

Mental Health of University Students Who Are Victims of Domestic Violence: The Role of Past Trauma

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Abstract

Domestic violence is a serious issue within families that not only has a physical impact on victims but also leaves deep psychological scars. This study aims to determine the effect of past trauma on the mental health of college student victims of domestic violence. This is a quantitative causal study. The subjects are 100 students from Universitas Muhammadiyah Purworejo. The sampling technique used is non-probability sampling with a purposive sampling method. The research data was obtained using a questionnaire that had been tested for validity and reliability. The result of the study show that past trauma has a negative effect on the mental health of college student domestic violence a significance level of $0.00 < 0.05$. With a constant value (a) of 51.001 and coefficient value (b) of -0.139, it can be said that for every 1% increase in past trauma (X), mental health (Y), will decrease by -0.139. It can be concluded that the higher the past trauma, the lower the mental health level of college students who are victims of domestic violence.

Keywords: Past trauma, Mental health, Domestic violence

Abstrak

KDRT yang dikenal dengan istilahnya sebagai Kekerasan dalam rumah tangga menjadi sebuah isu yang krusial dalam kehidupan keluarga yang tidak hanya berdampak pada fisik korban, tetapi juga meninggalkan luka psikologis yang mendalam. Studi ini dirancang untuk menganalisis dampak trauma masa lalu mengenai kesehatan mental kepada mahasiswa korban KDRT. Pendekatan riset yang diterapkan adalah kuantitatif kausalitas. Partisipan dalam studi ini melibatkan 100 mahasiswa dari Universitas Muhammadiyah Purworejo. Metode penentuan sampelnya memakai teknik non-probability sampling dengan pendekatan purposive sampling. Informasi riset dihimpun melalui instrumen angket (kuesioner) yang telah terverifikasi validitas dan reliabilitasnya. Temuan dari penelitian ini mengindikasikan bahwasanya trauma masa lalu memberikan pengaruh negatif terhadap kesehatan mental pada mahasiswa korban KDRT dengan tingkat signifikan $0,00 < 0,05$. Nilai a (*constant*) sebesar 51.001 sedangkan nilai b (koefisien) sebesar -0,139 maka bisa diartikan bahwasanya tiap kenaikan 1% pada tingkatan trauma masa lalu (X), maka kesehatan mental (Y) akan mengalami penurunan sebanyak -0,139. Dapat disimpulkan semakin tinggi trauma masa lalu maka semakin menurun tingkat kesehatan mental mahasiswa korban kekerasan dalam rumah tangga (KDRT).

Kata kunci : Trauma masa lalu, Kesehatan mental, Korban KDRT.

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Introduction

Domestic violence, commonly referred to as Domestic Violence (DV), is defined as acts committed against individuals most commonly women that result in physical, psychological, sexual suffering, or neglect within the household context. According to the World Health Organization (2020), unresolved childhood trauma often triggers a range of psychological problems, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Past trauma resulting from domestic violence has been shown to increase vulnerability to various mental health disorders. Van der Kolk (2020) emphasizes that trauma experienced during childhood, including exposure to domestic violence, can alter brain structure and function, particularly in emotional regulation and stress response systems. Similarly, research by Alisic et al. (2020) revealed that university students who experienced childhood trauma are more likely to face health problems and difficulties in social adaptation. These impacts may lead to decreased academic motivation, social withdrawal, and an increased risk of academic dropout.

National data further highlight the urgency of this issue. Komnas Perempuan (2024) reported hundreds of thousands of domestic violence cases annually, with women constituting the majority of victims, although men are also affected. In addition, a study by Rezkyawan (2023) documented 504 cases of domestic violence, including physical, psychological, sexual abuse, and neglect. These high figures indicate that domestic violence remains a significant social problem in Indonesia and poses the risk of intergenerational consequences.

The university period represents a critical phase in individual development, during which students are expected to develop independence, adapt to academic demands, and establish healthy social relationships (Koli et al., 2022). Students who carry unresolved trauma from their family environments tend to encounter substantial obstacles during this process. Research by Smith et al. (2021) indicates that students with a history of domestic violence are more vulnerable to severe depression, social anxiety, and difficulties in forming supportive interpersonal relationships.

Although several studies have examined the impact of domestic violence, most research focuses on adult victims or women as direct victims. Studies that specifically investigate university students who are survivors of domestic violence since childhood or adolescence remain limited, particularly in Indonesia. University students are at a developmental stage characterized by high academic and social demands, making past trauma a critical factor that may affect educational attainment and overall quality of life (Fergusson et al., 2021).

Therefore, this study aims to further explore how past trauma influences the mental health of university students, with particular attention to those who have experienced domestic violence. The hypothesis of this study posits a negative effect of past trauma on mental health among university students who are victims of domestic violence, such that higher levels of past trauma are associated with poorer mental health. By understanding and addressing the impact of past trauma, it is expected that students can achieve their full potential in both academic performance and personal well-being.

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Research Method

This study employed a quantitative research design with a causal approach to examine the effect of past trauma on mental health among university students who are victims of domestic violence. The research was conducted at Universitas Muhammadiyah Purworejo. The study population comprised all university students who are victims of domestic violence. Because the total population size was not identified, the sample size was determined using the Lemeshow formula (1997) as follows:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p(1-p)}{d^2} = \frac{1,960^2 \cdot (0,5)(1-0,5)}{0,1^2} = \frac{3,8416 \cdot (0,25)}{0,01} = 96,04$$

Explanation

Where:

n = required sample size

Z = standard normal distribution value at a 5% significance level (1.96)

p = proportion of the population that is not identified (0.5)

d = margin of error (10%)

The calculated sample size was 96.04, which was rounded up to 100 respondents. The inclusion criteria consisted of active students of Universitas Muhammadiyah Purworejo from the 2021–2024 cohorts, aged 18–24 years, both male and female, who had experienced domestic violence related trauma. The sampling procedure applied non-probability sampling using a purposive sampling approach. Data were collected using a questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. Two instruments were employed in this study: a past trauma scale and a mental health scale. The past trauma scale was adopted and adapted from the study conducted by Damayanti et al. (2018), which was originally developed by Van der Kolk (1991). This scale consists of two dimensions—resources and other trauma—with a total of 38 items. Response options were provided on a four-point scale: Never, Rarely, Sometimes, and Often.

The mental health scale was adopted from the study conducted by Tangke (2023) and comprises four aspects: emotional well-being, psychological well-being, social well-being, and absence of mental illness, with a total of 16 items. Response options included Never, Sometimes, Often, and Always. Validity testing was conducted to assess the accuracy and precision of the measurement instruments and to ensure the validity of the questionnaires. The validity analysis was performed using SPSS for Windows version 16.0. All items from both scales showed item–total correlation coefficients greater than 0.30, indicating that all items were valid.

Reliability testing was carried out to determine the consistency and stability of the instruments over time. An instrument is considered reliable if individual responses demonstrate consistency and if the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient exceeds 0.70. The results of the reliability testing for the past trauma scale and the mental health scale are presented in Table 1 below.

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Table 1. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Criterion	Interpretation
Past Trauma	0.964	> 0.70	Reliable
Mental Health	0.844	> 0.70	Reliable

Based on the reliability test results shown in Table 1, the Cronbach's Alpha value for the past trauma scale was 0.964, which exceeds the established standard (> 0.70). Therefore, the past trauma instrument can be considered reliable. Similarly, the Cronbach's Alpha value for the mental health scale was 0.844, also exceeding the reliability threshold (> 0.70), indicating that the mental health instrument is reliable.

Results

The respondents in this study were university students who had experienced past trauma as victims of domestic violence (DV) perpetrated by their parents. The sample consisted of 100 respondents, including 69 female participants (69%) and 31 male participants (31%). Regarding the types of domestic violence experienced, 33 respondents (33%) reported experiencing physical abuse, 32 respondents (32%) experienced psychological abuse, 5 respondents (5%) experienced sexual abuse, 31 respondents (31%) experienced neglect, and 19 respondents (19%) reported experiencing more than one type of abuse. All respondents were within the age range of 18–24 years.

Table 2. Normality Test

		Unstandardized Residual
N		100
Normal Parameters ^a	Mean	.0000000
	Std. Deviation	6.81736118
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.057
	Positive	.055
	Negative	-.057
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		.570
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.902

a. Test distribution is Normal.

Based on the findings presented in Table 2, the normality test using the One-Sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov Test yielded an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.902, which exceeds the significance threshold of 0.05. This result indicates that the data are normally distributed.

Table 3. Linearity Test ANOVA Table

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Mental Health * Past Trauma					
Between Groups (Combined)	3543.583	53	66.860	1.534	.070
Linearity	947.835	1	947.835	21.741	.000
Deviation from Linearity	2595.748	52	49.918	1.145	.321
Within Groups	2005.417	46	43.596		
Total	5549.000	99			

Based on Table 3, the significance value for Deviation from Linearity is 0.321, which is greater than 0.05. This indicates that there is a linear relationship between past trauma (X) and mental health (Y).

Table 4. Correlation Test Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.413 ^a	.171	.162	6.852

^aPredictors: (Constant), Past Trauma

The results presented in Table 4 show a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.413, indicating a moderate relationship between the variables. The coefficient of determination (R^2) is 0.171, meaning that 17.1% of the variance in mental health (Y) can be explained by past trauma (X). The remaining 82.9% is influenced by other factors not examined in this study, such as social support, resilience (adaptive capacity), and coping strategies.

Table 5. Hypothesis Testing Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	51.001	3.256	—	15.665	.000
Past Trauma	-0.139	0.031	-0.413	-4.493	.000

Dependent Variable: Mental Health

As shown in Table 5, the significance value for the past trauma variable is 0.000, which is less than 0.05, indicating a statistically significant effect. The constant value (a) is 51.001, while the regression coefficient (b) is -0.139. This indicates that for every 1-unit increase in past trauma (X), mental health (Y) decreases by 0.139 units. Furthermore, the calculated t-value (-4.493) exceeds the t-table value (1.987), leading to the rejection of H_0 and acceptance of H_1 . This confirms that past trauma has a significant effect on mental health. The findings demonstrate that past trauma exerts a negative influence on the mental health of university students who are victims of domestic violence.

Thus, students with more severe traumatic experiences tend to experience a more rapid decline in mental health, including increased anxiety symptoms, irritability, and difficulties in social interaction. Although the regression coefficient (-0.139) appears relatively small, the cumulative impact of multiple traumatic experiences can substantially reduce students' overall quality of life. Berdasarkan temuan dari tabulasi 19. Pada pemeriksaan normalitas yang menerapkan One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test, didapatkan besaran Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) sejumlah 0,902 atau melampaui taraf Sig. 0,05, yang mengartikan bahwasanya data terdistribusi secara normal.

Discussion

The experience of a child who becomes a survivor of domestic violence is inherently traumatic, as the perpetrator originates from the closest environment namely, the family. The family should serve as a source of safety and protection; however, when violence occurs within the household, it instead becomes a source of fear, anxiety, and anger (Ningsih et al., 2024).

The findings of this study indicate that past trauma has a negative and significant effect on the mental health of university students who are victims of domestic violence. These results are consistent with previous studies showing that trauma resulting from family violence is associated with increased anxiety, fear, psychological distress, and low self-esteem (Molina et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, this study also reveals that some students still demonstrate moderate levels of mental health, suggesting the presence of protective factors that mitigate the negative effects of trauma. Such factors include social support, peer relationships, and a supportive campus environment. These findings align with those of Boyraz et al. (2019), who emphasized that adaptive coping strategies can help strengthen students' psychological resilience.

Furthermore, this study demonstrates an inverse relationship between past trauma and mental health, meaning that the more severe the trauma experienced, the poorer the individual's mental health condition. This finding is consistent with the definition provided by the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS, 2020), which characterizes PTSD as a disorder marked by intrusive symptoms, avoidance behaviors, negative changes in emotions and cognition, and heightened arousal following exposure to traumatic events. ISTSS (2020) also highlights the concept of complex PTSD, which includes difficulties in emotional regulation, interpersonal relationships, and negative self-concept. However, in this study, several students who were victims of domestic violence still exhibited moderate levels of mental health.

This condition indicates the presence of protective mechanisms, such as social support, a conducive campus environment, and individual coping capacities. These findings are consistent with previous research showing that strong social support and effective coping strategies can help students manage the impact of past trauma (Wang et al., 2022). Students with access to strong support systems whether from peers, family members, or campus counselors tend to be more capable of coping with stress and trauma-related symptoms.

Therefore, the implications of this study underscore the importance of providing adequate attention and support to students with a history of domestic violence related trauma, as such experiences significantly affect their mental health. Counseling programs specifically designed to address trauma-related issues are expected to contribute positively to students' psychological well-being. Nonetheless, further research incorporating additional relevant variables is needed to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the mental health of university students who are survivors of domestic violence.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that past trauma has a significant negative impact on the mental health of university students who are victims of domestic violence, as evidenced by an inverse relationship higher levels of past trauma are associated with lower levels of mental health. However, protective factors such as social support, a supportive campus environment, and adaptive coping strategies can help reduce the negative effects of trauma. This study highlights the importance of viewing the impact of trauma holistically by considering both risk and protective factors.

It is recommended that universities develop trauma-sensitive counseling services and implement peer-support programs to foster a safe and supportive social environment. Students are encouraged not to hesitate in seeking help, either through campus counseling services or mental health professionals such as psychologists and psychiatrists outside the university setting. Parents are also advised to create a family environment that is warm, supportive, and free from violence so that children feel safe, protected, and valued. Finally, future researchers are encouraged to include additional variables such as resilience, attachment, or spiritual support to further explore the relationship between past trauma and mental health, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the mental health of university students who are survivors of domestic violence.

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