

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The representation of indigenous children in policies in Indonesia

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Abstract

According to the Indonesian Child Protection Law, Number 35/2014, the group of children that should receive special protection are minorities and isolated children; this includes Indigenous children who mostly live in remote areas. Under this law, Indigenous children gain special protection, including facilities to share their cultural practices, practice their beliefs, and use their language. This article aimed to describe how Indigenous children have been represented in selected policies in Indonesia. The first step of a policy analysis approach known as “*What's the problem represented to be*” (WPR), introduced by Carol Bacchi in her book “*Analysing policy: What's the problem represented to be?*” in 2009, was applied to examine how Indigenous children in Indonesia are represented in six significant policies. Findings from the analysis indicate that the government of Indonesia acknowledges Indigenous rights. However, the policies describe Indigenous children as vulnerable and linked to social welfare problems. Social work core values state that respect for the dignity and worth of all human beings, promotion of welfare or well-being, and social justice should be extended to Indigenous children. To promote well-being, it is argued that social workers must be given more opportunities to be involved in policymaking and advocacy for implementing Indigenous children's policies in Indonesia.

KEYWORDS

indigenous children, indigenous policy, Indonesia, policy analysis, WPR-approach

1 | INTRODUCTION

Indigenous communities around the world are struggling for their rights. At the international level, three essential statements of rights pertain to indigenous communities. There are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations General Assembly, 1948), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (2007), and ILO C169 International Labour Organization (1989). Almost all the countries in the world, as member states of the United Nations (UN), therefore acknowledge these indigenous rights in their policies. However, most only cover inclusivity rather than recognize indigenous communities' rights to choose what is best for them (Page et al., 2019).

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1.1 | Care of indigenous children

The issues of care decisions for indigenous children in Western countries are contentious (Bastian, 2013; Ivec et al., 2012; Mak et al., 2020; Maxwell, 2017; McKenzie et al., 2016; Robertson et al., 2022; Sinha et al., 2021; Yu, 2019). Children are being separated from their parents based on racist and colonialist assumptions that indigenous parents cannot give their children a safe and healthy environment. Cram et al. (2015) stated that according to indigenous perspectives, this situation is influenced by various factors, including "assimilationist policies of colonial governments that disrupted families, unequal distribution of resources, systemic racism in child welfare systems, and racial bias in reporting and decision-making" (p. 171). Consequently, indigenous children may be placed in social welfare institutions or adopted by non-indigenous parents (Ivec et al., 2012; Yu, 2019). Indigenous communities, especially in Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, are still facing the consequences of historically forced child removal, leading to a disproportionate number of indigenous children being involved in child welfare systems (Harnett & Featherstone, 2020; Maxwell, 2017; Sinha et al., 2021).

There is widespread criticism of child protection policies that were established in the name of children's best interests because these policies effectively decreased the population of indigenous people. Children lost to their birth families are referred to in Australia as the "Stolen Generation" (Fejo-King, 2011). In Canada, as mentioned by Maxwell (2017), Blackstock et al. (2007), and Sinha et al. (2021), indigenous children's removal from their families is considered "*Cultural Genocide*." There is ample evidence that such policies not only do not work to solve risks to children but do serious harm to indigenous children and their families. Yu (2019) stated that indigenous children separated from their biological parents not only grew up without knowing their culture but also faced psychological problems and a propensity to drug abuse. Placing indigenous children in care and removing them from their families sometimes only puts them at more risk (Blackstock et al., 2007; Coy, 2009). Moreover, indigenous parents also experience "epistemic justice," making them mistrust the child welfare system (Leckey et al., 2022; Robertson et al., 2022).

Awareness of the harm caused by child removal policies has led to legislative change in some countries. Modern policymakers try to learn from their mistakes and improve their policies by accommodating indigenous voices (Bastian, 2013; Fejo-King, 2011; Hahn et al., 2020; Maxwell, 2017). After many protests about the impact of child welfare policies on indigenous families and communities, the United States passed the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) in 1978. This Act allows indigenous parents to take part in decisions about their children's care (Hahn et al., 2020). As late as 2019, Canada introduced a similar legislative change by presenting Bill C-92. This Act has several purposes, including to:

affirm the inherent right of self-government, which includes jurisdiction in relation to child and family services; set out principles applicable, on a national level, to the provision of child and family services in relation to Indigenous children; and contribute to the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

(Bill C-92, 2019, p. 4-5)

Both North American countries acknowledge their first peoples' rights, learning from the past mistakes made by the colonization process. However, the appropriate policies for caring for indigenous children are still being formulated. Some argue that having specific policies for indigenous people is a form of positive discrimination. Positive discrimination policies exist to keep indigenous people's original culture, but somehow, they also limit their opportunities. The program for Indigenous children in Bogota, for example, has the purpose of giving indigenous children the opportunity to learn their own culture; however, it separates them from non-indigenous children and limits their access to interacting with other languages (Caro, 2019). That is why its implementation is arguable. Some writers argue that positive discrimination policies would broaden indigenous opportunities to access resources because the policies allow poorer communities to get resources from wealthier communities (Weisskopf, 2006).

The role of social workers in policy involvement and advocacy, particularly regarding policies affecting indigenous communities and children, is crucial, especially when those social workers possess cultural competence (Gray et al., 2016; Suradi et al., 2019). Although the explicit study of the involvement of social workers in the well-being of indigenous children remains limited, recent years have seen an increasing focus on integrating indigenous perspectives and knowledge into social work practices. This trend underscores the importance of actively engaging with indigenous communities, listening attentively to their voices, and incorporating their insights into policy-making processes. By doing so, social workers can better understand the unique needs and challenges faced by indigenous children and work collaboratively with these communities to effect meaningful changes in social policy.

Despite the ongoing changing care of indigenous communities especially children, only a few policies that cover indigenous rights acknowledge indigenous children's rights (Hahn et al., 2020; Lopez-Carmen et al., 2019; McKenzie et al., 2016), despite calls for governments to address this. Indonesia is one of the countries trying to include indigenous children's voices in policies and planning of social programs, but implementation still needs improvement.

Almost thirty percent of the population in Indonesia are from indigenous communities. The policies that directly benefit them are limited. Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara (AMAN) reported that there are 2161 indigenous communities in Indonesia, with most communities living on Kalimantan Island (Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara [AMAN], 2020). In these communities, the children's best interests must be

supported, as they are the ones who will ensure the continuity of these indigenous communities in the future. However, policies directly targeting indigenous communities and children in Indonesia are still limited. The meaning of what indigeneity is in Indonesia is still debatable and needs to be determined (Haba, 2010; Yulaswati et al., 2013), and rather complex (Tamma & Duile, 2020).

Based on that background, this article explores how six policies in Indonesia address indigenous children. This is done with the hope that it will contribute to a better understanding of how indigenous children are seen in the policies of the government of Indonesia and by doing so, pave the way for the development of more inclusive policies that specifically address the needs and rights of indigenous children and communities.

2 | METHODOLOGY

Bacchi's (2009) method of "What is the problem represented to be?" (WPR) has been used for the critical analysis of policies in Indonesia. The WPR approach has been used for various social policy analyses, including for children's and adolescent policies (see, for example, Bills & Howard, 2017; Cordeiro & Mello, 2020; Komai, 2021; Skovhus & Thomsen, 2017; Tawell & McCluskey, 2021; Wismayanti et al., 2021). This approach provides a critical policy analysis method consisting of seven interrelated forms of questioning and analysis (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016; Riemann, 2023). According to Bacchi and Goodwin (p. 20, 2016), the questions and steps are as follows:

1. What's the "problem" represented to be in a specific policy?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the "problem"?
3. How has this representation of the "problem" come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the "problem" be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the "problem"?; and
6. How/where has this representation of the "problem" been produced, disseminated, and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted, and replaced?
7. Step 7: Apply this list of questions to your own problem representations.

The analysis presented in this article concerns only the first question of WPR: *What is the "problem" represented to be in a specific policy?* The process of WPR begins by examining the suggested "solutions" to uncover any implicit issues they may raise. While it is not mandatory to ask every question during each application of the critical thinking approach, it is highly probable that the WPR analysis will need to be applied multiple times within a single context (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). Using this approach, the critical analysis of the child protection policies under the first question was constructed with two sub-questions: (a) How are indigenous children represented as a policy problem? and (b) How do the policy documents represent the solution to the problem for indigenous children?

The WPR approach argues that policies contain implicit representations of the "problems" they purport to address. Specific policy documents are therefore needed when using the WPR approach framework (Wisayanti et al., 2021). The Central Government of Indonesia's most recent official policy documents explicitly state terms of indigenous children and/or indigenous communities were selected for this analysis. The documents were accessible to the public via relevant websites. The search terms that were used to find the specific documents are *Undang-Undang Perlindungan Anak di Indonesia* (translation: Child Protection Law in Indonesia), *Kebijakan Anak Komunitas Adat Indonesia* (translation: Indonesia indigenous children policies), and *Komunitas Adat Terpencil Indonesia* (translation: isolated indigenous communities in Indonesia). From the close reading of these documents, reference to previous laws also assisted in the identification of additional material, employing snowball techniques.

All of the documents that were found ($n = 6$) were only available in the Indonesian language (see Table 1). For that reason, documents were analyzed using the WPR approach in the Indonesian language, and then, the findings were translated into English. Table 1 provides a summary of the six policy documents.

3 | FINDINGS

3.1 | How are indigenous children represented as a policy problem in Indonesia?

The policy problem was examined by studying the terms used when referring to indigenous children in the policy documents. Not all six Indonesian central government texts used explicit language when describing indigenous children. They use terms like "isolated" and "minority children," and only two documents use the term indigenous children. Article 59 of Indonesia's child protection law Number 35/2014 (P1) says that the government is responsible for giving special protection to minority and isolated children (P1, p. 24). In this document, the term



TABLE 1 Indigenous children policy documents analyzed (n = 6).

Code	Year	Title	Document length	Authorship	Term use
P1	2014	Undang-undang (UU) Nomor 35 Tahun 2014 tentang Perubahan atas Undang-Undang Nomor 23 Tahun 2002 Tentang Perlindungan Anak (translation: <i>Law number 35/2014 about the amendment of law number 23/2002 about child protection</i>)	66 pages	This document was approved by the President of the Republic of Indonesia	Minority and isolated children
P2	2021	Peraturan Pemerintah (PP) Nomor 78 Tahun Tahun 2021 tentang Perlindungan Khusus bagi Anak (translation: <i>Government regulation number 78/2021 about special protection for children</i>)	83 pages	This document was approved by the President of the Republic of Indonesia	Minority and isolated children
P3	2014	Peraturan Presiden Republik Indonesia Nomor 186 Tahun 2014 tentang Pemberdayaan Sosial Terhadap Komunitas Adat Terpencil (translation: <i>President regulation number 186/2014 about social empowerment for remote indigenous communities</i>)	14 pages	This document was approved by the President of the Republic of Indonesia	Remote indigenous communities
P4	2015	Peraturan Menteri Sosial Republik Indonesia Nomor 12 Tahun 2015 Tentang Pelaksanaan Peraturan Presiden Nomor 186 Tahun 2014 tentang Pemberdayaan Sosial Terhadap Komunitas Adat Terpencil (translation: <i>Ministry of Social Affairs regulation number 12/2015 about the implementation of President regulation number 186/2014 about social empowerment for remote indigenous communities</i>)	22 pages	This document was approved by the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia	Remote indigenous communities
P5	2012	Peraturan Menteri Sosial Republik Indonesia Nomor 08 Tahun 2012 Tentang Pedoman Pendataan Dan Pengelolaan Data Penyandang Masalah Kesejahteraan Sosial dan Potensi dan Sumber Kesejahteraan Sosial (translation: <i>Ministry of Social Affairs regulation number 08/2012 about Data Management of People with Social Welfare Problems and Potential and Sources of Social Welfare Services</i>)	29 pages	This document was approved by the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia	Remote indigenous communities; minority and isolated children; and remote indigenous children
P6	2021	Buku Saku Pendidikan Layanan Khusus Seri 3: Pendidikan bagi Komunitas Adat Terpencil (KAT) (translation: <i>Special service education handbook series 3: education for remote indigenous children</i>)	32 pages	This document was produced by the Elementary School Division, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia	Remote indigenous children

used to represent indigenous children is “minority and isolated children.” Article 1 Indonesia government regulation Number 78/2021 (P2) provides the meaning of minority and isolated children as children “who are left behind, at the forefront, are the outermost; in an environment that is different in culture, tradition, ethnicity, race, religion with other children; and whose numbers are far less than children of other groups” (P2, p. 2).

Article 1 presidential regulation Number 184/2014 (P3) does not use the term indigenous children but refers to remote indigenous communities. The document says, “A remote indigenous community is a group of people in a certain number who are bound by geographical, economic, and/or socio-cultural unity, and are poor, remote, and/or socio-economically vulnerable” (P3, p. 2). This meaning can be used as the government’s understanding of indigenous children because the word “remote” is the same as calling them a minority and isolated. Moreover, the attachment of the Minister of Social Affairs regulation Number 08/2012 (P5) states that one of the criteria of children that need special protection is “from minority and isolated groups, as well as from remote indigenous communities” (P5, p. 18–19).

The Minister of Social Affairs regulation Number 12/2015 (P4) divided indigenous communities into three categories. These categories emphasized “what the problem is represented to be” about indigenous communities in the policies. The first category is the indigenous communities that live in more “primitive” ways than the others. In this category, indigenous communities are identified as those who live scattered and move in small, closed, and homogeneous communities; livelihoods highly depend on the environment and local natural resources; they live with a subsistence economic system; very simple and marginal in the countryside; and experience various vulnerabilities (P4, p. 4). The second category is indigenous communities whose life is slightly more advanced than the first. They have a temporary sedentary life, generally still homogeneous but already more open, shifting cultivators, live with an economic system that leads to a market system, and experience

vulnerability (P4, p. 5). Lastly, the third category is characterized as more open and advanced indigenous communities than the first two categories because they have a sedentary life, already heterogeneous, and more open; their livelihood is farming, gardening, fishing crafts, and/or trade; they live with a market economy system; marginal in rural and urban areas; and still vulnerable (P4, p. 6).

Additionally, the regulation (P4) describes the vulnerability of indigenous communities related to social welfare problems such as basic needs, health, education, and access to social services. According to the Ministry of Social Affairs regulation number 08/2012 (P5), indigenous communities and children are part of the "individual or group that has social welfare problems" (P5, p. 17). This analysis clearly indicates that the government of Indonesia regards the problem faced by these indigenous communities, including indigenous children, as being related to social welfare problems.

3.2 | How do the policy documents represent the solution to the problem for indigenous children?

The second question was examined by studying the solutions mentioned in the six policy documents. Indonesia's child protection law Number 35/2014 (P1) aims to fulfill children's rights to live, grow, develop, participate, and receive protection from violence and discrimination. In order to do that, article 65 (P1, p. 27) explains that the special protection that government should provide to the minority and isolated children is the facilities for enjoying their own culture, accepting and practicing their religion, and using their language (P1, p. 27). This solves the problem of indigenous children who do not have places to practice and enjoy their way of life because they are considered to be different from others. Government regulation number 78/2021 (P2) describes the special protection indigenous children receive as "protection from violence, discrimination, and another wrong treatment" (P2, p. 20).

In addition to reducing their potential of experiencing discrimination, government regulation number 78/2021 (P2) also states that government should provide (a) culture-based public spaces, art and cultural facilities, along with equipment and training, including places of worship; (b) necessary facilities in providing services for children from minority and isolated groups; and (c) required accessibility for children from minority and isolated groups to obtain fulfillment of basic needs (P2, p. 20).

Fulfillment of basic needs is linked to the fact that indigenous children also face social welfare problems such as hunger, lack of access to basic education, and lack of access to healthcare. In order to improve the quality of life of the indigenous communities, they must be provided with programs such as housing, citizenship administration, religious life, health care, education, food, access to jobs, access to land, and other social services (P3, p. 5–6). The government calls this a social empowerment program for the indigenous communities. Article 20 of the Minister of Social Affairs regulation number 12/2015 (P4) says that social empowerment for the Indigenous communities can be given in the form of diagnosis and motivation; skills training; accompaniment; providing capital stimulants, business equipment, and place of business; increasing access to the marketing of business results; supervision and social advocacy: strengthening social harmony; social environment arrangement; and/or further guidance (P4, p. 10). The meaning of these forms of social empowerment is explained in nine articles (from articles 21 to 29). This is summarized in [Table 2](#).

From [Table 2](#), we can see that the solution for solving indigenous problems in the ministerial regulation (P4) is more specific than what is written in the child protection law (P1) and the government regulation (P2). This is because, in P4, the policy target is for all elements in indigenous communities, while in P1 and P2, the target is only for indigenous children. The intention behind the solutions in these documents is to improve the quality of life for indigenous communities, including children. The purpose of motivating them is to strengthen their determination or spirit to achieve better conditions (P4, p. 10). For indigenous children, one solution that represents a way to accomplish that is through education. The Special Service Education Handbook (P6) describes strategies for giving indigenous children the right to education. The educational approach depends on the indigenous children community categories stated in Minister of Social Affairs regulation number 12/2015 (P4).

Indigenous children from the first category, which are considered more traditional communities, received education services through learning basic literacy such as reading, writing as well as basic mathematics; learning about life skills in the context of locality, and abilities that include organizing, communication, management, teamwork, and maintain equitably biodiversity (P6, p. 12). The facilitator assigned to this program will adjust the learning time to the indigenous children's everyday life, and the learning location moves according to the pattern of living of the indigenous community (P6, p. 20). Besides receiving what was given to the children in the first category, indigenous children in the second category also received informal education and knowledge about local resources' potential (P6, p. 12). Meanwhile, indigenous children in the third category received more advanced services. The government encourages them to receive a formal education (P6, p. 12). From these services given to improve indigenous children's education, we can see another problem faced by indigenous children as outlined in the policies, is that they are not literate enough. Most indigenous children, especially in the first category, are represented as children who cannot read and write and have limited ability in life skills.

Despite that, the special service education handbook (P6) includes an exciting point about giving educational services to indigenous children. The handbook states that aspects of consideration when giving educational services to indigenous children are in providing subject matter in the teaching and learning process. Subject matter must be based on agreement or participation with children, learning adapted to social and cultural aspects, and paying attention to the psychological and ecological aspects of the indigenous communities (P6, p. 21). This can



TABLE 2 The meaning of forms of Social Empowerment in the Minister of Social Affairs regulation number 12/2015 (P4).

Forms	Meaning
Diagnosis and motivation	Follow-up needs analysis activity of remote indigenous communities and strengthening determination or spirit to achieve better conditions
Skills training	It is an activity to introduce or deepen technical and non-technical skills. Technical skills aim to improve living standards through training in agriculture, plantations, fisheries, entrepreneurship, and/or household economic management. Meanwhile, non-technical skills aim to improve understanding, attitudes, and behavior through training on self-development, leadership, organization, social interaction, and/or national insight
Accompaniment	Establish social relations between assistant staff, indigenous communities, and the surrounding community to solve problems, strengthen support, utilize various potentials and resources to fulfill life needs, and increase access to essential social services and government administration services
Providing capital stimulants, equipment, and a place for business	In the form of funds, materials, and/or goods that aimed to allow indigenous people to start a productive economic business. This is given based on the needs analysis results and after receiving skills training
Increasing access to the marketing of business results	Efforts to increase marketing opportunities for indigenous production through publications, exhibitions, business cooperation, formation of business groups/cooperatives, and/or linking indigenous locations with strategic areas
Supervision and social advocacy	It is carried out to ensure that the social empowerment process for the indigenous communities is carried out according to the provisions and overcomes obstacles. Supervision is an activity of guidance, support, or technical assistance to management officers, assistant staff, indigenous communities, and/or other related parties. Meanwhile, social advocacy is an effort and/or activity to protect and defend indigenous citizens through awareness of rights and obligations, defense, and fulfillment of indigenous rights
Strengthening social harmony	Efforts to increase social interaction among indigenous communities and with the non-indigenous community to realize a harmonious life are carried out by establishing community forums for social institutions, strengthening traditional institutions, and strengthening local wisdom
Social environment arrangement	Optimal arrangement of indigenous housing and settlements by the provisions of regional spatial plans, natural carrying capacity, balance, and environmental sustainability carried out through accessibility facilitation for stimulant assistance for house construction and building materials; construction of social centers and worship facilities; development of health, educational, communication, transportation, environmental, economy and/or business/livelihood facilities
Further guidance	Activities to continue the social empowerment process for indigenous communities based on the potential and results of the programs

Source: P4, p. 10–13.

be articulated as even though the government wants the indigenous communities to be literate or receive a modern education, policymakers also want to preserve and respect the indigenous way of life.

As can be seen from this analysis of terms used and programs given in the policy documents and regulations, the problems of indigenous children written in these policy documents are as follows: (i) there is a limited population of them; (ii) they live in isolated places that are difficult to reach by central and even local government; (iii) they have a different way of life to the majority of the population such as different culture, tradition, ethnicity, race, and religion; and (iv) they have social welfare problems such as indigenous children face discrimination and difficulty getting housing, citizenship administration, religious life, health care, education, food, access to jobs, land, and access to other social services.

4 | DISCUSSION

The policy analysis reported in this article aimed to explore the way indigenous children are represented in Indonesia's indigenous children's policy documents. There is a limited number of policies that directly target indigenous children. Of the six documents, only the *Special Service Education Handbook Series 3: Education for Remote Indigenous Children (P6)* describes the indigenous children directly. Even those use the term "remote" to describe the population that is the focus of the policy. In the Indonesian context, the term used for indigenous children in related policies mainly refers to children from the communities that live in isolated places or remote areas and all define indigenous as a disadvantaged

and vulnerable group or individuals. Using this term implies that the Indonesian government uses the problems faced by the indigenous communities as a way to define them.

Indigenous policy in Western countries uses the name of the indigenous communities in the policies rather than the term “indigenous people.” For example, in the indigenous children policy in the United States, the Indian Child Welfare Act (1978) directly says “Indian Child” in the name of the policy. Another example is Canada Bill C-92: An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families (2019) an indigenous children policy for respecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children, youth, and families. In this policy, they write the term “indigenous” in the document. However, the definition of indigenous refers to the “aboriginal peoples of Canada,” which includes the Indian, Inuit, and Metis peoples of Canada. This indicates that both countries do not label indigenous communities as remote and vulnerable people, as seen in Indonesian policies.

Vulnerability is not an uncontested term. The meaning of it can differ substantially based on the context and our understanding of the term (Brown, 2011). Henrickson and Fouché (2017) state that to address risk for marginal or vulnerable people, policymakers and powerful groups tend to put a label on them. The utilization of the term “vulnerable” to describe certain groups or individuals may give rise to stigmatization; however, it also yields favorable outcomes by prioritizing their needs, deflecting blame, offering additional support, and rationalizing welfare entitlements (Brown, 2012). The way the government labels indigenous communities is a practice of positive discrimination (Caro, 2019; Weisskopf, 2006). Even though the concept of positive discrimination in the policies can benefit the beneficiaries, some argue that it can also make them face more discrimination from others. Caro's (2019) study about positive discrimination in Early Childhood Education found that particular policies seem to separate indigenous children from the outside world. This can be understood because problems in the policy documents significantly impact “how people think about themselves and others” (Bacchi, 2009, p. 9). Therefore, labeling indigenous children can affect how indigenous children see themselves and how the whole society treats them. A study on indigenous communities in Bangladesh found that indigenous children experience unequal opportunities to access social services, they did not have the opportunity to use their own language in school (Islam et al., 2015). In Indonesia, Vonika's (2020) investigation revealed that indigenous children residing in Cirende, West Java, experience discrimination due to their refusal to partake in the religious education curriculum within the school system.

The inherent meaning exemplified by the indigenous children-related policies in Indonesia is inherently congruent with Indonesia's overarching position regarding the indigenous identity and heritage within the Indonesian contextual framework. Bamba (2008) argues the concept of Indigeneity within the Indonesian context, underpinned by three key assumptions. Firstly, it posits that all native Indonesians inherently qualify as indigenous peoples. Secondly, it contends that this demographic is uniquely characterized as a “*vulnerable group*” within Indonesia, thus warranting the categorization as “*remote indigenous communities*” Lastly, the discussion underscores the differentiation between the entitlement to self-determination and the broader concept of the right to self-determination. Therefore, in the Indonesian context, when talking about the indigenous issues is related to the remote indigenous communities.

Looking at the meaning and the programs in the policies aimed at indigenous children residing in remote communities and the initiatives they encompass, it becomes evident that the Indonesian government demonstrates a commitment to fostering modernization within these indigenous communities. Despite the ongoing challenges in defining the concept of indigenous communities in Indonesia, as acknowledged by Bamba (2008), the evidence from indigenous policies in Indonesia suggests a concerted effort to accommodate and prioritize indigenous rights, particularly those pertaining to indigenous children. The policies concerning indigenous children have consistently demonstrated a concerted effort to incorporate and respect the indigenous way of life through their programmatic initiatives. As an illustration, within the educational program tailored for remote indigenous children, both the choice of study locations and the curriculum have been adapted to align with the specific conditions and needs of the respective community.

To enhance existing policies, particularly those pertaining to indigenous communities, the Indonesian government needs to continue their previous efforts, notably the 2019 initiative which replaced the term “social welfare problem bearers” (*Penyandang Masalah Kesejahteraan Sosial (PMKS)*) with “social welfare service recipients” (*Pemerlu Pelayanan Kesejahteraan Sosial (PPKS)*). This change brought about a more empowering perspective for previously perceived vulnerable and marginalized groups. However, some policies, particularly those concerning indigenous communities, have yet to see significant alterations.

Additionally, to ensure effective program implementation, it is imperative that the Indonesian government integrates social workers into the policy implementation process designed for indigenous children. Social workers in Indonesia will play an essential role in working with indigenous communities and children. In Article 3 of Law Number 14 of 2019 concerning Social Work (Undang-Undang Pekerjaan Sosial, 2019), it is stated that the objectives of social work in Indonesia are to prevent the occurrence of social dysfunction in individuals, families, groups, and communities; restore and improve the social functioning of individuals, families, groups, and communities; enhance community social resilience in addressing social welfare issues; improve the quality of social welfare management to achieve the independence of individuals, families, groups, and communities; and enhance the community's capacity and concern in the institutional and sustainable provision of social welfare. To achieve these objectives, social workers in Indonesia play a crucial role in social advocacy, particularly concerning policies that may undermine these objectives.

Currently, the involvement of social workers in policy-making is still limited, only through the Ministry of Social Affairs regulations and programs. Social worker involvement in policy-making at the international level is also minimal (Briskman, 2007). As a profession that “promotes

social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people" (International Federation of Social Work [IFSW], 2014), social workers have a role in improving policies, especially indigenous policies. After all, human rights are the concern of the social work profession (Ballantyne, 2019), and policies should be based on human rights to achieve the best interest interests of all communities. Therefore, more social workers' involvement in ensuring policy implementation is needed, and having good intentions from social workers is not enough, the wrong move can produce poor outcomes in the future for the indigenous communities and children (Blackstock et al., 2007). In order to actively engage in the policy-making processes related to indigenous communities, social workers should possess proficient cultural competence to conduct accurate assessments and understand the complexities of indigenous cultures (Cram et al., 2015; Harnett & Featherstone, 2020). Hence, it is imperative for them to actively engage with and listen to indigenous voices.

5 | CONCLUSION

This policy analysis underscores a notable approach within Indonesia's policy framework concerning the representation of indigenous children. The evident lack of direct focus on indigenous children, with just one out of six examined policy documents explicitly addressing them, reveals a prevailing tendency to characterize indigenous children in the context of remote or isolated populations, emphasizing their challenges rather than recognizing their distinct identities. The utilization of such labels within policies carries a duality of implications, both positive and negative, impacting the self-perception of indigenous children and shaping societal perceptions of them. Despite this framing, the policies introduced by the Government of Indonesia demonstrate a conscious consideration of the rights of indigenous children, marking a significant effort to address their needs, particularly among those residing in remote indigenous communities.

The development of policies aimed at safeguarding the best interests of indigenous children is a multifaceted challenge faced by nations worldwide. A crucial aspect of this process is the active involvement of indigenous communities, as they possess invaluable insights and perspectives. In this context, social workers can play a pivotal role in facilitating communication and collaboration between indigenous communities and government entities. The policies examined in this study reflect an acknowledgment of indigenous rights by policymakers in Indonesia, representing a crucial stride toward safeguarding the best interests of indigenous children within the nation.

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