

When Legal Aid Does Not Reach Them: Access to Justice for Women Victims of Domestic Violence in East Lombok Regency

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Abstract

Women experiencing domestic violence face legal challenges extending beyond the prosecution of perpetrators to include access to information, legal assistance, protection, and recovery services. At the local level, economic dependence, family relationships, social stigma, and limited institutional services may significantly influence victims' decisions to report violence. This study aims to examine barriers to justice faced by women victims of domestic violence in East Lombok Regency and to evaluate the responses of legal institutions and available support services. A socio-legal approach is adopted by combining legal analysis with empirical research involving victims or their advocates, law-enforcement officials, legal-aid organizations, and relevant service providers. The study argues that the existence of protective legislation does not automatically guarantee substantive access to justice. Geographic distance, financial costs, economic dependency, stigma, and limited legal literacy may create multiple and overlapping barriers. Effective protection requires stronger inter-institutional coordination, accessible legal-aid services, victim-centered procedures, and recovery mechanisms that account for victims' social and economic circumstances. The study highlights the importance of narrowing the gap between formally guaranteed rights and victims' lived experiences. It further suggests that local justice policies should move beyond a purely punitive approach toward an integrated framework combining protection, legal empowerment, and sustainable recovery.

[Perempuan yang mengalami kekerasan dalam rumah tangga menghadapi tantangan hukum yang meluas melampaui penuntutan pelaku hingga mencakup akses terhadap informasi, bantuan hukum, perlindungan, dan layanan pemulihan. Di tingkat lokal, ketergantungan ekonomi, hubungan keluarga, stigma sosial, dan keterbatasan layanan kelembagaan dapat secara signifikan memengaruhi keputusan korban untuk melaporkan kekerasan. Studi ini bertujuan untuk meneliti hambatan terhadap keadilan yang dihadapi oleh perempuan korban kekerasan dalam rumah tangga di Kabupaten Lombok Timur dan untuk mengevaluasi respons lembaga hukum dan layanan dukungan yang tersedia. Pendekatan sosial-hukum diadopsi dengan

menggabungkan analisis hukum dengan penelitian empiris yang melibatkan korban atau pendukung mereka, petugas penegak hukum, organisasi bantuan hukum, dan penyedia layanan terkait. Studi ini berpendapat bahwa keberadaan undang-undang perlindungan tidak secara otomatis menjamin akses substantif terhadap keadilan. Jarak geografis, biaya finansial, ketergantungan ekonomi, stigma, dan keterbatasan literasi hukum dapat menciptakan berbagai hambatan yang saling tumpang tindih. Perlindungan yang efektif membutuhkan koordinasi antarlembaga yang lebih kuat, layanan bantuan hukum yang mudah diakses, prosedur yang berpusat pada korban, dan mekanisme pemulihan yang mempertimbangkan keadaan sosial dan ekonomi korban. Studi ini menyoroti pentingnya mempersempit kesenjangan antara hak-hak yang dijamin secara formal dan pengalaman hidup korban. Selain itu, hal ini juga menyarankan bahwa kebijakan peradilan lokal harus bergerak melampaui pendekatan yang semata-mata bersifat menghukum menuju kerangka kerja terintegrasi yang menggabungkan perlindungan, pemberdayaan hukum, dan pemulihan berkelanjutan.]

Keywords: domestic violence, women, access to justice, legal aid, victim protection

Introduction

Domestic violence is not merely a private family problem but a serious violation of human rights, gender equality, personal security, and human dignity. International research consistently demonstrates that intimate-partner violence represents one of the most widespread forms of violence against women and may include physical, sexual, psychological, and controlling behavior (Heise 1998; Stark 2007; World Health Organization 2013). The World Health Organization has emphasized that violence against women is both a public-health problem and a human-rights violation, while intimate-partner violence constitutes a substantial proportion of the violence experienced by women worldwide (World Health Organization 2021). The persistence of domestic violence therefore requires legal systems to address not only criminal accountability but also prevention, protection, legal assistance, health care, psychosocial recovery, and socioeconomic empowerment.

Indonesia has established a specific legal framework for addressing domestic violence through Law Number 23 of 2004 concerning the Elimination of Domestic Violence. The statute recognizes domestic violence as a form of violence that must be eliminated and establishes provisions concerning victims' rights, government responsibilities, protection, recovery, and criminal sanctions. The law is significant because it rejects the idea that violence occurring within households should be treated exclusively as a private matter. It also establishes principles of human-rights protection, gender equality, nondiscrimination, and victim protection. Nevertheless, the existence of legislation does not automatically guarantee effective

access to justice. The central challenge lies in translating formal rights into practical institutional assistance that victims can actually reach and use.

Access to justice should consequently be understood more broadly than the ability to bring a case before a court. Cappelletti and Garth conceptualize access to justice as a fundamental objective of legal systems and emphasize that formal rights are insufficient when individuals cannot effectively use legal institutions (1978). Rhode similarly demonstrates that economic, institutional, informational, and social barriers can prevent disadvantaged groups from benefiting from legal rights (2004). For women experiencing domestic violence, these barriers may be intensified by dependence upon perpetrators, fear of retaliation, childcare responsibilities, family pressure, social stigma, limited knowledge of legal remedies, and lack of independent income. The decision not to report violence should therefore not automatically be interpreted as consent, forgiveness, or lack of interest in justice.

The problem is particularly significant in rural and semi-rural areas. Geographical distance from courts, police offices, hospitals, shelters, and legal-aid organizations can create practical obstacles for victims who lack private transportation or financial resources. Research on access to justice among vulnerable communities in Janapria Village, Central Lombok, found that low legal literacy, economic constraints, unequal distribution of legal-aid services, and cultural factors limited engagement with formal legal institutions (Ramdani and Lestari 2024). Although Central Lombok differs administratively from East Lombok, the findings demonstrate the importance of examining access to justice through a local socio-legal perspective rather than assuming that national legal institutions are equally accessible across geographical settings.

Domestic violence is also strongly influenced by the social environment in which victims live. In communities where marriage and family relationships are regarded as matters that should be protected from outside intervention, victims may face pressure to preserve family unity even when violence has become recurrent. Research on Indonesia has identified stigma, family expectations, limited information, and unequal institutional access as factors that can discourage women from reporting domestic violence (Arief 2017; Wicaksono, Soebiakto, and Arifin 2021). The problem is therefore not simply whether a woman knows that violence is prohibited. She must also believe that reporting is safe, that institutions will take her seriously, that legal assistance will be available, and that she can survive economically and socially after leaving an abusive relationship.

East Lombok Regency provides an important setting for examining these issues because rural social structures, family networks, economic dependence, and geographical conditions can shape women's interactions with legal institutions. The study does not assume that local culture is inherently responsible for domestic violence. Rather, it examines how social expectations, institutional arrangements, and economic circumstances may interact with the formal legal system. A socio-legal perspective is particularly useful because domestic violence is simultaneously

a legal problem, a social relationship, an economic problem, and a question of gendered power. Focusing exclusively on criminal law would therefore provide only a partial understanding of why some victims reach formal justice mechanisms while others remain outside them.

This study addresses three principal questions. First, what barriers prevent women victims of domestic violence in East Lombok from accessing justice and legal aid? Second, how do law-enforcement institutions, legal-aid organizations, local government, and community-based actors respond to these barriers? Third, what institutional framework could improve substantive access to justice while protecting victims' safety, autonomy, and socioeconomic interests? The study argues that access to justice requires more than the existence of protective legislation. It requires a coordinated ecosystem in which legal information, legal aid, emergency protection, health services, psychosocial assistance, and economic recovery are available through accessible and victim-centered mechanisms.

Conceptual Framework

1. Access to Justice as Substantive Equality

Access to justice is frequently misunderstood as synonymous with access to courts. Such an interpretation is too narrow for victims of domestic violence because the legal process begins before litigation and continues after a judicial decision. Cappelletti and Garth argue that access to justice concerns the capacity of individuals to obtain effective remedies through legal systems rather than merely possessing formal legal rights (1978). Sen's capability approach provides an additional perspective by emphasizing people's actual ability to achieve outcomes that they have reason to value (1999). Applied to domestic violence, a woman may technically possess the right to report violence, request protection, obtain legal assistance, and seek divorce, yet these rights have limited practical value if she lacks transportation, money, information, safety, or social support.

Substantive access to justice therefore requires attention to the conditions under which legal rights become usable. Rhode emphasizes that barriers to justice include financial costs, complexity, lack of information, institutional procedures, and unequal distribution of legal resources (2004). These barriers are particularly serious for women experiencing violence because the perpetrator may control household income, mobility, communication, and social relationships. The victim may therefore face a paradox: the law provides a pathway to protection, but using that pathway may itself create economic and social risks. Effective justice policy must consequently address both legal and non-legal barriers.

Gender also matters because apparently neutral legal institutions may produce unequal consequences. Feminist legal scholars have demonstrated that law can reproduce social inequalities when it fails to account for women's lived experiences and structural dependency (MacKinnon 1989; Fineman 1995). Domestic violence law must therefore recognize that victims may not behave like autonomous legal actors making decisions under conditions of equality. A victim

may return to an abusive household because she has nowhere else to live, lacks income, fears losing her children, or faces pressure from relatives. Understanding such decisions is essential to designing meaningful legal protection.

2. Domestic Violence as a Gendered Form of Power

Domestic violence should be analyzed through the concept of power rather than solely through isolated incidents of physical aggression. Stark's theory of coercive control demonstrates that domestic abuse can involve patterns of intimidation, isolation, surveillance, economic restriction, and control that gradually undermine a victim's autonomy (2007). This perspective is important because legal systems often focus on individual incidents, while victims may experience violence as a continuing pattern. A woman may therefore seek assistance not because of one physical assault but because the cumulative effect of threats, financial control, psychological abuse, and social isolation has made her life unsafe.

Heise's ecological framework further explains that violence results from interactions between individual, relational, community, and societal factors (1998). At the individual level, personal histories and attitudes may influence vulnerability or perpetration. At the relationship level, unequal power and economic dependency may increase risk. At the community level, social isolation, unemployment, and weak institutional support may shape the prevalence and consequences of violence. At the societal level, gender inequality and norms that legitimize male authority may contribute to the persistence of abuse. This framework is useful for East Lombok because it prevents the analysis from blaming either individual victims or local culture in isolation.

The gendered dimension of domestic violence also influences institutional responses. Historically, violence occurring inside households has sometimes been treated as a family dispute rather than a criminal or human-rights matter. Arief observes that Indonesia's Domestic Violence Law was introduced partly because domestic violence had long been treated as an insufficiently visible problem despite its serious consequences for women (2017). The transition from private dispute to public legal concern is therefore an important aspect of Indonesia's legal development. Yet changing legislation does not necessarily transform institutional attitudes immediately. Police officers, village officials, relatives, and community leaders may continue to interpret violence through reconciliation-oriented frameworks.

3. Indonesian Legal Framework

Law Number 23 of 2004 provides the central statutory framework for domestic violence in Indonesia. The law establishes principles based on human rights, justice, gender equality, nondiscrimination, and victim protection. It also recognizes several forms of domestic violence and regulates victim rights, government and community obligations, protection mechanisms, recovery, and

criminal sanctions. The significance of the statute lies in its rejection of the assumption that domestic violence should remain within the private sphere. By defining state responsibilities, the legislation transforms domestic violence into a matter of public legal concern. Nevertheless, its effectiveness depends upon the availability of institutions capable of implementing these rights.

Victim protection under the domestic-violence framework cannot be separated from legal aid. Law Number 16 of 2011 concerning Legal Aid establishes the state's responsibility to provide legal assistance for eligible persons, particularly poor people, as part of the constitutional guarantee of equal treatment before the law. The statute regulates recipients, providers, procedures, financing, and institutional responsibilities. For women experiencing domestic violence, however, poverty cannot be understood exclusively through household income. A woman may live in a household that appears economically stable while lacking independent access to money because the perpetrator controls household finances. Legal-aid assessment should therefore be sensitive to economic dependency and the practical circumstances of victims.

The legal framework has also developed through Law Number 31 of 2014 amending the Witness and Victim Protection Law. Protection mechanisms are important because reporting domestic violence can expose victims to retaliation, intimidation, or renewed violence. Legal assistance without physical and psychological safety may therefore be insufficient. The state's obligations should be understood as requiring a continuum of protection, beginning with safe reporting and continuing through investigation, prosecution, adjudication, and recovery. A victim-centered justice system must consequently coordinate legal protection with health, shelter, psychosocial, and social services.

Law Number 12 of 2022 concerning Sexual Violence Crimes further strengthens Indonesia's victim-centered legal architecture, particularly in relation to sexual violence, victim protection, recovery, and intergovernmental coordination. Although not every domestic-violence case falls within the scope of the Sexual Violence Crimes Law, the statute provides a broader policy orientation emphasizing protection and recovery rather than prosecution alone. Its approach reinforces the proposition that legal responses to gender-based violence should integrate criminal justice with victim services.

Indonesia's international obligations also provide an important normative foundation. Indonesia ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women through Law Number 7 of 1984. CEDAW requires states to address discrimination against women and establish effective protection of women's rights. General Recommendation No. 19 of the CEDAW Committee recognized violence against women as a form of discrimination, while General Recommendation No. 35 further developed the state's obligations regarding gender-based violence against women (CEDAW Committee 1992, 2017). These international principles reinforce the idea that domestic violence is not merely a family dispute but a manifestation of structural gender inequality.

Methods

This study adopts a socio-legal research approach combining normative legal analysis and qualitative empirical inquiry. The approach is appropriate because the research investigates the gap between formal legal guarantees and women's actual experiences in accessing justice. The normative component examines Law Number 23 of 2004 concerning the Elimination of Domestic Violence, Law Number 16 of 2011 concerning Legal Aid, Law Number 31 of 2014 concerning amendments to the Witness and Victim Protection Law, Law Number 12 of 2022 concerning Sexual Violence Crimes, relevant regulations concerning victim services, constitutional provisions, and international human-rights instruments. The empirical component focuses on women victims or their advocates, legal-aid providers, police officers, prosecutors, local-government officials, village actors, health workers, and representatives of organizations providing protection or psychosocial assistance. Primary information is obtained through semi-structured interviews, while secondary information consists of legislation, judicial materials, institutional reports, academic publications, and relevant local studies.

The empirical research uses purposive sampling to identify participants with direct knowledge of domestic-violence cases and institutional responses. Interviews are designed to explore five principal dimensions: knowledge of legal rights, reporting experiences, access to legal aid, institutional treatment, and post-reporting protection and recovery. The study uses thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns relating to economic dependence, geographical accessibility, family pressure, stigma, legal literacy, institutional responsiveness, and service coordination. Triangulation is conducted by comparing accounts from victims or advocates with information obtained from institutional actors and documentary sources. Because domestic violence is a sensitive subject, ethical safeguards are essential. Participation must be voluntary, informed consent must be obtained, personal identities must be protected, and interviews must avoid creating additional risks for participants. The research does not treat non-reporting as evidence of unwillingness to seek justice; instead, it interprets non-reporting within the broader structural and social conditions surrounding victims' choices.

Results and Discussion

1. The Gap between Legal Rights and Practical Access

The first major finding concerns the difference between formal entitlement and practical accessibility. Indonesian law provides women victims of domestic violence with rights to protection, legal assistance, and recovery, but rights are meaningful only when victims can identify and use the relevant institutions. This problem reflects the broader distinction between formal and substantive equality. A legal system can be formally available to everyone while remaining practically inaccessible to people with limited resources. Research concerning legal aid for domestic-violence victims in Indonesia has similarly found that access remains

uneven, partly because victims are insufficiently exposed to information concerning available legal assistance (Wicaksono, Soebiakto, and Arifin 2021).

Legal literacy is therefore an important component of access to justice. A victim must know that domestic violence is prohibited, understand that she can report it, know where to report, and understand what forms of protection may be requested. However, legal literacy should not be reduced to knowledge of statutory provisions. Victims also need practical information concerning transportation, evidence, medical documentation, legal-aid organizations, protection mechanisms, shelters, and possible consequences of reporting. Without such information, the law remains distant from everyday experience. The challenge is especially significant in rural communities where institutional information may circulate through informal networks rather than formal public channels.

2. Economic Dependence as a Barrier to Justice

Economic dependency represents one of the most significant barriers to reporting domestic violence. A woman who relies on her husband for food, housing, children's education, transportation, or health expenses may perceive legal action as threatening her family's economic survival. The decision to report therefore involves a calculation that extends beyond legal rights. Even when the victim understands that violence is unlawful, she may fear losing access to household resources. This phenomenon is consistent with research showing that economic inequality and dependency can constrain women's ability to leave abusive relationships (Anderson and Saunders 2003; Stark 2007).

Economic barriers also affect access to legal institutions after reporting. Transportation costs, documentation expenses, medical costs, childcare, and time away from employment can accumulate throughout a legal process. For poor victims, even apparently small expenses may be significant. Law Number 16 of 2011 addresses this structural problem by establishing state-supported legal aid for eligible recipients. Yet legal aid alone cannot solve the problem if victims lack housing, income, childcare, or protection. A victim-centered system should therefore connect legal assistance with social protection and economic empowerment.

The problem becomes particularly serious when perpetrators control the victim's access to money. Economic abuse can itself form part of a broader pattern of coercive control. A victim may be prevented from working, denied access to bank accounts, or required to surrender her earnings. These practices reduce her ability to seek assistance independently. Financial independence should therefore be treated as part of violence-prevention and recovery policy rather than as a separate socioeconomic issue. Legal protection becomes more effective when victims have realistic alternatives to remaining economically dependent upon perpetrators.

3. Geography and Institutional Distance

Geographical accessibility represents another important barrier in rural areas. Courts, police stations, legal-aid organizations, hospitals, shelters, and government service centers may be concentrated in urban or administrative centers. A woman living in a remote village may therefore need considerable time and money to access multiple institutions. This creates a structural distinction between the existence of a service and its actual accessibility. A legal-aid organization may technically serve an entire regency while remaining practically inaccessible to victims who cannot travel to its office.

Research in Central Lombok provides useful evidence concerning this broader rural access problem. Ramdani and Lestari found that vulnerable communities in Janapria faced barriers involving legal literacy, economic limitations, uneven legal-aid distribution, and cultural factors (2024). Although the research does not specifically focus on East Lombok domestic violence, its findings support the argument that rural access to justice requires decentralized and community-based mechanisms. The same principle should be applied to domestic-violence services.

Mobile legal-aid clinics, village-level paralegals, referral networks, and integrated service points can reduce institutional distance. Digital services may also improve access to information, but digitalization should not be treated as a complete solution. Women experiencing domestic violence may not control their phones or internet access, and perpetrators may monitor communication. Digital systems must therefore be designed around confidentiality and safety. Physical community-based services remain essential, particularly for women facing economic or technological limitations.

4. Stigma, Family Pressure, and the Culture of Silence

Social stigma constitutes a powerful barrier because domestic violence may be interpreted as a family matter that should not be exposed to outsiders. Victims may fear being blamed for marital problems, losing social status, damaging children's reputations, or being accused of failing to maintain the household. Such concerns can discourage reporting even when violence is severe. International research demonstrates that social norms and fear of stigma are important factors influencing women's help-seeking behavior (Jewkes 2002; Garcha-Moreno et al. 2005). In Indonesia, research similarly indicates that cultural expectations and limited legal awareness may discourage victims from accessing formal institutions (Arief 2017; Ramdani and Lestari 2024).

Family pressure can produce a particularly difficult form of informal justice. Relatives may encourage reconciliation because they prioritize family continuity or fear social consequences. Reconciliation itself is not inherently problematic when freely chosen by a victim in safe circumstances. The difficulty arises when reconciliation becomes an institutional substitute for protection or criminal accountability. A victim may be pressured to withdraw a complaint without

receiving adequate guarantees that violence will cease. Legal institutions should therefore distinguish voluntary restorative processes from coercive reconciliation.

The persistence of silence also affects official statistics. Reported cases do not necessarily represent the actual prevalence of domestic violence. The WHO has emphasized that violence against women is significantly underreported because of stigma, fear, and difficulties in obtaining reliable data. Indonesia's Komnas Perempuan similarly identifies limitations in violence-against-women documentation and emphasizes the importance of strengthening data systems. Its CATAHU 2024 recorded 330,097 cases of gender-based violence against women reported through available mechanisms, while also stressing that changes in reporting and documentation influence the recorded numbers.

5. Victim Treatment within Formal Institutions

The treatment victims receive when they first approach an institution can strongly influence whether they continue pursuing justice. A victim who feels disbelieved, blamed, pressured to reconcile, or required to repeatedly recount traumatic experiences may withdraw from the process. Access to justice therefore includes not only physical access to institutions but also respectful and trauma-informed treatment. Arief's analysis of the implementation of Indonesia's Domestic Violence Law identified concerns regarding law-enforcement responses and the persistence of perceptions that domestic violence belongs within the private sphere (2017).

Victim-centered procedures require institutions to minimize unnecessary repetition, protect confidentiality, provide understandable information, and explain available options. Police officers and other officials should recognize that trauma can influence how victims recall events. A fragmented or inconsistent narrative should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of dishonesty. Similarly, victims should not be required to demonstrate extraordinary levels of resistance before their claims are taken seriously. The institutional objective should be to establish facts while protecting the dignity and safety of the complainant.

The importance of institutional treatment is also connected to procedural justice. Tyler argues that individuals are more likely to perceive legal institutions as legitimate when they experience procedures as fair, respectful, and neutral (1990). This insight is particularly relevant to domestic violence because victims may already distrust institutions. A respectful first response can strengthen confidence in the legal system, while dismissive treatment may reinforce the belief that reporting is pointless. Institutional legitimacy is therefore part of effective victim protection.

6. The Role of Legal Aid

Legal aid can serve as a bridge between formal legal rights and practical access to justice. Lawyers and trained paralegals can explain legal options, assist with reporting, help prepare documentation, accompany victims during institutional procedures, and challenge unlawful or discriminatory treatment. Law

Number 16 of 2011 provides a national legal framework for state-supported legal aid and recognizes the responsibility of legal-aid providers to deliver assistance according to established standards.

However, legal aid should not be conceptualized narrowly as courtroom representation. For domestic-violence victims, early legal advice can be more important than litigation itself. A woman may need assistance in deciding whether and how to report, understanding protection options, preparing evidence, obtaining identity documents, dealing with divorce or child-custody issues, or securing economic rights. Legal aid should therefore be available at the earliest stage of the victim's interaction with the justice system.

Community-based paralegals can expand this function. They may be more geographically accessible than lawyers and can act as links between villages and formal legal institutions. Nevertheless, paralegals require adequate training, supervision, confidentiality obligations, and referral protocols. They should not substitute for qualified lawyers in complex legal matters. Their principal value lies in legal empowerment, early identification, referral, and assistance with navigating institutions.

7. Inter-Institutional Coordination

Domestic violence rarely fits within the jurisdiction of one institution. A victim may simultaneously require police protection, medical treatment, legal assistance, psychological support, safe housing, social protection, and assistance with children. Fragmented institutions can force victims to navigate multiple systems independently. This increases administrative burdens and may expose them repeatedly to traumatic experiences. WHO policy guidance emphasizes the importance of coordinated multisectoral responses involving health, social, legal, and community institutions (World Health Organization 2021).

At the local level, coordination should involve district government, police, health services, legal-aid organizations, women's organizations, village governments, and social-service providers. A clear referral mechanism can ensure that a victim does not need to identify every institution independently. For example, an initial report at a police station should trigger information concerning medical services, legal aid, emergency protection, and psychosocial support. Similarly, health workers who identify signs of domestic violence should have safe referral pathways while respecting confidentiality and informed consent.

Coordination should also include data governance. Institutions need sufficient information to coordinate services but must avoid unnecessary disclosure of victims' personal information. Confidentiality is particularly important in small communities where victims and service providers may know one another personally. Data-sharing protocols should therefore distinguish between information necessary for protection and information that could expose victims to stigma or retaliation.

8. Protection before Prosecution

A major policy problem arises when legal systems prioritize prosecution while treating protection as secondary. Criminal prosecution is important because perpetrators must be accountable, but prosecution alone does not necessarily make a victim safe. If a perpetrator returns to the same household during or after proceedings, the risk of repeated violence may remain. Law Number 23 of 2004 expressly includes provisions concerning protection and recovery, demonstrating that Indonesian law recognizes this broader responsibility.

Protection mechanisms should therefore be available from the earliest stage. Victims should receive clear information concerning emergency protection, safe accommodation, medical assistance, and mechanisms for reporting renewed threats. Protection should also be assessed dynamically because risk can increase after a perpetrator learns that the victim has reported the violence. A victim-centered system must therefore consider the possibility of retaliation and not assume that risk ends when a report is filed.

This approach requires stronger integration between criminal justice and social services. Police officers may be able to respond to immediate threats but cannot independently provide long-term housing or economic recovery. Social services may provide shelter but lack authority to enforce protection orders. Legal-aid organizations can represent victims but cannot independently guarantee physical safety. The effectiveness of protection therefore depends on institutional cooperation.

9. Recovery and Economic Empowerment

Justice should not end with prosecution. Domestic violence can produce physical injury, psychological trauma, economic loss, disruption of employment, and damage to family relationships. Victims may require long-term support even after criminal proceedings conclude. WHO guidance emphasizes that responses to violence should address health consequences and support women in accessing appropriate services (World Health Organization 2021). Recovery should therefore be regarded as an essential dimension of justice rather than an optional social-service function.

Economic recovery is especially important in cases involving financial dependency. A victim who leaves an abusive relationship without income may become vulnerable to homelessness or renewed dependency. Legal assistance should therefore be linked to social protection, vocational programs, livelihood assistance, and access to financial resources. Such programs should not be framed as charitable assistance but as mechanisms that enable women to exercise their rights and make meaningful decisions about their lives.

Recovery also includes social reintegration. Victims may face stigma after reporting or leaving a relationship. Community organizations can help create environments in which victims are not blamed for the perpetrator's conduct. Public education should emphasize that responsibility for violence lies with the

perpetrator, not the victim. Community-based interventions can therefore complement formal legal institutions by challenging norms that normalize violence.

10. The Role of Village Government and Community Institutions

Village government can become an important entry point for access to justice because it is geographically closer to residents than many formal legal institutions. Village officials may identify vulnerable women, disseminate information concerning legal rights, facilitate referrals, and connect victims with district-level services. However, village institutions should not be expected to resolve serious domestic violence through informal mediation alone. Their role should primarily be prevention, information, referral, and support, while criminal and protection matters remain within competent institutions.

Community leaders can also contribute to prevention by challenging norms that normalize violence. However, community involvement must be carefully designed because community pressure can either support victims or silence them. Leaders should be trained to recognize that domestic violence is not a matter in which family reconciliation should automatically take priority over safety. Where reconciliation is considered, it should be voluntary and should never replace emergency protection or formal remedies when serious violence has occurred.

Religious and civil-society organizations may provide additional support. Their involvement can be particularly important where victims trust community institutions more than formal government agencies. Such organizations can provide safe spaces, counseling, information, and referrals. The objective should be to create multiple pathways to assistance so that victims are not required to begin with the police if they are initially afraid to do so. Nevertheless, every alternative pathway should have a reliable connection to formal protection mechanisms.

11. Toward a Victim-Centered Justice Model

The findings support the development of a victim-centered local justice model consisting of five interconnected elements. First, legal information should be available at the village level through community education, paralegals, women's organizations, health workers, and digital information where safe. Second, legal aid should be geographically accessible and available at an early stage. Third, emergency protection should be integrated with reporting procedures. Fourth, victims should receive health and psychosocial services. Fifth, recovery should include socioeconomic empowerment. This model shifts the focus from the question "Has the perpetrator been prosecuted?" toward the broader question "Has the victim obtained safety, legal recognition, meaningful participation, and the capacity to rebuild her life?"

The model also requires one-stop referral mechanisms. A victim should not have to independently navigate police, hospitals, courts, legal-aid offices, shelters, and social services. One institution receiving the complaint should be capable of activating referrals to the others. Such coordination is consistent with WHO's

emphasis on multisectoral responses to violence against women. The system should also provide a case-management function to ensure that victims do not disappear from institutional attention after the initial report.

A second element is community legal empowerment. Legal empowerment differs from conventional legal education because it focuses on people's capacity to use law to improve their circumstances. Legal literacy programs should therefore use practical scenarios: what constitutes domestic violence, where to report, how to request protection, how to access legal aid, how to preserve evidence safely, and where to seek medical and psychological assistance. Such programs should be designed in accessible language and delivered through trusted local actors.

A third element is institutional accountability. Agencies should monitor how complaints are handled, how quickly protection is provided, whether victims receive information, and whether referrals are completed. Data should be disaggregated by location, type of violence, age, disability, and other relevant characteristics while preserving confidentiality. Monitoring should focus not only on the number of cases but also on outcomes. A high number of reports does not necessarily demonstrate an effective justice system if victims continue to experience violence or abandon proceedings because of institutional barriers.

12. Discussion

The central finding of this study is that legal aid may fail to reach victims not because the legal framework is entirely absent but because access is mediated through multiple social and institutional barriers. The formal framework established by Law Number 23 of 2004 is significant, but its practical impact depends on whether victims can reach institutions, understand their rights, obtain assistance, and remain safe throughout the process. This demonstrates the importance of distinguishing between legal availability and legal accessibility. A right existing on paper is insufficient when the social conditions necessary to exercise it are absent.

The East Lombok context reinforces the importance of a rural access perspective. Evidence from nearby Central Lombok indicates that vulnerable rural populations experience barriers related to legal literacy, economic limitations, service distribution, and social norms (Ramdani and Lestari 2024). These barriers should be considered interconnected rather than independent. Low income can make transportation difficult; geographical distance can reduce contact with legal organizations; limited information can prevent victims from knowing that assistance exists; and stigma can discourage them from seeking help even when services are technically available.

The study also demonstrates why criminal justice cannot be separated from socioeconomic policy. A woman who depends financially upon her abuser may face a practical dilemma between physical safety and economic survival. If legal intervention does not provide access to shelter, income support, childcare, and recovery services, the victim may return to the abusive household. Such a return should not automatically be interpreted as failure of the legal system by the victim.

Instead, it may reveal the inadequacy of a justice model that treats prosecution as the principal measure of success.

Legal aid should consequently be understood as an empowerment mechanism. Wicaksono, Soebiakto, and Arifin found that legal aid for domestic-violence victims in Indonesia remains uneven partly because information concerning available services does not adequately reach potential beneficiaries. This suggests that legal-aid organizations should not rely exclusively on office-based service delivery. Outreach, village-based paralegals, partnerships with health services, and cooperation with women's organizations can make legal assistance more visible and accessible.

The study further supports a distinction between access to institutions and access to justice. A victim may successfully file a police report but still fail to obtain justice if she experiences intimidation, repeated delays, lack of information, or inadequate protection. Similarly, a case may result in conviction while the victim remains economically vulnerable and psychologically traumatized. Access to justice should therefore be evaluated through a broader set of indicators, including safety, participation, legal assistance, procedural fairness, protection, and recovery.

Policy Recommendations

First, the East Lombok Regency Government should strengthen an integrated local referral system for domestic-violence victims. The system should connect village governments, police, health facilities, social services, legal-aid organizations, and psychosocial providers. Each institution should have clearly defined responsibilities and referral procedures. The objective is to ensure that a victim does not need to repeatedly explain her circumstances to multiple institutions or independently identify available services. Such integration would transform fragmented services into a coordinated protection system.

Second, legal aid should be brought closer to rural communities. Periodic legal-aid clinics should be established in villages or subdistrict centers, supported by trained paralegals who can identify cases and provide preliminary assistance. Law Number 16 of 2011 provides a legal foundation for state-supported legal aid, but local implementation should focus on practical accessibility. Funding mechanisms should recognize the additional costs of serving remote communities, including transportation and outreach.

Third, legal literacy programs should target women before violence becomes a crisis. Community education should explain legal rights, forms of domestic violence, reporting options, protection mechanisms, and available legal aid. Programs should involve women's organizations, health workers, village institutions, and other trusted community actors. Information should be delivered in accessible language and should not assume that literacy in formal legal terminology is sufficient.

Fourth, institutional training should emphasize trauma-informed and gender-responsive procedures. Police, prosecutors, health workers, social-service officers,

and village officials should understand patterns of coercive control, economic dependency, trauma, and victim-blaming. Training should also emphasize that reconciliation should never be imposed when it compromises victim safety. Institutional performance should be monitored through victim-centered indicators rather than case-processing numbers alone.

Fifth, local government should strengthen socioeconomic recovery programs. Victims should have access to temporary housing, employment assistance, vocational training, social protection, childcare, and financial support where necessary. These interventions can reduce economic dependency and increase victims' capacity to make autonomous decisions. Economic empowerment should be treated as part of violence prevention and access to justice rather than merely as a welfare program.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, because the research is designed as a socio-legal inquiry focusing on institutional and community barriers, its findings should not be interpreted as statistical estimates of domestic-violence prevalence in East Lombok. The number of cases reported to legal institutions cannot be assumed to represent the total number of incidents occurring within the community. Underreporting remains a major challenge in violence-against-women research, as international and Indonesian evidence demonstrates (World Health Organization 2021; Komnas Perempuan 2025). Future studies should therefore combine qualitative interviews with administrative and survey data.

Second, future research should examine the experiences of women with different socioeconomic and demographic backgrounds. Rural women, women with disabilities, women with limited education, women with young children, and economically dependent women may experience distinct barriers. Intersectional analysis is important because gender does not operate independently from poverty, disability, age, geography, and family status. A more detailed study could therefore identify which groups experience the greatest institutional obstacles and which interventions are most effective.

Third, comparative research between East Lombok and other regencies in West Nusa Tenggara would provide valuable insights. Comparing East Lombok with Central Lombok, West Lombok, and North Lombok could reveal whether differences in service infrastructure, village institutions, legal-aid availability, and local government policies influence women's access to justice. Comparative research could also identify effective local practices that might be institutionalized at the provincial level.

Conclusion

Domestic violence against women represents a complex legal and social problem in which formal legal rights frequently encounter substantial barriers in practice. Indonesia has established important legal protections through Law

Number 23 of 2004, Law Number 16 of 2011, the Witness and Victim Protection framework, and subsequent legislation concerning sexual violence. Nevertheless, the existence of these laws does not automatically produce substantive access to justice. Women in rural communities may continue to experience economic dependency, geographical distance, limited legal literacy, family pressure, stigma, and institutional barriers.

The central argument of this study is that access to justice must be understood as a process rather than a single institutional event. Reporting a complaint is only one stage. Justice also requires access to information, legal assistance, immediate protection, fair procedures, health care, psychosocial support, and sustainable recovery. A victim who can report violence but cannot obtain safe housing or economic independence remains vulnerable. Similarly, a criminal conviction does not by itself resolve the social and economic consequences of domestic violence.

For East Lombok, the most appropriate policy direction is an integrated and victim-centered justice framework. Such a framework should bring legal aid closer to villages, strengthen community legal empowerment, establish reliable referral systems, improve institutional responsiveness, and connect legal protection with socioeconomic recovery. The role of village and community institutions should be strengthened without allowing informal reconciliation to replace legally required protection or criminal accountability.

Ultimately, the question is not whether Indonesia has laws protecting women from domestic violence. It clearly does. The more difficult question is whether those laws can be reached, understood, trusted, and effectively used by women whose social and economic circumstances make them vulnerable. Narrowing this gap between legal rights and lived experience should become a central objective of local justice policy. For women in East Lombok, meaningful access to justice requires a legal system that does not merely wait for victims to reach it but actively brings protection, information, assistance, and recovery mechanisms closer to them.

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