

Intergenerational cycles of violence: Risk factors of child abuse victims who turned violent offenders growing up

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Abstract

Child abuse has profound consequences for survivors. It increases the the risk of brain disorder, emotional regulation, self-adjustment, learning, and memory disorders, and is correlated with anti-social interactions and violent behavior in adulthood. This research aims to understand how individuals who have experienced child maltreatment, committed a violent crime once they became an adult. A narrative method was used in this study. By illuminating how early-life victimization could shape the life of an individual, we hope to shed light and eventually prevent survivors of child maltreatment down a path of violence. Three violent offenders were the subjects of this study. Data collection methods in the form of semi-structured interviews and non-human sources of information were carried out on three perpetrators of criminal acts of murder and abuse which resulted in death. The results in this study were analyzed using thematic analysis in chronological order. It was revealed that there are several risk factors in the series of cases of criminal acts. Intergenerational transmission of multiple risk factors and the use of illegal drugs are the main causes of aggressive behavior and criminal acts.

Keywords: *abuse, inmates, offender, victim, violence*

Introduction

Cases of child abuse increase sharply every year. In Indonesia, the number of cases of violence against children in 2022 reached 21,241 cases (Pratiwi, 2023), this figure almost doubled from the previous year, 11,952 cases (Ramadhan & Prabowo, 2022). In the world, it is estimated that up to 1

billion children became victims of violence in 2021 (WHO, 2022).

Child abuse according to WHO (2022) is an act of violence and neglect of children under the age of 18, which includes psychological, physical, and sexual violence. In a meta-analysis research conducted by Stoltenborgh et al., (2015), research related to sexual violence against children

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dominates more than research on other types of violence. This is possible because sexual violence is considered to have a greater impact than other violence (Stoltenborgh et al., 2015). In addition, sexually violent behavior is an act that is always regarded as wrong, in contrast to physical and psychological violence which has the potential to be part of parental disciplinary behavior and is considered normal and appropriate even though it is cruel (Stoltenborgh et al., 2015).

The imbalance in the number of studies related to physical violence is a strong reason why research related to physical violence in the parenting process must be carried out. Parents who physically discipline their children are at greater risk of physically abusing their children (Zolotor et al., 2008; Stoltenborgh et al., 2013). Therefore, the number of cases of physical violence in cultures that normalize physical discipline such as Africa and Asia will be greater (Meston et al., 1999; Stoltenborgh et al., 2013).

In Indonesia, in recent years there have been many cases of violence against children which have resulted in death (see Maichel & Utomo, 2023; Alhamidi, 2023). In the US, in 2022 there were 1955 child deaths caused by violence (Statista Research Department, 2024). According to a study by Fatmawati et al. (2020), for the period 2000 to 2018, there were 99 cases of child deaths due to violence at Sardjito Hospital Yogyakarta. Unfortunately, at the national level, there is no data yet that shows the number of child deaths caused by violence. Indonesian culture which normalizes physical discipline perpetuates the practice of violence against children (Kurniasari,

2015). The lack of intervention from local neighbors to normalize this is one of the reasons for the loss of children's lives by their own parents (Wolf et al., 2018). Child death is one of the most extreme impacts of child violence cases. However, this does not mean that the impact on survivors of child abuse can be belittled.

Child abuse has the potential to cause disorders in adulthood. Exposure to violence and various types of traumas can affect brain and health development, including emotional regulation as well as the development of brain shape, which has an effect on brain processes such as learning and memory (Shinkoff et al., 2012; Yule et al., 2019). Harsh parenting practices, full of hatred, anger, and overprotective can have a bad effect on a child's adjustment (Barber et al., 1994; Conger et al., 1994; Eltanamly et al., 2021). In males, maltreatment is the factor that has a greater effect on violence-related juvenile delinquency than family structure, SES, family size, and birth order (Heck & Walsh, 2000; Trickett et al., 2011). In research by Trickett et al. (2011) it is also explained that violence experienced is correlated with violent behavior, which predicts involvement with anti-social relationships, which then predicts violent acts.

There is strong evidence on the correlation of experiences of failure or adversity in childhood with negative outcomes in adulthood (Walsh et al., 2019). In a study in Indianapolis, children who experienced physical violence until the age of 11 had a higher risk of becoming violent criminals over the next 15 years (Maxfield, 1996; Farrington, 2005). While in a study by Robinson & Breaux (2019) confirmed that

experiencing physical violence in childhood predicts future involvement in violent and non-violent law violations.

From the studies above, child abuse and law violations and/or violent behavior in adulthood are seen as two things that correlate, influence and predict each other. A study by Robinson & Breaux (2019) explains several theories that can be used to analyze the relationship between violence in childhood and violent behavior in adulthood, including Attachment Theory, Social Learning Theory and the Intergenerational Transmission of Violence, General Strain Theory, Self-Control Theory, Resnick's Filicide Typology, and Three-Factor Theory. Studies that use the theories above suggest that one of the predictors of violent behavior against children is the parents' past who were also victims of child abuse (see Lesnik-Oberstein et al., 1995; Spatz Widom, 2012). Individuals who have experienced violence as children are three times more likely to commit the same violent act (Milaniak & Widom, 2015).

In the Intergenerational Transmission of Violence theory, the possibility of a child adopting the behavior of a parent who commits violent acts is based on social learning theory. (Spatz Widom, 2012). A child who is exposed to violence as a child by his parents will see violence as acceptable (Robinson & Breaux, 2019). This tolerance for violence is dangerous and can perpetuate the practice of violence as part of parenting method.

Farrington in Besemer (2017) explained that intergenerational transmission of violence, apart from social learning, can also occur through several mechanisms, namely genetics, intergenerational exposure to multiple risk

factors, and official bias. The presence of one or a collaboration of these mechanisms can create intergenerational transmission of violence. Intergenerational exposure to multiple risk factors explains how exposure to risk factors, characteristics, or experiences associated with increased aggressive behavior in parents can affect the likelihood of their children behaving in the same way as their parents. However, the effect given is not a direct but rather an indirect effect of social inequality and anti-social behavior (Farrington, 2011)

The phenomenon of child abuse has been widely investigated. However, most of the studies carried out were carried out using quantitative correlation methods and were predictive or historical in nature (see Camerini et al., 2020, Trickett et al., 2011b, Walsh et al., 2019, Liu et al., 2022, Dvir et al., 2014, Smith & Thornberry, n.d., Gallo et al., 2018). This study tries to use qualitative studies to tell the perspective of victims of violence who have become perpetrators of violence while seeing the life they have gone through. This study also describes how perpetrators of violent crimes view the cases that ensnare them and explores the relationship between their childhood experiences, their views on violence, and several factors that influence the crimes they commit.

Method

This research uses a qualitative method with a narrative approach. This was done because the researcher wanted to understand the informant's point of view in perceiving his life journey and explore the risk factors that existed in the informant's life.

Informants in this study were chosen using purposive sampling with the informants' characters being perpetrators of crimes related to violence and had experience of child abuse. The informants in this research were Inmates (WBP) in Surabaya Correctional Facilities. There were three informants and all three were perpetrators of crimes related to violence. Two people are homicide offenders and one person is the violence offender that resulted in the loss of someone's life. Researchers had previously conducted initial interviews to ensure that the three informants had experienced child abuse.

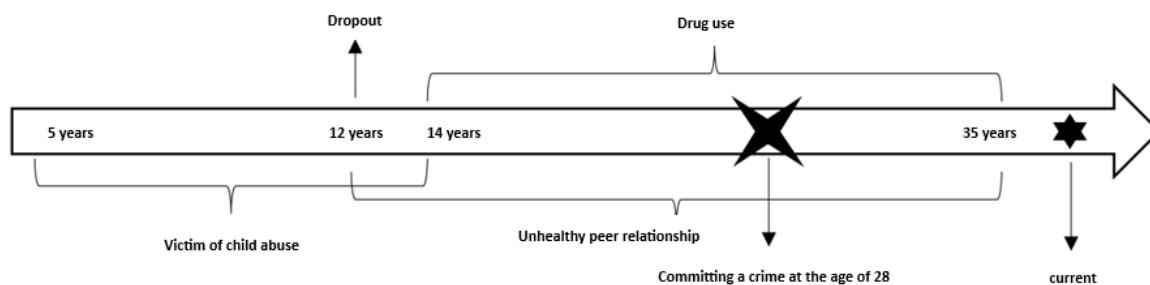
The data collection technique used in this study is semi-structured interviews and non-human sources of information (reports from the police, parole and probation officer, and the correctional facility, Court Decisions, and related online news).

Correctional Facilities. The informants chosen were victims of child maltreatment, namely physical violence by parents, and were also perpetrators of violent crimes. In this study, the cases of violence committed by all three resulted in the loss of someone's life. Two informants were convicted of premeditated murder / Article 340 of the Criminal Code and one informant was convicted of a violence case which resulted in the loss of someone's life.

Before collecting data using semi-structured interviews, the informant first went through a preliminary interview to ensure that the informant met the specified criteria.

The results of this study are divided into four main topics which are presented in chronological order, namely, early victimization, juvenile delinquency, criminal acts, and informant self-reflection.

Image 1. The course of life Informant GE



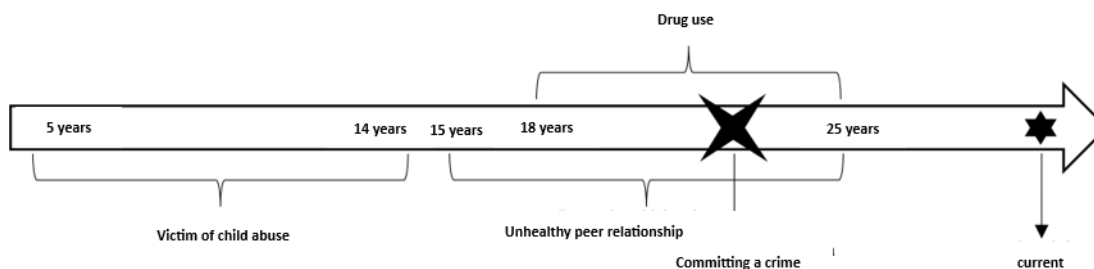
The data analysis technique used in this research is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is used because researchers want to find patterns and themes in the information provided by informants regarding the research topic.

Result and Discussion

Three informants were used in this research (BE, HN, and GE). The three of them are correctional inmates at the Surabaya

Early Victimization

The three informants were born and raised in a suburban area. The three informants have complete parents, a mother and a father. The three informants grew up in families with incomes below the regional average in their era. The three informants admitted that they were often beaten by their father or mother when they were children. The earliest memory of this event

Image 2. The course of life Informant BE

was when the informant was around five years old.

GE informant admitted that his parents often beat him because he did not want to share toys with his younger siblings. He explained that his father often hit him without him knowing what he had done wrong. However, after he was hit his mother would explain why his father hit him and finally understood why he was hit. Informants HN and BE admitted that their mother often hit them because they often played outside when they were children. Their mother often scolded HN for her very active and playful behavior.

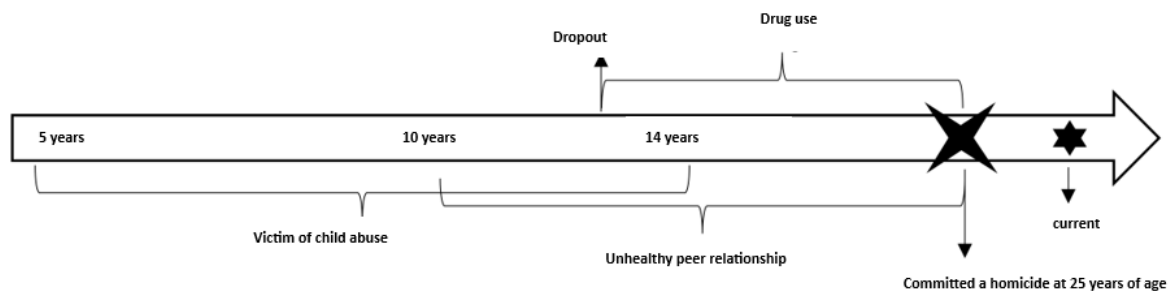
The three informants began to receive physical violence when they were around five years old until they were around 14 years old. The informant explained that the abuse they received caused scars and bruises all over their bodies but felt that this was normal and a consequence of their behavior. Violence committed by their parents is a form of punishment for what they did. This pattern of thinking is identical to the phenomenon of self-blame in victims of violence against children. Children who are victims of violence tend to blame themselves for the violence they receive (Klebanov et al., 2023). The mindset above is based on several concepts according to Weinbach & Curtiss (1986) which are:

- In some groups and cultures, violence is not considered a deviation.
- Acts of violence received by children are perceived as a form of attention that children expect.
- Children may see that the acts of violence they receive are not something phenomenal because they consider these acts to be only a small part of the total (good) interactions with the perpetrator of violence.
- Denial can occur consciously or unconsciously. Children can carry out conscious denial because they are afraid of the consequences they will receive if they perceive these actions as violence. Unconscious denial can occur when it is difficult for children to perceive the action as an act of violence without asking themselves why they experienced such violence. The pattern of thinking above has the potential to perpetuate intergenerational violence. Intergenerational violence can only be prevented by realizing that the treatment received during childhood was violence (Weinbach & Curtiss, 1986). If individuals do not realize that the violent actions their parents

committed when they were children were a form of violence, then these individuals will not hesitate to do the same to their children.

not continue to higher education was due to economic limitations.

Image 3. The course of life Informant HN



The three informants stated that they were delinquent children. Three informants revealed that they had often beaten their friends since elementary school. They reasoned that this behavior occurred because of their friend's provocation and they deserved to be treated that way. This behavior is then often carried out and is still carried out into adulthood. However, it is necessary to explore more deeply whether the image of delinquent children and the violent behavior they commit is the result of internalization of perceptions of the family environment since they were children.

Even though they were raised with a fairly strict parenting style, the three informants felt they were not too restrained by their parents. The informant's parents do not know the informant's daily activities. One informant explained that his parents did not know that he was a busker. This shows that parental supervision of informants is low. Two of the three informants graduated from elementary school and one informant continued their education to high school. According to informants, the reason they did

Juvenile Delinquency

After graduating from elementary school and not continuing their education, two informants stated that they often gathered and played with older people. They begin to adopt the behavior of their friends, such as smoking and drinking alcohol. The informant also started working unskilled, odd jobs such as construction laborer, busker, and porter.

Since the informant was not in school, the informant often came home late at night. During that time, one of the informants also stated that he had a family member who had to serve a sentence in prison for a case of abuse. The informant, as a younger sibling, often visits the prison to visit his older sibling with his father.

BE informants felt that their environment at that time was unhealthy because it revolved around alcohol, drugs, and nightlife. This is what made Informant BE start to become a drug user and drinker.

The peer influence was also felt by informant HN who felt that his criminal act at that time was due to the actions of his colleagues. He was offered to use drugs

which ultimately prevented him from being fully conscious when he killed the victim. Informant HN stated that before he committed the crime, his colleague had previously been caught in a narcotics case, although in the end he only spent two weeks in prison.

Parental supervision is a significant variable in controlling juvenile delinquent behavior (Fischer, 1983). Parents need to know their children's activities to prevent their children from falling into illegal activities or unhealthy environments. Those were the case with the informants.

The Crime

The three informants committed violent crimes at the respective ages of 21 years, 25 years, and 28 years. The GE informant who committed a crime at the age of 28 was a recidivist in a fraud case at the age of 25.

The three informants committed acts of violence and took the victims' lives. Two of the victims of crimes committed by the informants were people they knew (relatives, partners) while the other victim was not personally known to the informants but was associated with a known group.

In acting, the three informants used tools (shoes, stones, sarongs) and were assisted by at least one friend (accomplice).

Of the three informant cases, each had a different motive. One informant had a motive for revenge not against the victim personally but against the victim as part of a group.

"Revenge, ma'am. Revenge because I was beaten up so badly before by their group that I was hospitalized. Then every time we meet, we are ridiculed, that's for

sure. Eventually, I just let my emotion guide me." (GE300923A, 108)

Another informant's motive was fear. The victim threatened the informant with things that could damage the informant's career so the informant was afraid and then killed the victim.

"She was knowing too many secrets." (BE300923B, 97)

The next motive was anger, the informant was angry at what the victim said so he strangled the victim with a sarong until he died and then threw him into the river.

"Yes, maybe yes, that was caused by the drugs given by my pratner earlier. I was also angry." (HN300923C, 190)

Risk Factors

From the informant's course of life above, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the factors that influence criminal acts. Risk factors for criminal behavior are divided into four sources according to the Development Services Group (2015). The four sources are self, family, peers, and education or school.

a. Self

In the process of extracting data, researchers found that the three informants were users of illegal drugs and consumed alcohol in their daily lives. At the time of committing the crime, one informant was under the influence of alcohol and the other was under the influence of drugs. The other informant does not use drugs or consume alcohol but is currently serving a sentence for his fourth criminal offense, namely the Narcotics case.

Apart from the use of illegal drugs and alcohol, a risk factor at the personal

level is violent behavior. Two of the three informants stated that they had often been involved in fights since they were in elementary school. One of the informants said he once hit his friend on the head with a stone that required medical attention. Below is an excerpt from a transcript of the informant's violent behavior.

"Yes, a lot ma'am, often. Anyway, every time I get annoyed, I hit him. When someone irritated me, I hit them." (GE300923A, 74)

The aggressive behavior that the informant had shown from an early age and the lack of intervention carried out to minimize this was one of the important factors that influenced the criminal acts that the informant committed. The informant stated that he got satisfaction when he channeled his emotions through punching and felt dissatisfied if he didn't do this.

"Well, when I hit someone, I feel a sense of satisfaction in me." (GE300923A, 76)

"Yes, that's right, (when I did not hit someone) it did not feel good." (GE300923A, 80)

The second transcript above is the informant's answer which confirms that angry emotions in the form of violent behavior that are not channeled will cause dissatisfaction.

b. Family

In the theory of intergenerational transmission of violence, the family plays a major role in a person's aggressive behavior. In this case, the three informants were raised and cared for by aggressive individuals. Violence is part of

parenting patterns and is considered non-deviant behavior. This was internalized by the informant so that the informant unconsciously normalized the use of excessive force in everyday life.

Apart from that, the things that underlie the informant's parents to become aggressive individuals are inherited from the informant (economics, environment) which is then referred to as intergenerational exposure of multiple risk factors.

Researchers found that apart from their parents' violent upbringing, the informants also received little supervision since childhood. One of the informants stated that he often busked but no one in the informant's family knew about this.

"(I collect) The cap of the ginger juice bottle, then I put a nail on it. So I just used them (to busk). She did not know that." (HN300923C, 130)

"Yeah, maybe she thought that I was playing (with my friends)." (HN300923C, 132)

Another risk factor for criminal behavior originating from the family is the presence of family members who break the law.

"Yes, he was in (prison) in Sidoarjo." (HN300923C, 104)

Having a family member who has committed a law violation makes the individual have a higher potential for committing a law violation (Costa et al., 2015). Apart from violating the law, the informant's family member was also a heavy alcoholic which resulted in death.

"Drinking too much, I heard that he was sick. He suffered from lung disease" (HN300923C, 100)

c. Peers

From a normative influence perspective, unhealthy relationships socialize or normalize bad habit in a person (McGloin & Thomas, 2019). Researchers found that the three informants had an unhealthy peer environment. One of the informants stated clearly that the crime he committed was largely influenced by the relationships he had at that time. Below is an excerpt from the transcript with Informant BE:

"If I hadn't joined them, I didn't mean to blame them, it was my own fault, but their lives were like that, why did I join them? I regret that. In the past, I went straight home after school, but after I joined them, I often hang out late and play around." (BE300923B, 212)

d. Education

Many studies have shown a positive correlation between school dropouts and law violations. A Study (Sweeten et al. (2009) shows that in the United States, 70 percent of people who do not graduate from high school have a greater potential to commit criminal acts.

Schools can decrease the potential to break the law in teenagers. This is because school takes up most of the teenagers' time so that other activities such as breaking the law can be prevented (Anderson, 2014).

In this research, it was found that two of the three informants were elementary school graduates. One other informant is a high school graduate.

Someone who does not go to school has a greater potential to be exposed to juvenile delinquency because they have more free time. Informants HN and GE

only completed their education up to elementary school and after that spent more time playing with their friends and occasionally helping their parents with work.

After the Storm

In the interview session, the three informants expressed regret for what they had done. All three express a desire to change their actions if they could go back in time.

Two out of three informants regretted the consequences they had to face after committing an unlawful act, including the loss of someone's life. They regretted the impact of their actions, such as having to spend time in a correctional facility. The two informants were sentenced to 15 and 20 years in prison.

One informant expressed regret because he felt sorry for the possibility that the deceased victim had children and a wife.

"Because of my emotions, I ended up taking people's lives, that's a shame. Maybe he also had a wife and children, that's a shame too." (GE300923A, 116)

While in the correctional facility, the three informants behaved well and played the role of *Tamping* (Inmate workers) and Head of the Block.

Conclusion

From the results and discussion above, it can be concluded that several risk factors influence victims of child abuse to become perpetrators of violence in adulthood. The three informants indicated that they normalized violence as part of discipline. Informants felt that the violence they received as children was their parents'

way of educating them because they were delinquent. This mindset then leads to the internalization of the concept of "bad kids" to rationalize the acts of violence they received. This internalization then directs the informant to bad environments and actions.

Apart from that, the informant's lack of education also affects the informant's use of time, exposing to many types (mostly bad) of environment.

The risk factors above are the result of intergenerational transmission of multiple risk factors. The informant is a victim of risk factors inherited from the informant's family. The informant's ability to regulate emotions, think, role models that normalize violence, and lack of education are the result of family risk factors originating from a lower middle-class economy, law violations committed by the family, and parenting methods. The potential for law violations increases due to the use of illegal drugs, the nature of illegal drugs disrupts the functioning of the brain, increasing the risk of violent behavior carried out by informants.

Implications

This study tried to raise the perspective of individuals who experienced violence as children and became perpetrators of violence in adulthood. It is hoped that the results of this research can explain deeper into the complexity of

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humans and what factors can influence an act. By having a deeper understanding of the informant's point of view, readers can gain broader insight into what factors push someone from being a victim to becoming a perpetrator. Additionally, understanding an individual's journey from victim to perpetrator can help identify behavioral patterns and risk factors that enable this transition.

In the preventive and promotive realm, strategy development based on the subject's perspective can be designed more effectively for better-targeted prevention programs. Understanding the complex path the informants have taken also helps society build more empathy and solidarity, open up space for more empathetic dialogue, and encourage better support from society.

Research Limitations

This research chose informants from the Surabaya Correctional Facility which has a connection to one of the researchers' workplaces, the Surabaya Parole and Probation Office. The bias of researchers who are correctional officers and informants as inmates may occur. Apart from that, the informants' internal position within the Correctional Institution as inmate workers can also influence the research results.

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