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The role of parental education on verbal abuse and its impact on the mental health of young adults

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ABSTRACT

Introduction. Verbal abuse is one of the domestic violence that is still underestimated because it has no direct physical effect; it has a tremendous impact on young adults' mental health. **Objective.** This study wanted to confirm the negative effect of verbal abuse on mental health. In addition, parental education is also predicted to play a role in young adults' mental health. **Method.** This study uses a quantitative approach with a total sample of 160 respondents, consisting of 47 males and 113 females. Data collection was carried out by distributing questionnaires through social media, with the criteria of respondents being in the range of 18-22 years old and being cared for by their parents in childhood. **Results.** The results showed a significant negative effect of parental verbal abuse in childhood on mental health in young adults. In addition, a father's education also has a positive effect on young adults' mental health, whereas a mother's education does not play a role in mental health. **Discussion and conclusion.** Verbal abuse from parents as a youngster will impact one's mental health as a young adult. Future research is expected to look at who commits verbal abuse in more detail and increase the sample size to evaluate the effect of maternal education.

Keywords: Verbal abuse, mental health, education, young adult, childhood.

RESUMEN

Introducción. El abuso verbal es una de las violencias domésticas que aún se subestima porque no tiene ningún efecto físico directo; de hecho, tiene un impacto tremendo en la salud mental de los adultos jóvenes. **Objetivo.** Este estudio quería confirmar el efecto negativo del abuso verbal en la salud mental. Además, también se prevé que la educación de los padres desempeñe un papel en la salud mental de los adultos jóvenes. **Método.** Este estudio utiliza un enfoque cuantitativo con una muestra total de 160 encuestados que consta de 47 hombres y 113 mujeres. La recolección de datos se llevó a cabo mediante la distribución de cuestionarios a través de las redes sociales, con el criterio de que los encuestados se encontraran en el rango de 18 a 22 años y fueran cuidados por sus padres en la infancia. **Resultados.** Los resultados mostraron un efecto negativo y significativo del abuso verbal de los padres en la infancia sobre la salud mental en el adulto joven. Además, la educación del padre también tiene un efecto positivo en la salud mental de los adultos jóvenes, mientras que la educación de la madre no influye en la salud mental. **Discusión y conclusión.** El abuso verbal de los padres cuando era joven tendrá un impacto en la salud mental de uno en el adulto joven. Se espera que la investigación futura observe quién comete abuso verbal con más detalle y aumente el tamaño de la muestra para evaluar el efecto de la educación materna.

Palabras clave: Abuso verbal, salud mental, educación, adulto joven, niñez.

INTRODUCTION

Children's growth is influenced by their surroundings and family. Parenting patterns influence how to care for children. During childhood, children tend to have an egoistic attitude, stubbornness, and rebellion against parental rules with the desire to gain freedom and fulfill curiosity. This situation will make parents feel that their children are difficult to manage, then consciously or unconsciously abuse children verbally (Indrayati & PH, 2019).

Verbal abuse is characterized as any language or speech intended to distress an individual that could be considered demeaning, insulting, intimidating, or disrespectful (Howells-Johnson, 2000) and resulting in feelings of low self-esteem and hindering ambitions and goals (Howells-Johnson, 2000). Study Coates, Dinger, Donovan, and Phares (2013) showed differences in the impact of verbal abuse by fathers and mothers on Southeastern University students' psychological distress (mental health). Mother's verbal abuse was a strong predictor of greater psychological distress in adult daughters and sons. On the other hand, the father's verbal abuse did not rise as a significant predictor of adult daughters' or sons' greater psychological distress. A study conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic on 125 children in Jakarta, Indonesia, showed the presence of fathers who were more often at home because they did not have to work in the office were found to have verbally abused their children by cursing, scolding, yelling, and threatening. Children felt that they did not obtain the expected learning guidance. Father abuse is more deemed because it is recognized more often than mother abuse. Furthermore, the verbal abuse received by children will cause psychological trauma in the long term (Fitriana, Sagita, & Utami, 2021).

In terms of violence, most people's views are more inclined toward cases related to physical abuse; otherwise, they are ignored. Verbal abuse is one of the domestic violence that is still underestimated because it has no direct physical effect; it has a tremendous impact on children's mental health. Indrayati and PH (2019) stated that 86.9% of 61 children experienced verbal abuse from their parents. Various types of words that hurt children will affect them, both at the time and in the future. Verbal abuse will hurt the children and make them think they are what their parents say. The other impact of verbal abuse is not felt directly but through a gradual process (Fitriana, Pratiwi, & Sutanto, 2015).

The negative effects of verbal abuse can impact individuals' emotional wellbeing and development (Brendgen, Wanner, & Vitaro, 2006). The effects of verbal abuse on mental health are in class with other types of abuse, such as sexual or physical abuse, which are generally considered more gradual (Jeong et al., 2015). Emotional abuse in the pattern of verbally aggressive parenting has been exposed to lasting effects on brain development (Polcari, Rabi, Bolger, & Teicher, 2014). In general, memory fades over time

for children, adolescents, and adults (Hirst et al., 2001). Yet, memories of highly emotional events are often difficult to forget (Yonelinas & Ritchey, 2015).

Children whose parents verbally abuse are more physically aggressive, antisocial, and suffer from interpersonal problems than those who are not (Loh, Calleja, & Restubog, 2011). Other research also shows that children who often receive verbal abuse tend to have serious emotional and behavioral problems, namely aggression, anxiety, depression, lack of emotional attachment, self-confidence, low cognitive abilities, and social relationship problems (Teicher, Samson, Polcari, & McGrenery, 2006). Verbal abuse can have a detrimental effect on the victim's psychological wellbeing and stand for a long time (Wright, Crawford, & Del Castillo, 2009).

Parents who verbally abuse their children will have a psychological impact on children's development. Teicher and Samson (2013) conducted a study that revealed that verbal abuse damages certain connections in the brain, which are part of an individual's strategy to isolate the various types of abuse experienced. A follow-up study by Kim-Spoon et al. (2021) looked at the effects of childhood abuse on brain function; the results showed abuse affects the control system and is related to steeper developmental decreases. The study show abuse is a bad experience for neurodevelopment.

Attachment theory explains how the child-parent relationship rises and affects subsequent development. This theory holds that attachments formed during childhood have important effects later in life, namely in adulthood (Feist & Feist, 1998), and are positioned on the relation between the child and the primary caregivers (mother and father), where the relationship continues throughout the development of an individual's life from infants, toddlers, school years to adolescence, and adulthood (Myers, 1999). When parents or caregivers treat children in an intrusive or abusive way, it will cause pathogenic conditions in children, which will have an impact on adulthood (Ecke, Chope, & Emmelkamp, 2006). In a study, Riggs (2010) proposes a model that previous emotional abuse arouses insecure attachment, which debilitates emotional regulation and contributes to destitute mental health.

Mental health has concepts that involve mental balance and internal emotional, subjective wellbeing, the ability to effectively manage stress, the perception of efficacy, autonomy, the ability to live harmoniously, and intellectual capacity for self-realization (Martínez-Soto, Montero-López Lena, & Córdova y Vázquez, 2014). Common mental health problems affect thoughts, feelings, behavior, and social relationships with others (Granrud, 2019). Among adolescents, mental health problems can appear in various forms, for example, internalization and externalization problems. Internalization problems refer to emotional problems, and externalization problems to behavioral problems (Granrud, 2019).

Previous studies have shown a relationship between the experience of verbal abuse during life with parents as a child to the mental health of young adults (Fitriana et al., 2015; Loh et al., 2011). Socio-economic status also plays a role in the impact of parental verbal abuse on children's mental health (Sabarre, Villareal, & Arcinas, 2021). In addition, differences in parental sex affect the effect of verbal abuse on mental health (Fitriana et al., 2021). Quesnel-Vallée and Taylor (2012) stated the influence of parental education on children's mental health. Meanwhile, Risma, Solifah, and Satria (2018) showed a relationship between parental education and verbal abuse, where the sample is 300 parents in Pekanbaru, Indonesia. Therefore, this study wanted to look in detail at the role of education of each parent on mental health and verbal abuse. Based on the sample's age ranging from 18-22 years, we will use the term young adults to describe the sample.

The aims of this study were to establish the influence of past parental verbal abuse in childhood on mental health of young adults and to determine the role of parents' education on verbal abuse.

METHOD

Design of the study

Study with cross-sectional research for empirical-analytical using regression analysis. With independent variables consisting of sex, age, education of mother, education of father, the income of parents, and verbal abuse. At the same time, the dependent variable is mental health.

Sample

The population is young adults domiciled in Indonesia. Sample members must meet the inclusion criteria, including Indonesian citizens aged 18-22 years and were cared for by their parents as a child, while the exclusion criteria were refusing to give informed consent. Sampling was carried out in September 2021. Data collection was carried out by

distributing online questionnaires through Instagram, Line, Twitter, and WhatsApp. The number 34 respondents were 160, consisting of 47 men (29.4%) and 113 women (70.6%).

Measurements

Verbal abuse was measured using the Verbal Abuse Questionnaire (VAQ) from Teicher et al. (2006). This measure evaluates types of verbal abuse, including scolding, yelling, swearing, blaming, threatening, demeaning, mocking, insulting, criticizing, shouting, belittling, and demeaning. In this study, trans adaptation was carried out concerning Beaton, Bombardier, Guillemin, and Ferraz (2000).

Adaptation is carried out in the following stages, 1. translating the instrument from the original language into Indonesian by two translators, 2. synthesizing the two translations into one translation, 3. translating the synthesis results back into the original language, and carrying out a different translator for the validity process, 4. the expert committee reviewed the translation of the measuring instrument by considering the equivalence of semantic, idiomatic, experiential, and conceptual 5. the measuring instrument by pretested 38 young adults, they were asked to complete a questionnaire and provide an opinion on understanding. Face validity was used based on an assessment of each item's appearance, format, and context, where respondents were asked to provide an assessment based on a set scale. The results of face validity showed that the instructions in the questionnaire were easy to understand, so it was concluded that the questionnaire had high validity. Construct validity was used based on the correlational method test, and the results showed that the instrument items were valid. The reliability test was carried out using the Cronbach Alpha technique. The results showed that the verbal abuse variable was .954 and the mental health variable was .849. Both scales had high reliability, so it could be concluded that the instrument was reliable. The final result showed no statement items were declared invalid from the instrument.

Mental health was measured using the Mental Health Inventory (MHI-38) as developed by Veit and Ware (1983), which has been adapted into Indonesian by Aziz and Zam-

Table 1
Description of respondents

Age	Year %	18	19	20	21	22		
		16.3%	22.5%	19.3%	18.1%	23.8%		
Income (I)	IDR (K) %	I < 1500	1500 ≤ I < 3000	3000 ≤ I < 5000	5000 ≤ I ≤ 7500	I > 7500		
		5.6%	21.3%	43.8%	16.9%	12.4%		
Education	Level	Elementary	Junior H School	High School	Diploma	Bachelor	Master	Doctoral
Father		3.7%	4.4%	23.1%	8.1%	41.9%	17.5%	1.3%
			31.0%			68.8%		
Mother		3.7%	11.9%	19.4%	18.1%	41.9%	4.4%	1.6%
			35.0%			65.0%		

Table 2
Verbal abuse by parents

	Never (%)	Once or twice (%)	Once / year (%)	Several times / year (%)	Monthly (%)	Weekly (%)	Several times / week (%)	Every day (%)
Scold	.6	18.1	1.3	19.4	14.4	5.6	33.8	6.9
Yell	16.9	17.5	1.3	16.9	16.9	5.0	23.1	2.5
Blame for things	38.8	12.5	3.1	21.3	11.3	1.9	11.3	.0
Swear	7.5	26.3	1.9	23.8	15.6	5.0	18.1	1.9
Insult	43.1	15.0	5.6	21.3	9.4	.6	5.0	.0
Threaten	73.8	21.9	1.9	.6	.0	.0	.0	.0
Tell stupid	53.8	10.0	3.8	24.4	3.1	.6	3.1	1.3
Call with bad names	29.4	22.5	5.6	23.1	9.4	2.5	6.9	.6
Blame that didn't do	21.9	30.0	6.3	31.9	5.0	.0	5.0	.0
Humiliate	33.1	15.6	6.9	31.3	.0	6.3	6.3	.6
Scream	.6	20.0	1.3	37.5	20.6	2.5	14.4	3.1
Criticize	48.8	17.5	10.6	17.5	3.1	.0	2.5	.0
Tell incapable	53.8	18.8	10.6	11.3	2.5	.0	3.1	.0
Make feel worthless	35.0	17.5	3.1	30.0	6.9	1.3	6.3	.0
Raise the voice	8.1	22.5	1.9	12.5	12.5	6.9	29.4	6.3

roni (2019). The aspects revealed in this measuring instrument are psychological wellbeing (positive emotions, love, life satisfaction) and psychological distress (anxiety, depression, loss of control).

Procedure

Participants are young social media users aged 18-22 years. They were asked to voluntarily fill out questionnaires distributed through Bio Instagram, Line Group, WhatsApp Group, and Timeline Twitter. The questionnaire was made in the structure of a Google Form. It stated the purpose of filling out the questionnaire and including a contact person who can be contacted. Those who can fill out the questionnaire have experienced verbal abuse from their parents as a

child. Those willing to fill out the questionnaire also express their agreement to participate and submit the completed questionnaire anonymously. Furthermore, the data obtained were processed and analyzed using SPSS 24 software.

Statistical analysis

A two-way ANOVA was used for a Groupwise comparison test with F-test. This test evaluates whether there is a difference in the group mean of any education group of verbal abuse variable. Furthermore, Multiple Regression analysis, with the “enter” method, was used to explain the influence of the independent variable (sex, age, education of mother, education of father, income of parents, verbal abuse) on the dependent variable (mental health).

Table 3
Mental Health of Young Adults

	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>				<i>Strongly Agree</i>
	0 (%)	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)
Daily life is interesting	6.3	28.7	30.6	26.3	8.1
Enjoy what you do	.6	16.9	15.0	51.9	15.6
Feel comfortable communicating	1.3	2.5	22.5	51.9	21.9
Feel valuable	2.5	13.1	32.5	36.3	15.6
Feeling happy	1.9	15.6	38.8	30.6	13.1
Enjoy the life	1.3	9.4	20.0	53.1	16.3
Feel confused or frustrated	3.1	17.5	25.0	46.3	8.1
Feel tired or helpless	6.3	29.4	17.5	40.0	6.9
Feeling at rock bottom	6.9	21.3	21.3	39.4	11.3
Enjoy the feeling of despair	1.3	9.4	15.0	54.4	20.0
Feel out of control	2.5	11.3	13.1	56.9	16.3
Feel have nothing	3.1	10.0	18.1	43.8	25.0

Table 4
Paired Sample Test – Paired Differences

	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error	95% CI of the difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
Father's and mother's education	.106	.443	.035	.037	.175	3.034	159	.003

Variable: Father's education and mother's.

The linear regression model is used to describe the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable.

$$Y = a + b X1 + c X2 + d X3 + e X4 + f X5 + g X6$$

Where X1 = sex, X2 = age, X3 = education of mother, X4 = education of father, X5 = income of parents, X6 = verbal abuse, and Y = mental health. Meanwhile, b, c, d, e, f, g are the regression coefficients, and a is the intercept constant.

Ethical considerations

The ethics committee of Universitas Brawijaya, Indonesia, approved the project and procedures of this research (1715/UN10.F11.15/PP/2021). The respondents have the opportunity to study the questionnaire and participate accordingly with ethical research considerations.

RESULTS

Data characteristics from respondents that describe their age, education of father and mother, and parental income per month are displayed in Table 1.

Based on Table 1, respondents aged 22 years old had the largest percentage, namely 23.8% or 38 respondents. The age of respondents has a mean of 20.05 years old (SD = 1.43). The education of fathers was mostly bachelor's (41.9%), and those who had education above high school were 68.8%. Meanwhile, the education of mothers in the bachelor category also had the highest percentage, namely 41.9%, and those who had education above high school were 65%. The ma-

jority of respondents' parents had a monthly income of IDR 3,000,000 ≤ I < 5,000,000 with a total percentage of 43.8% and income have a mean of IDR 4,152,000 (SD = 1,994,000). IDR is the Indonesian currency.

Verbal abuse had a mean of 32.67 (SD = 21.137) with a minimum value of 2 and a maximum of 81. Based on Table 2, the most significant types of verbal abuse that young adults never received during their childhood were said to be stupid (53.8%) and incapable (53.8%). On the other hand, the largest portion of the verbal abuse received every day is being scolded (6.9%) and having a high tone of voice (6.3%).

Mental health had a mean of 30.48 (SD = 7.237) with a minimum of 12 and a maximum of 48. As seen in Table 3, the psychological wellbeing condition of young adults with the largest percentage is feeling comfortable communicating with friends (21.9%) and being able to enjoy life (16.3%); however, the psychological condition where daily life is interesting is not owned by young adults with the largest percentage (6.3%) than others. On the other hand, the psychological distress condition with the largest percentage of young adults has nothing to look at the future (25%) and enjoy hopelessness (20%).

Table 4 displayed that there are group differences between the father's education and mother's education with a significance of .003 ($p < .05$). The following analysis looks at whether each father's education and mother's education have a role in verbal abuse.

Table 5 shows that the father's education affected verbal abuse differentiation by a significance of .029 ($p < .05$). Meanwhile, the mother's education and the interaction between the father's and mother's education do not affect verbal abuse.

Table 5
Tests of between-subjects effects

Source	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Corrected model	21	1,150,780	3.388	.000
Intercept	1	29,955,481	88.196	.000
Education of father*	6	826,807	2.434	.029
Education of mother	6	342,507	1.008	.422
Education of father x Education of mother	9	324,047	.954	.481
Error	138	339,645		
Total	160			
Corrected total	159			

Dependent variable: verbal abuse.
N = 160; * $p < .05$; R squared = .340.

Table 6
Coefficients of linear regression

Model	B	Std. error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	26.209**	8.427		3.110	.002
Sex	.486	1.172	.031	.414	.679
Age	.276	.369	.055	.749	.455
Education of mother	-.185	.490	-.033	-.378	.706
Education of father	2.250*	1.340	.145	1.679	.095
Income	.143	.522	.021	.274	.784
Verbal abuse	-.177**	.028	-.517	-6.227	.000

Dependent variable: mental health.

N = 160; ** $p < .05$; * $p < .10$; R Square = .241.

A regression model was used to predict the effect of sex, age, education of fathers, education of mothers, the income of parents, and verbal abuse by parents on the mental health of young adults. Table 6 displays that a father's education affects mental health by a significant .145 ($< .10$), and verbal abuse significantly affects mental health by $-.517$ ($< .05$). Sex, age, mother's education, and parent's income did not affect mental health. A significant regression was found between such variables; every 26.209 points scored in the Verbal Abuse Questionnaire (VAQ) predicted a decrease of $-.177$ points in the Mental Health Inventory (MHI-38).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Respondents of this study were 160 young adults aged 18-22 years old, and they were cared for by their parents during childhood. The results showed that the sex and age of young adults and parental income did not play a role in young adults' mental health.

Young adults in this study have an age a mean of 20.05 years old, consisting of 29.4% males and 70.6% females out of 160. Parents' monthly income has an average of IDR 4,152,000 (SD = 1,994,000). The average income range in the study is equivalent to the average income in Indonesia, which is IDR 5,183,000 (Badan Pusat Statistik [BPS], 2021). While the education of the parents who have a level above high school for father education reaches 68.8% and mother education reaches 65%.

The regression analysis results showed that verbal abuse and father education affect young adults' mental health. The effect of verbal abuse was $-.517$, which means that the more verbal abuse received by young adults during childhood, the more likely they are to have lower levels of mental health.

The results of this study confirm previous studies. Yun, Shim, and Jeong (2019) stated that verbal abuse that conveys wrongdoing unfairly would harm mental health. A similar study states that verbal abuse received in childhood will lead to psychological disorders in adulthood (Thomason, 2018). The emotional experience of verbal abuse will instill self-destructive beliefs such as the thought of being

stupid and unworthy of attention (Rogosch, Cicchetti, & Aber, 1995; Waldinger, Toth, & Gerber, 2001).

Father's education had an effect of .145 on young adults' mental health. The magnitude of the influence of a father's education on mental health is more diminutive than verbal violence. The positive effect indicates that a better father's education level tends to have a better mental health impact on young adults. On the other hand, the lower the education of the father, the more likely he will be to have young adults with common mental health. Meanwhile, mother education does not affect young adults' mental health. It is also known that father education affects verbal abuse. Furthermore, it can be explained that a father's education is an antecedent of the influence of verbal abuse on the mental health of young adults; in short, there is a role of a father's verbal abuse on mental health.

Indonesian culture places the father as the head of the family, responsible for the needs of family members, including children. The role of the mother is to take care of children while working for an income is not an obligation. The father will be a role model for the child. The relationship between the child and the father tends to be more formal than the relationship with the mother. Indonesian society still holds a strongly patriarchal culture, where there is a dominant role of the father in the family. Dagan (2013) explained that the father's role in parenting is necessary for a child's development because the mother's role is different from the father's. The psychological development of children can be influenced by a fatherless condition, where the absence of a father's role in the child's life results in low psychological well-being (Sundari & Herdajani, 2013).

The study results indicate that the negative effect of verbal abuse on young adults' mental health confirms previous research. Verbal abuse from parents received in childhood will affect mental health as a young adult. This study found an interesting finding that only the father's level of education affects young adults' mental health, not the mother's level of education. The result showed differences in the educational background between father and mother and the impact of father education on verbal abuse. Meanwhile, the different educational experiences of mothers did not produce significant differences in verbal abuse. The average level of education in Indonesia, among 100 people over the age of 15 years, 29% have completed high school, and 9.67% have completed a bachelor's degree (BPS, 2021). With an education level above high school of more than 60%, it shows that the education level of the sample used is already above the average level in Indonesia. In addition, gender, age, and family economic level (parental income) do not play a role in young adults' mental health.

The limitation of this study is that it was not specifically identified whether the mother, father, or both were involved in verbal abuse among the parents involved in this study. Future studies are expected to see in detail who

commits verbal abuse and expand the scope of research to confirm the role of maternal education.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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