

Ethics of Care about Social Change and Its Application in the Foundations of Public Policy in Indonesia

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Abstrak

Perubahan sosial di Indonesia menghadirkan tantangan kompleks dalam bidang kemanusiaan, mulai dari bencana alam, migrasi, hingga kemiskinan struktural. Situasi ini menuntut kebijakan publik yang tidak hanya menekankan efektivitas administratif, tetapi juga mempertimbangkan dimensi etika. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis perubahan sosial dari perspektif *ethics of care* dan menelaah bagaimana kerangka etis tersebut dapat diterapkan sebagai dasar dalam perumusan kebijakan publik. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif-analitis dengan pendekatan studi literatur, melalui telaah kritis terhadap dokumen kebijakan, laporan lembaga pemerintah, serta literatur akademik yang relevan. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa kebijakan publik di Indonesia masih teknokratis dan prosedural, misalnya keterlambatan distribusi bantuan bencana, salah sasaran BLT COVID-19, serta kesenjangan digital pada Program Kartu Prakerja. Integrasi prinsip empati, tanggung jawab relasional, dan perhatian terhadap kerentanan dapat memperkuat legitimasi dan efektivitas kebijakan publik. Artikel ini merekomendasikan agar *ethics of care* dijadikan paradigma alternatif dalam administrasi publik, sehingga perubahan sosial yang terjadi dapat dikelola secara lebih manusiawi, berkeadilan, dan berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: Perubahan Sosial; Etika Kepedulian; Kebijakan Publik.

Abstract

Social change in Indonesia presents complex humanitarian challenges, ranging from natural disasters and migration to structural poverty. This situation demands public policies that not only emphasize administrative effectiveness but also take ethical dimensions into account. This article aims to analyze social change from the perspective of the *ethics of care* and examine how this ethical framework can be applied as a foundation for public policy formulation. The research method employed is qualitative-analytical with a literature study approach, through a critical review of policy documents, government reports, and relevant academic literature. The analysis shows that Indonesian public policies often remain technocratic and procedural, as seen in delayed disaster relief, misdirected COVID-19 cash assistance, and the digital gap in the Pre-Employment Card Program. Integrating care principles empathy, relational responsibility, and attentiveness to vulnerability can enhance legitimacy and effectiveness in public policy. This article recommends adopting the *ethics of care* as an alternative paradigm in public administration so that social change can be managed in a more humane, just, and sustainable manner.

Keywords: Social Change; Ethics of Care; Public Policy

INTRODUCTION

Social change in Indonesia is occurring at an increasingly rapid and complex pace, driven by globalization, urbanization, digital transformation,

as well as the growing risks of natural disasters and economic inequality. These dynamics not only transform social structures but also affect relationships between individuals and communities.

Such conditions demand a public policy response that is not merely technocratic and procedural but also sensitive to the actual needs of society, particularly vulnerable groups. Nugroho argues that public policy in the contemporary era must be more adaptive to social dynamics while simultaneously incorporating ethical values in order to respond adequately to the complexities of emerging problems (Nugroho, 2018).

Several studies illustrate the gap between policy objectives and lived social realities in Indonesia. For example, the development of Dhoho International Airport in Kediri generated economic benefits but also created social disruption for local communities (Junari et al., 2022). Likewise, disparities in access to education persist despite government commitments to inclusive policies (Luthfi et al., 2025). These findings highlight that policies often prioritize growth and formal targets over human experiences, underscoring the need for an ethics of care perspective that centers empathy, relational responsibility, and attentiveness to vulnerability.

This situation reflects a specific gap between the formal objectives of public policy and the lived realities of communities. For instance, disaster relief distribution has often been delayed by bureaucratic procedures (BNPB, 2020), while COVID-19 cash assistance programs were misdirected, excluding some poor households and benefiting wealthier groups (Astuti & Yuliani, 2021). Such cases demonstrate how policies focused on administrative efficiency frequently neglect the human dimension.

Based on this background, the present study aims to analyze social change in Indonesia from the perspective of the ethics of care, focusing on how principles such as empathy, relational responsibility, and attention to vulnerable groups can be integrated into the foundation of public policy. By employing a qualitative analytical approach through literature review, this study seeks to contribute to the development of a more humane, inclusive, and just paradigm of public policy, while at the same time affirming the importance of ethical

dimensions in responding to contemporary social dynamics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies have shown that ethics plays an important role in strengthening public policy in the context of social change. Tronto emphasizes that the ethics of care can enrich modern democracy because the principle of care ensures that policies do not marginalize vulnerable groups (Tronto, 2017). This is relevant for this study as it provides a normative foundation for inclusive policymaking. However, Tronto's argument remains largely theoretical and requires empirical grounding in specific policy contexts such as Indonesia. Similarly, Barnes argues that practices of care in everyday life contribute to strengthening social solidarity and reducing exclusion in public services (Barnes, 2020). This highlights the practical dimension of care ethics and shows its applicability to governance. Nevertheless, Barnes discussion is centered on community level practices, leaving open the question of how such practices can be institutionalized at the level of national public policy.

In Indonesia found that poverty alleviation programs often failed due to the lack of ethical consideration and sensitivity to the lived experiences of poor communities, Nugroho stressed the need for public policy reform to become more responsive to humanitarian values. These findings indicate a persistent gap between the formal objectives of public policy and the ethical needs of society, highlighting the relevance of this study (Nugroho, 2018). This directly supports the relevance of this study, yet Nugroho's work stops short of offering a concrete ethical framework, which the ethics of care can potentially provide.

In theoretical terms, this study employs the framework of the ethics of care, which emphasizes empathy, relational responsibility, and attentiveness to human vulnerability in decision making processes (Noddings, 2018). This principle is considered more contextual and relational than

other normative ethics that tend to be abstract. In the context of public policy, the principle of care can be operationalized into several indicators, including the extent to which policies are sensitive to community needs (empathy), how policies involve public actors and local communities (relationality), and whether policies prioritize vulnerable groups such as disaster victims, the poor, and marginalized populations (attention to vulnerability). On the other hand, public policy as a variable in this study can also be understood through indicators of effectiveness in achieving objectives, fairness in distribution, and social legitimacy as reflected in the acceptance of policies by the public (Nugroho, 2018).

Recent scholarship further enriches the understanding of care ethics and demonstrates its applicability in contemporary governance. Noddings reiterates that moral action arises from concrete human relationships and is grounded in empathy and responsibility for others (Noddings, 2018). Building on this, Tronto extends care ethics into the public and political domain, suggesting that institutions should institutionalize care as part of their decision-making structures (Tronto, 2017). More recent works have highlighted that the ethics of care provides an alternative paradigm for policy evaluation in times of rapid social change. Xu and Smyth for instance, argues that care ethics places interdependence and well-being at the center of organizational and policy decisions, moving beyond efficiency to embrace human dignity (Xu & Smyth, 2023). This aligns with the present study’s objective to integrate ethics of care into policy analysis. Still, their focus on organizational contexts requires further exploration in relation to state level policy challenges in Indonesia. Ley likewise contends that resilience and social sustainability depend on recognizing care as a collective responsibility, which can guide equitable and inclusive policymaking (Ley, 2023). Hou and Johnston also demonstrates that applying the ethics of care in institutional communication builds legitimacy and trust by centering responsiveness and relational accountability (Hou & Johnston, 2024).

With this framework, the present study proceeds from the assumption that social change creates humanitarian challenges that require public policy to be ethically sensitive. If policy remains focused solely on technocratic effectiveness, there is a risk of neglecting the needs of vulnerable groups. Conversely, integrating the ethics of care can strengthen the human dimension of public policy, ensuring that social change is managed more humanely, fairly, and sustainably. Therefore, the main research questions of this study are how the perspective of the ethics of care can be used to analyze social change in Indonesia and how the principles of care can be applied in the foundation of public policy to make it more humane and inclusive. These questions also point to the hypothesis that integrating the principles of the ethics of care into public policy will increase sensitivity toward vulnerable groups and enhance social legitimacy in processes of social change.

Please refer to the table below to visually see how previous studies are presented.

Table 1. Previous Studies on Ethics of Care and Public Policy

Author & Year	Focus of Study	Key Contribution	Relevance to Present Study
Tronto (2017)	Ethics of care in democracy	Argues care ensures policies do not marginalize vulnerable groups	Provides ethical foundation for inclusive policymaking
Barnes (2020)	Care in every-day life	Highlights how care strengthens solidarity and reduces exclusion	Shows practical impact of care on social cohesion
Nugroh o (2018)	Poverty allevia-	Notes failure due	Demonstrate- s local policy



	tion in Indon- esia	to lack of ethical sensitivity	gaps needing ethics of care
Noddin gs (2018)	Theore- tical founda- tion	Emphasizes empathy, relational responsibi- lity, attentiven- ess to vulnerabil- ity	Serves as core theoreti- cal lens
Xu & Smyth (2023)	Organ- ization- al & policy decisi- ons	Places interdepe- ndence and well being at the center	Links ethics of care to contempora- ry governa- nce
Ley (2023)	Resilie- nce & sustai- nability	Defines care as collective responsibi- lity for equitable policy	Connects care with long term social justice
Hou & Johnsto n (2024)	Institut- ional comm- unicati- on	Shows care builds legitimacy & trust	Extends ethics of care into public sector practices

Source: Compiled from literature review

As summarized in Table 1, previous studies consistently demonstrate the relevance of the ethics of care for strengthening public policy, particularly in contexts of vulnerability, social cohesion, and democratic legitimacy. Tronto and Noddings provide the theoretical foundation, while Barnes and Nugroho highlight its practical importance in everyday governance and Indonesian poverty programs. More recent contributions by Xu & Smyth, Ley, and Hou & Johnston extend the discussion into organizational decision-making, sustainability, and institutional trust. Taken together, these studies indicate that while the ethics

of care has been widely discussed conceptually and in community-level practices, its application to state-level policymaking in Indonesia remains underexplored. This gap underscores the urgency of examining how care principles can be operationalized in Indonesian public policies to respond to the challenges of social change.

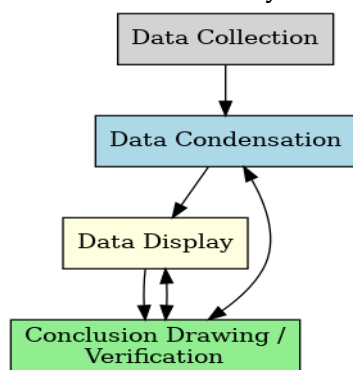
RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design with a literature study approach, which is suitable for exploring the ethical dimensions of social change and public policy through the lens of the ethics of care. Data sources were collected from both academic publications and policy documents, with particular attention to recent works in Jurnal Mediasosian. For example, Hanum dan Yanuarita analyzed the dynamics of community health services within the TB Care Aisyiyah program in Kediri Regency, offering valuable insight into how local governance responds to social and humanitarian issues (Hanum & Yanuarita, 2020), while Haryono conducted a comparative study of public management reform in Indonesia and France, which highlights how institutional reforms are shaped by broader ethical and administrative considerations (Haryono, 2021).

These studies provide important contextual grounding for situating care ethics within the Indonesian policy landscape. Data collection was carried out through systematic searches using keywords such as “social change”, “ethics of care”, “public policy” across academic databases and journal archives, with inclusion criteria restricted to publications between 2016 and 2025 to ensure contemporary relevance. The data analysis employed thematic content analysis, which, as Miles, Huberman, and Saldana explain, involves data reduction, categorization, and synthesis (Miles et al., 2019).



Picture 1. Chart of Data Analysis Technique



Source: Microsoft Word

This study employed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, which involves data collection, condensation, display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Policy documents and academic literature were coded and categorized to identify key themes such as bureaucratic delays and exclusion of vulnerable groups. The condensed data were then organized into tables and diagrams, enabling the identification of recurring patterns. Conclusions were iteratively verified, highlighting how the ethics of care can inform more humane and inclusive public policies.

Document analysis was also applied as a complementary strategy, following Bowen's approach, which emphasizes identifying recurring patterns and meanings across policy texts (Bowen, 2009). This combined analytical framework enabled the researcher to identify key themes such as empathy, relational responsibility, vulnerability, justice, and legitimacy and to synthesize them into a conceptual model linking ethics of care with humane and sustainable public policy outcomes. The methodological rigor of this design ensures both theoretical depth and empirical relevance, while also reflecting best practices in qualitative inquiry as outlined by Sugiyono (Sugiyono, 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Examples of Policy

The findings indicate that public policy in Indonesia, in responding to social change, is still largely dominated by technocratic and procedural approaches. For instance, in disaster management,

the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB) reported that the distribution of aid was often hampered by bureaucracy, which delayed the delivery of basic necessities to victims. This reveals a gap between administrative effectiveness and the urgent fulfillment of human needs, which largely stems from the dominance of technocratic approaches in policy design. Policies tend to prioritize efficiency, procedures, and statistical targets, while neglecting the lived realities of vulnerable groups. The ethics of care can bridge this gap by emphasizing empathy, relational responsibility, and attentiveness to vulnerability, ensuring that policy decisions address not only procedural goals but also the dignity and well being of affected communities. Similar findings were observed in poverty alleviation programs, where success indicators were mostly determined by macro-level statistics, while the daily experiences of poor communities were frequently overlooked (BNPB, 2020).

Another example can be seen in the implementation of the Direct Cash Assistance (BLT) program during the COVID-19 pandemic. Research by Astuti and Yuliani found that BLT distribution in several regions was often misdirected; some poor households were not included in the beneficiary lists, while relatively affluent groups received the assistance. This reflects a lack of sensitivity in policy toward real social conditions on the ground (Astuti & Yuliani, 2021). A similar problem occurred in the Pre-Employment Card Program (Kartu Prakerja), which, as noted by Firnanda, placed greater emphasis on digitalization and online training without considering the limited internet access faced by informal workers and rural communities, thereby widening the digital divide (Firnanda et al., 2021).

Public policy in the education sector has also revealed shortcomings in its implementation. Falah and Hadna argued that the policy of computer-based national examinations was not fully inclusive because it failed to account for infrastructure limitations in underdeveloped regions. Instead of improving the quality of education evenly, the

policy created additional burdens for schools and students in areas with inadequate access (Falah & Hadna, 2022).

Further criticism has been directed at large-scale infrastructure development policies, which often neglect social dimensions. According to Junari, Widodo, and Prissando, the construction of Dhoho International Airport in Kediri generated double-edged social impacts while it contributed to economic growth, local communities simultaneously faced social alienation, cultural shifts, and rising crime rates. This illustrates that development policies focused solely on economic growth are often misaligned with the social needs of local communities (Junari et al., 2022).

Table 2. Example of Public Policy Responses to Social Change in

Sector	Source	Key Findings	Ethical Gap Identified
Disaster Management	BNPB (2020)	Distribution of aid delayed by bureaucracy, slowing delivery of basic necessities to victims	Administrative effective-ness prioritized over urgent humanitarian needs
Poverty Alleviation Programs	BNPB (2020)	Success indicators based on macro statistics, daily realities of poor communities overlooked	Lack of attention to lived experiences of vulnerable groups
Direct Cash Assistance (BLT) during COVID-19	Astuti & Yuliani (2021)	Misdirected distribution: poor households excluded, affluent groups included	Weak sensitivity to real social conditions on the ground
Pre-Emplo-	Firna-nda et	Emphasis on digitalization	Widening digital divide

yment Card Program (Kartu Prakerja)	al. (2021)	and online training despite poor internet access in rural areas	and exclusion of informal workers
Educati-on Policy (Com-puter Based National Exams)	Falah & Hadna (2022)	Infrastruc-tural limitationsin underde-veloped regions ignored, burdening schools and students	Inequality in education access and inclusive-ness
Infrastr-ucture Develo-pment (Dhoho Airport, Kediri)	Junari, Wido-do & Prissa-ndo (2022)	Boosted economic growth but caused social alienation, cultural shifts, and crime	Prioritized economic growth over local community well being

Source: BNPB (2020), Astuti & Yuliani (2021), Firnanda et al.(2021), Falah & Hadna (2022), and Junari et al.(2022).

As summarized in Table 2, different sectors of public policy in Indonesia disaster management, poverty alleviation, cash assistance programs, employment training, education, and infrastructure reveal recurring patterns. Across these cases, policies prioritize administrative rationality, efficiency, and procedural goals while neglecting the lived realities of vulnerable groups. Bureaucratic delays, reliance on macro indicators, digital exclusion, and infrastructural inequality illustrate how technocratic approaches dominate policy design. This recurring gap highlights the absence of ethical sensitivity and underscores the relevance of the ethics of care, which calls for empathy, relational responsibility, and attentiveness to human vulnerability as guiding principles for policymaking.

Perspective Ethics of Care

From the perspective of the ethics of care, the persistent gap in Indonesian public policy can be

understood as a weakness in incorporating empathy and attentiveness to human vulnerability. Care ethics underscores that moral and political decisions should emerge from concrete human relationships rather than abstract, impersonal logic (Held, 2019). This implies that effective public policies should not merely prioritize the attainment of quantitative targets but must also ensure that the voices, needs, and lived experiences of vulnerable communities are fully integrated into the design and implementation of policies.

Evidence from recent studies suggests that community-based approaches in Indonesia demonstrate stronger alignment with care ethics. For instance, a study on participatory governance practices highlights that policies shaped with active citizen involvement are more responsive to local needs and therefore generate higher legitimacy (Hanum & Yanuarita, 2020). Similarly, Mulyadi notes that inclusive administrative practices such as involving marginalized groups in planning processes tend to reduce social exclusion and enhance collective resilience (Mulyadi, 2022). These findings resonate with Tronto's argument that just democracies must embed care practices at the institutional level to design policies that are both inclusive and ethically grounded (Tronto, 2017).

Moreover, adopting a care-based framework has the potential to strengthen the social legitimacy of public policy. As Fischer argues, legitimacy depends not only on compliance with formal regulations but also on whether people perceive policies as an authentic expression of governmental concern for their well-being. This relational dimension of legitimacy is especially critical in contexts where public trust is fragile (Fischer, 2019). Research on social policy in developing regions further confirms that when governments visibly prioritize care, empathy, and fairness, citizens are more likely to support and engage with state initiatives (Abbas et al., 2023). Thus, embedding ethics of care into Indonesian public policy can serve not only as a moral imperative but also as a practical

strategy to foster public trust and ensure sustainable social transformation.

Suggestion for the better public policy in Indonesia

Based on the analysis, it is evident that social change in Indonesia requires public policies that are not only procedurally responsive but also ethically sensitive. Procedural responsiveness ensures that policy processes are efficient and systematic, yet without ethical grounding, they often fail to address the lived realities of vulnerable groups. The integration of care principles into public policy offers a pathway to bridge this gap, transforming governance into a tool of social justice and human dignity.

The first strategy is to strengthen institutional empathy by positioning the needs of vulnerable groups such as disaster victims, the urban poor, and marginalized communities as a primary consideration in policy formulation. Institutional empathy requires governments to move beyond statistical indicators and embrace qualitative understandings of human experiences (Held, 2019). Research demonstrates that when governments actively integrate empathy into decision-making, policies become more inclusive and gain stronger societal acceptance (Abbas et al., 2023).

The second strategy is to reinforce relationality by involving local communities directly in the policymaking process. Community-based approaches allow citizens not merely to be recipients of policy but active participants in shaping it. As Hanum found in her study of community health services in Kediri, policies that incorporate local participation are more adaptive and effective in responding to specific social contexts. Similarly, Mulyadi emphasizes that participatory governance reduces exclusion and fosters collective ownership of policies, aligning with Tronto's argument that just democracies require institutionalized practices of care.

The third strategy is to ensure ethical sustainability, which entails designing policies that do not merely resolve immediate crises but also safeguard long-term human dignity and social resilience. Ethical sustainability involves anticipating the unintended consequences of policies and embedding fairness, equity, and care into their long-term outcomes (Fischer, 2019). For example, infrastructure development projects should not only aim for economic growth but also protect cultural heritage, community well-being, and environmental integrity. This echoes Ley's argument that well-being and resilience in modern societies are collective responsibilities grounded in care (Ley, 2023).

Table 3. Strategies for Integrating Ethics of Care into Public Policy

Strategy	Description	Expected Impact
Strengthening Institutional Empathy	Prioritize the needs of vulnerable groups (disaster victims, urban poor, marginalized communities) by moving beyond statistical indicators to qualitative understandings of lived experiences	Policies become more inclusive and socially accepted
Reinforcing Relationality	Involve local communities directly in policymaking, enabling citizens to be active participants rather than passive recipients	Policies are more adaptive, reduce exclusion, and foster collective ownership
Ensuring Ethical Sustainability	Design policies to safeguard long term dignity and resilience by embedding fairness, equity, and care while anticipating	Policies support sustainable development, protect community well-being,

unintended
consequences

and
strengthen
social
resilience

Source: Held (2019), Tronto (2017), Abbas et al.(2023), Fischer (2019).

Taken together, these strategies highlight how the ethics of care can serve as a normative foundation for reorienting Indonesian public policy. By embedding empathy, relational responsibility, and sustainability into governance structures, policies can function as instruments of transformative social change policies that are not only technically sound but also humane, fair, and sustainable. In this way, the state is not perceived merely as a bureaucratic apparatus but as a caring institution that acknowledges, responds to, and upholds the dignity of all citizens.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study concludes that social change in Indonesia presents complex challenges that cannot be adequately addressed through technocratic and procedural policy frameworks alone. The analysis reveals that existing public policies often prioritize administrative efficiency and macro level indicators, while neglecting the lived realities and vulnerabilities of marginalized groups. Such an approach undermines the human dimension of governance and weakens public trust. By employing the perspective of the ethics of care, it becomes evident that empathy, relational responsibility, and attentiveness to human vulnerability are essential elements for reorienting public policy. Policies that incorporate these values are not only more inclusive and responsive but also strengthen social legitimacy, ensuring that governance functions as an instrument of humane, just, and sustainable transformation.

Future research is encouraged to further investigate how the principles of the ethics of care can be operationalized in diverse policy domains such as disaster management, education, health, and infrastructure development. Empirical studies involving community-based participatory

approaches would be particularly valuable in examining how care-oriented practices enhance policy legitimacy and social cohesion. Comparative studies between Indonesia and other countries could also provide insights into best practices for integrating ethical sensitivity into public policy. Moreover, interdisciplinary approaches combining philosophy, sociology, and public administration are needed to enrich theoretical frameworks and produce more holistic strategies. Instead of remaining abstract, the ethics of care can be applied concretely in public policy through several strategies. First, institutional empathy can be strengthened by prioritizing the needs of disaster victims, the poor, and marginalized communities in policy formulation. Second, relational responsibility can be realized by involving local communities directly in decision making processes. Third, sustainability can be ensured by designing policies that anticipate long term social impacts, such as protecting cultural identity and reducing inequality in infrastructure development. By integrating these practices, policies can move beyond technocratic rationality to become both effective and ethically responsive to human dignity and social justice.

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