





# The Effects of Emotional Expression, Family-Expressed Emotion and Attitudes towards Violence on Peer Bullying Behaviors of Adolescents: A Structural Equation Model

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## ABSTRACT

The present study aims to examine the effects of emotional expression, family-expressed emotion, and attitudes towards violence on adolescents' peer bullying behaviors through the analysis of a structural equation model. A survey model and a correlational survey model were carried out in this quantitatively designed study. 403 students (199 females, 204 males) studying at 2 secondary public schools in Şanlıurfa, which is a southeastern city of Türkiye, participated in this study. The data was collected by the "Demographic Form," the "Shortened Level of Expressed Emotion Scale in Adolescents," the "Emotional Expression Questionnaire," and the "Adolescents' Attitudes towards Violence Scale." SPSS and LISREL programmers were applied for data analysis. According to the findings of the study, it was found that family-expressed emotion and attitudes towards violence had a positive predictive effect on peer bullying behaviors, whereas emotional expression had a negative predictive effect on peer bullying behaviors. The findings were discussed in the scope of the literature, and it was suggested that parents need to be educated in effective communication styles and healthy parental attitudes.

Keywords:

Peer bullying, emotional expression, family-expressed emotion, attitudes towards violence

## 1. Introduction

Peer bullying is a universal problem that continues to increase in severity and rate day by day, especially in the school environment, reaching higher levels in adolescents. Peer bullying has been defined in various ways in existing research. Olweus (1993) describes peer bullying as repeated negative actions directed at one by one or more peers, defined by the bully-victim power inequality. Smith and Sharp (1994) also stress how bullying behaviors happen over and over again and how they are meant to hurt the victim. According to Espelage and Swearer (2003), peer bullying involves aggressive behaviors that occur among peer relationships and are shaped by individual and contextual factors. In addition, Rigby (2008) defines peer bullying as a systematic abuse of power that presents as physical, verbal, relational, or cyber forms. In conclusion, these definitions highlight repetition, intentionality, and power imbalance as the core components of peer bullying.

When the studies investigating the occurrence of peer bullying are examined, Craig et al. (2009) included 202,056 primary, secondary, and high school students in 40 countries, including European countries, South American countries, and Israel. They found that 10.7% of the students were in the bullies' category, 12.6% were in the victims' category, and 3.6% were in the bully/victim's category, and a total of 26% of the students were engaged in peer bullying. In the study carried out by Uçanok (2012) with 800 adolescents, it was stated that 5.1% of the adolescents were in the bully category, 17.2% were in the victim category, and 9.6% were in

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the bully/victim category, and a total of 31.9% of the students were engaged in peer bullying. As the results of the studies are assessed, it is clear that peer bullying is a very common problem both in the world and in Türkiye.

Research on the causes of bullying has generally shown that environmental factors play a significant role (Olweus, 1994; Patton et al., 2013; Thomas et al., 2018). Among these factors, the family—where communication and social skills are first developed—is considered one of the most influential (Gibson & Jefferson, 2006). A study by Saydam and Yılmaz (2024) found that teachers often attribute bullying to family influences. A study on the connection between family characteristics and bullying behaviors indicates that children raised in authoritarian households, where physical punishment and strict control are common, are more inclined to participate in bullying (Stevens et al., 2002; Yerger & Gehret, 2011). In addition, in the family context, another critical aspect of communication is family-expressed emotion, which reflects the family's communication style and attitudes toward the individual—whether hostile, critical, protective, or intrusive (Fahrer et al., 2022). Experiencing high levels of hostility, criticism, intrusiveness, or overprotection, which are sub-dimensions of emotional expression, can significantly impact well-being and contribute to serious psychological problems (Çap, 2017). While some studies suggest that high family-expressed emotion—noted by criticism, hostility—can make a growth in the likelihood of bullying perpetration or victimization, other research indicates that not all bullies or victims experience severe psychopathological consequences. According to Rutter (2012), some individuals exposed to peer bullying do not develop depression or anxiety; instead, they use these experiences as motivation for social development. Similarly, Luthar et al. (2000) propose that some adolescents exposed to high family-expressed emotion develop resilience and coping skills, which help them avoid negative outcomes. In this context, family-expressed emotion is assumed to have a major influence in shaping adolescents' involvement in peer bullying behaviors.

Emotional expression is one dimension of interpersonal skills, which is the focus of that study. Emotional expression refers to the way one conveys his emotional experiences through verbal and nonverbal ways (Gross, 1998b, 1999). Since suppressing emotional expression can cause distorted feelings and thoughts after a while and disrupt the individual's harmony with the social environment, problems experienced in emotional expression negatively affect individual well-being as well as significantly affect the individual's interpersonal functionality (Robinson et al., 2003). From this view, the ability to express emotions is to be evaluated as a factor in peer bullying.

Attitudes toward violence are another important factor influencing peer bullying and aggression. Research has shown that a greater tendency toward violent behavior is positively associated with accepting violence as justified. Finkel et al. (2019) highlight that individuals prone to violence often misinterpret social cues, leading to escalated aggressive behavior. Similarly, Huessman and Guerra (1997) found that individuals who believe violence is deserved by the victim exhibit higher rates of aggression. Vernberg et al. (1999) also identified a strong positive relationship between favorable attitudes toward violence and aggressive behaviors. An evidence based review by David et al. (2021) suggests that individuals with positive beliefs about violence are more inclined to participate in violent acts. Jankowiak et al. (2024) further argue that children who perceive violence as normal behavior have a greater tendency toward aggression. Additionally, An evidence based review by Lopez et al. (2022) emphasize a strong correlation between positive attitudes toward violence and the occurrence of school bullying, indicating that students who view violence as acceptable are more likely to involve in bullying behaviors.

This study seeks to unravel key psychological and environmental predictors of bully-victim behaviors among adolescents. Specifically, it examines the role of adolescents' attitudes toward violence, their capacity for emotional expression, and the influence of family-expressed emotion. Do adolescents who view violence favorably exhibit higher involvement in bully-victim dynamics? Can the ability to express emotions serve as a protective factor? And how does family emotional climate shape these behaviors? By exploring these questions, this research aims to provide deeper perspective on the mechanisms that drive bully-victim behaviors.

Peer bullying among adolescents has been broadly known as an significant public health and educational problem as a result of its long-term psychological, social, and academic outcomes (Espelage & Swearer, 2010; Arseneault, 2018). Existing studies have revealed that individual emotional dynamics, family emotional

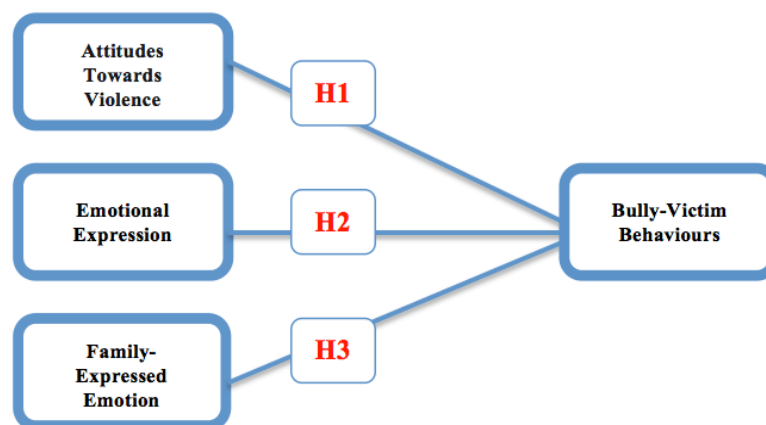
climate, and attitudes toward violence are independently connected to bullying-related behaviors (Bowes et al., 2015; Gini et al., 2019). Yet, the majority of existing research has assessed these factors separately, and their combined and predictive effects within a comprehensive model remain understudied. In addition, studies simultaneously addressing emotional expression, family-expressed emotion, and attitudes toward violence conducting advanced analytical approaches such as structural equation modeling (SEM) remain inadequate. Addressing this gap, the current study is designed to assess the predictive effects of emotional expression, family-expressed emotion, and attitudes toward violence on adolescents' bully-victim behaviors through structural equation modeling; consequently, providing an integrative conceptual model may offer a roadmap for preventive and intervention-oriented action plans.

## 2. Method

In this section, information will be delivered about the research model, study group, data collection tools, data collection processes, data evaluation, and analysis.

### 2.1. Research Design

In current study, which was designed as a quantitative design, the correlational survey model was used to reveal the existing conditions. In the research, the hypothetical model, which claims that emotional expression, family-expressed emotions, and attitude towards violence predict bully-victim behaviors, was assessed with structural equation modeling. The model based on the purpose of the research is given in Figure 1, and the hypotheses are given below.



**Figure 1.** *The Hypothetical Model of Peer Bullying*

**H1:** Adolescents' favorable attitudes towards violence predict positively bully-victim behaviors.

**H2:** Adolescents' tendency of emotional expression predicts negatively bully-victim behaviors.

**H3:** Adolescents' family-expressed emotion predicts positively bully-victim behaviors.

### 2.2. Participants

The participants of the study comprised adolescents attending at secondary schools in Şanlıurfa, one of the southeastern cities of Türkiye. This participants were regarded as appropriate for the research since young adolescence represents a crucial developmental phase during which peer bullying behaviors and emotional, familial, and behavioral factors become increasingly evident. Two secondary schools were randomly selected to establish representativeness of the target population. The study was carried out with 403 adolescents aged between 13 and 15 years who voluntarily agreed to attend and whose families provided informed consent. Of these, 49.4% (n = 199) were female and 50.6% (n = 204) were male, indicating a balanced gender distribution. Regarding the number of siblings, the majority of participants had three or more siblings (71.0%; n = 286). This was followed by those with three siblings (19.4%; n = 78), two siblings (6.0%; n = 24), and one sibling (3.7%; n = 15).

In terms of maternal education, most participants' mothers had completed primary school (43.7%; n = 176). This was followed by secondary school graduates (29.3%; n = 118), illiterate mothers (10.9%; n = 44), high

school graduates (8.4%; n = 34), and those with university-level education or higher (7.7%; n = 31). For paternal education, the largest proportion of fathers had completed secondary school (37.7%; n = 152). This was followed by primary school graduates (25.8%; n = 104), high school graduates (22.1%; n = 89), university-level education or higher (9.9%; n = 40), and illiterate fathers (4.5%; n = 18).

With respect to monthly income, the largest group of participants reported a family income of 1000 TL or less (24.8%; n = 100). This was followed by 4000–5000 TL (22.3%; n = 90), 3000–4000 TL (18.6%; n = 75), 2000–3000 TL (12.9%; n = 52), 1000–2000 TL (11.4%; n = 46), and 5000 TL or more (9.9%; n = 40). Finally, regarding parental status, the majority of participants reported that both parents were alive and living together (89.6%; n = 361). In addition, 1.2% (n = 5) reported that their mother was deceased and father alive, 3.5% (n = 14) reported that their father was deceased and mother alive, and 5.7% (n = 23) indicated that both parents were alive but separated.

### 2.3. Data Collection

The Emotional Expression Questionnaire, Shortened Level of Expressed Emotion Scale in Adolescents, Adolescents' Attitudes toward Violence Scale, and Illinois Bullying Scale were applied for gathering data in the study.

*Emotional Expression Questionnaire:* It was developed by King and Emmons (1990) in order to determine the inclination of children to express themselves verbally and non-verbally. The Turkish validity and reliability study of the scale was carried out by Kuzucu (2012). While the questionnaire covers 16 items in the original form, this number decreased to 15 in the Turkish version. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was determined as 0.85, and the test-retest reliability coefficient was determined as 0.85. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was determined as 0.965.

*Shortened Level of Expressed Emotion Scale in Adolescents:* It was developed by Nelis et al. (2011) in order to determine the level of family emotional expression perceived by children. The Turkish validity and reliability study was conducted by Vural et al. (2013). The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.90, and the test-retest reliability was 0.81. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was measured as 0.991.

*Adolescents' Attitudes toward Violence Scale:* It was designed by Çetin (2011) in order to assess children's attitudes towards violence. The scale is one-dimensional and consists of 10 items in total. The high score obtained from the scale indicates that the tendency to violence is high. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency reliability coefficient of the scale was calculated as 0.85, while the Spearman-Brown coefficient was calculated as 0.86 (Çetin, 2011; Akın, 2012). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient was measured as 0.968.

*Illinois Bullying Scale:* It was created by Espelage and Holt (2001) to scale children's engagement in peer bullying behaviors. The Turkish validity and reliability study of the scale was conducted by Aydın et al. (2020). The scale was evaluated in three sub-dimensions: bullying, victimization, and fighting. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was calculated as 0.90. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was measured as 0.981.

### 2.4. Data Analysis

SPSS and LISREL statistical package programs were used to analyze the variables in the model. Frequency and percentage values of the variables were obtained. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency reliability coefficients of the scale sub-dimensions were calculated.

Normality analysis was applied to examine whether the data obtained during the analysis process showed a normal distribution. While examining the distribution of the data, central tendency measures were used. Considering the closeness of the mean and median values, as well as the fact that the kurtosis value and skewness value for all measurement tools are between -2 and +2, it was determined that the distribution of the data was obtained from a normal distribution (George and Mallery 2010). It is pointed out in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Findings Regarding the Distribution of the Obtained Data

Measures	Mean	Median	Skewness	Kurtosis
Bully-Victim Behaviors	3,00	3,83	-0,52	-1,59
Emotional Expression	3,69	3,27	0,37	-1,29
Family-Expressed Emotions	3,36	3,79	-0,81	-0,54
Attitudes Towards Violence	3,51	4,10	-0,66	-1,08

Additionally, other assumptions required for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were also analyzed. Sample size adequacy was examined and found to be sufficient for SEM analysis. Linearity among variables was evaluated through correlation analyses, indicating linear relationships between the observed variables. Multicollinearity was assessed using correlation coefficients, and no excessively high correlations were found. The presence of outliers was analyzed using standardized values and Mahalanobis distance, and no influential outliers were detected. Homoscedasticity was evaluated by examining residuals, which indicated constant variance. In conclusion, the data met the assumptions necessary for conducting SEM analysis.

In the study, whether there were meaningful differences in demographic variables was examined by t-test and one-way analysis of variance. Pearson correlation analysis was carried out to examine the relationship between the scales. In addition, the relationship between the variables in the proposed model was examined through the LISREL program, and the hypotheses put forward in the model were tested by applying confirmatory factor analysis and path analysis.

**2.5. Ethical**

With decision number 2022/72746, the Gümüşhane University Ethics Committee granted ethical permission for this study..

**3.Findings**

**3.1. Descriptive Findings of the Scales**

In the study, first, adolescents' mean scores obtained from the scales were examined; then, the relationships between the adolescents' mean scores obtained from the scales were shown, and the results of the analysis regarding the predictive effects in line with the structural equation model were given.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Findings of Adolescents' Mean Scores Obtained from the Scales

Measures	Mean	SD
Bully-Victim Behaviors	3,00	1,29
Emotional Expression	3,69	1,83
Family-Expressed Emotions	3,36	1,04
Attitudes Towards Violence	3,51	1,34

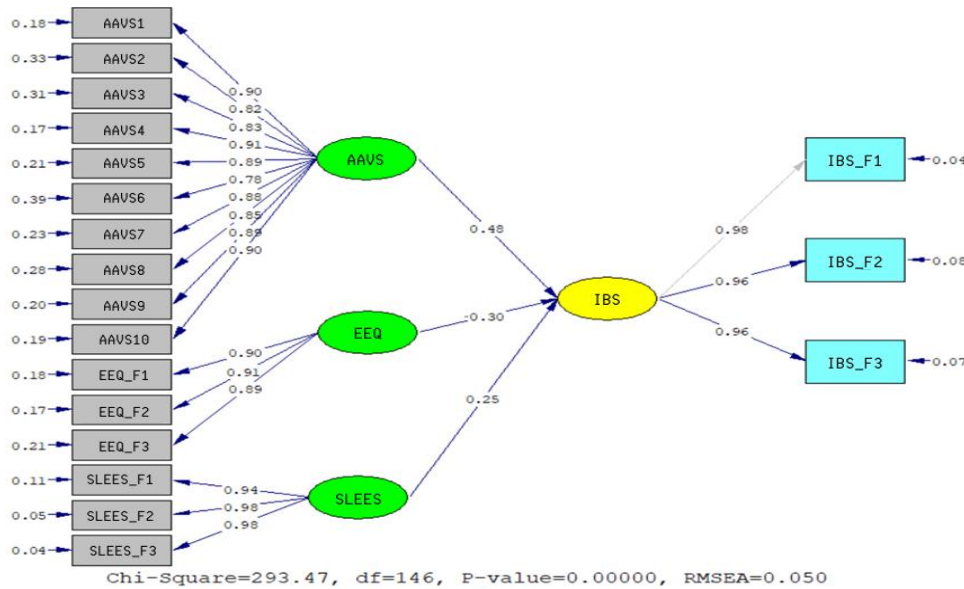
Before conducting the structural equation modeling (SEM), the assumptions required for multivariate analyses were assessed. Along with normality, multivariate outliers were analyzed using Mahalanobis distance values, and no observation exceeding the critical chi-square value was detected, indicating the absence of problematic multivariate outliers. Influential cases were further examined through Cook's distance values, and all values were determined to be below the critical threshold, pointing out that no single case exerted an undue influence on the model.

In addition, multiple regression analyses were applied to examine linearity and multicollinearity assumptions. The results show acceptable tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) values, validating that multicollinearity was not a concern and that the relationships among variables were linear and appropriate for SEM analysis.

After confirming these assumptions, descriptive findings of the measurement tools were analyzed. It was detected that the mean of adolescents' bully-victim behaviors was 3.00±1.29; the mean of the emotional expression was 3.69±1.83; the mean of family-expressed emotion was 3.36±1.04; it was determined that the mean of attitudes towards violence was 3.51±1.34. From these values, it is seen that the level of bully-victim behavior, family-expressed emotion, and attitudes towards violence are high, and the level of emotional expression is at a medium level.

### 3.2. Results of the Research Model

The results of the model established for the hypotheses of the research are presented in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Structural Equation Model Path Diagram of the Research Model

**Note:** AAVS: Adolescents' Attitudes toward Violence Scale EEQ: Emotional Expression Questionnaire EEQ\_F1: Expression of Positive Emotion EEQ\_F2: Expression of Intimacy EEQ\_F3: Expression of Negative Emotion SLEES: Shortened Level of Expressed Emotion Scale in Adolescents SLEES\_F1: Lack of Emotional Support SLEES\_F2: Irritability, SLEES\_F3: Intrusiveness IBS: Illinois Bullying Scale IBS\_F1: Bullying IBS\_F2: Fighting IBS\_F3: Victimization

When the fit criteria of the research model shown in Figure 2 are examined, it is seen that  $\chi^2/df=2.010$ ,  $RMSEA=0.050$ , and the other fit criteria are in perfect agreement, as well as  $CFI=0.99$ ,  $RMR=0.065$ ,  $SRMR=0.028$ ,  $GFI=0.93$ , and  $AGFI$ . With  $CFI=0.91$ ,  $NFI=0.99$ , and  $NNFI=0.99$ , it was determined to be acceptable and within the perfect fit criteria (Baumgartner and Homburg, 1996; Bentler, 1980; Bentler and Bonett, 1980; Browne and Cudeck, 1993; Marsh et al., 2006). The hypothesis results of the research model seen in Figure 2 are given in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Standardized Parameter Estimates, *t*-Values, and Hypothesis Results of the Research Model

H	Paths	( $\beta$ )	<i>t</i> -Values	Results
H1	(AAVS)→( IBS)	0,48	12,33**	Significant
H2	(EEQ)→( IBS)	-0,30	-8,96**	Significant
H3	(SLEES)→( IBS)	0,25	8,03**	Significant

\*\* $p<0.01$ ; AAVS: Adolescents 'Attitudes toward Violence Scale EEQ: Emotional Expression Questionnaire SLEES: Shortened Level of Expressed Emotion Scale in Adolescents SLEES\_F3: Intrusiveness IBS: Illinois Bullying Scale

Examining the results of the research model given in Table 4, it is seen that the adolescents' attitudes towards violence ( $t=12.33$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and family-expressed emotion level ( $t=8.03$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) were found to have a positive effect on bully-victim behaviors; it was determined that the emotional expression ( $t=-8.96$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) had a negative effect on bully-victim behaviors. These results indicate that when there is a one-unit increase in adolescents' attitudes towards violence, there will be a 0.48-unit increase in their bully-victim behavior levels, and a 0.25-unit increase in bully-victim behavior level when there is a one-unit increase in family-expressed

emotion level; when there is a one-unit increase in emotional expression, there will be a 0.30-unit decrease in the levels of bully-victim behaviors.

#### **4. Discussion**

In the current study, the impact of emotional expression, family-expressed emotions, and the attitudes towards violence on the adolescents' bully-victim behaviors were examined using structural equation modeling. According to the research findings, it was confirmed that the adolescents' bully-victim behavior level, the level of family-expressed emotions, and the attitude towards violence were high, and the level of emotional expression was moderate. It was determined that the family-expressed emotions and attitudes towards violence have a positive predictive effect on adolescents' bully-victim behaviors, while emotional expression has a negative predictive effect on bully-victim behaviors.

Reviewing the literature relating to the association between attitudes towards violence and bully-victim involvement, in a study carried out by Ünalmiş (2010) with high school freshmen, a positive and notable relationship was observed between attitudes towards violence and bully-victim behavior scores. As the level of attitude towards violence increases, bully-victim behavior scores also increase. According to Olweus's (1978) study, it was stated that aggressive and bullying individuals have personality disorders and show a positive attitude towards violence. In a study applied by Balkis et al. (2005) with secondary school students, it was stated that students who developed a favorable attitude towards violence were more likely to apply bullying and victim behaviors than other students. In the study conducted by Demirbağ Bolat (2010) with sixth-grade students, similar findings were obtained. These studies support the finding of this study, which shows that adolescents' attitudes towards violence have a positively directed effect on bully-victim behaviors. This finding supports the first hypothesis that adolescents' attitudes towards violence positively predict bully-victim behaviors. Based on this result, it can be thought that there is a positively oriented connection between attitude and behavior. Developing a positive attitude towards violence is a strong factor that facilitates individuals displaying violent behaviors and being involved in peer bullying.

Reviewing the literature on emotional expression, which is the second independent variable of the model, was examined; no study was come across that assessed the relationship between emotional expression and peer bullying behaviours. Based on the findings of the study, a negative meaningful relationship was observed between emotional expression and bully-victim behaviors. It was observed that as family-expressed emotion levels increased, the scores of being involved in peer bullying decreased. This supports the second hypothesis, which argues that the level of emotional expression negatively predicts involvement in peer bullying. It is thought that this finding is due to the role of expressing emotions in interpersonal relations. The individual who expresses his/her emotions is aware of the feelings and is conscious of what bothers him/her and what does not. An individual who easily shares his/her feelings with people does not hesitate to ask for support when necessary and also can solve relationship problems more easily (Abacı, 2014).

Han and Shaffer (2014) concluded in their study that the level of intrusiveness and criticism from the mother influences the prevalence of emotional problems and expressive symptoms. In the study conducted by Stubbe et al. (1993) examining the relationship between mothers with high expressed emotion and psychiatric diseases observed in children, five times more psychiatric cases were observed in children of mothers with high levels of expressed emotion compared to the other population. These findings are parallel with the finding of this study that family-expressed emotion has a positive predictive effect on bully-victim behaviors. As the family-expressed emotion level increases, the level of involvement in bully-victim behaviors also increases. This finding supports the third hypothesis that the family-expressed emotion predicts involvement in peer bullying. It is thought that this finding may be due to the effects of sub-dimensions of family-expressed emotion (interventionism, lack of emotional support, and irritability) on behavioral, emotional, and social adjustment problems observed in children. It is thought that emotional regulation problems can be observed in children who are not emotionally supported and grow up in a critical and angry environment. That may increase the rate of being involved in peer bullying.

#### **5. Conclusion**

In the current study, the effects of emotional expression, family-expressed emotions, and the attitudes towards violence on the adolescents' bully-victim behaviors were examined using structural equation modeling.

According to the research findings, it was revealed that the adolescents' bully-victim behavior level, the level of family-expressed emotions, and the attitude towards violence were high, and the level of emotional expression was moderate. It was determined that the family-expressed emotions and attitudes towards violence have a positive predictive effect on adolescents' bully-victim behaviors, while emotional expression has a negative predictive effect on bully-victim behaviors.

In conclusion, there is a clear requirement for further research with different sample groups to generalize the results.

## 6. Recommendation

A limitation of this study concerns the scale used to measure peer bullying. The scale does not differentiate between bullies and victims; rather, it provides a total count of students involved in bullying, which may limit the depth of analysis. Future research should consider alternative scales that distinguish between perpetrators and victims to obtain more detailed insights.

Another limitation is related to the generalizability of the findings. Since only two schools were included in the study, both located in districts where residents generally have low socioeconomic status, the findings may not be representative of broader adolescent populations. To enhance generalizability, future studies should include participants from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

Additionally, the concept of family-expressed emotion—integrating components such as criticism, overprotection, and emotional warmth—may be interpreted differently across cultures and family structures. These variations could influence the study's findings. Future research should explore how cultural or familial differences affect emotional expression and adolescent behavior, using cross-cultural comparisons to gain a more comprehensive perspective.

Lastly, while the study applied a specific structural equation model to evaluate the relationships among variables, this model may not account for all potential moderating factors. Future research could broaden the model to incorporate additional components, such as emotional regulation, coping strategies, or peer group dynamics, to offer a more subtle perspective of the factors influencing peer bullying.

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