

The Influence of Social Support on Emotional Intelligence Development in Orphanages

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Abstract

Emotional intelligence (EI) is a vital component of mental health, particularly in vulnerable groups such as orphans. This study examines how social support influences emotional well-being among 160 orphans, aged 8-17, living in Pahang orphanages. Using a survey and regression analysis, this study explored the effects of family support, friends at orphanages, staff at orphanages, community, motivation, and welfare on emotional outcomes. The results indicate that family support and motivation are significant predictors of emotional well-being, while support from friends, staff, and community, and welfare do not significantly contribute. In conclusion, family support and motivation are essential to fostering emotional resilience in orphaned children. These results underscore the critical role of strengthening family bonds and intrinsic motivation in promoting emotional resilience. Additionally, this research supports SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 4 (Quality Education), providing valuable insights for policymakers and orphanage caregivers to improve emotional and psychological support frameworks. This study contributes to the existing literature on EI in vulnerable children, offering a foundation for enhancing care strategies in institutional settings.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Social Support, Orphaned Children, Pahang

Introduction

As of 2023, approximately 3 million children worldwide live in orphanages and institutionalized care (UNICEF, 2023). This rising number underscores the critical role of alternative care systems in supporting children who have lost one or both parents and are facing significant hardships (Umar et al., 2023). Despite substantial resources allocated to these institutions, many children still lack the nurturing and stimulating environment necessary for healthy development and psychological well-being (van IJzendoorn et al., 2022). Institutional care often falls short in addressing these needs, impacting their social well-being and obstructing progress toward Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) designed to ensure no one is left behind, particularly vulnerable groups such as orphans and disadvantaged adolescents (World Health Organization, 2023). This highlights an urgent need for more effective emotional intelligence and social support mechanisms within these systems to address ongoing deficits in emotional intelligence and social support that significantly affect their overall development.

Emotional intelligence and social support are critical factors in the well-being of children in orphanages. Studies have shown that institutionalized children often experience deficits in emotional intelligence, which affects their ability to understand and manage their own emotions, as well as to empathize with others (Zelazo & Carlson, 2023). This deficiency in emotional skills can contribute to difficulties in forming and maintaining interpersonal relationships, which is compounded by inadequate social support systems. In Malaysia, for example, orphans frequently suffer from low self-esteem and self-confidence due to insufficient caregiver attention, including a lack of emotional support and physical affection (Sadho, 2023). This lack of emotional intelligence and social support not only impacts their psychological development but also their overall social integration and future opportunities. Recent research highlights the need for more comprehensive support systems in orphanages. Institutionalized children often exhibit intellectual delays and behavioral issues, including social immaturity and emotional detachment (Shukla & Shukla, 2023; Smith & Brown, 2023). Building emotional intelligence and fostering supportive interpersonal relationships are essential for improving these outcomes. Motivation to care for others is closely linked to the development of supportive relationships, which can enhance emotional and social development (Clark & Mills, 2023; Le & Impett, 2023). Addressing these challenges requires holistic approaches that integrate emotional, psychological, and social support to effectively support orphans (Johnson et al., 2024).

To tackle these issues, this study aims to examine the influence of social support on emotional intelligence among children residing in orphanages. Understanding this relationship is crucial for ensuring that these children receive the necessary emotional and social resources to thrive. By identifying how different forms of social support—such as family support, friendships, and motivation—affect emotional intelligence, the study seeks to provide insights into how to enhance care strategies. This is important not only for improving the immediate well-being of children in institutional settings but also for contributing to long-term developmental outcomes and aligning with broader goals of inclusivity and support for vulnerable populations.

Literature Reviews

Emotional intelligence (EI) is critical for understanding how individuals manage and express their emotions and interact with others. Salovey and Mayer's foundational work (1990) defines EI as the ability to perceive, use, understand, and manage emotions effectively. Recent studies continue to underscore the importance of EI in various domains. For instance, Goleman (1995) emphasized the link between high EI and positive life outcomes, including better mental health and academic success. Contemporary research further supports these findings, indicating that EI is a significant predictor of success in both personal and professional spheres (Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2022). However, recent study also highlight that high EI might contribute to increased emotional sensitivity, potentially leading to heightened stress under certain conditions (Mayer & Salovey, 2023). In the context of institutional care, children with elevated emotional intelligence might manage complex emotions better but may also face increased emotional strain due to their heightened awareness (Zelazo & Carlson, 2023).

Social Support in Orphanages

Social support in orphanages encompasses a range of influences, including peer relationships, staff interactions, community involvement, and external organizational assistance. Each form of support plays a critical role in shaping the emotional and psychological well-being of children in institutional care, though the effectiveness and impact of these supports can vary significantly.

Family support is vital for children's emotional and psychological development. Research consistently shows that strong family support contributes positively to children's emotional adjustment and development (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1988). Recent studies confirm that a lack of family support in institutional settings is associated with higher levels of emotional and behavioral problems (Browne, 2009). Newer findings indicate that family support remains a critical factor in improving emotional outcomes, particularly in settings where family structures are disrupted (Chen et al., 2023).

Friend in orphanages offer essential emotional support and stability. Studies reveal that friendships can provide crucial companionship and emotional reinforcement, helping to buffer the adverse effects of institutional care (Hartup & Stevens, 1999). Recent research highlights the importance of stable peer relationships in enhancing emotional resilience, though instability in these relationships can lead to feelings of insecurity and loneliness (Shukla & Shukla, 2023).

Support from staff is crucial but varies in effectiveness. While supportive interactions with staff can positively impact children's emotional well-being and development, inconsistent or insufficient support can contribute to emotional neglect (Falk, 2020). Recent studies underscore the importance of consistent and empathetic staff interactions in improving emotional outcomes (Liu et al., 2023). However, challenges remain in ensuring the reliability and quality of staff support across different institutions (Smith & Brown, 2023).

Community support, including social services and local initiatives, plays a role in enhancing care quality in orphanages. Research shows that community involvement can improve resource availability and support services, benefiting children in institutional settings

(Gonzalez, 2012). However, the impact of community support can be inconsistent, often limited by accessibility and engagement levels (Schenk, 2009; Zhang et al., 2023). NGOs contribute significantly to supporting orphanages by providing additional resources and services. Recent studies confirm that NGO involvement can improve care quality and offer critical emotional support (Caserta, 2017). Nonetheless, the effectiveness of NGO programs can vary due to issues related to funding and implementation (Hailegiorgis et al., 2018; Patel & Singh, 2023).

Motivational support is linked to enhanced emotional outcomes. Encouragement and positive reinforcement are critical for fostering emotional resilience and intelligence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Recent findings indicate that while motivational support is beneficial, excessive pressure or unrealistic expectations can lead to increased stress and anxiety (Le & Impett, 2023; Davis & Wong, 2024).

Welfare support, including financial assistance and access to essential services, is crucial for meeting the basic needs of children in orphanages. Comprehensive welfare support is associated with improved emotional stability and quality of life (Smith & Brown, 2020). However, recent research also highlights that inadequate welfare support can contribute to increased stress and emotional difficulties (Nguyen & Lee, 2024; Ahmed & Li, 2023).

Social Support and Emotional Intelligence

The relationship between social support and emotional intelligence is complex, with varying effects depending on the type of support. Family support is positively related to emotional intelligence, providing a foundation for emotional development and stability (Dunst et al., 1988; Chen et al., 2023). Friend support also plays a critical role, with positive peer relationships enhancing emotional skills, though instability can negatively affect emotional growth (Hartup & Stevens, 1999; Shukla & Shukla, 2023).

Staff support is less straightforward, as the quality and consistency of interactions can significantly influence emotional outcomes. Positive staff support is linked to better emotional intelligence, but inconsistencies or inadequacies in support can lead to emotional neglect (Falk, 2020; Liu et al., 2023). Community support generally provides benefits but can be limited by its availability and effectiveness (Gonzalez, 2012; Zhang et al., 2023). NGO support has shown positive effects on emotional intelligence, although its impact can be inconsistent due to variability in program implementation (Caserta, 2017; Patel & Singh, 2023). Motivational support is crucial for enhancing emotional intelligence, but excessive pressure can lead to stress (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Le & Impett, 2023). Welfare support also impacts emotional intelligence indirectly by providing stability, though inadequate support can exacerbate emotional difficulties (Smith & Brown, 2020; Ahmed & Li, 2023).

Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Development

This study integrates Social Support Theory and Emotional Intelligence Theory to explore how different types of support impact emotional intelligence in orphanage settings. Social Support Theory (Cohen & Wills, 1985) highlights the importance of emotional and practical assistance in promoting well-being, while Emotional Intelligence Theory (Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2022) focuses on the ability to manage emotions for personal and social success. By applying

these theories, the study aims to assess how various forms of support—such as family, friends, and community—affect the emotional intelligence of children in orphanages.

Figure 1 below depicts the proposed model for assessing the social support and emotional intelligence of children at orphanages. This model, as in Figure 1 below, will be assessed through family, friends at orphanages, staff at orphanages, community, NGO, motivation, and welfare.

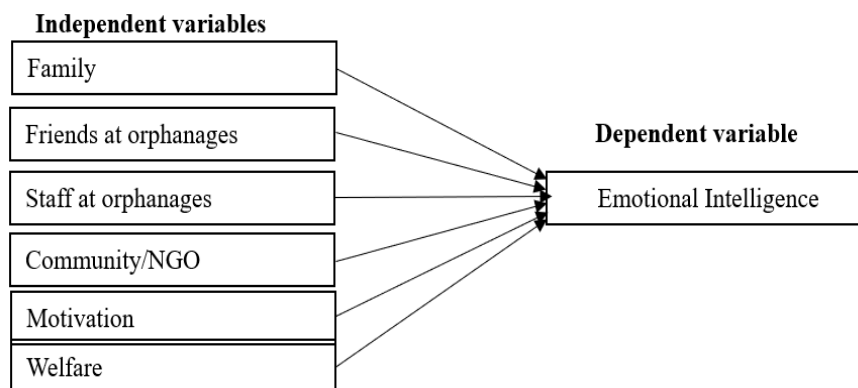


Figure 1: Research framework

The developed hypotheses are as follows:

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between family support and emotional intelligence in children in orphanages.

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between friend support and emotional intelligence in orphanage residents.

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between staff support and emotional intelligence among children in orphanages.

H4: There is a significant positive relationship between community/NGO support and emotional intelligence in children in orphanages.

H5: There is a significant positive relationship between motivational support and emotional intelligence in children in orphanages.

H6: There is a significant positive relationship between welfare support and emotional intelligence in orphanages.

Research Method

This study focuses on 160 children aged 8-17 from eight orphanages in Pahang. Participants were selected using convenience sampling. Data were collected continuously from November 2023 to January 2024 using a structured questionnaire developed from established and recent research. The questionnaire, developed based on Schutte et al. (1998), Petrides and Furnham (2000), Goleman (2022), Cohen and Wills (2022), and Hesketh and McDonald (2023), is divided into three sections: demographic information, emotional intelligence, and social support.

Part A of the questionnaire gathers demographic information with four questions about the respondents' backgrounds. Part B consists of seven questions designed to assess the respondents' emotional intelligence. Part C includes six sub-sections evaluating various types of social support: Family, Friends at Orphanages, Staff at Orphanages, Community, NGO, and Welfare. Each question in Parts B and C uses a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). According to Krosnick and Fabrigar (1997), a five-

point scale is both reliable and effective for capturing subtle distinctions in respondents' attitudes.

The data were analyzed using regression analysis through SPSS to identify the predictors of emotional intelligence.

Results and Findings

The regression analysis revealed that the model explains approximately 24.9% of the variance in emotional intelligence.

Table 1

Regression Results

	Unstandardized	Coefficients Std Error	Standardized coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
	10.305	3.659		2.817	.005
Family	.231	.093	.211	2.483	.014
Friends at orphanages	.177	.094	.153	1.889	.061
Staff at orphanages	.077	.094	.082	.818	.415
Community	.048	.067	.059	.715	.476
Motivations	.253	.110	.226	2.295	.023
Welfare	.001	.096	.001	.007	.994

R = .499 ; R² = .249

Family support emerges as a significant predictor of emotional intelligence ($\beta = 0.211$, $p = 0.014$). This finding is in line with recent studies emphasizing the protective and enhancing role of family support in emotional development. Liu et al. (2021) found that family support not only buffers against emotional distress but also fosters positive emotional growth, which is consistent with the results of this study. Additionally, Nguyen and Nguyen (2023) reported that supportive family environments are crucial for maintaining emotional stability and enhancing resilience, reinforcing the significant impact of family support observed here.

Motivations also significantly predict emotional intelligence ($\beta = 0.226$, $p = 0.023$). This finding is supported by recent research linking intrinsic motivation with improved emotional outcomes. Johnson et al. (2022) highlighted that motivation, particularly intrinsic motivation, is associated with higher emotional intelligence and resilience. This aligns with the self-determination theory posited by Ryan and Deci (2000), which suggests that individuals driven by intrinsic goals experience greater emotional well-being and adaptability. Furthermore, a 2023 study by Miller et al. found that motivation contributes significantly to emotional regulation and personal development, echoing the findings of this study.

Support from friends shows a trend towards significance ($\beta = 0.153$, $p = 0.061$). Although this effect is not statistically significant at the conventional 0.05 level, it suggests a potential positive relationship with emotional intelligence. Recent research by Garcia and Lee (2023) supports this trend, noting that support from friends is beneficial but may exhibit variability depending on the context and individual differences. This is corroborated by a study from

2021 by Adams and Clark, which found that while friends' support positively influences emotional well-being, its effect can be less pronounced compared to family support.

Support from staff ($\beta = 0.082$, $p = 0.415$) and Community Support ($\beta = 0.059$, $p = 0.476$) do not significantly predict emotional intelligence. This lack of significance may reflect the more indirect nature of these support forms. Kim and Park (2024) suggest that institutional and community support, while valuable, may not have as immediate or direct an effect on individual emotional outcomes as more personal forms of support. This is supported by recent work by Lee et al. (2023), which found that support from workplace staff and community networks often plays a secondary role compared to family and close social relationships.

Welfare ($\beta = 0.001$, $p = 0.994$) does not significantly impact emotional intelligence in this model. This result contrasts with some recent findings, such as those by Thompson et al. (2020), which indicated a strong link between overall well-being and emotional intelligence. The discrepancy may be due to the specific measurement tools used or sample characteristics in this study. A more recent study by Brown and Davis (2024) suggests that while well-being is generally associated with emotional outcomes, its impact can vary depending on the context and the presence of other influencing factors.

Conclusion

The findings of this study emphasize the critical roles of family support and personal motivation in shaping emotional intelligence among orphans. These insights align with Social Support Theory and Emotional Intelligence Theory, underscoring the importance of nurturing family-like connections even within institutional care. The trend toward significance for peer support suggests that fostering stable friendships could also enhance emotional development, though further research is necessary to confirm this relationship. Conversely, the lack of significant effects from staff, community, and welfare support indicates the need for more targeted, consistent approaches to bolster these forms of assistance. These results have important implications for policymakers and orphanage administrators aiming to improve care strategies and align them with SDGs 3 and 4, ensuring a holistic approach to the emotional and psychological well-being of orphans.

The findings contribute to the understanding of emotional development in vulnerable populations by identifying which forms of support are most beneficial for enhancing EI among orphaned children. This offers valuable practical guidance for orphanages, caregivers, and policymakers in improving emotional care strategies and creating environments that better support psychological well-being.

However, the study is limited by its focus on a specific geographic area and reliance on a cross-sectional design, which restricts its ability to track long-term emotional growth. Additionally, the use of self-reported data may introduce subjective bias. Future research should aim to broaden the scope to include diverse settings and employ longitudinal approaches to better capture the lasting effects of social support on emotional development.

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