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**ORPHAN'S SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT AND DEMOGRAPHIC
RELATIONSHIP: A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION FROM
PAHANG ORPHANAGES**

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Abstract

Social engagement is essential to make sure that the orphans do not feel like they are being left behind by society. It is also necessary to support Sustainability Development Goal (SDG) in creating child well-being. Child well-being is both an indicator and a foundation of social and economic development. Therefore, this study aims to identify the social engagement of orphans in Pahang orphanages. Besides, this study examines the relationship and significant differences between demographic factors (gender, age, and years of living in orphanages) and social engagement among the orphans in Pahang orphanages. The questionnaire was distributed to 270 orphans aged 8 to 17 years old at 12 orphanages in Pahang, Malaysia. To test research objectives, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used in generating the descriptive result, regression and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The result shows that the overall social engagement in Pahang orphanages is considered moderately high. Besides, the result revealed that gender and years of living in orphanages have an impact on social engagement. For these results, there is a need for the policymakers to organize more programs between orphans and society by considering the gender and years of living in orphanages to support the National Children's Mental and Well-being Strategy.

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1. Introduction

Orphans and underprivileged care of children have remained a serious issue in society. At least 140 million children had lost at least one or both parents as reported by United Nations Children's Fund (2019). As they are orphans, some of them choose to stay in childcare due to lack of support they received from their loved one (Suryaningsih et al., 2022). In the Malaysian context, at least 64,000 children were estimated to be living in childcare institutions for the year 2021 (Hazariah et al., 2020). From that, 87% of the children still have at least one living parent. The number is expected to increase since some childcare institutions are still unregistered under government or private orphanages.

Alfred et al. (2018) revealed that low levels of guardian involvement among orphans at the orphanages. This issue led to difficulty to have a sense of belonging and acceptance among orphans' families before they start feeling it among their social groups. Therefore, the responsibility to care for children in childcare is not only for the guardian only. The society also needs to engage and support the children for their overall holistic development (Mir & Bhat, 2022). Society needs to provide social engagement as the social interactions with them create self-belonging and form social bonds (Thurman et al., 2008). The caregivers, friends and management at the orphanage, teachers and the public as the target group for the social engagement should avoid negative attitudes and enhance care and protection towards children from the institution (Muguwe et al., 2011).

Suryaningsih et al. (2022) revealed that children could get social support in the form of comfort, care, or help from other people in the orphanage surroundings. Physical activities include recreational activities and innovations that can strengthen bonds between orphanage residents and society. Besides, society can offer continuous support and serve as role models to inspire the orphans for future directions. Sadly, these orphans still lack the nurturing which required the stimulation on environment. Therefore, the objectives of this study are:

- To identify the level of social engagement of orphans in Pahang orphanages.
- To explore the relationship between demographic (gender, age, and years of living in orphanages) with social engagement in Pahang orphanages.
- To examine the significant difference between demographic (gender, age, and years of living in orphanages) with social engagement in Pahang orphanages.

Limited studies focus on social engagement in orphanages in which previous studies highly emphasize the psychosocial well-being of orphans (Nortje & Pillay, 2022; Ringson, 2022; Yimer, 2022). Orphans who stay at Pahang orphanages were selected for this study since varies challenges in orphan management faced by caregivers and management and the increasing number of orphans every year Department of Social Welfare Malaysia (2022). Besides, this study can strengthen better life of orphans with the strong community ties. Furthermore, this study contributes to the literatures on whether demographic factors affect social engagement among orphans in Pahang orphanages. It is important to have high social engagement by focusing on the specific demographic, including gender, age, and years of living in orphanages, in order to empower their well-being.

2. Literature Reviews

Social engagement refers to the ability to initiate social interaction and be receptive to social overtures from others (Tsuchiya-Ito et al., 2022). The level of social engagement is considered as one of the most important predictor of children's successful learning outcomes include for orphans who live at orphanages (Sjöman et al., 2021). This engagement will create a positive vibe, self-belonging, and attachment, which will create better psychological well-being. It will avoid negative aspects such as social isolation from the community, anxiety, and depression. In addition, this engagement will be working collaboratively with the community to improve the well-being of the orphans (Johnston, 2018). There are many factors that influence the community care provided to orphans, including social, historical, and cultural factors (Thurman et al., 2008). Besides, a demographic factor can also influence social engagement, as mentioned by Huxhold and Fiori (2019) and Sillaots et al. (2020).

Demographic factor on gender is capable of influencing social engagement. Thomas (2011) explained the difference in social engagement levels between women and men. The women show greater social engagement with lower levels of subsequent physical and cognitive limitations. Meanwhile, men are more on a lower level of social engagement, but they have greater physical and cognitive limitations. Ejechi (2015) added that women engage more with society in religious activities and visitations and participate in the formal volunteer work, while men prefer to have informal socialization with a family and friends. However, development in technology helps all the gender to maintain their preferred type of social engagement (Kim et al., 2017). In terms of the children, Sjöman et al. (2021) explained that boys with high levels of hyperactivity will show lower social engagement except if they receive enough special support to improve their attention and perseverance in everyday activities. Therefore, it leads to the following hypothesis:

H1a: There is a significant relationship between genders and the social engagement of orphans in Pahang orphanages.

H1b: There is a significant difference in the social engagement between genders of orphans in Pahang orphanages.

Age will also affect social engagement. Age has positive influences on social engagement since they will have different abilities in physical activity (Pan, 2009). Hofer and Hargittai (2021) revealed that older individuals tend to have a more online social engagement, which will increase their anxiety due to negative feedback from others. Besides, older people have more social engagement since they can crystallize cognitive age-adjusted abilities (Borgeest et al., 2020). Besides, children often show a low level of social engagement with peers and adults if they have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (Kellems et al., 2022). Therefore, it leads to the following hypothesis:

H2a: There is a significant relationship between age and the social engagement of orphans in Pahang orphanages.

H2b: There is a significant difference in social engagement between the age of orphans in Pahang orphanages.

Kiely and Flacker (2003) explained that the duration that the children stay at the orphanages would affect their social engagement with the people surrounding them. Lapane et al. (2022) and Ahmad (2021) mentioned that individuals who live in special care and with other people might increase the odds of high social connectedness and improve their mental health. The evidence is also supported by Shiferaw et al. (2018), who found that individual in orphanages for less than 2 years has a possibility of depression of 2.08 times higher compared with those who were in orphanages for more than 2 years. However, Rolandi et al. (2020) explained the need to avoid self-isolation in the same place for a long duration since it will affect older adults' psychological and social well-being. Therefore, it leads to the following hypothesis:

H3a: There is a significant relationship between years of living in orphanages and the social engagement of orphans in Pahang orphanages.

H3b: There is a significant difference in the social engagement between years of living in orphanages of orphans in Pahang orphanages.

2.1. Theoretical framework

Social capital theory refers to the social relationships that facilitate certain actions of individuals and accumulate human capital (Bankston, 2022). This social capital can enable the individual to set the relationship with others, including friends, colleagues, and more general contacts. It also facilitates coordinating actions more effectively (Crosby et al., 2009). Besides, Kim and Cannella (2008) also studied that social capital will create trust, norms, and networks, which create either internal social capital or external social capital. In this study, the orphans will have internal social capital with other people in the orphanages, for example, caregivers and friends as shown in Figure 1. While external social capital ties and relations with various outside include nongovernment agencies and people surrounding orphanages.

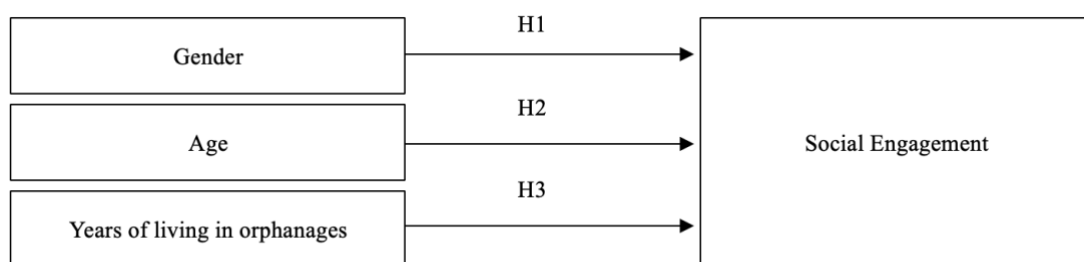


Figure 1. Theoretical framework

3. Methodology

3.1. Research methodology

The sample used for this study is 270 orphans at the age of 7 years old and above who live at 12 Pahang orphanages. The respondents must receive basic education from the school to ensure they are able to understand the language used in the questionnaire. Besides, Pahang orphanages were selected since it is reported to have the highest number of childcares under the Department of Social Welfare Malaysia (2022).

For data collection, a questionnaire survey was used and distributed face-to-face for two months, from November to December 2021. The questionnaire consists of two-part which are demographic items for Part A, and social engagement for part B. Part A comprise of three questions on gender, age and years of living in orphanages. Part B consists of social engagement aspects which were measured using the five-Likert type with 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Moderate Disagree, 4= Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. The questions on social engagement related to the engagement of orphans with people inside and outside the orphanages which was developed based on research conducted by Tsuchiya-Ito et al. (2022), Ahmad and Jamil (2021), Tuovinen et al. (2020), and Fredricks et al. (2016). The interpretation of the levels of social engagement are translated into four level as depicted in Table 1 based on Ahmad et al. (2018).

Table 1. Score and levels of social engagement

Overall score	Levels of social engagement
4.00-5.00	High
3.00-3.99	Moderately-high
2.00-2.99	Moderately-low
1.00-1.99	Low

3.2. Analytical methods

This study uses SPSS version 25 to generate descriptive result, regression, and ANOVA. The descriptive result was used to identify the social engagement of orphans in Pahang orphanages. A regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the variables (Uyanık & Güler, 2013). In this study, regression was used to measure the relationship between demographic factors and social engagement. According to Abdul-Wahab et al. (2005), ANOVA is used to compare two means from two groups. This ANOVA will determine the influence that independent variables have on the dependent variable in a regression study. For this study, ANOVA will be used to measure the significant difference between demographic factors with social engagement.

4. Results

4.1. Respondents' demographic data

Out of 270 respondents, 122 (45.19%) are male orphans, and 148 are female orphans (54.81%). In terms of age, 160 (59.26%) respondents are in the range of 13-17 years old, which means they are in secondary school and the remaining 110 (40.74%) at 8-12 years old. The majority (140, 51.9%) respondents already live in the same orphanages for 2 years, and only 3 (1.1%) respondents live there for 10 years. Table 2 shows the demographic information of the respondents.

Table 2. Demographic of respondents

Demographic	Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	122	45.19%
	Female	148	54.81%
Age (year)	8-12 years old	110	40.74%
	13-17 years old	160	59.26%
Years of living in orphanages	1 year	55	20.4%
	2 years	140	51.9%
	3 years	21	7.8%
	4 years	22	8.1%
	5 years	6	2.2%
	6 years	10	3.7%
	7 years	7	2.6%
	8 years	5	1.9%
	9 years	1	0.4%
	10 years	3	1.1%

4.2. Social engagement

Table 3 presents the results regarding social engagement of orphans in Pahang orphanages. To describe the strength of each statement, the mean score for each item was used which means 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Moderate Disagree, 4= Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. The highest mean score was recorded for the statement “I always get involved in activities organized by outsiders” (M=4.074). The second highest mean score was recorded for the statement “I was always treated well” (M=3.80), followed by the statement “I feel loved by others” (M=3.80) and “other people are always helpful if I need help” (M=3.70). The statement “I am confident to deal with outsiders” (M=3.30) was recorded as the lowest mean score. Overall, the mean for social engagement is rated as moderately-high according to the rate by Ahmad et al. (2018).

Based on the results obtained in Table 3, the results show that the respondents strongly agree (45.56%) that they are always involved with activities organized by outsiders, for example, non-profit organizations, universities/colleges, and companies. Trampa and Venetsanou (2022) revealed that physical activity organized at the orphanages has positive implications for the quality of life of youth. World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) explained that quality of life is important for individual and public health to support the well-being of people. Hyndman et al. (2017) support that physical activity, either free or organized, offers a holistic framework for social-psychological-physical development.

Additionally, the respondent exhibited that they strongly agree (31.85%) that they feel loved by people. The respondents have received adequate encouragement and care from their social environment to further inspire them for daily activities. Gatsi (2014) explained that the child needs consistent love and care from the main support system. The main support system is from organizations, including schools and orphanages, since they are sensitive to their loss of parents, financial problems, and family problems.

The result also identified that 7.78% of respondents strongly disagree that they are confident in dealing with outsiders. Burnett (2021) mentioned that the experience of social rejection due to their destitution, poor living conditions, and appearance affects lower interpersonal contacts. Besides, it will

create difficulties in cultivating possible relationships with other parties. Besides, caregiving also has the responsibility to develop the psychological development of children, including cognitive abilities, language, attachment, and emotional maturity, as well as behavioral issues (Khalid et al., 2022). Therefore, the result for first research objective proved that overall social engagement among orphans in Pahang orphanages is moderately highly but still need continuous social support and social participation from caregiver, NGO, regulators and public.

Table 3. Percentage distribution of social engagement

No	Statement	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Moderate disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Mean	Interpretation
1	I feel loved by others.	1.11	5.93	37.04	24.07	31.85	3.80	Moderately- high
2	I was always treated well.	0.74	5.93	32.59	34.07	26.67	3.80	Moderately- high
3	Other people are always helpful if I need help.	1.11	9.63	33.70	28.89	26.67	3.70	Moderately- high
4	I am confident in dealing with outsiders.	7.78	17.78	33.70	18.15	22.59	3.30	Moderately- high
5	I always get involved in activities organized by an outsider.	1.11	5.93	22.96	24.44	45.56	4.07	High
Overall mean							3.73	Moderately- high

For second research objective, regression analysis is performed to identify the relationship between demographic factors and social engagement. Table 4 indicates that gender and duration of stay in the orphanages are significant, with social engagement at a p-value less than 0.005. Therefore, H1a and H3a are accepted. In addition, age and duration of stay in the orphanages are insignificant to social engagement. Hence, H2a is rejected.

Table 4. Relationship between demographic factors and social engagement

Variables	Coefficient's value	t-statistics	Sig.
Gender	-.128	-2.078	.039*
Age	.033	.525	.600
Years of living in orphanages	-.047	-.755	.036*

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

For third research objective, further analysis was done to examine the significant difference in demographic (gender, age, and years of living in orphanages) with social engagement using ANOVA. The result in Table 5 shows that there is a statistically significant difference at $p < 0.05$ level in social engagement based on gender and duration of stay in the orphanages. Therefore, H1b and H3b are accepted. Meanwhile, the result provides evidence that no significant difference was found between age and social engagement. It means that age does not influence social engagement among orphans in Pahang orphanages. Therefore, H2b is rejected.

Table 5. ANOVA result for demographic factors and social engagement

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Gender	Between Groups	6.214	15	.414	1.735	.045*
	Within Groups	60.660	254	.239		
	Total	66.874	269			
Age	Between Groups	56.793	15	3.786	.647	.835
	Within Groups	1487.415	254	5.856		
	Total	1544.207	269			
Years of living in orphanages	Between Groups	97.180	15	6.479	1.753	.042*
	Within Groups	938.705	254	3.696		
	Total	1035.885	269			

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The result on gender supports previous studies by Feng et al. (2014), where they found female individuals have more varied social engagement compared to male individuals since female individuals encounter a greater level of communication apprehension. Besides, the female individual who is more interested in engaging with her friends had a lower cognitive decline. Lee and Yeung (2019) reported that social engagement would be declined among female individuals who have lower education. Male individuals do not have an interest in engaging in non-paid socially productive activities such as volunteering and caregiving (Thomas, 2011).

In terms of years of living in orphanages, the result found is consistent with Kiely and Flacker (2003). They revealed that a longer duration of survival in the same place would increase the level of social interaction due to familiarity among members. Yi and Kim (2022) also supported that the long-term care received will influence social engagement, which will improve the quality of life among the residents of institutions.

For age, the result is not significant with social engagement. Meek et al. (2018) pointed out that health status, including disease-related emotional/physical problems, regardless of age, might influence engagement with society. Besides, Ihm (2018) supported that the addiction to smartphones among children will lead to less participation in social engagement. Csibi et al. (2021) commented that excessive use of smartphone use is among adolescents aged 12 to 18 years.

5. Conclusion

For first research objective, the overall social engagement in orphanages is considered moderately high based on the moderate mean scores recorded for all the statements from the questionnaires. The highest mean score is on the statement that they always get involved in activities organized by an outsider. At the same time, the lowest mean scores were recorded for the statement that the respondents are confident in dealing with outsiders, which reflects the effectiveness of physical activities organized inside or outside the orphanages. For second and third research objectives, the finding of this study also highlights that gender and years of living in orphanages have an influence on social engagement. Besides, gender and years of living in orphanages have significant differences in social engagement. This result is aligned with the social capital theory that emphasizes that one of the factors affecting social engagement is related to the actor and

the nature of the relationship between any two actors, which will relate to familiarity and trust (Koley et al., 2020).

This study recommends that the policymaker needs to have a proper guideline for orphanages to monitor the level of social engagement among orphans. It is to ensure that Malaysia can support Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 10, in creating a more equitable, just, and sustainable world for all. Besides, this study provides more information on the demographic factor that need to consider to ensure active engagement throughout the physical and virtual activities in the orphanages. More importantly, this study successfully fills the gaps due to limited studies done on social engagement for orphans in orphanages. Therefore, future research should focus on the effectiveness of physical activities for the orphans according to their gender and years of living in orphanages in order to improve their quality of life, including enhancing self-confidence and improving self-esteem.

Since this study only covers one state in Malaysia, generalization cannot be drawn. However, this preliminary idea of how the orphans feel about social engagements can be imagined in brief. To generalize the result, more respondents are needed, and more data must be collected, including interviews with caregivers, orphans, and society.

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