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Portrait of Street Children in Indonesia: Facts, Challenges, and Hopes

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A B S T R A C T

The phenomenon of Indonesian street children is a complex multidimensional social problem that reflects social inequality, structural poverty and weak protections for children's rights. The purpose of this article is to provide a comprehensive picture of the reality of the lives of street children in Indonesia. This includes the socioeconomic background that will lead them on the path, the form of their work, and the risks and challenges they face on a daily basis. With a variety of reports, research and country guidelines, qualitative approaches and literature studies by non-governmental organizations, this article distinguishes actual facts about the status of street children, including access to education, health, proper housing, and legal protection. In addition, the psychological and social dynamics that affect the development of these children, including issues of violence, exploitation, social stigma, and long-term impacts on their futures, have also been discussed.

A R T I C L E   I N F O

1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of street children has actually been developing for a long time, but is currently increasingly becoming a global concern, along with the increasing number of street children in various major cities in the world. This study aims to examine how the self-concept of adolescent street children is described and why the self-concept is formed. Self-concept is an individual's descriptive and evaluative picture of oneself; research or assessment of oneself, or the way one views oneself. According to Baldwin and Holmes (in Hariawan *et al.,* 2021), the factors that shape adolescents' self-concept are parents, peers, society, and learning. The sample in this study is a street child who has lost contact with his family, and participates fully on the streets, both socially and economically. From the results of data analysis, it is known that in general, the self-concept formed in the subject is a negative self-concept. This can be seen from several parts of the subject's self, most of which view themselves negatively. This can also be caused by several factors that shape the subject's self-concept in a negative direction, namely parents, peers, and society (Tumimomor & Ferdinan, 2019).

The background of organizing this non-formal education is as an increase in informal education, a complement to formal education. The studio itself is a place for art activities, as an effort to improve the skills of children under the guidance of the studio. For this reason, research on non-formal education as an effort to improve the skills of street children who are assisted in the studio. The type of research used in this research is field research, using a qualitative approach (Mansir, 2022). Data analysis used in this research is descriptive which is done by data reduction and data exposure. The result of this research is that the Bodol studio provides skills that are in accordance with the interests and talents of the studio's foster children. The skill possessed by the children is the skill of playing music. Efforts made by the studio to improve skills: providing assistance, having books that can support, the availability of supporting tools and providing support for the interests and talents of children who are assisted by the studio (Epiani, 2022).

Non-formal education is needs-based education and is tailored to the characteristics of street children. This study aims to analyze the implementation of non-formal education for street children. The research method used in this research is qualitative research to obtain more specific and in-depth data about non-formal education for street children. The research technique in this research is using interview techniques, observation and document studies with data analysis techniques are data reduction, data presentation and conclusion drawing. The results showed that the education process for street children takes place around the streets because non-formal education is flexible according to the conditions of the street children themselves and is adjusted to the agreed learning contract (Kusumadewi *et al.,* 2024). This is because street children themselves have busy lives so that facilitators can adjust to the conditions of street children. Evaluation by facilitators as teaching staff for street children is also carried out to determine the success rate of non-formal education implementation and input for program development. Based on the research results, it can be concluded that non-formal education implemented for street children includes basic education in the form of education to complete illiteracy including reading, writing and counting activities (calistung) as basic education for street children (Rahman, 2020). In addition, life skills education is also taught to equip street children with skills that can be used to develop their capacity so that this skills education can make street children have the capacity so that street children do not return to the streets.

Street children are one of the groups of people who are vulnerable to various social and economic challenges. Their lives are often filled with uncertainty, instability, and limited educational opportunities. This article reviews community service activities that focus on character education for street children (Purnama & Siti, 2021). It also describes the approach, results, and positive impact of the program. In achieving social inclusion, it highlights the role of the community and examines the challenges faced. The results show that character education is effective in building positive relationships and giving hope to street children, promoting better social inclusion.

2. METHODS

Descriptive research method using document analysis is the method used in this research. Without concentrating on hypothesis testing, the descriptive method seeks to present a systematic and coherent description of the phenomenon under study. In this case, researchers collect data and analyze records related to research-related topics, including documents, archives, or publications that provide the necessary data (Fauzi & Wulandari, 2020). The data analysis carried out is by reading, categorizing, and interpreting the contents, documents to identify, patterns, themes and important information that support deeper problems related to the issues studied. This approach allows research to reveal knowledge in detail and provide a comprehensive picture of the subject under study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Facts About Street Children

Street children in Indonesia represent a significant social challenge, with their numbers and vulnerabilities increasing due to various socio-economic factors. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Social Affairs, in 2018, there were approximately 12,000 street children across major cities such as Jakarta, Bandung, Makassar, and Surabaya (Salsabila, 2021). However, recent studies suggest that this figure may have risen, exacerbated by factors like poverty, domestic violence, family dysfunction, and the allure of freedom associated with street life (Lashari et al., 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified these issues, disrupting social protection systems and leaving many children without adequate support (PUSKAPA, 2024).

Life on the streets exposes children to numerous risks, including exploitation, violence, and neglect. Psychosocial studies have highlighted that street children often experience high levels of anxiety and depression, coupled with limited access to basic social services and support networks (Az Zamzami & Rossa, 2021). The street environment becomes a training ground where these children learn behaviors and norms to survive, often leading to the development of a distinct street culture (Sage Journals, 2021). This adaptation, while necessary for survival, can hinder their reintegration into mainstream society and perpetuate cycles of marginalization. To address these challenges, various interventions have been implemented. Psychosocial counseling training for street child volunteers in Bandung aims to equip them with skills to provide emotional and psychological support (Supriatna et al., 2024). Holistic approaches, such as those by the Aulia Qurrota Aini Foundation in Banten, integrate education, health services, psychosocial assistance, and vocational training to support children's well-being and societal integration (Ni'mah, 2024). Additionally, Islamic educational interventions in Central Java have shown promise in enhancing reasoning, moral development, and emotional well-being among street children, fostering a sense of

community and belonging (ResearchGate, 2022).ResearchGateDespite these efforts, challenges persist, including limited funding, negative perceptions among parents regarding educational programs, and insufficient trained personnel. The implementation of foster care programs, as piloted by the Martin James Foundation, offers an alternative by providing family-based care, which positively impacts the psychological development of children in need (Martin James Foundation, 2020).

Moreover, international organizations like Friends-International have developed comprehensive models that encompass outreach, education, vocational training, and family reintegration, demonstrating the effectiveness of multifaceted approaches in supporting marginalized children (Friends-International, 2015).Martin James FoundationWikipediaIn conclusion, addressing the plight of street children in Indonesia requires a collaborative and multifaceted approach. Combining psychosocial support, education, vocational training, and family-based care, while ensuring adequate funding and community engagement, is essential. By fostering partnerships among government bodies, NGOs, communities, and the private sector, it is possible to create an inclusive environment that upholds the rights and welfare of street children, enabling them to lead dignified and productive lives.

3.2. Key Challenges

(i) Social and Economic CausesExtreme poverty, family disharmony and domestic violence are the main factors that force children out of their homes and onto the streets.
(ii) Exploitation and ViolenceStreet children are often victims of economic exploitation, such as begging or busking, as well as physical and sexual abuse They are also vulnerable to risky behaviors such as drug abuse and promiscuous sex
(iii) Limited Access to Education and Health Access to formal education and health services is limited, resulting in many street children being deprived of their basic rights They also find it difficult to access health services due to lack of legal identity and fear of arrest.

3.3. Government Programs and Cross-Sector Collaboration

The government through the Ministry of Social Affairs and the local Social Service Office has been conducting raids and fostering street children. In Makassar, for example, more than 300 street children were netted in 2023 citeturn0search1. However, an effective response requires collaboration between the government, the community and non-governmental organizations (Siregar *et al.,* 2022).

3.4. Empowerment and Alternative Education

The Child Social Welfare Agency (LKSA) in East Java has provided non-formal education programs, such as skills training and digital literacy, to empower street children and provide them with useful skills.

3.5. Health and Nutrition Protection

Efforts to improve nutrition and access to health services through mobile health centers and nutritious food assistance are expected to improve the quality of life of street children.

4. CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of street children in Indonesia reflects deep social and economic inequalities in society. These children are often forced to live on the streets due to various factors, such as extreme poverty, domestic violence, and family disharmony. They spend most of their lives on the streets, struggling to survive through inadequate work, such as begging, busking, or doing other menial jobs. According to data from the Ministry of Social Affairs, the number of street children in Indonesia is still quite high, with thousands of children vulnerable to economic exploitation, physical abuse, and sexual violence. The challenges faced by street children are enormous. In addition to difficulties in meeting basic needs such as food and adequate shelter, they also face limited access to education and health services. Many of them do not have official identification, which prevents them from accessing social facilities such as schools and health centers.

To make matters worse, street children are often victims of exploitation by individuals who take advantage of their condition for personal gain, as well as being trapped in risky behaviors such as drugs and promiscuous sex. However, there is hope for change. The Indonesian government has implemented various programs and policies to help street children, such as raids and coaching in several major cities. However, effective responses require solid collaboration between the government, communities and non-governmental organizations. This collaboration can include empowerment programs that focus on alternative education, skills training, and improved access to health services and better nutrition. In addition, some social institutions have successfully provided skills training and non-formal education that help street children acquire skills that are useful for their future lives.

These programs provide hope for street children to escape poverty and achieve a better life. Overall, street children in Indonesia are part of a very vulnerable group that requires serious attention from all parties. Although the challenges they face are enormous, there is still hope if all parties, including the government, communities, and social organizations, work together to create an environment that supports positive change for them. Efforts to protect the rights of street children and provide better access to education and health will pave the way for a brighter future for these children.

AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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