

Psychological Dynamics of Domestic Violence Victims: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

This study aims to understand the psychological dynamics experienced by victims of domestic violence through a qualitative approach. By focusing on the subjective experiences of victims, this study explores how domestic violence affects the mental and emotional state of victims, as well as the coping strategies they use to survive. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with a number of victims of domestic violence, which were then thematically analysed to identify common psychological patterns. The results showed that victims of domestic violence experience various forms of psychological trauma, including fear, depression, anxiety, and a sense of worthlessness. In addition, many victims also experience internal conflict between the desire to leave a harmful relationship and a sense of emotional or economic dependence on the perpetrator. The coping strategies used by victims vary, ranging from seeking social support to using defensive mechanisms such as denial and avoidance. This study highlights the complexity of the psychological experiences of victims of domestic violence and the need for intervention approaches that are more holistic and sensitive to the psychological needs of victims. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of more effective policies and services in supporting the recovery of victims of domestic violence.

Keywords: Psychological Dynamics, Domestic Violence, Victims, Indonesia

1. Introduction

Domestic violence (DV) is a complex and profound social problem, with far-reaching impacts on the physical, emotional and psychological well-being of victims. While much research has been done to understand the legal, social, and medical aspects of domestic violence, the psychological dynamics experienced by victims often receive less attention (Grunewald & Nath, 2002). In fact, this psychological aspect is a critical component that influences how victims respond to violence, make decisions, and live their daily lives.

Domestic violence includes not only physical abuse, but also emotional, verbal, and economic abuse, all of which can leave a deep mark on the victim. The psychological impact of this violence can vary from anxiety disorders, depression, to prolonged trauma, which often affects a victim's ability to move on from a violent situation and begin the recovery process (Nascimento et al., 2023). In addition, social and cultural pressures often exacerbate the situation, leaving victims feeling trapped and with no way out.

The qualitative approach in this research was chosen to delve deeper into the personal and subjective experiences of domestic violence victims, which often cannot be fully understood through quantitative approaches. By listening to the stories and reflections directly from victims, this research seeks to uncover the psychological dynamics underlying their experiences, including how they understand and cope with the violence they experience (Laraia et al., 2006).

The research also aims to explore factors that influence victims' psychological responses to domestic violence, such as family background, social support, and economic conditions. A deeper understanding of these dynamics is expected to make an important contribution to the development of intervention

strategies that are more effective and sensitive to the psychological needs of victims of domestic violence (Nguyen et al., 2016; Saud et al., 2021).

In this context, this research is important because it not only seeks to identify the psychological impact of domestic violence, but also to understand how victims manage and navigate the trauma they experience (Aycan et al., 2000). This research is expected to provide new insights for practitioners, policy makers, and the wider community in an effort to support the recovery of domestic violence victims and prevent further violence.

2. Method

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore the psychological dynamics experienced by victims of domestic violence. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore the subjective experiences and deep perceptions of the victims, which are difficult to express through quantitative methods. The focus of this research is on the personal experiences of victims, which can provide richer insights into how violence affects their mental and emotional state. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with a number of informants who are victims of domestic violence (Miles et al., 2019). The interviews were semi-structured to allow flexibility in the exploration of relevant topics, while ensuring that the predetermined main themes were covered. Informants were purposively selected, taking into account variations in their experiences and backgrounds, to obtain a comprehensive picture of the psychological dynamics associated with domestic violence.

Interviews were conducted in locations that were safe and comfortable for the informants, taking into account their privacy and confidentiality. Each interview was recorded with the informants' permission, and transcriptions were made for further analysis. In the data analysis process, the researcher used a thematic analysis approach to identify patterns that emerged from the data collected. The analysis steps included repeated reading of the interview transcripts, coding the data, and grouping similar codes into larger themes. Throughout the research process, the researcher maintained ethical sensitivity by ensuring that informants' participation was voluntary, and they could terminate their involvement at any time without consequences. Informants' identities were kept confidential to protect their privacy, and the data obtained was stored securely.

Data validity was strengthened through triangulation by using several additional data sources, such as field notes and related documents, as well as through discussions with fellow researchers (Patton, 1990; Reeves et al., 2008). The researcher also conducted member checking, which involved asking informants to review the interview results or interim findings, to ensure that the researcher's interpretations were in line with their experiences. Through this qualitative approach, this research is expected to provide a deeper understanding of how domestic violence affects victims' psychology, as well as the factors that influence their responses to violent situations. The results of this study will make an important contribution to the development of more appropriate and effective intervention strategies in supporting the recovery of victims of domestic violence.

3. Result

The results of this study reveal various psychological dynamics experienced by victims of domestic violence (DV). From the analysis of in-depth interviews with informants, several main themes emerged that describe the mental, emotional, and coping strategies used by victims in dealing with violence.

Deep Psychological Impact

Most victims reported experiencing serious psychological impacts as a result of the violence they experienced. These included deep-seated fear, excessive anxiety, depression, and feelings of worthlessness. Fear often comes in the form of constant worry about the violence recurring, even when the situation is considered safe. In addition, many victims experience sleep disturbances, loss of interest in daily activities, and a significant drop in self-confidence.

Internal Conflict and Dependency

Victims also described complex internal conflicts within themselves, especially when faced with the decision to leave an abusive relationship or stay. On the one hand, there is a strong desire to get out of a dangerous situation, but on the other hand, a sense of emotional or economic dependence on the perpetrator often makes them feel trapped. Some victims feel that they have no alternative or that they will suffer more if they leave their abuser.

Coping Strategies

In the face of violent situations, victims develop various coping strategies to survive. These strategies include seeking support from family, friends, or women's protection organisations, although this support is not always available or easily accessible. Some victims also use defensive mechanisms such as denial or avoidance to reduce the emotional impact of the violence they experience. This denial sometimes comes in the form of rationalising the perpetrator's actions or convincing oneself that the situation will improve.

Social Support and Isolation

The results showed that social support plays an important role in the victim's recovery process. Victims who have access to strong social support, both from family and community, tend to be better able to cope with the psychological impact of domestic violence. However, many victims reported experiencing social isolation, either due to the perpetrator's actions that deliberately cut them off from others or due to social stigma that discourages them from talking about what happened. This isolation worsens the psychological state of victims and reduces their ability to seek help.

Barriers to Accessing Assistance

Although some victims managed to get help from women's protection agencies or authorities, many reported difficulties in accessing these services. These barriers include lack of information about available services, fear of the perpetrator's reaction if they seek help, as well as mistrust of the effectiveness of the legal system in protecting them. Victims often feel that their reports will not be taken seriously or that the legal process will take a long time and not yield adequate results.

Influence of Cultural and Social Factors

Culture and social norms were also found to have a significant influence on how victims respond to violence. In some cases, traditional norms that household problems should be resolved internally made victims feel reluctant to seek outside help. In addition, social pressure to maintain a harmonious family image often led victims to choose not to report the violence they experienced.

The results of this study suggest that the psychological experiences of domestic violence victims are complex and influenced by a variety of factors, including the trauma experienced, available social support and cultural norms. The findings highlight the importance of a holistic and sensitive approach to victims' psychological needs in an effort to help them recover from the experience of violence and rebuild their lives.

4. Discussion

The discussion of this research focuses on the interpretation and analysis of the results obtained in relation to the psychological dynamics of victims of domestic violence (DV), as well as how these findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the issue.

The Complexity of the Psychological Impact of Domestic Violence

From the results of the study, it is clear that the psychological impact of domestic violence is much more complex than it may seem from the outside. The fear, anxiety, depression and feelings of worthlessness experienced by victims are not just temporary reactions to violence, but are long-term consequences that can affect all aspects of their lives. This is in line with trauma theory which states that repeated violence can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other psychological conditions (Swift et al., 2013). Deep feelings of fear, often accompanied by helplessness, reinforce a vicious cycle where victims feel trapped in an abusive relationship.

Internal Conflict and Dependency: A Trapping Dilemma

The research found that many victims experience a strong internal conflict between the desire to escape the destructive relationship and a sense of dependence on the abuser, both emotionally and economically. This conflict demonstrates how difficult it can be for victims to make firm decisions, especially when they are caught in unequal power dynamics (Cooke, 2003; Singh & Maseko, 2006). Emotional dependence is often exacerbated by the manipulation of the perpetrator, which creates a situation where the victim feels it is impossible to live without them. Economically, victims who do not have an independent source of income or who have children often feel they have no other choice but to stay in an abusive relationship.

Coping Strategies and Defence Mechanisms: Surviving the Violence

The coping strategies adopted by victims of domestic violence show how they attempt to survive in extremely difficult situations. The research found that many victims utilise defensive coping strategies, such as denial and avoidance, which while they may be effective in the short term, can actually exacerbate the long-term impact of the violence. These mechanisms allow victims to temporarily ignore or suppress negative feelings, but often prevent them from seeking more effective solutions or help (Cooke, 2003; Lines, 2008). On the other hand, social support has been shown to be one of the strongest protective factors, although access to it is often limited.

The Role of Social Support: A Double-Edged Sword

Social support proved to be an important element in the recovery of domestic violence victims, but the study also revealed that not all victims have adequate access to this support network. For victims who have strong social support, the psychological recovery process becomes easier as they feel listened to, valued and protected. However, for victims who experience social isolation, either because of stigma or because of the perpetrator's attempts to cut them off from others, this lack of social support can worsen their psychological condition and make it more difficult for them to get out of violent situations.

Barriers to Accessing Help: Suboptimal System

Findings on the barriers victims face in accessing help, such as fear of the perpetrator's reaction or mistrust of the legal system, highlight the need for improvements in the domestic violence victim protection system. Despite the existence of various protection institutions and laws, this research shows that victims still often feel neglected or inadequately protected (Haryanto et al., 2021). This suggests that in addition to more inclusive legal reforms, there needs to be improvements in community counselling and education to reduce stigma and increase understanding of victims' rights.

Influence of Cultural and Social Factors: Challenges in Resolving Domestic Violence

Cultural and social norms also play an important role in how victims respond to violence and seek help. The research found that in some cultures, there is strong pressure for victims to maintain an image of a harmonious family, even at the expense of their own well-being. Norms that regard domestic matters as private matters that should not be interfered with by outsiders often deter victims from reporting violence or seeking help (Bardach, 1977; Irmawan & Mashdurohatun, 2018). This suggests the need for changes in social attitudes and perceptions towards domestic violence, through more intensive public awareness and education campaigns.

Implications of Research Findings

This research provides important implications for policy makers, practitioners and the general public. The importance of a holistic and victim-centred approach in addressing domestic violence becomes increasingly clear, given the complexity of the psychological dynamics experienced by victims. Intervention strategies should take into account the psychological, emotional, and social aspects that affect victims, and provide comprehensive support, including psychosocial services, legal aid, and economic empowerment programmes. In addition, systemic reforms are needed to ensure that victims have easy and fair access to the protection and assistance they need.

Awareness of the challenges victims face in overcoming this violence also emphasises the need for stronger preventive efforts, including early education on healthy relationships, gender equality and human rights (Reimund, 2004). As such, the results of this study not only provide new insights into the

psychological dynamics of domestic violence victims, but also inform the development of more effective policies and practices to support victims and prevent further violence.

5. Conclusion

Mediation The conclusion of this study highlights the complexity of the psychological dynamics experienced by victims of domestic violence (DV). Findings suggest that victims experience profound psychological impacts, including fear, anxiety, depression, and feelings of worthlessness, which worsen their quality of life and hinder their ability to exit violent situations. The strong internal conflict between the desire to leave the destructive relationship and the sense of dependence on the perpetrator, both emotionally and economically, creates a difficult dilemma for victims to solve (Lord & Stein, 2008). Coping strategies used by victims are often defensive and not always effective in the long term, while social support has proven to be an important factor in helping victims face and cope with the impact of domestic violence (Yunitasari, 2020). However, barriers to accessing help, including mistrust of the legal system and social stigma, remain significant challenges that prevent victims from getting the protection they need. The research also underscores the important role of cultural and social factors in influencing victims' responses to violence, and the need for a holistic, victim-centred approach to addressing domestic violence. Protection system reforms, improved public education, and stronger preventive efforts are needed to support victims' recovery and prevent further violence. As such, this research makes an important contribution to the development of more effective policies and practices in supporting victims of domestic violence and increasing public awareness of the issue.

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