

# “They are Empty Baskets”: Teachers’ Perspective on Violence Among Children

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## ABSTRACT

Violence behaviour in Kindergarten children has raised concerns about how teachers handle children’s violence cases. Teachers’ involvement in preventing and coping with children’s violent behaviour relies on teachers’ assessment of the situation or the care. Perceptions of children’s violence could be different among teachers and academics. Using grounded theory, this research tries to discover the underlying dominant discourses behind teachers’ perception of violence among children. This study interviewed three teachers who work at one of Kindergarten in West Bandung District, Indonesia. The findings show that there are three discourses embedded in teachers’ perception of violence among children. The discourses are the normalization of violence among children, the innocent child, and blaming the adults. All of these discourses are perpetuated by the dominant developmentalism discourse. Viewed from a post-structuralist lens, this study discusses alternative perspectives about violent behaviour in Kindergarten. The findings may be helpful for preventive programs.

**Keywords:** Dominant discourse, post-structuralist, kindergarten.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

For years, violence between children is considered as something common among them, because often incidents of violent behaviour by children are viewed as part of interactions in play or normal things in their development [1]. The problem of children’s violent behaviour among children sometimes considered a harmless incident because children are seen as someone who will not feel any impact from the incident [2]. The assumption that children are weak creatures also reinforces this view. In fact, according to Margaret J. et al. [3], violence during childhood is related to obstacles in completing developmental tasks, among others the development of children’s interactions and further social development. Besides, violent behaviour in childhood is also considered a warning sign of the emergence of violence and gun abuse during adolescence and adulthood [4-5]. Nowadays, there is more research about violent incidents by children, even kindergarten students. This is certainly not surprising because the children’s sources of learning about violence are more diverse, from those directly observed by children or they experienced [6], so this is one of the reasons children’s violent behaviour in childhood should receive more concern. Violence among children is worrying, especially if it happened in schools

that are supposed to be safe socializing places for children [7]. Fighting over toys or playful fighting when children play with friends is a common scenario, but become violent if they end with physical hurt and feelings of displeasure [8]. Common forms of children’s violent behaviour among children in Kindergarten include physical violence, verbal violence, and psychological violence [9].

Children’s violent behaviour that occurs in Kindergarten certainly leads us to see how teachers deal with these problems. Teachers, especially teachers in Kindergarten, have a very important position because they are directly involved in playing and learning activities. Teachers influence the development of violence in the class, teachers who respond directly will suppress violence in the classroom, on the contrary, teachers who loosen violence encourage the growth of more violence [10]. So, a teacher’s response to handling incidents of violence committed by children to their peers is inappropriate when the teacher cannot interpret violence correctly. The findings of the International Center for Research on Women & Plan International regarding the response of Indonesian teachers to incidents of violence between students in schools indicate that teachers in some cases do not recognize interactions that lead to violence [11]. In several violent incidents,

pre-school teachers have difficulty distinguishing between fun fights and which behaviour includes violence in violent incidents among children [12]. When teachers do not recognize violence, teachers tend to ignore the incident and this can lead to the normalization of violence [13]. Repeated incidents of violence can have an impact on the children's perception of violent behaviour is something that can be done [14]. This study will focus on the teacher's perspective of violent behaviour among children, which has so far been understood as part of the developmental phase and is often seen as the impact of less controlled active play [15].

Previous research has shown the importance of knowing the teacher's perspective as a useful source of information for preventive action or violent intervention, and these studies have mostly been conducted at the age of older children [16-18]. However, previous research has not yet explored what is the reference or background for teachers' views on violent behaviour among children. Adult perspective about children's violent behaviour, in this study, is a teacher's perspective, is very important to be explored because it can explain how their actions deal with violence committed by children. In understanding the teacher's perspective of violent behaviour among children, we need to explore what dominant discourse teachers use in this case. The dominant discourse will show how the teacher interprets children and how to deal with occurrences or problems related to children [19]. The dominant discourse will regulate and limit teachers' understanding of children [20]. To gain more knowledge about the teacher's perspective, this study will attempt to describe what dominant discourse teachers use to see children's violent behaviour among children in kindergarten.

When children commit violence, such as hitting, scratching or, kicking, the usual discourse is that the child is in a developmental phase and does not know how to channel his anger. This perspective often does not support prevention or intervention programs for incidents of violence by children. It is necessary to rethink other ways of looking at this violent behaviour which creates an encouragement to prevent violent behaviour even at a very young age to encourage the sensitivity of teachers in kindergarten that emergence children's violent behaviour is that things should beware and find a way out.

Along with the construction of science in recent years, there is a starting rising of studies about discourse used by teachers in early childhood education. The research begins to focus on rethinking the developmental discourse that has been used such as research conducted by Adriany & Warin [21], using a post-structuralist feminist approach in criticizing the development discourse used by teachers' perspective gender in kindergartens. By using the same approach, Adriany & Saefullah [22] trying to reconstruct the discourse of

human capital which also refers to child development is a discourse that "seems" friendly to children, but in reality is a rigid norm to monitoring children's development. Rethinking about developmental discourse invites us to look at problems from another point of view that can be of benefit in dealing with children's problems in kindergarten.

## **2. METHOD**

The research design used in the research is a qualitative approach and uses the grounded theory method. Qualitative research is used in this research because it is considered suitable because this approach can help this study to explain what's behind someone's thoughts [23]. The choice of grounded theory method was chosen because it is considered to be a method that supports efforts to reveal something or discourse used behind the teacher's understanding of the phenomenon of children's violent behaviour [24]. The grounded theory method in this research is not used to prove a theory but to build a teacher understanding scheme from the analysed interview data.

Data were collected from in-depth interviews with three teachers from a Kindergarten located in West Bandung District. The choice of research location was based on the existence of violent behaviour repeated by children in that Kindergarten and the ease of permission to conduct research. The data obtained from the interviews were coded and several categories were generated, then these categories were selected and grouped into main themes. After getting a big theme, these findings are discussed using a post-structuralist perspective. The use of a post-structuralist perspective is a response to the desire to rethink the view that children's violent behaviour is determined by universal developmental standards [25]. To maintain the privacy of informants, the name of the teacher only uses initials.

## **3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

The findings obtained from this study are 3 developmental discourses in kindergarten, namely normalization violence among children discourse. This discourse is the background of how teachers accept children's violent behaviour. The second is the innocent child discourse, this discourse is a developmental discourse that explains how teachers view children's violent behaviour. The last one is the discourse of blaming the adults' discourse, which explains the teacher's views on the causes of the emergence of child violent behaviour. These findings will portray how teachers view and meaning violent behaviour problems by children.

### **3.1. Normalisation of Violence among Children Discourse**

Normalization of violence between early childhood is a developmental perspective. Through this perspective, the teacher sees that violence is part of the process of socio-emotional development so that incidents of violence in early childhood are seen as natural aggressive behavior in relationships with friends [26]. The development discourse on seeing violent behavior is not a cause for concern because according to this view the aggression that encourages children to commit violence will decrease with age [27]. When teachers use this knowledge, teachers will link age-related violence with specific abilities in developmental tasks experienced by children. With this viewpoint, violence among children is natural for teachers. This can be shown by the teacher's statement.

Mrs. W: That's actually a natural thing.

(Interview with Ms. W, 12 July 2020).

Mrs. E: If violence just only hits, it doesn't till bleeding, it's reasonable because children want to outbursts their emotions.

(Interview with Mrs. E, 12 July 2020).

Mrs. R: Because... because they are just children, yeah, so we still have to...we still have to understand them.

(Interview with Ms. R, 12 July 2020).

The next conversation shows how teachers use developmental discourses that view violent behaviour in children as part of emotional development.

Mrs. W: Because the child in early childhood age, the emotional level emm is still unstable not like an adult.

(Interview with Ms. W, 12 July 2020)

Mrs. E: Violence, for example, if a child can't tell you how upset they are, they usually talk but if they cannot, they use physical.

(Interview with Mrs. E, 12 July 2020)

Mrs. R: When the children are angry, they cannot control

(Interview Mrs. R, 12 July 2020)

The teacher's answer shows that the teacher views that children's violent behaviour among children is not potentially dangerous and is part of development. This explains why they accept the incident so easily. Very young age and emotionally unstable is used as a reference that violence perpetrated by children is a negative emotion that is beyond their control [28]. Thus, violent behaviour is something that cannot be avoided. Seeing that violence perpetrated by children is a child's inability to regulate themselves can make teachers more accepting

and not motivated to take preventive action. Violence is seen as something normal for children. This has the potential to make acts of violence by children appear continuously happen

### **3.2. The Innocent Child Discourse**

In the viewpoint of development, children are seen as innocent individuals, hence violence perpetrated by children is considered a form of ignorance and is not motivated by the desire to harm [29]. This perspective encourages teachers to always protect and tolerate acts of violence against children, because of the belief that they are a fragile and innocent individual who must be protected.

Mrs. W: They actually wanted to practice what they watched to their friends.

(Interview with Ms. W, 12 July 2020).

Mrs. E: They can only see, right? They are like an empty basket.

(Interview with Mrs. E, 12 July 2020).

Mrs. R: Emm, children sometimes just spontaneity, maybe because of the spontaneity so there is no intention of hitting like that.

(Interview with Mrs. R, 12 July 2020).

The use of this discourse in seeing incidents of violence perpetrated by children can make teachers fail to recognize acts of violence by children. This view ignores that children have their knowledge. Children are considered as individuals who always need help and protection. Rather than protecting children, this makes teachers eliminate the opportunity for children to learn to solve their problems because they must always be supported and supervised by adults [30]. Assuming a child is an innocent individual whose knowledge is limited, the teacher does not actively involve them in discussing a problem, in this case, the violence there does. Besides, because violence by children is considered an accidental incident, the teacher cannot detect any tendency for children to take action to hurt others. As a result, this incident was handled inappropriately.

### **3.3. Blaming the Adults Discourse**

These findings further show that according to the teacher, children's violent behaviour is the result of imitating parents or adults around them. In the discourse of child development, child's violent behaviour is formed due to environmental influences [31]. In cases of violence in early childhood, teachers judge parents and adults around them as role models for children to learn about violence. The conversation below shows that teachers see children's violent behaviour as the result of their observations from the adults around them.

Mrs. W: They imitate parents' behaviour at home. So sometimes they imitate, what they see, what they hear, they practice what they see, sometimes they practice at school. "Oh, my parents too, like that when they get angry.

(Interview with Ms. W, 12 July 2020).

Mrs. E: When they are not playing with their peers, sometimes they like to play with the grown-ups, playing with the mature one, so sometimes they are following the way adults communicate.

(Interview with Mrs. E, 12 July 2020).

Mrs. R: They want to keep getting attention, usually umh ...where these factors come from? it's clearer, it's definitely from the factor of parents too.

(Interview with Mrs. R, 12 July 2020).

This finding shows that the teacher sees that the child is currently in the social learning stage. From the answers given, it shows that the teacher sees that the emergence of violence against children is mostly the result of observations of parents or because they have experienced violence at home. This explains how exposure to violence is obtained by children, but the perspective about violence is the mistakes of parents and adults because becoming a source of exposure to violence can make teachers limit a broader understanding of violence by children [32]. They missed that they are also one of the models of behavior for children.

Mrs. E: Well, because in this case here the parents are working, sometimes the parents have not enough attention to their child, right? Ah, don't care, the important thing is that the child does not feel bothered, just up to them.

(Interview with Mrs. E, 12 July 2020).

One of the teacher's statements said that there children who committed violence because of the negligence of the supervision provided by the working parents. If the teacher blames this situation, the teacher becomes not focused on supporting parents in finding a solution. Teachers fail to see from the point of view that parents' busyness may be their effort to be able to provide a better life and education for their children and, the lack of supervision is not only because they do not care, but also because of difficulties in managing the time for care.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The findings in this study show how teachers give more acceptance of violence among children. The teacher sees that this is a normal behaviour in their development. A child who commits violence is seen as part of his development, the influence of adults, and the child's inability to have a proper response to environmental stimuli. Children are conceived as helpless individuals

and do not understand many things [33]. The developmental discourse used by teachers in understanding that children's violent behaviour shows the children cannot be blamed for this behaviour. However, the post-structuralist view provides another alternative, that children are competent individuals and can make decisions about themselves [29]. So, children's violent behaviour can be prevented. Teachers can involve children and in discussions about good or bad behaviour, and involve them in preventive action. Teachers who do not make this behaviour as a concern, of course, can preserve violence among children. This indicates the need to provide teachers with further knowledge that violence among children in kindergarten is something to be aware of so that teachers need to take preventive actions so that this behaviour does not increase severely and carry over to adulthood.

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