



## Survival Dynamics Of Street Children In Big Cities In Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

Street children are a vulnerable group found in many big cities in Indonesia. They live in poor social and economic conditions, and face various challenges in maintaining their lives. Street children generally come from poor families, do not complete formal education, and do not receive optimal care. To survive they use three types of strategies: active (such as busking or trading), passive (living frugally, enduring hunger), and social networking (building solidarity among fellow street children). These strategies are adaptive depending on the child's age, experience and social environment. In addition to survival, some of them have motivation to leave street life, driven by bad experiences, family encouragement, or hopes for a better future. Social support from the community and non-governmental organizations is an important factor in increasing their resilience. The government through various programs such as skills training, halfway houses, and family education has tried to address this issue. However, the effectiveness of the programs is still limited. A more holistic, participatory, and sustainable approach is needed so that street children get equal rights and opportunities to develop. .

### ARTICLE INFO

**Article History:**

Submitted/Received 22 Oct 2021

First Revised 12 Nov 2021

Accepted 07 Jan 2022

First Available online 07 Jan 2022

Publication Date 01 Apr 2022

**Keyword:**

Survival strategies, Street children, Child welfare.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of street children is a complex and multidimensional social issue, especially in big cities in Indonesia. Street children are a group of children who live and work in public spaces to survive, often without supervision, protection, or access to basic rights such as education, health, and adequate shelter. These children not only live in economically vulnerable conditions, but also face various psychosocial challenges and risks of exploitation. Their existence is a representation of social inequality that has not been addressed optimally. This phenomenon is not only a concern from a moral perspective, but also from the aspects of social welfare, law, and sustainable human development. Therefore, it is important to understand how they survive in the midst of the harsh urban environment, and how social efforts can support their survival in a decent and dignified manner.

### 1.1. Root Causes of the Street Child Phenomenon

The root causes of the phenomenon of street children in big cities in Indonesia are diverse and interrelated. The most dominant factor is family economic poverty. Many children are forced to take to the streets to help make ends meet due to their families' inadequate financial conditions. They come from low-income families and do not have access to decent work or social security. In addition, low education or even dropping out of school is also a major contributing factor. Most street children do not have time to complete basic education, so they lose the opportunity to improve their lives through formal channels (Suhartini & Panjaitan, 2009).

Internal family problems also exacerbate the situation. Household breakdown, parental divorce, and domestic violence push children to seek protection and security outside the home, which eventually leads them to the streets (Faip, 2022). In addition, the lack of parental supervision and care makes children more susceptible to negative influences from the environment, including economic exploitation and criminality. Children who grow up in families with minimal care often choose the streets as their daily social space.

Exploitation by certain parties is also a serious problem. Not a few street children are used by adults to busk, beg, or do other informal work, not of their own free will, but because of pressure and coercion (Faip, 2022). In addition to economic and family factors, social and cultural values in some communities also shape the idea that children can work from a young age to help their parents. This norm reinforces children's cycle of dependence on street life and makes it difficult for them to escape the situation.

### 1.2. Survival Dynamics of Street Children

Street children in major cities in Indonesia face various challenges in maintaining their survival in a harsh and inhospitable environment. For this reason, they develop various survival strategies that can be categorized into three main forms: active strategies, passive strategies, and social network-based strategies. Active strategies include activities such as busking, selling small items, wiping car windows, or helping park vehicles to earn money directly from daily activities. This strategy shows that street children try to remain productive despite the limited conditions (Suhartini & Panjaitan, 2009).

In addition, there are passive strategies, which are efforts to survive by minimizing needs, such as enduring hunger, sleeping in makeshift places, and relying on the mercy of others. These children learn to live frugally and accept the harsh reality of life on the street.

Meanwhile, the social network-based strategy is carried out through the formation of a community of fellow street children. They share information, food, temporary shelter, and protect each other from external threats, including violence and enforcement officials.

This survival dynamic is not only limited to economic strategies, but also includes psychological adaptability. These children learn to deal with fear, social pressure, and uncertain conditions through self-defense mechanisms, such as ignoring stressors, creating certain routines, and maintaining stable social relationships in their environment. However, not all street children are able to survive in a balanced way. Some of them experience mental distress, dependence on addictive substances, and engage in unlawful activities as a form of escape from the pressures of life (Hafni, 2020).

Thus, the survival dynamics of street children show how they use various methods, both individually and collectively, to survive in the midst of limitations and pressures. Their resilience is a reflection of the strength, ingenuity, and vulnerability that combine in the reality of street life.

### **1.3. The Long-term Impact of Street Children's Lives**

The life of street children not only has immediate impacts, but also long-term consequences that can affect their entire future. One of the most serious long-term impacts is the loss of access to formal education. Many street children have never attended school or have dropped out of school at an early age, depriving them of the opportunity to acquire the basic skills needed in the world of work. This puts them at high risk of being trapped in an intergenerational cycle of poverty and making it difficult to escape their marginalized social status (Arfani & Sukamdi, 2018).

In addition, the experience of living on the streets from an early age can significantly affect children's psychological development. Children who live in uncertainty, violence and social rejection tend to experience emotional disturbances, low self-confidence and difficulties in building healthy interpersonal relationships in adulthood. Research by Hafni (2020) shows that although some children are able to develop resilience to stress, many experience prolonged psychological trauma due to exploitation, neglect and mistreatment from the surrounding environment.

From a social perspective, street children who grow up without adequate intervention have the potential to experience alienation in society. They often do not have civil registration documents, job skills, or supportive social networks, making it difficult for them to find decent work and integrate into the formal social system. It is not uncommon for them to be trapped in informal jobs that involve criminal activities due to the necessity of life (Rizki, 2022).

In the long term, the lack of intervention for street children also has an impact on the quality of national human resources. If these children are not empowered early on, they will lose their potential to contribute to development and risk becoming a recurring social burden. Addressing street children should therefore be viewed as a long-term social investment, which requires holistic policies, cross-sectoral support, and a child rights-based approach.

The problem of street children requires a comprehensive and sustainable solution, involving synergy between the government, the community, non-governmental organizations, and the education and health sectors. One of the main approaches is through coaching and empowerment programs facilitated by government agencies such as the Social Service. This program includes skills training, character building, provision of shelter houses,

and psychosocial assistance. In Jayawijaya, for example, street-based, community-based and social guidance approaches have been implemented to reduce the number of street children and increase their independence (Tambawang, 2023).

In addition, solutions also need to be carried out from the root of the problem, namely the family. Educating parents about proper parenting and the importance of education is an integral part of the intervention. The community also needs to be educated so that they no longer give money directly to street children on the street, as this reinforces the cycle of dependency. Instead, the community can be redirected to donate through official institutions or support programs that empower street children collectively (Tanzil, 2024).

Innovative efforts have also been made through community approaches and empathic design, such as the construction of a community space for street children in Grogol, West Jakarta. This facility not only provides a place to learn but also builds street children's confidence, interest in learning, and social engagement with the general public (Wijaya & Carina, 2024). This community space is a bridge to remove negative stigma and open access to a better future.

Equally important is the strengthening of public policies that favor children. Regulations are needed that emphasize a child rights-based approach, not just curbing or expulsion. Legal protection for street children, their integration into the formal and non-formal education system, as well as health and counseling services must be ensured to be present in an inclusive and sustainable manner.

With an approach that touches various economic, social, educational, and psychological dimensions, it is hoped that street children will not only be able to survive, but also grow as an independent and competitive generation.

## 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. 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 the research to reveal knowledge in detail and provide a comprehensive picture of the subject under study.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Street children in Indonesia's major cities exhibit complex and varied survival dynamics. They develop survival strategies that fall into three main categories: active strategies, passive strategies, and social network strategies. Active strategies include activities such as busking, selling small items, or wiping car windows to earn money directly. Passive strategies involve enduring hunger, sleeping in the open, and living very frugally. Meanwhile, the social network strategy is applied through solidarity and protection among fellow street children, where they help each other in meeting basic needs and maintaining each other's safety (Suhartini & Panjaitan, 2009; Sukma, 2023).

On the other hand, the government and social institutions have carried out various interventions through coaching and empowerment. In Jayawijaya and Probolinggo, skills training programs and shelters have been implemented to equip street children with better life skills (Tambawang, 2023; Mubarog & Veredila, 2023). However, the effectiveness of these programs is still limited. Warfandu's (2024) study in Sorong City showed that even though coaching programs were carried out, the number of street children actually increased due to the lack of program continuity, minimal human resources, and the absence of comprehensive evaluation.

Furthermore, community-based solutions have begun to be developed through an empathetic approach. Wijaya and Carina (2024) developed a community space in West Jakarta that is open and friendly to street children. This facility is not only a place to learn, but also a safe space that removes stigma and builds children's self-confidence. This approach shows positive results because it emphasizes building relationships and trust, rather than just providing facilities.

However, various obstacles are still encountered in handling street children, including lack of public awareness, weak coordination between agencies, and the absence of firm and consistent child protection policies. Therefore, cross-sector synergy, strengthening social support, and sustainable community empowerment are needed to create real change in the lives of street children.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of street children in big cities in Indonesia reflects social and economic inequality and weak child protection systems. Street children are a vulnerable group that faces various challenges, ranging from poverty, family violence, limited education, to social stigma. To survive, they develop adaptive strategies both individually and collectively, through informal economic activities, extreme savings, and community solidarity. Although they show extraordinary resilience, life on the street still leaves many long-term risks, both physically, psychologically, and socially.

Efforts to handle street children have been carried out through various interventions, such as skills training, shelters, and community-based approaches. However, their effectiveness is still limited due to the lack of program continuity, overly formal approaches, and participatory and cross-sectoral approaches have proven to be more capable of reaching street children in a humane and impactful manner.

Thus, handling street children must be carried out holistically and sustainably, involving families, communities, governments, and social organizations. Protection of children's rights, access to education and health, and the elimination of stigma must be part of long-term policies. Street children are not a burden, but individuals with potential who need to be empowered for a more just and prosperous future.

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