

Psychological Dynamics of Adolescents with Conduct Disorder: A Case Study Using Skinner's ABC Model

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Abstract: Conduct disorder focuses on an individual's inability to control behavior that harms the rights of others or violates applicable social norms. This study aimed to explore and understand the psychological dynamics in individuals with behavioral disorders. The researcher used a qualitative method with a case study approach to reveal patterns of stimulus, response, and consequence based on Skinner's ABC model. Data collection techniques were conducted through in-depth interviews with a 13-year-old subject and significant others, direct observation, and medical record review. The results showed that the subject exhibited chronic truant behavior for the past six months, physical and verbal aggression toward the mother, and impulsivity in decision making. Excessive interest in bantengan activities is the main trigger for the emergence of maladaptive behavior, which is then reinforced by consequences in the form of instant gratification and lack of control and sanctions from the environment.

Keywords: Conduct disorder, psychological dynamics, behaviorism, abc model, adolescents

1 INTRODUCTION

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition (DSM-5) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), the diagnosis of conduct disorder focuses on an individual's inability to control behavior that harms the rights of others or violates prevailing social norms. Conduct disorder is a psychiatric syndrome most common in childhood and adolescence that is characterized by persistent and repeated violations of the rights of others and age-appropriate social norms (Lillig, 2018). The DSM-5 identifies 15 criteria for conduct disorder that fall into four main categories, namely aggression toward people or animals, destruction of property, fraud or theft, and serious rule breaking. In the category of aggression toward people or animals, behaviors that may appear include: (1) frequent intimidation, bullying, or threats against others; (2) frequent initiation of physical fights; (3) use of weapons that can cause serious injury such as sticks, broken bottles, knives, or firearms; (4) physical violence against others; (5) torturing animals; (6) stealing by direct confrontation such as pickpocketing or robbery; and (7) forcing others to engage in sexual activity. In the aspect of property destruction, the behavior shown can be: (8) intentionally setting fire to cause major damage; and (9) intentionally damaging goods or objects. Symptoms that can be seen in the fraud or theft category include: (10) breaking into houses, buildings, or vehicles by force; (11) often lying to gain personal gain or avoid responsibility; and (12) stealing without facing a direct victim, such as shoplifting. As for the category of serious violations of the rules, individuals may exhibit behaviors such as: (13) frequently going out at night despite prohibitions, with onset before the age of 13; (14) running away from home at least twice or once without returning for a long period of time; and (15) frequently skipping school that began before the age of 13.

Within the scope of behaviorism, learning is viewed as nothing more than the acquisition of new behaviors based on environmental conditions (Akyina, 2024). Skinner emphasized that psychology should focus on directly observable behavior. Skinner argues that the only real and relevant object of psychological study is visible behavior and to understand and control this behavior, it is necessary to review the relationship between the behavior and the events that precede it (antecedent) and those that follow it (consequence) in the environment (Alwisol, 2015). The environment plays an important role in shaping individual behavior. The behavioristic framework consists of two key elements: antecedents, which are events or stimuli that occur before a behavior takes place, and consequences, which are the responses or outcomes that result from having performed the behavior. The two components form a sequence known as the ABC model (Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence). A series of antecedent events trigger behavior. The consequences that follow the behavior will influence whether it is repeated (Potoczak, 2017). The outcome of an action not only influences how often

that action occurs in the future, but it can also become a trigger for subsequent actions. As'ad's (2016) findings also support the idea that all human behavior is initiated by an external stimulus. No behavior occurs without a stimulus, and the more powerful the stimulus, the greater the likelihood of eliciting a response. Skinner's ABC model highlights a systematic framework for elucidating the development and sustenance of maladaptive behaviors. The application of this model in the study of adolescent behavioral disorders remains restricted, particularly in the local cultural context. This research endeavors to investigate the psychological dynamics of adolescents with behavioral disorders through a case study that applies Skinner's ABC model in greater depth.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs a qualitative methodology that incorporates a case study approach to comprehend the psychological dynamics of individuals with behavioral disorders. Qualitative methods delve deeply into phenomena from the participants' perspective, focusing on their subjective experiences, personal interpretations, and the meanings they attach to events in their lives (McCoy, 2021). This method can lead to a more comprehensive and intricate understanding of social and psychological aspects that are challenging to articulate using quantitative methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The subject of this study was a 13-year-old male client identified by the initials MKA. MKA originates from Malang and practices the Muslim faith. MKA is the youngest sibling of two children, presently enrolled in junior high school. MKA's leisure activities include participating in bantengan events, playing soccer, and engaging in gaming.

Data collection involved multiple stages, including in-depth interviews with the subject and significant others such as the mother, the counseling teacher, and the school principal. In-depth interviews were conducted to investigate issues and gather more detailed information. Researchers also conducted direct observations on document incidents or occurrences tied to the case that were not exposed through interviews. Information was collected through various sources including interviews, observations, medical records, and the subject's mother and teacher's observation reports to gain a more comprehensive understanding. Data triangulation was achieved by combining the results of the interviews, observations, and medical records. Before data collection began, the participants provided informed consent, demonstrating their willingness to participate and accepting the confidentiality of the data held by the researcher.

The author employed thematic analysis in the data analysis, identifying key themes that arose from the data and the connections between the cases of behavioral disorders. The author then provides detailed descriptions of the behavioral disorders, encompassing symptoms and underlying causes in each case. The author then draws conclusions about the phenomenon of behavioral disorders by linking relevant theories and the existing literature. This case study approach has limitations, including the fact that it cannot be applied universally to all instances of behavioral disorders, but it can provide detailed analysis of specific cases and potential researcher bias in interpreting key data.

3 RESULTS

According to an interview with the subject, his fascination with bantengan art started when he was in the first grade of elementary school, triggered by his daily habit of watching bantengan carnivals in his local area. Bantengan is a traditional performing art in Malang that brings together elements of dance (sendratari), kanuragan sports (pencak silat), music, poetry or mantras, along with the use of a bull's head mask, and significant magical undertones. These activities are generally considered more enjoyable than staying at home because they incorporate social interaction with friendly children and provide an entertaining element through dance movements. The subject particularly enjoys the kalapan part or the moment of possession, especially chasing and consuming flowers, and also enjoys the saweran part. The subject also enjoys collecting banteng figurines as a display. The subject started playing bantengan in the sixth grade of elementary school but was eventually asked by the group leader to put his involvement on hold so he could concentrate on his schoolwork.

Upon entering junior high school the subject's grades began to decline due to a developing habit of truancy and a lack of motivation to attend school regularly. The subject attributes truancy to tiredness and the tendency to oversleep, yet he finds school enjoyable, particularly during sports classes and socialising with his peers. The bantengan activity also impacted the subject's time management skills, leaving him feeling hooked and averse to attending school. One of the causes of this laziness is the fatigue experienced after participating in bantengan performances. The subject did not attend bantengan every day and chose to spend his time playing games with his friends. He mentioned attending bantengan approximately two times per week.

Changes in the subject's behavior were also influenced by the transition to junior high school, where many of his old friends chose to continue their education to boarding school so that the scope of association became narrower and had an impact on the decline in enthusiasm for school. The subject admitted that he preferred science and civics because he liked the teacher, although he found math difficult and did not really like to study. He described the relationship with friends and teachers at school as good, but still felt lazy to go to school because the long return time made him lose enthusiasm quickly.

The subject acknowledged that his mother frequently scolded him for taking part in bantengan activities too late and losing track of time. The subject was not permitted to play after late in the evening, particularly beyond 22.00. The subject disliked this regulation as he felt more content playing at night, particularly when playing bantengan and engaging in games with his friends. The individual also mentioned that he frequently felt unmotivated to take care of himself or clean the house because he was more inclined to attend his friends' invitations to play and watch bantengan. He felt bored in a house that was quite crowded with his grandmother, aunt, mother, and father present. In his opinion, the atmosphere outside the house is more enjoyable, particularly when playing with friends

He displayed a significant amount of affection towards his family, especially his mother. He confessed that his last physical assault on his mother was a result of frustration stemming from being prevented from riding a motorcycle after being involved in an accident where he collided with another individual. The person responsible for the act admitted regret once they grasped that such actions are morally unacceptable, even though comparable incidents kept happening over and over again. He claimed that his inclination to resort to violence usually happens when he is upset by his mother's criticisms, specifically those related to her excessive financial expectations or her tendency to stay up late.

According to the mother's interview, noticeable changes in the subject's behavior emerged approximately one year ago, concurrent with the subject's growing enthusiasm for local bantengan activities. Bantengan performances became more popular when the subject was in grade six, and from then on he started going out of the house more frequently. Interest in bantengan heightened even more during junior high school, eventually leading the subject to participate actively in numerous bantengan activities within his village and the surrounding villages. The peak happened during the seventh year of junior high school, at which point the subject asked his father for a bull's head mask. The mother objected to the subject's involvement in bantengan, however, the father had bought a small item. Over time, the subject began acquiring attributes independently, employing the cash on delivery (COD) method and resources derived from parental gifts.

The subject has a notable fondness for bantengan accessories, such as scarves, bull's head masks, and comparable items. The mother revealed that the subject buys these items discreetly by using COD on the internet, leading to the mother being charged for parcels that are delivered without her knowledge. He was extremely defensive of his bantengan collection, prohibited anyone from handling it, and had a habit of locking his room every time he left the house.

Over the past six months the subject has consistently been absent from school and has not participated in any school activities. The child would frequently vow to attend school at night, yet finding the motivation to rise the following morning proved to be a considerable challenge. The subject also showed aggressive behavior particularly towards the mother. He frequently lost control of his emotions and physically assaulted his mother nearly every day when he was angry. He also became less proactive in everyday activities, spent more time alone in his room with his cellphone, showed reluctance to maintain his personal and environmental cleanliness, and had his mother meet all his needs. Previously, the subject was regarded as a diligent, independent, and responsible child.

The mother claimed that the subject was struggling to manage his emotional responses. The subject frequently exhibits tantrum behavior when his demands are not met, including cases where he is forbidden from watching bantengan, persistently asks for pocket money, or wishes to purchase bantengan attributes. Destructive episodes, which are often characterised by tantrums, can involve actions like smashing glass, hurling objects, slamming on cabinets, and causing damage to household items. The subject frequently returns home in a state of emotional instability, accompanied by anger and outbursts of emotion, typically directed at the mother. The subject shouted at his grandmother without hesitation, but his mother became the primary recipient of his anger. Following a bout of anger lasting roughly one hour, the subject typically apologizes and conveys remorse, accompanied by expressions of affection and assurances that his behavior won't be repeated. The same behavior was repeated the following day.

The mother noted that the subject had exhibited positive behavioral changes for one to two days following a visit from a teacher or soldier referred to by the mother, however these changes were short lived and the original behavior resumed. On one occasion the mother contacted soldiers asking them to intervene, but the subject had locked himself in his room and was refusing to engage with anyone. The subject persisted in refusing to go to school over the next few days, citing fabricated physical ailments despite having expressed an initial willingness to attend following the threat from the soldier.

The counseling teacher stated that the subject was not a quiet child nor was he active in class, like other students in general. The subject when entering school does not have a record of skipping class when learning is in progress, he follows the learning until it is finished. The thing that the subject cannot fight against is the laziness to wake up early to go to school. This difficulty in waking up early is often caused by the subject's involvement in playing bantengan until late at night. The subject does not show any social problems with friends at school, although his interactions tend to be limited due to his infrequent attendance. The relationship with teachers is also well established, and there are no records of negative behavior in the school environment.

According to information provided by the school principal, it was discovered that the subject possessed a polite demeanor, was friendly, and had the ability to form solid connections with both his classmates and educators at the educational institution. The subject is frequently engaged in traditional arts, with a particular interest in bantengan activities. The individual in question has a tendency to miss classes and is frequently spotted by the principal outside the school grounds during lesson times, yet maintains a friendly demeanor by greeting the principal. The principal explained that before exhibiting truant behavior, the subject was previously regarded as a well-behaved child who didn't require special treatment. The subject's appearance changed when they became actively engaged in bantengan activities, including wearing a chain necklace and dressing less neatly. The principal noted a shift in the subject's emotional dynamics, with increased sensitivity and emotional volatility being exhibited.

4 DISCUSSIONS

The subject displayed maladaptive behaviors including persistent truancy since the onset of junior high school, having missed teaching and learning activities for the past six months. The subject displayed aggressive behavior, particularly towards the mother, manifesting as physical and verbal aggression when his demands were not met. Moreover, the subject is indifferent towards maintaining personal and environmental cleanliness and averse to fulfilling daily duties. The subject exhibits disobedience towards its parents, frequently disregards imposed rules, and has an impulsive inclination to purchase bantengan attributes without authorisation via the COD system. Excessive playing was another notable behavior, involving both participating in bantengan activities and staying up late at night.

According to Skinner's ABC model, events or stimuli known as antecedents (A) can cause behavior to occur. The bantengan activity is the antecedent in the subject's case. The subject's interest in bantengan started in sixth grade and grew over time to become a regular part of his routine. The subject participates in the activity in two capacities: as a spectator and as a participant. He exhibited significant changes in his daily behavior since becoming deeply involved in bantengan activities.

A behavioral response (B) exhibited by an individual occurs as a result of a specific antecedent. The subject's maladaptive behavior is evident in their continuous truancy since entering junior high school. Throughout the past six months, the subject has not participated in any teaching and learning events on school premises whatsoever. According to the ABC Model, the antecedent causing this behavior is the individual's participation in bantengan activities, which are high energy and offer immediate gratification. Following evening performances or playing bantengan until late at night, the subject frequently felt physically exhausted and less motivated to wake up early and attend school. Consequently, school related tasks were increasingly overlooked and replaced by pursuits that were considered more enjoyable by the individual.

A consequence (C) is an event that occurs as a direct outcome or result of a particular behavior. The outcome of this skipping behavior is the subject's postponement in formal education at school. In contrast, the subject did not regard this consequence as a negative outcome. The subject found playing with friends and participating in bantengan to be more enjoyable than attending class. The lack of strict sanctions and a lack of interest in learning cause this skipping behavior to recur. The subject's skipping behavior develops through a process of negative reinforcement, in which he avoids the inconvenience of learning and waking early in order to engage in activities that offer more immediate emotional satisfaction.

Desirable impulses do not always coincide with less desirable impulses, the latter often being more powerful in specific circumstances. There is an apparent conflict between the subject's preferred and less desirable behavioral tendencies. The individual's objective is to become a successful person. To achieve his objective, he understood that he required persistence and reliability in pursuing his education, involving activities such as thorough studying and regular school attendance. The subject felt fatigued after playing bantengan at night, which led to him becoming lazy, prompting the emergence of other behavioral urges, including the desire to skip class and play. Engaging in this skipping behavior results in immediate gratification through feelings of happiness and relief from studying pressures. Instant rewards can quickly turn into unwanted impulses, undermining the intended objective. Duckworth & Gross (2020), suggest that people generally favour quick rewards over delayed benefits even though the latter typically offer more value. The desire to miss

class and play intensifies due to the fact that it offers immediate emotional gratification, whereas learning demands time and effort with benefits that will only be experienced later on.

The subject exhibited excessive playfulness continuing until late at night with behavior encompassing both gaming and engaging in bantengan activities with friends. The subject's extensive engagement in bantengan activities functions as a precursor that precipitates the occurrence of outcomes in the form of reduced daily performance, including challenges in waking up in the morning, sustained exhaustion throughout the day, and diminished motivation to participate in educational activities. The subject failed to demonstrate an awareness of the need to alter their behavior despite these consequences having a real effect on adaptive functions like academic performance and discipline. The reason for this is that play activities offer more immediate satisfaction than the long-term advantages of going to school or having a regular schedule.

The subject has a tendency to impulsively make online purchases of bantengan attributes using the COD payment method without informing or obtaining permission from their parents. The origin of this behavior is an overzealous enthusiasm for bantengan activities. In the bantengan community, this impulsive buying behavior is a form of seeking immediate satisfaction and achieving a sense of accomplishment. Upon arrival of the goods, the subject typically pressures or requests his mother to pay, resulting in the mother's anger or reprimand. The presence of anger does not automatically halt the behavior, as in certain instances, the mother continues to pay for the goods that have been ordered. This situation inadvertently reinforces impulsive behavior, since the subject discovers that his actions continue to yield results, namely, the acquisition of the desired item.

The subject exhibited lazy behavior in self-grooming and maintaining their surroundings as well as defying their parents which in turn prompted the mother's anger as a reaction to this behavior. This anger does not serve as a form of correction rather it acts as a new antecedent, triggering aggressive behavior such as yelling and hitting the mother. In this instance the outcome of one behavior serves as a trigger for the subsequent behavior, thereby creating a chain pattern of maladaptive behavior. This aggressive behavior didn't emerge overnight but was also shaped by the subject's experience in bantengan activities, where expressions of aggression such as chasing, lunging, hitting, and being hit were typical within the game. The mother's expression of anger actually perpetuated the cycle of problem behavior instead of ending it. Inappropriate outcomes can lead to the development of further maladaptive actions, as demonstrated by Nurishlah et al. (2024), who found that aggression stems from a reaction to frustration, often a result of unfulfilled needs or aspirations. This aggression is demonstrated through actions like hitting, pinching, kicking, biting, losing one's temper, and using profanity. Responding to a child's aggression with punishment typically results in an increase in the child's level of aggression.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Skinner's ABC model illustrates that skipping school, aggression toward the mother, and overinvolvement in bantengan activities in subjects arise from a chain of antecedent-behavior-consequence interactions that reinforce one another. Bantengan activities as the antecedent trigger maladaptive behavior, which is subsequently reinforced by consequences of instant gratification and a lack of environmental control. The lack of strict sanctions, poor emotional regulation, and inconsistent parenting exacerbated the subject's behavioral problems, particularly when negative behaviors were inadvertently encouraged by the surroundings. The subject's struggle between short-term desires and long-term objectives led to a preference for enjoyable activities offering immediate emotional satisfaction, despite their detrimental effects on academic, social, and family connections.

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