
Whatsapp as a Medium for Mother and Child Communication: A Study on Women Migrant Workers in Cilacap, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT: The phenomenon of female migrant worker migration in Cilacap Regency has become a social issue presenting family dynamics, especially in mother-to-child care. One way that is often done in overcoming this is to use the WhatsApp social media application to keep communicating remotely. However, in its use, several things arise that must also be considered. The purpose of this study is to optimize the use of Whatsapp as a communication medium for mothers and children and the obstacles faced. Using a descriptive qualitative method, this study analyzes several conversations conducted by migrant workers' mothers with their children on the WhatsApp application. The results of the study show that the description in the use of WhatsApp as a medium of communication between migrant workers' mothers and children is sufficient. Some are constrained by networks and the ability to access digital technology. In conclusion, female migrant workers must explore more digital technology such as WhatsApp so that its use can be maximized.

KEYWORDS: Female migrant workers, WhatsApp, Children

1. INTRODUCTION

Cilacap is one of the districts in Central Java that has the highest number of migrant workers. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of Cilacap Regency, the number of female migrant workers continues to increase in line with the high demand for domestic workers abroad. Based on the recapitulation of data that has been obtained until June 2024 from the Cilacap Regency Manpower and Industry Office, there are 3,588 people who have become Indonesian Migrant Workers, of which 64.15% or as many as 2,302 people are women. The majority of female migrant workers from Cilacap work as domestic workers in countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Saudi Arabia.

The decision to work abroad is certainly based on economic motives which then bring significant consequences to family relationships, especially mother-child relationships. The main challenge faced by women migrant workers is how to maintain effective communication with their children living in Indonesia. Parenting patterns are often less than optimal, especially in maintaining children's motivation to learn and fulfilling their emotional needs (1). Digital communication has become very important in maintaining remote mothercare. The phenomenon of migration of female migrant workers in Cilacap Regency has become a social issue involving family dynamics, especially in maintaining mother-child relationships. One of the right ways to overcome this communication challenge is through the use of technology, especially instant messaging applications such as Whatsapp.

WhatsApp is here to be the most widely used communication application in Indonesia, the application offers a number of features that allow users to stay connected, such as text messages, voice calls, video calls, and sending images and videos, all of which can be done in real time using an internet connection. For female migrant workers, WhatsApp is an effective and inexpensive communication tool in maintaining relationships with their children living in Indonesia. WhatsApp has great potential in overcoming long-distance barriers in the relationship between mother and child. This technology allows migrant workers to stay involved in their children's lives, provide advice, and monitor their children's emotional development (2). However, the effectiveness of this communication also depends on factors such as technological capabilities, internet access, and communication patterns in the family.

Communication technology plays an important role in exploring how WhatsApp is optimized to strengthen mother and child communication. Communication technology plays an important role in maintaining family relationships across geographical boundaries (3). Emotional and technical challenges also often arise and are still a part of this long-distance communication.

Research on the use of WhatsApp as a medium of communication between mothers and children, especially among female migrant workers, is still limited. Therefore, this study aims to dig deeper into how female migrant workers in Cilacap use WhatsApp to communicate with their children. In addition, this study will also identify the obstacles faced by migrant workers in using WhatsApp, both technical and socio-psychological.

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2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method, the researcher does not test hypotheses or look for cause-and-effect relationships, but focuses on depicting phenomena or events in narrative form. And researchers are trying to explore the meaning contained in the data (4,5). The main focus in this study is the analysis of communication between mothers and children using the WhatsApp application.

The data collection process in this study uses observation by contacting informants to conduct interviews. Second, in the digital documentation stage, researchers use Capture it software to digitally archive several interactions between mother and child. Subsequently, visual analysis is carried out on text messages, as well as messages accompanied by images to illustrate the intensity and type of communication that occurs. This can indicate how both parties are trying to build an emotional bond or explain the situation between the two through available media (6)

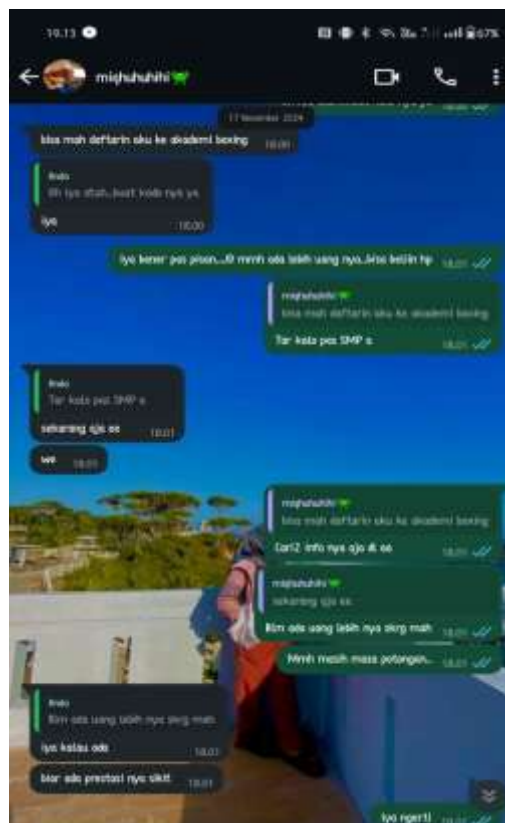
3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 WhatsApp as a means of long-distance communication between Mother and Child

WhatsApp is here as an instant messaging application that changes the way we communicate in the digital era. This application has many features that are quite comprehensive, ranging from text messages, voice calls, voice messages, video calls to media sharing. This ease of access and relatively low cost makes it the main choice for migrant workers to communicate remotely. WhatsApp allows for more intense and flexible communication, overcoming distance constraints and time differences between the countries where they work and Indonesia. WhatsApp has become a fairly important communication tool among migrant workers to stay connected with their children in Indonesia, which then makes it easier for migrant workers to keep in touch with their children in Indonesia (7,8)

WhatsApp is not only used to communicate on a regular basis, but for this it is used to provide direction and parenting even indirectly. Although it cannot replace its existence physically, WhatsApp provides space for mothers to remain involved in the childcare process. WhatsApp is also an effective educational resource in formal and informal education, in providing motivation and various skills (9). The presence of WhatsApp has changed the way they live family relationships, where communication feels more lively and dynamic.

Figure 1. Screenshot of a conversation between a migrant worker's mother and her child



Source: researcher 2024

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In the WhatsApp conversation above, a child asked his mother to enroll him in a boxing academy, but the mother suggested that he seek information first because the mother was still in the process of deducting fees from the company that dispatched her. From this conversation, not only information exchange occurs, but the emotional bond between the child and the mother is also seen. When the mother told him that he did not have more money to attend a boxing academy, the child knew his mother's complaints when working in the country. This then provides an emotional bond between the two.

WhatsApp also plays a role in providing wider family communication facilities as well as support in collective parenting. According to previous studies conducted by (10) the real-time exchange of information between family members as well as emotional support, there are more benefits for families living far apart. Based on research conducted in China by (11), the use of WhatsApp in establishing a quality remote parenting relationship with their abandoned children, especially for instant communication and the transfer of affection. Through exchanging text messages and sending photos, they can share important moments in their daily lives. This application is also used to support children's education, mothers participate in helping explain lessons and provide learning motivation to children through voice messages even though there is a distance between the two .

With the presence of WhatsApp allowing mothers and children to stay connected and support each other, it is important to maintain a balance in the use of technology to stay connected and prioritize the quality of emotional interaction in supporting children's social development in their daily lives.

3.2 WhatsApp in maintaining the emotional and psychological well-being of mothers and children

The use of WhatsApp as a medium of remote communication has a significant impact on maintaining the emotional well-being of female migrant workers and their children. For mothers working abroad, intense communication with children through apps fosters a sense of interconnected calm, the most important thing to remember is that mothers cannot be physically present in their children's daily lives. The limited interaction by the screen allows mothers to feel emotionally close to their children. For children, communication with WhatsApp has an important role in maintaining their emotional well-being. With the presence of this application, they feel that mothers are still present and accompanying in their lives only in the form of a display on the gadget screen.

Figure 2 Screenshot of a video call between mother and child



Source : Researcher 2024

In the screenshot above, it appears that there is closeness in chatting through the video call feature available on the WhatsApp application. In the image it appears that a brother and sister are joking while making a video call with a mother who works abroad. This proves that the presence of the available video call and voice message features is a medium that not only reduces longing, but also provides an opportunity for mothers to look at their children's facial expressions, listen to voices and share small moments that are quite important, even though they are thousands of kilometers apart. For abandoned children, WhatsApp is also an important channel to feel the presence of their mother, who they often miss. Although they cannot physically feel to be able to hug and talk in person, interaction through voice messages and video calls provides a sense of security and emotional support. Children can tell their daily experiences, share their complaints and happiness, they feel heard by their mothers who then give them a sense of comfort.

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Previous research studies on (12) remote parenting, in many cases can help reduce feelings of loneliness or abandonment that arise due to the physical absence of mothers in their daily lives.

WhatsApp allows migrant worker mothers to provide experiences as well as provide emotional support to each other (7,8). According to research conducted by (8) shows that the use of WhatsApp by migrant workers' mothers can improve the quality of communication and relationships in the family. The role of WhatsApp is not only limited to a communication medium, but also a place to share stories and concerns and provide moral support to each other that can overcome the isolation and anxiety often experienced by migrant workers

Although WhatsApp offers quite intense communication opportunities, some mothers complain that anxiety or guilt often arises because they are unable to fully present themselves in their child's life. The anxiety that comes with how the child is doing when sick, and other situations that require the full attention of parents can increase when communication through WhatsApp does not go smoothly. This then creates a dilemma for mothers, who feel torn between their obligations as migrant workers and the child's need for the mother to be emotionally present.

3.3 Challenges of Using WhatsApp in Mother and Child Communication

The main challenge in using WhatsApp as a remote communication tool is the limitation in the expression of emotional expression conveyed through text messages and voice calls. Although technology allows mothers and children to interact with each other through video calls, emotional turmoil and depth of feelings conveyed directly through physical interaction are often difficult to achieve. According to her, there is a difference in perception and expectations between mothers as migrant workers and childcare in their home countries, which then causes tension in the parenting relationship (13)

Other technical issues such as poor internet signals or unsupported devices can be obstacles to effective communication. Some migrant workers often work in locations that have quite limited access to technology or a stable internet connection, which ultimately becomes an obstacle in conveying messages both virtually and textfully. In some regions, limited access to digital technology and resources can hinder its effective use. This can then affect the ability of mothers to provide necessary health instruction and support to their child (14). The presence of a connection disruption can increase anxiety and discomfort between both parties. Mothers who can't connect often feel anxious about missing out on an important event in their child's life.

WhatsApp also has the potential to change the view of the role of mothers in the family. When the mother cannot be physically present, the children may think that the mother is a figure who has a "distance", even though the two continue to have a relationship through digital media. The mother's presence in the family becomes "virtual" rather than "real", which then affects the way children perceive and interact with their mother. Children feel emotionally connected to their mothers through digital communication media, but they still feel a void in the physical role of mothers in their lives. This then affects the development of children's identity, because they see their relationship with their mother as a relationship based on technology rather than involving direct interaction. While WhatsApp provides the possibility of virtual intimacy, building deep and meaningful relationships remains a challenge, especially when communication is limited to text and voice calls only (11,15)

Children who grow up side by side with technology tend to be comfortable when communication is done through applications like WhatsApp. But for some mothers who lack digital skills, this application feels confusing and tiring. The use of digital media also creates problems in technology dependence in family communication. While the app allows mothers and children to stay connected, the reliance on digital communication has a significant impact on how they build emotional, more personal bonds. Some children who are used to interacting with their mothers through messages or video calls feel dissatisfied because it is difficult to express themselves directly. This then leads to their inability to deal with social situations that require direct involvement, both at school and in daily life. The feeling of "connected but separate" also often arises, where even though communication takes place intensely through WhatsApp, there will be an emotional void that cannot be replaced by the presence of technology.

4. CONCLUSION

The importance of this research lies in its ability to provide a clearer picture of the use of WhatsApp in maintaining mother-child relationships in the context of migration. The results of this study are expected to provide recommendations in supporting policies or programs that can improve the quality of communication between mothers as migrant workers and their children. In addition, this research can also contribute to the development of communication technology by considering the limitations that exist among migrant workers, such as digital literacy and access to a cheaper and better internet.

Although there are considerable challenges faced by female migrant workers in maintaining relationships with their children, the use of digital communication media such as WhatsApp is a promising solution. With the effective use of application, women migrant workers can play an active role in children's lives even though they are separated by distance. It is important to continue to explore the use of digital technology to support communication between women migrant workers and children and to identify barriers that need to be overcome in order for the relationship to work.

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