Children's Self-esteem Crisis During Indonesian Post-pandemic

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Abstract. Although the pandemic is starting to subside, the impact still leaves problems threatening children's development. This study aims to explain that in the transition period to the new normal, children experience impaired self-esteem development as an important element that supports child development. The study relies on an empirical approach through self-report data in the form of bibliotherapy from 15 children in grades 5 and 6 of elementary school about their experiences during the covid pandemic and the new normal period. Then, the data are analysed qualitatively. The study results showed that children's self-esteem experienced a crisis through three conditions: the child's self-image, which tends to be negative about himself. The inability of children to build friendships is shown by their failure to develop social interactions with their peers. The unhappiness experienced throughout Covid-19 is that children have feelings of boredom, stress, and dissatisfaction. The condition indicates that children lose confidence which threatens the development of self-esteem. Although the pandemic has decreased, life behavior during the Covid-19 pandemic can become a lifestyle in the future. This study suggests the need for attention from all parties, families, schools, and the wider community, so children's self-esteem growth is not constrained. So, this can support the formation of children's welfare as the transition from the pandemic to the new normal progress.

Keywords: Self-esteem · Children's well-being · Pandemic transition · Negative self-image · Stigmatization

1 Introduction

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has decreased even in countries declared endemic, the impact is powerful on child development, including children's self-esteem. Self-esteem is essential for a child's mental health, potentially disrupted by quarantine policies, school closures, and keeping their distance. During the pandemic, many children lose daily experiences that help build their self-esteem. Surveys show that the children's mental health deteriorates as the pandemic enters its third year. Approximately 1.6 billion children are directly affected by online learning, disrupting recreational routines and

family finances and causing children to experience stress, anger, fear, and anxiety about the future. Save the Children's survey of 25 million children in 37 countries reported that the rate of violence was higher when schools were closed than when direct learning was taking place in African schools. More than 350 children were killed in the last three months of 2021. There was a 30% spike in violent suicides at home Children have the potential to experience maltreatment from the family as an important environment for building self-esteem.

Thus far, the research on child self-esteem in the pandemic transition phase has not received significant attention. At least the studies of children emphasize three issues: First, transformative educational systems from online learning to hybrid and offline learning. Second, mental and physical health recovery due to the pressures children face during the implementation of social distancing and school closures. The third is rebuilding children's relationships with the social environment, hampered by the pandemic for two years [1–8]. Based on the studies' tendency about existing children, there have not been studies that view children as individuals who experience a crisis in self-esteem formation as an essential aspect of psychosocial development that determines their well-being. In other words, children are prone to losing their welfare and self-esteem.

The study aimed to fill a gap in studies that had not explored children's self-esteem during the pandemic transition. Children have faced various risks that can harm the development of their self-esteem. In line with that, this paper explicitly maps risky conditions that indicate a crisis in children's self-esteem due to the pandemic. It starts from three starting points: negative self-image, inability to build friendships, and child unhappiness. Investigating these three points is the study's aim.

This study argues that the prolonged epidemic has disrupted children's self-esteem. These disorders arise through various welfare crises children face [9, 10]. Children receive negative Stigmatization from the environment due to multiple problems the people around them face. The limited social interaction of children with peer groups causes them cannot build friendships as a source of developing their self-esteem. The next obstacle is child dissatisfaction, such as anxiety, boredom, and stress Changes in children's rhythm of life and changes in the pandemic with all its consequences cause the children's self-esteem crisis.

Many factors affect students' mental health and self-esteem during the pandemic. The period has brought online learning and increased student social media use, exposing them to harmful and excessive use of social media [11–14]. This situation tells them about social media's harmful and excessive use [15, 16]. It causes parental anxiety about the quality of children's achievements and development during online learning [17, 19]. His condition triggers the environment, especially the parents, to stigmatize the child [19]. It may lead to negative self-images and lower self-esteem in students [20].

2 Literature Review

2.1 Self-esteem

Self-esteem is one of the fundamental aspects of a person's personality formation [21, 22] define self-esteem as a thorough evaluation of a person's value or value as a person.

Rosenberg [23] asserts that at least two things make up self-esteem: reflected appraisals and social comparison. Reflected reviews are how individuals think others see them concerning a particular identity, influencing self-view[24]. Meanwhile, social comparison is the tendency to evaluate themselves, whether,r in terms of the situation, capacity, skills, or identity, based on comparisons or information about others received [25]. This second point is common in recent phenomena, especially when technological advances have built spaces that increasingly position each individual to compare himself to others [26, 27].

Furthermore, self-esteem has two dimensions: competence and value [28]. The competency dimension (efficacy-based self-esteem) refers to how others see themselves as successful. The value dimension (self-esteem based on value) refers to how an individual feels himself a valuable person. In comparison, Smeijers et al. [29] propose two forms of self-esteem: explicit self-esteem and implicit self-esteem. Explicit self-esteem is related to Rosenberg's commonly used self-esteem scale. It refers to the conscious meaning of self-esteem as an emotional evaluation relating to the assessment of self-esteem and self-worth. In contrast, implicit self-esteem is unconscious self-evaluation and usually presents as a spontaneous reaction to the stimulus [22, 30–32]. According to these definitions, self-esteem is an evaluative and affective dimension of self-concept influenced by internal and external factors that affect a person's mental and life progress [33].

2.2   Pandemic to Endemic COVID-19 in Indonesia

Pandemics are widespread epidemic phenomena that occur worldwide, crossing international boundaries and infecting relatively large numbers of people. COVID-19 is a disease caused by the coronavirus [34–39] droplet mucus transmission resulting in acute shortness of breath syndrome, pneumonia, headache, cough, fever, and loss of taste and smell but not death. The high number of people who got sick and even died from the disease led governments worldwide to start implementing policies for dealing with it. These policies ranged from making people wear masks, wash their hands, and stop gatherings to isolating people and closing public buildings like schools[40–42].

Globally, the prevention and handling of the COVID-19 pandemic have increased the risk of child and adolescent abuse and neglect, whereby this pandemic has affected the protection and well-being of children as well as Indonesia. A study by Jentsch & Schnock [43–46] points out unpreparedness regarding changes to childcare, leaving children vulnerable to physical and mental health. In addition, psychological trauma during the pandemic also adds to the concerns of both adults and children. At least four types of pandemic-related trauma exist in looking at COVID-19, trauma shown by changes in attitudes, a trauma in self-expression, and trauma in response to public panic [47].

In its third year (2022), the pandemic began to experience a decrease in its spread. Indonesia declared that it was entering a pandemic transition period to endemic. The Indonesian government began implementing a hybrid learning policy while still implementing strict health protocols during the transition Children still do not get a regular learning and social environment during this transition and recovery. Thus, in addition to uncompromising health protocol services, recovery from various traumas children face during the pandemic is needed for child welfare [48–51].

3 Method

3.1 Design and Data

The researcher employed a qualitative approach. The data was collected by asking children to write about their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic in an essay Questions were asked of respondents to describe their experiences, such as (1) what do you know about the pandemic (2) How do you feel about not being able to leave the house during the pandemic (3) How was your health condition during the COVID-19 pandemic (4) How do you feel about your friendships (5) What difficulties do you frequently face during your home studies (6) What emotions do you frequently experience while learning online Why do you experience the emotion The six questions guided students to write the biography and became the research data.

3.2 Respondent

Self-esteem is essential for children's prosperity and development. However, during the pandemic, their self-esteem may be at risk because their schools are closed, and some policies keep them from socializing, especially with their peers. The study aims to investigate factors threatening children's self-esteem during the pandemic. The subjects in the study consisted of 15 elementary school students between the ages of 11 and 12 in grades five and six. They were selected purposively based on teachers' recommendations and identified as students who needed mentoring during online learning at home. Table 1 describes the demographic profile of the respondents.

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents.

Respondent	Age	Male/Female	Class	Family Socioeconomic Status
R1	10,8	F	5	Middle
R2	11,1	F	5	Middle
R3	11,5	F	6	Middle
R4	12	M	6	Middle
R5	11,9	F	6	Low
R7	11,3	M	5	Middle
R8	10,7	M	5	Middle
R9	12,1	M	6	Low
R10	12	F	6	Middle
R11	10,8	F	5	Above Middle
R12	12,3	F	6	Low
R13	11,9	M	6	Above Middle
R14	12	M	5	Above Middle
R15	12,2	F	6	Middle

Researchers received informed permission from all research respondents. We deleted all identifying information from the transcripts to protect the privacy and anonymity of the respondents. Moreover, the researcher attributed the codes contained the unique respondent (R), e.g., R1, to find the source of quotes in the result section.

3.3   Data Analysis

This study uses three stages of analysis data. At the initial stage, the researcher assessed the respondent's writing by reading, understanding, and recognizing phrases that contained negative statements. Then the researcher classified each word according to the required data. The next stage is to compile terms that match children's low self-esteem indicators. Applying the three steps of data analysis aims to understand children's views on their situation during the pandemic and their self-evaluation in this setting.

4   Result

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a crisis in developing children's self-esteem. The results of this study show three aspects of evidence that social restrictions during the pandemic hurt a child's sense of self-worth.

4.1   Negative Self-Image

A child's self-image is their mental representation of themselves. A negative self-image is a tendency for a child to view themselves negatively. This study uncovered three sorts of children's negative self-image during the pandemic: unfavorable perceptions of their physical, cognitive, and behavioral capacities (Table 2).

Table 2 presents children's negative self-images during the pandemic. First, physically, children accept that they are susceptible to the COVID-19 virus, especially those with certain diseases, such as asthma (R5). Adult concerns also make them see themselves as physically weak and easily infected with the virus. In addition, the child's surroundings cause them to believe that their physical strength is insufficient and makes them susceptible to infection (R4; R11). In developing a portrait of their physical health, these viewpoints illustrate how the epidemic has adversely impacted individuals.

Second, in addition to the physical aspect, children tend to have a negative self-image related to their competence in following online learning at home. Some respondents state that they cannot understand the lessons and face difficulty focusing on their learning (R1; R4; R6). They also describe themselves as students with difficulty concentrating during online learning, like R3, R7, and R8. Thus, online learning has created children's negative self-image about their learning abilities.

Third, during the pandemic, children often feel that they behave negatively or do not follow their family norms. One respondent stated that he is disrespectful because he always speaks grumpily (R8). At the same time, other respondents say they have become obedient children. Parents and teachers call them rude for speaking impolitely to their parents, as expressed by respondents R8 and R1. That also reveals that children identify as undisciplined (R7, R14) and disobedient (R9, and R13). Based on respondents'

Table 2. The Children's Negative Self-Image

Aspects	Negative Self-image	Examples of respondent statements
Physical	Have a weak physique	"My mom always advised me not to play outside because I was easily sick with heat and later contracting Covid" (R4)
	The sick danger of contracting Covid	"The Covid virus prevents me from leaving the house because it is hazardous for health. I easily experience shortness of breath, and my parents say it's dangerous if Covid" (R5)
	Easily infected	"During the Covid season, I was sad that I always could not mess around outside because I was a child and easily contracted Covid" (R11)
Competence	Difficulty understanding lessons during online learning	"Studying at home has its love and sorrow The suffering is that I have difficulty understanding the lesson, as my mother said I have difficulty understanding the lesson, so my mother is sometimes tired of learning" (R1) "I often do not know the lessons explained by teachers online" (R4) "My parents called math tutors because I had trouble understanding Math" (R6)
	Unable to concentrate	"When studying online, I have difficulty concentrating, sometimes while eating, while playing games, and often easily sleepy" (R3; R7; R8)
Inappropriate behavior	Opposing	"I am often said to be disrespectful to parents for speaking grumpily" (R8). "
		"My parents said I was disrespectful because if called or talked to, did not pay attention and play hp "R12)
	Undisciplined	"My parents often complained that I do not discipline in learning" (R7) "It feels like I'm now (the time of covid) so lazy anything" (R14)

statements, children develop a negative self-image due to the treatment, expression, and attitudes of those around them in response to their behavior.

Table 2 demonstrates the relationship between children's self-perception, physical capacity, and conduct throughout the epidemic. Their responses also suggest that their self-perception is inextricably linked to the impact of their social surroundings, particularly their family, which affects the development of their negative self-image.

Table 3. The Children's Barriers to making friends.

The barriers to making friends	Examples of respondent statements
Unable to do activities with a friend	*"During the pandemic, I always stay at home, unable to play with friends. It makes me bored" (R10)*
Unable to do schoolwork in groups	*"Since learning online at home, schoolwork must be done independently at home. I cannot study in groups with friends like before COVID (R7)* *"Before the Covid pandemic, I had a study group and usually did my homework with friends. After we finished, we biked together. But now, we can still do even still together online, and for me, it makes not interesting anymore (R13)*
Have a strange feeling when they meet each other	*"We do not meet in a long time, so when we meet each other, it feels like meeting with a stranger or new friend., We cannot joke like before the pandemic." (R14)*

4.2 Children's Inability to Build Friendship

Childhood is a crucial period for creating friendships outside of the family, but the Covid epidemic prevents children from forming friendships. It prevents children from relying on friendships for self-esteem (Table 3).

Table 3 illustrates the barriers to children making friends during the epidemic age. Several children said they could not play with their classmates (R10). As indicated in R7 and R13, pupils could not do schoolwork in groups throughout the outbreak. According to R14, school closure makes some students feel uneasy when they have to meet their classmates at school. The children's facial expressions suggest they cannot acquire social well-being through interacting with their peers.

4.3 Children Feel Unhappy

The widespread COVID-19 epidemic negatively influences children's happiness in numerous aspects of life. Data indicate that indicate they suffer dissatisfaction, suggesting that they face developing self-esteem. There were at least three distinct types of discontent throughout the epidemic, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 describes the emotional condition that inhibits children's developmental self-esteem and situations that cause unhappiness. First, school closure and online learning during pandemics have caused children to feel bored, R8 points out. Besides that, children also feel fed up with schoolwork overload, as complained R13. Feeling bored is also often experienced by children who want to play with their friends, but the conditions are impossible due to lockdown or social distancing (R12).

Table 4. Negative Feelings of Children

Feeling	Causative Conditions	Examples of respondent statements
Bored	Boring online learning	*"I feel bored following online learning at home. It is unlike when I study at school."* *(R8)*
	Overloaded schoolwork	*"… there is always a lot of homework. I feel tired and tired of studying. Before the pandemic, there was homework, but not as much as during the pandemic." (R13)*
	difficult to play with friends due to social distancing	*"... I am tired of staying at home, but I also cannot play with friends outside it's because of Covid" (R12)*
Anxiety	Children are worried about their family's health, especially those infected by the Coronaviruses.	*"At all times, I feel afraid of the Covid viruses and worried that my family and I will be infected by this virus" (R4)*
	A declining family's financial condition	*"I am so afraid that my father is going to lose my job during this Covid pandemic" (R15)*
	Low test score	"I always anxiety *that my test score is low during this Covid pandemic" (R15)m*
Stress	Unsupportive home conditions and miscommunication with parents	*"The teacher was more patient in teaching mathematics than my mother, so it was stressful when my mother taught me he was always grumpy." (R7)*

Second, the significant changes due to the COVID pandemic caused concern for respondents. They are afraid for their health and parents, possibly infected with COVID. In addition, respondents are worried about their learning achievement, especially the sixth-grade respondents facing school graduation exams, as stated by a respondent (R9). Respondents are also worried that their parents will lose their jobs during the pandemic and their financial condition will worsen, as stated by one respondent (R15).

Third, in this study, children's unhappiness was also manifested in stress. Unsupportive home conditions and a lack of communication with parents when learning online caused stress, as revealed by respondent 7 (R7). Low psychological conditions threaten the respondents' happiness and well-being to build self-esteem.

5   Discussion

Children become the objects harmed during the pandemic. Based on the data in this research, the Covid 19 pandemic has caused at least three disorders in children to develop their self-esteem. The first is a negative self-image; children view themselves negatively from physical, competency, and behavioral aspects. The second is the inability to make

a friend. During the pandemic, children have difficulty building relationships and maintaining closeness with their friends, and it makes them unfamiliar with each other. The third is unhappiness. The pandemic era has caused children to experience emotional conditions. They tend to be unhappy, including boredom, anxiety, and stress. All three of the children's self-esteem disorders appeared inseparable from some factors that affected them.

Children's negative self-image is formed through the stigmatization children receive from their environment. Stigma is a perception or judgment that involves a negative or discriminatory attitude towards someone based on individual characteristics. While Stigmatization is an internalization process in which negative thoughts and feelings arise in the stigmatized individual [19, 52]. In this research, children have beliefs about how people's judgment or sense of their stigma condition then internalized it. These children's thoughts become apparent when they get "labeling" by the stigma they received (e.g., you get sick very often, your physique is weak, stupid, disrespectful). Then children get adverse treatment or assessment of the environment (stigmatized), and they tend to make negative beliefs or perceptions about the stigma (experienced stigma). After that, the child negatively evaluates himself based on the stigma [53]stated that stigmatized people tend to give negative judgments based on their stigma and have a negative self-image. The result shows that negative self-images can build low self-esteem [54, 55].

A pandemic causes the child hardship in building friendships. The staying-at-home policy and online learning implementation have pushed the inability to make friends [56, 57]. Online learning has driven the quality of social interaction between children and their peers [58]. Children are not only deprived of the experience of developing empathy skills and learning cultural values [11], social norms, or socially acceptable behavior [59], but also the child's social well-being [60] who have an essential role in building long and meaningful relationships [61].

Two critical pillars form self-esteem reflected appraisals and social comparison [23, 24], Festinger in [25]. The reflected appraisal is the assessment of the children about how they are accepted by their environment, as feeling loved and supported. In contrast, social comparison leads more to the tendency of children to evaluate themselves based on their abilities or competencies than others. Other pillars develop the children through their social interaction with friends and adults, where the children are open to other individuals and avoid selfishness [62]. It could be recognized that when children are forced to stay at home, and it is hard to interact socially with their peers, they do not acquire the sense of competence being evaluated and do not feel accepted by others. So the impact is the suppression of their self-esteem. Thus, according to the results of this study, social interaction is an essential factor in building self-esteem.

Pandemics have caused many changes and uncertainties that cause unhappiness in children. Psychologically, children are not pleasant [58, 63]; children feel frustrated or stressed with online learning systems that change learning habits and create schoolwork overload [64]. Children are also worried about the Coronaviruses that can infect them and their families [65]; restrictions on social interaction with friends and teachers cause children to experience boredom and loneliness [58]. Stress and fear exacerbate the unwell condition of children emotionally due to pressure and maltreatment from parents [66, 67]. Like positive self-image and Friendship, happiness also becomes the foundation for

children to develop their self-esteem. This research showed unhappiness contributes to low self-esteem [68, 69].

Negative self-image, inability to interact with peers, and unhappiness in the pandemic era is closely related to the policy of limiting children's social interaction and school closures. Theoretically, the three forms of threat reinforce the theory of self-esteem formation, which states that social roles are fundamental aspects of the development of self-esteem [28, 70].

The self-esteem development of children who can experience barriers during pandemics confirms that children need social support to develop healthy self-esteem. Families, schools, and society need awareness and insight into maintaining and improving children's mental health as a social environment. Other socially and emotionally, holistic mental health becomes an essential pillar for children to build self-esteem. The last three activities can raise awareness among parents, schools, and families to develop self-esteem. First, parenting literacy should be increased based on children's mental health through socialization, training, and strengthening for parents who experience parenting problems with children. Second, it reinforces educators' competence in creating learning that fosters self-esteem through a growth mindset. His approach encourages children to develop a positive self-image. Third, assist children in socialization with the surrounding community. Thus, the children do not lose attention to inhibit self-esteem formation.

6 Conclusion

Quarantine and social distancing policies set by the government to avoid the spread of the covid 19 virus also threaten the ability of children to build self-esteem. Empirically, this research has explained the risk of inhibited children's self-esteem through negative self-image, inability to build friendships, and unhappiness experienced during the pandemic. Studies of children during pandemics tend to be less sensitive to children's subjectivity, thus carrying a risk of neglect or psychological distress experienced by children.

The emic approach used in this research makes it possible to see the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's self-esteem, which has been neglected in research on the development of children's personalities. Children are positioned as passive objects that cannot judge themselves and their environment. A Study on self-esteem from a child's viewpoint provides an understanding of the child as an active subject who conceptualizes the world with the challenges faced and perceives the experience from their perspective. From the children's point of view, the disturbed can get a good idea of what they have been through and what they can expect in terms of their self-esteem.

This research has data coverage based on cases, so it is impossible to obtain a comprehensive understanding. Further studies need more excellent data coverage. It does not include education, socioeconomic status, and culture in understanding self-esteem issues. In line with that, additional research must accommodate more varied characteristics with a larger sample. The more comprehensive and holistic analysis provides a deep understanding and enables the formulation of more appropriate policies.

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