



## Protection of Children's Mental Development in Prostitution Environments: A Qualitative Study

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the impact of prostitution environments on children's mental development and evaluates the effectiveness of child protection programs in Indonesia. Studies show that children living in prostitution environments are vulnerable to psychological trauma, anxiety, depression, and social stigmatization. This study aims to analyze these impacts, assess the effectiveness of child protection policies, and formulate an intervention model based on psychological, social, and educational support. Through qualitative methods, the study involved participants from the village secretary and the head of the Pamandangan RT, who were selected purposively. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and policy document analysis. The results showed that children in prostitution environments experience complex trauma due to violence, stigmatization, and family instability. Protective factors such as school support, mentoring, and the role of community leaders can increase children's resilience. However, the implementation of child protection policies is hampered by weak coordination between institutions and limited resources. This study enriches the child development model with an ecological and resilience perspective and offers guidelines for community-based interventions. In terms of policy, it is recommended to strengthen the synergy between the government, KPAI, and LSM through integrated monitoring and specific budget allocation for child protection in prostitution environments.

**Keywords:** *Child Trauma In Prostitution Environment, Child Resilience, Qualitative Approach*

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## INTRODUCTION

Prostitution is a symptom of behavioral deviation where women sell themselves, engage in sexual acts as a livelihood. According to data from Bappenas (National Development Agency) in 2015, there are currently around 150,000 CSWs spread across various places in Indonesia (Kurniawan & Sarmini, 2022; Kusumawardhana, 2023; Maulidya et al., 2021; Sukmana, 2019). Actors of prostitution are considered deviant behavior and cause social diseases in society or are called social pathology. Social pathology is a symptom or phenomenon in which several elements are not in harmony with each other, so that it can endanger the life of a group that is not in accordance with the basic fundamental desires of its members due to a damaged social environment (Ashykin & Trilaksana, 2019; Awalli, 2024; Janna & Herianto, 2021; Kalsum & Harianto, 2016). The practice of prostitution is regulated

in the Criminal Code (KUHP) Chapter II, Article 296 for those who provide facilities for sexual intercourse, Article 297 for those who sell underage women and men to become prostitutes, and Article 298 for those who work as commercial sex workers (Ariani Kusumawati et al., 2024; Hermawan et al., 2024; Karo et al., 2018).

The life of prostitution in the midst of the community environment, allows children who live in localities to also be involved in child prostitution practices and the practice of prostituted children is a form of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSKA). Children in the CSKA phenomenon are basically unable to make decisions to choose prostitution as their profession. These children may be controlled by an intermediary who regulates or supervises the transaction (Adikaputri & Pasmadi, 2020; Eddyono et al., 2017). The reason for the Indonesian Government's efforts to establish the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) as a real form of child protection. KPAI is an independent institution tasked with overseeing the implementation of protection and fulfillment of children's rights which was established based on Law Number 35 of 2014 concerning Amendments to Law Number 23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection (Jannah et al., 2024; Sudriman, 2021).

Child protection is closely related to five pillars, namely parents, family, community, government, local government and the state. All five are related to each other as organizers of child protection. In its simplest form, child protection seeks to ensure that every child's rights are not harmed. Child protection complements other rights, ensuring that children will receive what they need so that they can survive, develop and grow. However, in reality, the condition of children in Indonesia is still very concerning, especially regarding the problem of child labor, street children, and children who are victims of sexual violence, sexual exploitation, and commercial sexual exploitation (Ahmad, 2014; Fitriani, 2016; Roza et al., 2019). Child protection efforts need to be implemented as early as possible, namely from the fetus in the womb until the child is eighteen years old. Starting from the concept of complete, comprehensive, child protection, the law places an obligation to provide protection to children based on the principles of the best interests of the child, the principle of the right to life, survival and development, as well as the principle of respect for the child's views or opinions (Arliman S, 2017; Taosen & Nurisman, 2022).

In addition to concerns about moral decline due to a bad prostitution environment, teenagers there are also vulnerable to social deviation or deviant behavior, such as drinking alcohol, gambling, and fighting. Teenagers' social interactions in Indonesia are very free and often ignore societal norms, some teenagers even do not continue their education to the next level (Aziz, 2018; Nurgiansah, 2020; Riana et al., 2017). The impact of this exposure not only creates a bad stigma in society but can also directly affect children's mental health. Children who are exposed to a prostitution environment are more susceptible to related diseases, such as infections or sexually transmitted diseases, which can have serious impacts on their growth, development, and reproductive health in the future (Amalia, 2018; Muntazza, 2023).

Efforts to provide legal protection for children who are victims of prostitution have been carried out by utilizing various existing legal provisions, although there are no specific laws and regulations that explicitly regulate this (Fikriyah, 2018). Therefore, regardless of whether child protection is good or bad, acceptable or not, we need to be aware of the

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important phenomena that are crucial in the implementation of child protection initiatives (Djawas & Fajrina, 2019; Farida & Naviati, 2013). In the community, prostitution is viewed negatively because it causes unrest, especially for those who live around prostitution locations. In reality, not only adults live around prostitution locations but also children (Ghofur, 2022; Qolby & Cahyono, 2022; Sari et al., 2023).

The stages of mental development have their own characteristics or traits that are displayed by different children. One of the characteristics that appear at the concrete operational stage is that at this stage the child has begun to understand the concept of eternity (Alhaddad, 2012; Munirah & Jazimi, 2020; Yuningsih et al., 2024). There are three main postulates in human mental development. (1) Intellectual development occurs through successive stages that always occur in the same order. (2) This stage is defined as a cluster of mental operations that indicate intellectual behavior. (3) Movement through these stages is complemented by balance (Adhiansyah et al., 2023; Farida & Naviati, 2013; Indanah & Yulisetyaningrum, 2019).

Mental development is a psychological change as a result of the process of maturation of psychic and physical functions in children, which is supported by environmental factors and learning processes in a certain time cycle towards maturity from an environment that greatly influences a child's life towards adulthood. Development marks the maturity of organs and systems, the acquisition of skills, the ability to be more ready to adapt to stress and the ability to bear maximum responsibility and gain freedom in expressing creativity (Kholilullah, Hamdan, 2020; Sukatin et al., 2020).

Mental development can be interpreted as a continuous change in an individual from birth to death changes experienced by individuals or organisms towards their level of maturity or maturity that takes place systematically, progressively, and continuously, both physically and psychologically. Mental emotional development is a basic development because the potential of the child's brain during this period will affect the child's psyche. Mental processes are information processing processes that encompass cognitive activities, intelligence, thinking, learning, problem solving and concept formation (Firdausi & Ulfa, 2022; Said & Jamaluddin, 2022). One of the factors that plays a role in the development of emotional mentality in children is parental parenting. Parents have a close relationship and a relatively long time in socializing with children, so that the ability of parents to provide stimulation or stimulus affects the child's emotional condition (Farida & Naviati, 2013; Munirah & Jazimi, 2020; Pinem et al., 2023). Children who grow up in prostitution environments face a high risk of mental development disorders, including psychological trauma, low self-esteem, and anxiety and depression disorders (Aditiyawarman, 1970; Azzahra et al., 2023; Haryanti et al., 2019; Septiawan, 2022).

The studies explain the protection of children in the life of the prostitution environment, the impact and laws that explain the protection of children if children who grow up in a prostitution environment can experience mental problems, such as difficulty trusting others or being too anxious. They too often see unstable situations or even violence around them and children who grow up in a prostitution environment often do not get enough emotional support from their parents, so they may grow up feeling insecure and afraid and Children who grow up in a prostitution environment face a high risk of mental

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development disorders, including psychological trauma, low self-esteem, and anxiety and depression disorders.

Although many studies have identified the negative impacts of prostitution environments on children's mental development, such as psychological trauma, low self-esteem, and anxiety and depression disorders, there is still a lack of understanding of the specific mechanisms by which factors such as social stigma, environmental instability, and lack of emotional support cumulatively affect children's mental development in the long term. In addition, existing research has not fully explored the effectiveness of community-based interventions or holistic child protection programs, including the role of alternative education and mental health services, in breaking the negative cycle. On the other hand, although the Child Protection Law and institutions such as the KPAI have been in place, the implementation of policies at the local level and collaboration between stakeholders (government, community, and civil society organizations) are still poorly documented empirically, so more in-depth research is needed to fill the gap between policies, practices, and real impacts on children in prostitution environments.

This research focuses on creating opportunities for children living in prostitution environments to achieve psychological, emotional, and social well-being despite being in challenging situations. Children in such environments are at high risk for mental disorders, including psychological trauma, anxiety, and depression. In addition, they also have to deal with social impacts such as stigma and marginalization from society. Recognizing the complexity of the situation, this research aims to: (1) ensure that children can build a strong developmental foundation, (2) help them overcome complex trauma, and (3) break the negative cycle that is often inherent in the environments in which they grow up. All of this is done through a holistic approach that integrates psychological, social, and educational support.

The main contribution of this study covers three important aspects, namely theoretical, practical, and policy. From the theoretical side, this study aims to enrich the model of child development in the context of high-risk environments, as well as develop the concept of resilience that is specifically relevant to child victims of sexual exploitation. In addition, this study will map the interaction between risk factors and protective factors that influence child development in marginal environments.

In terms of practical contribution, this study will produce an evidence-based integrated intervention model that can be applied directly in the field. This study also formulates operational guidelines for assisting children in prostitution areas and develops early detection instruments for mental development disorders in children. Thus, the results of this study are expected to be used by practitioners and assistants to improve the quality of the interventions provided.

Meanwhile, contributions in the policy field include the preparation of data-based recommendations to support policy improvements, especially the Child Protection Law. This study also aims to strengthen the synergy between the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI), social services, and civil society organizations in dealing with the problems of children in prostitution environments. In addition, this study encourages the

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birth of more inclusive education policies so that marginalized children are not further marginalized from the formal education system.

This study specifically evaluates the effectiveness of community-based interventions and multi-sector collaborations between the government, child protection agencies, and civil society organizations. The transformative approach carried out is not only focused on identifying problems, but also on empowering children through building positive self-identity, strengthening adaptive capacity, and creating sustainable support systems. It is hoped that the findings of this study can be a strong foundation for the preparation of effective recovery programs and encourage a paradigm shift in handling child victims of sexual exploitation.

Children who grow up in prostitution are at high risk for mental and emotional developmental disorders. Exposure to violence, exploitation, social stigma, and environmental instability are the main factors that worsen their psychological condition. International studies show that children of mothers involved in prostitution tend to experience minimal parental supervision and poorer mental health functioning than children in general.(Murnan et al., 2018). This condition is exacerbated by poverty, limited access to education, and often witnessing or being victims of violence in their surroundings.(Dalla et al., 2025).

The psychological impacts experienced by children in prostitution environments are very complex. They are at high risk of experiencing psychological trauma, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Research on child victims of human trafficking in Southeast Asia found that more than a third of them experienced physical or sexual violence, and many showed symptoms of depression, anxiety, and PTSD. These symptoms were also associated with self-harm and suicidal ideation, indicating how serious the mental impacts are.(Wilson & Widom, 2010)

In addition to psychological trauma, children living in prostitution environments also often experience social marginalization and discrimination. They are often ostracized, feel ashamed, and lose their self-confidence and self-esteem. This condition causes them to withdraw from society and makes it increasingly difficult to get the social support they need. The social stigma attached to prostitution environments also impacts access to education and health services, thus worsening their chances of escaping the cycle of poverty and exploitation.(Willis & Levy, 2002)

International organizations such as ECPAT highlight the importance of special protection for children exposed to prostitution and sexual exploitation. ECPAT and a network of other civil society organizations work to raise awareness, advocate, and provide comprehensive support services for child victims of exploitation. They emphasize the need for legal reform and changes in social attitudes so that exploited children are no longer viewed as perpetrators, but as victims in need of protection and rehabilitation.(Nalele, 2019).

Therefore, serious attention from various parties is needed to provide protection and create a safer environment for children around prostitution locations. Effective approaches include community-based interventions, provision of mental health services, alternative education, and advocacy for policies that support child protection. Collaboration between the government, civil society organizations, and international institutions is essential to break the chain of exploitation and provide a better future for children living in prostitution environments.

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Thus, this study has a significant impact on children's mental development, both in the short and long term. Children who grow up in this environment often face major challenges that can affect their emotional, social, and psychological aspects. Children who are in a prostitution environment are often faced with strong social stigma. They may be looked down upon by the surrounding community, which can lead to feelings of shame, low self-esteem, and social isolation.

This can hinder the development of their self-identity and make them feel worthless. Prostitution environments are often full of conflict, violence, or uncertain situations. Children who grow up in these conditions can experience emotional instability, such as anxiety, depression, or trauma. The uncertainty of their environment can also make children feel unsafe, which hinders the development of self-confidence. They may witness physical, verbal, or sexual abuse. Exposure to risky behaviors, such as drug use or alcohol abuse, is also higher. These experiences can normalize destructive behaviors for children, which risks affecting their behavior in the future. Many children in these environments do not have adequate access to formal education. The inability to get a good education can limit their future opportunities and reinforce the cycle of poverty. In addition, education is also important for building self-esteem and social skills.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

Qualitative research is an approach used to understand social or human phenomena through in-depth descriptive data collection and analysis that is not focused on numbers or statistics. This approach emphasizes understanding the meaning, subjective experiences, and social context in the lives of individuals or groups. The following is a complete explanation of qualitative research methods, including the objectives, approaches, processes, data collection techniques, and data analysis in qualitative research. The purpose of Qualitative Research is to understand the phenomenon in depth. This research is more interested in understanding and interpreting the experiences, views, or perspectives of the research subjects. Exploring meaning: The main focus of qualitative research is to explore the meaning behind a phenomenon, whether in a social, cultural, or psychological context. Identifying patterns and themes: Researchers want to find patterns or themes that emerge in the data collected to gain a deeper understanding of the research topic. Exploring individual perspectives Qualitative research often seeks to understand an individual's personal views or experiences in a broader social context.

Materials developed in this study Qualitative Research Process Qualitative research processes generally involve several stages of the main techniques used in qualitative data collection (1) In-depth Interviews (2) Participatory Observation (3) This technique involves one-on-one conversations between researchers and informants to explore their views, experiences, or meanings of a phenomenon. In-depth interviews can be open or semi-structured, with exploratory and easy questions. In this technique, researchers are directly involved in the activities or daily lives of the groups or individuals being studied to understand the social context directly. This observation can be structured or unstructured.

After interviewing the participants, the researcher used data triangulation techniques to ensure the validity and accuracy of the research findings. This triangulation was carried out

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by comparing and confirming data from various sources, such as the results of interviews with the RT Head and Secretary of the Pamandangan Village Head, official village documents, and direct observations in the field. This approach allows researchers to see a phenomenon from various perspectives, avoid subjective bias, and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the policy of fulfilling the right to vote for people with disabilities. Through this process, the data collected becomes stronger, more credible, and can be scientifically accounted for.

In this study, participants consisted of various parties who have important roles in implementing policies and fulfilling the rights of people with disabilities at the village level. The participants included the Head of the Pamandangan Village RT and the Secretary of the Pamandangan Village Head who have direct insight into the social and administrative dynamics at the local level. Then both of them agreed to be interviewed regarding this study while still prioritizing the confidentiality of the identities of children and their families who live in prostitution environments, then both of them provided important perspectives on policy implementation and the obstacles faced in the field. Their participation complements data from other sources in this study, resulting in a more comprehensive and contextual picture. This interview aims to explore information about the conditions of children, the impact of the environment on their development, and efforts and obstacles in implementing child protection programs. The following are the interview guidelines.

Table 1. Interview Guidelines

| <b>Interview Instrument</b>                          | <b>Child Protection Against Mental Development In The Environment Prostitution</b>   |
|--|--|
| Objective  | Identifying the conditions of children living in prostitution environments, the impact of the environment on their development, and protection efforts made by the village government.<br>and the obstacles faced in its implementation. |
| Respondent Profile                                   | Head of RT of Pamandangan Village<br>Secretary to the Head of Pamandangan Village  |
| <b>Category</b>                                      | <b>Interview Questions</b>   |
| Condition of Children in the rostitution Environment | What are the conditions of children living in this area?   |
| Environmental Impact towards Children                | What impact do children feel as a result of living in prostitution environment?  |
| Government Efforts in Protection Child               | What programs has the village government implemented to protect children from negative environmental influences? prostitution?   |

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| Obstacles in Implementing Child Protection Programs | 4What are the main challenges faced in protecting children in this environment? 5. Is there any cooperation between the village government and the Child Protection Agency (LPA) in dealing with this problem? If so, what form of cooperation does it take? the same? |
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## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Children who grow up in environments full of violence, conflict, and prostitution are highly susceptible to experiencing deep psychological trauma. Based on observations, they often become victims or witnesses of physical and verbal violence, both at home and in the surrounding environment. Repeated exposure to this violence can cause psychological disorders such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Children who live in areas of prostitution are also often exposed to pornography and porn action indirectly, which can interfere with their moral and emotional development. Early exposure to explicit sexual content can influence the way children think and form unhealthy sexual behavior in children. In addition, prostitution environments are often negatively labeled by society, which has an impact on the formation of children's self-image. They feel inferior, ashamed, and worthless because of the stigma attached, even though they are not directly involved in the activity.

This condition can occur because childhood is a critical stage in the development of an individual's personality, emotions, and social life. The environment in which children are raised greatly influences how they form their perceptions of themselves and the world around them. When children grow up in unstable and stressful situations, their ability to build a sense of security, self-confidence, and self-control is disrupted. Children who should receive love, education, and protection, instead have to face situations full of uncertainty and threats. This disrupts their social functions, such as interest in positive activities, the desire to socialize, and the ability to manage emotions and solve problems. The inability to manage these emotions makes them easily angry, overly anxious, or even withdraw from the social environment, which ultimately hinders their optimal growth and development.

The presence of children living around prostitution locations greatly affects their mental condition and development, so they need special attention and protection for the fulfillment of their rights. Based on the results of interviews conducted with local governments, such as the Head of RT, RW, and the Head of the Village of Sekitar, Panjang District, Bandar Lampung City, it shows that there have been several efforts that have been made to provide protection for children living in prostitution environments, especially in supporting their mental development. One of the main efforts is to provide support in the field of education, considering that many children who grow up in these environments do not have adequate access to education. The lack of formal education makes them feel marginalized, worthless, and lose their self-confidence.

The Head of the RT of the Village of Sekitar explained that his party actively collects data and monitors children in his area who are at risk of experiencing negative impacts from their living environment. In addition, they also work together with social institutions and

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related agencies to distribute educational assistance such as providing school supplies and access to scholarship programs. The Secretary of the Head of the Village of Sekitar also added that the village government is also trying to provide mental development activities through counseling and religious activities, which aim to build children's character and divert their attention from the negative influences of their surroundings. Both speakers agreed that ongoing intervention from various parties is very important to ensure that children living around prostitution areas can continue to grow and develop healthily, both physically and mentally.

This phenomenon occurs because the prostitution environment is an area that is very vulnerable to various forms of violence, crime, and deviant social values. Children who grow up in an environment like this tend to absorb the conditions around them as something normal, even though it is actually contrary to moral values and healthy psychological development. When they witness or even experience violence, conflict, and exposure to explicit sexual behavior, the child's brain, which is still in the development stage, has difficulty processing and understanding these events properly. As a result, they experience chronic stress, lose their sense of security, and experience identity disorders and emotional development.

Furthermore, the social stigma attached to the prostitution environment worsens the psychological impact. Society tends to give negative labels to children who come from such environments without considering that they are victims of circumstances. Ridicule, discrimination, and unfair treatment from the social and school environment make these children feel inferior, ashamed, and alienated. They lose self-confidence, feel unworthy of being accepted in the wider social environment, and eventually withdraw from socializing. This is why they become more vulnerable to psychological disorders such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Without proper intervention and support from family, society, and government, these children are at risk of experiencing failure in long-term social and emotional development.

One of the biggest impacts of this environment is the lack of parental attention to their children. Children in prostitution areas often do not get enough guidance from their parents, making them vulnerable to negative influences from their surroundings. The Village Head Secretary added in an interview, "Most mothers work late at night, while their fathers are not where they are. Children are often left alone without supervision, some even do not go to school because there is no one to take care of them." This condition causes many children to fall into bad company, such as the habit of staying up late and playing on the street without a clear direction, which has a direct impact on their development.

Lack of access to education is also a major problem in the development of children in prostitution environments. The Village Head Secretary said, "*We have tried to provide social assistance and provide free learning places, but many children are not interested. They feel there is no point in going to school because their environment does not support it.*" This factor further strengthens the limited educational conditions for children who grow up in prostitution areas, where they tend to spend more time on the streets than in school.

The local government has tried various efforts to provide protection to children in prostitution environments. Based on the results of the interview, the RT Head explained that

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the government is working with the Child Protection Agency (LPA) of Bandar Lampung City in holding various programs, such as discussion forums, parenting skills, and psychological recovery. However, he added, *"There is indeed a counseling program from LPA volunteers, but there is no follow-up. After the program is finished, they rarely come back to evaluate whether these children really get the benefits."* This shows that even though there are protection efforts, the implementation is still less than optimal and not sustainable.

The main challenge in protecting these children is the stigma that continues to be attached to them. The RT head said, *"There are many children who feel ostracized by their peers. In fact, some mothers forbid their children from playing with children from prostitution environments."* This reflects that social discrimination is still very strong, causing children to feel inferior and lose the opportunity to develop normally. This stigma makes them even more isolated, which worsens their psychological and social conditions.

To overcome this problem, cooperation between the government, communities, and social organizations is needed to provide more effective protection for children. The Village Head Secretary emphasized, *"In addition to material assistance, these children need assistance from psychologists and religious figures so that they can feel supported and have a grip on life."* Therefore, concrete steps are needed such as providing counseling guidance, religious activities, and motivational programs to rebuild their self-confidence. These steps are important to help children recover from trauma and gain a true understanding of their rights and better life goals.

In addition, economic empowerment for families in prostitution environments should also be a priority. The RT head highlighted that "Mothers work hard to meet their daily needs, but the children are not monitored. If there is skills training for them so they can work in other fields, maybe they don't need to be involved in prostitution anymore." This shows that a long-term solution that can be implemented is to provide more decent alternative livelihoods for parents so that they can focus more on guiding their children. By empowering parents economically, it is hoped that they can pay more attention to the education and welfare of their children.

In conclusion, the interview results strengthen the previous discussion regarding the negative impacts of prostitution environments on children. Psychological trauma, lack of parental attention, social stigma, and limited access to education are the main factors that affect their development. Therefore, concrete and sustainable steps are needed through cooperation between the government, LPA, communities, and society so that these children get better protection and opportunities to have a brighter future. Only with solid collaboration and sustainable programs can children in prostitution environments be restored and guided towards a more positive life.

The efforts made by the Child Protection Agency (LPA) of Bandar Lampung City together with the local government in protecting children living in prostitution environments show a fairly comprehensive approach, but also require critical reflection on the effectiveness and challenges of its implementation. The FGDs held provide space for children to express their feelings and experiences, and this is very important as an initial step in healing trauma. However, in-depth reflection is needed on the extent to which the results of the FGDs are truly used as the basis for real and sustainable policies. Children who are stigmatized because

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of their living environment, even though they are not directly involved, show that the protection approach must be complemented by public education efforts to eliminate negative stereotypes that are attached.

In addition, steps such as providing understanding to WTS and parents indicate a preventive approach that involves key actors in the child's life. However, the effectiveness of this intervention needs to be evaluated, especially in the context of consistency and emotional involvement of the parties involved. Parenting Skills and Psychological Recovery Program activities are important steps, but do these activities reach all children and families in a sustainable manner? Are these programs carried out with a trauma-based approach and taking into account local cultural sensitivity? Child protection is not enough to be just a temporary activity, but must be part of a sustainable social system. Therefore, there needs to be cross-sector synergy, increased human resource capacity, and regular monitoring and evaluation of all programs so that they can truly answer the needs of these vulnerable children in a real and in-depth manner.

Efforts to prevent children in prostitution environments from engaging in such activities require a holistic and sustainable approach. Local governments play an important role in providing guidance and skills training to these children. Children who live around prostitution locations often face difficulties in terms of access to education and self-development, due to unsupportive environmental factors and limited resources. Therefore, through appropriate skills training, they can be directed to develop their potential and talents, opening up opportunities for them to achieve a better future. Skills training involving technical or vocational education can be a way for these children to obtain decent and stable jobs, avoiding involvement in activities that are detrimental to themselves and the surrounding community.

In addition, intensive protection of these children is very important to protect them from potential sexual exploitation and violence. Protection must not only come from the government, but also from the family and the surrounding community. Therefore, collaboration between various parties, such as the government, social institutions, families, and communities, is very vital so that these protection efforts can run well and effectively. Forming a supportive family, providing affection, and creating a comfortable home atmosphere for children is the first step that can be taken to prevent them from seeking the wrong comfort. When children feel safe and appreciated at home, they are less likely to seek attention outside which can lead them to a risky environment.

Economic empowerment for families is also an important step in reducing poverty, which is often the root cause of children's involvement in prostitution. By providing skills training for parents, opening access to decent employment opportunities, and providing assistance to build small businesses, it is hoped that families can improve their quality of life. When the family economy improves, the mental burden borne by children can also be reduced, and they will not feel forced to find sources of income or survive in unhealthy environments.

However, despite these measures, significant challenges remain. One is the limited resources and support available. Many children in prostitution are isolated and do not have easy access to education, health care, or skills training. Adequate education, which should be

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the right of every child, is often hampered by economic and social factors, making it difficult for these children to develop to their full potential. In addition, the strong social stigma against their families, as well as the instability of the political and social situation, can be major obstacles to the recovery and future development of these children.

Another limitation is in terms of coordination between institutions. Government, social institutions, and communities must work together to address this complex issue, but there is often a lack of adequate coordination. For example, educational institutions may not have sufficient understanding in dealing with children who come from traumatic backgrounds, while health institutions may be limited in providing the necessary psychological support. All parties must have the same understanding and a clear strategy in dealing with cases like this in order to achieve maximum results.

Healthy and accurate sexual education is also very important to provide to these children. They need to be given a proper understanding of the risks they may face and how to protect themselves. In many areas, sexual education is still a taboo topic, which only exacerbates the knowledge gap among children, especially those living in vulnerable environments. Inclusive sexual education programs, based on the values of health and well-being, can provide children with the tools they need to protect themselves and avoid harm.

With close collaboration between various parties, as well as greater attention to the fulfillment of children's basic rights, it is hoped that the conditions of children in prostitution environments can improve. However, challenges in implementation and limited resources need to be addressed so that all children receive the rights and protection they deserve.

This study revealed that children who grow up and live in a prostitution environment face serious challenges in their mental and emotional development. The findings of the study indicate prolonged exposure to violent situations, social stigma, and environmental instability that directly affect the psychological well-being of children. From the results of observations and in-depth interviews, it is clear that psychological trauma, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem are significant impacts due to an unfavorable environment. This condition not only affects the emotional aspect, but also disrupts the process of forming self-identity and cognitive development that are essential for their future.

Conceptually, children's mental development is influenced by many factors, both internal and external. The prostitution environment is one of the most damaging external factors, where children are inadvertently exposed to behavior and situations that are inappropriate for their age. Within the framework of cognitive and emotional development theory, exposure to violence, exploitation, and lack of emotional support have been shown to hinder the process of learning and social adaptation. Children who live in such an environment tend to have difficulty developing healthy coping mechanisms, so that when faced with stressful or conflict situations, they are more susceptible to excessive emotional reactions.

In addition to the psychological aspect, the social stigma attached to the prostitution environment also adds to the psychological burden on children. This stigma not only makes children feel alienated, but also worsens their self-perception. When children are labeled negatively by society, this can lead to internalization of feelings of inferiority and an inability to build healthy social relationships. This social stigma results in isolation and rejection, which

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in turn lowers self-confidence and hinders the development of their communication and social interaction skills. This phenomenon is a side effect that is no less important to address, considering that social involvement is a fundamental aspect in shaping a child's identity and personality.

In the context of child protection, the role of government institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is very crucial. Data obtained from interviews with community leaders, such as RT/RW heads and village heads, show that there are real efforts to provide protection and recovery for children around prostitution environments. For example, Forum Group Discussion (FGD) activities involving children and related parties have been carried out to listen to their aspirations and complaints. Such activities provide space for children to express their feelings and experiences, so that psychosocial interventions can be carried out more precisely. In addition, programs such as Parenting Skills and psychological recovery have been initiated to provide direct support to families and children. Collaborative efforts between the government, NGOs, and local communities are important strategies that can create a safer and more supportive environment for children.

Furthermore, the results of this study highlight the importance of providing adequate access to education for children living around red-light districts. Lack of formal education not only limits their future opportunities but also reinforces the cycle of poverty and marginalization. Education is one of the main tools to increase self-awareness and develop critical thinking skills that can help children overcome the trauma and psychological stress they experience. With adequate education, children have the opportunity to develop their potential and gain the skills needed to escape from adverse environments. On the other hand, education also serves as a medium to provide an understanding of moral values, ethics, and human rights, which are very important in forming a resilient character and personality.

In addition to the educational aspect, the role of family support in the child's recovery process cannot be ignored. Warm parenting and consistent supervision are the main foundations in protecting children from the negative impacts of the environment. In this study, it was found that children who receive emotional support from parents and family tend to show better adaptability even in challenging environments. However, conditions in prostitution environments often result in the disintegration of family structures, where the role of parents is marginalized due to economic pressures, social stigma, and internal conflict. Therefore, it is important for child protection interventions to not only focus on the child themselves, but also strengthen the family unit through empowerment programs and parenting skills training.

Furthermore, findings regarding the dynamic conditions of the prostitution environment indicate uncertainty and instability that directly affect children's mental development. An unstructured and conflict-filled environment hinders the development of children's emotional abilities to recognize, manage, and express their feelings in a healthy way. This instability also impacts children's ability to establish healthy relationships with their social environment. When children grow up with experiences of violence or exploitation, they tend to internalize negative patterns that can affect their interactions later in life. This has the potential to cause a cycle of deviant behavior that is difficult to break, considering that the trauma experienced is deep and rooted in very sensitive childhood experiences.

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The research findings also emphasize that interventions to protect children in prostitution environments must be holistic. An approach that only emphasizes one aspect, such as only the educational aspect or only the psychological aspect, will not be enough to address this complex problem. Child protection needs to include psychological, social, economic, and legal support simultaneously. Collaboration between various government stakeholders, child protection institutions, schools, and the wider community is key to creating a comprehensive protection network. Intervention programs must be designed in such a way as to not only reduce short-term negative impacts, but also build a strong foundation for children's long-term development.

## **Discussion**

In addition, this study revealed a gap between existing child protection policies and their implementation in the field. Although there are various laws and regulations governing child protection, the reality in society shows that practical support from the government is still minimal. Many children are still at risk due to the lack of adequate supervision and lack of coordination between related institutions. This indicates the need for a re-evaluation of existing policies to be more responsive to real needs and conditions in the field. Community involvement and empowerment of local communities are one strategic solution to bridge this gap, because the community has a central role in supervising and supporting vulnerable children in their environment.

There are a number of factors that indicate that interventions on the impact of prostitution environments on children's mental development must be comprehensive. Not only emphasizing the psychological aspect, but also touching on the social, economic, and cultural dimensions that comprehensively affect the psychosocial conditions of vulnerable children. Emotional stress arising from violence, stigma, and exposure to negative environments requires integrated treatment. Therefore, collaboration between government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the community needs to be strengthened through innovative community-based programs.

In the context of psychological support, the implementation of mental recovery programs through counseling and therapy should be optimized. Psychosocial interventions provided to children are expected to help them recognize and manage feelings that arise due to the trauma they experience. Intensive training for educators and mental health professionals regarding the characteristics of trauma in children, especially in the context of prostitution environments, is a key element in designing an effective approach. This individual approach must take into account the background and experiences of each child, so that recovery strategies can be tailored to their unique needs. In addition, providing a safe space where children can express their experiences and feelings without fear or rejection is essential to restoring emotional balance.

The educational aspect also plays an equally important role. The curriculum and teaching methods in affected areas need to be adjusted to be relevant to the conditions of children living in prostitution. Educators must be equipped with the skills to recognize signs of trauma and stress in children, and given training in implementing interactive and participatory learning methods. This not only helps children develop cognitive and character

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skills, but also creates a learning environment that is conducive to the formation of a positive identity. Inclusive education, in addition to providing formal knowledge, must also include learning about moral values, ethics, and awareness of human rights as a foundation for healthy character development.

In addition to psychological and educational support, family economic empowerment is a vital strategic strategy. Many children trapped in prostitution come from families with weak economic conditions. Providing skills training and access to productive economic programs can open up opportunities for families to earn a more stable income. Efforts to improve family economic welfare also indirectly help reduce the pressure that pushes children into unhealthy environments. Micro and small business development programs, accompanied by technical assistance and access to capital, can be an effective solution in breaking the cycle of poverty and marginalization that has so far hampered child development.

The role of local communities is no less important in creating a supportive environment for children. Local communities have great potential to act as agents of change through a participatory approach. The formation of support groups, such as community discussion forums and local counseling groups, can be a means to share experiences and find joint solutions to the problems faced. Collaboration between community leaders, religious leaders, and local educational institutions can produce more inclusive and sustainable initiatives. In this framework, active community participation is not only limited to moral support, but also involves direct involvement in the planning and implementation of child protection programs.

The existence of supportive government policies must be combined with transparent evaluation and monitoring mechanisms. Although various regulations regarding child protection have been in place, their implementation in the field still faces a number of obstacles, such as lack of resources and coordination between agencies. Local governments as the spearhead in implementing policies need to develop a reporting system based on information technology to monitor program developments. Periodic evaluations involving community participation are also important to ensure that each intervention program is running according to target and can be adapted if there are changes in conditions in the field.

The role of government institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in child protection is crucial. This study shows that efforts to provide protection and recovery for children in prostitution environments are being made through various programs. For example, FGD activities involving children and related parties serve as an important means of listening to and understanding children's feelings and experiences, enabling more targeted psychosocial interventions (Adhiansyah et al., 2023). Programs such as parenting skills training and psychological recovery are efforts to provide direct support to families and children. Collaboration between the government, NGOs, and local communities is a key strategy in creating a safer environment for children in these areas (Djawas & Fajrina, 2019).

Moreover, the importance of access to education for children living in prostitution environments has been a major concern in this study. As a transformative factor in children's lives, education plays a significant role in reducing marginalization and addressing the negative impacts of unsupportive environments. The lack of educational access exacerbates the cycle of poverty, creating even greater challenges for children to develop optimally

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(Murnan et al., 2018). Education also functions to teach moral values, ethics, and human rights, which are essential in forming a resilient and well-rounded character (Munirah & Jazimi, 2020).

The importance of family support in the child's recovery process cannot be ignored. Ongoing parenting education and consistent supervision are vital foundations in protecting children from the negative impacts of their environment. The findings of this study show that children who receive emotional support from their families tend to adapt better, even in challenging environments. However, in prostitution environments, family structures are often disintegrated, further complicating children's situations as parental roles are marginalized due to economic pressures, social stigma, and internal conflicts within families (Kurniawan & Sarmini, 2022).

The dynamic conditions of prostitution environments, characterized by instability and uncertainty, directly affect children's emotional development. An unstructured and conflict-filled environment hinders their ability to recognize, manage, and express their emotions in a healthy manner. This instability also impacts their ability to form healthy relationships with their social environment. Children raised in such environments, exposed to violence or exploitation, tend to internalize negative patterns, which can affect their interactions later in life and may create a cycle of deviant behavior that is difficult to break (Willis & Levy, 2002).

This research also emphasizes that interventions to protect children in prostitution environments must be holistic. An approach that focuses on only one aspect, such as education or psychology alone, will not be sufficient to address this complex issue. Child protection must include psychological, social, economic, and legal support simultaneously. Collaboration among various government stakeholders, child protection institutions, schools, and the broader community is key to creating a comprehensive protection network. Intervention programs must be designed not only to reduce short-term negative impacts but also to build a strong foundation for children's long-term development (Ahmad, 2014; Desmita et al., 2023; Nisak et al., 2022).

Furthermore, this study revealed a gap between existing child protection policies and their implementation on the ground. Although various regulations govern child protection, practical support from the government is still minimal. Many children remain at risk due to a lack of adequate supervision and coordination between relevant institutions. This indicates the need for a re-evaluation of current policies to be more responsive to the real needs and conditions in the field (Kusumawardhana, 2023). Community involvement and local empowerment is a strategic solution to bridge this gap, as the community plays a central role in supervising and supporting vulnerable children in their environment.

## **CONCLUSION**

Children in prostitution environments face severe mental and emotional challenges, including trauma, anxiety, depression, and social stigma, exacerbated by lack of parental care, limited education, and emotional instability. Exposure to violence and a stigmatized environment makes them vulnerable to mental health issues. Despite efforts from local authorities and the Child Protection Agency (LPA) in Bandar Lampung City, such as empowerment programs and psychological recovery initiatives, social stigma and inadequate

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follow-up remain significant barriers. Greater collaboration between government, families, social institutions, and communities is essential for effective child protection. This research contributes to social, ecological, and resilience development theories, emphasizing the influence of external factors on children's psychological development. It recommends tailored programs that address emotional stability, stigma reduction, and education access, alongside continuous parental empowerment. Limitations include limited data and a focus on policy rather than community interventions. Future research should assess long-term intervention impacts and include children's perspectives for more responsive policies..

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