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A Brighter Future: Innovative Initiatives to Empower the Potential of Street Children

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ABSTRACT

Street children are a marginal social group that is often overlooked in the mainstream of national development. Their existence not only reflects structural poverty, but also shows the failure of the child protection system in providing basic rights such as education, protection, nurturing, and health insurance. In the Indonesian context, the phenomenon of street children has developed into a complex and multidimensional social problem. This article aims to examine various innovative initiatives that have been developed between 2020 and 2025 in order to empower the potential of street children. This research uses literature study methods from various scientific journals that discuss educational, psychosocial, legal, and economic empowerment approaches. The results of the study show that an integrative and collaborative approach involving social services, children's social welfare institutions, communities, and social workers can have a significant impact in improving the quality of life of street children. Initiatives such as alternative education, entrepreneurial skills training, religious guidance, and social rehabilitation have yielded positive results in restoring the rights and dignity of children who were previously excluded from the social system. Thus, the development of community-based and multi-sector empowerment models is an important step in realizing a brighter future for street children.

ARTICLE INFO

1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of children living on the streets in Indonesia is a complex and multi-dimensional social problem. They belong to a vulnerable group, experiencing not only financial hardship, but also deprivation of basic rights such as education, health services, protection, and proper care. These children live and work outdoors, facing various dangers from exploitation, violence, and marginalization that can have a long-term negative impact on their future (Latipah *et al.,* 2021).

Research in Gorontalo City by Bertus *et al.* (2022) shows that the motivation to help economically struggling parents is the main factor for children to go out on the streets. Although most of them still live with their families, they decide to work on the street due to pressing economic pressures. This indicates that being a street child does not mean separation from the family, but rather an attempt to survive in difficult conditions.

The exploitation of street children is a very serious issue. In a study comparing Bandung City and Ciamis Regency, Yuliani & Rachmawati (2022) revealed that children are exploited in various ways, ranging from busking, hawking, to being used as intermediaries in illegal activities such as drug buying. While in areas like Ciamis, the forms of exploitation may be simpler, it still deprives children of their right to grow up in a safe and healthy environment.

The education aspect is also a big challenge. Birkil & Aulia (2024) emphasize the important role of social workers as liaisons who assist in restoring access to education to children living on the streets. They function as enablers, brokers, and educators. These social workers play an important role in helping children rebuild their interest in learning and confidence that may have been lost due to stigma and negative experiences on the streets. Not only education, street children also face major challenges in the health sector. They live in environments without adequate sanitation facilities, experience malnutrition, and are exposed to the risk of infectious diseases. Rossa (2021) note that the health issues of street children not only include physical aspects, but also have psychological and social dimensions. They are also very vulnerable to depression, hopelessness, and prolonged trauma due to the harsh realities of life on the streets.

However, amidst these challenges, a number of innovative initiatives have been undertaken by the government, social organizations and civil society. Programs such as skills training, non-formal education, religious character development, and social rehabilitation have been implemented to empower street children. Rahman & Anwar (2023), for example, combine religious education with an art approach at Rumah Kreatif Keboen Sastra to shape children's character and morals. In addition, the Bandung City Government through the Unit Social Response (USR) Program, which has been evaluated by Hendarsin & Rediana (2025), showed positive results in reducing the number of street children exploitation through a direct and structured approach.

With the right, cooperative and sustainable approach, children living on the streets can be rescued from the harshness of street life and empowered to achieve a better future, but this takes away the child's right to grow up in a safe and healthy environment.

2. METHODS

The method used in this research is literature study, which is a systematic approach to collecting and analyzing information from various relevant sources. Literature study involves a series of steps, including reading, recording, and processing existing research materials (Sofiah *et al.,* 2020). According to Danial and Warsiah (2009: 80) in Fiaji (2021), literature study

is a type of research conducted by researchers by collecting data from previous research results, such as journals, theses, theses, and scientific articles related to the subject and research objectives.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Factors Causing Children to Become Street Children

The problem of street children in Indonesia arises from various structural and cultural factors. Suryaningsih & Nur (2020) state that children tend to go to the streets because of the influence of dysfunctional families, including neglect, loss of parental role models, and economic pressure. In addition, influences from the social environment, such as peers who have already lived on the streets, also strengthen children's decisions to earn a living in public spaces.

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3.2. Street Child Exploitation

The exploitation of street children is a very serious issue. In a study comparing Bandung City and Ciamis Regency, Yuliani & Rachmawati (2022) revealed that children are exploited in various ways, ranging from busking, hawking, to being used as intermediaries in illegal activities such as drug purchases. While in areas such as Ciamis, the forms of exploitation may be simpler, it still deprives children of their right to grow up in a safe and healthy environment. This difference indicates that the presence of children on the streets is not only influenced by personal aspects, but also by social and economic factors in the surrounding environment.

3.3. Education and the Role of Social Workers

The education aspect is also a big challenge. Birkil & Aulia (2024) emphasize the importance of the role of social workers as liaisons who assist in restoring access to education to children living on the streets. They function as enablers, brokers, and educators. These social workers play an important role in helping children rebuild their interest in learning and confidence that may have been lost due to stigma and negative experiences on the streets. Rasyid & Sahrul (2023) corroborate these findings by describing how social workers at Taruna Jaya 2 Youth Development Center serve as intermediaries between children and social services. They ensure children have access to health services, skills training, and social guidance. As a result, street children who initially experienced difficulties in fulfilling their basic needs are now able to lead more structured lives.

3.4. Physical, Psychological and Social Health

Not only education, street children also face major challenges in the health sector. They live in an environment without adequate sanitation facilities, experience malnutrition, and are exposed to the risk of infectious diseases. Rossa (2021) note that the health issues of street children not only include physical aspects, but also have psychological and social dimensions. They are also very vulnerable to depression, hopelessness, and prolonged trauma due to the harsh realities of life on the streets.

The health problems of street children are multidimensional. Rossa (2021) identified three main groups of problems: physical, psychological and social. These children are malnourished, vulnerable to infectious diseases, and often victims of violence. Psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety are also common, along with the life pressures they experience from an early age. Their research showed a significant correlation between physical health problems and the overall condition of street children.

In the aspect of healthy living behavior, Kartikasasmi *et al.* (2023) found that the application of PHBS (Clean and Healthy Living Behavior) among street children is still low. Lack of knowledge, unavailability of hygiene facilities, and the absence of adequate assistance cause children to be unable to carry out healthy living principles independently.

3.5. Empowerment and Social Rehabilitation Initiatives

In the midst of various challenges faced, various street children empowerment programs have emerged. One of them is a religious-based approach developed by Rumah Kreatif Keboen Sastra. Rahman & Anwar (2023) reported that religious education combined with art training such as music succeeded in increasing the motivation and positive behavior of street children.

Government-based programs also show encouraging results. Hendarsin & Rediana (2025) evaluated the implementation of the Unit Social Response (USR) Program by the Bandung City Social Office. The program targets exploited children on the street by providing shelter, psychological guidance, and skills training. Outreach is carried out on a daily basis, and social workers monitor children's development so that they do not return to the street environment.

4. CONCLUSION

Street children are not a product of individual failure, but a reflection of systemic social inequality. They do not need pity, but equal access to their basic rights. Based on a review of various initiatives between 2020 and 2025, it can be concluded that collaborative, participatory and humanistic empowerment approaches have great potential in creating real change in the lives of street children.

Alternative education, skills training, social rehabilitation, religious approaches, as well as legal and health protection are the main foundations that must be strengthened in designing policies and programs to overcome street children. In the future, cross-sectoral commitment and program sustainability are needed so that the empowerment process does not stop at the project level, but becomes an integral part of national social development. Thus, the hope for a brighter future for street children can truly be realized.

Moreover, the active involvement of street children themselves in the design and evaluation of programs is crucial to ensure that interventions are relevant, respectful, and responsive to their actual needs. Participatory approaches that empower children to voice their experiences and aspirations not only improve program effectiveness but also foster children's sense of agency and self-worth. This shift from treating street children as passive recipients of aid to recognizing them as active stakeholders can strengthen the impact of interventions and help break cycles of marginalization.

In addition, strengthening data collection and monitoring systems is essential to track progress, identify gaps, and inform evidence-based policymaking. Integrating data from multiple sectors, such as education, health, child protection, and labor, provides a more

comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by street children and enhances coordination among stakeholders. By prioritizing data-driven decision-making, governments and organizations can design more adaptive, efficient, and targeted interventions that truly address the root causes of child homelessness and vulnerability.

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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