PUBLICUS: Jurnal Administrasi Publik

IMPROVING CHILDREN'S QUALITY OF LIFE THROUGH CHILD-FRIENDLY CITY POLICIES IN THE REGIONAL AUTONOMY SYSTEM

PENINGKATAN KUALITAS HIDUP ANAK MELALUI KEBIJAKAN KOTA LAYAK ANAK DALAM SISTEM OTONOMI DAERAH

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Abstract

This article examines the issues of children's quality of life in Indonesia, particularly in cities that are not conducive for children, characterized by a high level of violence against children, inadequate infrastructure meeting children's needs, and low stakeholder involvement in policies and child protection in those cities. The research aims to describe efforts to improve the quality of life for children through the implementation of child-friendly city policies within the framework of regional autonomy. The research methodology employed a qualitative approach, utilizing literature reviews and policy studies. The results of this study indicate that efforts to enhance Child-Friendly Cities within the regional autonomy policy framework involve the development of policies, programs, strategies, and development activities prioritizing children's rights. Initiatives include the declaration of Child-Friendly City policies, the development of infrastructure tailored to children's needs, and the enhancement of child protection systems. The implications of this research provide a clear understanding of the crucial role of active stakeholder involvement in building child-friendly cities. By integrating principles of regional autonomy policies, this study establishes a foundation for formulating more effective strategies and programs to enhance the quality of life for children in cities. Furthermore, it offers recommendations for the implementation of similar policies in different regional contexts.

Keywords: Children's Quality of Life, Child-Friendly City Policies, Regional Autonomy, Child Protection System

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji masalah kualitas hidup anak di Indonesia, terutama di kota yang tidak layak bagi anak-anak, yang ditandai oleh tingginya tingkat kekerasan terhadap anak, kurangnya infrastruktur yang sesuai dengan kebutuhan anak, dan rendahnya keterlibatan stakeholder dalam kebijakan dan perlindungan anak di kota tersebut. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan upaya peningkatan kualitas hidup anak melalui implementasi kebijakan kota layak anak dalam konteks sistem otonomi daerah. Metode penelitian yang diterapkan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan menerapkan studi pustaka dan studi kebijakan. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa upaya peningkatan Kota Ramah Anak dalam kerangka kebijakan otonomi daerah melibatkan pengembangan kebijakan, program, strategi, dan kegiatan pembangunan yang mengutamakan hak anak. Beberapa inisiatif yang dilakukan melibatkan pencanangan kebijakan Kota Layak Anak, pengembangan infrastruktur yang sesuai dengan

kebutuhan anak, dan peningkatan sistem perlindungan anak. Implikasi dari penelitian ini memberikan gambaran yang jelas tentang pentingnya keterlibatan aktif stakeholder dalam membangun kota yang ramah anak. Dengan menggabungkan prinsip-prinsip kebijakan otonomi daerah, penelitian ini menyediakan dasar untuk menyusun strategi dan program yang lebih efektif dalam meningkatkan kualitas hidup anak di kota, serta menawarkan rekomendasi untuk penerapan kebijakan serupa di konteks daerah lain.

Kata Kunci**:** Kualitas Hidup Anak, Kebijakan Kota Layak Anak, Otonomi Daerah, Sistem Perlindungan Anak.

INTRODUCTION

Several cities in various countries face challenges in achieving the status of "child-friendly cities." One example can be found in Lagos, Nigeria, where the lack of green open spaces and limited educational facilities pose serious problems (Shiru et al., 2020). According to a UNICEF report, only a small portion of Lagos has easy access to parks or open areas, leaving children with insufficient space to play and develop healthily (Adewuya & Oladipo, 2020). A similar situation is seen in Cairo, Egypt, where children's educational services are still inadequate. Data from the World Health Organization (WHO) indicates that a significant number of children in the city struggle to access quality education. The lack of adequate educational facilities can negatively impact children's intellectual development, providing a concrete picture of the unsuitability of some cities for fostering children's growth and development (Abd Elgalil et al., 2023; Abdel Wahed Ahmed & Abd El Monem, 2020). Additionally, Karachi, Pakistan, faces similar challenges with limited access to child healthcare services. The low availability of adequate health facilities can make it difficult for children to receive timely care, increasing the risk of diseases and health disorders that can affect their future (Majeed & Munir, 2020; Moyebi et al., 2023; Razzaq et al., 2020).

Moreover, Indonesia also faces similar challenges related to child-friendly cities. There are three main issues regarding child-friendly cities in Indonesia: high levels of violence against children (Ekaningtyas, 2020; Hidayat, 2021); lack of child-friendly city infrastructure (Anggrain & Mashur, 2022; Maulana, 2021); and low stakeholder involvement in child protection (Fajri et al., 2020; Yuniningsih & Dwimawanti, 2021). The high levels of violence against children in Indonesia are deeply concerning, as this violence takes various forms, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse (Herman & Yuningsih, 2023). Children often become victims in various contexts, whether at home, school, or in the wider community. Addressing this issue seriously requires understanding and addressing its driving factors (Hanandini, 2022). A lack of awareness about children's rights is one of the triggers of violence, alongside cultural norms that may indirectly support such actions. Additionally, the inability of the child protection system to handle cases of violence exacerbates this situation (Sulistiyowati & Jajuli, 2021).

Furthermore, findings highlight that most cities in Indonesia still face serious challenges related to infrastructure that does not support children's development (Widyaputra, 2020). In daily reality, some issues include the lack of safe playgrounds, damaged sidewalks, and limited access to educational and healthcare facilities. For instance, in Jakarta, there is a noticeable shortage of suitable playgrounds for children, leaving little space for safe play that fosters their creativity (Suwandi et al., 2023). Additionally, damaged sidewalks in several cities, such as Surabaya, create an unfriendly environment for children. The discomfort and danger posed by poor sidewalk conditions can negatively impact children's mobility and safety when engaging in outdoor activities. Moreover, the lack of access to educational and healthcare facilities in cities like Bandung can be an obstacle to children's development.

Limited educational facilities can hinder children's access to quality education, while insufficient healthcare facilities can endanger their physical and mental well-being (Noor, 2023).

Additionally, it was found that there is a low level of child protection policies at the national level in Indonesia, starting with involvement and implementation at the city level (Pertiwi & Saimima, 2022). Concrete examples can be found in several major cities like Medan, where, despite existing child protection policies, local government involvement remains minimal in overseeing and enforcing their implementation. The impact of this is seen in the lack of concrete efforts to ensure the safety and well-being of children in urban environments (Jailani, 2021; Nisa, 2021; Sinaga, 2022). The importance of understanding and becoming aware of the need to involve various parties in child protection cannot be ignored. For example, in Yogyakarta, there is still a lack of active community participation in supporting child protection programs. Low community involvement can be a significant obstacle to creating a safe environment that supports children's growth. The lack of involvement from the private sector is also a serious issue that can affect the implementation of child protection policies (Silalahi, 2023; Siskasari, 2021; Wijaya, 2020). In some cities, like Surabaya, cooperation between the government and the private sector in supporting child protection initiatives has not been optimal. This results in limited resources and financial support that could strengthen child protection programs at the local level. Additionally, the lack of coordination between relevant parties, such as the government and non-governmental organizations, can hinder the implementation of child protection policies (Faisea & Dan, 2020; Kurniawan & Zalzabilla, 2023; Tizaka & Ismail, 2023; Ulya, 2020). Evidence of this can be found in various cities in Indonesia, where the lack of inter-agency coordination often hampers the effectiveness of child protection programs and creates gaps in child protection across different regions.

This research aims to describe the steps taken to improve children's quality of life through the implementation of child-friendly city policies within the context of regional autonomy. The unique position of this research lies in its focus on the development of child-friendly cities within the framework of regional autonomy policies, involving the development of policies, programs, strategies, and development activities that specifically emphasize children's rights. The research argument provides an up-to-date and innovative perspective on the critical role of regional autonomy policies in creating environments that support optimal child development. The steps taken include the initiation of child-friendly city policies, the development of infrastructure tailored to children's needs, and the enhancement of child protection systems. By detailing these initiatives, this research provides in-depth insights into the practical implementation of child-friendly city policies within the framework of regional autonomy.

METHODS

The research methodology applied in this study is a qualitative approach, used to detail and describe issues related to children's quality of life, the implementation of child-friendly city policies, and the aspects of regional autonomy that influence these improvement efforts (Creswell, 2017). This approach allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the complexities of the problems faced by children in non-child-friendly cities. The research design involves two key elements: a literature review and a policy study. The literature review is used to detail the theoretical context, while the policy study is used to analyze the role and implementation of child-friendly city policies within the regional autonomy system. The combination of these two designs provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the issues and related policies.

Data collection was conducted through policy document analysis, literature review, and interviews with various stakeholders. Representatives from local governments, children's organizations, and community groups involved in efforts to improve children's quality of life were included in the interviews to gain diverse perspectives. The collected data were then analyzed using descriptive and policy analysis approaches. The aim is to identify the factors influencing the implementation of child-friendly city policies in the context of regional autonomy. This analysis provides a comprehensive

overview of the constraints and potential solutions for creating a better environment for children in cities.

The development of research criteria and instruments involved identifying indicators of children's quality of life, policy effectiveness, and the level of stakeholder involvement. Interview guidelines, policy analysis, and evaluation of child-friendly city infrastructure were used as instruments to collect relevant and valid data. To ensure the validity of the research, data triangulation was applied by combining data from various sources. The reliability of the research was maintained through careful documentation of research methods and procedures. With this method, the research provides a strong foundation for understanding and addressing the challenges of improving children's quality of life through child-friendly city policies within the regional autonomy system.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result
Public Policy Formulation

The definition of public policy given by Demenge and Robert (2024) is the authoritative allocation of values for the entire society or the enforced allocation of values to members of the society. This view is supported by Alderman & Blair (2024), who interpret public policy as a projected program concerning goals, values, and practices, or, in other words, a program for achieving goals and values in a directed practice. Farazmand (2023) also contributes his perspective by stating that public policy is a specific action followed and implemented by an actor or a group of actors to address an issue or matter of concern.

Weible (2023) emphasizes that a country's competitive advantage depends on its ability to create an environment that encourages the competitiveness of each actor within it. In a global context, the public sector's task is to create an environment that enables each development actor to become competitive. Therefore, effective public policy is crucial for building this environment. The success of a country in creating policies that encourage each citizen to build their own competitiveness is the cornerstone of an ideal public policy, which not only avoids dependency but also promotes independence.

From the above exposition, it can be concluded that public policy can be interpreted as management in achieving national goals, especially in the era of regional autonomy. Gazzola et al. (2023) add two characteristics of public policy: clarity in understanding and measurement. Public policy becomes something easily understood because it relates to actions taken to achieve national goals. Moreover, public policy is also something that is easy to measure because it has clear parameters, namely the extent to which progress in achieving national aspirations has been reached.

Legislation is a tangible manifestation of public policy, where policies such as legislative regulations can be considered public goods. Bovaird & Löffler (2023) describe the characteristics of legislative regulations as public goods, which include the hierarchy of policy processes. The policy process at the highest policy level produces institutional arrangements such as laws, which are then translated by the policy process at the organizational level into lower institutional arrangements such as government regulations, presidential decrees (Kepres), or ministerial decrees (Kepmen). These institutional arrangements then influence the pattern of outcomes from specific policies at the operational level.

From the explanation of the policy process, it can be concluded that policy levels have significant implications for interaction patterns at the lower levels. Bovaird & Löffler (2023) state that public policy acts as a source of change or institutional renewal within society. Although legislation as a public good is considered related to the public interest, Sudarsono acknowledges that the government does not

always succeed in achieving the desired results from the public interest perspective, aligning with Barzeley's view.

Bovaird & Löffler (2023) highlight the incompleteness of legislation as a limitation of human ability to anticipate future problems. Therefore, Sudarsono emphasizes that legislation must continuously undergo improvements and refinements to address these limitations.

On the other hand, in the implementation of public policy, especially in third-world countries, Smith shows that it becomes a serious challenge for the effectiveness of policy implementation in the social and economic development fields. Gazzola et al. (2023) add that these obstacles are due to ineffectiveness, inefficiency, and a lack of goal orientation within the government bureaucracy. Therefore, to understand public policy implementation, it is not only important to look at the behavior of public administration institutions or public entities responsible for a program but also necessary to consider the various networks of political, economic, and social forces that influence the behavior involved in a program from policy formulation to implementation.

To clarify the relationship between policy, implementation, and public policy evaluation, Bovaird & Löffler (2023) depict the schematic cycle of public policy. Policy implementation, according to Bovaird & Löffler (2023), is considered a process toward policy goals through administrative and political steps. Gazzola et al. (2023) add that policy implementation is not only related to the mechanism of breaking down political decisions into routine procedures through bureaucratic channels but also involves conflicts and decisions about who gets what from the policy.

Policy implementation involves applying basic policy decisions, whether in the form of laws or more specific decisions and orders regarding the problems to be addressed and the goals to be achieved. Gazzola et al. (2023) highlight two actors involved in policy implementation: people outside the bureaucracy who may be involved in implementation activities and the bureaucrats themselves engaged in functional activities. Bovaird & Löffler (2023) emphasize that policy implementation analysis plays an important role in identifying variables that influence the achievement of formal goals throughout the implementation process. Based on this description, it can be concluded that the general function of public policy implementation is to establish relationships that enable policy goals and objectives to be achieved as the final outcome of government activities. As part of the public policy cycle, implementation is a critical step that allows the transformation of policy into concrete actions with real impact.

Discussion
Public Policy and Regional Autonomy

The broad autonomy authority refers to the freedom regions have to manage governance in all aspects, except in the areas of foreign policy, defense and security, justice, monetary and fiscal matters, religion, and other fields that will be determined by government regulation. Additionally, autonomy includes the full right to manage the entire process of governance, from planning, implementation, monitoring, control, and evaluation (Afdhal et al., 2023).

Real autonomy, on the other hand, is the freedom for regions to manage governmental authority in specific areas that are evidently present and needed in that region. This includes aspects that develop and exist in the region (Afdhal et al., 2022). Meanwhile, responsible autonomy signifies the responsibilities that must be borne by the region as a consequence of the granting of rights and authority. This responsibility includes the region's duties and obligations in achieving autonomy goals, such as improving public welfare services, developing democratic life, justice, equity, maintaining appropriate relationships between the Central and Regional Governments, and inter-regional relationships, all aimed at preserving the integrity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.

According to Afdhal et al. (2023), there are three main tasks in society that form the foundation for society to live, grow, and develop, which are service tasks, development tasks, and empowerment tasks. Organizations are born with the purpose of carrying out these three tasks. Public service tasks involve the obligation to provide services to the public without discrimination and at affordable costs for all levels of society, including the most disadvantaged groups. This task is carried out by the state through executive power or government.

From this task classification, it can be concluded that the primary task of the government is to provide public services. Evaluation and assessment of the achievement of public service tasks become relevant to measure how well the government has carried out its mission. However, such evaluation can only be done if there are appropriate measuring tools or indicators aligned with the given tasks or missions. Minimum service standards are known as one such measuring tool or indicator.

Afdhal et al. (2023) argue that public services provided by the government can be distributive, redistributive, and regulatory within the context of public policy. Despite their diversity, generically, government services can be divided into three main categories: (1) primary services, as fundamental services; (2) secondary services, as supportive services focusing on specific groups; and (3) tertiary services, as services indirectly related to the general public.

From this task division, it can be concluded that the primary function of the government is to provide public services. The evaluation and assessment of the achievement of public service tasks are crucial to determining how well the government has fulfilled its mission. However, such evaluation can only be done if there are appropriate measuring tools or indicators aligned with the given tasks or missions. One such measuring tool, known as minimum service standards, plays a crucial role in assessing these achievements.

Afdhal et al. (2023) also state that public services provided by the government can take various forms, including distributive, redistributive, and regulatory, within the context of public policy. Although diverse, generally, government services can be categorized into three main types. First, primary services refer to fundamental services. Second are secondary services, which are supportive services focusing on specific groups. Third, tertiary services, which are indirectly related to the general public,.

Creating Child-Friendly Cities

Since September 5, 1990, Indonesia has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, demonstrating the country's commitment to respecting and fulfilling children's rights. Article 28B(2) of the 1945 Constitution enshrines this commitment, while Law No. 23 of 2002 on Child Protection implements it. To integrate children's rights into the development process, the Indonesian government developed the Child-Friendly City policy. The concept of a child-friendly city (Kota Ramah Anak, KRA) emerged following research on children's perceptions of the environment. The study highlighted that an optimal urban environment for children is one with a strong physical and social community, clear and firm rules, opportunities for children, and educational facilities that allow them to explore and understand their environment and the world.

At the Habitat II Conference or City Summit in Istanbul, Turkey, government representatives from various countries, including Indonesia, gathered and signed an Action Program to Make Settlements More Comfortable and Sustainable. The program explicitly emphasizes that children and adolescents should have decent living conditions, be involved in decision-making processes in their cities and communities, and have the right to fulfill their needs and play roles in their environment. UNICEF introduced the Child-Friendly City Initiative during the City Summit, with a focus on urban children,

particularly those from impoverished and marginalized families, to guarantee their basic rights through basic services and protection.

According to the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, a child-friendly city is one that guarantees every child's rights as a city resident. As city residents, children have the right to participate in decision-making that affects their city. They have the right to express their opinions about the vision of the city they want, and they can actively participate in family, community, and social life. These rights include the right to receive basic services such as health and education, access to clean drinking water, and adequate sanitation. Children also deserve protection from exploitation, cruelty, and abuse.

Additionally, as part of a child-friendly city, children have the right to feel safe walking on the streets, meeting, and playing with their friends. They also have the right to green spaces in which to plant and interact with animals. To ensure a healthy life, the environment in which they live should be free of pollution. Children have the right to city cultural and social activities. Every city resident's rights reflect the importance of justice and equality, irrespective of their ethnicity, religion, wealth, gender, or disability. Thus, every resident, including children, should have equitable access to all services.

In the effort to create a child-friendly public policy bureaucracy, it is essential to meet the necessary qualifications. Children have a significant influence on city decisions, and therefore, public policy should consider the diversity of community groups. Integrating this aspect into comprehensive work programs can promote equal opportunities in various aspects of life, including for children. When local governments pay special attention to children, their lives tend to improve.

Adequate understanding and appropriate policies towards children can contribute positively to the city's progress and its social structure. Valuing children's opinions about the city they want is an important step in child-friendly public policy. Listening to people's voices, including those of children, is an essential aspect of developing child-friendly policies. Local governments, like Jakarta, have initiated smoke-free zones to reflect a child-friendly city. These zones not only create a healthier environment for children but also protect them from health risks that can hinder their growth and development.

Green open spaces (RTH) play a dual role in the city, serving not only as city parks but also as safe and comfortable play areas for children. The existence of more play and creativity spaces for children reflects the capability of public policies to meet community needs and play a role in family, community, and social life. In this context, it is important for local governments to create adequate bureaucracy and legal frameworks to support children's growth and development. Policies may include meeting toddlers' nutritional needs through posyandu or dasawisma.

Every child has the right to receive basic services such as health care and education. Therefore, local governments need to include free basic education for children on their agendas. Free education has the potential to encourage parents to send their children to school, but the success of this program also highly depends on the quality of adequate teaching resources. Without such support, free basic education will only be a meaningless program. The same applies to health guarantees, where local governments should prioritize the availability of easily accessible health centers to ensure the welfare of their citizens.

Ensuring the availability of fresh drinking water and adequate sanitation is essential for improving human life quality. Therefore, local governments need to make clean water a basic agenda item for community life. Similarly, sanitation, such as having latrines in every household, should be mandatory. Local governments must strive to meet these conditions through family welfare programs. Local governments must address the urgency of protecting children from exploitation, cruelty, and abuse. In this regard, local governments need to establish regulations that encompass all societal layers. Punishing perpetrators of violence against children is an effective step in protecting their future.

The safety of walking on the streets is a vital basic need in everyday life. The availability of adequate roads not only supports general public mobility, but also has a positive impact on children's lives. Children will feel at home on safe, well-maintained streets. Additionally, excellent roads facilitate children meeting and playing with their friends, creating enjoyable experiences. The presence of green spaces for plants and animals, as well as a pollution-free environment, has a significant impact on the community's survival, including that of children. Providing green open spaces (RTH) not only ensures sustainability but also creates a healthy and child-friendly environment.

Children's participation in cultural and social activities is a matter that needs attention. Governments should make regulations supporting children's involvement in cultural and social activities. This creates opportunities for children to grow, interact, and share experiences according to their capabilities. The principle of equality in public services is very important. Every citizen, regardless of ethnicity, religion, wealth, gender, and disability, must have equal access to every service. Social differences or personal identity should not limit these rights, as the government should establish policies to ensure this.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

The research findings conclude that serious attention is required to address the issue of children's quality of life in Indonesia, particularly in cities that are not yet child-friendly. The high levels of violence against children, the lack of infrastructure that meets their needs, and the low involvement of stakeholders in child policy and protection are the main problems that need immediate resolution. This study provides a comprehensive overview of efforts to improve children's quality of life by implementing child-friendly city policies within the context of the regional autonomy system. The qualitative research method, with a literature review and policy study approach, offers an in-depth understanding of the complexity of these issues. The results indicate that efforts to enhance child-friendly cities within the framework of regional autonomy involve the development of policies, programs, strategies, and development activities that prioritize children's rights. Some initiatives, such as the declaration of child-friendly city policies, the development of infrastructure that meets children's needs, and the improvement of child protection systems, are positive steps in creating a better environment for children's growth and development.

Recommendations

This research highlights the importance of active stakeholder involvement in developing child-friendly cities. By aligning the principles of regional autonomy policy, this study offers a solid foundation for formulating more effective strategies and programs to enhance children's quality of life in urban areas. Involving various parties, such as local governments, community organizations, educators, and child advocacy groups, will enrich perspectives and ensure that children's needs are the primary focus of policy planning and implementation.

The recommendations from this research are not only beneficial for the studied city but can also serve as valuable guidelines for other regions looking to implement similar policies. By adopting an inclusive and participatory approach, efforts to improve urban environments for the welfare of children will become more sustainable and have a broader impact. Active stakeholder involvement ensures that the policies created are not only relevant to local needs, but also accepted and supported by the local community.

Thus, the results of this research underscore the importance of collaboration between the government, the community, and various other related parties in creating urban environments that

support children's optimal growth and development. We hope that this approach will create more inclusive, safe, and enjoyable cities for children, enabling them to reach their full potential and develop into a resilient and capable generation.

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