

From the Margins to Protection: Empowerment of Marginalized Communities for Exploited Children

*Dari Terpinggirkan hingga Perlindungan:
Pemberdayaan Komunitas Terpinggirkan
untuk Anak yang Dieksploitasi*

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Abstract

Economic exploitation of children is a form of human rights violation that is still rampant, especially in areas with high poverty rates and limited access to education and legal protection. In Central Java, this phenomenon often affects children from marginalized families who are forced to work to help support their families' economy. This study aims to analyze how empowering marginalized communities can be an effective strategy in supporting the implementation of legal protection for children who are victims of economic exploitation. Using a qualitative approach and case study methods in several areas in Central Java, this study explores the role of local communities, civil society organizations, and government institutions in building legal awareness and social capacity of marginalized communities. The results of the study show that community empowerment not only increases understanding of children's rights but also strengthens the community's bargaining position in rejecting exploitative practices. Programs such as skills training, legal counseling, and the formation of local advocacy

groups have been shown to create a more protective environment for children. In addition, collaboration between the community, local government, and child protection institutions is key to building a sustainable protection system that is responsive to local needs. This study confirms that a community-based approach is an important element in child protection strategies, especially in areas with limited resources. Therefore, policies are needed that support the active participation of marginalized communities in the process of formulating and implementing child legal protection. Thus, child protection efforts are not only the responsibility of the state, but also become a collective movement from the grassroots that starts from shared awareness and concern.

Keywords Child Exploitation, Community Empowerment, Legal Protection, Marginalized Communities, Central Java.

Eksplorasi ekonomi terhadap anak merupakan bentuk pelanggaran hak asasi manusia yang masih marak terjadi, terutama di wilayah dengan tingkat kemiskinan tinggi serta akses pendidikan dan perlindungan hukum yang terbatas. Di Jawa Tengah, fenomena ini seringkali menimpa anak-anak dari keluarga yang termarginalkan yang dipaksa bekerja untuk membantu perekonomian keluarga. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana pemberdayaan komunitas termarginalkan dapat menjadi strategi efektif dalam mendukung penerapan perlindungan hukum bagi anak korban eksploitasi ekonomi. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan metode studi kasus di beberapa wilayah di Jawa Tengah, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi peran masyarakat lokal, organisasi masyarakat sipil, dan lembaga pemerintah dalam membangun kesadaran hukum serta kapasitas sosial masyarakat termarginalkan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pemberdayaan masyarakat tidak hanya meningkatkan pemahaman tentang hak-hak anak, tetapi juga memperkuat posisi tawar masyarakat dalam menolak praktik-praktik eksploitatif. Program seperti pelatihan keterampilan, konseling hukum, dan pembentukan kelompok advokasi lokal telah terbukti menciptakan lingkungan yang lebih protektif bagi anak. Selain itu, kolaborasi antara masyarakat, pemerintah daerah, dan lembaga perlindungan anak menjadi kunci dalam membangun sistem perlindungan yang berkelanjutan dan responsif terhadap kebutuhan lokal. Penelitian ini mengonfirmasi bahwa pendekatan berbasis komunitas merupakan elemen penting dalam strategi perlindungan anak, khususnya di wilayah dengan sumber daya terbatas. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan kebijakan yang mendukung partisipasi aktif masyarakat termarginalkan dalam proses penyusunan dan pelaksanaan perlindungan hukum anak. Dengan demikian, upaya perlindungan anak tidak hanya menjadi tanggung jawab negara, tetapi juga berubah menjadi gerakan kolektif dari akar rumput yang bermula dari

kesadaran dan kepedulian bersama.

Kata Kunci Eksploitasi Anak, Pemberdayaan Masyarakat, Perlindungan Hukum, Masyarakat Termarginalkan, Jawa Tengah.

Introduction

Currently, the number of street children resulting from economic exploitation—whether by their own families or by others—is on the rise. According to data from the Ministry of Social Affairs, sourced from the Integrated Social Welfare Data Dashboard (DTKS) SIKS-NG as of December 15, 2020, there are 67,368 abandoned street children across Indonesia. This alarming situation is likely driven by the government's legal protection strategies for exploited children, which remain inadequate. These strategies often fail to incorporate community empowerment efforts that focus on unlocking and utilizing the community's potential. As a result, communities are not fully equipped to support, nurture, and take responsibility for fulfilling children's rights.ⁱ

An alternative strategy that can be done by the government to facilitate local communities in planning and managing community-owned resources that ultimately have the ability and independence economically, ecologically and socially in a sustainable manner is community empowerment¹. Empowerment of marginalized communities is an effort to overcome the phenomenon of street children who are victims of economic exploitation which is quantitatively increasingⁱⁱ.

Children should receive protection, love and supervision from their parents, be educated and cared for properly in accordance with their rights as children, so that deviations do not occur during their growth period.²In fact, currently, in several regions in Indonesia, including Central Java, there are many problems regarding exploitation of children, one form of which is economic exploitation³.

Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the population aged 10-17 years who worked in the country was 1.17

¹Dominique Coy , *From little things, big things grow: Facilitating community empowerment in the energy transformation* , Energy Research & Social Science 11 November 2021 2214-6296/© 2021 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved

² Vineeth Ajith , *Empowering communities in addressing drinking water challenges using a systematic, participatory and adaptive approach and sustainable PPP model Technological* , Forecasting and Social Change Volume 185, December 2022, 121970

³ Ridwan, *Participatory Planning from a Community Welfare Perspective* . RA De. Rozarie. Surabaya . 2013.

million people in 2020, an increase of 320 thousand people compared to the previous year. The percentage also increased from 2.37% in 2021 to 3.25% in 2021. In 2020 there were 3.6% child workers aged 10-12. The number of child workers aged 13-14 years also increased from 2.07% to 3.34%.⁴

Article 28B paragraph (2) of the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia explicitly regulates the rights of every child to survival, growth and development and has the right to protection from violence and discrimination. This mandate is manifested in Law Number 23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection Article 23 paragraph (1): The state and government guarantee the protection, care and welfare of children by paying attention to the rights and obligations of parents, guardians or other persons who are legally responsible for the child⁵.

Article 2 of Law Number 4 of 1979 concerning Child Welfare states that children have the right to:

- (1) welfare, care, upbringing and guidance based on affection both in the family and in special care to grow and develop naturally;
- (2) services to develop their abilities and social life, in accordance with the culture and personality of the nation, to become good and useful citizens;
- (3) care and protection, both in the womb and after birth; and
- (4) protection of the environment that may endanger or hinder its normal growth and development.

Protection of children is also inseparable from the presence of affection which is the most basic need in a child's life. Especially the affection given by parents.

But in reality, many children are raised in conditions full of conflict that often cause the development of the child's soul to be unhealthy. The development of a child's personality in such a situation can encourage children to do negative actions that are often categorized as juvenile delinquency.

Juvenile delinquency is increasing in society. Not only is it disturbing the parents of the child who is doing the delinquency, but the community around the child is also disturbed by the security, comfort and order of their lives.

Juvenile delinquency ultimately does not only harm parents

⁴ Suharto E, *Building Society Empowering People*. Refika Aditama. Bandung. 2010

⁵ Utari, Indah Sri. *Schools and Theories in Criminology* Yogyakarta: Thafa Media2012.

and the surrounding community. But further threatens the future of the nation and state, where children are the next generation of the future of the nation and state of Indonesia.

On this basis, children need to be protected from actions that are detrimental to themselves or to others around them, whether mental, physical or social, considering the condition and situation of children who are essentially still unable to protect themselves from various actions that cause harm.

As is known, legal experts have different understandings regarding the term "law". One legal expert, E. Utrecht, defines law as a collection of life instructions in the form of commands and prohibitions that regulate order in a society that should be obeyed by all members of society, therefore violations of these life instructions can result in action by the government/ruler.

According to Dr. Maidin Gultom, SH.⁶, M.Hum in his book entitled *Legal Protection for Children in the Juvenile Criminal Justice System in Indonesia*, the purpose of the law is to create safety, happiness and order in society. Each member of society has various interests so that members of society in fulfilling their interests establish relationships that are regulated by law to create social balance.

If a person or several people commit a violation of the law, then there is an imbalance because the violation of the law may cause harm to other parties. At this point, the phenomenon of marginalized children often arises.

Marginalized children, children who are considered marginal or "sidelined" with shallow understanding are often understood as children who do not have a place to live, or children who are abandoned because their parents are unable to afford it. They take to the streets to do anything to get money to survive. They hang around in crowded places, such as city sidewalks, train stations, bus terminals, or live under bridges, city parks, etc.

The reasons behind their coming to the streets vary. Some of them initially worked because their parents asked or forced them to supplement the family income. But often after work they did not receive affection but were cursed and beaten. Several cases were found that street children did come from disharmonious families. Life in a harsh and chaotic family often pushed them to sever ties with their families and choose to live on the streets.

⁶ Maidin Gultom. *Legal Protection for Children in the Juvenile Criminal Justice System in Indonesia*. Bandung: Refika Aditama, 2010

This condition is often triggered by parents who behave badly, gamblers, and curse, beat and oppress, and never show affection. Children who are in this position rarely still have a relationship or maintain a relationship with their family's place of origin. Often they have an uncertain existence where the family is and it is unclear who their parents are, because since childhood they have been traded, rented out for complementary alms. So that it ends in the condition of their daily life growing and developing completely on the streets.

This research aims to analyzing the forms of economic exploitation experienced by children from marginal families in Central Java, as well as the social, economic and cultural factors behind it; Reviewing community empowerment programs to increase legal awareness and social capacity of marginalized communities in preventing and handling cases of child exploitation; Evaluating the synergy between communities, local governments, and child protection institutions in building a sustainable and community-based child protection system.

Problem solving is attempted to be done carefully, this is because often, the programs implemented cannot empower the community, but instead create community dependence on the government. To answer these problems, the following steps will be taken:

1. First, the general orientation stage is the identification of the community about the potentials they may have. Identification is closely related to the needs assessment. A need can be defined as a deficiency that drives the community to fulfill it.
2. Second, the stage of in-depth study of marginalized communities both at the level of kinship, locality, cultural values, and the potential they have and their function for the welfare of the local community. The methods that will be used at this stage are in-depth interview methods, participant and semi-participatory observations, and cultural analysis to understand their conceptual world and ideals.
3. Third, the assessment stage regarding the opportunities and urgency of empowerment within the framework of protection for children who are victims of economic exploitation. For that reason, the beginning of empowerment is done by (1) providing motivation with the hope that the community will

become more positive in various things, such as: a) . Diligent and full of fighting spirit or have a strong drive in carrying out activities b) . Disciplined in activities (worldly and afterlife affairs) c) . Appearing and communicating more focused d) . Having stronger self-control e) . Not easily provoked by unclear news.

4. Fourth, the stage of implementing community empowerment programs/activities that aim to make the community more independent in doing business. With the hope of being able to lift the lives of the community as a target group to be more prosperous, empowered or have the strength to meet the main needs of life, and ultimately will create independence in the community. For data analysis and evaluation and analysis results, a partnership strategy will be adopted between researchers and research partners throughout the research cycle, starting from information collection, concluding study results, and confirming data validation and conclusions. This combination of approaches and strategies is expected to be able to answer the problems and objectives of the study.

State of the art from research Empowerment of Marginalized Communities and Implementation of Legal Protection for Children Victims of Economic Exploitation in Central Java , is that the aim of this research is to empower the community which is an alternative solution or relevant way out. For overcome problem poverty experienced by people who exploit their children economically. Previous research that legal protection carried out by the government is limited to conducting socialization, detaining street children in social service offices, dissemination. This is where the novelty of this research is. Empowerment strategies place active community participation into effectiveness, efficiency, and an attitude of independence ⁱⁱ. Empowerment is a concept of economic development that encapsulates social values. This concept reflects a new paradigm of development, namely: *people-centered, participatory, empowering, and sustainable*ⁱⁱ

The birth of the concept of empowerment as an antithesis to the development model that is less pro-majority ⁱⁱ. This concept is built from the following logical framework:

- (1) The process of centralizing power is built from the centralization of power over production factors.
- (2) The centralization of power over production factors will

give rise to a society of workers and a society of marginal entrepreneurs.

- (3) Power will build knowledge systems, political systems, legal systems and systems manipulative ideology to strengthen legitimacy
- (4) The systematic implementation of knowledge systems, political systems, legal systems and ideologies will create two groups of people, namely empowered people and powerless people. To free ourselves from the situation of controlling and being controlled, liberation must be carried out through a process of empowerment for the weak (*empowerment of the powerless*).

Methods

Research on Empowerment of Marginalized Communities and Implementation of Legal Protection for Child Victims of Economic Exploitation in Central Java using a multidisciplinary approach qualitative with *sociolegal research type*ⁱⁱ. As a consequence of qualitative approach, researchers rely on first-hand information (primary data) in the field. Secondary data (from statistics and documents) are used to complete the analysis. Data from the field are analyzed with analytical tools using Motivation Theoryⁱⁱ. The drive or motivation that arises in a person can come from within himself, or motivation that arises because of the drive of people around him.

By using the above method , six diverse environmental areas /regions will be selected, namely 6 regencies /cities in Central Java, namely Semarang, Tegal, Surakarta, Magelang and Kudus and Rembang regencies . From each regency /city , two sub-districts and two villages/sub-districts of cases were selected. The process of selecting the sample area was carried out through a *purposive sampling*ⁱⁱ procedure.

Data will be collected first-hand (informants and respondents) in villages, sub-districts and districts, as well as cities and regencies in the study area. This study involves community leaders , government officials, social services, religious leaders , and residents from the village, sub-district, district, and regency levels as well as police from the local community police institution . They are

not only treated as informants or respondents, the research is also involved in the entire cycle of research activities: information collection, conclusion of interim study results, data confirmation/validation, and determination of final conclusions. This means that through (repeated) interviews and seminars (groups), each has the opportunity to make corrections (to the findings of the research team), to be involved in analyzing and concluding research data so that an acceptable level of generalization can be obtained, applicable at the village, sub-district, district, and district levels that are the location of the research .

The data collection techniques that will be used to collect data from informants and respondents are:

1. Observation, to capture situations, conditions, real behavior, and events that occur around an incident. This observation strategy will also be used for general orientation of the study field/research area, in which secondary data and document collection is carried out.
2. In-depth interviews , to further reveal things that are not yet clear that are obtained through observation. The general impression captured in the observation will be followed up with in-depth interviews to obtain clarity about the actual situation. In addition, through this in-depth interview, an effort is made to obtain an understanding of the meaning, symbols, language, or other symbolic expressions. At this stage, visits will be more intensive, intimate, and personal with informants/respondents, so that they can reveal the potential they have and the needs they want.
3. Focus group discussions are conducted to find tendencies and patterns on an issue. Systematic analysis of the discussions conducted will provide some clues and descriptions regarding what the discussion participants want.
ⁱⁱThus, the largest part of the data collection results will be in the form of thick field notes, which will produce a research report with thick descriptions as well.ⁱⁱ

The collected data will be analyzed qualitatively. In the initial stage, data is grouped according to study elements using the *open coding model. coding* and *axial coding* ⁱⁱThe second stage is continued with the arrangement of the relationship between the elements of the study ⁱⁱ. The next stage is to confirm the conclusion about the relationship between the elements of the study with the informants/respondents. Then continued with a discussion with

competent experts regarding the researcher's temporary conclusions. Each conclusion and generalization at each level of the study area is always preceded by data confirmation activities and seminars, both with (representatives of) informants and respondents and with experts. As a final stage, conceptualization is carried out to formulate the findings.

Results & Discussion

A. Forms of Economic Exploitation Experienced by Children from Marginalized Families in Central Java

Field findings produced data that there had been exploitation of children in the economic sector accompanied by violence. In the study, it was found that the forms of economic exploitation were that children were ordered to become buskers, beggars and commercial sex workers. All forms of economic exploitation of children of course violate the Child Protection Act. In real terms, BPS data related to violence experienced by children are as follows:

Number of Violence Based on Type of Violence Experienced by
Children (Ages 0-18 Years) Victims of Violence in Central Java
Province

Jenis Kekerasan	Jumlah Kekerasan berdasarkan Jenis Kekerasan yang dialami oleh Anak (Usia 0-18 Tahun) Korban Kekerasan di Provinsi Jawa Tengah		
	2018	2019	2020
Fisik	324	292	205
Psikis	306	312	296
Seksual	734	700	789
Penelantaran	91	85	58
Trafficking	48	8	8
Eksplorasi	5	9	15
Lainnya	85	51	56
D P3AKB Provinsi Jawa Tengah			

From the data above, it can be seen that many children experience violence. The position of children in the research area is

very vulnerable to the declining economic conditions, many children are forced and forced to work to help meet the economic needs of their parents in providing food to survive their daily lives.

Until now, the number of child workers has not been recorded with certainty. Child labor or work in general is children who do routine work for their parents, for others or for themselves that requires a large amount of time, with or without compensation. Although the Republic of Indonesia Law Number 23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection explains that exploitative treatment, for example actions or deeds of exploiting, taking advantage of or blackmailing children to obtain personal, family or group benefits. Related to the concept of age, Law Number 13 of 2003 concerning employment states that what is meant by a child is: "those under the age of 18". Meanwhile, according to Law Number 23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection, the age limit referred to as "a child is when they reach the age of 18."

This kind of condition if based on the concept of moral and ethical in terms of ethics and morals then there is an agreement that the name of the child actually they should not work at an early age, let alone work in various sectors that are categorized as dangerous for the survival of the child. Because the child's job should be to learn, play and help parents as much as possible at home and as much as they can. Exploitation is blackmail, exploitation, exploitation, and unfair profit-making.

Research data shows that child exploitation or in fact extortion or unfair profit-taking of children in Central Java is very common . It was found that until now the problem of child labor is no longer about child labor itself, but rather there has been exploitation of children or placing children in dangerous environments.

UNICEF has set several criteria for exploited child labor, namely when it concerns: 1) full-time work at an age that is too early, 2) too much time spent working, 3) work that causes physical, social and psychological stress that is not appropriate, 4) inadequate wages, 5) too much responsibility, 6) work that hinders access to education, 7) work that reduces the dignity and self-esteem of children, such as slavery or forced contract work and sexual exploitation.¹²

1. Forms of Economic Exploitation of Children

Children from marginalized families in Central Java face

various challenges in fulfilling their rights, especially the right to grow and develop properly without economic pressure. In limited social and economic conditions, children often become victims of economic exploitation, both directly and covertly. This exploitation not only hinders the physical and mental development of children, but also violates their basic rights as individuals that should be protected by the state and society. To understand the complexity of this problem, it is important to identify the various forms of economic exploitation experienced by these children, as well as to examine the social, economic, and cultural factors that underlie it. The forms of exploitation include:

- 1) **Child Labor in the Informal Sector**
Children work as scavengers, buskers, hawkers, or manual laborers in markets and on the streets. They often work in substandard conditions and without legal protection.
- 2) **Hazardous and Age-Inappropriate Work**
Children are involved in heavy work such as construction, agriculture, or household industries that pose high risks to their safety and health.
- 3) **Exploitation in the Form of Unliving Wages**
Children are often paid far below the standard, or not at all, because they are seen as simply “helping” their parents or employers.
- 4) **Excessive Working Hours**
Many children work more than 6 hours a day, even into the evening, which interferes with their study and rest time.
- 5) **Exploitative Domestic Work**
Children, especially girls, work as domestic workers in confined conditions and are vulnerable to violence or abuse.

2. Factors Causing Economic Exploitation of Children

Economic exploitation of children does not occur in a vacuum, but rather is the result of a complex interaction of various factors that influence each other. In areas such as Central Java, the social, economic, and cultural conditions of the community play a significant role in shaping the realities of children's lives, especially those from marginalized families. Persistent poverty, low levels of education, and cultural norms that are permissive of children's involvement in work are the main triggers that push children into exploitation practices. To understand the root of this problem more

deeply, it is important to examine the social, economic, and cultural factors that underlie the economic exploitation of children in these environments.

Social Factors:

- 1) Low levels of parental education, which leads to a lack of understanding of children's rights and the importance of education
- 2) Family breakdown or domestic violence, which pushes children to leave the house and earn their own living
- 3) Permissive cultural norms, where working from childhood is considered normal or a form of child contribution to the family.

Economic Factors:

- 1) Structural poverty forces families to rely on children's income to meet daily needs.
- 2) Lack of access to decent work for adults, so that children become an alternative source of income.

Cultural Factors:

- 1) Traditional views on the role of children, especially in rural areas, consider children as an economic asset to the family.
- 2) Lack of legal awareness, both from the community and the authorities, regarding the prohibition of child exploitation and the importance of child protection.

In various current human rights instruments, child sexual exploitation is grouped into five forms of criminal acts, namely:

- 1) Child Prostitution
The act of offering a child's services or direct services to perform a sexual act for money or other reward.
- 2) Child Pornography
Any performance including photographs, visuals, audio, written or otherwise involving children in sexual activity.
- 3) Child Trafficking For Sexual Purposes
The process of recruiting, harboring and receiving children for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

4) Child Sex Tourism (CST)

Sexual exploitation of children by people who travel from one place to another. Often involving the use of various accommodation, transport and tourism services that can facilitate contact with children. This allows the perpetrator to remain invisible in the community and surrounding environment.

5) Child marriage

Marriage involving children and adolescents under the age of 18 can be considered a form of exploitation if a child is used for sexual purposes to obtain goods or payment in the form of money or services. Then, the latest form of crime is online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC). OSEC is all acts of sexual exploitation carried out against children online including: grooming, sextortion, sexting, child sexual abuse material (CSAM), and live broadcasts of sexual violence against children.

Based on field data from Central Java Province, the forms of exploitation experienced by children from marginal families include several categories that are quite serious and complex. Among others:

1) Direct Economic Exploitation

Children are forced or compelled to work in the informal sector as scavengers, buskers, street vendors, or manual laborers. They work in inadequate conditions and without legal protection.

2) Commercial Sexual Exploitation

Although not always visible on the surface, several cases show that children are also victims of sexual exploitation for commercial purposes, especially in urban areas and tourist areas [1].

3) Hazardous and Age-Inappropriate Work

Children are involved in work that endangers their safety and health, such as working in workshops, construction, or agriculture with heavy equipment [1].

4) Domestic Exploitation

Children, especially girls, work as domestic workers in closed conditions and are vulnerable to physical and psychological violence.

5) Child Trafficking for Economic Purposes

Several cases indicate the existence of child trafficking

for the purposes of forced labor or other exploitation, although the numbers are relatively small but have a large impact [1] .

6) Economic Neglect

Children are left to earn their own living without parental support or supervision, which is indirectly a form of exploitation as they are forced to survive in harsh conditions. Data from the Central Java Province Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Service in 2023 noted that the most dominant form of violence against children was sexual violence, followed by psychological violence, physical violence, neglect, and economic exploitation.

7) Economic Exploitation

The use of children in work or activities for the benefit of others, but not limited to child labor. Economic exploitation is related to certain benefits obtained from the process of production, distribution, and consumption of goods/services (*supply chain*) in which children are employed in the cycle. These material interests have an impact on the economy of a particular unit, whether it is a country, society or family. For example: Child Domestic Workers (PRT), Child Soldiers (involved in armed conflict), child slavery, use of children for criminal purposes (drug dealers), involvement of children in dangerous work, etc.

It is also important to understand that exploitation is different from violence. Child exploitation occurs in the form of violence where the perpetrator aims to gain commercial/economic benefits. In cases of child exploitation, children are not only sex objects but also commodities to obtain money, goods, or services for the perpetrator and other people involved. In principle, every child has the right to be protected from exploitation in any form that is detrimental to him/her. This is the obligation of parents, guardians, or other parties such as the government and related state institutions. This principle has been accepted both through international legal instruments (the Convention on the Rights of the Child) and national legal instruments (the Child Protection Act) and other regulations.

According to the 2016-2020 Child Complaint Case Data published by the KPAI on its official website, there were 29 cases of child prostitution, 23 cases of commercial sexual exploitation of children (ESKA), 54 cases of child labor exploitation, 11 cases of illegal adoption, and 4 cases of commercial sexual recruitment of

children (pimps). Furthermore, KPAI recorded 35 cases of sexual exploitation, child trafficking, and child labor during the period of January-April 2021. Of that number, 60% were carried out *online* with the MiChat application being the most widely used media (41%). Then, the position was followed by WhatsApp (21%) and Facebook (17%).

In implementing various forms of this program, the government faces obstacles in dealing with the problem of violence and economic exploitation of children, namely:

- 1) The government's program of providing free education to the underprivileged is not evenly distributed, and law enforcement officers in issuing decisions on children do not resolve the root of the problem, only taking curative measures, not preventive measures

Referring to Law No. 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection, Article 1 paragraph (15) also states that children are given special protection. If examined, what is meant in Article 1 paragraph (15) of Law No. 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection is: "Special protection is protection given to children in emergency situations, children in conflict with the law, children from minority and isolated groups, children who are exploited economically and/or sexually, children who are traded, children who are victims of abuse of narcotics, alcohol, psychotropics, and other addictive substances (napza), children who are victims of kidnapping, sale, trade, children who are victims of physical and/or mental violence, children with disabilities, and children who are victims of mistreatment and neglect."

- 2) Child protection aims to ensure that children's rights are fulfilled so that they can live, grow, develop and participate optimally in accordance with human dignity and honor, and receive protection from attempts to exploit children economically or sexually

The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child was then classified by Presidential Decree Number 36 of 1990 (dated August 25, 1990) which states four basic rights of children, namely: 1) Survival, 2) growth and development, 3) protection from activities that threaten survival and health that

will hinder normal growth and development, and 4) participation in decision making.

It is also confirmed in the law Law Number 39 of 1999 concerning Human Rights (HAM) in Article 64, states: "Every child has the right to receive protection from economic exploitation and any work that is dangerous to him/her, so that it can interfere with his/her education, physical health, morals, social life and mentality. " Children's rights have been universally established through the UN General Assembly on November 20, 1959, in the form of a declaration of the rights of the child. With this declaration, it is hoped that all parties will recognize children's rights and encourage all efforts to fulfill them.

There are ten principles regarding children's rights according to the declaration, namely:

- 1) Every child shall enjoy all the rights set forth in this Declaration without exception, without distinction or discrimination;
- 2) Every child shall enjoy special protection, shall be given opportunities and facilities by law or by other means, so that he or she may develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually, and socially in a healthy and normal manner;
- 3) Every child from birth must have a name and national identity;
- 4) Every child should enjoy the benefits of social security;
- 5) Every child who is physically, mentally or socially disabled must be given special treatment, education and care according to his/her condition;
- 6) Every child for his full and balanced personal development needs love and understanding;
- 7) Every child shall receive education free of charge and on a compulsory basis;
- 8) Every child in any situation should receive first aid and protection;
- 9) Every child must be protected from all forms of neglect, violence and exploitation.

Thus, the legislation has clearly explained the existence of equal rights for children to receive protection, care, development and growth in carrying out their lives without discrimination, especially in the context of implementing legislation regarding special legal protection for children who are victims of economic exploitation as stated in Law No. 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection, Article 1 paragraph (15) as mentioned above.

Children should receive protection, affection and supervision from their parents, be educated and cared for properly in accordance with their rights as children so that there are no deviations during their growth. Currently in fact, in several regions in this country, including in the city of Semarang, there are still many problems regarding the exploitation of children, one form of which is economic exploitation. In addition, as research or surveys have been conducted, based on gender, it shows that the proportion of boys who work is greater than girls. The greater number of male child workers compared to female children is thought to be related to the view of parents that boys are physically stronger, have economic responsibility for the family and work is a man's job.

In the Child Protection Law, children are not allowed to work in order to help their family's economy. This means that even if the desire to work comes from the child, the Child Protection Law still does not allow children to work. The current phenomenon shows that children are used as beggars, buskers and the worst is that children are used as sexual commodities so that prostitution of female children is also increasingly rampant. The activity of exploiting children in any form for economic purposes is something that is not expected by existing laws and regulations. Children according to their age level should enjoy their childhood happily, and do not need to think about the economic conditions of their families, let alone help their family's economy. Several cases that have occurred prove that it is a fact that children are victims of exploitation by several individuals to gain economic gain.

Article 1 point 2 of the Republic of Indonesia Law Number 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection explains that child protection is all activities to guarantee and protect children and their rights so that they can live, grow, develop, and participate optimally in accordance with human dignity and honor, and receive protection from violence and discrimination. The concept of child protection covers a broad scope in the sense that child protection is not only about protecting all rights and interests that can guarantee their growth and development properly, both spiritually, physically and socially, and child protection also concerns the younger generation.

The implementation of child protection and welfare requires support from institutions and laws and regulations that can guarantee the implementation of child protection and welfare.

Everyone is prohibited from placing, allowing, carrying out, ordering or participating in economic or sexual exploitation of children, in accordance with Article 76 I Child Protection Law. Form of protection The law regarding underage child victims of economic exploitation is regulated in the Child Protection Act.

Article 66 of the Child Protection Law explains that special protection for children who are exploited economically or sexually is carried out through the dissemination and/or socialization of provisions of laws and regulations relating to the protection of children who are exploited economically or sexually; monitoring, reporting, and imposing sanctions; involvement of government agencies, companies, labor unions, non-governmental organizations, and the community itself, and everyone is prohibited from ordering or exploiting children. Child workers or laborers in general are children who do routine work for their parents, for other people or for themselves that requires a large amount of time, with or without compensation.

B. Community Empowerment Programs in Increasing Legal Awareness and Social Capacity of Marginalized Communities in Preventing and Handling Child Exploitation Cases

In an effort to overcome child exploitation, an approach that relies solely on law enforcement is often insufficient. A strategy is needed that touches the root of the problem, namely by empowering communities—especially marginalized groups—to have adequate legal awareness and social capacity. Community empowerment is key to creating a safe and supportive environment for children, while strengthening the role of communities as the frontline in preventing and handling exploitation cases. Various programs have been designed and implemented by the government, NGOs, and local communities to increase active community participation in child protection. The following describes several empowerment programs that have proven effective in building legal awareness and strengthening the social capacity of marginalized communities in various regions, including Central Java.

In conditions like this, the Department of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection and Community Empowerment plays an active role in overcoming the economic exploitation

experienced by children.

In this study, data was obtained that:

- 1) The form of implementation of legal protection for child victims of economic exploitation in the Central Java region is carried out by taking firm legal action against the perpetrators.
- 2) Community participation is also very necessary, whether from individuals, child protection institutions, social institutions, NGOs, educational institutions, religious institutions, business entities and mass media, the implementation of which is adjusted to the provisions of applicable laws and regulations.
- 3) The government encourages community participation, including through social organizations, both in the form of foundations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to participate in increasing their activities in child protection programs.

The community empowerment programs that have been implemented in various regions of Indonesia, including Central Java, to increase legal awareness and social capacity of marginalized communities in preventing and handling cases of child exploitation are:

- 1) Community-Based Legal Education and Counseling

This program aims to increase public understanding of children's rights and the laws that protect them. This activity is usually carried out through:

- a. Citizen forums and focus group discussions (FGD);
- b. Community paralegal training;
- c. Counseling by legal aid institutions (LBH).

This program helps the community recognize forms of exploitation and the correct reporting procedures.

- 2) Family Economic Empowerment

Poverty is the root cause of child exploitation. Therefore, economic empowerment programs such as:

- a. Job skills and entrepreneurship training;
- b. Providing access to micro business capital;
- c. Labor-intensive programs and conditional social assistance have been shown to help families escape dependence on children's earnings.

- 3) Establishment and Strengthening of Children's Forums

Children's Forum is a forum for children to participate in voicing their rights. In many areas, this forum also acts as a reporter and pioneer in preventing violence and exploitation of

children. They are trained to:

- a. Conveying aspirations to the government;
- b. Conduct awareness campaigns in schools and communities;
- c. Becoming an agent of change in one's peer environment.

4) Cross-Sector Collaboration

Programs involving local governments, NGOs, community leaders, and law enforcement officers in:

- a. Building a community-based reporting system;
- b. Establishing child protection units at the village/sub-district level;
- c. Improving the capacity of village officials in handling child cases.

An example is the program in Bhuana Jaya Village, East Kalimantan, which succeeded in reducing the number of child exploitation cases through a collaborative approach.

5) Public Awareness Campaign

Through social media, community radio, and arts and culture activities, this campaign aims to change the public's perception that child exploitation is not normal. This campaign also encourages reporting of cases and social solidarity towards victims.

C. Synergy in Building a Sustainable and Community-Based Child Protection System

Child protection is a shared responsibility that cannot be fully delegated to the state or a particular institution. To create an effective and sustainable child protection system, strong synergy is needed between three main pillars: the community, local government, and child protection institutions. All three have complementary roles in building a safe, inclusive, and responsive environment to children's needs.

1. Role of Society

The community is the element closest to the daily lives of children, so it has a strategic position in efforts to prevent and handle child exploitation. In the context of marginal communities, the role of the community becomes increasingly important because they are often direct witnesses to various forms of child rights violations that occur in their surroundings. However, limited legal

knowledge, low access to protection services, and the normalization of exploitation practices often hinder the community from acting. Therefore, strengthening the role of the community through social empowerment and legal education is a crucial step in building a community-based child protection system. With the active involvement of the community, child protection efforts are not only the responsibility of the state, but also become part of collective awareness and social solidarity. The community, especially at the grassroots level, is at the forefront of detecting and preventing various forms of violence and exploitation of children. Through community forums, mothers' groups, religious leaders, and youth, the community can:

- 1) Becoming a social monitor for potential violations of children's rights.
- 2) Providing psychosocial support for child victims.
- 3) Encourage reporting of cases to authorities.

2. Role of Regional Government

Local governments have the authority and resources to develop child protection policies and programs that are contextual and based on local needs. Their roles include:

- 1) Providing budget and facilities for child protection services.
- 2) Establish a Regional Technical Implementation Unit (UPTD) for the Protection of Women and Children.
- 3) Train village and sub-district officials in handling child cases.

3. The Role of Child Protection Agencies

Institutions such as the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and international organizations such as UNICEF play a role in:

- 1) Providing legal and psychological assistance to child victims.
- 2) Conducting policy advocacy and public awareness campaigns.
- 3) Providing training and educational modules for the community and government.

4. Form Synergy

Synergy between these three parties can be realized through:

- 1) Establishment of a community-based integrated reporting system .
- 2) Cross-sector coordination forum at village to district level.
- 3) Collaborative programs such as child-friendly schools, child-friendly villages, and anti-exploitation campaigns.

By building strong and sustainable synergy, the child protection system is not only the formal responsibility of the state, but also becomes part of the collective consciousness of society. This approach ensures that every child, without exception, can grow up in a safe, healthy and dignified environment.

Conclusion

Economic exploitation of children from marginalized families in Central Java is a complex issue that is not only related to legal aspects, but also closely related to the social, economic, and cultural conditions of the community. Children who should be enjoying their growth and development are instead trapped in a cycle of forced labor, low wages, and unsafe environments. This study shows that empowering marginalized communities is a very important strategy in supporting the implementation of legal protection for children who are victims of exploitation.

Through a community-based approach, communities can be empowered to understand children's rights, recognize forms of exploitation, and dare to take an active role in preventing and handling cases. Programs such as legal counseling, skills training, the establishment of children's forums, and cross-sector collaboration have been proven to be able to increase legal awareness and social capacity in the community. In addition, synergy between the community, local government, and child protection institutions is an important foundation in building a child protection system that is sustainable and responsive to local needs.

Thus, child protection cannot only rely on formal regulations, but must be a collective movement involving all elements of society. Empowering marginalized communities is not just a short-term solution, but a long-term social investment to create a safe, fair, and

decent environment for every child. These efforts must continue to be strengthened through inclusive policies, ongoing assistance, and joint commitments across sectors.

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