

Empowering Orphaned Children Through Counseling: Enhancing Life's Meaning

Khairunnisa*, Nurhayani

Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Jl. William Iskandar, Deli Serdang, North Sumatera, 20371, Indonesia

*Corresponding author, email: khairunnisa6088@gmail.com

Article History

Received: 5 June 2024

Revised: 25 June 2024

Accepted: 5 July 2024

Keywords

Counseling services

Meaningfulness of life

Orphans

Abstract

Counseling services are very important to help children find meaning in life and overcome the various problems they face as adults. Children are the future of the nation and need attention; many of them lose their identity during adolescence but can lead good lives with an intact family. The aim of this study is to understand the implementation of counseling services in developing the meaningfulness of life for orphans at the Al-Washliyah Orphanage in Lubuk Pakam, Indonesia. The method used is a qualitative approach. The subjects of this study are the children of the Al-Washliyah Orphanage in Lubuk Pakam, Lubuk Pakam District, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra, Indonesia. The results of the study show that the success of the counseling services at the Al-Washliyah Orphanage in Lubuk Pakam can be seen from several indicators, such as understanding a clear purpose in life, knowing how to find meaning in daily activities, recognizing their potential and knowing how to develop it, valuing life experiences, having positive relationships with others, creating a harmonious family within the orphanage, feeling gratitude and accepting themselves without comparing themselves to others, being optimistic about their life choices, learning valuable lessons from suffering, and having spirituality with the belief that Allah SWT loves them. The activities provided by the counselors to the children in the orphanage include religious activities such as prayer guidance, teaching reading and writing of the Qur'an, and moral guidance. The children at the orphanage can understand their purpose in life through various processes and activities conducted during their stay.

How to cite: Khairunnisa, K. & Nurhayani, N. (2024). Empowering Orphaned Children Through Counseling: Enhancing Life's Meaning. *Buletin Konseling Inovatif*, 4(2). 91–98. doi: 10.17977/um059v4i22024p91-98

1. Introduction

Essentially, every individual is expected to progress towards an increasingly better life. However, in reality, not all individuals can lead their lives well or are fortunate enough to have an ideal family. Many children experience the harshness of life (Mazaya & Supradewi, 2011). Orphanages serve as surrogate family institutions that care for abandoned and orphaned children, striving to meet their physical and psychological needs during their development (Syahputra, 2017). In practice, however, orphanages often neglect the emotional needs and growth of children. The limited interaction between caregivers and children, where caregivers focus solely on routine tasks such as feeding and cleaning without engaging in conversation, play, or giving special attention to the children, is a significant issue (Hays & Erpord, 2018). Furthermore, the use of strict disciplinary methods and physical punishment can instill fear and trauma in the children (Corey, 2017). This is due to the perception of children as merely biological beings rather than psychological or social beings (Rosmawati, 2019).

Numerous phenomena and problems arise during adolescence, often rooted in the challenges being faced. The meaningfulness of life for children in orphanages can be developed through counseling services (Martini & Nengsih, 2020). Counseling services aimed at enhancing life's meaningfulness in orphanages can involve a holistic approach encompassing spiritual, psychological, and social aspects (King & Hicks, 2021).

Orphaned children residing in orphanages frequently encounter significant emotional and psychological challenges. Losing parents at an early age can lead to trauma, profound sadness, and a sense of directionlessness. In such situations, counseling services are crucial to help them find

meaning in life and overcome the various problems they face. Viktor Frankl, an Austrian psychologist and psychiatrist, developed Logotherapy, a theory that focuses on the search for life's meaning as the primary human motivation. In the context of orphanages, Logotherapy can be applied to assist children in finding purpose and meaning in life and developing resilience to face life's challenges (Bronk et al., 2019). Specifically, the application of Logotherapy in orphanages can aid children in discovering life's meaning through creative values, encouraging a positive attitude towards difficult life experiences, providing support for the development of experiential values, helping children find meaningful life goals, teaching responsibility, creating an environment that fosters spiritual growth, and presenting role models or mentors who can inspire the children (Syahrir, Hidayah, & Basir, 2022). According to Frankl, humans possess an innate drive to find meaning and purpose in their lives. He asserted that by finding meaning in life, individuals can overcome suffering and face challenges more effectively (Frankl, 1970).

Counseling services in orphanages can assist orphaned children in discovering life's meaningfulness by offering support, guidance, and strategies to confront their challenges. Counselors can help them explore creative values, such as developing talents and interests, as well as experiential values through building positive relationships and appreciating the beauty of life. Additionally, counselors can aid children in developing attitudinal values by teaching them how to face difficulties with courage and dignity. Based on this background, the objective of this research is to investigate the implementation of counseling services in enhancing the meaningfulness of life for orphans in orphanages.

2. Method

This study was field research employing a qualitative approach aimed at understanding and exploring the meaningfulness of life for orphanage children who had received counseling services (Sugiyono, 2021). Qualitative research sought to understand phenomena experienced by research subjects by describing them in words. The subjects of this study were children at the Aliyah level, aged 15 to 17 years, residing at the Al-Washliyah Lubuk Pakam Orphanage, located in Lubuk Pakam District, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra. The object of this research was the implementation of counseling services in developing the meaningfulness of life for orphans at the Al-Washliyah Lubuk Pakam Orphanage.

The technique used for selecting research subjects was purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was a sampling technique with specific considerations or criteria set by the researcher. In this study, the criteria used were: (1) orphanage children aged 15 to 17 years, (2) those who had received counseling services at the orphanage. The number of selected subjects was six, consisting of three boys and three girls. The choice of six subjects was based on the following considerations: (1) In qualitative research, the number of subjects was not too large because the goal was to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon or issue. (2) The number of six subjects was deemed sufficient to provide data variation and different perspectives on the meaningfulness of life for orphanage children who had received counseling services. (3) The distribution of subjects into three boys and three girls was done to ensure gender balance in data collection, enabling the researcher to obtain a broader and more comprehensive perspective from both gender groups. (4) The selection of subjects aged 15-17 years was based on the consideration that at this age, children had sufficient cognitive abilities to reflect and express their experiences and perceptions about the meaningfulness of life after receiving counseling services.

By using purposive sampling and considering the established criteria, the researcher hoped to obtain rich and in-depth data on the meaningfulness of life for orphanage children who had received counseling services. The data collection methods used in this research included direct observation and interviews with the research subjects to obtain a clearer picture. According to Esterberg in Sugiyono, there were several types of interviews: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted, utilizing a broadly outlined interview guide to delve deeply into the research subjects (Sugiyono, 2019). Data collection also involved literature studies to obtain relevant information regarding research on developing life meaningfulness through counseling.

Data analysis was a process of systematically searching and organizing data obtained by categorizing the data. The qualitative data analysis method used by the researcher began with data

reduction, selecting the essential elements needed, followed by data presentation, creating concise descriptions using narrative text, and finally drawing conclusions.

3. Results and Discussion

The Al-Washliyah Lubuk Pakam Orphanage, situated in Deli Serdang District, Indonesia, accommodates 50 children predominantly comprising elementary school students at 65%, followed by 20% in junior high school, and 15% in senior high school. The institution is dedicated to nurturing, educating, and fulfilling the basic needs of orphaned and abandoned children, ranging from provisioning food to educational necessities. In order to meet these needs, the government plays a crucial role in providing for the children's primary requirements. Beyond satisfying these basic needs, it is also imperative to consider the children's future and foster a meaningful existence for each orphan.

The life challenges faced by the children in the orphanage necessitate a pursuit of life's meaning, expected to motivate and bolster their spirits. If progress and a meaningful life are desired for these generations, it is clear that the orphanage children require counseling services, which are increasingly utilized to aid each child in understanding the significance of life. To ascertain the percentage of life's meaning in the characteristics of a child living a meaningful existence, it involves displaying a vibrant lifestyle, distancing from feelings of emptiness, setting clear life goals thus directing activities more purposefully, performing daily tasks with enthusiasm, adapting to environments, discovering diverse new experiences and interests, recognizing the wisdom in suffering endured, harboring no thoughts of suicide, finding personal goals, and discovering life's meaning, loving and accepting affection from others as outlined by Bastaman.

Counseling services constitute activities where assistance is provided by counselors to counselees. At the Al-Washliyah Lubuk Pakam Orphanage, Indonesia counseling includes individual and group methods with a familial approach. Individual counseling involves one-on-one sessions between a counselor and a counselee (orphan), characterized by a counseling relationship that includes assessment, with the counselor helping in the personal development of the counselee and anticipation of faced challenges. This method employs private conversation techniques. Group counseling, on the other hand, involves direct communication with counselees in a group setting, typically utilizing group discussion techniques.

The presence of counseling services in the orphanage has, according to observations, led several orphaned children to define and discover clear life objectives for themselves. As expressed by one of the orphanage children who has participated in counseling services during their stay at the institution:

"I came to realize my life's purpose through a profound process of self-reflection, evaluating the values and priorities most significant to me" Atika, aged 15, reflected during an interview on February 28, 2024, at Al-Washliyah Orphanage in Lubuk Pakam.

In contrast, Sakti, who discovered his life's purpose due to the activities engaged in at the orphanage as stated below:

"My life's purpose has been shaped by the tasks and work I perform here, which have revealed my capabilities and interests" (Interview with Sakti, aged 16, February 28, 2024, at Al-Washliyah Orphanage in Lubuk Pakam).

Following their respective discoveries of life's purpose, the necessary steps to actualize these aspirations were explored. During subsequent interviews with several children at the orphanage, Atika expressed her intent to diligently study, particularly in the fields of science and medicine, aspiring to enroll in medical school tutorials to align with her life goals.

Yenni, aspiring to become an educator, frequently participates in activities that enhance her teaching skills through interactions with her peers at the orphanage.

Annisa, aiming to become a proficient entrepreneur, is committed to studying relevant fields such as business and entrepreneurship, and believes in gaining experiences outside the orphanage.

This is evidenced by her active participation in discussions and direct counseling sessions offered by the orphanage's manager and counselors.

Marulitua, with the noble goal of honoring his parents in the hereafter and becoming a righteous and useful individual in the future, begins his journey with religious studies and devout practices. He not only seeks to grow closer to Allah but also consistently aids other children at the orphanage, while cultivating his own talents.

Sakti, who lost his father at the age of five and was separated from his mother due to economic needs, finds confidence in his life's purpose through his painting skills, and hopes to secure a rewarding job. Khairul, on his part, plans to achieve his life's goals by focusing on completing his education well, seeking employment, or pursuing higher education.

For these individuals, realizing their life's goals requires sincere engagement in meaningful daily activities—activities that lend significance to life. According to the orphanage's manager, routine religious activities are conducted, including prayer guidance, teaching the reading and writing of the Qur'an, and moral tutoring, ensuring that each day is structured to build enthusiasm and usefulness, rather than mere play. With structured daily routines and counseling services, the children are encouraged to draw life lessons and value from their experiences.

Observations conducted with orphaned children at an orphanage reveal that engaging in meaningful activities such as studying, reciting religious texts, participating in skill-building activities, gardening, playing with fellow orphans, and partaking in institutional activities like sewing, cooking, and playing sports significantly enhances their lives. These activities not only provide satisfaction through visible outcomes of hard work but also foster knowledge sharing, mutual entertainment, and team-building among the orphans.

Orphaned children face a more complex life journey as their experiences differ substantially from those of other children. They must accept their current circumstances. What experiences then render their lives meaningful? As expressed by Marulitua, Sakti, and Khairul:

"Being able to gather with friends here is a tremendous experience for me because it brings me into contact with good people" stated Marulitua during an interview on February 28, 2024, at Al-Washliyah Lubuk Pakam Orphanage.

"The experience that gives my life meaning is when I can assist others, like teaching younger orphans who struggle with their studies. This makes me feel useful and valuable," Sakti remarked during the same interview.

"Although it was initially difficult not having parents, at this orphanage, I have found many friends and love from the caretakers. I have learned to be independent and to love others as a family," Khairul added.

How do they perceive the positive aspects of each experience, whether good or bad? Through counseling services, they believe that difficulties can be transformed into motivation to achieve their dreams, appreciating and accepting these as blessings, never giving up on their aspirations, facing future challenges with greater strength, being grateful for what they have, and viewing hardships as tests that encourage further improvement.

Life in an orphanage is undeniably challenging for those accustomed to living with a complete family and suddenly having to integrate with new individuals of differing temperaments. However, this does not preclude the possibility of creating harmonious relationships among the orphans. Strategies employed by the orphanage children to foster such harmony include: (1) Mutual respect, affection, and non-discrimination. (2) Maintaining polite behavior, offering comfort to each other, and showing empathy. (3) Building trust, creating a sense of community, and appreciating one another. (4) Consistently being friendly and respecting differences. (5) Being honest, helping one another, and listening attentively. (6) Maintaining effective communication and mutual support.

The existence of harmonious relationships among the orphans cultivates a sense of gratitude. From the interviews, it was evident that several orphans accept their strengths and weaknesses without comparing themselves to others, as noted by Atika.

"I learned not to compare myself with others". (Interview Atika, 15 years old, February 28, 2024 at Al-Washliyah Orphanage Lubuk Pakam)

Similar to Atika, Yenni also chose to focus on her strengths:

"I accept my shortcomings and focus on the strengths that I can develop". (Interview Yenni, 16 years old, February 28, 2024 at Al-Washliyah Orphanage Lubuk Pakam)

There is no point in dwelling on sadness and shortcomings, which is how Khairul described his shortcomings:

"I try to accept my shortcomings and strengths gracefully. I don't regret my shortcomings, but keep trying to improve them. As for my strengths, I am grateful and use them to help others". (Interview Khairul, 17 years old, February 28, 2024 at Al-Washliyah Orphanage Lubuk Pakam)

In the orphanage, the residents are taught to be grateful for their current possessions, despite their modest living conditions, as they experience a sense of warmth from their newfound family within the institution. In addition to gratitude, they are guided to maintain optimism and confidence in a brighter future. They are encouraged to perceive the wisdom inherent in each challenge they face, patiently accepting the divine will of Allah SWT to become better individuals. This process necessitates a sufficient level of spirituality to prevent the emergence of pessimism regarding their circumstances.

Participating in counseling services also enhances the spiritual well-being of the orphaned children, allowing them to feel the presence of Allah SWT in their lives. They are reassured of Allah SWT's love through opportunities provided to develop their talents and potential within the orphanage. These opportunities include residing in the institution, receiving an education, and maintaining their health, all of which are seen as evidence of divine care. Religious activities within the orphanage serve as a catalyst for the children to deepen their religious connections, typically aligning with the established routines such as reciting the Quran and participating in communal prayers.

According to the administrators, Al-Washliyah Orphanage in Lubuk Pakam has been operational since 1935. Like other orphanages, it was established against a backdrop of widespread poverty and the presence of numerous orphaned, impoverished, and abandoned children. The institution aims to provide care to disadvantaged children, including orphans, the impoverished, and the abandoned, to ensure they meet normative needs and develop appropriately like their peers. The orphanage also aims to provide both formal and informal education to prepare these children as educated, knowledgeable, and skilled human resources who are independent and socially well-adjusted. Additionally, it aims to offer social and mental development programs to foster religious faith, ethical behavior, and self-confidence among the children, along with ensuring their legal protection and safeguarding them against violence, exploitation, and trafficking.

The orphanage administrators note that the counseling services provided go beyond individual counseling and include family-oriented approaches when issues arise among the children, such as conflicts. Counseling is often conducted by school counselors, who were once residents of the Al-Washliyah Orphanage themselves, and who now assist the children in resolving their issues and require counseling at the Tsanawiyah and Aliyah educational levels.

The counseling process for the orphaned children typically involves several stages: building relationships and trust to create a comfortable and safe environment for the children, gathering data and information about the children's backgrounds and issues, devising intervention plans such as counseling, therapy, or activities, implementing the planned interventions either individually or in groups, and finally evaluating the effectiveness of these interventions and planning further actions if necessary.

The counseling services at the orphanage are facilitated by a private and comfortable counseling room, essential for creating a conducive atmosphere for the counseling process. Additionally, various aids such as dolls, games, storybooks, or other media are employed to assist children in expressing themselves and to facilitate the counseling process. A designated play area is also crucial for conducting activities that aid in problem-solving.

Counselors preparing to provide services to orphaned children at the orphanage must organize several elements beforehand. The head of the institution details the preparations required for the counseling services, including: (a) understanding the background and information of each child, (b) developing a counseling plan specifying objectives, techniques, and planned activities, (c) preparing aids and available facilities, and (d) coordinating with relevant parties involved in the children's counseling process.

The material prepared for counseling includes techniques and strategies such as play therapy, narrative therapy, cognitive-behavioral counseling, or other methods tailored to the children's needs (Hendriani, 2018). Additionally, psycho-educational materials aim to enhance children's understanding of themselves, their emotions, behavior, and problem-solving strategies, as well as activities that facilitate self-expression, interaction, and life skills development, such as role-playing, art, or group activities (Abdurrahman, 2019).

The outcomes of these counseling services have proven to be effective and efficient, with children in the orphanage feeling more composed, confident, and motivated in their religious practices without feeling coerced (Monnalisza & Neviyarni, 2018; Nurhayati, 2018). Although changes are not immediately apparent, the positive impacts of counseling are significantly beneficial for the children. This is evident from observations of the orphaned children, who have begun to formulate life goals and aspirations for the future (Martini & Nengsih, 2020). The joy of learning and playing with peers fosters happiness and motivates them to excel academically and non-academically (Wong, 2019).

Despite the benefits, several challenges impede the implementation of counseling services. These include the diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, and individual problems of the children, such as familial violence, neglect, being victims of broken homes, lack of familial affection, bullying, and emotional or behavioral issues such as aggression, anxiety, and depression, along with the environmental, cultural, and normative factors prevalent within the orphanage.

Establishing counseling objectives involves several considerations as outlined by the head of the institution, including: (1) the child's specific issues and needs, (2) the child's age and developmental stage, (3) the resources and time available, and (4) the involvement of other parties, such as caregivers, teachers, or the child's family, if necessary (Amin, 2015).

Evaluation in the Al-Washliyah Lubuk Pakam orphanage involves multiple stages, ultimately leading to necessary follow-up actions. Initially, an evaluation determines the extent to which the established counseling objectives have been achieved, quantitatively or qualitatively (Allan et al., 2015). Behavioral, emotional, and overall well-being changes in the children's post-counseling are then observed and measured. Feedback from involved parties, such as caregivers and teachers, is sought to gain a broader perspective (Steger et al., 2019). Various methods, including observation and interviews, are used in the evaluation process. Following the evaluation, necessary follow-up actions are planned, which may include continuing counseling sessions, designing new interventions, or referring the child to other specialized services if required.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results, it can be concluded that the successful implementation of counseling services at the Al-Washliyah Lubuk Pakam Orphanage can be seen from several indicators, specifically knowing clear life goals, understanding how to find meaning in daily activities, having self-potential and knowing how to develop it, appreciating life experiences, positive relationships with others and creating harmonious families in orphanages, gratitude and accepting oneself by not comparing oneself with others, optimism with the chosen life choices, making wisdom in suffering as a valuable lesson, and spirituality by believing that Allah SWT loves them. Activities that have been provided by counselors to children at the orphanage such as carrying out religious activities consist of prayer

guidance, teaching reading and writing the Qur'an, and moral guidance. From the questions asked to the children, with them getting counseling services beforehand, there are no more children who experience low meaning of life. The existence of counseling is expected to provide peace for orphanage children, being able to tell everything that the orphanage children used to keep to themselves. In addition, counseling services produce better mental orphanage children, and foster self-confidence to keep living with all limitations.

Author Contributions

All authors have equal contributions to the paper. All the authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding

No funding support was received.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

References

- Abdurrahman. (2019). *Konseling Islami*. Perdana Publishing.
- Aini Ahmad, M., & Subandi, S. (2022). Efektivitas Logoterapi Dalam Meningkatkan Kebermaknaan Hidup Pada Narapidana. *Hisbah: Jurnal Bimbingan Konseling dan Dakwah Islam*, 19(1), 107–124.
- Allan, B. A., Duffy, R. D., & Douglass, R. (2014). Meaning in life and work: A developmental perspective. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 10(4), 323–331. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2014.950180>
- Amin, S. M. (2015). *Bimbingan dan Konseling Islam*. AMZAH.
- Corey, G. (2017). *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy* (10th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Cotton Bronk, K., Hill, P. L., Lapsley, D. K., Talib, T. L., & Finch, H. (2009). Purpose, hope, and life satisfaction in three age groups. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 4(6), 500–510. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760903271439>
- Frankl, V. (1970). *The Will To Meaning: Faounding And Aplication Of Logotherapy*. New American Library.
- Hasbahuddin, H. & Rosmawati, R. (2019). Implementasi teknik pengelolaan diri untuk meningkatkan kedisiplinan siswa. *KONSELING: Jurnal Ilmiah Penelitian dan Penerapannya*, 1(1), 11–18. <https://doi.org/10.31960/konseling.v1i1.325>
- Hays, D. G., & Erpord, B. . (2018). *Developing Multicultural Counseling Competence: A System Approach* (3rd ed.). Pearson Education.
- Hendriani, W. (2018). *Resiliensi Psikologis: Sebuah Pengantar*. Prenada Media Group.
- King, L. A., & Hicks, J. A. (2021). The science of meaning in life. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 72, 561–584. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-072420-122921>
- Martini, M., & Nengsih, R. (2020). Penanaman Nilai-Nilai Karakter pada Anak Panti Asuhan Melalui Pohon Cita-Cita. *Education and Learning Journal*, 1(1), 74–81. <https://doi.org/10.33096/eljour.v1i1.42>
- Mazaya, K. N., & Supradewi, R. (2011). Konsep diri dan kebermaknaan hidup pada remaja di panti asuhan. *Proyeksi*, 6(2), 103–112. <https://doi.org/10.30659/jp.6.2.103-112>
- Monnalisza, M., & Neviyarni, N. (2018). Kepercayaan diri remaja panti asuhan Aisyiyah dan implikasinya terhadap layanan Bimbingan dan Konseling. *JPGI (Jurnal Penelitian Guru Indonesia)*, 3(2), 77–83. <https://doi.org/10.29210/02235jpgi0005>
- Nurhayati, Y. (2018). *Efektivitas Layanan Bimbingan Kelompok Dalam Meningkatkan Kepercayaan Diri (Studi Eksperimen Di Panti Asuhan Hidayatullah Palembang)*. Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah Palembang. Retrieved from https://repository.radenfatah.ac.id/10376/1/YETI_NURHAYATI_SKRIPSI_EFEKTIVITAS_LAYANAN_BIMBINGAN_KELOMPOK_DALAM_MENINGKATKAN KEPERCAYAAN DIRI.pdf
- Steger, M. F., Shin, J. Y., Shim, Y., & Fitch-Martin, A. (2013). Is meaning in life a flagship indicator of well-being? In A. S. Waterman (Ed.), *The best within us: Positive psychology perspectives on eudaimonia* (pp. 159–182). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/14092-009>
- Sugiyono. (2021). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif Kualitatif, dan R&D*. Alfabeta.
- Syahputra, I. (2017). Al-Qur'an dan Konseling. *Al-Irsyad: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Konseling*, 7(2). <https://doi.org/10.30829/al-irsyad.v7i2.6697>
- Syahrir, A., Hidayah, N., & Basir, M. (2022). Intervensi Logoterapi Pada Peningkatan Harga Diri dan Kebermaknaan Hidup Remaja di Panti Asuhan Nahdhiyat Makassar. *Jurnal Keperawatan Florence Nightingale*, 5(1), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.52774/jkfn.v5i1.86>

Wong, P. T. P. (2019). Second wave positive psychology's (PP 2.0) contribution to counselling psychology. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 32(3-4), 275-284. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09515070.2019.1671320>