

Promoting Self-Control through Reflective and Participatory Emotional Training: A Macro-Level Intervention for Adolescent Girls in An Orphanage

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Abstract

This study aimed to enhance self-control among children at Aisyiyah Girls Orphanage in Grogol, Sukoharjo using modul intervention “Strengthening Self-Control in Children Through Emotion Training.” The subjects of this intervention were 28 female children residing at the orphanage. The intervention was carried out using a macro-level approach, employing methods such as observation, semi-structured interviews, and participatory training. The training was conducted on June 11, 2025, over a span of 2 hours and 15 minutes, and consisted of four sessions: (1) Know Yourself, Know Your Friends, (2) When Emotions Arise, What Should I Do?, (3) Choose Your Path, Take Responsibility, and (4) Building a Healthy Group. Evaluation was conducted through follow-up interviews with the orphanage caregiver. The results revealed positive changes in the children’s social dynamics, such as increased empathy, healthier communication, and the establishment of collective agreements, including borrowing with permission and advising without belittling. These values have begun to be internalized and practiced in the children’s daily lives. The training proved effective in fostering self-control and creating a more emotionally supportive and healthy environment within the orphanage.

Keywords: adolescent; intervention; orphan; self-control

Introduction

Children living in orphanages face unique developmental challenges compared to those growing up in nuclear families. The loss of parental figures, limited emotional support, and unstable family economic conditions often give rise to feelings of loneliness, emotional vulnerability, and maladaptive behaviors. This condition is also experienced by the children at the Yatim Putri Aisyiyah Orphanage in Sukoharjo, where this research and intervention were conducted. Although their daily routines are structured through formal education, religious instruction, and self-development activities, the results of the initial assessment indicated a phenomenon of weak self-control. Several behaviors that emerged included stealing belongings of friends or caregivers, fighting due to teasing, refusing to participate in congregational prayers, secretly bringing mobile phones, and even running away from the orphanage. At school, undisciplined behaviors were also observed, such as reading novels during lessons, which resulted in caregivers being summoned by the school. These phenomena can be explained through the literature on self-control.

Self-control is an essential skill in the development of children and adolescents, as it influences academic achievement, mental health, interpersonal relationships, and long-term success (Kim et al., 2022). Furthermore, self-control regulates thoughts, emotions, and actions to align with long-term goals, not merely resisting immediate temptations, but rather a conscious process of directing behavior in accordance with personal values and priorities (Arum & Khoirunnisa, n.d.). Its aspects include the regulation of attention, emotion, impulse, and cognition, which help individuals remain focused, manage emotional reactions, delay instant gratification, and control cognitive processes when facing challenges (Dewi et al., 2021). Longitudinal studies have shown that changes in self-control during adolescence are closely correlated with mental health and family functioning. Adolescents with good self-control are less likely to experience psychological problems and have greater opportunities to achieve academic and economic success in the future. Conversely, weak self-control increases the risk of deviant behaviors and psychosocial problems. Similar findings have also been observed in children living in orphanages. (Ulfah, 2023) reported that adolescent residents of orphanages with low self-control tend to have poorer subjective well-being. The lack of parental affection and emotional support exposes children in institutional care to additional risks. (Mukerji et al., 2021) found that post-institutionalized children who had the opportunity to grow up in foster families showed significant improvement in self-regulation, thereby reducing the risk of psychopathology. This underscores the significant influence of caregiving context on the development of self-control.

Other research findings highlight that although orphanage children relatively possess emotional awareness, they still experience difficulties in managing stress and maintaining calmness, thus making emotional intelligence-based training

highly necessary (Ahmad, 2024). Based on this urgency, the present study developed and implemented an intervention program in the form of training titled “Strengthening Self-Control in Children through Emotional Training.” The program consisted of four sessions: (1) Know Yourself, Know Your Friends to enhance self and social emotional awareness, (2) When Emotions Arise, What Do I Do? to train constructive emotional management, (3) Choose Your Path, Take Your Responsibility to help children recognize the consequences of impulsive versus controlled behavior, and (4) Building a Healthy Group to strengthen collective commitment through the formulation of a cultural charter. This series of sessions was directed not only at individual behavioral change but also emphasized the involvement of all orphanage children, caregivers, and administrators in constructing collective values. With this approach, the training conducted at the Aisyiyah Orphanage is expected to strengthen children’s self-control, reduce maladaptive behaviors, and create a new, healthier, more supportive, and sustainable culture. This community-based intervention model is grounded in the principle that behavioral change does not occur solely at the individual level, but also within the broader social system. Therefore, this study seeks to fill the gap in caregiving practices in orphanages by presenting an evidence-based intervention that can be replicated in similar communities, while also contributing theoretically to the developmental psychology literature in the context of institutional care.

Method

Design

This study employed a community-based psychological intervention approach with a participatory-reflective framework. This design was chosen because it is appropriate to the context of the orphanage, where children’s behavior is influenced not only by individual factors but also by group interactions, internal institutional rules, and relationships with caregivers. Through this design, the intervention does not stop at efforts to build individual awareness but is expanded toward the creation of collective norms and a healthy culture that can be sustained in the long term. Thus, when the intervention is directed at the community level, the impact of change extends more broadly and holds greater potential for sustainability.

Participants

The subjects of this study were 28 female residents of the Yatim Putri Aisyiyah Orphanage in Sukoharjo. Their ages ranged from 8 to 18 years, consisting of one child in elementary school, seven children in junior high school, and twenty children in senior high school. In addition to the children, this study also involved the caregivers and orphanage administrators. These stakeholders were likewise included in the final evaluation session so that they could monitor, enforce, and strengthen the outcomes of the intervention that had been implemented.

Procedures

The research procedure was carried out in three major phases: initial assessment, intervention implementation, and post-intervention evaluation.

Initial assessment

The assessment was conducted to understand the needs, main problems, and life context of the orphanage children. The assessment techniques included: semi-structured interviews with the caregiver and two children who were frequently involved in behavioral problems. The interviews revealed behaviors such as stealing, running away from the orphanage, fighting, and refusing to participate in congregational prayers. Non-participant observation was also conducted on the children’s daily dynamics, including peer interactions, attitudes toward orphanage activities, and responses to caregivers. Additionally, documentation study was carried out using the orphanage’s internal records regarding rule violations previously committed by the children. These assessment data formed the basis for designing the intervention, ensuring that the training materials were not generic but directly targeted self-control issues relevant to their daily lives.

Intervention Implementation

The intervention provided was a training program titled “Strengthening Self-Control in Children through Emotional Training”, which was structured into four sessions. Each session lasted approximately 20–45 minutes and was conducted sequentially within one day. First Session: “Know Yourself, Know Your Friends”, The focus of this session was to enhance emotional self-awareness. Children were invited to identify the emotions they often experienced, map out triggering situations, and recognize differences in emotions experienced by their peers. Second Session: “When Emotions Arise, What Do I Do?” This session aimed to train skills in managing emotions, particularly in conflict situations. The children performed a short drama simulation depicting everyday conflicts in the orphanage, followed by a discussion of healthier alternative responses. They also used reminder cards, small notes containing positive messages that could be exchanged

with friends when experiencing negative emotions. Third Session: “Choose Your Path, Take Your Responsibility” In this session, the children were guided to recognize the consequences of impulsive behaviors compared to controlled behaviors. Through role-play, they enacted two different scenarios: acting on emotional impulses versus acting with self-control. Collective reflection helped them understand personal responsibility for the choices they made. Fourth Session: “Building a Healthy Group” The final session focused on shaping a collective culture. The children reflected on the learning gained from the previous three sessions and collaboratively formulated a Group Cultural Charter containing the new values they wanted to apply. The three main points agreed upon were: (1) providing support to friends without belittling them, (2) borrowing items with permission, and (3) giving advice in a respectful manner. This charter was displayed in the common room as a reminder.

Data collection

This study employed qualitative techniques, using semi-structured interviews to explore the children’s subjective experiences and the caregivers’ perspectives. Non-participant observation was then conducted to capture the behavioral dynamics of the children within their natural setting. Finally, the researcher carried out documentation of the activities, including field notes, activity photographs, and the children’s products..

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using a descriptive qualitative approach. Interview data were transcribed and then categorized into themes relevant to the research focus, namely: factors contributing to weak self-control, behavioral dynamics in the orphanage, and post-intervention changes. Observations were used to complement the narrative of the interview results, while documentation served as visual and written evidence of both the process and outcomes of the intervention.

Results

From the very first session, the children demonstrated relatively high enthusiasm in participating in the activities. Although some children were initially passive or shy to speak, participatory methods such as games and small group discussions successfully stimulated their involvement. In the session Know Yourself, Know Your Friends, most children were able to mention at least three types of emotions they frequently experienced in daily life, such as anger, happiness, and sadness, as well as describe the situations that triggered those emotions. Some children were even able to provide more specific descriptions, such as “feeling angry when their belongings were borrowed without permission” or “feeling sad when they felt ignored by their roommate.” This indicates an improvement in emotional awareness, which is a crucial foundation for emotion regulation. In the second session, When Emotions Arise, What Do I Do?, differences in skills related to emotion management began to emerge. Children who initially tended to express anger by shouting or withdrawing began to articulate alternative strategies such as taking a deep breath, speaking calmly, or writing their feelings in a diary. The mini-drama simulation activity became an effective medium for them to practice these skills. In addition, the use of reminder cards proved helpful in strengthening reflection. The children expressed that they were happy when receiving positive reminder cards from their friends, as it made them feel noticed and appreciated. The third session, Choose Your Path, Take Your Responsibility, demonstrated an increased awareness among the children regarding the consequences of behavior. Through role-play, they were able to compare two scenarios: impulsive behavior (for instance, shouting at a friend when teased) and controlled behavior (such as choosing to remain silent or addressing the situation in a respectful manner). Reflection following the role-play revealed that most of the children realized that impulsive behaviors often lead to greater conflict, whereas controlled behaviors have the potential to resolve problems without escalation. In the fourth session, Building a Healthy Group, a spirit of togetherness was clearly observed. The children actively participated in drafting the Group Cultural Charter. They engaged in constructive debate to determine which rules were considered most important. Eventually, three core values were agreed upon collectively: (1) providing support without belittling, (2) borrowing items with permission, and (3) giving advice in a respectful manner. These values were chosen because they were deemed most relevant to the children’s everyday problems in the orphanage. The agreed-upon charter was then displayed in the common room as a symbol of collective commitment. This process demonstrates the success of the intervention in shifting the focus from individual awareness to the creation of a group culture.

Discussion

The results of the “Strengthening Self-Control in Children through Emotional Training” program showed that the intervention not only strengthened emotional regulation skills at the individual level but also stimulated the creation of collective norms. This is consistent with scientific evidence stating that self-control is a skill that can be developed through structured, creative interventions that involve social support. Self-control is not an innate trait but rather a capability that can be learned through practice. For example, self-regulation interventions for adolescents and young adults (aged 14-25) have demonstrated that programs based on cognitive and emotional skill training such as conflict resolution, anger

management, stress management, resilience training, and mindfulness can produce significant changes in cognitive regulation, mental health, and behavior (Murray & Rosanbalm, 2017) . This reinforces the relevance of the emotional training approach carried out in this study, particularly in enhancing children’s emotional awareness and control through participatory methods.

A systematic review on interventions to improve emotion regulation abilities found that such approaches are effective in addressing emotion regulation difficulties in both children and adults (Lancastle et al., 2024). Moreover, mindfulness-based interventions have been shown to improve attentional regulation and bodily awareness, which are essential components of emotional regulation among elementary school children (Rowland et al., 2023) . Specifically, in the context of children in orphanage-like environments, a scoping review of various emotional and behavioral interventions indicated that combining cognitive and emotional group-based approaches tends to increase effectiveness in addressing issues such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and trauma (Pandey et al., 2018) This underscores that the training conducted in a group format involving reflection and consensus among children aligns with empirically supported best practices. Without reflection, self-control often remains merely a short-term reaction without deeper understanding (Ezra Addo Setiawan, 2023).

Furthermore, meta-analytical evidence demonstrates that universal self-regulation interventions in children and adolescents successfully improve multiple outcomes, including academic achievement, health, social behavior, and the reduction of behavioral disorders. This aligns with the changes observed in the present study, namely a reduction in conflicts among children, a more conducive atmosphere in the orphanage, and the emergence of group norms through the cultural charter, which reflects the impact on social quality and daily behavior.

The “Strengthening Self-Control in Children through Emotional Training” program at the Yatim Putri Aisyiyah Orphanage proved effective in enhancing emotional awareness, improving emotion regulation skills, and reducing the intensity of conflicts among children. The positive impact occurred not only at the individual level but was also reflected collectively through the establishment of a Group Cultural Charter, which reinforced positive social norms within the orphanage. However, this study has several limitations. First, the short duration of the intervention (only four sessions conducted in one day) makes it difficult to ensure the sustainability of the changes. Second, the evaluation relied primarily on qualitative data obtained from children’s reflections and caregiver interviews, without the support of standardized quantitative instruments. Third, children’s participation varied; some of the more introverted children remained passive, thus not fully benefiting from the intervention. Overall, this intervention demonstrated initial effectiveness and has the potential to be further developed. Future research is recommended to extend the duration, incorporate quantitative measurement tools, and adapt more personalized approaches so that the outcomes may be more comprehensive and sustainable.

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