

Neglected children: Whose responsibility? Politics of protection of neglected children in Aceh Province Indonesia

Anak terlantar: Tanggung jawab siapa? Politik perlindungan anak terlantar di Provinsi Aceh Indonesia

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Abstract

The Indonesian government defines neglected children as anyone under the age of eighteen who has not had their basic needs met. According to Article 34 of the 1945 Law, neglected children must be protected and become the responsibility of the state. However, in reality, neglected children are not fully protected. The purpose of this study is to learn about the policies in Aceh Province that protect neglected children. The qualitative research method was used, with a phenomenological approach. Data were gathered through interviews with informants, and from documents. After that, the data were analyzed using interpretive phenomenological analysis. The results of the study indicate that the problem of neglected children in Aceh occurs because the structure of the Acehnese society is improving after the long conflict and the tsunami disaster that resulted in community poverty. This study concludes that there are obstacles in the protection process related to: (1) The definition of neglected children so far is still one way (up-down); (2) Data collection is still hampered because many children in Aceh lack birth certificates, limiting their access to state services and protection.

Keywords: after conflict; neglected children; politics protection; state responsibility

Abstract

Pemerintah Indonesia mendefinisikan anak terlantar sebagai seseorang yang berusia di bawah delapan belas tahun yang kebutuhan dasarnya tidak terpenuhi. Menurut Pasal 34 UUD 1945, anak terlantar harus dilindungi dan menjadi tanggung jawab negara. Namun pada kenyataannya, anak terlantar tidak sepenuhnya terlindungi. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mempelajari politik perlindungan anak terlantar di Provinsi Aceh. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif, dengan pendekatan fenomenologis. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara dengan informan dan data dokumen. Setelah itu, data dianalisis dengan menggunakan analisis fenomenologis interpretatif. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa permasalahan anak terlantar di Aceh terjadi karena perubahan struktur masyarakat Aceh pasca konflik panjang dan bencana tsunami yang mengakibatkan kemiskinan masyarakat. Kajian ini menyimpulkan bahwa terdapat kendala dalam proses perlindungan terkait: (1) Pengertian anak terlantar selama ini masih bersifat satu arah (naik-turun); (2) Pendataan masih terhambat karena banyak anak di Aceh yang tidak memiliki akta kelahiran. dan membatasi akses mereka ke layanan dan perlindungan negara.

Keywords: setelah konflik; anak terlantar; politik perlindungan; tanggung jawab negara

Introduction

Children are one of the important human resources that must be protected and maintained by the state and seen as state assets in the future (Windiarto 2018). Based on BPS data (2021) published in the Child Profile book, shows that 30.1% of Indonesia's population are children, with details of 39.1 million girls and 40.4 million boys. Therefore, children must be a priority to be protected from problems of child (early) marriage, decrease child violence, increase the role of parents in children's education,

and decrease child labor as a form of protection (Palmer 2019). However, efforts to protect children in Indonesia currently face various challenges, namely: poverty, birth certificate ownership, and child participation (Wismayanti et al. 2021, Baumont et al. 2020). The results of the 2018 Susenas show that there are 16% of Indonesian children do not have a birth certificate which affects various assistance and support programs for child protection efforts, especially for neglected children (Siagian et al. 2019, Cameron et al. 2022, Setiawan & Wijayanto 2022)

Children who have been neglected are vulnerable children or children who require special protection. The term “vulnerable child” refers to a group of children whose rights, conditions, and cultural or structural pressures have resulted in their rights not being fulfilled, and their rights being frequently violated. BPS (2021) in the Child Profile Book makes indicators that limit the definition of neglected children, i.e. a child is called a neglected child if it meets three of the eight criteria. Included in the almost neglected category if it meets two criteria, and not neglected if it meets only one criterion. As described in Figure 1.



Figure 1.
Indicators of the definition of neglected children
(BPS 2021) - author modification

The issue of protecting children from violence, exploitation, and neglect of children is an interesting issue to discuss because until now cases of neglected children in Indonesia are still high. This is due to the poverty rate in Indonesia which is still high (Muhajarah 2018). The Central Statistics Agency (BPS) noted that in 2021 Indonesia’s poor population reached 26.42 million people or equivalent to 9.78% of the total population of Indonesia. This has a direct impact on increasing the number of neglected children in Indonesia because, in a poor household, there are children who are also exposed to poverty (Lopus et al. 2019, Bessell et al. 2020). Currently, BPS notes several important things about neglected

children, namely: (1) there are 27.4 million children without family care; and (2) there are 10-14% of children living in very poor, poor, and vulnerable families included in the pre-prosperous category or below the poverty line (KPPA 2019).

The emergence of neglected children is strongly influenced by family poverty because poor families will find it difficult to meet children's basic needs such as ownership of a birth certificate (Pramesti et al. 2021). Currently, 14% of children in Indonesia do not have a birth certificate, which makes them vulnerable to various social problems (Nastia et al. 2021). For example, because children do not have birth certificates, they lose their basic rights to access basic services such as health and education (Aji 2014). In fact, without education, children will be involved in jobs that are harmful to their physical, mental, social, and emotional development. An example is the neglected child working in child labor (Kurdziel et al. 2020). Facts show that around 7.05% (around 2.6 million) of children aged 10-17 years in Indonesia are currently child laborers (Ardana 2021). According to the World Bank, the effects of the pandemic caused 5.5-8 million new poor people. This opens up opportunities for children from poor families to take to the streets and affects the potential increase in the number of street children in Indonesia (Bajari & Kuswarno 2020, Adam 2022).

If before the pandemic, one of the steps to deal with children taking to the streets was to take them to school, but in a pandemic situation like now, this is not the right step because children are encouraged to stay at home. This is an opportunity for neglected children to take to the streets (Allen 2021). This is an opportunity for neglected children to take to the streets (Basri & Yoserizal 2019). According to the Ministry of Social Affairs' SIKS-NG Application Dashboard, there are 9,113 street children in Indonesia as of May 26 2021. Furthermore, in the November 2020 survey conducted by KPAI in 9 provinces and 20 districts/cities in Indonesia shows that many neglected children are exploited and forced to work, some working in the agricultural sector "black" as a prostitute, and various other negative conditions (Cahyadhi et al. 2021, Satriawan 2021). Then Table 1 is written from the Integrated Social Welfare Data on 2020 showing the high number of problems of neglected children in Indonesia.

Table 1.
Integrated social welfare data (2020)

No.	Child status	Amount
1.	Children who need special protection	6,955
2.	Children need the development of social functions	108.343
3.	Street children	9.355
4.	Children face the law	3.207
5.	Toddlers (from poor families, discarded, undocumented, need a replacement family)	10,687
6.	Homeless child	67,368
Total		205.915

Source: Ministry of Social Affairs (2020)

The Table 1 indicates whether there are challenges in the protection of neglected children due to the various types of problems encountered by neglected children. As an example: (1) children in need of special protection 6,955 cases; (2) children in need of social function development 108,343 cases; (3) street children 9,355 cases; (4) children in conflict with the law 3,207 cases; (5) toddlers from poor families, neglected, undocumented, in need of substitute families 10,687 cases; and (6) homeless children 67,368 cases. These conditions make it difficult for the Indonesian government to deal with neglected children.

The data also show that the majority of child problems in Indonesia are caused by poverty. This is consistent with many studies on efforts to protect neglected children, which identify poverty as the root cause of the problem of neglected children. Children who come from low-income or poor families have a higher risk of experiencing neglect that leads to (1) child abuse (Berger 2004, Coulton et al. 2007),

because children living in poverty in low-income families are five times more likely to experience abuse than children from well-to-do families (Sedlak et al. 2010); (2) child neglected (Slack et al. 2004); (3) acceptance of welfare for children (Fein & Wang 2003, Martin & Lin 2003), meaning that children from poor families are more likely not to receive and enjoy welfare; (4) unemployment (Gillham et al. 1998), poverty makes children lose the opportunity to get an education so that it increases the possibility that they will become unemployed when they grow up; (5) single-parent family structure (Berger 2005); and (6) children experience food shortages and have difficulty paying for clothing, housing, utilities, or other important bills (Slack et al. 2007).

In addition to these risks, poverty due to lost income caused by natural disasters, wars, and pandemics also reduces family welfare. As a result, many children become neglected and experience abuse (Sovitriana 2021). Various studies have shown that changes in family income, in the form of increases and decreases in income, affect the likelihood of child neglect (Suyanto 2019). This happens because income affects the ability of parents to provide children with basic needs, such as the availability of food, clothing, medical services, and adequate housing conditions for children (Slack et al. 2007). In addition, low income and poverty also affect the way parents care for their children, limited time in parenting, quantity, and quality of care, and willingness to invest in children (Berger 2005). In fact, under certain conditions, parents, especially single parents, become stressed and depressed during child care (Quraisy & Arifin 2017, Utami & Raharjo 2021).

According to Figure 2, the study map sourced from the Scopus database above has been dominated by issues of child abuse, child welfare, and child protection, as evidenced by the thick color nodes in that section. Meanwhile, studies on neglected children have not been influenced by aspects of the state, particularly state responsibility. According to the research map on the protection of neglected children, existing research has not revealed the severity of the situation. The state, or government in this case, is responsible for caring for or protecting neglected children from socioeconomic conditions that limit their access to health, education, and other services. As a result, more research is required to close the knowledge gap regarding the state's responsibility to protect neglected children in Aceh Province.

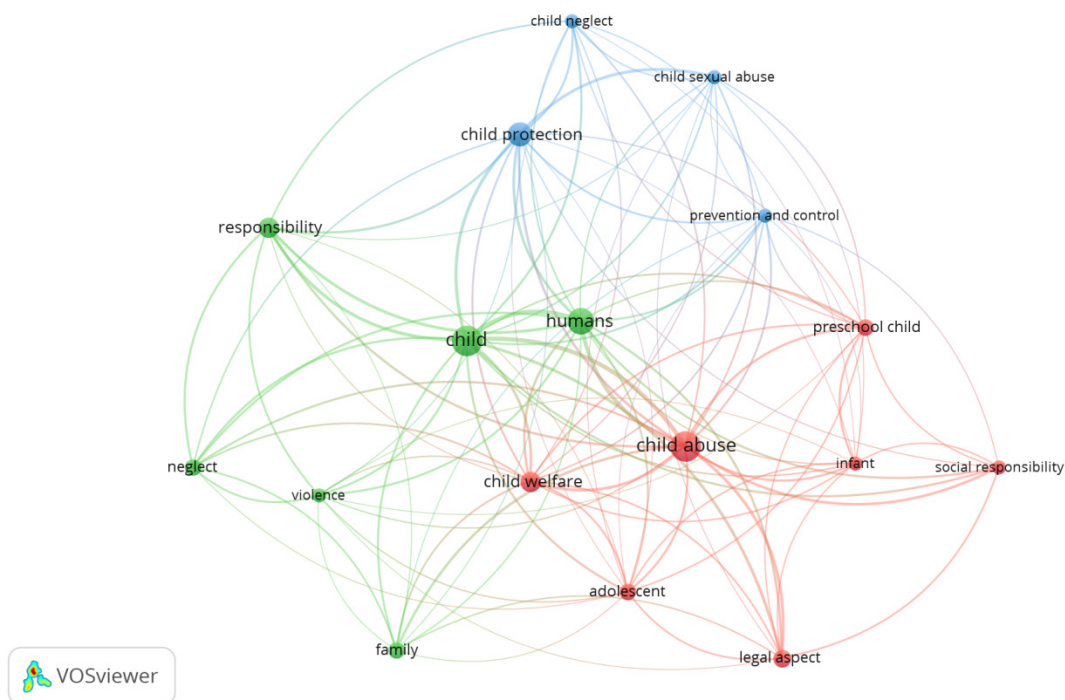


Figure 2.
Mapping research on the protection of neglected children from Scopus database
Source: Processed with the VOSviewer application

The protection of neglected children in Indonesia has not become the main focus of the country (Rumble et al. 2020, Russell et al. 2020, Rahiem 2021). So far, efforts to protect children are borne by parents, families, and the community (Abdullah et al. 2022). Meanwhile, the state as the main responsibility holder tends to hide behind programs that are not substantive (Gershun & Terrebonne 2018). Child protection means that the state must strive so that every child's rights are not harmed and ensure that children get the rights they need to grow and develop properly. Therefore, the state must be present through the central government and local governments as representatives of the state (Collins & Wright 2022). The protection of neglected children from the potential for violence, discrimination, exploitation, stigmatization, and labeling must be sought to achieve justice for neglected children. Even though the state guarantees the fulfillment of rights and protection for neglected children, it has not been implemented properly (Cromain 2021). In 2015, the Minister of Social Affairs Khofifah Indar Parawansa said that there were 4.1 million neglected children in Indonesia and it was still an iceberg phenomenon, meaning that there were still many other neglected children who were not recorded by the government. And this condition has not changed much in Indonesia, the latest data in 2021 show that the number of neglected children in Indonesia is still above 4 million and those are surface data recorded by the state.

In this paper, we discuss neglected children and the politics surrounding their protection in Aceh Province. This study takes a different stance than previous studies. This study focuses on the state as the actor responsible for protecting neglected children from obstacles to the fulfillment of education, health, and welfare in accordance with the mandate of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which emphasizes three main aspects: (1) affirmation of children's rights; (2) child protection by the state; and (3) participation of various parties. This study employs welfare state theory to examine how the state provides basic economic guarantees to its citizens, including neglected children. A welfare state is defined as a country in which the government is held accountable for ensuring a minimum standard of living for all citizens. The welfare state's indicators are as follows: (1) providing universal and comprehensive social services to its citizens; and (2) regulating human relations in society.

Research Method

The study of the politics of protecting neglected children in Aceh employs a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach (Creswell 2019). This study describes the significance of several people's life experiences as they deal with a phenomenon. There are several stages in this phenomenological research, namely: First, *epoche* or disconnection from previous experience and knowledge to avoid bias by planning the research, making a list of questions, selecting informants, and collecting data through interviews with informants from five agencies, namely: (1) Social Service (Dinas Sosial); (2) Empowerment Service Women, Child Protection, Population Control and Family Planning (DP3AP2KB); (3) Education Office (Dinas Pendidikan); (4) Health Office (Dinas Kesehatan); and (5) Orphanage Manager. Supporting data were gathered from journals, books, and related documents obtained from the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, the Indonesian Child Protection Commission, and the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS).

Second, phenomenological reduction is explaining in a structured language how the object looks by bracketing, horizontalizing, or comparing with other people's perceptions, finding pure phenomenal horizons, and then grouping horizons and separating things that are not needed. Third, *imaginatio Variations* is looking for existing meanings through analysis. The data are then analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al. 2009), which includes the following stages: (1) reading and re-reading (reading and re-reading) the original data, namely writing interview transcripts from audio recordings into written transcripts; (2) initial noting, which is the stage of testing the content of the resource person's words, sentences, and language at the exploratory level; and (3) developing emergent themes, which is developing emergent themes from the interviews. (4) looking for connections across emergent themes, i.e. mapping or mapping emerging themes and exploring and discovering something new from research findings; (5) moving on to the next case; and (6) looking for patterns across, which is looking for patterns that appear between cases so that researchers can guide them in describing and labeling for further research conclusions. Fourth, synthesis of meaning and essence is the stage of drawing conclusions and assessing the significance of research findings.

Results and Discussion

State social services for neglected children in Indonesia

Neglected children according to the Indonesian government (Permensos) are someone who is not yet eighteen years old, including children who are still in the womb and in a condition that their basic needs are not being met, not being cared for, not being cared for, and not being taken care of. According to this definition, a child is categorized as a neglected child if: (1) his basic needs in the form of clothing, food, and shelter are not met; (2) there is no longer an individual, family, or community to take care of it; (3) vulnerable to violence from the environment; and (4) still have a family but have the potential to experience various problems such as (1) acts of violence; (2) mistreatment; (3) exploitation; and (4) neglect. According to the law, every child has the same right to live, grow, and develop optimally according to their potential. This differs from the definition of abandoned children, which is defined as having no proper parental care left by parents for three consecutive months.

According to Article 34 paragraph (1) of the Republic of Indonesia's 1945 Constitution, the state is tasked with guaranteeing and protecting children's rights, which states: the poor and neglected children are cared for by the state. Furthermore, through Presidential Decree Number 36 of 1990 concerning Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the state ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which upholds, recognizes, and protects the rights of children. The Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia created several programs to protect neglected children as a result of this law, such as fostering neglected children and orphanages. The goal is to ensure that neglected children receive the basic education required by the state, as well as their physical needs and protection from anything dangerous.

The Government of Aceh, on the other hand, regulates regulations concerning the protection of abandoned children in Aceh Province through Qanun No. 11 of 2008. According to regulations concerning efforts to provide protection for neglected children, the state, in this case the Government of Aceh, is required to: (1) be responsible for respecting the fulfillment of children's rights regardless of ethnicity, religion, race, class, or gender; (2) provide facilities and infrastructure that support the implementation of child protection; and (3) guarantee the protection, care, and welfare of children and provide supervision. The Banda Aceh City Qanun Number 17 of 2011 is one of the implementation derivatives. According to this regulation, the person in charge of child protection in Banda Aceh City is the Banda Aceh City Office of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, Population Control, and Family Planning. This service aims to create dignified and qualified conditions for women and children according to Islamic law by: (1) clarifying roles in child protection; and (2) improving the quality of life of women and children in various fields of life and development; (3) enhancing gender and child mainstreaming in development; and (4) increasing women's and children's protection from various forms of violence.

Efforts to protect neglected children have been implemented in a variety of programs run by the Indonesian government, Aceh provincial governments, and district/city governments. However, the various programs that have been implemented are still only surface-level solutions. Such as, Sari & Sumarti (2017) discovered that the Child Empowerment Program was still low in Bogor Regency in his research. Furthermore, Cahyadi et al. (2021), who studied child social welfare service programs in the city of Surabaya, discovered that the implementation of street child welfare service programs was ineffective because the program was unable to reach children's awareness and motivation. Hasanah & Putri's (2018) research in Serang City demonstrates the failure of community development-based child management programs.

Meanwhile, in the city of Banda Aceh, Fitriliana et al. (2022) conducted a study on the treatment of neglected children, discovering that the social welfare development programs, services, and social rehabilitation implemented by the Government of Aceh had not been maximized due to the high number of neglected children, funds allocated for this, in addition to human resource constraints, and the absence of shelters for neglected children. The failure to protect neglected children in Aceh Province, according to this study, was caused by a lack of coordination among government agencies. Furthermore, so far, the task of protecting neglected children has tended to focus on problems rather than aspects of victim

prevention and rehabilitation, resulting in the observation that various policies and programs for the protection of neglected children are still moving downstream of the problem and working in separate boxes that do not complement each other, both vertically and horizontally between government agencies in charge of protecting neglected children.

The lack of inter-agency coordination makes data collection and resolution of abandoned children's problems difficult because the data obtained are limited and have not been integrated with social rehabilitation services. Furthermore, various protection services for abandoned children have not reached remote areas, are exclusive, and do not provide multiple services. The ideal situation for the protection of abandoned children is when the government works in an integrated and holistic manner, involving many actors. Within the government structure, there are eight ministries and agencies with primary tasks and functions in the field of child services and protection. Based on this, the state must redefine the 'who' and 'how' of Indonesian neglected children so that the state can be present to protect them through the cooperation of all the institutions. But, the current definition of neglected children is: 'a child whose parents or caregivers do not provide the necessary attention, supervision, affection, and support for the child's health, safety, and well-being. Child neglect includes physical neglect and insufficient supervision, emotional neglect, medical neglect, and/or educational neglect'. This definition ultimately confines the concept of neglected children to a few institutions, implying that child protection cannot be handled comprehensively and appears to be sectoral, falling under the Ministries of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection and Social Affairs (DP3AP2KB).

When discussing the protection of neglected children, other issues such as health, education, and religion must be addressed (Slack et al. 2004, Nadan & Ganz 2018, Rudolph & Zimmer-Gembeck 2018, Ubabuddin 2020). Because of factors such as: (1) family poverty; (2) family dysfunction. First, poverty can be seen as a situation where children from poor families are vulnerable to neglect in terms of health such as experiencing poor nutrition and stunted growth and development and in education because they tend to have to help the family economy by working as beggars, scavengers, construction workers, and become domestic workers, making them vulnerable to dropping out of school. Second, the dysfunction of the family can be seen as neglect because the family is not physically and mentally present, so it does not get adequate care. Third, related to systems and regulations, the problem that often arises is the technical implementation of the protection carried out by the state which is not yet comprehensive.

The redefinition of neglected children in the concept of child protection is important to do. The definition of neglected children has so far been limited to the explanation that "mistreatment" in general. A child who is neglected by his parents and his basic needs are not met, of course, has difficulty finding help from related parties. Not to mention the "neglected" indicators used by the state are too broad and difficult to measure and tend to be unknown to the child concerned. Every child who should be a neglected child does not have access to gain the access they should have, such as access to a decent life, education, health, and security.

The above definition is not without flaws; the indicators of neglected children are only materialistic or ownership of things such as clothes, houses, and food. Meanwhile, the state's definition does not prioritize access to security, health, education, or psychological-religious protection. As previously stated, a child is considered neglected if he exhibits three of the eight indicators listed above. Imagine a situation in which there are children A who drop out of school due to a lack of funds, child B who works but is not treated when sick, and child C who does not have proper clothes, rarely eats protein in a week, and does not have a fixed place to sleep. Then, even though what is experienced is a material shortage, child C will be included in the definition of the neglected child above, whereas child B only falls into the category of almost neglected even though he is sick but has to work, or child C who is not neglected even though he loses his future because he does not have a job go to school. This state's definition of a neglected child must be challenged. The categories of (1) neglected; (2) almost neglected; and (3) non-neglected need to be redefined before they can have an impact on Indonesia's growing number of neglected children.

In addition, the definition of neglected children so far is still one way (up-down), namely the state that decides this child is neglected and the child is not neglected based on the definition made by the state.

Meanwhile, neglected children do not have the information, access, and courage to speak up and seek state protection. A neglected child who drops out of school and works for a living at a red light as a busker will be secured by the state. A neglected child sleeping on the overhang of a shop because he doesn't have a roof for shelter will be brought under control by the state, even a neglected child who gets sick to death without treatment is the fault of the community, not the state. The state positions itself exclusively in one direction from the issue of protecting neglected children, whereas the bottom-up relationship is where the complaint door for neglected children is not opened, communication spaces are clogged, and the concept of protection is difficult to reach for the small body of neglected children. Therefore, the definition of neglected children needs to be reviewed so that the handling and protection of neglected children can be carried out by the state optimally and on target. This situation is consistent with previous research (Gillham et al. 1998, Ase 2012, Chen & Wang 2015, Bachtiar et al. 2017), which found that poverty is the root cause of the majority of neglected children. As a result, efforts to protect neglected children in Indonesia must be expanded to identify the root causes of neglected children's problems, so that the handling process is also comprehensive and sustainable.

The government of Aceh and the politics of protection of neglected children

The problem of neglected children is not only a global and national issue but also occurs at the local level such as in Aceh Province. This problem is increasingly complicated and multidimensional because of the structure of the Acehnese society which is currently improving after the long conflict and tsunami disaster. Amid the onslaught of funds from the center for Aceh's development, such as those sourced from the Special Autonomy Fund and the Village Fund, Aceh's position in poverty ranking is still the highest in Sumatra, namely Aceh at 15.43%, Bengkulu at 15.30%, and South Sumatra 12.98%. If you look back, according to BPS data in Aceh (2021) the number of poor people in Aceh reaches 850.26 thousand people. This condition is certainly an anomaly because, in areas that are rich and abundant in materials, poverty still occurs. This condition of poverty has an impact on the condition of children in Aceh.

In Aceh Province as a former conflict area, child protection has not been a concern of many parties, especially the state. Based on data from International Crisis Group (2002), BRA found out there are about 6.5 thousand children victims of the Aceh conflict (1976-2015) who are unable to access proper education. They are children who have lost their homes, families, and opportunities for education due to conflict. However, there are still only a few who are included in the category of neglected children who are protected and facilitated by the state through various educational aids and scholarships provided by the Aceh Government. Finally, a group of people decided to help through the Cet Langet community. This community provides public services through various programs such as house construction for the poor, scholarships, and business assistance. Until now, the Cet Langet community has constructed 104 livable housing units and provided scholarships to 235 students. All expenses are covered by benefactors and volunteers. Figure 3 show conditions of poor families' houses in Aceh Province.



Figure 3.

Conditions of poor families' houses in Aceh Province
Source: Personal document Cet Langet Community in 2021

Aceh has a very high poverty rate, which has been widely discussed by researchers (Jalil et al. 2019, Ikhsan et al. 2020, Kadafi & Murtala 2020, Putra et al. 2021). Because of the poverty conditions

described above, Aceh has a high number of neglected children. According to data from the Banda Aceh City Social Service, poverty in Banda Aceh City is the leading cause of children being neglected in school (Fitriliana et al. 2022). The North Aceh Social Service sees neglected children as a result of their parents’ lack of knowledge about children, particularly in relation to population status (birth certificate). Meanwhile, data from the East Aceh Social Service on 2021 show that the situation of the conflict-affected family worsens because the child is neglected. This situation can arise because the state is not present in assisting neglected children in need of education; additionally, the uncertainty of population status makes children displaced “far” from access to government assistance. Aceh’s status as a former conflict zone contributes to the high number of neglected children, as many children lose their parents during the conflict (Waizenegger & Hyndman 2010, Miller & Bunnell 2012).

Many children lack an identity as a result of their family’s poverty. As a result, many children have gone unrecorded, making it difficult for the Aceh government to pinpoint the exact location and number of neglected children in each region. In fact, a child’s rights include identity documents such as birth certificates and family cards. Every child from any background, including those whose parents’ identities are unknown as a result of being dumped or as a result of rape, is entitled to a birth certificate under Population Administration Law No. 24 of 2013. Several districts in Aceh, including West Aceh, Bener Meriah, Bireuen, East Aceh, Aceh Tamiang, and others, are attempting to address this issue by establishing a Village Registration Officer (PRG) whose job it is to assist villagers in obtaining birth and death certificates. As a result, the state keeps track of how many children are born and how many die. This is necessary to ensure that all children receive the best state protection possible (Ulfa et al. 2021).

This discussion leads us to the conclusion that having an identity for children is important because having an identity, such as a birth certificate, allows children to receive services and guarantees for their rights to health, education, and so on, as well as receive state protection from acts of violence, discrimination, and sexual harassment. However, even though the presence of PRG resolves the problem of child identity, the state is not free and must take full responsibility in efforts to protect abandoned children from violence and sexual abuse. The number of child problems in Aceh Province is depicted in Figure 4. These figures, of course, do not accurately reflect the situation in Aceh because there are still many cases of children who are not reached by the state and are not widely publicized. Child neglect is a major issue that is growing like an iceberg. Cases of child neglect have a wide range of motivations, including street children, infant abandonment and abandonment, and children neglected because their parents work.

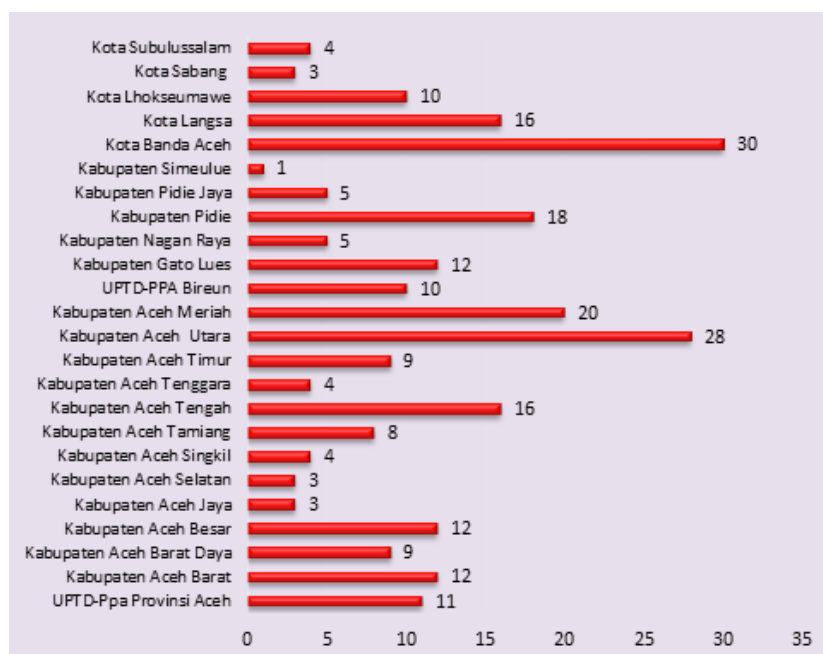


Figure 4.
Child problems in Aceh Province
Source: PPPA (2022)

According to data from the Ministry of Women's and Children's Empowerment (KPPA) in 2021, there were 11,000 cases of violence against children throughout Indonesia, with Aceh accounting for 10% (1,752 cases). The state ignores the protection of children's rights in Aceh Province, as evidenced by the problems of street children, child labor, child victims of sexual violence, and sexual exploitation. Meanwhile, Flower Aceh's Executive Director, who works to protect women and children, stated that during the Covid-19 pandemic 2020-2021, the number of child violence in Aceh remained high, with 200 cases of violence reported, including 33 cases of rape, 69 cases of sexual abuse, and 58 cases of psychological violence. While data from the Office of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (PPPA) of Aceh Province in 2022 found the fact that most child problems occurred in Banda Aceh City (30 cases), North Aceh Regency (28 cases), Bener Meriah Regency (20 cases), and Pidie Regency (18 cases) (PPPA 2022). This is similar to the situation in India, where neglected children are frequently born into impoverished families. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit India, Ramaswamy and Seshadri (2020) noticed that children were always a high-risk group that was vulnerable when disaster and crisis situations occurred. In India, the poverty that persisted during the pandemic caused children to be neglected and trapped in abuses such as child labor, child sex work, human trafficking, child marriage, and child sexual abuse. This demonstrates that child protection has not been properly implemented.

The state must protect neglected children and reduce the likelihood of children becoming victims. This is consistent with what Peter Newell (2001) has stated in many of his writings that children require state protection because when children become victims, they require high recovery costs. Children are also directly affected by the policies made by the state for them, and they also experience gaps when they require services. The issue is that a child does not have voting rights, which gives them the ability to lobby or influence the government's policy agenda. As a result, they lack access to protection and are vulnerable to exploitation. In this case, the state's important role is required to eliminate the possibility of social problems arising that could disrupt future order, security, law enforcement, and national development. The state can intervene in the protection of abandoned children in two ways: direct and indirect. Direct protection is likely to have an immediate impact through preparedness and mitigation interventions in the form of government programs aimed at child protection risk, social protection, and safety net measures such as cash transfers (conditional/unconditional), food distribution, and school-based feeding programs. Kane (2009) urged the government to protect vulnerable children from being pushed to the breaking point, so it must be actively considered by the state and child welfare and protection agencies to ensure that children are protected from internal and external disturbances.

The state can provide indirect protection through the support of other actors, such as the awareness of parents, officers, and coaches, rather than directly. This type of protection includes the state enacting regulations to prevent others from endangering the child's interests, the state increasing literacy and education about children's rights and obligations so that children understand their rights, the state providing mental, physical, and social development for neglected children, and the state punishing those who attempt to obstruct child protection efforts. When the state has completed all of this, protection for neglected children can be effectively carried out through various government-prepared programs.

Conclusion

This study helps to understand and implement appropriate strategies to protect neglected children in Aceh. The findings of the study show that neglected children, particularly those from low-income families, are not protected by the state due to technical shortcomings in the program's implementation. This leads to neglect in terms of health, education, and the economy, with neglected children becoming the family's backbone by working as beggars, scavengers, construction workers, or domestic workers.

Efforts to protect neglected children in Aceh face a number of challenges, including those related to a lack of definition, data collection, and social factors affecting neglected children. Where: (1) the definition of neglected children is still one-way (up-down), namely the state decides who falls into the category of neglected children, which is supported by not opening the door for complaints for neglected children (access), a lack of information or communication space for those who are secretive and dare not speak

up and seek the protection of the state; (2) data collection is carried out to protect neglected children, but this is usually hampered because many children are chivalrous and do not speak up; especially children whose parents' identities are unknown, even though birth certificates are very important because they open access for children to obtain information services and protection from the state; (3) another case of neglected children is in conflict victim families, where many children lost their parents during the conflict, so that the children are neglected and far from government protection because of the unclear status of residence.

The study's recommendation is that the state be in charge of developing programs for neglected children based on their interests. The government must work in an integrated and holistic manner, involving many actors. So that every child has the opportunity to obtain what is his right, such as a decent life, an education, good health, and security.

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