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## **Social Welfare Issues for Women in Urban Areas: A Systematic Review of Indonesian Literature**

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# Social Welfare Issues for Women in Urban Areas: A Systematic Review of Indonesian Literature

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## Abstract

This study systematically reviews social welfare challenges faced by urban women in Indonesia and proposes policy recommendations to address gender-based disparities. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, five peer-reviewed articles published between 2020 and 2024 were analyzed. Findings reveal persistent structural and socio-economic inequalities, including limited access to education, employment, healthcare, and social protection. Vulnerable groups such as domestic workers, single mothers, and women at risk of socio-economic vulnerability (WRSE) remain marginalized despite existing welfare programs. Cultural norms, patriarchal values, and inconsistent implementation of gender-responsive policies exacerbate these challenges, especially in rapidly urbanizing areas. This review underscores the urgent need for inclusive, gender-sensitive, and participatory welfare strategies that strengthen women's economic empowerment, improve access to social services, and enhance resilience against crises. By synthesizing contemporary evidence, this study provides insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to develop equitable and sustainable urban welfare systems that foster gender equality and social justice.

**Keywords:** Gender Inequality, Inclusive Policy, Indonesia, Social Welfare, Systematic Literature Review, Urban Women.

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## INTRODUCTION

Social welfare is one of the key indicators of a nation's development, reflecting the extent to which all citizens without exception can meet their basic needs and live with dignity [1]–[3]. From the perspective of sustainable development, social welfare not only involves economic aspects but also includes dimensions such as health, education, social protection, and social participation. However, in the social reality of Indonesia, welfare distribution remains uneven, particularly for vulnerable groups, one of the most affected being women [4]. In urban areas, although there is generally greater access to social services, women face specific challenges, such as limited access to decent work, higher participation in the informal sector, and the double burden of unpaid domestic work [5]. These challenges often exacerbate gender inequality and hinder women's economic and social mobility.

According to the World Bank, gender equality is a crucial issue in development that helps countries grow, reduce poverty, and improve governance [6]. Therefore, if a country aims to build an advanced and inclusive government, it must take gender equality seriously. For instance, in the implementation of regional autonomy, regulations related to women were often created without involving women themselves and ended up negatively affecting them [7]. A widely debated local regulation prohibits women from riding motorcycles in a straddling position, allegedly for reasons of modesty and religious principles without ever consulting the women targeted by this policy. This article aims to provide a comprehensive overview of social welfare issues faced by women in urban areas of Indonesia. It does so by conducting a systematic review of Indonesian literature on gender inequality, social protection policies, and welfare distribution, focusing on key challenges and recommendations for policy improvements.

According to the Institute for Community Studies and Advocacy, at least 153 regional regulations are discriminatory toward women. These regulations are considered violations of human rights because they restrict women's freedoms [8]. Data from national and international institutions show that women continue to face disadvantages in many welfare aspects, such as lower labor force participation and higher unemployment rates compared to men. Access to health services, especially reproductive health, remains inadequate, particularly for women in remote and marginalized areas. Women are also more vulnerable to poverty, especially in female-headed households, which often struggle with limited resources and insufficient social assistance.

The issue of women's social welfare in Indonesia is deeply influenced by societal structures, cultural values, and public policies that have yet to fully support gender equality [9]–[11]. Patriarchal norms create invisible barriers that hinder women's participation in social and economic development. External factors like rapid urbanization, globalization, and crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbate these challenges, further increasing women's vulnerability, particularly in lower-income urban communities. Moreover, the suboptimal implementation of gender-responsive social protection policies worsens the injustices women experience, both in normal times and during crises.

Women are often treated as passive recipients or disadvantaged subjects, which hampers their self-development and empowerment. In fact, if policies are designed using a gender perspective, each stage planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation will consider the balanced roles and equal benefits for both men and women. This approach fosters

the implementation of programs that reflect the principles of equality, justice, democracy, and transparency, ultimately improving the accountability of government performance. The World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995 established gender equality as a key strategy in socio-economic development and environmental protection. This was reaffirmed at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in the same year, which emphasized the importance of strengthening the position of women through a strategic agenda and global declaration. The agenda aimed to eliminate barriers to gender equality and encourage the active participation of women in all aspects of life [12]–[14].

In Indonesia, although the government has made progress, challenges remain due to ineffective gender-responsive policies and social protection systems. The lack of active involvement of women in the policymaking process, coupled with societal norms, continues to perpetuate gender-based inequalities. The Indonesian government must ensure that gender mainstreaming is fully incorporated into policy planning and implementation to ensure inclusivity. The Indonesian government, along with all elements of society, continues to face major challenges in addressing ongoing gender disparities [15]. In the effort to promote gender equality and strengthen women's roles in development, Indonesia is still dealing with complex and deeply ingrained issues. One such issue is the persistent societal perception that places women as second-class citizens even within the family sphere. Boys are often seen as more capable and worthy of pride than girls. This perception affects educational priorities, where boys are more often encouraged to attend school, while girls are expected to help with domestic chores. These social and cultural norms that demand girls to assist in household responsibilities are contributing factors to poor academic performance and even school dropout rates. The belief that educating girls is not a profitable investment still lingers in many communities.

There is a growing body of research addressing social welfare and gender inequality in Indonesia, focusing on issues such as economic participation, access to health, and legal protections for women. However, many of these studies predominantly focus on rural areas or broad national policies, with limited emphasis on the specific challenges faced by women in urban settings. For instance, studies by Susilo & Purnomo (2022) and Wulandari & Sari (2023) have highlighted the ongoing gender disparities in access to employment, healthcare services, and legal protections [16], [17]. These studies show that while women in urban areas may have better access to resources compared to their rural counterparts, they still face significant barriers, such as gender-based discrimination, unequal labor force participation, and limited access to gender-responsive policies. Moreover, the impact of COVID-19 further deepened these challenges, particularly for women working in the informal sector, who were disproportionately affected by the economic downturn and limited access to social safety nets [18].

While these studies contribute significantly to understanding women's welfare in Indonesia, the literature lacks a systematic review specifically focusing on the social welfare challenges of urban women. The complex intersection of gender inequality, economic vulnerability, and limited access to urban welfare programs remains underexplored. Moreover, despite the progress in promoting gender equality in national policies, the implementation of these policies often remains inconsistent, especially at the local government level [19]. This article aims to fill this research gap by systematically reviewing the Indonesian literature on

women's social welfare in urban areas, identifying key barriers, and evaluating gender-responsive policies that could help improve their social welfare.

Despite progress in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, there is a significant research gap regarding the specific welfare needs of women in urban areas in Indonesia. While many studies focus on gender disparities in rural contexts, insufficient attention has been given to how urbanization and socio-economic changes in cities impact women's social welfare. The intersection of cultural norms, patriarchal values, and urban economic pressures remains underexplored, particularly in terms of policy implementation. This gap is primarily due to the lack of gender-sensitive approaches in urban social welfare programs and policies, which often neglect the unique needs of urban women in areas such as reproductive health, employment, and social protection. This study aims to fill this gap by systematically reviewing literature and analyzing how gender-responsive policies can be integrated into urban welfare frameworks to improve women's well-being.

This article aims to provide a comprehensive overview of social welfare issues faced by women in urban areas of Indonesia. It does so by conducting a systematic review of Indonesian literature on gender inequality, social protection policies, and welfare distribution, focusing on key challenges and recommendations for policy improvements. The study aims to fill the research gap by offering a clear analysis of the challenges faced by women in urban areas and suggesting strategies for improving gender-responsive policies in the future.

## METHODS

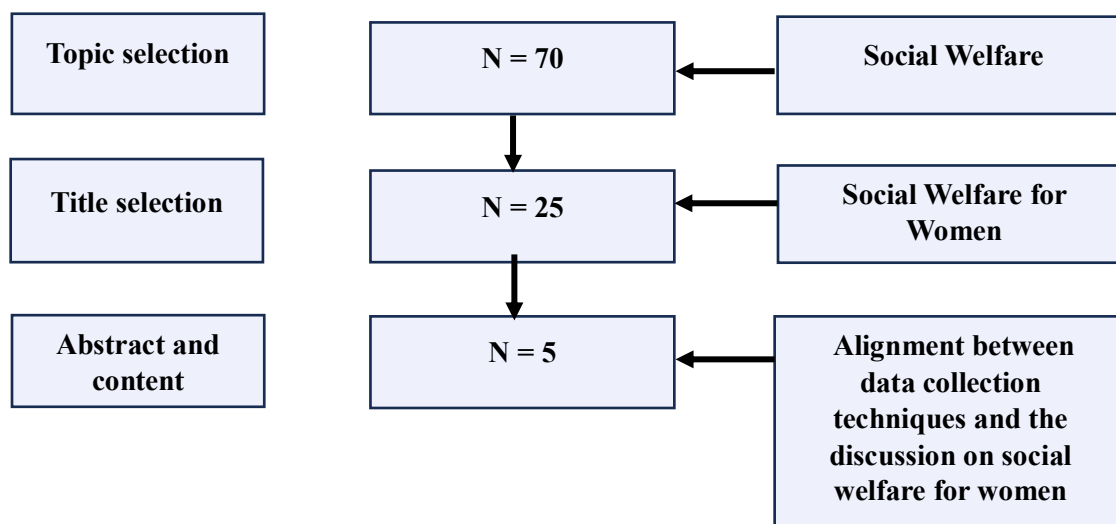
This article uses the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method. SLR refers to a specific research methodology developed to systematically collect, evaluate, and synthesize relevant studies on a particular topic [20]. The review process involves following predetermined protocols or steps to ensure comprehensive data collection and analysis. The article selection and analysis were conducted on June 13, 2024. The following keywords were used in the search: "social welfare for women," "social welfare for women in rural or urban areas," and "women's welfare in employment." The search was carried out on academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, and Publish or Perish, ensuring broad coverage of relevant studies.

The inclusion criteria for article selection were: (1) studies that address social welfare specifically for women, (2) publications from 2020 to 2024, and (3) studies published in English or Indonesian. Articles were excluded if they focused on general social welfare without a gender lens, if they were not related to women's welfare, or if they were published in languages other than the specified ones. Based on the initial search, 70 articles met the inclusion criteria, but after refining the selection to those specifically addressing women's social welfare, only 25 articles remained. The remaining articles were then analyzed for relevance, with 10 articles being identified as relevant based on data collection techniques and key discussion themes. Finally, 5 scholarly articles were selected that provided substantial and pertinent information aligned with the study's focus.

This systematic review also acknowledges its limitations, including the exclusion of studies not published in English or Indonesian, and the focus on articles published only within the last four years.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The selection process for articles in this review involved several screening stages to ensure relevance and quality, focusing on studies addressing social welfare for women. The outcome of the journal review process is illustrated in the PRISMA diagram below:



**Figure 1.** PRISMA Diagram

As illustrated in the diagram, 70 articles were initially identified, narrowed down to 25 after title screening, and finally, 5 articles met all criteria with full alignment in data collection techniques and discussion on social welfare for women.

In order to provide a comprehensive understanding of social welfare issues for women in Indonesia, particularly in the context of urban areas, a systematic review of relevant studies was conducted. The following table presents the results of the literature review based on the inclusion criteria, which include studies focusing on women's welfare, particularly in relation to socio-economic challenges, gender inequality, and access to social protection. The selected articles highlight various aspects of social welfare, from healthcare services to labor conditions and policy implementation.

**Table 1.** Results of Journal Review Based on Inclusion Criteria

Name	Title
Widrus Sajarah Dan Ida Syahriyani	Service Service With Care In Increase Society Health Care (Studi At Puskesmas Lenteng Sumenep's Regency)
Husin, Nita Azizah, Rif'ah, Siti Khadijah	<i>Kesejahteraan Sosial Perempuan Di Desa Pulantani Kecamatan Haur Gading</i>
Alsa Apriani , Ahmad Arfandi, Vetty Erista, Nasywa Syahira Oktaviani	<i>Masalah Kesejahteraan Sosial pada Pengemis Perempuan dan Anak</i>
Rayhan Septa Rivaldi , Tuah Nur M. Rijal Amirulloh	Evaluation of Policies for the Implementation of Social Welfare for Women in Socio-Economic Vulnerabilities in Sukabumi City
Najwa Aulia Revina Dian Salma Wahida Muhamad Rizky Syawaludin Sobari	The Welfare of Women Domestic Workers as Informal Labor in the Framework of Social Protection of Vulnerable Groups

The table above summarizes key studies that meet the inclusion criteria for this review. Each study examines different dimensions of women's social welfare, such as access to healthcare, the welfare of female informal workers, and the impact of local policies on women's socio-economic vulnerabilities. These studies provide valuable insights into the

challenges faced by women in various contexts, particularly those in marginalized or vulnerable situations. The findings from these studies will serve as a foundation for identifying gaps in current social welfare policies and inform recommendations for future improvements in urban welfare frameworks.

The social welfare issues faced by women are often rooted in economic inequality, particularly among low-income communities [21]. In Indonesia, vulnerable groups of women such as Women at Risk of Socioeconomic Vulnerability (WRSE) are often marginalized in accessing education, employment, and social services. Factors such as divorce, the death of a spouse, low educational attainment, and low-paying jobs are the main contributors to their classification as WRSE. Furthermore, even though social assistance programs like the Family Hope Program (PKH) have been expanded, women in impoverished areas still face difficulties in accessing these benefits due to factors such as low education levels, age, number of dependents, and limited financial access [22]. This inequality is also reflected in the low representation of women in leadership and decision-making roles. Data show that only 30% of Indonesian women occupy managerial or equivalent positions lower than in other ASEAN countries [23].

Women's contributions to economic development are often undervalued and perceived merely as supplementary or secondary income, despite their essential roles in both formal and informal sectors, including agriculture, micro-enterprises, petty trade, and unpaid domestic work. Unfortunately, such work is often unrecorded in national economic statistics and thus overlooked in policy-making [24]. This highlights a bias in recognizing women's economic roles, directly impacting their social welfare. The World Bank (2012) report asserts that gender equality and the active participation of women in the economy can significantly and sustainably boost economic growth [25]. Similarly, UN Women (2020) emphasizes that women's economic empowerment plays a major role in reducing poverty and improving family welfare. However, in many communities especially among low-income groups women still lack equal access to education, skills training, and economic resources. Therefore, it is crucial for the state and society to reform mindsets and policies to better appreciate and support women's tangible contributions to economic and social development [26].

The issue of social welfare also affects mothers and children who are forced to beg on the streets, often resulting from the inability of male heads of households to obtain stable jobs and sufficient income. This economic instability pushes mothers to take on the breadwinner role, even through vulnerable means such as begging with their children. This phenomenon reveals an unequal distribution of economic roles within families, forcing women and children into activities they should not have to engage in [27]. Research by Ibrahim et al. (2024) confirms that economic hardship is a major factor compelling children to beg, as parents feel they have no choice but to involve their children in income-generating activities to meet basic needs [28]. A separate study by Candra and Subairi (2021) also stresses that extreme poverty often drives individuals to do whatever it takes to survive, including involving their children in street begging. In Islamic teachings, economic responsibility lies with the husband as the head of the household, although the wife may assist if the husband cannot fulfill his obligations [29]. This situation shows that women's and children's roles in family economics are often undervalued, and they become trapped in a cycle of poverty. Thus, serious attention is needed from both the government and society to provide equitable access to education, skill training,

and other economic resources for women and children so they can actively and productively contribute to economic development without sacrificing their dignity and rights.

Gender imbalance also has serious implications for social welfare, particularly in disaster contexts. One notable impact is the higher mortality rate among women compared to men during natural disasters. This disparity is not merely due to biological or physical differences, but stems from social and economic structures that place women in more vulnerable positions. In many communities, women have limited access to disaster education, early warning systems, evacuation facilities, and decision-making factors that are critical during emergencies [30]. Traditional gender roles further heighten the risk, as women are often at home caring for children or the elderly when disasters strike, and they prioritize rescuing others before themselves. In addition, women's access to economic resources such as private vehicles, communication networks, and property ownership is typically lower than that of men, which delays their ability to escape dangerous situations. According to Neumayer and Plümper (2007), gender inequality in social and economic structures significantly increases female mortality during natural disasters, particularly in countries with high levels of gender inequality. This indicates that gender inequality is not only a social issue but also a matter of life and death. Therefore, disaster mitigation and management policies must incorporate a gender perspective to ensure women have equal opportunities to access information, training, and resources that can save their lives in emergencies [31].

Another serious issue in women's social welfare concerns female domestic workers (PRT), a group often overlooked by the public and national policy. Female domestic workers are vulnerable to various forms of workplace violence, including physical, verbal, psychological abuse, and economic exploitation. Many are forced to work without formal contracts, endure excessive hours, receive unfair wages, and experience sexual harassment in the workplace. The power imbalance between employers and workers, coupled with weak legal protections, exacerbates their social welfare conditions [21]. According to research by Saptari (2020), many female domestic workers suffer from gender-based violence that goes unreported because they live in their employers' homes and lack access to protection mechanisms [32]. A study by *Jurnal Perempuan* (2022) also noted that most domestic workers are not fully protected under labor laws because their work is classified as informal. As a result, basic rights such as fair wages, social security, and protection from violence are often neglected. This issue highlights that domestic workers not only face economic challenges but also structural social injustice. Therefore, it is essential for the government to strengthen regulations protecting female domestic workers by passing the Domestic Worker Protection Bill (RUU PPRT) and ensuring safe spaces for them to report abuse and seek justice.

## CONCLUSION

The issue of social welfare experienced by women in urban areas of Indonesia reflects a complexity shaped by various economic, social, and structurally rooted gender inequalities. Women from vulnerable groups, such as Women at Risk of Socioeconomic Vulnerability (WRSE), domestic workers, and mothers with children who are forced to beg, often face serious barriers in accessing education, decent employment, social services, and legal protection. These inequalities are reinforced by the low participation of women in leadership positions, stigmatization of women's economic contributions, and the lack of legal recognition

for informal labor sectors. In emergency situations such as natural disasters, women tend to be more vulnerable due to limited access to information, evacuation facilities, and control over life-saving resources. This demonstrates that gender inequality not only affects social welfare but can also endanger women's physical safety. Although social programs such as the Family Hope Program (PKH) aim to reduce economic vulnerability, many women still struggle to fully benefit from such initiatives due to barriers related to education, age, and limited financial access. Therefore, efforts to improve the welfare of urban women require gender-just and inclusive policy approaches. The state must provide greater recognition of women's economic contributions, strengthen legal protection for informal workers such as domestic helpers, and ensure the integration of gender perspectives in all aspects of development and disaster management. Such approaches will not only enhance the quality of life for women but also strengthen the social and economic resilience of families and communities as a whole.

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### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

"The authors declare no conflict of interest."

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