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DEVELOPING THE COMPREHENSIVE SOCIAL WELL-BEING INDEX FOR ORPHANS IN MALAYSIAN ORPHANAGES

Nur Shuhada Yaacob (a), Nurul Nadiah Ahmad (b), Wan Farhah Shafiy Wan Kamalluarifin (c)*
*Corresponding author

(a) College of Business Management and Accounting, Universiti Tenaga Nasional, Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah Campus, Pahang, Malaysia. Shuhada@uniten.edu.my
(b) College of Business Management and Accounting, Universiti Tenaga Nasional, Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah Campus, Pahang, Malaysia. Shuhada@uniten.edu.my
(c) College of Business Management and Accounting, Universiti Tenaga Nasional, Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah Campus, Pahang, Malaysia. Farhah@uniten.edu.my

Abstract

Tragically, millions of children all over the globe have become orphaned for many reasons for example famine, displacement, disease or poverty. With a desire to take care of the orphans left behind, this study aims to focus on the social well-being of orphans. This study hopes to produce a Comprehensive Social Well-Being Index of orphans as the final output that can be used on samples from an orphan population. This framework is based on the previous research that focus on socio-economic, psycho-social, interpersonal relationship, environment and education. It is important to ensure that the Comprehensive Social Well-Being Index of orphans is could help review orphan's status in order to preserve social justice, particularly among children. Furthermore, this index will support the Malaysian government's aims to enhance social capital, inclusivity and social cohesion as part of its effort in the 12th Malaysia Plan and to support new initiative on National Children's Well-being Roadmap.

Keywords: Well-being, orphans, orphanages, Pahang, Malaysia.

1. Introduction

United Nation's Children's Fund (UNICEF) and its global partners defined an orphan as a child under 18 years of age who has lost one or both parents to any cause of death. Govender et al. (2014) and Cheng (2003) revealed that there are two type of orphans either (i) actual orphans in which children that both of their parents have passed away or have been missing for more than 4 years, and (ii) form orphans who refer to the children whose parents are still alive, but they are not stayed with their parents due to poverty, abandonment or imprisonment.

Based on available report by UNICEF (2016), in year 2014, there were nearly 140 million orphans globally including Asia (61 million), Africa (52 million), Latin America and Caribbean (10 million) and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (7.3 million). UNICEF reported an increase in the number of orphans, particularly in South and Southeast Asia which recorded the largest number of orphans (more than 82 million) for year 2016. Until now, this group always get the attention from global, national, and local leaders in finding the best care solutions (Mohammadzadeh, Awang, Ismail, et al., 2018). Cantwell and Holzscheiter (2008) claimed that Article 20 of the CRC (UN General Assembly, 1989) states that the government is obliged to ensure alternative care for a child come into effect when it is fundamentally impossible for child to be fend for themselves after they lose their parents.

In Malaysia context, in Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development's Strategic Plan 2013-2017, one of strategic thrusts is to ensure the safety and well-being of children towards the formation glorious country (Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, 2016). This strategic plan basically support government aims as embodied in the Government Transformation Program, Program Economic Transformation and 11th Malaysia Plan. The aims are to develop future generations, the well-being of the people and increase the inclusiveness to strengthen the nation's economic based. Besides, recently, based on 12th Malaysia Plan, the concept of shared prosperity was introduced in which cover three development dimensions include social re-engineering (Thestar, 2019). Under social re-engineering dimension, the government aims to enhance social capital, inclusivity and social cohesion which also affected to the orphans. Bernama (2018b) also revealed that Malaysia government in process of formulating and drafting National Children's Well-being Roadmap which might benefited to orphans.

2. Problem Statement

In this light, the countries with the highest rates of orphans are among the economically deprived and most under-resourced (Thielman et al., 2012). These countries are poorly equipped to meet the social, educational, and health care needs of orphans, which include adequate shelter, education, nutritional and psychosocial support. Sameena et al. (2016) also revealed that children living in orphanages are one of the most vulnerable groups of children in a society since many of them live in a state of repeated neglect, abuse and fear. This situation will lead to numerous negative effects to the orphans, for example, traumatic grief, compromised cognitive and emotional development and denied access to education (Whetten et al., 2009).

In the Malaysian context, the orphans have received great attention from government, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and private agencies, where they are provided with certain assistance and training (Mohammadzadeh, Awang, Ismail, et al., 2018). However, compared to other groups, for

example, disabled people and single mother, assistance for orphans in Malaysia, in general, is still lacking. For instance, the National Budget 2018 has put more focus on People with Disabilities (PWDs) by announcing an increase in the allowance for working and unemployed PWDs, as well as caretakers of PWDs by RM50 per month with an allocation of RM100 million. Meanwhile, according to Bernama (2018a), there are still many orphanages that have received less donation, which effect their economic situation. This may be due to the limited budget allocation for the welfare of orphans, poor and neglected children and the increase in the number of permanent and temporary orphanages. Orphanages have provided a home where infants are brought up to serve as alternative actors in welfare, development and to eradicate the failure role of the state in child protection. However, for National Budget 2019 there is no specific allocation for orphans. Besides, Bernama (2018a) revealed that RM287 million from 1989 to 2018 was spend on children's well-being programmes but the results were less than satisfactory in which there are a problem on nutrition, housing and education, especially involving orphans. Moreover, there are many unregistered institutions in Malaysia and the number of orphans and adolescents living in institutions is unclear.

According to NGOs that responsible to find homes for abandoned orphans, at least 13,000 orphans are living in almost 90 private and 35 government-run registered institutions throughout Malaysia (Mohammadzadeh, Awang, Shahar, et al., 2018). Nevertheless, orphans are highly under privileged in terms of education, socialisation, and access to nutrition than non-orphans. Therefore, a high understanding of these issues is needed in order to address care for the orphans. Furthermore, in 2016, only 1,348 orphans received the financial assistance under Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (JKM) compared to 2014 where there were 2,112 recipients. This denies the need of orphans to live in the environments that promote their well-being.

The research on social well-being index that focus on orphans in Malaysian orphanages had been very rare. The current research of orphanages is often limited to the orphanages' financial record (Ishak, 2012), emotional health and self-esteem (Mohammadzadeh, Awang, Shahar, et al., 2018), stress and coping mechanisms (Mohammadzadeh, Awang, Shahar, et al., 2018), body image perception (Rahim et al., 2019) and interpersonal and intrapersonal (Azid & Yaacob, 2016). To the best of the researchers' knowledge, there are no research that revealed on the comprehensive social well-being index for orphans. Due to the limited literature in recent well-being of orphans in Malaysian orphanages, there is a need to have comprehensive research in this area which focusing on socio-economic, psycho-social, interpersonal relationship, environment and education.

3. Research Questions

The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. How is the social well-being of orphans in Malaysia?

2. What are the indicators that explain Comprehensive Orphans' Social Well-Being index in Malaysia?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study can be outlined as follows:

1. To discuss the social well-being of orphans in Malaysia.

2. To explore the indicators that explain Comprehensive Orphans' Social Well-Being index in Malaysia?

5. Research Methods

The proposed comprehensive social wellbeing index of orphans was based on literature of orphans worldview and focused in the identity of orphans in Malaysia. The five indicators were found to be consistently used in measuring well-being. The framework build in this study synthesizes the extensive body of research across numerous fields in order to identify and measure the multifaceted construct of well-being especially for orphans. Therefore, the proposed comprehensive social well-being index of orphans in Malaysia is shown in Figure 01.
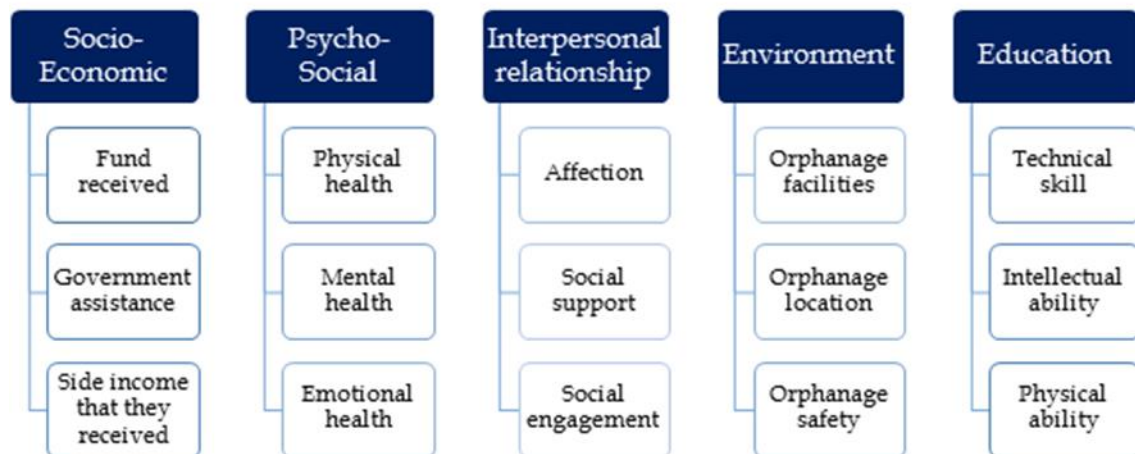

Figure 01. Proposed Comprehensive Social Well-Being Index of Orphans in Malaysia

6. Findings

6.1. Social Well-being Index

There are many versions of the social well-being scale or index that have been developed worldwide over the years for example financial (Cuthill, 2002), mental and emotional health, (Wan Salwina et al., 2014), physical health (Emmanuel & Maheswari, 2016), environmental (Shukla & Shukla, 2011) as well as education (Msoka & Holroyd, 2018). However, for Malaysia, there are very limited number of study and references that investigates on the whole social well-being of orphans which only focus more on psycho-social. Therefore, this study will propose and develop the social well-being of orphans to be used specifically in Malaysia based on the following indicators.

6.1.1. Socio-economic

Socio-economic focuses on how the economy involving orphans or orphanages will affect orphans' behavior. Elements proposed in this first indicator are in terms of funds received, government assistance and side income that the orphans received.

It is crucial for orphanages or orphans to receive sufficient funds from the community or any NGOs so that they can improve their household wealth. Orphanages nowadays are struggling just to stay afloat, suffers problems with its finances (Free Malaysia Today News, 2019). For instance, the poor socioeconomic climate in Nigeria has resulted in the growing population of vulnerable households and caregivers are having trouble on a daily basis in securing access to social basic services like education, food, portable water, protection, good hygiene and good health for the children (Bamgboye et al., 2017). Recently, there are many methods used by the orphanages to raise fund such as from the tourists that pay money to stay at the orphanage (World Identity Network, 2019), charity appeals using television channels, posters, leaflets, and direct fundraising (The Daily Star, 2019).

In term of government assistance, orphanages already received allocation from the government. However, there are been reports indicating that institutional grants provided by the government are unreliable (Yuekai, 2014).

Meanwhile, due to insufficient funds received from community or government assistance, orphans are forced to work to gain some income in order for them to survive. For example, by working or begging, plays traditional instruments and some orphanages have collaborated with guesthouses, taxi drivers and western tour companies (The Guardian News, 2010).

6.1.2. Psycho-social

Psycho-social indicator comprises of the health of orphans. Children cared by orphanages are more likely to suffer poor health, physical underdevelopment, slow brain growth and experience developmental delays and emotional attachment disorders (Orphancare, 2019). Thus, there are three elements discussed which are physical health, mental health and emotional health.

In term of physical health, Emmanuel and Maheswari (2016) explained that many orphans suffer physical problems for example malnutrition, lice, developmental delays, scabies and severe infections, such as hepatitis, HIV or AIDS. In addition, physical abuse also can lead to physical health.

According to Duthé et al. (2016), mental health disorders arise from multiple factors, such as biological (poorly understood), psychological (stress due to family divisions, physical violence, etc.), and sociodemographic factors (gender, age, poverty). Past studies have revealed that indicators that have contributed to poor mental health outcomes of orphans in sub-Saharan Africa include the educational status of the caregiver, discrimination, lack of material possessions, neighbourhood quality, food insecurity, lack of clothing, absence of the father in the household, maltreatment from host families, and poverty (Govender, et. al., 2014). In the Malaysian psycho-social context, a study conducted on three orphanages in Kelantan reported 4%, 20% and 31% of orphans have shown symptoms of severe, moderate and mild level of depression respectively, indicating a high percentage of depression cases among institutionalized adolescents (Ramli et al., 2010). Another study showed that more than 10% of the Malaysian adolescents

living in the selected residential homes suffered from Major Depression Disorder (MDD) (Wan Salwina et. al., 2014).

Another element of psycho-social health is emotional health. Past study has shown orphans brought up in foster care homes and orphanages are exposed to various emotional and behavioral difficulties, such as anti-social behavior, aggression, anxiety and depression (Lehmann et al., 2013). The caregivers have no time to give individualised care thus led to the orphans cannot actively responsive due to the lack of appropriate affection and attention from adults (Malaysiakini, 2018). Therefore, if they do not receive any support from the community, they will be exposed to depression, loneliness and withdrawal (Raphael et al., 2000). Furthermore, according to Women, Family and Community Development Ministry's report in 2015, almost all of children and adolescents in Malaysian orphanages have low self-esteem and self-confidence due to lack of attention from caregivers in terms of smiles, kisses or touches (Sadho, 2015). In this light, attending schools is seen as another way of minimising orphans' psychological distress.

6.1.3. Interpersonal Relationship

Interpersonal relationship is related to the social association, connection or affiliation between two or more people. Therefore, this study proposes three elements under this indicator, namely affection, social support and social engagement.

According to Browne (2018), emotional happiness and physical are important in interpersonal relationships. These relationships help fight loneliness and giving a sense of purpose in life. For instance, the closeness feel with family and friends is an essential part of the social support. Meanwhile, in term of affection, it is important to understand the link between motivation to care others and well-being because there are costs and benefits associated with caring for others (Crocker et al., 2017).

Social support refers to the psychological and material resources provided by a social network to help individuals cope with stress (Cherry, 2019). Such social support from family and friends can come with varying forms for example giving advice to a friend when they are facing a difficult situation or helping with various daily tasks. However, this situation could not happen to orphans because of the reasons like being left by parents, loss of parents, family disintegration, that caused they live in orphanages (Asif, 2017).

Meanwhile, in regard to social engagement, prior works suggested that the need to belong may explain the motivation to have frequent and regular social interactions. The need to feel belonged will lead to the social interaction with surrounding (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), by having social engagement activity such as cleaning, educational talk, food bank, medical expenses and other noble missions.

6.1.4. Environment

Environment can be classified as the surrounding or conditions a person lives in. The Comprehensive Social Well-Being Index used for this study suggests the inclusion of orphanage facilities, orphanage location and orphanage safety as elements to measure environments for orphans.

In term of facilities, past studies found that some of facilities in orphanages tend to cater for many more needs than just the provision of accommodation others merely provides safe accommodation for the orphans (Simons & Koranteng, 2012). Most of the orphanages have insufficient accommodation facilities and are overcrowded (Yuekai, 2014). In the Malaysian context, all parties in Malaysia should be concerned

on the comfort of orphanages to make sure that orphans can have better living accommodation and conducive environment for their life.

According to William (2016), it is crucial to provide orphanages with comfortable housing which include a sense of safety, security and loving environment so that the orphans can grow and have self-sustaining community for the facilities provided. For example, in western country they proposed to have a program named "safe haven orphanages" to make sure that design and materials for the orphanages are safe and comfort especially for orphanages that located at rural area.

6.1.5. Education

Education is a process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at a school or university. In this study, three elements under education indicator were proposed consists of technical skill, intellectual ability and physical ability which aim to take a closer look for orphans' education.

Education is critical to individual and national well-being. Yet, orphans often face challenges to obtain it (Lingenfelter et al., 2017). Msoka and Holroyd (2018) reported that in order to enhance orphans' technical skills such as reading, writing, communications or decision-making, the orphans should be given free access to education, books, stationeries and free transportation. The Star (2018) reported that Malaysia government in keeping abreast with the 4.0 industrial revolution has implemented 43 education initiatives.

In term of intellectual and physical capabilities, optimal nutrition is necessary for physical, mental growth and development of the children. In order to support growing and maximizing learning potential, it is important to have good nutrition (Kamath et al., 2017). Nutritional intake affects energy levels, physical stamina, mental clarity, emotional mood, memory, and mental well-being. Proper nutrition is also critical in maximizing brain function as well as enhancing learning and adequate brain function is needed for efficient cognition and performance of organized behaviour (Bellisle, 2004). In this regard, children living without permanent parental care are at a heightened risk for under-nutrition, putting their health and development in great jeopardy and affect their level of education.

7. Conclusion

The primary outcome of this study is to propose the first Comprehensive Social Well-Being Index for orphans to live in the environments that promote their well-being. This index can be chart and track periodically in order to enable the government to keep in touch with the orphan's condition in the country. This index can be used by policy makers to track and initiate intervention strategies especially in the development of the orphans in many aspects. Besides, as at today, there is very limited number of study and references that investigates in this particular field. As a suggestion, future researcher can have an empirical study in this area. Hence, introduce Comprehensive Social Well-Being Index for orphans in this country is important, so that better policy recommendations can be highlighted specifically to support National Children's Well-being Roadmap.

Acknowledgments

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