



# Counselors' Essential Experiences with Victims of Child Abuse

## A Guide to a Client-Driven Counseling

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**Abstract.** This paper discussed the Jaringan Relawan Independen (JaRi) Foundation counselor's experience in dealing with cases of child victims of domestic violence in Kota Bandung. The study sees cases of violence against children as a traumatic phenomenon. It aims to describe the significance of JaRi Foundation counselor volunteers' experiences in dealing with victims of child abuse in Kota Bandung and how these can be used as basis in formulating various mechanisms to provide support to the victims. The method used is qualitative with a phenomenological approach. The study utilized phenomenological data analysis techniques, which include: (1) identifying significant statements related to volunteer counselor experiences; (2) formulating and incorporating the exact phrases into minor themes; (3) grouping small themes into one to combine into prominent themes; and (4) describing the findings on the meaning of the JaRi foundation counselor volunteer experiences in the connection between the major themes. Volunteer counselors at the JaRi Foundation have noted that the victims of child abuse have indeed undergone significant traumatic experiences that leaves physical and psychological trauma in the long run. Given the long-term impacts of the incidents, the counselors are motivated to build appropriate interventions and develop a victim-centered counseling approach in order to ensure that all interventions made are sensitive to the nature of the situation.

**Keywords:** Child Abuse · Nonprofit Organization Service · Public Service

## 1 Introduction

Domestic violence, particularly child abuse, has been prevalent globally over the years. According to World Health Organization [1], approximately one billion children aged 2–17 years old have experienced *physical, sexual, or emotional violence or neglect* in 2019. Unfortunately, Indonesia is not exempted in this global atrocity as domestic violence is also rampant in the country. In 2021, the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection reported 11,952 cases of child abuse. Disturbingly, a total of 7,004 cases of

sexual assault against children – 58 percent of all cases of child abuse in Indonesia, can be deduced as a form of violence that children endure [2]. These cases of violence inflicted on children have evident detrimental effects specifically on the growth and development of children.

In the context of Indonesia, Bandung is one of the major cities with occurrence of violence against children. According to Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS) Kota Bandung, 431 cases of violence against children were reported in 2020 [3]. However, vast majority victims remain silent due to the stigma and culture of not taking the complaints seriously which eventually lead to no resolution for the victims [4]. This is why the phenomenon of domestic violence against children has been compared to an iceberg phenomenon – having volumes of cases of subsurface violence that go unreported.

However, this does not mean that no efforts are being made to address the psychological issues experienced by victims of child abuse. The government, universities, and civil society have exerted collaborative efforts to find appropriate solutions. The Jaringan Relawan Independen (JaRi), a non-profit organization in Bandung, has been attempting to play a significant role through mentoring victims of domestic violence since 2003. The JaRi Foundation has around ten volunteer counselors for the children who had been victims of domestic violence. As of now, the foundation has assisted 830 cases of violence against children.

In line with this, the study is designed to ascertain the significance of the JaRi Foundation counselor volunteers' experiences in dealing with the victims if child abuse in the city of Bandung. These experiences will be analyzed later on how these were considered as basis in designing and determining future interventions for victims of child abuse.

## 2 Literature Review: Victimization of Children

Research conducted by Lloyd [5], discovered that violence in children's lives frequently disrupted their schools and harmed the quality of their education. Child abuse can cause emotional trauma, physical and psychological barriers to learning, and disruptive behaviors at school. Other research suggests that growing children are negatively impacted by domestic violence because they have been directly or indirectly abused in violent incidents [6]. In addition to this, violence against children can result to negative coping mechanism (e.g., smoking, misuse alcohol and drugs, and engage in high-risk sexual behavior) which eventually lead to health risks [1]. The findings mentioned above reaffirm that violence against children has a severe and long-lasting impacts. The feelings of violence they have incurred will continue to pervade their lives, both personally and socially.

According to other studies, domestic violence has become a significant problem during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the requirement to stay at home, there is a constant contact between the perpetrator and the victim of violence, resulting in an increase in violence and a decrease in reporting these cases [7]. Furthermore, another research in Australia [8], presented four findings concerning the experience of child abuse in the midst of pandemic, namely:

- Number of police reports and referrals to child protection services has decreased;

- Number of calls to police helplines or domestic violence hotlines has decreased;
- Increase in child abuse-related hospitalizations; and
- Family violence has been multiplying.

### 3 Methods

Taking into consideration the scope and objectives of the study, the paper employs a qualitative approach. According to Creswell [9], qualitative research is a method for investigating and interpreting individuals' or groups' subjective experiences in the context of social or human problems. Emerging issues and techniques are included in research methods, as are data that are typically collected in the participants' natural environment, inductively form interpretations of data from data to common themes, and researchers interpret the significance of these themes. Phenomenology was used as the qualitative research strategy in this study. According to Moustakas [10] and Creswell and Porth [11], phenomenological research seeks to understand the meaning of human experience in relation to a phenomenon felt by participants. Transcendental phenomenology is used in the research, which emphasizes details, textual descriptions, structural descriptions, and the meaning of experiences [10, 11].

Purposive sampling is the technique used in qualitative research. The researchers developed research participant criteria based on volunteers who became JaRi Foundation counselors. The researchers chose ten JaRi Foundation counselors to participate in this study based on these criteria. In-depth interviews and focused group discussions (FGD) were used to collect data. Initially, each participant was interviewed individually by the researchers. Following the processing of the interview data, the researcher held a FGD to validate the research findings. On that occasion, they also requested final feedback from all participants before the study's findings were published.

The data is analyzed using the phenomenological research data analysis procedure proposed by Moustakas [10]. This procedure consists of four stages: (1) bracketing (epoche); (2) horizontalization of the data by identifying significant statements and removing overlapping and repetitive statements; (3) listing the meaning by clustering the data into themes; and (4) developing the textural and structural descriptions of the experience.

### 4 Results and Discussion

As previously stated, researchers interviewed ten JaRi Foundation volunteer counselors. The ten counselors have mentored children who have been victims of violence in the city of Bandung. The following are the demographics of the ten JaRi Foundation counselors who took part in this study:

Table 1 presents the overview of the profile of the respondents of the interviews and participants of the focused group discussion (FGD). Evidently, the counselors are a group of women with an age range of 23 to 50 years old. They are likewise with a good academic standing as four of which has master's degree and the rest have a bachelor's degree. Majority of the counselors have one year experience on the position, some with 2–3 years, 7 years, and one with 20 years of experience.

**Table 1.** Participant demographics.

Pseudonyms	Gender	Age	Education Level	Tenure
P1	Female	45 Years	Master	7 Years
P2	Female	24 Years	Sarjana	1 Year
P3	Female	26 Years	Sarjana	1 Year
P4	Female	27 Years	Sarjana	1 Year
P5	Female	25 Years	Sarjana	1 Year
P6	Female	35 Years	Master	3 Years
P7	Female	30 Years	Sarjana	2 Years
P8	Female	50 Years	Master	20 Years
P9	Female	23 Years	Sarjana	1 Year
P10	Female	33 Years	Master	3 Years

The researchers identified significant statements obtained from the results of interviews with participants, in accordance with the process of qualitative data analysis in phenomenological research. The identification results are then poured into a list of significant statements. The researchers discovered 34 significant statements by bracketing or epoche results. Reflectively, the researchers separated themselves from the knowledge and experiences associated with the phenomenon of dealing with child victims of violence and read the contents of the interview transcript as something new. These findings/statements were then further scrutinized to define the significance of each statement. Table 2 provides a detailed table of the statement and its corresponding significance.

**Table 2.** Formulation of the counselor’s significant statement’s meaning addressing child maltreatment.

No.	Significant Meaning	Formulation Statement
1	As a result, the finger foundation is the first to assist government programs, particularly those aimed at the mental development of children.	Priority Assistance
2	Someone reports the first.	Victim Report
3	The first is to examine the report’s findings; for example, if there is evidence of beatings, we see, and if he is not visum, we assist the physical visum. The second is psychic visum, which is known as intervention, and this child is later tested in counseling.	Report Verification
4	We take notes after we get the information, and then it’s over to psychologists to see if we need more counseling or something. We need to talk about what the future holds.	Follow-up Measures

*(continued)*

**Table 2.** (continued)

No.	Significant Meaning	Formulation Statement
5	It's difficult because the children are sometimes spoken to harshly, especially if they've been traumatized, and they end up shutting down.	Shutting Down
6	He's a 15-year-old who doesn't talk much but tries to wrench himself when he's at home. Now that we can't dig any further, we ask his parents why he developed trauma from his parents' separation.	Self-Harm
7	I have my own story because I, too, am a survivor.	Survivors Serve As Counselors
8	Who was abandoned by his mother, he continued to appear to be scolded but it was unclear why.	Neglected Experience
9	So, even during this consultation, I learned from these clients. I don't give anything to the client, but I do receive something from them.	Concern for Victims
10	During the process, we first look at the case and what the client's needs are. And what we do is more about psychological assistance, if the psychological one is more about psychological assistance.	Client Needs Oriented
11	The first is that we are more into emotional focus because emotional problems, the consequences or impacts of the violence they experience, have an impact on their emotions.	Evaluation of the victim's emotional condition
12	Clients who come in when they are experiencing violence and are unsure what to do or how to act, and they are worried and fearful.	Victims' Fear
13	The report card is how to establish a relationship with the client so that the client is at ease and willing to tell a story.	Constructing victim trust
14	Then, after the client has been given space, we allow them to tell their story and express their feelings. When he comes in with emotional issues, he is much more at ease when he tells stories.	Client's Right to Free Expression
15	There are cases where they have been violent since childhood, from bullying at school, and when they marry, they also commit violence.	Circles of violence
16	It is closely related to power dynamics in which the husband feels superior to his wife and children and considers women and children to be weak.	Powerlessness
17	JaRi's role appears to be significant to me. In addition to JaRi, there is also in terms of the law, psychologically it is handled, so help those victims, mentally prosperous, legally accompanied by	The Importance of Nonprofit Help
18	Following subsequent interventions, the patient is monitored. The intervention is then evaluated.	Monitoring and evaluation of violent incidents
19	if there is a psychological examination for reporting to authorities that can be used in court	Submitted a Report to the Authorities
20	His own uncle abused him. Actually, there was a police report, and the police report was given to us for a psychological examination.	Abuse of the sexual kind by close relatives

(continued)

**Table 2.** (continued)

No.	Significant Meaning	Formulation Statement
21	Perhaps, before I jumped in, I still believed that my own family could be like this.	Violence perpetrators beyond suspicion
22	His son is four years old, and the perpetrator is a grandfather's friend, so he tells him he wants to tell him what happened, but the other party says it should be forgotten.	Victim Intimidation
23	So the violence has been done since he was a child, and violence has become a culture there, but the impact is that his son has come in 1st grade and has stolen.	Assaultive Society
24	Because I am vulnerable to violence as a woman and a child, I use counseling to help.	The counselor's generosity
25	Assist the government in its dealings with victims of violence, including children.	Contributing to the Government
26	The JaRi Foundation's role is very helpful for survivors in expressing their grievances, particularly in terms of mental health... Not everyone is brave, especially when the main cause is from within their own family. As a result, I believe the JaRi Foundation's role is to assist not only the government, but also those in need.	NPO Assists Survivors of Violence
27	Victims of child abuse are arguably difficult because they are still children who don't understand anything.	Communication Barriers for Victims
28	Because they are, indeed, unpredictable. During counseling, people can become agitated. There are also those who continue to cry. There are also those who remain silent when questioned. However, there is something to work with, so he wants to tell what happened to him.	Confusion Victims
29	So the victim is a daughter, around 12 or 13 years old. His father physically abused him, and his mother has been dead since he was a child. She was eager to be separated from her father, but she was unable to do so because no brother wanted to accommodate her, especially since her family's financial circumstances were also poor.	Physical Violence Experiences
30	Assisting people who have been victims of any type of violent act,	Offering All-Inclusive Services
31	He wasn't physically violent, but he became mentally violent. His parents frequently fought in front of his eyes, and his parents frequently said harshly when they fought,	Experiences of Psychic Violence
32	Because his son refused to leave the house, I and a few of my colleagues eventually followed him there. When he first met me and my friend, this kid was terrified. So when I approached her, she burst into tears. So it took some time to get this cub to calm down. Oh, his parents are divorced, so he lives with his mother, but his mother is often at work, so he is frequently entrusted to his neighbors. Well, it turns out that this child was sexually abused by his neighbors.	Sexual Harassment Experienced by Neighbors

(continued)

**Table 2.** (continued)

No.	Significant Meaning	Formulation Statement
33	As a result, the JaRi Foundation was established in order to fight for victims' rights.	Defending Victims' Rights
34	I enjoy being around children. When I was studying psychology, I realized that children are frequently victims of violence in their own homes, in what is supposed to be their most comfortable environment.	Making the Environment Safe

The subsequent steps in data analysis is to cluster the formulated meanings. Seven themes emerged as a result of the formulation of interconnected meanings. The cluster themes and formulations of their associated meanings are displayed in Table 3. Brief explanation of each theme is also presented in the succeeding sections.

**Table 3.** Clustering themes and their connection to meaning constructions.

Theme 1: Procedures for Handling Victims	Priority Assistance
	Victim Report
	Report Verification
	Follow-up Measures
	Evaluation of the victim's emotional condition
	Monitoring and evaluation of violent incidents
	Submitted a Report to the Authorities
	Contributing to the Government
Theme 2: Victim's Trauma	Shutting Down
	Self-Harm
	Victims' Fear
	Confusion Victims
	Communication Barriers for Victims
Theme 3: Reasons for Violence	Circles of violence
	Powerlessness
	Violence perpetrators beyond suspicion
	Victim Intimidation
	Assaultive Society
Theme 4: Victims' Traumatic Experiences	Experiences of Psychological Violence
	Physical Violence Experiences
	Sexual Harassment Experienced by Neighbors
	Abuse of the sexual kind by close relatives
	Neglected Experience
Theme 5: Counsellor Motivation	Survivors Serve as Counsellors
	Concern for Victims
	The counsellor's generosity

(continued)

**Table 3.** (continued)

Theme 6: Client Driven Counseling	Client Needs Oriented
	The Importance of Non-profit Help
	NPO Assists Survivors of Violence
	Offering Inclusive Services
	Defending Victims' Rights
Theme 7: Building Victim Support	Constructing victim trust
	Client's Right to Free Expression
	Making the Environment Safe

**4.1 Procedures for Handling Victims**

Participants in this study disclosed that their experience as volunteer counselors at the JaRi Foundation was related to the implementation of victim handling procedures. Participant P8, who has 20 years of experience, revealed that children who are victims of violence must be handled with delicate care. Participants (P1, P6, P7, and P10) suggested that counselors should be aware that their clients are children whose futures must be considered. They are a priority for mentoring that requires additional support.

The participants also stated that the experience of mentoring children who have been victims of violence should pay close attention to the reports submitted by the victims and diagnose their emotional state. This report must be validated in order to determine the appropriate next steps of interventions. In order to determine the progress of victim recovery, participants also monitored and assessed cases of violence as this helped the government formulate policies for dealing with victims of child abuse. In certain instances, if the situation falls under the category of criminal cases, the procedure for dealing with victims also includes notifying the police.

**4.2 Victim's Trauma**

In addition, participants identified trauma patterns among children who have been victims of violence. Participants (P2, P3, P4, P5, and P9) reported that at the start of the casualty meeting, they had a tendency to withdraw from the conversation and keep things to themselves. In addition, those who are still young have a limited vocabulary for expressing their emotions due to their age. These constrains the victim's ability to tell the counselor the complete story of his or her experiences. In addition to fear and confusion when discussing their experiences with counselors, victims often resort to self-harm as an expression of their frustration.

**4.3 Reasons for Violence**

In addition, the participants identified several factors as their conclusions regarding the causes of acts of violence against children. According to participants P1 and P8, the results of their excavations of stories revealed the violence's root causes. P1 explains that eventually, this experienced violence becomes part of his/her life cycle. The acts of



violence committed by parents against their children are a result of the same treatment their parents received from their own parents, creating a cycle of violence that is passed on to the next generation. P1's cycle of violence evolves into a culture of violence that is viewed as a means of educating and disciplining children. Participant P8 stated that the victim's helplessness was also a factor in the perpetuation and repetition of violence where the offenders feel superior over his/her victim/s. Therefore, as counselors, they frequently do not suspect that the perpetrators of violence are the victim's closest loved ones, who should provide affection and care.

#### **4.4 Victims' Traumatic Experiences**

Participants (P6, P7, and P10) noted their observations that these children were not only exposed to a variety of abuses, including physical and psychological violence, but also survivors of sexual abuse at the hands of family members and neighbors. There are also instances where the victims were abandoned and neglected by their own biological parents due to financial concerns.

#### **4.5 Counsellor Motivation**

Participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P8) disclosed their motivations for becoming counselors which pertains to their own experiences as survivors of these abuses. In addition, participants stated that they are motivated to become counselors because they empathize with the victim's feelings and have good intentions to assist the victim in overcoming their traumatized emotions.

#### **4.6 Client Driven Counseling**

Participants (P6, P7, P9, and P10) also considered providing innovative client-centered counseling. According to them, counseling currently prioritizes the professional knowledge of counselors over the client's needs and problems.

The participants also stated that, as a non-profit organization, the JaRi Foundation is more adaptable in its mentoring roles, particularly for survivors of violence. This flexibility makes it easier for non-profit organizations that are not bound by procedural rules, such as government agencies, to provide inclusive services and advocate more effectively for victims' rights.

#### **4.7 Building Victim Support**

Participants (P1, P4, P5, P6, P7, P9, and P10) opined that when offering counseling services, one must provide victims with effective support. This can be accomplished by believing the victim's trust in the counselor, allowing the client expressive freedom, and providing the victim with a safe environment.

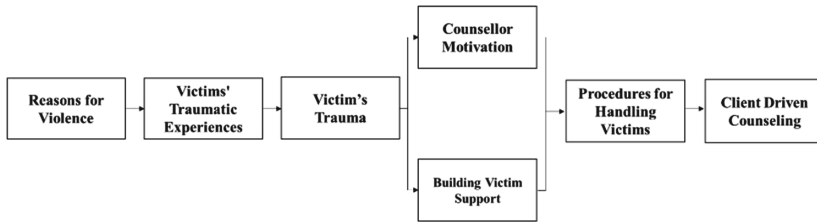


Fig. 1. Textural description.

#### 4.8 The Counselor Experience's Essence

To gain an understanding of the counselor's experience when interacting with victims of child abuse, researchers attempted to connect the seven themes that emerged from this research. This process is called the phenomenological descriptions of texture and the statement below provides the description of texture.

*Volunteer counselors at the JaRi Foundation have noted that the victims of child abuse have indeed undergone significant traumatic experiences that leaves physical and psychological trauma in the long run. Given the long-term impacts of the incidents, the counselors are motivated to build appropriate interventions through implementing program handling procedures. In this procedure, the counselor prioritized developing a victim-centered counseling approach or a client-driven counseling in order to ensure that all interventions made are sensitive to the nature of the situation.* Figure 1 provides a sample on how to illustrate the textural description of the study.

## 5 Conclusion

The findings of the study reaffirm the long-term trauma being experienced by victims of child abuse. These traumatic experiences lead to physical, psychological, and even social traumas that haunt the victims for years, especially if not provided with interventions. These realities motivate the counselors to develop various victim support mechanisms that emphasized counseling approach center to the victim's unique needs and contexts. It is within this context that the study recommends the following to the all the institutions focusing on providing support to the victims:

- Assisting child victims of violence should prioritize not only the professional knowledge of counselors, but also the victim's needs and problems;
- Adaptability of non-profit organizations is essential for providing effective assistance to victims of child abuse; and
- Further consideration on the counselors' intentions and opinions in the whole situation is also significant in order to ensure that the counselors' mediations are for the best interests of the victim/s.

As a final conclusion, an examination of the counselor's experience with the victims will reveal the significance of the counselor's feelings in providing advice and treatment to the victims. The findings of the study will contribute to the development of knowledge and provide counselors with information on effective methods for assisting the victims of child abuse.

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