Analysis of Mandailing Tribe Students Who Experience Inner Child Dynamics Towards Social Life

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the dynamics of the inner child experienced by Mandailing students and its impact on their social life at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra. The background of this research is based on the importance of understanding unresolved childhood wounds (inner child), particularly within the context of Mandailing culture, which is known for its strong, hierarchical parenting style and deep-rooted traditional values. A qualitative approach was employed using a case study method. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation involving several purposively selected Mandailing students. The findings reveal that childhood experiences related to emotional stress, authoritarian parenting, and social expectations from both family and traditional communities have significant impacts on the students' social interactions on campus. Some of the participants struggled with expressing emotions, building healthy interpersonal relationships, and tended to suppress inner conflicts. However, forms of resilience also emerged, such as the drive for independence and academic achievement as a means of compensation. The study concludes that the dynamics of the inner child within the Mandailing cultural context have a complex influence on the students' social lives. Therefore, a psychosocial approach that is sensitive to cultural values and personal experiences is essential.
Keywords: Culture, Inner Child Dynamics, Social Life

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dinamika inner child yang dialami oleh mahasiswa Mandailing dan dampaknya terhadap kehidupan sosialnya di Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara. Latar belakang penelitian ini didasarkan pada pentingnya memahami luka masa kecil (inner child) yang belum terselesaikan, khususnya dalam konteks budaya Mandailing yang dikenal memiliki pola asuh yang kuat, hierarkis, dan kental dengan nilai-nilai tradisional. Pendekatan yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus. Data diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan dokumentasi terhadap beberapa informan mahasiswa Mandailing yang dipilih secara purposive. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pengalaman masa kecil yang terkait dengan stres emosional, pola asuh otoriter, dan harapan sosial dari keluarga dan masyarakat adat memiliki dampak yang signifikan terhadap hubungan sosial mahasiswa di kampus. Sebagian dari mereka mengalami kesulitan dalam mengekspresikan emosi, membangun hubungan interpersonal yang sehat, dan kecenderungan untuk menekan konflik batin. Namun, ada pula bentuk-bentuk resiliensi yang muncul, seperti dorongan untuk mandiri dan keberhasilan akademis sebagai bentuk kompensasi. Penelitian ini berkesimpulan bahwa dinamika anak batin dalam konteks budaya Mandailing memberikan pengaruh yang kompleks terhadap kehidupan sosial peserta didik, sehingga memerlukan pendekatan psikososial yang peka terhadap nilai-nilai budaya dan pengalaman pribadi
Kata Kunci: Budaya, Dinamika Inner Child, Kehidupan Sosial

Introduction

University students are individuals undergoing a crucial developmental phase, transitioning from adolescence to adulthood (Netrawati, 2024). This period is often marked by identity exploration, social adjustment, and the formation of personal values and life direction. However, not all students experience this stage with mental stability (Hermanto, 2024). Many still carry emotional wounds from unresolved childhood experiences, often referred to in psychology as the "wounded inner child" (Dora & Susanti, 2021).

As one of the major ethnic groups in North Sumatra, the Mandailing community possesses distinct cultural structures, including parenting styles, gender roles, and family communication patterns (Umi Kalsum, 2023). In many cases, values instilled from a young age through parental attitudes, customary norms, or emotional pressure and trauma leave psychological imprints manifested in inner child dynamics (Amanda Afriza Putri, 2024). When the inner child is neither acknowledged nor healed, it can influence how individuals interact socially, form relationships, and manage emotions in a university environment.

Mandailing students who carry emotional burdens from childhood may experience inner conflict, social withdrawal, difficulty forming healthy relationships, or a tendency to people-please in order to gain validation (Silvana, 2024). If inner child dynamics are not properly understood or managed, they can significantly affect students' quality of social life.

In this context, students from the Mandailing ethnic group face unique cultural conditions. The Mandailing culture is known for its rigid social structure, authoritarian parenting style, and high expectations placed upon children, particularly regarding the preservation of family honor and clan reputation (Zhang, 2022). Mandailing children are often raised in highly disciplined environments with limited emotional communication (Rahmawati, 2022). Strong traditional values and social demands from extended families and communities tend to suppress emotional expression from an early age (Dewi, 2023). If such conditions are not addressed psychologically, individuals from this background may carry emotional wounds into adulthood, which affect their social relationships (Chen, 2022). Social life plays a critical role in the formation of identity and personal development among university students (Nurlaila Sapitri, 2023).

The concept of the *inner child* in psychology refers to the emotional aspect of the self formed during childhood, often carrying unresolved psychological wounds. In individualistic Western cultures, the inner child is regarded as a central element in the healing process,

often addressed through emotional expression and the exploration of past experiences (Surianti, 2022). In contrast, in collectivist and hierarchical cultures like the Mandailing, emotional expression is often restricted to preserve family honor (*hasangapon*), leading to suppressed and unacknowledged emotional wounds (Nilsson, 2019).

Within the framework of cultural and cross-cultural psychology, cultural values significantly influence how individuals interpret and respond to childhood trauma (Wulan, 2023). Therefore, healing approaches for the inner child must be culturally adapted. In the Mandailing community, incorporating local values such as the practice of *marsialap ari* (heart-to-heart storytelling) and community-based approaches is essential to ensure psychological interventions are culturally relevant and do not conflict with social norms (Wibowo, 2024). Thus, understanding and addressing the inner child must consider cultural dimensions to ensure that the healing process is contextualized and sustainable.

Childhood serves as a foundational stage in the development of an individual's personality and character (Fahrunnisa, 2024). All experiences during childhood whether joyful or traumatic are recorded and embedded in the subconscious mind (Rahmatullah, 2023). In psychology, the part of the self that stores these memories is referred to as the *inner child*, representing the "child within" who carries emotional wounds, unmet needs, and unresolved past experiences (Hermanto, 2024). When these inner wounds remain unhealed, they can significantly affect how a person relates to themselves and others in adulthood (Mursalin, 2023).

Healing emotional wounds especially those formed during childhood due to cultural pressures requires therapeutic approaches that not only address psychological aspects but also demonstrate sensitivity to the individual's cultural background (Karim, 2022). In the context of Mandailing students, who are raised within collectivist and hierarchical values, three therapeutic approaches are considered relevant and effective: narrative therapy, culturally-based counseling, and the integration of local values into the healing process. First, narrative therapy emphasizes the power of personal storytelling as a means to unravel and reconstruct traumatic experiences. Second, culturally-based counseling incorporates culture as an integral part of the counseling process, ensuring interventions align with the client's cultural framework. Third, integrating local values into emotional healing allows the therapeutic process to be more meaningful and culturally accepted. By applying these three approaches in an integrated manner, healing emotional wounds in individuals from specific

cultural backgrounds such as Mandailing students can become more relevant, holistic, and sustainable (Nasution, 2022).

Initial field observations show that students at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra, who come from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, face various challenges in the process of social adaptation on campus. This diversity includes differences in cultural values, communication styles, and social expectations brought from their home environments. In daily interactions, these differences often create barriers to forming harmonious relationships, both at individual and group levels. Some students exhibit tendencies to withdraw from social interaction due to discomfort or difficulty adapting to the dominant social norms on campus. This is exacerbated by internal pressures such as anxiety, self-doubt, and a lack of confidence especially among students from cultures with stricter and more hierarchical social norms, such as the Mandailing ethnic group.

This phenomenon indicates that social adaptation on campus is influenced not only by individual factors but also by the cultural constructs carried by each student. This situation highlights the importance of culturally sensitive approaches in supporting students' social integration. Institutional support that takes into account students' psychosocial and cultural backgrounds is crucial to building an inclusive and supportive academic environment for the entire university community. One emerging psychological factor increasingly discussed in studies of individual development is the *inner child*, a part of the self that stores emotional experiences from childhood and continues to influence adult behavior and emotional responses.

Unfortunately, to date, no research has specifically examined the relationship between inner child dynamics and university students' social lives, particularly in a cultural context like that experienced by Mandailing students at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra. Yet, understanding these psychological and sociocultural dimensions is vital to supporting students' holistic development and creating a campus environment that is inclusive and responsive to their emotional needs.

Previous studies have explored the concept of the inner child in relation to mental health, childhood trauma, and healing processes. Research by (Nuriza Dora, 2021) highlighted the impact of the inner child on an individual's ability to form interpersonal relationships, including in academic and social settings. However, most of these studies are general in scope and have not examined the inner child through the lens of specific cultural or ethnic backgrounds. Meanwhile, (Ritonga, 2023) has explored Mandailing students mainly from sociocultural aspects, ethnic identity, and the preservation of traditional values.

Very few studies have delved into the psychological dimensions of Mandailing students, especially those involving childhood emotional wounds and their impact on social life in higher education settings.

No existing research has directly analyzed the relationship between inner child dynamics and the social lives of Mandailing students, particularly in a multicultural campus context such as the State Islamic University of North Sumatra. This indicates a significant research gap, given the crucial role cultural background plays in shaping emotional and social dynamics. The presence of a large number of Mandailing students at this university offers an opportunity for intercultural engagement. However, many face difficulties in adapting socially, maintaining healthy relationships, or openly expressing their emotional side.

This situation calls for further investigation, particularly from the perspective of cultural psychology and inner child dynamics. This study aims to analyze how Mandailing students at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra experience inner child dynamics and how these affect their social lives on campus. Understanding this can contribute to the development of culturally sensitive mental health support and help foster a more inclusive and empathetic university environment.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method (Moleong, 2000). This approach was chosen as it allows for an in-depth understanding of individuals' subjective experiences in this case, Mandailing students regarding the dynamics of their inner child and how this affects their social lives on campus. The case study method enables the researcher to explore psychosocial phenomena holistically within real-life contexts and uncover the meaning behind behaviors and personal experiences that cannot be quantitatively measured (Robert, 2002). The main focus of this study is on personal experiences, emotional dynamics, and the cultural influences on identity formation and social relationships among students.

The research was conducted at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra, focusing on students from the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, particularly those from the Mandailing ethnic group. The study was carried out over an estimated period of two to three months, which included initial observations, in-depth interviews, and data analysis. The participants were active Mandailing students at the university who met the following criteria: they came from families and communities that uphold Mandailing cultural values;

they exhibited or recognized signs of inner child dynamics, such as difficulty expressing emotions, insecurity in social relationships, childhood trauma, or interpersonal difficulties; and they were willing to serve as informants and participate openly in the interview process. A total of 10 students from the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training were selected through purposive sampling, based on the depth of insight each informant could provide.

To obtain rich and relevant data, multiple data collection techniques were used. Observation, the researcher observed the social interactions of the informants on campus to understand how they build relationships, engage in group settings, and respond to specific social situations. Semi-structured interviews, these allowed informants to speak openly about their childhood experiences, family relationships, and social dynamics on campus. The questions were designed to explore emotional aspects and cultural influences. Documentation, this included field notes, interview transcripts, and additional materials such as reflective writings from the informants (if available), which supported the analysis (Iskandar, 2021).

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the stages outlined by (Creswell, 2020). Full transcription of the interviews. Identification of key themes emerging from the informants' narratives. Coding the data according to themes such as childhood experiences, parenting styles, cultural pressure, emotional wounds, and social interaction patterns. Analyzing the interrelations among the themes, especially between the inner child and students' social life dynamics. Drawing comprehensive conclusions based on thematic patterns.

To ensure the validity of the data, triangulation techniques were applied (Putri Syahri, 2024), including. Source triangulation, comparing data from multiple informants. Method triangulation, cross-checking interview results with observations and documentation. Member checking, confirming the researcher's interpretations with the informants to ensure accuracy and consistency of meaning.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the scope of the research is limited to Mandailing students at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra, so the results may not fully represent the experiences of Mandailing students in other university settings or geographic regions. Second, the qualitative approach used in this study heavily relies on the depth of participants' narratives, which may be influenced by cultural norms emphasizing politeness and emotional restraint, potentially limiting open expression of emotional experiences. Third, not all external factors contributing to inner child dynamics such as family background, specific childhood traumas,

or the influence of social media could be thoroughly explored within the scope of this research. As a result, the findings should be understood within their contextual boundaries, and further research using broader methods and coverage is needed to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

Result and Discussion

Students' Social Reactions to the Dynamics of the Inner Child in the Campus Environment

Observational findings indicate that the majority of students display reserved social interaction patterns. They tend to keep a distance during group conversations, often remain silent, and only speak when directly addressed. In class discussions, they rarely raise their hands or express opinions spontaneously. When invited to participate, their facial expressions often appear blank or tense. Students with unresolved emotional wounds frequently appear awkward or hesitant when interacting with new people or participating in large groups. They prefer familiar environments or choose to withdraw from active involvement in campus social activities, such as student organizations or events. These students also show discomfort in situations involving debate or conflict even academic ones often choosing to withdraw or concede rather than engage in discourse.

Some students exhibit physical gestures typically associated with suppressed emotional stress, such as biting their lips, clasping their hands, fidgeting, or avoiding eye contact during conversations. Those struggling with inner child issues often form close relationships with only one or two peers. They lack a wide social network and feel more comfortable in private or personal interactions. These observations align with the interview findings regarding students' social responses to inner child dynamics on campus. The "inner child" refers to the part of oneself that holds memories and emotional wounds from childhood. When this inner child is hurt, individuals may struggle to build relationships, express emotions, or develop self-worth. Interview excerpts further illustrate this. Student **S** shared:

> "I don't really enjoy socializing. When others are chatting in a crowd, I prefer sitting alone or going to a quiet place. I feel uncomfortable when I have to talk too much."

Students **D** and **U** added:

> "Since I was a child, I've been quiet. If something bothers me, I keep it to myself. Even now in college, it's hard to get close to new people, especially if they're too active or ask personal questions."

Student **K** remarked:

> "I can't trust people easily. It's better to be alone than to trust too much and end up disappointed. I've been through that too many times."

Student **G** emphasized emotional control:

> "When I'm angry or disappointed, I just stay silent. I'm afraid people will think I'm rude. Besides, I'm Mandailing we have to control our behavior."

Similarly, students **E**, **R**, and **T** shared:

> "I have friends, but only one who's really close to me. I'm afraid that if I get too close, I'll get hurt. When I was a child, I was often scolded without knowing why. That made it hard for me to trust people."

Based on interviews with five Mandailing students at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra, it can be concluded that inner child dynamics rooted in childhood experiences significantly influence their social interactions on campus. Students with unresolved emotional wounds tend to distance themselves from others and prefer solitude. They feel uncomfortable in large social environments due to difficulties expressing emotions or participating actively in group discussions. These students also struggle with trust and often maintain limited, close-knit relationships with only one or two peers. Childhood experiences of emotional neglect or unfair criticism have led to hesitancy in forming deeper connections.

All five students experiencing this pattern suppress their emotions in both stressful and intense situations. The cultural norm of "silence and emotional restraint," coupled with tense early life experiences, reinforces emotional suppression both positive and negative. This hampers their ability to express themselves honestly in social interactions. They frequently exhibit low self-esteem and lack confidence, particularly in group settings or academic discussions. Constant comparisons to high standards from an early age have instilled a fear of negative judgment. Overall, these childhood emotional wounds rooted in cultural and emotional pressures have resulted in socially withdrawn behavior and conflict avoidance, making it difficult for students to adapt and build healthy relationships on campus.

The findings confirm that Mandailing students at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra who face unresolved inner child issues demonstrate guarded, cautious, and disengaged social behavior. They show discomfort in expressing emotions, struggle to establish broad social connections, and tend to avoid group settings or potential conflicts.

This pattern is consistent with previous research showing how emotionally traumatic childhood experiences can lead to anxious and defensive relational styles in adulthood.

According to (Aini & Wulan, 2023), the inner child is shaped by early experiences involving emotional attachment, trauma, and interactions with caregivers. Individuals with emotional wounds or unmet emotional needs during development often carry defensive patterns into adulthood, such as social withdrawal, trust issues, and anxiety. (Karim, 2022) also argues that negative emotional experiences in childhood can shape the social nervous system, making individuals hypersensitive to perceived social threats even in neutral settings such as class discussions or daily interactions. As a result, students with wounded inner children tend to hold back, avoid group conversations, and display anxious or blank expressions in social situations.

Cultural values also play a significant role. The Mandailing culture emphasizes emotional restraint, respect for authority, and the belief that "silence is better" (emotional suppression to maintain social harmony). These cultural norms reinforce socially withdrawn behavior (Adinda & Netrawati, 2024), consistent with the collectivist cultural perspective, in which self-expression is often limited to preserve group harmony. Among Mandailing students, this reinforces the tendency to suppress emotions and avoid conflict.

(Surianti, 2022) theory is also relevant. She notes that misaligned parenting can result in the development of a "false self," where individuals conform to external expectations at the expense of emotional authenticity. This is reflected in the interviews, where students remain silent in the face of anger or disappointment not because they lack emotion, but because they fear being perceived as impolite or culturally inappropriate. Thus, students' social responses to inner child dynamics are influenced by two main factors the psychological imprint of unhealthy childhood emotional experiences, and cultural values that promote emotional control as a marker of politeness and self-discipline. Together, these factors hinder students' social adaptation, ability to form healthy relationships, and authentic self-expression in academic environments.

Based on these findings, it is clear that unresolved childhood wounds such as feeling neglected, being unfairly criticized, or fearing conflict lead students to withdraw from social situations, avoid group discussions or student organizations, suppress feelings rather than express them openly, exhibit low levels of social trust, form only limited interpersonal relationships, these tendencies are further reinforced by Mandailing cultural values that stress emotional control, social obedience, and the maintenance of harmony through conflict

avoidance. Psychologically, this reflects a defense mechanism developed during childhood to prevent further emotional pain. Collectively, unresolved inner child dynamics function as psychosocial barriers, preventing students from achieving holistic development both socially and academically.

Table 1. Summary of Observation and Interview Findings on Mandailing Students

Aspect	Behavioral Indicators	Explanation
Social Participation	Inactive in group discussions, rarely speak spontaneously, mostly silent	Students appear passive and unwilling to interact unless directly invited.
Emotional Expression	Blank or tense facial expressions, discomfort during conflict, silent when upset	Emotions are suppressed due to cultural expectations or childhood trauma.
Social Interaction	Only close to one or two friends, avoids large groups	Lack of trust in others and a preference for solitude.
Response to Conflict	Avoids debates, stays silent, yields even with differing opinions	Avoidant pattern shaped by childhood experiences of avoiding conflict.
Signs of Emotional Stress	Biting lips, clasping hands, fidgeting fingers, avoiding eye contact	Typical signs of anxiety or stress in social situations.
Cultural and Self-Beliefs	"As a Mandailing, I must restrain myself", fear of being seen as impolite, lack of confidence	Mandailing culture enforces emotional suppression; high family standards foster low self-esteem.
Inner Child Meaning	Emotional wounds from childhood frequent scolding, neglect, or feeling unappreciated	Leads to closed-off relationships and difficulty in building social trust.

The Role of Mandailing Culture in Strengthening the Dynamics of the Inner Child

Observations indicate that Mandailing culture is characterized by a strong and hierarchical social structure, where a child's role in the family is determined by their clan status and gender. It was observed that students often feel burdened by cultural expectations requiring them to embody an ideal figure in society. Mandailing cultural values tend to encourage children to be obedient, reserved, and emotionally restrained. This is reflected in the interactions of university students, where emotional expression is often avoided, even in informal settings. Some students were observed suppressing their emotions during tense moments, as if they had been trained to "contain" their feelings. The concept of *hasangapon* (respect for family/clan) appears to be deeply internalized. Students admitted to restraining themselves from behaviors considered "shameful" to their family, even within friendships. This creates internal pressure and reinforces emotional wounds caused by habitual suppression of self-expression.

Mandailing culture comprises a system of values, norms, customs, language, and social life patterns that have developed within the Mandailing ethnic group, predominantly located in South Tapanuli, North Sumatra. These observations are supported by interviews

exploring the role of Mandailing culture in shaping inner child dynamics. One respondent, **R**, stated:

> "Since childhood, I was taught never to argue with my parents. Even when we knew they were wrong, we stayed silent. That's our culture we must know our place. So, I grew up feeling I couldn't be honest, especially about my feelings."

Another interviewee, **H**, shared:

> "I'm the only daughter, so I have to protect the family's reputation. If I socialize a bit too freely, they say I've brought shame to the family. I grew up afraid of making mistakes."

A third respondent, **A**, explained:

> "In my family, children are expected to follow the rules without needing to be told. If not, we're seen as disrespectful or lacking in understanding of tradition. I often felt scared even of making small mistakes."

Another participant, **M**, added:

> "I have friends, but only one close friend. I'm afraid that getting too close could hurt me. As a child, I was often scolded without knowing what I had done wrong. Now I find it hard to trust others."

F described a similar experience:

> "I often feel like I can't be myself. For example, I have dreams that are different from what my parents want, but I'm afraid to speak up. I don't want to be labeled a disobedient child. So even now, I'm unsure about the direction of my life."

In-depth interviews with five Mandailing students at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra clearly indicate that Mandailing culture plays a significant role in reinforcing inner child dynamics. Although cultural values are meant to shape character and uphold family honor, they often result in emotional wounds the so-called "wounded inner child." Students are conditioned to unquestioningly obey their parents and traditions, leaving little room for self-expression. As a result, they grow up feeling oppressed and afraid to speak up.

The cultural value of maintaining family dignity (*hasangapon*) makes students feel obligated to behave perfectly at all times. They suppress emotions and avoid mistakes to prevent bringing shame to their family or clan, which deepens unresolved emotional wounds. Boys are taught not to show vulnerability, while girls are expected to be patient and restrained. This hinders the development of healthy emotional expression. The cultural emphasis on politeness and excessive decorum fosters a fear of authenticity, causing

students to feel guilty for being different and ultimately leading them to suppress personal desires.

This study shows that Mandailing culture significantly shapes and reinforces inner child dynamics among university students. A culture that highly values social hierarchy, family honor (*hasangapon*), and gender role expectations has created patterns of interaction that suppress emotional expression from an early age. Consequently, Mandailing students tend to repress their feelings, limit their self-expression, and avoid actions that might tarnish the family's reputation. They are raised in an environment that demands absolute obedience to parents and cultural norms, even when these demands conflict with the psychological needs for emotional expression, personal opinion, and autonomy.

Cultural values such as avoiding disagreement with parents, the obligation to protect family image, and gender role expectations (e.g., girls must be patient and obedient, boys must be strong and unemotional) contribute to deep internal conflicts. Students experience tension between the need to be themselves and the pressure to conform to cultural standards, reinforcing emotional wounds carried from childhood (the wounded inner child). Interview data reveal students' fear of speaking up, confusion about life direction due to dependence on family expectations, and difficulty forming healthy relationships as a result of low self-esteem and fear of social judgment.

Thus, while Mandailing culture plays an important moral and social role, it can also hinder emotional and psychological development if not balanced with healthy emotional communication and family understanding. A more reflective approach to these cultural values is essential to nurturing a Mandailing youth generation that is not only rooted in tradition but also psychologically healthy and free to express themselves authentically.

This study highlights the role of Mandailing culture in reinforcing inner child dynamics among students at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra. Observations and interviews reveal patterns of emotional suppression, limited self-expression, and avoidance of social conflict due to cultural pressures to uphold family honor (*hasangapon*) and comply with traditional norms. These patterns align with the psychological concept of the wounded inner child, where emotional injuries from early life stem from unhealthy relationships with authority figures or oppressive cultural structures (Saleh, 2024).

According to (Silvana, 2024), traumatic experiences or emotional rejection in early childhood can disrupt affective regulation and social bonding systems, leading individuals to develop protective behaviors such as emotional suppression, distrust, and social withdrawal. These tendencies are observed in students raised in Mandailing environments, where

children are expected to be obedient without question. Female students are expected to be patient and submissive, while male students are taught to be strong and suppress vulnerability reflecting patriarchal values that shape defensive personality structures.

According to (Sarahdevina & Yudiarso, 2022) note that negative early emotional experiences can impact the nervous system and increase sensitivity to social threats, even in neutral situations. Students in this study reported anxiety about public speaking, fear of negative judgment, and pressure to appear perfect to avoid disgracing their family. This suggests that cultural pressures influence the development of defensive responses to the social environment on campus.

According to (Mufidah, 2020) introduces the concept of the false self, in which individuals conform to external expectations at the cost of their emotional authenticity. This concept is highly relevant to the findings, where Mandailing students report an inability to express their true selves, conceal personal aspirations, and hesitate to share dreams out of fear of being labeled disobedient. In this context, Mandailing culture serves as a backdrop that reinforces the development of the false self through the imposition of social norms, hierarchical structures, and collectivist values.

According to (Wibowo, 2024) explains that in collectivist cultures such as Mandailing, individuals are expected to prioritize group harmony over personal needs, even at the expense of self-expression. Core values such as conformity, humility, and emotional restraint form the basis of interpersonal interaction but may exacerbate emotional wounds if not accompanied by an understanding of individual psychological needs.

In conclusion, Mandailing culture not only shapes social behavior but also reinforces psychological wounds rooted in childhood. The combination of oppressive cultural norms, rigid patriarchal structures, and limited emotional dialogue creates an environment where students struggle to express themselves in a healthy manner. This directly impacts their social well-being, including low self-confidence, fear of judgment, and difficulties in forming meaningful interpersonal relationships. This study affirms the importance of a psychosocial and cultural perspective in understanding inner child dynamics. Healing emotional wounds requires not only individual therapy but also cultural reform that emphasizes empathy, openness, and support for the development of authentic identity among the younger generation.

Conclusion

This study reveals that Mandailing students experience significant inner child dynamics that impact their social lives on campus. The strong Mandailing culture, characterized by hierarchical values, collectivism, and a strong emphasis on family honor (*hasangapon*), creates emotional pressure from an early age. Students are accustomed to suppressing emotional expression, maintaining the family's image, and adhering to traditional norms without space for open dialogue. These conditions contribute to the formation of emotional wounds (injured inner child), which manifest as low self-confidence, fear of speaking up, difficulty in establishing healthy social relationships, and conflicts in personal identity. Rigid gender roles further intensify this pressure men are expected to be strong and assertive, while women are expected to be patient and obedient. This pattern leads to psychological imbalances that hinder students from authentically expressing themselves in daily social interactions. Therefore, the inner child dynamics influenced by Mandailing culture are not merely individual issues, but also carry broader social implications for interpersonal relationship quality and students' psychological well-being.

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be made to improve the psychosocial conditions of Mandailing students both on campus and in the wider community. Universities and social institutions should provide emotional regulation training and assertive communication skill development programs to help students understand and express their emotions in a healthy manner while building self-confidence. The Mandailing community needs to develop a critical awareness of cultural values that may hinder psychological growth, so as to balance tradition preservation with the emotional development needs of individuals. Creating safe and open spaces for dialogue among parents, cultural leaders, and students regarding psychological needs and gender roles can help reduce repressive cultural pressures and minimize emotional wounds. Universities should offer culturally sensitive counseling services to support Mandailing students in resolving internal conflicts and forming a healthy social identity. Efforts must be made to reduce gender stereotypes that limit the roles and expressions of both male and female students, enabling individuals to grow optimally without being burdened by rigid norms. With the implementation of these recommendations, it is hoped that Mandailing students will experience more positive psychosocial development, improve the quality of their social relationships, and be able to express themselves authentically and healthily in both campus and community settings.

Suggestion

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