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Strengthening resilience in families of street adolescents with embedding spiritual values ☆

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Abstract The problems that occur in street adolescents inflict heavy burdens upon the family, which the family should be able to withstand.
Objective: This study aims to identify the families' experiences of strengthening their resilience in helping street adolescents to adapt as they grow and develop.
Method: This qualitative study took a phenomenological approach of recruiting six participants after saturating the data.
Results: The study showed that the main reason why adolescents had occupations in the street was to assist their families financially. Other reasons were the influence of friends and imitating the parents' previous jobs. The families' anxieties over their adolescents' safety were psychological responses that emerged later. Investment in spiritual values became a coping source for these families.
Conclusions: The families' acceptance of their fears did not occur because of their powerlessness but rather indicated their resilience in facing the situation.
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Introduction

The annual increase in street children, especially adolescents, is a complex social issue. The Directorate of Child

Social Welfare of Indonesia reported that the number of street adolescents had reached 1.1 percent of the total number of Indonesian adolescents, with the highest number living in DKI Jakarta 21.9 percent.[1] Meanwhile, the government could handle only 50 percent of existing street adolescents. Adolescents, including street adolescents, are vulnerable populations who require special attention and services. Adolescents often become vulnerable because of the changes that occur during their growth process, a transitional period that might exacerbate the crisis of identity.[2] Adolescents also tend to escape from their dependence on the family and become more peer-oriented.[3] The lives

of street teenagers, who spend most of their time on the streets for work, play, and other activities, are considered extremely at risk because of health issues and criminal acts, such as sexual harassment, child exploitation, and drug abuse.[4]

The problems that occur in street adolescents inflict heavy burdens upon the family, who are required to assist teenagers during the adaptive process of growing up.[5] Another challenge is the external and internal societal stigma against street adolescents, which the family should be able to withstand. Referring to the results of Muslim[6] stated that there was a change in street teenagers' patterns of interacting with their families on the street, particularly as those interactions concerned parents' lack of attention toward their children, especially in terms of protection from street life. The results of qualitative research, stated that street adolescents expected their parents to take care of, give affection to, be responsible for, and show love toward the teenagers to encourage them to leave the street life.[7] Looking at the picture of family life with street adolescents was expected to bring out the synergy between both parties.

Families whose teenagers spend most of their time on the streets often feel helplessness, inferiority, embarrassment, and sadness. These psychological responses are naturally aroused by those above negative societal stigma. Families who allow their teenagers to play or work on the streets are considered unable to perform their functions properly. Most adolescents who work on the streets are motivated by their families' economic inability to meet the entire family's primary, secondary, and tertiary needs. In addition to poverty, many other factors cause adolescents to live on the streets, such as peer influence and disharmony and ignorance in the family, which precipitated teenagers' running away.[8] Referring to the results of the qualitative research, stated that street adolescents in Bombay had similar principles to typical adolescents, who were expected to participate in family gatherings and get family support. However, the street youths were different because of socioeconomic conflicts that encouraged them to seek support outside the home. Family support became one of the most effective strategies for solving the problems of street adolescents. In keeping with the concept of the family as the smallest social group, each family member shared a close, interdependent emotional bond predicated on a common goal. Psychosocial support from surrounding adults, manifested through such actions as giving affection, understanding, and caring and avoiding conflict, was and is needed to help prevent maladaptive behavior in street teenagers, such as stopping them from using drugs.[7]

According to previous research, families were considered healthy if they were adaptable to dynamic changes, could meet all members' physical, emotional, spiritual and sociocultural needs, and were able to perform family functions as a form of resilience.[9,10] Resilience was needed to form a strong family, to enable it to survive, adapt, and rise from the current problems or crises.[11,12] Spirituality as one of the subdomains of family toughness was considered very important for strengthening family resilience. Spirituality became a bridge between coping power and toughness. This opinion was in line with a study done by Grabbe et al.,[13] which stated that the planting of spiritual values in family members was believed to help the families of street adolescents to adapt

to their teenagers' condition and to prevent self-harmful behavior, drug abuse, and antisocial behavior.

The quality of life in Indonesian society could be developed through a spiritual perspective that consisted of dimensions of divinity and humanity and was derived from the diversity of spiritual and noble values in Indonesian culture. Indonesia, as a civic country that recognizes the existence of six religions, has a great opportunity to strengthen the spirituality of its inhabitants.[14] For typical Indonesian families, family resilience could be utilized when crises arose, and this resilience would let families see a crisis as a challenge they could overcome. Spirituality could be the foundation and worldview that would help families survive the crises.[15] That phenomenon became the background for this research, which aims to describe families' experiences in strengthening their resilience while helping street adolescents grow.

Method

Qualitative research that used a phenomenological approach was done to describe the experiences of street adolescents' families when spiritual values were instilled to strengthen resilience during the adolescents' growth phase. The purposive sampling method was used to get participants to reach data saturation; six participants were involved in this study. Participants' inclusion criteria included a willingness to participate, living in Jakarta, and having adolescent family members who partly spent their time on the streets for work or play but still returned home (street adolescents, in other words).

This research applied the basic ethical principles that guaranteed the rights of the participants and anticipated the occurrence of ethical problems. The study also passed an ethics test from the Ethics Commission of the Faculty of Nursing University of Indonesia. Furthermore, this study considered the standards of the data validity, including: (1) credibility was ensured by asking participants to reread the themes found in the research. Discussion with colleagues who had qualitative research experience was another way to ensure the creativity of the data found; (2) dependability was ensured through an audit inquiry that involved an external reviewer; (3) confirmability was ensured by discussing all transcripts and results of field notes with colleagues or research supervisors; (4) transferability was ensured by compiling research reports in a systematic, detailed, clear, reliable way that could let the reports be used as a reference.

Results

The results of this study described a history of teenagers living on the streets, the psychological responses of families living with street adolescents, and the way the families of street adolescents strengthen their families' resilience.

A history of teenagers on the streets

The findings of the study revealed three causes behind adolescent street life. The first main cause of street life for

adolescents was the need to work to help the family financially. This motivation was evident in the expressions of all participants, who stated:

''[To] have his own pocket money; I never told him [to do so]; he said he wanted to help his mother, so, yeah, I only work as an onion peeler.'' (P2)

''….. Being a street musician can help me paying for rent house.'' (P6)

The influence of friends was the second cause of teenagers wandering in the streets, according to these statements:

''Well, at that time when he was invited by his friends, saying that rather than staying at home it would be better to join [his friend], he said.'' (P1)

''At first I just did not want to go to school, but then it turned out that I was following the bandwagon, street musician friends.'' (P4)

Following in family members' previous lines of work was the third cause of teenagers working on the streets, as was revealed by two participants, one of whom stated:

''Honestly, yes, I also used to sing on the street since I was a girl until the moment I was childrearing… so my son followed my path, singing on the streets… I did not ask him to do so.'' (P2)

Psychological responses of families who have street adolescents

The teenagers' decision to live on the streets caused those teenagers' families to undergo psychological responses that caused crises if not handled properly. A common psychological response was the families' fear for the safety of their teenagers on the streets. Families revealed the abundance of child abduction cases and adolescent involvement in drug abuse, which later became worrisome for the families. These fears were expressed by all participants:

''… I'm anxious; I'm afraid that my teenagers would follow evil people; they've been becoming a lot lately. We never knew what kind of people they are. So, yes, I feel terrified.'' (P1)

''I'm afraid that someone gives drugs to my son, like it usually does right now.'' (P2)

''Sometimes I'm afraid of being given drugs like…some kind of sedative pill.'' (P3)

''My child has already been smoking with friends outside; (he also has) many friends who smoke, I'm afraid that he'll be consuming liquors.'' (P6)

''I'm worried that my child would be kidnapped, then sold.'' (P4)

''… it's hard, children on the street tend to make parents worry. I often witness those who were drunk, yet thankfully they're not my son's friends.'' (P5)

How the families of street adolescents strengthen their resilience

The anxiety of street adolescents' families over teenage safety is one source of stress. Street adolescents are very vulnerable to crime, and peers and the social environment of the community are very influential on the development of adolescent behavior. Strong families, however, will be able to survive and rise from stress. In such situations, family spirituality gives the family the strength to survive the stress, as the participants express:

''It's been taught to only perform [sing] on the street, do not do bad things… I prayed continuously for my children, considering his activities on the streets. That made me content at home, merely working as an onion peeler'' (P1)

''It's nurturing, caring about each other…. if my nephew has not come home, (I) immediately look for him. Hence his friends often also asked for help'' (P3)

''Living in Jakarta, if you couldn't carry yourself, it might be dangerous. For example, the drug is illegal, but he has a lot of friends on the streets who got that thing; even my son had been offered once. My son just carried on; he said he was reminded of his mother and that his purpose of performing on the street was to help Mom.'' (P2)

''It's true… if I resigned to God, my problem would be easier to burden, I am so calm.'' (P4)

''What I emphasize the most to the child, I want the child to be a good person, worship let me go. In street life, the number one is religion, let's run it all.'' (P5)

''If it is time for prayer, yes, he does it first.'' (P5)

''When I was a child, I used to participate in studying in the mosque, learn to read al-Quran; it's just nowadays that I'm no longer go to the mosque.'' (P6)

Discussion

A history of teenagers on the streets

Many factors require teenagers to divide their time among school, play and work. One of these factors is poverty. For this reason, teenagers wandered the streets as singers and caretakers to help their families financially. The increasing number of street adolescents was one of the many impacts of unplanned social change. Advances in civilization and technology could lead to changes in a society that still has a high level of anxiety over weakening the relationship ties among family members. Conditions of social gaps, especially economic difficulties, have led to the occurrence of cultural lag, or the difference in the levels of culture inside a society. Street adolescents are one of the groups that experience cultural lag, unable to balance cultural development because of modernization. The resultant social gap correlated with the increasing number of street children.

Differentiation in family structure characterized by changes in the role and function of the family is also a

cause of street adolescence. One example of a shift in economic functioning is the difficulty of finding employment, and the increasing demands of the family also impose the task of earning a living on teenagers. Teenagers under all these limitations must help their families to meet their economic needs. Although the participating families said they never forced their teenagers to help earn a living, the families realized that teenagers' earnings from working on the streets could ease the families' financial burden. Perhaps appropriately, teenagers also emulated the work that their parents once did on the streets. 72.25 percent of adolescents who are driven onto the streets want to help their parents economically.[16]

This finding is similar to those of the previous qualitative research, which states the reasons why teenagers become street adolescents: poverty, invitations from and influenced by friends, and the desire to seek new experiences.[8] Teenagers generally tend to escape from their attachment and dependence on the family and become more oriented to their peer groups. Adolescents also have a tendency to do things that are not approved of by their families or the surrounding social environment because of peer pressure or desire alone. These actions are very understandable because teenagers have a naturally elevated curiosity about whatever is new to them. Teenagers must fulfill their developmental tasks to be able to socialize in their environment. This ability certainly affects adolescents greatly: studies found that teenagers were usually very easily influenced by peers.[2,3] This study proved the influence or invitation of peers to be a reason why teenagers wandered on the streets. This finding was also in line with the results of research, which stated that peers could influence a person to perform risky behaviors such as smoking, using drugs, and visiting prostitutes.[17] Naturally, teenagers tried to find new things, learn independently, more confidently, and be accepted into the group.[18]

Psychological responses of families with street adolescents

The mild anxiety experienced by street adolescents' families in this study is well-founded, given that street juveniles have open access to the outside world, making them particularly vulnerable to health problems and crime. Teenagers mingle with street life and are introduced to aspects of street culture like cigarettes, alcohol, and drug use. Adolescents tend to observe smoking behaviors or the use of adjacent drugs, which could create an addiction to or accustomed feel for those maladaptive behaviors. This statement was reinforced who stated that 71 percent of street teens in Western Kenya was introduced to drugs by friends, whereas 18 percent were introduced by the family.[19]

A previous study on street children stated that 85 percent of the respondents were addicted to glue.[20] Anxiety was a normal response in facing this particular situation and even could be an ''alarm'' for families to immediately make efforts to prevent addiction. Previous research results explained that subjects who experienced mild and moderate anxiety would perform an adaptive coping mechanism, and no participants in the study performed a maladaptive coping mechanism. This was because the subjects were still able to

control their feelings of anxiety, since they were aware of the increasing danger and motivated to change.[21] Participants in this study also made efforts to prevent maladaptive behavior that may occur in street adolescents who show an adaptive coping response.

How the families of street adolescents strengthen their families' resilience

Family resilience is a family's ability to withstand the problems or anxieties they face and make the family stronger. This ability allows family members to adapt to hazards from outside and within the family. Resilience implies the tenacity and the physical, material, mental, spiritual, and social ability to live independently and achieve family welfare.[11,12] Spirituality is one of the subdomains of toughness that can be a source of coping for the family. The family's resignation to perceived fears is not a sign of helplessness but rather showcases the resilience of the family to accept the reality that its teenagers must work on the streets. The remembrance of religious teachings to avoid forbidden things and advice given by the family are expected to be defensive mechanisms that prevent maladaptive behavior in street adolescents.

According to Fowler's theory of spiritual development that adolescents are in the synthetic conventional faith phase, meaning that they have a high interest in religion and might find its significance radical.[22] Adolescents in this phase synthesize religious beliefs and values that could support the process of identity formation. The process of establishing a paradigm of a personal relationship with God also occurs in this phase, helping teenagers realize that there is a god who knows them better and to value God as a savior who gives them peace of mind. This suggests that the approach of spirituality could be used as an effective coping strategy. Previous research results also suggested a positive relationship between a religious-oriented coping strategy and anxiety level.[23] Other studies had also shown that a person with a high spirituality had a stronger tendency to interpret life, which affected his coping mechanism.[24]

Spirituality can be seen from two dimensions: the vertical dimension associated with the divine value and the human relationship with God and the horizontal dimension that governs good relations among people. Strong spiritual values in the family could influence participants to develop trust in the healthy principle of illness. Spiritual well-being was shown to be significantly correlated with physical and mental health because closeness with God helps one become calmer and happier.[25]

According to the findings of this study, spiritual values also affected the prevention of crises or maladaptive behavior, so the spiritually inclined families of the street adolescents felt calmer and more confident about letting the teenagers go to work on the streets to support their families economically. The prayers that families always offer, are part of spirituality, which supports and facilitates families and adolescents in adapting to stress or crisis.[15] Significant family support increases family toughness.[26]

Indeed, street adolescents also strongly expected family support because, phenomenologically, the family was a place of social learning and health protection for all its

members. Previous researchers mentioned that street children desperately needed effective psychosocial support from the adults around them to help them stop using drugs and to supply them with food.[7] The implantation of spiritual beliefs in divine power and the significance of humanity could assist a formidable family figure in facing problems. This hypothesis was in accordance with the results of a study that stated that there was a relationship between spirituality and family toughness.[15]

Conclusions

Predicate as a teenager is actually not because of self-interest but because of factors such as economic problems, the influence of friends, and imitating the work of parents. The experience of street life causes teenagers to tend to behave similar to their environment, which causes families to worry about the safety of street teenagers. These worries include the fears of being abducted, being arrested by the authorities, and involvement in the use of drugs. Street teenagers need their families to support them in facing external challenges. Family solidarity in carrying out spiritual habits and interdependence among family members are important parts of spiritual values. Family spirituality can maximize family coping, so family resilience can be achieved. Therefore, street teenagers' families need guidance to increase their awareness and be willing to increase family toughness collectively. They can strengthen their resilience by utilizing available resources to survive and turn a problem into a challenge that must be faced.

This study has limited generalization because we relied only on samples taken from the shelters for street children in Jakarta. The recruitment process and data collection were assisted by shelter officials whose relationship of strength can cause respondents to be biased. Another limitation is that the data are still qualitatively restricted. Further studies with data triangulation, more representative samples, and broader research areas are needed to better understand the resilience of street adolescents' families. These studies should also provide input on nursing interventions to prevent street adolescents' health problems through family empowerment.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgement

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