Social services for children victims of domestic violence: A feminist perspective analysis in social work

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Abstract

Children's experiences of violence can have a significant impact on their psychological and social well-being. Social services to address these impacts are needed to restore children's social functioning. In providing such services, social workers can adopt intersectional feminist values to ensure culturally and socially sensitive social services. This article uses a literature review method of 4 books and 17 journals. A feminist perspective in social work is considered a holistic framework for understanding, addressing, and championing solutions to child abuse connected to the cultural diversity and social context of the children. This approach creates a solid foundation for social work that focuses on restoring and rebuilding the social functioning of children who have experienced violence.

Keywords: child domestic violence, domestic violence impact, feminist social work, social services

Abstrak

Pengalaman kekerasan pada anak dapat berdampak signifikan pada kondisi psikologis dan sosial mereka. Untuk mengatasi dampak tersebut, pelayanan sosial yang bertujuan mengembalikan keberfungsian sosial anak diperlukan. Dalam memberikan pelayanan tersebut, pekerja sosial dapat mengadopsi nilai-nilai feminis interseksional untuk memastikan pelayanan sosial yang sensitif budaya dan sosial. Artikel ini menggunakan metode tinjauan literatur dari 4 buku dan 17 jurnal. Perspektif feminis dalam pekerjaan sosial dianggap sebagai kerangka kerja holistik untuk memahami, menangani, dan memperjuangkan solusi terhadap kekerasan pada anak, terhubung dengan keberagaman budaya dan konteks sosial anak-anak tersebut. Pendekatan ini menciptakan dasar yang

kuat untuk pekerjaan sosial yang fokus pada pemulihan dan pembangunan kembali keberfungsian sosial anak-anak yang mengalami kekerasan.

Kata Kunci: *dampak kekerasan domestik, feminis pekerjaan sosial, kekerasan domestik pada anak, pelayanan sosial*

INTRODUCTION

The family serves as the fundamental social unit within society, playing a crucial role in the early socialization of values and norms in children. Typically, a family includes a father, mother, and children, characterized by love, support, nurturing, and acceptance for personal development (Hutchison, 2018). The family is fundamentally the most nurturing and secure environment for children to grow and develop at their respective stages of life. According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Children in 1989, the fundamental rights of children include: 1) the right to life and health, 2) the right to develop through proper nutrition, education, and cultural opportunities, 3) the right to protection from discrimination and violence, and 4) the right to take part in decisions that impact their lives (Tursilarini, 2017)

Parents, families, adults, and the government all have responsibilities in ensuring that children's rights are protected. Nonetheless, many instances of violence against children persist. As reported by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KEMEN PPPA), by October 2023, there were 21,068 cases logged. Out of these, 14,241 involved victims who were under 18 years old. Additionally, 12,920 of these cases took place in domestic environments, with 2,458 committed by parents and 1,219 by other family members. This information highlights that families, which are supposed to be the safest and most supportive environments for children, are increasingly failing to provide safety and security due to the prevalence of domestic violence.

Domestic violence refers to forms of violence that occur in domestic settings, such as within families, typically involving someone close to the victim, such as parents, siblings, uncles, or grandparents. While it can affect individuals of any background, women and children frequently find themselves as the primary victims. This form of violence can manifest as verbal, psychological, or physical abuse (Hutchison, 2018)

Children who either experience domestic violence themselves or witness violent actions against their parents often encounter obstacles in their growth and personal development. According to Margolin & Gordis (2000), domestic violence is considered one of the most severe adverse events during childhood (Gil, 2010). This is further clarified by Hutchison (2018) who states that over the past three decades, global studies have indicated that children affected by domestic violence experience significant impacts on their physical, emotional, cognitive, and social health

Social workers have a crucial role in offering support to domestic violence victims, helping them address their basic and psychosocial needs. As

stated by Raharjo (2017), social workers are involved in social services work to assist individuals in meeting their essential psychosocial needs through government or private organizations, promoting feelings of belonging, acceptance, and comfort during challenging times. Child welfare is one specific field within social services.

When working with children, social workers can embrace a feminist perspective that highlights gender-related issues in a patriarchal society, aiming to ensure access to human rights and diminish dynamics of dominance and subordination (Turner & Maschi, 2015). Following Hanisch & Moulding (2011), feminist theories, particularly those rooted in post-culturalism and intersectionality, have led to a more nuanced understanding of violence, influencing how professionals handle and respond to instances of violence against children. Feminist social work views violence against children as a social issue rooted in gender-based power relations (Fleckinger, 2023). This perspective encourages social workers to adopt a broader understanding of the issues they address.

Regarding violence against children, the feminist perspective, as discussed in the research by Hanisch & Moulding (2011), emphasizes the need for a language-focused understanding and approach that empowers interactions with female survivors of sexual violence. The study highlights the difficulties in applying an emancipatory feminist framework in therapeutic interventions, which must find a balance between recognizing the traumatic effects of violence and steering clear of pathological narratives. The results highlight the necessity of enhancing feminist awareness in social work practices, prioritizing women's voices over those of the social workers, and stressing the importance of values like respect and collaboration.

A study by Mulyana et al. (2019), reveals that social workers assisting child victims of violence deliver services both on an individual basis and in group settings, collaborating with multiple parties to guarantee that the services are fair, open, and ongoing (Mulyana et al., 2019). By implementing a feminist perspective, the services provided can become more comprehensive and sustainable. This is due to the feminist belief that every individual is entitled to human rights and should be free from oppression and subordination (Turner & Maschi, 2015).

This article aims to examine social services for child victims of violence through a feminist lens in social work. By utilizing this approach, social work services incorporate an intersectional feminist framework that acknowledges the effects of structural and interpersonal oppression on marginalized individuals and communities. The objective is to identify the elements that social workers should understand and address in their efforts to provide services that aid in restoring the social functioning of children who have experienced domestic violence. It is anticipated that this research will enhance the existing literature on social work with children and offer new insights for social workers to deliver effective support to child victims of domestic violence through an intersectional feminist perspective.

METHOD

This study utilizes a literature review methodology to synthesize findings, present evidence at the meta-level, and identify research areas that require further investigation (Snyder, 2019). For this writing, the author has compiled a variety of previously published studies to substantiate the work. A total of 15 journals and 6 books have been gathered, sourced from Google Scholar, ResearchGate, ScienceDirect, and Sage pub, covering the timeframe from 2008 to 2023. The author employed keywords such as child violence, social services, feminist social work, child abuse, family violence, and domestic violence during the journal search. The selected sources were chosen for their relevance, credibility, and novelty, contributing to the article's foundation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Feminist Perspective in Social Work

One perspective in social work for addressing the issue of domestic violence against children is the feminist perspective. The feminist perspective is utilized in a range of social work practices across micro, meso, and macro levels. As noted by Van Den Bergh & Cooper, (1986) and referenced in Dunkerley (2017) grasping social issues from a feminist viewpoint involves an approach that is "*holistic, integrated, and ecological.*" This means that a feminist perspective looks at social problems in a comprehensive manner, taking into account the various interrelated factors at play.

Feminist social work began to emerge in the late 1970s and early 1980s within social work academia Dominelli (2002); as it started to be established as a specific concept in the field (Kemp & Brandwein, 2010). Initially, it aimed to highlight the different experiences faced by women in social work practice, addressing the lack of attention to these differences in a field where men universally hold power (Wilson, 1977 in Dominelli, 2002). It also sought to identify the shortcomings of practices that operated within the confines of viewing women solely as primary caregivers for others (husbands, children, and elderly relatives) (Dominelli and McLeod, 1989 in Dominelli, 2002).

Feminist practitioners and scholars have utilized feminist theories and practices to emphasize gender issues in social work, affirming and validating women's experiences (Dominelli, 2002). During its initial development, feminist social work was guided by principles such as feminist egalitarianism, collective decision-making, and prioritizing women's voices. In this context, feminist social workers worked alongside women service users to establish and manage environmental health clinics, women's shelters, and counseling programs aimed at supporting women (Kemp & Brandwein, 2010).

Research and practice in feminist social work are influenced by various feminist perspectives, but fundamentally aim to highlight gender inequality and power dynamics while empowering the most marginalized individuals in society (Hyde, 2013 dalam (Cramp & Zufferey, 2021)). The feminist framework in social work provides an understanding of practices that focus on issues of violence, power, and gender inequality (Alston, 2018). Feminist social work

encompasses a range of areas, engaging with women, men, families, communities, systems, and institutions, thereby revealing a multidimensional and multisystemic framework of practice (Pandya, 2014).

Domestic Violence against Children

Domestic violence refers to a form of violence that occurs within a private setting. The perpetrator is usually a family member or close acquaintance of the victim, such as parents, grandparents, or cousins. When it comes to domestic violence against children, specifically refers to violent acts within the private settings committed by adults who are close to the child, typically immediate family. This situation highlights the dynamic between children and adults, such as parents, where one party usually holds more social power or skills, which can result in violent behavior. The power imbalance in these relationships is a significant factor leading to violence against children.

The family is ideally a safe and nurturing environment for children during their growth and development, but it can also be a source of violence and neglect. As highlighted by Butler & Roberts (2004) in "Working Together to Safeguard Children" child abuse is classified into four types: physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect. These forms of abuse represent various harmful behaviors toward children, including actions like hitting, emotional mistreatment, sexual coercion, and the failure to meet a child's basic and emotional needs (Butler & Roberts, 2004; Rozak, 2013)

Domestic violence against children is a multicoated issue, with underlying factors that can be examined at various levels: individual, community, societal, and the relationship between the perpetrator and the child (close relationship). At the close relationship level, specifically, within the family context, family harmony is one of the factors contributing to domestic violence against children, often perpetrated by parents or other close family members. Disharmony between parents can lead to a lack of care for their children. This results in parents becoming more preoccupied with their issues, leading them to neglect the development and social interactions of their children. Consequently, the children are seeking protection outside the home. This makes children more vulnerable to becoming victims of violence. This statement is supported by the argument from Mulyana et al., (2019), who state that family disharmony indicates a disrupted family structure, which can lead to cases of violence against children. Furthermore, at the community level, economic conditions are one of the factors contributing to violence against children. At the societal level, social and gender norms that normalize a culture of violence also contribute to the occurrence of violence against children.

A child's encounters with domestic violence affect their development and growth. Children who either experience or witness domestic violence can endure psychological trauma that affects their cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development. Based on , each child has their response to violence and assault within the family context. These behaviors can manifest as somatic

complaints, school issues, excessive crying, withdrawal, clinginess, aggressiveness, anxiety, depression, and self-mutilation.

Earlier studies have shown that children who experience violence tend to grow into individuals with attachment problems. They may exhibit shyness, struggle to socialize with peers, withdrawal from their environment, trauma related to violence, and a fear of experiencing similar situations (Maslahah, 2020; Moulding et al., 2015; Turner & Maschi, 2015). This is certainly in line with (Webb, 2003), regarding children's responses to experiences of domestic violence they have endured or witnessed. Furthermore, children who either experience violence at home or witness it learn that violence is a way of settling disagreements. This is not a constructive lesson and can impact their relationship both now and, in the future, as they lack the experience or understanding to solve problems without using violence (Webb, 2003).

Social Services for Children Victim of Domestic Violence

Children affected by domestic violence, either as victims or witnesses, need suitable social support to help them regain their social functioning and reduce the adverse effects of the violence they have encountered. The provision of social services to children who are victims of domestic violence cannot be handled by a single party; collaboration from various parties is necessary to provide the best support for the children. Kahn's (1973) perspective on the dimensions of social services can serve as a reference for social services aimed at children who are victims of domestic violence.

According to Kahn (1973) as cited by Mulyana et al., (2019), the dimension of social services consists of well-designed programs that involve the government, private sector, and community. These programs often overlook the market criteria, which means they focus more on the services without considering the recipient's ability to pay. The scope of these social programs is quite broad, encompassing individuals, families, groups, and even the entire community. The main goal of each program or activity is to enhance the well-being of its recipients, as highlighted by Mulyana et al. (2019). Through a holistic and inclusive approach, these initiatives aim to deliver substantial benefits that address the needs and improve the quality of life for those receiving social services.

According to the dimension of social services stated by Kahn (1973), it is clear that collaboration with all stakeholders in the provision of social services for children who are victims of domestic violence is important and necessary. In offering services to these children, the involvement of the government, private sector, families, and the community is vital for restoring the victim's social functioning and preventing violence done by the children in the future. This collaborative approach ensures that comprehensive support is provided, addressing not only the immediate needs of the victims but also the underlying issues that contribute to domestic violence.

Social services for children who are victims of domestic violence are part of the child welfare services in social work. The social work profession

considers the social and environmental contexts affecting clients (*person-in-environment),* which is why the model of social services is categorized into three levels: micro, meso, and macro (Suharto, 2006). Suharto (2006) further explains that micro-level social services focus primarily on children, including counseling services. The Meso-level involves families and playgroups as models of social services aimed at children. At the macro level, broader entities such as communities and the government are included, with services that focus more on community development.

Social Services for Children Victim of Abuse from Feminist Social Work Perspective

In handling child abuse issues, multiple perspectives can be applied, and the treatment of child victims of violence is inseparable from the social services they receive (Mulyana et. al., 2019). A feminist perspective can be applied. The feminist social work viewpoint understands child abuse as a form of violence rooted in power imbalance and gender inequality (Aadnanes, 2017). Alongside that, feminists view domestic violence against children as being caused by gender inequality within the home setting.

Feminists separated the concepts of sex and gender. Sex refers to a biological condition, whereas gender is shaped by cultural and social factors (Hutchison, 2017). The feminist perspective also highlights that the violence experienced by mothers can play a role in child abuse, as mothers facing oppression or control within the home may express their frustration and anger toward their children (Dekel et al., 2019) thus violence against children within the home becomes unavoidable.

The provision of social services for child victim of abuse from the feminist social work perspective includes interventions such as counselling, group work, advocacy, negotiation, initiatives focused on tackling structural inequalities and promoting social change (Alston, 2018). Dominelli (2002) explains that feminist social work emphasizes an inclusive and egalitarian approach to addressing family-related issues. It acknowledges the rights of both children and women, while demanding that the state take responsibility for protecting these rights. Furthermore, feminist social work understands the social identities that adhere to both children and the mothers and avoid mother-blaming in cases of child abuse.

Social workers engaged with children are also involved with their families. The intervention provided by social workers should focus on the child's best interest. In cases where children are victims of domestic violence or have witnessed it, prioritizing their safety, emotional health, and empowerment is essential while also addressing the underlying causes of the violence. This argument is supported by research conducted by Côté et. al., (2022), which shows that social work interventions from a feminist lens emphasize the necessity of uncovering the root causes of violence, particularly the patriarchal social system and violence against women. The goal of these interventions is to empower both women and children by confronting the underlying structural

factors that perpetuate violence, fostering cooperation between social workers and mother to safeguard children while tackling larger societal problems (Côté et al., 2022).

The concept of femininity is often interpreted in two ways, particularly when it comes to society's expectations of women, and this is frequently used to pathologize and place blame on women in cases of domestic violence (Moulding et al., 2015). Research has shown that in domestic violence cases, mothers commonly experience both self-blame and blame for others. This can appear in various forms, including blaming the mother for her inability to protect the child or for being unable to leave an abusive partner (Côté et al., 2022; Moulding et al., 2015). Such blame may also surface during the social work intervention in addressing domestic violence cases.

To reduce the tendency to blame mothers in cases of domestic violence, the feminist principle of intersectionality can be applied in the social work intervention. This principle emphasizes social workers to acknowledge how different forms of oppression intersect and overlap, leading to distinct experiences of trauma and marginalization for both individuals and communities (Wilkin & Hillock, 2014). Furthermore, the intersectional feminist perspective helps explain how gender and race interact to create systematic disadvantages, as Cramp & Zufferey (2021) pointed out, women and children are often the most disadvantages in domestic violence cases. The intersectionality approach emphasizes the importance of preventing mother-blaming, holding the perpetrators of domestic violence accountable, and promote cross-service collaboration to create more adaptable response to domestic violence (Cramp & Zufferey, 2021).

Applying the principle of intersectionality allows social workers to promote social justice, as it helps them to recognize and understand the various power imbalance within the society (Goulden et al., 2023). Social services based on the feminist value of intersectionality ensure that the services designed by social workers take into account the complex needs of child victims of domestic violence, considering factors such as race, class, social experiences, and cultural background. With an intersectional feminist perspective, social workers can develop interventions that are not only culturally sensitive but also responsive to the specific needs of individuals and families. This approach involves recognizing the complexity and intersection of various factors that contribute to domestic violence. By applying this perspective, it is hoped that more sustainable solutions can be created, resulting in significant positive impacts on the lives of children and their families.

CONCLUSION

Children experiences of domestic violence have a significant impact on their development and growth. Based on the literature review conducted, it reveals that during their development, children may suffer from trauma, anxiety, issues with attachment, and may even withdraw from their social circles. To tackle these challenges, interventions by social workers are essential.

One approach that social workers can employ to comprehend the issue of domestic violence against children is the feminist perspective.

According to the feminist viewpoint in social work, violence against children reflects power imbalances and gender inequality, making women and children the victims. Social workers applying a feminist perspective can design interventions that aim to empower both women and children while also addressing the underlying structural issues that contribute to violence. This approach also underscores the importance of intersectionality to prevent blaming mothers for the violence that occurs.

This study underscores the significance of adopting a feminist lens in both understanding and tackling violence against children. It discusses how gender-based injustices within households can lead to domestic violence and advocates for the use of intersectional principles to avoid placing blame on mothers. Additionally, this research encourages further investigations to address gaps identified, particularly regarding the influence of feminist perspectives in social work on services for child victims of violence within the Indonesian context.

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