

PRO-CHILD POLICY: SAFEGUARDING THE NEXT GENERATION FROM THE THREAT OF VIOLENCE, NEGLECT AND EXPLOITATION

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Abstract

Pro-child policy is an important initiative in protecting and ensuring the welfare of the nation's next generation from the threat of violence, neglect and exploitation. A pro-child policy is a set of measures, regulations, programmes and initiatives designed and implemented by governments, institutions or organisations with the primary aim of protecting, promoting and fulfilling children's rights. It focuses on the best interests of children in various aspects of life, including health, education, security and well-being. The ultimate goal is to create a safe, supportive and conducive environment for children's optimal growth and development, and to protect them from various forms of abuse, neglect and exploitation. Pro-child policies include efforts to strengthen child protection systems, improve access to basic services, and ensure children's participation in decisions that affect their lives. With that, effective and sustainable pro-child policies not only protect children from immediate threats but also contribute to the long-term development of human capital, which is critical to the progress and sustainability of a nation.

Keywords: Pro-child policies, next generation, threats of violence, neglect and exploitation.

Introduction

Children are valuable assets and the next generation of the nation who have a crucial role in determining the future of a country. They are invaluable assets that will become leaders, innovators and drivers of progress in various fields of life. As the baton holders of development, the younger generation has a great responsibility to continue and improve the achievements of previous generations (Mare & Modise, 2022). Their great potential, if properly nurtured and developed, can be a major force in facing increasingly complex global challenges, such as climate change, social inequality, and technological revolution (UMENWEKE & UMEGO, 2024).

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Investing in the nation's next generation is not only important, but also urgent. Providing children and youth with quality education, adequate protection, and opportunities to thrive will result in superior and highly competitive human resources. A healthy, educated and strong characterised generation will provide a solid foundation for a nation's economic progress, social stability and cultural sustainability (Yilmaz, 2021). Therefore, maintaining and preparing the next generation as well as possible is the shared responsibility of all elements of society, from families, educational institutions, to the government, in order to realise a brighter and more prosperous future for the nation. However, reality shows that children are still vulnerable to various forms of threats, including violence, negligence, and exploitation. This phenomenon occurs not only in developing countries, but also in developed countries, indicating that child protection is still a global issue that requires serious attention (Boyce, 2024).

Data from UNICEF (2021) shows that around 1 billion children worldwide experience various forms of violence each year. In Indonesia, the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) noted an increase in cases of violence against children, with more than 4,000 cases reported in 2020, although the actual number is estimated to be much higher as many cases go unreported (Woodhams et al., 2021). In addition to violence, neglect and exploitation are also serious threats to children. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that around 160 million children in the world are engaged in child labour, with almost half of them in hazardous conditions. Meanwhile, negligence in the care and fulfilment of children's basic rights is still common, both in family and institutional settings (Lahtinen, 2022).

Various efforts have been made by governments and international organisations to protect children, including through the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the establishment of child protection laws at the national level. However, the implementation of these policies still faces various challenges, ranging from lack of coordination between institutions, limited resources, to social and cultural barriers (Simango & Mafa, 2022).

In this context, pro-child policies are very important as an instrument to ensure the protection and fulfilment of children's rights comprehensively. Pro-child policies not only cover legislative aspects, but also involve various sectors such as education, health, social and economic to create a safe and conducive environment for children's growth and development (Ibiam et al., 2024).

With that in mind, this study examines existing pro-child policies, analyses their effectiveness in protecting children from the threat of violence, neglect and exploitation, and identifies challenges and opportunities in their implementation. Through a comprehensive literature review, this research is expected to provide recommendations for the development of pro-child policies that are more effective and adaptive to local and global contexts.

Research Methods

The study in this research uses the literature research method. Literature research method, also known as desk study or literature review, is a research method that focuses on collecting and analysing data from existing written sources. (Jelahut, 2022); (JUNAIDI, 2021).

Results and Discussion

Analysis of Existing Pro-Child Policies

The concept of Pro-Child Policy is an approach that places the interests and welfare of children as the top priority in decision-making and policy-making. This approach is based on the principles contained in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which include the rights to life, development, protection, and participation (Acquaye et al., 2024). The Pro-Child Policy aims to create an environment that supports children's optimal development, physically, mentally, emotionally and socially. It involves various sectors such as education, health, social protection, and law to ensure that every child has equal access to basic services and opportunities to thrive (Chaudhry, 2021).

In its implementation, the Pro-Child Policy requires collaboration between government, civil society, the private sector and communities to create an integrated system to protect and fulfil children's rights. This includes the development of programmes that focus on preventing violence against children, improving the quality of education, improving child nutrition and health, and allowing children to participate in decisions that affect their lives (Winslow & Mangold, 2024). Pro-child policies also emphasise the importance of collecting accurate data on children's conditions, ongoing policy evaluation, and adjusting strategies based on empirical evidence to ensure policy effectiveness in improving children's quality of life (Fitzgerald, 2022).

Analyses of current Pro-Child Policies show significant progress in protecting and fulfilling children's rights in many countries. Many governments have adopted legal and policy frameworks in line with the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This includes the establishment of specialised ministries or agencies dealing with children's affairs, the development of national action plans for children, and the integration of a child rights perspective into various policy sectors. Some countries have even incorporated the principle of the best interests of the child into their constitutions, demonstrating a high level of commitment to child protection (Mok et al., 2024).

However, despite this progress, the implementation of pro-child policies still faces various challenges. Gaps between existing policies and their implementation on the ground are still common. Factors such as limited resources, lack of inter-agency coordination, and structural barriers such as poverty and discrimination often hinder policy effectiveness (Adegbite, 2024). In addition, some policies may not fully take into account the diverse needs of children from different social, economic and cultural

backgrounds, resulting in approaches that are too generic and less responsive to local contexts (Akpotaire, 2024).

Analyses also show that children's participation in policy-making processes is often negligible or symbolic. While many countries have recognised the importance of children's voices in policies that affect them, effective mechanisms to facilitate children's meaningful participation still need to be further developed. This includes ensuring that children from different groups, including those who are most vulnerable, have the opportunity to voice their opinions and that their views are genuinely considered in decision-making (Geldenhuys, 2021).

Evaluations of existing pro-child policies also reveal the need for a more holistic and integrated approach. While many policies focus on specific aspects of child well-being such as education or health, a more comprehensive approach that addresses different aspects of children's lives simultaneously is lacking (Rocha, 2022). In addition, the importance of systematic data collection and disaggregation to monitor the impact of policies on different groups of children is often under-emphasised. Improvements in these areas, along with strengthened accountability mechanisms and improved resource allocation, will be critical to increasing the effectiveness of pro-child policies in the future (Vissing, 2023).

Furthermore, analyses of pro-child policies also point to the need to pay more attention to contemporary issues affecting children. The development of digital technologies, for example, has created new challenges in terms of online child protection, data privacy and cybersecurity. Existing policies often lag behind in anticipating and addressing these new risks (Masterton et al., 2024). In addition, climate change and environmental degradation are increasingly recognised as serious threats to children's rights, yet many pro-child policies do not adequately integrate an environmental sustainability perspective. Adapting policies to meet these new challenges will be crucial in ensuring comprehensive protection for children in the modern era (Morris, 2023).

Based on the analysis of existing pro-child policies, it can be concluded that: 1) Significant progress has been made in the development of legal and policy frameworks to protect children's rights in various countries. 2) Nonetheless, there is still a gap between policies and their implementation, caused by various factors such as limited resources and structural barriers. 3) Children's participation in policy-making processes still needs to be improved to ensure policies are more responsive to children's needs. 4) A more holistic and integrated approach is needed in pro-child policies, which addresses various aspects of children's lives simultaneously. 5) Systematic data collection and disaggregation, as well as strengthening accountability mechanisms, are essential to improve policy effectiveness. 6) Pro-child policies need to adapt quickly to contemporary challenges such as digital risks and climate change (Witte, 2023).

Thus, to improve the effectiveness of pro-child policies in the future, sustained commitment from all stakeholders, including governments, civil society and the international community, is required. Focus should be placed on effective implementation, meaningful child participation and adaptive approaches to new challenges. By doing so, pro-child policies can be more effective in protecting and advancing children's rights in a changing global landscape.

Effectiveness of Pro-Child Policies in Addressing Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation

Child abuse can be defined as any act or behaviour that causes physical, psychological, or emotional harm to children under the age of 18. This definition encompasses a wide range of behaviours that can harm a child's well-being, development, and self-esteem. Child abuse is not only limited to intentional acts, but also includes negligence or failure to provide adequate care and protection. It is important to understand that child abuse can occur in a variety of contexts, including the home, school, institution, or the wider community (Glendon, 2024).

Forms of violence against children can be categorised into several main types. Firstly, physical violence, which involves actions that cause physical harm such as hitting, kicking, or torturing. Second, emotional or psychological abuse, which includes behaviours that undermine a child's mental well-being, such as humiliation, intimidation, or rejection. Third, sexual abuse, which includes any form of sexual exploitation or abuse of a child. Fourth, neglect, which is the failure to fulfil a child's basic needs such as food, shelter, education, or health care. Fifth, exploitation, which involves the use of a child for the economic benefit or personal gratification of an adult. Finally, online or digital abuse, which is becoming increasingly common in the digital age, including cyberbullying, online grooming, and sexual exploitation over the internet (Sandhu, 2024).

Child neglect, also known as child abandonment, can be defined as the persistent failure to meet a child's basic needs that results in or has the potential to result in serious harm to the child's health or development. This neglect can occur in various aspects of a child's life, including physical, emotional, educational, and supervisory (Dickensheets, 2023). It is important to understand that negligence is not always intentional; sometimes, it occurs due to ignorance, lack of resources, or the caregiver's inability to provide adequate care. However, regardless of intent, negligence can have serious long-term impacts on a child's well-being and development (Paramitha & Sukardi, 2023).

Forms of child neglect can be categorised into several main types. Firstly, physical neglect, which includes failure to provide necessary food, clothing, shelter, or health care. Second, emotional neglect, which is the lack of affection, emotional support, or attention to a child's psychological needs. Third, educational negligence, which includes failure to ensure the child gets an appropriate education or attends school regularly. Fourth, supervisory negligence, where the child is left without

adequate supervision, putting them in dangerous situations. Fifth, medical negligence, which is the failure to provide necessary medical care or follow medical recommendations for the child's health. Finally, developmental negligence, where the child is not provided with sufficient stimulation for their cognitive, social, and emotional development (Mattheis, 2022).

Child exploitation is the act of exploiting or using a child for personal, economic, or other purposes in a way that harms or endangers the child's physical, mental, and emotional well-being. It violates children's fundamental rights and often involves the abuse of power by adults or more powerful parties. Child exploitation can occur in a variety of contexts, including within families, communities or even at a global level. The impact of this exploitation can be devastating, affecting a child's overall development and potentially leaving long-term trauma (Norwood & Carr, 2024).

Forms of child exploitation can be categorised into several main types. First, child labour exploitation, where children are forced or induced to work in conditions that are harmful or detrimental to their development. Second, sexual exploitation, including child prostitution, trafficking of children for sexual purposes, and child pornography. Third, exploitation in the form of early or forced marriage (Lamb & Hülsen-Esch, 2021). Fourth, exploitation in armed conflict, where children are recruited as soldiers or used in support roles in war situations. Fifth, exploitation in criminal activities, such as using children to deal drugs or commit theft. Sixth, exploitation in media or entertainment, where children are used unethically in advertisements, films or television shows. Finally, exploitation in organised begging, where children are forced or manipulated to beg on the streets (Huebner, 2022).

Pro-child policies are an important step in addressing child abuse, neglect and exploitation. The effectiveness of this policy can be seen from several aspects. Firstly, pro-child policies help create a strong legal framework to protect children's rights. This includes the adoption of laws that specifically prohibit various forms of child abuse and exploitation, and establish strict sanctions for violators. This strong legal framework provides the basis for law enforcement and the justice system to act more effectively in cases involving children (Mare & Modise, 2022).

Second, pro-child policies encourage the development and implementation of comprehensive prevention and intervention programmes. This includes educational programmes to raise public awareness about children's rights, the negative impact of violence and exploitation, and the importance of child protection. These programmes also include training for professionals who work with children, such as teachers, social workers and health workers, to recognise the signs of violence or exploitation and how to respond appropriately. In addition, pro-child policies support the establishment of effective reporting and referral systems, enabling early identification of cases of violence or exploitation and prompt intervention (Kask et al., 2022).

Third, pro-child policies facilitate greater resource allocation for child protection. This includes increased budgets for child protection services, development of infrastructure such as safe houses and rehabilitation centres, and capacity building of institutions responsible for child welfare. With adequate resources, these institutions can provide better and more extensive services, including psychosocial support, legal aid, and reintegration programmes for children who are victims of violence or exploitation (McShane, 2024).

However, it is important to remember that the effectiveness of pro-child policies also depends on consistent implementation and enforcement. Challenges such as lack of inter-agency coordination, limited resources, and socio-cultural norms that may discourage reporting cases of abuse or exploitation still need to be addressed. In addition, the active participation of various stakeholders, including government, civil society, the private sector and local communities, is crucial to ensure pro-child policies are effective. Regular evaluation and adjustment of policies are also needed to ensure their relevance and effectiveness in the face of changing challenges in child protection (Tobin-Tyler, 2022).

Challenges in Pro-Child Policy Implementation

The implementation of pro-child policies faces complex and multidimensional challenges. One of the main challenges is the gap between established policies and their implementation on the ground. While many countries have strong legal frameworks in place to protect children, effective implementation is often hampered by a variety of factors. These include a lack of understanding of policies at the implementing level, limited human and financial resources, and weak enforcement mechanisms. As a result, even when pro-child policies are in place, children are still vulnerable to violence, exploitation and neglect (Richards, 2024).

The second challenge relates to social and cultural norms that can conflict with the principles of pro-child policies. In many societies, traditional practices that harm children, such as child marriage or corporal punishment, are still considered acceptable. Changing these entrenched mindsets and behaviours takes time and consistent effort. In addition, social stigma often prevents reporting cases of child abuse or exploitation, especially if the perpetrators are family members or community leaders. This creates significant barriers in identifying and addressing cases of child rights violations (Wilhelm, 2022).

Coordination between agencies and levels of government is also a major challenge in implementing pro-child policies. Child protection involves various sectors, including health, education, social welfare and law enforcement. However, there are often overlapping responsibilities or, conversely, gaps in response due to a lack of effective coordination. This can result in inefficient use of resources and gaps in the child protection system. In addition, differences in capacity and priorities between central

and local governments can also hinder consistent policy implementation across regions of a country (Rodrigues, 2021).

A final challenge is the lack of effective data and monitoring systems. Many countries lack accurate and comprehensive data on the situation of children, especially the most vulnerable groups. Without reliable data, it is difficult to design targeted policies and measure the effectiveness of interventions. In addition, weak monitoring systems make it difficult to detect child rights violations early and respond to them quickly (Kurakar, 2022). These limitations also hinder effective policy evaluation, which is essential for future policy improvements and adjustments. Overcoming these challenges requires strong political commitment, long-term investment in systems and human resources, and a holistic and evidence-based approach to child protection (Bezin et al., 2024).

Conclusion

The pro-child policy is a crucial step in the effort to protect and ensure the well-being of the nation's next generation. Through a series of regulations, programmes and initiatives that focus on the best interests of children, this policy aims to create a safe, supportive and conducive environment for children's optimal growth and development. By targeting various aspects of children's lives, ranging from health, education, to protection from various forms of violence, negligence, and exploitation, pro-child policies become an important foundation in building a more just and sustainable society. Effective implementation of these policies not only protects children from immediate threats, but also contributes to the long-term human capital development that is vital to a nation's progress.

However, realising the vision of pro-child policies is not without challenges. It requires strong and sustained commitment from various stakeholders, including the government, civil society, the private sector and the international community. Cross-sector collaboration, increased public awareness, strengthened child protection systems, and adequate investment in human and financial resources are key to the successful implementation of this policy. Furthermore, regular evaluation and adjustment of the policy based on evidence and lessons learnt are essential to ensure the effectiveness and relevance of the policy in the face of changing challenges. With a comprehensive, inclusive and rights-based approach, pro-children policies can be a powerful instrument in building a generation that is resilient, healthy and able to reach their full potential, while ensuring the sustainability of the nation's development in the future.

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