-making
3	Emotional Response	What did you feel during and after the incident?	To identify the emotional dynamics experienced by the participant
4	Psychological Response / Coping	What do you usually do when that happens? Why?	To explore coping mechanisms, including the tendency toward

			silence (<i>silent suffering</i>)
5	Social and Identity Impact	Did that experience affect your relationships with friends, teachers, or the way you see yourself?	To identify the impact on social relationships and self-identity
6	Support and Needs	Have you ever shared this experience with someone else? What kind of support do you need?	To explore the availability of social support and the psychological needs of the victim
7	Reflective Meaning	How do you understand that experience now?	To generate a reflective synthesis of the meaning of the experience

Interviews were conducted individually, recorded with the participants' permission, and transcribed verbatim to preserve the meaning of the participants' experiences. Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexible exploration of subjective experiences while maintaining the research's focus (Smith & Osborn, 2015). To enhance the depth and reflexivity of the data, the researchers also used reflective notes (*a reflective journal*) during the research process, which served to document the process of interpretation, researcher assumptions, and the dynamics of research interactions (Finlay, 2008).

Procedure

This interpretive phenomenological research (IPA) procedure was carried out in stages to ensure the depth, accuracy, and integrity of the research process in revealing the meaning of experience. *The silent suffering* of students who are victims of culture-based bullying. The following is the Phenomenological Research Procedure in table form:

Table 2. Research procedures

Research Stage	Main Activities	Procedure Description	Expected Output	Estimated Time
1. Research Preparation	Preliminary study and planning	Literature review on phenomenology, culture-based bullying, and silent suffering; development of interview guidelines; initial reflection (bracketing)	Conceptual framework and interview protocol	May 2025
	Permission and ethics	Obtaining research permission from the school; parental/guardian approval (informed consent); selection of participants using purposive sampling	Research permit and list of participants	May 2025
2. Data Collection	In-depth interviews	Conducting individual semi-structured interviews in an empathetic and non-judgmental manner; focusing on participants' lived experiences as victims	Narrative data of participants' lived experiences	June – July 2025
	Data documentation	Audio recording of interviews, verbatim transcription, and writing researcher's reflexive journal	Interview transcripts and reflective notes	June – July 2025
3. IPA Data Analysis	Idiographic analysis	Reading and re-reading transcripts, initial noting, and development of emergent themes	Preliminary themes of participants' experiences	August – September 2025
	Cross-case synthesis	Clustering themes, identifying relationships among themes, and synthesizing across participants	Thematic structure and essence of the silent suffering phenomenon	August – September 2025
4. Validation and Trustworthiness	Credibility checking	Member checking, triangulation, audit trail, and researcher reflexivity	Ensured validity and trustworthiness of data	October – November 2025
5. Report Writing	Writing research	Developing textual and structural	Complete	December

findings	descriptions, formulating the essence of the phenomenon, and presenting theoretical and practical implications	phenomenological research manuscript	2025
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Trustworthiness

The quality and validity of research are maintained through criteria of trustworthiness, which cover *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). *Credibility* done through triangulation of sources and *member checking* to ensure the interpretation matches the participant's experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). *Transferability* is achieved through detailed contextual descriptions, whereas *dependability* is maintained through *an audit-trail* research process. *Confirmability* is achieved through researcher reflexivity and analytical documentation, ensuring that the findings are grounded in empirical data (Nowell et al., 2017; Ferdiansyah, 2026).

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study followed the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) framework, which focuses on a deep understanding of participants' subjective experiences. The analysis process began with reading and rereading, repeatedly reading interview transcripts to gain a holistic understanding of participants' lived experiences. The next stage was initial noting, an exploratory note-taking process encompassing descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual aspects to capture the nuances of meaning expressed by participants. Next, emergent themes were developed by identifying key themes of meaning that represent how participants interpret the experience of silent suffering.

In the "searching for connections across themes" stage, themes were analyzed interpretively to construct a coherent structure of experience. The analysis then moved to the next case, using an idiographic approach: analyzing each participant in depth before making limited generalizations. The final stage, "looking for patterns across cases," aimed to synthesize patterns of meaning across participants to formulate the essence of silent suffering. The entire process was conducted reflectively and hermeneutically to uncover the relationship between personal experiences, social contexts, and participants' psychological constructions of meaning. This approach aligns with the principles of natural science (IPA), which emphasizes in-depth, idiographic, and interpretive exploration of individual life experiences to understand how individuals give meaning to their psychological experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2021).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

Data analysis using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) yielded in-depth insights into the lived experiences of students who were victims of culture-based bullying in a multicultural elementary school in Jambi City. The idiographic analysis and cross-case synthesis process revealed four essential themes that shaped the construction of these experiences: silent *suffering*.

Theme 1: Hidden Emotional Wounds

Participants interpreted the bullying experience as a profound emotional suffering that was not always visible to the social environment. The experience was interpreted not simply as a painful interpersonal event, but as a psychological experience that disrupted their sense of security, self-esteem, and sense of meaning. Emotions of sadness, fear, shame, and anxiety emerged repeatedly and formed a persistent inner experience.

Phenomenologically, emotional suffering is not always expressed verbally or through overt behavior, but experienced as an internalized, subjective experience. Psychological wounds present

as "invisible but felt" experiences, influencing how participants interpret themselves and their social environment. One participant expressed:

"...I was often teased because my way of speaking was different... I was sad but didn't dare tell anyone..." (P1)

In line with that, another participant said:

"...when I'm in class I feel scared... scared they'll tease me again, so I keep quiet most of the time..." (P3)

This statement indicates the presence of suppressed and unexpressed emotional experiences, and that this silent response is not merely a situational reaction but rather a psychological strategy to protect oneself from repeated emotional threats. Thus, phenomenologically, the experience of bullying is interpreted as a hidden emotional wound that is not always visible externally but exists as a persistent inner experience, affecting the participants' sense of security, self-confidence, and social relationships.

Theme 2: Silence as a Survival Mechanism (*Silent Coping*)

Participants demonstrated a tendency to choose silence when experiencing bullying. Silence is interpreted as a self-protection strategy aimed at avoiding open conflict, social punishment, and escalation of negative treatment from the perpetrator. At the subjective level, silence is not merely a sign of helplessness but a consciously chosen coping strategy to minimize perceived emotional and social threats. However, interpretively, silence also has complex psychological consequences, namely, reinforcing emotional isolation and prolonging the experience of inner suffering.

From the perspective of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), silence represents the process of meaning-making, namely, how participants interpret the experience of suffering as something that must be endured personally without involving social support. This phenomenon shows how victims gradually construct a self-position as individuals who must "be strong alone," even while simultaneously experiencing unexpressed emotional stress. This condition contributes to the formation of experienced silent *suffering* as a dominant psychological reality in the participants' lives. One participant said:

"...I just kept quiet so I wouldn't be ridiculed more... if I resisted, they would get angrier..." (P2)

Another participant said:

"...I didn't tell the teacher because I was afraid of being called weak... so I kept it to myself..." (P5)

These two participants' statements indicate that silence is perceived as a preventative strategy to avoid escalating negative treatment and reflects a fear of social stigma and anxiety about negative judgment from the environment. Phenomenologically, silence not only functions as a coping mechanism but also reinforces emotional isolation and hinders the psychological recovery process. Thus, the experience of silence represents a psychological paradox: on the one hand, it protects the victim from external threats, but on the other, it deepens internal suffering and prolongs the emotional wounds experienced by victims of bullying.

Theme 3: Rejection of Culturally Based Self-Identity

Participants interpreted culturally based bullying as an experience of rejection of inherent self-identity, such as language, accent, social background, and cultural characteristics. This experience is not only perceived as social ridicule but also as a form of delegitimization of one's existence. Participants feel different, disowned, and marginalized from the more dominant social group. Phenomenologically, this experience demonstrates that bullying goes beyond interpersonal aggression and enters an existential realm that touches on self-concept and a sense of belonging.

Within the framework of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), cultural identity rejection represents a subjective process whereby individuals define themselves as "other." This process gives rise to experiences of social alienation, where participants not only experience external rejection but also begin to question their own values and acceptance. This condition gradually contributes to the formation of experiences. *silent suffering*, namely, psychological suffering experienced internally without open expression. One participant stated:

"...They said I was a villager because my accent was different... it made me feel like I wasn't the same as them..." (P4)

Another participant revealed:

"...I am often called by derogatory names from my area... it feels like I am not accepted..." (P6)

This statement demonstrates how cultural ridicule influences self-perception and creates psychological distance from social groups, reflecting repeated experiences of social rejection and weakening the sense of acceptance within the community. Phenomenologically, this experience demonstrates that culturally based bullying touches on the individual's existential dimension, particularly the fundamental need for acceptance, recognition, and belonging to a social group. Identity rejection not only reinforces social alienation but also deepens emotional wounds and prolongs the experience of silent suffering experienced by participants. Thus, culturally based bullying is not merely a social phenomenon but a psychological experience that influences the construction of an individual's identity and sense of self-meaning within their social context.

Theme 4: The Need for Empathy and Safety

Beyond the experience of internalized suffering, participants revealed a deep emotional need for acceptance, empathy, protection, and a sense of security within the school environment. The experience of being a victim of bullying does not always give rise to a desire to punish the perpetrator, but rather a fundamental need to be understood, heard, and acknowledged. Phenomenologically, these findings indicate that *silent suffering* not only represents the experience of emotional wounds, but also reveals unmet psychological needs in students' social relations.

From an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) perspective, the need for empathy reflects the process of searching for meaning in the experience of suffering. Participants do not merely seek physical protection, but rather a relational presence that provides emotional validation. When victims' experiences are ignored or not responded to empathetically, psychological suffering tends to persist and reinforce feelings of insecurity and helplessness. Conversely, the presence of significant figures—especially teachers—is perceived as a source of security and potential psychological healing. One participant stated:

"...I just want someone to listen and believe me..." (P1)

Another participant said:

"...If the teachers knew and helped, maybe I wouldn't be afraid to go to school anymore..." (P3)

What participants expressed reflected the need for emotional recognition as a form of validation of subjective experiences and indicated that safety was perceived as a condition that allows individuals to feel protected and accepted again in the school environment. Phenomenologically, empathy emerged as central to the recovery of victims' experiences, as it enabled the reconstruction of self-meaning from a position of alienation to an experience of acceptance and esteem. These findings confirm that the experience of *silent suffering* not only depicts hidden suffering, but also demonstrates the existence of underlying psychological needs that demand an empathetic response and an emotionally safe school environment. Thus, empathy and a sense of safety are key dimensions in the psychological recovery process for victims of culture-based bullying in multicultural school contexts.

The main findings of this study are synthesized into a conceptual framework that represents the structure of participants' experiences holistically. This visualization aims to clarify the interrelationships between themes, the dynamics of the meaning of experiences, and the positions of participants. *silent suffering* as the core of the psychological phenomena experienced by the victims. The conceptual representation of the research results can be seen in the following figure:

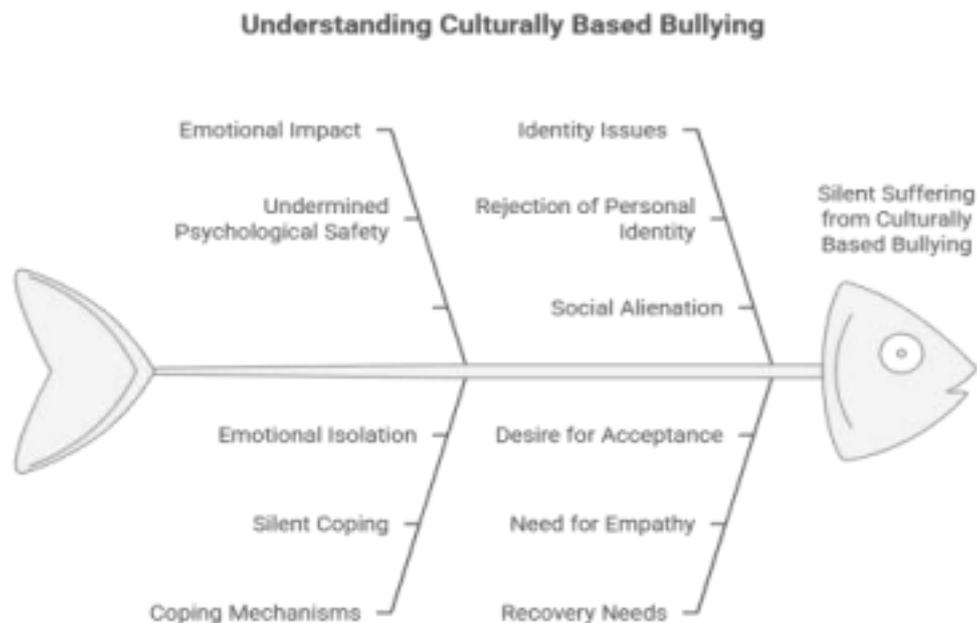


Figure 1. Display Data

Discussion

Research findings confirm that culturally based bullying is interpreted by victims as a profound and existential psychological experience, going beyond merely overt aggressive behavior. In line with Theme 1, victims' experiences reflect internalized distress, which is emotional suffering that is internalized and not always visible externally, but has a significant impact on psychological well-being (Gross & Jazaieri, 2014). From a phenomenological perspective, subjective experience is central to the formation of self-meaning, so hidden emotional wounds retain existential power in shaping a sense of security and self-esteem (Smith et al., 2021). From an Islamic perspective, hidden inner suffering receives moral and spiritual attention, as the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "A Muslim is a brother to another Muslim; he does not oppress him or allow him to be harmed" (Narrated by Bukhari no. 2442/2262 and Muslim no. 2580). This hadith emphasized that allowing someone to experience suffering, including emotional suffering due to bullying, is a form of neglect of the values of brotherhood and social concern.

In line with Theme 2, silence is understood as a protective coping mechanism, but paradoxically reinforces emotional isolation and inhibits help-seeking. This phenomenon reinforces the construction of *silent suffering*, a condition where an individual internally endures suffering as a defensive coping strategy (Jack, 1991). In developmental psychology, passive coping is correlated with increased psychological distress and low social support (Compas et al., 2017). From an Islamic perspective, remaining silent in the face of injustice is not an ideal condition, as evidenced by the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him): "Whoever among you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; if he is not able, then with his tongue; if he is not able, then with his heart, and that is the weakest form of faith" (HR. Muslim no. 49). This hadith shows the importance of empathetic response and moral action towards social suffering, including in the context of bullying in the educational environment.

The findings of Theme 3 expand the understanding of culturally based bullying as an experience of identity rejection. Psychologically, identity rejection is related to a disruption in the sense of belonging and the development of self-concept (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Priest et al., 2019). In phenomenology, the experience of rejection is interpreted as a disruption to self-existence (*being-in-the-world*), which deepens social alienation. Islam firmly rejects insults to individual identity, as Allah says in the Qur'an.

The Qur'an states: "O you who believe, let not a people ridicule another people; perhaps they are better than they" (QS. Al-Hujurat: 11). This verse emphasizes that insults based on differences in identity, including cultural and linguistic differences, are contrary to Islamic humanitarian values and social ethics.

Theme 4 emphasizes that victims have fundamental psychological needs in the form of empathy, acceptance, and a sense of security. This finding aligns with the humanistic counseling approach that places empathy at the core of psychological recovery (Rogers, 2012). In the context of silent suffering, empathy serves as validation of subjective experiences that enable victims to reveal hidden suffering (Elliott et al., 2018). From an Islamic perspective, empathy and compassion are the main principles of social relations, as stated by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him): "None of you is a believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself" (Narrated by Bukhari no. 13 and Muslim no. 45). This value of empathy is relevant to guidance and counseling practices that emphasize unconditional acceptance and psychological security as the basis for recovery.

Conceptually, this research enriches the study of Islamic guidance and counseling by positioning silent suffering as a phenomenological and moral-spiritual construct of psychological experience. The integration of hidden emotional wounds, silence as a coping mechanism, identity denial, and the need for empathy demonstrates that the experience of bullying victims is a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing psychological, social, and spiritual aspects. Therefore, guidance and counseling interventions need to integrate an empathetic-phenomenological approach with Islamic values, such as compassion (*mercy*), brotherhood (*brotherhood*), and respect for human dignity (*human blessings*), in order to build a safe, inclusive, and civilized school environment.

Implication

The findings of this study provide important theoretical and practical implications for the development of guidance and counseling scholarship in understanding the psychological experiences of victims of culture-based bullying in the context of multicultural elementary schools. Theoretically, this study confirms silent *suffering* as a construct of the primary psychological experience of bullying victims. The victims' suffering is not always visible but is internalized in the form of emotional wounds, social isolation, and denial of self-identity. These findings broaden the understanding of bullying from aggressive behavior to subjective experiences that affect self-meaning and psychological well-being. From an Islamic perspective, inner suffering is related to the dimension of the heart as a center of spiritual awareness and meaning (Al-Ghazali, 2010). In addition, the rejection of cultural identity shows the importance of respect for human dignity (*human blessings*), as in QS. Al-Isra: 70, so that this research enriches the framework of phenomenological-spiritual and multicultural guidance and counseling.

Practically, the findings confirm the need for guidance and counseling services that are oriented towards students' subjective experiences. *Silent suffering*. Studies show that many victims go undetected because they choose to remain silent. Therefore, counselors need to develop early detection through empathetic observation, reflective communication, and a safe counseling relationship. From an Islamic perspective, the practice of empathetic counseling aligns with the principles of *mercy* and social concern (Al-Bukhari, 1997; Muslim, 2007). The integration of a

phenomenological approach and Islamic spiritual values enables counselors to help students uncover hidden suffering, reconstruct self-meaning, and strengthen psychological and spiritual resilience, thus supporting the creation of an empathetic, inclusive, and civilized school environment.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

This study focuses on the depth of meaning of subjective experiences in accordance with the principles of interpretive phenomenology, so the limited number of participants does not aim to generalize. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with elementary school students who have limitations in articulating emotional experiences, so interpretation of meaning relies heavily on the researcher's reflective process. This study also only uses the victim's perspective without involving teachers, parents, or perpetrators, so it does not describe the phenomenon of bullying systematically. Furthermore, the specific research context in a multicultural elementary school in Jambi City limits the transferability of the findings to other cultural contexts and educational environments.

Further research is recommended involving more diverse participants and different school contexts to broaden the understanding of silent suffering. Integrating the perspectives of multiple informants, such as teachers, parents, and counselors, is necessary to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon. Applied research is also recommended to develop and test empathy-based guidance and counseling intervention models to help victims uncover hidden suffering and improve psychological well-being. Furthermore, longitudinal studies and mixed-method approaches are recommended to explore the relationship between *silent suffering*, emotional regulation, and resilience in the context of multicultural education.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that culturally based bullying in multicultural elementary school students is interpreted as an experience of hidden emotional suffering (*silent suffering*) and is endured silently. Victims not only experience psychological wounds in the form of sadness, fear, and social alienation, but also interpret bullying as an experience of identity rejection that disrupts their sense of belonging (*sense of belonging*) and self-esteem. Silence serves as a protective mechanism to avoid social pressure,

However, paradoxically reinforces emotional isolation and hinders the help-seeking process. The main contribution of this research is the confirmation of *silent suffering* as the core of the phenomenological experience of victims of culture-based bullying, which is characterized by unexpressed inner wounds, identity denial, and a deep need for empathy, acceptance, and a sense of security. These findings expand the guidance and counseling paradigm from a behavior-focused approach to an approach oriented toward the meaning of subjective experience, while enriching the conceptual framework of phenomenological counseling in the context of multicultural education. The novelty of this research lies in the integration of psychological experiences, dimensions of cultural identity, and construction. *Silent suffering* as an existential phenomenon in elementary school-aged children. Therefore, guidance and counseling services in elementary schools need to develop an empathetic approach that is sensitive to students' lived experiences, able to detect hidden emotional suffering, and create a safe and inclusive psychological space. An approach oriented toward understanding subjective experiences is expected to help victims uncover hidden suffering and support the recovery of their psychological well-being.

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