

Article

# The power of social work and showing up for children

## Building trust and helping children to heal

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Muhammad Fariz Wadji was in his early years as a social worker when a case left an unforgettable mark — a father who had abused his own daughter was released with



facing any charges. For Fariz, it was a painful reminder that violence against children often hides behind family walls.

According to data from the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection's information system, Simfoni PPA, more than half — 58.8 per cent — of reported cases of violence against women and children in Indonesia happen at home, a place meant to be safe.

Cases where the perpetrator is an immediate family member can be especially difficult to handle. Families often control who children interact with and may worry about the shame social stigma. For social workers like Fariz, the most important thing is making sure children are safe – physically and emotionally.

With a bachelor's degree in Applied Social Work and a Certificate of Competency in Social Work, Fariz feels a deep sense of responsibility toward children who are in need of support.

"So many dynamics unfold in the effort to provide services for a child survivor. I can't give up — no matter how difficult access may be, the child's well-being will always be my priority," he says



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*Accompanying children and families through each step, Fariz helps them access the services needed for recovery and protection.*

After nearly a decade of working with children, Fariz pinpoints one experience that changed how he sees children's vulnerability. In 2018, he was deployed by the Ministry of Social Affairs to support the response to a major natural disaster in Central Sulawesi.



was there he saw clearly how much a child’s well-being depends on the strength and support of their immediate environment — their families, schools and communities.

Fariz draws on both his own experiences and those of others to guide him through complex cases. He begins by helping families understand the situation clearly so they feel safe enough to accept support. He has learned that recovery takes a comprehensive network of services to help a child heal fully. Over time, he has also learned how to build trust with children—especially girls, by using a more sensitive and gender-responsive approach.

Fariz also pays close attention to how he shows up during home visits. He believes that everything – from the way a social worker speaks and dresses to their body language – can help a child feel safe and comfortable. He knows that a calm, respectful and reassuring presence can quietly win a child’s trust long before words are spoken.

“By fostering a sense of comfort and minimizing factors that may trigger fear, trust gradually begins to grow,” he says.



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*Every encounter is an opportunity — a brief chat with mothers can open doors to stronger protection for children.*

Beyond appearances, Fariz focuses on being fully present. He stays attuned to the mood in the room, how the family responds and the child’s subtle signs. All of this helps him build trust with the child and the whole family.

Through ongoing training provided by the Ministry of Social Affairs with support from UNICEF, social workers like Fariz are better equipped to handle the emotional demands



their work. From December 2024 - October 2025, a total of 7,856 (5,278 female and 2,578 male) social workers have been trained through various capacity-building initiatives on case management, online protection, and psychosocial support, including in emergency settings.

Reflecting on his years as a social worker – and as a father – Fariz believes that what children need most is to feel comfortable and secure with their parents. When that comfort is lost, the risk of violence often begins. This insight shapes the way he parents his own children.

“These days, it’s no longer just about spending a lot of time, but about creating meaningful moments,” he explains. “What children need is not constant advice, but a good example — a figure they can look up to, not just someone who tells them what to do.”

He is also aware of the important role of the community. “A deep commitment to protecting and nurturing children is fundamental. This responsibility is shared — safeguarding children is an investment in the future of this nation,” he says.

To Fariz, children are like pencils — full of potential, ready to create new beginnings with every stroke. Mistakes are not failures, but part of learning. And when families, communities and social workers protect them, children can confidently draw their own future.

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