

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONDITIONS OF FOSTER CHILDREN DUE TO CAREGIVER CHANGES IN BAKTI LUHUR ORPHANAGE

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Abstract

Caregiver changes in orphanages are a frequent phenomenon that can significantly impact the psychological conditions of foster children. Children who have formed attachments with caregivers often experience emotional distress when they must separate and adapt to new caregivers. This study aims to describe the psychological conditions of children at Bakti Luhur Orphanage due to caregiver changes. This research employs a qualitative approach using photovoice techniques and interviews. Participants consisted of 8 foster children aged 8-15 years who had experienced caregiver changes, analyzed using thematic analysis. This study identified three main themes: (1) Negative emotional responses to separation, including differences in caregiving patterns, cognitive responses, affective responses, and conative responses; (2) Adaptation process to new caregivers, encompassing initial awkwardness, coping strategies, and formation of new attachments; (3) Impact of caregiver changes, including attachment problems, adaptation issues, and effects on the environmental system. Caregiver changes provide complex psychological impacts on foster children, creating collective emotional responses and affecting attachment stability. These findings underscore the importance of caregiving stability and structured transition management in institutional care systems.

Keywords: *Caregiver Change, Psychological Conditions, Foster Children, Attachment, Orphanage.*

Abstrak

Pergantian pengasuh di panti asuhan merupakan fenomena yang sering terjadi dan dapat memberikan dampak signifikan terhadap kondisi psikologis anak asuh. Anak-anak yang telah membentuk kelekatan dengan pengasuh seringkali mengalami distress emosional ketika harus berpisah dan beradaptasi dengan pengasuh baru. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan Gambaran Kondisi Psikologis Anak-anak di Panti Asuhan Bakti Luhur akibat pergantian pengasuh. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan teknik photovoice dan wawancara. Partisipan terdiri dari 8 orang anak asuh berusia 8-15 tahun yang telah mengalami pergantian pengasuh, dengan menggunakan analisis tematik. Penelitian ini mengidentifikasi tiga tema utama : (1) Respons emosional negatif terhadap perpisahan, meliputi perbedaan pola asuh, respons kognitif, respons afektif, dan respons konatif; (2) Proses Adaptasi terhadap pengasuh baru, mencakup kecanggungan awal, strategi coping, dan pembentukan kelekatan baru; (3) Dampak pergantian pengasuh, berupa masalah kelekatan, masalah adaptasi, dan dampak terhadap sistem lingkungan. Pergantian pengasuh memberikan dampak psikologis yang kompleks pada anak asuh, menciptakan respons emosional kolektif, dan mempengaruhi stabilitas kelekatan. Temuan ini menggarisbawahi pentingnya stabilitas pengasuhan dan manajemen transisi yang terstruktur dalam sistem pengasuhan institusional.

Kata Kunci: Pergantian Pengasuh, Kondisi Psikologis, Anak Asuh, Kelekatan, Panti Asuhan.

INTRODUCTION

Orphanages constitute one form of alternative care institution that plays an important role in ensuring the welfare of children who have lost care from nuclear families, whether due to abandonment, neglect, or other social conditions. In Indonesia, the existence of orphanages has become an integral part of the child protection system. Based on data from the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2022), more than 8,000 child care institutions are recorded across Indonesia. In East Nusa Tenggara Province (NTT), particularly in Kupang City, there are approximately 180 orphanages sheltering around 600 children from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

In institution-based care systems, caregivers play a vital role as parental substitute figures. Not only do they provide children's physical needs, but caregivers also help shape children's emotional, social, and psychological development. Based on attachment theory developed by Bowlby (1988), the presence of stable and consistent relationships between children and caregivers significantly determines the formation of security and healthy psychosocial foundations. However, when this relationship is disrupted—especially due to repeated caregiver changes—children are at risk of experiencing emotional disorders, behavioral difficulties, and obstacles in establishing healthy interpersonal relationships in the future.

Caregiver changes in orphanages are a fairly frequent issue, often triggered by various reasons such as work rotation, resignation, retirement, institutional policy changes, or limited caregiver personnel. Although often considered part of organizational dynamics, in reality, caregiver changes can bring significant psychological impacts to children. Several studies, such as those conducted by Zulfah et al. (2023) and Ijzendoorn (2011), reveal that caregiver changes can cause anxiety, withdrawal from social environments, adaptation difficulties, and failure to form secure attachments in the future.

Bakti Luhur Orphanage Kupang is one institution that cares for children from various backgrounds and developmental conditions. Based on preliminary surveys conducted by researchers, within the past four years, this orphanage has experienced caregiver changes 3 to 4 times, both from nuns and freelance caregivers. This situation becomes important to study because children with normal development living there greatly need stable and consistent caregiving patterns. Additionally, the researcher's direct experience during Community Service (KKN) at this orphanage provided contextual understanding that strengthened the urgency of research on psychological impacts of caregiver changes.

Different from most previous research that predominantly used quantitative approaches or general case studies, this research adopts a qualitative approach with the photovoice method. This method is a participatory approach that allows children to express their experiences and feelings through images and oral narratives, thus providing space for children's voices that are often marginalized in caregiving policies.

Therefore, this research aims to describe and understand the psychological conditions of children at Bakti Luhur Orphanage due to caregiver changes. It is hoped that the results of this research can contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of more stable, empathetic, and child-needs-oriented childcare systems.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach with the photovoice method, aimed at understanding and describing the psychological conditions of foster children due to caregiver changes at Bakti Luhur Orphanage. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore subjective meanings and profound experiences of participants, especially in social and emotional contexts that cannot be explained quantitatively.

The photovoice method combines participatory and visual techniques through photography activities, enabling children as primary participants to record, narrate, and reflect on their life experiences. This approach was developed by Wang and Burris (1997) to empower marginal communities, including children whose voices are often neglected in social decision-making and policy processes. In this context, children become active subjects in the research process, not merely objects of observation.

Research subjects are foster children living at Bakti Luhur Orphanage Kupang Branch who have experienced caregiver changes. Inclusion criteria for participants are:

1. Aged between 8–15 years
2. Have experienced at least one caregiver change
3. Willing to participate in the research process, including photography sessions and interviews
4. Able to use simple cameras (mobile phone or digital cameras)
5. Do not have significant developmental disabilities

Participant selection was conducted using purposive sampling technique, where researchers deliberately choose individuals considered to best understand and experience the studied phenomenon. Eight children were selected as participants, considering variations in age, gender, and duration of stay at the orphanage.

The research was conducted at Bakti Luhur Orphanage Kupang Branch located at Jl. Soeverdi No. 1, Tuak Daun Merah Village, Oebobo District, Kupang City, East Nusa Tenggara. This location was chosen because it has a history of caregiver changes and provides adequate access and permission for research implementation.

Data collection was conducted using two main techniques: Photovoice, where children were asked to take photos they believed represented memories, experiences, or feelings toward former caregivers or their relationships with new caregivers. Each photo became discussion material during interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in-depth using interview guides based on SHOWeD principles (Wang & Burris, 1997), namely:

1. What do you See here?
2. What is really Happening here?
3. How does this relate to Our lives?
4. Why does this situation, concern, or strength exist?
5. What can we Do about it?

All interviews were recorded using audio recorders and transcribed for analysis. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis from Braun and Clarke (2006). To ensure data validity and credibility, two verification techniques were used: Member Check, where each interview result was reconfirmed with participants to ensure data interpretation matched their intentions, and Diary Method, where researchers recorded daily reflections during the data collection process to capture dynamics that might not be recorded in formal interviews.

This research obtained approval from orphanage management and followed ethical procedures, including written consent from children's guardians (caregivers or responsible parties). Participant identities were disguised using pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. Researchers also observed non-maleficence principles, ensuring that the research process did not endanger children's psychological conditions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis produced three main themes describing children's psychological conditions due to caregiver changes: negative emotional responses to separation, adaptation processes to new caregivers, and impacts of caregiver changes on foster children.

1. Negative Emotional Responses to Separation

Children showed intense emotional responses including sadness, disappointment, anger, and confusion, despite being informed beforehand about caregiver changes. This finding is consistent with Bowlby's (1988) attachment theory, which states that severing relationships with primary caregiver figures triggers profound emotional distress. Research by Zeanah et al. (2008) found that low-quality caregiving and high turnover in institutions are associated with high prevalence of disorganized attachment. Research by Ramanda et al. (2021) also shows that caregiver changes without structured transitions trigger emotional and behavioral disorders in children.

The first theme encompasses four sub-themes: differences in caregiving patterns, cognitive responses, affective responses, and conative responses. Differences in caregiving patterns between old and new caregivers became the main source of emotional distress. Roy revealed: "Sister Serly was disciplined, strict, and if we slept without praying, Sister Sherly would get angry." Cognitive responses were seen from children's understanding that caregiver changes were beyond their control, as expressed by Ike: "When there are caregiver changes, they feel sad, cry too, but this is from headquarters that makes caregiver changes."



Gambar 1. Bedtime caregiving pattern differences

Affective responses were characterized by the emergence of feelings of sadness, anger, and loss. Ester expressed: "Sometimes angry with Sister Tiara, previously Sister Linda was always there for me while now Sister Tiara is rarely there." Conative responses included daydreaming behaviors and searching for emotional substitute figures, as experienced by Agnes: "Sitting and daydreaming, because if Sister Rini were here or we could tell stories together."

2. Adaptation Process to New Caregivers

Adaptation proceeded through an initial awkward phase where children showed withdrawal and sought peer support, followed by an adjustment phase where some children began opening up and building new attachments. Bowlby (1988) states that previous attachments can make children cautious in forming new bonds. Wijaya et al.'s (2021) study highlights the importance of emotional sensitivity from new caregivers, while Muliawiharto (2021) found that children's coping strategies such as playing with peers play important roles in this process. Zalika et al. (2021) add that dilemmas between maintaining old attachments and building new relationships often characterize this adaptation process. Additionally, Erikson's Industry vs Inferiority theory shows that school-age children need continuity in caregiving to

build competence and confidence; caregiver changes can hinder achievement of industry and instead trigger inferiority.

The second theme consists of three phases: initial awkwardness and adjustment process, coping strategies, and formation of new attachments. The initial awkwardness phase was characterized by feelings of shyness and awkwardness, as expressed by Andre: "When I first met Sister Ledi, I was shy." Coping strategies used by children included playing with peers and seeking emotional substitute figures. Boy explained: "Mainly playing with other friends, to forget."

Formation of new attachments showed significant variation among participants. Roy successfully formed new attachments: "Sister Zanty is nice, I most like telling stories with Sister Zanty, with Sister Sherly I never did." However, some participants were still in the process of trying to adapt.



Gambar 2. Mealtime caregiving pattern differences

3. Impact of Caregiver Changes on Foster Children

The third theme encompasses three aspects: attachment problems, adaptation problems, and impacts on the environmental system. Attachment problems were evident from the emergence of feelings of insecurity and deep longing for former caregivers. Andre expressed: "I miss Sister Rini, I could tell stories with Sister Rini." Adaptation problems appeared in difficulties adjusting to new caregivers' rules and communication styles.

Impacts on the environmental system showed that caregiver changes created a collective atmosphere of grief in the orphanage. Ike explained: "We once sat playing and talked about this, they said they felt the same sadness, but couldn't do anything about it."



Gambar 3. Parking area used as play space

Discussion

Based on the research objective to describe the psychological conditions of children at Bakti Luhur Orphanage due to caregiver changes, three main themes were found representing psychological dynamics experienced by foster children: negative emotional responses to separation, adaptation processes to new caregivers, and impacts of changes on the caregiving system in the orphanage environment.

The first theme reveals that children show negative emotional reactions such as sadness, confusion, disappointment, and suppressed anger when facing separation from former caregivers. Although some children knew that changes would occur, this did not fully prepare them emotionally. This indicates that cognitive understanding does not always align with affective readiness. Based on Bowlby's (1988) attachment theory, losing primary caregiver figures can cause emotional instability, especially if the separation process is not accompanied by adequate transitional support. Children also showed cognitive responses in the form of questions and doubts about new caregivers, and conative responses such as withdrawal, avoidance, or passive behavior. Previous research (Dozier et al., 2006; Asprilia et al., 2021; Ramanda et al., 2021) reinforces that disrupted relational experiences can affect children's self-concept, behavior, and social-emotional development in the long term.

The second theme is children's adaptation process to new caregiver presence. The initial phase was characterized by awkwardness, shyness, and reluctance to interact, which are protective mechanisms against possible future losses. Over time, children gradually began adjusting, depending on new caregivers' emotional approaches and consistency. Emerging coping strategies included playing, sharing stories with peers, or seeking support from other staff. This process was greatly influenced by previous attachment experiences and current caregiving environment quality. According to Erikson's psychosocial theory, at school age, children are in the industry vs inferiority phase, where caregiving stability is important for building confidence and competence. Poorly managed caregiver changes can disrupt this process and cause inferiority feelings in children.

The third theme highlights broader impacts of caregiver changes, both individually and collectively. Many children experienced difficulties forming new attachments and became emotionally closed. They tended to show insecure attachment patterns, such as avoidant or ambivalent attachment, because they no longer viewed caregivers as consistent and reliable figures. Additionally, changes in caregiving styles, routines, and rules also caused confusion and disorientation. This finding shows that instability in caregiving structures can affect children's emotional regulation and behavior. Furthermore, caregiver changes also impacted social dynamics within the orphanage, where children collectively felt loss and expressed grief with peers. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory stating that changes in one system element (caregiver) can affect balance of other elements, including inter-child relationships and institutional emotional climate. Research by Aqila (2021) emphasizes the importance of systemic emotional interventions in major change situations to prevent long-term psychosocial dysfunction.

Overall, these three themes provide a complete picture of the complexity of children's psychological conditions in facing caregiver changes, and the importance of holistic and continuous approaches in accompanying them through transition processes.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that caregiver changes at Bakti Luhur Orphanage provide complex and multidimensional psychological impacts on foster children. Three main identified themes - negative emotional responses to separation, adaptation processes to new caregivers, and impacts of caregiver changes - provide comprehensive descriptions of psychological dynamics experienced by children facing changes in caregiving figures.

Research findings confirm the importance of stability in caregiving relationships and show that caregiver changes not only impact individual levels but also create collective effects in orphanage social systems. Collective emotional responses, caregiving pattern differences causing discomfort, and intense grief responses are new findings that enrich understanding of caregiver change phenomena.

These research results have important implications for policy development and caregiving practices in orphanages. More structured approaches are needed in caregiving transition management, including transition protocol development, caregiver training, and adequate psychological support provision. Additionally, it is important to consider continuity in caregiving styles to minimize negative impacts on children's psychological stability.

Further research is recommended to explore effective interventions in helping children adapt to caregiver changes, and develop more stable and sustainable caregiving models in institutional caregiving contexts. Longitudinal approaches will also provide deeper insights into long-term impacts of caregiver changes on children's psychological development.

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