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# Parenting Stress and Styles as Predictors of Verbal Aggression in Early Childhood: A Study in Pemalang Kindergartens

Dwi Uni Haryanti<sup>1</sup>, Liftiah Liftiah<sup>2</sup>, Diana<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Early Childhood Education, Graduate Program, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

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## Correspondence to

Dwi Uni Haryanti, Early Childhood Education, Graduate Program, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

## e-mail:

[uniharyanti76@students.u nes.ac.id](mailto:uniharyanti76@students.u nes.ac.id)

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## Abstract

Verbal aggression in early childhood, often characterised by behaviours such as mocking, cursing, and insulting, is a growing concern influenced by parenting stress and parenting styles. This study aims to analyse the relationship between parenting stress and parenting styles and their effects on verbal aggression in young children. A quantitative descriptive approach was employed, involving 125 parents from seven kindergartens in Pemalang Regency. Data collection utilised validated questionnaires, and the sample was determined through proportional sampling. The analysis included descriptive statistics, partial significance testing (T-test), and linear regression. The findings reveal that parenting stress has a significant effect on verbal aggression, with a significance value of 0.002 ( $< 0.050$ ). Parenting style was also shown to significantly influence verbal aggression, with a significance value of 0.000 ( $< 0.050$ ). Collectively, these variables were found to substantially contribute to the level of verbal aggression in early childhood. This research underscores the importance of addressing parenting stress and promoting positive parenting styles to mitigate verbal aggression in young children. Limitations include focusing solely on parenting variables and the absence of longitudinal analysis. Future research should explore additional contributing factors, such as socioeconomic status and child temperament, to develop comprehensive intervention strategies.

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## Introduction

There is currently a growing phenomenon of verbal aggression among early childhood children, influenced by parental stress and parenting styles. Parents play a significant role in shaping children's tendencies toward aggression or aggressive behaviour. Aggression is behaviour aimed at disturbing or harming oneself or others (Br Sihombing & Ambarita, 2023). It can be categorised into four types: physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility. Physical aggression involves attacking others using body parts or objects, often resulting in bodily harm to the victim. Verbal aggression, on the other hand, refers to behaviours such as threats or rejections that cause psychological harm to the victim (Pratiwi et al., 2018). Anger is characterised as an emotional response involving frustration and irritation, while hostility refers to implicit verbal behaviour, often expressed as suspicion toward others as a means of self-protection from perceived threats (Gallagher & Ashford, 2016; Hardoni et al., 2019).

Aggression in children is associated with several long-term adverse outcomes, including anxiety disorders, depression, academic challenges, juvenile delinquency, and even criminal behaviour (Pratiwi et al., 2018). Children who exhibit high levels of aggression often display low warmth and concern for others, a heightened propensity for anger, and an increased likelihood of experiencing anxiety and depression (Fung et al., 2015; Tremblay, 2010; Webster-Stratton et al., 2008). Verbal aggression is the most prevalent form of aggressive behaviour in early childhood. It is commonly manifested through behaviours such as expressing anger, engaging in arguments, public criticism, mocking, cursing, insulting, blaming, laughing at others, or making malicious accusations. Other forms of verbal aggression include using harsh language

to attack others, shouting, forcing, or intimidating peers through gestures or facial expressions (Saman & Latif, 2024).

Parental stress and parenting styles have been identified as critical contributors to verbal aggression in children (Maghfiroh & Wijayanti, 2021a; Puji Rahayu, 2018a). In Indonesia, the incidence of violence related to children's verbal aggression has shown a significant increase, often linked to the stress experienced by their caregivers (Anggraini & Asi, 2022). Parental stress and ineffective parenting styles often arise when parents face difficulties in meeting the demands of parenthood, which subsequently impacts children's behaviour, well-being, and adaptability (Ayu Ratnasari, 2017).

Parental influence is critical in shaping a child's developmental trajectory. Closest family members, particularly parents, play a central role in determining parenting styles and practices that shape a child's development into adulthood (Albaiz & Ernest, 2021). Parenting involves nurturing, protection, attention, and imparting values to support a child's growth from infancy to adulthood (Devi & Ichsan, 2022; Dhiu & Fono, 2022). Specifically, parental upbringing has significantly influenced a child's tendency toward aggressive behaviours (Hastuti, 2015).

According to data from the Social Service Office of Pemalang Regency, cases of violence against women and children have been increasing. Between 2017 and 2021, 384 cases were reported, with 67 cases in 2017, 57 cases in 2018, 69 cases in 2019, 89 cases in 2020, and 102 cases in 2021. However, in 2022, there was a 60% decline, with only 41 cases reported (Widodo et al., 2022). The Head of the Family Planning, Women Empowerment, and Child Protection Division (KBPPPA) at the Pemalang Social Service Office attributed this rise in violence to complex societal challenges, including economic issues exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Observations and interviews conducted with parents of young children in Pemalang schools revealed that working and non-working parents experience stress differently. For instance, one working parent noted;

*"We both work. My husband is an online motorcycle taxi driver, and I work as a shop employee. Most of our time is spent at work. Parenting our children has become stressful because, after coming home in the evening, we are already exhausted, but the children are fussy, asking for this and that. We only spend extended time playing with the children on our days off"* (Interview with DW, a working mother with children, October 17, 2023).

Similarly, a non-working parent shared:

*"I do not work and stay home to care for the children, but I still feel stressed because I have many children. I have three young ones plus two older children already in school. Sometimes, I feel overwhelmed caring for the children, but what can I do? It is my responsibility as a parent"* (Interview with NN, a non-working mother with children, October 18, 2023).

These interviews illustrate that working and non-working parents face significant stress related to caregiving. Working parents often experience exhaustion due to long work hours, which limits the quality time they can spend with their children. In contrast, non-working parents face stress from continuous caregiving responsibilities and household demands. This parental stress, in turn, influences their parenting styles, which contributes to the verbal aggression exhibited by their children.

This study focuses on examining the impact of parental stress and parenting styles on the prevalence of verbal aggression in early childhood. The aim is to investigate how these factors influence children's behaviour and identify underlying mechanisms contributing to aggression. The study seeks to provide valuable insights to inform the development of effective parenting strategies and intervention programs by addressing this issue. The findings are expected to contribute significantly to early childhood education, offering practical guidance for educators, policymakers, and researchers working to foster healthier parent-child relationships and mitigate aggressive behaviours in young children.

## Methods

This study utilised a descriptive design with a quantitative approach to examine the influence of parenting stress and parenting styles on verbal aggression in early childhood. A descriptive survey method was employed, aligning with the research objective of identifying relationships between these variables. The population comprised parents of early childhood children attending schools in Pemalang Regency, with additional input from teachers to validate parents' responses regarding their children's behaviour in the school environment. However, details regarding the validation process, including the criteria used by teachers and the methods for ensuring consistency between teacher and parent reports, require greater clarity.

The sample for this research was drawn proportionally from early childhood education institutions in the Nusa Indah cluster of Pemalang Regency. These institutions included TK Negeri Pembina Pemalang, TK Pakkis Sugihwaras, TK Pertiwi Bahari Siwi, TK Pertiwi Lawangrejo, TK IT Al Kahfi, TK Pertiwi Danasari, and TK Muslimat Danasari. A proportional sampling technique was used to ensure representative participation from the 125 parent respondents across these institutions.

Data was collected using validated questionnaires to measure parenting stress, parenting styles, and verbal aggression in early childhood. Although instrument validation was performed, the methodology would benefit from further explanation of the validity and reliability testing processes, including reliability coefficients and the steps taken to ensure content and construct validity. The instruments used are detailed below:

Table 1. Parenting Stress Instrument

Variable	Indicator	Aspect
Parenting Stress	Parental Distress (PD)	Depression
		Role Limitations
		Feelings of Competence
		Social Isolation
		Relationship with Partner
		Parental Health
	The Difficult Child	Adaptability
		Demands
		Mood
		Distractibility
The Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction (PCDI)	Parent-Child Bond	
	Child Acceptance of Parent Parent Reinforcement of Child	

Table 2. Parenting Style Instrument

Variable	Indicator	Aspect
Parenting Style	Authoritarian	Verbal Hostility
		Physical Punishment
		Directiveness

Table 3. Verbal Aggression in Early Childhood Instrument

Variable	Indicator
Verbal Aggression	Using Harsh Words
	Insulting Others
	Yelling at Others

To analyse the data, the study employed two statistical tests to examine the relationships between the variables. The first test was the T-test (Partial Test), which was used to evaluate the individual effects of Parenting Stress (Variable  $X_1$ ) and Parenting Style (Variable  $X_2$ ) on Verbal Aggression (Variable  $Y$ ). This test aimed to determine whether each independent variable significantly influenced the dependent variable. A significance level of 5% ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) was applied

as the threshold for statistical significance, ensuring that the results accurately reflected the relationships between the studied variables.

Additionally, an F-test (Simultaneous Test) is conducted to examine the simultaneous influence of the independent variables (Parenting Stress and Parenting Style) on the dependent variable (Verbal Aggression in Early Childhood). The research hypotheses are as follows:

- **H<sub>1</sub>**: Parenting stress has a significant effect on verbal aggression in early childhood.
- **H<sub>2</sub>**: Parenting style significantly affects verbal aggression in early childhood.
- **H<sub>3</sub>**: Parenting stress and parenting style have a significant simultaneous effect on verbal aggression in early childhood.

These statistical tests were chosen for their ability to validate both individual and combined effects, ensuring robust insights into the relationships between the variables. This methodological framework provides a systematic approach to achieving the research objectives while emphasising the need for more detailed descriptions of instrument validation processes and data collection procedures.

## Result

This study focused on developing the Mini Box Theater as a tool to enhance storytelling skills among children aged 5-6 years. The development process followed the ADDIE model (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation). The research results include expert validation on both material and media aspects, as summarised below:

### The Effect of Parenting Stress on Verbal Aggression in Early Childhood

The results of the T-test (partial test) indicate that Variable X<sub>1</sub> (Parenting Stress) has a calculated t<sub>value</sub> of 1.329 with a significance value of 0.002. Although the calculated t<sub>value</sub> is greater than the critical t<sub>table</sub> (1.329 > 1.660), the significance value (0.002 < 0.050) confirms that parenting stress has a statistically significant influence on verbal aggression in early childhood. Therefore, the first hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>), which posits that parenting stress significantly influences verbal aggression in early childhood, is accepted.

The table below presents the results of the T-test (partial test) conducted using SPSS:

Table 4. T-Test (Partial Test) Results - Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model	Coefficients <sup>a</sup>			T	Sig.
	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
<b>(Constant)</b>	10.270	3.250		3.160	.002
<b>Parenting stress</b>	.047	.036	.074	1.329	.186
<b>Parenting Style</b>	.822	.057	.804	14.402	.000

**a. Dependent Variable: Verbal Aggression in Early Childhood**

Based on Table 4, the regression coefficient for Variable X<sub>1</sub> (Parenting Stress) is 0.047, which indicates that a 1% increase in parenting stress is associated with a 4.7% increase in verbal aggression in early childhood. This finding suggests that while parenting stress contributes to verbal aggression, its effect is relatively weak compared to Variable X<sub>2</sub> (Parenting Style), which has a significantly higher regression coefficient of 0.822.

Although parenting stress shows a partial influence, its comparatively minor impact (4.7%) highlights the possibility of other influential factors beyond those examined in this study. This is consistent with the Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> value of 70.6%, suggesting that 29.4% of the variance in verbal aggression remains unexplained by the current model. Further exploration of additional factors, such as socio-economic status, parental support systems, or child temperament, may provide a more comprehensive understanding.

### The Effect of Parenting Style on Verbal Aggression in Early Childhood

The T-test (partial test) results indicate that Variable X<sub>2</sub> (Parenting Style) has a calculated t-value of 14.402 with a significance value 0.000. This shows that the calculated t-value is greater than

the critical  $t_{\text{table}}$  ( $14.402 > 1.660$ ), and the significance value is less than 5% ( $0.000 < 0.050$ ). These findings confirm that Variable  $X_2$  (Parenting Style) has a significant partial effect on Variable Y (Verbal Aggression in Early Childhood). Therefore, the second hypothesis ( $H_2$ ) states that parenting style significantly influences verbal aggression in early childhood is accepted.

Based on Table 5, the multiple regression equation's interpretation reveals that Variable  $X_2$  (Parenting Style) has a regression coefficient of 0.822, meaning that a 1% increase in parenting style is associated with an 82.2% increase in verbal aggression in early childhood.

Table 5. T-Test (Partial Test) Results - Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model	Coefficients <sup>a</sup>			T	Sig.
	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	10.270	3.250		3.160	.002
Parenting stress	.047	.036	.074	1.329	.186
Parenting Style	.822	.057	.804	14.402	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Verbal Aggression in Early Childhood

From the multiple regression equation, it can be concluded that of the two independent variables—Variable  $X_1$  (Parenting Stress) and Variable  $X_2$  (Parenting Style)—the most dominant variable influencing Variable Y (Verbal Aggression in Early Childhood) is Variable  $X_2$  (Parenting Style), with a regression coefficient of 0.822, accounting for an 82.2% impact. In contrast, the weakest variable is Variable  $X_1$  (Parenting Stress), with a regression coefficient of only 0.047, representing a mere 4.7% impact.

These results indicate that parenting style, particularly the authoritarian style emphasised in this study, plays a significant role in influencing verbal aggression in early childhood. High levels of control, one-way communication, and a strong focus on strict discipline characterise authoritarian parenting. This aligns with prior research, which highlights that such parenting approaches are more likely to contribute to verbal aggression in children. However, the study does not explore other parenting styles, such as democratic or permissive, which could offer alternative insights. Future research could examine whether a warmer, more responsive approach, like democratic parenting, might reduce verbal aggression in children and provide a broader understanding of the dynamics between parenting styles and childhood behaviour.

### The Effect of Parenting Stress and Parenting Style on Verbal Aggression in Early Childhood

The simultaneous effect of the independent variables, Variable  $X_1$  (Parenting Stress) and Variable  $X_2$  (Parenting Style), on the dependent variable, Variable Y (Verbal Aggression in Early Childhood), was evaluated using the F-test (Simultaneous Test). If the calculated  $F_{\text{value}}$  exceeds the critical  $F_{\text{table}}$ , it indicates a significant influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable. The critical  $F_{\text{value}}$  was calculated using degrees of freedom. The critical F-value was determined using the degrees of freedom ( $df_1$ ) =  $k - 1 = 2 - 1 = 1$  and *degree of freedom* ( $df_2$ ) =  $n - k = 125 - 2 = 123$ , resulting in  $F_{\text{tabel}} = 3,090$ . The results of the F-test conducted with SPSS are as follows:

Table 6. F-Test Results (Simultaneous Test)

Model	ANOVA <sup>b</sup>				
	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	4330.123	2	2165.062	149.773	.000 <sup>a</sup>
Residual	1763.589	122	14.456		
Total	6093.712	124			

A. Predictors: (constant), parenting style, parenting stress  
B. Dependent variable: verbal aggression in early childhood

The calculated F-value is 149.773, with a significance value of 0.000. This confirms that the  $F_{\text{-value}}$  is significantly greater than the critical  $F_{\text{-value}}$  ( $149.773 > 3.090$ ), and the significance value is well below 5% ( $0.000 < 0.050$ ). Thus, Parenting Stress and Parenting Style collectively have a statistically significant simultaneous effect on Verbal Aggression in Early Childhood.

To evaluate how well the independent variables explain the variance in the dependent variable, the Coefficient of Determination ( $R^2$ ) was used. Since there are two independent variables, Adjusted R Square was calculated to account for potential overestimation in the model. The results are summarised below:

Table 7. Coefficient of Determination ( $R^2$ ) Test

Model Summary <sup>b</sup>					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin- Watson
1	.3843 <sup>a</sup>	.711	.706	3.80206	1.606

A. Predictors: (constant), parenting style, parenting stress

B. Dependent variable: verbal aggression in early childhood

The Adjusted R Square value of 0.706 indicates that Parenting Stress and Parenting Style explain 70.6% of the variance in Verbal Aggression in Early Childhood. However, 29.4% of the variance remains unexplained, suggesting that other factors may contribute to verbal aggression in children.

The unexplained variance of 29.4% highlights the presence of other variables not included in the current model. Possible factors include exposure to media, especially content that models aggressive behaviours, and peer influences from interactions with classmates or friends. Environmental elements such as school climate or teacher interactions could also play a role. Additionally, socioeconomic status, family dynamics, parental mental health, and community support systems may indirectly impact a child's verbal aggression.

These findings underline the importance of examining additional factors beyond parenting stress and parenting style. Future studies should incorporate variables such as child temperament, parental communication patterns, and external environmental influences to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the causes of verbal aggression. This would allow for the development of targeted interventions to reduce aggressive behaviours in children, benefiting both parents and educators.

## Discussion

This study aims to analyse the relationship between parenting stress and parenting styles on verbal aggression in early childhood. The study proposed three hypotheses:  $H_1$  (there is a significant effect of parenting stress on verbal aggression in early childhood),  $H_2$  (there is a significant effect of parenting styles on verbal aggression in early childhood), and  $H_3$  (there is a significant effect of both parenting stress and parenting styles on verbal aggression in early childhood). All hypotheses were confirmed. However, while the findings provide valuable insights, it is essential to critically assess their implications and address the study's limitations to enhance the results' depth of understanding and applicability.

The indicators of parenting stress in this study include 1) Parental Distress (PD), which consists of depression, role restriction, feelings of incompetence, social isolation, spousal relationships, parental health, and adaptability; 2) The Difficult Child, including demands, mood, distractibility, and parent-child attachment; and 3) The Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction (PCDI), covering the child's acceptance of the parent and parental reinforcement of the child. These three indicators significantly influence verbal aggression in early childhood. The results revealed a  $t_{\text{-value}}$  of 1.329, which is less than the critical  $t_{\text{-value}}$  ( $1.329 < 1.660$ ), and a significance value of less than 5% ( $0.002 < 0.050$ ). This indicates a significant effect of parenting stress on verbal aggression in early childhood. These findings align with the Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention (CDC, 2020), which highlights parenting stress as a risk factor for parental violence toward children. Other studies have also shown a relationship between parenting stress and the likelihood of child abuse and extreme variations in maladaptive parenting behaviour (Kusuma et al., 2021).

Brown et al. (2020) found that parents experiencing parenting stress often expose their children to risks of violence and neglect. According to Chung et al. (2022), high levels of parenting stress are associated with poor parenting practices, such as harsh parenting, leading to a deterioration in the parent-child relationship. Consequently, parents may become authoritarian, harsh, and less responsive. Holly et al. (2019) define parenting stress as a psychological response that arises in parents involved in caregiving, mainly when they cannot meet parenting demands as expected by themselves or others. Parenting stress can also be influenced by economic factors, with parents of higher economic status reported being more vulnerable to parenting stress than those of lower economic status (Ginaa & Fitriani, 2020). This finding highlights a possible limitation in the study: the lack of analysis regarding how demographic or socioeconomic factors might moderate or mediate the relationship between parenting stress and verbal aggression.

The parenting style indicators used in this study focused on authoritarian parenting, which includes five aspects: 1) verbal commands, 2) hostility, 3) punishment, 4) physical discipline, and 5) direction. These aspects influence verbal aggression in early childhood. The study revealed a  $t_{\text{-value}}$  of 14.402, significantly higher than the critical  $t_{\text{-value}}$  ( $14.402 > 1.660$ ), with a significance value of less than 5% ( $0.000 < 0.050$ ). This confirms a significant effect of parenting styles on verbal aggression in early childhood. These findings align with Kusumawardani and Fauziah (2020), who assert that parenting styles, including communication methods, impact children's social and emotional development. Similarly, Pratiwi et al. (2019) found that higher levels of authoritarian parenting correlate with increased aggressive behaviour in children (Maemunah, 2024).

Authoritarian parenting styles have both positive and negative impacts. Children raised under such styles tend to adhere to rules with good moral values from childhood into adulthood. Positively, this style fosters independence, discipline, and responsibility. However, its adverse effects include defiance of rules, disobedience to parental directives, and strained parent-child relationships (Taib et al., 2020). Social-emotionally, children may appear unenthusiastic in activities, experience anxiety, interact less with peers, and have diminished communication skills (Mil & Ningsih, 2023). However, this study did not examine how cultural norms may influence perceptions of authoritarian parenting, which could have enriched the interpretation of its findings.

Candra et al. (2017) argue that parenting styles significantly shape a child's character and behaviour, influencing their maturity in decision-making and problem-solving. Parenting is crucial in early childhood education (Gómez Chova et al., 2015). It profoundly impacts children's character development, behaviour, and emotional intelligence (Candra et al., 2017b; Erdaliameta et al., 2023; Putri & Lestari, 2021).

The indicators of verbal aggression in early childhood examined in this study include using harsh language, insults, and yelling. For children aged 5–6, verbal aggression often manifests as harsh words. This behaviour stems from closed, dismissive, authoritarian, or one-way communication, with one-way communication being the most significant predictor of verbal aggression (Siahaan et al., 2020). Parents often engage in verbal abuse unconsciously, using harsh words such as scolding, yelling, insulting, and berating. Verbal abuse constitutes emotional violence that can have psychological consequences for children (Lestari et al., 2018).

Children's aggression may stem from stress, a desire for attention, or exposure to similar environmental behaviours. Multivariate studies indicate that factors such as low socioeconomic

status, parenting styles, family hostility, maternal mental health, inconsistent parenting, and coercion contribute to aggressive behaviours in children. Early childhood verbal aggression is often influenced by parental actions, including physical punishment, shouting, and authoritarian parenting styles (Ladya et al., 2021). The study would benefit from longitudinal analysis to better capture these complex, dynamic relationships over time.

The study results revealed an  $F_{\text{-value}}$  of 149.773, significantly more significant than the critical  $F_{\text{-value}}$  (149.773 > 3.090), with a significance level of less than 5% (0.000 < 0.050). This confirms that parenting stress and parenting styles significantly influence verbal aggression in early childhood. These findings align with Rahayu (2018) and Maghfiroh and Wijayanti (2021), who reported similar effects of parenting stress and parenting styles on children's aggressive behaviour. Parenting stress triggers unpleasant physiological and psychological responses, often leading to maladaptive coping strategies. Violence frequently arises from unpreparedness in parenting, as Anggraini and Asi (2022) noted. Experiencing or witnessing aggression in childhood can lead to lifelong physical and mental health issues for victims and antisocial tendencies for perpetrators in adolescence and beyond (Hillis et al., 2016). The parent-child relationship quality significantly impacts children's externalising behaviours, with poorly organised caregiving linked to externalising behaviours such as physical aggression, low attention, rebellion, temper tantrums, and hyperactivity (Rahmadani et al., 2023).

This study has significant implications for early childhood education practitioners, particularly in designing intervention programs to reduce verbal aggression in children. Parents are encouraged to adopt more democratic, warm, and consistent parenting approaches. Schools can provide training or counselling programs to help parents develop more positive and effective parenting strategies. Additionally, schools can enhance curricula and activities that promote healthy communication skills and emotional regulation in early childhood. Future research should also explore the effects of interventions to reduce parenting stress and improve parenting styles to provide more actionable strategies.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that parenting stress and parenting style collectively contribute to the level of verbal aggression in early childhood. It provides significant insights into the factors influencing verbal aggression in young children. The findings confirm that both parenting stress and parenting styles significantly influence verbal aggression, with parenting style having the most dominant effect. Specifically, the authoritarian parenting style was associated with an 82.2% impact on verbal aggression, compared to a relatively minor influence of parenting stress at 4.7%. Simultaneously, these variables collectively accounted for 70.6% of the variance in verbal aggression, leaving 29.4% unexplained, suggesting the need for further exploration of additional factors. The findings underscore the critical need for democratic and responsive parenting approaches to reduce verbal aggression, and they highlight the importance of intervention programs such as parent training and emotional regulation curricula in early childhood education. However, the study is limited by its narrow focus on parenting variables and cross-sectional design, which restricts exploring other factors like socioeconomic status, child temperament, or environmental influences and precludes causal inference. Future research should incorporate longitudinal designs and broader variables to provide a more holistic understanding of verbal aggression while evaluating interventions to reduce stress and foster positive parenting practices.

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