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## Evaluation of child protection case in Indonesia: Exploring barriers and policy directions

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Received Date: August 7, 2025

Revised Date: September 20, 2025

Accepted Date: September 25, 2025

### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Indonesia has built a strong legal foundation for child protection, including Law No. 35 of 2014 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which comprehensively regulates child protection. On the other hand, there is a significant gap between legal recognition and practical concretization, which the government actualizes through the Indonesian Child Protection Commission. **Methods:** This study employed a descriptive qualitative method with content analysis, collecting secondary data from 2016–2024. Data were organized, analyzed, and triangulated to examine child protection cases in Indonesia, providing insights to guide policy recommendations and address structural and coordination challenges. **Findings:** The findings reveal institutional crumble, limited coordination between central and regional governments, a lack of trained personnel, and weak data systems as the main issues in child protection cases in Indonesia. Despite policy and budgetary interventions, legal gaps, fragmented monitoring, and cultural barriers persist, highlighting the need for harmonized regulations, capacity building, integrated data, and community engagement to strengthen child protection. **Conclusion:** The study concludes that legal frameworks alone are insufficient; effective child protection requires coordinated institutions, stronger local capacity, cultural transformation, and a community-based approach to ensure children's rights are fulfilled, upholding commitments and safeguarding every child consistently. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** The novelty of this study highlights the scientific implications of child protection cases in Indonesia by evaluating the period from 2016 to 2024 as a reflection to protect children's rights, providing new insights to overcome barriers, and offering policy recommendations to adequately address these issues.

**KEYWORDS:** child protection, institutional fragmentation, policy design.

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### 1. Introduction

The core principle of child protection is a global priority aimed at protecting every child's rights and interests. In line with that, this commitment is clearly articulated in the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, which emphasizes four core principles: non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the right to survival and development, and the right of children to be heard (UNICEF, 2019). Adhering to these principles requires all social actors (i.e., families, communities, institutions, and governments) to ensure that children live with dignity in a safe, nurturing environment (Burman, 2023; Hampson et al., 2021; Han, 2024; Lalayants & Merkel-Holguin, 2023; Lizano et al., 2021; Wessells & Kostelny, 2021). Nevertheless, adequate child protection goes beyond preventing abuse; it involves

**Cite This Article:**

Werang, N. P. L., & Werang, M. L. F. (2026). Evaluation of child protection case in Indonesia: Exploring barriers and policy directions. *Journal of Gender Equality Disability Social Inclusion and Children*, 3(2), 118-131. <https://doi.org/10.61511/jgedsic.v3i2.2026.2191>

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inclusive and systemic efforts that respond to children's developmental, emotional, and social needs. However, cases of violence and neglect persist in various forms, often rooted in structural, cultural, or policy-related gaps. To confirm this, Bronfenbrenner (2005) emphasised, from a theoretical perspective, the role of interactions within multiple social systems in child development. Although a brief outline is provided here, a detailed discussion is presented in the literature review to avoid overburdening the introduction. This theory helps illustrate how factors at the micro, meso, exo, and macro levels, ranging from family and schools to policy frameworks and cultural norms, impact children's well-being and protection (Alfandari & Taylor, 2022; Masten, 2021; Schoch & Aeby, 2022).

In addition, this study is grounded in a rights-based approach, which posits that children's rights form the foundation for policy and intervention (Andow et al., 2024; Sacher, 2022; Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023; Wroe, 2021). This premise is also linked with a policy model framework that examines the role of institutions and regulations in preventing violence and promoting child welfare (Angelöw & Psouni, 2025; Boatwain-Kyte et al., 2022; Toros et al., 2021). Moreover, while international literature on child protection is substantial, relevant Indonesian sources need to be more fully integrated to contextualize the findings and support policy relevance. Hence, in discussing child protection trends based on the Indonesian Child Protection Commission from 2016 to 2024, this study needs to critically examine potential methodological factors that influence fluctuations in reported cases, including changes in reporting systems, public awareness, and policy implementation.

Henceforth, despite growing research in this field, a significant gap remains in studies that combine recent national data with comprehensive policy analysis for the period from 2016 to 2024. From this, a nuanced interpretation of child protection trends in Indonesia was utilized, and the effectiveness of existing policy instruments was assessed. In addition, if examined extensively, child protection cases, especially in Indonesia, are still a special concern of the government through the Indonesian Child Protection Commission, where empirically investigated data reveals a fairly significant trend in the last few years, as follows:

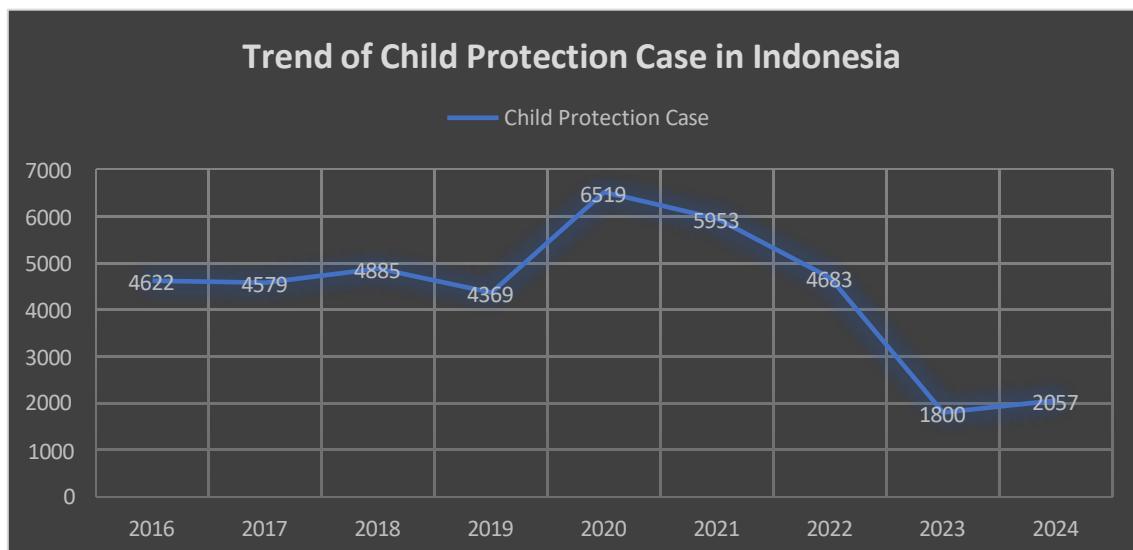


Fig. 1. Trend of child protection case period 2016-2024  
(Indonesian Child Protection Commission, 2025)

The results of data tracing pertinent to child protection cases in Indonesia from 2016 to 2024 illustrate significant dynamics and contextually need to be studied comprehensively. If observed, from 2016 to 2021, there was a consistent increase in cases, from 4,622 cases in 2016 to a peak of 6,519 cases in 2020. This spike can be yielded from two perspectives. First, it could describe an upsurge in the number of cases of violence against children that occur in society. Second, more optimistically, this trend may also indicate an increase in public awareness of child protection issues and an improvement in

the reporting system and institutional response, so that more cases are identified and officially recorded through reports received and followed up. Regardless, the trend changed drastically from 2021 to 2024, with the number of cases seen from 5,953 cases to only 1,800 cases in 2023, and slightly increased to 2,057 cases in 2024. Hence, the study will fill the gap pertinent to child protection cases in Indonesia from 2016 to 2024 by evaluating barriers and future policy directions.

Even so, several previous studies revealed that studies in several regions in Indonesia with a limited period still did not cover the entire area; this is the core of the gap that needs to be evaluated comprehensively to represent extensive data in Indonesia based on reports received from child protection cases. In short, to achieve the study's objective, these cases' report data were assessed by inspecting the barriers and future policy directions to formulate an inclusive and comprehensive approach from a policy perspective, which would be a conceptual note. To sum up, the government can prevent these cases and consistently prioritise human rights. Finally, this study is divided into several sub-sections: Section II explains the research method, Section III discusses the results and theoretical debates underpinning the formulation to overcome barriers and provide policy directions, and Section IV narrates the conclusions and implications of the research.

## 2. Methods

The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with content analysis, aiming to recognize the phenomenon collectively in this context and explore how the issues raised were of interest based on facts and relevant issues (Dodgson, 2017). Moreover, this method involves collecting and scrutinizing data from various openly available sources (e.g., case reports, government policy documents, institutional supervision results, and publications from related organizations), all of which are categorized as secondary data.

Based on this, an attempt is made to investigate, comprehend, scrutinise, and evaluate the issues raised comprehensively. In addition, the research process is carried out in stages, starting with determining the research topic, selecting relevant data sources, searching and reviewing the data content, and organizing, comparing, and analyzing the obtained data. All these stages are carried out carefully to ensure the analysis focuses on the central issues discussed (Creswell & Bález, 2020). Next, this research topic was selected because there are still many serious problems in the practice of child protection in Indonesia. To confirm and ensure the validity of these, the five-strategy approach technique from Creswell & Poth (2016) was applied as follows: From the problem presented in the research, an interest is shown in analyzing the study's background, specifically a child protection case spanning 2016 to 2024. Based on the literature review, this approach was chosen to enhance the connection between the research problem and the theoretical foundation and to address the barriers associated with the study theme. In addition, data collection involves the use of secondary sources, with the data categorized by child protection case trends from 2016–2024 to facilitate easy recognition. Furthermore, the intended interpretation involves utilizing academic debates from this research study, adopting an analytical perspective, and presenting logical arguments to resolve the study's problem.

Lastly, focus is placed on reporting; this could be the final part of the study, providing a comprehensive and consistent conclusion of the findings and displaying the final implications in line with the research theme. Nonetheless, the triangulation approach was also applied in this study, focusing on the data sources used to confirm the inspection of child protection cases in Indonesia over the period 2016–2024, with secondary data that was collected and required comprehensive examination. Moreover, emphasis was placed on the technique, contextualized through content analysis, to provide insight into academic debates, with the focus aligning with the theoretical effect of the study's theme.

In sum, the time frame, spanning 2016–2024, underscores that this issue is ongoing and requires intervention through policy design. All in all, these problems include structural barriers, weak policy concretisation, and less-than-optimal coordination between authorised institutions. Henceforth, a descriptive qualitative approach was applied to

provide a systematic and comprehensive account of the condition of child protection cases in Indonesia and to serve as a strong basis for the actualisation of better, specific, and appropriate policy recommendations.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Understanding the patterns: Socioeconomic and institutional factors behind child protection data

Child protection has remained one of Indonesia's most pressing social obstacles in recent years. This basis also displays analysis and momentous government policy intervention. If traced, the data on child protection cases from 2016 to 2024 presents a complex narrative that demands careful analysis. The baseline statistical trajectory of reported child protection cases in Indonesia follows a distinctive pattern: a steady climb from 4,622 cases in 2016 to a peak of 6,519 cases in 2020, followed by a dramatic decline to 1,800 cases by 2023, with a slight uptick to 2,057 cases in 2024. Moreover, the initial upward trend (2016-2020) represents a compound annual growth rate of approximately 9%, indicating worsening conditions for children, revamped reporting mechanisms, or the data not being optimally gathered. This trend is noteworthy because of its consistency each year, which is higher than the previous one. In short, it is justified that the government must optimally prevent these cases by deliberating on the multilevel government role of central and local authorities.

The following consideration analysis examines whether several interpretations can yield the observed patterns, with different implications for policy and intervention strategies. First, the rising cases from 2016 to 2020 could reflect a genuine increase in child protection violations. This evidence supporting the interpretation includes broader socioeconomic pressures during this period (i.e., economic volatility, increasing urbanisation, and the disruption of traditional family structures). Empirical findings from the report of the Indonesian Child Protection Commission have documented how financial pressures can translate into elevated domestic stress and subsequently higher rates of child abuse and neglect. Alternatively, the initial upward trend could primarily reflect institutional improvements. This basis also provides evidence for the interpretation, including the passage and actualisation of several key child protection laws during this period, increased funding for child protection agencies, and expanded community awareness campaigns.

The study underlines the increase in this manifestation, driven by improvements in reporting mechanisms, increased public awareness, and strengthened institutional capacity to identify. Document cases reported or received for follow-up during this period. Surprisingly, the results of the sharp decline from 2021 to 2024 are an essential urgency in the analysis. One optimistic aspect of the study shows that the government, through the Indonesian Child Protection Commission has formulated interventions and policy implementations that are pretty successful and have begun to produce results in reducing cases in this period, because the efforts in handling previous cases were categorized as quite critical. Still, following the implementation of reconstructive policy interventions, these measures can be considered effective in suppressing existing cases. The study found this through evidence that includes an increase in budget allocation for prevention programs in many provinces and the maturity of community-based protection networks established in previous years through the realisation of the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection. Budget in 2022, recorded at IDR 242,428,323,019, or 99.19%. This figure places the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection first among 34 Ministries and fifth out of 85 Ministries/Institutions (K/L).

Meanwhile, for 2023, based on Online Monitoring of the State Treasury and Budget System, data from the Ministry of Finance as of September 1, 2023, the budget realisation of the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection reached IDR 158,731,465,873, or 55.42%. With this figure, the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection is

currently ranked 14th out of 34 Ministries and 41st out of 85 Ministries/Institutions. In addition, the study also found traced the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, who also reported the Budget Ceiling for 2024, which increased by IDR 35,670,000,000, or 13%, compared to the Indicative Ceiling for 2024. Thus, the total Budget Ceiling for the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection for 2024 is IDR 309,653,311,000. This Budget Ceiling is determined through a Joint Letter of the Minister of PPN/Head of Bappenas and the Minister of Finance Number: S-626/MK.02/2023 and B.644/M.PPN/D.8/PP.04.02/07/2023 on July 31, 2023, concerning the Budget Ceiling for Ministry/Institution

Expenditure, Special Allocation Funds for the 2024 Fiscal year, and Completion of the Work Plan and Budget of Ministries/Institutions for the 2024 Fiscal year. This budget increase will be allocated to implement the National Survey of Children and Adolescents' Life Experience leading to child protection programs. Finally, data on child protection cases in Indonesia from 2016 to 2024 present a statistical narrative that cannot be stressed separately from the broader social, economic, and institutional context. This analysis yields substantial gaps linked to child protection cases in Indonesia, which must be reflected as a commitment in line with the principle of citizen rights. In the future, through these findings, the government and related entities can formulate baseline and specific policies regarding social phenomena and consistent preventive work.

### *3.2 Structural and institutional barriers*

Structural and institutional barriers in general, when viewed from the perspective of governance put forward by Kjaer (2023), are gradual complexities such as weak coordination between institutions, limited community participation, and the absence of collaborative mechanisms that cause fragmentation of governance. In modern governance, institutions are not only hierarchical and bureaucratic but must be horizontal, adaptive, and participatory. On the one hand, this issue is closely related to the failure to build connectivity and has implications for child protection policies in the current case in Indonesia, which are partial, unresponsive, and lack social support. The study traces this description in Strategic Plan, 2016-2020 and 2020-2024. The results reveal that to fulfil and protect children's rights in Indonesia, the Indonesian Child Protection Commission has attempted various strategic steps (e.g., strengthening regulations, establishing supervisory institutions, and involving the wider community) (Indonesian Child Protection Commission, 2015, 2023).

However, the concretisation of child protection still faces several serious structural and institutional barriers. These barriers are fundamental and systemic and become pathological in actualisation, explicitly leading to the ineffectiveness of child protection implementation across levels and structurally from the centre to the regions. The study describes this complexity as follows: First, in terms of policy structure, the main obstacle faced is the suboptimal actualisation of regulations that have been ratified. This basis, although through various mechanisms linked agencies already have a strong legal regulation such as the 1945 Constitution, Law Number 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection, and ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but in terms of quality, the facts on the ground there is significance in laws and regulations that are not in line with the principles of child protection. The study considers that several regulations contradict or do not fully assist child protection efforts, indicating a lack of harmonisation between regulations or weak implementation at the national level. Withal, the study re-examines the actualisation of regulations not prepared as derivatives of existing laws. For instance, the Government Regulation regarding the procedures for implementing preventive measures as ordered in Law No. 17 of 2016, or the absence of implementing regulations regarding special protection for children as mandated by Articles 59-71 B of Law No. 35 of 2014. From this point of view, this creates a legal vacuum and distorts policies that should be implemented by related institutions that do not have a strong operational basis, so that, in terms of contextualisation, efforts to protect children are often hampered.

Second, on the institutional side, the study observed weaknesses in the capacity of the organisational structure and apparatus that carry out child protection duties. As strong evidence from the documents analysed, many regions still do not have a formal child protection supervisory institution. For example, in areas that already have similar institutions, these institutions often do not have adequate resources in terms of the number of personnel, budget, or infrastructure. It significantly slows down the implementation of the supervisory function and handling cases of child rights violations, which cannot be done optimally. Consequently, this weak institution's problem is policymakers' lack of comprehension and commitment. Additionally, many government agencies at the central and regional levels have not prioritised child protection or included it as a special agenda in the regions' programs. If reflected, the law's mandate clearly states that the state is responsible for comprehensively guaranteeing the protection and fulfilment of children's rights. However, the essence of this is that there are still many government programs that have not explicitly covered child protection, sometimes even ignoring the impact of policies on children, and the lack of cohesion and weak coordination between institutions also worsen prevention efforts.

Third, the analysed findings refer to the data collection and monitoring system for violations of children's rights, which is still very weak. Data on violence against children, exploitation, neglect, and violations of children's civil rights have not been integrated nationally and have not been used as references in policy formulation with the involvement of central and regional governments. Thus, this context highlights that many regions do not have transparent reporting and documentation mechanisms, so that figures on violence or violations of children's rights are difficult to track accurately. As a result, the planning and interventions carried out tend to be off-target, have less real impact, and create public opinion that the government is not firm on child protection issues. Fourth, the bureaucracy in many institutions related to child protection still shows resistance to change. The indication is that many officials still do not have a comprehensive child protection perspective, and do not even understand the importance of a child rights-based approach. In general, this creates weaknesses in the form of minimal routine or structured training and coaching for state officials who handle children's issues from the institutional functions carried out. Moreover, many officers are not yet equipped with the skills to handle cases of child violence, mediation, or psychosocial rehabilitation, which urgently emphasize humanistic aspects of resolving cases.

Based on the existing findings, the study stresses that these structural and institutional barriers form a series of interconnected complexities that reinforce each other. If examined, this causes the ineffectiveness of the legal system, which impacts weak institutions. At the same time, weak institutions will also complicate the concretisation of supervision and protection at the operational level. This condition will affect children who should be a priority for handling cases that befall, but instead become the most vulnerable parties, both to physical, psychological, and sexual violence, and violations of civil rights. Hence, the study encourages efforts to synchronise and synergise in an effective child protection system, which is not just about increasing the number of institutions or expanding the program's reach. Nevertheless, extensive improvements need to be made at every level, starting from policies, institutions, and changes in work culture. It includes harmonisation of regulations, acceleration of implementing rules, strengthening supervisory institutions' capacity, revamping human resources' quality, and forming a combined supervision and data collection system. With these methods, the study advocates that child protection cases will not be mere slogans but will be actualized through real policies and actions that protect children's interests.

### *3.3 Policy direction*

Most attempts to explain the concept of policy occur within the context of public administration. Several objectives have been proposed, such as those outlined by Androniceanu (2021), who explains that the components applied to government activities

emphasize transparency. Yet, before it is formulated, it must prefer core elements, which are not merely a legal obligation but a foundational element of democratic governance. Here, the outcomes were to enhance institutional accountability, bolster citizen trust, and allow meaningful public participation in decision-making processes. If linked to the case of child protection in Indonesia, as the previous analysis reveals, a huge barrier that needs to be adequately addressed, here the study formulates the policy direction as follows:

Tabel 1. Formulation of policy direction

No.	Problems	Policy direction
1	Regulations are not aligned or still incomplete	Harmonize national laws, government regulations, and regional bylaws. Accelerate drafting of implementing regulations. Conduct regulatory audits.
2	Divergent Comprehension and Low Commitment Among Stakeholders	Organize nationwide training on child rights for public officials and stakeholders. Institutionalize child protection as a development priority at the local level.
3	Unequal Institutional Presence and Capacity	Facilitate the establishment of local child protection institutions. Strengthen existing bodies through proper funding and skilled HR deployment.
4	Limited Human Resources	Recruit specialized child protection staff. Develop capacity through certification programs and technical training.
5	Weak National Data Integration and Monitoring Systems	Develop an integrated national child protection information system. Lifting data collection and inter-agency coordination mechanisms.
6	Institutional Resistance	Implement internal bureaucratic reform. Establish child-focused SOPs and performance systems within institutions.
7	Poor Synergy Between Central and Regional Governments	Establish cross-sector coordination frameworks. Clearly define institutional mandates and responsibilities.
8	Legal Risks for Frontline Workers	Establish legal safeguards for good-faith implementation.
9	Harmful Cultural Norms	Promote child rights literacy at the family and community levels.
10	Absence of Local Legal Frameworks (Regional Regulation)	Assist in the formulation of local child protection regulations. Ensure alignment with national child protection strategies.

The first and most fundamental barrier the study observed was legal inconsistency across government levels. In practice, despite national regulations being in force, the regulations still create significant gaps, especially in implementation at the regional level. It is pretty strong and implies several laws that appropriate implementing regulations have not followed. In several cases, rules at the regional level often conflict with central regulations (Laurensiusarliman, 2018). This basis certainly affects inconsistencies, weakens law enforcement, and confuses the actors responsible for child protection.

Second, it is a key issue in governance that is not just the law, but focuses on how people interpret and act on it. The findings describe that many stakeholders, especially at the local level, still do not recognize children's rights. It often results in a lack of urgency or ownership of the issue. In some areas, issues pertinent to child protection are seen as secondary issues, which lack specific attention (Hardiyanti & Indawati, 2023). According to this issue, the study find that child protection should be presented as a primary and not a secondary issue

in practice by seeking an approach that involves assistance elements (e.g., religious leaders, educators, and youth in contextualization at the local level). Furthermore, the absence of formal child protection agencies in many areas in Indonesia illustrates a critical barrier. In places with such institutions, capacity is often less than satisfactory, a classic example of institutional weakness (Sarmadi, 2024). Thus, the implications point to capacity at the local level or national policies that cannot be actualised effectively. It is also important to note that efforts to formally strengthen and establish these agencies are appropriate. Yet, the basic point is that success is highly dependent on real decentralisation and holistic support from the role of the government itself, both central and regional.

Fourth, a structural problem scrutinises that the number of professionals specifically trained in child protection, namely social workers, psychologists, legal counsellors, community outreach officers, and many government staff who handle these cases, has not been specifically trained (Pratiwi et al., 2023). So with this finding, there needs to be recruitment of skilled personnel with continuous professional development balanced with consistent institutional support from the centre-regions. In the next phase, child protection policies rely heavily on accurate data to be effective. Unfortunately, The findings indicate that Indonesia's monitoring system is still fragmented. (Sidauruk, 2023) also stated that each institution with a partner of Indonesian Child Protection Commission has its system regarding the use of data that is often not shared or verified. So, this justification illustrates that without comprehensive data, evaluating the work programs of each institution in charge will be hard. Sixth, if looked closely, many child protection issues, especially in Indonesia, still adopt a rigid and very conventional institutional culture. This connotation creates bureaucratic slowness in following up on cases received. The analysis shows that a system needs more than just a new policy that functionally includes leadership, accountability, and performance incentives from an institution.

Interestingly, it was also found (Rizky, 2018) stating that the complexity linked to the institution hinders action in the field, so the urgency that can be taken is that the government needs to formulate procedures that focus on child welfare, along with clear performance benchmarks, so that the point can help change institutional behavior gradually and comprehensively. The seventh problem is the gap between central and regional authorities; the findings suggest it's a classic problem that has not been addressed proportionately in Indonesia. If traced, the implications often lead to inconsistent policy implementation, duplicated efforts, and overlapping in service delivery. It is also in line with the findings (Prastini, 2024), stressing that institutional collaboration is needed at all levels of government to build cross-sector connectivity. This coordination can facilitate the concretisation of more coherent and efficient child protection policies, because if observed currently, the disparity between the center and regions is inconsistent in responding to this problem. In addition, this analysis aims to provide a clear definition of institutional mandates and responsibilities that aim to reduce jurisdictional ambiguity and increase accountability, so that policy implementation is more specific and consistent.

Nonetheless, the next problem is that the elements of frontline workers who often work in government partner environments are not legally valid, indicating overlapping child protection case enforcement, which can inhibit proactive child protection interventions. As a supporter of this issue, it was also expressed (Siregar & Wahyudi, 2021), the urgency of the need for a proposal to establish legal protection for the concretisation of specific and measurable government partners, so that with clarity and legal protection, the government can strive to encourage more responsive and firm actions in cases of child abuse or neglect. Hence, the problem of deeply rooted cultural norms can undermine child protection efforts, especially if these norms conflict with the principles of children's rights. This context is also documented by Artisna et al., 2022 and Mansir (2022) whose findings emphasize that inconsistent norms in protecting children's rights can elevate tension in relations between parents and children, indicating in cases such as crime and repressive actions against children becoming vital issues among society in general and regardless of the influence of external culture. Thus, the message that needs to be considered by the government and partners is to strive for literacy regarding children's rights at the family and community

levels periodically, so that it can increase awareness and change behavior.

The last problem is the lack of regional regulations that align with the national child protection strategy, thus creating a legal vacuum and concretization at the sub-national level. This stress is also explained by Sahputri & As'ari (2021), describing that the regulations and derivatives at the regional level still cause misperceptions, indicating implications such as inadequate facilities in implementing policies. The organization has not formed a Regional Technical Implementation Unit for the protection of women and children that specifically handles violence against children, causing excess tasks within the scope of the organization. Empirically, this finding justifies that most of the cases at the regional level linked to child protection are still not optimal and inconsistent. So, the study provides a valuable message: when formulating child protection regulations at the regional level, the regulations must be aligned with the urgency and implications. On the other hand, it will develop policy coherence, strengthen the legal basis for intervention, and improve the overall protection environment for children at Indonesia's regional level. The results found, in principle, are urgent. It speaks about the trend of child protection cases in Indonesia and reflects social and institutional dynamics that are not coordinated proportionally.

The study emphasizes that this trend is not just a change in numbers but shows symptoms of structural problems that the state has not entirely resolved. One of the most striking symptoms of this study is institutional fragmentation. If observed legally, the Indonesian state does not lack normative instruments, such as Law No. 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection, coupled with the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is used as the basis for forming regulations. However, the problem lies in its concretization, which remains highly uneven. In several findings, many regions lack specialized child protection institutions and are often not technically equipped with adequate human resources, budgets, or technical capacity. Policies that embody the ideals of decentralization and are intended to strengthen public services are critical; however, without clear mandates and adequate structural support from the central government, child protection can be weakened. The weakness of the data and documentation system further exacerbates this condition.

The study find that institutionally, various institutions work separately and do not share or combine data. It is not only a technical obstacle, but also reflects a lack of commitment to accountability and transparency. Nonetheless, in the social context, this study also shows that culture still plays a vital role in shaping the response of society and the state to violence against children. In many areas, especially at the community level, there is still a view that children's affairs are solely a family matter. The practice of physical violence, verbal violence, or neglect is often justified under the pretext of tradition or parental authority. It makes state intervention complicated because it clashes with deep-rooted social norms. Legal and institutional transformation will not be enough if it is not accompanied by intensive and sustainable cultural change.

Meanwhile, the study also found found a level of institutional resistance to reform. Despite budget and regulatory support, this context suggests that many institutions maintain a bureaucratic, slow, and unresponsive work model for cases requiring sensitivity and speed. The findings criticize field staff, who are expected to serve as the spearhead of child protection, for often lacking comprehensive training and note the absence of legal protections when acting in critical situations. So contextually, when state apparatuses do not feel safe carrying out duties, how can society expect adequate protection for children? Overall, these findings stress that Indonesia has formally recognized the importance of child protection. However, there is a very significant disparity between recognition and realization. In the context of governance theory, these findings strengthen the argument that regulations do not determine the effectiveness of policies, but rather by institutional capacity, social legitimacy, and the sustainability of the coordination system. Quoting the framework proposed by Kjaer (2023), a modern government system should be adaptive, participatory, and cross-sectoral. Thus, in practice, the child protection system in Indonesia is still too bureaucratic and vertical, and it has not sufficiently involved the community as a subject in the protection process.

Nevertheless, as a reference for the future, the government needs to pay attention to the recommendations of the findings as follows: First, accelerating legal harmonization between the center and regions is an absolute step. Second, training and capacity building for officials and social workers must be a national priority. The training focuses not only on the legal aspect, but also on psychosocial understanding and a child rights-based approach. Third, developing an integrated national data system must be realized immediately, so data becomes the basis for designing policies, evaluating programs, and ensuring targeted interventions. Fourth, field workers need to receive clear legal protection, including standard operating procedures and accountability mechanisms that do not create personal burdens, so that this will encourage courage and professionalism in performing duties. Fifth, the socialization and public education approach must be aligned with the local context by involving (i.e., community leaders, religious leaders, and youth groups as change agents).

Sixth, preparing regional regulations that align with the national strategy must be consistently referred to, accompanied by technical support from the central government, so that regions do not work alone in developing a child protection system. In short, Child protection in Indonesia is not a matter of one sector or institution. It reflects the state's commitment to the generation of children who need to have access to fundamental rights. Hence, every Indonesian child, without exception, can feel complete protection as a legal right and a living reality daily.

#### 4. Conclusions

The research concludes that child protection case trends in Indonesia from 2016 to 2024 indicate a shift from a steady rise in reported cases to a significant decline after 2020. These patterns reflect not only changing incidence rates but also more pronounced transformations in governance, institutional responses, and public awareness. Admittedly, unlike previous studies that treat child protection as a legal or social issue in isolation, this research attempts to integrate financial data, institutional dynamics, and legal concretisation to explain these patterns. Next, the findings suggest that the scale-up cases from 2016 to 2020 likely stemmed from both worsening socioeconomic conditions and improved reporting mechanisms. In contrast, the decline from 2021 onwards correlates with increased budget allocations, stronger community-based interventions, and the maturation of institutional frameworks, primarily through the efforts of the Indonesian Child Protection Commission and the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection.

Interestingly, this success remains partial and fragile, with key structural barriers persisting. These include fragmented legal frameworks, weak implementation of existing laws, limited institutional capacity at local levels, and poor coordination among agencies. Hence, many child protection institutions lack sufficient human resources, funding, or technical expertise. Moreover, data systems remain disjointed, with inconsistent monitoring and reporting, undermining policy effectiveness. Lastly, this study's main contribution lies in linking policy intent with actual field-level concretization and outcomes, utilizing government budget realization and an institutional analysis approach to provide new insights. Finally, the limitations include reliance on secondary data, a lack of regional disaggregation, and limited insight into the on-the-ground impact of interventions. These gaps pointed to the need for further field-based research and longitudinal evaluation.

#### Acknowledgement

The authors express enormous gratitude to colleagues from the Postgraduate School, Master of Public Administration Program, University of National (UNAS) Jakarta, Indonesia, and the Department of Public Administration, Parahyangan Catholic University, Bandung, Indonesia, for their critical input and comments.

#### Author Contribution

NPLW contributed to the study's conceptualisation by suggesting the policy design

approach's research design, methodology, and theoretical framework based on the research theme. MLFW helped in the literature review, data set, and scrutiny and contributed to interpreting the data, chiefly focusing on the research's effect. Both authors have reviewed or ratified the final manuscript.

## Funding

This research received no external funding.

## Ethical Review Board Statement

Ethical inspection and license were not suitable in this research.

## Informed Consent Statement

The nature of the research did not necessitate informed consent.

## Data Availability Statement

Not available.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Declaration of Generative AI Use

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used a generative AI tool to assist in paraphrasing certain sections for clarity and Grammarly to assist in improving the grammar and academic tone of the manuscript. After using these tools, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and took full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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