

The Role of Child Abuse Experience in College Students' Adaptation at University

Nadhira Khairunnisa^{1*}, Azizah Fajar Islam¹

¹Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. Hamka
Jl. Limau II No.2, RT.3/RW.3, Kramat Pela, Kec. Kby. Baru, City, Daerah Khusus
Ibukota Jakarta 12130 – Indonesia
Email: nadhirara19@gmail.com
*Correspondence

Abstract:

College adjustment is a challenge for new students, especially for those with childhood abuse experiences. This study aims to examine the effect of child abuse experiences on college adjustment. The method used is quantitative with simple linear regression analysis involving 184 freshmen with child abuse experiences. The results show that child abuse experiences negatively affect college adjustment. Students with such experiences tend to face difficulties in emotional, social, academic, and institutional adjustment. These findings confirm that past experiences contribute to difficulties in adjustment and highlight the importance of psychosocial interventions in higher education institutions. Colleges are encouraged to provide psychological support services for students with child abuse backgrounds to help them adapt academically and socially.

Keywords: *Child abuse, college adjustment, freshmen*

1. Introduction

First-year students in higher education often face various challenges in adjusting to the new academic and social environment. They are required to be independent in fulfilling personal needs and adapting to the higher education system. Unfortunately, many first-year students struggle to meet these demands, and it is not uncommon for them to fail in the adjustment process. According to research conducted by Lee, Ang, and Dipolog-Ubanan (2019), first-year students have been identified by experts as a group particularly vulnerable to difficulties in adapting to college life.

A survey conducted by the University of California (UCLA) involving over 300,000 first-year students from more than 500 universities showed an increase in stress and depression levels among new students compared to previous years. A study by Chang et al. (2007) also highlighted that most first-year students face difficulties in fulfilling academic obligations, leading to failure in completing their studies due to heavy workloads. Furthermore, research by Farzaneh, Ali, and Reza (2016) revealed that about 60% of new students choose to leave university in their second year due to difficulties in adapting, which leads to stress.

This phenomenon underscores the importance of self-adjustment skills for new students in facing these challenges. According to Schneider (1964), self-adjustment is a crucial condition for achieving individual mental health. Good self-adjustment allows students to cope with frustration, pressure, and challenges in college life. In this context, college adjustment becomes critical. College adjustment encompasses students' ability to adjust to

academic, social, and personal-emotional aspects in the college environment (Baker & Siryk, 1986). Good self-adjustment can enhance academic performance, social involvement, and emotional well-being. In contrast, failure in self-adjustment can lead to feelings of isolation, loneliness, lower academic performance, and even failure to complete studies.

However, there are certain factors that can affect students' ability to adjust, one of which is traumatic childhood experiences, such as child abuse. Research indicates that individuals who experience abuse in childhood are more likely to face psychological issues, including difficulties in adjusting to college life (Moore, Welsh, & Peterson, 2020). Childhood abuse, whether physical, emotional, or neglect, can lead to increased stress and difficulty coping with challenges in the college environment. Therefore, it is important to identify whether childhood abuse experiences influence the self-adjustment process of new students.

Previous studies have mostly focused on qualitative analyses of the relationship between traumatic experiences and college adjustment, but there is still a lack of quantitative approaches that are more generalizable. Based on this research gap, the aim of this study is to investigate whether there is a significant relationship between childhood abuse experiences and college adjustment among first-year students. This research is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors that affect the success of first-year students' self-adjustment and provide recommendations for universities to design support programs that can help students overcome these challenges.

2. Methods

The method used in this study is a quantitative approach, which aims to examine the relationship between childhood abuse experiences and college adjustment among first-year students. The population in this study consists of first-year students (semester 1 and 2) who have experienced childhood abuse. A sample of 184 participants was selected using purposive sampling, which is a sampling technique based on certain criteria relevant to the research topic. This study uses two main measurement instruments: the Child Abuse Scale and the College Adjustment Scale. The Child Abuse Scale was developed based on the aspects proposed by Malik and Shah (2007), which include Physical Abuse, Emotional Abuse, Physical Neglect, and Emotional Neglect, with 27 items and a validity test result ($p < 0.05$) and reliability ($r = 0.602$). The College Adjustment Scale was developed based on the theory by Baker and Siryk (1989), which includes four dimensions: Personal-Emotional Adjustment, Social Adjustment, Institutional Adjustment, and Academic Adjustment, with 38 items and a validity test result ($p < 0.05$) and reliability ($r = 0.930$). The data obtained will be analyzed using IBM SPSS 26.0, with descriptive analysis techniques to describe the characteristics of the respondents and regression tests to examine the effect of childhood abuse experiences on college adjustment.

3. Hasil

This section explains the results of the study regarding the role of childhood abuse experiences in college adjustment among first-year students. This study uses a quantitative method with simple linear regression analysis to test the effect of childhood abuse on college adjustment. The results show that childhood abuse has a significant effect on college

adjustment. Based on the simple linear regression test, the results are as follows:

Table 1.
Results of Data Analysis

Variable	R	R Square	F	Sig
Childhood Abuse Experience and College Adjustment	0.282	0.080	15.755	0.000

The results show that the F value is 15.755 with a significance level of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), indicating that childhood abuse significantly affects college adjustment. The coefficient of determination (R Square) is 0.080, meaning that childhood abuse has an 8% influence on college adjustment. Furthermore, the influence of childhood abuse on the dimensions of college adjustment is as follows:

Table 2.
Influence of Childhood Abuse on College Adjustment Dimensions

College Adjustment Dimension	Influence (%)
<i>Personal emotional adjustment</i>	10.1%
Social Adjustment	3.5%
Institutional Adjustment	4.5%
Academic Adjustment	4.1%

The results show that new students who have experienced childhood abuse tend to face difficulties in self-adjustment, especially in the personal emotional adjustment aspect, which has the highest influence at 10.1%. Childhood abuse significantly affects college adjustment with a significance level of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). The personal emotional adjustment dimension is most affected, with a value of 10.1%, indicating that students with a history of childhood abuse tend to struggle with managing emotions and academic stress. Childhood abuse also affects academic adjustment (4.1%) and social adjustment (3.5%), indicating difficulties in academic performance and social interactions in the campus environment. Institutional adjustment shows an influence of 4.5%, meaning that students with childhood abuse experiences may have lower levels of attachment and commitment to their educational institution.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce the state of the art in the field of educational psychology by affirming that childhood abuse experiences contribute to difficulties in self-adjustment in college. These findings support the self-adjustment theory by Baker and Siryk (1986), which suggests that past experiences, including trauma, can influence an individual's adaptation in an academic environment.

Compared to previous research, these results align with the findings of Moore et al. (2020), which showed that students with a history of childhood abuse tend to have higher levels of aggression, lower GPA, and lower adjustment levels. These results also extend the research conducted by Young and Widom (2014), which found that childhood abuse disrupts

emotional regulation and social adaptation abilities.

Theoretically, these findings also confirm the coping and resilience model developed by DiPalma (1994), which states that individuals with trauma experiences tend to have weaker adjustment mechanisms. The implication of these findings is the importance of psychosocial interventions in higher education environments to support students with trauma backgrounds in adapting more easily.

5. Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that childhood abuse has a negative influence on college adjustment among first-year students, with the greatest influence on the personal emotional adjustment aspect. Therefore, it is important for higher education institutions to provide psychological support for students with a history of childhood abuse to help them adjust better in the academic environment.

References

- Baker, Robert W., and Bohdan Siryk. 1986. "Exploratory Intervention With a Scale Measuring Adjustment to College." *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 33(1):31–38. doi: <https://10.1037/0022-0167.33.1.31>.
- Chang, Edward C., Lawrence J. Sanna, Meghan M. Riley, Ann Marie Thornburg, Kathryn M. Zumberg, and Michael C. Edwards. 2007. "Relations between Problem-Solving Styles and Psychological Adjustment in Young Adults: Is Stress a Mediating Variable?" *Personality and Individual Differences* 42(1):135–44. doi: <https://10.1016/j.paid.2006.06.011>.
- DiPalma, Linda M. 1994. "Patterns of Coping and Characteristics of High-Functioning Incest Survivors." *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing* 8(2):82–90. doi: [https://10.1016/0883-9417\(94\)90038-8](https://10.1016/0883-9417(94)90038-8).
- Farzaneh, Mikaeli Manee, Isazadegan Ali, and Fekrat Reza. 2016. "Predicting Adjustment of Students to University Considering Positive and Negative Affects." *International Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences* 6(5):219–24. doi: <https://10.5923/j.ijpbs.20160605.04>.
- Lee, Kam-Fong, Chin-Siang Ang, and Genevieve Dipolog-Ubanan. 2019. "My First Year in The University": Students' Expectations, Perceptions and Experiences." *Journal of Social Science Research* 14:3134–45. doi: <https://10.24297/jssr.v14i0.8006>.
- Malik, F., & Saeed, S. (2022). *Child abuse Scale-Revised: Modification, Revision and Cultural Validation of Child abuse Scale*. *Webology*, 19(2). <https://www.webology.org/data-cms/articles/20220215092327>
- Moore, Susannah M., Marilyn C. Welsh, and Eric Peterson. 2020. "History of Childhood Maltreatment: Associations with Aggression and College Outcomes." *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment and Trauma* 29(1):111–28. doi: <https://10.1080/10926771.2019.1637989>.
- Schneider, A. 1964. *Personal Adjustment and Mental Health*. newyork: Rinehart & Winston. <https://archive.org/details/personaladjustme0000schn>
- Young, Joanna Cahall, and Cathy Spatz Widom. 2014. "Long-Term Effects of *Child abuse* and

Neglect on Emotion Processing in Adulthood.” *Child abuse and Neglect* 38(8):1369–81. doi:
<https://10.1016/j.chiabu.2014.03.008>.