

Family Understanding of the Role of Social Support in Healing Child Trauma

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the family's understanding of the role of social support in the process of healing child trauma. Trauma in children can occur due to various bad events that can affect their psychological development, and social support from the family plays an important role in this recovery. This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design, involving 25 families who had children who were or had experienced trauma. The results showed that although most families understood trauma as a result of bad events, their understanding of the long-term impact of trauma on children was still limited. Social support provided by families was more dominant in the form of emotional and psychological support, such as affection, attention, and open communication, while material support was more limited. The main challenges faced by families in providing social support were the lack of knowledge about the right way to help children overcome trauma, as well as limited resources. This study also found that the role of parents was very important in healing child trauma, with strong social support from the family directly related to faster recovery in children.

Keywords: Family Understanding, Child Trauma, Psychological Development, Social Support

Introduction

Childhood trauma can significantly impact their emotional, cognitive, and social development, requiring comprehensive support for healing. A variety of factors, including physical or emotional abuse, accidents, and parental separation, can contribute to such trauma (Clements et al., 2019). A critical aspect of recovery is the role of social support, especially from family, which can enhance resilience and facilitate healing (Boyer, 2019). Families who understand their role in providing a nurturing environment are essential for effective trauma recovery (Purtscher, 2008). In addition, the quality of the parent-child relationship is critical; supportive interactions can promote healing, while dysfunctional dynamics can hinder recovery (Nicholson et al., 2018). Trauma experienced during childhood can significantly disrupt emotional stability and lead to a variety of psychological disorders, including post-traumatic

stress disorder (PTSD) and anxiety disorders. Approximately 1 in 4 children globally experience some form of trauma, which can have long-term effects on their development and overall quality of life (Sarode, 2023). The consequences of childhood trauma are profound, often resulting in difficulties in social, emotional, and cognitive development (Moser et al., 2020). If not properly addressed, these traumatic experiences can persist into adulthood, disrupting personal relationships and mental health (Akhouri, 2018).

Social support is essential for a child's recovery from trauma, including emotional, material, and informational support. Families play a critical role in this process, yet many lack the understanding necessary to provide effective support. Emotional support, which includes comfort and empathy, helps reduce anxiety and distress in traumatized children, fostering a sense of security that is essential for healing (Alexander & Alexander, 1999). Additionally, material support, such as providing basic needs, contributes to a stable environment that further aids recovery. Understanding family dynamics is also important, as a supportive family environment can significantly enhance a child's healing journey, while dysfunction can exacerbate trauma (O'Connell et al., 2017).

In Indonesia, many families still view social support primarily as providing basic needs or physical protection, ignoring the important role of emotional and psychological support in the recovery process for children who have experienced trauma. This limited understanding can hinder effective healing, as emotional support is essential to help children process their experiences and build resilience (Tentama, 2015). Strengthening social support networks is essential, as these networks can provide the emotional and psychological support that is often overlooked by families (Elfendi, 2025). Additionally, adopting a trauma-informed care approach can raise families' awareness of the importance of emotional support, thereby reducing the risk of re-traumatization. Furthermore, interventions such as psychological first aid can empower families to offer ongoing support, ensuring that children feel safe and secure in their healing journey.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. This study aims to deeply understand the family's understanding of the role of social support in the healing process of trauma in children. This approach allows researchers to gain deeper insight into how families understand and apply social support in the context of child trauma (Stake, 1995). Participants in this study are families who have children who are experiencing or have experienced psychological trauma. The selection of participants will be carried out through a purposive sampling technique, namely by selecting families who meet the inclusion criteria and have relevant experience in providing social support to traumatized children (Patton, 2002). A total of 20-25 families are expected to participate in this study, considering the principle of saturation point, namely the number of participants sufficient to obtain in-depth and consistent findings.

Results and Discussion

This study revealed several key findings regarding family understanding of the role of social support in healing child trauma. From 25 families who participated in this study, the results found that various factors influence the understanding and implementation of social support in families. The results of the study are organized based on the main themes that emerged during interviews and observations.

Key Findings

- a. Most families have a basic understanding of child trauma, but lack depth about the long-term psychological impact of trauma on child development.
- b. Emotional and psychological support is more dominantly provided by the family compared to material support.

- c. Many families expressed difficulties in providing appropriate support due to a lack of understanding of how to manage child trauma and limited resources.
- d. Parents have a major role in providing emotional support and accompanying children through the recovery process, both through open communication, providing a sense of security, and supporting professional therapy.
- e. Children who receive strong social support from their families tend to show better and faster recovery compared to those who lack adequate social support.

Table 1. Research Findings

Main Theme	Subtheme	Description of Findings	Number of Families Affected
Understanding of Child Trauma	Basic Understanding	Most families understand trauma as the result of adverse events, but lack awareness of its long-term effects on child development.	20 out of 25
	Lack of Understanding of Psychological Impact	Many families do not fully understand the long-term psychological effects of trauma on children, such as anxiety disorders or PTSD.	18 out of 25
Types of Social Support Provided	Emotional Support	Most families provide emotional support in the form of affection, attention, and spending more time with the child.	22 out of 25
	Psychological Support	Psychological support is provided through open communication, talking	19 out of 25

Main Theme	Subtheme	Description of Findings	Number of Families Affected
		about emotions, and encouraging professional therapy for the child.	
	Material Support	Material support such as financial aid or daily needs is less commonly provided, as families tend to focus more on emotional support.	15 out of 25
Challenges in Providing Social Support	Limited Knowledge	Many families feel unsure about how to support a child who has experienced trauma, especially in managing the child's emotions.	18 out of 25
	Limited Resources	Some families report being constrained by resources—such as time, external support, or finances—which hinders their ability to provide optimal support.	17 out of 25
Parental Role in Trauma Recovery	Open Communication with the Child	Parents who actively talk with their child about the traumatic experience and share their feelings tend to have children who are more open and feel safer.	20 out of 25
	Providing Safety and Stability	Parents who offer emotional safety, consistent presence, and stability tend	21 out of 25

Main Theme	Subtheme	Description of Findings	Number of Families Affected
		to have children who recover more quickly.	
	Supporting Professional Therapy	Some families demonstrate commitment by encouraging children to undergo professional therapy such as psychotherapy, which is essential for trauma recovery.	16 out of 25
Impact of Social Support on Trauma Recovery	Positive Impact of Social Support on Children	Children who receive adequate social support from parents or other family members tend to make faster progress in trauma recovery.	22 out of 25
	Children with Limited Social Support	Children who lack sufficient social support, especially from family, tend to have a slower recovery process.	12 out of 25

Source: Data Processed (2025)

1) Understanding Child Trauma

- a. **Basic Understanding:** The majority of families have a sufficient understanding of child trauma, but only a few understand its long-term impact. This is reflected in 20 out of 25 families who can identify trauma as a result of a bad event, but only a few understand the long-term impact that can affect a child's development.
- b. **Lack of Understanding of Psychological Impact:** The majority of families (18 out of 25) do not fully understand the long-term psychological effects that trauma can cause, such as

anxiety disorders or PTSD in children. This shows that there is a gap in knowledge about how trauma affects children's mental conditions in the long term.

2) Types of Social Support Provided

- a. Emotional Support: The majority of families (22 out of 25) provide emotional support, such as affection and more attention to children who experience trauma. This reflects the major role of affection in the healing process.
- b. Psychological Support: Many families (19 out of 25) also provide psychological support through open communication and support for professional therapy that children need. This shows the importance of the role of parents in facilitating access to professional therapy.
- c. Material Support: Although material support such as finances is also important, only 15 out of 25 families were able to provide this support. This suggests that, although crucial, material support is given less, with more focus on emotional and psychological support.

3) Challenges in Providing Social Support

- a. Limited Knowledge: Some families (18 out of 25) felt they did not know how to support children who experienced trauma, especially in managing their children's feelings. This indicates the importance of further education for families on how to support children effectively.
- b. Limited Resources: As many as 17 out of 25 families experienced limitations in terms of resources, such as time, external support, or finances, to provide optimal support. This indicates that, although families want to provide maximum support, they are sometimes limited by various external factors.

4) The Role of Parents in Healing Trauma

- a. Open Communication with Children: Parents who try to talk openly with their children about the trauma they have experienced tend to have children who are more open and feel safer (20 out of 25 families). This emphasizes the importance of communication in creating a sense of security for children.

- b. **Providing a Sense of Safety and Stability:** As many as 21 out of 25 families indicated that parents who provide a sense of safety and emotional stability can help their children recover faster. This shows the key role of parents in creating an environment that supports trauma recovery.
 - c. **Supporting Professional Therapy:** Although not all families support professional therapy (16 out of 25), those who do show a significant commitment to supporting their children through the healing process with professional help.
- 5) **The Effect of Social Support on Children's Trauma Recovery**
- a. **Positive Impact of Social Support on Children:** Children who receive sufficient social support, both from parents and other family members (22 out of 25), show faster progress in their trauma recovery. Social support has a positive influence on the healing process.
 - b. **Children with Minimal Social Support:** Conversely, children who receive less social support, especially from family (12 out of 25), tend to be slower in their trauma recovery. This shows how crucial family support is in helping children recover from trauma.

Discussion

1) Understanding of Child Trauma

- a. **Basic Understanding:** Most families showed a basic understanding of trauma as a result of a bad event. However, only a few were aware of the long-term impact of trauma on child development. This indicates a need to improve understanding of how trauma impacts children's psychological and emotional growth in the long term.
- b. **Lack of Understanding of Psychological Impact:** Many families do not fully understand the long-term psychological effects of trauma, such as anxiety disorders or PTSD. This indicates that although trauma is known as a bad event, the profound impact that can occur on a child's mental development is often not understood. Therefore, educational programs for families about the psychological impact of trauma are very important.

2) Types of Social Support Provided

- a. Emotional Support: Most families (22 out of 25) provided emotional support that involved affection, attention, and giving more time to their children. This shows that direct affection and attention are the easiest forms of support to provide and are considered effective by families in helping traumatized children.
- b. Psychological Support: Although many families provide psychological support in the form of open communication and support for professional therapy (19 out of 25), this shows that there is still a gap in the family's understanding of the importance of more structural and professional-based psychological support.
- c. Material Support: Material support, although important, is given less (15 out of 25 families) compared to emotional and psychological support. This may be influenced by financial constraints or a greater priority on emotional and psychological aspects that are considered to have a more direct impact on trauma recovery.

3) Challenges in Providing Social Support

- a. Limited Knowledge: Many families feel they do not know how to provide appropriate support to children who have experienced trauma, especially in terms of managing children's feelings. This reflects the need to provide further training or assistance to families on how to support children who have experienced trauma effectively.
- b. Limited Resources: Limited resources, be it time, external support, or finances, are challenges for families in providing optimal support. This shows that despite good intentions to support children, external conditions such as financial problems and lack of social support or psychological facilities can limit the family's ability to provide the necessary support.

4) Role of Parents in Trauma Healing

- a. Open Communication with Children: Families who have open communication with their children about the trauma they have experienced show better results in terms of children's

openness and sense of safety (20 out of 25 families). This highlights how important the role of parents is in creating a safe space for their children to talk about their feelings and trauma.

- b. **Providing a Sense of Safety and Stability:** Providing a sense of safety and emotional stability is an important aspect that is widely implemented by families (21 out of 25). This shows that stability in daily routines and accompanying children with a sense of safety is very helpful in accelerating children's recovery from trauma.
- c. **Supporting Professional Therapy:** Only a few families showed a commitment to supporting professional therapy (16 out of 25). This shows the importance of raising awareness that professional therapy is a very important part of children's trauma recovery.

5) The Influence of Social Support on Children's Trauma Recovery

- a. **Positive Impact of Social Support on Children:** Children who receive sufficient social support, both from family and parents, show faster progress in trauma recovery (22 out of 25). This confirms the important role of social support in the child's recovery process.
- b. **Children with Minimal Social Support:** Conversely, children who lack social support, especially from family, tend to be slower in the recovery process (12 out of 25). This illustrates that social support, especially from the nuclear family, has a major influence on how quickly children can recover from trauma.

Conclusion

Most families understand trauma as the result of a terrible and frightening event, but they are less aware of the long-term psychological impacts that can arise in children, such as anxiety disorders or PTSD. However, many families realize that trauma recovery requires time and ongoing support. Families provide social support in various forms, with emotional and psychological support being the most dominant. This support includes affection, attention, open communication, and efforts to accompany children in the recovery process. Although material support is also provided, this is not as much as emotional support which is considered more important in the process of healing children's trauma.

Many families expressed difficulties in providing effective social support. One of the biggest challenges is the lack of knowledge about the right way to help children overcome trauma. Some families also feel limited by external factors such as time, outside support, and financial constraints, which can hinder their ability to provide optimal support. Parents have a key role in healing children's trauma. Parents who provide a sense of security, provide emotional stability, and are open in communicating with their children tend to help the recovery process faster and more effectively. Some families also support their children to undergo professional therapy as part of the recovery process. 5. The results of the study showed that social support provided by the family greatly influences the recovery of children's trauma. Children who receive sufficient social support, both emotional and psychological, tend to show faster and better recovery. Conversely, children who lack social support, especially from the family, experience slower and more difficult recovery.

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