

MINDFUL PARENTING PROGRAM IN IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS OF ORPHANAGE CAREGIVERS AT RUMBELA MUTHMAINNAH-BANDUNG

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ABSTRACT

The article aims at explaining the authors' proposal to develop parenting education for caregivers of an Islamic orphanage in Bandung namely Rumah Belajar (Rumbela) Muthmainnah in improving parenting skills of caregivers. The preliminary study conducted at Rumbela Muthmainnah indicated that the caregivers had limitations and practiced the parenting based on their nurtured experience or by "trial and error" ways. The observation and interview results showed that lack of nurturing experiences and participation in parenting training or education made the caregivers have limitations in overcoming the children's problems effectively. Care by orphanage caregivers should be able to replace the parental care of biological parents/relatives for orphanage children with the purpose of making them grow into happy children and satisfied with their lives or have high subjective well-being. Non-biological parenting is not easy, even may cause stress either for caregivers and children. It required a parenting program to improve parenting skills of caregivers at the same time to have an impact in improving subjective well-being of children. The parenting program proposed in the study will be developed from Bögels and Restifo's mindful parenting (2014) which involves awareness, observation, and description of children's behavior in a "not judgmental" way. The practice of mindfulness is assumed to be able to help caregivers cope with stress in parenting and develop acceptance of the problems, at the same time to help children happier and satisfied with their life.

Keywords: Mindful parenting, orphanage, subjective well-being

INTRODUCTION

Children without parental care (6-18 years) are children who have lost custody of their parents/families (Decree of the Minister of Social Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia Number: 15 A/Huk/2010), either orphans or poor children, thus 'forced' to live in an orphanage. The research result of Sudrajat's, et al. (2007) showed that the percentage of orphanage children were 6% truly orphaned and 90% of them still had one or complete parents. They were raised in orphanages because their families experienced economic difficulties and aimed at ensuring their children to obtain education.

Care by caregivers at the orphanage should be able to replace the parental care by biological parents/relatives for children who cannot be cared for by their own parents. It was intended to ensure that they grew into happy children and satisfied with their lives. Jager (2011) stated that care for children in orphanages were intended to keep children in a safe, healthy, positive, and educating family environment, and had the same root as the previous environment until biological parents/relatives took care of them or might be permanent. Thus, the non biological childcare are certainly not an easy thing, even can be stressful either for caregivers and children, moreover, if the caregivers do not have the adequate background and caring experiences.

The preliminary study conducted in Rumbela Muthmainnah (2016) showed that the majority of children entrusted in Rumbela Muthmainnah came from low level economic background or

non-intact family because of death or divorce. The result of questionnaire filling and interviews to caregivers about the problems of children and the parenting ways of caregivers' discovered that the children problem occurring in the orphanage were lying, insecure feeling, inferior, shy, lazy, unruly, concerned physical and psychological conditions, sickness, low capability to take care of themselves, traumatized, having speaking difficulty, less restrained of emotions, conflict with older children, and children entrusted to Rumbela without the consent of either party mother/father. The lack of educational background and nurturing experiences, and participation in parenting training or education made caregivers experience limitations to overcome these problems effectively. Thus it required parenting skills possessed by caregivers in order to overcome these problems more effectively.

The research result of Sudrajat's, et al. (2007) showed that in general, childcare institutions provided access to education and were intended to meet the collective needs (especially the daily material needs), while the "care" as well as the emotional and developmental needs of children were not considered. These were reflected explicitly from parenting approach, services provided, and resources provided by childcare institutions.

In the research report, Sudrajat, et al (2007) stated that although the government has provided substantial funding for all childcare institutions assessed, but the lack of minimum standards of care and licensing system showed that this support did not perform professional and qualified care. Lack of staff who received professional training indicated that most of children served their daily care by themselves and the older children took care of the younger children. The study also found that "care" was understood in the context of responding to problems and tended to be associated with disciplinary issues. In general, the childcare institutions enacted rigorous regulations and conducted physical and humiliating punishment. There was only one childcare institution who had child protection policy or mechanism to identify, prevent, and respond to violence against children.

Various studies on the quality of care in orphanages showed that the research were more emphasis on children as the object of care; whereas studies related to the quality of care were still very minimal. The quality of care had a strategic role to implement the best care service in an orphanage because caregivers were the first party who existed and lived together with the children in the orphanage environment thus the development of the children was mostly influenced by the quality of the caregiver. Professionalism of caregivers was a reflection of childcare institution quality as a human service organizations. In implementing social service professionalism as the goal of the childcare institution, it was necessary to have well-educated, reliable, and professional human resources (Budiharjo, 2015)

Collaborative research conducted by Save the Children, DEPSOS RI, and UNICEF in 2007 in six (6) provinces in Indonesia aimed to identify and assess in depth the quality of childcare institution. The seven variables identified and assessed were: (1) institution ownership (government or non governmental organization), (2) target children/group (specifically for boys, girls, or mixed), (3) capacity of institutions, (4) type of institutions, (5) system of care implemented by institutions, (56) geographical setting (rural or urban context), and (7) characteristics of the founding organization that developed childcare institutions. Result of the research did not proposed what solutions were offered to improve the quality of care.

In order to improve the parenting professionalism, quality, and skills in the orphanage, the authors propose a parenting program based on mindfulness. Mindfulness involves awareness, observation and depiction of a person's behavior in a not judgmental way. The practice of mindfulness can help caregivers cope with stress in parenting and develop acceptance of the

problems faced. Thus the practice of mindful parenting can provide transformative influence for children and caregivers (Bögels & Restifo, 2014). By practicing mindful parenting, besides improving parenting skills, at the same time can improve the subjective well-being of children.

Subjective well-being is defined as affective evaluation of an event and cognitive evaluation of the life satisfaction and need fulfillment. Children with high subjective well-being will have pleasant emotional experiences, low level negative moods, and high life satisfaction, which furthermore will make their lives more useful (Diener, et al, 2002). In other words, children who have high subjective well-being will love their life as it is, be happy, be productive, and be able to overcome their problems effectively and constructively.

THE ORETICAL FOUNDATION OF MINDFUL PARENTING

Mindfulness is a form of meditation based on Buddhist tradition and involves awareness of the 'current', focuses on the reality and accepts it as it is (Bögels & Restifo, 2014). The practice of mindfulness involves awareness, observation, and a description of covert and overt behaviors in a nonjudgmental way (Martin & Pear, 2015).

Jon Kabat-Zinn developed the program Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) to meet the needs of chronically ill people to participate in their own healing, to cope with their disease, and to cope with the stress of life in general. Zindel Segal, Mark Williams and John Teasdale then develop Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), as a specific approach for patients with depression. Over the past two decades, mindfulness-based interventions had been used and managed to bring about a change in a wide range of physical health, stress, and mental problems (Bögels & Restifo, 2014).

The practice of mindfulness is used by Kabat-Zinn (1982) in stress reduction and relaxation program conducted for 10 weeks to train chronically ill patients to do self-regulation. Meditation reduced the sensory dimension of alarm reaction as a result of the affective evaluation and decrease the suffering experience as a result of cognitive assessment. Kabat-Zinn (1982) concluded that meditation can be used as a basis for effective behavioral programs for chronically ill patients in regulating themselves. The approach was then applied to the situation of parents, children, and family life, namely mindful parenting. (Bögels & Restifo, 2014).

When caregivers were experiencing stress, both internally and externally, the practice of parenting would be disrupted and caused caregivers to be more irritable, critical, and punitive. Such behavior might cause behavioral problems in children which then might increase the stress on the caregivers, and so on as an endless cycle (Webster-Stratton, 1990). Parents might have learned from his parents' parenting skills, courses, books or television programs about parenting. However, when under stress or other emotions, the parents of any socioeconomic level would tend to yell at their children, give threats, and even hurt them. The courses and knowledge about how good parents dealt with these difficulties might have an impact on parents to conduct more effort to avoid 'disruption' in their parenting skills (Bögels & Restifo, 2014).

Mindful parenting is one form of mindfulness training and defined as “paying attention to your child and your parenting in a particular way: intentionally, here and now, and non-judgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn, 1997). In mindful parenting, parents learn how to give attention to

children without judgment, raise awareness on the ongoing events, and lower the automatic negative reaction to children (Bögels, Lehtonen, and Restifo, 2010).

Parenting is one of the most demanding tasks and laden with responsibility for many caregivers. Caregivers desire to do their best care and parenting for orphanage children may be one of stressors. The condition can lead to frustration, depression, fatigue, somatic complaints, and eventually mental and physical disorders, which then interfere with the quality of care. Similarly with children, they will experience the same things as the impact. (Bögels & Restifo, 2014).

Mindfulness practice in parenting can help caregivers cope with the stress of parenting and develop acceptance of the problems faced. The idea carried in mindful parenting is that if we can not change the problem, at least we can control our relationship with the problem, by taking care of ourselves and practicing openness, light, and not judging the problems in parenting. The practice of mindful parenting can provide transformative influence for children and caregivers (Bögels & Restifo, 2014).

Aims of Mindful Parenting Program

In mindful parenting, caregivers will learn how to apply mindfulness to themselves and to experience in parenting their children. Bögels, Lehtonen, and Restifo (2010) stated that mindful parenting helped caregivers to reduce stress, to improve the quality of their relationship with the children, to be more effective and not impulsive in parenting, or to help their children become more well-behaved.

Themes in Mindful Parenting

Mindful parenting developed by Bögels & Restifo (2014) consisted of eight themes carried out in the following eight sessions.

Session 1: Automatic Parenting.

The main theme of the first session is to develop awareness of the caregivers towards their automatic reactions during daily interaction with children or under stress situation. The facilitator explores 'fight-flight-freeze' reaction of caregivers to stress situation. In this session, caregivers learn to pause before reacting and displays intentionally reaction, instead of automatic reactions.

Session 2: Beginner's Mind Parenting

In this session, caregivers are invited to share the experience of observing the children using beginner's mind and often discover their positive qualities. Caregivers may realize how difficult to assess the children without affected by judgment and label attached to the children. By sharing experiences, it is expected that caregivers will be able to explore how difficult to be nice and kind to themselves, while naturally feel sympathy to other caregivers.

Session 3: Reconnecting with Our Body as a Parent

The main theme of this session is to raise awareness of the body sensations while nurturing, experiencing pleasant sensation, or experiencing stress. Caregivers are invited to explore the body signals when experiencing positive or negative experiences in parenting.

Session 4: Responding Rather than Reacting to Parenting Stress

The initial step in responding to the stress of parenting is aware of signals experienced by the body and accepts it rather than denies it. Awareness and a chance to breathe for a moment may help caregivers to avoid automatic reactions, but show intentionally responses.

Session 5: Parenting Patterns and Schemas

Childhood experiences in relation to the parent affect the way we care for children. In this session, caregivers are invited to recognize childhood anger against the demanding and punitive attitude of the parents and to cultivate self-compassion and acceptance toward inner childhood experiences.

Session 6: Conflict and Parenting

In this session, caregivers are invited to explore the caregiver-child conflict which is reframed in order to get closer to the child. Mindfulness can help us take into account our perspective and our children's perspective. After practicing self-compassion, caregivers are invited to practice compassion for children emotional experiences in order to improve relations with them.

Session 7: Love and Limits

This session had two themes, namely (1) develop a loving-kindness parenting practices as inherent capacity attached to us, and (2) explore the limits and boundaries we have in the practice as a way of taking care of ourselves while meeting children needs.

Session 8: A Mindful Path through Parenting

In this session, caregivers are invited to reflect on the experience that have been gained in the previous seven sessions and predict what will change from them or the children. To facilitate reflection experience, caregivers are invited to produce objects, drawings, poems, songs or short stories that symbolize their personal journey and share it with the group.

Follow-Up Session: Each Time, Beginning Anew....

This session is intended to review the success or consistency of caregivers in practicing mindful parenting skills. This session was also intended to find any difficulties experienced by caregivers to remain practicing mindful parenting in child care. The facilitator needs to warn the caregivers that the skills acquired during each session can be repeated many times.

Practice at Home

Eight sessions have been described previously carried out once a week. Between each session, caregivers are asked to practice skills that have been learned in each session and make notes of the practice. In the beginning of each session, the group openly discuss their respective experiences concretely and facilitator listens to them without criticism. From these discussions can be found difficulties experienced by caregivers and the solutions to overcome them.

MINDFUL PARENTING PROGRAM IN IMPROVING PARENTING SKILLS OF ORPHANAGE CAREGIVERS AT RUMBELA MUTHMAINNAH

Mindful parenting program proposed in this article was developed from Bögels & Restifo (2014) that is packaged in Islamic touch because the target orphanage has high Islamic values of education. Hasanah (2016) in her study stated that parenting implemented at Rumbela Muthmainnah based on Islamic daily rituals in order to build a solid conviction to God along with noble character/behaviors, as well as to develop children potential in accordance their interests and

talents and to make them become autonomous. Guidance provided to caregivers refers to the attainment of worship imposed standards for caregivers according to provision of Rumbela Muthmainnah which is evaluated and discussed at monthly meeting.

Mindful parenting program in Rumbela Muthmainnah aims to teach skills to caregivers to use the awareness to themselves and their experiences during parenting. These skills are expected to deliver children become noble and pious.

Mindful parenting program in Rumbela Muthmainnah will be implemented in a small group setting (in accordance with the caregivers amounting to four persons) in eight meetings (1x/week). Each session will be ended with homework in the form of daily practice skills learned in each session. Evaluation to the home practice is conducted by using self-report and self-monitoring. Self report is used to record parenting experiences and skills practiced, while self-monitoring is used to appraise skills practiced in scale of 1 (unskilled) to 5 (highly skilled).

Each session except the first session will be begun with a discussion and sharing the experiences gained at the time doing homework and difficulties experienced by caregivers.

Session 1: Automatic Parenting

In this session, caregivers will be invited to explore and write down any reactions are usually displayed them spontaneously while parenting, relating with children, or under parenting stress. In this session, caregivers will perform simulations individually by imagining what the reactions shown caregivers to parenting stress situation, then say “*astaghfirullahal adziim*” repeatedly until they can imagine intentional response as substitution for automatic reactions. The word “*astaghfirullahal adziim*” is intended to release all burden and bring about mindfulness.

Session 2: Beginner's Mind Parenting

In this session, caregivers are asked to share stories about experiences in parenting. Caregivers are asked to perform simulations to imagine what the response will be given to other caregivers who experience stress. By doing simulation is expected they will realize that they can choose their response to stress by seeing stress from a different point of view. In this session, caregivers also perform simulations to consider children’s perspective/point of view to the problem. Caregivers are invited to believe that every child is born as “*fithrah*” creature therefore they have many inherent positive qualities.

Session 3: Reconnecting with Our Body as a Parent

In this session, caregivers will be invited to explore the sensation of the body by detecting body signals that arise while nurturing as a form of reaction to the experience happened, either pleasant or unpleasant experiences. Caregivers are encouraged to increase “*khusyu*” in praying and to implement it in daily activities.

Session 4: Responding Rather than Reacting to Parenting Stress

In this session, caregivers are encouraged to be aware of body signals and accept it as *Allah*’s will and managing. In this session, caregivers are taught to feel very deeply any air flow into the chest cavity during breathing and tried to purify their mind to avoid automatic or spontaneous reactions, but rather intentional responses.

Session 5: Parenting Patterns and Schemas

In this session, caregivers will learn to forgive childhood experiences in the relationship with the parents, begins with recognizing childhood anger against the demanding and punitive attitude of

parents by growing and developing compassion toward self and acceptance of such experiences. In this case, caregivers are encouraged to be “*ikhlas*” accompanied by optimistic attitude towards the future.

Session 6: Conflict and Parenting

In session 6, caregivers are invited to explore the caregiver-child conflict in a positive point of view. It is expected the conflict is not tapered and cause other problems. Caregivers are invited to see the conflict from the child perspective with full of compassion to the child in order to improve the relationship between them.

Session 7: Love and Limits.

In this session, caregivers are invited to develop loving-kindness parenting practices. The loving-kindness are basically inherent to ourselves. Caregivers is also invited to explore the limitations of the practice. In this case, caregivers are asked to realize and feel the meaning of “*Bismillahirrahmaanirrahiim*” which is spelled to initiate activities or actions.

Session 8: A Mindful Path through Parenting

In this session, caregivers are invited to reflect their journey in the previous seven sessions and home practice on productive artworks according to their choices. The works will be interpreted by themselves and shared to group.

Follow-Up Session: Each Time, Beginning a New

After completion of the 8th session, the facilitator follow-up the caregivers to review the success or consistency of caregivers in practicing mindful parenting skills. This session is also to discover any difficulty experienced by caregivers to remain consistent in practicing mindful parenting and warn caregivers that the skills acquired during each session can be repeated as needed.

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