



## Parents' Understanding of Child Sexual Abuse: A Social Cognitive Theory Perspective

Tiara Lie Kamilatin<sup>1\*</sup>, Maria Fitriah<sup>2</sup>, Koesworo Setiawan<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1-3</sup>Communication Science, Universitas Djuanda, Indonesia

\*Corresponding Author: [arakamilatin@gmail.com](mailto:arakamilatin@gmail.com)

**Abstract.** Child sexual abuse (CSA) poses serious risks to children's physical, psychological, and social development, with parents playing a crucial role in risk recognition and prevention within the family. This study aims to describe parents' understanding of child sexual abuse from the perspective of Social Cognitive Theory. The study employed a quantitative approach with a descriptive method. The population consisted of 376 parents of ninth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Megamendung. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling based on several criteria, including parents with children under 18 years old, active internet users, and individuals with basic literacy skills to complete the questionnaire independently. Based on these criteria, 216 parents participated in the study. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale and were complemented by brief interviews to obtain contextual information. Secondary data were obtained from scientific journal articles and other relevant documents. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically the Weighted Mean Score method, to categorize the level of parents' understanding across the measured dimensions. The results indicate that parents' level of understanding of child sexual abuse is in the very high category, particularly in the knowledge dimension. These findings suggest that parents have a strong understanding of the basic concepts and various forms of child sexual abuse, which may help them recognize potential risks and consider preventive measures in everyday life.

**Keywords:** Child Protection; Child Sexual Abuse; Observational Learning; Parental Understanding; Social Cognitive Theory.

### 1. BACKGROUND

Child sexual abuse (CSA) represents a serious violation of children's rights and has significant consequences for their physical health, mental well-being, and educational development (UNICEF, 2025). Monitoring conducted by ECPAT Indonesia (2024) indicates that cases of child sexual exploitation and abuse continue to occur widely across various regions in Indonesia. Specifically, data from the Online Information System for the Protection of Women and Children (SIMFONI PPA, 2025) show that West Java Province recorded the highest number of cases nationally, with 1,324 reported incidents of violence against children (KemenPPPA, 2025). An increasing trend is also evident at the regional level, particularly in Bogor Regency, where the number of reported cases rose from 50 in 2023 to 59 in 2024 and sharply increased to 239 cases in 2025 (SIMFONI PPA). This escalation places Bogor Regency as the region with the highest number of child violence cases in West Java. The rise in these cases indicates that child protection efforts continue to face substantial challenges, one of which relates to parents' level of understanding of child sexual abuse and its prevention.

From a demographic perspective, the trend of violence between 2023 and 2025 was most prevalent among adolescents aged 13 to 17 years, with sexual violence as the dominant form. This age group generally falls within early adolescence, a developmental stage characterized

by ongoing psychosocial development and heightened vulnerability to various forms of violence and exploitation (KemenkoPMK, 2025). In the context of protecting this vulnerable group, the family environment plays a crucial role, particularly parents who are the individuals closest to children in their daily lives (Diriwari, 2023). Therefore, parents' understanding of the definition, forms, and impacts of child sexual abuse becomes a crucial factor in identifying potential risks and preventing the occurrence of abuse (Dewi et al., 2024).

The development of parents' understanding of child sexual abuse can be explained through the perspective of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). This theory suggests that individual knowledge develops through the process of observational learning, which refers to learning that occurs through observing the social environment, the experiences of others, and exposure to information from media sources. In this context, parents may develop an understanding of the risks of sexual abuse against children through social interactions, community experiences, and information obtained from various sources. These cognitive processes subsequently influence how parents assess risks and respond to potential threats of sexual abuse toward their children.

Previous studies have demonstrated that parents' understanding and attitudes are associated with the implementation of child sexual abuse prevention strategies. Steedman and Jeglic (2025) found that positive parental attitudes toward children's sexuality education are correlated with more active child sexual abuse prevention practices. However, research by Juaini et al. (2025) indicates that gaps in parents' understanding remain regarding the specific mechanisms of child sexual exploitation, even though they generally recognize the existence of sexual crime risks. Meanwhile, several other studies have primarily focused on the role of digital literacy and technology in preventing sexual exploitation in cyberspace (Indriani & Yemmartotillah, 2021; Muhingi et al., 2021; S et al., 2025). Therefore, there remains a limitation in research that specifically describes parents' understanding of child sexual abuse through the lens of Social Cognitive Theory.

To address this gap, this study was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Megamendung. The site was selected due to the condition of Megamendung Subdistrict (Puncak Area), where the Regional Child Protection Commission (KPAD) of Bogor Regency has urged the government to declare a "Child Abuse Emergency" status, following numerous cases involving children (Mahendra, 2023). The study involved parents of ninth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Megamendung, Bogor Regency. The selection of these participants was related to reports indicating an increase in cases of violence against children in Bogor Regency, as well as the characteristics of junior high school students who are in the early adolescent stage. In addition,

the parents of students at this school come from diverse educational backgrounds. Based on these considerations, this study aims to describe the understanding of parents of ninth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Megamendung regarding child sexual abuse from the perspective of Social Cognitive Theory.

## **2. THEORETICAL REVIEW**

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is recognized as a violation of children's rights that can affect their physical, psychological, and social development. Referring to the Law on Sexual Violence Crimes (Law No. 12 of 2022) and UNICEF guidelines (ICVAC, 2023), child sexual abuse is defined as any act that humiliates, harasses, or attacks the body and reproductive functions of a child under the age of 18, whether conducted physically, verbally, or nonverbally with sexual intent. Child sexual abuse is generally categorized into two main forms: contact abuse and non-contact abuse. Contact abuse includes acts such as incest, rape, molestation, and sexual touching, whereas non contact abuse refers to sexual acts that occur without direct physical interaction (Greijer & Doek, 2016). With the expansion of digital technology, non-contact abuse has increasingly occurred in online environments and is often referred to as online child sexual abuse. This includes practices such as online grooming, exploitative live streaming, online coercion and extortion, as well as the production and distribution of sexual images involving children (Canadian Centre for Child Protection, 2022). Previous studies report that child sexual abuse may result in various consequences, including physical injury, psychological distress such as depression and phobia, and social withdrawal associated with negative social stigma (Octaviani & Nurwati, 2021).

In the context of child protection, parents' knowledge regarding child sexual abuse is considered an important factor related to prevention efforts. Knowledge in the cognitive domain is not limited to the ability to recall information but also involves the processes of understanding and applying that information in particular situations. To examine this construct, this study refers to the cognitive hierarchy within the Knowledge-Attitude-Practice (KAP) model proposed by Notoatmodjo (2018), which views knowledge as a cognitive process that develops progressively. In this study, knowledge is operationalized into three cognitive levels. The first level is known, which refers to an individual's ability to recognize and recall basic factual information related to child sexual abuse (Swari, 2021). The second level is comprehension, defined as the ability to interpret and understand the meaning of information related to child sexual abuse (Bloom, 1956; Solehati et al., 2022). The third level is application, which refers to the ability to use acquired knowledge to determine appropriate responses in

specific situations (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). In the context of this study, the application level reflects parents' cognitive capacity to identify potential risks and determine appropriate preventive responses related to child sexual abuse (Suwarni, 2025).

The development of these cognitive dimensions can be examined using the framework of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) proposed by Bandura (1986). Social Cognitive Theory explains that learning occurs through interactions among cognitive factors, environmental influences, and behavior. One of the central mechanisms in this theory is observational learning, which refers to the process through which individuals acquire knowledge by observing information and actions in their environment. Bandura describes observational learning as consisting of four stages: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. The attention stage refers to the process in which individuals focus on particular information or events within their environment. The retention stage involves storing observed information in memory. The reproduction stage refers to the ability to translate stored information into responses or actions. The motivation stage refers to internal or external factors that influence whether the observed behavior or knowledge is maintained and applied.

Previous studies have examined factors related to parents' knowledge and understanding in the context of child protection. Research indicates that digital literacy and parental awareness are associated with efforts to prevent online sexual exploitation of children (Indriani & Yemmarotillah, 2021; Muhingi et al., 2021). These findings highlight the importance of parents' knowledge and understanding as a foundation for strengthening child protection in the digital environment. Other studies report that parental knowledge is related to attitudes toward children's sexuality education and prevention practices (Steedman & Jeglic, 2025). However, some studies also identify gaps in parents' understanding of specific mechanisms of sexual exploitation, despite general awareness of potential risks (Juaini et al., 2025). These findings indicate that parental understanding of child sexual abuse remains an area of study that continues to be examined in relation to cognitive processes and information exposure.

### **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employed a quantitative approach with a descriptive research design. The population consisted of parents of ninth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Megamendung, totaling 376 individuals. The sample comprised 216 respondents selected using purposive sampling, a technique in which participants are intentionally chosen because they possess characteristics relevant to the objectives of the study (Trikesumawardani et al., 2024). The inclusion criteria were defined as follows: (1) parents of ninth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1

Megamendung, (2) parents who have children under the age of 18; (3) individuals categorized as daily active internet user to ensure exposure to digital information that may facilitate observational learning (Du et al., 2020); and (4) individuals with basic literacy skills to independently complete the questionnaire.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale (Edrisy & Rozi, 2021) distributed online via Google Forms to parents of ninth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Megamendung. The instrument testing results indicated that all questionnaire items were valid, with correlation coefficient values ranging from 0.406 to 0.869, exceeding the *r*-table value of 0.361. The research instrument also demonstrated good reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.818. Brief interviews with several parents were also conducted to obtain contextual insights that supported the interpretation of the quantitative findings. Secondary data were obtained through a literature review, which involves collecting relevant references related to the research problem in order to obtain secondary data (Nuryana et al., 2024), including scientific journal articles and supporting documents related to the research topic (Pederson et al., 2020).

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistical techniques. The level of respondents' understanding was analyzed using the Weight Mean Score (WMS) method, which calculates the weighted mean of respondents' answers for each questionnaire indicator based on a five-point Likert scale. The obtained mean scores were then categorized into five class intervals with a range of 0.8. The categories were defined as follows: 1.00–1.80 (very low), 1.81–2.60 (low), 2.61–3.40 (moderate), 3.41–4.20 (high), and 4.21–5.00 (very high). These categories were used to interpret parents' level of understanding of child sexual abuse.

#### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The demographic profile indicates that most respondents were mothers (78%), while fathers accounted for 47 respondents (22%). This distribution suggests that mothers were more frequently represented in the survey. In many family contexts, mothers tend to be more involved in daily childcare activities, including supervising children's social interactions and media use (Bamber et al., 2023). Such involvement may influence how parents perceive and interpret risks related to children's safety.

In terms of educational background, most respondents had completed secondary education. A total of 110 respondents (51%) reported that their highest level of education was senior high school, followed by 58 respondents (27%) with junior high school education, 25 respondents (12%) with elementary school education, and 23 respondents

(11%) who had completed a diploma, undergraduate, or postgraduate education. This distribution suggests that most respondents possess a basic level of literacy that may support their cognitive ability to access and interpret information, including information related to child sexual abuse.

**Parents' Understanding of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)**

Parents' understanding of child sexual abuse was examined through three cognitive dimensions: knowledge, comprehension, and application. The results of the descriptive statistical analysis are presented and discussed according to each dimension.

**Parents' Knowledge Of Child Sexual Abuse**

**Table 1.** Descriptive Analysis of Knowledge Dimension.

Dimension	Mean Score	Category
Knowledge	4.30	Very High

*Source: Processed Primary Data, 2026*

Table 1 shows that the knowledge dimension obtained a mean score of 4.30, which falls into the very high category. This finding indicates that most respondents were able to recognize basic information related to child sexual abuse, including its definition, forms of abuse, and potential risks that may occur in children's environments. Interview findings support the quantitative results. Several parents reported that they frequently obtain information about child sexual abuse cases through online news portals, television programs, and social media platforms. Such exposure to information may contribute to increasing parents' awareness of issues related to child sexual abuse. These findings suggest that digital media and public discussions can function as informal learning sources for parents in understanding issues related to child protection.

From the perspective of Social Cognitive Theory, this process can be associated with the *attention* stage of observational learning, in which individuals focus on information that is perceived as relevant or important. Exposure to news reports and public discussions regarding child sexual abuse may attract parents' attention and initiate the process of knowledge acquisition about potential risks faced by children.

**Parents' Comprehension Of Child Sexual Abuse**

**Table 2.** Descriptive Analysis of Comprehension Dimension.

Dimension	Mean Score	Category
Comprehension	4.17	High

*Source: Processed Primary Data, 2026*

Table 2 indicates that the comprehension dimension obtained a mean score of 4.17, which falls into the high category. This result suggests that respondents were not only able to recognize information about child sexual abuse but were also capable of interpreting the implications of such information in everyday contexts. Interview findings revealed that several parents reported paying closer attention to behavioral changes in their children, such as social withdrawal, unusual silence, or discomfort around certain individuals. These responses indicate that the information obtained by parents is used as a reference in observing and interpreting children's behavior.

Within the framework of Social Cognitive Theory, this process can be associated with the retention stage, in which observed information is stored in memory and contributes to the formation of cognitive understanding. Information about child sexual abuse obtained from various sources may therefore help parents develop a cognitive framework that assists them in recognizing situations that may pose risks to children.

### ***Parents' Application of Knowledge about Child Sexual Abuse***

**Table 3. Descriptive Analysis of Application Dimension.**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Mean Score</b>	<b>Category</b>
Application	4.17	High

*Source: Processed Primary Data, 2026*

Table 3 shows that the application dimension obtained a mean score of 4.17, which falls into the high category. This finding suggests that respondents demonstrated the ability to apply their knowledge when considering appropriate responses to potentially risky situations involving children. During the interviews, several parents mentioned preventive practices they considered important, such as maintaining open communication with their children, explaining body boundaries, and monitoring children's digital activities. These practices indicate that parents' understanding has begun to translate into practical considerations for preventive actions within the family environment.

In the context of Social Cognitive Theory, this stage can be related to the reproduction component of observational learning, where knowledge acquired through observation begins to be translated into potential behavioral responses. Although the present study focuses primarily on cognitive aspects, these findings suggest that a higher level of understanding may support parents' readiness to consider preventive measures aimed at protecting children.

### ***Discussion of Findings***

Overall, the findings indicate that parents' understanding of child sexual abuse falls within the high to very high category across the three measured dimensions. This suggests that respondents generally possess a relatively strong level of awareness regarding the issue of child sexual abuse and the potential risks that children may face.

These results are consistent with previous findings by Steedman and Jeglic (2025), which suggest that higher levels of parental knowledge are associated with greater engagement in child protection practices. Parents who possess better knowledge tend to communicate more actively with their children and implement preventive strategies related to child sexual abuse.

However, these findings differ from the results reported by Juaini et al. (2025), who identified gaps in parents' understanding of specific mechanisms of online child sexual exploitation. In that study, parents demonstrated general awareness of sexual risks but showed limited knowledge regarding more complex forms of exploitation. Differences in research context, respondent characteristics, and levels of information exposure may contribute to these variations in findings.

Conceptually, the results also align with the assumptions of Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes that learning can occur through observation of the social environment. Information obtained through media exposure, public discussions, and social interactions may serve as forms of observational learning that help parents develop awareness regarding risks related to child sexual abuse.

In addition to the stages of attention, retention, and reproduction, observational learning within Social Cognitive Theory also involves the element of motivation. Although the present study focuses on cognitive aspects of understanding, the relatively high level of parental understanding observed in this study may serve as an initial foundation that potentially encourages motivation to engage in child protection practices. However, motivational aspects were not directly measured in this study and therefore require further investigation in future research.

Overall, the findings suggest that parents' understanding of child sexual abuse encompasses the ability to recognize relevant information, interpret potential risks, and consider preventive responses within everyday family contexts. This cognitive understanding may represent an important foundation for strengthening parental awareness and preparedness in efforts to protect children from sexual abuse.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aims to describe parents' understanding of child sexual abuse from the perspective of Social Cognitive Theory. The results show that the level of parents' understanding falls within the high to very high category. The knowledge dimension obtained the highest mean score, followed by the comprehension and application dimensions. These findings indicate that parents generally are able to recognize the forms of child sexual abuse, understand potential risks within children's environments, and consider preventive measures in everyday life. From the perspective of Social Cognitive Theory, this pattern can be understood through the mechanism of observational learning, in which exposure to information from media and social environments contributes to the development of parents' awareness and cognitive responses toward the issue of child sexual abuse.

However, these findings should be interpreted with caution, as the study was conducted within a single school environment, which limits the generalizability of the results. This study highlights the importance of strengthening public education programs on the prevention of child sexual abuse that target parents as key actors in child protection. Media platforms commonly accessed by parents, such as television, online news portals, and social media, have the potential to be utilized as effective channels for disseminating educational information. In addition, schools may serve as collaborative spaces between educational institutions and families through programs such as seminars, discussions, and parent engagement activities related to child protection. Future research is recommended to expand the scope of the study to more diverse populations and to consider analytical or comparative approaches in order to further examine factors that influence parents' understanding of child sexual abuse.

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