

**THE QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S ATTACHMENT
TO CAREGIVERS AT THE MANDHANISIWI
ORPHANAGE, MUHAMMADIYAH COMMUNITY
HEALTH CENTER, PURBALINGGA, CENTRAL
JAVA**

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Abstract: This study aims to provide an empirical overview of the quality of attachment between children and caregivers at the Mandhanisiwi Orphanage under the Muhammadiyah Community Welfare Foundation in Purbalingga, Central Java. Attachment is understood as an emotional bond formed through continuous interaction between a child and their attachment figure, in this case, the orphanage caregiver. This emotional relationship plays a significant role in supporting children's psychosocial development. The study focuses on three main aspects of attachment: trust, communication, and alienation. A descriptive quantitative approach with a survey method was used. The sample consisted of 39 children selected through a total sampling technique (census). Data were collected using questionnaires, observations, and documentation studies, with instruments adapted from the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA). The reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha produced a score of 0.667, indicating acceptable internal consistency for research purposes. The research findings show that the aspects of trust and alienation fall into the moderate category, while the communication aspect is categorized as low. Children tend to feel reluctant to express their feelings to caregivers and

perceive limited emotional involvement from the caregivers in their daily lives. The low intensity of interaction affects the emotional closeness and sense of security that should ideally develop between children and caregivers. Based on these findings, the researcher proposes an intervention program called “Child and Caregiver Support Service (SAPA ASUH)” as a strategy to improve the emotional relationship and two-way communication between children and caregivers in the orphanage. The program includes mentoring sessions, empathic communication training, and caregiver role reflection to enhance the quality of emotional bonding

Keywords: Attachment; caregiver; orphanage; trust; communication; alienation

Introduction

Meeting basic needs such as clothing, food, and shelter is important for children living in care institutions such as orphanages. However, these aspects are not sufficient to ensure optimal growth and development without the fulfillment of psychosocial needs, particularly secure and meaningful emotional attachment. In this regard, the presence of caregivers as surrogate parents plays an important role in providing stable, responsive emotional relationships that support children's development.

A healthy attachment between children and caregivers is the foundation for building self-confidence, independence, and the ability to form positive social relationships. Children who do not experience secure attachment tend to have difficulties regulating their emotions, feel insecure, or even experience emotional isolation, which can have long-term effects.

In Indonesia, the number of children in orphanages is still relatively high. According to data from the Ministry of Social Affairs in 2020, there are more than 106,000 children being cared for by Child Social Welfare Institutions (LKSA). These institutions serve as alternative care for children who experience family dysfunction, loss of parents, extreme poverty, or situations that result in them being unable to be cared for by their immediate family. Although the existence of LKSA is very important in ensuring the survival of these children, the care system in these institutions often faces challenges in forming close and quality emotional

relationships.

One of the main challenges often encountered is the limited number of caregivers and the lack of quality time between children and caregivers. Many caregivers have to look after a large number of children in a limited amount of time, or even have additional jobs outside the institution, so their presence in the children's emotional lives becomes inconsistent. This hinders the formation of supportive relationships, which ultimately affects the children's attachment.

The attachment theory proposed by Bowlby (1969) asserts that attachment relationships are built from consistent, sensitive, and responsive patterns of interaction between children and attachment figures. Secure attachment has been shown to help children manage stress, build self-esteem, and form healthy interpersonal relationship patterns. In the context of institutional care, caregivers play a crucial role in creating secure attachments through unconditional acceptance, open communication, and emotional validation.

Armsden and Greenberg (2009) then developed three main dimensions in measuring the quality of child attachment, namely trust, communication, and alienation. These three aspects are interrelated and reflect the quality of the emotional relationship between the child and his or her attachment figure. Trust indicates the extent to which children feel safe and accepted, communication describes children's ability to speak openly to their caregivers, while alienation reflects the extent to which children feel isolated, misunderstood, or neglected.

Previous studies have revealed that the quality of attachment between children and caregivers in childcare institutions tends to be moderate. For example, research conducted by Mu'alimatus Sholihah et al. (2020) at LKSA Al-Kautsar Bandung showed that the relationship between children and caregivers has not yet fully formed a secure attachment. A similar finding was reported by Darwati (2023) at the Muhammadiyah Gurah Orphanage, who concluded that the emotional presence of caregivers was still not optimal, especially in providing consistent attention and support.

These studies have not explored the dynamics of attachment in the context of rural community-based

orphanages, where the social and economic conditions of caregivers often require them to divide their time between their duties at the orphanage and their work outside. This context is important to examine because it can provide an overview of the unique challenges in building attachment in a resource-limited environment. Therefore, this study aims to examine the quality of attachment between children and caregivers at the Mandhanisiwi Muhammadiyah Orphanage in Purbalingga, Central Java, focusing on three main dimensions: trust, communication, and alienation. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on orphanages in rural areas with limited human resources, as well as the background of caregivers, most of whom have multiple jobs. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the design of more contextual interventions and serve as a reference in the development of alternative care policies that are more emotionally responsive

Methodology

This study uses a quantitative approach with descriptive methods. The main objective of the study was to describe the quality of children's attachment to caregivers based on three dimensions: trust, communication, and alienation. The study was conducted at the Mandhanisiwi Pembina Kesejahteraan Umat Muhammadiyah Orphanage located in Purbalingga Regency, Central Java.

The population in this study consisted of all 39 children living in the orphanage. The entire population was sampled using a census technique. Respondents were children under the age of 18 who had lived in the orphanage for at least six months. The study was conducted from February to March 2025.

Data collection was conducted using a questionnaire instrument developed based on indicators from the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) by Armsden and Greenberg. The questionnaire consisted of 25 closed-ended statements with a 1–5 Likert scale. The questionnaire was distributed directly to respondents and filled out independently under the supervision of the researcher. In addition, field observations and documentation studies were conducted to supplement and verify the data.

Validity testing was conducted using the item-total correlation technique, while reliability testing was conducted

using Cronbach's Alpha, which produced a value of 0.667, indicating that the instrument was reliable. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques with the help of Microsoft Excel and SPSS version 29. The final results were presented in the form of frequency distributions, percentages, and categories based on the score range for each dimension

Result and Discussion

This study shows that the quality of attachment between children and caregivers at the Mandhanisiwi Orphanage is classified as moderate, with a total score of 3412 out of an ideal score of 4875 (70.02%). The three aspects of attachment analyzed were trust, communication, and alienation, each of which provided a different picture of the emotional relationship between children and caregivers.

Children's Trust in Caregivers

The aspect of trust received the highest score of 1441 out of 1950 (73.90%) and was categorized as high. This reflects that most children feel emotionally secure with their caregivers. The children acknowledged that their caregivers were fair and responsible, as reflected in the indicator “my caregiver accepts me without discriminating against my ethnicity, religion, or race.” The children also felt that their caregivers paid adequate attention to their basic needs and were open in establishing social relationships within the orphanage. However, not all children had the same perception. Some respondents revealed that caregivers sometimes have high expectations or find it difficult to understand certain emotional conditions, especially when children are experiencing emotional distress or conflicts with peers. Some children also feel that they do not yet fully trust their caregivers enough to share their personal problems in depth, indicating that trust is not evenly distributed among all individuals.

This condition indicates that the attachment formed tends to be general and not yet fully personal. Bowlby (1958) in his attachment theory states that secure attachment is characterized by openness, unconditional acceptance, and

consistent emotional support. These findings emphasize the importance of improving caregivers' capacity to respond sensitively to children's emotional needs, so that the quality of attachment can be more consistent and stronger across all relationships.

Communication between Children and Caregivers

The communication aspect scored the lowest, with 1134 out of 1755 (64.6%), and was classified as moderate. This result indicates that children do not yet have a completely comfortable and open space to express their feelings or personal experiences to their caregivers. Interactions tend to be one-sided, with caregivers giving more instructions or directions without providing sufficient space for dialogue with children. Children tend to hold back their emotional expressions for fear of being judged negatively or misunderstood by caregivers.

This lack of open communication shows that the relationship between children and caregivers is not yet fully reciprocal. Some respondents stated that they were not accustomed to discussing personal issues with caregivers because they felt they would not receive an empathetic response. Others felt that caregivers were too busy or tired to engage in conversations that were considered difficult or complicated. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that most caregivers in orphanages also have additional jobs outside the orphanage, which reduces the frequency and quality of their interpersonal interactions with the children.

This phenomenon of limited communication is highly relevant to Bowlby's attachment theory (1968), particularly the anxious-avoidant attachment style, in which children learn to refrain from expressing their emotional needs because they feel they will not receive the support or attention they need. Children become reluctant to open up because past experiences have shown that their attempts to establish communication are often not responded to positively.

This condition certainly has implications for children's emotional and social development. Suboptimal communication can hinder children in learning to manage their emotions, resolve interpersonal conflicts, and build long-

term trust with adults who act as attachment figures. Therefore, the role of caregivers as empathetic listeners and communication facilitators is very important to be strengthened through training and mentoring.

Children's Alienation from Caregivers

The aspect of alienation scored 837 out of 1170 (71.54%) and was classified as moderate. Although not low, this score still indicates emotional dynamics that require attention. Many children expressed that they felt ashamed, afraid of being looked down upon, or worried about being ridiculed if they told their caregivers about their personal problems. These feelings arise from past experiences when their complaints were not taken seriously or did not receive an empathetic response from caregivers.

This situation creates a psychological distance between the child and caregiver, which hinders the formation of a healthy emotional bond. Children who experience alienation tend to withdraw, hide their emotions, and prefer to solve problems on their own. In the long term, this can interfere with the development of self-confidence and social skills, and hinder the psychosocial recovery process of children who have experienced loss or past trauma.

According to Bowlby's attachment theory (1968), alienation is a manifestation of insecure attachment, especially if children feel they do not have a safe place to express their emotions or obtain support. Children who experience alienation tend to develop defensive interaction patterns, such as refusing help, closing themselves off from attachment figures, or even withdrawing from their social environment.

This phenomenon of alienation is also influenced by the lack of emotional presence of caregivers, where caregivers are not only rarely physically present, but also do not actively engage in understanding the child's feelings. If left unchecked, this alienation can take root and become a pattern of relationships filled with anxiety and distrust. Therefore, it is important for orphanage administrators to create a supportive and open caregiving environment, where children feel safe, heard, and unconditionally accepted. Interventions through caregiving role reflection and empathy training can be

strategic steps to reduce the level of alienation and rebuild healthy emotional closeness.

The summary of the research results for all aspects is as follows. Table 1 Summary of Results by Aspect of Child Attachment Quality with Caregivers

No	Aspect	Current Score	Ideal score	Percentage	Category
1.	<i>Trust</i>	1441	1950	73,90%	Tinggi
2.	<i>Communication</i>	1134	1755	64,6%	Sedang
3.	<i>Alienation</i>	837	1170	71,54%	Sedang
Comparison of Actual Scores with Ideal Scores		3412	4875	70,02%	Sedang

Source: Research Results for 2025

Table 1 shows that the total actual attachment score of children to caregivers at the Mandhanisiwi Muhammadiyah Orphanage in Purbalingga, Central Java, was 3412 out of an ideal score of 4875, or equivalent to 70.02%. This indicates that the overall attachment level is in the moderate category.

The highest score was obtained in the aspect of trust with a percentage of 73.90% and was categorized as high, followed by the aspect of alienation with a percentage of 71.54% which was categorized as moderate. Meanwhile, the aspect of communication obtained the lowest score with a percentage of 64.6%, which was also categorized as moderate.

These findings indicate that although, in general, the attachment relationship between children and caregivers has been established quite well, there is still room for improvement, particularly in the area of communication, which received the lowest score. The aspect of alienation shows relatively stable conditions, but still requires preventive attention so that it does not develop into a barrier in the emotional relationship between children and caregivers.

The total attachment score of children to caregivers at the Mandhanisiwi Pembina Kesejahteraan Umat Muhammadiyah Purbalingga Orphanage in Central Java is 3412 out of an ideal score of 4875, with a percentage of 70.02%, which is in the moderate category. The three aspects of attachment studied—trust, communication, and alienation—generally show the same category, although with different levels of achievement.

The three aspects of attachment that were studied, namely trust, communication, and alienation, generally also showed moderate categories, although there were variations in the scores for each aspect. Based on this, it can be concluded that foster children have not shown a strong level of attachment to their caregivers in all aspects studied, so that efforts to improve the quality of the relationship between children and caregivers need to be carried out more comprehensively. To strengthen the analysis, Figure 2 shows the average percentage and number of statements for each aspect.

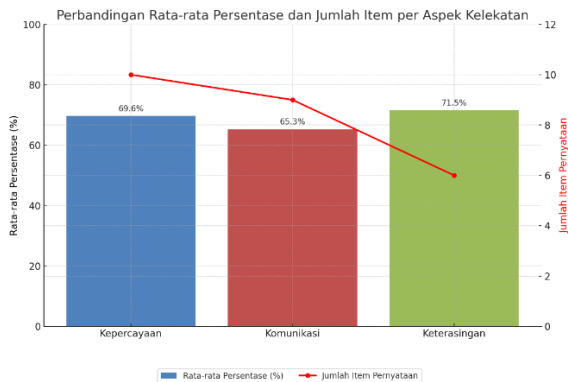


Figure 2 Diagram of the Average Percentage and Number of Statements for Each Aspect of Child Attachment
Source: Research Findings, 2025

The figure shows that the trust aspect has the highest average score (73.90%) with 10 statements. The Isolation aspect ranks second (71.54%) despite only consisting of 6 statements, indicating that attachment quality still leaves children feeling isolated. The Communication aspect received the lowest score (64.60%) with 9 statements, indicating that the ability for deep communication between children and caregivers still needs to be improved.

The recapitulation of the above data shows that the quality of attachment between children and caregivers is fairly good, with a predominance of moderate categories. Children's trust in caregivers is relatively high, indicating that most children feel emotionally secure. However, low scores in the

communication aspect indicate that daily interactions do not fully support the formation of close and open relationships.

These findings provide a basis for focusing efforts to improve attachment quality on strengthening empathetic and responsive communication, as well as reducing children's feelings of alienation from caregivers through warmer, more open, and consistent relationships. In addition, these findings are in line with Bowlby's (1969) theory, which states that secure attachment is only formed when there is a consistent and empathetic emotional response from the attachment figure. Suboptimal attachment quality can have long-term implications for children's social-emotional aspects, especially in late adolescence when the need for recognition and understanding is very high. Therefore, improving the quality of the child-caregiver relationship needs to focus on strengthening empathic communication, reducing alienation, and ensuring the emotional consistency of the caregiver, as the foundation for the formation of healthy and functional attachment.

Based on the results of the research and analysis conducted, the author recommends a program called “Sarana Pendampingan Anak dan Pengasuh (SAPA ASUH)” (Child and Caregiver Assistance Facility). This name was chosen to describe the essence of the program in creating a warm, open, and empathetic space for interaction between children and caregivers. The word “SAPA” represents simple but meaningful initial communication as the foundation for building strong emotional relationships. Meanwhile, “ASUH” emphasizes that the role of caregivers is not only limited to meeting children's physical needs or managing their activities, but also as emotional companions who are fully present in children's daily lives.

The SAPA ASUH program was designed in response to attachment conditions that are generally still in the moderate category, particularly in terms of communication and isolation, which are not yet optimal. Although the aspect of trust shows high results, it is still necessary to strengthen emotional relationships to make them more consistent and comprehensive. In addition, the program targets children aged

14-17 years, who are individuals in an important phase of psychosocial development and are in great need of adult figures who are able to listen, understand, and respond empathetically.

With a structured yet flexible approach, this program aims to improve the quality of attachment between children and caregivers through a series of activities such as two-way dialogue, emotional reflection, feeling journals, and regular mentoring. By creating a safe and supportive environment, it is hoped that children will be more open, feel heard, and build healthy relationships with their caregivers. In addition, the “Child and Caregiver Support Facility (SAPA ASUH)” program at the Mandhanisiwi Pembina Kesejahteraan Umat Muhammadiyah Purbalingga Orphanage in Central Java was developed in response to research findings related to attachment quality, which is still in the moderate category, particularly in terms of communication and isolation.

The general objective of this program is to improve the quality of emotional attachment between children and caregivers at the Mandhanisiwi Pembina Kesejahteraan Umat Muhammadiyah Purbalingga Orphanage through an approach based on open dialogue, empathy, and continuous emotional support, so that children feel safer, understood, and valued in the care environment. At least in the period after the program was implemented, 39 foster children showed the following achievements:

At least 80% of children's trust in their caregivers increases their ability to interact consistently and empathetically.

At least 80% of foster children are able to improve two-way communication between children and caregivers as the basis for forming healthy attachments.

At least 80% of foster children are able to create a warm, supportive, and responsive caregiving environment that addresses the child's emotional needs.

The method used in the “Child and Caregiver Assistance Facility (SAPA ASUH)” program is Social Group Work, a social work method that facilitates growth and change through structured group activities. The main focus of this method is

to improve the social functioning of individuals in a group context by developing supportive, empathetic, and mutually reinforcing interactions between children and caregivers.

The Social Group Work method was chosen because it creates a space that allows children to express their emotions, share experiences, and build positive interpersonal relationships, both with their peers and caregivers. With this approach, children are not only recipients of the program, but also actively contribute and engage reflectively in group dynamics. In its implementation, this program uses the Recreational Group type, which is a group designed to enhance togetherness, cohesiveness, and enjoyment through fun and meaningful activities. Through recreational activities such as group games, open discussions, emotional reflection sessions, and writing feeling journals, children are encouraged to interact positively with caregivers and peers. These activities are specifically chosen to be lighthearted yet still contain emotional, educational, and relational values.

Recreational Groups are an effective means of bridging communication between children and caregivers in a relaxed and non-preachy atmosphere. Children feel safer to open up, while caregivers can show empathy and emotional involvement more tangibly. The combination of the Social Group Work method and the Recreational Group approach is expected to have a positive impact on improving the quality of attachment between children and caregivers. This program also has the potential to become a model activity that can be adapted and developed by orphanages in the long term.

In response to the research findings, researchers developed a social intervention program called “Sarana Pendampingan Anak dan Pengasuh (SAPA ASUH)” (Child and Caregiver Support Facility). This program is holistically designed to improve the quality of the relationship between children and caregivers by targeting three main aspects of attachment: trust, communication, and isolation. SAPA ASUH combines a psychosocial approach based on empathetic communication, strengthening the role of caregivers, and providing ongoing support to children.

The SAPA ASUH program began with a preparation and

initial assessment phase. During this phase, observations were made of the orphanage environment and the dynamics of the relationship between the children and their caregivers as part of the initial mapping process. A team of facilitators consisting of social workers, psychology volunteers, and field practice students participated in the initial data collection through interviews with children and caregivers to find out each party's perception of the emotional relationship that had been built. This information was then used as the basis for preparing the schedule and material for the intervention sessions, so that the intervention carried out was truly contextual and appropriate to the needs.

The next stage is the implementation of the program, which is designed to last for eight weeks. Children will participate in mentoring sessions that include emotional expression activities, journaling, small group discussions, and role-playing. These activities aim to develop children's ability to recognize, express, and manage their emotions in a healthy way in a supportive environment. On the other hand, caregivers will undergo intensive training that emphasizes empathetic communication, active listening techniques, validating children's emotions, and emotionally-based parenting. The training is designed with a participatory approach through case studies, simulations, and group reflection so that caregivers not only understand theoretically, but are also able to apply it directly in their daily interactions.

The SAPA ASUH program also provides a space for guided interaction between children and caregivers. Collaborative activities such as playing together, reflective discussions, and children's appreciation days are designed to rebuild trust, reduce awkwardness, and strengthen emotional bonds between the two. This type of interaction is expected to serve as a medium for restoring relationships as well as real learning in forming healthy bonds.

After the program implementation, the evaluation and follow-up stages were carried out over two weeks. The evaluation was conducted using a quantitative approach by comparing the pre-test and post-test results using an attachment scale, as well as a qualitative approach through

observation and follow-up interviews. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the extent of change in the aspects of communication, emotional openness, and the quality of the relationship between the children and their caregivers. Based on the results of this evaluation, the team will develop recommendations for the sustainability of the program that can be integrated into the routine of the orphanage by the management and caregivers.

The SAPA ASUH program is designed to be flexible and adaptable to the characteristics of each orphanage. Cross-sector collaboration involving social workers, academics, students, and foundations is key to ensuring the implementation and sustainability of the program. It is hoped that SAPA ASUH will not only serve as a temporary intervention, but also become a model for sustainable care that can strengthen the quality of emotional attachment between children and caregivers in alternative care settings.

The SAPA ASUH program begins with a preparation and initial assessment phase. During this phase, observations are made of the orphanage environment and the dynamics of the relationship between the children and their caregivers as part of the initial mapping process. A team of facilitators consisting of social workers, psychology volunteers, and field practice students participate in the initial data collection through interviews with the children and caregivers to determine each party's perception of the emotional relationship that has been established. This information is then used as the basis for developing the schedule and materials for the intervention sessions, ensuring that the intervention is truly contextual and tailored to the needs. This phase also serves to build initial trust between the facilitators and program participants.

The program implementation phase lasts for eight weeks and forms the core of the intervention process. Children will participate in mentoring sessions that include emotional expression activities, journaling, small group discussions, and role-playing. These activities aim to develop children's ability to recognize, express, and manage their emotions in a healthy manner in a supportive environment. Caregivers, on the other hand, will be involved in intensive training that emphasizes

empathetic communication, active listening techniques, validating children's emotions, and emotional closeness-based parenting strategies. This training is designed using participatory methods that combine theory and hands-on practice. Case studies, simulations, and group reflections are an important part of ensuring that the training material is easily internalized by caregivers.

In addition to separate sessions, SAPA ASUH also provides guided interaction between children and caregivers. Collaborative activities such as playing together, reflective discussions, and children's appreciation day celebrations are designed to rebuild trust, reduce awkwardness, and strengthen emotional bonds. Such interactions are important for creating positive shared experiences that can strengthen affective relationships in a tangible way. Caregivers are trained to be active companions who are able to read children's emotional needs, respond with empathy, and create a safe climate for dialogue. After the program is implemented, an evaluation and follow-up phase is conducted over a two-week period.

The evaluation was conducted using a quantitative approach by comparing pre-test and post-test results using an attachment scale, as well as a qualitative approach through observation and follow-up interviews. The evaluation focused not only on the children, but also included the caregivers and the social environment of the orphanage. Feedback from caregivers, children, and managers was used for reflection and continuous improvement. In addition, follow-up sessions were also aimed at strengthening the orphanage's internal commitment to maintaining the sustainability of the program, both through the active involvement of staff, the formation of a reflective caregiver team, and the recording of routine activities as part of monitoring.

The SAPA ASUH program is designed to be flexible and adaptable to the characteristics of each orphanage. Cross-sector collaboration involving social workers, academics, students, and foundations is key to ensuring the implementation and sustainability of the program. Researchers also encourage the replication of the program in other orphanages by adapting it to local needs. The hope is that

SAPA ASUH will not only serve as a temporary intervention, but also become a model for sustainable care that can strengthen the quality of emotional attachment between children and caregivers in alternative care settings. In the future, SAPA ASUH is expected to be developed into a training module format and become part of the caregiver human resource development policy under the coordination of the Social Services Agency or the Child Social Welfare Institution

Conclusion

This study shows that the quality of attachment between children and caregivers at the Mandhanisiwi Muhammadiyah Purbalingga Orphanage varies. The aspects of trust and alienation are in the moderate category, while the aspect of communication is classified as low. This indicates that although there is a foundation for an emotional relationship between the children and caregivers, it has not been fully developed due to limited interaction, lack of quality time, and inconsistent emotional presence on the part of the caregivers.

This condition shows that the role of caregivers as attachment figures does not fully meet the psychosocial needs of children living in alternative care settings. In fact, secure and healthy attachment is a basic need for children in building a sense of security, self-identity, and the ability to form positive social relationships in the future. Suboptimal attachment can lead to emotional developmental barriers such as relational anxiety, distrust, and a tendency to withdraw from social environments.

These findings emphasize the importance of developing a care system in orphanages that not only focuses on meeting basic needs such as food and shelter, but also emphasizes the relational and affective aspects of children's lives. Empathetic communication skills, emotional presence, and listening skills on the part of caregivers are key assets in creating supportive and safe relationships for children living without their immediate families.

The follow-up to this study recommends the implementation of interventions based on strengthening the

relationship between children and caregivers, such as the SAPA ASUH program, on a regular basis. In addition, developing the capacity of caregivers through communication training, parenting reflection, and regular supervision is an important part of the strategy to improve the quality of care services. It is hoped that with these efforts, orphanages can become places that not only provide physical protection but also nurture children emotionally and socially, thereby supporting their holistic growth and development

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