

Research Article

Fatherlessness in the Social Life of Street Children on Krakatau Ujung Street, Medan Deli District

Juliana Sinaga^{1*}, Rosramadhana²

¹⁻² Anthropology Education Study Program, Faculty of Social Sciences, Universitas Negeri Medan, Indonesia

* Corresponding Author: julianasinaga718@gmail.com

Abstract. The absence of a father or fatherlessness in a family is a serious problem that affects children's social, psychological, and educational development. This condition becomes even more complex when experienced by street children who live in limited economic conditions and lack family support. The purpose of this study is to reveal the social life of street children on Jalan Krakatau Ujung, Medan Deli District, find the factors that cause fatherlessness, and study the consequences. This study is a qualitative study conducted through a descriptive approach. Data were collected through documentation and in-depth interviews with street children, parents, and community leaders. The results of the study show that the factors causing fatherlessness include divorce, abandonment, and the death of the father. Fathers may also migrate or engage in deviant behavior, such as drug abuse. Children without parents have visible impacts in the form of psychological vulnerability, such as loneliness, lack of self-control, and lack of self-confidence; social impacts, such as difficulty socializing, vulnerability to bullying and exploitation; and educational impacts, such as lack of desire to learn and limited access to education. The lives of street children at the traffic light intersection on Jalan Krakatau Ujung show weak family functioning, especially the role of the father, which encourages children to earn their own living from an early age.

Keywords: Bullying; Children; Fatherlessness; Social Impacts; Street Children

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1. Introduction

The family is the smallest social unit in society, and they are responsible for the formation of personality, moral values, and the path of child development. Fathers and mothers have a great responsibility in providing affection, attention, and guidance for children to grow into healthy individuals physically, mentally, and socially. In the family structure, fathers have a strategic function as protectors, economic supports, and moral guides. However, not all children get the full role of a father in their lives. The phenomenon of fatherlessness is now an increasingly complex social issue, especially when experienced by children who live on the streets with limited economic conditions.

The phenomenon of fatherlessness can occur due to various factors such as the death of a father, divorce, neglect of responsibilities, or parental migration, which results in a severance of the emotional bond between father and child. This condition has serious impacts on a child's psychological, social, and educational development. Research by Fajarrini and Umam (2023) explains that fatherlessness can result in impaired self-control, low self-confidence, and weak social interaction skills. Furthermore, Aulia et al. (2024) suggest that the phenomenon of fatherlessness contributes to children's failure to achieve success in life due to the loss of guidance from a father figure as a role model and reinforcer of values. This impact is even more severe when it occurs to street children who not only lose a father figure but also have to struggle to make ends meet in a harsh and risky public space.

Several previous studies have discussed fatherlessness and street children separately. Hadi, Hastuti, and Marthalena (2024) highlighted the influence of fatherlessness on girls' social and emotional intelligence, while Rempe et al. (2023) reviewed poverty and family breakdown as key drivers of street children. However, few studies have examined the direct link between fatherlessness and the social lives of street children in a local context such as

Medan. This gap in research represents an important research gap to fill, given the increasing number of street children in urban areas, which demonstrates the weak role of the family, particularly the father.

This study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how fatherlessness affects the social lives of street children on Jalan Krakatau Ujung, Medan Deli District. In addition to identifying the factors causing fatherlessness, this study also aims to describe the dynamics of the social lives of street children who live without a father figure and analyze the psychological, social, and educational impacts they experience. The results of this study are expected to provide empirical and theoretical contributions to the development of family anthropology studies, as well as serve as a basis for government and community efforts to strengthen support systems for children experiencing fatherlessness.

2. Literature Review

The behavioural theory proposed by B.F. Skinner, known as "Operant Conditioning," is the basis for research on the phenomenon of fatherlessness in the social lives of street children. Research on the phenomenon of fatherlessness in the social lives of street children is based on the behavioral theory (Operant Conditioning) proposed by B.F. Skinner. This theory emphasizes that human behavior is formed through the relationship between stimulus and response that is influenced by reinforcement or punishment. Skinner (2014) explains that individual behavior is the result of environmental consequences; behavior that is reinforced tends to be repeated, while behavior that is punished tends to be abandoned. In the context of street children, this theory explains that deviant behavior, such as working on the street or busking, is the result of a social learning process in which children receive positive reinforcement in the form of money, attention, or acceptance from peer groups. The absence of a father figure causes weak behavioral control, because there is no authoritative source to provide guidance and reinforcement of positive behavior in the family environment.

As the primary social institution, the family plays a key role in shaping a child's character and moral values. Ki Hadjar Dewantara (in Amaliyah, 2021) described the family as the primary educational center, determining the direction of a child's development. Family harmony depends not only on the mother's presence but also on the father's active role as a protector and moral guide. Research by Nisa et al. (2022) shows that a father's presence significantly impacts a child's cognitive, emotional, social, and psychological well-being. Lamb et al. (2017) emphasized that paternal involvement encompasses three dimensions: direct interaction, accessibility, and responsibility for children. The absence of any of these elements has the potential to weaken family function and influence children's behavior in the social environment.

Fatherlessness is a condition where a child grows up without the physical or emotional presence of a father (Aulia et al., 2024). This absence can be caused by death, divorce, employment, or neglect. Its impacts include low self-confidence, weak emotional control, and decreased motivation to learn (Salsabila et al., 2020). Aini (2019) also emphasized that minimal paternal involvement is closely related to low independence and a child's ability to manage emotions. Reduced frequency of interaction with the father increases the risk of aggressive behavior, withdrawal, and difficulty socializing (Djawa & Ambarini, 2019). Thus, fatherlessness not only results in the loss of a father figure but also disrupts a child's psychological and social balance.

The phenomenon of fatherlessness becomes more complex when experienced by street children, who live outside the family system and formal education. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Social Affairs (2001), children aged 5–18 who spend most of their time on the streets for work or survival are known as street children. Poverty, domestic violence, divorce, and family disharmony are the main causes of the emergence of street children. Suyanto (2019) describes street children as a marginalized group, alienated from family affection, and living in a harsh environment. This condition exacerbates the impact of fatherlessness because children not only lose their father's guidance, but also do not have an environment that supports the formation of positive character.

Previous studies provide an empirical basis for this research. Hadi et al. (2024) found that fatherless girls exhibit lower emotional intelligence and difficulty controlling social behaviour. Yuliana, Khumas, and Ansar (2023) confirmed that adolescents who do not live

with their fathers have moderate to low levels of self-control, especially in regulating emotions and social behaviour. Meanwhile, research by Nurjanah et al. (2023) shows that young children without father figures experience difficulties in developing independence and emotional stability. In the context of street children, Rempe et al. (2023) revealed that poverty and family conflict are the dominant factors driving children to the streets, followed by low access to education and parental supervision.

From these various theories and research findings, it can be concluded that fatherlessness is not simply a matter of losing a family figure, but also involves the loss of a social and moral control system that shapes a child's behavior. When this happens to street children, the impact is multiplied because the children must adapt to a harsh social environment without the emotional and economic support of their families. Based on Skinner's behavioral theory framework, the behavior of street children experiencing fatherlessness is the result of interactions with an environment that provides negative reinforcement, making it difficult to develop adaptive behavior. Therefore, this research is based on the view that restoring the father's role and establishing a supportive social environment are key to improving the social lives of street children.

3. Research Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design, which aims to describe and understand social phenomena in depth without manipulating the research variables. This approach was chosen because it is in accordance with the research objective, namely to reveal the reality of the social life of street children who experience the absence of a father (fatherless) on Jalan Krakatau Ujung, Medan Deli District. The researcher acts as the main instrument in collecting and interpreting data, as stated by Creswell (2016), that qualitative research emphasizes understanding phenomena from the perspective of research subjects in their natural environment.

The population in this study were all street children who were active in the traffic light intersection area of Jalan Krakatau Ujung, Medan Deli District, Medan City. The informant determination technique was carried out using purposive sampling, namely the deliberate selection of informants based on certain criteria relevant to the focus of the study. The main informants consisted of street children aged 8–14 years who experienced fatherlessness due to divorce, death, or neglect of their father. Additional informants included parents or close family members (such as grandparents), as well as community leaders around the research location. The selection of these informants aimed to obtain in-depth and contextual data.

Data collection techniques were conducted through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to directly understand the social behavior of street children in their environment. Unstructured interviews were used to explore the experiences and views of informants regarding the role of fathers and their lives on the streets. Documentation was used to supplement the data in the form of field notes, photographs, and archives relevant to the research. The main instrument in this study was the researcher herself, supported by interview guidelines and observation notes that had been tested for feasibility through content validation by the supervising lecturer. The results of the validity test showed that the instrument was suitable for use, while its reliability was maintained through data triangulation from various sources.

Data analysis in this study was carried out interactively using the Miles and Huberman model, which involves three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. In the data reduction stage, important information related to the causal factors and impacts of fatherlessness was filtered and grouped. The data presentation stage involved creating narrative descriptions to systematically portray the social reality. Drawing conclusions was done through a repetitive process of interpreting the emerging patterns and themes throughout the research. To ensure the credibility of the data, triangulation of sources and methods was employed, while the validity of the results was reinforced through member checking with informants, ensuring the data's meaning aligned with the reality observed in the field.

4. Results and Discussion

Social Life of Street Children

Life in a Family Environment

The research results show that most street children in the study area come from broken families, where their fathers have died, divorced, or left home without responsibility. The absence of a father results in the caregiving role shifting to grandparents.

Table 1. Primary Data

No.	Pseudonym	Age	Father's Condition	Current Caregiver	Activities on the road	Educational status
1.	Fris	8 years old	Father is traveling	Grandma	Busking	Elementary School Grade 2
2.	July	10 years	Father died	Grandma	Busking	4th Grade Elementary School
3.	Son	13 years old	Father is in prison	Mother	Busking	Junior High School
4.	Risk	13 years old	Father is away from home	Grandpa & Grandma	Busking	Junior High School
5.	Shakira	10 years	Father works out of town	Grandma	Wiping the car windows	Elementary School
6-8	Other	9-14 years	Father divorced or died	Grandma or Grandpa	Busking	Elementary-Middle School

Source: Primary data from interviews, 2025.

This phenomenon demonstrates that the loss of a father figure weakens the family's role in parenting and social control. Children tend to grow up without direction, and the parenting role emphasizes meeting basic needs rather than character development.

These results support Nisa et al.'s (2022) view that father absence can reduce a child's psychological well-being and disrupt family stability. Theoretically, according to Skinner (2014), this condition indicates a lack of positive reinforcement from authoritative figures, making children's behaviour more susceptible to external influences such as peer pressure and economic pressures.

Religious Life and Social Values

Most street children admit to having limited religious understanding. Despite living in religious communities, they rarely participate in religious activities due to their work on the streets. According to one community leader, many children have lost their moral compass because their families are no longer the place where they learn spiritual values.

This is in line with research by Fitriyah & Rahman (2020) This indicates that the low level of religious education among street children results in a lack of self-control and low self-confidence. In the context of Skinner's theory, this situation illustrates that religious values, which should reinforce good behavior, are not reinforced by the family or social environment.

Factors Causing Fatherlessness

This analysis reveals that fatherlessness among street children is caused by several factors. First, the death of the father due to illness or accident can lead to a lack of paternal presence. Second, parental divorce often results in conflict and subsequent neglect of the child. Third, fathers who migrate for work outside the city, without maintaining ongoing communication, create a sense of absence for their children. Finally, deviant behaviour by the father, such as drug abuse or involvement in crime, further destabilizes the family. These factors exacerbate the already fragile economic conditions of the family, compelling children to contribute to the household income from an early age. As a result, these children lose an authoritative figure and feel directionless in life. This finding is consistent with Fajarrini & Umam (2023), who observed that children in fatherless families tend to experience a loss of self-control and purpose in life.

The Impact of Fatherlessness on the Social Lives of Street Children

Psychological Impact

The loss of a father figure has a significant impact on a child's emotional development. Interviews revealed that most children felt lonely, lacked self-confidence, and often exhibited aggressive behavior when interacting with peers. One child reported frequently becoming angry or yelling when teased, indicating poor emotional control.

This finding reinforces the research findings of Hadi et al. (2024) which showed that fatherlessness reduces children's emotional intelligence and social skills, and is in line with Rahayu & Saroinsong (2023) who confirmed the relationship between father absence and increased levels of anxiety in children.

Social Impact

Street children who have lost their fathers tend to struggle to build positive social relationships. They are accustomed to living in solidarity with small groups of fellow buskers and develop a tough attitude as a form of self-defense. Children often use foul language and exhibit undisciplined behavior. According to Operant Conditioning theory, this behavior is an adaptation to an environment that provides negative reinforcement where tough behavior is considered effective for survival.

Impact of Education

Fatherless children to focus on their studies. Some still attend school, but frequently miss school due to work. Interview data indicates that learning motivation declines due to economic pressures and a lack of emotional support. This phenomenon supports Aini's (2019) research that found that fathers contribute to children's learning motivation and academic responsibility.

5. Conclusion

The loss of a father figure not only removes a protective figure and moral guide but also weakens the family's economic function and social control. Children who experience fatherlessness tend to develop adaptive behaviors for survival, often in negative forms due to an environment that reinforces non-constructive behaviors. Socially, they experience difficulty establishing healthy relationships; psychologically, they are vulnerable to feelings of loneliness, low self-esteem, and emotional instability; and educationally, their motivation to learn decreases due to economic pressures and minimal emotional support from their families.

These findings emphasize that the phenomenon of fatherlessness cannot be viewed solely as an internal family issue, but rather as a social problem requiring structural intervention. The government and social institutions are expected to strengthen single-family empowerment programs, mentoring street children, and psychosocial counseling oriented towards restoring family roles and strengthening children's moral values. Educational institutions also need to develop a more empathetic and responsive learning approach to the conditions of fatherless children. This research was conducted with a limited area of coverage and number of informants, so the results cannot be broadly generalized. Therefore, further research is recommended to expand the study area and develop a comparative approach across regions to obtain a more in-depth picture of the dynamics of fatherlessness in various social contexts. Further research could also focus on more applicable intervention strategies to strengthen the social resilience of children growing up without a father figure.

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