

Analyzing the Implementation of Child Protection Policies in Local Government: Insights from a Local Administrative Unit in Indonesia

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Abstract: Child protection has become a strategic priority in governance; however, increasing cases of violence against children in Indonesia indicate a persistent gap between policy commitments and implementation outcomes. This study aims to analyze the implementation of child protection policies within a local administrative unit by identifying key factors that influence effectiveness. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, using semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis, with data analyzed through the interactive model of data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing based on Edward III's framework. The findings reveal that policy implementation remains suboptimal. Communication is limited in transmission, clarity, and consistency, resulting in low public awareness due to reliance on face-to-face outreach and weak community-based structures. Resource constraints are evident in insufficient personnel, limited technical capacity, inadequate budget allocation, and lack of supporting infrastructure. Despite these limitations, implementers demonstrate strong commitment, although this is insufficient to overcome systemic barriers. Bureaucratic structures provide formal procedures, yet coordination remains fragmented and uneven across sectors. These results indicate that ineffective integration among communication, resources, and institutional coordination constrains policy outcomes. Strengthening implementation requires a systemic approach that enhances communication strategies, increases resource capacity, and reinforces coordinated governance mechanisms to ensure effective child protection.

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INTRODUCTION

Child protection has become a central policy priority within global and national development agendas (Islam, 2025; Khatani et al., 2025; Zhu et al., 2025), particularly in contexts where institutional capacity and service delivery systems remain uneven. In Indonesia, the constitutional mandate articulated in Article 28B (2) of the 1945 Constitution establishes a strong normative foundation for safeguarding children's rights, including protection from violence and discrimination. This commitment is further reinforced through statutory frameworks, such as Law No. 35 of 2014 on Child Protection (Rande & Asmarani, 2025; Wismayanti et al., 2021). However, as highlighted in comparative analyses of child protection systems, the existence of formal legal frameworks does not automatically translate into effective implementation, particularly in decentralized governance contexts where coordination, capacity, and accountability mechanisms vary significantly across regions.

Recent scholarship emphasizes that child protection should be understood as a system rather than a collection of fragmented interventions. The child protection system approach underscores the importance of interconnected components, including legal frameworks, institutional coordination, service delivery, workforce capacity, and data systems (Johnson & Sloth-Nielsen, 2020; McGregor & Devaney, 2020; Sheehan, 2021; Sidha & Amuomo, 2023). Evidence from cross-country comparisons demonstrates that while countries such as Indonesia have made notable progress in system building and enhancement, persistent challenges remain in achieving system integration and maturity (Faradina, 2025; Khiatani et al., 2025; Lubis, 2025). These challenges are often linked to gaps in implementation, including weak inter-agency coordination, limited resource allocation, and inconsistent service provision at the local level. Furthermore, implementation research suggests that policy effectiveness is shaped not only by formal structures but also by relational dynamics among actors, wherein collaborative (“doing with”) approaches tend to produce more sustainable outcomes than top-down (“doing to”) models.

Table 1. Number of Child Abuse Cases in Indonesia, 2020–2023

No.	Year	Number of Cases
1	2020	11.264
2	2021	14.446
3	2022	16.106
4	2023	18.177

Source: SIMFONI-PPA Website, 2024

At the national level, administrative data recorded through the SIMFONI-PPA system reveal a consistent increase in reported cases of violence against children over recent years. As shown in Table 1, the number of cases increased from 11,264 in 2020 to 18,177 in 2023, indicating a sustained upward trend. While this increase may partly reflect improved reporting mechanisms, it simultaneously points to ongoing vulnerabilities within communities and limitations in preventive and protective interventions. This trend reinforces findings from prior studies that highlight persistent gaps between policy commitments and implementation outcomes in child protection systems.

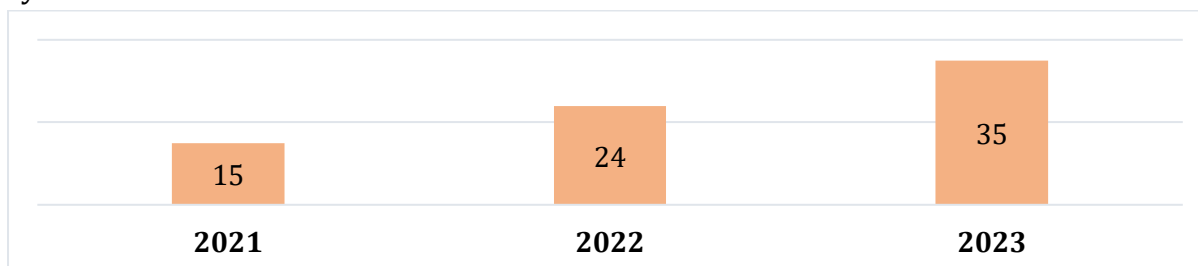


Figure 1. Number of Child Abuse Cases in Soppeng Regency, 2021–2023

Source: Soppeng Regency Office of Women’s Empowerment, Child Protection, Population Control, and Family Planning, 2024

Similar patterns were observed at the sub-national level. Data from Soppeng Regency (Figure 1) indicate a notable increase in reported cases over a three-year period, from 15 cases in 2021 to 35 cases in 2023. This escalation suggests that local administrative units continue to face significant challenges in translating policy mandates into effective action. Consistent with implementation theory, such challenges may stem

from limitations in communication, coordination, and institutional capacity, as well as the degree of stakeholder engagement in policy execution processes.

Table 2. Number of Child Abuse Cases in Soppeng Regency in 2022–2023 by Type of Abuse

Types of Violence Cases	Number of Cases	
	2022	2023
Physical Abuse	15	13
Psychological Abuse	3	5
Sexual Abuse	6	17
Total	24	35

Source: Soppeng Regency Office of Women’s Empowerment, Child Protection, Population Control, and Family Planning, 2024

A more granular analysis of case distribution by type of abuse (Table 2) further reveals shifting patterns of violence. Although cases of physical abuse slightly declined from 15 in 2022 to 13 in 2023, psychological abuse increased from three to five cases, and sexual abuse increased sharply from six to 17 cases. This significant increase in sexual violence cases highlights critical gaps in prevention, early detection, and response mechanisms at the local level. Such findings align with broader evidence indicating that child protection systems often struggle to address complex and hidden forms of abuse, particularly when coordination across sectors and service providers remains fragmented.

Building on these empirical trends, this study examines the implementation of child protection policies within a local administrative unit in Indonesia using George C. Edward III’s framework (Rande & Asmarani, 2025), focusing on communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure as key determinants of policy effectiveness.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative research design (Nicmanis, 2024; Villamin et al., 2025), to examine the implementation of child protection policies within a local administrative unit in Indonesia. This design is particularly appropriate for capturing the complexity of policy processes, institutional interactions, and contextual dynamics that shape implementation outcomes. In line with a systems-oriented perspective, child protection is understood not merely as a set of programs but as an interconnected structure of actors, institutions, and practices operating across multiple levels of governance.

A qualitative approach allows for an in-depth exploration of how policies are interpreted, negotiated, and enacted by local actors (Kruck & Schneiker, 2017; Sadovnik, 2017). This aligns with implementation research emphasizing that policy success is not determined solely by formal rules, but by how actors interact, collaborate, and adapt policies to local contexts. The study therefore prioritizes understanding real-world administrative practices, including both formal procedures and informal dynamics that influence policy delivery. The descriptive orientation further enables the study to generate detailed accounts of implementation gaps, institutional constraints, and adaptive strategies within the local governance setting.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using multiple qualitative techniques to ensure depth, validity, and triangulation (Natow, 2020). Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders involved in child protection implementation, including government officials, program coordinators, and representatives of non-governmental and community-based organizations. These interviews explored participants' experiences, perceptions, and roles in policy execution, with particular attention to coordination mechanisms, service delivery practices, and institutional challenges.

In addition to interviews, non-participant observations were conducted to capture everyday administrative practices (Cheek et al., 2024), interaction patterns, and operational realities within the local administrative unit. This approach enables the identification of discrepancies between formal policy design and actual implementation practices, which is a critical concern in child protection systems where service delivery often depends on frontline actors.

Secondary data were collected from official documents, including regional regulations, policy guidelines, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), program reports, and statistical records of child abuse cases (Cross et al., 2005). These documents provided institutional context and supported the validation of primary data. The use of multiple data sources reflects a system-based analytical approach, where understanding policy implementation requires examining both structural frameworks and lived practices.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1984). In the data reduction stage, all qualitative data from interviews, observations, and documents were systematically coded and categorized based on themes derived from Edward III's policy implementation framework: communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure. This thematic coding enabled the identification of patterns, consistencies, and discrepancies across different data sources.

The data display stage involved organizing the coded information into matrices, thematic charts, and narrative summaries to facilitate analytical interpretation (Ahmed et al., 2025). This process allowed the researcher to examine relationships between variables and to assess how different factors interact within the implementation process. Particular attention was given to identifying gaps between policy intent and implementation outcomes, as well as variations in institutional performance.

Conclusion drawing and verification were conducted iteratively throughout the research process. Findings were continuously compared across data sources to ensure consistency and credibility. This iterative approach strengthens analytical rigor and ensures that conclusions remain grounded in empirical evidence, reflecting the complex and dynamic nature of policy implementation.

Informant Selection

Informants were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring that participants possessed relevant knowledge, experience, and involvement in child protection policy

implementation. The selection included key personnel from the local administrative unit responsible for women's empowerment and child protection, program implementers, and representatives from partner organizations such as non-governmental organizations and community-based groups.

This multi-actor perspective is essential in capturing the systemic nature of child protection, where effective implementation depends on coordination among diverse stakeholders. By incorporating perspectives from both state and non-state actors, the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of institutional interactions, collaborative practices, and operational constraints. This approach is consistent with findings in child protection research that emphasize the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration and actor engagement in achieving effective policy outcomes.

Analytical Framework

This study employs George C. Edward III's policy implementation model as the primary analytical framework, focusing on four key variables: communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure. These variables provide a structured lens for examining how policies are translated into practice and for identifying factors that facilitate or hinder implementation.

The framework is complemented by a systems perspective on child protection, which highlights the interconnectedness of institutional components and the importance of coordination across sectors. This combined approach enables a more comprehensive analysis that not only evaluates individual implementation factors but also situates them within the broader governance and service delivery system.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Communication in Policy Implementation

Communication constitutes one of the most decisive determinants of successful policy implementation within Edward III's framework (Mubarok et al., 2020). In the context of child protection policy execution within the studied local administrative unit, communication functions as a mechanism through which policy intent is translated into shared understanding and actionable practice. Effective communication ensures that implementers, stakeholders, and communities understand policy objectives, operational procedures, and expected outcomes. However, the findings indicate that communication-related constraints significantly limit the effectiveness of implementation.

A primary issue relates to the transmission of policy information. Interviews with key informants reveal that dissemination efforts remain largely dependent on face-to-face socialization activities. Although these initiatives play an important role, their reach is restricted by time limitations, participant capacity, and geographical coverage. As a result, only a limited proportion of the community receives direct exposure to information on child protection. The absence of diversified communication channels, particularly the limited use of digital platforms such as social media and online communication tools, further constrains outreach. This condition creates a structural barrier in information flow, reducing public responsiveness and weakening preventive

efforts. In this situation, policy messages tend to remain confined within institutional boundaries rather than reaching the broader community.

The clarity of communication also emerges as a significant challenge. Internal actors within the administrative unit demonstrate a clear understanding of policy objectives, supported by routine coordination meetings and internal briefings (Gil-Garcia et al., 2019; Molenveld et al., 2020). However, this clarity is not equally reflected at the community level. Many community members are not aware of the regional regulation on child protection or the services available to address cases of violence against children. This gap illustrates a broader issue in decentralized governance, where internal comprehension does not automatically translate into public awareness. The use of technical policy language, limited adaptation into accessible formats, and the absence of sustained awareness initiatives contribute to this lack of clarity. Consequently, individuals who are most vulnerable remain insufficiently informed about their rights and available support systems.

Consistency in communication represents another critical concern. Community-based structures such as Integrated Community-Based Child Protection Groups and youth forums have been established to function as intermediaries in policy communication. However, their performance is uneven. Several villages or subdistricts have not yet established these structures, and in areas where they exist, many operate with low levels of activity. Youth forums at the subdistrict level also demonstrate limited engagement, with consistent activity primarily observed at the regency level. This uneven institutional presence disrupts the continuity of communication and weakens the effectiveness of outreach efforts. Since these structures are intended to serve as frontline channels for disseminating policy information, their limited functionality creates significant gaps in communication.

Resources in Policy Implementation

Resources represent a critical determinant of policy implementation effectiveness within Edward III's framework, as policies cannot be translated into practice without adequate human, financial, and infrastructural support (Mubarok et al., 2020). Within the studied local administrative unit, resource constraints emerge as one of the most significant barriers shaping both operational capacity and service delivery outcomes. This finding reflects broader evidence in child protection systems, where limitations in resources often undermine the transition from policy commitment to effective implementation.

Findings from interviews indicate persistent shortages in human resources, particularly within the division responsible for child protection services. The unit is staffed by only five personnel without additional administrative support, requiring staff members to assume multiple roles simultaneously. This condition reduces their ability to respond promptly to cases, conduct outreach activities, and maintain coordination with external stakeholders. While the existing personnel demonstrate adequate understanding of child protection procedures, several limitations in technical skills remain evident. In particular, gaps in basic computer literacy hinder effective documentation, reporting, and utilization of digital case management systems. This

mismatch between institutional demands and staff capacity highlights a structural constraint that affects both efficiency and accountability in service delivery.

Table 3. Soppeng Regency Child Protection Budget

No.	Program	Fiscal Year	
		2022	2023
1	Fulfillment of Children's Rights	Rp. 20.679.500	Rp. 55.575.000
2	Special Protection for Children	Rp. 36.474.750	Rp. 19.075.000
	Total	Rp. 57.154.250	Rp. 74.650.000

Source: Soppeng Regency Office of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, Population Control, and Family Planning, 2024

Financial resources also present a significant challenge. The implementation of child protection policies relies primarily on allocations from the regional government budget. As presented in Table 3, the total budget increased from Rp. 57,154,250 in 2022 to Rp. 74,650,000 in 2023. Despite this increase, the allocation remains insufficient to support comprehensive program implementation. Notably, funding for special protection programs decreased, indicating uneven prioritization across program areas. These limitations affect the scale and continuity of activities such as community outreach, capacity building, and inter-agency coordination. As a result, several planned initiatives are either reduced in scope or delayed, limiting the overall effectiveness of policy implementation.

Beyond financial and human resources, infrastructural limitations further constrain implementation capacity. The administrative unit lacks a dedicated space for clinical psychological services, which restricts the provision of confidential and trauma-sensitive support for child victims. Basic office facilities, including workspaces, storage systems, and digital equipment, remain inadequate for efficient case handling and documentation. In addition, the absence of a specialized operational vehicle limits mobility, particularly in reaching remote or underserved areas. These infrastructural gaps reduce responsiveness and hinder the ability to deliver timely interventions.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that resource constraints operate as systemic barriers within the implementation process. The limitations are not confined to a single dimension but extend across human capacity, financial allocation, and infrastructural support. This condition reflects a broader pattern identified in child protection systems, where policy ambitions often exceed available resources, resulting in fragmented and reactive implementation. Strengthening resource capacity requires sustained investment, improved allocation strategies, and alignment between policy priorities and operational needs. Without such improvements, the effectiveness of child protection policies remains constrained and uneven across implementation contexts.

Disposition in Policy Implementation

Disposition, defined within Edward III's policy implementation framework as the attitudes, commitment, and willingness of implementers to carry out policy directives, plays a critical role in shaping policy outcomes at the operational level (Andiarsa et al., 2023). In the implementation of child protection policies within the studied local administrative unit, disposition emerges as a relatively supportive factor, reflecting the presence of strong individual commitment among implementers. This finding aligns with

implementation research that emphasizes the importance of actor engagement and relational dynamics in translating policy into practice.

Findings from interviews indicate that personnel responsible for women's and child protection demonstrate a strong sense of moral and professional responsibility. Despite persistent limitations in funding, staffing, and infrastructure, they consistently show willingness to carry out their duties, manage multiple responsibilities, and respond to cases under constrained conditions. This level of commitment reflects intrinsic motivation, where implementers perceive child protection not only as an administrative obligation but as a social responsibility. Such commitment contributes positively to sustaining service delivery, particularly in contexts where institutional support remains limited.

However, the effectiveness of this positive disposition is shaped by broader structural conditions. Informants report that excessive workloads, driven by limited human resources and logistical support, place considerable pressure on staff. This situation often results in fatigue, delayed responses, and challenges in maintaining consistent service quality. The findings indicate that while commitment remains strong, it is continuously tested by operational constraints. This condition highlights a structural tension in policy implementation, where individual dedication is expected to compensate for systemic deficiencies, thereby creating risks of burnout and reduced effectiveness over time.

Staff awareness of the importance of child protection further strengthens the disposition dimension. Implementers recognize their role as contributing directly to the safety and well-being of children, which enhances their responsiveness and willingness to collaborate with external stakeholders. This awareness supports adaptive practices in handling complex cases and strengthens coordination with community actors. However, the internalization of this commitment is not uniformly distributed across all organizational units. Personnel directly engaged in child protection activities tend to demonstrate higher levels of commitment compared to those in supporting or administrative roles, where child protection may be perceived as a secondary responsibility. This uneven disposition can affect internal coordination and the overall coherence of policy implementation.

The findings also demonstrate that disposition does not operate in isolation but interacts closely with other implementation variables. Strong commitment among implementers is frequently constrained by limited resources, weak communication systems, and inconsistencies in bureaucratic structures. This interaction confirms that disposition, while essential, requires institutional support to translate into effective outcomes. Without adequate structural conditions, the positive attitudes and dedication of implementers are insufficient to overcome systemic barriers. Consequently, strengthening policy implementation requires not only maintaining high levels of commitment among personnel but also ensuring that institutional environments enable and sustain their efforts.

Bureaucratic Structure in Policy Implementation

Bureaucratic structure represents a fundamental component within Edward III's policy implementation framework, determining how institutional arrangements enable or constrain the translation of policy into practice (Sager & Gofen, 2022). In the implementation of child protection policies within the studied local administrative unit, bureaucratic structure is reflected through the existence of formal procedures, organizational arrangements, and patterns of coordination among actors. The findings indicate a dual condition in which formal structures provide an essential operational foundation, while fragmentation and limited integration continue to restrict overall effectiveness. This condition is consistent with broader evidence in child protection systems, where coordination across sectors remains a persistent challenge.

One of the key strengths within the bureaucratic structure is the availability of Standard Operating Procedures that guide the handling of child protection cases. These procedures, particularly those applied within the Integrated Service Unit for Women and Child Protection, offer a structured framework for case identification, referral, intervention, and follow-up. The presence of these guidelines enhances procedural clarity and reduces variability in decision-making among implementers. Staff members demonstrate a sufficient understanding of these procedures, indicating that formal protocols contribute positively to institutional capacity and accountability in managing cases.

However, the effectiveness of these procedures is influenced by the broader organizational context in which they are applied. Despite the existence of Standard Operating Procedures, several constraints limit their consistent implementation. Limited personnel, inadequate facilities, and uneven access to resources reduce the ability of staff to carry out all procedural steps comprehensively. In addition, not all partner agencies share the same level of understanding or familiarity with these procedures, resulting in inconsistencies during inter-agency coordination. These findings indicate that procedural standardization must be accompanied by continuous capacity development and alignment across institutions to ensure consistent application.

Fragmentation within the bureaucratic structure represents another significant challenge. Child protection requires collaboration across multiple sectors, including social services, health, law enforcement, education, and community organizations. Although cooperative relationships exist, coordination mechanisms often rely on informal communication rather than structured institutional systems. This condition creates vulnerabilities, particularly when coordination depends on individual actors rather than formalized processes. Variations in role clarity, communication flow, and follow-up actions contribute to inconsistencies in case management and weaken the overall coherence of the system.

The uneven development of community-based structures further contributes to bureaucratic fragmentation. Groups such as Integrated Community-Based Child Protection Groups and child forums are intended to function as extensions of the formal system at the community level, supporting early detection, reporting, and public awareness. However, the limited establishment and inconsistent activity of these groups

disrupt the continuity of the bureaucratic chain. This gap reduces the reach of policy implementation and weakens the integration between administrative structures and community-level mechanisms.

Despite these constraints, the bureaucratic structure demonstrates potential for strengthening. The presence of formal procedures, existing inter-agency collaboration, and partially functioning community mechanisms provide a foundation for developing a more integrated system. Strengthening coordination through formal mechanisms, joint capacity-building initiatives, and regular inter-agency engagement can reduce fragmentation and improve consistency in implementation. Enhancing institutional integration is essential to ensure that policy directives are translated into coordinated and sustained actions across all levels of governance.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of child protection policies within the examined local administrative unit remains suboptimal, reflecting a persistent gap between policy intent and practical execution. Communication emerges as a critical weakness, particularly in terms of transmission, clarity, and consistency, where limited outreach strategies and reliance on face-to-face dissemination hinder broader public awareness and engagement. At the same time, resource constraints significantly affect implementation capacity, including insufficient human resources, limited technical competencies, inadequate financial allocation, and infrastructural deficiencies. Although implementers demonstrate strong commitment and responsibility, this positive disposition is not sufficient to compensate for structural limitations that restrict the effectiveness of policy delivery.

From an institutional perspective, the bureaucratic structure provides a formal foundation through the availability of Standard Operating Procedures and existing interagency collaboration. However, fragmentation and weak institutional integration continue to constrain coordination across sectors. Uneven engagement among partner agencies and the limited functionality of community-based mechanisms weaken the continuity and coherence of implementation. These findings indicate that formal arrangements alone are insufficient without strong coordination systems and aligned institutional capacity. Effective policy implementation therefore requires a comprehensive and system-oriented approach that integrates improved communication strategies, strengthened resource allocation, infrastructural development, and more formalized and consistent coordination mechanisms across governance levels.

This study is subject to several limitations. The reliance on qualitative data from interviews and observations may not fully capture the perspectives of all stakeholders, particularly children and families as primary beneficiaries. The focus on a single local administrative unit also limits the generalizability of the findings to other contexts with different institutional and sociocultural characteristics. In addition, dependence on administrative data and reported cases introduces potential bias due to underreporting and incomplete documentation. Future research is encouraged to expand comparative analyses across regions, incorporate mixed-method approaches to enhance validity, and

explore longitudinal dimensions to better understand the dynamics and sustainability of child protection policy implementation.

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