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The Lived Religion of the Bereaved Parent of Human Trafficking Victims in East Nusa Tenggara

Liliya Wetangterah
Ph.D. Candidate at Faculty of religion and theology, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Email: l.liliyafebriantykurniawa@vu.nl.

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Abstract

Human Trafficking has an impact on various aspects of life. One of them is the experience of parents who have to lose their daughters as victims of human trafficking. Living in meaningful life after losing a loved child is challenging. The objective of this study is to explore the experience of bereaved parents particular, the parent who loses a beloved daughter who works away from home as a domestic worker. This research interviewed four participants (two couple of parents) of deceased victims of human trafficking in East Nusa Tenggara-Indonesia. The bereaved experience challenges their perspective on life, the human limitation, and the assumption about justice. Religion assists the parent in coping and meaning to deal with the bereaved experience. Related to the sense of control, the bereaved parent perceives the same meaning of the Divine plan but in the term of justice, the bereaved parent has a different perspective that obtains a different outcome. A beloved parent passively surrenders to God's revenge while the other bereaved parent understands justice involves forgiveness also law enforcement of perpetrators.

Keywords: The Lived Religion; Bereaved Parent; Human Trafficking; Victims; East Nusa Tenggara

Abstrak

Perdagangan manusia berdampak pada berbagai aspek kehidupan. Salah satunya adalah pengalaman para orang tua yang harus kehilangan anak perempuannya sebagai korban perdagangan manusia. Menjalani kehidupan yang bermakna setelah kehilangan anak tercinta penuh dengan pergumulan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi pengalaman orang tua yang berduka khususnya, orang tua yang kehilangan putri tercinta yang bekerja jauh dari rumah sebagai pekerja rumah tangga. Penelitian ini mewawancarai empat orang partisipan (dua pasang orang tua) korban meninggal dunia perdagangan orang di Nusa Tenggara Timur-Indonesia. Pengalaman berduka menantang cara pandang mereka tentang kehidupan, keterbatasan manusia, dan asumsi tentang keadilan. Agama membantu orang tua dalam mengatasi dan memberi makna untuk menghadapi pengalaman berduka. Orang tua yang berduka merasakan arti yang sama dari rencana Ilahi tetapi dalam hal keadilan, orang tua yang berduka memiliki cara pandang yang berbeda yang memperoleh hasil yang berbeda. Orang tua yang secara pasif menyerah pada pembalasan Tuhan, sementara orang

tua yang berduka memahami bahwa keadilan melibatkan pengampunan juga penegakan hukum terhadap pelaku.

Kata-kata Kunci: Agama yang dihidupi; Orang Tua yang berduka; Perdagangan Manusia; Korban; Nusa Tenggara Timur

INTRODUCTION

Living in meaningful life after losing a loved child is a hurtful challenge. It is a very stressful event, an uncontrollable life situation, testing the limits of the ability to control, and religion for the bereaved couple.[1] Religion reported plays an important and beneficial role during the grieving and meaning-making process of bereaved parents.[2] Related to the meaning maker, there is a correlation between the experience of child loss and the divine struggle, relation to God.[3] Moreover, believing in the divined plane has a protected effect to on older adults who cope with the aftermath of child loss. [4]

Bereavement experienced due to losing a beloved child is the story of many human trafficking victims' families in Indonesia. In particular, East Nusa Tenggara (ENT) is a province with a high number of human trafficking cases. By applying lived religion, this paper describes the experiences of two families of the victims of human trafficking. Their daughter from both families migrates as a domestic worker but returns home in a coffin. This article describes the experience of two bereaved parents. Explore how they deal with the death of their daughters in the aftermath and how religion role in that process.

Working with a good-paying job and pursuing a better future is the common desire of every people. Universal declaration of human right article 23 warrants the right to work, free choice of employment, equal pay for equal work, right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and

[1] Ileana Ungureanu and Jonathan G. Sandberg, "'Broken Together': Spirituality and Religion as Coping Strategies for Couples Dealing with the Death of a Child: A Literature Review with Clinical Implications," *Contemporary Family Therapy* 32, no. 3 (2010): 302–19, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10591-010-9120-8.

[2] Nur Atikah Mohamed Hussin, Joan Guàrdia-Olmos, and Anna Liisa Aho, "The Use of Religion in Coping with Grief among Bereaved Malay Muslim Parents," *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 21, no. 4 (2018): 395–407, https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2018.1500531.

[3] Rivi Frei-Landau, Ilanit Hasson-Ohayon, and Rivka Tuval-Mashiach, "The Experience of Divine Struggle Following Child Loss: The Case of Israeli Bereaved Modern-Orthodox Parents," *Death Studies* 0, no. 0 (2020): 1–15, https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2020.1850547.

[4] Jong Hyun Jung and Hyo Jung Lee, "Death of a Child, Religion, and Mental Health in Later Life," *Aging and Mental Health* 0, no. 0 (2021): 1–9, https://doi.org/10.1080/13607863.2021.1889968.

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supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.[5] Leaving home, migrating far from family, or even working overseas become a choice that must be taken to pursue a better life. World Bank reported 9 million of Indonesian are working overseas [6] and many more workers migrate within Indonesia.

East Nusa Tenggara is an archipelago province in the eastern part of Indonesia recognized as a source of migrant workers who work as domestic workers overseas or within the country. Poverty, lack of education, domestic violence, and patriarchal culture are the pool factors to migrate as a domestic worker.[7] Children and women work as domestic worker and elder caregivers in other province within country. In overseas the destination country are Malaysia, Singapore, and Hongkong. Unfortunately, the process of migrant worker vulnerable with human trafficking.

United Nations defined human trafficking as trafficking in person to describe a process of the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, or deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.[8] Working as a migrant worker is not a human trafficking process but, in many cases, the process of migrant worker qualifies the element of human trafficking. In 2016 there were 451 people identified as being related to handling human trafficking cases by the regional Police.[9] Since 2016, East Nusa Tenggara recognised as the province with the highest number of human trafficking.

Around 2017- 2019, more than 339 the number of migrant worker coffin that return from abroad and other places in Indonesia to NTT. [10] Most of them indicated human trafficking victims. It describes the high number of the bereaved family and a reminder to

[5] "Universal Declaration of Human Rights | United Nations," n.d.

[6] The World Bank, "Indonesia ' s Global Workers Juggling Opportunities & Risks," *The World Bank*, 2017, 1–94.

[7] Lia Wetangterah, "Kerentanan Masyarakat Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT) Menjadi Korban Perdagangan Orang Dengan Modus Pekerja Migran Di Indonesia." Dalam Menolak Diam: Gereja Melawan Perdagangan Orang, Editor Rappan Paledung Mery Kolimon, Hans Harmakaputra, Toar Hutagalung, Xvii," *Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia*, 2018.

[8] "OHCHR | Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons," n.d.

[9] Maria Agustina Kleden and Astri Atti, "Analysis of the Causes of Human Trafficking in East Nusa Tenggara Province," *Journal of Social and Political Sciences* 2, no. 2 (2019): 313–19, https://doi.org/10.31014/aior.1991.02.02.72.

[10] "NTT Terima 119 Jenazah PMI Selama 2019 | Antaranews.Com | LINE TODAY," n.d.

provide better protection for migrant worker. Hearing and sounding the victims experience is important to increase public awareness.

In terms of religion, this article applies the perspective of lived religion in the Christianity context. Lived religion perceives religion as expressed and experienced in the lives of individuals.[11] Instate of focus on doctrinal and institutional perspective, lived religion focus on what ordinary people do in their daily lives.[12] Involvement God in everyday life.[13] Lived religion as a religious study based on experience is an intersection between religion, human trafficking, and trauma study. It is a means to hear and sound victims' experiences. The experience of the victims consists of the religious story and source of theology including how they experience God in their suffering. Moreover, establishing theology based on human trafficking victims' experiences is a means to raise public awareness that human trafficking has impacted many aspects of the community and religious communities vulnerable to human trafficking.

This article is based on depth interviews that applied semi-structured interviews to gain interview data as narrative material.[14] Taken place in East Nusa Tenggara-Indonesia. The interview participant consists of four participants: two parents couple of deceased victims of human trafficking. Their daughter works as a migrant worker in the domestic working sector within Indonesia and Malaysia. Actually, this research is part of the Ph.D. study on themes of human trafficking, suffering, and religion. For the analysis applied Grounded theory, develop a theory through three stages code, conceptual and interpretative. The coding process began with line-by-line code and resulted in four main groups: Identity, Recruitment, placement, repartition, religious coping, meaning, and outcome.

[11] Meredith B McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

[12] R. Ruard Ganzevoort and Johan Roeland, "Lived Religion: The Praxis of Practical Theology," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 18, no. 1 (2014): 91–101, https://doi.org/10.1515/ijpt-2014-0007.

[13] Negotiating Self, Ines W Jindra, and Nancy Ammerman, *Lived Religion, Conversion and Recovery*, *Lived Religion, Conversion and Recovery*, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-40682-0.

[14] Steven Engler and Michael Stausberg, *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion* (Routledge, 2013).

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DISCUSSION AND RESULT

First Narration: Martha's Parent

Martha, a 17-year-old girl, the second daughter from four siblings, went to Makasar and working as a domestic worker since she did not pass the final exam in senior high school. She went to earn money to help the family who live in poverty. She was recruit by a relative who lives in the same village. The recruiter facilitates all documents and pays all the costs. All the costs count as debt that has to be paid by six months' salary deduction. The parent-approved her decision because the recruiter was convinced that she was responsible for it.

Martha has been working for one year. Since she arrived in Makasar, she called her parent only one time. According to her mother, she went to the recruiter's house several times to ask for Martha's information. The recruiter said the employer did not allow Martha to have a handphone and make a phone call if the employer gave her permission.

One morning, the parent accept the information from the recruiter that Martha died in the hospital after falling into a toilet. She has been hospitalized and died the next day. The family did not know when Martha's body will be returned home and just asked to wait. The bodies were returned by plane from Makasar to Kupang, from the airport and delivered to the home by a rental car without being accompanied by a responsible person. There was no clear information about the accident.

Martha's father describes: "After the burial, I was sick for almost two weeks. We are too sad." Martha's mothers need three years to accept the reality

> "I suffer from high blood pressure for three years because of overthinking. But slowly I was able to accept that my daughter had died. I cannot do anything, she cannot live again, she was gone, I'm sincere. Every time I remember my daughter and get hurt, I pray to god. God is in control of our lives. I don't want to be sick anymore that's why I'm sincere."

Martha's parents are aware as a poor family, they do not have the ability and courage to report this case to the police and take legal action. Law enforcement requires plenty of time and expensive costs. Otherwise, they surrender to God, Martha's mother narrates:

> "I'm hurt by the person who recruited her and the employer, I just pray. Let God take revenge. We are poor people who cannot do anything, we pray that God will repay them."

Pray is the main source to deal with the difficult situation. When needing more encouragement, they went to team prayer. In the prayer team, they can share their story and pray together, encouraging each other.

Second Narration: Leona's Parent

Leona, a girl 18 years old, is the third daughter of four siblings. After graduating from senior high school, leave home and working in Malaysia as a domestic worker. Leona went to Malaysia without a permit from her parents no one in the family know about it. To find her information, the family went to several Private Placement Companies for Indonesian Migrant Workers (The agent) but there was no information.

After she had worked for 8 months, the parent got information from an agent that she died in Malaysia by suicide. The body returned was in an unrecognizable condition. The agent changes her name, age, and address on her passport. There were Y-shaped stitches due to the autopsy on her body. The church and several anti-human trafficking organizations assist the family to report the case to the police for the legal process. There was indicative of organ trafficking.

The legal process eventually imprisoned 16 perpetrators of the human trafficking mafia: a recruiter, an immigration employee who changes her identity on her passport, the head of local agents in the regions, and the head of the national agent in Jakarta. They were one of the mafias of human trafficking.

Leona's mother narrates her grief:

> *"*I am very sad but there is nothing I can do. They tortured her, they cut her internal organs into pieces, and they tortured my beloved daughter like an animal, I was sad. It's been over 4 years so I don't really think about it anymore. If I remember her I pray, I leave everything to the Lord Jesus, God rules us our life. Her sister says: mother doesn't think too much you will sick". I'm not angry with God, I'm just praying, I believe God will bring justice for us., I sincerely. *"*

The law enforcement process takes more than a year, and Leona's family has been through it patiently. Leona's father describes:

> "My family always struggles in prayer. We have to be strong in praying because what we are fighting is a big mafia. Every time there is the information we pray. Before doing anything we pray. God walks in front of us and beside us. We pray for justice." "As a Christian, I have to forgive the

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> perpetrators, but the judicial process continues. Justice for us, the poor families of the victims of human trafficking, must be fought for.*"*

The parent learns due Leona went to Malaysia because of poverty, and they promise themselves to work hard to provide for the family's needs. No more children must go abroad as domestic workers. They are also active in anti-human trafficking campaigns.

Analysis

Religion plays an important role as a source of coping to deal with the bereaved in both narratives. People cope religiously when religion is a relatively available, accessible, and compelling way to cope.[15] It is accessible and available when religious beliefs, feelings, practices, and relationships are a part of the orientating system. Religions are compelling, due to being acutely aware of the limitation of the human condition. The parents turn to religion as a coping mechanism because being available, accessible, and compelling with them.

Traumatized event has an impact on the conception of control and justice. The bereaved parent grapples with the death of the beloved child as an unexpected and unchangeable reality. Moreover, the bereaved parent confronts the fact that there is something unnatural about the dead. To live in meaningful life in the aftermath, religion assists the bereaved parent constructs their meaning related to control and justice.

Divine Plane

Death is an unexpected and unchangeable reality that causes awareness of the limitations of life and influences people's sense of control, people cannot control their own lives but God. To deal with this situation, the bereaved parent perceives God as a ruler of life. What happens in life is the Divine plane. The perspective assists the bereaved parent in sincerely accepting the reality. It was a painful process and requires time. Martha's mother needs three years while Leona's mother needs 4 years to achieve sincerely. Moreover, it heals them physically and psychologically.

The traumatized event affects people's basic assumption that the world is benevolent and meaningful and the self is worthy.[16] Perceives God as a ruler of life is a meaning that

[15] Kenneth I Pargament, *The Psychology of Religion and Coping: Theory, Research, Practice* (Guilford press, 2001).
[16] Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered Assumptions* (Simon and Schuster, 2010).

assists to deal with reality. Even though death is unpredictable and unchangeable, proves human limitations but it is not out of God's control. Perceives God as a ruler of life and encourages the bereaved parent that God knows what they have been through and never let them alone in bereaved. As long as life is under God's rule, the world is still benevolent and meaningful. It is a way to claim the sense of control that the self is still worthy.

Both experiences define that experience of losing beloved children and the relationship with the higher power are closely related theme and has a positive outcome in healing. It is an important factor in acceptance for the bereaved parent. The bereaved parent who believes in a divined plan shows a gradual decline in the number of depressive symptoms over time.

Justice

The meaning that God is a ruler of life shapes the bereaved parent's concept of justice but obtains different outcomes. Martha's family believes because God is the ruler of life, they surrender to God's revenge. They tend to be passive due the recruiter is a close relative and reporting the case to the police affected their relationship. In addition, economically constrained cause judicial law is a process that requires time and high cost. Team prayer plays an important role as a support system. Religious coping obtains a positive outcome, and Martha's family gets closer to God.

Leona's parents drive by the same meaning God is the ruler of life but they perceive justice includes forgiveness and the law enforcement process. They perceive forgiveness as mandatory and law enforcement as also a part of faith action. Justice through law enforcement to prove the existence of mafia of human trafficking and people who live in poverty also have the right to justice. It is a way for the victims to claim their dignity and an important aspect of the healing of healing. Advocacy from the church and the anti-trafficking alliance plays an important role as a support system.

Traumatized events encounter people's considerations about human limitations in different ways. The first side reinforces awareness about boundary conditions. People transcendence the limits and surrender to God in a passive way. On the contrary, encourage people from the boundary to the center of life. It raises awareness of God's power that

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encourages people to overcome the boundary.[17] These two different ways are reflected in the bereaved parent's concept of justice.

Both perspectives about justice have a positive outcome because Martha's parents and Leona's parents describe getting closer to God. It is only positive on a personal level but in a communal level, the passive action establishes impunity for the perpetrators. The perpetrators are immune to recruiting and exploiting without fear of law enforcement. The victims learn to hopeless in their poverty. The community then perceives the violence and exploitation as a natural thing, not aware of mafia human trafficking. This type of community is vulnerable of human trafficking.

The different perspectives on justice illustrate the strategic role of support systems. The support the bereaved parent needs involve litigation and non-litigation advocacy. Justice through the juridical law process is an essential part of healing. The bereaved parents need to be aware of the mafia of human trafficking, and encourage, and support to through the law enforcement process that requires time and high cost. This process reclaims their dignity and positions the bereaved parents as a subject for justice. It transformed from the victim to the agent of change.

CONCLUSION

Religion and human trafficking are related themes. Religion plays an essential role for the bereaved parent to overcome the losing experiences. Religion assists the victims in the meaning process. It was a hurtful process and requires time. Beloved experience impacts the perspective of human limitation and justice. In order to create a meaning related to human limitation, both of the bereaved parents perceive God as a ruler of life. While in perspective about justice they obtain different perspectives and outcomes: passive and active action of faith. In the human trafficking context, religious coping can result in a positive outcome on a personal level but has a negative impact on the community level. Another support system needs to encourage religious coping has a positive outcome on both levels, personal and community. Religious coping is supposed to assist the bereaved parent in the healing process and raise public awareness through the law enforcement process about human trafficking, both are faith actions.

[17] Juliana A Tuasela, "The Dynamic of Power Relationship in Judges 16:1- 22 and Its Relevance in the Indonesian Context," *ARUMBAE: Jurnal Ilmiah Teologi Dan Studi Agama* Vol 4, no. 1 (2022): 81–97, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.37429/arumbae.v4i1.797.

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