

Shattering Warmth: The Psychological Impact of Domestic Violence on Female Children

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Abstract:

This study aims to reveal the impact of domestic violence on the psychological dynamics of girls who have experienced violence since childhood. Domestic violence often leaves deep emotional scars, especially for children who become hidden victims of family conflicts. This research employs a qualitative approach using a case study method to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of the subject, identified as K, an adult woman who endured physical, verbal, and economic violence, as well as sexual abuse by her stepfather. The findings indicate that such violence leads to anxiety, low self-esteem, difficulties in social relationships, and challenges in forming healthy relationships. The subject also exhibits ineffective coping mechanisms in dealing with trauma, such as crying and channeling emotions through online gaming. The lack of support and protection from her mother has resulted in attachment disturbances in the mother-child relationship. This study concludes that psychological interventions through forgiveness therapy and art therapy are necessary to help alleviate anxiety and trauma, while strong social support is crucial for improving the subject's self-esteem and social relationships. The implications of this research highlight the need for increased awareness and social support for domestic violence victims to prevent long-term adverse effects.

Keywords: domestic violence, psychological dynamics, social support

1. Pendahuluan

Domestic violence (DV) is a social phenomenon with widespread impacts, particularly on the psychological health and emotional development of children who are victims. According to Law No. 23 of 2004 on the Elimination of Domestic Violence (UU PKDRT), DV is not limited to violence between spouses but also includes violence against children. In Indonesia, the rate of domestic violence continues to rise, with children and adolescents often being the hidden victims who do not receive adequate attention and protection. The National Commission for Child Protection (Komnas PA, 2023) reports that cases of special child protection account for 31.3% of all child-related complaints as of September 2023, with 35% of these cases occurring within family environments.

The psychological impact of DV on children is complex. Research by Nasution (2016) found that DV can lead to prolonged stress, anxiety disorders, low self-esteem, and recurring trauma caused by violence from perpetrators. In addition to physical violence, other forms of abuse, such as verbal and emotional violence, can also hinder the psychosocial development of children (Ariani & Asih, 2022). Children who experience DV tend to have low self-esteem, difficulty forming healthy social relationships, and are at risk of developing anxiety and depression in adulthood (YKAI, 2017).

Previous research has examined various impacts of domestic violence on children,

from psychological, social, and emotional development aspects. For instance, a study by Amanah et al. (2023) showed that physical violence inflicted by parents varies greatly, from hitting with hands to using hard objects like ashtrays or brooms. Another study by Joseph et al. (2018) revealed that art therapy can be an effective method in reducing anxiety in women who are victims of DV. However, there remains a research gap in understanding the psychological dynamics experienced by adult women who have suffered domestic violence since childhood, particularly in terms of coping mechanisms and how these experiences influence their social relationships later in life.

This study aims to delve deeper into the psychological dynamics of female children who experience domestic violence and how this experience affects their lives in adulthood. The main focus of this research is to understand the coping mechanisms used by victims, the long-term trauma implications, and the factors that contribute to their psychological recovery process. Using a qualitative case study approach, this study will provide deeper insights into the subjective experiences of victims, which are often overlooked in quantitative studies.

The significance of this research lies in its efforts to fill the gap in literature regarding the long-term effects of DV on girls who are now adults. Thus, this study not only contributes academically but also provides practical recommendations for professionals in psychology, social work, and policymakers to design more effective interventions for DV victims.

2. Metode

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to deeply understand the psychological experiences of individuals who have experienced domestic violence since childhood. This approach was chosen because it allows for a more comprehensive exploration of the victims' subjective experiences, including their feelings, perceptions, and coping mechanisms in dealing with past trauma. The subject of the study is a young adult female who has experienced various forms of domestic violence since childhood, selected through purposive sampling. In addition to the main subject, the study also involves an additional informant, a close friend of the victim, who provides an additional perspective on the subject's psychological and social conditions.

Data collection is conducted through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. In-depth interviews are used to explore the subject's experiences regarding the forms of violence they have experienced, its psychological impact, and how they cope with the trauma. Observations are conducted during the interviews to observe emotional expressions, communication patterns, and non-verbal responses that support the understanding of the subject's psychological condition. Meanwhile, documentation includes field notes taken during the interview and observation process to enrich the data analysis. The research procedure consists of three main stages: preparation, data collection, and data analysis. The preparation stage includes determining the participant criteria, initial approach to the subject, and preparing the interview guidelines based on literature review. During the data collection stage, in-depth interviews are conducted with the main subject and supporting informant, accompanied by observations and field notes recorded in the form of transcripts. Data analysis uses thematic analysis, which consists of

several stages: reading and understanding interview transcripts, identifying initial codes, grouping the codes into main themes, and interpreting the findings based on relevant psychological theories.

To ensure data validity, this research uses source triangulation, comparing information from the main subject, supporting informants, and observational results. Additionally, member checking is conducted by confirming the interview results and preliminary analysis with the participants to ensure the data interpretation aligns with their experiences. This research also adheres to ethical research principles, including informed consent, confidentiality, and minimizing psychological risks, by creating a comfortable interview environment and providing emotional support if needed. With this systematic approach, the study is expected to provide deep insights into the psychological impact of domestic violence on women who have experienced it since childhood.

3. Hasil

This study aims to understand the psychological dynamics of adult women who have experienced domestic violence since childhood. The results show that the subject has experienced various forms of violence, including physical, verbal, economic violence, and abuse. The psychological impacts include anxiety, low self-esteem, social relationship difficulties, and challenges in forming emotional attachments with others. In addition, the subject demonstrates ineffective coping mechanisms in dealing with past trauma. Thematic analysis resulted in several key themes that explain the subject's psychological dynamics, as summarized in Table 1 below:

Table 1.
Themes and Subthemes of Research Results

Main Theme	Subtheme	Interview Quote
Forms of Violence	Physical, verbal, economic, sexual abuse	"I was often hit, even choked when my stepfather got angry."
Psychological Impact	Anxiety, trauma, low self-esteem	"I often feel worthless and scared to interact with new people."
Social Disturbance	Difficulty building relationships, social isolation	"I prefer to be alone, I find it hard to trust others, especially men."
Coping Mechanisms	Denial, crying, escaping into other activities	"Whenever I feel anxious, I usually isolate myself in my room and cry."
Role of Social Support	Lack of support from mother and environment	"I hoped my mother would defend me, but she just told me to submit."

Specifically, the subject experienced various forms of violence since childhood, especially after the arrival of a step-sibling in the family. Her stepfather frequently inflicted physical violence, such as hitting, kicking, and choking when he felt angry or his demands were not met. The subject also experienced verbal abuse in the form of insults and degrading statements, leading to low self-esteem. Moreover, the subject experienced economic violence, where her stepfather did not contribute to the family's needs but instead demanded money from the mother. Sexual abuse by the stepfather further aggravated the psychological impact on the subject.

The psychological impacts include prolonged anxiety, constant fear, and difficulty in forming healthy social relationships. The subject also experiences attachment issues with her mother due to the lack of protection and support provided. As a result, the subject feels unsafe within her own family environment, which then influences her social relationship patterns in adulthood.

The coping mechanisms employed by the subject are still ineffective in addressing the trauma she experienced. The subject tends to deny the issues she faces and withdraws from her social environment. When feeling anxious, she often isolates herself, cries, or distracts herself by engaging in activities like playing online games. However, these coping strategies do not offer long-term solutions for overcoming the psychological impacts. The lack of support from her environment, especially from her biological mother, exacerbates the subject's psychological condition. Although the subject tried to resist the violence inflicted by her stepfather, her mother advised her to submit, leaving her without the protection she needed. Consequently, the subject lost trust in those around her and struggled with building interpersonal relationships.

Based on these findings, it is important for victims of domestic violence to receive appropriate psychological intervention, such as forgiveness therapy and art therapy, to help them accept the past and overcome the trauma they experienced. Furthermore, adequate social support from the surrounding environment is necessary to improve the victim's self-esteem and help them build healthier social relationships. This research highlights that domestic violence has long-term psychological impacts, especially regarding anxiety, social isolation, and low self-confidence. Therefore, greater attention from families, professionals, and policymakers is needed to provide recovery services for domestic violence victims.

4. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that experiences of domestic violence since childhood have a significant impact on the psychological condition of women in adulthood. These findings align with previous research stating that exposure to domestic violence can lead to emotional disturbances, anxiety, and difficulties in establishing social relationships (Nasution, 2016; Joseph et al., 2018). However, this study offers a new contribution by revealing how ineffective coping mechanisms can prolong the psychological impact on the victims.

The psychological impact of domestic violence is seen in the emergence of chronic anxiety, low self-esteem, and difficulties in forming healthy social relationships. These findings are consistent with reports from the Indonesian Child Welfare Foundation (YKAI, 2017), which show that children who are victims of domestic violence tend to experience long-term emotional disturbances and have a poor self-concept. Furthermore, research by Fitriana et al. (2015) revealed that verbal abuse causes individuals to feel worthless and tend to withdraw from their social environment. However, this study further emphasizes that experiences of violence also affect the victim's relationship patterns in adulthood, particularly in building trust in others, especially men.

In addition to the psychological impact, this study also found that the subject used less effective coping mechanisms, such as denial, withdrawal, and crying as an emotional

outlet. This contrasts with the research by Joseph et al. (2018), which showed that art therapy can help reduce anxiety in victims of domestic violence. In the subject's case, the coping mechanisms used have not provided a long-term solution to dealing with the trauma. According to Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) theory, the coping mechanisms employed are maladaptive as they do not help in reconstructing the negative thoughts resulting from the violence (Reliani et al., 2020). Therefore, the results of this study reinforce the urgency of psychological intervention for victims of domestic violence to help them develop healthier and more effective coping strategies.

Another factor that exacerbates the subject's psychological condition is the lack of social support, particularly from the mother. When victims do not receive adequate protection and emotional support from their family, they tend to experience feelings of isolation and helplessness (Mayastuty, 2024). According to Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988), secure attachment with parents helps children develop self-confidence and better coping mechanisms. However, in this case, the disruption of the relationship with the mother led to the loss of a protective figure within the family, causing the subject to feel even more unsafe and without a place to rely on.

The results of this study have important implications for clinical psychology and child protection policy. Clinically, this study emphasizes that psychological intervention for victims of domestic violence should not only focus on trauma recovery but also on strengthening more adaptive coping mechanisms. Programs like forgiveness therapy and art therapy can be effective approaches to help victims overcome trauma and improve their self-esteem (Oktaviana, 2022). From a policy perspective, this study underscores the importance of improving psychological rehabilitation services for victims of domestic violence, especially for children who experience early trauma. Additionally, family and social support should be strengthened so that victims do not feel isolated in facing their traumatic experiences.

However, this study has several limitations. The use of a case study method with a single subject means that the results cannot be generalized to a larger population. Furthermore, this study relied solely on interviews and observations without employing other methods such as psychometrics or psychological tests, which could provide more objective data. Therefore, further research with a larger number of participants and a mixed-method approach could be conducted to enrich the understanding of the long-term impact of domestic violence on victims.

5. Conclusion

The conclusion of this study is to reveal the impact of domestic violence on the psychological dynamics of female children. The results show that the violence experienced by the subject, K, since childhood, including physical, verbal, economic, and sexual abuse, has a significant impact on her psychological condition. The subject experiences anxiety, low self-esteem, difficulties in social relationships, and attachment issues with her mother. Additionally, the coping mechanisms used by the subject are not effective in overcoming the trauma. This study also highlights the importance of social support and psychological interventions, such as forgiveness therapy and art therapy, to

help the subject overcome psychological problems and raise awareness about the impact of domestic violence in efforts to prevent similar cases in the future.

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