

**FIGHTING FOR A FUTURE: THE VIEWS OF THE YAA BUNAYYA ORPHANAGE CHILDREN ON EDUCATION AND LIFE EXPECTATIONS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SOCIOLOGY AND LEGAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study examines the perspectives of children at Yaa Bunayya Orphanage regarding education and their future hopes, employing legal sociology and legal anthropology approaches. The children view education as a space for struggle to build identity, overcome social stigma, and achieve a better life. However, they face structural obstacles, including limited funding, a lack of policy support, and barriers to accessing adequate education. Findings reveal that these children possess high agency and social awareness, along with collective dreams to contribute to social change. The study recommends the development of inclusive policies and contextual, participatory educational programs to support the fulfilment of the educational rights of orphaned children.

**Keywords:** Education, Educational rights, Legal anthropology, Legal sociology, Orphanage, Vulnerable children.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Children living in orphanages are part of a social group that is vulnerable to various forms of marginalization, both socially, economically, and legally. They grow up in an environment that is very different from most other children who live in nuclear family structures. The absence of a biological family or separation from the family due to economic factors, domestic violence, or other social conditions makes them live in an alternative social system regulated by the orphanage institution. In this space, the dynamics of identity formation, access to rights, and the search for meaning in life unfold in a unique and often unequal context.

The social stigma against orphanage children is still firmly embedded in society. They are often considered a weak group, dependent on compassion, or

even as a social burden. These labels create invisible barriers that limit their space for movement and opportunities in various aspects of life, including education. In fact, in a society that idealizes social mobility through education, orphanage children have multiple challenges in being able to use education as a way out of structural poverty. In this context, education is no longer just a fundamental right, as guaranteed in the Constitution, but becomes a vital tool for fighting for a better future.

Unfortunately, reality is not as beautiful and easy as stated in the text of the Constitution or laws and regulations. Article 31, paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia does state that every citizen has the right to receive an education. However, in practice, many children in orphanages face significant challenges in accessing quality education. Problems such as limited operational funds for orphanages, a shortage of educators or learning assistants, and a lack of attention from the state and local governments are classic issues that have not been resolved. As a result, orphanage children often receive only a minimal formal education without adequate emotional, motivational, or personal capacity-building support.

In such conditions, it is essential to examine how orphanage children perceive the education they are receiving. For most of them, education does not only mean attending school and taking lessons but also becomes a space to affirm one's existence and build hope amidst limitations. Education is viewed as a means of navigating a complex life cycle and, simultaneously, as a symbol of resistance against social destiny that is often imposed by external conditions. These views cannot be analyzed solely through quantitative data; instead, they require a deep, reflective, and humanistic approach.

To understand the orphanage children's views on education and the future, this paper uses the approach of legal sociology and legal anthropology as an analytical framework. Legal sociology helps explain how social structures and legal systems influence children's experiences in accessing educational rights. From this perspective, law is not seen solely as written rules but as part of a social structure that can either strengthen or weaken a child's position in society. On the other hand, legal anthropology is used to explore how values, symbols, and cultural practices that develop in the orphanage environment shape children's perspectives on life and the future.

Through this interdisciplinary approach, the study aims to explore how the children of Yaa Bunayya's orphanage, as a representation of a vulnerable social community, navigate their lives by making education a focal point of hope. Orphanage children should not be viewed as a passive, homogeneous group but rather as individuals who have agency and subjectivity in determining the direction of their lives despite their limitations. Their experiences interacting with the education system, both inside and outside the orphanage, reflect the struggle between norms, culture, and legal structures that are integrated into everyday life.

This is where it is important to see law more broadly, not only as a collection of formal rules but also as part of the lived experience shaped by social practices. In the context of orphanages, "law" can be present in the form of

internal regulations of the institution, the relationship between caregivers and children, or even in unwritten customs that determine the direction of the children's lives. All of this forms a separate legal system that lives and develops within the orphanage community. To understand how orphanage children perceive education and the future, we must also comprehend how the concept of "living law" influences their lives.

This study also aims to dismantle the dominant narratives that are often attached to orphanage children, such as the narrative of "underprivileged children", "unwanted children", or "children who need to be pitied". These narratives, although perhaps intended to foster empathy, often reduce their identity and place them in a position as passive objects who depend on assistance. Many of them have dreams, critical thinking skills, and a high fighting spirit. They only need opportunities, recognition, and a fair system to develop. Therefore, this article also aims to provide a platform for the voices of orphanage children, who have rarely been heard in academic discourse or public policy.

Specifically, the focus of this article is how children at the Yaa Bunayya Orphanage view education as part of their struggle towards a better life. This orphanage was chosen because it is a social institution that actively assists children from diverse backgrounds, including those who are orphans or neglected. In their daily lives, the children at this orphanage not only face academic problems but also complex emotional, psychological, and social challenges. Thus, through a qualitative approach, this study aims to capture their voices in their entirety and depth, not only what they experienced but also how they interpreted those experiences in relation to the future they want to achieve.

With all that, this study aims to contribute to enriching studies on education and social justice, particularly those concerning marginalised groups, such as children from orphanages. In addition, the results of this study are also expected to serve as a reflection for policymakers, orphanage managers, and the broader community in designing a more inclusive, participatory, and equitable approach to realising significant education for all children without exception.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative approach, specifically a case study type, aiming to explore in-depth the views of the children at the Yaa Bunayya Orphanage regarding their education and life expectancy. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the meaning and subjective experiences of children in the context of their social life in the orphanage environment. Theoretically, this study is grounded in the perspectives of legal sociology and legal anthropology. The perspective of legal sociology is employed to examine how social norms and legal values prevalent in society shape children's perspectives on education and the future. Meanwhile, legal anthropology is employed to understand the social practices and cultural structures that emerge within the orphanage environment, a social institution with its own set of rules.

The location of this study is the Yaa Bunayya Orphanage located in Kp. Salaawi, 004/007 Sukamanah, Kec. Karang Tengah, Kab. Cianjur, West Java. The location was selected purposively, considering that this orphanage

accommodates children from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and is active in both informal and formal educational activities. The subjects in this study consisted of foster children aged 3 months to 18 years, orphanage managers, and volunteers or educators involved in child development activities. The researcher employed purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques to select informants, with the primary criteria being direct involvement in educational activities and willingness to share their views on the future.

Data collection was conducted through three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, non-participatory observation, and documentary studies. In-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to explore children's narratives about their experiences with accessing education and envisioning the future. Observations were conducted to capture the social dynamics that occur daily in the orphanage environment. Additionally, the researcher collected relevant documents, including activity schedules, children's educational data, and internal orphanage rules related to development and education.

During the research, ethical considerations were strictly adhered to, particularly since the research subjects involved children. Therefore, the researcher first obtained official permission from the orphanage management and obtained approval from the children who would serve as informants. The identities of the informants were kept confidential, and the entire research process was conducted with respect for the rights and comfort of the participants.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Education as a Space of Hope and Identity**

From in-depth interviews conducted with children at the Yaa Bunayya Orphanage, it is evident that education plays a crucial role in shaping their aspirations for the future. Most children expressed that school is not only a place to learn but also a social space where they feel equal to their peers outside the orphanage. One 15-year-old informant stated: "If I can go to college, I don't want to be considered pitiful all the time. I want to be able to help other people later, so people know that orphanage children can also succeed."

This statement shows an effort by children to negotiate their identity in a society that often views orphanage children with stigma. Education is viewed as a tool for social transformation and a symbol of the struggle to prove that they deserve to be appreciated, not out of pity, but because of their capacity and efforts (Arif et al., 2024). From a legal, sociological perspective, this indicates that orphanage children possess agency in navigating social structures that position them in subordinate roles (Sukmawati, 2016).

### **Structural and Legal Challenges that Hinder Access**

Despite having high aspirations for education, children from orphanages face various structural challenges that limit their opportunities. One of the most significant challenges is the limited funding for meeting adequate educational needs, including books, school supplies, and other additional expenses. In addition, the absence of a special affirmative program from the local government for orphanage children is also evidence that legal protection remains formalistic and has not addressed real needs.

Orphanage caregivers reported that some children were forced to postpone their schooling because they were unable to afford activity fees or transportation. On the other hand, several government assistance programs did not reach orphanage children due to limited information or inconsistencies in administrative data. This shows a gap in the legal system that should guarantee the right to education for all children, as stated in Article 31 of the 1945 Constitution (Palguna & Dwi Atmaja, 2023). From a legal sociology perspective, this shows a lack of synchronicity between written law and living law in society (Isima, 2022). In practice, children in orphanages are often marginalized from justice distribution mechanisms, both due to a lack of representation and weak implementation of inclusive policies.

### **The Role of the Orphanage Environment in Shaping Attitudes Towards Education**

The social environment of the orphanage plays a significant role in shaping children's perspectives on education and the future. From the results of observations, children who receive emotional support from caregivers or volunteers tend to be more optimistic in setting goals. Those who are often encouraged to engage in additional learning activities or participate in academic and non-academic competitions tend to show stronger motivation to pursue their education to a higher level.

Legal anthropology helps us understand that rules are not always written down (Putri, 2022). At the Yaa Bunayya Orphanage, collective values are instilled informally, including the importance of honesty, enthusiasm for learning, and mutual support among children. These values function as unwritten norms that form the internal social structure of the orphanage. Rules such as "don't be lazy to study" or the habit of studying in groups at night are concrete examples of "living laws" in the community (Lestari, 2023). Thus, the orphanage is not only a social institution that provides a place to live but also a social arena where the formation of educational ethos and values of struggle takes place culturally and symbolically.

### **Narratives about the Future: Dreams to Fight For**

When asked about their future, the majority of children in the orphanage expressed a wide range of aspirations, including those for careers as teachers, police officers, doctors, entrepreneurs, and social activists. However, what is interesting is that most of them mentioned the desire to "return to help people who are in the same boat as them". One 16-year-old informant said: "If I am successful, I want to build an orphanage too. But better, one that can help more children."

Narratives like this show that the hopes of the orphanage children are not only individual but also collective. They not only dream of change for themselves but also for the community that they consider to be part of their social identity. In a legal sociology approach, this indicates that the social justice they imagine is participatory justice—where they want to be agents of change, not just beneficiaries (Rahmatullah, 2021).

This view also reverses the dominant narrative about orphanage children who are often reduced to "victims" or "recipients of assistance". Instead, they demonstrate high critical thinking skills and social awareness. This reinforces the

argument that children in orphanages should be actively involved in every policy formulation process related to education and child protection (Elia et al., 2023).

### **Reflection on Systems and Policies: The Need for an Inclusive Approach**

The findings of this study highlight the need for reforms in the education system and social policies that are more responsive to the needs of children in orphanages. Top-down and uniform policies often fail to reach children with complex social backgrounds (Prasetyo, 2024). This is where the importance of a community-based approach lies, which not only adapts programs to local needs but also involves children as active subjects.

For example, several children in orphanages stated that they preferred learning through practical activities or skills training rather than formal learning methods that were too theoretical. This highlights the importance of a flexible and integrative curriculum, which can bridge the gap between the world of formal education and the realities of children's lives in orphanages.

From a legal anthropology perspective, the success of an education program is not only measured by academic output but also by the extent to which the education system can impact the lives of children as social and cultural beings (Elia et al., 2023). In other words, meaningful education for orphanage children is education that understands the context of their lives, acknowledges their experiences, and provides them with space to express themselves and shape the future they envision (Asuhan, 2024).

## **CONCLUSION**

This study reveals that children at the Yaa Bunayya Orphanage perceive education as more than just a formal obligation; for them, education is a means of escaping a restrictive reality and a symbol of the struggle to create a better identity and future. However, access to quality education still faces structural challenges, such as limited funding, minimal support for affirmative policies from the government, and social stigma that hinders their self-confidence and full participation. Using a sociological and legal anthropology approach, this study reveals that children at the orphanage have agency, social awareness, and a collective dream to become agents of change in society, provided they are given equal space and recognition.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that education and child protection policies be directed towards a more inclusive, participatory, and community-based model. Local governments and orphanage managers must collaborate to develop contextual and adaptive education programs that incorporate life skills training, psychosocial support, and character development. Additionally, it is crucial to reduce social stigma through public campaigns and the direct involvement of orphanage children in policy forums. Thus, education can become a tool of social emancipation, enabling every child, without exception, to determine their future with dignity.

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