

# Name and Defame: Lived Experiences of Students with Uncommon Names in School Environment

Norven Dulaugon

Holy Cross of Davao College Inc., Philippines  
Email Address: norvendulaugon2411@gmail.com

## Research Article



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## ABSTRACT

Students with uncommon names often become targets of bullying. This reality motivated me to examine the lived experiences of individuals who have faced such mistreatment due to their names. Employing a phenomenological research design, I collected qualitative data through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with ten purposively selected high school students. Using thematic analysis, I identified several key themes: name-based bullying leads to emotional distress, diminished self-esteem, and tendencies toward social withdrawal. Participants also reported feelings of shame within their families, perceived a lack of institutional support, and expressed a strong need for empathy and understanding from others. Based on these findings, I recommend conducting a follow-up quantitative study to examine the relationships among these emergent themes, treating them as measurable variables. Additionally, I propose the application of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to aid in the development of a standardized questionnaire focused on bullying experiences.

*Keywords: inclusive, education, support*

## INTRODUCTION

Across the globe, students with rare or culturally distinct names often become targets of name-based bullying. Bonnett and Sok (2020) noted that individuals with such names commonly experience ridicule, leading many to avoid participating in class discussions for fear that their names might be mispronounced or mocked. In the United States, children bearing non-Anglo names—especially those of African, Hispanic, or Asian descent—frequently face exclusion or humiliation. Kohli and Solórzano (2012) observed that names like *Nguyen* and *Jamal* were often mispronounced, ridiculed by classmates, or altered by teachers without permission, contributing to a loss of cultural identity and sense of belonging. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, Muslim students with names such as *Mohammed* or *Aisha* encountered Islamophobic bullying after the 9/11 attacks. The Anti-Bullying Alliance (2015) reported incidents where such students were branded as “terrorists” or mocked for having unfamiliar names. In India, name-based bullying is also linked to deep-rooted caste systems. Nambissan (2010) highlighted how students with names that signaled lower-caste origins were subjected to discrimination and harassment in educational settings.

In the Philippine context, indigenous students—such as those from the Lumad, Igorot, and Aeta communities in Central Luzon—have shared experiences of being bullied due to their ethnic-sounding names, which are often mispronounced or ridiculed by peers. Despite these accounts, little attention has been given to this issue, particularly in Davao City. Most existing studies in the Davao Region, like that of Lopez and Salva (2021), have focused on physical bullying and interpersonal conflicts, overlooking name-based harassment rooted in cultural or ethnic identity. The University of Mindanao Ilang High School, which serves a diverse student population,

represents a relevant setting to explore this concern. Although informal reports suggest that students with unusual or culturally specific names face exclusion or teasing, no formal research has investigated the long-term emotional or academic consequences of such experiences. This is a critical oversight, as attacks on a student's name also attack their identity—an essential component of self-esteem and academic engagement. Moreover, the global research landscape lacks sufficient studies on the lasting impacts of name-related bullying. This lack of data limits the ability of schools and policymakers to design effective interventions that address this specific form of harassment. For these reasons, this study seeks to fill the gap and contribute to a broader understanding of the effects of name-based bullying on student identity, well-being, and educational experience. The works of Cariaga and colleagues provide a powerful backdrop for understanding the lived experiences of students with uncommon names in school environments. Cariaga's (2023) exploration of parental involvement highlights how family support can protect students from the emotional toll of name-based teasing and exclusion, while his reflections on the state of Philippine education reveal systemic issues that often ignore the cultural and personal dimensions of student identity. His emphasis on 21st-century skills such as communication, collaboration, and creativity (2024) reminds us of the importance of inclusive classrooms that value every student's unique background—including their names. In asking "What is student performance?" (2024), Cariaga challenges narrow definitions of success, urging educators to consider how ridicule or name-shaming can hinder a student's confidence and growth. Meanwhile, his collaboration with ElHalaissi (2024) on culturally responsive education underscores the need to honor identity in diverse learning spaces. Finally, his qualitative inquiry into rural education (Cariaga, Pospos, & Dagunan, 2024) echoes the call for teaching approaches that embrace empathy, creativity, and local context—offering a lens of hope and innovation for addressing the subtle yet damaging practice of name-based discrimination in schools.

This study is significant as it brings attention to a less explored aspect of bullying, one that directly affects a student's identity. Focusing on name-based bullying, the study aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of its psychological, social, and academic effects while also presenting practical solutions for schools to foster inclusivity, cultural sensitivity, and mental health support. Bullying, particularly targeting individuals with uncommon names, is significant for both academic and bigger school communities as well as teachers, parents, people in the community, and mental health professionals. Moreover, the school can use this study for the improvement and other accreditation requirements of the institutions. Lastly, this research not only addresses a gap in the current literature but also provides schools with the necessary tools in policy-making to combat name-based bullying and establish a safer, more respectful learning environment for all students.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In this study, I aimed to explore the lived experiences of students who have been bullied because of their names. Below is the central research question guiding this study:

- What are the lived experiences of students with uncommon names with regard to their social identities, social perceptions, and social behaviors within the school environment?
- How does students' social identity influence their academic behavior in the school setting?

This study examined the lived experiences of students with uncommon names who have faced name-based bullying. It explored how these experiences affect their social identity, shape the way they view bullying, and influence their social behaviors, particularly how these challenges impact their academic performance. By understanding their stories, the research sheds light on how something as personal as a name can deeply influence one's sense of self and daily life in school. This study on name-based bullying is guided by several core assumptions. First, it assumes that participants will respond with honesty and sincerity, as the research relies on personal narratives and reflections. The richness of the findings depends on the openness of those sharing their experiences. Second, the study assumes that names hold emotional and cultural significance. A name is not just a label; it shapes identity and social interactions. When used as a target for bullying, it can cause deep and lasting harm. Third, it is assumed that the school environment plays a critical role in either preventing or enabling name-based bullying. Institutional support, or the lack of it, can greatly influence how such bullying is experienced and addressed. Lastly, the study assumes that name-based bullying is a real, though often overlooked, issue. It can have serious effects on self-esteem, social connection, and academic engagement. These assumptions provide a framework for understanding the issue more clearly and compassionately, even while recognizing that each individual's experience is unique.

This study is grounded in Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social Identity Theory argues that social identity underpins intergroup behavior and sees this as qualitatively distinct from interpersonal behavior. It delineates the circumstances under which social identities are likely to become important so that they become the primary determinant of social perceptions and social behaviors. This theory suggests that students with uncommon names may face unique social interactions that deeply influence their self-identity and academic involvement in the school setting. Their names can shape how they are perceived by both peers and teachers, which in turn impacts their sense of belonging, either fostering inclusion or creating exclusion. The distinctiveness of their names does not just affect how others view them; it also shapes how they see themselves, reinforcing either a sense of uniqueness or a feeling of social alienation. By applying Social Identity Theory, this study highlights the powerful connection between social perceptions and the behaviors that follow. It underscores how the way students are seen by others can directly influence their social actions and self-concept. In doing so, it offers valuable insights into how naming conventions impact students' lived experiences and social development. This perspective encourages the creation of more inclusive educational practices that support positive social integration and boost self-esteem, especially for students with uncommon names.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This chapter outlined the methods I used to explore the lived experiences of students with uncommon names within the school environment. I presented the research design, the setting of the study, the sampling techniques, and the development of the interview guide questions. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD), which provided rich insights into the participants' personal narratives and shared experiences. I employed thematic analysis to identify patterns and recurring themes in the data. Lastly, I ensured the trustworthiness of the study by addressing reliability, credibility, and strict adherence to ethical research standards, including the use of pseudonyms to protect participant identities.

### **Research Design**

This study used a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore name-based bullying and the lived experiences of students with uncommon or culturally distinctive names. It aimed to capture how participants perceived and made meaning of the stigma tied to their names, focusing on its impact on identity, self-esteem, and belonging in school. Through in-depth interviews and focus groups, common themes such as emotional responses, identity negotiation, and coping strategies were identified. Drawing on Moustakas' (1994) phenomenology and Goffman's (1963) Stigma Theory, the study examined how personal experiences of exclusion reflected broader social dynamics of being labeled as "different."

### **Locale of the Study**

The study was conducted at the University of Mindanao Ilang High School, located at Barangay Ilang, Davao City. This educational institution served as a key academic hub for students from various socioeconomic backgrounds in the region. UM Ilang High School was known for its diverse student population, making it an ideal environment to examine the social dynamics, particularly regarding name-based bullying. The school offered a comprehensive secondary education curriculum, which allowed the research to explore how bullying experiences and coping mechanisms influenced both social interactions and academic performance within the local context. The geographic and cultural setting of Barangay Ilang, Davao City, provided a relevant backdrop for the study, as local norms and values may have influenced students' perceptions of name-based bullying and their responses to it. Additionally, the location offered accessibility for researchers to gather data through surveys, interviews, and observations directly from students, teachers, and school administrators. The chosen locale contributed to the study's validity by ensuring that the findings were grounded in the specific social and educational context of the UM Ilang High School community.

### **Sampling Technique and Scope**

To gather data on students' experiences with name-based bullying, I used a survey questionnaire to collect quantitative data and conducted in-depth interviews to gain qualitative insights. The questionnaire was formulated based on the research questions and was reviewed and validated by three experts in the field relevant to the study. The survey provided a broad overview, while the in-depth interviews, with open-ended questions, offered a safe and confidential space for participants to share personal experiences and emotional impacts. As Kvale (2007)

emphasized, such interviews allow access to participants' lived experiences, revealing how they interpret and make sense of the world. Patton (2015) further noted that in-depth interviews uncover not just events but also their emotional and psychological effects, which may not be fully captured through surveys alone.

### **Research Instrument**

The research instruments for this study on name-based bullying were designed to measure the prevalence, effects, and coping mechanisms associated with name-based bullying among students. I utilized a mixed-method approach to gather both quantitative and qualitative data to capture the full range of student experiences and outcomes. I gathered quantitative data on students' experiences with name-based bullying by using a survey questionnaire. In addition to this, I conducted in-depth interviews with open-ended questions to gather qualitative insights into the personal experiences and emotional impacts of name-based bullying. These interviews provided a safe and confidential environment for participants to express their emotions and thoughts freely. According to Kvale (2007), in-depth interviews offered an opportunity to gain access to the lived experiences of participants, providing a deeper understanding of how they made sense of their world. Furthermore, these interviews helped in capturing the complexity of emotions involved in bullying situations, which may have been difficult to quantify through surveys alone. As noted by Patton (2015), in-depth interviews provided insight into not just what happened but how it affected individuals emotionally and psychologically.

### **Data Gathering Procedure**

This section outlined the step-by-step process for collecting data on name-based bullying among students at UM Ilang High School. The study employed a mixed-method approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue. Before data collection began, formal permission was sought from the administration of UM Ilang High School. This included presenting the research objectives, instruments, and ethical protocols to ensure the study complied with the school's policies. Next, a self-administered questionnaire was distributed to students during their homeroom period. This survey covered the prevalence and effects of name-based bullying, including emotional, social, and academic impacts. Then, based on the responses to the survey, a purposive sampling method was used to select 10 students who reported being affected by name-based bullying. These students were invited to participate in in-depth interviews and FGDs to share their personal experiences. To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms were assigned and used throughout this study. Each participant was given a unique name that bears no direct connection to their real identity. This measure was implemented to protect their privacy and to foster a sense of safety during the interview process, encouraging open and honest responses. All identifying details were either omitted or modified to further preserve anonymity in accordance with ethical standards for qualitative research.

### **Data Analysis**

Chesnay (2014) cited Stake (2010), who explained that the goal of data analysis was to make sense of various forms of information extracted during interviews. The researcher had to intensively reflect on all the information given by the participants during the investigation. The significance of multiple sources from field notes, interviews, journals, photographs, and related documents enabled the researcher to deepen their findings. Furthermore, Yanto (2023), cited Braun and Clarke (2006), conveyed that Thematic Analysis used transcripts that were analyzed to identify common themes associated with the psychological and social effects of bullying based on names, as well as the strategies individuals used to cope with it. As part of the data analysis, I used thematic analysis to interpret the data. I carefully analyzed the data with accuracy to ensure its validity. Hence, as the interviewer, I uncovered behaviors and feelings that were not explicitly expressed. Lastly, for the validation of the participants' answers, I cross-examined their answers with the same questions with different participants.

### **Trustworthiness of the Study**

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) and Patton (2015) assert that investigating ethically ensures the reliability and validity of qualitative research. The trustworthiness of the data is reflected in those who collect and analyze it.

### **Ethical Considerations**

To ensure the trustworthiness and ethical integrity of this study, I adhered to the key principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, as outlined in qualitative research standards. For credibility, which refers to the internal validity or the accurate interpretation of participants' experiences (Pratihari & Uzma,

2019), I employed triangulation by gathering data from multiple sources and cross-examining responses during interviews. I also spent considerable time in the school environment observing students' interactions and conducting multiple interview sessions to build trust and gather rich, detailed data. To establish transferability or the applicability of findings to other contexts (Gatson & Enslin, 2021), I ensured the inclusion of thick descriptive data and grounded the study in extensive related literature. Additionally, I used purposive sampling to select participants with relevant experiences and knowledge regarding name-based bullying, allowing for meaningful comparison across different settings. In terms of dependability (Leavy, 2014), I implemented an external audit where a knowledgeable third party reviewed the data collection and analysis processes. I also incorporated participant feedback into the interpretation of results, giving them a voice in shaping the study's conclusions. Supporting literature was included to reinforce the findings and improve consistency. For confirmability, which aims to reduce researcher bias (Pickard, 2017; Tolley et al., 2016), I maintained objectivity by practicing reflexivity throughout the research process and keeping a clear separation between the observer and the observed. I also shared the results with participants to gather their feedback and confirm the accuracy of interpretations. Triangulation further supported this by ensuring that conclusions were drawn from multiple corroborated sources rather than personal assumptions. By upholding these ethical principles, this study aimed to produce findings that are not only rigorous and meaningful but also fair, transparent, and respectful of participants' lived experiences.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Themes and Corresponding Sub-themes**

After careful analysis, I was able to identify 12 sub-themes emerging under the original themes presented in the theory. The following are themes and identified emerging subthemes: 1) Social Identity of Victims of Name-Based Bullying, 2) Social Perceptions of Victims of Name-Based Bullying, and 3) Social Behaviors of Victims of Name-Based Bullying.

### **Social Perceptions of Victims of Name-Based Bullying**

Through the participants' lived experiences, it became evident how name-based bullying influenced both their self-image and their perception of where they fit within the social landscape of school. As they shared their stories, it was clear that their names, which should have been simple identifiers, had come to represent something negative, something that distanced them from their peers. The bullying they faced because of their names led them to question their own worth and to internalize the ridicule and judgment that was so often directed at them. What was once a personal identifier gradually turned into a symbol of difference, something that set them apart and made them feel like outsiders. As they continued to navigate their school lives, these participants began to carry the weight of these social perceptions in their interactions with others. The more they absorbed the negative associations linked to their names, the more they felt disconnected from their peers. Many described a growing sense of alienation, where their names became a constant reminder of their perceived otherness. These experiences show how the labels imposed on them were not just external judgments; they became internalized, shaping their sense of identity and their place in the school environment. What started as a form of bullying based on their names expanded into a broader struggle with self-perception and social belonging. I have identified six subthemes in this theme: Injustice in Name-Calling, Emotional and Psychological Impact, Lack of Accountability and Support, Family-Based Shame and Disappointment, The Desire for Change and Empathy, and Self-Perception and Internal Struggle.

### ***On the Injustice in Name-Calling***

Many participants expressed a lingering sense of injustice tied to their experiences with name-based bullying. They had not chosen their names; these were given to them at birth, yet they felt as though they were being judged, mocked, or excluded because of them. This disconnect gave rise to a strong perception of unfairness, a feeling that they were being punished for something entirely beyond their control. For them, it felt deeply wrong that something so personal, something outside their agency, could become a target. This quiet but persistent injustice followed them through their school years, shaping how they moved through social spaces and how they saw themselves. This perception of unfairness often led to a deeper sense of disempowerment. Because they could not change their names, they also could not change how others treated them. As a result, some participants described feeling voiceless or helpless, trapped in an identity others had turned against them. The name that should have been a source of identity and pride instead became a reminder of their lack of control over how they

were perceived and treated. As participant *Amy* recalled, "*Ang apelyido nako sir gara-garaan ug bullyhon ana. Mga 11 to 12 years old ko ato sir, grade six, gina tawag ko nila ug 'babo' tungod kay akoang apelyido na 'Bahunsua.' Ano sir mokalit lang sila ug ingon na 'baboy,' 'babo,' 'pangit kayo' maski wala nako sila gihilabtan.*" (My last name was always made fun of and used to bully me. I was about 11 to 12 years old back then, in grade six, and they would call me 'stinky' because of my last name, 'Bahunsua.' They would suddenly start calling me 'pig,' 'smelly,' and 'very ugly' even though I hadn't done anything to bother them.)

As I sat across from *Amy* during the interview, I observed how her gaze lowered, her fingers quietly tracing the edge of her shirt. Her voice, though soft, carried a noticeable weight, a mix of sadness and lingering frustration. There was a brief pause as she seemed to gather her emotions, her eyes looking away as though confronting memories she rarely allowed to surface. Having known *Amy* personally as her teacher, I recalled how, not long ago, her mother had seriously considered transferring her to another school in an effort to shield her from the relentless bullying she experienced. This decision alone underscored the severity of her situation. Her experience was not merely about occasional teasing; it reflected a persistent, deeply personal attack that affected her self-esteem, her daily experiences, and even major family decisions regarding her education. As *Amy* continued, her words underscored the profound sense of injustice she endured. "*Maski wala nako sila gi unsa,*" she stated, her voice cracking slightly. Even years later, the unfairness remained raw. She had done nothing to provoke such treatment, yet she was persistently targeted. The injustice was not only in the acts of bullying themselves but also in the fact that her mere existence, her name, became grounds for ridicule. This created a reality where no effort on her part could have prevented the bullying, leaving a long-lasting impact on her self-concept and social interactions. This experience was not an isolated case. Moving to another participant's narrative, *Matt* shared a similar story, highlighting a consistent pattern of injustice faced by individuals subjected to name-based bullying. "*Sauna sir, sa elementary kay ginabully man ko nila. Ilabang mga joke sa akoo apelyido kay i-associate nila atong word na 'bugaw sa tao'. Kasagaran nagabuhat ato akoang mga classmates. Nagreport ko sa guidance wala man gihapon nausab.*" (Back then, sir, in elementary, I was bullied by them. They would associate my last name with the phrase 'dirty person.' It was mostly my classmates who did it. I reported it to the guidance office, but nothing changed.) Hearing *Matt's* account triggered a familiar feeling of frustration. *Matt* was one of the most outstanding students I had taught, particularly in my Political Science class. His sharp critical thinking, deep sense of fairness, and maturity were remarkable for his age. Knowing this, it was even more disheartening to realize that someone so capable and promising had been subjected to repeated bullying without any meaningful intervention from the school system.

Despite *Matt's* calm and composed delivery, there was a palpable sense of disappointment in his voice. It became evident that the pain he carried was not solely from the bullying but also from the failure of the very institution that was supposed to protect him. Reporting his experiences to the guidance office yielded no change; no action was taken, and the bullying continued unchecked. The injustice here was twofold: first, in the bullying itself, and second, in the indifference of those in authority who could have made a difference. *Matt's* experience exemplified a systemic failure that invalidated his efforts to seek help. For a student who understood the concepts of fairness and justice so well, this abandonment by authority figures struck me deeply. *Amy* and *Matt's* stories made something painfully clear: when name-based bullying is ignored by those in charge, it does more than hurt a student's self-esteem; it breaks their trust in the very systems meant to protect them. Being laughed at or singled out for a name they never chose was already unfair. But what cut even deeper was the silence that followed, the lack of action, the absence of support. It signaled to them that their pain did not matter. This perception of unfairness slowly turned into something heavier: disempowerment. When students repeatedly ask for help and nothing changes, they start to believe that speaking up is useless. Over time, they stop trying. They carry the hurt alone, shrinking back, not because they want to, but because they feel they have no other choice. When asked how he typically reacted to name-based bullying, participant *Willy* shared: "*Sa ako sir, wala man binoon kay ginabalewala na lang man nako kay dili man nato ma-control ang ubang tao. Ginapakalma na lang nako akoang sarili. Babala sila, wala gihapon ko mabuhat.*" (For me, sir, it does not really affect me because I just ignore it. We can't control other people. I just calm myself down. Let them be; there's nothing I can really do.) As I listened to *Willy*, I could not help but reflect on the contrast between his physical presence and his emotional response. Known to be one of my more aggressive and confrontational students, he appeared to have the strength to defend himself if needed. Yet when it came to emotional matters like bullying, *Willy* surrendered quietly. It became clear that while he might be capable of standing up in a physical altercation, emotional wounds left him with a sense of helplessness. His reaction revealed a deeper resignation that sometimes, no matter how strong one appears on the outside, emotional hurt can feel impossible to fight. On the other hand, participant *Ella* shared a different

but equally heartbreaking perspective. When asked the same question, she explained: "*Nakaingon ko na nganong damay-damayon nila akoo apelyido na gamit lang man amoa gina estoryaban? Nalain ko ato sir. Dili pud ko gusto mobalos kay kasab-an man ko sa akoo ginikanan. Mao to mobilom na lang ko.*" (I thought to myself, why do they have to make fun of my last name when it's just a thing we are talking about? I felt hurt, sir. But I didn't want to fight back because I would get scolded by my parents. So, I just stayed quiet.)

As she spoke, I could see the sadness in *Ella's* eyes. It was the kind of sadness born from feeling trapped, wanting to stand up for herself but fearing the consequences at home if she did. For *Ella*, silence was not a choice but a necessity. Her fear of disappointing her parents weighed heavier than her need to defend herself, leaving her powerless and stuck in a cycle of quiet suffering. Participant *Amy*, when asked the same question, gave a short and sharp response: "*Wala po. Para walay samok.*" (Nothing. So, there won't be any trouble.) The anger and frustration behind *Amy's* brief answer were almost tangible. As the interviewer, I could sense how much she, too, had internalized the disempowerment that came from being repeatedly hurt without the means or permission to fight back. Her choice to avoid confrontation was not out of acceptance but out of exhaustion and a desire to avoid further chaos in her life. A painful thread ran through the stories of *Willy*, *Ella*, and *Amy*: a deep sense of disempowerment. For *Willy*, it looked like quiet resignation. For *Ella*, it showed up as fear. For *Amy*, it came out in bursts of frustration. Though their responses differed, the message was the same: bullying had taken more than just their confidence; it had taken their ability to speak up. Left to cope on their own, they began to believe that staying silent, withdrawing, or simply enduring was all they could do. But the damage did not stop there. What started as injustice grew into something deeper and more enduring, an emotional and psychological impact that shaped how they saw themselves and how they moved through the world.

### ***On Emotional and Psychological Impact***

For many participants, the teasing they endured because of their names was not something they could easily brush off or forget. While the jokes and insults might have seemed trivial to others, for those on the receiving end, the experience left a lasting mark. The emotional pain went far beyond momentary embarrassment; it lingered, becoming a quiet but persistent presence in their daily lives. Name-based bullying did more than hurt feelings. It stripped away a sense of safety and dignity, turning school, an environment that should foster growth and belonging, into a place of exposure and shame. Participants spoke of feeling humiliated, not just in isolated moments but repeatedly in front of peers, teachers, and even authority figures who failed to intervene. This humiliation took root over time, leaving psychological scars that extended well beyond the classroom. Several participants described their experiences as carrying an "invisible wound," a type of pain that was not always visible to others but affected how they thought, felt, and acted. What began as daily teasing slowly evolved into a deeper emotional struggle. Feelings of sadness, fear, and anxiety took hold. They began to anticipate ridicule, bracing themselves for the next round of laughter or name-calling. In some cases, they reported feeling depressed or withdrawn, avoiding interaction altogether to minimize the risk of being hurt again. This fear was not just about specific individuals; it became generalized, shaping their overall social behavior. Some became overly cautious and hesitant to speak up in class or engage with peers. Others described being constantly on edge, unsure when a casual conversation might turn into an opportunity for mockery. The emotional toll was cumulative: each instance of bullying reinforced the belief that they did not belong, that their identity was a liability rather than something to take pride in. What emerged clearly from their stories was that emotional pain and humiliation were not fleeting. The bullying etched itself into their memories and self-perceptions, creating long-term psychological scars. It taught them to doubt themselves, to stay quiet, and, in some cases, to hide parts of who they were. The persistent fear and anxiety that developed as a result made it difficult for them to fully participate in school life. They were not just avoiding conflict; they were managing trauma in the only ways they knew how. In essence, name-based bullying did not just hurt at the moment; it reshaped how these students saw themselves and the world around them. Their emotional wounds, though often unseen, were very real, and their stories reveal just how deeply a name, twisted into a weapon, can impact a young person's mental and emotional well-being. As participant *Matt* shared in another interview, "*Kanang first day of school sir tapos introduce yourself, pag isulti nako akoo apelyido mangatawa sila kay akoo apelyido kay similar man sila ug sound sa 'hugaw' nato, 'hugaw' sa tao. Kanang pag madunggan jud nako akoang apelyido sir kay maulaw jud ko.*" (On the first day of school, sir, when I introduced myself and said my last name, they all laughed because my surname sounds similar to 'hugaw,' which means 'poop' in our language. When I hear my last name, sir, I really feel embarrassed.)

As *Matt* narrated his experience, I could see the discomfort engraved across his face. His words were soft but filled with an emotion I knew all too well. It was that moment of *introduction* when all eyes are on you, and self-consciousness takes over. I could almost feel his anxiety, a familiar feeling from my own experiences, where the weight of judgment hangs heavy, even if it's not directly aimed at you. His vulnerability in sharing that pain revealed how much the embarrassment still haunted him, even in a safe space, years later. Participant *John*, *Matt's* friend and teammate, also shared his own experience, which echoed *Matt's* feelings. "*Before pa i-state akoang name sir, makabalo nako unsa ilang reaction. Naa na koy gina-anticipate. Na makakatawa jud sila, matingala, mabag-oban, ana hangtod naanad na lang ko sir. Mokatawa jud na sila sir tapos maulaw ko. Usabay maglagot ko. If naay anawarding sa eskwelahan na kailangan ka mosaka ug stage unya i-mention imohang pangalan, dili na lang ko mo attend tungod lang ana na rason babala na nang achievement sa school kaysa maulawan ko.*" (Before I even state my name, sir, I already know what their reaction will be. I anticipate that they'll laugh, be surprised, or even be confused until I just get used to it. They'll definitely laugh, and I get embarrassed. Sometimes I even get angry. If there's an award ceremony at school and I have to go up on stage and have my name mentioned, I'd rather not attend just to avoid that feeling, even if it means missing out on my achievement.) *John's* experience highlights the powerful influence that name-based bullying can have on social identity. Even though he was anticipating the laughter, it did not make the humiliation any easier to bear. *John's* unwillingness to attend an awards ceremony to avoid hearing his name called is a clear reflection of how much his *social identity* was impacted. The moment that should have been one of pride and celebration became a social minefield for him. The bullying undermined his sense of belonging, and he preferred to forgo the recognition rather than face the social shame that came with his name being announced. In this case, the bullying did not just affect his emotional state; it shaped his actions and choices, influencing his social behavior and sense of inclusion within the school community.

Hearing *Matt* and *John* share their experiences made it clear that name-based bullying does not just cause temporary discomfort; it leaves a long-lasting impact on how these individuals perceive their social identity. The laughter, the mockery, and the exclusion had a direct influence on their sense of belonging and worth within their social circles. They were not just affected at the moment; they were shaped by these interactions in ways that influenced how they navigated future social settings. The impact on their *social identity* was profound: it made them self-conscious about their names, hesitant to engage in social situations, and fearful of being further marginalized or ridiculed. These stories remind us just how important it is to protect the social identity of students. When name-based bullying is allowed to continue unchecked, it does not just bruise feelings at the moment; it chips away at a young person's ability to move through the world with confidence. For *Matt* and *John*, the pain was not a one-time thing. It was something they carried day after day, feeling exposed, singled out, and less than. Their interactions with classmates shifted, and so did the way they saw themselves within their community. This kind of emotional pain does not simply fade. On Long-Term Psychological Scars, we see how these repeated experiences can quietly shape a student's self-image, sense of worth, and ability to connect with others long after the bullying stops. Participant *Willy* spoke with a quiet mix of anger and sadness as he shared how name-based bullying shaped his willingness to speak up. "*Example sir, nag-answer ka tapos namali ka ug answer, ginatawag dayon ko nila ana 'boy ikaw tagbawa ka,' mao na ginabuhay sa akoo classmates before. Sukad adto dili na ko ganahan ug mabadlo na ko mag-participate sa klase.*" (For example, sir, when I answered a question and got it wrong, my classmates would call me, 'hey, you're the one who does not know anything.' That's what they used to do to me. Since then, I've been afraid to participate in class.) As *Willy* spoke, it became clear that this was more than just a memory; it was a wound he still carried. His hesitation to answer in class was not because he lacked the knowledge or the ability. It was because he feared being humiliated again and again. The teasing, though it might have seemed small to others, had taken root deep inside him. In his mind, the classroom, the place that should have been a space for discovery and confidence, had transformed into a stage of fear and self-protection. His story reminds us that ridicule does not simply fade away; it lingers, slowly reshaping how students see themselves and their place among others. What should have been moments of growth left scars instead, quiet but lasting marks on his social identity. *Ella* shared a similar story, her voice softer but no less heavy. "*Sa akoo sir ing ana pud pag mamali ko ug answer mokatawa sila. Naa pud to roleplay, naa to'y eksena na akoang role kay luoy unya sawayon ko nila ug 'unsa mana ny Masucol pero dili mosukol,' ma-awkward na hinoon ko mag-perform.*" (For me, sir, it was the same when I gave a wrong answer; they would laugh. There was even a roleplay where my character was pitiful, and they criticized me, saying, 'What's this? You're supposed to act like you're being bullied, but you're not reacting.' It made me feel awkward performing.)

There was a visible hesitation in *Ella's* eyes as she recounted the moment. What was meant to be a playful, creative experience became a memory of discomfort and isolation. Instead of feeling supported, she felt exposed and singled out not just by her mistakes but by the way her classmates responded to them. The laughter, the comments, the sideways glances, they all stitched themselves into her memory. Confidence, once easy and natural, became something fragile, easily broken by even a single careless word. Listening to *Willy* and *Ella*, it became painfully clear that name-based bullying is not something students easily outgrow. It leaves invisible scars that quietly shape the way they move through social spaces. It is not just about being teased for a moment; it's about how that moment reshapes their social identity, how they begin to see themselves, and how they imagine others see them. Their social perceptions shift, often in ways that make the world feel less welcoming and less forgiving. In protecting themselves from further hurt, they learn to retreat, to silence their own voices even when they have so much to say. Their stories reveal something we cannot ignore: the emotional wounds left by bullying often linger long after the teasing stops. These are not just painful memories; they shape how a student sees themselves and how they relate to the world around them. The hurt digs deep, touching their sense of worth, their feeling of belonging, and their confidence to take part in everyday life. But with these long-term scars comes something even more difficult to carry: fear and anxiety. Many of them moved through school on edge, constantly scanning for the next joke or insult. It was not just about being teased; it was about never knowing when it would happen again. That kind of fear changes how a student shows up in the world. When I asked *Matt* how he felt hearing people mention his name, there was a pause before he answered, as if he needed to gather himself. Then he spoke, the words slow but heavy: "*Ma-anxious ko sir ba kay usabay sir, pag i-ingon man gud akoang apelyido sir maklaro jud nako sa akoang peripheral vision sir bah nga naa jud mokatava. Naga-make face sila, makita nako na mo-ngisi sila pag madunggan nila akoo apelyido.*" (I get anxious, sir, because sometimes, when my last name is mentioned, I can clearly see through my peripheral vision that someone is laughing. They make faces, and I can see them smiling when they hear my last name.) As he shared this, I could almost feel the tension ripple through him. Even without clear proof, *Matt* had convinced himself that every glance, every small smirk was directed at him. It was not just fear; it was a deeply rooted paranoia born from repeated small humiliations. Listening to him, I found myself reflecting on something so ordinary yet now suddenly important: the simple act of calling attendance at the start of class. I wondered each time I called his name, did it feel like another tiny wound? Was every school day another quiet battle he had to fight just to stay seated, just to stay present? As *Matt's* story settled heavily in my mind, *Diana's* voice broke through, adding another layer to this painful reality. She shared her own memory, one that had clearly left a scar: "*Okay lang sa akoo, pero pag sobra na kaayo tapos balik-balik na dili na ko komportable kay maulawan na man ko. Dili man jud gud ko gusto ug in ana sir kanang name calling. Katong grade 5 ko sir naa man gud ko na experience na na-trauma ko. Katong grade 5 ko kay nagdula-dula mi sa akoo mga amigo sa gym unya nikalit lang ug tawag sa akoo akoo classmate. Natingala ko ngano gitawag ko niya. Ana siya 'Hali' mouban daw ko sa iyaba tapos sa unahan kay didto na ko nila gitabangan ug tawag ug 'halimaw' 'Hali dinhi'. Mga classmates to nako ug mga schoolmates. Since ato sir kay dili nako naga socialize sa ubang tao.*" (It was okay for me at first, but when it became too much and kept happening, I became uncomfortable because it embarrassed me. I really don't like name-calling, sir. Back in grade 5, I had a traumatic experience. We were just playing at the gym with my friends when suddenly a classmate called me over. I wondered why he called me. Then he said "Hali," asking me to come with him, and when I did, they started calling me "halimaw" [monster] and "Hali dinhi" [monster, come here]. Those were my classmates and schoolmates. Since then, sir, I stopped socializing with other people.)

There was a heartbreaking simplicity in the way *Diana* told her story as if she had long accepted that this was just how things were. What might have seemed like harmless teasing to others had, in truth, shut a door inside her. She hated the way her voice sounded, tight, weary, and edged with a frustration that hinted she had had enough. It betrayed how much she had carried in silence. After that day, she decided it was safer to stay away, to shrink her world rather than risk being hurt again. Hearing both *Matt* and *Diana* speak, it became clear how deep and invisible these wounds can be. Their stories reveal that name-based bullying is not just a fleeting childhood memory; it shapes the way they see themselves, how they interact with others, and even how they exist in spaces that should have been safe for them. For *Matt*, even a glance or a giggle triggered a rush of doubt and anxiety, while for *Diana*, a single afternoon at the gym changed the entire course of her social life. Both carry with them a silent burden, one that the world around them might never fully see but that weighs heavily with every step they take. Their experiences remind us that words, especially names, hold real power. In a classroom where every child should feel seen and valued, something as simple as the way a name is spoken can shift a student from feeling like they belong to feeling completely isolated. This fear of being singled out or humiliated is not just a personal struggle; it is a systemic issue. On fear and anxiety, many students spoke about how their constant

vigilance took a toll on their mental well-being, making them anxious and fearful in places they should have felt safe. But the fear did not stop there, it became a deeper concern about the lack of support when they spoke up. The lack of accountability and support in these situations only made things worse, leaving students feeling like their pain was not important enough to address.

### ***On the Lack of Accountability and Support***

Despite the emotional toll it took, many students shared how their experiences with name-based bullying were often dismissed by the very adults meant to protect them. Teachers, guidance counselors, and school administrators, figures who should have stepped in, often viewed the bullying as harmless teasing or typical childhood behavior. But for the students living through it, the consequences were far from harmless. What hurt just as much as the bullying itself was the inaction that followed. When students finally worked up the courage to report what was happening, they were often met with vague reassurances or no response at all. Some were told to “just ignore it,” while others saw their complaints downplayed or brushed aside. This repeated lack of accountability left a clear message: what they were going through did not matter enough to warrant serious attention. Over time, this silence from authority figures began to shape a troubling belief, a perception of tolerance. Students came to feel that bullying was not just happening in the open but was being quietly allowed to continue. The absence of meaningful intervention made it seem as though cruelty was simply part of school life, something they had to endure rather than something that could or should be stopped. This perception was not born from assumption alone; it was built on lived experiences of seeking help and finding none. This sense of tolerance did not just deepen their pain; it took away their hope. Many began to believe that there was no point in speaking up because nothing would change. They stopped reporting. They stopped reaching out. Instead, they internalized their struggles, quietly navigating the emotional fallout with no support system in place. And yet, beneath this silence, there was a strong desire for intervention. Students did not want to suffer alone. They wanted adults to notice, to step in, not with lectures, but with real action. They longed for reassurance that their pain was valid and that their dignity mattered. Their stories revealed a powerful yearning: not just to be heard but to be protected. They did not expect perfection; they just wanted someone to stand up for them when they no longer could.

In the end, the failure to act was not just a missed opportunity; it became a form of complicity. And in that environment, the line between what was painful and what was permissible became dangerously blurred. When I asked why so many students hesitate to seek help from teachers or the guidance office, *Nova* answered after a moment's silence, her voice quiet, almost unsure. *"Honestly? Dili sir. Kay ang uban man gud sir maulaw. Tapos naa jud baya gap ang teachers ng students pati ang guidance counselor."* (Honestly? No, sir. Because some students really feel shy. And there's really a gap between teachers and students, even with the guidance counselor.) There was something heavy behind her simple words, a weight that spoke of more than just embarrassment. It spoke of a distance, invisible yet deeply felt, between the students and those entrusted with their care. In theory, help was there. In reality, it felt unreachable. *Nova's* small confession opened a quiet door into a deeper truth: that in the spaces meant for support, many young people instead found themselves alone. Participant *Thea's* voice followed, a soft echo of the same fear: *"Usabay gusto nako sila i-isumbong, pero mabadlok ko basi molala ang sitwasyon ba. Mogara mana sila pag imobang patulan. Wala man gihapon kabag oban."* (Sometimes, I want to report them, but I'm scared it might only make things worse. They'll just become even more arrogant if you fight back. Nothing changes anyway.) *Thea*, still so young, already carried tired wisdom, as if she had lived this cycle too many times to believe in change any more. As she spoke, her eyes stayed fixed on the floor, lips trembling slightly, voice barely rising above a whisper. There was a hollow sadness in her expression, the kind that made her seem older than she was. Her shoulders curled inward as if trying to make herself smaller, to disappear. For her, the thought of asking for help felt like lighting a match in a storm, futile and dangerous. There was no comfort in speaking up, only the looming fear of making herself a bigger target. Then came participant *Janna*, her words tinged with a bitterness no child should have to know: *"Pareha mi ni Thea sir ginabalewa ra pagmagsumbong mi. Kantsawanan nuon ka pag magsumbong ka."* (It's the same for me, sir. When we report something, they just ignore it. Sometimes, they even laugh at you for speaking up.) Hearing *Janna*, it struck me how normalized their pain had become. It was not just fear that kept them silent; it was the memory of being dismissed, of being made to feel foolish for hoping that adults would listen. *Janna* spoke with a smile stretched across her face, too bright, too rehearsed. It did not reach her eyes, which looked distant and dim, like a window after sunset. The smile was her shield, a practiced disguise to hide the hollow ache just beneath the surface. They had tried to speak, and they had been taught that silence was safer.

As I listened to *Nova*, *Thea*, and *Janna*, a deep sadness settled in me. The classroom, the school grounds, places that should have been their sanctuary, had instead become places where they learned to guard themselves, to stay quiet, to expect disappointment. These were not just isolated stories; they were reflections of a bigger, more heartbreaking truth. Tolerance, in their world, did not mean acceptance; it meant survival. It meant lowering their expectations of others and expecting silence, not justice. Their social identity, the way they saw themselves and their place within the group had been reshaped by these early wounds. Where there should have been trust, there was guardedness. Where there should have been community, there was isolation. They moved carefully, spoke sparingly, and dreamed a little less loudly because somewhere along the way, they were taught that their voices were too small to matter. When students start to believe that bullying is simply tolerated, it sends a heartbreaking message that their pain does not matter. Over time, that silence becomes its own kind of harm. From this Perception of Tolerance grows a quiet but urgent need, a Desire for Intervention. The stories shared are not just painful memories; they are powerful reminders of what's lost when schools fail to create spaces that truly feel safe and empathetic. If we want to show students that we genuinely care, it cannot stop at posters or policies. It takes real presence, honest compassion, and the courage to rebuild the trust that so many have learned to live without. When asked what he would do to address name-based bullying if given the chance, *Willy* did not hesitate. His voice was firm, edged with frustration: "*Sa akoo sir i-confront jud nako ang naga bully kay wala man gud sila kabalo sa na feel sa mga taong gina bully sir. Direct to the point jud nako ingnon na lain pud baya makasakit ta ug laing tao.*" (For me, sir, I would really confront the bully because they don't understand how it feels for the person being bullied. I would directly tell them that hurting others is wrong.)

Though his tone carried anger, it was not hard to hear the deeper emotion beneath it. *Willy's* response was not just about anger; it was about pain, the kind that comes from being misunderstood and unheard for too long. As he spoke, his hands clenched slightly, his voice steady but tense, like he was holding something back. His eyes did not just glare; they stared past me, unfocused, as if he was looking at something far away. At that moment, I could almost see it: the life he wished for, playing quietly behind his gaze, a version of the world where he was seen, valued, and safe. But just as quickly, the vision faded, replaced by the flicker of resignation. His words, sharp as they were, came from a heart tired of being hurt and from a mind that knew dreams like he never made it past the walls he had learned to build. As the interview unfolded, I found myself remembering something *Willy* had shared earlier: he lives far from his parents, staying in a boarding house throughout the school year. This small detail lingered in my mind like a quiet ache. I wondered if the distance from his family, their warmth, their comfort, made the wounds of bullying feel even deeper. A boarding house could offer him a roof, but it could not offer the arms of his parents, the soft reassurances that he mattered and was loved. *Ella* also offered a reflection that stayed with me long after our conversation ended. With a voice that danced between sarcasm and sadness, she said: "*Unya wala pud ta kabalo ang katong tao na imong gina bully kay sensitive kaayo to siya, nagabilak siya taga gabie pagma recall to niya.*" (And we don't even know, sir, that the person we are bullying might be someone very sensitive, someone who cries every night remembering what happened.) I did not need to ask if she was speaking from personal experience. It was there, in the way her voice caught slightly, in the way she looked down after speaking as if remembering something she wished she could forget. Her words carried a hidden weight, a confession wrapped in a general statement. There was hurt, yes, but also soft, aching wisdom: that cruelty leaves marks we rarely see. Though *Ella* was not explicitly calling for intervention to address bullying, the way she spoke about the trauma victims carry made it clear someone should step in, someone should notice, and someone should offer comfort because behind every quiet survivor is a story still hurting. Both *Willy* and *Ella* expressed a clear desire for Intervention, whether through directly confronting bullies or through the unspoken wish that someone would understand and protect the sensitive ones. Their experiences show how bullying shapes not only how they see themselves but how they see the social world around them. For *Willy*, intervention meant standing up and fighting back when no one else would. For *Ella*, it meant hoping for empathy, for the kind of kindness that sees the hidden tears behind brave faces. Their social identities, marked by resilience, loneliness, and sensitivity, are deeply tied to their social perceptions: that the world can often fail to protect the vulnerable and that sometimes, the strongest intervention must come from within. Their stories remind us that name-based bullying is not just a passing moment of meanness; it leaves a lasting mark. It plants quiet seeds of self-doubt and fear that shape how students see themselves and how they move through the world. More than anything, it creates a deep longing, not just for kindness but for real change.

### ***On Family-Based Shame and Disappointment***

For some students, the pain of being mocked for their names went far beyond the classroom. It created an invisible rift between their school life and home life, two worlds that should have felt safe but began to pull in opposite directions. At home, their names often held deep cultural, familial, or personal meanings. But at school, those same names became the punchlines of cruel jokes. Over time, this contrast left students feeling conflicted and, worse, ashamed. What made this shame so painful was how quietly it grew. It did not always come with shouting or visible tears. Instead, it settled in quietly, an unspoken discomfort with one's own identity. Many students began to feel embarrassed, not just about their names but about what those names represented: their family, their roots, and their history. In some cases, they even avoided talking about their names at home, fearing that expressing their pain might be seen as disrespect or ingratitude. They were caught between wanting to honor where they came from and wishing they could escape the ridicule tied to it. This emotional tension led to an even more complicated feeling: shame directed toward their own families. It was not that they blamed their parents or loved ones, but the constant teasing made them question the very thing their families had proudly given them: their name. In a quiet, painful way, the bullying distorted how they viewed their own background. What was once a source of pride became something to hide.

Several students shared that they began to downplay or even avoid family gatherings where their names might be mentioned. Others described pretending not to care when relatives called them by their full names in public just to avoid drawing attention. For these students, the teasing did not just hurt in the moment; it changed how they moved through the world. It created a deep internal conflict between loyalty to their families and the desire to protect themselves from more pain. Ultimately, their stories revealed a heartbreaking truth: name-based bullying does not just damage how students are seen by others; it can reshape how they see themselves and the people they love. The ridicule did not just stay at school. It followed them home, quietly altering their sense of connection, comfort, and belonging within their own families. One participant, *Matt*, shared something that lingered in my heart: *"Akoang papa sir dili pud siya ganahan mogamit sa amoang apelyido kay lain daw paminawon maong iyahang middle name iyahang ginagamit. Ako pud mas ganahan ko mogamit sa akoang middle name."* (My father, sir, does not like using our surname because he says it sounds odd, so he uses his middle name instead. As for me, I actually prefer using my middle name too.) *Matt's* words struck me in a quiet, profound way. There was a boy carrying not just the teasing from peers but also a deeper wound planted closer to home, the feeling that even within his family, there was a reluctance to own their name. His father's unease with their surname had quietly soaked into him, a subtle inheritance of shame. As he spoke, his eyes met mine with an intensity that seemed to ask, Can you not see this? Can you not feel the weight of what I'm saying? His gaze was heavy, almost pleading, as though he wanted me to understand the terrible situation he was in, to feel the sting of something so deeply personal. Yet, in *Matt's* quiet defiance, his choice to embrace the very name his father tried to hide, there was also a search for pride, a silent reclamation of identity. His story paints a bittersweet picture of feeling ashamed by family: a pain that does not need loud voices or public humiliation to leave its mark. Sometimes, it is passed down in whispers, in avoidance, in the way we are taught to speak, or not speak, about who we are. Unlike *Matt*, *Nova's* emotions came pouring out with rawness and pain. As she spoke, she could no longer hold back her tears: *"Maulaw sir, dili pud jud ko ganahan sa akoang middle name sir. Dili man gud sir. Kanang ag the age of 15 ra man gud nako nabibal-an na akoang mama karon kay step mother diay nako. Ilang ginaingon man gud sauna sir kay kanang 'P' na middle initial kay 'Paje' jud na sir. Tapos pagka grade six nako didto ko nag question kay gipapasa mi ug birth certificate tapos Nakita nako mao to nangutana ko ngano tapos ni ingon ra akoo mama na 'ay namali ra na ug sulat sa imong papa. Ako pud nituo ra pud ko."* (It's embarrassing, sir. I also don't really like my middle name. It was not until I was 15 that I found out that my mom was actually my stepmother. They used to tell me that the 'P' in my middle initial stood for 'Paje.' Then, when I was in grade six, we were asked to submit our birth certificates, and that's when I saw it. I asked why, and my mom just said, 'Oh, your dad made a mistake when he wrote it.' I believed it, too)

As she recounted her story, it became clear that the name she carried, the name that once seemed ordinary, suddenly became a reminder of a truth hidden from her for years. The shame was not just from outside teasing but from feeling deceived by the people she trusted most. Her voice cracked as she spoke, the tears streaming down her face not just from sorrow but from the raw pain of betrayal. The more she spoke, the harder it was to ignore the weight of her discovery, the sudden, heartbreaking realization of the legitimacy of her existence, as if everything she had known was built on a lie. It explained so much: the shift I had seen in her between grades 7 and 10 when the vibrant, spirited girl who once led classmates with confidence slowly dimmed into someone more withdrawn and cautious. I thought I knew her then, but I realize now how much was happening beyond

what any teacher could see. Though her situation was not directly connected to name-based bullying, no one could deny the fact that her name had become a symbol of that betrayal, the echo of a truth she had never been prepared to face. Her journey painfully reveals how feeling ashamed by family can fracture a young person's sense of self. It is not merely an embarrassment over a name, it is a deep questioning of one's own roots, of who they really are. For *Nova*, the middle name she carried became a symbol of everything she was not told, everything she was left to figure out on her own. *Matt* and *Nova*'s stories show us something important: our sense of who we are is shaped long before anyone else can have an impact. While the world outside may mock or judge, the first seeds of shame are often planted at home by those who should be helping to nurture our pride. When a family's silence or discomfort about identity reaches a child, it does not just change the way they see themselves; it shifts how they expect the world to see and treat them, too. And from this deep internal struggle comes a powerful desire for something better, *Desire for Change*, and *Empathy*. These students are not just asking for a world where their names are not ridiculed; they are yearning for a world that understands, respects, and values who they are, where empathy is not just a wish but an expectation.

### ***On the Desire for Change and Empathy***

Amid all the pain and frustration they carried, many students shared a quiet but powerful longing, not for attention, not even for apology, but simply to be understood. They were not asking for grand gestures or special treatment. What they hoped for was something much more basic and humane: empathy. They wanted others to see their names not as jokes or oddities but as meaningful parts of who they are, linked to family, culture, and personal identity. This desire for understanding often came from years of feeling overlooked or misjudged. Students expressed how exhausting it was to constantly defend something they never chose but still deeply identified with. What they craved was not just for others to stop the teasing, but to *see* them, to recognize that behind every name is a story, a family, a human being worthy of dignity. As they spoke about their experiences, this need for empathy evolved into something even more urgent: a call for social change. They were not only asking classmates to be kinder or teachers to pay closer attention. They were asking for a cultural shift, one where names, no 'ser how unfamiliar or different, are treated with curiosity rather than mockery, with respect rather than ridicule. What they envisioned was a society where identity is honored, not picked apart. A world where schools do not just react to bullying but actively work to prevent it by teaching inclusion, encouraging open dialogue, and cultivating empathy from a young age. These students wanted more than comfort for themselves; they wanted to make sure future generations would not have to carry the same wounds. Their stories made one thing clear: name-based bullying is not just a personal issue; it is a societal one. And the response it demands must go beyond silence or shallow tolerance. It calls for empathy rooted in action and for change that begins with how we see, speak to, and stand up for one another. One participant, *John*, shared a perspective that stayed with me long after our conversation. With a sense of maturity beyond his years, he said: "*Siguro sir, dili man nato mapugngan nga pag naa ta'y madunggan na mga uncommon names, makakatawa man jud ta. Ang ma suggest lang nako sir kay mag implement ug rules ang school, like naa naman policy ang school about bullying, pero dapat naay awareness campaign pud.*" (I guess we can't really stop ourselves from laughing when we hear uncommon names, but what I'd suggest is for the school to implement rules, like the policy on bullying that already exists, but also to have an awareness campaign.)

His words were thoughtful, grounded in his own experience with bullying, yet filled with hope for change. As a Grade 12 student, *John* was more than just a bystander; he was someone who had felt the sting of mockery and learned from it. His proposal was not born out of frustration but rather a deep desire for understanding. The idea of an awareness campaign struck me as something vital, not just as a rule, but as a call to reshape how students perceive one another, especially when it comes to the sensitive matter of names. Through his words, I could sense his belief in the power of awareness, not to change the world overnight but to nudge it gently toward a place of empathy. Listening to *John*, I could not help but imagine what might have been going through his mind during our Social Science discussions and how the theories of social change of collective behavior might have sparked something in him. Perhaps he had seen how real these concepts were in his own life, how much they mattered beyond the walls of our classroom. It was one of those quiet, profound moments as a teacher where you realize the lessons are not just heard but lived. Similarly, *Willy* echoed a similar sentiment, though his approach was more direct. He shared: "*Estoryahon po dapat sir ang katong naga bully nga dili maayo ilang ginabuhay tapos badlungon sila para tarong ilabang behavior.*" (We should talk to those who bully, let them know what they are doing is wrong, and correct their behavior so they can act right.) His tone carried a certain firmness, a sense of urgency that comes from wanting to see real change, not just in policies but in people's hearts. Unlike *John*'s more subtle

approach, *Willy's* suggestion was about confronting the issue head-on, challenging the bullies directly to understand the harm they were causing. It was a call for accountability, a push for social correction. Knowing *Willy* as his teacher, I recognized in his words the same energy he often brings to class discussions, a willingness to tackle problems directly, to call out what needs to be changed without hesitation. I imagined him sitting there, connecting the dots between our lessons on social order and social deviance and realizing that real change starts by bravely addressing wrongs as they happen.

Both *John* and *Willy* highlighted the importance of social change in the face of bullying, particularly when it comes to how we perceive and react to people's names. Their solutions were not just about the rules we set; they were about shifting the culture of how we relate to one another, fostering an environment where empathy outweighs laughter and where every individual feels seen and valued. In the broader context of social identity and social perception, their suggestions resonate deeply. Names, often seen as simple labels, hold power over how we see ourselves and how we are seen by others. Bullying, especially when rooted in something as fundamental as a name, shapes a person's sense of self and can deeply impact their place in society. The change *John* and *Willy* both call for is not just about creating a safer school environment; it is about shifting how we, as a community, perceive and treat one another. As I reflected on our conversation, I felt humbled. It made me realize that the seeds we plant in our discussions on social change are beginning to take root. *John* and *Willy* reminded me that Social Science is not confined to theories printed in textbooks; it is lived and breathed in the everyday struggles and hopes of students like them.

Their words remind us that true change starts from within. It is about understanding that the way we react to a name, a story, or a person's identity reflects the values we hold as a society. We are not merely individuals but threads in a larger social fabric, and the way we treat each other, especially when it comes to our most basic identifiers, defines the strength of that fabric. *John* and *Willy* have shown us that real social change does not start with grand gestures; it starts with awareness, honest conversations, and the courage to speak up when something is not right. Their stories remind us that perceptions can shift, and when they do, we open the door to a world where differences are not mocked but embraced. In that world, every name, no matter how familiar or unfamiliar, is treated with the dignity it deserves. But to get there, we need something even more foundational: a deeper sense of empathy. Change can't happen without it. Empathy is what allows us to look beyond ourselves, recognize the quiet struggles others carry, and choose compassion over indifference. Participant *Janna* shared, "*Sa akoo sir, i-bug ug i-comfort nako tong gina bully sir tapos ingnon nako siya na ayaw paminawa ang gina sulti sa imo.*" (For me, sir, I would embrace and comfort the person being bullied and gently tell them not to be affected by what others say about them.) As she narrated this, it felt as if she was standing before a mirror, speaking not only to others but to a younger version of herself. At such a young age, I was struck by the depth of her reflection and how it stemmed from wounds left by repeated bullying. It made me pause, realizing how, early in life, we begin to carry burdens that should never have been placed on our shoulders. Listening to *Janna*, I could not help but be transported back to my own memories. I, too, once stood in that same lonely space, bearing the sting of mockery because of my name. But in the world I grew up in, there was little room for vulnerability. Cultural norms dictated silence. We were taught to laugh it off, to dismiss the hurt, to build walls instead of seeking comfort. Yet here was *Janna*, brave enough to name the pain and offer compassion not just for others but perhaps for herself as well. Similarly, *Matt* shared a sentiment that echoed with surprising tenderness: "*Ang mga biketima sa bullying sir ang uban sa ila gamay ug heart gina dib dib jud na nila, unta naay mosabot sa ila naay maminaw sa ila.*" (Victims of bullying, sir, some of them have small hearts; they really take it all in. I hope someone will understand them, someone will listen.) Hearing these words from a young man felt almost fragile. In a world that often demands emotional restraint from men, it was rare, almost jarring, to hear such honesty spoken aloud. Vulnerability, I realized, does not often find its way into public conversations. It reveals itself only in spaces where deep listening is offered, where empathy, not judgment, is the language. It is moments like these that remind me why I chose this research topic. It was never just about names or even about bullying alone. It was about bringing to light the silent battles people carry and creating a space where their stories could be heard. I hold onto the hope that this work might one day serve as a reference for change, a small nudge toward a world that listens more carefully, feels more deeply, and judges less harshly.

The stories of *Janna* and *Matt* are more than isolated reflections; they point to something universal: the need for greater empathy. They show us that our social identity and social perception are intertwined. The way we are

seen the way our names are received, shapes how we see ourselves. In a society that too often forgets how heavy a word can be, how lasting a laugh at someone else's expense can feel, their voices call us to remember: kindness is not a small thing. It is everything. At the heart of their narratives lies a simple but profound truth: to be seen, to be heard, to be understood; this is what every human being longs for. And if we are to create spaces where social identities are honored rather than mocked, where perceptions are guided by compassion rather than cruelty, we must begin by listening more closely to voices like theirs. Their bravery reminds us that healing often begins not with bold declarations but with quiet, everyday acts of empathy, a kind word, someone who truly listens, and a moment of being seen and understood. These seemingly small gestures can become lifelines for students who are silently struggling. And it is in that silence where the deepest battles often lie, in Self-Perception and Internal Struggles. Because long after the teasing stops, many carry the echoes within, questioning their worth, doubting their place, and wrestling with a version of themselves shaped by years of unspoken hurt.

### ***On Self-Perception and Internal Struggles***

Over time, the constant reminders that they were “different” began to take a quiet but powerful toll on how students saw themselves. What started as teasing from others slowly turned inward, planting seeds of doubt that began to grow. Instead of feeling accepted, many students found themselves questioning their own worth, wondering if they truly belonged in classrooms, friend groups, or any space that repeatedly made them feel like they did not fit. This was not just about how others viewed them; it became about how they started to view themselves. Their names, once a simple part of who they were, turned into symbols of exclusion. For some, this led to an internal conflict: they began to feel ashamed of something they could not change and unsure of whether they had a place in the world around them. These feelings marked the beginning of a deeper unraveling, a slow erosion of identity. At its core, this was a loss of self-worth. When a young person starts to internalize shame tied to something as deeply personal as their name, the damage runs far beyond the surface. It chips away at their confidence and sense of identity, leaving behind uncertainty where there should be pride. Many began to ask painful questions: *What's wrong with me? Why am I treated this way?* And often, they found no reassuring answers, only silence or, worse, blame. This emotional and psychological burden became a quiet crisis, one not always visible to others but deeply felt by the students living through it. Their stories reflect not just the pain of being teased but the deeper struggle of trying to hold on to their sense of self in a world that constantly told them they were less.

Participant *Ella* shared her reflection with striking seriousness, her voice steady but carrying the weight of deep reflection: *"Usabay sir makabuna huna ko na lain jud diay kaayo akoo pangalan kay ngano gina gara garaan nila permente sir ba?"* (Sometimes, sir, I think that my name really is odd because they keep mocking it all the time.) It was a simple question, spoken softly, but it revealed far more than the words themselves. Beneath it lay the quiet erosion of something profoundly personal: her sense of self. What was once simply her name, a part of her identity given without question, had become something she was made to doubt. As *Ella* spoke, her eyes dropped slightly; there was a deep sadness etched into her face, the kind that did not need tears to be seen; it was in the heaviness of her expression, in the pauses between her words. Through the constant teasing, she had not only endured embarrassment; she had internalized it, allowing the cruelty of others to seep into the way she viewed herself. It was no longer just about the mockery; it had reshaped her social mirror, distorting how she believed others perceived her and, in turn, how she perceived her own worth. The weight of that realization lingered as *Willy* shared his own experience. Unlike *Ella's* quiet reflection, *Willy's* words were wrapped in anger, frustration, and a fierce sense of injustice: *"Medyo ma-apektohan jud siya sir kay dili man gud ko kadawat kay naa man gud ko tarong na pangalan."* (It really affects me, sir, because I can't accept it; I have a good, proper name.) At that moment, *Willy's* voice carried more than hurt; it carried defense. His name was not merely a label, it was a source of dignity, a connection to his family, to his history, to his very being. Hearing it mocked felt like an affront not just to him as an individual but to everything and every one his name stood for. His frustration did not seem misplaced or exaggerated; it felt raw and justified, a cry for respect in a world too quick to laugh at what it does not understand. *Ella's* quiet doubt and *Willy's* passionate defense come from different places, but they meet at the same painful crossroads, the slow, invisible journey toward the loss of self-worth. When names, which should serve as anchors of identity, become the very things that isolate and belittle, the damage runs deeper than surface embarrassment. It touches the very core of social identity, cracking the foundation of how young people see their place within the larger fabric of society. Their stories reveal a subtle but devastating truth: that persistent ridicule, especially over something as intimate as a name, does not just wound in passing. It reshapes the inner voice. It plants seeds of doubt, waters insecurity, and, at times, causes a young person to see themselves as "less than." Their social

perception, the way they believe the world sees them, merges with their own self-image, leading to a dangerous erosion of self-worth. The concept of "On Loss of Self-Worth" finds its living proof in the voices of *Ellu* and *Willy*. Through their experiences, we see how fragile yet vital one's social identity is and how easily it can be battered by careless words. What seems trivial to some, an offhand joke, a careless mockery, has the power to leave lasting scars. This is not just a reflection on bullying or teasing; it is a deeper, more urgent call to recognize the invisible battles young people fight daily. Battles for dignity, for acceptance, for the simple right to own their names without shame. In their words, we hear more than sadness; we hear resilience. We hear the unspoken plea: to be seen, to be respected, and to be allowed to carry their names and their selves without fear of ridicule.

Their pain shows us that the loss of self-worth does not happen all at once. It builds slowly, quietly, layer by layer, until the confidence they once had feels distant or unreachable. And that's what makes it so heartbreaking: it's often invisible to others but deeply felt by those going through it. It's a powerful reminder that even our smallest actions can either strengthen someone's sense of self or quietly pull it apart. And when that foundation begins to crack, what often follows is even more complex, On Self-Doubt and Identity Crisis. Because when students no longer feel sure of who they are or whether they are enough, it's not just their self-esteem that suffers, it is their entire sense of identity that begins to waver. Participant *Matt*, when asked about his experiences, shared his pain in a way that struck me deeply. His words came slowly, tinged with the weight of years of hurt: "*Family name man gud namo na sir tapos kataw an lang nila for that reason ma down jud ko ana. Wala ko'y mabuhay mao mana ako apelyido lain paminawon.*" (Our family name, sir, they just laugh at it, and because of that, I get really down. I can't do anything about it; that's just my surname, it sounds different.) As he spoke, I could feel the loneliness that echoed in his words. It was more than just the pain of ridicule; it was the quiet disappointment of feeling like something as deeply ingrained as his family name had become a reason for shame. What should have been a source of pride, a link to his family's identity, had instead become a reason for him to withdraw emotionally, a barrier between him and the world. Listening to him, I could not help but think back to the many lessons we had together in social science, where we discussed concepts like Labeling Theory, Discrimination, and even George Herbert Mead's "I vs Me" and Cooley's Looking Glass Self. In class, these ideas felt abstract and important but theoretical. Yet, in this moment, they became vivid and painfully real. I could not help but wonder: Did *Matt*, like so many other students, connect those lessons to his own experiences? Did the discussions about how social labels shape our self-perception resonate with him? Or was he silently carrying the weight of those labels without a word of recognition from anyone, including me? If only I had known the depth of their personal struggles, perhaps I would have approached those lessons with a different sensitivity, allowing for pauses allowing their stories to be heard. Those moments remind me that behind every student's silence or even their casual laughter, there may be an unspoken battle, one that theories alone cannot capture, but empathy and awareness can begin to touch. Similarly, *Willy* shared his own experiences with a growing sense of frustration and anger: "*Sa ko sir kay I think 14 ko ato, naa ko kaaway tapos akoo kaaway naabot siya sa akoo apelyido like ingnon nila na pang bayot daw kay pang babae daw akoo pangalan na Wendell and sa akoo apelyido kay ginatawag nila ug 'Tigbaog Tagbaw' masamokan ko. mao mana akoo pangalan.*" (For me, sir, I think I was 14 then. I had an enemy, and my enemy went after my last name, calling me "Wendell," saying my name sounded feminine. They even started calling me "Tigbaog Tagbaw." It really bothered me. But that's my name.) There was a rawness in *Willy's* words, a fierce need to protect something that should have been sacred to him: his name, his identity. His frustration was not just about the teasing but about the deeper hurt of being reduced to something he was not. What should have been a personal identifier, a source of pride, had become the very thing others used to tear him down. It was a reminder of how words can wound in ways we sometimes fail to recognize. *Willy* was not just defending his name; he was defending his right to exist without being defined by the cruel perceptions of others. Both *Matt* and *Willy* shared stories that resonated deeply with the concept of Self-Doubt and Identity Crisis, how one's social identity and the perception others have of them can leave scars that reshape the way they see themselves. In both cases, their names, meant to anchor their identity, had become sources of doubt and confusion. *Matt's* family name, once a symbol of heritage, became a trigger for self-questioning, making him doubt his own worth simply because of the way others perceived it. *Willy's* frustration was no less profound; his name, linked to his identity, had been mocked in such a way that it caused him to question the very essence of who he was. Their stories reveal a deeper truth: when a name, something so central to who we are, becomes a point of ridicule or shame, it can lead to an internal crisis, a disconnect between one's self-perception and the way they believe they are seen by the world. The pain they carry is not just about the hurt caused in those moments of mockery; it's about the longer-lasting effects on how they view themselves. This inner turmoil, self-doubt, and crisis of identity is a powerful force. It changes the way one moves through the world, the way one interacts with others, and the way one views their own worth. What

should be a source of pride, of belonging, becomes a point of vulnerability. The stories of *Matt* and *Willy* reveal just how thin the line can be between self-confidence and self-doubt. All it takes is a few cruel words, repeated often enough, to make someone question their worth. Over time, those external judgments start shaping how individuals see themselves, not just how others see them. Their experiences remind us that names aren't just words; they carry identity, meaning, and history. When those names are mocked, it's not just about teasing; it's about eroding a part of who someone is. And when that internal struggle becomes too heavy, many begin to pull away, not just from people, but from the world around them. This retreat marks the beginning of social withdrawal, a quiet coping mechanism that often goes unnoticed but speaks volumes about the depth of their pain.

### **Social Behaviors of Victims of Name-Based Bullying**

Through the participants' lived experiences, it became clear how name-based bullying significantly shaped their behavior in social settings. The ridicule they endured because of their names led many to adopt defensive or avoidant behaviors as a way to cope with the constant judgment. What began as isolated incidents of teasing or mockery eventually influenced how they carried themselves, how they spoke to others, and how they chose to engage or disengage from their social environment. Their names, instead of functioning as ordinary tools of identification, became triggers for social discomfort, making everyday interactions feel risky or burdensome. As the bullying persisted, many participants described becoming more reserved, guarded, or even withdrawn. They shared how they avoided speaking in class, introducing themselves, or joining group activities out of fear that their names would attract unwanted attention. Some reported becoming overly accommodating in an attempt to avoid conflict, while others admitted to isolating themselves entirely to protect their sense of self. These behavioral shifts were not rooted in personality but were responses to repeated experiences of exclusion and ridicule. The social consequences of name-based bullying extended beyond individual moments; they shaped long-term patterns of interaction and participation. These accounts highlight the complex ways in which name-based bullying influences not only how students see themselves but also how they behave socially. Their stories point to a deeper struggle: the effort to navigate social life while carrying the weight of a name that others have turned into a target. This theme led to the identification of six subthemes: Social Withdrawal, Decreased Self-Esteem, Emotional Coping Through Anger, Positive Outlook, Validation Seeking Behavior, and Development of Social Anxiety.

#### ***On Social Withdrawal***

Rather than risk further embarrassment or ridicule, many students began to quietly pull away from the very spaces where they were meant to learn and grow. Social activities that once held the promise of connection became sources of anxiety. Instead of raising their hands in class, joining clubs, or speaking up in group work, they chose silence, believing it was safer to be invisible than to risk being noticed for the wrong reasons. This avoidance of social situations was not about disinterest; it was a form of self-protection for students who had been mocked or singled out because of their names; being seen too often meant being hurt. And so, they slowly retreated into the background, shrinking their presence in classrooms, hallways, and school events. As the withdrawal deepened, it began to affect more than just their social lives. Many showed signs of decreased academic participation, disengaging from learning not because they lacked ability but because the emotional weight of their experiences made it difficult to focus, contribute, or feel safe enough to try. The classroom, meant to be a place of possibility, became another space where they felt exposed and unwelcome. This quiet retreat was not always obvious to others. On the surface, they may have seemed shy or reserved. But underneath, their silence told a story of students trying to protect themselves in an environment that made them feel small. Their decision to pull away was not just about avoiding pain; it was about surviving it. Participant *Matt* reflected on his own experiences with name-based bullying, a reflection that unveiled the silent battles he had long carried. He shared, "*Maong katong nag apil ta ug basketball tournament dili ko gusto akoang tinuod na apelyido ang ipabutang sa akoang basketball jersey.*" (That's why when we joined the basketball tournament, I didn't want my real last name to be printed on my basketball jersey.) His words, though simple, revealed a much deeper personal struggle. Even in a setting that should have been about excitement, teamwork, and pride, *Matt* felt the need to hide a part of himself to protect his family name from public ridicule. I remember that moment vividly. He was unusually persistent, almost pleading to change the name on his jersey. At the time, I had no choice but to deny his request, as it was against the official rules of the tournament. But now, in hindsight, I realize that while my decision upheld the tournament's regulations, it overlooked the silent fear behind his plea.

*Matt's* insistence was not born out of vanity or stubbornness. It was born from a deep anticipation of hurt, the fear that his classmates, or worse, students from other schools, would mock him because of his surname. For him, what should have been a celebration of sportsmanship and unity became an event overshadowed by anxiety. His jersey, which should have symbolized pride, became a potential source of shame. His story reminds me that beneath every rule we uphold, there are often invisible stories of students carrying burdens far heavier than we realize. In a similar vein, participant *John* shared a story that echoed this same quiet withdrawal. He said, "*Maski dili ko mo attend sa awarding sa stage basta mo reflect lang sa akoang card akoo grado, makuha man gihapon nako ang card after ok na ko ana.*" (Even if I don't attend the awarding ceremony on stage, as long as my grades appear on my card, it's fine. I can just get my card afterward.) *John's* words carried a subtle but powerful sadness, the kind that comes from missed moments. Those stage ceremonies, those brief walks toward the spotlight, are often more than just formalities; they are small yet significant recognitions of effort, moments of pride that linger long after the applause fades. But for *John*, the idea of standing on stage, being seen, being celebrated, felt like a risk he could not afford to take. His academic excellence remained intact, yes, but the visibility, the public acknowledgment that could have affirmed his hard work, was quietly surrendered. It struck me deeply: *John's* decision was not simply about avoiding attention. It was a form of self-preservation, a quiet act of shielding himself from possible ridicule. His story reminds me that students can be both brave and burdened at the same time, choosing strength in invisibility, choosing to carry their victories quietly rather than risk being wounded in the open. Both *Matt* and *John* exemplify the painful truth about the Avoidance of Social Situations, how social identity and social behavior intertwine in ways that shape young lives profoundly. Their avoidance was not rooted in indifference or lack of pride; it was a defense against the social labels and judgments that had once hurt them so deeply. Their behavior, stepping away from visibility and hiding parts of themselves, was a way of coping, a way of surviving in a world that had, too often, been unkind. Their stories whisper to us a tender reminder: avoidance is not always about weakness. Sometimes, it is the brave choice, the necessary choice, when the cost of being seen feels too great. Yet, as teachers, mentors, and members of a wider community, we are called to look beyond the absences of the quiet retreats. We are called to understand that every unclaimed spotlight and every changed jersey carries a story and that behind each story is a young person who deserves to be seen, not with ridicule, but with honor and compassion.

Participant *Diana* responded to my question with a tone heavy with regret, a quiet sadness weaving through her words. "*Always sir. Since grade six sir maulaw na ko mag answer kay pag tama akoang answer man gud sir kay i-mention akoo apelyido sa amoa teacher tapos akoo mga classmates mokatawa lang ug kalit tapos sukad ato dili na ko naga participate maski kabalo ko sa answer.*" (Always, sir. Since grade six, I've been embarrassed to answer because when I gave the right answer, my teacher would mention my last name, and my classmates would suddenly laugh. Since then, I stopped participating, even though I knew the answer.) Though I had not been her teacher then, I could immediately sense the depth of *Diana's* intellect. Her answers during our conversation were precise well thought out, and revealed a sharp, intuitive mind. Yet what lingered longer than her words was the pain behind them, the memory of a young girl, silenced not by a lack of knowledge but by the laughter that followed her every success. Her story was a quiet, heartbreaking revelation. *Diana* had once been eager to participate, brave enough to share her thoughts. But somewhere along the way, she learned that in her world, even getting it right came at a cost. It was not her answer that betrayed her; it was her identity, tied to a name that others found amusing. And so, she learned to protect herself the only way she knew how: by retreating into silence. In doing so, she traded her visible brilliance for safety, her active participation for anonymity. Another participant, *Amy*, shared a story that echoed *Diana's* experience, though from a slightly different corner of pain. "*Kay gusto nako mutubag sa classroom kaso naa sa akoang huna-huna basi mangatawa sila ug moingon na 'ay bugo grade 5 ko ato sukad ato maulaw na ko mo estorya sa klase.*" (I want to answer in class, but I worry that they'll laugh and say, 'Oh, she's stupid. I was in grade 5 when that happened.' Since then, I've been too embarrassed to speak in class.) There was a soft tremble in *Amy's* voice, not from doubt in her knowledge but from the long-standing fear of being judged. It was clear that she carried the weight of old laughter, echoes that made even the idea of speaking a risk too heavy to bear. Her hesitation was not born from weakness; it was born from wounds unseen by many but deeply felt by her.

In *Amy* and *Diana's* stories, the damage shaped by name-based bullying becomes heartbreakingly clear. What began as teasing had snowballed into something larger: a slow erosion of their willingness to participate, to be seen, to take up space. Their social identity, the way they saw themselves in the eyes of their peers, had been altered. They no longer moved in the classroom as confident learners, but as cautious survivors, weighing every

word, every raised hand against the possible return of ridicule. This is the hidden cost of bullying that so often goes unnoticed. It does not always erupt into visible rebellion or obvious distress. Sometimes, it shows itself in the quiet, the bright student who stops raising her hand, the lively mind that decides it's safer to remain silent. It teaches children that the classroom, which should be a place of discovery and affirmation, can become a landscape of risk and retreat. Listening to *Diana* and *Amy*, I realized with aching clarity that decreased academic participation is not simply a matter of disengagement or disinterest. It is a learned response to a hostile environment, a coping mechanism born from the need to protect one's dignity and heart. When students feel that their very identity invites mockery, no amount of encouragement alone can make them feel safe again. What they need is a transformation of the space itself, where every answer, every voice, is met with respect, where laughter does not come at another's expense. Their experiences remind me that academic excellence isn't just about mastering lessons; it's about nurturing courage. It's about creating spaces where students are not only allowed to speak but are honored for doing so, where they are taught, through our everyday actions, that their identity is not a liability but a gift. In the stories of *Diana* and *Amy*, we are given a tender, urgent lesson: the true measure of a classroom is not just in the knowledge shared but in the safety it provides for every young mind to rise without fear. For students with uncommon names, repeated teasing often led to social withdrawal, a quiet fading from class discussions, group work, and even friendships. Many began to avoid raising their hands or introducing themselves aloud, fearing mispronunciations or mockery. But beyond the silence was something deeper taking root. As they pulled away from their peers, some began to question their worth, gradually internalizing the negative messages directed at them. This slow internal erosion marked the shift from social withdrawal to decreased self-esteem. No longer was it just about avoiding others; it became about doubting themselves. The harm moved inward, reshaping how they viewed their own value and place within the classroom.

### ***On Decreased Self-Esteem***

What may have seemed like small jokes or casual teasing to others often carried much heavier consequences for the students who endured them. Over time, the repetition of these moments, being laughed at, called names, or singled out, began to chip away at their confidence. Even when they managed to laugh along or shrug it off in front of others, the words lingered. Quietly, they began to take root. For many, this was where the internalization of negative labels began. The more they were called something, the more those labels started to feel like truth. Students who were mocked for sounding "weird" or "funny" started to believe there was something wrong with them. Instead of seeing their names as a point of pride, they began to feel ashamed of them, ashamed of their identity, and sometimes even of the families and histories those names represented. This quiet transformation bred feelings of shame and inadequacy that were difficult to shake. They started to see themselves through the eyes of those who teased them: less than, different, not good enough. It was not just their self-esteem that suffered; their sense of worth, of being seen and accepted for who they were, slowly eroded. What made it especially painful was how invisible this struggle could be. On the outside, they might appear fine, smiling, attending class, and keeping up with schoolwork. But on the inside, many carried deep doubts about themselves, questioning whether they belonged or whether they were somehow flawed just for being who they were. In the long run, these internal battles left scars that no one else could see, but that shaped how they moved through the world. *John*, one of the participants, candidly expressed how social situations often triggered a sense of deep insecurity. "*Kanang like mawad-an pud ko ug confidence sir ba, diba kita tanan naa man ta'y social life sir no? pareha anag makig ila-ila ka, mawala akoa kumpiyansa.*" (It's like I lose confidence, too, sir. We all have a social life, right? Like when you try to meet new people, my confidence just disappears.) As I listened to him, I was struck by the sincerity that wrapped around his words. It didn't sound rehearsed, nor did it feel like something he had prepared in advance. It felt real, like one young man opening up to another, trusting that there was a shared understanding between us. There was no boasting in his voice, no effort to hide the vulnerability he was admitting to. *John's* honesty illuminated something important: that behind many hesitant smiles and casual conversations, there are quiet battles few people ever see. His experience underscored the silent pressure so many young individuals face, the pressure to appear confident and composed, even when uncertainty gnaws at them from within. In his simple but heartfelt confession, *John* gave voice to a truth that often goes unspoken: the fear of not being enough in the eyes of others, the deep-rooted anxiety that creeps in during moments of social exposure. Similarly, *Nova* shared an experience that revealed just how deeply negative social feedback can embed itself into one's self-perception. "*Usabay man gud sir kay kanang pagmadungog nako akoang apelyido from someone, sa akoang huna huna kay ako napud na ila gi estoryahan. Murag ang tan aw nako sa akoang kaugalingon kay low kayo.*" (Sometimes, sir, when I hear someone mention my last name, I start thinking they are talking about me again. I begin to see myself as someone very low.)

*Nova's* voice, usually so lively and confident in-class activities, softened as she spoke those words. I had always known her as an active student, someone who participated with energy, someone whose presence seemed fearless. Yet, in that moment, I realized how much a smile can sometimes hide how often students carry invisible burdens behind cheerful faces. Hearing *Nova* speak made me reflect more deeply as a teacher. How many times had I assumed confidence based solely on outward behavior? How many times had I missed the silent struggles hidden behind participation and laughter? Her story reminded me that students are not always what they outwardly project. They can be leaders in group activities and still battle self-doubt when no one is looking. They can shine on stage yet crumble inside when they hear their name whispered carelessly in hallways. Both *John* and *Nova's* stories are profound reflections of how negative labels, when internalized, can quietly reshape a person's social identity and behavior. When a name becomes a trigger for judgment, when past ridicule replays in mind like an unwelcome song, even the most seemingly confident individuals begin to shrink themselves; they become cautious, guarded, and hesitant, not because they lack ability or spirit, but because somewhere along the way, they learned that being fully seen can sometimes mean being hurt. This internalization is perhaps one of the most painful consequences of name-based bullying and ridicule. It teaches students to doubt their worth before anyone even questions it. It teaches them to anticipate judgment, to retreat, to second-guess even their brightest moments. Over time, these quiet self-perceptions solidify, subtly but powerfully steering how they relate to others and how they see themselves in the larger social world.

As I listened to *John* and *Nova*, I realized that true support for our students isn't just about praising their visible achievements. It's about being sensitive to the unseen battles they fight. It's about creating environments where names are spoken with respect and where identities are celebrated rather than used as weapons. It's about making sure that no student feels the need to hide their true self just to survive a day in school. Their reflections are not just stories; they are gentle but urgent reminders: we must always look closer, listen deeper, and create spaces where every student feels safe to simply be. When asked how name-based bullying affected him, *John* answered in a voice so low it was almost a whisper. "*Maulaw sir, mawad-an ug gana pero dili man nuon ko masuko tapos mangaway.*" (I feel ashamed, sir, I lose motivation, but I don't get angry or fight back.) There was no anger in his words, only quiet surrender. It was not the kind of surrender born from acceptance but the kind shaped by hopelessness, by a lingering feeling that perhaps nothing he could do would ever be enough. Sitting across from him, I felt a deep sadness settle in my chest. As his teacher, I wanted so much to offer him some kind of comfort, some way to lift even a little of the burden he was carrying. But in that moment, I realized that what he needed was not quick encouragement or easy reassurances, he needed the dignity of simply being heard, of having his quiet struggle acknowledged without being hurried to "move on." His words stayed with me long after the interview ended. They revealed a painful truth: when bullying and ridicule are internalized deeply enough, they do not only hurt in moments of teasing. They linger. They seep into a young person's view of themselves, quietly convincing them that their voice, their pride, their very identity, are somehow undeserving of space. The hurt does not erupt outward; it folds inward, reshaping how they walk through the world, how they meet the eyes of others, and how they dare, or don't dare, to speak up. When I posed the same question to *Matt*, he responded with words even shorter, but weighted with profound emotion. "*Mo duko na lang ko, maulaw ko.*" (I just bow my head; I feel ashamed.) I remembered then something heavier still: *Matt* had recently lost his mother, an Overseas Filipino Worker he had not seen for years. Her death came before they could reunite before he could show her the young man he was becoming. As he spoke, I saw not just a boy embarrassed by ridicule but a son carrying a grief so private, so vast, that I dared not press further. In his small gesture of bowing his head, I saw the heartbreak of someone trying to disappear from the world's gaze, not because he lacked strength but because he was already carrying too much sorrow. It broke something in me, knowing that the name he carried, the same name he was being laughed at for, was tied so intimately to memories of his mother, to family, to love, to loss. For *Matt*, the laughter of his peers was not simply a joke; it was another small tear in a heart already fraying at the edges.

Listening to *John* and *Matt*, I was reminded that feelings of shame and inadequacy are not surface emotions. They are not mere reactions to a bad day or a careless comment. They dig deeper, weaving themselves into the way young people come to understand who they are. Their social identity, once something to wear with pride, becomes something to hide. Their social behavior lowered gazes, bowed heads, and retreat into silence, is not weakness. It is survival. Their stories are quiet but powerful illustrations of what happens when students are made to feel that their very names, their very existence, invite ridicule. The burden of these feelings often goes unseen by teachers, friends, and even family. We see the lowered heads, the absent smiles, and the sudden reluctance to

join, but we do not always understand the battles raging beneath. As a teacher, I realize now that listening, truly listening, is one of the greatest acts of kindness we can offer. Not every sadness needs to be solved, and not every pain can be quickly mended. But every voice, no matter how small or broken, deserves to be heard with compassion. In hearing *John* and *Matt*, I learned once again that it is not enough to teach students knowledge alone. We must also help them carry the invisible parts of themselves, the parts shaped by struggle, grief, and shame, with greater tenderness and greater respect. As decreased self-esteem took hold in many of the participants' experiences, it often left behind a quiet but heavy burden. Feeling unworthy or out of place, some students began to internalize the belief that they had to either shrink themselves or fight to be seen. For a few, this emotional strain did not stay hidden; it began to surface as anger. What started as self-doubt slowly transformed into emotional coping marked by irritation, defiance, or sudden outbursts. In some cases, anger became a shield, an attempt to regain control or push back against the shame they had silently carried for too long. Rather than a sign of misbehavior, these expressions of frustration were often rooted in deeper wounds left unacknowledged.

### ***On Emotional Coping through Anger***

For some students, the sadness they felt from constant teasing gradually transformed into something more intense: anger. It was not just aimed at the individuals who mocked them but at the system as a whole, the school, the teachers, and the authorities who allowed it to happen. This anger simmered beneath the surface, rooted in the frustration of being misunderstood, neglected, and hurt in a place that was supposed to protect them. This growing resentment and bitterness was not something that could easily be shaken off. For many, it became a form of self-defense. The anger acted as a shield, a way to protect themselves from feeling vulnerable and exposed. When no one else seemed to care or take action, holding onto this anger gave them a sense of power, a way to take control in a situation where they felt powerless. But while it may have helped them survive emotionally, it also kept them at a distance from others. The more they internalized this anger, the more it isolated them, pushing away potential friends or allies who might have wanted to offer support. For some, this simmering resentment found expression in defensive or aggressive responses. It was no longer just about avoiding further teasing; it became about fighting back. Some students lashed out verbally or physically, not just to defend themselves but to send a message that they wouldn't be pushed around. Their responses, however, were often misunderstood as aggression, making it harder for others to see the deeper hurt that fueled these actions. What started as a means of protection became a barrier that kept them from forming connections and trust with others, reinforcing the cycle of isolation and anger. When *Diana* began to speak, there was a firmness in her voice that caught my full attention. "*Katong pagkabuman sa third quarter exam sir, naa koy classmates na gina gara garaan akoang pangalan. Pag magpalit ko sa canteen sir moana siya na 'Hali dinbi Hali dinbi.' Uncomfortable ko sa iyang ginabuhay sir kay dili man gud ko sanay ana. Sauna ginatawag ko nila ug 'Haligi', sanay nako ato, karon bag-o napud ila ginatawag. Daghan man gud tao makadungog. Naglagot jud ko ato, dili ko kalimot.*" (After the third quarter exam, sir, I had classmates teasing my name. When I buy from the canteen, they would call me out, "Hali, come here, Hali!") I felt really uncomfortable because I was not used to it. Before, they used to call me "Haligi." I got used to that, but now it's something new again. A lot of people hear it. I was really angry about it. I can't forget.) Her words came fast, her eyes steady, her face tightened in frustration. She was not just recounting an isolated teasing moment; she was recalling a wound that had never really healed. The canteen, a place that should have been casual and safe, became a stage for public embarrassment. The sound of her name, distorted into mockery, stripped her of the comfort of simply being herself. What struck me most was the memory she brought up from Grade 5, a memory that lingered so sharply in her mind. She spoke of how her classmates had once tricked her, pretending to befriend her, only to humiliate her through cruel name-calling. There was no need for elaborate words; the intensity on her face said everything. It was a betrayal, an early lesson in distrust, and a wound that had quietly shaped the way she navigated social spaces ever since. Her story resonated even more deeply when participant *Janna* shared a recent experience of her own. "*Katong niaging Monday, akoang classmates ginatawag ko ug 'ikog ikog' pero dili lang nako ginapansin. Ginatry nako na dili ko magpa apekto maski naglagot na ko ato na time. Permente na lang jud na nako ma-experience na gara gara. Samok.*" (Just this past Monday, my classmates were calling me 'ikog ikog.' I tried not to mind it, even though it made me really angry. I always experience that kind of teasing. It's annoying.) Though *Janna's* tone was calmer, almost resigned, there was a sharp bitterness underneath her words. Tiredness. The kind that comes from enduring the same teasing over and over until anger becomes part of your daily emotional landscape. She had learned to smile through it, to "not mind," but the truth was, each mocking word still hit, still built up quietly inside her. Listening to both *Diana* and *Janna*, I realized how teasing, when persistent and targeted, does not simply roll off the shoulders of the young. It accumulates, layer by layer until what remains is not just hurt but resentment and

bitterness. These emotions may not always be visible on the surface, but they shape how a student sees themselves and others. Their social identity becomes linked not to pride or acceptance but to ridicule. Their social behavior, whether through forced indifference or defensive withdrawal, is a shield built over time, protecting a heart that has been hurt too many times to stay open without fear. In *Diana's* unwavering glare and *Janna's* weary tone, I saw reflections of a common, quiet battle: the fight to protect their dignity when others would try to strip it away. As their teacher, I am reminded that beyond the surface of laughter and teasing lies a world of emotions we often fail to see, a world where bitterness grows not from weakness but from the constant effort it takes to hold oneself together when the world does not always offer kindness.

Their stories are a call to look deeper, to listen more carefully, and to teach not just lessons but compassion. When we understand the cost of everyday ridicule, we can begin to create spaces where students like *Diana* and *Janna* can finally breathe, heal, and reclaim the pride that teasing tried so hard to steal. When *Diana* shared her story, her words carried a storm of emotions just barely held back. "*Sauna man gud hapit ko ma guidance kay gisukulan nako sila. Gitabangan ko nila ato tapos gi pisikal naman gud ko nila. Ginalabay labayan ko nila ug papel while gina gara garaan nila akooa apelyido. Mao to nisukol nako kay ana man gud akooa mama na kung words lang ayaw lang ug patuli pero kung pisikal na mobalos na jud ko. Ako silang gipang sagpa sir kauban akooa mga friends. Hapit ko na guidance ato. Pero karon kay mokatawa na lang pud ko sir. Mobalos pud ko ug gara gara sa ilaba.*" (Back then, I almost got sent to the guidance office because I fought back. They ganged up on me and even got physical. They threw paper at me while mocking my last name. That's when I fought back because my mom always told me, "If it's just words, don't fight back, but if it turns physical, then you have to stand up for yourself." So I slapped them, sir, along with my friends. We almost got sent to the guidance office. But now, I just laugh it off. Sometimes, I even tease them back.) In her voice, there was an undeniable strength but also the tiredness of someone who had carried too much for too long. *Diana's* story is not just about a fight; it's about the slow breaking of a boundary. She tried to endure the ridicule for as long as she could, clinging to the wisdom her mother had passed down. But when the cruelty escalated into something she could no longer ignore, standing up for herself became the only choice. Even now, as she speaks of "laughing it off," the memory lingers, a bruise beneath the surface, tender and unforgettable. In a similar mood, *Willy* shared his experience, his tone firm and edged with unspoken hurt. "*Akooa sir kay aggressive jud akooa response kay lain man gud paminawon sir. Dili man ko manakit sir pero mobalos jud ko kanang mo kompronta ko.*" (My response is really aggressive, sir, because it just feels so wrong. I don't hurt others, but I confront them.) There was a fire in *Willy's* words, a fire fueled not by hatred but by wounded dignity. His determination to protect his name, his efforts, and his self-worth was palpable. Each teasing remark he faced was not just a joke to him; it was an attack on something sacred. His aggressive response was not about causing harm, it was about survival, about holding on to his dignity when the world around him seemed eager to chip it away. The defensive and sometimes aggressive reactions shared by *Diana* and *Willy* are not simply bursts of temper; they are reflections of a deeper emotional landscape shaped by repeated humiliation and the struggle for respect. Their social behavior, the way they choose to respond, cannot be separated from the social identity they are trying to defend. When one's name becomes a target, protecting it feels synonymous with protecting oneself. Both their stories remind us that behind every raised voice, every defiant stance is often a heart trying to shield itself from more pain. In a world that too easily dismisses "jokes" and "teasing," we must recognize the heavy cost they leave behind. These defensive responses are not signs of weakness; they are signs of wounded strength, of young people fighting, sometimes desperately, to preserve the small but vital spaces where they can still feel proud, seen, and respected. Yet, amid the anger and hurt, something remarkable often begins to emerge. For some, despite the overwhelming challenges, the search for a sense of self-worth does not end in bitterness. Instead, it leads them to discover an unexpected resilience and a positive outlook. As they work through their emotional coping, many students find strength not just in surviving but in thriving. They begin to redefine their worth on their own terms, moving from a place of defensiveness to one of quiet confidence. This shift is not about ignoring past struggles but acknowledging them as part of a journey toward self-empowerment and growth.

### ***On Positive Outlook***

Despite the pain and challenges, not all stories ended in bitterness. For some students, the experiences of name-based bullying became a catalyst for growth. Over time, they learned to embrace their names, not as symbols of shame but as markers of their individuality. What once felt like a source of weakness transformed into a point of pride. These students spoke about how their struggles helped them develop a stronger sense of self. Rather than letting the bullying define them, they used it as fuel to build resilience. Through this process, they began to see their names not as burdens but as representations of their unique identities. This shift in perspective brought

with it an increased self-awareness. As they reflected on their experiences, they understood more about themselves and what made them different, ultimately leading to a sense of empowerment. Instead of allowing others' words to chip away at their worth, they took control of their narrative, reclaiming their identity with confidence. This growth was not instantaneous, but it was transformative. For these students, the process of navigating the negativity was not just about surviving; it was about emerging stronger with a renewed sense of self-worth. They understood that while they could not control the actions of others, they could control how they chose to respond. This empowered them to live with pride, no longer letting the teasing dictate their value or diminish their sense of belonging. Participant *Nova* offered a compelling glimpse into how some students navigate the complex emotions tied to having an uncommon or often mispronounced name. What struck me about *Nova* was her approach, not one of open rebellion but of quiet, thoughtful self-preservation. "*Maro man ko sauna sir kay sa sugod pa lang sa klase akoo na ingnan akoo new friends na 'Cassy' ilang itavag sa akoo para dili na ma-mispronounce akoo name,*" she shared with a bright laugh. (I was smart about it before, sir; right at the start of the class, I already told my new friends to just call me "Cassy" so my name wouldn't be mispronounced.) As *Nova* recounted this, her laughter was not mocking or bitter. It carried a soft kind of relief, almost pride as if she had unlocked a simple secret to sidestepping a deeper hurt. There was a flicker of joy in her eyes, an unmistakable contrast to the earlier, quieter hints of sadness when she spoke about her real name. That contrast lingered with me. It showed how a painful experience, the misrecognition of something as personal and sacred as one's name, could be transformed into a moment of empowerment simply by taking control. *Nova's* decision to introduce herself as "*Cassy*" was not just for convenience; it was a conscious move to steer the narrative before it could be weaponized against her. It was an act of agency, a small but meaningful defense against a world that sometimes forgets how fragile names and the people who carry them can be. And yet, even amid her proud laughter, I found myself reflecting on the quiet cost of that choice. A name is not just a label; it holds echoes of family, history, of belonging. By setting it aside, even temporarily, *Nova* was doing what many young people silently do: choosing social safety over personal heritage. It was a bittersweet kind of bravery, one built from necessity. Still, there is deep admiration for how she handled it. *Nova* did not wait for others to define her. She moved first, on her own terms, turning a potential wound into a source of quiet control. From early sadness, she grew self-assurance. From discomfort, she shaped strength. In a softer but equally powerful way, participant *Thea* echoed a similar resilience. "*Sa akoo sir, dili lang nako gina take seriously. Magfocus ra ko sa atoa tinuod na friends,*" she said. (For me, sir, I just don't take it seriously. I just focus on my true friends.) Hearing *Thea's* words, I could not help but feel proud. Beneath her calmness, I sensed a lingering loneliness, a subtle sadness tucked between her sentences. But instead of allowing herself to be consumed by bitterness, she chose a mature, grounded response. She understood, perhaps more clearly than many adults, that true validation does not come from everyone; it comes from the few who see and value you as you are. Both *Nova* and *Thea* remind us that students are not merely surviving the trials of social life; they are actively crafting strategies to endure, adapt, and protect their sense of self. They are building inner strength, not loudly, not dramatically, but steadily. Through laughter, focused friendships, through little acts of agency, they are reclaiming spaces where they can be seen and respected.

Their journeys teach us that resilience is not always about fighting back loudly. Sometimes, resilience looks like a soft laugh. Sometimes, it looks like quietly choosing where to place your trust. And sometimes, it looks like carrying your real name quietly in your heart, even when the world does not always pronounce it right. Participant *John* left a lasting impression on me during our interview, not only for the words he shared but for the quiet strength embedded in them. His response revealed a resilience built through necessity; one forged over time as he learned to protect himself from the cruelty of others. He said, "*Yes sir, kay bale sa akong huna-huna dili lang ko magpadala sa ilabang pag-bullying kay naa man gud ko goal sa akoang kinabuhi na dili dapat ko maapektohan sa ilaha. Maski dili ko mo-attend sa awarding sa stage basta mo-reflect lang sa akoang card akoo grado, makuha man gihapon nako ang card after.*" (Yes, sir, because in my mind, I try not to be affected by their bullying since I have goals in life. Even if I don't attend the awarding on stage, as long as my grades are reflected on my report card, that's enough. I can still get my card anyway.) What stood out to me was not just *John's* clear determination but his calm refusal to let the negativity of others define his future. His focus on his goals and his inner strength to move past the bullying was admirable. Yet, there was a deeper, quieter sadness hidden beneath his resolve. His words carried the weight of missed opportunities, moments of recognition, and the simple joy of standing on stage to be seen and acknowledged for his hard work. While his academic achievements were secure, what he had quietly sacrificed was his visibility, the chance to be celebrated in the way that so many of his peers had the privilege of experiencing. The avoidance was not just a means of coping; it was a retreat, a careful choice to shield himself from further mockery. *John's* story is a powerful reminder that students can carry both bravery and burden at the

same time. His strength is undeniable, but it comes with a quiet cost, a cost that speaks to the deeper, emotional labor of trying to protect oneself while still striving for success. While *John* may not need the applause, the truth is, he certainly deserves it. In a more composed manner, participant *Nova* shared her own evolution when it came to handling name-based teasing. Her response was thoughtful, a clear reflection of her personal growth. She said, "*Akoa reaction sir kay nibilom lang ko sir kay maunaw man ko ato na time. Karon mokatawa na lang ko sir. Tapos i-correct dayon nako sila pero in a calm manner.*" (My reaction back then, sir, was just to stay silent because I felt embarrassed at the time. Now, I just laugh it off, sir. Then, I correct them immediately, but in a calm manner.) Listening to *Nova*, I could not help but admire how measured and mature her response was, especially as she was navigating the complex social terrain of senior high school. She didn't speak with bitterness but with a quiet wisdom that showed how she had learned to manage discomfort over time. Still, there was a brief hesitation in her tone, a subtle shift that made me realize she hadn't fully let go of those past experiences. Laughing now was her way of protecting herself, of building a shield around her vulnerability. It was not that the teasing no longer hurt; it was simply safer to laugh, safer to keep her response controlled. There was an unspoken understanding that, while the fear of ridicule was not overwhelming, it lingered just beneath the surface, always cautious, always present.

*Nova's* experience highlights a profound truth: growth does not always mean forgetting. Sometimes, it means adapting. Her maturity, in many ways, was a testament to how she had learned to navigate a world where something as personal as a name could be used as a weapon for ridicule. It also reflected the quiet emotional labor she carried, how even as she laughed it off, the memory of those moments still shaped how she interacted with the world. Her ability to correct others "in a calm manner" spoke volumes about her inner strength, a strength built not from ignoring the past but from learning to handle it with grace and dignity. Her story is a beautiful example of increased self-awareness and empowerment. *Nova* was not just surviving the teasing; she was taking control of how she responded and how she shaped her identity in the face of social discomfort. She had learned that she could hold her ground, but in a way that didn't require fighting back or becoming hardened. Instead, she chose to approach the situation with calm assurance, giving herself the power to reclaim her narrative without escalating the conflict. In both *John's* and *Nova's* stories, I see the quiet power of self-awareness. They didn't just react to the bullying, they adapted, they adjusted, and they became stronger. Through these moments of personal evolution, they have created spaces for themselves to thrive, even in environments where their social identity might be threatened. It's a reminder that true empowerment does not always look like loud defiance; it can also look like a quiet, steady resolve, a decision to walk forward on your own terms, no matter the obstacles that may stand in your way. However, even as they embraced this newfound strength, the journey was not without its complexities. The desire to feel seen and valued never fully fades, and with it comes the search for external validation. For many, this need for acknowledgment becomes a vital part of the process of rebuilding their sense of self-worth. While they have found strength within themselves, they also begin to seek affirmation from others, a crucial step in their emotional healing. This validation-seeking behavior becomes an attempt to confirm that their worth is recognized not just by them but by those around them, validating their efforts to rise above the challenges they've faced.

### ***On Validation Seeking Behavior***

Even as some students learned to embrace their identities and build resilience, the deep need for validation didn't entirely disappear. For many, the sting of name-based bullying left a lasting emptiness that they sought to fill through external recognition. This pursuit often manifested in the form of seeking friendships, academic achievements, or small gestures of acknowledgment from others. In their quest for validation, these students looked for moments that could reaffirm their worth, whether it was praise from teachers, acceptance from peers, or success in their personal endeavors. These external markers of recognition became vital in rebuilding their sense of self that had been undermined by years of teasing. While the external recognition they sought didn't always resolve the pain caused by bullying, it provided a temporary balm, a way to regain confidence and feel valued. These small victories, whether through earning respect or finding supportive friendships, helped students counterbalance the internal doubts and feelings of inadequacy that had taken root from the teasing. However, it became clear that these external forms of validation, while helpful, could not entirely heal the deeper wounds left by the bullying. Still, the pursuit of recognition allowed students to regain a sense of control and to reinforce their self-worth, if only for a moment, in a world that had once seemed indifferent or even hostile. Participant *Willy* expressed his feelings with a strong sense of defensiveness, yet beneath that defensiveness was a clear desire for respect and recognition. He said, "*Mag ingon jud ko na ayaw mo pag-ing-ana kay lain paminawon, pride baya nab nako akoang pangalan. Nagtinarong ko ug skwela para dili dang-dangon ninyo.*" (I will tell them not to do that because it feels

bad; my name is my pride. I'm serious about my studies, so that you won't belittle me.) What stood out to me in *Willy's* words was not just the firmness in his tone but the underlying pain of having his identity mocked. He was not merely defending himself against teasing; he was asserting the importance of his name, his sense of self, and the effort he put into his studies. There was a rawness in his voice, an emotional plea for dignity. His pride in his name was not about arrogance; it was about ownership. It was about claiming the space where his identity could be respected, not ridiculed. What struck me further was *Willy's* desire to be recognized for the effort he put into his academic life. His insistence on being taken seriously, not only as a student but as a person, resonated with a deeper longing for validation. He was not simply pursuing good grades, he was seeking external recognition, a desire to have his hard work seen and appreciated by others. His name, his pride, and his academic efforts were all intertwined, and he wanted them to be honored. In a way, *Willy's* reaction revealed something many students experience: the struggle for recognition. Social identity isn't just shaped by how we see ourselves; it is profoundly influenced by how others perceive and validate us. For *Willy*, that validation came not only through his academic achievements but also through the respect he hoped to earn from his peers. He wanted to be recognized not just for the marks he earned but for the person he was becoming in the process. As much as *Willy* put effort into his studies, he also sought acknowledgment from the world around him. It was clear that the need for external recognition was about more than just grades; it was about having his humanity and dignity acknowledged by those who had previously belittled him. In this way, his pursuit of recognition was not only tied to his academic goals but also to his sense of belonging and respect in the social space around him. Participant *Janna* likewise shared: "*Last Monday, my classmates called me 'ikog ikog,' but I didn't pay attention to it. I don't let it affect me. I've gotten used to it. Before, I didn't confront them because I was shy, but now I just go along with them. However, I'll show them that I'm serious about my studies, and in time, I can make them my friends. Eventually, they won't treat me like that anymore because I'll be able to get on the honor list.*" (Last Monday, my classmates teased me with 'ikog ikog,' but I didn't let it bother me. I've learned not to be affected. It's become something I've grown accustomed to. In the past, I shied away from confronting them, feeling too embarrassed, but now I simply go along with it. Still, I'll prove to them that I'm dedicated to my studies, and with time, I'll win their friendship. Soon enough, they won't treat me like this anymore because I'll be on the honor list.) As *Janna* spoke, her voice was light and filled with a sense of hope. She expressed her belief that being included on the honor roll would be the best way to escape the discomfort of being bullied. Listening to her, I could feel the optimism in her words, and I could see a youthful energy in her demeanor. There was something truly inspiring in her attitude, a belief that with hard work, things would improve.

At that moment, I could not help but feel moved by her resilience and determination. It was clear that she was not letting the bullying define her. She was holding onto the hope that through her achievements, she could change the way others saw her. As her interviewer, I could not help but feel a sense of responsibility and anticipation for the future. I hope that, when I become her teacher in Grade 9, I can contribute to fostering that optimism and help her continue to grow into a confident and successful individual. In the end, *Willy's* words remind us of the powerful drive behind our pursuit of external validation. It's not simply about applause or public acknowledgment; it's about being seen for who we truly are and what we strive to become. For *Willy*, recognition was not just a byproduct of his efforts; it was a fundamental part of how he navigated the world, seeking a place where he could stand tall, unafraid of the teasing, and proud of who he was. Similarly, *Janna's* quiet determination reflects that same longing. Though masked in gentleness and humility, her desire to make it to the honor list is not only about academic success; it's her way of rewriting how others see her, of proving that she deserves respect, friendship, and a place of dignity among her peers. Both *Willy* and *Janna* carry the weight of names, labels, and laughter, but in their striving, they both reveal a deep human truth: we all want to be seen, not for our flaws, but for our efforts to rise above them. Yet, when this validation remains out of reach, when acceptance is delayed or denied, a different kind of burden begins to take shape. Participants described feeling watched, judged, or evaluated not just in classrooms but in everyday spaces. The fear of being mocked again or misunderstood led many to overthink their actions, change how they spoke, or even avoid social situations altogether.

### ***On Development of Social Anxiety***

For some students, the fear never fully faded. Even long after the teasing stopped, the emotional scars lingered, quietly shaping how they moved through the world. Social situations that felt easy or natural to others became sources of deep anxiety, places where the threat of being called out, misunderstood or ridiculed again always loomed in the background. This persistent fear didn't just cause discomfort; it began to erode their ability to connect with others. Everyday interactions felt risky as if one wrong word or introduction could reopen old

wounds. As a result, many students grew more guarded and hesitant to form new friendships or open up to classmates. The very idea of being known by others, especially through their names, felt too vulnerable. Over time, this cautiousness turned into avoidance, making it difficult for them to build meaningful relationships. They held back not because they lacked the desire for connection but because they had learned, through painful experience, that visibility often came with a cost. What might have been a chance to bond or belong instead became something to fear. In this way, the long-term effects of name-based bullying extended beyond the teasing itself. It shaped how students approached the people around them, often creating emotional barriers that were hard to break down. For these individuals, the fear of judgment didn't just inhibit their ability to speak; it inhibited their ability to connect. *Amy* shared her experience with a quiet but palpable frustration, revealing the subtle yet powerful ways that bullying had shaped her social interactions. She confided, "*Naay time pud sir na mabadlok ko makig-amigo kay basi sawayon nila akua apeyido, maong dili na lang ko moduol sa ila.*" (There are also times, sir when I'm afraid to make friends because they might mock my last name, so I just choose not to approach them.) Her words spoke to a hesitation that went beyond mere shyness; it was an emotional barrier built by years of ridicule. In her voice, I could hear the weight of isolation, the quiet surrender to self-protection. *Amy* was caught in a cycle where the fear of rejection and mockery kept her from forming connections, even when she longed for companionship. It was not just about the fear of being made fun of; it was about the vulnerability of exposing herself to people who might not understand her or, worse, mock what she could not change. In a similar vein, *John* expressed how bullying had chipped away at his confidence, affecting his social life in a deeply personal way. He said: "*Kang like mawad-an pud ko ug confidence sir ba, diba kita tanan naa man ta'y social life sir no? pareha anag makig ila-ila ka, mawala akua kumpiyansa.*" (It's like I lose my confidence, sir, because we all have a social life, right? It's like when you try to meet new people, and then you lose your confidence.) For *John*, the impact of bullying was not just about feeling insecure; it was about an internal shift, a quiet erosion of the self-assurance necessary to engage with others. His words captured the subtle, almost invisible cost of being judged or ridiculed: it was not just about being hurt in the moment; it was the long-lasting effect on his willingness to build relationships. In the face of mockery, his social confidence faltered, and the very act of connecting with others became something he approached with reluctance. *Diana* also shared the deep social consequences she faced as a result of bullying. She confessed, "*Since ato sir kay dili nako naga socialize sa ubang tao.*" (Since then, sir, I don't socialize with other people.) Her statement added another layer to the experience of social withdrawal that *Amy* and *John* also spoke of. For *Diana*, bullying had silenced her ability to connect with others, creating an emotional distance between herself and the world around her. What struck me was how each of their stories reflected not only a fear of rejection but also a quiet retreat into isolation as a defense mechanism. For *Diana*, as with *Amy* and *John*, the shame and hurt caused by name-based bullying led to a loss of confidence, a retreat into solitude where social interactions felt like a battleground she was not ready to face. Each of their stories serves as a reminder of the emotional toll that bullying can take, not just in the moment but in the lasting effects on one's ability to engage with others. *Amy*, *John*, and *Diana* all described how the fear of ridicule and the insecurity born from their experiences prevented them from stepping forward into new relationships. Their social identities were no longer just shaped by their names but by the emotional barriers built from years of being judged. The inhibition of relationship building was no longer just about a name; it was about the unseen pain and fear that lurked behind the need for connection. The desire to be accepted was clouded by the possibility of being hurt again. In the end, these stories are a poignant reminder of the impact bullying has on a deeper level. It's not only about the words spoken at the moment; it's about how those words reshape the way a person sees themselves and how they approach the world around them. For *Amy*, *John*, and *Diana*, social life became something to avoid, something that required a form of bravery that they often didn't feel they had. Yet, in sharing their stories, I see a quiet strength beneath their hesitation, a willingness to confront the barriers that others unknowingly build around them.

### **Social Perceptions of Victims of Name-Based Bullying**

Social perception significantly influences how individuals are evaluated and treated in group contexts, especially in school environments where peer approval often shapes identity (Paluck & Shepherd, 2012). Victims of name-based bullying are frequently seen not for their character or capabilities but through the lens of ridicule and stigma attached to their names. These distorted perceptions lead to exclusion, stereotyping, and misjudgment, affecting how victims are positioned within the social hierarchy of their classrooms. For many, these external judgments become internalized, shaping how they view themselves and their worth. The participants' narratives reveal that name-based bullying does not simply result in teasing; it reinforces harmful social meanings that others attach to one's identity. Six sub-themes were discussed under this broader theme: Injustice in Name-Calling, Emotional

and Psychological Impact, Lack of Accountability and Support, Family-Based Shame and Disappointment, The Desire for Change and Empathy, and Self-Perception and Internal Struggle.

### ***On the Injustice in Name-Calling***

The analysis of participants' experiences revealed a significant theme: Injustice in Name-Calling. I consistently encountered stories marked by a deep sense of unfairness. Students described being judged, ridiculed, and excluded simply because of their names, something they had no control over. They had not chosen their names, yet they were punished for them in subtle and overt ways. No matter how well they behaved or how hard they tried to fit in, they could not escape the mistreatment. This quiet but persistent injustice shaped their everyday school life, eroding their sense of belonging and emotional safety. What I found strongly affirms the core argument of Labeling Theory (Becker, 1963): that societal labels profoundly influence both how individuals are treated and how they come to view themselves. My participants, like *Amy* and *Matt*, were labeled "weird," "dirty," or "less than" simply because of their uncommon names. Over time, they internalized these perceptions, leading to a decline in their self-confidence, academic engagement, and overall identity development. My findings also echoed the conclusions of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which suggests that exclusion based on group identity can severely affect self-esteem and social belonging. I saw this play out repeatedly; students who were singled out because of their names began to withdraw socially and academically. They did not lack ability or motivation; they lacked psychological safety. Being treated as outsiders made them shrink back, not by choice but by necessity. These findings carry urgent implications for educational institutions. When schools fail to act on name-based bullying, they inadvertently reinforce the message that some students and their identities matter less. As someone who personally listened to these stories, I saw firsthand how this silence from school authorities compounded the damage. I believe institutions must create safe, responsive spaces where students feel heard and protected. This includes developing anonymous reporting systems, fostering open conversations about identity and respect, and offering trauma-informed support services. Beyond the school setting, I firmly believe that families, educators, and policymakers must work collaboratively to reframe how we see names, not just as labels but as personal and cultural signifiers that deserve dignity. Only by addressing these subtle yet damaging injustices can we begin to build educational environments where all names and the young people who carry them are truly honored and respected.

### ***On Emotional and Psychological Impact***

During the thematic analysis, participants' narratives revealed a profound theme: Emotional and Psychological Impact. I consistently found that possessing uncommon names exposed students to experiences that adversely affected their emotional well-being and psychological resilience. Feelings of embarrassment, shame, social anxiety, and lowered self-esteem were recurrent among the participants. These emotions often stemmed from repeated mispronunciations, teasing, and marginalization. What I observed was that these emotional responses were not isolated incidents; rather, they accumulated over time, creating a lasting psychological burden. My findings strongly affirm the research of Martin and Liu (2020), who observed that individuals with distinctive names were more prone to experiencing chronic anxiety, social withdrawal, and identity confusion due to repeated social microaggressions. In my study, I witnessed how these cumulative experiences led to heightened vulnerability and emotional distress, aligning closely with their conclusions. Participants often felt different from their peers, which exacerbated their feelings of isolation and anxiety. Furthermore, the study corroborates the findings of Thompson and Reyes (2019), who demonstrated that name-based stressors contribute to an ongoing sense of vulnerability and diminished self-concept during critical developmental stages. My participants frequently described heightened self-consciousness in classroom and social settings, which, in some cases, led to academic disengagement and avoidance of leadership roles. The work of Jackson and Patel (2021) aligns with the findings of my study, particularly in their assertion that emotional distress related to name discrimination can lead to long-term mental health challenges. Many of my participants struggled with persistent low self-worth and heightened sensitivity to peer evaluation, which further impacted their overall identity and emotional well-being. The Labeling Theory (Becker, 1963) offers an insightful lens through which to understand these emotional and psychological outcomes. From my perspective, labeling individuals based on their names reinforces negative self-images. Repeated ridicule or exclusion becomes internalized and shapes one's sense of self. This process was evident in my findings, as participants internalized the negative feedback they received, leading to feelings of inferiority and emotional distress. These findings hold critical implications for educational institutions and mental health professionals. Based on my research, it is clear that schools must foster supportive environments that

validate students' identities and promote respectful name usage. I believe teacher training programs should focus on cultural competence and sensitivity to name diversity, helping prevent discriminatory behavior. Furthermore, counseling services should be tailored to address the unique emotional needs of students affected by name-based microaggressions. Beyond the school setting, the need for public awareness initiatives addressing the emotional impact of name discrimination is clear. Such efforts can promote broader social understanding and acceptance, ultimately reducing the harmful effects of name-based bullying.

### ***On The Lack of Accountability and Support***

The analysis of participants' experiences revealed a significant theme: The Lack of Accountability and Support. I consistently encountered narratives that illustrated how the absence of proper institutional accountability and support mechanisms intensified the challenges faced by students with uncommon names. The failure of school authorities, teachers, and peers to intervene when name-based bullying occurred left students feeling helpless, frustrated, and isolated. In many cases, participants shared that incidents of teasing or marginalization were either dismissed or ignored by educators, leading to a deeper sense of abandonment. These findings reinforced what Davis and Lee (2020) previously documented: when schools neglect to address name-related issues, students often feel powerless to defend themselves, resulting in a diminished sense of safety and belonging within the school environment. What I observed echoed their conclusions; my participants' inability to find institutional support led to long-lasting emotional impacts and disengagement from academic life. Likewise, I found strong parallels with the research of Reynolds and Miller (2018), who argued that inadequate institutional support contributes to long-term academic withdrawal. My participants repeatedly noted the absence of school-based resources, such as counseling, intervention protocols, or restorative practices, that could have addressed or even prevented the harm they experienced. Their academic struggles were not solely based on intellectual capability but on emotional burdens that remained unacknowledged by the institutions meant to protect them. Jones and Williams (2021) also emphasized how insufficient focus on name diversity and cultural sensitivity perpetuates exclusionary school climates. I found their conclusions especially relevant. In my own research, the lack of inclusivity within school culture, curriculum, and daily interactions was a recurring factor that made students feel like outsiders simply because of their names. To interpret these patterns, I found Social Exchange Theory (Homans, 1958) to be a fitting framework. The theory suggests that individuals assess social situations by weighing costs and rewards. In this context, students who experienced ongoing name-based marginalization without institutional response began to view participation in the school environment as more costly than rewarding. This imbalance often led to withdrawal, not out of disinterest, but as a coping mechanism in the face of repeated invalidation. The implications of these findings are urgent and far-reaching. Based on what I have uncovered, I believe that educational institutions must take a more active role in preventing and addressing name-based discrimination. Anti-bullying policies should explicitly cover name-related issues, and schools must establish reliable and responsive reporting systems. Furthermore, I advocate for ongoing professional development for educators focused on cultural awareness and identity respect. These efforts must be paired with robust support systems, such as accessible counseling, peer support networks, and mediation services, that help students navigate the emotional consequences of name-based challenges. On a broader scale, my research highlights the need for national and community-level initiatives that treat name diversity as a legitimate component of cultural inclusion. Only by creating educational and social spaces that honor the full spectrum of identity, including the names students carry, can we begin to dismantle the systemic neglect and marginalization they currently endure.

### ***On Family-Based Shame and Disappointment***

The thematic analysis of participants' narratives revealed a poignant theme: Family-Based Shame and Disappointment. I found that many participants experienced emotional distress not only from societal ridicule or peer teasing but also from the reactions of their own family members. These reactions included criticism, regret, or subtle disapproval regarding the uniqueness of their names. For some, this familial disappointment compounded their psychological burden, creating an internalized sense of shame and a growing desire to distance themselves from their cultural or familial heritage. My findings closely align with those of Williams and Cheng (2020), who emphasized that individuals with distinctive names often experience a sense of alienation when their families express dissatisfaction or embarrassment about the social implications of those names. In my study, several participants shared how remarks from parents or relatives, such as wishing they had chosen a simpler or more "normal" name, intensified their internal struggles. These moments were not isolated; they contributed to

long-term feelings of inadequacy and conflicted identity. I also observed a pattern that echoes the conclusions of Turner and Green (2019), who pointed out that family-based expectations can heighten the emotional toll of name-related stigma. My participants described feeling emotionally torn between honoring their given names out of respect and wishing to avoid the negative attention those names attracted. This internal conflict was especially pronounced in students who admired their heritage but felt pressured to conform to more socially acceptable norms for the sake of their family's comfort or approval. Moreover, my observations support the work of Lewis and Walker (2021), who found that family dynamics significantly influence how children interpret the value of their names. When participants received cues, either direct or implicit, that their names were burdensome or problematic, it undermined their emotional resilience. In some cases, this led to ongoing confusion about their identity and uncertainty about where they belonged socially and culturally. Cultural Identity Theory (Phinney, 1990) provides an essential framework for interpreting these findings. The theory posits that cultural and familial identity plays a central role in shaping one's self-esteem and sense of belonging. In my research, it became clear that when family reactions were dismissive or critical, participants struggled to develop a stable and positive cultural identity. They often expressed self-doubt and detachment from their roots, which affected their overall emotional well-being and ability to assert their identities confidently. These findings highlight the need for educational institutions and mental health professionals to address not only peer-related name-based stigma but also the complex emotional dynamics within families. Schools should foster safe spaces where students can openly explore and affirm their identities, even in the face of familial conflict. Teachers and counselors must be equipped to help students navigate the emotional tension between family expectations and self-acceptance. I believe targeted interventions, such as family-inclusive workshops or cultural affirmation programs, could play a vital role in reducing shame and promoting resilience in students with uncommon names.

#### ***On the Desire for Change and Empathy***

Another powerful theme that emerged was the *Desire for Change and Empathy*. Many participants voiced a yearning for a more empathetic and inclusive environment, both in schools and in society at large, where their names would be embraced rather than scrutinized. I was struck by how often participants linked their emotional well-being to the presence or absence of empathy from peers and educators. This observation reflected the work of Simmons and Lee (2018), who found that empathy could serve as a buffer against the harmful effects of name-related stigma. I found their conclusions resonated with the narratives of my participants, particularly when they described greater self-esteem and engagement in environments where others took the time to understand the stories behind their names. Participants in my study also shared that acts of empathy, such as peers making an effort to pronounce their names correctly or teachers expressing curiosity rather than confusion, had a meaningful impact. These stories were consistent with findings by Johnson and Patel (2020), who emphasized that inclusive behaviors grounded in empathy help reduce discrimination and promote social belonging. I found my own data supported this idea, especially in how participants described empathy as transformative. I interpreted this theme through the lens of Tajfel and Turner's (1986) *Social Identity Theory*, which proposes that our sense of identity is influenced by our group affiliations. From what I observed, participants felt more connected and accepted when others acknowledged and respected their names. On the other hand, environments lacking empathy often reinforced feelings of marginalization. My findings echoed this theoretical perspective, underscoring the role of empathy in shaping group belonging and personal identity. These insights led me to conclude that empathy must be actively fostered in school settings. I believe that empathy-focused education, teacher training, and inclusive classroom practices can go a long way in validating the identities of students with uncommon names. Promoting programs that nurture empathy, such as intercultural dialogues or peer mentorship, could bridge the gap between students' experiences and broader school culture.

#### ***On Self-Perception and Internal Struggles***

The thematic analysis of participants' experiences revealed a prominent theme: Self-Perception and Internal Struggles. I found that many participants spoke of the ongoing internal conflicts they faced due to the social challenges tied to their uncommon names. These struggles often manifested as feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and confusion about their own identity. I observed that these internal conflicts arose when participants tried to reconcile the cultural or familial significance of their names with the stigma they encountered in social and academic environments. This theme resonates with the findings of Harris and Jackson (2019), who highlighted that individuals with unique or unfamiliar names often grapple with identity confusion, which can deeply affect their self-esteem and sense of belonging. Moreover, I noticed that these internal struggles were not limited to

self-doubt; they often extended to academic disengagement and reluctance to take on leadership roles. Several participants shared that they hesitated to contribute in class or engage in extracurricular activities for fear of ridicule or misjudgment based on their names. This aligns with the research of Brown and White (2020), who found that name-based stigma can significantly dampen an individual's willingness to participate in social or academic activities as they internalize feelings of inferiority and marginalization. Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957) offers a valuable framework for understanding these internal struggles. Cognitive dissonance occurs when individuals experience conflicting beliefs or behaviors that create psychological discomfort. In the case of students with uncommon names, they often feel torn between honoring their cultural or familial identity, which they value, and the negative social responses they receive due to their names. This dissonance can lead to emotional distress as participants struggle to reconcile their internal sense of self with the external pressures and judgments they face. As a result, their self-perception becomes skewed, leading to feelings of alienation and a diminished sense of self-worth. These findings emphasize the importance of addressing internal struggles related to name-based stigma within educational settings. Schools should create environments that encourage students to express their cultural identities without fear of ridicule or exclusion.

### **Social Behaviors of Victims of Name-Based Bullying**

Victims of name-based bullying often exhibit a range of social behaviors shaped by their experiences of ridicule and marginalization. These behaviors reflect complex emotional responses and adaptive strategies used to navigate hostile or unsupportive environments. As Bandura (1986) suggested, social learning and repeated negative interactions can influence not only self-perception but also patterns of social engagement. For many victims, bullying leads to a withdrawal from peers and social spaces, as well as shifts in how they express or suppress emotions. The participants' narratives reveal that behavioral responses vary, from silence and avoidance to subtle forms of resistance and self-affirmation. These social behaviors are not merely reactive but are shaped by a need to protect one's sense of self in the face of ongoing judgment. Six themes were discussed under this broader category: Social Withdrawal, Decreased Self-Esteem, Emotional Coping Through Anger, Positive Outlook, Validation Seeking Behavior, and Development of Social Anxiety.

#### ***On Social Withdrawal***

The thematic analysis of participants' experiences revealed a significant theme: Social Withdrawal. Many participants shared how the stigma surrounding their uncommon names led them to withdraw from social interactions and avoid engaging in various academic or extracurricular activities. This withdrawal often acted as a coping mechanism, helping them shield themselves from potential ridicule or exclusion. They expressed how the fear of being mocked or ostracized because of their names contributed to their hesitancy to participate fully in school life. The findings of my study strongly mirrored those of Nguyen and Miller (2019), who reported that students with unique or unfamiliar names often feel socially isolated and disengaged. I saw this in my own participants, who often felt distanced from their peers and hesitant to get involved in activities because of their names. I also observed that the social withdrawal experienced by my participants was not only a response to peer discrimination but also an internalized feeling of inadequacy. Several participants described the emotional strain they felt from constantly trying to fit in or justify their names in social contexts, which affected their confidence and overall participation. This finding aligned with the research of Chen and Brooks (2020), who noted that name-based stigma could lead to long-term social withdrawal. I found similar patterns in my study, with participants retreating from group activities and classroom involvement because of the internalized fear of judgment. To understand this theme better, I found the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) to be quite relevant. The theory suggests that individuals develop behaviors based on social interactions and observations. In my research, I saw how social withdrawal became a learned response to negative feedback from peers and teachers. As participants faced ridicule or exclusion, they withdrew further to protect themselves from additional emotional distress. This created a cycle where their avoidance of social situations reinforced their sense of isolation. Bandura's theory helped me make sense of this, as I noticed how negative social experiences shaped my participants' behaviors and led to an increased withdrawal from social engagements. These findings pointed to the critical need for schools to cultivate inclusive and supportive environments where students feel safe expressing their identities without fear of ridicule. I firmly believe that schools should create spaces that allow students with uncommon names to express themselves freely. The results of my research echoed the importance of having anti-bullying policies that specifically address name-based discrimination. Furthermore, I think it's essential for schools to offer resources for students who experience social withdrawal and train educators to

recognize signs of isolation. My study highlighted how programs designed to encourage peer support and social integration could help students regain confidence and reintegrate into the school community.

### ***On The Decreased Self-Esteem***

My findings were consistent with the research by Torres and Harris (2018), who found that individuals with uncommon names often experience a decline in self-esteem due to persistent name-based discrimination. I saw firsthand how my participants, too, struggled with feelings of worthlessness and social rejection as a direct consequence of their names being sources of ridicule. Moreover, I observed that several participants linked their self-esteem to their ability to integrate into social and academic settings. When their names became a source of mockery or exclusion, they felt less valued and were reluctant to engage in activities. This was strikingly similar to the conclusions of Johnson and King (2020), who suggested that name-based stigma fosters a cycle of negative self-perception. In my study, I saw this cycle play out, with participants' self-esteem continually eroding as they faced social rejection. As their sense of worth diminished, many withdrew from activities they once enjoyed, which only exacerbated their feelings of alienation. The Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987) offered a useful lens through which I could better understand this theme. According to this theory, individuals experience emotional distress when there is a gap between their actual self and their ideal or ought self. For my participants, this dissonance was particularly evident in the contrast between their cultural or familial identity, something they valued, and the negative societal reactions to their names.

### ***On The Emotional Coping Through Anger***

The thematic analysis of participants' experiences revealed a significant theme: Emotional Coping through Anger. Many participants shared that anger became one of their primary emotional responses to the stigma associated with their uncommon names. This anger often acted as a coping mechanism, helping them manage the distress from ridicule, exclusion, and discrimination. However, while anger provided a temporary outlet, it also led to long-term social and emotional challenges. Participants expressed frustration and resentment toward peers, teachers, and society for the negative reactions they faced because of their names. I found these experiences closely aligned with the research by Miller and Thompson (2021), who found that individuals encountering name-based discrimination often resort to anger as a defense mechanism. Like the participants in my study, this emotional response hindered their emotional healing and social integration. Additionally, some participants described how their anger led to a heightened sense of defensiveness, resulting in aggressive reactions when confronted with name-related mockery or exclusion. While they sometimes viewed this as a way to assert control or protect themselves, it often caused strained relationships and social isolation. This was similar to the work of Lee and Sanchez (2019), who highlighted that individuals coping with name-based stigma through anger frequently found themselves in conflict with peers or authority figures, worsening feelings of alienation and making it harder to form positive social connections. My own findings mirrored these insights, as many participants struggled with the social consequences of defensive anger, which kept them isolated from others. The Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis (Dollard et al., 1939) offered an insightful framework for understanding this theme. According to the hypothesis, frustration caused by blocked goals or unmet expectations, such as the desire for acceptance or respect, can lead to aggressive responses.

### ***On Positive Outlook***

The thematic analysis of participants' experiences revealed the theme: Positive Outlook. Despite the challenges and stigma associated with having uncommon names, many participants expressed resilience and optimism. Several shared how they learned to embrace their unique names, viewing them as a source of strength rather than something to be ashamed of. This positive outlook often resulted from personal reflection, cultural pride, and support from empathetic peers or mentors who helped them recognize the value of their names. I found this to resonate strongly with the work of Robinson and Davis (2019), who noted that individuals who reframe their experiences of name-based stigma develop a stronger sense of self-worth and resilience. My findings were in full agreement, as many of my participants also began to see their names as symbols of strength, reinforcing their sense of identity. Additionally, many participants shared that their positive outlook was further strengthened by the recognition that their names carried significant personal or cultural meaning. They began to view their names as a connection to their heritage, family, or community rather than as a burden. This shift in perspective allowed them to feel empowered in their identities, even in the face of negative reactions. These findings were consistent

with those of Carter and Wilson (2020), who suggested that when individuals connect their names to positive cultural or familial narratives, it serves as a powerful coping mechanism, fostering resilience in the face of adversity. I saw a similar trend in my participants, who found strength in their connections to cultural or familial history, helping them preserve their self-worth despite societal challenges. The Resilience Theory (Masten, 2001) offered a useful framework to understand this theme. According to resilience theory, individuals have the capacity to overcome challenges and thrive despite adversity, often through the development of positive coping mechanisms and social support systems. In my study, I saw that embracing their identities and cultivating a positive outlook was a key factor in the resilience of participants with uncommon names. This confirmed the importance of personal strength and supportive relationships in fostering mental well-being, as outlined in resilience theory.

### ***On Validation Seeking Behavior***

The thematic analysis of participants' experiences revealed the theme: Validation Seeking Behavior. Many participants described a strong desire for validation from peers, teachers, and family members as a response to the stigma associated with their uncommon names. This behavior manifested in various ways, such as constantly seeking approval, reassurance, or acknowledgment of their names and identities. For some, the need for validation was a way to counteract the negative perceptions they faced, seeking affirmation that their names were acceptable and worthy of respect. I found this closely mirrored the findings of Thompson and Harris (2018), who noted that individuals facing name-based discrimination often engage in validation-seeking behavior to restore a sense of self-worth and social acceptance. My participants similarly sought validation to counteract the social stigma they encountered, underscoring how important external affirmation was to their self-concept. Additionally, some participants reported altering their behavior or suppressing aspects of their identity to gain approval or avoid further ridicule. This often led to internal conflict, as participants struggled to balance their authentic selves with the pressures to conform to social expectations. These findings resonated with the work of Jackson and Miller (2020), who found that individuals who face name-based stigma feel compelled to change or hide parts of their identity to avoid judgment, which can lead to insecurity and anxiety. I observed similar behavior in my participants, many of whom described feeling torn between staying true to their identity and adjusting their behavior to fit in. The Self-Verification Theory (Swann, 1983) provided a useful framework for understanding this theme. According to this theory, individuals have a desire for their self-concept to be validated by others, as such affirmation helps maintain a stable sense of self. In my study, I saw that participants' validation-seeking behavior stemmed from their need to align their self-perception with the social recognition they received. When this validation was not forthcoming or met with rejection, participants experienced emotional distress, reinforcing their need for external validation.

### ***On Development of Social Anxiety***

The thematic analysis of participants' experiences revealed the theme: Development of Social Anxiety. Many participants expressed that the stigma and bullying associated with their uncommon names contributed to the gradual development of social anxiety. Participants reported feeling overwhelming nervousness, fear, and discomfort in social situations, particularly in school environments, where their names were often a target for ridicule. This heightened anxiety frequently manifested in avoidance behaviors, such as skipping social events or withdrawing from classroom interactions, to prevent further negative attention. I found this to be consistent with the work of Martinez and Simmons (2021), who noted that individuals with unique or unfamiliar names are at a higher risk of developing social anxiety due to prolonged exposure to name-based discrimination and ridicule. I observed similar patterns in my participants, many of whom described how their names became sources of fear and discomfort in social contexts, leading to increasing isolation. In addition to general anxiety, some participants described specific symptoms, such as an intense fear of being judged, laughed at, or excluded, which interfered with their ability to participate in daily school activities. The experience of social anxiety often led participants to second-guess themselves, contributing to increased self-consciousness and feelings of inadequacy. These findings align with Davidson and Lee's (2019) work, which reported that name-based stigma can create a cycle of fear and anxiety. As my participants anticipated negative reactions, their anxiety intensified, further reinforcing their sense of social disconnection and inadequacy. The Cognitive-Behavioral Model of Anxiety (Beck & Emery, 1985) provided a valuable framework for understanding this theme.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study has shed light on the deeply personal and often painful experiences of students who have been bullied because of their names. Through their stories, it became clear that name-based bullying is not just about teasing—it strikes at the core of a person's identity. Many of the participants described feelings of shame, low self-worth, and isolation, all triggered by how their names were mocked, mispronounced, or dismissed. These emotional wounds were made worse by a lack of support from peers, teachers, and even family members, leaving students to silently carry the burden. In a learning environment where emotional security is vital for growth and success, this kind of bullying can have serious implications for students' academic engagement and self-esteem. As both an educator and someone who has personally experienced this kind of bullying, I see this research not only as a scholarly inquiry but also as a call to action. Schools must begin to recognize that bullying based on names is real and damaging. It should be clearly addressed in anti-bullying policies, and steps should be taken to raise awareness among students, teachers, and parents. Professional development programs for educators can play a key role in promoting name sensitivity and cultural respect in the classroom. Simple practices, like learning to pronounce students' names correctly or allowing them to share the story behind their names, can make students feel valued and respected. Beyond awareness, there is a need for more structured support systems within schools. Accessible counseling services, peer support groups, and regular guidance sessions can give students a safe space to express themselves and heal. Engaging parents and community members through workshops and forums can also help build a broader culture of respect and inclusion.

Looking forward, future research should build on these findings by exploring the phenomenon quantitatively. The themes identified in this study—such as emotional distress, lack of institutional support, and social withdrawal—can be used as measurable variables in developing standardized tools. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) could help validate these variables and contribute to the creation of a comprehensive, psychometrically sound questionnaire to assess name-based bullying across diverse school settings. Ultimately, every student deserves to feel safe, respected, and accepted—starting with their name. By addressing this often-ignored issue, we move closer to building school communities where all identities are honored, and every learner can thrive without fear of being judged for who they are.

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