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Building Children's Character From Afar: Strengthening The Role of Indonesian Migrant Worker Mothers In Hong Kong

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Abstract

The objective of this community service program is to provide detailed guidance on how IMW mothers, many of whom have completed senior high school, can continue to support the character education of their 6-12-year-old children from a distance. The program aims to enhance the knowledge and skills of IMW mothers in recognizing, understanding, and supporting the character development of their children, even while they are abroad. The execution of the community service activity comprises three stages: (1) Preparation: This phase involves communication with partners, particularly The Special Branch of Aisyiyah (PCIA) Hong Kong, as well as liaising with other relevant parties such as the Indonesian Consulate General in Hong Kong (KJRI Hong Kong) and other IMW community members. (2) Education: Providing education to the community by delivering materials. (3) Counseling: Counseling sessions are conducted with some participants, addressing their stories and challenges, particularly in relation to their relationships with their children. Despite being physically distant from each other, Indonesian Migrant Worker mothers have significant potential to foster character development in their children. Through active communication, modeling positive behavior, instilling values, nurturing creativity, emotional management, as well as religious education and ethics, mothers can contribute to shaping their children's characters with strength and integrity. Consequently, they not only contribute to the economy but also represent a valuable moral legacy for future generations.

Keywords: Character Education, Distance Learning, Children, Moral Development

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BACKGROUND

Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs) constitute a significant demographic in the economic and social landscape of Indonesia. Data from the Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency (BP2MI) reveals that as of June 2023, approximately 191,241 IMWs were registered as working across various regions worldwide (BP2MI 2023). This figure reflects a substantial increase when compared to the numbers from June 2022, which indicated approximately 15,641 IMWs (BP2MI 2022).

In June 2023, the majority of IMWs were placed in Taiwan, totaling 6,154 placements, followed by Hong Kong with 5,296 placements, and Malaysia with 4,834 placements. The combined placements in these three countries accounted for 80% of the total placements in June.

Most IMWs held married status, with 9,209 placements, and the majority had completed their high school education, representing 43% of the placements (BP2MI 2023).

Of the IMWs, approximately 62% were female. They left their home country to seek better economic prospects in order to support the welfare of their families in Indonesia. The primary professions pursued by IMWs abroad included housemaids and caregivers (BP2MI 2023).

In their pursuit of a better future, many of them had to part from their children who remained in Indonesia. A noteworthy challenge lies in the fact that these working mothers often have young children, with most falling in the age range of 6 to 12 years, corresponding to the primary education level. During this period, children are actively forming the foundations of their character, morals, and values that will shape them into adulthood. This developmental stage is critically important in shaping their personalities (Munir, Sholehah, & Rusmayadi, 2022; Sofiasyari, Atmaja, & Suhandini, 2019; Aulia & Dewi, 2021; Annisa, Wiliah, & Rahmawati, 2020; Kezia, 2021; Safitri, 2020).

Due to the physical separation from their mothers who work abroad, these children often rely on caregivers who may lack the necessary time and ability to provide appropriate attention to their development. These caregivers may include fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, neighbors, or other individuals. This situation presents a significant challenge in ensuring that positive values and character education, essential for their development, are effectively maintained.

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

Based on the background that has been outlined, the identified problems are as follows: (1) Some Indonesian Migrant Worker (IMW) mothers have children aged 6-12 years who must be left behind because they have to work abroad. (2) Children aged 6-12 years are in a critical stage of development, requiring monitoring and guidance, especially concerning moral development.

OBJECTIVE

Based on the case analysis, the objective of this community service program is to provide detailed guidance on how IMW mothers, many of whom have completed senior high school, can continue to support the character education of their 6-12-year-old children from a distance. The program aims to enhance the knowledge and skills of IMW mothers in recognizing, understanding, and supporting the character development of their children, even while they are abroad. Thus, the program seeks to address the issue of physical separation and offer appropriate guidance to support the moral development of children during this critical developmental stage.

This community service program is carried out through coordination and collaboration with the Special Branch Leader of Aisyiyah Hong Kong. Additionally, it also involves the participation of IMW communities who regularly gather at Victoria Park.

The Community Service Activity engages approximately 50 IMWs in the Victoria Park area, Hong Kong. The service activity is a collaborative effort involving several universities, including Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Universitas Muhammadiyah Semarang, Universitas Muhammadiyah Mataram, Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, and Universitas Sumatra Utara. The activity was conducted on August 27, 2023.

BENEFITS

The benefits of this activity are as follows:

1. **Enhanced Knowledge and Skills:** IMW mothers will gain improved knowledge and skills in applying character education for their children from a distance, making them more effective parents.
2. **Formation of Better Child Characters:** With a better understanding of character education, IMW mothers can actively participate in shaping their children's character, helping them grow into strong, moral, and ethical individuals.
3. **Improved Parent-Child Relationship Quality:** With more effective character education, the relationship between IMW mothers and their children can become stronger and more meaningful, even across physical distances.
4. **Contribution to a Better Future:** Children who receive effective character education have the potential to become good leaders and valuable contributors to society and the nation in the future.

METHOD

The execution of the community service activity comprises three stages:

Preparation

This phase involves communication with partners, particularly The Special Branch of Aisyiyah (PCIA) Hong Kong, as well as liaising with other relevant parties such as the Indonesian Consulate General in Hong Kong (KJRI Hong Kong) and other IMW community members. Subsequently, strategic IMW communities are identified as the target audience for the program. Specifically, the targeted communities consist of IMW women who have children aged 6-12 or equivalent to elementary school students.

Education

Providing education to the community by delivering materials that encompass the Essence of Children, Moral Development of Children, Active Communication, Positive Behavior, Value Development, Creativity Development, Emotional Management, and Religious Education and Ethics. These materials are presented through methods including lectures, question-and-answer sessions, and modules.

Counseling

Counseling sessions are conducted with some participants, addressing their stories and challenges, particularly in relation to their relationships with their children. Additionally, counseling addresses the efforts made by participants in the character education of their children. The community service team also offers virtual counseling services via WhatsApp, which can be accessed at specified times after the educational activities conclude.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:**Preparation**

After communication and coordination, the selected locations were the "Under Bridge" area, which is situated beneath the entrance bridge of Victoria Park. Another location included Victoria Park itself. These locations are frequently utilized by Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs) for gatherings and the pursuit of their hobbies, such as discussions, singing, dancing, poetry, reading, reflexology massages, or simply enjoying meals together. Importantly, these locations are often used for various information campaigns and socialization activities. The community service team also prepared modules and tote bags to be distributed to the

participants. Once all preparations were complete, the team traveled to Hong Kong via Soekarno-Hatta Airport.



Figure 1: Visitation to KJRI Hong Kong

Education:

Several topics were conveyed through lectures, question-and-answer sessions, and modules. The following topics were covered:

The Importance of Mother's Involvement:

Despite being physically separated from their children, Indonesian Migrant Worker (IMW) mothers continue to wield a profound influence on the development of their children's character. Recognizing the significance of their role, they were guided on a multitude of approaches to actively support their children's character development, even from afar. This guidance emphasized the value of consistent, meaningful communication with their children. Although geographical distances may separate them, maintaining regular contact through means such as video calls or text messages allows these mothers to stay informed about their children's daily lives, school activities, and interactions with peers. This communication enables mothers to express genuine interest in their children's experiences, listen attentively when their children share their thoughts or concerns, offer emotional support, and provide positive encouragement for achieving success and overcoming challenges.

Modeling Positive Behavior:

IMW mothers were encouraged to set an exemplary standard of desired positive behaviors when communicating and interacting with their children. This encompassed not only the demonstration of qualities like appreciation, honesty, and conflict resolution but also the consistent practice of these virtues in daily life. By modeling these positive behaviors, these mothers aim to instill in their children the values of respect, honesty, and constructive conflict resolution. This approach emphasizes the importance of treating family members and others with respect, maintaining truthfulness in words and actions, and teaching children effective methods for addressing and resolving disagreements in a healthy and constructive manner.

Value Development:

Guidance was provided on the pivotal role of instilling essential values in children. The IMW mothers were empowered to communicate and foster values such as hard work, accountability, empathy, and concern for the feelings of others. This education on values focused

on sharing experiences and stories that inspire diligence and discipline, engaging children in discussions about responsible actions and decisions, and emphasizing the significance of empathy and compassion. By imparting these values, mothers strive to create a foundation upon which their children can build their moral compass and develop into compassionate, accountable, and principled individuals.

Fostering Creativity:

IMW mothers were urged to actively promote their children's creativity and imaginative potential. In their interactions with their children, these mothers were advised to support their interests and hobbies, encouraging them to develop their talents and passions. Additionally, mothers were prompted to suggest creative projects and artistic activities for their children to explore. By nurturing creativity from a distance, these mothers aimed to stimulate their children's imagination, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. This approach fosters an environment where children can express themselves, explore their interests, and develop a passion for artistic and creative endeavors.

Emotional Management:

Advice was offered to help children identify and effectively manage their emotions. During their conversations with their children, IMW mothers were encouraged to assist their children in recognizing their emotions and providing support in dealing with negative feelings. Techniques for relaxation and controlled breathing were introduced to aid children in managing stress and anxiety. These mothers served as role models for their children, demonstrating positive attitudes and effective problem-solving skills in the face of challenges. By empowering their children to understand and regulate their emotions, IMW mothers aim to equip them with the emotional intelligence to navigate various life situations with resilience and composure.

Religious Education and Ethics:

IMW mothers were advised to continue reinforcing their children's religious education and ethical understanding from a distance. In their conversations, these mothers discussed religious values and principles, teaching their children about religious obligations and sharing stories and teachings relevant to their daily lives. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of honesty, integrity, and morality in their children's daily actions and decisions. By integrating religious education and ethical principles into their children's lives, IMW mothers sought to instill a sense of responsibility, a strong ethical foundation, and a commitment to moral conduct. This guidance encouraged children to lead a life characterized by honesty, integrity, and a strong ethical compass.



Figure 2: Education Session

Counseling:

Counseling sessions were conducted with three participants in the "Under Bridge" area and Victoria Park. The participants shared their stories about their journey to becoming IMWs in Hong Kong. Some had been working in Hong Kong since they were young, while others began after marriage and having children. The decision to work in Hong Kong and leave behind their young children was emotionally challenging for them. However, financial circumstances compelled them to do so. They expressed concerns about their children's development, particularly their moral development. Additionally, they considered the fathers' roles at home (in Indonesia) as less than ideal for caregiving. Sometimes, their children exhibited resistance due to disagreements with their mothers' departures. Nonetheless, they hoped to continue fulfilling their roles as educators, particularly in character education for their children.



Figure 3: Counseling Session

CONCLUSION

Despite being physically distant from each other, Indonesian Migrant Worker mothers have significant potential to foster character development in their children. Through active communication, modeling positive behavior, instilling values, nurturing creativity, emotional management, as well as religious education and ethics, mothers can contribute to shaping their children's characters with strength and integrity. Consequently, they not only contribute to the economy but also represent a valuable moral legacy for future generations.

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