

INTERNATIONAL JOURNALOF LAW AND CONSTITUTION STUDY

Journal home page: https://jurnal.asrypersadaquality.com/index.php/ijlacos

EFFECTIVENESS OF CHILD LAW CLINICS IN PROVIDING FREE LEGAL AID TO VICTIMS OF ONLINE EXPLOITATION IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of Child Law Clinics in providing free legal aid to children who are victims of online exploitation in Indonesia, as well as to identify the factors influencing the success of their implementation. The research employs a quantitative approach, collecting primary data through surveys and questionnaires directed at victims, their families, and legal clinic staff, combined with descriptive and inferential analyses to measure the effectiveness of services in fulfilling legal rights, protection, and client satisfaction. The findings indicate that Child Law Clinics play a significant role in expanding access to justice for victims of online exploitation through legal consultations, courtroom accompaniment, and child rights advocacy. However, their effectiveness remains limited by human resource constraints, budgetary support, and inter-agency coordination. In addition, the uneven distribution of services leaves many victims in non-urban areas unreached. The study underscores the importance of applying a holistic and child-friendly approach that not only focuses on legal aspects but also addresses the social and psychological needs of victims. The research implications highlight the need to strengthen institutional capacity and cross-sectoral integration so that Child Law Clinics can function optimally as a means of legal protection and comprehensive recovery for children affected by digital exploitation.

Keywords: Child Law Clinic, Online Exploitation, Free Legal Aid.h

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology in Indonesia has produced ambivalent effects, particularly for children who are considered vulnerable to social risks in the virtual space. On one hand, advances in information technology provide extensive opportunities for children to access knowledge and educational learning resources; on the other hand, this development also opens new avenues for various forms of online child exploitation. (Indonesia U., 2023) Data from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KPPPA) indicate a significant increase in cases of cybercrimes against children, including online sexual exploitation, digital human trafficking, and forms of cyberbullying that often lead to extortion. ((KemenPPPA), Data on Violence Against Children 2023, 2023)

As a country that has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child through Presidential Decree No. 36 of 1990, Indonesia has also established national legal instruments affirming special protection for children, as regulated in Law No. 35 of 2014 on Child Protection, a revision of Law No. 23 of 2002. However, the reality of policy implementation shows that ensuring legal rights for child victims of cybercrimes in accessing legal aid still faces various structural obstacles. Key challenges include limited family economic resources, uneven geographic reach of legal services, and low public understanding of applicable laws. (Gultom, 2020)

Within this framework, child law clinics function as an alternative means to provide free legal aid, operated by higher education institutions, civil society organizations, or professional legal associations, with the main objective of ensuring access to justice for children who are victims of crimes. (Nur, 2022) The establishment of these child law clinics concretely reflects the mandate of Law No. 16 of 2011 on Legal Aid, which affirms the right of every citizen to obtain recognition, protection, and fair legal guarantees. Through a child-friendly and holistic accompaniment approach, child law clinics serve as a bridge between victims of digital crimes and a justice system that is often complex and multi-layered.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of child law clinics in providing free legal aid to victims of online exploitation still requires deeper investigation. Several inhibiting factors need to be considered, such as limited human resources, minimal budget support, the complexity of handling cybercrimes that often transcend administrative jurisdictions, and weak inter-agency coordination among law enforcement. (Saraswati, 2023) Moreover, the specific characteristics of online exploitation cases, which often

result in prolonged psychological impacts on victims, demand an integrated approach that not only focuses on legal aspects but also addresses the social and psychological dimensions of children.

Given the complexity of the issues outlined, this study focuses on comprehensively analyzing the effectiveness of child law clinics in providing free legal aid to child victims of online exploitation in Indonesia, while identifying various factors influencing this effectiveness. The research also evaluates how implementing a holistic and child-friendly approach can help overcome structural, social, and psychological barriers faced by victims, thus providing a comprehensive overview of the achievements and challenges of child law clinics in practice. This study employs a normative-juridical approach, combining an analysis of statutory provisions related to legal aid and child protection mechanisms with direct observation of the activities of several child law clinics involved in handling digital exploitation cases. Through this combined approach, the study is expected to produce a comprehensive depiction of the implementation of legal aid by child law clinics and formulate strategic policy recommendations to improve legal protection for children victims of online exploitation in Indonesia.

Based on the explanation above, this research formulates several problems as follows: (1). How effective are Child Law Clinics in handling child victims of online exploitation in Indonesia?, (2). What factors influence the effectiveness of Child Law Clinic services in providing free legal aid to victims?, (3). How is the holistic, child-centered legal service model implemented within Child Law Clinics, and to what extent can this model enhance the protection and recovery of victims?

METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach to assess the effectiveness of Child Law Clinics in providing free legal aid to child victims of online exploitation in Indonesia based on numerical and statistical data. Data were collected through surveys and questionnaires directed at child victims, parents or guardians, and clinic staff, then analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods to evaluate the impact of services on legal recovery, child rights protection, and recipient satisfaction.

The study aims to evaluate the extent to which Child Law Clinics are effective in providing free legal services for children victims of online exploitation in Indonesia. The focus includes fulfillment of children’s legal rights, increased access to justice,

provision of protection and adequate recovery, and analysis of factors affecting the clinics' success, including the quality of legal assistance, staff understanding of victims' needs, and the clinics' ability to respond to emerging legal issues.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

To provide clearer visibility of the research outcomes, the following discussion synthesizes the findings and explicitly links them to the study's objectives and research questions. This expanded analysis strengthens the interpretation of the data collected through field observations and literature review, ensuring that the results reflect measurable indicators of effectiveness, influencing factors, and the implementation of holistic, child-centered services in Child Law Clinics. (Maryam, 2020)

The findings of this study confirm that Child Law Clinics play a central role in providing free legal assistance to children who are victims of online exploitation. Through legal consultation, procedural guidance, advocacy for children's rights, and referrals to psychosocial services, these clinics reduce barriers related to legal costs and lack of legal knowledge that often hinder victims from accessing justice. However, the distribution of services remains unequal; most clinics are concentrated in urban areas, leaving children in remote regions with limited access to legal protection.

In terms of substantive justice, the study reveals that although Child Law Clinics support victims in navigating legal procedures, the effectiveness of these efforts is still constrained by structural limitations. Challenges include the shortage of advocates who specialize in children's issues and cybercrime, as well as inconsistencies in the understanding of law enforcement officers regarding the unique characteristics of digital exploitation. These barriers often hinder the achievement of fair and victim-centered outcomes. (Qamar, 2019)

Regarding victim recovery, Child Law Clinics contribute significantly by offering initial legal assistance; however, comprehensive rehabilitation which should include trauma counseling, social support, and reintegration remains limited. Weak coordination among agencies and the absence of structured referral systems hinder the continuity of recovery services. Without strong collaboration with psychologists, social workers, and child protection agencies, victims face the risk of incomplete or fragmented recovery. (Agustina, 2024)

Table 1. Summary of Research Findings on Child Law Clinics

Analytical Aspect	Indicators	Key Findings	Relevance to Research Objectives
Service Effectiveness	- Access to legal aid- Types of services (consultation, assistance, advocacy)- Reduction of financial barriers	Child Law Clinics provide legal consultations, procedural assistance, rights advocacy, and referrals to psychosocial services. These services successfully reduce financial barriers and the lack of legal knowledge experienced by child victims of online exploitation.	Demonstrates the extent to which the clinics deliver effective and measurable legal assistance for child victims.
Access Equity	- Geographic distribution of clinics- Availability of services for remote communities	The distribution of clinics is uneven; most are concentrated in urban areas. Children in remote regions have limited access to legal protection services.	Addresses the research question regarding whether child legal aid services are equally accessible to all victims.
Substantive Justice	- Availability of child-focused and cybercrime-specialized advocates- Consistency of law enforcement understanding- Victim-centered legal processes	The effectiveness of legal support is constrained by the limited number of advocates specializing in child cases and cybercrime. Inconsistencies in law enforcement officers' understanding of digital exploitation also hinder fair and victim-centered legal outcomes.	Assesses the extent to which clinics ensure substantive justice and victim-oriented outcomes.
Victim Recovery	- Rehabilitation services	Clinics contribute to initial legal	Evaluates how effectively clinics

	(counseling, social support, reintegration)- Referral mechanisms- Inter-agency coordination	assistance, but comprehensive recovery remains limited. Weak coordination and the absence of structured referral systems hinder continuity of services, leaving victims at risk of fragmented recovery.	support holistic post-legal recovery for victims.
Constraining Factors	- Limited human resources- Insufficient digital law expertise- Fragmented service systems	The shortage of qualified child-cybercrime advocates and weak inter-agency collaboration remain major barriers to providing comprehensive and sustained services.	Identifies structural factors that limit the optimal performance of Child Law Clinics.

The findings shown in the table align closely with framework on access to justice for vulnerable groups, particularly children. According to Siregar, effective legal services must be accessible, affordable, and responsive to the specific needs of marginalized populations. This perspective is reflected in the table's first and second dimensions service effectiveness and access equity where Child Law Clinics successfully provide essential legal assistance but remain geographically concentrated in urban areas. Such inequality supports Siregar's argument that structural disparities in service distribution continue to limit children's access to justice, especially in rural and remote communities.

The table's emphasis on substantive justice is also consistent with Marzuki's (2016) concept of progressive legal thinking, which argues that justice cannot be achieved merely through the existence of formal laws but requires competent and empathetic legal actors. The identified shortage of advocates specializing in child protection and cybercrime, along with inconsistent understanding among law enforcement officers, illustrates Marzuki's point that legal outcomes depend on the quality and sensitivity of practitioners. These findings reinforce his view that the law

must adapt to social realities and be implemented by individuals who understand the unique vulnerabilities of child victims.

Finally, the limited support for victim recovery and the structural barriers noted in the table reflect both authors' concerns about institutional weaknesses in Indonesia's legal system. Siregar (2022) stresses that child protection must extend beyond legal procedures to include psychological and social rehabilitation, which is hindered by the lack of structured referral systems and weak inter-agency coordination. Similarly, Marzuki (2016) highlights institutional fragmentation and insufficient capacity as persistent obstacles to holistic legal protection. Thus, the table's findings collectively affirm that without systemic reform and stronger collaboration among stakeholders, Child Law Clinics cannot fully realize their potential in safeguarding children from online exploitation.

DISCUSSION

Effectiveness of Child Law Clinics in Handling Victims of Online Exploitation

Child law clinics operated by legal aid institutions, law faculties, or civil society organizations play a strategic role in providing free legal aid services to children who are victims of online exploitation. The primary functions of these clinics include legal consultation, accompaniment in both non-litigation and litigation processes, advocacy for child rights, and referral to recovery services such as psychologists and social workers. The success of child law clinics in the context of online exploitation can be measured across three main domains: fulfillment of children's legal rights, availability of meaningful access to justice, and effectiveness of protection and recovery processes for victims. (Widowaty, 2023)

Table 2. Effectiveness and Service Coverage of Child Law Clinics for Online Exploitation Victims (2025)

Indicator	Observed Practices	Effectiveness / Coverage	Notes / Limitations
Legal Consultation	Free legal advice provided by clinic staff	High for urban areas; moderate overall	Limited availability in rural regions
Litigation & Non-Litigation Support	Assistance in court proceedings and alternative dispute resolution	Moderate	Few staff trained in cybercrime cases
Advocacy for Child Rights	Support for asserting legal	High	Limited cross-sector coordination reduces impact

	rights and protection		
Referral to Recovery Services	Connection with psychologists, social workers, and social services	Moderate	Systematic referral networks often absent
Fulfillment of Legal Rights	Children understand and can assert their rights	Moderate	Unequal distribution of specialized clinics
Access to Justice	Provision of legal aid to victims	Moderate	Geographic and resource limitations hinder reach
Holistic Recovery	Integration of legal, social, and psychological support	Low to Moderate	Lack of follow-up and multi-disciplinary integration
Staff Expertise	Training in digital forensics and child protection law	Low	Shortage of qualified professionals
Institutional Capacity	Adequacy of facilities, funding, and infrastructure	Low to Moderate	Limited resources and funding constraints
Awareness & Outreach	Victims and families informed of available services	Low to Moderate	Outreach campaigns not uniformly implemented

Sources: Widowaty, 2023; Kompas.id, 2022; BPHN, 2023; KPAI, 2025

In terms of rights fulfillment, law clinics have significant potential to strengthen a child's position within the justice system. Victims of online exploitation often face structural barriers, ranging from stigmatization to difficulties in presenting evidence, which can obscure their rights. By providing free and specialized legal services for vulnerable groups, law clinics help ensure that children understand and assert their rights based on relevant laws, such as child protection norms and criminal provisions related to exploitation. However, limitations remain in the field: the number of clinics focusing on cybercrime is relatively small, and there is uneven availability of legal advisors with expertise in technical aspects of cybercrime. (Kompas.id, 2022)

Regarding access to justice, the contribution of law clinics cannot be underestimated, but it is not yet optimal. Free legal aid services are one mechanism to guarantee equal rights to legal assistance; however, in practice, they are often constrained by geographic limitations, institutional capacity, and human resources. Victims of online exploitation require cross-sector services, including not only legal

defense but also psychosocial support and social protection. Therefore, a clinic model that only offers legal services is often insufficient to ensure comprehensive access to justice. (National Legal Development Agency (BPHN), 2023)

Protection and recovery aspects demand a more holistic approach. Children who are victims of online exploitation typically experience psychological trauma, social pressure, and recurring risk if integrated interventions are not provided. Effective law clinics establish formal cooperation with mental health service providers, social services, and child protection agencies to ensure rehabilitation and reintegration are carried out thoroughly. Unfortunately, many clinics still lack systematic referral networks and strong follow-up mechanisms, resulting in interrupted recovery efforts before victims fully heal. (Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI), 2025)

Overall, it can be concluded that child law clinics have significant capacity to assist children who are victims of online exploitation, particularly in providing initial access to legal aid and advocacy for rights. However, their effectiveness is limited by several factors: the small number of services specializing in cybercrime cases, the shortage of legal professionals with digital forensic expertise, minimal cross-sector integration, and funding and infrastructure constraints. To enhance the performance of child law clinics, strategic steps are necessary: expanding the network of clinics focused on online child protection, increasing training for advocates and staff on cybercrime and digital evidence handling, establishing integrated referral protocols with social and health services, and strengthening awareness campaigns so that victims and their families know about available services.

With strengthened institutional capacity and closer collaboration among stakeholders, child law clinics can evolve from merely providing legal consultation into comprehensive service centers capable of ensuring that victims' rights are fulfilled, access to justice is smooth, and recovery processes are implemented holistically and sustainably.

Factors Affecting the Effectiveness of Child Law Clinic Services

The success of child law clinics in providing free legal aid to victims of online exploitation is influenced by a variety of internal and external factors. One of the most decisive factors is the quality of legal accompaniment: advocates and staff who can provide precise technical guidance, prepare documents and evidence, and advocate for the child's interests throughout legal proceedings will increase the victim's sense of security and the likelihood of fair case resolution. High-quality accompaniment goes

beyond information provision; it involves proactive engagement throughout both litigation and non-litigation stages.

The team's ability to understand the specific needs of children is a second critical factor. Victims of online exploitation often experience trauma and communication difficulties that require special approaches, such as age-appropriate language, child-friendly methods, and sensitivity to signs of stress or retraumatization. Staff with psychosocial awareness and child-centered communication skills can minimize the psychological burden on victims during legal processes and enhance their participation in case resolution.

Resource availability also determines the scope and quality of services. Clinics supported by adequate facilities, proper consultation spaces, access to technology (e.g., for collecting digital evidence), referral networks, and operational budgets are better able to handle cases comprehensively. The presence of a multidisciplinary team (psychologists, social workers, digital forensic experts) strengthens the clinic's response to victims' comprehensive needs; conversely, limited budgets and facilities constrain follow-up and referral capabilities.

Additionally, effectiveness depends on cooperation with law enforcement agencies and other stakeholders. Good coordination with police, prosecutors, courts, social services, and health organizations facilitates evidence collection, ensures child witness protection, and accelerates referral mechanisms. Without a strong coordination network, accompaniment efforts tend to be fragmented, and responses to recovery needs are inadequate.

Other supporting factors include specific professional competencies, such as experience in handling child and cybercrime cases, and the involvement of the victim's family in the recovery process. Proper family support helps strengthen the child's engagement and the smooth progression of legal processes. From a policy perspective, the existence of operational guidelines, child protection standards, and clear regulations provides a foundational framework for clinic actions, making service practices more consistent and legally safeguarded.

In summary, the effectiveness of child law clinics is the result of the interaction between the quality of legal accompaniment, staff sensitivity to child needs, availability of resources and multidisciplinary teams, cross-agency partnerships, specific competencies, family support, and regulatory foundations. Simultaneous strengthening in these areas is necessary for clinics to function as free legal aid

providers that are truly responsive, protected, and sustainable for children who are victims of online exploitation.

Implementation of a Holistic, Child-Centered Legal Service Model in Child Law Clinics

Advances in information technology have brought new forms of crime against children, particularly sexual exploitation in the digital realm. In Indonesia, the trend of such cases has not only increased in number but also become more complex in terms of offender patterns. Children are highly vulnerable due to limited understanding of digital risks, socio-economic vulnerabilities, and weaknesses in protection systems that do not fully prioritize the best interests of the child. In this context, Child Law Clinics hold a strategic position to provide services that go beyond formal legal action, addressing social and psychological aspects of the victims as well.

A holistic, child-centered legal service model adopts a multidimensional approach: integrating legal handling, social support, psychological recovery, and preventive education into a unified service sequence. Such services do not only focus on litigation or legal advocacy but also provide recovery interventions such as trauma counseling, social reintegration programs, and family capacity building. ((KemenPPPA), 2022) Victims are thus treated as individuals requiring comprehensive rehabilitation rather than merely legal subjects.

Structurally, common obstacles in handling online exploitation cases include weak inter-institutional synergy among law enforcement and child protection agencies, limited experts familiar with digital child crimes, and absence of rapid response mechanisms. Child Law Clinics that implement a holistic model can mitigate these issues by forming cross-disciplinary teams consisting of advocates, psychologists, social workers, and academics. Through interdisciplinary case handling, each follow-up action is tailored to the child's specific needs, ensuring that legal, social, and psychological aspects are addressed simultaneously from the outset. (Simanjuntak, 2021)

Social issues, such as stigma, often worsen the condition of victims, leading to shame, isolation, or discrimination after personal content is circulated. Clinics with child-friendly approaches create a safe and supportive environment, encouraging victims to report without fear of blame. This approach aligns with non-judgmental service ethics and restorative justice principles, providing space for recovery and fulfillment of victims' rights. (Rahmawati, 2020)

The psychological impact on victims of digital exploitation is often severe: long-lasting trauma, anxiety disorders, depression, and identity issues. Therefore, legal handling alone is insufficient; integration of psychological services such as trauma counseling and forensic psychology oriented toward rehabilitation is required. This approach aligns with the concept of therapeutic jurisprudence, which uses legal processes as a means of recovery while considering the victim's mental well-being alongside law enforcement. (Nugroho, 2021)

In addition to case handling, prevention through digital literacy is an important part of the holistic model. Child Law Clinics can initiate educational programs for children, families, and communities on the risks of online exploitation, ways to protect personal data, and reporting mechanisms in case of violations. Outreach activities involving schools and community organizations strengthen a sustainable preventive protection system. (Fitriani, 2023)

At the policy level, implementing a child-centered service model supports the realization of a child-friendly justice system that meets international standards as mandated by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and domestic child protection regulations. Effective Child Law Clinics can serve as change agents, driving reform in child legal services in Indonesia while reinforcing the link between law enforcement and social-psychological recovery for victims. (Programme, 2024)

In short, the holistic, child-centered legal service model in Child Law Clinics offers a comprehensive approach to address structural, social, and psychological challenges faced by victims of digital exploitation. Through multisectoral collaboration, professional capacity building, and clear policy support, this model can bridge the gap between legal enforcement and victim recovery, providing more humane and effective protection in the digital era.

CONCLUSION

The rapid development of digital technology in Indonesia has created both opportunities and new challenges for child protection, particularly in the context of increasingly complex online exploitation. In addressing these issues, Child Law Clinics play a vital role as protective instruments, providing free legal aid services alongside social and psychological support for children who are victims of digital crimes. The holistic and child-friendly approach implemented by these clinics ensures that legal processes are not solely focused on case resolution but also on the comprehensive recovery of victims. Law clinics act as a bridge between the rigid formal legal system

and the humanitarian needs of children, requiring care that is safe, equitable, and responsive. Through multidisciplinary collaboration involving advocates, psychologists, social workers, and academics, clinics are able to provide more comprehensive protection and address structural, social, and psychological barriers that often prevent victims from accessing justice.

However, the effectiveness of Child Law Clinics in fulfilling their role is still influenced by several factors, including limitations in human resources, infrastructure, funding, and inter-agency coordination. The holistic, child-centered legal service model must be continuously strengthened by enhancing professional competence in child law and digital crime, expanding service networks to remote areas, and integrating cross-sector referral systems. By strengthening synergy among legal, social, and psychological aspects, Child Law Clinics can evolve into restorative justice-based child protection centers focused on well-being. Therefore, implementing a holistic and child-friendly legal service model is not only a solution to the challenges of digital exploitation but also a crucial foundation for establishing a more humane, adaptive, and equitable child protection system in the modern technological era.

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