

A Case Study of Psychological Features of Children in Conflict with the Law in Violence and Sexual Offenses

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Abstract: Adolescents in conflict with the law often have complex and stressful psychosocial backgrounds. This qualitative research uses a case study approach to understand the psychological dynamics of a child in conflict with the law through psychological assessment. The subject in this study was a 17-year-old male adolescent who was involved in a case of child abuse and sexual intercourse. Data were obtained through interviews, observations and aggression scales conducted during the coaching process at the X Social Protection and Rehabilitation Center. Additional information was obtained from interviews with people closest to the subject. The assessment results showed that the subject had difficulty in controlling aggressiveness, which was influenced by less affectionate and less supervised parenting, exposure to violence, and a social environment that did not support moral development. This research highlights the important role of family and social environment in shaping adolescent behavior. Albert Bandura's social learning theory explains that learning can occur through observation and modeling from the surrounding environment. This study concluded that the subject's deviant behavior was influenced by a lack of parental affection, a history of physical abuse, and a negative peer environment.

Keywords: Adolescent, Social Learning Theory, Aggressive Behavior

1 INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a crucial period in an individual's development, characterized by a search for identity, an increased need for social acceptance, and a strong drive to form an identity through social interaction (Simamora et al., 2025). During this period, adolescents are highly susceptible to environmental influences, particularly from peer groups (Santrock, 2012). At this stage, adolescents begin to form their identities and build broader relationships outside the family environment. However, in the process, many adolescents face serious challenges, especially if they are raised in an unsupportive family environment (Bulan et al., 2022).

According to Wenno (2024), children in conflict with the law are children who are forced into conflict with the criminal justice system due to: a. Being suspected, charged, or found guilty of breaking the law; or b. Being a victim of a crime committed by an individual or group; or c. Having seen, heard, felt, or known about a crime. Children who are perpetrators or involved in legal problems are those aged 12 to 18 who are suspected, charged, or proven to have violated the law and need protection (Rinaldi & Yuliani, 2020). Children involved in legal conflicts, whether as perpetrators, victims, or witnesses, often experience significant psychosocial impacts. These impacts not only affect their mental health but also their social and academic development (Rinaldi & Yuliani, 2020).

The phenomenon of children in conflict with the law in Indonesia shows an alarming trend, particularly in cases of violence and sexual assault. Data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission and the Directorate General of Corrections show that cases of children in conflict with the law, particularly those involving physical and sexual violence, have continued to rise from 2020 to 2023. In August 2023, nearly 2,000 children were recorded as detainees or inmates, with physical violence accounting for 29.2% and sexual violence 22.1% of the total criminal offenses committed by children. Adolescents involved in sexual and violent crimes generally come from dysfunctional families, with inconsistent parenting patterns or minimal emotional attachment (Ariyanto, 2023). Violence committed by adolescents is often driven by dysfunctional family environments, negative peer influence, easy access to violent media, and emotional instability (Pahmi et al., 2023), such as anger, jealousy, or the need to demonstrate dominance. Research by Katembu et al. (2023) indicates that childhood trauma resulting from abuse is correlated with significant cognitive-emotional deficits, which can trigger violent behavior in adolescents. Meanwhile, deviant sexual acts may stem from parental neglect, low moral and mental standards of the perpetrators, and a lack of education regarding sexual education (Ramadani et al., 2023).

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

The type of research conducted in this study is a qualitative research method using a case study approach to explore the causes and characteristics of adolescents' behavior in conflict with the law in acts of violence and sexual intercourse. According to Creswell & John (2017) a case study is an in-depth exploration of a case whose data is collected from

various rich contextual sources of information. Case studies were chosen because they can reveal unique aspects of an event and help understand the meaning behind events in real-life situations. This allows researchers to explore in depth the psychological dynamics experienced by the subjects

The research subject is a 17-year-old boy who is undergoing legal proceedings for sexual intercourse and violence against children. Primary data was collected from the subject of the study using interviews, observation, and aggression scales, and secondary data was obtained through interviews with people close to the subject, namely his parents and social rehabilitation officers. Secondary data is needed to reinforce the findings of the primary data that has been collected. Pseudonyms are used to protect the privacy of the data provided for research purposes.

Data collection strategy is a method used by researchers to collect the necessary data. Data collection in this study used interviews and direct observation. Interviews are a method used to find primary data to dig deeper into the attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and experiences of subjects (Bastian et al., 2018). Meanwhile, observation is direct observation, either active or passive, conducted by researchers on specific subjects or environments with the aim of collecting data on behavior, events, or situations to understand the context being studied (Sugiyono, 2017). In this study, data analysis was conducted to help researchers formulate accurate conclusions.

To reach these conclusions, an appropriate data analysis strategy was needed. Therefore, this study used thematic analysis as an approach to processing the collected data. Thematic analysis allows researchers to identify, evaluate, and organize patterns or themes that emerge from the data. This technique serves as a tool for systematically organizing data and providing in-depth interpretations of various aspects related to the research focus (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Heriyanto (2018), thematic analysis is particularly suitable for research aimed at exploring what actually occurs within a phenomenon.

3 RESULTS

The subject is a 17-year-old male teenager from a broken home. The subject has experienced a lack of affection from both his father and mother since childhood and has a history of physical abuse by both parents. His parents divorced when the subject was in fifth grade, and since then his father has never been present in his life, causing the subject to feel lost. After the divorce, the subject was temporarily cared for by his grandparents in a village. During this time, the subject often experienced bullying at his new school because he was a new student. Initially, the subject ignored the bullying, but because he felt he was constantly being bullied, he eventually struck back at the classmates who were bullying him. However, the subject eventually returned to live with his mother in the city and had no intention of continuing his education. Although they lived together, the emotional bond with his mother was not strong. His mother was busy working and often communicated through commands or reprimands, leaving the subject feeling emotionally neglected.

The family's poor economic situation forced the subject to work as a construction laborer from the age of 15 and to change jobs several times to help meet household needs. The subject is also known to have a hobby of watching violent videos, such as murders, which he accesses digitally without any fear or disgust and tends to enjoy. He associated with friends who introduced him to harmful activities such as violence, casual sex, alcohol consumption, smoking, and nightlife activities. He was once part of a street gang, commonly referred to as a "gangster" and had stored sharp weapons and assembled molotov cocktails to attack members of rival gangs.

During this period of socializing, the subject got to know the victim and their relationship developed quickly. In engaging in sexual relations, the subject revealed that initially he felt curious, coupled with the influence of his circle of friends, who tended to consider such behavior as normal or commonplace. As a result, the two began to actively engage in sexual relations 2-3 times a week. During the course of their romantic relationship, the subject physically abused the victim by hitting them, causing injuries and trauma. The subject's relationship with his girlfriend was known to their parents and neighbors because the victim lived in the subject's house for two months. Initially, the subject's mother was angry about this, but eventually she allowed the victim to stay at her house. After two months of the victim staying at the subject's house, the subject was officially designated as a Child in Conflict with the Law by the Police Department based on reports regarding allegations of criminal acts of sexual intercourse and violence against a child.

Based on the results of tests measuring aggressiveness, the subjects showed high levels of aggressiveness overall. Emotionally, the subject demonstrated low emotional regulation ability, characterized by difficulty in controlling anger, especially in situations that trigger jealousy or conditions where the subject feels belittled by others. This is evidenced by a history of physical violence, such as hitting, damaging surrounding objects, repeated lying, and attacking others with sharp weapons to the point of causing injury, which emerged as a response to their inability to manage emotions adaptively.

4 DISCUSSIONS

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) explains that learning can occur through observation, imitation, and modeling from the surrounding environment. Albert Bandura, in his theory of social learning, explains that a person's behavior can be influenced by two main things, namely the existence of direct models and symbolic models. These two types of models have an important influence on the formation and change of behavior through the mechanism of observation. The subject grew up in a family environment with parents who used physical violence as a form of discipline and in a social environment that exhibited deviant behavior. In the subject's case, the parents and the surrounding environment served as direct models that were observed in real life. The absence of positive role models around the subject further reinforced the internalization of the negative behavior exhibited by these direct models. In addition to direct models, subjects are also influenced by symbolic models accessed through digital media, such as cell phones. Subjects are known to have a habit of watching pornography, which is a symbolic representation of deviant sexual behavior. Exposure to pornographic content through digital media is associated with an increase in risky sexual behavior among adolescents (Wright et al., 2019). Thus, the subjects' behavior does not arise spontaneously, but as a result of an observational process, in which subjects assess and imitate the behavior of models that are considered effective or valuable in their environment.

In Albert Bandura's personality structure, the subject's behavior can be explained through the following aspects:

1. Self System

According to Bandura, the self-system plays a role in regulating perception, evaluation, and control of behavior. Subjects have difficulty distinguishing between right and wrong behavior because they lack a strong foundation of self-control. Subjects grow up in a family environment with strict parental figures and neglectful parenting, characterized by a lack of supervision, emotional involvement, and affective warmth. Research conducted by Muslim & Kristiana (2024) explains that adolescents who experience neglectful parenting feel negative psychological dynamics such as a lack of communication and attention from parents, and are more prone to psychological problems and deviant behavior. In addition, a lack of self-control makes it difficult for subjects to distinguish between right and wrong behavior. According to Kurniawati and Renny (2017), adolescents who engage in deviant behavior do so because of their inability to control themselves and the lack of supervision and control from adults. In this case, the subject's self-system lacks a strong foundation for developing adaptive self-control.

2. Self-Regulation

According to Bandura, self-regulation is an individual's ability to control their behavior, emotions, and internal impulses in accordance with prevailing moral and social standards. Low self-control tends to make it difficult to control emotions and impulsive behavior, making individuals more prone to delinquency, such as gang fights, drug use, and other deviant behaviors (Nuzul & Amin, 2021). The subject exhibits low self-control, as seen in his tendency to act impulsively, aggressively, and violently. Bandura explains that low self-control makes it difficult for individuals to adjust their behavior to social and moral standards. In the subject's case, weak self-control contributes to his involvement in deviant behavior. The subject has difficulty controlling his emotional impulses, especially when he feels jealous or belittled by others, which then drives him to act impulsively. This is likely influenced by a parenting style that lacks moral guidance and a social environment that is permissive of violence. The subject's inability to control himself and adjust his behavior to prevailing norms indicates weak self-regulation, as described by Bandura.

3. Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to organize and carry out the actions necessary to achieve certain results (Bandura, 1997). Adolescents with low self-efficacy tend to have difficulty controlling their behavior and emotions, making them more prone to juvenile delinquency (Andayani et al., 2021). In the context of the subject's case, low self-confidence is reflected in his inability to make the right decisions, manage his emotions, and his tendency to be easily influenced by peers and lack confidence in making choices that are in line with moral values. He often follows the negative influence of peers as a form of identity search and self-affirmation.

4. Collective efficacy

Collective efficacy refers to a shared belief within a group that they are capable of bringing about change or achieving certain goals through collective effort. The subject's peer group has negative collective efficacy. Bandura emphasizes that group norms influence the internalization of behavior. The subjects are in a social environment that is tolerant of deviant behavior such as violence, juvenile delinquency, and promiscuous sexual behavior. In this context, collective efficacy manifests as a shared belief among group members that such deviant behavior is acceptable, even considered normal and effective for achieving certain social goals, such as gaining recognition, a sense of belonging, or dominance within the group. This peer group can influence adolescents to develop a

negative identity (Densius, 2024). According to Leswidianti et al. (2025), adolescents have a strong desire to be accepted and appreciated by their peers. This urge often makes them inclined to follow trends and norms that prevail in the group, even if they conflict with their personal values or beliefs.

According to Bandura, one of the important elements in social learning theory is observational learning, which is the process of learning through observing the behavior of others, either directly or through symbolic media (Pohan et al., 2024). In this context, the behavior exhibited by a person does not solely originate from direct experience but is also the result of the process of imitating the observed model. In the case of the subject, the process of observational learning appears to play a significant role in the formation of deviant behavior. According to Petersen (2020), there are three main factors that influence the effectiveness of observational learning: the characteristics of the model, the characteristics of the observer, and the characteristics of the behavior being imitated.

1. Model characteristics.

Models that observers emulate often have a charismatic, popular, and admired style that influences observer behavior (Petersen, 2020). The similarity between observers and role models also influences the behavior that emerges. In the case of the subject, the subject perceives gangsters as a cool group with a big name, making the subject highly interested in joining it. The group typically consists of children and adults with family histories similar to the subject. Within the gangster group, violent behavior such as fights, attacking others, and using sharp weapons is normalized, so if the subject's behavior exhibits violence, it may be a result of imitating their social environment. Additionally, the mother figure is the closest person in the subject's life, so the mother's behavior and decisions have a significant influence on the formation of the subject's values and attitudes. Based on interview data, the subject's mother has an unmarried partner who is allowed to stay at home during the day and leave at night without a marital bond. This is likely to have served as an example that the subject internalized as normal. This behavioral pattern was then replicated by the subject, as seen in his decision to allow his partner, FA, to live with him.

2. Characteristics of the observer

The subject is known to have a weak psychological background, including experiences of childhood violence, low self-esteem, and poor emotional regulation. This makes the subject more susceptible to imitating the behavior of others, especially if that behavior appears to give a sense of power or control over a situation, even if it is in a maladaptive way. Moreover, the subject is currently still a child. According to Cherish (2023), children tend to have a high tendency to imitate, where they naturally mimic the behavior of adults or family members around them, whether positive or negative. This is because children have not yet developed the ability to distinguish between behaviors that should be emulated and those that should be avoided, so they heavily rely on figures in their environment as models for shaping their behavior.

3. Characteristics of imitated behavior

The subject most likely perceives that violent or coercive actions are a “successful” way to solve problems or get what they want. This may be reinforced by the lack of strict consequences from the environment for deviant behavior, or even reinforcement from their social group.

Based on these aspects, it is clear that a subject learns a lot from what he sees and experiences around him. They imitate the behavior of those close to them, whether friends or family members. Due to the absence of positive role models and their vulnerable psychological state, the subject tends to imitate negative behaviors that they perceive as normal. They also observe that violence or coercion can be a means of resolving issues, especially if the environment does not provide clear reprimands or consequences.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The subjects in this study were 17-year-old male adolescents who were in conflict with the law due to cases of violence and sexual intercourse with children. Based on the assessment results, the subjects showed a dysfunctional family background, parenting patterns that lacked affection and supervision, and a social environment that was permissive of deviant behavior. Since childhood, the subjects experienced physical and emotional abuse from both parents and grew up in poor economic conditions, forcing them to work from a young age. The lack of a warm relationship with their mother and the absence of a father figure further weakened their emotional foundation and self-control. Psychologically, the subject demonstrated difficulty in managing emotions, particularly in situations that triggered feelings of jealousy, anger, or threat. This was reflected in his tendency to engage in aggressive behavior, destroy property, and commit acts of violence against others. From the perspective of Albert Bandura's social learning theory, the deviant behavior exhibited by the subject is largely influenced by the process of observational learning, where the subject imitates behavior from direct models (family and friends) as well as symbolic models (digital media). The lack of positive role models and high exposure to deviant behavior in the surrounding environment reinforce the internalization of negative values and behavioral patterns within the subject. In Bandura's personality structure, it is concluded that the subject has an underdeveloped self-system, weak self-regulation, low self-efficacy, and negative collective efficacy due to the influence of their social group. An environment that does not impose clear boundaries on deviant behavior further exacerbates the subject's tendency to imitate negative behavior.

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