

# Determinants of Verbal Abuse in Preschool-Aged Children: An Analytical Study

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## ABSTRACT

The impact of child abuse involves a range of psychological problems that can continue into adulthood, child abuse is not only limited to physical abuse but also includes emotional and verbal abuse. This study aimed to evaluate determinants of verbal abuse in preschool-aged children. This is a cross-sectional study involving 112 mothers with preschool-aged children recruited using total sampling method in Peusangan Sub-district, Bireun District, Aceh, Indonesia. Results showed that the majority of respondents reported a history of verbal abuse from their parents (54.5%) and also had done at least a form of verbal abuse to their children (60.7%). The chi-square test showed that there is a significant association between mother's education, history of verbal abuse, and family's income with verbal abuse in Preschool-Aged Children. The result of this study concluded that there was a significant association between mother's education, history of verbal abuse, and family's income with verbal abuse in Preschool-Aged Children.

**Keywords:** Preschool, Verbal abuse, Violence risk.

## INTRODUCTION

Child development during the preschool period is strongly influenced by stimuli received from the surrounding environment. Positive stimuli support healthy development, while negative stimuli can hinder children's growth and development. One significant negative stimulus is violence or abuse. Violence against children can occur in various environments, including at home and in other social contexts. Ideally, the family serves as a place of protection and security for children. However, in reality, the family is often a source of violence or abuse, especially when parents apply violent behavior in an effort to discipline their children (Soetjningsih & Ranuh, 2013).

Child abuse is not only limited to physical abuse but also includes emotional and verbal abuse. Research shows that many parents often resort to abuse with the aim of disciplining their children, even though this approach often has negative effects. These forms of violence include indifference, intimidation, exclusion, humiliation, rejection, and extreme punishment. Many parents do not realize that their actions are a form of violence (Setianingsih, 2016).

The impact of child abuse involves a range of psychological problems that can continue into adulthood. Children who experience violence often show a tendency to isolate themselves, and experience fear, sadness, lack of confidence, and aggressive behavior. In addition to short-term psychological impacts, violence can lead to long-term effects, such as a cycle of violence within the family, imitation of violent behavior when they become parents, lack of empathy, impaired social relationships, and even suicide risk (Sagala, 2023).

Globally, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that nearly 3 in 4 children, or approximately 300 million children aged 2–4 years regularly suffer physical punishment and/or psychological violence at the hands of parents and caregivers, implying the high burden and the urgency of this problem (WHO, 2020). As for Indonesia, an abrupt increase in child abuse case in general, was reported, with the majority of cases occurring

at home (91%), followed by the school (87.6%), and the minority of cases in the community (17,9%) although emotional or physical nature was not described in detail (Dhamayanti et al., 2020).

With the case of abuse on the rise and cultural differences across geographical locations in Indonesia, it is important to understand the factors associated with the risk of violence in preschool-aged children, particularly in specific geographic areas. Therefore, this study aims to explore the determinants of verbal abuse in preschool-aged children in Aceh, Indonesia.

## METHOD

This is a cross-sectional study that aimed to evaluate determinants of verbal abuse in preschool-aged children. The population of this study was preschool children in Peusangan Sub-district, Bireun District, Aceh, Indonesia. Eligible respondents who consented to the terms of this study were recruited using total sampling method, with a total of 112 mothers with preschool-aged children.

Data were collected using a questionnaire. Demographic data include the mother’s age, educational background, and occupation along with children’s age and gender. The Family’s income was classified as below or above minimum wage using Aceh Province minimum wage as the reference (IDR 3,413,000). History of abuse was defined as a history of verbal abuse experienced by mother and verbal abuse was defined as a mother’s attitudes and behaviors involving speech, actions, and parenting methods that are considered abuse. Both history of abuse and verbal abuse were determined using a questionnaire developed by the author. Tabulation and analysis of the data using the Chi-square test was carried out on SPSS software. A p-value of <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants (n=112)

No	Demographic Variable	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1	<b>Mother’s Age (years old)</b>		
	26-35	39	34.8
	36-45	54	48.2
	46-55	19	17.0
2	<b>Mother’s Education</b>		
	Elementary School	49	43.8
	Middle or High School	28	25.0
	College	35	31.2
3	<b>Mother’s Occupation</b>		
	Blue Collar	36	32.1
	Civil Servant	21	18.8
	Private Employee	17	15.2
	Housewife	38	33.9
4	<b>Children’s Age (years old)</b>		
	3-4	53	47.3

	5-6	59	52.7
<b>5</b>	<b>Children’s Gender</b>		
	Male	48	42.9
	Female	64	57.1
<b>6</b>	<b>Family’s Income</b>		
	Below Minimum Wage	50	44.6
	Above Minimum Wage	62	55.4
<b>7</b>	<b>History of Verbal Abuse</b>		
	Yes	61	54.5
	No	51	45.5
<b>8</b>	<b>Verbal Abuse</b>		
	Yes	68	60.7
	No	44	39.3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>100</b>

As shown in Table 1, the majority of mothers were housewives (33.9%), 36-45 years old (48.2%), having elementary school as educational background (43.8%). As for children, they were predominantly female (57.1%) and aged 5-6 years old (52.7%). Almost half of respondents had below minimum wage family income (44.6%).

The majority of mothers also reported a history of verbal abuse from their parents (54.5%) and also had done at least a form of verbal abuse to their children (60.7%).

Table 2. Analysis of Factors Related to Verbal Abuse

No	Variable	X <sup>2</sup>	P-value
1	Mother’s Education	0.05	0.002
2	Family’s Income	0.05	0.000
3	History of Verbal Abuse	0.05	0.012

Based on Table 2, the Chi-square test shows that there is a significant association between the mother’s education, history of verbal abuse, and family’s income with verbal abuse in Preschool-Aged Children, with a p-value of 0.002, 0.000; and 0.012 respectively.

## DISCUSSION

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines child maltreatment as “all forms of physical and emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, and exploitation that result in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, development or dignity” (Gonzalez et al., 2024). Verbal abuse is one of the most common and also often overlooked forms of violence against children, defined as a form of interpersonal violence used to control or dominate the victim, which is intended to humiliate or insult. Most verbal abuse is perceived as a form of disciplining by parents, even though this is an ignorant perspective that instead could potentially lead to very damaging consequences for children, particularly psychological effects (Rerkswattavorn & Chanprasertpinyo,

2019).

This study revealed a strong association between a mother's education level and the incidence of verbal abuse. Specifically, mothers with lower levels of education are more likely to use verbal abuse as a disciplinary method compared to those with higher education levels. These results corroborate previous research which reports that lower educational attainment in mothers correlates with a higher frequency of verbal abuse used as a discipline (Iqomh et al., 2019). Higher education is frequently linked with enhanced parenting skills, including a more empathetic and effective approach to child-rearing (Jackson et al., 2017). Educated parents are generally more aware of the long-term negative effects of verbal abuse and are more likely to employ positive parenting techniques (Iqomh et al., 2019).

Results from this study showed that family income has a significant impact on verbal abuse behavior. Families with low incomes are more likely to experience economic stress that can trigger aggressive behavior, including verbal violence against children. Economic stress can reduce parents' ability to focus on positive parenting and increase their likelihood of using verbal abuse as a coping mechanism. Conversely, families with higher incomes may have more resources to deal with stress and be better able to provide a supportive environment for child development (Perzow et al., 2018).

History of Verbal Abuse experienced by the mother is another significant factor influencing verbal abuse towards children. Parents who have experienced verbal abuse in their childhood often replicate these patterns of behavior in their own parenting. These past experiences can influence how parents interact with their children, often repeating the patterns of violence they experienced. This factor points to the importance of interventions that target the reduction of verbal violence in the previous generation to break the cycle of violence (Fitriana et al., 2015).

This study has several limitations. First, a small sample size limits the strength of the analysis and the cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw definite conclusions of causality. A proper design with with large sample size and a clustered sampling approach from all districts in Aceh province may be appropriate to improve the generalizability in future studies. Second, the role of the father in verbal abuse was not explored in this study, future studies may employ separate analyses on father characteristics to further expand the determining factors. Another important aspect Nevertheless, this study provides insight into the determinant of verbal abuse to preschool-aged children in Aceh and guides future studies.

## CONCLUSION

The result of this study concluded that there was a significant association between mother's education, history of verbal abuse, and family's income with verbal abuse in Preschool-Aged Children.

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