

Original Research

Exploring Family Functioning in Adolescent Dating Violence: A Case Study of an Indonesian Spiritual Community

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ABSTRACT

Background: Adolescence is a period of transition from childhood to adulthood. One of the significant changes during this period is changes in behavior related to sexual life. Adolescent sexual behavior that is almost identical to adolescence is dating behavior. Dating relationships are colored by cases of violence, especially by men. According to UN Women (2021) shows that at least 736 million women, and 87% of them are committed by people closest to them, including dating violence. Family Functioning is the quality of relationships between family members, one of which is the role of parents in preventing dating violence because parents are the first place of socialization before children socialize with the outside environment. Therefore, this study aims to explore the impact of Family Functioning on dating violence behavior among adolescents. **Methods:** This study employed a case study approach. Data collection was performed between November 2023 and March 2024 through in-depth interviews with two groups: one adolescent who had experienced dating violence and another who had not. **Results:** The finding found that adolescent who experienced dating violence came from dysfunctional families, while adolescent who did not experience dating violence were from families with higher levels of family functioning. **Conclusions:** The study indicates that adolescents from dysfunctional families are more prone to dating violence, while those from well-functioning families are less affected. This emphasizes the critical role of family dynamics in adolescent experiences. Future research should develop interventions to enhance family functioning and examine these dynamics across various cultural settings.

Keywords: Adolescence; dating violence; family functioning; case study; Indonesian spiritual community

1. INTRODUCTION

Dating violence encompasses acts of aggression within pre-marital relationships, spanning physical, emotional, and economic abuse, often affecting women disproportionately.⁽¹⁾ This form of violence manifests in various ways, including physical assaults, emotional manipulation, economic control, and sexual coercion.⁽²⁾ Adolescence marks a critical developmental period where curiosity and exploration are heightened, including in dating behavior.⁽³⁾ However,

dating relationships can become arenas for violence, predominantly perpetrated by males, despite cultural perceptions of courtship as a positive experience.⁽⁴⁾ Such incidents are frequently underreported, perpetuating societal ignorance of their prevalence.

Global statistics underscore the pervasive nature of gender-based violence, with UN Women (2021) reporting that one in three women globally has experienced violence, predominantly within personal contexts like homes or relationships.⁽⁵⁾ The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these figures, highlighting the urgent need for intervention and support.⁽⁶⁾ According to teen dating violence in Indonesia has been identified as a significant issue. Twenty-one percent of adolescents reported experiencing physical dating violence.⁽⁷⁾ Additionally, Family dynamics significantly influence adolescents' susceptibility to dating violence. Negative parenting practices, such as harsh discipline or emotional neglect, can contribute to emotional issues that manifest as violent behavior in relationships later in life.⁽⁸⁾ Exposure to domestic violence within the family environment further increases the likelihood of replicating such behaviors.⁽⁹⁾

Effective family functioning, characterized by cooperative task management and positive communication, plays a crucial role in shaping adolescents' relational skills.⁽¹⁰⁾ Dysfunctional family environments, lacking in healthy communication and affective responsiveness, hinder adolescents' ability to develop trust and maintain stable relationships.⁽²⁾ Addressing these challenges requires proactive measures within families. Educating parents about healthy relationship dynamics and fostering open communication with their children are critical steps in preventing dating violence.⁽¹¹⁾ This approach not only empowers adolescents to recognize and resist abusive behaviors but also promotes emotional resilience and self-esteem, crucial for navigating peer relationships.

Despite several quantitative studies on the prevalence and factors associated with dating violence among adolescents in various countries,^(12,13) an understanding of how adolescents perceive dating violence and the role of family functioning in preventing such dating violence is limited. This highlights the need for a qualitative exploration of this phenomenon based on adolescents' perspectives, which will broaden the understanding of their views and experiences regarding dating violence and family functions. This study sought to describe the perceptions

of adolescents on dating violence, comparing those who have experienced dating violence to those who have not.

The objective of this study is to explore the impact of Family Functioning on dating violence behavior among adolescents within an Indonesian spiritual community, aiming to fill a gap in understanding how family functioning influence relationship behaviors. By examining adolescents' perspectives—both those who have and have not experienced dating violence—the research seeks to identify family factors that either protect against or contribute to violent behavior. The study's findings could inform culturally sensitive interventions and educational programs, promoting healthier family environments and reducing dating violence among adolescents. This qualitative approach offers deeper insights into adolescents' lived experiences, highlighting the importance of family in shaping relational skills and emotional resilience.

2. METHODS

2.1 Study Design

This research utilizes a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of dating violence among adolescents, particularly within the context of a spiritual community in Indonesia. A qualitative method was chosen to produce rich, descriptive data reflecting participants' experiences and perceptions. The study is characterized by naturalistic inquiry, utilizing human participants as instruments, and relies on qualitative techniques such as observations, semi-structured interviews based on McMaster's theory of family functioning,⁽¹⁴⁾ and document analysis. Data were analyzed inductively with an emphasis on processes rather than outcomes, seeking to identify underlying patterns in family functioning and its influence on adolescent dating behaviors. The research was conducted from November 2023 to March 2024 at the Indonesian Spiritual Community Institute (RASI) Jatikalang Post, located in Jatikalang Village, Krian District, Sidoarjo Regency, East Java.

2.2 Population

The study focused on adolescents who had experienced dating violence and those who had not, as well as key individuals involved in their spiritual and mental development. Inclusion criteria required adolescents to have resided with their parents for a

minimum of one year. Purposive sampling was used, selecting informants based on their relevance and expertise regarding the study topic.⁽¹⁵⁾ The sample included adolescents and their parents within the community, aiming to capture a diverse range of perspectives. A total of 2 groups were recruited to explore the information based on their viewpoint: one adolescent who had experienced dating violence and his parents, and one adolescent who had not experienced dating violence and his parents.

2.3 Data Collection

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and document analysis. An interview blueprint was employed to guide the data collection process, ensuring consistency while allowing flexibility for in-depth exploration. Researchers used recording devices, detailed notes, and triangulation methods to verify the accuracy of the data. Parents of adolescent participants were also interviewed to provide additional context and verify findings, enriching the data through a triangulated approach.⁽¹⁶⁾

2.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis process followed an inductive approach, allowing themes and patterns to emerge from the collected data. Thematic analysis was used to identify key factors related to dating violence, family functioning, and relational dynamics. Data were coded, categorized, and analyzed descriptively to emphasize the underlying processes influencing adolescents' experiences. Efforts were made to ensure data validity through member checking and iterative comparisons.⁽¹⁴⁾

2.5 Ethical Clearance

Ethical approval was granted by the research ethics committee of IIK STRADA Indonesia, Kediri (reference no. 000110/EC/KEPK/I/05/2023). Participants were fully informed about the study's aims, procedures, risks, and benefits, ensuring transparency and ethical integrity. Confidentiality was maintained through anonymized data, using code numbers instead of personal identifiers. Informed consent was obtained in writing from all participants, who were also given the option to withdraw from the study at any point without consequence. During interviews, participants were monitored for any signs of psychological or physical distress. None exhibited symptoms requiring further professional intervention. No financial incentives were

provided to participants to maintain the study's ethical standards.

3. RESULTS

Case Study One: Adolescents Who Had Dating Violence (DV)

The first case study involves a 23-year-old university student, the youngest of three siblings. Due to his parents' demanding work schedules, he has limited communication with them, particularly his mother. He is described as a bright and sociable individual, consistently maintaining a GPA above 3.25 at his university. He met his girlfriend, a student from another institution, on campus, and they were acquaintances for a year before beginning a relationship that lasted another year. Throughout their relationship, he reported engaging in controlling and abusive behavior towards her. This included frequent verbal aggression such as scolding, threats, yelling, and humiliation. There were also multiple attempts to coerce her into sexual activity, all of which were unsuccessful, accompanied by threats of physical violence if she did not comply. He exhibited possessive and ambitious tendencies, driven by a fear of losing her. He also threatened to release private videos of their intimate moments if she did not adhere to his demands. Moreover, he insisted that she cook for him daily, using threats to enforce compliance when she refused.

Case Study Two: Adolescents Who Had Not Experienced Dating Violence (NDV)

The second case study focuses on a 22-year-old university student, the second of two brothers. He receives positive treatment from both his parents and his older brother, Fena, who are supportive and nurturing. He is regarded as an obedient and disciplined individual, with his parents placing a strong emphasis on time management, religious obligations such as prayer and recitation of the Koran, and academic responsibilities. Religion plays a significant role in the family's daily life, with frequent family gatherings during meals to foster love, respect, and close family bonds. He is currently studying at a public university in Surabaya and commutes from home each day. Academically, he excels, maintaining a GPA above 3.30. On campus, he met a female student from another university, and they began dating after six months of acquaintance, maintaining a relationship for the past

year. Their courtship was characterized by infrequent in-person meetings, as they prioritized a healthy relationship dynamic. His parents remained attentive and supportive, partly due to his obedient nature. Any disagreements between the couple were addressed thoughtfully, and the parents were not aware of any conflicts. Throughout their relationship, they did not encounter any form of dating violence, whether physical, emotional, economic, or sexual. Despite being of dating age, the relationship was guided by specific conditions, including adherence to religious principles and strict time management, such as a curfew set at 9 PM.

1. Problem-Solving

Adolescents (DV group)

Adolescents in the Dating Violence (DV) often mentioned that his families struggled with solving problems. One participant said, "When there's an issue, especially about dating violence, I don't mention it. My parents usually get angry or stay quiet, and nothing gets solved." This lack of resolution made some adolescents feel helpless, leading them to seek comfort in unhealthy relationships.

Adolescents (NDV group)

In the Non-Dating Violence (NDV), adolescent shared that his families were better at working through problems. One teenager explained, "When I have a problem with my girlfriend, I always talk to my parents. They remind me to be careful in dating, take care of myself, and understand the differences between men and women." This approach helped prevent conflicts from getting worse.

Parents

Parents of the DV group admitted that handling problems was hard for them. One parent shared, "We're busy with work, and sometimes we just let things go because it's too stressful." Meanwhile, parents of the NDV group took a more active role in problem-solving, saying things like, "I always remind my son to treat his girlfriend well." This more involved attitude created a positive family atmosphere.

2. Communication

Adolescents (DV group)

Communication in family of adolescent experiencing dating violence (DV) was often described as limited or absent. One adolescent shared, "I rarely talk to my parents because they're always busy with

their own work, and my siblings have their own households to manage. Even when I ask for advice, my parents usually don't have much to say." This lack of communication led to feelings of isolation among these adolescents.

Adolescents (NDV group)

In contrast, adolescent who had not experienced dating violence (NDV) described his family communication as open and supportive. One participant said, "I can talk to my mom about anything, even about relationships. My parents, especially my mom who stays home, always give me advice—like being careful with friendships, being respectful, and understanding my responsibilities as a child." This open communication allowed adolescents to seek guidance when needed, which seemed to protect them from engaging in unhealthy relationships.

Parents

Parents of DV adolescents often didn't realize how little they communicated with their children. One parent said, "We don't talk much because we're tired from work. If he does talk, it's usually with his father, not with me because I'm quieter and stricter." In contrast, parents of NDV adolescents were more involved in daily conversations. One parent explained, "I often talk to the kids, especially since I'm a housewife. My husband doesn't talk much because of work, but he makes time on weekends or holidays. We've always been open with our children, showing them a positive example. Thankfully, they've never seen us argue because we maintain a strong, united family."

3. Roles

Adolescents (DV group)

Adolescent in the Dating Violence (DV) often expressed confusion about their roles within the family. One participant said, "I don't really know what I'm supposed to do at home. My main tasks are studying and playing. Sometimes my parents want me to act like an adult, and other times they treat me like a child." This inconsistency created frustration and uncertainty about family expectations.

Adolescents (NDV group)

Adolescent described family roles as being clearer and more stable. One adolescent shared, "My parents have always been my first teachers, showing me love, mutual respect, and guiding me about responsibilities. They are always open when there are problems to discuss." These well-defined roles

contributed to a more structured and supportive home environment.

Parents

Parents in the DV group admitted struggling with setting consistent expectations. One parent noted, "We're both working a lot, so sometimes there's no time to manage them properly." In contrast, parents of NDV adolescents emphasized the importance of clear and consistent family roles, describing how they cooperated as a team to handle household duties. One parent explained, "In our family, everyone is cared for, and we try to follow our religious values." This consistency helped create a balanced and united family atmosphere.

4. Affective Responsiveness

Adolescents (DV group)

Adolescent who experienced dating violence often reported feeling a lack of emotional support from his family. One participant said, "If I tell my parents about my problems, they get angry. They don't like hearing that their child is being treated badly, and they definitely won't stay quiet." This emotional disconnect made them more vulnerable in their external relationships.

Adolescents (NDV group)

In contrast, adolescent in the Non-Dating Violence (NDV) described receiving consistent emotional support from his families. One adolescent shared, "If I have a problem, my parents always listen first. They stay calm and then give me the best advice." This kind of emotional responsiveness contributed to a sense of security within the family.

Parents

Parents of DV adolescents often seemed unaware of their children's emotional struggles. One parent commented, "I thought they were fine because they never talked about their problems." This lack of awareness highlighted a gap in emotional connection. On the other hand, parents of NDV adolescents described being emotionally engaged and approachable. One parent explained, "If we notice he's upset, we guide him on how to solve the problem or help him calm down." This proactive involvement fostered a more supportive and emotionally stable family environment.

5. Affective Involvement

Adolescents (DV group)

Adolescent who experienced dating violence often spoke about a lack of emotional connection in his families. One adolescent said, "It feels like everyone's just doing their own thing. We don't really spend time together or show much care for each other's feelings." This emotional disengagement seemed to lead to feelings of neglect, pushing some adolescents toward unhealthy relationships for emotional support.

Adolescents (NDV group)

In contrast, adolescent in the Non-Dating Violence (NDV) reported strong emotional involvement from his families. One participant mentioned, "We spend time together as a family, and my parents really care about what's happening in my life." This kind of emotional investment appeared to act as a protective shield against outside stress, including challenges in relationships.

Parents

Parents of adolescents in the DV group acknowledged a lack of emotional involvement. One parent admitted, "We've all been busy, so we don't spend as much time together as we should." On the other hand, parents of NDV adolescents highlighted regular family activities and meaningful interactions. One parent explained, "We always make time for family activities, but we also respect his decisions and personal space." This balanced approach seemed to nurture a strong emotional bond within the family.

6. Behavior Control

Adolescents (DV group)

Adolescent who experienced dating violence often described inconsistent behavioral control at home. One participant noted, "My parents either don't care what I do or they are rarely strict and don't enforce discipline at home." This lack of balanced expectations contributed to conflicts within the family and in their dating relationships.

Adolescents (NDV group)

In contrast, adolescent in the Non-Dating Violence (NDV) reported a more balanced approach to behavioral control. One adolescent said, "My parents are strict and disciplined, but it's to help me learn responsibility and respect." This structured environment provided clear rules and fair consequences, creating a sense of stability.

Parents

Parents of DV adolescents admitted challenges in maintaining consistent discipline. One parent shared, "We never clearly told him about rules or that religion forbids certain things because we assumed he already understood." This led to confusion and a lack of clear guidance. Meanwhile, parents of NDV adolescents reported a more consistent and balanced approach, often involving both parents in setting expectations. One parent explained, "We regularly remind him about our religious values, and he tends to stay home rather than go out with friends. He's always been obedient." This clear and fair behavioral control seemed to foster a more positive and respectful family environment.

4. DISCUSSION

The study aimed to understand the impact of family functioning on violent dating behavior among adolescents. Major findings on dating violence in adolescents, based on McMaster's theory of family functioning (14), include the following dimensions: 1) Problem-solving, 2) Communication, 3) Roles, 4) Affective Responsiveness, 5) Affective Involvement, and 6) Behavior Control. These dimensions collectively highlight the significant role that family functions in influencing adolescent dating violence behavior.

Problem-solving

Families dealing with dating violence often struggle with effective problem-solving, primarily due to parents' work-related preoccupations leading to emotional neglect of their children.⁽¹⁷⁾ This parental inattention can result in adolescents seeking alternative coping mechanisms, such as turning to spirituality or attempting to handle issues on their own, rather than involving their parents. Spirituality, in particular, has been identified as a crucial factor in healing from abuse and decreasing mental health symptoms.⁽¹⁸⁾ In contrast, families without dating violence typically demonstrate stronger problem-solving skills. These families are characterized by active parental involvement in conflict resolution and support provision.⁽¹⁹⁾ This engagement creates an environment conducive to open communication and mutual respect, which is essential for adolescents to feel secure and understood.⁽¹⁰⁾ The impact of problem-solving abilities extends beyond immediate family dynamics. Research has shown that higher negative problem-solving scores in mothers are

significantly associated with increased odds of their children exhibiting borderline or clinically significant levels of both internalizing and externalizing behaviors.⁽²⁰⁾ This underscores the importance of developing effective problem-solving skills within families to prevent and address adolescent dating violence. Furthermore, the lack of effective coping mechanisms in adolescents facing dating violence is often characterized by immaturity, lack of trust in their families, and an inability to recognize relationship violence.⁽²¹⁾ This highlights the need for educational programs and support systems to help adolescents develop healthier coping strategies and improve family communication.⁽²²⁾

Communication

Communication plays a pivotal role in shaping family dynamics and addressing adolescent dating violence. Research indicates that families experiencing dating violence often exhibit deficient communication patterns, characterized by parents prioritizing work over meaningful interactions with their children.^(10,18) This communication gap exacerbates the challenges faced by adolescents, leading them to seek alternative coping mechanisms or attempt to resolve issues independently.⁽²³⁾ In contrast, families without dating violence typically demonstrate stronger communication skills, fostering an open dialogue that encourages adolescents to share their thoughts and feelings.⁽²⁴⁾ This clear and direct communication style strengthens familial bonds and promotes a sense of trust and security. Studies have shown that effective family communication is associated with better adolescent well-being and improved ability to navigate relationship challenges.⁽²⁵⁾ Conversely, poor communication and negative problem-solving approaches in parents are linked to increased risk of behavioral issues in children.⁽²⁴⁾ These findings underscore the critical importance of fostering open and supportive communication within families as a means of preventing and addressing adolescent dating violence, highlighting the need for interventions that focus on enhancing family communication skills.

Roles

In family dating violence (DV) is present, adolescents often struggle with unclear family roles, leading to feelings of frustration and instability. This lack of consistency in expectations can push them to

seek validation and emotional support outside the family, sometimes resulting in unhealthy relationships.⁽¹⁹⁾ Research indicates that poorly defined family roles are associated with higher adolescent stress and a greater tendency to engage in risky behaviors.⁽²⁶⁾ In contrast, families without dating violence (NDV) typically establish well-defined roles that create a structured and supportive atmosphere. Clear and consistent roles promote emotional stability, enabling adolescents to build healthy relationship skills and decreasing the likelihood of violent interactions.⁽²⁴⁾ A stable home environment with clearly defined expectations serves as a protective factor against dating violence, offering adolescents a dependable framework for behavior.⁽²⁷⁾

Affective Responsiveness

In families experiencing dating violence, there is often a notable lack of emotional responsiveness from parents, leaving adolescents feeling isolated and unheard. This lack of consistent emotional support can contribute to increased risks of emotional dysregulation and subsequent behavioral issues, including dating violence.⁽²⁸⁾ Recent studies have highlighted that low levels of parental emotional responsiveness are associated with higher levels of adolescent emotion dysregulation and depressive symptoms.⁽²⁹⁾ Conversely, families that do not experience dating violence tend to exhibit high levels of emotional responsiveness. Parents in these families actively offer support and understanding during times of distress, nurturing strong parent-child bonds. This emotional attunement fosters a sense of belonging and security for adolescents, effectively addressing their emotional needs.^(2,10) Studies show that supportive parent-adolescent relationships characterized by openness and acceptance are linked to better adolescent adjustment, including lower aggression and depressive symptoms.⁽³⁰⁾ These findings underscore the importance of fostering emotionally responsive environments to mitigate risks associated with adolescent dating violence.

Affective Involvement

In families where parental involvement is minimal, individual pursuits often take precedence over family activities, leading to a lack of cohesion. This absence of engagement leaves adolescents yearning for emotional connection and support that they do not

receive.⁽¹⁹⁾ Recent research supports this finding, indicating that low parental involvement is associated with poorer mental health outcomes and increased risky behaviors in adolescents.⁽³¹⁾ Conversely, in families with high levels of parental involvement, parents actively participate in their children's lives and activities. This active engagement fosters a supportive environment where adolescents feel cared for and understood, enhancing their emotional well-being and sense of belonging.^(8,32) Studies have shown that supportive parent-adolescent relationships characterized by openness and emotional responsiveness are linked to better adolescent adjustment, including reduced aggression and depressive symptoms.⁽³⁰⁾ Additionally, family involvement in students' lives positively influences social-emotional development, further underscoring the importance of active parental engagement.⁽³³⁾

Behavior Control

In families where behavioral control is well-established, parents provide consistent guidance and supervision, helping adolescents navigate challenges effectively. Clear expectations and consistent monitoring contribute to adolescents feeling supported and guided in their decision-making.⁽³⁴⁾ Research indicates that such structured environments foster better behavioral outcomes and decision-making skills in adolescents.⁽²²⁾ Conversely, in families where parents struggle with monitoring and guiding their children's behavior, adolescents often feel unsupported and unsure. This lack of behavioral control can lead to increased risk-taking behaviors and a sense of instability, as parental involvement in daily life remains insufficient.⁽¹⁹⁾ Studies have shown that insufficient parental monitoring is associated with higher levels of adolescent behavioral issues, including increased susceptibility to peer pressure and risky behaviors.⁽³⁵⁾

In summary, the presence or absence of dating violence among adolescents correlates closely with various aspects of family function as McMaster's model.⁽¹⁶⁾ Families characterized by effective problem-solving, communication, good roles, responsive parenting, active involvement, and strong behavior control tend to foster a supportive environment where adolescents thrive emotionally and developmentally. Conversely, families struggling with dating violence often exhibit deficits in these areas, leading to emotional distancing and challenges in adolescent development.

However, this study has several limitations. Firstly, only two participants were included in the in-depth interviews, which limits the amount and diversity of data gathered. Secondly, the study only included male participants, which restricts the findings to a male perspective. Future research should aim to include a more diverse sample by exploring the perspectives of females and other family members involved in dating violence to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issue.

5. CONCLUSION

Adolescents who had experience violence this is because the lack of attention from parents is caused by parents being busy with their respective jobs so that communication or sharing rarely occurs between children and parents so that it can be concluded that there is family dysfunction. Meanwhile, adolescents who do not have dating violence experience live in a happy and harmonious family, the relationship between parents and children is very close so that it can mean better family functioning. Additionally, schools and communities should collaborate to establish Family Engagement Initiatives, focusing on building stronger family units. These initiatives can include activities such as family retreats, interactive parenting workshops, and school-based family counseling sessions. Schools can also provide resources like parental guides on fostering healthy communication and creating a supportive home environment. Encouraging parents to actively participate in school events and involve themselves in their children's education can further bridge the gap between busy work schedules and family time. By cultivating a culture that values family involvement, parents are more likely to recognize the importance of being emotionally present, which can lead to healthier adolescent development and stronger family bonds.

Ethics Approval

Ethical approval was granted by the research ethics committee of IIK STRADA Indonesia, Kediri (reference no. 000110/EC/KEPK/I/05/2023).

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Competing Interests

All the authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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Underlying Data

Derived data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author on request.

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