The Impact of the Family Relationship on Children’s Spirituality in Tangerang, Indonesia

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Abstract
This study was conducted to see the impact of the family relationship on the children’s spirituality in Tangerang, Indonesia. Family relationships in this pandemic Covid-19 situation where every family spent more time at home became very important for the children’s spiritual growth. The purposes of this study were to see the children’s background characteristics, family relationships, and religious backgrounds. Descriptive research using a Cross-Sectional Survey Design was applied. A questionnaire with 13 questions was given to 114 children of three Sunday Schools in Tangerang, Indonesia. The results about the background characteristics were 53% of the children were female and between 8-11 years old (70%) as well as living with both parents (93%). Based on the family relationship, 96% of the children had complete parents, had close relationships with mothers (89%), loved both parents (100%), and loved home (96%). Based on the religious background, 94% of mothers attended church regularly and read Bible with the children (77%). Further, 93% of the children had a positive perception of life after death. The conclusion was the family relationship had an impact on the children’s spirituality. Children’s spiritual life grew well if parents lived with them, provided safe and secure homes, and read Bible with them regularly.

Keywords: family, spirituality, children.

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INTRODUCTION

Pandemic Covid-19 has lasted for about one year. The situation made lots of people around the world stay at home and do business from home. Not only adults, but children also had to experience online learning. Indonesia had no exception to it. It meant that parents and children had much time at home. Ironically, the opportunity of being together at home as a family did not bring the better condition to most of the children. Parents did not have patience in guiding the children at home, because they got more burden during this pandemic not only financially but also mentally, physically, and socially. As a result, they did not help the children to overcome their difficulties during online learning or their boredom during staying at home. The condition was contrary to what Dewi said (2020, p. 55) that “the implementation of online learning in elementary schools can be done quite well if there is a collaboration between teachers, students, and parents in learning at home.” Moreover, along with Yunitasari & Hanifah (2020, p. 232), it was stated that this Covid-19 online learning created boredom for elementary school students because they could not meet their teachers and friends directly face to face. The worse happened, parents did physical and psychological violence to their children by hitting or yelling when they were overwhelmed by the situation. It was reported by KPAI (Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia) – an organization to protect Indonesian children in KOMPASTV on November 21, 2020 (KOMPASTV, 2020).

From the paragraph above, we could see that parents had a significant role in their children. The children’s development depended on the parents’ treatment and attitude toward them. In other words, there was a relationship between parents and their children. Three experts talked about the relationship between parents and children in a family discussed in this paper. The first was Sangtam (2016, p. 17). Sangtam argued that the best child development happened when the children grew in a loving, healthy, and empowered family. The home should be a place for children to find security and belongingness (p. 18). Sangtam’s definition of parents was adult people who had a sincere relationship with their children. They did not only serve as a healthy role model for the child but also provided the emotional security and guidance necessary for the children to experience all the normal childhood developmental stages that lead to adulthood. Unfortunately, Sangtam found that many parents were so concerned about what their children should become. To pursue their dream, parents sacrificed the childhood of their children. The children were pushed to move according to the parents’ dictates. It made the children very dependent on the parents even in the future. Consequently, the children missed the opportunity to realize their potentials (p. 23).

The second experts were Chiang and Ellis (2019, p. 68). They stated that family was the primary learning environment for the children. Parents were children’s first social network. The critical influence of parental expectation eventually permeated into all aspects of an individual’s life. Further, the parent-child relationship could be the fundamental influence on building the children’s self-efficacy and self-esteem (p. 81). Chiang and Ellis suggested that through the discussion and reflections among family members in any specific area of childhood, family experiences consolation, confirmation, and constructive dialogue to improve their relationships and bless the next generation—the children (p. 83).

The third experts were Ceka and Murati (2016, pp. 63–64). According to them, to provide education support to children, parents could praise, vaunt, and reward the way the children performed any tasks given. This approach would raise the children’s sense of respecting other family members. This was a better mutual communication way between the parents and children. Furthermore, rewarding and praising the children was a real stimulator towards better mutual respect and closeness between all members as a compact family. This kind of education was one of the positive approaches to the educative and formational function with the children, who would become successful grown-up citizens.

Based on the three experts above, the conclusion taken was children would develop well when they are in a loving, healthy, and empowered family. It was a positive and conducive learning environment for them.
Children would learn how to socialize with others firstly with their closest people, i.e. their family. A healthy relationship between parents and children would support the increase of children’s self-efficacy and self-esteem. There were some ways parents could do to help the children grow appropriately based on their ages, such as praising, vaunting, and giving rewards. Moreover, positive family activities for example dialogues and reflections would make the children feel closer to the parents and learn how to respect others.

This paper also discussed the impact of the family relationship on children’s spirituality. What was called children’s spirituality? Moberg (2012, p. 18) said that spirituality was the human awareness of a relationship or connection that went beyond the sensory perceptions. Spirituality was usually considered as a subjective personal phenomenon that was recognized with such things as “faith commitments, behavior consistent with beliefs, personal transcendence, supra conscious sensitivity, and meaningfulness”. Regarding children, there was a definition of spirituality. It was the ways God is with children and the ways children being with God. This was an awareness expression of sacred life experiences. This awareness might affect actions, feelings, and thoughts. This meeting with transcendence possibly happened through imaginative or reflective experiences. Those experiences helped children to make meaning for their life (Nye, 2014, p. 5).

While according to Miller (2015, p. 7), spirituality was a sense of a close personal relationship to God. People also described it as a relationship with nature or the universe or whatever they thought to be a higher power. Spirituality was a vital source of daily guidance. The spiritual development through the early years prepared the adolescents to face any future difficulties that may appear. It also provided children with protective health, less risk of depression, substance abuse, aggression, and high-risk behaviors, including physical risk and sexual harassment (p. 3).

Phillips (2011, p. 10) who quoted David Hay’s research with Rebecca Nye indicated three themes that contributed to children’s spiritual life. The first was awareness-sensing. It was the ability to tune in and lose oneself in an experience. The second was value-sensing. It was related to conscience or moral sense. The last was mystery-sensing. It was connected to the intimations with the transcendence which raised the feeling of wonder and awe.

Coulter (2015, p. 160) contributed her idea about two qualities that characterized the spiritual lives of children. The first was children were hungry for God. This was a religious hunger that should be fed as soon as possible. The second was children had the potential to encounter God. Therefore, in accompanying children along their religious path, adults were invited into the child’s way with God. Adults need to respect the children’s own religious life and to recognize its lofty seriousness (p. 161). Adults were involved in introducing children to scripture and liturgy. It would help children to experience their own personal encounters with God. Children needed to be given direct access to age-appropriate means to actualize their encounter with God (p. 163).

To summarize, spirituality was an awareness of sacred life experiences. The experiences with God could be imaginative or reflective especially for children. These sacred experiences could affect children’s actions, feelings, and thoughts. Children whose spirituality developed well would have protective health and be spared from any depression or sexual abuse as well as high-risk behaviors. When the children connected with the transcendence, they could dive into their personal experience which gave them life meaning and awakened a sense of awe and wonder. Therefore, parents as adults who accompanied the children’s life journey required to recognize their children’s need of finding the personal life meaning by respecting their experiences and supporting by introducing them to scripture and liturgy.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework on The Impact of Family Relationship on Children’s Spirituality
The writer tried to put all the ideas into Figure 1 to show the impact of the family relationship on children's spirituality. When children lived in the middle of a loving, healthy, and empowered family, their spirituality would grow well. It happened because the parents attempted to understand their spiritual needs, respect their personal experiences with God, and support them by introducing Scripture to them. One indicator that children’s spirituality developed was when they knew there was life after death that was being with God in heaven. In other words, they understood they had life purpose or their life was purposeful (meaningful).

Based on the previous research above which mostly talked about parents’ accompanying their children’s life journey, this research would only focus on the relationship between parents and their children in Tangerang, Indonesia during Covid-19 pandemic where they stayed at home for more or less one year. This situation was a challenge to be researched further seeing the bad news around about the parents’ violence against children. It was expected that the result of the research would make the parents aware of their roles to be models for the students. Then, they could afford a safer and healthier family life, especially for the children during their online learning. Thus, the parents’ modeling at home and effort could facilitate the growth of their children’s spiritual life.

Therefore, generally, the problem that appeared was what is the impact of a family relationship on the children’s spirituality? Specifically, the problems were: (1) what is the children’s profile in terms of gender, age, and parents living with them?; (2) how could the family characteristics be assessed in terms of complete parents, relationship with father, relationship with mother, feeling toward father, feeling toward mother, and feeling toward home?; and 3) what is the children’s religious background in terms of the following, i.e. a) father’s church attendance, b) mother’s church attendance, c) Bible reading with parents, and d) children’s perception after death?.

The purposes of this study were to: (1) determine the children’s profile in terms of gender, age, and parents living with them; (2) assess the family characteristics in terms of complete parents, relationship with father, relationship with mother, feeling toward father, feeling toward mother, and feeling toward home; (3) identify the children’s religious background in terms of father’s church attendance, mother’s church attendance, parents’ Bible reading, and child’s perception on life after death.

There were some benefits of doing the research. The first was for the parents from the three Sunday schools. This study could give a picture of the family relationship and the children’s spirituality. This picture could help the parents evaluate the family relationship and make a better way to help the children grow their spirituality. The second was for the three Sunday schools. This picture could help the Sunday schools teachers to make a curriculum that would support the parents’ role as the prime educators to introduce God to the children through Sunday school programs and activities. The third was for other researchers and readers. This study could be preliminary research to study further about family relationships and children’s spirituality especially in the pandemic.

RESEARCH METHOD

This was survey research. It was to identify the important beliefs and attitudes of children and parents (Creswell, 2012, p. 377). Then, it would describe the family relationship and children's spirituality. More specifically, it was to see the impact of the family relationship on the children's spiritual growth. Therefore, a Cross-Sectional Survey Design was applied. The data was collected at one point in time to assess immediately and quickly.

The population was the Christian children between 6-11 years old who were the students of Sunday Schools of the three churches located in Tangerang, Indonesia. All of them shared common characteristics, such as cultural background, language, age, and religion. 114 children became the respondents of the research. The instrument was a questionnaire with 13 questions. The questions were taken from One Hope International - an organization committed to ministering to youth and children by presenting God's Word in the most
understandable format - survey questionnaire. The purpose of taking this One Hope International survey questionnaire because it was already tested and used by the organization. The question items were valid and reliable. Nevertheless, the questions were adjusted to the level of Indonesian children's understanding and context. Each question was given a picture to make the students understand the questions easily. For the younger children (6-8 years old), the Sunday School teachers provided some help to fill the questionnaire.

### Table 1. Questionnaire Items

| Section A | Background Characteristics |
|-----------|----------------------------|
| 1.        | What is your gender?       |
| 2.        | What is your age?          |
| 3.        | With whom do you live at home? |

| Section B | Family Relationships |
|-----------|----------------------|
| 1.        | Do you have complete parents? |
| 2.        | Do you love your father?    |
| 3.        | Do you love your mother?    |
| 4.        | How often do you talk with your father? |
| 5.        | How often do you talk with your mother? |
| 6.        | How do you feel about your home? |

| Section C | Religious Background |
|-----------|----------------------|
| 1.        | How often does your father attend church? |
| 2.        | How often does your mother attend church? |
| 3.        | How often do you read Bible with your parents? |
| 4.        | Where do you go when you die? |

Table 1 above was the 13 questions given to the children. The questions were classified into three sections, i.e. Background Characteristics, Family Relationships, and Religious Background. The questionnaire was in the form of closed questions or Multiple Choice. The purpose of giving closed questions was easier for the students to provide the answers. So, the children only chose the best answer for them according to their condition. All the children’s answers were put into tables and processed using a simple statistic. The results were shown in tables. Then, the data results were analysed and interpreted. At last, a conclusion was made to answer the questions. So, this was the research procedure: 1) identifying the research purposes, 2) identifying the priority, 3) planning the possibilities, 4) deciding the research design, 5) implementing the research design, 6) analyzing all the data, and 7) summarizing the result.

### ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

To answer the problem formulation about the children’s profile (background characteristics), family relationship, and religious background, a questionnaire with 13 questions was distributed among 114 Sunday School children in Tangerang, Indonesia. For background characteristics, the questionnaire results would be described in a table explaining the distribution percentage of children by gender, age, and living with parents. For family relationships, the questionnaire results would be described in a table explaining the distribution percentage of children by having complete parents, relationship with parents, and feeling toward parents and home. For religious background, the questionnaire results would be described in a table explaining the percentage distribution of children by parents’ church attendance, Bible reading with parents, and children’s perception of life after death.
The Background Characteristics

Below was a table explaining the distribution percentage of children by gender, age, and living with parents.

| Table 2. The Distribution Percentage of Background Characteristics |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Gender           | Age (years old)  | Living with Parents |
| Male             | 6-7              | 8-9              | 10-11            | With father | With mother | With parents | Not with parents |
| 47%              | 30%              | 35%              | 35%              | 0.9%         | 4.4%        | 93%          | 1.7%           |
| Female           | 53%              | 35%              | 35%              |              |             |              |                |
| Total: 100%      | Total: 100%      | Total: 100%      |                  |              |             |              |                |

Based on Table 2, the percentage of male and female children was almost the same. The percentage of male children was 47% and female children was 53%. The percentage of children from three different age categories was almost the same. The category of 6-7-year-old children was 30%, 8-9-year-old children were 35%, and 10-11-year-old children were 35%. The percentage of children who only lived with their fathers was 0.9%. The percentage of children who only lived with their mothers was 4.4%. The percentage of children who lived with their parents was 93%. The percentage of children who did not live with their parents was 1.7%.

Based on the background characteristics, it was concluded that the percentage of female children (53%) was higher than the male children (47%). While the percentage of 6-7-year-old children (30%) was less than the percentage of 8-9-year-old children and 10-11-year-old children which was 35% for each category. The percentage of the children who lived with both of their parents was 93%. 4.4% of children lived only with their parents. Nevertheless, there were 1.7% of children who did not live with their parents. In other words, the majority of the children were female (53%) between 8-11-year-old (70%) and lived with both parents (93%). Here, we could see that most children who were female between 8-11 years old lived with their parents. It meant that they grew up in the middle of the family and were nurtured by the parents.

The Family Relationship

Below was a table explaining the distribution percentage of children who had complete parents, relationship with both parents, and feeling toward both parents and home.

| Table 3. The Distribution Percentage of Family Relationship |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Having Complete Parents | Feeling | Relationship with Parents |
| Only have father | Only have mother | Have complete parents | Love father | Hate father | Love mother | Hate mother | Love home | Hate home | Always have chats with father | Rarely/never have chats with father | Always have chats with mother | Rarely/never have chats with mother |
| 1%                | 3%             | 96%             | 100%           | 0%             | 100%         | 0%          | 96%        | 4%           | 86%         | 14%        | 89%        | 11%        |
| Total: 100%       | Total: 100%    | Total: 100%     | Total: 100%    | Total: 100%    | Total: 100%   | Total: 100% | Total: 100% | Total: 100% |

Based on Table 3, the percentage of children who only had fathers was 1%. The percentage of children who only had mothers was 3%. The percentage of children who had both parents was 96%. The percentage of children who did not have both parents was 0%. The percentage of children who always or usually had chats with their fathers was 86%. The percentage of children who hardly ever or never had chats with their fathers was 14%. The percentage of children who always or usually had chats with their mothers was 89%. The percentage of children who hardly ever or never had chats with their mothers was 11%. The percentage of children who loved their fathers was 100%. The percentage of children who hated their fathers was 0%. The percentage of children who loved their mothers was 100%. The percentage of children who hated their
mothers was 0%. The percentage of children who loved their homes was 96%. The percentage of children who hated their homes was 4%.

Based on the family relationship, it was concluded that the majority of the children was having complete parents. It was about 96%. While the children who only had fathers was 1%. There were 3% of the children who only had mothers. The percentage of children who always had chats with their fathers was 86%. The rest which was 14% of the children rarely or never had chats with their fathers. The percentage of children who always had chats with their mothers was 89%. The rest which was 11% of the children rarely or never had chats with their mothers. 100% of children loved their fathers and mothers. Nevertheless, only 96% loved homes, the rest was about 4% of the children hated their homes. Almost all of the children (96%) had complete parents. Nonetheless, they had more chats with their mothers (89%) compared to their fathers (86%). It was assumed that the children’s relationship with their mothers was closer compared to their fathers. Their closeness to their mothers did not decrease their positive feeling toward both parents. All of the children loved both parents (100%), but only 96% loved their homes. It meant that there were other factors, not their parents, who made them felt unsafe and insecure living at home.

The Religious Background

For religious background, the questionnaire results would be described in a table explaining the percentage distribution of children by parents' church attendance, Bible reading with parents, and children’s perception on life after death.

| Parents’ Church Attendance | Bible reading with Parents | Perception of Life after Death |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Father                    | Mother                    | Will be in heaven | Do not know |
| Always/usually            | Always/usually            |                 |               |
| Hardly ever/never         | Hardly ever/never         |                 |               |
| 92%                       | 94%                       | 77%              | 93%           |
| 8%                        | 6%                        | 23%              | 7%            |
| Total: 100%               | Total: 100%               | Total: 100%      | Total: 100%   |

Based on Table 4, the percentage of children whose fathers always or usually attended church was 92%. The percentage of children whose fathers hardly ever or never attended church was 8%. The percentage of children who always or usually read the Bible with their parents was 77%. The percentage of children who hardly ever or never read the Bible with their parents was 23%. The percentage of children who thought they would be in heaven after death was 77%. The percentage of children who had no idea about after death was 23%.

Based on the religious background, it was concluded that the mothers attended church more regularly than the fathers. The percentage of the mothers who attended church more regularly (94%) was higher than the fathers (92%). However, the percentage decreased (77%) when the activity of reading the Bible with their parents were asked. The result was presumed that the regular parents’ church attendance did not guarantee that they would share God’s Word to their children at home by reading Bible together. Surprisingly, 93% of children had a positive perception of life after death. The children knew that their lives were meaningful and had a purpose. The percentage (93%) was much higher than the Bible reading with parents (77%). It was assumed that there were other people outside the families that contributed to the children’s perception of life after death. One of the possibilities was Sunday School teachers.

The overall conclusion was most of the children were female between 8-11 years old and lived with both parents. Even though they loved both parents, they had a closer relationship with their mothers. Relating to church attendance, the mothers attended church more regularly than the fathers. However, not all parents read the Bible with their children. Amazingly, almost all children had a positive perception of life after death. From the fact, we could see that both parents especially the father had to work harder on building a closer relationship with their children, including reading the Bible together.
relationship with the children. Moreover, the relationship between both parents and their children needed to build children's perception of life after death. Parents were required to learn how to guide the children in their spiritual journey to prepare them to be responsible and responsive Indonesian citizens as well as the earth citizens. This interpretation was in line with what was found out by Team (2018, p. 74) that parents' spirituality, family life, and church were agencies to help them thrive well.

The conclusion above supported the previous research results that mostly discussed parents' contribution to children's life development. However, this research would like to emphasize the activity could be done by parents at home with children during the Covid-19 pandemic in Tangerang, Indonesia context. It was Bible reading together. Besides making the relationship between parents and children stronger, it would help the children to understand about their lives and purpose. It was in line with what Deputy et al. (2016, p. 3) said the spiritual part of the human psyche endeavoured to recognize the meaning and purpose of life. Useful home activities would also decrease the parents’ pressure on their children during distance learning as mentioned by Aswat et al. (2021, p. 770). Bible reading was one of useful home activities. In other words, the parenting style was really influential to children’s emotions during the pandemic ((Syahrul & Nurhafizah, 2021, p. 694). Therefore, parents should be careful and wise in nurturing the children.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions of this study were as follows. Based on the background characteristics, it was found that most of the children were female between 8-11 years old and live with their parents. Based on the family relationship, it was found that most of the children had complete parents and love them, but they had closer relationships with their mothers. Based on the religious background, it was found that most of the mothers always/usually attended church and did Bible reading with their children. It built the children’s positive perception of life after death. In other words, the family relationships had an impact on children’s spirituality. Parents who lived with the children and could provide a secure and safe home for the children tended to have a close relationship with them. Additionally, if the parents attended church regularly, one of the home activities done with their children was reading Bible together. This activity would help the children to have a positive perception of life after death. Therefore, parents had a great role in a family relationship which impacted children's spirituality.

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