



Research Paper

Analysis of the Government's Role in Supporting Single Parents in Bulu Ara Village, Suro Makmur District, Aceh Singkil Regency

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Abstract

This study aims to answer two research questions: (1) what is the role of the government in assisting single parents in Bulu Ara Village, and (2) how effective are these policies in improving their welfare? The study employed a qualitative approach using field research methods. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The informants consisted of single parents, village officials, community leaders, and social workers, and the data were analyzed descriptively using a thematic approach. The findings reveal that the village government has provided assistance in the form of social aid, such as direct cash assistance and basic necessities. However, there are no specific empowerment programs designed for single parents. Furthermore, the lack of targeted data collection means that village policies tend to be general and fail to address the actual needs of single-parent households. Access to assistance is also hindered by limited information, administrative barriers, and the absence of participatory forums involving single parents in the policy-making process. The study concludes that the effectiveness of existing policies remains low and that village policies need to be reformed to include single parents directly in data collection, planning, and empowerment programs.

Keywords: Government Role, Single Parent, Policy Effectiveness, Village Development, Welfare

1. Introduction

The family is a social institution that plays a fundamental role in shaping personality, instilling values, and ensuring individual well-being. From a sociological perspective, the family is the primary social group in which children first acquire moral, religious, and cultural values, and the parenting practices within it strongly influence children's developmental outcomes [1]. Ideally, a



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family consists of two parents who work together to guide, care for, and meet the needs of their children, so that the material and emotional needs of children can be balanced [2].

However, social reality shows that not all families are able to maintain this ideal structure. Divorce, the death of a spouse, or an out-of-wedlock pregnancy can force a person to assume the role of a single parent [3], [4]. A single parent bears dual responsibilities, serving as both breadwinner and primary caregiver for their children. This condition increases the physical and psychological burden on the parent and affects both the quality of parenting and the well-being of children [5], [6].

The phenomenon of single parenthood is receiving increasing attention in Indonesia, including in Suro Makmur District, Aceh Singkil Regency. National welfare statistics record the characteristics of household heads, including households headed by women, which in Indonesia are commonly formed through widowhood or divorce [4], [7]. Single parents often face significant challenges in fulfilling their dual roles as breadwinners and caregivers. Financial constraints, limited access to education for their children, social pressure from the surrounding community, and vulnerable psychological conditions are among the key challenges they face [8], [9].

In this context, the government plays a crucial role in supporting single parents so that they can live a better life. Various social policies have been designed to assist vulnerable families, including single parents, in the economic, educational, health, and social welfare domains. Relevant government programs include the Family Hope Program (*Program Keluarga Harapan*, PKH), Non-Cash Food Assistance (*Bantuan Pangan Non-Tunai*, BPNT), the Smart Indonesia Card (*Kartu Indonesia Pintar*, KIP), the Healthy Indonesia Card (*Kartu Indonesia Sehat*, KIS), and economic empowerment programs through skills training and business capital assistance [10], [11].

However, the effectiveness of government policies supporting single parents continues to be questioned. Many poor households do not receive adequate assistance because of limited information and administrative constraints [12], [13], as well as weak coordination between the central and regional governments. Furthermore, there are currently no policies specifically focused on the long-term needs of single parents, such as psychological counseling, ongoing educational support for their children, or village-based community support [9], even though financial hardship among single parents is closely tied to social distress and help-seeking difficulties [5].

In Suro Makmur District, this phenomenon is clearly visible. In a preliminary interview, a single parent identified as "Mrs. J" stated: "We do need assistance, but not just basic necessities. We want to be able to run our own businesses so we can be independent. But there has never been a program like that aimed directly at us." This testimony indicates that most of the assistance received by single parents is consumptive and short-term, and does not address productive aspects such as improving job skills or economic empowerment.

Furthermore, the lack of specific data on the number and conditions of single parents in villages means that they are not prioritized in development planning. Vulnerable groups such as single parents should receive affirmative support to achieve social and economic independence [14]. Unfortunately, single-parent issues are often not considered a priority in village development, and the participation of poor and marginalized residents in planning forums such as the Village Development Planning Forum (*Musyawarah Perencanaan Pembangunan Desa*, Musrenbangdes) remains limited [15], [16].

Previous studies in Indonesia have examined the impacts of conditional cash transfers [10], the implementation of PKH at the village level [11], and the needs of poor single mothers in urban areas [9]. However, few studies have examined how village governments in rural areas respond specifically to single parents as a distinct vulnerable group. This study addresses that gap. First, it analyzes the role of the village government in supporting single parents administratively (data

collection and aid distribution), facilitatively (access to education, health, and social services), and advocatively (mainstreaming single-parent issues in village policies). Second, it evaluates the effectiveness of existing policies in improving the welfare of single parents and identifies barriers to their implementation. Third, it offers more targeted, inclusive, and sustainable policy recommendations to strengthen the economic independence and social welfare of single parents in Bulu Ara Village, Suro Makmur District.

The Concept and Causes of Single Parenthood

A single parent is an individual who fulfills the dual role of caregiver and primary breadwinner for their children. This condition generally arises from divorce, the death of a spouse, the prolonged absence of a spouse, or other social factors. Single parents face complex challenges in meeting their children's emotional, economic, and social needs because they must function without the support of a partner [5]. In a social context, single-parent families are often viewed as incomplete families facing economic, psychological, and social difficulties. Research shows that children who experience family instability tend to face greater risks in their socioemotional development than children raised in stable two-parent families [2].

Several factors contribute to single parenthood. The first is divorce, which is one of the main causes of the increasing number of single parents and affects not only the economic but also the psychological well-being of parents and children [3]. The second is the death of a spouse. In this situation, the double burden tends to be heavier because the sudden loss of emotional and economic support forces the surviving parent to adjust quickly to the new roles of breadwinner and caregiver [17]. The third is premarital pregnancy, in which individuals often face social stigma, economic burdens, and the responsibility of raising a child without a partner's support. In Indonesia, widowed and divorced women (*janda*) are also frequently subject to social stigma, which adds to the pressures they experience [4].

The Role of Government in Social Welfare

Social welfare is essentially a condition in which people can live decently, safely, and with dignity because their basic material and non-material needs are met. These needs encompass economic security, education, health, social protection, and opportunities to participate in development. Social welfare policy is therefore a form of organized public intervention to reduce inequality, improve social justice, and support vulnerable groups, encompassing income redistribution, the provision of public services, and the protection of vulnerable groups [18].

In the context of single parents, the government's role is particularly significant because this group faces distinct challenges, such as economic hardship, limited access to education and health care, and social stigma [4], [8]. Relevant policy instruments include social assistance programs that help cover education and health costs, job training and business capital programs that enable single parents to become economically independent, and counseling and mentoring services that help them cope with psychological stress and stigma [5], [18]. Women make up the majority of single parents, and the feminization of poverty means that policies for this group must take into account the double burden of paid and unpaid work borne by women [14].

Public Policy and Policy Evaluation

Public policy is the primary instrument used by the government to regulate, direct, and resolve social problems, including the welfare of single parents. Government policy can be defined as a series of decisions and actions taken by public authorities to achieve specific goals in the public sphere [19]. Public policy reflects not only what the government chooses to do but also what it chooses not to do, and is formulated through a process involving various stakeholders. Policies are

typically designed by combining several instruments, such as cash transfers, services, regulation, and information, into a policy mix [20].

The public policy process generally consists of four stages. The first is problem identification, in which the government recognizes social issues requiring intervention, such as the economic and social difficulties faced by single parents. The second is policy formulation, in which policies are designed to address these issues, for example, social assistance or job training programs. The third is policy implementation, in which the policies are carried out by relevant institutions, such as the Ministry of Social Affairs, the women's empowerment agency, and village governments. The fourth is policy evaluation, which assesses the effectiveness of the implemented policies and determines whether revisions are needed [19].

Policy evaluation assesses the extent to which implemented policies achieve their intended objectives. Dunn [19] proposes several evaluation criteria, including effectiveness (whether the desired outcomes are achieved), adequacy (whether the outcomes are sufficient to solve the problem), equity (whether benefits are distributed fairly among target groups), responsiveness (whether the policy meets the needs and preferences of the target group), and appropriateness (whether the policy objectives are worthwhile). In the context of social policies for single parents, evaluation is crucial to ensure that programs have a genuine positive impact on the target group. In Indonesia, programs such as direct cash assistance (*Bantuan Langsung Tunai*, BLT), KIP, and women's empowerment programs have been implemented, but their implementation faces budget constraints, weak inter-agency coordination, targeting errors, and limited access to program information among intended beneficiaries [11], [12], [21].

2. Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design. Qualitative descriptive research aims to provide a comprehensive and factual account of a phenomenon in the everyday terms of those who experience it [22]. A qualitative approach was chosen because the study seeks to understand the experiences, perceptions, and social interactions between single parents and the government in accessing welfare programs; this approach allows researchers to explore the meanings that individuals attach to a social phenomenon based on their subjective experiences [23]. The study is also exploratory in nature, as the implementation of welfare policies for single parents in Suro Makmur District has not been specifically investigated before.

Research Site and Informants

The study was conducted in Bulu Ara Village, Suro Makmur District, Aceh Singkil Regency. The informants consisted of single parents, village officials, community leaders, and social workers. This combination of informants made it possible to examine the implementation of village policies from the perspectives of both policy implementers and beneficiaries.

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation studies. Interviews explored the types of assistance received by single parents, the processes of data collection and aid distribution, and the obstacles encountered in accessing programs. Observation focused on the living conditions of single-parent households and village activities related to social assistance, while documentation included village records and program data. The use of three data collection techniques and several categories of informants allowed the information obtained to be cross-checked, thereby strengthening the credibility of the findings [24].

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification [25]. The analysis was carried out simultaneously during and after data collection. In the data condensation stage, the researchers sorted, focused, and simplified data relevant to the research focus, and grouped them into main themes, such as types of government policies, policy implementation, and their impact on single-parent households. Data deemed irrelevant to the research objectives were set aside. In the data display stage, the condensed data were presented as descriptive narratives to reveal patterns of relationships between government policies and the conditions of single parents. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified by repeatedly comparing them with the data collected.

Research Ethics

The informants were informed of the purpose of the study and participated voluntarily. To protect their privacy, informants are not identified by name in this article; single-parent informants are referred to by initials, such as “Mrs. J.”

3. Result and Discussion

The Role of the Village Government

The results show that the Bulu Ara Village government’s role in supporting single parents remains general and lacks specific direction. Administratively, single parents are included only in general data collection and are not recorded as a separate vulnerable category in village data or in the Integrated Social Welfare Data (*Data Terpadu Kesejahteraan Sosial*, DTKS). Facilitatively, single parents receive the same social assistance as other poor households, such as BLT, PKH, and basic food packages (*sembako*), but there are no programs designed specifically for them. Advocatively, single-parent issues have not been mainstreamed in village policies, and single parents are rarely involved in village meetings, so existing policies are poorly targeted.

These findings are consistent with studies showing that participatory planning forums in Indonesia tend to be dominated by village elites and better-off residents, while poor and marginalized groups are underrepresented [15]. Although the 2014 Village Law has given villages greater authority and funding to address local needs, the extent to which these resources benefit vulnerable groups depends on the quality of village governance and community participation [16]. In Bulu Ara Village, the absence of single parents from village deliberations means that their specific needs do not enter the planning agenda.

The Effectiveness of Government Policies

There is a gap between the expectations of single parents and the reality of existing policies. Single parents want empowerment programs, such as business capital, skills training, and mentoring, but only consumptive assistance is available. Measured against policy evaluation criteria [19], existing programs only meet short-term needs and are weak in terms of adequacy, sustainability, and responsiveness to the real needs of single parents. The effectiveness of government policies in improving the welfare of single parents therefore remains low.

This pattern is in line with evidence that cash transfers can improve consumption, schooling, and health access [10], [18], but do not in themselves guarantee long-term economic independence unless they are linked to productive and livelihood support [11], [18]. Similar findings were reported by Rustanto *et al.* [9], who found that the economic needs of poor single mothers were the least fulfilled of their family needs, partly because of restricted access to social assistance.

Barriers to Policy Implementation

Administrative barriers, such as the lack of a divorce certificate or a separate family card (*Kartu Keluarga*, KK), prevent some single parents from being included in the DTKS. Such requirements impose administrative burdens that fall most heavily on citizens with limited resources [13]. In addition, limited information about available programs reduces the ability of single parents to claim their entitlements; research in Indonesia has shown that providing households with clear information about their eligibility significantly increases the assistance they receive [12]. Inaccurate targeting data also lead to inclusion and exclusion errors in social assistance programs [11], [21].

This study also highlights the gender dimension of single parenthood. The majority of single parents in Bulu Ara Village are women who bear a double burden, so consumptive programs without skills development or caregiving support have not been able to improve their long-term welfare [14]. Social stigma toward widows and divorcees may further discourage them from participating in public forums or seeking help [4], [5]. Meanwhile, local potential, such as skills-based small businesses, could be developed, but there has been no initiative from the village government. A community-based development approach could therefore help create economic independence for single parents.

Impact on Single Parents

The social assistance received by single parents is temporary and consumptive. Single parents still face economic hardship, limited access to education and health care for their children, and psychological stress. These conditions are consistent with research showing that financial hardship among single parents is closely linked to social distress and poorer mental health [5], [6], which in turn can affect parenting practices and children's outcomes [1]. Single parents hope for skills training programs, business capital assistance, and counseling services to support their long-term independence and well-being. Taken together, these findings indicate that village policies need to shift from purely consumptive assistance toward a policy mix that combines social assistance with economic empowerment and psychosocial support [18], [20].

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that the Bulu Ara Village government has attempted to assist single parents through general data collection and social assistance programs such as BLT, PKH, BPNT, KIP, and KIS. However, single parents have not received special attention because they are not recorded as a distinct category in village data or the DTKS, they are rarely involved in village deliberations, and their access to assistance is hindered by limited information and administrative requirements. The existing programs are mostly short-term in nature, consisting of basic necessities and cash assistance, and have not addressed economic empowerment, psychological support, or social capacity building. Consequently, the effectiveness of government policies in improving the welfare of single parents remains low.

Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed. The village government should create a special database of single parents, allocate village funds for skills training and business capital assistance, and involve single parents in village deliberations. The social affairs agency and the regional government should expand empowerment programs based on local potential, strengthen coordination with villages, and provide psychosocial counseling for single parents. Social institutions and community groups can establish support groups for single parents and collaborate with villages to provide ongoing assistance. This study is limited to a single village and relies on qualitative data; future research could extend the study to other regions or use a quantitative approach to measure the welfare of single parents statistically.

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Authors' contributions and responsibilities

All authors contributed to the conception and design of the study, data collection, and data analysis. Waraidah drafted the manuscript, and Hasanah served as the corresponding author. All authors reviewed, revised, and approved the final manuscript.

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Availability of data and materials

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Interview data are not publicly available to protect the privacy of the informants.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interest.

Ethical approval

This study involved interviews with adult informants on public policy issues. All informants participated voluntarily after being informed of the purpose of the study, and their identities have been anonymized in this article.

Additional information

No additional information from the authors.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies

During the preparation of this manuscript, Claude (Anthropic) was used to improve the language and readability of the English text and to format the manuscript and references according to the journal template. The tool was not used to generate research data, perform the analysis, or draw conclusions. The authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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