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CHILDREN**

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Abstract:

The prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress among orphaned children is a critical concern requiring careful examination. Orphaned children grapple with unique challenges, such as the loss of parental support and the disruption of stable familial connections, with significant implications for their mental well-being and overall psychological health. This study investigates the prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress among orphaned children, with a specific focus on gender-related variations. A total of 26 orphans, aged 7 to 12 years, were recruited from Pusat Jagaan Hembusan Kasih Sayang in Kuantan, Pahang. The Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21) was employed for assessment. While no significant values for DASS Test variables were detected, there were gender-related differences in the psychological well-being of the children in the orphanage. The prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress among orphans from Pusat Jagaan Hembusan Kasih Sayang is low. Notably, females exhibit higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress compared to males.

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**Keywords:**

Depression; Anxiety; Stress; Orphans; Prevalence

Introduction

The global crisis of orphanhood presents a multifaceted challenge, with profound implications for child welfare, public health, and social policy. According to a report by Mohammadzadeh et al. (2018), there were approximately 140 million orphans globally in 2014, a figure that underscores the scale of this issue. These children, who have lost one or both parents, are distributed unevenly across continents, with Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Eastern Europe and Central Asia hosting the majority (UNICEF, 2016). In South and Southeast Asia, the number of orphans exceeded 82 million in 2016, highlighting a significant concentration in this region.

In Malaysia, the situation of orphans is particularly pronounced in certain areas. For instance, in 2022, Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya reported the highest proportion of orphans under 18 years, amounting to 46.1% of its population (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2022). This demographic trend is reflective of broader societal issues and necessitates targeted interventions and policies.

The definition of an orphan varies across cultures and religious beliefs. UNICEF (2016) broadly defines an orphan as a child under 18 who has lost one or both parents. However, Islamic scholars often define an orphan as a child who has lost their father before puberty, emphasizing the father's crucial role in providing for the child's needs (Rahman & Abdullah, 2019). In contrast, the Malay community considers a child an orphan if they have lost either or both parents (Ismail, 2021).

The Malaysian government, alongside NGOs and the private sector, provides considerable support to orphans, influenced by Islamic teachings which emphasize kindness and care towards vulnerable children (Rahman & Abdullah, 2019). Orphanages in Malaysia aim to provide not only shelter but also education, nurturing, and developmental opportunities.

Children residing in orphanages come from diverse backgrounds, including those who have lost one or both parents and those from economically disadvantaged or separated families (Chik et al., 2021). These children are at a higher risk of psychological distress due to the absence of familial love and support, which can hinder their emotional and social development. Childcare experts assert that children in orphanages often fail to develop adequately, both socially and psychologically, if they are abandoned early in life (Jones & Welch, 2020).

The stressors associated with parental loss and orphanage placement are significant and can lead to both positive and negative impacts on a child's psychological well-being. The loss of parents during childhood is known to increase the likelihood of negative effects on mental health, including difficulties in accessing basic necessities, educational decline, and increased vulnerability to risky behaviors (Smith & Howard, 2020; Johnson et al., 2019).

Operational challenges in orphanages, including negative relationships between children and carers, corruption, and fund mismanagement, can further impact the mental health of orphans (Khan, 2021). Research has shown that institutionalization can lead to serious deficits in intellectual, emotional, and behavioral development, particularly in the absence of maternal figures (Johnson et al., 2019).

However, the impact of orphanages is not universally negative. Effective management and the provision of essential needs can positively influence the psychological welfare of orphans (Smith & Howard, 2020). This highlights the potential benefits of well-run orphanages, which can provide a stable and nurturing environment for orphans.

Children in orphanages often face emotional problems due to insufficient grief support. They may not fully comprehend the finality of death, leading to unresolved negative emotions, such as anger and depression (Mohammadzadeh et al., 2017). In Malaysia, a high incidence of depression, anxiety, stress, and low self-esteem has been reported among orphanage residents, indicating the need for better emotional support structures (Mohammadzadeh et al., 2017).

The psychological impacts of orphanhood are profound and multifaceted. Orphans often face social stigmatization and isolation, which can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and despair. The absence of parental figures can lead to a lack of guidance and support in critical developmental stages, resulting in poor decision-making skills, lower educational attainment, and diminished life prospects (Brown & Llabre, 2020). Additionally, the trauma of parental loss can manifest in behavioral issues, with some orphans exhibiting signs of aggression, withdrawal, or anxiety (Khan, 2021).

The role of caregivers in orphanages is pivotal in shaping the psychological well-being of orphans. Caregivers who are compassionate, supportive, and adequately trained can significantly mitigate the negative impacts of orphanhood. They can provide a sense of stability and security, helping children develop healthy coping mechanisms and resilience (Jones & Welch, 2020). However, the challenges faced by caregivers, including inadequate training, emotional burnout, and resource constraints, can hinder their ability to effectively support the children in their care (Khan, 2021).

The societal implications of the orphan crisis are far-reaching. Orphans, particularly those in resource-poor settings, are at an increased risk of exploitation, including child labor, trafficking, and other forms of abuse. The lack of protective familial structures leaves these children vulnerable to external threats, underscoring the need for comprehensive child protection policies and interventions (Brown & Llabre, 2020).

The Malaysian context presents unique challenges and opportunities in addressing the needs of orphans. The influence of cultural and religious norms plays a significant role in shaping policies and practices related to orphan care. Islamic teachings, which emphasize compassion and care for orphans, can serve as a foundation for developing holistic care models that address the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of these children (Rahman & Abdullah, 2019).

The situation of orphans in Malaysia thus demands a multi-dimensional approach that encompasses psychological support, social integration, educational opportunities, and protective policies. Addressing the needs of orphans is not only a moral imperative but also a

crucial investment in the future of our societies. As this study aims to investigate the prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress among orphaned children in Malaysia, it is hoped that the findings will contribute to the development of more effective support systems and interventions tailored to the unique needs of this vulnerable population.

Methodology

Study Design

This research adopts a quantitative cross-sectional design to investigate the prevalence of depression, stress, and anxiety among orphans residing in an orphanage. The study utilises self-report questionnaires as the primary tool for data collection.

Sample Size and Subject Recruitment

The study focuses on a specific cohort of children, comprising 26 participants aged between 7 and 12 years. The participants were selected from Pusat Jagaan Hembusan Kasih Sayang in Kuantan, Pahang. Data collection took place on April 9, 2023, resulting in a total sample size (N) of 26 children who willingly participated in the study.

Data Collection Procedures

Prior permission for data collection was obtained from Pusat Jagaan Hembusan Kasih Sayang. The distribution of questionnaires served as the primary method of data collection. Participants were required to meet specific inclusion criteria, including being at least 7 years old, a Malaysian citizen, able to comprehend the informed consent, and willing to proceed with the study under the guidance of the assessor.

Children's Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Assessment

The study employed the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS) Test to evaluate the targeted variables. The DASS Test comprises 21 self-report scales designed to measure symptoms associated with depression, anxiety, and stress. Each scale corresponds to its respective variable, and participants' responses are later aggregated to derive an overall score. A higher cumulative score indicates elevated levels of each variable.

Statistical Analysis

IBM SPSS version 26 was employed for all statistical analyses. An independent samples t-test was utilized to compare stress, anxiety, and depression levels between male and female participants. This analytical approach enables a comprehensive examination of gender-based variations in the studied psychological variables.

Results

There were 13 males and 13 females of children of mean age ($M = 9.46$) that took part in this study, with all Malay ethnicity and when it comes to the religion, Islam accounted for all of them.

In terms of their average score they obtained average scores of 2.38 for stress, 3 for anxiety and 1.96 for depression. These are all within the normal range. However, when comparing within the two genders, males and females, there are distinctive differences that can be observed.

Table 1 The Mean Difference Between Females And Males During The Intervention

	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation
Stress	Male	1.69	1.437
	Female	3.08	1.320
Anxiety	Male	1.38	1.193
	Female	4.62	1.758
Depression	Male	1.23	.599
	Female	2.69	.751

Table 2 Summary Of The Ratings Difference Between The Variables

		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Stress	Equal variances assumed	-2.558	24	.017
Anxiety	Equal variances assumed	-5.483	24	.000
Depression	Equal variances assumed	-5.485	24	.000

When comparing between males and females, independent samples t-tests were used to evaluate the differences in their ratings. In terms of stress the males ($M = 1.69$, $SD = 1.44$) rated themselves lower than females ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 1.32$), $t(24) = -2.56$, $p < 0.02$. When turning to anxiety the females ($M = 4.62$, $SD = 1.76$) rated themselves significantly higher than males ($M = 1.38$, $SD = 1.19$), $t(24) = -5.48$, $p < 0.000$. In the context of depression the males ($M = 1.23$, $SD = .60$), $t(24) = -5.49$, $p < 0.000$ rated lower than females ($M = 2.69$, $SD = .75$), $t(24)$. Thus, the difference in gender elucidated different ways of handling their psychological state which employs the positive outcomes of their daily life.

Though no significant values for the DASS Test results in terms of depression, anxiety and stress there significant differences that can be discussed in conjunction with the gender of the children in the orphanage that is associated with their psychological well being.

Discussion

This study delves into the mental distress based on stress, anxiety, and depression within a cohort of 26 children, evenly divided between 13 males and 13 females, residing in the Hembusan Kasih Sayang Indera Mahkota Kuantan orphanage. The findings reveal notably low average scores for stress (2.38), anxiety (3), and depression (1.96), suggesting a positive emotional state among the participants. Several contributing factors are identified in the subsequent discussion.

Caretaker Relationships and Communication Dynamics

The study's focus on caretaker relationships and communication dynamics aligns with existing literature emphasizing the importance of these factors in the lives of orphans. Drawing on the research of Ndugga Patricia et al. (2023), the pivotal role of meaningful relationships between orphan caretakers and children in fostering socialization, emotional well-being, and the fulfillment of basic needs is highlighted. Such relationships, characterized by effective communication, are vital in creating a supportive environment for children in orphanages.

In the realm of communication, caretakers were consistently described as loving, compassionate, and patient by orphaned children. Observations during the study revealed instances where respondents expressed joy in staying with their caretakers, citing their humor and ability to evoke laughter. Both male and female caretakers overseeing 26 orphans aged 7 to 12 reported harmonious relationships with the children. The open communication observed between caretakers and orphans signifies stability in the relationships. Remarkably, the strong bonds formed were evident as caretakers refused to label the children as "orphans," instead considering them integral parts of their familial unit. This familial bond was reflected in the orphans standing in for each other during times of need, showcasing enduring support. The participant responses, reflecting positive interactions with caretakers, echo the findings of Bowlby's attachment theory, which emphasizes the importance of secure attachments in early childhood for healthy emotional and social development (Bowlby, 1982). The effective communication noted between caretakers and children is consistent with the research by Hughes et al. (2017), which underscores the importance of open and empathetic communication in building trust and a sense of safety among children in care. Observations of caretakers being loving, compassionate, and patient align with the principles outlined in the Positive Youth Development framework, which stresses the importance of supportive adult relationships in the overall development of children (Lerner et al., 2005). The caretakers' approach of not labeling the children as "orphans" but rather as integral members of a family unit resonates with the findings of Smith and Howard (2020), who argue for the importance of a family-like environment in the psychosocial development of orphans. The solidarity observed among the orphans, as they stand in for each other during times of need, is supported by Sullivan et al. (2010), who highlight the significance of peer relationships in providing emotional support and fostering resilience in children facing adversity.

Influence of Children's Behavior on Interactions

The study delves into the influence of children's behavior on interactions with orphan caretakers. Caretakers reported occasional unsettling habits among orphaned children, emphasizing the significance of the caretakers' approach in handling such behaviors. The positive aspect observed in the Hembusan Kasih Sayang orphanage is the rarity of reported bad behaviors, rebellion, or withdrawal. The study suggests that the children's responses may be linked to how caretakers treat them.

Remarkably, the study notes the equal distribution of household chores among the children, fostering cooperation and mutual assistance without favoritism. Despite significant age gaps, the orphans demonstrated willingness to help each other, resembling a harmonious sibling dynamic. This equitable treatment further facilitated positive relationships between children and caretakers. The impact of caretaker responses on children's behavior and the promotion of positive interactions through equitable treatment are well-documented in the literature. The importance of caretaker approaches in handling unsettling behaviors is echoed in the work of Dozier, Albus, Fisher, and Sepulveda (2002), who emphasize that responsive and nurturing caregiving is crucial in mitigating problematic behaviors in children, especially in institutional settings. The rarity of negative behaviors such as rebellion or withdrawal among the orphans can be attributed to effective behavior management strategies employed by caretakers, as discussed by Pianta, Nimetz, and Bennett (1997). These strategies often involve positive reinforcement and consistent, caring responses to children's needs. The study's observation of equitable distribution of chores and mutual assistance among children resonates with the findings of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. This theory suggests that creating an

environment of cooperation and fairness can significantly impact a child's social development and behavior (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The harmonious sibling-like dynamics among the orphans, facilitated by equitable treatment, aligns with research by Kendrick et al. (2012), who found that positive peer relationships in care settings can lead to better social and emotional outcomes for children. The study's findings on the positive relationships between children and caretakers support the developmental theories of Vygotsky (1978), which emphasize the role of social interactions in cognitive development. According to Vygotsky, supportive adult-child interactions are fundamental to learning and development.

Impact of Social Activities and Programs

The discussion highlights the positive impact of social activities and programs organized by various universities resonate with existing research in developmental psychology and education. The positive effects of these activities on a child's psychological well-being, social development, and skill acquisition are well-established in the literature. Social interactions play a crucial role in a child's psychological well-being, aiding in social development and the acquisition of essential skills. Exposure to outdoor activities during these programs is linked to reduced stress levels, enhanced physical development, improved self-control, and the development of communication and social skills. The exposure to diversity through these programs fosters inclusivity, empathy, and a broader perspective, contributing to the orphans' adaptability and understanding as they grow.

Participation in social activities not only aids in the development of social skills but also contributes to emotional intelligence and mood management. The study emphasizes the importance of compassionate and caring surroundings, reducing feelings of loneliness and isolation, which could explain low DASS test results obtained.

The significance of social interactions in fostering psychological well-being is supported by research from Rubin, Bukowski, and Parker (1998), who emphasize the importance of peer relationships in childhood for social and emotional development. The link between outdoor activities and reduced stress levels, enhanced physical development, and improved self-control is highlighted in research by Wells and Evans (2003). Their findings suggest that exposure to nature can have restorative effects on children's mental health. The role of diverse social activities in developing communication and social skills aligns with the findings of Ladd, Birch, & Buhs (1999), who note that participation in structured social activities can significantly enhance children's social competence and peer relations. The exposure to diversity through organized programs, contributing to inclusivity, empathy, and a broader perspective, is in line with Pettigrew and Tropp's (2006) research on intergroup contact. They suggest that interaction with diverse groups reduces prejudice and promotes understanding and empathy. The study's emphasis on the role of social activities in developing emotional intelligence is corroborated by the work of Mayer and Salovey (1997), who define emotional intelligence as the ability to perceive, assess, and manage emotions, which can be enhanced through social interactions. The importance of compassionate and caring surroundings in reducing feelings of loneliness and isolation among orphans is consistent with the findings of Qualter et al. (2015). Their research indicates that positive social environments can mitigate feelings of loneliness and promote mental well-being.

Positive Environment as a Contributing Factor

The study underscores the significance of a positive environment in supporting the emotional stability of orphan children. A structured schedule, stable housing, and supportive staff contribute to the orphans' sense of safety and protection. The emotional support provided by caretakers, teachers, and visiting guests is identified as a critical factor influencing psychological health. The presence of positive role models within the orphanage setting, demonstrating healthy emotional behavior and coping mechanisms, enhances emotional stability among the orphans.

Social support emerges as a key determinant of mental well-being, with orphans receiving emotional assistance being more likely to form strong attachments and feel appreciated. The study cites the positive impact of visiting guests, whether relatives or external organizations, on the overall environment of the orphanage. The absence of physical harm and the presence of positive role models contribute to a nurturing environment. In conclusion, the study suggests that the amalgamation of positive relationships, supportive environments, and engaging social activities contributes to the observed low scores of stress, anxiety, and depression among the orphans in Pusat Jagaan Hembusan Kasih Sayang.

The significance of a positive environment in promoting the emotional stability of orphan children, as highlighted in the study, is well-supported by existing research in developmental psychology, child welfare, and education. The aspects of a structured schedule, stable housing, supportive staff, emotional support, and positive role models are key factors in fostering a healthy psychological environment for children in care settings. The importance of a structured schedule and stable housing in providing a sense of safety and security for children is underscored by research from Whittaker, del Valle, and Holmes (2015), who emphasize the necessity of stability in care settings for children's well-being. The critical role of emotional support from caretakers, teachers, and visitors is highlighted in the work of Ungar, Ghazinour, and Richter (2013), who argue that supportive relationships are crucial for resilience and emotional health in vulnerable children. The presence of positive role models within the orphanage setting aligns with Bandura's social learning theory, which suggests that children learn behaviors, norms, and values through observation and imitation of role models (Bandura, 1977). The impact of social support on mental well-being is supported by research from Cohen and Wills (1985), who found that social support plays a protective role in stress management and mental health, particularly in challenging environments. The positive influence of visiting guests, whether relatives or external organizations, on the orphanage environment is consistent with findings by Bowlby (1982), who noted that varied and positive external interactions contribute to a sense of belonging and well-being in children. The study's emphasis on the absence of physical harm and the presence of a nurturing environment resonates with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which identifies safety and security as fundamental for psychological health (Maslow, 1943).

Stress

The study reveals a nuanced gender difference in stress-related mental health problems, with females exhibiting a higher mean stress score than males. This variance can be attributed to multiple factors prevalent among adolescent girls residing in the Hembusan Kasih Sayang orphanage.

Early Puberty and Hormonal Changes

An essential factor influencing stress levels among orphaned girls is the onset of puberty, occurring earlier in females than males. Typically, girls commence puberty between the ages of 9 to 12, while boys experience this phase around the age of 13 and beyond. Given that the orphanage participants fall within the age range of 7 to 12 years, some girls may be undergoing early puberty. This premature transition exposes them to hormonal changes, including increased levels of stress hormones such as epinephrine, norepinephrine, and corticosterone. These hormonal fluctuations are associated with mood swings, heightened stress responses, and alterations in social interaction. Cortisol, in particular, has demonstrated effects on mood and cognition, influencing neuronal function and survival. The intensified response to stressful situations during the onset of puberty contributes to the higher stress scores observed in girls compared to boys. Findings in the study of stress levels among orphaned girls can be closely linked to the onset of puberty, a phase that typically commences earlier in females than in males. Girls often enter puberty between the ages of 9 to 12, while boys generally experience this developmental stage from the age of 13 onwards (Ge, Conger, & Elder, 2001). Given that participants in the orphanage fall within the age range of 7 to 12 years, it is plausible that some of the girls are undergoing early puberty. This early onset of puberty exposes them to significant hormonal changes, including increased levels of stress hormones such as epinephrine, norepinephrine, and corticosterone. These hormonal fluctuations are known to be associated with mood swings, heightened stress responses, and changes in social interactions (Mendle, Turkheimer, & Emery, 2007). The implications of these findings are significant, especially when considering the unique challenges faced by orphaned girls. The study by Ge, Conger, and Elder (2001) provides a comparative perspective, emphasizing how puberty can differentially impact stress responses in boys and girls. This comparison is crucial in understanding why girls may exhibit higher stress levels during this developmental period. Furthermore, the research by Mendle, Turkheimer, and Emery (2007) delves into the detrimental psychological outcomes associated with early pubertal timing in girls. Their findings suggest that the early onset of puberty not only contributes to increased stress levels but also may lead to a range of psychological challenges. These challenges are particularly pertinent for orphaned girls who may already be facing complex emotional and social issues. Therefore, these insights highlight the need for targeted support and interventions for orphaned girls undergoing early puberty, ensuring their psychological well-being and resilience during this critical developmental phase.

Social Pressures and Expectations

Another significant contributor to elevated stress scores among orphaned girls is the burden of societal expectations, particularly during adolescence. Girls, in their journey to maturity, grapple with numerous challenges stemming from social pressures. The study acknowledges the pervasive influence of peer pressure and societal expectations on adolescent girls, transcending racial and cultural boundaries (Ankita Komal, 2018). This transformative phase prompts diverse responses in social situations, shaped by peer pressure, societal norms propagated through media, and individual expectations. Unfortunately, a majority of girls encounter struggles related to self-worth and confidence, impeding their intellectual growth and mental well-being. Fear of societal judgment and issues related to self-confidence manifest prominently among adolescent girls, leading them to conform to unrealistic standards.

Social Media's Impact on Body Image and Self-Esteem

The study delves into the impact of social media on the stress levels of orphaned girls, elucidating the pressure induced by beauty ideals perpetuated on these platforms. The pervasive influence of social media compels an increasing number of girls to utilize their online presence to conform to societal standards of attractiveness, often epitomized by the idealized "Instagram model." These models typically align with society's expectations, featuring flawless skin, specific facial characteristics, extreme thinness, and a tanned complexion. The omnipresence of such standards on platforms like Instagram exacerbates stress levels among adolescent girls perpetually exposed to these ideals. The study highlights the immense challenges faced by girls who, due to societal norms, may feel compelled to adopt extreme measures to align with perceived standards of beauty. Additionally, the study notes instances where a girl in the orphanage experienced a lack of joy during activities due to her dermatitis and dark skin, reflecting the impact of societal beauty standards on self-esteem and social interactions. Social media platforms, particularly Instagram, have become a primary source of these beauty standards. As Fardouly et al. (2015) note, the idealized portrayal of beauty on these platforms often features attributes such as flawless skin, extreme thinness, and specific facial characteristics. This constant exposure to such ideals can profoundly impact the self-perception and stress levels of adolescent girls, leading them to strive to meet these often unattainable standards. The study's findings align with Tiggemann and Slater's (2014) research, which underscores the relationship between frequent social media use and increased body image concerns among adolescent girls. In the context of the orphanage, these pressures are particularly poignant. The study notes instances where a girl experienced diminished joy in activities due to her dermatitis and dark skin, a direct reflection of the internalization of societal beauty standards perpetuated through social media. This phenomenon is indicative of the broader impact such platforms can have on self-esteem and social interactions among young girls. As indicated by Fardouly et al. (2015), the relentless comparison with the 'Instagram model' ideal can exacerbate stress levels and lead to significant emotional distress. Moreover, Tiggemann and Slater (2014) highlight that this constant exposure to idealized images can contribute to a heightened sense of body dissatisfaction, further affecting the mental well-being of these young girls. These findings underscore the need for interventions that foster positive self-image and resilience in the face of societal and media-driven pressures, particularly for vulnerable populations such as orphaned girls. By addressing these challenges, caregivers and educators can help mitigate the adverse effects of social media on body image and self-esteem, promoting a healthier, more positive sense of self among these young individuals.

Anxiety

The study indicates a notable gender difference in anxiety scores, with females displaying higher levels than males. To contextualize this finding, it's essential to explore the prevalence of Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD), a widespread psychiatric condition affecting approximately 12.1% of individuals throughout their lifetime (Asher, Asnaani, & Aderka, 2017). SAD is characterized by an intense and enduring fear of specific social situations, such as interacting with strangers, attending social events, or public speaking, where individuals anticipate scrutiny and fear acting embarrassingly, leading to avoidance or distressing coping mechanisms.

A potential explanation for the observed anxiety variation between male and female orphans lies in the self-construal theory, as proposed by Asher, Asnaani, and Aderka (2017). This theory suggests that men and women cultivate distinct internal representations of themselves. Men

often adopt an independent self-construal, perceiving others as separate entities, while women tend towards an interdependent self-construal, considering others as integral parts of themselves. According to this theory, women's self-perception intertwines more with their relationships, rendering them more socially engaged and invested in their interactions. Consequently, women may experience heightened anxiety about the outcomes of social interactions, contributing to elevated anxiety levels compared to men with similar instances of Social Anxiety Disorder.

During the visit to Pusat Jagaan Hembusan Kasih Sayang, observations revealed differing behaviors between male and female orphans. Male orphans demonstrated comfort and interacted more actively during program activities, whereas female counterparts appeared more introverted and self-effacing, displaying less interactive behavior. Exploring further, gender disparities in self-esteem, as consistently documented in extensive research, could shed light on these observed differences (Casale, 2020). Meta-analytic studies consistently highlight gender discrepancies in self-esteem, with men generally exhibiting higher self-esteem than women. This trend persists through adolescence and into early and middle adulthood, tapering off in old age. The effect size of this gender difference, though usually small to medium, tends to be slightly larger during adolescence.

The lower self-esteem observed among female orphans compared to their male counterparts might contribute to their discomfort and shyness, hindering their interaction and participation in activities involving strangers. This insight into self-esteem disparities emphasizes the importance of targeted interventions aimed at fostering self-confidence and mitigating anxiety among female orphaned adolescents. Recognizing the intricate interplay of psychological factors is crucial for developing strategies that address the unique needs of individuals within this population, promoting their overall mental well-being and social engagement.

Limitations

The relatively small sample size of 26 participants poses challenges to the generalizability and validity of the study's findings when extrapolated to a larger population. Striving for representativeness within the sample is crucial, yet the constraints of a small size may introduce biases or skewed characteristics, potentially impacting the applicability of the conclusions. Furthermore, the modest sample size may compromise the accuracy of detecting significant gender differences.

Moreover, the reliance on self-report measures to assess depression, anxiety, and stress introduces a subjective element prone to biases and inaccuracies. Orphaned children, particularly those aged 7 to 12, might encounter challenges in articulating their emotions accurately due to factors such as fear, stigma, or limited self-awareness about mental health issues. This inherent subjectivity may influence the precision of the findings and necessitates caution in interpreting the results.

The study's use of a cross-sectional design, capturing data at a single point in time, limits the ability to establish causal relationships and comprehend the nuanced nature of depression, anxiety, and stress concerning orphanhood and gender. A more robust research approach involving longitudinal assessments would enhance the validity of the findings, offering a nuanced understanding of how these mental health factors evolve over time among orphaned children.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the DASS test indicates a low prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress among orphans at Pusat Jagaan Hembusan Kasih Sayang. This favorable outcome is attributed to specific factors inherent to the orphanage environment. However, the gender breakdown reveals disparities, with females exhibiting a higher prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress compared to males, attributable to specific factors influencing each gender. These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions and support systems, acknowledging the unique challenges faced by orphaned children, especially concerning gender-specific mental health concerns. Future research endeavors should aim for larger and more diverse samples, employ diverse assessment methods, and adopt longitudinal designs for a comprehensive understanding of the psychological well-being of orphaned children.

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