

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN: A CASE STUDY ON CHILDREN TREATED DP3AP2KB BENGKULU CITY

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ABSTRACT

Violence against children is a complex social problem that has long-term consequences for their physical, psychological, and social development. In Bengkulu City, data from the UPTD PPA DP3AP2KB recorded 97 cases of violence against children during the 2021–2024 period, with molestation and sexual intercourse being the most prevalent forms. This study aims to identify the factors that cause sexual violence against children and to understand the social dynamics underlying these cases. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, using in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation. Research informants consisted of child victims, their families, and staff of the UPTD PPA DP3AP2KB Bengkulu City, with a total of five child victims as the main informants. The findings show that sexual violence against children is driven by multiple interrelated factors, including low economic conditions, dysfunctional family roles, low parental education and awareness, the nature of parental employment, as well as exposure to media and peer influences. These factors interact to create conditions that increase children's vulnerability to violence, particularly within the domestic environment that should function as a place of protection. From a family sociology and structural functionalism perspective, sexual violence against children reflects weakened family functions and insufficient social control in the wider community. The study highlights the need for comprehensive efforts through improved parenting literacy, strengthened child protection systems, and stronger synergy between government institutions, communities, and families to more effectively prevent and address sexual violence against children. It also bridges theory and practice by linking family level vulnerabilities with institutional responses of DP3AP2KB, offering a reference for future research and child protection policy development.

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INTRODUCTION

Violence against children is an urgent social and humanitarian problem because it directly affects children's physical, psychological, and social development. According to UNICEF (2021), reports that one in two children in

Indonesia has experienced some form of violence, either physical or emotional. This indicates that violence against children is not merely an individual or family problem, but a social phenomenon that requires collective attention. The impact of such violence extends beyond immediate trauma, potentially reducing the quality of human resources and social welfare in the long term. Based on data from UPTD PPA DP3AP2KB Bengkulu City during the 2021-2024 period, there were 97 cases of sexual violence against children. With the following details.

Table 1. Number of Children Victims of Sexual Violence Handled by UPTD PPA DP3AP2KB Bengkulu City in 2021-2024

Case Type	2021	2022	2023	2024
Promiscuity	6	6	9	4
Abuse	22	7	7	6
Physical Violence	-	9	8	-
Rape	4	6	2	-
Sodomy	-	-	1	-
Amount/Year	32	28	27	10
Total Casualties	97 Children			

Source : UPTD PPA DP3AP2KB Bengkulu City in 2021-2024

In Bengkulu City, data from the Office of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, Population Control, and Family Planning (DP3AP2KB) show that 97 children became victims of violence between 2021 and 2024. The permissive social environment and exposure to media that contain elements of violence also worsen the situation (Tempo, 2006). These cases include sexual intercourse, molestation, rape, sodomy, and physical violence, with molestation being the most frequently reported form. The high incidence of sexual violence against children demonstrates that child protection efforts still face complex challenges related to economic conditions, dysfunctional family roles, low levels of parental education and awareness, parental employment patterns, and the influence of media and peer groups. Previous studies have similarly found that violence against children is often associated with poverty, psychological stress among parents, low educational attainment, and inadequate understanding of positive parenting (Sarwono, 2020; Emilda, 2018; Kurniawansyah, 2021). Theoretically, this study draws on a family sociology perspective, which views the family as a social system in which each member performs roles and functions that influence one another. When this system becomes dysfunctional due to economic pressure, weak social control, or changes in values, violence may emerge as a form of social deviation. Structural factors such as gender inequality, patriarchal norms, and weak legal literacy further exacerbate children's vulnerability to sexual violence. Many cases remain unreported because they are considered private family matters or because victims and families fear social stigma.

This shows that the problem of child violence is not only related to perpetrators and victims, but also related to patriarchal culture and weak local legal protection systems. Social and cultural approaches are important to understand the root of the problem of violence against children. Gender inequality is also a significant factor in the increase in cases of child violence, especially sexual violence. Social norms that place men as the dominant party make children, especially women, in a vulnerable position. Children are often considered to have no right to their own bodies and lives. This confirms that violence against children is not only triggered by economic and psychological factors, but also structural problems related to gender inequality.

Despite the growing body of research on violence against children in Indonesia, most existing studies tend to emphasize statistical trends, legal frameworks, or psychological impacts on victims, with limited attention to the interaction between family dynamics, socioeconomic pressures, and institutional responses at the local level. In particular, there is a lack of in-depth qualitative studies that examine sexual violence against children through a family sociology perspective while simultaneously analyzing the role of local child protection institutions such as DP3AP2KB. Moreover, empirical research focusing on Bengkulu City remains scarce, resulting in limited contextual

understanding of how structural factors—such as gender inequality, patriarchal norms, and media exposure—operate within families and communities to increase children’s vulnerability to sexual violence.

This gap underscores the need for a qualitative case study that captures lived experiences of victims and families and links them with institutional practices in order to generate more context-sensitive insights for policy and intervention. Based on this context, violence against children particularly sexual violence must be understood as a structural problem rather than a purely individual act. The present study therefore seeks to answer the question: “Why does sexual violence against children occur in Bengkulu City?” To address this question, the study employs a qualitative case study approach focusing on child victims of violence handled by the UPTD PPA DP3AP2KB Bengkulu City. The research aims to identify the causes of sexual violence against children and to provide empirical evidence that can strengthen local child protection policies and contribute to the sociological study of the family and child protection.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative descriptive approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of the causes of sexual violence against children in Bengkulu City and to analyze the role of DP3AP2KB in handling these cases. The qualitative design was chosen to enable the researcher to explore meanings, experiences, and social processes from the perspectives of informants who are directly involved. According to Viyanti, Satmaidi, and Illahi (2023), descriptive qualitative research focuses on the contextual depiction of social phenomena based on the empirical experience of the research subject, without focusing on numbers or statistical generalizations.

This design emphasizes the interpretation of social behavior, interaction between individuals, and policies related to child protection issues. Through this approach, the researcher seeks to understand the social dynamics that occur in the victim's family, identify the dominant factors that cause violence, and assess the effectiveness of programs and interventions carried out by DP3AP2KB in reducing cases of violence against children in Bengkulu City. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their relevance to the research focus. The main informants were five children who had experienced sexual violence and were recorded as victims at the UPTD PPA DP3AP2KB Bengkulu City, along with their families. Additional informants included the head of division and staff of the UPTD PPA who handle child protection cases.

This study uses three main techniques in data collection, namely in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, and documentation studies, namely: Data were collected through three techniques: (1) in-depth semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences and perceptions of victims, families, and officers; (2) non-participant observation of activities and interactions within the DP3AP2KB environment to understand work patterns and communication dynamics (Febriaani et al., 2023) ; and (3) documentation study of official reports, case records, child protection regulations, and supporting academic sources (Lestari, Adiyani, & Abdi, 2022).

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Febriaani et al., 2023). During data reduction, information from interviews, observations, and documents was organized according to themes such as economic, family, and social factors. The results were presented in descriptive narratives and thematic matrices to identify patterns and relationships. Conclusions were continuously verified through source and method triangulation by comparing interview data, observations, and documents, and through peer discussion. These procedures were intended to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that sexual violence against children in Bengkulu City is a serious and ongoing social problem. Data from the UPTD PPA DP3AP2KB indicate that 97 cases of sexual violence against children were recorded from 2021 to 2024, with molestation and sexual intercourse being the most prevalent forms. Most incidents occurred in domestic settings, within the family or close social environment, which ideally should function as a place of safety and protection for children. This pattern suggests that the family, as the primary social unit, has not fully carried out its protective function. Field data reveal that the forms of violence experienced by

children are multidimensional and often overlap. Sexual violence includes harassment, molestation, intercourse, and rape with severe physical and psychological consequences. Physical violence takes the form of beating, kicking, and other aggressive actions that endanger children's safety. Psychological violence, such as threats and intimidation, leads to fear, low self-esteem, and social withdrawal. Neglect is reflected in inadequate supervision, unmet basic needs, and limited access to education and protection services. These forms of violence frequently occur simultaneously, so that children experience multiple layers of trauma. The research results also show the following forms of violence and causes of violence:

a. Forms of child violence

Field data show that the forms of violence experienced by children in Bengkulu City are multidimensional and often occur simultaneously. Sexual violence is the most dominant form, including harassment, molestation, sexual intercourse, and rape, all of which have severe physical and psychological consequences. This finding is consistent with the World Health Organization (WHO), which defines child sexual violence as any sexual act imposed on a child that results in physical harm, emotional distress, and long-term trauma (WHO, 2020). Physical violence, such as beatings, kicking, and other aggressive acts, was also identified and poses serious risks to children's safety and development. Psychological or emotional violence manifests through threats, intimidation, coercion, and psychological control, leading to fear, low self-esteem, anxiety, and social withdrawal.

UNICEF (2021) emphasizes that emotional abuse often has long-lasting effects on children's mental health and social functioning, even when no visible physical injuries are present. Neglect is reflected in inadequate supervision, unmet basic needs, and limited access to education and protection services, which, according to the United Nations Children's Fund, constitutes one of the most common but least recognized forms of child maltreatment globally (UNICEF, 2021). In addition, non-physical forms of violence such as bullying and social exploitation by peers and the surrounding environment were also found. International studies indicate that bullying frequently coexists with other forms of violence and increases children's vulnerability to psychological distress and further victimization. Importantly, these forms of violence do not occur in isolation. Cases of sexual violence are often accompanied by psychological abuse and neglect, resulting in compounded trauma that affects children both physically and emotionally. This pattern aligns with international evidence suggesting that children who experience one form of violence are significantly more likely to experience multiple forms of abuse simultaneously.

b. Causes of child violence

The analysis of the causes of child violence reveals five interrelated factors. First, low family economic conditions play a crucial role. Financial hardship increases parental stress, which is strongly associated with aggressive behavior and authoritarian parenting, including physical and verbal violence against children. International studies show that economic pressure undermines parents' emotional regulation and caregiving capacity, thereby increasing the risk of child maltreatment (WHO, 2020). Moreover, poverty limits families' access to child protection services, education, and psychological support, making children more vulnerable to neglect and exploitation (UNICEF, 2021).

Second, family role dysfunction significantly elevates the risk of violence. Children who are left unsupervised due to parents' long working hours, divorce, parental absence, or ongoing domestic conflict often experience emotional insecurity and reduced protection. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, weak family supervision and disrupted caregiving environments increase children's exposure to violence from individuals within their immediate social surroundings, including neighbors, older peers, or trusted figures.

Third, low parental education and limited awareness of children's rights contribute substantially to the occurrence of violence. Parents with lower educational backgrounds often lack understanding of child development and may perceive physical punishment as an acceptable disciplinary method. Gershoff and Grogan-Kaylor (2016) demonstrate that such parenting practices are strongly associated with negative psychological outcomes in children, including anxiety, depression, and behavioral problems. This reflects a broader global pattern in which limited parental knowledge increases the likelihood of harmful parenting behaviors (UNICEF, 2021).

Fourth, the nature of parental employment affects children's safety and supervision. Jobs characterized by long hours, irregular schedules, and high mobility common in informal sectors reduce parents' availability for meaningful interaction and monitoring. The International Labour Organization reports that unstable employment

conditions are linked to parental burnout and weakened caregiving capacity, indirectly increasing children's exposure to unsafe environments. Fifth, media exposure and peer influence also play a significant role. Children who are exposed to violent or pornographic content through digital media without parental supervision are at higher risk of normalizing aggressive and sexually inappropriate behavior. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) emphasize that unsupervised media consumption and negative peer environments function as powerful socialization agents that can reinforce violent norms, particularly when family guidance is weak. Overall, these findings align with international evidence suggesting that child violence is rarely caused by a single factor, but rather emerges from the interaction of economic stress, family dysfunction, inadequate parental capacity, and broader social influences (WHO, 2020).

Analysis of the causes of sexual violence against children points to five interrelated factors. First, low family economic status emerges as a dominant factor. Economic hardship increases parental stress, which can lead to aggressive behavior and authoritarian parenting through physical or verbal violence. Families living in poverty have limited access to social and psychological support services, making children more vulnerable to exploitation and neglect. This finding supports the family stress model, which explains how economic pressure triggers internal family conflict and violent behavior (Sitohang, 2004; Sarwono, 2020). Family role dysfunction is also one of the significant factors in the increase in violence against children. Many cases show that acts of violence occur when a child is left alone at home because both parents work.

This phenomenon is in accordance with the theory of family disorganization which states that the absence of effective parenting functions can lead to dysfunction in the family structure. Based on the results of research that has been conducted, children from informal working families often experience violence from neighbors or close people who are asked to help take care of them. This condition shows that weak family control increases the opportunity for perpetrators in the social environment to commit acts of sexual violence against children. In addition to low economic factors and dysfunction of family roles, low levels of education and parental awareness also contribute to the occurrence of violence. Parents with low education backgrounds tend not to understand the principles of healthy parenting and are less aware of children's rights. In some cases, violence is considered a reasonable form of discipline. This is in line with Sri Emilda (2018) research which found that sociodemographic variables such as education and employment have a significant relationship with violence against children. The lower the parent's education, the more likely it is that violence will occur due to a lack of understanding of positive parenting.

The type of work of parents also strengthens this risk. In this study, most of the victims' parents worked in the informal sector with long working hours and uncertain incomes. Economic pressure and burnout due to work make parents tend to be emotional and less able to control behavior in parenting. Sarwono (2020) explained that socioeconomic pressure is closely related to the increase in aggressive behavior in the household. Thus, irregular employment and low income can be indirect triggers for the emergence of sexual violence against children, both in the form of harassment, molestation, and rape. In addition, the influence of digital media and friendship also has an important role.

The results of observations and interviews show that some victims and perpetrators of violence have been exposed to pornographic or violent content through the internet and social media without parental supervision. This exposure has the potential to normalize aggressive behavior and accelerate children's sexual maturity. This phenomenon strengthens the report of the National Commission for Child Protection and the research of Tempo (2006), which confirms that mass media, especially television and the internet, can shape violent behavior in the family. In addition, the influence of media and friendships also play an important role in shaping children's behavior. Negative friendship environments, such as groups that are used to violence or exhibit deviant behavior, can encourage children to imitate similar behaviors.

When analyzed through the perspective of Parsons' theory of structural functionalism, the family ideally functions as an agent of socialization and protection for the child. However, when these functions fail to be carried out due to economic pressure, low education, and dysfunction of family roles, the social balance is disturbed. Violence experienced by children is a reflection of the disharmony of the social structure as a whole. Therefore, violence against children in Bengkulu City must be understood not as a mere individual problem, but as a structural problem that

reflects economic inequality and the weak social protection system for children. Overall, this study confirms that sexual violence against children is a complex and multidimensional social phenomenon.

The economic factor is exacerbated by weak family supervision, low education, family disorganization, and the negative influence of digital media and friendships. To reduce the rate of violence, collaborative efforts are needed across sectors, such as improving family economic welfare, positive parenting training, strengthening child protection services by DP3AP2KB, and increasing people's digital literacy. This approach is expected to be able to build a safer, more responsive, and sustainable social ecosystem for child protection in Bengkulu City. The phenomenon of violence against children in Bengkulu City can be explained through the perspective of structural functionalism of Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton. According to Parsons, the violence that occurs shows an imbalance in the family that is unable to carry out its important functions within the framework of AGIL, such as adaptability that is pressured by economic conditions, weak integration due to family conflicts, and the lack of optimal value socialization process. Meanwhile, through Merton's view, child violence describes the emergence of dysfunction and latent function in the family, when the role of the family as a protector which is a manifest function is not fulfilled and instead causes negative impacts such as trauma, neglect, and disruption of the child's social development. Therefore, violence against children is not simply understood as an individual act, but as a manifestation of the irregularities of the social structure that require comprehensive treatment to restore the ideal functioning of the family and social institutions.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that sexual violence against children in Bengkulu City is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon shaped by economic hardship, family dysfunction, low parental education, demanding work conditions, and exposure to digital media and negative peer environments. These factors weaken the family's protective and socialization functions, thereby increasing children's vulnerability to violence. From a sociological perspective, the findings reinforce family sociology and structural functionalism theories, which view child sexual violence as an indicator of disrupted social equilibrium. Practically, the study highlights the need for strengthened parenting education, enhanced child protection services, and integrated collaboration among families, communities, and government institutions. This research is limited by its qualitative design, small number of informants, and focus on one city, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future research is encouraged to adopt mixed-method approaches and broader samples to deepen understanding of child sexual violence in diverse social contexts. Collaborative efforts among government agencies, families, schools, and communities are essential for building a sustainable child protection system and reducing the incidence of sexual violence against children in Bengkulu City.

This study makes an important contribution to the development of family sociology and sociology of violence against children by presenting contextual empirical evidence from the city of Bengkulu. The findings of this study enrich our understanding of how family dysfunction does not stand alone as a single factor, but is intertwined with social structures, economic pressures, and social changes resulting from digitalization. Using a structural functionalist perspective, this study emphasizes the relevance of classical theory in explaining the phenomenon of sexual violence against children in contemporary society, while also demonstrating the limitations of the family institution in facing modern social challenges. Furthermore, this research contributes to filling the gap in the literature on sexual violence against children in the regional context, particularly in the Bengkulu area, which has been relatively understudied sociologically. These findings can serve as a theoretical and empirical basis for further research, the development of family-based social intervention models, and the formulation of child protection policies that are more sensitive to local social and cultural conditions.

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