Estimating the Requirement for Social Workers at Subnational Level: Application of Regional Guidance on the Development and Use of Social Service Workforce to Population Ratios in ASEAN

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Abstract

Background and Purpose

Indonesia faces significant challenges in social work workforce planning, particularly following the enactment of Law No. 14/2019 which established social workers as professional human resources with defined rights and responsibilities. Despite this legal framework, no standardized methodology exists for estimating market demand for social workers, creating difficulties in professional identity formation and strategic career planning. The Yogyakarta Special Region, with its population of 4.2 million and diverse social welfare needs including 430,000 people in poverty (11%), 600,000 elderly (17.33%), and vulnerable populations including children, persons with disabilities, and substance users, serves as an ideal testing ground. While ASEAN has developed Regional Guidance on Social Service Workforce to Population Ratios as part of the Hanoi Declaration implementation, evidence-based application at provincial levels in Indonesia remains limited. This study aims to develop and test a methodology for estimating social work workforce requirements using the ASEAN framework, adapted to local Indonesian contexts.

Methods

This study employs a mixed-methods approach implementing the ten-step ASEAN methodology for workforce ratio development. Data collection involves comprehensive mapping of social welfare institutions across sectors in Yogyakarta Special Region, utilizing the Integrated Social Welfare Data System (SIKS-NG), demographic data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS), and cross-sectoral proxy indicators from education, health, and justice sectors. Key stakeholders

include government agencies (Social Services Department, Regional Personnel Agency), professional associations (IPSPI), and academic institutions. The methodology includes: (1) defining operational social worker categories based on Indonesian legislation; (2) establishing information management systems; (3) mapping current workforce distribution; (4) conducting population needs assessment using rights-based approaches; (5) reviewing normative frameworks; (6) determining population denominators; and (7) calculating differentiated ratios based on target group needs. Data sources encompass social welfare recipients, institutional care data, demographic indicators, cross-sectoral vulnerability markers, and current social work human resources across governmental and non-governmental sectors.

Expected Results

The study anticipates producing a contextualized methodology for social work workforce estimation suitable for Indonesian subnational application. Expected outcomes include identification of significant workforce gaps across different service sectors, development of evidence-based ratio calculations that account for local demographic and socio-economic characteristics, and establishment of differentiated workforce requirements based on population vulnerability profiles. The research will generate specific workforce-to-population ratios for general and specialized social work services, highlighting disparities between current capacity and identified needs. Results will inform recruitment strategies, educational planning, and resource allocation decisions while providing empirical evidence for advocacy and policy development.

Significance and Implications for Social Work Practice

This research addresses critical gaps in social work workforce planning methodology in Southeast Asia, providing the first systematic application of ASEAN guidance at subnational levels. The study contributes to evidence-based professional development by establishing reliable workforce estimation tools that can enhance public recognition of social work as an essential service. Practical implications include improved strategic workforce planning, enhanced integration of social workers within comprehensive public service systems, and strengthened collaboration networks among practitioners, academics, and government entities. The methodology can be replicated across other Indonesian provinces and adapted for diverse ASEAN contexts, supporting regional efforts to strengthen social work toward cohesive and responsive community development. Findings will inform policy recommendations for sustainable professional ecosystem development, contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals framework, and provide evidence for increased investment in social welfare sectors. The research ultimately supports the professionalization of social work practice through systematic workforce planning that ensures adequate service coverage and prevents professional burnout through appropriate workload distribution.