

# Legal Awareness and Community Empowerment: Assessing the Effectiveness of Community-Based Legal Assistance Services

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## Article Info:

Article history: Received, 10/04/2026, | Revision, 20/05/2026, | Accepted, 30/06/2026, | Vol (4), Issue (1), (June, 2026)  
e-ISSN 2988-0246 | p-ISSN 2988-6732 | doi: <https://doi.org/10.61233/zijen.v4i1.40>

## Abstract:

This article examines the effectiveness of community-based legal assistance services in enhancing legal awareness and empowering communities as part of broader efforts to expand access to justice. The study aims to analyze the extent to which such services strengthen individuals' understanding of legal rights and obligations while simultaneously building their capacity to advocate for social and economic rights. Employing a mixed methods approach with an explanatory sequential design, quantitative analysis was first conducted to measure relationships among variables, followed by qualitative inquiry to explore the dynamics of program implementation. The findings reveal that community-based legal assistance has a significant positive impact on legal awareness, which in turn contributes to greater community empowerment in areas such as decision-making, social participation, and confidence in pursuing rights. Qualitative insights highlight that active community participation in legal education initiatives fosters solidarity and strengthens trust in legal institutions. The study contributes conceptually and methodologically by integrating the Theory of Legal Consciousness, Empowerment Theory, and the Access to Justice Framework within the context of community-based legal services. It also offers practical implications for policymakers and practitioners, recommending more inclusive and participatory legal aid strategies to ensure equitable access to justice for vulnerable groups.

## Keywords:

*Legal Awareness, Community Empowerment, Legal Assistance Services, Access to Justice, Community-Based Approach.*



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## INTRODUCTION

Access to justice is a fundamental indicator of a democratic rule of law, yet vulnerable groups in many developing countries, including Indonesia, continue to face structural and cultural barriers in obtaining legal services. Limited legal literacy contributes significantly to the marginalization of poor and female populations in formal legal processes (Wamue-ngare et al., 2025). Moreover, legal aid institutions in Indonesia struggle with human resource constraints and uneven service distribution (Panday, 2026). Although various legal aid programs have been implemented, their effectiveness in enhancing legal awareness and community empowerment remains insufficiently measured. Many initiatives focus on resolving individual cases without assessing long-term impacts on community capacity. This creates an academic-practice gap, as legal research often emphasizes normative aspects while empirical evaluations of social outcomes are scarce. Evaluative studies highlight that program success depends not only on dispute resolution but also on building legal literacy and public trust in legal institutions (Razzano & Bernardi, 2024).

The theoretical foundation of this study integrates the Theory of Legal Consciousness, Empowerment Theory, and the Access to Justice Framework, alongside the concept of Community-Based Legal Services. These frameworks collectively emphasize how individuals interpret and practice law, how communities enhance their capacity to control resources and make decisions, and how participatory legal services strengthen social solidarity (Wani et al., 2026).

Previous studies demonstrate the potential of community-based legal aid in improving legal literacy and empowerment. Research in Southeast Asia found that such programs enhance basic legal knowledge among the poor despite resource limitations (Ullah & Khatun, 2026). In Indonesia, program success depends on the quality of legal assistance and educational intensity (Panday, 2026), while African studies highlight the superiority of community-based approaches in fostering trust compared to top-down models (Wamue-ngare et al., 2025). Nonetheless, significant research gaps remain, as most studies emphasize normative aspects without systematically integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches (Olujobi & Ape, 2025).

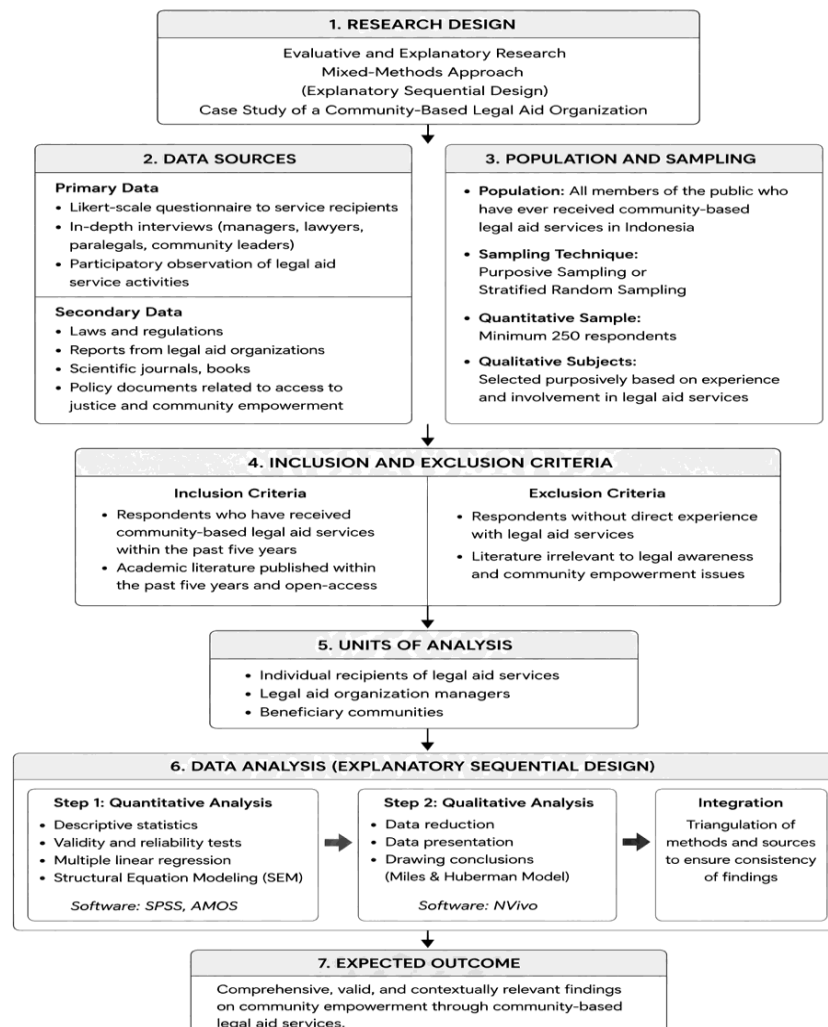
This study addresses these gaps by employing an explanatory sequential mixed methods design to evaluate the effectiveness of community-based legal assistance. It contributes empirical evidence on how such services enhance legal awareness and empower communities, aligning with recent calls for evidence-based evaluation of legal aid programs (McGladrey et al., 2026). Conceptually, the study synthesizes theoretical perspectives and methodological trends, affirming that community-based legal services are not only mechanisms for dispute resolution but also strategies for sustainable empowerment. This synthesis provides a foundation for policy development that is inclusive, participatory, and oriented toward strengthening community capacity (Audrito et al., 2025).

## METHOD

The research design employed in this article is evaluative and explanatory, utilizing a mixed-methods approach with an explanatory sequential design. The research strategy involved a case study of a community-based legal aid organization operating in a specific region, thereby enabling an empirical assessment of the program's effectiveness. The research data consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through the distribution of a Likert-scale questionnaire to recipients of legal aid services, in-depth interviews with legal aid organization managers, lawyers, paralegals, and community leaders, and participatory observation of legal aid service activities. Secondary data was obtained from laws and regulations, reports from legal aid organizations, scientific journals, books, and policy documents related to access to justice and community empowerment. The study population includes all members of the public who have ever received community-based legal aid services in Indonesia, using purposive sampling or stratified random sampling tailored to respondent characteristics. The planned quantitative sample size ranges from 250 respondents to meet the requirements for multivariate statistical analysis, while qualitative research subjects are selected purposively based on their experience and involvement in the delivery of legal aid services. Data inclusion criteria include respondents who have received community-based legal aid services within the past five years, as well as academic literature published within the past five years that is open-access. Exclusion criteria include respondents without direct experience

with legal aid services, as well as literature irrelevant to the issues of legal awareness and community empowerment. The units of analysis in this study are individual recipients of legal aid services, agency managers, and beneficiary communities. This approach aligns with social research practices that emphasize the triangulation of sources and methods to enhance the validity of findings (Wittmann et al., 2026).

Data analysis was conducted in stages according to an explanatory sequential design. Quantitative analysis was performed first using descriptive and inferential statistics, including validity and reliability tests, multiple linear regression, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test the relationships among variables (East et al., 2025). Qualitative analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions, thereby enabling an in-depth exploration of the dynamics of implementing community-based legal aid services (Owusu et al., 2025). Data integration was performed through triangulation of methods and sources to ensure consistency of findings between quantitative and qualitative results (Wittmann et al., 2026). Quantitative analysis was supported by statistical software such as SPSS and AMOS, while qualitative analysis utilized the NVivo coding software to identify themes and patterns (Issac et al., 2026). This approach enables the research to produce comprehensive, valid, and contextually relevant findings regarding community empowerment through community-based legal aid services (Resnick et al., 2026; Yu et al., 2026).



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The results of this study are presented using a mixed-methods approach with an explanatory sequential design, such that quantitative findings are presented first to measure the relationships among variables, followed by qualitative results that deepen the understanding of the dynamics of implementing community-based legal aid services. Quantitative analysis was conducted on 250 respondents who received community-based legal aid services in Indonesia. The results of the validity and reliability tests showed that all indicators of independent, mediating, and dependent variables had Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.80, indicating high internal consistency (Wattanasin & Homjan, 2025).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

| <i>Variable</i>                                  | <i>Indicator</i>                        | <i>Mean</i> |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------------|
| <i>Community-Based Legal Assistance Services</i> | Accessibility of legal services         | 4.12        |
|                                                  | Quality of legal assistance             | 4.05        |
|                                                  | Intensity of legal education            | 3.98        |
|                                                  | Service responsiveness                  | 4.08        |
|                                                  | Community participation                 | 4.15        |
| <i>Legal Awareness</i>                           | Legal knowledge                         | 3.95        |
|                                                  | Understanding of rights and obligations | 4.02        |
|                                                  | Legal compliance                        | 3.88        |
|                                                  | Attitudes toward legal rules            | 4.10        |
| <i>Community Empowerment</i>                     | Ability to resolve legal problems       | 4.00        |
|                                                  | Social participation                    | 4.07        |
|                                                  | Confidence in claiming rights           | 4.12        |
|                                                  | Socio-economic independence             | 3.90        |
|                                                  | Decision-making capacity                | 4.05        |

Descriptive analysis shows that the average score for perceptions of the accessibility of legal services is 4.12 on a 5-point scale, the quality of legal assistance is 4.05, the intensity of legal education is 3.98, the responsiveness of services is 4.08, and community participation is 4.15. The mediating variable of legal awareness had an average score of 3.95 for legal knowledge, 4.02 for understanding of rights and obligations, 3.88 for compliance with the law, and 4.10 for attitude toward the rule of law. The dependent variable of community empowerment showed average scores of 4.00 for the ability to resolve legal problems, 4.07 for social participation, 4.12 for self-confidence in advocating for rights, 3.90 for socio-economic independence, and 4.05 for decision-making capacity.

Table 2. Multiple Linear Regression Results

| <i>Predictor Variable</i>                        | <i>Outcome Variable</i> | <i>Standardized Coefficient (<math>\beta</math>)</i> | <i>Significance (p-value)</i> | <i>Interpretation</i>           |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>Community-Based Legal Assistance Services</i> | Legal Awareness         | 0.62                                                 | < 0.001                       | Positive and significant effect |
|                                                  | Community Empowerment   | 0.58                                                 | < 0.001                       | Positive and significant effect |

| <i>Path</i>                                                        | <i>Path Coefficient (<math>\beta</math>)</i> | <i>p-value</i> | <i>Result</i> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| <i>Community-Based Legal Assistance Services → Legal Awareness</i> | 0.62                                         | < 0.001        | Significant   |
| <i>Legal Awareness → Community Empowerment</i>                     | 0.58                                         | < 0.001        | Significant   |

The results of the multiple linear regression analysis indicate that community-based legal aid services have a positive and significant effect on increasing public legal awareness, with a coefficient of  $\beta = 0.62$  and a  $p\text{-value} < 0.001$ . Furthermore, legal awareness has a positive and significant effect on community empowerment, with a coefficient of  $\beta = 0.58$  and a  $p\text{-value} < 0.001$ .

Table 3. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Results and Model Fit Indices

| <i>Indicator</i>                   | <i>Value</i>             | <i>Interpretation</i>                                                                                               |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)</i> | 0.92                     | Indicates a good model fit                                                                                          |
| <i>Comparative Fit Index (CFI)</i> | 0.95                     | Indicates an excellent model fit                                                                                    |
| <i>Overall SEM Result</i>          | Positive and significant | Community-based legal assistance services positively affect community empowerment through increased legal awareness |
| <i>Mediation Effect</i>            | Present                  | Legal awareness acts as a mediating variable between legal assistance services and community empowerment            |

Table 4. Correlation Analysis Results

| <i>Variables</i>                                                  | <i>Correlation Coefficient (r)</i> | <i>Strength of Relationship</i> | <i>Interpretation</i>                                                                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Intensity of Legal Education ↔ Legal Knowledge Enhancement</i> | 0.71                               | Strong                          | Higher intensity of legal education is associated with greater legal knowledge enhancement     |
| <i>Community Participation ↔ Confidence in Claiming Rights</i>    | 0.68                               | Strong                          | Greater community participation is associated with higher confidence in defending legal rights |

Table 5. Summary of SEM Findings

| <i>Hypothesized Relationship</i>                                                           | <i>Result</i>        | <i>Model Evidence</i>  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| <i>Community-Based Legal Assistance Services → Legal Awareness → Community Empowerment</i> | Supported            | GFI = 0.92; CFI = 0.95 |
| <i>Legal Education Intensity → Legal Knowledge</i>                                         | Positive correlation | $r = 0.71$             |
| <i>Community Participation → Confidence in Defending Rights</i>                            | Positive correlation | $r = 0.68$             |

**Note.** GFI = Goodness of Fit Index; CFI = Comparative Fit Index;  $r$  = Pearson correlation coefficient. Values above 0.90 for GFI and CFI indicate acceptable to excellent model fit. Correlation coefficients between 0.60 and 0.79 indicate strong relationships.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis supports these findings by showing that the effectiveness of community-based legal aid services simultaneously has a positive effect on community empowerment through increased legal awareness, with a Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) of 0.92 and a Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of 0.95, indicating that the research model has a good fit (Kumar, 2021). Correlation analysis also reveals a strong relationship between the intensity of legal education and increased legal knowledge ( $r = 0.71$ ), as well as between community participation and confidence in advocating for rights ( $r = 0.68$ ).

Qualitative findings were obtained through in-depth interviews with legal aid organization managers, lawyers, paralegals, and community leaders. Thematic analysis using NVivo yielded four main themes. First, the theme of legal service accessibility emphasizes that the existence of community-based services makes it easier for the public to obtain legal assistance without barriers of cost or distance (Wamue-ngare et al., 2025). Second, the theme of the quality of legal assistance indicates that paralegals play a crucial role in providing simple and easily understandable legal

education, thereby enhancing the public's legal literacy (McGladrey et al., 2026). Third, the theme of community participation underscores that active citizen engagement in legal awareness activities strengthens social solidarity and boosts confidence in advocating for rights (Panday, 2026). Fourth, the theme of community empowerment demonstrates that community-based legal services not only resolve disputes but also build the community's capacity to make independent decisions in socio-economic matters (Razzano & Bernardi, 2024).

The integration of quantitative and qualitative results through methodological triangulation reveals consistent findings that community-based legal aid services are effective in raising legal awareness while empowering communities. Quantitative data confirms the existence of significant relationships between variables, while qualitative data illustrates the dynamics of program implementation that reinforce the statistical results. These findings align with previous research emphasizing the importance of a participatory approach in legal services to improve access to justice (Wani et al., 2026; Olujobi & Ape, 2025). Thus, the results of this study provide comprehensive empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of community-based legal aid services in increasing legal awareness and community empowerment.

## Discussion

The results of this study confirm that community-based legal aid services are highly effective in raising public legal awareness while empowering people to advocate for their rights. Quantitative findings indicate a strong positive correlation between the intensity of legal education and increased legal knowledge, as well as between community participation and confidence in advocating for rights. This aligns with the research objective of assessing the extent to which community-based services can enhance legal awareness and community empowerment. Thus, the research question is answered through empirical evidence that community-based legal services function not only as a dispute resolution mechanism but also as an instrument of social empowerment (Wamue-ngare et al., 2025).

The interpretation of these findings within a theoretical framework is consistent with the Theory of Legal Consciousness, which emphasizes that legal consciousness is formed through the community's direct experiences in interacting with the law. The increase in legal consciousness found in this study reinforces the relevance of this theory, as the community members involved in community-based legal services demonstrated a better understanding of their rights and obligations. Furthermore, these findings also support Empowerment Theory, in which community empowerment is reflected in their increased capacity to make decisions and advocate for their rights independently (Ali et al., 2026). The Access to Justice framework has also proven relevant, as community-based legal services have been shown to expand access to justice for vulnerable groups (McGladrey et al., 2026).

Compared to previous studies, the results of this research align with the findings of Razzano & Bernardi (2024), which affirm the effectiveness of community-based approaches in building public trust in the legal system. However, this study goes a step further by demonstrating an empirical relationship between legal services, legal awareness, and community empowerment

through Structural Equation Modeling analysis. This differs from Olujobi & Ape's (2025) study, which only highlights the level of legal knowledge without linking it to socio-economic empowerment. Thus, this study provides an additional contribution in the form of a more comprehensive integration of quantitative and qualitative methods.

The scientific contribution of this article to the development of theory and practice lies in its methodological and conceptual novelty. Methodologically, this study employs an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, which is rarely applied in community-based legal studies. Conceptually, this study expands our understanding of how community-based legal services not only improve legal literacy but also strengthen community capacity in socio-economic aspects. This provides a foundation for the development of more inclusive and participatory legal policies (Ullah & Khatun, 2026).

The limitations of this study must be acknowledged appropriately. First, this study was conducted at community-based legal aid institutions in a specific region, so generalizing the results to all of Indonesia should be done with caution. Second, the quantitative sample size was limited to 250 respondents, which, although sufficiently representative, still has limitations in reflecting the diversity of the population receiving legal services. Third, the qualitative analysis relies on in-depth interviews that may be influenced by respondents' subjective biases. These limitations align with common challenges in social research, which emphasize triangulation to enhance validity (Wattanasin & Homjan, 2025).

The implications of this research for policy development are the need to strengthen community-based legal services as a strategy for community empowerment. The government and legal aid institutions need to improve the quality of legal assistance, expand service accessibility, and strengthen community participation in legal education activities. This is in line with Capulli et al. (2025), which emphasizes the need for evidence-based evaluation of legal aid programs. Additionally, this study has implications for legal practitioners to develop service models that are more participatory and empowerment-oriented.

For further research, it is recommended that comparative studies be conducted across regions to assess the effectiveness of community-based legal services in different social contexts. Research could also expand the analysis by using longitudinal methods to assess the long-term impact on legal awareness and community empowerment. Additionally, integrating digital technology approaches into community-based legal services could be a new direction for research, given the rapid development of legal tech (Audrito et al., 2025).

Finally, this study makes an important contribution to the legal and public policy literature by affirming that community-based legal aid services are an effective strategy for enhancing legal awareness and community empowerment. These findings reinforce a methodological trend that emphasizes the importance of participatory approaches in legal research (Wani et al., 2026; Panday, 2026). Thus, this article not only addresses existing research gaps but also provides a new direction for the development of theory and practice in community-based legal services.

## CONCLUSION

This study conclusively demonstrates that community-based legal aid services are effective in raising public legal awareness while strengthening community empowerment in advocating for their legal rights. Quantitative findings indicate a positive and significant relationship between the quality of legal assistance, the intensity of education, and community participation, and improvements in legal knowledge and understanding. Meanwhile, the qualitative results reveal the dynamics of program implementation that strengthen social solidarity, self-confidence, and the community's decision-making capacity. Thus, the research objective of assessing the effectiveness of community-based legal services in enhancing legal awareness and community empowerment has been empirically achieved.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in the integration of the Theory of Legal Consciousness, Empowerment Theory, and the Access to Justice Framework within the context of community-based legal services. Practically, this study provides recommendations for the development of legal aid policies that are more inclusive, participatory, and oriented toward community empowerment. The conceptual novelty offered is the assertion that community-based legal services function not only as a dispute resolution mechanism but also as an instrument for building community capacity in social, economic, and legal aspects. The implications of this research open the door to further comparative and longitudinal studies to assess the effectiveness of community-based legal services in various social and geographic contexts. Furthermore, the integration of digital technology into community-based legal services could represent a new direction for practice development, thereby expanding the reach of services and enhancing the quality of legal education. Thus, this study not only makes an academic contribution but also offers practical insights relevant to policymakers and legal practitioners in strengthening access to justice and community empowerment.

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