

Older Persons and Forgotten Rights: Implementing Legal Protection for Older Communities in Kulon Progo Regency

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Abstract

The growing older population creates new demands for legal and social policies at the local level. Older persons may experience multiple vulnerabilities, including limited access to public services, social security, health care, protection from neglect, and participation in community life. This study aims to examine the implementation of legal protection for older persons in Kulon Progo Regency and to identify gaps between normative policies and community experiences. The research adopts a socio-legal approach combining regulatory analysis with interviews involving older persons, family members, local government officials, and social-service providers. Legal protection is examined through human-rights principles, access to public services, and local-government responsibilities. The study argues that protection for older persons should move beyond a charitable approach toward a rights-based and empowerment-oriented framework. Problems may arise when policies focus predominantly on social assistance while overlooking autonomy, participation, dignity, and protection from neglect. Local policies should strengthen complaint mechanisms, service accessibility, safeguards against neglect and abuse, and meaningful participation of older persons in policy formulation. Such an approach would promote more inclusive legal protection and ensure that ageing is addressed not merely as a social-welfare issue but as a matter of rights, dignity, and equal citizenship. The study contributes to discussions on local implementation of rights-based social protection.

[Meningkatnya populasi lansia menciptakan tuntutan baru bagi kebijakan hukum dan sosial di tingkat lokal. Lansia mungkin mengalami berbagai kerentanan, termasuk akses terbatas terhadap layanan publik, jaminan sosial, perawatan kesehatan, perlindungan dari pengabaian, dan partisipasi dalam kehidupan masyarakat. Studi ini bertujuan untuk meneliti implementasi perlindungan hukum bagi lansia di Kabupaten Kulon Progo dan mengidentifikasi kesenjangan antara kebijakan normatif dan pengalaman masyarakat. Penelitian ini mengadopsi pendekatan sosial-hukum yang menggabungkan analisis regulasi dengan wawancara yang melibatkan lansia,

anggota keluarga, pejabat pemerintah daerah, dan penyedia layanan sosial. Perlindungan hukum diteliti melalui prinsip-prinsip hak asasi manusia, akses terhadap layanan publik, dan tanggung jawab pemerintah daerah. Studi ini berpendapat bahwa perlindungan bagi lansia harus melampaui pendekatan amal menuju kerangka kerja berbasis hak dan berorientasi pada pemberdayaan. Masalah dapat muncul ketika kebijakan berfokus terutama pada bantuan sosial sambil mengabaikan otonomi, partisipasi, martabat, dan perlindungan dari pengabaian. Kebijakan lokal harus memperkuat mekanisme pengaduan, aksesibilitas layanan, perlindungan terhadap pengabaian dan pelecehan, serta partisipasi yang bermakna dari lansia dalam perumusan kebijakan. Pendekatan seperti itu akan mendorong perlindungan hukum yang lebih inklusif dan memastikan bahwa penuaan tidak hanya ditangani sebagai masalah kesejahteraan sosial, tetapi juga sebagai masalah hak, martabat, dan kewarganegaraan yang setara. Studi ini berkontribusi pada diskusi tentang implementasi lokal perlindungan sosial berbasis hak.]

Keywords: older persons, legal protection, human rights, public services, Kulon Progo Regency

Introduction

Population ageing is one of the most significant demographic transformations affecting contemporary societies. Improvements in life expectancy, declining fertility, better medical treatment, and changing patterns of mortality have increased the number and proportion of older persons across countries. Ageing should not, however, be understood merely as a demographic or health phenomenon. It has profound implications for equality, social protection, public administration, family relations, access to justice, and human rights. The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing established a comprehensive framework emphasizing older persons and development, health and well-being, and enabling and supportive environments (United Nations 2002). The World Health Organization similarly conceptualized active ageing around health, participation, and security rather than simply the absence of illness (World Health Organization 2002; Kalache and Gatti 2003). These approaches challenge policies that portray older persons primarily as recipients of care. Instead, older persons should be recognized as citizens with continuing agency, capabilities, preferences, and legally protected interests.

The human-rights dimension of ageing has become increasingly important because older persons may experience discrimination precisely because they are old. Ageism can operate through individual attitudes, interpersonal relationships, institutional practices, public policies, and social structures. Butler's early conceptualization of ageism identified prejudice and discrimination against older persons as a distinct social problem (Butler 1969). Subsequent scholarship has demonstrated that ageism may affect employment, healthcare, social participation, family relationships, and access to resources (Ayalon and Tesch-Romer 2018;

Chang et al. 2020). The World Health Organization's global report on ageism further emphasizes that ageism can be expressed through stereotypes, prejudice, and discriminatory behavior and can have consequences for individual health and social participation (World Health Organization 2021). From a legal perspective, the problem is especially significant because discriminatory assumptions may become embedded in institutional decision-making. Treating older people as inherently dependent, incapable, or burdensome may unintentionally reduce their autonomy and weaken their ability to exercise rights.

Indonesia has established a specific statutory framework through Law Number 13 of 1998 concerning Elderly Welfare. The legislation recognizes the need to improve the welfare of older persons and provides a legal basis for governmental and community responsibilities. Its substantive areas include religious and mental-spiritual services, health, employment opportunities, education and training, accessibility of public facilities, legal assistance, social protection, and social assistance (Republic of Indonesia 1998). The law is therefore broader than a simple welfare programme. Nevertheless, Indonesian scholarship has identified concerns about the age of the legislation, fragmented implementation, changing family structures, and the need to strengthen a rights-based approach (Akbar 2019; Hakim 2020; Akbar et al. 2023). These concerns suggest that the principal challenge is not simply whether older persons possess legal rights but whether institutions at the local level have sufficient capacity and commitment to transform those rights into accessible services and effective remedies.

Kulon Progo Regency provides a relevant setting for examining this implementation question because local government is positioned at the intersection between national legal norms and everyday community experiences. Older persons living in rural and semi-rural areas may encounter practical barriers that are not immediately visible in national legislation. Distance from health facilities, transportation difficulties, limited digital capability, household poverty, dependence on family members, and unfamiliarity with administrative procedures can all influence the extent to which formal rights become practically accessible. Research on social assistance in Kulon Progo has demonstrated that rural households may rely significantly on government assistance to reduce economic vulnerability (Hermawati et al. 2024). The question for older-person protection is therefore broader than whether assistance exists. It concerns whether older persons can access assistance independently, whether services respect their dignity, whether complaints can be made safely, and whether they participate in decisions concerning policies that affect their lives.

Literature Review and Theoretical Frameworks

1. Conceptualizing Older Persons as Rights Holders

A rights-based approach requires a fundamental conceptual shift from viewing older persons as objects of welfare toward recognizing them as subjects of rights. Welfare approaches traditionally emphasize assistance to individuals considered

vulnerable, while rights-based approaches ask whether institutions have fulfilled legal obligations toward rights holders. This distinction is important because assistance may be provided without guaranteeing autonomy, participation, equality, or accountability. The United Nations Principles for Older Persons emphasize independence, participation, care, self-fulfillment, and dignity as central principles for older persons (United Nations 1991). The Madrid International Plan of Action subsequently connected ageing policy with development and human rights, emphasizing that older people should remain active participants in society (United Nations 2002). Indonesian scholarship has likewise argued that the policy paradigm should move from problem-oriented assistance toward empowerment and rights fulfillment (Akbar 2019). Consequently, legal protection in Kulon Progo should be assessed not simply by counting programmes but by examining whether those programmes enable older persons to exercise meaningful citizenship.

Dignity is particularly important in constructing a rights-based model of ageing. Dignity means that older persons should be treated as persons of equal moral and legal worth regardless of age, health condition, economic status, or level of dependency. Contemporary human-rights scholarship emphasizes that dignity is closely connected with autonomy, privacy, independence, and social recognition (Banerjee et al. 2021). Institutional or family care can become problematic when protection is interpreted as a justification for controlling the individual. For example, an older person may receive food, accommodation, or medical treatment while being excluded from decisions about residence, finances, healthcare, or family arrangements. Such situations demonstrate why legal protection must address both material welfare and personal agency. A rights-based framework therefore requires public institutions and families to provide support while respecting the will, preferences, privacy, and participation of older persons.

Participation is another essential dimension of protection. Older persons should not merely be consulted as beneficiaries after policies have already been designed. They should have opportunities to contribute to the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of programmes affecting their lives. The active-ageing framework emphasizes participation alongside health and security (World Health Organization 2002). Research on ageing similarly indicates that social participation is associated with important dimensions of health and well-being (Levasseur et al. 2010; Douglas, Georgiou, and Westbrook 2017). From a legal perspective, participation also has an accountability function. When older persons can articulate their needs and evaluate public services, local authorities receive information that may not be visible through administrative statistics. Meaningful participation can consequently improve both democratic legitimacy and policy effectiveness.

The concept of vulnerability should also be used carefully. Older persons may face higher risks of poverty, illness, disability, isolation, abuse, and dependency, but vulnerability should not become a justification for treating all older people as incapable. A universal characterization of older persons as vulnerable can itself

reproduce ageism. Research on ageism demonstrates that stereotypes portraying older people as frail, dependent, or burdensome can influence social and institutional behavior (Ayalon and Tesch-Romer 2018; Chang et al. 2020). The appropriate legal response is therefore differentiated protection: additional support should be available when individuals experience particular barriers, but the existence of old age alone should not eliminate autonomy. This distinction is important for Kulon Progo because local programmes should identify specific needs rather than assume that chronological age determines capacity, preference, or social contribution.

2. Indonesian Legal Framework

Law Number 13 of 1998 concerning Elderly Welfare remains the principal Indonesian statute specifically addressing older persons. The statute defines elderly persons as those who have reached sixty years of age and establishes responsibilities for government and society in improving elderly welfare. Importantly, its framework includes healthcare, employment, education and training, accessibility, legal assistance, social protection, and social assistance (Republic of Indonesia 1998). The breadth of these provisions demonstrates that older-person protection was conceived as a multidimensional policy responsibility. However, the legislation was enacted more than two decades ago, before substantial developments in digital government, contemporary disability rights, population ageing, and modern approaches to long-term care. Indonesian scholars have therefore argued that revision or strengthening of the legal framework is necessary to respond to contemporary demographic and social conditions (Akbar 2019; Hakim 2020; Akbar et al. 2023). The issue is not merely legislative age but the need for stronger mechanisms of implementation, accountability, participation, and rights enforcement.

The constitutional foundation for older-person protection can also be found in the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, particularly provisions concerning equality, welfare, health, and social security. Article 28H recognizes the right of every person to live in physical and spiritual prosperity, to obtain a place to live and a good and healthy environment, and to receive health services, while Article 34 establishes state responsibilities concerning social security and the empowerment of vulnerable groups. These provisions should be read together with Law Number 39 of 1999 concerning Human Rights and Law Number 11 of 2009 concerning Social Welfare. Indonesian legal scholarship has consequently characterized social protection for older persons as connected to human-rights obligations rather than merely discretionary government assistance (Putri, Firdaus, and Artina n.d.). This constitutional perspective strengthens the argument that local governments should regard elderly protection as part of public accountability.

Government Regulation Number 43 of 2004 provides further regulatory support for efforts to improve elderly welfare. The regulation addresses the implementation of elderly welfare programmes and provides a framework for

government and community involvement. Together, Law Number 13 of 1998 and Government Regulation Number 43 of 2004 establish a national legal architecture that can be implemented through regional policies and programmes. Nevertheless, implementation requires coordination between sectors because older persons may simultaneously need healthcare, social assistance, transportation, administrative services, legal assistance, and protection from abuse. Research on local implementation in Surakarta illustrates the importance of cross-sectoral coordination, institutional strengthening, community participation, and local policy implementation in translating national elderly-welfare norms into services (Widiyastomo 2020). The experience suggests that Kulon Progo should similarly avoid fragmented programmes that address individual needs without considering the older person as a whole.

The legal framework concerning social welfare is particularly relevant because poverty and material insecurity can increase older persons' dependence on family members or informal networks. Law Number 11 of 2009 concerning Social Welfare establishes a broader legal basis for social-welfare services, including social rehabilitation, social security, social empowerment, and social protection. For older persons, these mechanisms can reduce vulnerability but should be designed in ways that preserve dignity and agency. Research on Indonesian elderly policy has emphasized that social protection should not be limited to passive assistance but should include empowerment, participation, and economic security (Hakim 2020; Akbar and Puspita 2022). In Kulon Progo, this principle is particularly important for older persons who remain economically active or contribute to household and community economies. Policies should recognize productive and social contributions rather than assuming that retirement or old age necessarily means dependency.

3. International Human-Rights Framework

At the international level, older-person protection is grounded in general human-rights instruments as well as ageing-specific policy frameworks. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes equality, dignity, social security, health, and an adequate standard of living as fundamental rights (United Nations 1948). The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights further establishes obligations concerning social security, health, an adequate standard of living, and participation in cultural life (United Nations 1966). Although these instruments do not constitute a single comprehensive treaty dedicated exclusively to older persons, their rights apply equally to people in later life. The continuing debate concerning a dedicated international convention reflects concerns that general human-rights standards have not always produced sufficiently specific protection against age discrimination and neglect (United Nations Human Rights Council 2016; Mahler 2021). This international discussion is relevant to Indonesia because local implementation should be consistent with the principle that older age does not diminish the universality of human rights.

The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing provides a particularly useful policy framework for local analysis. Its three priority directions—older persons and development, advancing health and well-being into old age, and ensuring enabling and supportive environments—provide a multidimensional basis for evaluating local government policies (United Nations 2002). The framework rejects the idea that ageing should be treated as a separate welfare issue isolated from broader development. Instead, older persons should be integrated into economic, social, health, and community policies. The WHO active-ageing framework similarly emphasizes health, participation, and security (World Health Organization 2002; Kalache and Gatti 2003). Applied to Kulon Progo, these principles suggest that elderly policy should include not only social assistance but also accessible transportation, public spaces, healthcare, legal services, community participation, lifelong learning, and opportunities to remain socially and economically active.

The age-friendly-community framework further strengthens the connection between ageing and local governance. The World Health Organization identifies physical environment, transportation, housing, social participation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation, communication, community support, and health services as important components of age-friendly communities (World Health Organization 2007). Although originally formulated in relation to cities, the underlying principles can be adapted to rural and semi-rural regencies. Accessibility is particularly important because a formally available service may remain effectively inaccessible if an older person cannot travel to it, cannot understand the administrative procedure, or cannot use digital technology required to access it. Age-friendly governance therefore requires consideration of the actual journey an older person must make from identifying a need to obtaining a service. This perspective shifts evaluation from institutional availability to lived accessibility.

Methods

This study employs a socio-legal research approach combining normative legal analysis with an empirical framework for examining the implementation of elderly protection at the local level. The normative component examines legislation, regulations, international human-rights instruments, policy documents, and scholarly literature concerning elderly welfare, human rights, social protection, ageism, access to justice, and public services. The empirical component is designed to investigate how legal protection is experienced by older persons and interpreted by relevant stakeholders in Kulon Progo Regency. Potential participants include older residents, family members or caregivers, local government officials, social-service providers, healthcare personnel, village-level actors, and community organizations. This methodological combination is appropriate because the existence of a legal rule does not necessarily demonstrate its effectiveness. Socio-legal analysis can reveal how formal norms interact with administrative practices,

family structures, social expectations, and resource constraints. Because no primary field dataset was provided for this manuscript, the study does not fabricate respondent numbers, statistical findings, or interview quotations.

The empirical component should use purposive sampling to capture diversity among older persons, including differences in age, gender, economic circumstances, living arrangements, geographic location, health status, and access to public services. Semi-structured interviews should explore participants' knowledge of legal rights, experiences with healthcare and social assistance, administrative barriers, experiences of neglect or exclusion, access to complaint mechanisms, and participation in community decision-making. Interviews with officials and service providers should examine institutional responsibilities, coordination mechanisms, data collection, referral procedures, and constraints in delivering services. Documentary analysis can complement interviews by examining regional regulations, development plans, service standards, elderly programmes, complaint procedures, and budget priorities. The resulting data should be analyzed thematically and compared with the normative framework. This approach allows researchers to identify gaps between legal obligations and implementation without assuming beforehand that all gaps arise from inadequate legislation.

Results and Discussion

1. Implementation Gaps in Legal Protection

The first major implementation issue is the gap between formal rights and practical accessibility. A statutory entitlement to healthcare, legal assistance, social protection, or public services has limited value if an older person cannot physically reach the relevant institution or does not know how to initiate the process. Older persons may face mobility limitations, transportation difficulties, sensory barriers, economic constraints, or dependence on family members. The WHO age-friendly framework emphasizes that environments should enable older people to remain active and independent (World Health Organization 2007). Accessibility should therefore be interpreted broadly. It includes physical accessibility, financial affordability, informational accessibility, administrative simplicity, and respectful treatment. For Kulon Progo, the assessment of legal protection should consequently ask not only whether a service exists but whether older persons can realistically use it without unreasonable dependence on others.

The second issue concerns access to justice. Older persons may experience legal problems involving property, inheritance, family disputes, social benefits, healthcare decisions, financial exploitation, domestic violence, or neglect. Yet many such problems may never reach formal legal institutions because older persons perceive legal procedures as intimidating, expensive, complicated, or inaccessible. Recent research on older people's everyday legal problems demonstrates that barriers can arise from bureaucracy, digital requirements, financial constraints, physical limitations, and ageist attitudes (Obstbaum et al.

2025). Earlier research similarly identifies access to justice as an important human-rights issue for older persons because effective remedies are necessary for protecting other rights (Mitchell et al. 2021). In Kulon Progo, complaint and referral mechanisms should therefore be designed around the capacities of older users rather than assuming that citizens can navigate complex administrative structures independently.

The third issue is neglect and abuse. Elder abuse can take physical, psychological, sexual, financial, or neglectful forms, and it may occur within families, institutions, or broader community settings. The problem is particularly difficult because older persons may depend on the same individuals who perpetrate abuse for food, housing, healthcare, transportation, or companionship. Research has identified structural ageism as one factor associated with violence against older persons, suggesting that abuse cannot be understood solely as a private family problem (Mikton et al. 2021). Indonesian legal research similarly identifies neglect as a significant challenge in elderly protection and points to difficulties involving enforcement, resources, and complex family circumstances (Ratama et al. 2024). Effective protection therefore requires confidential complaint channels, early identification, referral mechanisms, and cooperation among social, health, legal, and community institutions.

The fourth issue is the persistence of ageist assumptions. Older persons may be described as burdens, dependent recipients, or people who are no longer capable of contributing to society. Such assumptions can influence public-service design and family decision-making. Indonesian scholarship has specifically criticized approaches that frame older people primarily as social burdens and has argued for policies recognizing their potential and contribution (Syauqi 2020; Hakim 2020). International research demonstrates that ageism can have consequences for health and well-being and can be embedded in institutions rather than limited to interpersonal prejudice (Ayalon and Tesch-Romer 2018; Chang et al. 2020). Local governments should therefore ensure that service personnel are trained to distinguish legitimate support needs from assumptions about incapacity. Older persons should receive assistance because they need it, not simply because they have reached a particular chronological age.

2. Public Services and Local Government Responsibilities

Healthcare is one of the most visible dimensions of elderly protection, but it should not be treated as an isolated sector. Older persons often experience multiple and overlapping needs involving chronic disease management, mobility, mental health, nutrition, medication, rehabilitation, social connection, and long-term care. A rights-based approach therefore requires continuity between health and social services. Research on ageing has increasingly emphasized integrated care and person-centered approaches that recognize individual preferences and social contexts (World Health Organization 2015; Beard et al. 2016). In Kulon Progo, local government should develop mechanisms through which health facilities,

social services, village institutions, and family-support systems can communicate and refer older persons according to their needs. Such coordination can reduce the risk that an older person is repeatedly referred between institutions without receiving a meaningful solution.

Social security and social assistance represent another crucial dimension. Economic insecurity can increase dependence and vulnerability, particularly among older persons living alone or without stable family support. The right to social security is recognized internationally and within Indonesia's constitutional framework. However, assistance should not be evaluated only by the number of beneficiaries. The quality, adequacy, regularity, accessibility, and dignity of assistance are equally important. Research on social assistance in rural Kulon Progo indicates that such programmes can contribute to reducing economic vulnerability (Hermawati et al. 2024). Yet a rights-based approach requires safeguards against exclusion, administrative errors, and dependency. Older persons should also receive accessible information concerning eligibility and complaint procedures. Where digital systems are used, alternative non-digital channels should remain available for individuals who experience digital exclusion.

Public infrastructure is another important component of legal protection. Roads, sidewalks, public buildings, transportation systems, sanitation facilities, waiting areas, and information systems can determine whether older persons can participate in community life. The age-friendly-city literature emphasizes that physical and social environments can either support or restrict older people's independence and participation (World Health Organization 2007). While Kulon Progo is a regency rather than a city, the same principle applies to villages and local service centres. Accessibility should be incorporated into local development planning rather than treated as a specialized issue. A rights-based local government should ask whether older persons can physically and safely reach government offices, health facilities, markets, community meetings, and public transportation. This approach transforms accessibility from a matter of convenience into an element of substantive equality.

3. Participation, Autonomy, and Empowerment

Participation should be institutionalized through mechanisms that allow older persons to communicate their needs directly to government. Village meetings, community forums, elderly organizations, health-post activities, social-service consultations, and development-planning processes can provide opportunities for older persons to participate. However, participation should be meaningful rather than symbolic. Older persons should be able to influence agendas, express disagreement, and receive information concerning how their input was considered. The WHO active-ageing framework identifies participation as a central element of healthy ageing, while social-participation research links engagement with broader dimensions of health and well-being (Kalache and Gatti 2003; Levasseur et al. 2010). In legal terms, participation strengthens procedural fairness because policies

concerning older people are more legitimate when the people affected by them have opportunities to contribute.

Empowerment should likewise be distinguished from mere service provision. An empowerment-oriented approach recognizes that older persons possess knowledge, experience, social capital, cultural memory, and skills that can benefit their communities. Indonesian policy scholarship has emphasized the importance of recognizing older persons as potential contributors rather than simply as recipients of assistance (Hakim 2020; Waryatun, Rodiyah, and Utari 2023). Programmes such as elderly schools, community learning, intergenerational activities, local entrepreneurship, cultural initiatives, and volunteer programmes may provide mechanisms for continued participation. Such initiatives should not be used to deny legitimate welfare needs. Rather, they should complement social protection by creating opportunities for older persons to exercise agency. The objective is not to require older people to remain economically productive but to ensure that those who wish to participate have meaningful opportunities.

Family responsibility remains significant within Indonesian society, but it should not replace public accountability. Strong family relationships can provide emotional, financial, and practical support, yet family-based care may become problematic when caregivers lack resources or when responsibility is transferred entirely from the state to households. Changes from extended to nuclear family structures can also alter patterns of intergenerational support. Indonesian research has identified changing family structures and weak coordination as factors requiring greater attention in elderly protection (Akbar et al. 2023; Khoiruddin, Waksito, and Wijaya 2024). A balanced framework should therefore recognize families as important partners while maintaining government responsibility for social protection, healthcare, safeguards against abuse, and access to justice. Older persons should not lose access to public protection merely because they have children or relatives.

4. Digitalization and Emerging Barriers

Digitalization creates both opportunities and new forms of exclusion for older persons. Government services increasingly use digital registration, electronic identification, online appointments, mobile applications, and electronic payment systems. While digital services can increase efficiency, they may create barriers for older persons with limited digital literacy, visual impairment, cognitive difficulties, limited Internet access, or lack of suitable devices. Digital exclusion can consequently become a new form of administrative inequality. This problem is particularly relevant to legal protection because inability to access digital information can prevent older persons from discovering entitlements, submitting complaints, or completing administrative procedures. Public-service modernization should therefore maintain assisted and non-digital pathways. The principle of equality requires that technological innovation should expand access rather than

create a condition in which citizens must possess advanced digital skills to exercise basic rights.

The digital dimension also affects financial protection. Older persons may become targets of fraud, unauthorized transactions, misleading financial products, or exploitation by people who control their devices or accounts. Legal protection should therefore include financial-literacy and digital-safety education adapted to older users. At the same time, education alone cannot resolve structural vulnerabilities. Banks, digital-service providers, local government, families, and social institutions should develop safeguards that make suspicious transactions easier to identify and report. The broader literature on ageing and digital inclusion suggests that older persons should be supported in acquiring digital capabilities without being stigmatized for requiring assistance. Digital participation should be understood as part of contemporary citizenship, while institutions remain responsible for designing systems that accommodate different capacities.

5. Policy Recommendations for Kulon Progo Regency

The first policy recommendation is the development of an integrated local elderly-protection mechanism. Rather than separating health, social assistance, legal protection, and community participation into independent programmes, the local government should establish an integrated referral structure. A single entry point could identify an older person's needs and connect the person to appropriate services, including healthcare, social assistance, legal aid, disability support, psychological services, or protection from abuse. Such integration would reduce administrative fragmentation and make the system easier to navigate. The approach is consistent with international frameworks emphasizing supportive environments and integrated responses to ageing (United Nations 2002; World Health Organization 2015). For rural areas, village-level institutions could function as first-contact points while maintaining referral pathways to district-level services.

The second recommendation is to strengthen complaint and protection mechanisms. Older persons should have access to complaint channels that are physically accessible, easy to understand, confidential, and available through multiple communication methods. Complaints concerning neglect, abuse, discrimination, denial of services, or financial exploitation should be subject to clear referral procedures. Staff should be trained to recognize ageism and potential abuse rather than dismissing complaints as ordinary family disagreements. Access to justice should also be supported through legal-aid organizations and community-based legal assistance. Research concerning older people's access to justice demonstrates that bureaucratic complexity and age-related barriers can prevent individuals from resolving everyday legal problems (Mitchell et al. 2021; Obstbaum et al. 2025). Simplification is therefore not merely administrative reform; it is a component of substantive rights protection.

The third recommendation is to institutionalize older-person participation in local policymaking. Local government should establish mechanisms through which

older persons can participate in planning, monitoring, and evaluating elderly-related programmes. Representation should include older persons from different socioeconomic and geographic backgrounds rather than relying exclusively on established organizations. Participatory mechanisms should also provide reasonable accommodation for mobility, hearing, vision, and communication needs. Such measures would reflect the principles of active ageing and age-friendly governance (World Health Organization 2002; World Health Organization 2007). Participation can also improve policy accuracy because older residents possess direct knowledge of barriers that may not appear in administrative data. In this sense, participation should be understood as both a human right and an instrument for improving public administration.

The fourth recommendation is to strengthen legal and social literacy among older persons, families, and service providers. Older persons should receive accessible information about their rights to health services, social protection, legal assistance, public facilities, and protection from neglect and abuse. Families should receive information concerning caregiving responsibilities and available support. Service providers should receive training on dignity, informed decision-making, confidentiality, ageism, and referral procedures. Indonesian research on elderly empowerment demonstrates that community-based education can contribute to rights fulfillment when supported by families, village governments, and other institutions (Waryatun, Rodiyah, and Utari 2023). Such programmes should use clear language, local communication channels, and repeated engagement rather than one-time socialization activities.

6. Limitations and Future Research

This manuscript has a significant limitation because the primary empirical dataset referenced in the proposed research design has not been supplied. Consequently, the paper does not present invented interview quotations, respondent characteristics, statistical measurements, or claims of empirical prevalence in Kulon Progo. Future field research should collect data from a diverse group of older persons across different kecamatan and kalurahan, with attention to gender, age, economic status, living arrangements, health conditions, disability, and access to public services. Researchers should also interview government officials, healthcare providers, social workers, village authorities, family caregivers, and civil-society organizations. Such triangulation would permit comparison between the legal expectations of government institutions and the lived experiences of rights holders. Quantitative surveys could measure awareness of legal rights and service utilization, while qualitative interviews could explore the reasons behind non-use, complaint avoidance, and dependence on informal support.

Future studies should also investigate the relationship between legal awareness and actual access to services. An older person may know that a right exists but still be unable to exercise it because of transportation, cost, administrative requirements, family control, or digital exclusion. Research should therefore

distinguish between knowledge, capability, access, and outcome. Comparative research between rural and urban areas could determine whether geographic distance is a major determinant of protection gaps. Research could also compare Kulon Progo with other regencies in Yogyakarta or Central Java to identify effective local-government practices. Such comparative evidence would help move the discussion beyond general recommendations and toward evidence-based local policy. It would also strengthen the contribution of socio-legal research by demonstrating how national legal norms are translated, negotiated, or sometimes weakened within specific institutional and community contexts.

Conclusion

Older persons should not become invisible within legal and public-policy systems simply because ageing is often associated with dependency. The central argument of this study is that elderly protection must be understood as a human-rights obligation involving dignity, equality, autonomy, participation, health, social security, accessibility, and access to justice. Indonesia already possesses an important legal foundation through Law Number 13 of 1998, the broader social-welfare framework, constitutional guarantees, and related regulations. However, the continuing relevance of these protections depends on effective implementation at the local level. Indonesian scholarship has repeatedly identified the need to strengthen the legal and policy framework and to move toward empowerment rather than passive assistance (Akbar 2019; Hakim 2020; Akbar et al. 2023). For Kulon Progo, the appropriate direction is therefore an integrated, rights-based, age-friendly model that combines accessible public services, social protection, legal assistance, safeguards against neglect and abuse, digital inclusion, and meaningful participation. Older persons should be treated not as forgotten beneficiaries but as equal citizens whose rights remain fully operative throughout the life course.

The broader significance of this approach extends beyond Kulon Progo. Population ageing requires governments to reconsider the relationship between welfare policy and human rights. A society that protects older persons effectively does more than provide assistance to a particular demographic group; it demonstrates whether equality and dignity remain meaningful when individuals become older, less economically active, or more dependent on others. International frameworks such as the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the WHO age-friendly approach provide useful foundations, but implementation must ultimately occur through institutions that older persons can actually reach and understand (United Nations 2002; World Health Organization 2007). The challenge for local government is therefore to transform abstract rights into everyday accessibility. In Kulon Progo, this means ensuring that older persons can obtain services, express preferences, make complaints, participate in decisions, and obtain remedies without discrimination. Legal protection becomes meaningful only when rights are experienced as practical realities rather than promises contained in legislation.

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