

Does Brief Psychoeducation Works in Enhancing Street Children Knowledge to Prevent Sexual Abuse?

Hanum Nindialoka
 University of Muhammadiyah Malang
 hanumnumnum@gmail.com

Latipun
 University of Muhammadiyah Malang
 latipun@umm.ac.id

Abstract: *Streetlife is an unhealthy environment for children. However, in reality, social conflict, economical and low educational levels forced children to be involved in the rigors of street life. The involvement of children in street life carries a great deal of vulnerability for them, one of which is child sexual abuse (CSA). This study aims to examine the effectiveness of psychoeducation in increasing the knowledge of street children as a preventive measure in preventing sexual CSA. The psychoeducation consisted of five sessions, which were carried out using a discussion method that includes images and role-play. Fifteen street children aged 12 to 15 years were involved as participants. Data were collected through interviews and Children's Knowledge of Abuse Questionnaire-Revised (CKAQ-R) to see the effectiveness of psychoeducation, then analyzed quantitatively. The results show that psychoeducation as a preventive intervention is effective in increasing the understanding, alertness, and skills of street children in dealing with the risk of CSA that may occur around them.*

Keyword: *psychoeducation, preventive, sex abuse, street children*

Introduction

The existence of street children is one of the big problems faced by developing countries like Indonesia. For several years, the government continued to work to reduce the number of street children in various ways. Fortunately, according to data collected by antaranews.com, since 2015, the number of street children in Indonesia has dramatically reduced from 33 thousand to 16 thousand in 2018. However, until now, the problem of street children has not been appropriately resolved. Streets are an unhealthy environment for children's development (Panter-brick, 2002). They do not provide security for children because every aspect of their lives will be exposed, faced with people's views and judgments. Also, their appearance, living conditions, and interactions quickly get attention from many strangers (Moura, 2002).

Living on the street will bring much vulnerability for children, both for their social and health aspects (Nada et al., 2010). According to Lalor (1999), the negative impacts of living on the street include early maturity and the risk of developing negative behavior due to the influence of the people in the environment. Even worse, these children are prone to abuse, assault, and oppression on the streets (Ezeokana & Obi-nwosu, 2014). Indeed, CSA is one of the violence types often experienced by street children.

Sexual abuse is defined as unwanted sexual behavior, which can include unwanted sexual solicitation, requests for sexual acts, or other verbal, nonverbal, and physical sexual behavior (Hill & Kearl, 2011). Another definition of sexual abuse is a form of sexual aggression that covers a broad spectrum of unwanted sex-related behaviors from

relatively mild behavior, such as telling dirty jokes, to severe behavior, such as sexual coercion (Munson et al., 2000). In street life, the risk of CSA is higher, because street children lack the attention and supervision of their parents. CSA often makes children feel confused and frustrated about what they have to do to respond to the situation (Sarah, 2000).

The Indonesian government has put forth a great effort to deal with CSA that often occurs to street children, one of which is by providing many professionals and shelters for victims of CSA as a curative measure. However, it would be even more optimal if the preventive measure was also carried out by providing education for the children to prevent CSA.

Psychoeducation has been carried out by various groups, especially professionals in clinical and social settings. Psychoeducation is a form of intervention aimed at removing barriers in digesting complex information (Lukens & Mcfarlane, 2004). Psychoeducation is very important to do to prevent CSA. Previous research showed that preventive ways such as psychoeducation are better given to parents or professionals who have direct interaction with children, such as teachers or child care groups (Rheingold et al., 2014). This is because children are considered too early to learn materials about sex. However, pre-school aged children need to know what body parts are personal, the difference between men and women, and how CSA may occur (Kenny, 2009).

This current study was conducted to see the effectiveness of psychoeducation in increasing the understanding, awareness, and alertness of street children of CSA that occurs in their environment. In this study, we provide psychoeducation as the prevention of CSA for 15

street children who had been approved to take part in a series of programs that had been prepared using the most attractive methods possible. The hypothesis suggests that psychoeducation programs can effectively enhance street child knowledge related to CSA.

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)

CSA is defined as any form of involvement of a child in sexual activity that he does not fully understand, or there is no prior readiness, both mentally and physically, so there is no consent on it (Stoltenborgh et al., 2011; WHO, 1999). Sexual activities include exploiting children in prostitution or unlawful sexual practices, persuasion of sexual activity, and showing pornography (Maniglio, 2009). Child sexual abuse is considered a serious criminal offense because the individuals are engaged in sexual activity with the underage children and exploit them for sexual satisfaction (Child welfare information gateway, 2019).

Many studies have reported that CSA has short-term and long-term adverse effects on its victims. Disruption of social and psychological functions such as trauma, emotional disturbances, and problematic interpersonal relations are some consequences that must be accepted by children as victims (Beaudoin et al., 2013; Han et al., 2013; Mikaeili et al., 2013). Chronic mental problems such as PTSD, suicide, and depression often occur in victims of CSA (Han et al., 2013; Maniglio, 2009). The studies conducted by Brown et al. (1999) and Paolucci & Genuis (2001) found that the tendency of getting depressed is three times higher in individuals experiencing sexual abuse during their childhood compared to those who have never been sexually abused.

Street Children

The existence of street children is a very complex phenomenon. In general, this is an extension of the conflict of poverty, crime, and dysfunctional family, so that children are forced to live or earn a living on the streets (Conticini & Hulme, 2006; Panter-brick, 2002; Raffaelli, 2001). The term street children has broad interpretations. This study refers to the understanding that street children are underage individuals who make the street their home or place of livelihood without sufficient supervision or guidance from their parents (Gadd, 2016). There are two crucial points about street children gained from this understanding. Firstly, the streets are the source of their lives; and secondly, there is no proper social contact between children and family members at home.

Based on the results of previous research conducted in developing countries, the hypothesis states that poverty can create conditions that are not conducive to the home and encourage other family members, in this case children, to get involved in earning a living to survive (Bhukuth & Radja, 2013).

Sexual Abuse in Street Children

Children who live and work on the street are prone to abuse and exploitation because they are not covered by the national child protection program. Their fundamental rights, such as shelter, food, and sanitation, are not well facilitated, so they are very vulnerable to transmission of disease, crime, neglect, and abuse (Manjengwa et al., 2016). Sexual abuse that occurs to street children has a lot to do with the use of narcotics and alcohol or sex exchange for specific items that support life such as money or food (Chen, 2015).

Brief Psychoeducation as a Preventive Effort

In addition to maximizing the effort of assisting CSA victims, other preventive ways carried out by social workers are necessary. Children naturally have the basic ability to learn about security concepts and have a provision of security knowledge (Beaudoin et al., 2013; Kenny, 2010). However, this needs to be further developed in certain groups such as street children, because they live with very little supervision and attention from parents and educators. If child sexual abuse is considered a risk factor for the development of psychopathology, then prevention service programs such as the provision of psychoeducation, campaigns, and management of residual symptoms must be fully implemented (Maniglio, 2009).

There are four levels of prevention that can be targeted as an effort to prevent sexual abuse against children, including personal and biological risk factors, close relationships with family and friends, communities where violence occurs, and a broader social context such as social norms (Krug et al., 2002). In this study, psychoeducation is provided to increase the knowledge and understanding of street children about what CSA is, how to prevent it, and how to deal with it. This is in line with the results of previous research conducted by Satcher & Satcher (2013) and Wurtele (2009) that suggest that providing education about prevention and the risks posed is an essential element of preventive efforts. The education provided must undoubtedly be able to improve the knowledge, competencies, or coping abilities of children (Wurtele, 2009).

Method

This study used a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest method to test the effectiveness of psychoeducation with creative models in increasing understanding, alertness, and skills of street children in dealing with CSA.

Participant

This study was conducted in the street children community of Muharto Malang. There were 15 participants involved in this study consisting of 8 girls and 7 boys. The children aged between 11 and 15 years

and worked on the streets.

Instrument

The data in this study were collected from interviews and questionnaires using Children Knowledge of Abuse Questionnaire-Revised (CKAQ-R). Interviews were conducted to obtain data about participants' experience and general knowledge about sexual abuse. The interviews were also used to cross-check the results of the pre-test and post-test. On the other hand, CKAQ-R was used to determine the effectiveness of psychoeducation in increasing participant knowledge about sexual abuse. This scale was developed by Tutty (1995), consisting of 24 items. Each item has a choice of Yes or No response with a score of 0 and 1. This scale has a Cronbach's Alpha value of .856 and an index of validity range of 0.55 - 0.72. The results of the analysis of the discussion of items on this scale, which cover 1) Body Ownership 2) Private Parts and 3) Assertiveness, were used as a reference for determining the psychoeducation materials given to the street children.

Procedure

Psychoeducation was conducted in 5 sessions in 2 weeks. The materials of the psychoeducation were prepared in collaboration with women and child protection volunteers. The 15 participants were divided into three small groups, with each group consisting of five people. The formation of this group was expected to facilitate the speaker in giving assignments to participants. The following is a brief explanation of each session:

Session 1. Introduction and Commitment Building

Participants who had been divided into three groups were assigned to choose one person from their group. Each person from the group stood up and introduced each member of the group. After introducing them, all participants were given a CKAQ-R pre-test consisting of 24 items. Participants were then given a brief explanation of the goals, objectives, and importance of the provision of psychoeducation. This first session aims to build the commitment of participants to take part in a series of psychoeducation that was designed until the final session.

Session 2. Recognizing Forms of Sexual Abuse

At the beginning of this session, all participants were given an explanation of what CSA was and the effects it might cause. Various forms of CSA (both verbally and non-verbally), as well as direct contact and abuse through social media, were also shown to the participants with the help of pictorial animated slide media. All participants were invited to see and understand the verbal explanation given. Besides, an explanation about which parts of a woman's and man's body are privacy were also given to raise participant awareness of the importance of taking care of themselves.

Session 3. Learning how to prevent and respond to CSA

Providing direction and guidance about ways to prevent CSA and how to deal with it is the central part of this session. Increasing participants' knowledge and awareness about the importance of protecting the private parts of their body was carried out by displaying posters and giving explanations. One of the volunteers' ways to teach participants to be more aware of the people around them and be more assertive is by encouraging them to report to the authorities or other closest people they trust in the case of CSA.

Session 4. Role Play

After making sure all participants understand the material from the previous sessions, each group was assigned to make a short story and perform a role play about one form of CSA that had been previously learned, including how to respond to it. Then each group received feedback from the other groups, followed by discussion.

Session 5. Basic training self-defense and evaluation

Basic training in self-defense, which refers specifically to avoidance techniques, was given to participants to teach them how to protect themselves when facing an urgent situation. After the whole series of sessions were completed, each participant was allowed to express their thoughts and feelings about the program. This final session concluded with instructions to all participants to work on CKAQ-R again as a post-test. A follow-up activity was performed two weeks after the psychoeducation was given by asking the participants several questions in the form of case descriptions.

Result

The score obtained by the participants were analyzed using Wilcoxon analysis to compare the condition of participants before and after psychoeducation. It shows that there was an increase in the average score of all participants. This is supported by an increase in pre and post mean rank and the significance values of .006*, which means that psychoeducation was an effective way to increase children's knowledge, understanding, and skills in dealing with CSA. In more detail, the initial score obtained by the average participant was in the medium category, while the score achieved after receiving psychoeducation rose to the high category.

This result was also supported by statements from each participant who reported that after joining this psychoeducation program, they felt there was an increase in their knowledge about CSA. They understood better the boundaries of behavior (both verbal and nonverbal) that must be maintained in an interaction. Also, they began to feel more confident to report a strange or bad situation that might happen. It clearly shows the participants understand well that being assertive, open, and brave to report CSA case is vital so that victims of CSA can be appropriately handled.

Discussion

The results of this study revealed that psychoeducation supported by creative methods such as role-play and the use of pictures could increase the understanding and alertness of street children about ways to prevent and deal with CSA. Increased knowledge gained by the street children who were involved as participants in this research include 1) being able to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate touches, and people or situation leading to CSA that must be avoided, 2) knowing the right ways to avoid CSA, 3) knowing how to respond to CSA, 4) being more assertive and open in conveying something bad they might experience. This success is supported by the use of explanatory methods (pictures and role play) that appeal to children. This finding is in line with the results of previous research, which found that children's understanding of sexual abuse can increase significantly through theatrical methods (Black et al., 2000).

The method of dividing participants into small groups is also a method that makes them more comfortable because the participants feel close to one another during the psychoeducation program, which increases their interest in continuing to follow all series of the program. The group method also helps the participants do the tasks more easily because of the teamwork. Indeed, most of the participants who take part in psychoeducation programs using the group method increase their knowledge and social skills by establishing new relationships that strengthen their commitment to engage in the group discussion (Hale & Cows, 2009). The grouping method in psychoeducation also helps participants reduce the level of anxiety and awkwardness. Besides, they feel more comfortable following the program, so the goal can be achieved more easily (Kiliç et al., 2018).

Other supporting factors for success are in line with the results of previous studies on the effectiveness of psychoeducation, that is, involving professional workers or practitioners as presenters of the materials (Hickey et al., 2018). A professional or practitioner is considered a figure who has good ability and high credibility. The collaboration between social workers and professionals who are experts in their fields is one of the essential keys to the effectiveness of psychoeducation programs.

Conclusion

Preventing CSA using psychoeducation methods on street children is quite challenging. The design of implementation in a series of psychoeducation programs must be considered in detail. Using creative approaches like role play and pictures when delivering psychoeducation materials can be an effective way to further simplify the materials and accommodate the street children, who mostly get no proper school education. This creative method is also needed for children to avoid boredom so that their level of focus can be maintained

and the materials can be delivered more effectively. The results of this study, which found that psychoeducation with an interesting method has a good level of effectiveness as a preventive effort, is expected to encourage further research to find a lot more creative ways to carry out the program.

Limitations

The slight increase in participants' scores may be caused by the short duration of the psychoeducation so that there is no good maintenance strategy to maximize the increase in skills and knowledge of the street children. The limited number of participants also makes the results of this study weak because there is no control group used as a comparison, so the results of this study cannot be generalized. Besides, the long-term effects of the psychoeducation program, which was carried out briefly do not necessarily change the behavior of participants in the future. Based on the limitations of this study, advice that can be given for further research besides increasing participants and providing a control group is to increase the role of the author to further develop data collection methods at the beginning of the study. This is important because an adequate amount of data can help the author develop a psychoeducation program that will be carried out to minimize limitations.

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