Empathic communication of employers with domestic helpers in realizing work comfort

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Abstract

The working relationship between employer and domestic helper is often characterized by communication problems that affect work comfort. Lack of empathic communication, such as lack of attention, emotional distance, and limited dialogue space, are the main factors that cause discomfort. This research explains the empathic communication process between employers and helpers in realizing work comfort. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative. The data collection technique used was in-depth interviews with three pairs of employer and helper informants, which were conducted using a purposive sampling technique based on research needs. The results showed different conditions in each pair when carrying out empathic communication. The MR-LA pair revealed that the helper felt comfortable working with empathic employer communication, such as providing space for dialogue and understanding. In the WW-SP pair, the helper felt uncomfortable because they were not given space for dialogue, and the employer was passive. The AI-RA pair shows an employer more focused on professionalism so that empathic communication could be more optimal. Empathic communication will result in work comfort if it is carried out effectively and attention is paid to its dimensions. Employers can open a space for inclusive dialogue and balance professionalism for work comfort.

Keywords

Empathic communication, Employer, Domestic helper, Work comfort, Working relationship

Introduction

Humans as social beings depend on each other, including in families that involve relationships with domestic helpers. Families often employ helpers, especially after having children and both working, to help with household activities such as ensuring cleanliness and tidiness of the house and others [1]. A good understanding of the helper's duties will create a harmonious and mutually beneficial relationship between the employer and the helper. This relationship can be made through empathic communication, which involves understanding the conditions and viewpoints of each

party to support good cooperation [2]. Good empathic communication is essential for cooperation between helpers and employers.

Helpers who live with their employers have more intense interactions that can create closeness and familiarity. However, helpers still need boundaries to maintain a balance of professionalism [3]. The relationship between employers and live-in helpers is also not free from problems that are often caused by misunderstandings, differences in expectations, lack of communication, or worse, when there is a lack of open dialogue to resolve problems correctly, ultimately making the working relationship tense and unproductive [4]. Employers need to understand the workload and conditions of helpers so that working relationships do not become tense. This can be done by creating positive interactions through empathic communication. Both will feel valued and treated fairly so that employers and helpers can understand each other and feel what they feel [5]. Empathic communication will also create a comfortable working environment.

Many cases occur between employers and servants, as Erlyanie experienced. According to Ramalan [6], a child who started working at 13 became a helper. She was forced to become a helper because of problems in her family. However, when she migrated to Jakarta and became a helper, she got a good employer. Erlyanie's employer has a strong empathic sense; he fully supports Erlyanie, so empathic communication goes very well. The interaction between the two got Erlyanie more attention. Conversely, there are also stories of helpers who received unpleasant treatment. Few helpers feel underappreciated or unrecognized for their work by their employers, to the point of being abused. One of these cases happened to Rohimah. Rohimah's two employers committed a very heinous act. They did not appreciate Rohimah's work. The absence of empathic communication from the employer also burdens Rohimah. Yulio and Loura could not understand the feelings until Rohimah was tortured [7].

An employer who is impatient, uneasy, inconsiderate, and unable to support the helper will make the relationship between the two parties disharmonious. This situation will hurt the employer. Employers who cannot appreciate or respect their helpers will lose the respect of their helpers and those around them. This will make the home atmosphere uncomfortable. If the employer cannot provide empathic communication, it means that he is a person who tends to be selfish [8]. A harmonious relationship should be created when the employer can be sensitive, take a role, control emotions, and feel what the helper feels.

Method

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach to produce descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and behaviors that can be observed [9]. The data collection technique in this research uses in-depth interviews to ask open-ended questions so that informants can answer more comprehensively. Thus, the results can be primary information and interact directly with informants [10]. The

informant retrieval technique used was purposive sampling with the criteria that the employer is married, lives with the helper, and is at least 40 years old. The following informant is a helper who lives in the same house as the employer and works for at least one year.

The data that has been collected can then be analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques interactively and continuously until completion. The steps used for data analysis are divided into four stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion or verification [11]. Furthermore, the data validity test was carried out using source triangulation. It can use one data type (informant) and involve comparative information from several informants or sources from different groups or levels [12].

Results and Discussion

This research involved three informants, namely employers and helpers living in the same house. The following are the results of the in-depth interviews covering the six dimensions summarized in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. Empathetic communication through the dimensions of interest, patient attitude, calm demeanor

	Interest	Patient attitude	Calm demeanor
Pair 1	Employer MR shows concern for LA's helper by regularly asking about her feelings, sharing stories, receiving feedback, and creating a collaborative work atmosphere so LA feels comfortable.	Employer MR showed great patience in listening to LA's helper without interrupting and giving constructive feedback, which made LA feel valued and open.	MR's employer remained calm and managed her emotions nicely when dealing with the helper's mistakes, providing advice and discussion without venting anger so that LA's helper could understand her mistakes without feeling pressured.
Pair 2	Employer WW showed limited attention to SP, rarely asking about her feelings and condition and assuming the young domestic worker had no difficulties. Therefore, SP found it difficult to express her feelings.	WW's employer sometimes interrupted SP's conversation and was less responsive, which made SP feel like the conversation was rushed and more formal rather than emotionally supportive.	Employer WW often gets carried away with emotions when faced with repeated mistakes, expressing her feelings through direct reprimands without giving SP's helper space to explain, making SP tend to harbor feelings.
Pair 3	AI's employer showed limited attention, with communication focusing more on work without paying attention to RA's emotional state. Although the helper's facilities and rights are fulfilled, RA feels uncomfortable.	AI's employer did not immediately cut off the conversation but tended to avoid conversations that were considered irrelevant, so RA helpers felt worried about expressing opinions.	AI's employer is rarely provoked by emotion, but RA's helper feels reprimanded loudly when she is wrong about work. When emotions peak, the employer leaves the helper until the atmosphere calms down, so the helper feels pressured.

Source: Interview results with informants, November 2024.

Table 2. Empathic communication through the dimensions of prejudice-free attitude, alert attitude, understanding attitude

	Prejudice-free attitude	Alert attitude	Understanding attitude
Pair 1	MR employers avoid prejudice and prefer to find out the problem's cause before judging, making LA helpers feel comfortable and valued.	Employer MR is sensitive to helpers' nonverbal cues, such as body language and facial expressions, creates a relaxed atmosphere, encourages openness without coercion, and responds vigilantly to emotional needs.	MR's employer tries to understand the helper's condition by providing appropriate solutions, such as the division of light tasks and involving the helper in family activities, which makes LA's helper feel valued and eager to work.
Pair 2	WW's employer was not prejudiced against her but often judged her work without understanding the context, making SP's helper afraid to express her views.	Employer WW pays little attention to the helper's nonverbal cues, considering discrepancies between speech and expression as the helper's business, making SP uncomfortable because she is not cared for.	Employer WW gave detailed instructions but paid little attention to SP's emotional well-being. SP's helper felt she had no space to discuss personal issues or heavy workloads and felt underappreciated even though basic amenities were met.
Pair 3	AI's employer tried to maintain a professional distance and avoid prejudice. Still, the RA's helper felt that interactions were limited to the work context and that the employer did not understand.	The AI employer was unresponsive to the helper's nonverbal cues, ignoring signs of discomfort, making the RA feel even more awkward and hesitant to communicate.	AI's employer maintained a professional relationship and rarely provided emotional support. The RA helper felt valued in some ways, but the lack of emotional support and openness made her feel less comfortable expressing feelings or difficulties.

Source: Interview results with informants, November 2024.

The data obtained in this research is then discussed about the six dimensions of empathic communication. The following is a discussion of the findings of this research.

Interest in the communicant's point of view

This finding includes two parts. The first pair stated that MR paid attention to the actions taken by conducting open communication so that LA felt comfortable. The employer's attention is created because of the hope of encouraging the work enthusiasm of the helper [13]. Maintaining communication and creating an open communication space can foster mutual respect and appreciation [14]. As for the other two pairs, they tend to pay limited attention. Attention can create comfortable conditions, social support, and attention from superiors or employers; both personal and work problems can give workers confidence that they are capable so that stressful working conditions can be reduced and a sense of comfort created [15].

A patience attitude of not interrupting the conversation

All informant pairs showed different tendencies in controlling patience when listening. A patient attitude must be developed because it can help deal with any situation without involving emotions [16]. Factors influencing patience are internal and external factors

such as environment and family [17]. In pair one, MR could listen to LA until the end without cutting the conversation, so LA felt appreciated and open. In contrast to the other two pairs, who were impatient when listening, WW listened to SP in a rushed, unresponsive conversation and sometimes cut the conversation. One of the characteristics of people who do not have politeness is that they are impatient when cutting off the conversation of their interlocutors; this can lead to misunderstandings [18]. Meanwhile, AIs tend to leave or avoid conversations that are considered irrelevant.

A calm demeanor despite capturing the expression of strong emotions

The findings show good emotional management in pair one. Speaking softly is one of the effective communication tips taught by Islam, as communicating without emotion, without diatribes and curses, will make people feel valued [19]. MR can be calm when finding mistakes in LA because MR does not want to blame and make LA depressed. As for the other two pairs, the employers tended to get emotional. Emotional employers are caused by experience, observation, and responses to situations and conditions [20]. In the third pair, the employer chose to leave the helper when he was emotional; a less calm attitude made the helper uncomfortable and tended to harbor feelings. Individuals who can control emotions will help socialize and interact with others and create a comfortable atmosphere [21].

Being prejudice-free or non-evaluative

All three pairs showed the same tendency, with each employer avoiding prejudice at the outset. Pairs one and three are not evaluative because they only apply professionalism in the working relationship. MR and AI always try to think positively about their helper's actions. The same condition happened to WW by being prejudice-free. Still, WW often judged SP's work without understanding the context, making her afraid to express her views, and communication became closed. Factors that make employers think positively consist of ethnocentric and egocentric factors. Individuals who think positively will fill their minds with positive things by thinking logically and looking at things from a positive perspective [22]. Employers who are prejudice-free, non-evaluative, and able to communicate effectively will impact good relationships with helpers; this will also increase self-confidence so that they can work at their highest abilities, which affects positive work outcomes [23]. This way of seeing or assessing is directed at aspects that provide support; individuals are expected to be able to determine or view things positively so that, in the end, it can produce a positive impact as well [24]. Employers should be able to be prejudice-free or think positively about helpers; this will increase helpers' comfort at work.

Alert attitudes to choice or suggestion request cues

The findings included two parts. The first pair showed sensitivity to nonverbal cues by being cautious when responding to the helper. MR made the discussion space comfortable when LA seemed hesitant with her speech. As for the other two pairs, they tended to be insensitive; WW and AI tended to ignore nonverbal cues from helpers and

considered it a personal matter. Nonverbal cues, according to [25], have a more honest meaning because they are spontaneous; this needs to be considered by employers. The absence of nonverbal cues hurts SP and RA as helpers because they cannot get emotional needs, and communication becomes awkward. Different parenting experiences and backgrounds can cause insensitive employers, and individuals will be sensitive based on these factors [26]. Having good awareness and sensitivity will have a positive impact, such as increasing the work of helpers because they are comfortable at work; sensitivity can foster social attitudes such as empathy, social care, self-awareness, and respect for others [27].

An understanding attitude

The findings obtained have different trends. The first pair shows complete understanding to the helper so that the helper does not feel a heavy workload and is enthusiastic about working. The other pair tended not to show understanding and hurt the helper. The employer puts a heavy workload on employees, and understanding is limited to work only. Employers with a limited educational background will have limited knowledge and understanding, so they tend to behave poorly, even referring to authoritarian attitudes [28]. Professionalism can be a requirement to foster optimal performance, but it can also be a negative indication if applied excessively and inappropriately [29]. Excessive professionalism is also improper; individuals can avoid extreme, apathetic, and excessive attitudes to position themselves correctly [30]. The lack of emotional understanding makes helpers uncomfortable and difficult.

Conclusion

The results found that empathic communication between each employer and helper pair has different conditions in the six main dimensions. MR-LA pairs consistently demonstrate empathic communication, such as open, patient, calm, prejudice-free, sensitive, and understanding communication, so helpers feel they have a harmonious relationship and are comfortable working. In contrast, other pairs still need to fulfil the dimensions of empathic communication. In the WW-SP pair, the helper felt uncomfortable because the employer was passive, full of emotion, and did not provide enough space for dialogue. The AI-RA pair showed an employer who prioritized professionalism without giving importance to the emotional state of the helper, so the work atmosphere became uncomfortable, and the communication relationship was hampered. Empathetic communication will result in work comfort if done effectively, and attention is paid to its dimensions. Thus, employers must open a space for inclusive dialogue and balance professionalism for work comfort. This study also has object limitations so that the results cannot be generalized to all similar pairs and pay less attention to the background of the helper. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve more employer and helper pairs and pay attention to the background of the helper so that the results are more optimal.

Acknowledgments

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