

The Knowledge Base of Intervention Programs for Street Children in Jogjakarta Indonesia

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Abstract

Berbagai kebijakan penanganan masalah anak jalanan di Indonesia telah bertahun-tahun dilaksanakan oleh pemerintah melalui beragam program dan kegiatan. Namun demikian serangkaian program penanganan anak jalanan tersebut terlibat belum menampakkan hasil yang menggembirakan. Hanya sebagian kecil dari komunitas anak jalanan di Indonesia yang mendapatkan manfaat dari program pemerintah tersebut. Sementara itu jumlah populasi anak jalanan di Indonesia, tidak terkecuali di wilayah propinsi Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta, terus mengalami peningkatan.

Dari sisi perangkat hukum, boleh dibilang Indonesia tidak terlalu ketinggalan dengan negara lain. Indonesia juga tidak digolongkan sebagai negara yang "bandel" dalam mengakomodir peraturan Internasional tentang perlindungan anak. Namun sayang sekali sederetan perangkat hukum perlindungan anak yang dimiliki, seperti Konvensi Hak Anak (KHA) yang telah diratifikasi sejak tahun 1990 dan Undang-undang No. 23 Tahun 2002 tentang Perlindungan Anak, tidak dilengkapi dengan bentuk implementasi yang definitif sehingga tidak memiliki dampak yang signifikan bagi peningkatan perlindungan anaj jalanan di Indonesia.

Mengingat kondisi tersebut kiranya penting untuk dipertanyakan kembali dasar kebijakan penanganan anak jalanan di Indonesia. Bagaimana sebenarnya komunitas anak jalanan dan permasalahannya dipahami dan diinterpretasikan dalam kebijakan dan program-program yang ada selama ini.

Keywords: street children, intervention program

A. Introduction

The plight of street children in the Javanese royal city of Jogjakarta is scarred by marginalization and the lack of adequate supportive systems. This population is one of the most vulnerable groups for abuse and exploitation. These children migrate from the suburban areas surrounding Jogjakarta and work on the street as vendors, shoe-polishers, singing beggars, and in other various menial jobs.

The government officially attempts to address the problem of street children through a number of avenues. However, only a small number of

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street children benefits from the official programs. This reality raises questions about the suitability of these programs and whether or not the policies and the intervention programs for street children are adjusted to the circumstances of this population.

This paper will examine the knowledge base of intervention programs provided by the government for street children in Jogjakarta. It will discuss the attitudes of the government towards street children and examine how this population benefits from government's intervention programs. The discussion will be supported by experiences imparted to me in the past, in the course of my interaction with this population in Jogjakarta.

B. The Issues Surrounding the Terminology of *Street Children*

It appears that the government has been in denial in regards to the problems of street children in Indonesia. The wide exposure of the problems of this population and the international pressure finally forced the government of Indonesia to acknowledge their responsibility in addressing this issue.

The term for street children (*anak jalanan*) has been in use since the late 80s in Indonesia, about the same time as the beginning of the socialization of the UN convention on the right of the child (UNHCR). It has become more popular and wide spread Indonesia since the economic crisis (1997) when the number of street children increased dramatically. These circumstances encouraged the involvement of international agencies, such as Asian Development Bank (ADB).¹ However, it took a long time for the government of Indonesia to accommodate the use of this terminology in their policy and their official documents.

The use of the term for street children in the society plays an important role; it is a starting point for the emergence of public awareness. This term has obviously become a source for strong social criticism of government policy. This is the reason why the government prefers to use another term instead of street children to categorize this population, such as "children with social dysfunctions" or even *gepeng* (*gelandangan dan pengemis*) 'the group of tramps and beggars'.² In Jogjakarta, for example, the government programs for the street children are handled by the office of social rehabilitation, which means that these children are still being stigmatized as social deviants.

¹ Farid, M. and Dananto, A. *Capturing Our Experience in Working with Street Children*, (Jogjakarta: PLAN International-Indonesia, 2002), Unpublished, p. 4.

² *Ibid.*

The government's denial of their responsibility to help these children might be based on the reality that these children are officially invisible. Most street children in Jogjakarta have no identity cards and birth certificates, which is the most important legal proof of citizenship. Therefore, officially they do not exist, barring them from the benefits of state acceptance such as the right to education, the right to housing, the right to health care, and other basic rights as mentioned in the constitution. The lack of state acceptance encouraged the development of stigmas and stereotypes on a governmental and societal level. The most common vernacular term for these children is *gembel*, which means discarded or used clothes. The term implies a societal suspicion and a dominant belief that this group exists outside the normative societal structure, belonging to a subordinate group, which is excluded, from the accepted values and culture.

C. A Brief Demographical Overview of the Population

The lack of comprehensive information on street children in Indonesia is a barrier in presenting relevant numbers and data which would be fundamental in establishing a greater understanding of this population. The number of street children is expected to climb dramatically with the deepening economic crisis. However, most social agencies do not provide relevant numbers but only estimation and demographic trends of the increasing numbers of this population. The only extensive survey that has been done after the crisis was conducted by Atmajaya University in 1999, in collaboration with the Ministry of Social affair and Asian Development Bank (ADB). It documented that in this year there are 39,861 street children in the 12 major cities of Indonesia.³

Dinas Kesehatan dan Kesejahteraan Sosial DIJ (DKKS DIJ), the provincial office of social affairs, which runs the government programs for street children in Jogjakarta also could not provide a relevant number of street children in this province. It is documented in its annual report for 2002 that there are 1,083 street children in Jogjakarta, however this number is based on the children who have already participated in intervention programs through shelters and an estimate of those who are not in any intervention program. However, it is stated in this report that

³ *Ibid.*

this number does not include street children who are under the protection of NGOs which do not receive financial support from the government.⁴

D. Circumstances Related to Underlying Factors of Street Children

Poverty and a high cost of living resulting from the economic crisis are the main causes for the high rate of street children in Jogjakarta over the last six years. Some of these children are orphans and homeless. The majority of them live with their impoverished parents or other extended family members, where the economic reality of their situation dictates that they must work to help meet the family expenses. They are forced to seek employment to reduce the family expenses instead of enrolling in school or at the very least not to burden the family with school expenses.

These families might not intend to force their children to work on the streets. However, the necessity of family survival takes precedence. Some of these children are even the sole breadwinners for their family. It cannot be denied that there are poor families that force their children to work because of a lack of education and their perception of their children. The view that a child is an economic asset to the family means that some children suffer from exploitation by their parents. Data demonstrate that most of the street children come from illiterate families that lack adequate parenting skills and are unable to provide proper supervision for their children.⁵ The relative accessibility to a minimal earning potential lures many children to work on the street.

Child abuse and neglect are another reason why these children leave their homes and live on the street. The survey by Atmajaya University (1999) found that 23 percent of street children in the sample experienced abuse and neglect in their families.⁶ Population displacement, civil and ethnic conflicts in certain areas of Indonesia are also factors that might contribute to the increasing number of poor families and street children in Indonesia. People migrated from the areas of conflict to look for safe places, such as Jogjakarta which is considered one of the safest cities in Indonesia.

For some children leaving their homes might be a positive and rationale decision towards a better life, if their home life is a physically and psychologically debilitating environment. In these cases they might be

⁴ DKKS DIJ. *Laporan Kegiatan Bagian Proyek Pembinaan Anak Jalanan Daerah Istimewa Jogjakarta Tahun Anggaran 2002*, (Jogjakarta: DKKS DIJ, 2002), Annual report, p. 11.

⁵ Kompas, *Ratusan Ribu Anak SD Putus Sekolah*. 18 March 2001 (Indonesian daily). From <http://www.kompas.com>, retrieved on November 11, 2002.

⁶ Farid, M. and Dananto, A. *Capturing Our Experience*.

more accurately conceptualized as “abandoners” than as “abandoned”.⁷ An abusive home environment is one of the important reasons why children in Indonesia live on the street. It is a loaded choice as street life is obviously dangerous, but it is still better than being passive victims of abandonment. The dangers encountered on the street are neither as regular nor as debilitating as those found in some homes.⁸

Some children that I met stated that they decided to live on the street due to exclusion they felt from the society, after they considered breaking the rules and norms, which are respected in the society. Bulling, drunkenness, theft, and adultery are sample reasons which usually result in children being excluded from their society. In a village social setting where everybody knows everybody, stigmatization and exclusion from the society are really hard to bear, not only for the victim but also for the family. Some children have to hide their identities and change their names in their new community on the street in order to burry their past.⁹

Being burdened with the responsibility of earning a livelihood at a young age also forces them to think pragmatically, pushing aside any thoughts about their basic rights. The relatively young age of these children leaves them vulnerable to various kinds of exploitation. The street gangs who take them under their wing and exploit their desperate situation actively recruit many of these children.

The physical appearance and behavioral problems of these children cause them to encounter difficulties in initiating or sustaining interactions and mutual give and take relationships with children in general, so that they rarely achieve positive status with the other children in the society.¹⁰ Physically, these poor children generally lack proper hygiene, and conformity with peer norms for dress codes and performance. Even though, research indicates the physical factors are not the most important and significant ones in the development of positive peer relations and

⁷ Veale, A., Taylor, M., and Linehan, C. “Psychological Perspectives of Abandoned and Abandoning Street Children” in Panter-Brick, C. and Smith, M.T. , *Abandoned Children*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 135.

⁸ Dursin, R., *Right Indonesia: Street Children Need Government Protection Too*, (Jakarta : IPS,), p. 4. Veale, A., Taylor, M., and Linehan, C. “Psychological Perspectives, ” pp. 135-136.

⁹ Beazley, H. (2003). “The Construction and Protection of Individual and Collective Identities by Street Children and Youth in Indonesia” In *Children, Youth and Environments* 13 (1), spring 2003. From <http://cye.colorado.edu>, retrieved on January 15, 2004.

¹⁰ Henggeler, et. al., *Multisystemic Treatment of Antisocial Behaviour in Children and Adolescents*, (New York: The Guilford Press, 1998), p. 131.

friendships,¹¹ the fact is that these children do find these factors as significant obstacles in this regard. Consequently, these children are vulnerable to physical, verbal, or psychological to abuse and as exclusion from the group.

However, these circumstances are not considered by the government policy. The government tends to see the lack of positive peer relations and friendships among street children as symptoms of behavioral deviants. In this case street children suffer from various stigmatizations, such as conduct disorder and anti social labels.

These children might not be able to initiate interactions and relationships with children in general. However, it should be understood that this population has unique circumstances and therefore require a very different kind of socialization. Socialization it self is often misunderstood with the respect to street children, as most literature describes this population as having an absence of any socializing influences.¹² In reality, street children engage in specific social processes. It becomes a problem when their socialization process needs to be justified by the society.

E. The Intervention Programs and the Disadvantages of the Population

The government, officially, attempts to address the problem of street children through a number of programs. The efforts from the government to solve the problem of street children might give us some hope for a better policy on this population in the future. As mentioned by selected NGOs that I met, there are few changes in the government policy, particularly on the provincial level.

However, the overall efforts from the government, on the national level, appear to be cursory at best. The intervention programs for street children remains halfheartedly implemented, in the sense that the top down policy from the government is not followed by policies for the sustainability of the implementation on the provincial and regional levels. Some national programs for street children are not well adjusted to the circumstances of this population on the regional level.

At times, the government consistently demonstrates a hostile attitude towards this population, while paying lip service to humanitarian solutions for the problem of street children. In some occasions, such as in the recent Summit of East Asia and Pacific on Children, May 05 2003, the

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Visano, L., "The Socialization of Street Children: the Development and Transformation of Identities," *Sociological Studies of Child Development* 3, 1990, pp. 139-161.

president of Indonesia strongly emphasized the commitment of the government to provide better protection for children.¹³

1. The Problem of Street Children or the Problem with Street Children

So far, the government programs seem to be a formality and incidental propaganda to quell the demands of international pressure. In the case of human and child trafficking, for example, the government was reluctant to acknowledge this problem in international forums until the United State threatened the government of Indonesia with economic sanctions, and after the United Nation included Indonesia as one of the three worst countries in addressing the problem of human and child trafficking.

The hostile attitude towards the problem of street children is also demonstrated by the methodologies adopted in the implementation of the law on the rights of the child, which was ratified from the UN convention. The act 23, 2002 on child protection clearly states that it is the government's duty and responsibility to address the problem of the population of children at risks (Articles 55&59). However, it seems that there is no real implementation of this law.

In my observation, the government has not been consistent in their attitude toward street children. Moreover, they play double standards, and to some extents tend to be hypocrite, in their policy on street children on conceptual and empirical bases. The government policy regards street children as a population at risks on the conceptual basis. As risk factors are defined as factors that increase the likelihood of a child developing an emotional or behavioral disorder in comparison with children from the general population.¹⁴ These groups of street children are categorically defined at a high risk. It has been highlighted in government's documents that this group of street children suffers from serious externalizing problems, such as physical aggression, symptoms of attention deficit disorder, hyperactivity, and anti-social behavior.

Yet, on the empirical level the government does not provide appropriate intervention programs as the follow up that children at risk ideally should receive. It is not an exaggeration to say that the

¹³ Kompas daily, *Presiden: Indonesia bertekad Membangun Anak Sebagai Kekuatan*. Monday, May 05, 2003. From <http://www.kompas.com>, retrieved on July 6, 2003.

¹⁴ Rae-Grant, N., et. al., *Risk, Protective, and the Prevalence of Behavioral and Emotional Disorders in Children and Adolescents*, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 1989, p. 262.

government, so far, tends to take passes the appropriate legislature and broad programs for the sake of international observers without actualizing these policies in concrete terms.¹⁵

These circumstances and the needs of street children are not really taken into consideration in the policies and programs implemented by the government. The government and authorities do not examine the root causes of street children. On the contrary, the government often addresses the symptoms through punishment and social conditioning. At times, government action even takes the form of national 'cleansing operations,' organized mass arrests and legal punitive efforts. There is a lack of understanding that for some their lives on the street are strategies for coping with an unbearable environment, as the result of government's policies, which do not acknowledge marginal groups. In this case, it is interesting to refer to a thesis which was developed by Foucault that the subject is relatively powerless in the face of disciplinary techniques of the modern state and its agents, the professional experts.¹⁶

The question that remains for me is whether the intervention programs are really provided by the government for the needs of street children or to fulfill the demands of international pressure. Some cases demonstrate that the need for the government to maintain their positive image in the international forums appears to be the dominant reason for these programs rather than the need of this population.

The government's refusal to give street children the opportunity to fulfill the requirements for getting a national ID card or birth certificate is an example of how the largest obstacle for street children has not been a priority. As previously mentioned, most street children do not possess ID or birth certificate, barring them from the benefit of state acceptance. The lack of ID has also made this population invisible and vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. The lack of financial resources necessary to acquire an ID card or birth certificate, which is relatively expensive for them, is not the only reason why they do not hold identification. Officially there are serious impediments for street children to obtain an ID card and

¹⁵ RSI, *Perdagangan Anak dan Perempuan*, The archive of Radio Singapore International, 2003.

¹⁶ Leonard, L. & Leonard, P., "Women on the margins narrative, interpretation, resistance." In "Canadian Social Work Review," volume 16, no. 1, winter 1999. In Leonard, P., *Knowledge and values and ethics in social work*. Course pack SWRK-612, School of Social Work McGill University, 2003.

birth certificate, especially for those who are orphans and have no association with their families. For example, it is required for street children to have an address, know the names of their parents, and place/date of birth, which are not easy for some of these children.

2. The Discourse of Rehabilitation and the Problem of Oppression

In spite of the failures of some previous programs, the government seems to be reluctant to move from their position and to undertake alternative approaches in addressing the problem of street children. This population remains classified as social deviants in government policy, who are out of state's ideological discourse on social values and public order. It is mentioned above that in Jogjakarta, for example, the intervention programs for street children are run by the office of "social rehabilitation" meaning that this population is still being pathologized as a population who needs to be rehabilitated rather than as those who need protection.

To some extent, the discourse of "rehabilitation" in the government programs and policies on street children has made this population suffer from greater stigmatization and oppression. In the case of child prostitution, for example, the government efforts are focused on arresting the children, who are actually victims of sexual exploitation, for the reason of rehabilitation rather than taking action against the subject of child abuse. It is also in the name of rehabilitation when the government action takes the forms of *garukan* (cleansing operation), organized mass arrests and legal punitive efforts.

The changing of the mandate of the government (the Ministry of Social Affairs) is necessary in dealing with the problem of street children in Indonesia. The programs should be prioritized for the needs of street children and should be adjusted to their circumstances. The government should not only focus their efforts on rehabilitation, but also on prevention programs. As mentioned by Irwanto from Atmajaya University, that this would be a big change and demands reformation and professionalism in the Ministry of Social Affairs.¹⁷

The legal system in Indonesia also presents challenges to the effective management of child protection issues. The punishment for child trafficking is only a maximum of 4 years (The article No.297 of penal code/KUHP), 9 years maximum for child sexual abuse outside marriage and only 4 years maximum for child sexual abuse inside marriage (Article no.287 of penal code/KUHP). This is far behind other countries,

¹⁷ RSI, *Perdagangan Anak dan Perempuan...*

such as the Philippines that institute the death penalty for child sexual abuse.¹⁸

3. The Role of Social Workers

An important aspect highlighted by the exposure of the problems in the government policies and programs for street children is the need for social workers to not only direct their efforts on a micro level in working with street children but also to work at the macro level. Social workers as agents of social change should be more active in lobbying for change in the government policy. However, educational institutions for social work are limited in Indonesia, an effort to equip the social workers with the skills and knowledge to work with street children at various levels is required. To date, most institutions do not incorporate the issues of street children in any of the courses or fieldwork.

F. Conclusion

The discussion about the circumstances of street children in Jogjakarta demonstrates that street life might be a positive and rationale decision for street children, instead of complaining about the lack of protection from the government. The efforts of this population to maintain their subculture and solidarity are reflections of their struggle to liberate them selves from various oppressions from the mainstream culture in the society. Unfortunately, government policy and programs for street children are still prioritized for the purpose of diplomacy rather than to be implemented for the emergent need of this population.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

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