



# Childhood Maltreatment: Crisis in Family Informal Education

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**Abstract.** Survivors of childhood maltreatment generally have low self-esteem. Low self-esteem conditions can reduce resources and experience difficulties in dealing with problems in everyday life and have a negative impact on individual mental health. This study aims to examine the self-esteem picture of early adult women survivors of childhood maltreatment. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews. The data analysis method used is thematic analysis. The participants in this study were three early adult women survivors of childhood maltreatment. This study produced five themes, namely: (1) self-esteem in participants, (2) factors that influence participant self-esteem, (3) child maltreatment that occurred to participants, (4) the impact of childhood maltreatment on self-esteem participants, and finally (5) process development of participant self-esteem. This study found that the self-esteem picture of each participant was different which was influenced by various things both externally and internally.

**Keywords:** Childhood, Maltreatment, Education

## 1 Introduction

[1] put forward the notion of childhood maltreatment as all acts of abuse and violence which can include physical violence, sexual violence, emotional violence, neglect of the child's emotional needs, or neglect of the child physically from parents or caregivers of minors. Meanwhile, [2] describe child maltreatment as a dangerous act committed by authoritarian figures in the family, which can include parents, caregivers, or individuals who substitute for the role of parents to children under 18 years of age so that it can threaten the safety and health of children. The [3] reports that almost 3 out of 4 children or around 300 million children aged 2-4 years' experience consistent physical and/or emotional violence from parents all over the world. This statement shows that the phenomenon of childhood maltreatment occurs globally so that it can be found anywhere and anytime.

Indonesia is no exception where the level of violence against children is at an alarming stage with the level of violence being high every year. The 2021 National Life Experience Survey of Children and Adolescents found that as many as 46 out of 100

teenage girls had experienced at least one type or more of violence and 37 out of 100 boys had experienced violence of any kind[4]. The Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) stated that cases of violence against children within the family and alternative care had the highest number of cases since 2011-2021 where in 2021 there were 2,281 (76.8%) cases of violence against children in the family and care environment alternative of the 2,971 total cases of child abuse received [5]. This data is reinforced by the results of the 2021 National Survey of Life Experiences of Children and Adolescents showing that in the period 2019-2021 most of the violence against children occurred in the family sphere where in 2019 there were 43.56%, in 2020 there were 47.50% and in in 2021 it will rise to 48.68% [4]

Parenting styles have a very important role in the cognitive, social and emotional development of children [6]. [7] revealed that people are responsible for the development of children by guiding, caring for, raising, and fulfilling various kinds of children's developmental needs. In educating children, parents use various methods that are considered appropriate so that children can grow according to the wishes of parents. Very often children get violence with the aim of disciplining them so that children can obey and obey their parents' orders [8]. Parties who have the obligation to guide and care for minors but carry out child maltreatment have negative consequences for the child's survival.

Child maltreatment not only causes suffering to children and families but can have short-term and long-term negative impacts [9]. World Health Organization (2022a) states that child maltreatment has a negative impact on the mental health and physical health of children that can last a lifetime so that it affects the child in carrying out activities of daily life. [10] state that there are several negative impacts that will be felt by children after being physically abused, including bruises, burns, head injuries, broken bones and death. Child maltreatment survivors feel negative impacts that affect their mental health such as having low self-esteem, hopelessness, anxiety, depression, eating disorders, sleep disturbances, experiencing problems in establishing relationships with others, self-injury, having thoughts of kill yourself, have high aggression, experience PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) and so on[10][11][3].

[12] revealed that the formation of a child's personality in adulthood is influenced by parental education that is applied to children from an early age where an environment full of affection will encourage children to apply the attitudes and teachings of parents well, but an environment that Not supporting children's development will have a negative impact on the formation of children's character and personality. [13] stated that traumatic childhood experiences can weaken individual resources to successfully transition to adulthood and individuals tend to experience difficulties in facing and solving problems that will occur in the future. Individual childhood maltreatment survivors still feel the impact of child maltreatment carried out by parents and caregivers in dealing with the demands of early adulthood. Experiences that occurred in childhood will contribute to behavior and personality in adulthood [12][13]. [9] stated that child maltreatment fosters negative perceptions within oneself thereby weakening individual self-esteem which can result in anxiety, stress and so on when dealing with negative events that may take place in the future.

Self-esteem is an individual's assessment that includes awareness, beliefs, opinions, attitudes, values and feelings about himself both in a negative and positive view

[14][15]. states that childhood is one of the most important times when some self-esteem in individuals can develop. The development of self-esteem is reflected through observations made by children towards the attitudes of other people, especially those closest to them, namely the family in treating them. Children who are treated with warmth, kindness and positive things from the social environment grow feelings of worth in themselves, while children who get negative treatment such as violence, neglect and abuse grow feelings of worthlessness. The statement by [15] above is in line with the results of [16]'s research which found that the family environment in early childhood has a significant influence on the way children evaluate themselves as they get older where this effect is still seen during early adulthood.

Based on the results of interviews that were conducted with the three survivors of childhood maltreatment, it was found that there were differences in the impact of childhood maltreatment that was still being felt which indirectly affected the participants in carrying out their daily activities. The first participant tended to evaluate themselves in a negative way, while the second and third participants viewed themselves positively. With the background of the problems that have been described, the researcher is interested in discussing the impact of childhood maltreatment on how participants perceive themselves.

## 2 Methods

### 2.1 Methods of Data Collecting

This qualitative research uses a case study approach. Creswell & Poth defines a case study as a qualitative approach that explores and analyzes phenomena, contemporary finite systems (cases), or multiple finite systems (cases) from time to time in real life in depth. The researcher chose the case study approach because the researcher wanted to comprehensively examine and understand the participant's self-esteem through the participant's point of view as a childhood maltreatment survivor in responding to the events they went through and the impact they have had so far on their self-esteem. In this study there were three gender participants.

The criteria for participants to be studied in this study include: (1) early adult women aged 20-25 years, (2) experiencing childhood maltreatment from their parents/family authority figures, (3) residing in Surabaya. Significant others from research participants can include friends, peers, family members and other individuals who have close relationships and are trusted by research participants.

Data was collected using in-depth interviews (in-depth interviews). Saleh (2017) stated that in-depth interviews were conducted to explore experiences that were considered relevant and important to study so that they could complete the required data. The researcher chose to use in-depth interview techniques to obtain more in-depth detailed information regarding the views, perceptions, attitudes and knowledge possessed by the participants. To obtain more accurate data, the researcher will also conduct interviews with the significant other from each participant. The researcher also used a tape recorder to record the interviews conducted so that it could be used as cross-check material to assist in analyzing the data that had been collected.

## 2.2 Analysis Methods of Data Collecting

Data analysis in this study used thematic analysis techniques (thematic analysis). Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and interpreting patterns of meaning or can be called themes in qualitative data Clarke & Braun. Researchers use thematic analysis techniques because they can identify patterns within and across data related to the views, perspectives, behaviors and life experiences of participants. Thematic analysis techniques are also flexible and easy to apply, making it easier for researchers to analyze data.

## 3 Findings and Discussion

Childhood maltreatment is a negative experience involving acts of abuse committed by parents/caregivers to individuals in childhood [1]. This study found that the forms of child maltreatment tended to be the same but with different intensities. Early adult women experience physical violence in the form of punches, flicks and pinches. Meanwhile, the emotional violence that is felt is in the form of sentences that are degrading, hurtful and threats to the safety and health of individuals. Emotional neglect was also encountered in this study where parents or family authority figures did not provide supervision, affection and support to the young adult woman.

Child maltreatment has a negative impact on the physical health and mental health of individuals. Actions of child maltreatment endanger the physical health of individuals such as causing injury, disability, digestive or gastrointestinal disorders, sexually transmitted infections and so on [3]. Ongoing child maltreatment on an ongoing basis can weaken self-resources and individual development which is generally related to weakened self-esteem where individuals have negative cognitive styles and negative beliefs about themselves so they tend to be vulnerable to mental health problems [17].

Rosenberg [14] suggests that self-esteem is an individual evaluation of oneself that emphasizes individual feelings and beliefs about intelligence, abilities, social relations and their future which can be manifested in positive or negative views. Self-esteem possessed by individuals comes from the accumulation of experience in the past and in the present where the more new experiences that individuals go through, it can change self-esteem in individuals (Rosenberg, 1965). Various factors influence individual self-esteem such as academic performance, significant people, family environment and social environment [18]. It should be noted that the impact of childhood maltreatment felt by early adult women cannot be generalized. The way an early adult woman interprets the experiences that occur and the challenges that must be passed during her lifetime has a different measure. Through the process of data collection and the results of data analysis, this study succeeded in finding a process of self-esteem for early adult women survivors of childhood maltreatment as follows:

### 3.1 First participant SBP

Incidents of child maltreatment that occurred in childhood greatly affect SBP self-esteem. The form of child maltreatment experienced by SBP is physical abuse in the form of pinching to the point where it bleeds, emotional violence and emotional neglect. The cause of childhood maltreatment is due to the young age of the family authority figure so that they lack experience in caring for SBP and indirectly take out their emotions on SBP when they have problems at work. Since childhood, the authority figure in the SBP family has adopted an authoritarian parenting style in which SBP has to fulfill all the demands made. Negative consequences will be given when SBP is unable to comply with these demands/orders such as threats, insults and words that demean SBP. In addition, family authority figures almost never show affection or words of affirmation and even SBP never gets a hug. Abundant demands and prohibitions without guidance, supervision and assistance result in feelings of pressure and insecurity while at home so that SBP tends to harbor feelings that are felt and often daydream. Even though SBP's financial needs are met, SBP still needs warmth, understanding and love from his family.

Experiences in childhood still make an impression today and affect SBP in carrying out daily activities. The negative consequences applied by family authority figures when SBP does not reach the specified target make SBP feel that they are unreliable, afraid to make mistakes to anyone, especially family authority figures where the intensity of the fear increases and feels severe stress when meeting family authority figure. In addition, SBP is prone to feeling anxious and feeling that they are not strong enough to face problems. SBP felt that he became irritable due to past experiences where family authority figures often took their emotions out on SBP. The feeling of anger that sometimes the SBP could not control was vented by slashing his hands.

Academic activities that include the school environment, academic performance, demands from parents or school, high levels of educational stress are related to self-esteem [19]. SBP authority figures tend to demand perfection, especially in academic activities which results in SBP experiencing academic stress where feelings of anxiety, worry, panic attacks arise before taking exams and overthinking about the academic scores obtained. This made SBP push himself and try his best to maintain good academic performance. If related to Rosenberg's theory (1965), family authority figures show a response to punishment when SBP does not succeed in achieving predetermined academic value criteria where SBP will get words that hurt SBP's feelings, demean SBP, criticize SBP's abilities and words that can reduce self-esteem. SBP.

Authoritarian parenting styles that limit SBP's freedom affect SBP's ability to interact with the people around them. SBP finds it difficult to mingle with other people as a result of a family authority figure prohibiting them from associating/playing with other children when they were young. There is confusion within SBP to understand other people and how to behave when engaging in social interactions so that SBP often feels anxious about the reactions that other people will give them. In addition, SBP who is obliged to meet the demands and expectations of family authority figures makes SBP a people pleaser where individuals prioritize the interests of others above personal interests and try to please others even though it is

detrimental to themselves. When SBP is unable to meet other people's expectations or makes mistakes, it will cause feelings of guilt, anxiety, and fear within oneself.

In socializing with other people, SBP tends to have a negative perspective on other people, namely SBP feels that other people use masks when interacting with him, believes that other people have a bad view of his personality and feels afraid of what other people think of him. SBP experiences interpersonal threats, namely the belief that other people have a negative perspective on oneself, the expectation arises that other people will hate or take negative actions against the individual (Rosenberg & Owens, 2001). However, as social beings, SBP realizes that the ability to communicate and mingle with other people is very important in the future. In this regard, SBP tries to get out of the comfort zone and expand relationships regardless of the socio-economic status of other people. Socioeconomic status does not affect SBP in establishing interactions with other people and does not affect SBP in viewing himself.

Significant people (significant others) have a positive influence on individual self-esteem [18]. In line with this theory, the support given by a significant other to SBP fosters feelings of worth, affection and attention. With the existence of a significant other, SBP has the means to express the emotions felt and become a discussion partner to assist SBP in making decisions.

The impact of childhood maltreatment can last throughout the course of an individual's life [17]. Until now, SBP still feels unfair and disappointed with the treatment of family authority figures in the past, but SBP has no desire to do the same to their children in the future. SBP seeks to come to terms with the past and excuse the actions of a family authority figure. SBP's coping of stress to calm him down is to write a diary and carry out spiritual activities by praying and praying. The thing that made SBP survive in the face of childhood maltreatment was having the belief that things would get better and the will of his late father who always encouraged SBP to stay alive.

SBP feels that he has not been able to fully appreciate himself, still has many shortcomings, tends not to be able to believe in his abilities, is not firm in his stance, has negative perceptions of himself and others. However, SBP has a high enthusiasm in developing himself and his potential so that he can become a better person. SBP broadens his horizons by reading the experiences of other people who have experienced similar incidents to himself, is diligent in learning to improve his abilities so that he can change his life for the better and is trying to slowly accept himself both his strengths and weaknesses.

### 3.2 **Second participant ZYR**

ZYR's self-esteem is influenced by the accumulation of experiences in the past and in the present. Forms of child maltreatment that occur during childhood to adolescence are physical violence, emotional abuse and emotional neglect. ZYR's father often hits, flicks and smashes glassware when his emotions run high. The emotional abuse will be carried out until neighbors can hear or in public. This made ZYR get a bad image in the social environment where he earned the label of a naughty child, bothering parents and unfilial. The cause of child maltreatment was ZYR's father, who had a temperament that made it difficult for him to control his emotions, so he took these emotions out on his children.

ZYR's father adopted neglectful parenting in which he was indifferent to ZYR's survival. This makes ZYR feel sad because he needs love, attention and emotional support. In line with Rosenberg's theory (1965), parental attention has an influence on children's self-esteem which will lead to feelings of worth and affection in children. ZYR felt disappointed and unfair over the acts of violence committed by the father. As the head of the family who is supposed to protect and guide his children but commits violence against his own children which causes ZYR to be hurt. There was a feeling of pressure when ZYR realized that his peers did not experience something similar to him where parents used violence and said inappropriate words to their own children. In dealing with child maltreatment, ZYR observes the father's behavior so that he can understand the father's character to minimize the occurrence of acts of violence from the father. There was intervention from ZYR's siblings who tried to help ZYR when he received violence from his father. Siblings provide support and encouragement to one another which helps ZYR calm down.

Bi et al. in their research found that individuals with neglect parenting styles have a high level of autonomy where the individual's ability to act in accordance with the principles and values they have because they are accustomed to carrying out activities without depending on their parents. This research is in line with the findings where ZYR has a firm attitude towards its values and life principles. ZYR says that no one can influence his personality and does not pay attention to what other people think of him.

In academic activities, ZYR has never been demanded to get good grades. The indifferent response from his father made ZYR grow into an independent personality where ZYR would try to do all the tasks on his own and rely on his abilities. ZYR's motivation for studying is not to get bad grades because it wastes years of schooling. When ZYR gets good academic grades it creates a feeling of worth and pride in him. These findings are consistent with Rosenberg's theory (1965) where good academic performance results in self-confidence in individual abilities and feelings of self-worth for those who have struggled and studied hard.

The social environment can influence the formation of self-esteem in individual life [14]. This was found in this study where ZYR felt positive changes since going to Surabaya to live campus life. The social environment in Surabaya shows good tolerance towards the family's socioeconomic status and is more accepting of the ZYR situation. In contrast to the environment in the place of origin where the socioeconomic status of the family plays an important factor in socializing. Good adaptability and communication skills help ZYR to blend well with anyone. A positive social environment fosters a positive attitude within ZYR. When interacting with people around him, ZYR also doesn't feel anxious. In looking at other people, ZYR has a neutral and positive perspective, especially towards people close to him. Even though ZYR has experienced discrimination/bad treatment from other people, ZYR does not take this to heart because ZYR has close friends who are loyal to him.

Based on the theory of Rosenberg (1965), meaningful people provide a positive influence and can develop individual self-esteem. The findings in this study indicate that a significant other can foster feelings of worth within ZYR. The form of support provided by the significant other is in the form of financial support and emotional support which often provides encouragement, motivation and affection given by the

significant other makes ZYR realize that there are people who still care for and love him. The influence of the support given caused ZYR to become more self-respecting, think more positive, respect others and become more mature.

The quality of relationships in the family environment shows positive changes where family members are closer than before. My father realized the mistake he had made when AS was a child and had not committed these acts of violence anymore. The principle of ZYR's life is to live as long as God still gives age and focus on the future so that ZYR does not want to drag on to the past. ZYR has come to terms with a traumatic childhood experience. This happened because ZYR was trying to develop himself into a better personality so he could understand himself. There are several activities carried out by ZYR, namely broadening horizons to increase understanding regarding the actions taken by fathers, learning from experience not to repeat the same mistakes and self-control.

Research conducted by [20] shows that self-acceptance has an attachment to self-esteem where when individuals successfully deal with negative experiences or deficiencies in themselves unconditionally, they can change the negative side and develop themselves continuously. This is in line with the findings in this study, namely self-development and potential abilities that ZYR has to understand himself better so that he can accept himself unconditionally. That way, ZYR has good self-esteem where ZYR views himself positively, is steadfast, respects himself, has a high enthusiasm to develop himself to become a better person, believes in his abilities and has positive expectations for the future. ahead.

### **3.3 Third participant DFY**

Traumatic childhood experiences have an influence on DFY's self-esteem. DFY's father has a violent and irritable personality that has a negative effect on DFY. The form of child maltreatment that was carried out to DFY was physical violence and emotional violence. When he was little, DFY often got spanked and cursed by his father. The cause of child maltreatment was because DFY's father applied old-fashioned parenting using violence which was considered effective in educating children.

In dealing with child maltreatment in childhood, DFY tries to minimize conflict by being silent and following the wishes of the father. This act of violence created a feeling of insecurity within DFY and it sparked a desire to run away from home. In addition, DFY's mother and sister often intervened when DFY's father's emotions overflowed. To stabilize the emotions that are felt, DFY chooses to do various activities such as playing with cats to help divert the negative emotions that are felt. Apart from that, DFY also rests the body and mind by sleeping. When DFY still feels uncomfortable, DFY will encourage himself not to get carried away with negative emotions and give self-affirmation sentences.

Parenting style has a significant influence on individual personality, including self-esteem [16]. DFY expressed his distaste for parenting and felt it was unfair for fathers to treat them because this should not be done to minors, especially to their own families. In line with this statement, ongoing child maltreatment has a negative impact on DFY's personality, namely becoming an individual who is easily emotional and impatient because of parenting styles. Since childhood, father often forced his will and did not allow DFY to express opinions freely which resulted in



DFY becoming a stubborn person. This limitation in expressing opinions made DFY cry easily and was afraid of his father's reaction when trying to express his opinion.

Parents were very concerned about DFY's academic performance where since childhood DFY's father taught lessons to DFY until late at night until DFY understood the subject matter. Guidance given by parents makes DFY often get academic achievements such as ranking between the top 5-10. Parents' reaction to DFY's academic performance is positive and does not make demands on DFY to get a certain score, parents will encourage DFY when academic scores are not good. Good academic performance fosters a sense of self-esteem and pride in those who have succeeded in obtaining this grade. The motivation that often gives DFY enthusiasm for learning is not getting bad grades. In doing assignments and academic exams, DFY always exerts and relies on his ability to complete these assignments. These findings are in accordance with Rosenberg's theory (1965) which states that good academic performance is related to individual self-esteem.

In the social sphere, DFY tends to have difficulty blending in and will feel anxious when having to communicate with a large number of people. However, DFY creates an image in the social environment so that it maintains a good relationship with the people around it. This image helps DFY to adapt well in the social environment. In relationships, DFY tends to stick to one person and feels more comfortable communicating intensely with one to three people. DFY views other people in a positive way and tends not to have a negative perspective on how others view themselves. When interacting with other individuals, DFY never blames the family's socioeconomic status. Coming from a simple family, DFY does not feel ashamed or jealous if his peers have a higher socioeconomic status. Acceptance of the socioeconomic conditions of the family makes DFY more grateful because their financial needs are met well where DFY realizes that not everyone can have the same facilities. Socioeconomic status does not affect DFY's view of himself. According to Rosenberg (1965), significant people play a role in developing a sense of self-worth in the individual. One of the things that helps DFY in accepting himself is the support and affection given by his significant other. DFY is quite open to the problems experienced by significant others and often asks for opinions and suggestions in overcoming these matters. Emotional support from a significant other opens a new perspective for DFY where there are some negative sides from childhood maltreatment that can be corrected.

The condition of the DFY family has improved compared to the past. After contemplating past events, it made DFY aware that his father's actions had good intentions to educate him. DFY's father also experienced this ancient parenting style, so it is not surprising that DFY's father applied this parenting style to his children. Related to this, DFY has forgiven the act of childhood maltreatment but this experience caused trauma for DFY, namely not marrying a man who likes to commit violence. When DFY gives birth to children in the future, DFY does not want their children to experience the suffering they experienced in childhood. DFY only wanted the acts of violence to stop at him.

The process of coming to terms with traumatic childhood experiences is not easy. A positive environment, support from people around and self-acceptance play a role in the DFY process of accepting past events. The thing that keeps DFY fighting and surviving childhood maltreatment is because there are still many dreams that they

want to achieve and things that DFY has not yet done. It is this desire that inspires DFY to live and enjoy the beauty of a life that has not yet been lived. DFY didn't want to be burdened with the impact from the past that was still being felt up to that point, so the actions he took were to develop himself.

DFY shows high enthusiasm in developing himself to be a better personality than before. To correct existing deficiencies, DFY often seeks opinions from other people regarding these matters. DFY also received input from other people about his personality, but DFY also checked the facts that happened. DFY has a fairly strong stance and if what is conveyed by other people is not in accordance with the facts then DFY will not spend its energy to relate to that individual. In addition, DFY is also enthusiastic in developing his abilities so that he can realize his dream of becoming a successful person. DFY has a sense of confidence in the abilities they have. DFY's willingness to develop himself provides a deeper understanding of himself. This made DFY appreciate himself for having succeeded in going through various challenges in his life. In looking at the future, DFY has positive expectations and sets targets to become a wiser individual, more patient and able to create a happy family.

#### 4 **Conclusion**

This study found that the description of self-esteem in each participant was different. Self-esteem possessed by participants is influenced by various things both externally and internally. In terms of external factors that help foster a sense of self-esteem in participants, namely getting support from significant others, having good academic performance, improving family conditions from before, being in a positive social environment. Meanwhile, internally it can include an individual view of experience and overall self-acceptance.

The struggle of early adult women who never give up in facing childhood maltreatment is very great and deserves appreciation. The way all participants interpret themselves through the accumulation of past experience and present experience cannot be compared to one another. It should be noted that each individual has different steps and time cannot be used as a measure for individuals to make peace with past experiences.

The participants showed great enthusiasm in developing themselves to become good personalities. Self-development makes women in early adulthood understand themselves better so they can accept themselves unconditionally. Becoming a better version of before can foster a positive assessment of yourself as a whole.

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