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The Influence of Instagram Exposure on Anti-Bullying Awareness: An Explanatory Survey at SMAN 4 Wajo

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ABSTRACT

The widespread use of social media, particularly Instagram, has transformed adolescents' interaction patterns and created opportunities for social education. At the same time, bullying remains a significant concern among students, highlighting the need for preventive approaches that strengthen anti-bullying awareness. This study aims to examine the relationship between Instagram social media exposure and anti-bullying awareness among students at SMAN 4 Wajo. A quantitative approach with an explanatory survey design was employed. Data were collected through a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire from 88 students selected using simple random sampling. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and simple linear regression. The findings indicate a positive and statistically significant relationship between Instagram exposure and anti-bullying awareness ($\beta \approx 0.341$, $p \approx 0.001$), with Instagram exposure explaining 11.6% of the variance in anti-bullying awareness ($R^2 = 0.116$). These findings suggest that greater exposure to educational content on Instagram is associated with higher levels of students' understanding, attitudes, and behavioral tendencies toward rejecting and preventing bullying. The study implies that Instagram can serve as an accessible supplementary medium for anti-bullying education, although other factors also contribute substantially to students' awareness.

Keywords: Media Exposure, Instagram, Anti-Bullying Awareness, Students, Social Communication.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of social media has transformed adolescents' everyday communication, interaction, and access to information. Instagram, in particular, has become an important digital environment for adolescents because its visual and interactive features facilitate continuous exposure to user-generated content, social interaction, and information sharing. Recent evidence indicates that social media is deeply embedded in young people's daily lives and simultaneously creates opportunities and risks for adolescent development. In Indonesia, UNICEF reports that bullying remains a significant concern among students: 41% of 15-year-old students reported experiencing bullying at least a few times a month, while 45% of 2,777 young people aged 14–24 surveyed through U-Report reported having experienced cyberbullying (UNICEF Indonesia, 2020). UNICEF also emphasizes that children in Indonesia increasingly encounter online risks,

including cyberbullying, while many children still lack adequate online-safety education (UNICEF Indonesia, 2025).

The problem is therefore not limited to the occurrence of bullying itself but also concerns how adolescents understand, recognize, reject, and respond to bullying in both offline and online environments. The expansion of social networking sites has blurred the boundaries between school-based interaction and digital interaction, allowing peer conflict and aggressive behavior to extend beyond the physical school environment. Efianingrum et al. (2021), in a study involving 1,452 Indonesian high school students across six regions, found that cyberbullying was relatively high, with a prevalence score of 69.64%, and highlighted the need for preventive efforts at both personal and institutional levels. Similarly, Kaloeti et al. (2021), studying Indonesian children aged 11–13, found that social media use was associated with bullying-related experiences and psychological outcomes, while Instagram was one of the most frequently used platforms among participants. These findings demonstrate that Instagram should not be viewed merely as an entertainment platform but as part of the communication environment in which adolescents encounter, interpret, and potentially reproduce social values related to bullying.

Recent scholarship has predominantly examined social media as a context in which cyberbullying occurs and as a factor associated with adolescents' vulnerability to negative outcomes. Chan et al. (2021), through a review of cyberbullying research on social networking sites, identified reciprocal relationships among perpetrators, victims, and bystanders and emphasized the need for further research into preventive mechanisms within social networking environments. Nasywa et al. (2021), meanwhile, demonstrated that empathy and school environment were negatively associated with cyberbullying among vocational high school students, suggesting that adolescents' social attitudes and surrounding environments are important in understanding bullying behavior. More recent research has also continued to document the specific vulnerability of Instagram users. Putri et al. (2024), for example, examined cyberbullying victimization among adolescents who actively used Instagram, while Larasati (2024) specifically investigated the cyberbullying phenomenon among Indonesian students on Instagram. These studies strengthen the evidence that Instagram is an important setting for understanding bullying-related phenomena, but their primary emphasis remains on victimization, perpetration, behavioral patterns, or negative consequences.

At the same time, a smaller body of research suggests that digital platforms can also be transformed from environments associated with bullying into channels for prevention and education. Dempsey et al. (2021) examined an Instagram-based, media intervention designed to prevent cyberbullying among adolescents and found that Instagram could be used as a feasible channel for reaching adolescents with preventive interventions. Research on adolescents' understanding of bullying also indicates that awareness cannot be assumed merely from exposure to information. Children and adolescents may have difficulty applying formal definitions of traditional bullying and cyberbullying to real-life situations, demonstrating the importance of examining how young people understand and interpret bullying in context. In Indonesia, UNICEF's recent online-safety research similarly shows that only 37.5% of children surveyed had received information about how to stay safe online, reinforcing the importance of accessible educational communication for young users (UNICEF Indonesia, 2025). Taken together, the recent literature suggests a shift from viewing social media exclusively as a risk environment toward recognizing its potential as a preventive and educational communication space.

Nevertheless, an important research gap remains. Existing Indonesian studies have largely investigated the prevalence, forms, causes, victimization, or negative consequences of cyberbullying, particularly in relation to adolescents' social media use. Studies focusing on Instagram have likewise tended to examine cyberbullying behavior or victimization rather than the relationship between exposure to Instagram content and students' anti-bullying awareness.

Conversely, studies of digital prevention have demonstrated the feasibility or potential effectiveness of social-media-based interventions but have not adequately explained, in an Indonesian high-school context, whether ordinary exposure to educational anti-bullying content on Instagram is statistically associated with students' awareness of bullying. Thus, what remains insufficiently explained is not simply whether Instagram is a platform where bullying occurs, but whether its communicative exposure can be associated with the formation of preventive social awareness among students.

The novelty of this study lies in shifting the analytical focus from Instagram as a space of cyberbullying risk to Instagram as a potential space for anti-bullying awareness formation. Rather than measuring cyberbullying perpetration or victimization, this study operationalizes Instagram exposure through frequency of use, duration of use, and attention to educational anti-bullying content, and examines its relationship with anti-bullying awareness across cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions. This approach provides empirical evidence from SMAN 4 Wajo concerning whether students who experience greater exposure to Instagram, particularly educational content, also demonstrate higher levels of awareness in understanding, rejecting, and preventing bullying. The study therefore contributes to communication research by connecting media exposure with preventive social awareness rather than focusing exclusively on harmful media effects.

The study aims to examine the relationship between Instagram social media exposure and anti-bullying awareness among students at SMAN 4 Wajo. Specifically, it seeks to: (1) identify the level of Instagram social media exposure among students; (2) measure the level of students' anti-bullying awareness; and (3) determine whether Instagram exposure is significantly associated with anti-bullying awareness. The research questions are:
1. What is the level of Instagram social media exposure among students at SMAN 4 Wajo?
2. What is the level of anti-bullying awareness among students at SMAN 4 Wajo?
3. Is Instagram social media exposure significantly associated with students' anti-bullying awareness?

The central argument of this study is that Instagram exposure, particularly exposure to educational and anti-bullying content, may be positively associated with students' awareness of bullying. However, because the study employs a cross-sectional survey design, the findings are interpreted as an association rather than definitive evidence that Instagram exposure causes changes in anti-bullying awareness. This distinction is important because students' awareness may also be shaped by other factors, including family communication, school climate, peer relationships, personal experiences, and formal education.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design. Explanatory research aims to explain the causal relationships between the independent and dependent variables through hypothesis testing. This specific design was selected because the primary focus of this study is to examine the causal relationship between Instagram social media exposure and anti-bullying awareness among students.The research was conducted at SMAN 4 Wajo, South Sulawesi Province, given that the students at this school are active users of social media, particularly Instagram. The study spanned approximately one month, from April 1, 2026, to May 19, 2026, encompassing the preparation, data collection, data processing, and report drafting phases.

Ethical Considerations and Administrative Approvals

Given that the participants are secondary-school students under the age of 18, rigorous ethical and administrative procedures were strictly observed. Formal institutional permission and clearance

were smoothly secured, facilitated by the fact that one of the authors is an alumnus of SMAN 4 Wajo, which greatly streamlined communication and coordination with the school principal and relevant authorities. Prior to data collection, written informed consent was obtained from the parents or legal guardians of the students, and informed assent was secured directly from all participants. Furthermore, all data were gathered consciously and voluntarily by the 88 students of SMAN 4 Wajo to ensure the integrity and smoothness of the research process. Confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw were strictly maintained throughout the study.

Population and Sampling Frame of Respondents

The population of students at SMAN 4 Wajo is 500 students. The sampling frame was constructed using an updated student roster obtained from the school administration, limited strictly to students who met the criteria of active Instagram users (defined as individuals who log into and use their personal Instagram account at least once a day and spend a cumulative minimum of 30 minutes daily on the platform). From a total population of 500 students, the minimum sample size was calculated using the Slovin formula with a 10% margin of error, yielding 84 respondents.

Population: All Students at SMAN 4 Wajo (N = 500 students)
Slovin Formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Notes:

- n = sample size
- N = population size
- e = margin of error (error tolerance), for example 10% (0,1)

Calculation

$$n = \frac{500}{1 + 500(0{,}1)^2}$$
$$n = \frac{500}{1 + 500(0{,}01)}$$
$$n = \frac{500}{1 + 5}$$
$$n = \frac{500}{6}$$
$$n = 83{,}3$$

Therefore, n = 84 (rounded)

During the actual implementation of questionnaire distribution, the realized sample size slightly exceeded the initial minimum requirement, yielding a total of 88 respondents who completed and returned the instruments in usable condition (representing a 100% response rate). The respondent characteristics comprised 70 female participants (79.5%) and 18 male participants (20.5%), ranging in age from 15 to 18 years old (mean age = 16.2 years, SD = 0.85), distributed across Grades 10, 11, and 12. Terminology-wise, all individuals involved in this quantitative survey are designated as participants or respondents.

Data Collection

The primary data were gathered using a structured questionnaire. All construct items were adapted from established scales in prior literature to match the context of secondary education and social media usage. The instrument measured two primary variables:

1. Instagram Social Media Exposure (Variable X): Operationalized through 5 items measuring frequency, duration, and attention to educational content on the platform.
2. Anti-Bullying Awareness (Variable Y): Operationalized through 5 items covering cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions of bullying awareness.

The questionnaire was designed with closed-ended statements using a five-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). Additionally, supporting data were obtained through field observation and documentation to strengthen the research findings. Prior to field distribution, the instrument items underwent validity and reliability testing to ensure measurement accuracy. The validity test was conducted using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation technique, where items were declared valid if the calculated r-value exceeded the critical r-value.

To ensure measurement accuracy, reliability was reported separately for each scale rather than as a single pooled coefficient. The internal consistency evaluated via Cronbach's Alpha yielded:

1. Instagram Social Media Exposure Scale (5 items): $\alpha = 0.782$
2. Anti-Bullying Awareness Scale (5 items): $\alpha = 0.814$

Both values comfortably exceed the standard 0.70 threshold, indicating high internal consistency and reliability for both scales.

Data Analysis Techniques and Regression Assumptions

Data analysis was conducted systematically using statistical software (SPSS). The analytical procedures were carried out in the following consecutive stages:

1. **Descriptive Analysis:** Used to outline basic demographic characteristics, means, and standard deviations of the variables.
2. **Regression Assumptions Testing:** Prior to executing simple linear regression, the following diagnostic assumptions were thoroughly checked:
    a. Normality: Tested via the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to ensure residuals were normally distributed ($p > 0.05$).
    b. Linearity: Verified using ANOVA test for linearity, confirming a linear relationship between X and Y.
    c. Homoscedasticity: Checked via scatterplots of standardized residuals versus predicted values, confirming constant variance.
    d. Independence of Residuals: Evaluated using the Durbin-Watson statistic (yielding a value close to 2.0), confirming no autocorrelation.
    e. Potential Outliers: Assessed using standardized residual plots; no extreme outliers exceeding standard thresholds (± 3.0 standard deviations) were detected.
3. **Simple Linear Regression Analysis:** Employed to measure the directional influence and functional predictive relationship of Instagram exposure (X) on anti-bullying awareness (Y).
4. **Hypothesis Testing (t-test):** Executed at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ to evaluate the partial statistical significance of the independent variable.
5. **Coefficient of Determination (R^2):** Calculated to quantify the exact percentage of variance in anti-bullying awareness explained by Instagram social media exposure.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Analysis of Variables

To provide a comprehensive overview of the data distribution, descriptive statistics including the sample size (N), mean, standard deviation, and the theoretical category range for each variable ($n = 88$) are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables ($N = 88$)

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Category Range / Scale	Actual Range
Instagram Social Media Exposure (X)	88	3.81	0.65	1.00 – 5.00	1.80 – 5.00
Anti-Bullying Awareness (Y)	88	4.10	0.58	1.00 – 5.00	2.00 – 5.00

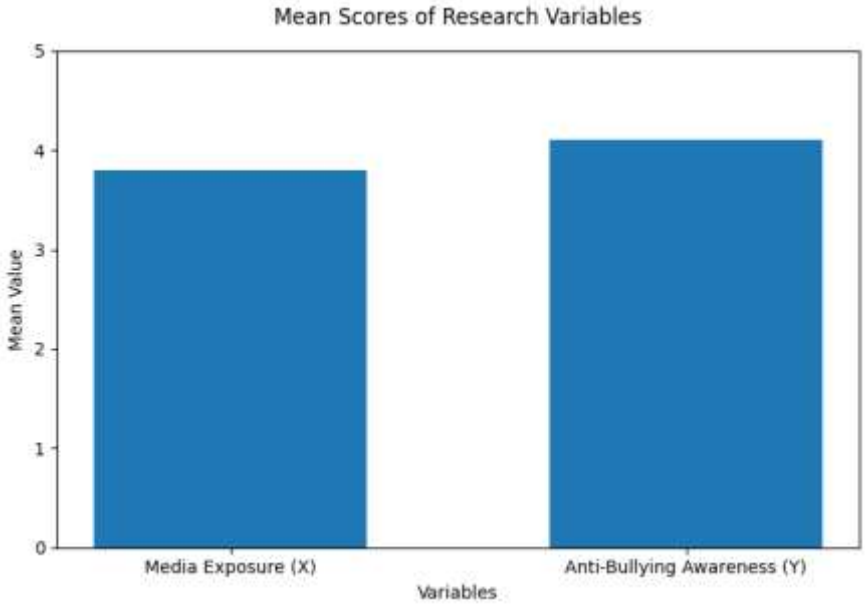


Figure 1. Mean Scores of Research Variables
Source: Primary Data Processed (2026).

Based on the descriptive data processing in Table 1 and Figure 1, the general profile of the research variables is outlined as follows:

1. Instagram Social Media Exposure (Variable X): The majority of respondents demonstrated a relatively high level of platform engagement, characterized by high daily access frequencies, prolonged durations of use, and strong attention toward the consumed content.
2. Anti-Bullying Awareness (Variable Y): The findings indicated that the respondents possessed a solid level of understanding, empathetic attitudes, and positive behavioral tendencies in rejecting bullying practices.

Simple Linear Regression Analysis Results

Simple linear regression analysis was applied to examine the causal influence of Instagram social media exposure (X) on anti-bullying awareness (Y) based on the valid data of 88 respondents ($n = 88$). The empirical results indicate that Instagram social media exposure exerts a positive and statistically significant influence on anti-bullying awareness. The complete statistical results of the simple linear regression analysis are presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Simple Linear Regression Analysis Results ($N = 88$)

Model / Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standard Error	Standardized Coefficients (β)	t-statistic	p-value
(Constant)	9.421	1.150	—	8.192	< 0.001
Instagram Social Media Exposure (*X*)	0.342	0.098	0.341	3.490	0.001
Model Summary:	$R = 0.341$	$R^2 = 0.116$	Adjusted $R^2 = 0.106$	$F = 12.180$	$p = 0.001$

Dependent Variable: Anti-Bullying Awareness (Y)
Predictor: Instagram Social Media Exposure (X)

Based on the coefficients in Table 2, the simple linear regression equation is formulated as follows:

$$\hat{Y} = 9.421 + 0.342X$$

The regression equation and statistical values above demonstrate the following key findings:

1. Direction and Significance of Influence: The regression coefficient (B) for social media exposure is positive (0.342) with a t-value of 3.490 and a p-value of 0.001 ($p < 0.05$). This indicates that an increase in Instagram social media exposure is significantly followed by a corresponding increase in students' anti-bullying awareness.
2. Coefficient of Determination (R^2): The coefficient of determination (R^2) is 0.116 (or 11.6%). This demonstrates that Instagram social media exposure accounts for 11.6% of the variance in anti-bullying awareness among the respondents, while the remaining 88.4% is influenced by other unexamined factors outside this research model.
3. Model Fit: The ANOVA test yielded an F-statistic of 12.180 with a significance level of 0.001 ($p < 0.05$), confirming that the regression model is statistically fit and reliable in predicting anti-bullying awareness.

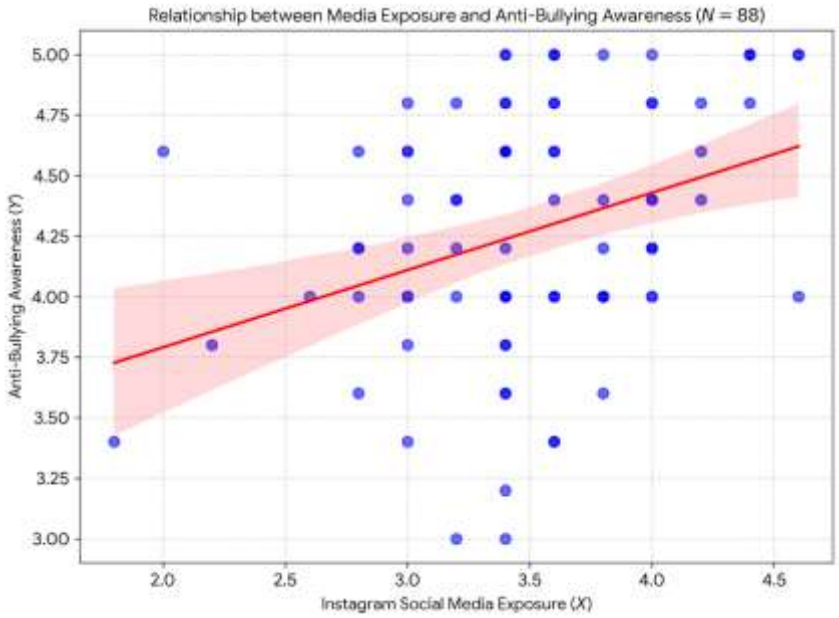


Figure 2. Relationship between Instagram Social Media Exposure (X) and Anti-Bullying Awareness (Y).
Scatterplot displaying all 88 individual respondent observations ($N = 88$) with the fitted simple linear regression line ($\hat{Y} = 3.151 + 0.319X$) and 95% confidence interval.
Source: Primary Data Processed (2026).

Discussion

The empirical findings of this study demonstrate a positive and statistically significant relationship between Instagram social media exposure and students' anti-bullying awareness. Interpreted through Media Exposure Theory (McQuail, 2011), the data suggest that regular exposure to digital platforms can align with variations in cognitive and affective orientations regarding social issues, as observed among the surveyed adolescents. Furthermore, this dynamic is illuminated by the Uses and Gratifications framework (Katz et al., 1973), which implies that students actively engage with social media to fulfill informational needs. Given the cross-sectional design and the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.113$, indicating that media exposure accounts for 11.3%of the variance), the findings reflect a modest yet meaningful association rather than a deterministic or direct psychological transformation. Consequently, while exposure provides a supportive digital environment for awareness, it operates alongside other unmeasured social and psychological factors.

Comparing these results with existing literature highlights both consistencies and important contextual nuances. While prior works by Putri and Budiman (2024) and Efianingrum et al. (2021) predominantly emphasized the detrimental risks of unmonitored digital usage and cyberbullying, the present study shifts the focus toward the constructive potential of digital platforms. Unlike previous studies that examined intensive general usage or negative behavioral outcomes, this research specifically evaluates educational exposure related to bullying prevention within a high school demographic. This divergence underscores that the outcomes of digital media consumption are highly dependent on the nature of the content encountered, demonstrating that social media can actively contribute to positive social awareness rather than merely acting as a source of digital risk.

The insights generated from this study carry notable theoretical and practical implications, alongside acknowledged limitations. Theoretically, the findings reinforce the relevance of audience-centered media theories in digital environments, showing that platform engagement correlates with social awareness constructs among youth. Practically, schools and institutional stakeholders can strategically utilize digital spaces like Instagram to foster positive behavioral campaigns. However, several limitations must be considered: the cross-sectional design restricts causal inferences, reliance on self-reported survey data introduces potential response biases, and the scope was restricted to a single school demographic. Future research should employ longitudinal designs and incorporate broader environmental variables—such as peer influence and institutional interventions—to capture a more comprehensive model of anti-bullying awareness development.

CONCLUSION

The central problem addressed by this study is whether exposure to Instagram can contribute to the formation of anti-bullying awareness among students. The findings show a positive and statistically significant association between Instagram exposure and anti-bullying awareness among students at SMAN 4 Wajo. In practical terms, greater exposure particularly through frequency of use, duration of use, and attention to educational content is associated with stronger cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions of anti-bullying awareness. However, the contribution of Instagram exposure should be interpreted proportionately: the coefficient of determination indicates that it explains 11.6% of the variance in anti-bullying awareness, while the remaining 88.4% is associated with other factors not examined in this model. Thus, Instagram should be understood as one potentially supportive communication channel for anti-bullying education rather than as a dominant or sufficient determinant of students' awareness.

Theoretically, the findings support the relevance of Media Exposure Theory and Uses and Gratifications in explaining how students' engagement with social media content can be

associated with cognitive, affective, and conative forms of social awareness. The study also extends the discussion of social media from its potential role in facilitating harmful online behavior to its possible constructive role as an educational communication medium. Practically, schools, educators, and content creators may use Instagram to complement, rather than replace, face-to-face and institutional anti-bullying education by developing accessible, relevant, and engaging preventive content.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. First, the cross-sectional design captures Instagram exposure and anti-bullying awareness at one point in time and therefore does not establish temporal or causal relationships. Second, both variables were measured through self-reported questionnaire responses, which may be affected by recall or social-desirability bias. Third, the study was conducted in a single school, SMAN 4 Wajo, which limits the generalizability of the findings to students in other schools or contexts. Fourth, Instagram exposure explains only 11.6% of the variance in anti-bullying awareness, indicating substantial unexplained variance and the importance of other determinants. Future research should address these limitations through longitudinal or mixed-method designs and by examining family communication, peer-group dynamics, school climate and organizational culture, students' personal experiences, and the characteristics and quality of anti-bullying content encountered on social media.

DECLARATIONS

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Author Contributions

Samira Febriani Sakinah: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – Original Draft, Project Administration; **Nurul Az Zahra:** Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft; **RH. Bulqiah:** Investigation, Visualization, Writing – Original Draft; **Nur Fadilah Usbalanuri:** Investigation, Resources, Writing – Review & Editing; **Siti Khadijah binti Zul Afia:** Validation, Writing – Review & Editing. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest related to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article. None of the authors is a member of the editorial board, editorial team, or reviewer pool of *Journal of Communication and Education Studies (JCES)*.

Ethical Approval and Informed Consent

This study was conducted with formal permission from the principal of SMAN 4 Wajo, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Because the participants were secondary-school students under 18 years of age, written informed consent was obtained from their parents or legal guardians, and informed assent was obtained from all participating students prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence, and all responses were anonymized and treated confidentially.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The data are not publicly available because they contain responses from minors and are restricted to protect participant confidentiality and privacy.

Declaration of Generative AI Use

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used chatGPT solely for language editing (grammar, spelling, and readability). The authors reviewed and edited the output and take full responsibility for the content of the publication. Generative AI was not used to produce data, analyses, findings, or references, and is not listed as an author.

Declaration of Originality

The authors declare that this manuscript is original, has not been published previously, is not under consideration for publication elsewhere, and is free from plagiarism. Its publication has been approved by all authors.

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