

The Role of Social Services in Rehabilitating Neglected Elderly in Sukabumi City

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of the Social Service Agency of Sukabumi City in implementing basic social rehabilitation for neglected elderly individuals—a highly vulnerable group requiring special government attention due to their inability to meet basic needs independently. Employing a qualitative approach, data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The findings reveal that the agency plays a vital role across four key areas: facilitative, educational, representative, and technical. The facilitative role involves needs assessments, provision of assistive devices, and basic social services. The educational role focuses on counseling and independence training. The representative role is manifested in cross-sectoral collaboration and institutional referrals, while the technical role includes data management and administrative support. Despite challenges such as limited human resources and inadequate infrastructure, the agency addresses these issues through inter-agency coordination. This study recommends enhancing the quality and reach of services, as well as strengthening institutional partnerships to ensure the well-being of neglected elderly individuals.

Keywords: Basic Social Rehabilitation, Neglected Elderly, Social Services, Government Role.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social welfare is an important aspect of sustainable development because it directly affects the quality of life of the community. Based on Law No. 11 of 2009 concerning Social Welfare, social welfare is a condition in which the material, spiritual, and social needs of citizens are fulfilled so that they can live properly and are able to carry out their social functions.

However, social welfare issues continue to evolve, both in terms of numbers and complexity, particularly among vulnerable groups such as abandoned elderly people. According to Minister of Social Affairs Regulation No. 5 of 2018, abandoned elderly people are individuals aged 60 years and above who are unable to meet their basic needs and depend on the assistance of others to carry out their daily lives. In Sukabumi City, the elderly population reaches around 39,900 people (12.05% of the total population), with 1,814 people (4.54%) classified as abandoned elderly. This condition poses a major challenge in fulfilling their basic rights and improving their quality of life.

The neglect of the elderly is generally caused by various factors, such as the busyness of their children, economic limitations, low legal awareness regarding the protection of the elderly, as well as shifts in cultural values and kinship. Neglected elderly individuals often lack access to basic services, experience feelings of insecurity and helplessness, and suffer from physical and mental decline that directly impacts their well-being.

In this context, local governments are expected to play an active role in protecting the rights of neglected elderly people through the provision of health services, social support, and social rehabilitation programs aimed at restoring their social functions and improving their quality of life. The Social Affairs Office of Sukabumi City is an institution that plays an

important role in addressing elderly issues through various programs that are not only charitable but also empowering, such as social rehabilitation, skills training, and social assistance.

However, initial observations and data from the Social Services Agency indicate that a number of problems still exist:

1. The number of neglected elderly people who have not yet received services remains high; in 2023, only 119 out of 1,695 people received services.
2. The number of social workers is very limited—there are only 3 available, while ideally 33 are needed to cover the entire sub-district.
3. Facilities and infrastructure are inadequate, such as operational vehicles that are not functioning and shelters that are no longer in use.

To address these challenges, the Social Services Agency has implemented various forms of intervention such as providing basic necessities (food, clothing, assistive devices), emergency response, access to health services, family tracing, and referral services.

These efforts align with Ife & Tesoriero (2024) theory of community social roles, which emphasizes the importance of four dimensions of role: facilitation, education, representation, and technical support in empowering vulnerable groups such as the elderly. However, the implementation of these roles in the field often faces structural and resource constraints, necessitating further examination of how well this theory can explain the effectiveness of the Social Services Department's interventions at the local level.

Previous studies have discussed the role of the Social Services Agency in improving the welfare of neglected elderly people through qualitative approaches and case studies in several regions. A study by Suryanti et al. (2023) in Tanjungpinang City highlights how the local Social Services Department carries out its role in addressing the challenges of elderly welfare through a case study approach. The focus of this study is on field dynamics, demographic challenges due to the increasing elderly population, and the importance of targeted social interventions.

Furthermore, Fridayanti et al. (2023) conducted research in North Sulawesi Province focusing on social services for the elderly at the “Senja Cerah” Social Welfare Center for Neglected Elderly People. This research emphasizes that the increase in life expectancy in Indonesia has led to a growing need for professional and structured social services for the elderly. This study highlights the importance of institutional service quality in addressing abandoned elderly individuals.

Meanwhile, Ratnawati (2022) analyzed the role of the Social Services Agency in the Social Assistance Program for Abandoned Elderly (ASLUT) through her research in Magelang City. The study found that the ASLUT program is an effective tool in addressing the economic dependence of abandoned elderly people on their families. The program is also considered successful in reaching elderly people with limited access to services. However, most previous studies have focused more on macro-level analysis, such as national programs or institution-based services, and few have delved deeply into how implementation models are carried out at the local level, particularly at the city or district level. Additionally, there are few comprehensive studies analyzing the multifunctional role of the Social Affairs Department, such as its facilitative, educational, representative, and technical roles, in addressing basic social rehabilitation for abandoned elderly individuals.

This study aims to address this gap by presenting a case study of the Social Services Agency in Sukabumi City. The focus of this research is to uncover how these roles are operationalized in practice, particularly amid resource constraints and other structural challenges. Thus, this study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of a contextual, adaptive, and community-based social service model.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach aimed at exploring and understanding the role of Dinas Sosial Kota Sukabumi in implementing basic social rehabilitation for neglected elderly. The qualitative approach is considered appropriate for capturing complex social phenomena in a natural setting, allowing researchers to understand the meaning behind behaviors, experiences, and interactions of research subjects. According to Moleong L. J (2018), qualitative research seeks to interpret social phenomena from the perspective of research participants, without relying on statistical tools, and emphasizes flexibility in responding to field dynamics. The descriptive method is used to provide a systematic and factual depiction of situations, roles, and influencing factors in the implementation of basic social rehabilitation. Thiiangulation (collecting data at different times to reduce bias).

Primary data were obtained from interviews and direct observation, while secondary data were gats research was conducted through several sequential stages. First, a literature review was undertaken to examine relevant theories, policies, and previous studies related to elderly welfare and social rehabilitation programs. This was followed by preliminary field observations at Dinas Sosial Kota Sukabumi to understand the ongoing rehabilitation activities and identify key informants. Ethical clearance and formal research permits were obtained from the university and the local government office to ensure the study met academic and ethical standards.

Informants were selected using snowball sampling, where initial key informants recommended others relevant to the research. A total of five informants were involved, including a structural official, two social workers, one technical staff member, and one elderly program beneficiary. Data collection was conducted using three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews captured the informants' insights, while observations were conducted during service activities to gain contextual understanding. Document analysis included reviewing official reports, program statistics, and policy records from Dinas Sosial.

Data analysis followed the interactive model by M. B. Miles (1984), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. To ensure data validity and credibility, triangulation was applied. This included source triangulation (comparing different informants), method triangulation (comparing interviews with observation and documents), and time trhered from institutional records, such as program implementation reports, statistics on neglected elderly, infrastructure data, and policy documents. All interview data were recorded, transcribed, and documented for systematic analysis. Member checking was conducted to allow informants to validate their statements, ensuring accuracy and reliability in the findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 The Role of Social Services in Basic Social Rehabilitation Efforts for Neglected Elderly People

This study aims to examine the role of the Sukabumi City Social Service Agency in implementing basic social rehabilitation for neglected elderly people. Based on interviews, observations, and documentation, it was found that the Social Service Agency performs four main roles, namely: facilitative, educational, representative, and technical. In addition, the study also analyzed the supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of these four roles.

3.1.1 Facilitative Role

The facilitative role carried out by the Sukabumi City Social Service focuses on directly and comprehensively fulfilling the basic needs of neglected elderly people. This activity begins with gathering information through reports from the community, sub-districts, or neighborhood associations, followed by an assessment by social workers to identify the social and health conditions of the elderly, as well as their ability to carry out daily activities.

This assessment is a key factor in determining the type of assistance provided, such as basic food assistance, suitable clothing, and mobility aids like wheelchairs, canes, or hearing aids. Additionally, facilitation in accessing health services, such as BPJS registration, and population documents (NIK, KTP), is carried out in collaboration with the Population Office and health institutions.

“We usually receive reports from the sub-district office, then go to the field for assessment. If a wheelchair or BPJS is needed, we help arrange it.” (Informant: Social Worker, Sukabumi City Social Affairs Department)

In its implementation, the Social Affairs Department also facilitates temporary placement for abandoned elderly individuals through shelters, although the current capacity and condition of the shelters are still suboptimal. Additionally, the responsiveness of services is influenced by the limited number of staff and logistics on the ground.

However, there are strengths that reinforce the sustainability of this role, namely support from the local community and institutional networks such as the Social Affairs Center, elderly organizations (LLI), and social volunteers. This aligns with Jim Ife’s approach, which emphasizes the importance of local community involvement in fair and sustainable social services.

3.1.2 Educational Role

The educational role is an important aspect in efforts to build awareness and empower the elderly so that they can improve their quality of life, both physically, psychologically, and socially. The Social Services Agency provides education through two main approaches: direct social guidance and health education activities.

Social guidance is provided both individually and to elderly families, using methods such as home visits and interactive discussions. Common educational topics include the importance of maintaining a healthy diet, personal hygiene, physical mobility, and understanding the social rights of the elderly.

“Sometimes we provide counseling on diet, personal hygiene, and encourage them to do senior citizen exercises to stay active.” (Informant: Senior Citizen Companion)

Programs such as senior citizen exercises, simple skill training, and participation in National Senior Citizen Day (HALUN) are part of the educational strategy involving the community and partner organizations like LLI. This approach fosters a sense of ownership and creates an inclusive social environment.

However, educational activities are still hindered by a shortage of professional caregivers and operational budget constraints. Additionally, challenges from the elderly themselves, such as physical and cognitive limitations, pose obstacles in effectively delivering educational materials.

3.1.3 Representative Role

As an extension of the local government in the social sector, the Social Services Agency plays a representative role by advocating for the needs and rights of neglected elderly people to various stakeholders. This is done by developing and submitting programs to the city/provincial level, as well as establishing formal and informal cooperation with relevant agencies.

The representative role is also evident in the Social Affairs Department's ability to bridge communication between the elderly and agencies such as the Health Department, the Population and Civil Registration Office, the police, and hospitals. This involvement includes assisting with document processing, applying for medical assistance, and providing legal protection if needed.

“We often communicate with the sub-district office, community health center, and sometimes the neighborhood association or PSM cadres if there are elderly people who need immediate attention.” (Informant: Head of Social Rehabilitation Section)

In addition to the institutional approach, representation is also carried out at the community level through neighborhood forums (RT/RW), which serve as the initial point of contact for the elderly to voice their complaints. This cross-sector coordination has been conducted digitally through applications, WhatsApp groups, and online reporting systems, although integration is still not optimal.

This representative function aligns with the principle of responsiveness in public service, which is the ability of institutions to listen to and voice the needs of citizens, especially vulnerable groups such as the elderly.

3.1.4 Technical Role

The technical role in the social rehabilitation of neglected elderly people is carried out through a series of structured service stages, starting from data collection, field assessment, intervention planning, assistance implementation, monitoring, evaluation, to the termination stage or referral to other agencies. All of these stages refer to Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) that have been formulated together with stakeholders.

“We already have the SOPs, from assessment to evaluation. But there are still challenges on the ground, especially when there are many cases.” (Informant: Head of Social Services Division)

In its implementation, the Social Services Department uses various supporting tools such as PDF documents, a WhatsApp-based reporting system, and the Cek Bansos app to

check the status of assistance. This step demonstrates efforts toward digitalizing services, although it is still limited by the low digital literacy of the elderly and the technological limitations of most elderly families.

Other technical challenges include pressure from the community or local leaders (RT/PSM) who expect assistance to be distributed quickly without following proper procedures, as well as limitations in the capacity of temporary shelters. Despite this, the commitment of officials and the scheduled internal reporting system indicate ongoing efforts for improvement.

3.2 Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of the roles of the Social Affairs Office of Sukabumi City in providing basic social rehabilitation for neglected elderly individuals can be described as follows:

3.2.1 Facilitative Role

Supporting factors include the existence of cooperation networks with the Sentra, Ministry of Social Affairs, Provincial Government, and partner organizations such as LLI and Palamarta. The availability of facilities such as temporary shelters, assistive devices, clothing, food assistance, healthcare access (BPJS), and civil registration (NIK) also supports service delivery, along with the SPPD (official duty travel order) program for field operations. However, inhibiting factors include limited budget and human resources, inadequate shelter facilities and assistive devices, as well as requests for assistance that often exceed available resources.

3.2.2 Educational Role

This role is supported by individual and family social guidance, health education (on hygiene, mobility, and physical activity), and collaboration with elderly institutions such as LLI during events like National Elderly Day. Inhibiting factors include limited staff and funding, as well as cognitive and physical limitations among elderly beneficiaries that often hinder the effectiveness of educational efforts.

3.2.3 Representative Role

Supporting factors include established inter-institutional coordination (with agencies such as the Civil Registry Office, Health Department, village and sub-district governments, and police) and partnerships with elderly organizations like LLI and PWRI that advocate for elderly rights. On the other hand, inhibiting factors include difficulties in schedule alignment across institutions, limited administrative equipment (e.g., ID scanners), and inadequate shelter conditions.

3.2.4 Technical Role

This role is supported by clear Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) developed with relevant stakeholders, availability of SPPD and transportation for fieldwork, and the use of digital tools such as WhatsApp, PDF, and the “Cek Bansos” application. Inhibiting factors include full shelters with limited capacity, digital illiteracy among elderly individuals

(many do not own or use mobile phones), and pressure from community leaders (RT/RW or PSM) to distribute aid immediately, often bypassing proper procedures.

3.3 Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the Social Services Agency of Sukabumi City has systematically and adaptively carried out four main roles in the basic social rehabilitation of neglected elderly people. The assessment-based approach that has been implemented enables more targeted interventions that are tailored to the specific needs of each individual elderly person. This reflects a serious effort to shift service practices from a charitable model to one based on the rights and social needs of individuals.

However, the effectiveness of the program is not without structural challenges, such as limited human resources, insufficient shelter capacity, and technical constraints in data collection and aid distribution. These limitations highlight the importance of institutional transformation that is not only technocratic but also based on collaborative, inclusive, and participatory principles.

Theoretically, the results of this study are in line with Jim Ife's (2021) theory, which emphasizes that effective social services must be community-based and empowerment-oriented. In practice, the Social Services Agency does not only act as a service provider but also as a facilitator, advocate, and coordinator connecting the elderly with various other institutions, both government and non-government. This approach positions the elderly not merely as passive recipients but as part of the social system that needs to be meaningfully involved and supported.

Furthermore, these results are consistent with the research of Suryanti et al. (2023) and Ratnawati (2022), which emphasizes that the success of social services is largely determined by service integration, multi-sector collaboration, and the use of information technology in the identification, intervention, and evaluation processes. The digitalization efforts by the Sukabumi City Social Services Department through the use of the Cek Bansos app, WhatsApp, and an online reporting system are progressive steps in the context of social bureaucratic reform. However, these efforts must be accompanied by improvements in digital literacy at the grassroots level, particularly for elderly families who serve as primary caregivers in the administrative process of assistance.

On the other hand, this finding also reveals a gap between planning and implementation on the ground, particularly in terms of sustainability (program sustainability) and institutional capacity. The shortage of professional social workers and limited budgetary support make services tend to be reactive and have not fully addressed the dimension of long-term empowerment. This raises a critical question: can the current social rehabilitation program create sustainable social impact or is it only temporary and administrative in nature?

Additionally, pressure from the social environment, such as neighborhood associations or community leaders, to distribute assistance quickly often forces field officers to bypass procedural steps. This phenomenon highlights a conflict between local social demands and formal operational standards, which, if not handled wisely, could threaten the accountability of public services.

Thus, this study not only confirms the success of implementing the four main roles of the Social Affairs Department but also emphasizes the importance of strengthening

institutional capacity, integrating service systems, and adopting a participatory social approach as the foundation for building more responsive, fair, and sustainable elderly protection policies.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research conducted, it can be concluded that the Social Services Agency of Sukabumi City plays a very significant role in basic social rehabilitation efforts for neglected elderly people through the implementation of four main roles, namely facilitative, educational, representative, and technical.

1. The facilitative role is carried out through needs assessments for the elderly, providing basic assistance such as food, clothing, and assistive devices, as well as facilitating health services and population administration. This process is conducted in a responsive and contextual manner, despite being constrained by limited resources and logistics.
2. The educational role includes social counseling, individual and family guidance, and educational activities such as elderly exercise and skills training. Although limited in quantity, the participatory approach has shown positive results in increasing the awareness and independence of the elderly.
3. The representative role is realized in the form of advocacy for the rights of the elderly through cross-sectoral cooperation and partnerships with elderly organizations. The Social Services Agency also acts as a liaison between the elderly and relevant institutions, both at the local and central levels.
4. The technical role is carried out by referring to a systematic service cycle, supported by SOPs and the use of digital technology. However, obstacles such as low digital literacy and local social pressures often hinder the implementation of formal procedures.

From all these roles, it can be concluded that the approach of the Sukabumi City Social Services Agency is systematic and adaptive, but it still faces serious challenges in terms of institutional capacity, human resource limitations, and program sustainability. Therefore, institutional strengthening, integrated digitalization, and improving community literacy are urgent needs to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of social rehabilitation for abandoned elderly individuals.

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