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**PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS RELATED TO PHYSICAL  
ABUSE OF CHILDREN**

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*Abstract*

Children maltreatment is a widespread, global phenomenon affecting the lives of millions children around the world. It also become a national and international salient issues. One form of children maltreatment is physical abuse. Some research stated that physical abuse was one of the most destructive forms. Physical abuse is not only caused died, but also associated with some psychological effects. A qualitative method was chosen to gain a detailed description about psychological problems related to physical abuse in two children who experienced physical abuse. This study used depth interview and behavior rating scale. The data obtained from this research, would be used as basic for planning of the right interventions. However, to get about behavioral and emotional problems clearly, this study also made direct measurements of children. This research found that every child who was victim of physical abuse showed different effects. Behavioral and emotional problems, attention problems and fear with perpetrator of physical abuse were arised in one of participant but not showed at the others. It was influenced by lesion, duration and perpetrator of physical abuse.

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**Keywords:** Behavioral problems, emotional problems, attention problems, physical abuse of child.



## 1. Introduction

Children maltreatment is a widespread, global phenomenon affected the lives of millions children around the world. It also become a national and international salient issues. Abusive behavior is indiscriminate. It can occurs at all age, ethnic and socioeconomic status. Maltreatment is an indication of gross violation of children's rights (Malekpour, 2004) and includes 5 (five) types, namely: (a) sexual abuse, (b) physical abuse, (c) psychological abuse (psychological maltreatment) which includes emotional violence (psychological abuse) and psychological neglect (psychological neglect), (d) physical neglect and (e) witnesses of domestic violence (witnessing family violence) (Higgins, 2004).

One form of children maltreatment is physical abuse. Child abuse is also concerned phenomenon that often reported in mass media. Ironically, the maltreatment is actually carried out by adults, who should become role models and protectors. Most perpetrators of abuse are related to significant person, even it was done by their parents. Malekpour (2004) stated that biological parents, especially mothers are more likely to commit violence than fathers. Besides parents, the most likely perpetrators are men.

In 1999, the Research and Development Center, Gadjah Mada University investigated children as victims of abuse in seven major cities, namely Medan, Palembang, Semarang, Surabaya, Ujung Pandang and Kupang. It found that 3.125 (60.33%) cases of physical violence, 1.902 (35.69%) cases of emotional violence and 212 (3.98%) cases of sexual violence. Based on data from Yayasan Kesejahteraan Anak, Indonesia, from January 1992 to July 2002, there were 3.969 cases of violence, i.e. 19.6 percent cases of physical abuse, 8.3 percent cases of child neglect, 6.3 percent cases of emotional abuse and the rest were other cases of violence (Patilima, 2003). In 2007, in North Sumatra, there were 19.57 percent of victims of violence. The information was obtained through PKPA's documentation (Pusat Kajian dan Perlindungan Anak) from three mass media. In fact, not all victims are under PKPA assistance. Generally, it could be concluded that physical abuse took the highest percentage of another forms of violence.

Some research stated that physical abuse is one of the most destructive forms of violence. Abuse is not only caused died, but it also associated with negative consequences for physical and psychological health, i.e cognitive, emotional, behavioral and social. In cognitive aspect, abusive behavior influenced IQ scores, visual motor integration skills, deficits in math, verbal and attention abilities and academic achievement. Furthermore, abusive also affected the child's emotional development. Abuse did not give children an opportunity to learn and manage emotion. Finally, it took effect on inability to regulate emotions (poor emotional regulation) (Tanaka, 2006). Victims of physical abuse did not able to sympathize or care for others as form of poor emotional regulation, i.e inability to identify, understand and respond to the emotions of others (Wenar & Kerig, 2000).

Besides behaviour problems described above, withdrawal and avoidance, low self-esteem, helplessness and depression were also appearance (Malekpour, 2004). Malekpour (2004) also stated that about eight percent victims of physical violence were diagnosed major depressive disorder. According to Fanti (2007) that the behaviour problems described above make children who experienced physical abuse difficult to develop interpersonal relationships, tend to be less favored, be rejected by peers and the condition affected the risk of social problems.

Merrell (1999) stated that behavioral and emotional problems could be measured through two approaches, namely direct measurement of children, i.e self report, interview and observation or through

parents, namely by behavior rating scale. Further, Merrell (1999) explained that interview and self-report methods are difficult to apply for children and adolescents while using observation methods, there are some undetectable behaviors. Another alternative could be chosen to measure the child's behavior and emotional problems, namely through behavior rating scale, which provides a lot of information because it is filled by the people who know the most about child's daily condition. In addition, behaviour rating scale is the best choice for predicting behavioral disorders that may arise later on.

## **2. Problem Statement**

This study began from interest and concern for children who experienced physical abuse. Besides being global phenomenon affecting the lives of millions children around the world, physical abuse also took the highest percentage of another forms of children maltreatment. Physical abuse has a strong effect on children. It is not only caused died, but also associated with some psychological effects. Therefore, the problem statement is psychological problems experienced by children who were victims of abuse.

## **3. Research Questions**

Physical abuse has a strong effect on children. Physical abuse is not only caused died, but also associated with some psychological effects. Therefore, the research questions was how to describe a detailed description about psychological problems related to physical abuse of children?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

This research was conducted to to gain a detailed description about psychological problems related to physical abuse in two children who experienced physical abuse. Because physical abuse has a strong effect on children, so the data obtained from this study would be used as basis for planning the right interventions.

## **5. Research Methods**

A qualitative method was chosen to gain a detailed description about psychological problems related to physical abuse of children. This research involved two children who were selected through purposive sampling technique. Data about children who committed violence were obtained through NGOs, which focus on handling cases related to violations of children's rights. This study used depth interview and behavior rating scale to get relevant data.

Besides being a global phenomenon with the highest incidence, physical abuse also has an impact on the behavioral and emotional problems, which were seen from the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL). CBCL has two problem scale domains that are believed to be able to uncover child behavioral and emotional problems. For the interpretation of CBCL results, researchers followed a standardized procedure and the total score could be useful for the purpose of the intervention (Achenbach, 1991). Merrell (1999) stated commonly the form of scaling behavior used is the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL). CBCL is believed

to be able to measure a child's behavioral and emotional problems and be administered to parents or caregivers. It was filled by people who knew about the child's daily condition.

However, to get about behavioral and emotional problems clearly, this study also made direct measurements of children. Achenbach (1991) explained that it was also necessary to make direct measurements of children to get validation about behavioral and emotional problems. It could be done by using another method, such as interviews and self-reports. However, interviews and self-reports are difficult to apply to children (Merrell, 1999). Therefore, the researchers decided to use drawing method as direct measurements of children to get depth data. Merrell (1999) stated that children are easier to express themselves nonverbally, namely drawing rather than verbally. One of drawing test which designed for children is Human Figure Drawings (HFDs) test. In HFDs test, children were asked to make pictures of human shapes. Furthermore, by using HFDs test, children were asked to express themselves through images. Emotional indicators on the HFDs test related to aggressive behavior, withdrawal, anxiety, depression which were part of behavioral and emotional problems in the CBCL test. This research used triangulation method to get validation about behavioral and emotional problems, namely by using HFDs test. For the interpretation of CBCL results and HFDs tests, researchers followed a standardized procedure. The victims of abuse obtained high scores and significant behavioral and emotional problems (Achenbach, 1991).

## 6. Findings

The data was obtained from two children who committed physical abuse. The full description about participants could be seen in the table 01 below:

**Table 01.** General Description of Participants

Participant	Sex	Chronological Age	Age when experienced physical abuse	Duration	Perpetrator of physical abuse
I	Boy	5 years old	4.5 years old	± 3 months	Stepmother
II	Girl	12 years old	From the age of 5 years old to 10 years old	± 6 years	Biological father

This table showed that abusive experience of second participant was longer than the first participant. Furthermore, there was a difference perpetrator of physical abuse. At first participant, perpetrator of physical abuse was stepmother and biological father as a perpetrator of abuse on second participants. The second participant also showed fear and denial reaction of the perpetrator. But, it was not found in the first participant. It was influenced by stage of cognitive development. The first participant was in early childhood. In this stage, generally the children believed in the words of their parents. O'Brien (1991) stated that younger children (early childhood) tended to believe that adults always tell the right things. The child refused that the statement was wrong if an adult said it was wrong.

Moreover, perpetrator of abuse on second participants was her significant others which should be a figure who acted as a protector, namely biological father. It had a significant effects. Unlike the case with first participant, the perpetrator was stepmother. Freyd, DePrince, and Zurbriggen (2001) said that victims of physical abuse also showed denial and forgetting, it was closely related to the status of the perpetrator.

It also was influenced by the duration of physical abuse. The abusive experience of second participant was longer than the first participant. Mash and Wolfe (2005) stated that duration of physical abuse was associate with behavioral and emotional problems.

Moreover, there are many problems arised related to physical abuse. The data was obtained from two children who committed physical abuse. This table described about behaviour and emotional problems of the participants. It could be seen in the table 02 below:

**Table 02.** Behaviour and Emotional Problems

Participant	Domain Problems							
	Anxious	Withdraw	Somatic	Social	Thought	Attention	Deliquency	Aggresion
I	Normal	Normal	Normal	Normal	Normal	Normal	Normal	Normal
II	Normal	Normal	Normal	Normal	Borderline	Borderlin	Normal	Normal

The table showed that there were many different effects related to abusive behavior. First participant did not show behaviour and emotional problems while getting involved this study. But, the second participant tended to show attention and thought problems. Malekpour (2004) stated that children who were victims of violence were also at risk of experiencing neurological damage that was closely related to cognitive aspects. One of the disturbed cognitive aspects is attention where the center was in the head area. Attention problems were experienced by the second participant because of the experience of abuse in the head area which was responsible for the function of attention and memory.

Fanti (2007) also explained that behavior problems made children to be rejected by peers and also had an impact on the risk of social problems. It meant children would have relationship problems with others. However, the second participant did not have a problem while interacting with other people despite there was a tendency for behavior problems. The behavior problems did not make her to be rejected by peers. She tried to adjust to the standards that applied by peers. The adaptation effort arised because she was in late childhood, which was a time when the child's attention was focused on the desire to be accepted by members of peer groups (Hurlock, 1999).

## 7. Conclusion

This research found that every child who was victim of physical abuse showed different effects. Behavioral and emotional problems, attention problems and fear with perpetrator of physical abuse were arised in one of participant but not showed at the others. It was influenced by lesion, duration and perpetrator of physical abuse. Attention problems were closely related to physical symptoms experienced. The participant had lesion in head region which was related to the center of attention and memory.

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