A Case Study on Aggressive Behavior in Early Childhood from the Perspective of Parenting Styles and Social Environment

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ABSTRACT
This study aims to describe aggressive behavior and emotional regulation in early childhood as viewed from parenting styles and the child's social environment. The research employed a qualitative method with a case study approach, utilizing observation, interviews, and documentation techniques. The findings indicate that the child exhibited both verbal and physical aggression, which were influenced by authoritarian parenting practices and a less supportive social environment. The child's emotional regulation skills were found to be low, as evidenced by difficulties in expressing and controlling emotions. This study emphasizes the importance of responsive parenting and a positive social environment in reducing aggressive behavior and enhancing emotional regulation abilities in early childhood.
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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood, defined as the period between 0 and 6 years of age, represents a foundational stage in human development that significantly shapes later behavioral, emotional, and social trajectories. During this phase, children experience rapid growth across multiple developmental domains, including physical, cognitive, language, social, and emotional aspects. Hurlock (1978) describes early childhood as a critical period for the formation of basic behavior patterns and emotional response styles that influence later personality development. Complementing this view, Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes that development occurs through social interaction within cultural contexts, positioning children as active constructors of meaning through engagement with their environment. These perspectives highlight that early childhood development is inseparable from relational and environmental influences that shape behavioral outcomes.

Social-emotional development constitutes a central component of early childhood growth, as it underlies children's ability to regulate emotions, manage impulses, and

establish positive peer relationships. Hurlock (1980) notes that children's capacity to adapt to social expectations depends heavily on their level of emotional maturity and social competence. When emotional regulation skills are underdeveloped, children may encounter challenges in managing frustration, anger, or disappointment. Such difficulties can manifest in maladaptive behavioral responses, particularly in social contexts that demand cooperation and self control (Santrock, 2018).

One behavioral manifestation frequently associated with social-emotional regulation difficulties is aggressive behavior. In early childhood, aggression may appear in physical forms such as hitting, kicking, or pushing, as well as in verbal expressions including shouting or using harsh language. Hurlock (1978) explains that aggressive responses often emerge when children lack adequate strategies to express negative emotions in socially acceptable ways. From a developmental psychology perspective, aggressive behavior in young children may reflect limited emotional vocabulary, immature impulse control, and insufficient coping strategies for resolving interpersonal conflict (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Parenting style constitutes one of the primary contextual factors influencing children's behavioral development. Baumrind (1967, 1991) classifies parenting into three major styles: authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative. Authoritarian parenting tends to emphasize rigid control and limited emotional expression, while permissive parenting is characterized by high warmth but low behavioral regulation. Both patterns may hinder the development of self-regulation when not balanced with appropriate structure and responsiveness. In contrast, authoritative parenting, which combines warmth with consistent boundaries, has been associated with more adaptive emotional and social outcomes (Santrock, 2018). Inconsistent discipline, overprotection, or lack of clear behavioral limits may reduce children's frustration tolerance and increase the likelihood of aggressive reactions when expectations are not met.

Beyond family influences, the broader social environment also plays a significant role in shaping early childhood behavior. Vygotsky (1978) underscores the importance of social interaction in internalizing behavioral norms, while Bronfenbrenner (1979), through ecological systems theory, explains that child development is influenced by multiple interconnected environmental systems, including family, school, peers, and neighborhood contexts. Environmental conditions such as overcrowding, limited safe play areas, and exposure to harsh interaction patterns may contribute to increased emotional stress and reinforce maladaptive coping strategies, including aggression. These environmental dynamics interact with parenting practices in shaping children's behavioral responses.

Previous studies have demonstrated associations between parenting styles and aggressive behavior in children, indicating that permissive and authoritarian patterns are more frequently linked to externalizing behaviors (Baumrind, 1991; Santrock, 2018). Research grounded in ecological theory also confirms that environmental stressors, including socioeconomic density and peer interaction patterns, contribute to behavioral regulation challenges (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). However, much of the existing research relies on quantitative survey designs that examine variables independently. There remains

a need for in depth case study research that holistically explores how parenting styles and social environments interact simultaneously in shaping aggressive behavior within specific early childhood contexts.

Observational findings in the present study focus on a five year old child identified as QS, who exhibited spontaneous aggressive behaviors in both physical and verbal forms within a kindergarten setting. The child frequently hit and kicked peers when personal desires were unmet and used elevated or harsh verbal expressions during conflicts. These behaviors suggest difficulties in emotional regulation and frustration tolerance. Preliminary contextual information indicated patterns of excessive attention and limited boundary setting within the family, combined with a densely populated residential environment characterized by limited structured play spaces.

Based on these considerations, the research question guiding this study is: How do parenting styles and the social environment interact in shaping aggressive behavior in early childhood? The objective of this study is to analyze aggressive behavior in a young child through a case study approach that integrates family parenting patterns and environmental influences within a unified analytical framework.

This research contributes to the field of early childhood education and developmental psychology by offering a contextualized and holistic examination of aggressive behavior from both micro level family dynamics and broader ecological perspectives. By employing a qualitative case study design, this study provides nuanced insight into the interaction between parenting practices and social environmental conditions, thereby enriching understanding beyond variable based quantitative approaches and supporting the development of more comprehensive intervention strategies for early childhood behavioral challenges.

METHOD
Research Design
This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design. Qualitative research aims to understand social phenomena from the participants' perspectives through in depth exploration of real life contexts (Creswell, 2014). It emphasizes the interpretation of meaning behind observable behaviors and social interactions rather than numerical measurement. Bogdan and Taylor, as cited in Moleong (2017), state that qualitative research generates descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words derived from observed individuals and behaviors.

The case study method was selected because it allows for a holistic and contextual analysis of a specific phenomenon within its natural setting. Yin (2018) defines a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, particularly when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. This design was considered appropriate to explore aggressive behavior in early childhood as it relates to parenting styles and social environmental influences within a specific setting. In line with Stake (1995), the case study approach enables in depth examination of processes, dynamics, and contextual factors shaping individual behavior.

Subjects / Population and Sample

The research was conducted at TK Rizkia, located in Bale Endah District, Bandung Regency, specifically in Class A. The study took place in November 2025. The primary subject of this research was a five year old child identified by the initials QS, selected due to the presence of observable aggressive behaviors consistent with the research focus.

The subject was chosen using purposive sampling. Sugiyono (2017) explains that purposive sampling involves selecting participants based on specific criteria to ensure the relevance and depth of the data collected. QS was selected because she exhibited recurrent physical and verbal aggressive behaviors in classroom interactions.

Supporting informants included the child's parents, classroom teacher, and selected peers. These informants were involved to provide complementary information regarding parenting practices, behavioral patterns, and social interactions in both home and school environments.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected using observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to directly record instances of aggressive behavior and patterns of social interaction within the classroom setting. According to Spradley (2007), observation allows researchers to examine social phenomena in natural contexts and obtain authentic behavioral data. The observation focused on identifying forms of aggression, triggers of behavior, interaction patterns with peers, and teacher responses.

Semi structured interviews were conducted with the child's mother, classroom teacher, and relevant informants. Moleong (2017) describes interviews as purposeful conversations intended to gather information, experiences, and interpretations from participants. The interviews explored parenting practices, disciplinary approaches, emotional communication patterns at home, and perceptions of the child's social behavior.

Documentation was used to complement observational and interview data. Sugiyono (2017) notes that documentation includes written records, photographs, and institutional archives that support research findings. In this study, documentation included school records, anecdotal notes, and relevant background information related to the child's developmental and social context.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman (2014), which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During data reduction, raw data from observations, interviews, and documentation were selected, coded, and categorized according to themes related to aggressive behavior, parenting styles, and environmental influences.

The data display stage involved organizing the categorized data into narrative descriptions and thematic matrices to identify patterns and relationships between variables. Conclusion drawing was conducted continuously throughout the research process, allowing emerging findings to be refined and verified as new data were obtained.

To enhance data credibility, triangulation techniques were applied. Denzin (1978) explains that triangulation involves the use of multiple data sources or methods to ensure consistency and validity. In this study, both source triangulation, involving parents, teachers, and peers, and technique triangulation, involving observation, interviews, and documentation, were implemented to strengthen the reliability and trustworthiness of the findings.

Table 1. Instrument Grid for Aggressive Behavior in Early Childhood

Variable	Sub-Variable	Indicators
Aggressive Behavior in Children	Physical Aggression	Hitting, kicking, throwing objects
	Verbal Aggression	Shouting, teasing, using harsh language
	Behavioral Triggers	Conflict, competition over toys, unmet desires
	Environmental Responses	Reactions from peers, teachers, and parents

FINDING AND DISCUSSION
Results
Main Results

The findings are presented according to the research objectives concerning parenting styles, social environment, and manifestations of aggressive behavior in early childhood. The data below are derived from interviews, observations, and documentation. The presentation focuses strictly on factual findings without interpretation.

1. Parenting Style

Based on interviews with the parents, the parenting style applied to QS tends to be authoritarian. The father functions as the primary authority figure in the household and is perceived as the most feared by the child. The mother often waits for direction from the father before responding to the child's behavior.

Reprimands or advice delivered by the mother are frequently ignored by QS. When mistakes occur, mild physical punishment such as pinching or hitting the child's hand is applied. Emotional discussions or structured conversations regarding feelings are rarely conducted at home.

2. Family Position and Fulfillment of Desires

QS is the first child and the first grandchild on both the paternal and maternal sides. Interviews indicate that many of the child's requests are fulfilled by extended family members. From early childhood, limits and consistent boundaries were not firmly established. Parents and relatives reported that the child often expects immediate fulfillment of desires. Situations involving delay or refusal frequently result in resistance behaviors.

3. Social Environment

QS resides in a garment production area characterized by dense activity, frequent noise, and predominantly adult interactions. Observational data indicate that communication patterns in the surrounding environment are often loud and direct.

The child is regularly exposed to emotionally expressive interactions within the neighborhood. During informal interactions with neighbors and relatives, QS was observed using a loud tone of voice, dominant gestures, and firm body movements when requesting something.

4. Aggressive Behavior at School

Classroom observations show that QS is frequently involved in peer conflicts. The child demonstrates difficulty waiting for turns, cooperating in group activities, and following collective rules.

When personal desires are not fulfilled, QS responds impulsively. The child is capable of complying with teacher instructions when direct and intensive supervision is provided. However, such compliance is temporary and inconsistent.

Aggressive behaviors observed include:

a) Taking peers' belongings without permission
b) Hitting peers
c) Pushing peers
d) Shouting in a loud tone
e) Interrupting ongoing peer activities

These behaviors occur across multiple peer interactions rather than targeting a single individual. Aggression most frequently appears in situations involving refusal, competition over objects, or lack of attention.

Data Visualization

Table 1. Summary of Parenting Characteristics

Aspect Observed	Findings
Primary authority figure	Father
Response pattern	Mother waits for father's instruction
Discipline method	Mild physical punishment (pinching, hitting hand)
Emotional communication	Limited discussion of emotions
Child response to mother's reprimand	Frequently ignored

Table 2. Observed Forms of Aggressive Behavior at School

Type of Aggression	Specific Behavior Observed	Frequency Pattern
Physical	Hitting peers	Recurrent

Physical	Pushing peers	Recurrent
Physical	Seizing objects	Recurrent
Verbal	Shouting loudly	Recurrent
Behavioral	Refusal to wait turn	Frequent

Table 3. Environmental Characteristics

Environment	Observed Characteristics
Home	Authoritarian control, mild physical discipline
Extended family	High fulfillment of child's requests
Neighborhood	Noisy garment production area, loud adult interactions
School	Multiple peer conflicts, temporary compliance with supervision

These results describe the documented patterns of parenting practices, environmental conditions, and aggressive behaviors demonstrated by QS during the period of study.

DISCUSSION
Interpretation of Findings

The findings indicate that QS's aggressive behavior is closely associated with the authoritarian parenting style implemented at home. Parenting practices characterized by strict control, obedience demands, and limited emotional dialogue appear to shape the child's behavioral responses. The father's role as the dominant authority figure, combined with the mother's passive caregiving position, creates a pattern in which compliance is driven primarily by fear rather than internal understanding of rules.

When the child transitions into the school environment, where direct parental authority is absent, patterns of dominance and control are expressed through aggressive interactions with peers. The data also show that inconsistency in rule enforcement, particularly the coexistence of mild physical punishment and frequent fulfillment of the child's desires, contributes to unstable behavioral boundaries. Situations involving rejection or delayed gratification at school frequently trigger impulsive responses.

In addition, the surrounding social environment plays a significant role. Exposure to loud communication styles and emotionally expressive adult interactions in the residential area provides behavioral models that are observable and repeatable. These observed patterns are reflected in the child's verbal tone, physical gestures, and conflict responses at school.

The findings also reveal limited emotional regulation capacity. QS demonstrates difficulty recognizing and verbally expressing emotions, often relying instead on physical actions such as hitting, pushing, and shouting. Although temporary compliance is observed when teachers provide direct supervision, behavioral change is not sustained.

Relationship to Literature

These findings align with the parenting typology proposed by Diana Baumrind (1971), who describes authoritarian parenting as emphasizing control and obedience without reciprocal emotional communication. Research within Baumrind's framework indicates that such parenting styles are associated with lower self regulation and higher externalizing behaviors in children.

The influence of the social environment observed in this study is consistent with the sociocultural theory of Lev Vygotsky (1978), which emphasizes that children's development is shaped through social interaction and environmental modeling. The imitation of communication patterns from the surrounding community reflects the internalization of socially observed behaviors.

Furthermore, the findings correspond with the perspective of William S. Grolnick and Mary Farkas (2002), who argue that emotional regulation develops optimally when children receive consistent guidance, emotional support, and opportunities for reflective dialogue. The limited emotional coaching identified in this case parallels their explanation regarding underdeveloped regulatory skills.

Overall, the present study supports previous theoretical and empirical research indicating that authoritarian parenting, inconsistent boundary setting, and limited emotional scaffolding are associated with aggressive behavioral tendencies in early childhood.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to a single case within one educational setting. The use of a case study design restricts the generalizability of the findings to broader populations.

Data were collected within a limited time frame, which may not fully capture long term behavioral patterns. Additionally, reliance on interview data introduces the possibility of subjective reporting from parents and teachers. Although triangulation was applied, observational scope was confined to specific classroom contexts.

Environmental factors beyond those directly observed, such as media exposure or peer dynamics outside school hours, were not extensively examined. These factors may also contribute to behavioral outcomes.

Implications

The findings highlight the importance of balanced and consistent parenting practices that combine clear boundaries with emotional responsiveness. Parenting approaches that encourage two way communication and emotional acknowledgment may support the development of adaptive emotional regulation.

In the school context, structured social emotional learning programs, guided conflict resolution activities, and role play strategies may assist children in developing non aggressive coping mechanisms.

For future research, studies involving multiple cases or comparative designs across different parenting styles and social environments would provide broader insight.

Longitudinal research may also clarify how early aggressive patterns evolve over time and how consistent intervention influences behavioral outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the aggressive behavior exhibited by QS emerges from the interaction between authoritarian parenting practices and a less supportive social environment. Parenting characterized by strong control, limited emotional dialogue, and inconsistent rule implementation contributes to low frustration tolerance and underdeveloped emotional regulation skills. The frequent fulfillment of the child's desires due to her status as the first child and first grandchild further reinforces expectations of immediate gratification.

These internal family dynamics are strengthened by environmental factors, including exposure to harsh communication patterns within the surrounding community and limited structured social emotional learning opportunities at school. As a result, emotions are predominantly expressed through physical and verbal aggression rather than adaptive communication strategies.

Addressing aggressive behavior in early childhood therefore requires the implementation of responsive democratic parenting practices that balance clear boundaries with emotional support. In addition, consistent and supportive environmental conditions, both at home and at school, are necessary to facilitate the optimal development of children's emotional regulation abilities.

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