

Community-Based Services for Child Survivors of Sexual Violence

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Cite this paper as: Muh. As'ad, Sudirman Nasir, Suriah, Shanti Riskiyani, Stang, Balqis, Anwar Mallongi, (2025) Community-Based Services for Child Survivors of Sexual Violence. *Journal of Neonatal Surgery*, 14 (32s), 1625-1631.

ABSTRACT

Background: Sexual violence against children is a complicated social problem that has psychological and social consequences for victims. A community-based approach to safeguarding and supporting children who have experienced sexual assault is the provision of refuge.

Objective: The purpose of this study is to examine how shelters in Makassar City handle cases of sexual abuse against children, taking into account the services' efficacy, difficulties encountered, and effects on survivors and the community.

Method: This research employs a case study methodology in conjunction with a qualitative approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document reviews. Nine individuals served as research informants, including survivors of childhood, members of the Shelter, survivor families, and representatives of associated organizations.

Results: Shelters play a major role in assisting, preventing, and educating children about sexual violence. Shelters not only offer protection but also play a crucial role in facilitating legal processes, supporting psychosocial recovery, and providing education on positive parenting within the community. Nonetheless, difficulties in inter-agency coordination and the lack of long-term monitoring continue to pose significant barriers to the effectiveness of services.

Conclusion: Shelters play a crucial role in tackling sexual violence against children by employing a community-based strategy. Improved inter-agency coordination and long-term monitoring of survivors are needed to ensure sustainable recovery.

Key-words: Shelter, child sexual violence, child protection, health services, psychosocial recovery

1. INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence against children is a complex social problem that requires serious attention from various parties. Cases of sexual violence against children often have long-term impacts, both psychologically and socially, on victims and their families^[1,2]. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), sexual violence is an act of forcing someone to engage in sexual activity, regardless of the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim^[3]. Most perpetrators are people known to the victim. Children can be persuaded, bribed, or threatened to engage in sexual acts^[4]. The influence of perpetrators

through deception, threats, or violence makes this crime difficult to avoid^[5]. Although Indonesia has cultural wisdom, cases of sexual violence continue to increase every year. Makassar City, as one of the big cities in Indonesia, faces challenges in handling and preventing these cases. The Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) in 2021 recorded that out of 5,953 cases, there were 859 complaints of sexual crimes against children^[6]. Meanwhile, data from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection shows that sexual violence is the highest form of violence against children in Indonesia. In 2021, there were 8,699 cases of sexual violence against children, increasing to 9,588 cases in 2022, and 10,932 cases in 2023^[7]. This increase in cases indicates the need for more effective protection efforts, including community participation in preventing and assisting child survivors of sexual violence. Various efforts have been made by the government, together with the community, in handling cases of sexual violence against children. Shelters are present as a community-based solution that aims to provide protection, education, and assistance for survivors of sexual violence. According to the World Health Organization, a Shelter is a safe house or place of protection. This term can also refer to a community or environment that protects women and children^[8]. In Makassar City, Shelters are described as communities at the sub-district level. This Shelter functions as a social protection service that not only plays a role in providing legal assistance but also psychosocial recovery for child survivors of violence. In addition, Shelters also have an important role in educating the community about positive parenting patterns to prevent sexual violence against children in the surrounding environment. This study focuses on the role of Shelter in handling cases of sexual violence against children in Makassar City using qualitative methods and a case study approach. This study analyzes the effectiveness of the services provided, the challenges faced, and the impacts felt by survivors and the surrounding community. In addition, this study explores the functions of assistance, prevention, and education for the community and survivors, including how child survivors respond to post-service trauma and challenges in long-term monitoring. Through this study, it is hoped that better strategies can be found in handling cases of sexual violence against children, increasing the role of the community in creating a safe environment, and recommending strategies to improve coordination between related institutions

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

Study Design.

This study uses a qualitative method with a case study approach, namely, research that seeks to investigate an incident of sexual violence against children in a real-life context^[9,10]. The research informants numbered 9 people, consisting of Shelter members, child survivors of sexual violence, survivors' families, and representatives of related agencies such as the Regional Technical Implementation Unit for the Protection of Women and Children (UPTD PPA) of Makassar City. By using a case study approach, researchers can analyze the theme segments in detail and reveal the characteristics or uniqueness of cases of sexual violence against children.

Data Collection.

The research was conducted using in-depth interviews and observation techniques to collect information. The researcher also used document review.

Data Analysis.

The research data was analyzed by detecting emerging themes and sorting them according to the informant's concept to be used as a discussion topic. Furthermore, a detailed analysis was carried out on the theme segments to test and understand the relationship between parts and interpret them to find problems and answers related to the topic being studied.

Ethical approval.

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Public Health, Hasanuddin University, with the number (1699/UN4.14.1/TP.01.02/2024). Furthermore, the Investment and One-Stop Integrated Service Office (DPMPTSP) of South Sulawesi Province approved this study and all related procedures (number 20187/S.01/PTSP/2024). At the beginning of the interview, the researcher introduced himself to the informants so they would not be surprised or shocked by the researcher's arrival. Each participant in this study gave consent after receiving clear information, so that their participation remained anonymous.

RESULTS:

The following are the data and characteristics of the informants in this study [Table 1].

Table 1: Characteristics of research informants.

Informant Code	Age	Status	Information
AL	15 years	Survivors	Kidnapping and Rape Case
NA	32 years	Survivor's Mother	Incest Case

R	17 years	Survivors	Incest Case
AR	29 years	Counselors and Companions	Staff of UPTD PPA Makassar City
NL	49 years	Shelter Members	Batua Raya sub-district Shelter
A	47 years	Shelter Members	Borong sub-district shelter
JJ	57 years	Shelter Members	Maccini Parang sub-district Shelter
IA	43 years	Shelter Members	Manggala sub-district shelter
SJ	56 years	Shelter Members	Tamamaung sub-district shelter

Community-Based Services.

Shelters in Makassar City are described as communities at the sub-district level. Shelters have the main function of prevention and education by conducting outreach to the community. Other functions, such as case assistance, namely accompanying victims from reporting to court. According to SJ (Shelter Member), Shelters assist and conduct outreach or education to the community about positive parenting patterns.

"In the shelter, in addition to case assistance, we also provide education to parents. We provide education on positive parenting patterns to parents, so that violence against children can be minimized." (SJ - Shelter Member, September 30, 2024).

Shelters also have special units that directly involve children in handling cases of sexual violence against children in Makassar City. The results of the interview with JJ (Shelter Member) explained the role and function of the Children's Forum as a reporter and pioneer, as a medium for children to report and play an active role in various issues related to child welfare. *"...Children's Forum as a reporter and pioneer. Because there is a Children's Forum, cases can be revealed because children can comfortably tell their cases to other children. The Children's Forum reports cases to the shelter..." (JJ - Shelter Member, October 1, 2024).*

If the shelter or UPTD PPA Makassar City handles a case of sexual violence against children that is deemed to require further counseling, then the final service will be referred to PUSPAGA (Family Learning Service Center). The results of an interview with AR (Counselor/Companion of UPTD PPA Makassar City) explained that the final referral service for children who still need counseling is recommended to PUSPAGA.

The shelter collaborates with various parties such as DP3A, UPTD PPA, Legal Aid Institute (LBH), and Witness and Victim Protection Agency (LPSK). However, several obstacles were still found in coordination between institutions, especially in the aspect of long-term monitoring of the condition of survivors after handling the case. According to A (Shelter Member), UPTD PPA Makassar City must continue to monitor cases that have been handled to help survivors recover from trauma due to sexual violence.

"We expect good cooperation and coordination between Shelter and UPTD. Do not make unilateral decisions without communication. ... If this case continues, UPTD must monitor the condition of the child survivors, because what is worrying is the impact on the psychological condition of the survivors." (A - Shelter Member, October 2, 2024).

Post-Service Behavior of Child Survivors.

The behavior of child survivors of violence is different from that of children in general. This is due to the traumatic experiences they have experienced. The behavior of seeking information, guidance, or support was found based on the results of an interview with NA (Mother of Survivors), who said that at the beginning of the incident, her child told her about the experience of sexual violence she had experienced.

The behavior of survivors tries to take action to solve the problem directly, such as making an action plan and following up on it. According to NA (Mother of Survivors), the parenting pattern used is still the same, not making an action plan for her child.

The behavior of survivors trying to engage in substitution activities and creating new sources of satisfaction was found from the statement of AL (Child of Survivors), *"If I am still bothered by something or an incident in the past, I look for something to do, like watching something." (AL - Survivor, August 27, 2024)*

The behavior of survivors trying to relieve tension by expressing negative feelings, by crying to express their feelings. This behavior was found in R (Child of Survivor), he admitted that he still thought about the violence he had experienced, and expressed it by surrendering and crying.

Table 2: Behavior of child survivors of post-service sexual violence.

Indicator	Survivor behavior
Looking for information, guidance, or support.	- All cases were revealed not on the initiative of survivors, but from other parties or accidentally. Survivors remain closed about the sexual violence cases they experienced.
Take action to address the issue directly.	- Survivors do not yet have a plan of action to address the problem due to cognitive, skill, and motor limitations.
Engage in substitution activities and create new sources of satisfaction.	- Shows that distractions, such as playing and watching, can help children forget their distractions and overcome uncomfortable feelings.
Expressing negative feelings.	- Crying is an independent way to cope with emotions in the face of intense feelings. The release of these emotions helps the survivor reduce tension.

3. DISCUSSION

Community-Based Services.

This shelter has been operating in 91 sub-districts in Makassar City and is at the forefront of handling cases of sexual violence against children. The services provided include Assistance in reporting to the police, Referral to the Regional Technical Service Unit for the Protection of Women and Children (UPTD PPA), Education for victims and families, and Temporary security in safe houses. The shelter plays a role in prevention and education by holding socialization at the Integrated Health Service Post, social gatherings, religious studies, RT/RW, and parenting programs for parents. The main focus of this shelter is to increase public awareness of children's rights, the impact of sexual violence, and the importance of positive parenting. Similar findings state that the Makassar City Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Service conducted socialization with the support of the Shelter^[11]. Other findings show that the shelter approach is effective in preventing and assisting survivors^[12]. Other studies also emphasize the need for socialization and preventive interventions by various parties, including social workers^[13]. In addition to the Shelter, Makassar City has community services such as the Children's Forum. This forum acts as a reporter and pioneer of child welfare, providing a space for them to share their stories comfortably. If they experience problems, they can report to the shelter or PATBM (Community-Based Integrated Child Protection). Similar research explains that PATBM at the sub-district level functions to prevent and respond quickly to violence against children^[14].

The Children's Forum plays an active role in the Shelter, helping children interact more freely without the presence of parents who can make them less open. This forum also supports survivors of sexual violence to re-socialize, feel happier, and overcome feelings of inferiority. Similar findings state that the Children's Forum is a place for learning, health services, and counseling for children^[15]. Other findings confirm the role of the Children's Forum in recognizing, preventing, and protecting children from sexual violence in their environment^[16]. The government has also formed the National Children's Forum (FAN) as a place for communication between children (Stefani et al., 2024)^[17]. According to Save the Children, involving children in decision-making provides long-term benefits and increases participation in child protection policies and programs^[18].

The final referral is usually given to PUSPAGA (Family Learning Center), Makassar City, which functions as a counseling center for children and families. With the help of professional psychologists, PUSPAGA supports children's mental recovery and helps parents overcome emotional burdens and provide positive support. Similar findings highlight PUSPAGA's role in preventing violence against children through education on positive parenting and children's rights^[19]. Another study also explained that family strengthening focuses on improving parents' ability to raise children^[20].

Children who need counseling, especially related to the cases they experience, will be referred to PUSPAGA. Counseling is carried out in stages, with the number of sessions adjusted to the child's condition. This service helps children's psychological recovery and supports their growth and development. In addition, PUSPAGA also provides counseling for families, especially affected parents, to overcome emotional burdens and avoid negative stigmas against children (for example, blaming children with the view of "bringing bad luck"). The goal is to restore the family's emotional condition so that they can provide positive support. Similar findings state that PUSPAGA also provides parenting classes and counseling services to maintain the mental health of children and families and prevent child violence^[21].

Shelters in Makassar City are community services to handle, accompany, and prevent cases of violence. Despite its limitations, the shelter collaborates with various parties and is active in socialization and education. However, the shelter

faces obstacles such as a lack of post-referral monitoring from the UPTD PPA, limited authority as a companion, and minimal resources and budget. Similar findings state that facilities and funding are still obstacles. In addition, the culture of "*siri*" (shame) in Makassar City makes victims reluctant to report, but shelter education has begun to foster community courage^[12]. Another study also emphasized that Shelter plays an important role in reducing violence against women and children^[16]. Community-based strategies emphasize the importance of community empowerment so that child protection is more holistic, sustainable, and by local needs^[22].

Post-Service Behavior of Child Survivors. The behavior of survivors who tried to seek information, guidance, or support found that NA chose not to talk about the past so that her child would not remember the bad incident, as an effort to protect her child's feelings. This shows an effort to avoid painful things. Mother's support plays an important role in post-traumatic adjustment and can reduce negative psychological symptoms in children^[23].

Although survivors talk about their problems, they still keep the sexual violence cases they experience secret. All cases were revealed not because of the survivor's initiative, but by other parties or by accident. The results of observations show that survivors tend to be reluctant to seek guidance and support. Similar findings indicate that survivors can recover after receiving social support, although they initially withdraw and lose their enthusiasm^[24].

The results found on the behavior of survivors who try to take action to deal with problems directly indicate that child survivors do not yet have an action plan to deal with problems due to cognitive, skill, and motor limitations^[25]. Children need help from others to develop executive functions, such as planning, decision-making, and problem-solving^[26]. Similar findings confirm that responsive parental support can help children regulate emotions and reduce behavioral problems^[27].

NA is aware of the challenges faced by her child and begins to pay more attention to her. Although the parenting pattern remains the same, there are adjustments by increasing attention as a problem-solving strategy. Mothers play an active role in meeting children's needs and monitoring their development. In addition, it is important to train children to solve small problems gradually to develop problem-solving skills. Integration of emotion regulation and problem-solving skills has been shown to improve mental health^[28,29].

The results of research on the behavior of survivors who try to engage in substitution activities and create new sources of satisfaction indicate that diversion, such as playing, can help children forget things that bother them and overcome uncomfortable feelings. Playing is a practical and accessible way to maintain children's emotional balance. Similar findings show that play therapy is effective in increasing positive behavior in children who are survivors of sexual violence^[30,31]. Other studies also emphasize that playing helps children cope with trauma, express experiences indirectly, and build a sense of security and self-confidence^[32].

Watching is considered a fun activity that helps children divert attention from anxiety, fear, or sadness. This activity can relieve stress and support emotional recovery. Similar findings indicate that entertainment media can provide temporary diversion from traumatic thoughts^[33]. Entertainment, such as movies or TV shows, creates emotional relief and supports psychological recovery^[34]. Other findings explain positive diversion through media as an effective strategy in managing negative emotions. Watching and playing can be healthy distractions for children who have experienced trauma^[28]. Simple activities, such as watching, playing, or interacting with friends, can help solve problems, make new friends, and relieve stress^[35]. Other studies also show that the media is often used as a temporary escape, including by children who have experienced trauma, to reduce stress^[36].

Child survivors express negative feelings as a way to reduce stress and cope with the experience of sexual violence. Thinking about the trauma can trigger emotional responses such as crying, which serves as an emotional release. Similar findings suggest that emotional release helps reduce psychological burden and accelerate trauma recovery^[37]. Other findings suggest that child survivors often experience anxiety and somatic symptoms, such as crying, as a form of emotional release^[38]. Other studies have also confirmed that crying plays a role in emotional regulation, reducing stress, and serving as a catharsis for trauma survivors^[39]. Crying is a way for survivors to cope with emotions independently without involving others. This emotional release helps survivors reduce stress. Other studies have also explained that sexual trauma affects the brain and body, and emotional release through therapy, art, or other activities can support recovery^[40].

4. CONCLUSION

This study discusses the role of Shelters in dealing with sexual violence against children in Makassar City. This shelter functions as a community that provides education, assistance, and referrals to related institutions such as UPTD PPA and PUSPAGA. The Children's Forum also plays a role in child protection advocacy. The results of the study indicate that this community service is effective, but it still faces obstacles in long-term monitoring of survivors. Child survivors respond to trauma in various ways, such as avoiding discussion, seeking substitute activities (watching or playing), and releasing emotions through crying. This study emphasizes the need for better coordination between institutions, ongoing psychosocial support, and positive parenting education to prevent child sexual violence

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