

## THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC STUDIES IN ENHANCING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN OF FEMALE INDONESIAN MIGRANT WORKERS IN BANTEN, INDONESIA

SRI NURUL MILLA<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup> Universitas Ibn Khaldun, Jl. Sholeh Iskandar, Kedung Badak, Tanah Sereal, Kota Bogor, Jawa Barat 16162, INDONESIA. E-Mail: sn.milla@fai.uika-bogor.ac.id

Corresponding Author: sn.milla@fai.uika-bogor.ac.id

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**Abstract:** Hundreds of thousands Indonesian Muslim mothers decided to be migrant workers overseas. Consequently, they leave their children behind and thus suffer from maternal absence. While still acknowledging the positive impacts of the revenue sent by their migrated mothers, those left-behind children are prone to psychological impairment. Previous study found that the left-behind children who are going to public school felt relieve when they are having Islamic studies nevertheless it has no specific exploration on how Islamic studies play a role in the psychological well-being of these children. This study aims to understand the role of Islamic studies in enhancing Indonesian left-behind children' psychological well-being. Qualitatively designed, 5 Indonesian left-behind children aged 14 to 16 years old who were studying at public high school in Banten, Indonesia were deeply interviewed. These informants have been left by their migrated mothers for more than 3 years. The data revealed that Islamic studies has ameliorate the psychological well-being of those children by having better understanding on their *purpose in life* and *self-acceptance*. Moreover, further study needs to quantitatively examine the extent to which Islamic studies enhance the level of each psychological well-being's dimension of Indonesian left-behind children.

**Keywords:** Islamic Studies, Left-behind Children, Migrant Workers, Psychological Well-being

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## INTRODUCTION

According to the institution of the protection of Indonesian migrant workers - *BP2MI (Badan Perlindungan Pekerja Migran Indonesia)* – from January to July 2024, there are 182.844 Indonesian people work overseas named as migrant workers. Focusing on their gender, 76% of them are females. In other words, there are 124.927 female Indonesian migrant workers all over the world. In fact, this number excludes those migrated before 2024.

Further the data shows that 60% of these females are both married and ever married (widow). As migrant workers, they are not allowed to bring along their children and they can only return home after the completion of their contract tenure which is usually 2 years. If each

married female migrant workers have at minimum one child, more than hundred thousand of Indonesian children are left behind by their migrated mothers.

Previous studies found that parental migration has been improved the quality of life of the left-behind children through the remittance sent by the parents (e.g. Bryant, 2005; De Glind, 2010; Dorantes & Pozo, 2010; Setioningsih, 2010; Nguyen & Purnamasari 2011; Ratha, 2013). The money received allowed the children to have enough food, clothes and go to school. Nevertheless, the absence of the parents to the mothers, gave some negative impacts for the psychological well-being of the left-behind children (e.g. Graham & Jordan, 2011; Wikramage, 2015, Milla, 2017). The lack of the quantity and quality of the children – mother communication was categorized as the main influencing factors of the psychological detriments among the children left-behind by their migrated workers. This situation led the left-behind children felt neglected and lonely (Jokhan, 2007). Comparing the psychological states of the left-behind children from four ASEAN countries which are Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, and Philippine, Graham and Jordan (2011) highlighted that Indonesian left-behind children suffered more emotional distress compared to those from the other three ASEAN countries.

Conducting a study on coping strategies implemented by Indonesian left-behind children in Banten - Indonesia, Milla (2016) highlighted that God-reliance has been recognized as the best coping strategy. Further exploration on the psychological experiences of Indonesian left-behind children in Banten - Indonesia, Milla (2017) documented that the left-behind children who are going to public school felt relieve when they are having Islamic studies. Yet, there is no specific exploration on how Islamic studies play a role in the psychological well-being of these children. Moreover, this study is conducted to understand the role of the Islamic studies on enhancing the psychological well-being of the children of female Indonesian migrant workers in Banten, Indonesia.

## **PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING**

Ryff (1989) proposed that humans need six distinct components to have psychological well-being which are:

1. Purpose in life refers to someone's perception of the meaning of his life.
2. Positive relation refers to someone's feeling of being connected, respected, and loved by others.
3. Self-acceptance refers to someone's positive attitude towards himself.
4. Autonomy refers to someone's independence and self-reliance.
5. Environmental mastery refers to someone's competency in meeting the demands of his situation.
6. Personal growth refers to someone's positive development, for instance, learning new skills.

## **METHOD**

This study is designed qualitatively. Five Indonesian left-behind children aged 14 to 16 years old were interviewed. This group of children was purposively selected considering that they

were good enough to express their thought and feelings towards their maternal absence situation. These children were doing their high school at the same school at Banten, Indonesia. When the interviewed was conducted, they had been left by their migrated mothers for more than three years. The interview was design to be semi – structured and the main questions were focus on how Islamic studies obtained from the school help these left-behind children to deal with their situation. The data were then analysed using thematic analysis and presented in a way to understand the extent to which Islamic studies enhanced the psychological well-being of the children. In analysing the data, the researcher emerges the themes following the dimensions of the psychological well-being which are Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations with Others, Purpose in Life, and Self-Acceptance

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The data analysis emerged two main themes explaining the role of Islamic studies in enhancing the psychological well-being of the left-behind children, they are: *purpose in life* and *self-acceptance*.

### **Purpose in life**

The informants confessed that the migration of their mothers has made them suffer from disorientation. Eventhough they understand the reason of their mothers' decision to work overseas, they sometimes felt sad knowing that – unlike their peers – their mothers were not physically around especially when they are having difficult situation. Consequently, they sometimes complained to the God about their unexpected situations. More than that, their spirituality and religiosity was somehow decreased.

Islamic studies obtained from the school gave them an enlightenment that ALLAH SWT has prepared good things for them in the future. This understanding could cheer them up when they felt sad and depressed. Therefore, they gradually stopped complaining to God and be more reliance to God. As a result, they perceived their lives to be more meaningful.

### **Self-acceptance**

The maternal absence due to migration led to a perception of being different from their friends whose mothers around. Furthermore, they felt jealous and believed that they were having a bad luck. Besides, they sometimes perceived low self-esteem. Islamic studies received from the school has helped them to understand and accept their situation. Thus, the have better self-acceptance.

## **CONCLUSION**

Islamic studies obtained from the school has helped the left-behind children to have better understanding of their purpose in life and self-acceptance. Thus, it helped them to deal with maternal absence situation due to mother migration. Moreover, through Islamic studies the school and society can create a support system for these group of children.

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