



Factors Causing Verbal Aggressive Behavior in Students at State Middle School 4, Tarakan

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ABSTRACT

Verbal aggressive behavior among adolescents has become a common phenomenon that potentially affects interpersonal relationships and students' social development. This study aimed to identify the factors causing verbal aggressive behavior among students at SMP Negeri 4 Tarakan. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed to explore students' experiences and perceptions regarding verbal aggression. Three students who tended to exhibit verbal aggressive behavior were selected through snowball sampling. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed that verbal aggression manifested in four forms: direct active verbal aggression, indirect active verbal aggression, direct passive verbal aggression, and indirect passive verbal aggression. Furthermore, several factors were identified as contributing to verbal aggression, including provocation, aversive conditions, aggressive cues, peer presence, individual characteristics, and deindividuation. Among these factors, provocation and peer influence emerged as the most dominant determinants. No evidence was found indicating that drug use contributed to verbal aggressive behavior among the participants. The findings suggest that verbal aggression among students is a multidimensional phenomenon resulting from the interaction between internal factors and social environmental influences. Therefore, efforts to reduce verbal aggression should emphasize emotional regulation, self-control, and the creation of a positive and supportive school environment that promotes healthy communication and mutual respect among students.

Keywords: adolescence; aggression; behavior; students; verbal aggression

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence represents a transitional period characterized by significant physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes. During this developmental stage, individuals experience rapid transformations and increased interactions with their social environment, particularly with peers. Adolescents spend considerable amounts of time with friends and are strongly influenced by peer relationships, which shape their attitudes, behaviors, and emotional responses (Steinberg, 2022). Although peer relationships contribute positively to social development, they may also expose



adolescents to negative behaviors, including verbal aggression. As adolescents strive for identity formation and social acceptance, they often encounter difficulties in regulating emotions and managing interpersonal conflicts, making them vulnerable to engaging in aggressive behaviors (Santrock, 2020).

Verbal aggression has become one of the most prevalent forms of aggressive behavior among adolescents. Unlike physical aggression, verbal aggression involves the use of words intended to hurt, insult, threaten, humiliate, or psychologically harm others (Infante & Wigley, 2018). Such behaviors may include mocking, insulting physical appearance, spreading rumors, lying, provoking conflicts among peers, and using offensive language. In many adolescent social groups, these behaviors are frequently perceived as ordinary forms of interaction, causing students to underestimate their harmful consequences. However, continuous exposure to verbal aggression may lead to emotional distress, low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, and deterioration in interpersonal relationships (Anderson & Bushman, 2018).

Recent studies indicate that verbal aggression among adolescents has become a serious concern in educational settings. According to Soetjiningsih (2019), many adolescents experience verbal victimization through ridicule, humiliation, gossip, and derogatory comments from peers. Such experiences often occur in school environments and contribute to negative psychological outcomes. Similarly, Hapsah and Muslim (2021) argued that verbal aggressive behavior diminishes empathy and sensitivity toward others, making adolescents less capable of appreciating differences and resolving interpersonal conflicts constructively. Students who habitually engage in verbal aggression tend to normalize hurtful communication and may fail to recognize the emotional damage inflicted upon others.

The emergence of verbal aggressive behavior is influenced by multiple factors. From a biological perspective, temperament and emotional characteristics contribute to differences in aggressive tendencies among adolescents. Nevertheless, environmental factors such as parenting styles, peer influence, family relationships, and exposure to aggressive models are equally important determinants (Barlett & Anderson, 2019). Social Learning Theory proposed by Bandura (1997) explains that aggressive behaviors are learned through observation and imitation of models in the environment. Adolescents who frequently witness aggressive communication from parents, peers, media, or social networks are more likely to adopt similar behaviors. Consequently, verbal aggression is not merely an individual problem but also a social phenomenon shaped by interactions within family, school, and peer contexts.

Family conditions have been identified as one of the major contributors to aggressive behavior. Saputra et al. (2017) found that adolescents from divorced families exhibit higher levels of aggression than those from intact families. Family conflicts and emotional deprivation may reduce adolescents' psychological well-being and increase the likelihood of expressing frustration through aggressive behaviors. Furthermore, ineffective parenting practices and lack of emotional support may hinder the development of empathy and emotional regulation skills, which are essential for maintaining healthy social relationships (Bornstein, 2022).



Peer relationships also play a crucial role in the development of verbal aggression. Adolescents often conform to group norms to gain acceptance and social recognition. When aggressive communication becomes normalized within peer groups, students are more likely to imitate and reinforce such behaviors (Bukowski et al., 2020). In addition, the increasing use of digital communication and social media platforms has expanded opportunities for verbal aggression, including cyberbullying, online harassment, and the spread of harmful rumors. These forms of aggression may intensify psychological harm and create a hostile social environment for victims (Kowalski et al., 2021).

In the educational context, verbal aggression can negatively affect the school climate and students' psychosocial development. Victims of verbal aggression often experience fear, anxiety, decreased academic motivation, and social isolation (Espelage & Hong, 2019). Meanwhile, perpetrators may develop maladaptive interpersonal patterns characterized by hostility, lack of empathy, and poor conflict-resolution skills. Consequently, verbal aggression represents a significant challenge for schools in creating safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments.

Preliminary observations and interviews conducted with guidance and counseling teachers at SMP Negeri 4 Tarakan revealed that verbal aggressive behavior remains evident among students. Several students frequently engage in behaviors such as insulting peers, mocking physical appearance, spreading rumors, provoking conflicts, lying to friends, and using offensive language that hurts others' feelings. These behaviors are often considered normal among students and therefore receive insufficient attention. If left unaddressed, verbal aggression may interfere with students' personal and social development and contribute to the emergence of more severe forms of aggression.

Although numerous studies have investigated aggressive behavior among adolescents, most have focused on the consequences of aggression or intervention strategies. Limited studies have specifically examined the underlying factors contributing to verbal aggressive behavior among junior high school students, particularly within the context of Indonesian schools. Understanding these factors is essential for developing effective preventive and counseling programs aimed at reducing verbal aggression and promoting positive social interactions among students.

Therefore, this study seeks to identify the factors causing verbal aggressive behavior among students at SMP Negeri 4 Tarakan. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of guidance and counseling services and provide empirical evidence for educators, counselors, and schools in designing strategies to prevent and manage verbal aggression among adolescents.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to explore the factors causing verbal aggressive behavior among students at SMP Negeri 4 Tarakan. Qualitative research aims to understand social phenomena from the perspectives and experiences of participants in their natural settings (Moleong, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Descriptive qualitative research enables researchers to describe and



interpret events, experiences, and interactions comprehensively without manipulating variables (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 4 Tarakan, North Kalimantan, Indonesia, and focused on students who demonstrated tendencies toward verbal aggressive behavior, such as insulting peers, mocking physical appearance, spreading rumors, provoking conflicts, and using offensive language. Participants were selected using snowball sampling, a non-probability sampling technique that allows researchers to identify information-rich participants through recommendations from previous informants (Patton, 2015; Sugiyono, 2019). Initially, three students were identified as key informants, and data collection continued until information saturation was reached, where no new themes emerged from the interviews (Guest et al., 2020).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which provide flexibility for participants to express their experiences while allowing researchers to explore emerging issues in greater depth (Sugiyono, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Semi-structured interviews are particularly suitable for investigating sensitive phenomena because they facilitate open communication and enable participants to provide detailed explanations regarding their experiences (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2014) and Sugiyono (2019), consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction involved selecting, simplifying, and organizing relevant information according to the research objectives. Subsequently, the data were presented in the form of descriptive narratives to facilitate interpretation and identification of patterns. Conclusions were continuously verified throughout the research process to ensure their consistency and credibility. To enhance trustworthiness, source triangulation was employed by comparing information obtained from different participants and supporting sources. Triangulation is considered one of the most effective strategies for establishing credibility and minimizing researcher bias in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that verbal aggressive behavior among students at SMP Negeri 4 Tarakan manifested in four forms, namely direct active verbal aggression, indirect active verbal aggression, direct passive verbal aggression, and indirect passive verbal aggression. Direct active verbal aggression was reflected in the use of swear words, insults, and derogatory expressions directed toward peers. Indirect active verbal aggression appeared through gossiping, spreading negative opinions, and encouraging peers to avoid certain individuals. Meanwhile, direct passive verbal aggression was demonstrated by silence and refusal to communicate during conflicts, whereas indirect passive verbal aggression involved suppressing negative feelings and avoiding interpersonal interaction. These findings indicate that verbal aggression among adolescents is not limited to explicit expressions but also includes subtle forms of hostility that can negatively affect social relationships.



The emergence of verbal aggression among students was influenced by several interconnected factors. Provocation emerged as the most dominant factor, where students tended to respond aggressively when they felt disturbed, offended, or treated unfairly by their peers. This finding supports the frustration-aggression theory proposed by Dollard et al. (1939), which states that frustration and unpleasant experiences can trigger aggressive responses. Similarly, Berkowitz (1993) emphasized through the cognitive neo-association theory that aversive situations generate negative emotions, particularly anger, which subsequently increase the likelihood of aggressive behavior. In this study, students frequently reported feelings of annoyance and anger resulting from teasing, ridicule, and disruptive behavior from classmates, which eventually led to verbal aggression.

Another important factor identified in this study was the presence of aggressive cues. Students admitted that they often laughed at or supported peers who insulted others, suggesting that aggressive behavior was reinforced through social interactions. This finding is consistent with Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), which explains that aggressive behavior is learned through observation and imitation. Adolescents who are repeatedly exposed to aggressive language in their environment tend to perceive such behavior as acceptable and are more likely to reproduce it. Similar findings have been reported by Anderson and Bushman (2002), who argued that exposure to aggressive models contributes significantly to the development of aggressive tendencies among adolescents.

Peer presence also played a crucial role in strengthening verbal aggression. Students were more likely to engage in teasing and insulting behavior when interacting in groups. Group situations provided social support and reduced individual responsibility, making students feel more comfortable expressing aggressive behavior. This phenomenon corresponds to the concept of deindividuation proposed by Zimbardo (1969), which suggests that individuals in groups experience diminished self-awareness and weakened self-control, thereby increasing the likelihood of deviant behavior. Previous studies conducted by Hapsah and Muslim (2021) also reported that peer influence significantly contributes to verbal aggressive behavior among adolescents.

Internal characteristics were another factor contributing to verbal aggression. Students with poor emotional regulation and low self-control tended to react impulsively and use offensive language without fully realizing the consequences of their words. This finding is consistent with the General Aggression Model developed by Anderson and Bushman (2002), which emphasizes that personal factors, including emotions, cognition, and personality traits, interact with situational factors to produce aggressive responses. Individuals with inadequate emotional regulation are more vulnerable to exhibiting aggressive behavior when confronted with stressful or unpleasant situations.

Interestingly, no evidence was found indicating that drug abuse contributed to verbal aggression among the participants. This finding suggests that verbal aggression in the present context was primarily associated with psychosocial factors rather than biological or substance-related influences. Therefore, the phenomenon of verbal aggression among students at SMP Negeri 4 Tarakan should be understood as the result of interactions between internal factors, such as emotional characteristics and self-



control, and external factors, including peer influence, provocation, aggressive cues, and group dynamics.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that verbal aggressive behavior among adolescents is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by both individual and environmental factors. Consistent with previous studies (Haslinda et al., 2020; Hapsah & Muslim, 2021; Saputra et al., 2017), peer interaction and emotional instability constitute major determinants of verbal aggression. Consequently, interventions aimed at reducing verbal aggression should focus not only on improving students' emotional regulation and self-control but also on fostering positive peer interactions and creating a supportive school environment that promotes healthy communication and mutual respect among students.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that verbal aggressive behavior among students at SMP Negeri 4 Tarakan appears in four forms, namely direct active verbal aggression, indirect active verbal aggression, direct passive verbal aggression, and indirect passive verbal aggression. The emergence of such behavior is influenced by several interconnected factors, including provocation, aversive conditions, aggressive cues, peer presence, individual characteristics, and deindividuation, whereas drug use was not found to contribute to verbal aggression among the participants. Provocation and peer influence were identified as the most dominant factors, indicating that social interactions and group dynamics play a significant role in shaping aggressive behavior among adolescents. Overall, verbal aggression is not solely determined by individual emotional conditions but is also strongly affected by environmental factors and peer relationships. Therefore, preventive efforts should focus on enhancing emotional regulation, strengthening self-control, and fostering a positive school climate that encourages constructive communication and healthy interpersonal relationships among students.

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