CARING TOGETHER: GRASSROOTS CHILDCARE, URBAN INCLUSION, AND COLLECTIVE RESILIENCE

Saifudin Asrori[1]*, Muhammad Ismai'il[2], Ahmad Shabbir[3]
[1,2] UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Indonesia
[3]University of Sahiwal, Pakistan
E-mail: saifudin.asrori@uinjkt.ac.id

Abstract. As urbanization accelerates in Indonesia, access to affordable, inclusive, and culturally relevant childcare remains a persistent challenge for urban families, particularly among working-class and marginalized communities. This study investigates Rumah Anak, a community-led childcare initiative in an urban neighborhood of Indonesia, to understand how grassroots caregiving models foster social cohesion, reciprocal care, and resilience amidst institutional fragmentation and resource scarcity. Using a qualitative case study approach that includes semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, the research identifies three interrelated dynamics: trust-building and social bonding, reciprocal caregiving as a local ethic, and grassroots navigation of institutional ambiguity. The findings illustrate that Rumah Anak functions not merely as a substitute for formal daycare, but as a form of relational social infrastructure that strengthens community ties, supports maternal employment, and enhances child development. The study concludes that community-based childcare systems, when adequately supported, hold transformative potential for inclusive urban development and call for policy frameworks that center care as a shared civic responsibility.

Keywords: community-based childcare; reciprocal care; urban inclusion; social infrastructure; grassroots resilience

Abstrak. Di tengah percepatan urbanisasi di Indonesia, akses terhadap layanan pengasuhan anak yang terjangkau, inklusif, dan sesuai dengan konteks budaya masih menjadi tantangan besar, terutama bagi keluarga kelas pekerja dan kelompok marjinal. Penelitian ini mengkaji Rumah Anak, sebuah inisiatif pengasuhan anak berbasis komunitas di kawasan urban Indonesia, untuk memahami bagaimana model pengasuhan akar rumput mampu membangun kohesi sosial, praktik perawatan timbal balik, dan ketahanan kolektif di tengah fragmentasi kelembagaan dan keterbatasan sumber daya. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi partisipan, dan analisis dokumen, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi tiga dinamika utama: pembangunan kepercayaan dan ikatan sosial, etika lokal dalam perawatan timbal balik, serta adaptasi komunitas terhadap ambiguitas institusional. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa Rumah Anak bukan sekadar alternatif dari daycare formal, melainkan berfungsi sebagai infrastruktur sosial relasional yang memperkuat jaringan komunitas, mendukung partisipasi kerja perempuan, dan meningkatkan perkembangan anak. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa sistem pengasuhan berbasis komunitas, jika didukung secara memadai, memiliki potensi transformatif dalam pembangunan kota yang inklusif dan menuntut kerangka kebijakan yang menempatkan perawatan sebagai tanggung jawab sipil Bersama.

Kata kunci: pengasuhan anak berbasis komunitas; pengasuhan timbal balik; inklusi perkotaan; infrastruktur sosial; ketahanan masyarakat

* Corresponding author

Introduction

As urbanization accelerates across Indonesia, urban families face increasing challenges in accessing affordable, high-quality, and accessible childcare services. The growing number of dual-income households, the decline of intergenerational support, and the weakening of traditional community ties have transformed childcare from a private responsibility into an urgent public issue. Despite Indonesia's notable economic progress, urban childcare services remain unevenly distributed, often excluding middle- and lower-income families due to high costs, limited availability, and the absence of culturally responsive models (Behbehani et al., 2024; Li & Li, 2024). Rumah Anak is located in Bintaro, South Tangerang, a rapidly urbanizing subdistrict within the Greater Jakarta Metropolitan Area. This location reflects both the infrastructural limitations and social diversity common to many peri-urban neighborhoods in Indonesia, making it a relevant site for examining grassroots care models under conditions of institutional flux.

Recent research on community-centered childcare in urban environments in Indonesia highlights significant challenges and opportunities in enhancing child development through localized care facilities. As cities continue to urbanize rapidly, the need for effective community-centered childcare systems becomes increasingly critical to support working families and ensure children's school readiness. First, the role of professionally qualified caregivers in promoting children's growth and development has been emphasized. Indarwati and Firmansyah (2022) argue that accredited childcare centers are pivotal in ensuring that staff possess the necessary qualifications and competencies, aligning with Indonesia's National Program for Children aimed at creating a world fit for children. Similarly, Hunter et al. (2022) suggest that evidence-based professional development programs for educators can significantly improve the quality of early childhood education in community-based centers, particularly those often underfunded.

Moreover, informal childcare settings commonly found in urban areas present a dual challenge and opportunity. Oloo et al. (2023) report that many informal home-based centers suffer from poor quality environments, hindering effective child development and leading to suboptimal educational and health outcomes. In response, Li and Laughlin (2023) advocate for recognizing childcare as a vital component of urban infrastructure, which could mobilize investment and elevate care standards across diverse settings. This infrastructure approach could also support informal caregivers who represent the backbone of urban childcare in Indonesia.

Furthermore, the integration of community-based participatory research has proven effective in uncovering the specific needs of childcare providers and the families they serve. Jegathesan et al. (2023) demonstrate how engaging local communities offers critical insights into childcare quality and enables implementation strategies tailored to the socio-economic realities of urban residents in places like Indonesia. This participatory approach aligns with broader findings that emphasize the need for inclusive community involvement in the design and delivery of early childhood programs to ensure responsiveness and quality.

At a structural level, the complexities surrounding women's participation in the labor force particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic underscore the importance of reliable childcare services. Studies from related contexts indicate that community-based childcare is essential for enabling mothers to participate in paid work without compromising the welfare of their children (O'Brien et al., 2022). As urban mothers face increasing pressure to balance work and caregiving responsibilities, it becomes evident that strong community childcare systems are essential not only for child development but also for women's economic empowerment.

In this context, Indonesia's conventional daycare model typically operated through formal institutions that emphasize standardization, professionalization, and service efficiency faces limitations. While this model provides structure, it often overlooks the relational and participatory dimensions of care that are crucial for children's emotional well-being and social development. Moreover, the top-down, transactional approach of institutional childcare may alienate parents from caregiving processes, weaken social cohesion, and diminish opportunities for mutual support.

Consequently, numerous studies have called for alternative models of childcare that are inclusive, affordable, and embedded in local contexts. Prior research highlights the importance of integrating cultural values, local knowledge, and participatory practices to foster child development while strengthening social cohesion (Auliya et al., 2021). Both the government and local organizations must take into account community feedback and adapt childcare practices to better serve Indonesia's increasingly diverse urban population. Dynamic collaboration among families, care providers, and community leaders can improve the effectiveness of child development programs in complex urban environments.

This article addresses this gap by examining *Rumah Anak*, a community-led childcare initiative located in an urban area of Indonesia. Unlike conventional daycare centers, *Rumah Anak* operates on principles of trust, mutual support, and collective responsibility, positioning childcare as an integral part of everyday community life. Through this case study, the research aims to explore two key questions: How does *Rumah Anak* foster social cohesion and reciprocal support among parents and caregivers? and What are the broader implications of community-based daycare models for inclusive and sustainable urban development?

Drawing on a qualitative case study approach that combines in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, this article argues that community-based childcare can function as a form of urban social infrastructure. The findings contribute empirical evidence to the growing literature on relational and participatory care models, demonstrating how such approaches can address systemic inequalities in childcare provision while enhancing social trust and environmental resilience. Ultimately, this study not only expands the understanding of childcare as a relational and collective practice but also contributes to broader urban policy debates on how community-based solutions can complement formal welfare systems in the face of rapid urbanization.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore how community-based childcare initiatives in urban Indonesia foster social cohesion, mutual support, and alternative caregiving models. This approach is well-suited to capture the nuanced, context-specific ways in which families and caregivers navigate the intersections of childcare, community participation, and urban life. Given Indonesia's rapidly urbanizing society and the persistent disparities in access to childcare services, a qualitative methodology allows for a deeper understanding of how grassroots models like Rumah Anak function as relational social infrastructure (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and participant observation conducted over the course of January-June 2025. A total of 18 participants were involved in the study, comprising 10 mothers, 3 fathers, 3 caregivers, and 2 daycare coordinators. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure diversity in caregiving roles, gender, socio-economic backgrounds, and duration of involvement with *Rumah Anak* (Palinkas et al., 2015). Inclusion criteria required caregivers to have at least one year of experience with *Rumah Anak*, and parents to have been actively involved for a minimum of six months. Daycare managers were included for their operational knowledge and community coordination roles. Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility in exploring key themes such as trust-building processes, experiences of reciprocal care, children's emotional and social development, and perceptions of collective responsibility. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes, was conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, and subsequently transcribed and translated for analysis.

In addition to interviews, participant observation was conducted to capture everyday dynamics of caregiving practices and community interaction within *Rumah Anak*. Observations were carried out in a non-intrusive manner and focused on caregiver-child interactions, daily routines (such as the "Morning Story" ritual), transitions between home and daycare, and informal exchanges between parents and caregivers. These observations provided rich contextual insights that complemented the narratives gathered through interviews.

To strengthen the data, document analysis was conducted on internal materials such as meeting notes, program outlines, and parent feedback forms. These documents offered additional perspectives on governance structures, participatory practices, and operational challenges faced by *Rumah Anak*.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six iterative steps proposed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006): familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme identification, theme review, theme definition, and final reporting. Coding was conducted inductively, allowing patterns to emerge organically from participants' narratives and field observations. The resulting themes were organized into broader categories that reflect the dynamics of trust-based caregiving networks, reciprocal care economies, and the institutional challenges encountered by Rumah Anak.

To ensure credibility and depth of findings, the study applied methodological triangulation by cross-verifying data from interviews, participant observations, and document analysis (Patton,

1999). This triangulated approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of families and caregivers, as well as the communal structures that support grassroots childcare initiatives in urban Indonesia.

As a qualitative, community-based study, the research process was informed by an awareness of the researcher's positionality and its potential influence on data collection and interpretation. The primary researcher approached the field as an outsider with prior experience in community development but no prior affiliation with Rumah Anak. This position necessitated a prolonged engagement phase to build rapport and minimize hierarchical dynamics during interviews and observations. Reflexive journaling was maintained throughout the research process to document researcher biases, shifts in understanding, and the evolving nature of field interactions.

Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the study. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation, with verbal and written explanations regarding the study's aims, the voluntary nature of participation, and the right to withdraw at any time. To ensure privacy and confidentiality, all names and identifying details have been anonymized or replaced with pseudonyms. Special care was taken in narrating sensitive stories particularly those related to gender, employment, and childcare struggles to ensure respectful representation.

Results and Discussion

The findings from this study reveal three interconnected themes that illustrate how *Rumah Anak* operates as a form of relational social infrastructure within an urban setting: the cultivation of trust and social cohesion, the practice of reciprocal caregiving and mutual support, and the negotiation of informal institutional logics in a constrained policy environment.

Trust-Building and Social Cohesion

One of the most salient outcomes of Rumah Anak is its role in fostering horizontal trust and social cohesion among parents and caregivers. Unlike conventional daycare models that emphasize transactional service delivery, Rumah Anak encourages continuous interpersonal engagement and a shared sense of responsibility. Parents described the center not as a service provider but as a "supportive family circle," where emotional comfort and solidarity were just as important as the act of caregiving itself. One mother noted, *"Saya merasa bukan hanya menitipkan anak, tapi ikut jadi bagian dari komunitas yang saling menjaga. Kalau saya tidak bisa datang, ada ibu lain yang bantu gantiin jaga."* Such comments reflect a high level of mutual trust and a shift from individualized to collective responsibility.

Activities such as the Morning Story ritual, collaborative cooking, and informal parent check-ins served both symbolic and practical functions, fostering a culture of emotional intimacy. These routines supported not only the children's sense of stability but also the parents' sense of belonging. One father explained, *"Awalnya saya pikir ini cuma tempat jaga anak, tapi ternyata saya juga dapat*

teman ngobrol, diskusi soal tumbuh kembang, bahkan urusan kerja." These narratives as social infrastructure the material and relational spaces that sustain social interaction, trust, and cooperation in everyday life.

Recent research on trust-building and cohesion in Indonesian childcare supports these findings. Kumalasari and Alhasyimi (2023) emphasize the role of social childcare, wherein community-based collaboration reduces caregiving stress while fostering safety and support. In Rumah Anak, parents often referred to informal norms of care rotation and mutual accountability as sources of emotional stability. A coordinator recalled, *"Tidak ada yang merasa lebih penting dari yang lain. Semua punya peran, dan itu membuat rasa saling percaya tumbuh."* These informal arrangements reflect the kind of informal social control that strengthens bonds and reinforces normative expectations in local communities.

Moreover, the presence of trust-based care arrangements appeared to support maternal employment and gender role flexibility. Several mothers expressed that knowing their children were in a "known and trusted environment" allowed them to re-enter or remain in the workforce. As one mother articulated, *"Saya bisa kerja lebih tenang karena tahu anak saya dijaga bukan oleh orang asing, tapi oleh orang yang saya kenal, bahkan sering ketemu tiap hari."* That accessible and trusted childcare is essential in enabling women's participation in the labor force and reshaping traditional gendered expectations.

From a broader urban policy lens, the insights from *Rumah Anak* represent forms of social investment not only for early childhood outcomes but also for neighborhood cohesion. In a context where public services are limited and privatized options are unaffordable, *Rumah Anak* emerged as a node of everyday resilience. This was particularly evident in how families from diverse socioeconomic and religious backgrounds came together through shared caregiving, reinforcing what one parent called "ikatan tanpa pamrih yang muncul karena saling peduli." Furthermore, *Rumah Anak* also served marginalized groups, including single and migrant mothers. For example, one caregiver recounted the story of a domestic worker who joined the caregiving rotation during her day off: *"Dia nggak punya keluarga di sini, tapi dia merasa diterima. Anaknya juga jadi dekat dengan anak-anak lain."*

Rumah Anak serves as bonding and bridging social capital emerged simultaneously, enabling deep relational trust within the group while also connecting families from different cultural and economic backgrounds. Rumah Anak demonstrates how community-centered childcare rooted in everyday trust, reciprocity, and informal participation can serve as an anchor of cohesion amid the turbulence of urban life. By embedding care in relational practices and shared routines, this model addresses not only child development but also the social architecture of inclusive cities.

Reciprocal Care as a Local Ethic

The caregiving ecosystem at *Rumah Anak* is grounded in a deeply embedded ethic of reciprocity, in which caregiving is not merely a task delegated to professionals but a shared, evolving responsibility among community members. Unlike institutional childcare models that are often individualized and commodified, the model observed in this study exemplifies what recent literature refers to as reciprocal care a locally situated ethic that sustains mutual support, emotional interdependence, and collective resilience in the face of urban pressures.

One of the defining features of this model is the flexibility of caregiving roles. Parents and caregivers routinely shift between providing direct care, organizing learning activities, or facilitating logistics depending on availability and need. A caregiver shared: *"Kalau ada orang tua yang harus lembur atau sedang sakit, kita langsung atur gantian. Sudah jadi kebiasaan saling bantu, bukan karena diminta tapi karena merasa bertanggung jawab."* Such arrangements reflect an informal but robust social contract generate informal social controls that not only reduce parental stress but also reinforce a communal safety net.

This ethic is not only emotional but practical. Tasks such as preparing communal meals, cleaning shared spaces, or managing children's routines were seen not as burdens, but as acts of care that deepened trust and belonging. *"Saya nggak merasa ini beban, karena tahu anak saya juga dirawat dengan cara yang sama oleh orang tua lain,"* said one participant. This sense of circular reciprocity where giving and receiving care are seen as mutually reinforcing is crucial in maintaining daily operations, especially in under-resourced settings.

Research has shown that such mutual care arrangements can enhance the overall quality of childcare. At *Rumah Anak*, the fluid rotation of caregivers did not diminish attachment or consistency. Instead, it enabled children to develop adaptive social relationships and emotional resilience. A mother described her child's behavior at home: *"Dia jadi lebih terbuka, gampang percaya sama orang dewasa karena dari kecil sudah terbiasa dikelilingi banyak orang yang sayang."* These findings suggest that communal caregiving, when grounded in reciprocity and trust, can produce developmental benefits comparable to (or in some cases exceeding) formal childcare settings. The reciprocal ethic also contributes to broader educational and professional development. Inspired by peer-led models, caregivers at *Rumah Anak* often hold informal training sessions where they exchange strategies for storytelling, conflict resolution, and emotional regulation.

Moreover, reciprocal care practices extend beyond immediate caregiving needs. Participants described how the network also mobilizes to address wider social needs, such as coordinating emergency funds, facilitating transport for pregnant mothers, or organizing collective clean-up days. Such models are especially significant for marginalized populations. One caregiver recounted how a migrant mother, initially hesitant to participate due to language barriers and irregular work hours, gradually became part of the caregiving rotation: *"Awalnya dia hanya antar jemput, tapi lama-lama ikut bantu juga. Sekarang malah jadi orang yang paling rajin hadir di pertemuan bulanan."* This

reflects that place-based childcare systems are vital for building inclusion and community belonging, particularly for women navigating precarious labor and limited state support.

The ethic of reciprocal care observed in *Rumah Anak* reveals policy-relevant implications that state-supported childcare systems can act as levers to expand communal trust and foster cultures of reciprocity. While *Rumah Anak* remains largely informal and self-sustaining, participants expressed a strong desire for greater recognition and infrastructural support from local authorities. Rather than replacing community efforts, public policy could strengthen these networks by legitimizing them, offering resources, and facilitating peer-to-peer learning platforms. *Rumah Anak* exemplifies a form of reciprocal care that blurs the boundaries between household, community, and institutional responsibility. It offers a model of resilience and solidarity, wherein caregiving is not outsourced but collectively owned. This ethic, deeply rooted in local relationality, challenges dominant paradigms of childcare and offers a compelling blueprint for inclusive and sustainable urban care systems.

Navigating Institutional Ambiguity and Resource Constraints

The experience of *Rumah Anak* underscores the complex terrain of navigating childcare provision amid institutional ambiguity and chronic resource constraints. As an informal yet structured community-led initiative, *Rumah Anak* operates in a liminal space between public policy and private responsibility where formal support is minimal, yet community expectations are substantial. This condition reflects broader national and global patterns, where urban childcare in rapidly urbanizing societies like Indonesia remains under-regulated, unevenly funded, and often out of sync with the everyday needs of working families.

Several participants expressed ambivalence regarding the presence of the state in supporting community childcare. One coordinator noted, *"Kami tidak terdaftar resmi, jadi tidak bisa dapat bantuan. Tapi kalau ada inspeksi dari kelurahan, kami harus memenuhi standar, padahal tanpa dukungan apa-apa."* This ambivalence highlights a form of institutional decoupling where official standards are expected, but the means to achieve them are absent or inaccessible. The experiences at *Rumah Anak* mirror where regional disparities and weak institutional infrastructures hinder the realization of health and safety goals in childcare policies. In the Indonesian context, this results in fragmented enforcement and a reliance on community improvisation.

To navigate this landscape, *Rumah Anak* depends heavily on relational resources and collective resilience, the initiative leverages informal networks of trust and shared responsibility to compensate for the absence of formal infrastructure. As one parent described, *"Di sini tidak ada subsidi, tapi kita punya orang-orang yang bisa diandalkan. Kalau satu orang tidak bisa, yang lain siap bantu."* These support systems do not simply fill institutional gaps; they reconstitute caregiving as a communal act, one that is embedded in a broader ethic of mutual care and improvisation under constraint.

The burden of institutional ambiguity also disproportionately affects women, particularly those working in the informal sector. One single mother working as a home-based tailor recounted, *"Saya tidak bisa ikut daycare formal karena tidak ada jam fleksibel dan mahal. Di Rumah Anak, saya bisa nitip sambil tetap ikut kegiatan kalau sempat."* This narrative that link work-family conflict and limited childcare access to broader gender inequities in urban labor markets. Without adaptable childcare solutions, women's economic participation remains precarious, reinforcing cycles of dependency and exclusion.

The tension between formal regulation and grassroots adaptability also raises questions about sustainability. Without legal recognition, Rumah Anak lacks access to public funding or technical assistance, yet formalization could risk undermining the very flexibility that allows it to thrive. As one organizer put it, *"Kalau terlalu diatur, nanti kehilangan rasa kekeluargaan. Tapi kalau dibiarkan, kami kesulitan berkembang."* This dilemma illustrates the tightrope walked by community-based initiatives that must navigate regulatory expectations while preserving their relational core. However, reconceptualizing childcare as a form of social investment, the state can shift from a policing role to one of facilitation supporting rather than standardizing community-led efforts. Policies that encourage collaborative governance and resource-sharing between public institutions and grassroots actors could alleviate many of the resource constraints currently faced by initiatives like Rumah Anak.

Further, social cohesion is itself a determinant of quality of life in urban settings. In *Rumah Anak*, the strength of community ties appears to mediate institutional fragility. Even in the absence of external resources, families derive psychosocial and practical support from one another, reinforcing collective efficacy and a sense of security. One mother reflected, *"Kami mungkin tidak punya gedung bagus atau fasilitas lengkap, tapi anak-anak tumbuh dengan kasih sayang, dan itu yang utama."*. navigating institutional ambiguity in Indonesia's urban childcare ecosystem is not merely a policy problem it is a lived condition shaped by negotiation, creativity, and solidarity. Initiatives like *Rumah Anak* demonstrate how community-based models can adapt to institutional uncertainty, turning constraints into opportunities for social cohesion. However, scaling such resilience requires not just stronger policy frameworks, but a paradigm shift that recognizes caregiving as both a communal and civic responsibility, deserving of both protection and support.

Implications for Urban Inclusion and Child Development

Recent research underscores the importance of urban inclusion and child development, particularly in the context of Indonesia, where rapid urbanization brings both opportunities and challenges. As urban areas expand, the traditional models of childcare and family support systems are increasingly strained, highlighting the need for adaptive and inclusive solutions that foster community resilience and child well-being. *Rumah Anak* offers a powerful example of how community-led initiatives can enhance child development outcomes while promoting social inclusion in urban contexts.

One of the central themes emerging from recent studies is the crucial role of community-led development initiatives in addressing urban inequality. Limaki (2024) asserts that communities themselves are best positioned to identify their needs and implement solutions, fostering a more participatory approach to urban development. *Rumah Anak* exemplifies this by empowering families to contribute to childcare arrangements, leveraging local knowledge and resources to create a sustainable model of care. This participatory approach not only mobilizes resources but also fosters a sense of collective responsibility, where each family feels a vested interest in the success of the initiative.

Trust-building within communities is another critical element for promoting effective urban inclusion. Lansing et al. (2023) emphasize that the establishment of trust through leadership and community engagement is foundational for mobilizing collective resources and achieving common goals. In the urban context, where diverse populations often coexist, fostering trust and collaboration is essential for creating safer and more nurturing environments for children. At *Rumah Anak*, the emphasis on relational care and mutual support between parents, caregivers, and community members has been pivotal in establishing a strong foundation of trust. As one participant reflected, *"Kami tidak hanya menjaga anak-anak, kami menjaga satu sama lain. Ini bukan hanya soal titipan anak, tapi soal memperkuat ikatan sebagai sesama orang tua."* This trust strengthens the social fabric of the community, ensuring that children grow up in environments where care is provided collaboratively and continuously.

Moreover, social capital, often defined as the networks of relationships and norms of reciprocity that enable cooperation among members of a community, plays a key role in enhancing child development. As noted by Busłowska and Marcinkiewicz (2023), robust community networks can significantly affect child welfare and educational outcomes. In *Rumah Anak*, the creation of a cooperative care network has not only provided a safety net for children but also fostered a sense of social belonging for parents. Parents' involvement in caregiving activities and decision-making processes has enhanced their sense of agency, reinforcing the value of shared responsibility in child-rearing. One parent remarked, *"Tidak hanya anak-anak yang berkembang, kami juga belajar untuk lebih peduli dan saling membantu."* This reciprocal care framework strengthens social cohesion, which in turn promotes better developmental outcomes for children.

The importance of new governance approaches that prioritize inclusivity is also evident in the experience of Rumah Anak has responded to the absence of formal state support by cultivating local governance structures based on trust, participation, and community empowerment. This approach demonstrates how localized governance can complement state-led policies, offering a more inclusive and responsive childcare model. Furthermore, the growth of social capital within urban communities is essential in reinforcing the mutual support systems necessary for successful child development. As urban areas become increasingly diverse, fostering environments with strong social networks becomes more critical. The implications for urban inclusion and child development are significant within Indonesia's rapidly urbanizing landscape. By prioritizing community-led initiatives, fostering trust, and enhancing social capital, stakeholders can create urban environments

that not only support child development but also empower families to thrive amidst the challenges of urban life. These findings stress the importance of integrated approaches to urban policy and community engagement, which are crucial for addressing the unique challenges faced by families in urban settings, especially in the context of limited formal resources and a rapidly shifting socio-economic environment.

Discussion

Although community-based childcare models like Rumah Anak offer a range of benefits, a critical discussion must address several inherent limitations. First, from the perspective of safety and professionalism, the absence of formal standards and the lack of caregiver training can pose potential risks to child protection, especially in emergency situations or in cases of violence and neglect that may go undetected. Second, systems that rely heavily on women's unpaid care work risk creating new dependencies that reinforce the double burden on women and increase the risk of burnout and exhaustion, particularly if male involvement in caregiving remains limited. Additionally, power relations and decision-making processes within the community can also be gender-biased, potentially sidelining the voices of women or other vulnerable groups.

The sustainability of community-based childcare initiatives like Rumah Anak continues to face a number of fundamental challenges. Heavy reliance on women's unpaid caregiving introduces the risk of excessive workloads, fatigue, and the perpetuation of gender inequality, especially if the equal distribution of roles and male participation have not yet reached an optimal level in the community. This situation becomes even more precarious in the event of social changes, member turnover, or the loss of key figures who have served as the backbone of the program. If not properly anticipated, the sustainability of the initiative may be threatened, and protection for both children and women may become inconsistent.

Therefore, it is crucial to establish genuine synergy between the community, government, and non-governmental organizations to ensure the continuous protection of women's and children's rights and not rely solely on informal solidarity. Collaboration with professional daycare services and the strengthening of community capacity through gender-sensitive training can help raise safety standards, professionalism, and the overall quality of care. Furthermore, policy advocacy that actively mainstreams the perspectives of women and children is essential to drive more just and systemic change.

Within this framework, community-based childcare models need to be critically evaluated to ensure they do not simply replicate old patterns in which women continue to bear the primary burden of caregiving without sufficient structural support. Future advocacy should focus on strengthening the role of the state as a facilitator, protector, and bridge between communities and public services, so that the value of care can truly be internalized as a shared responsibility across genders and sectors. With such an approach, community-based childcare systems have a greater

opportunity to advance gender justice, child protection, and long-term sustainability within Indonesia's urban ecosystem.

Conclusions

This study has explored how Rumah Anak, a grassroots childcare initiative in urban Indonesia, functions as a model of relational social infrastructure where caregiving is not outsourced but collectively enacted through trust, reciprocity, and mutual engagement. In contrast to institutional childcare models that emphasize efficiency, standardization, and top-down administration, Rumah Anak demonstrates the transformative potential of community-led systems grounded in social cohesion and everyday cooperation.

Through in-depth qualitative analysis, this research reveals that Rumah Anak not only provides an adaptive childcare solution for families facing urban pressures but also cultivates a strong ethic of reciprocal care that enhances both child development and community resilience. The flexible caregiving arrangements, shared routines, and informal social networks observed within the initiative are instrumental in building emotional security for children and enabling parents especially women to participate in the labor force with greater confidence and autonomy.

Moreover, Rumah Anak exemplifies how communities creatively navigate institutional ambiguity and resource constraints in the absence of consistent state support. Instead of waiting for top-down interventions, families and caregivers mobilize relational assets trust, local knowledge, and shared norms to co-create a care environment that is inclusive, participatory, and responsive to diverse needs. These practices demonstrate not only resilience but also a quiet form of resistance to the marketization and bureaucratization of care.

The implications of these findings extend beyond the localized experience of Rumah Anak. They contribute to a growing body of scholarship that views childcare not simply as a private obligation or a service to be delivered, but as a public good that requires collective investment. As urbanization continues to reshape social life in Indonesia and other parts of the Global South, the need for inclusive, culturally grounded, and community-driven models of care becomes increasingly urgent.

In light of this, policymakers and urban planners should reimagine childcare as part of the broader ecosystem of social infrastructure. Rather than imposing rigid models from above, supportive policy frameworks should recognize, resource, and replicate grassroots efforts like Rumah Anak. This means investing not only in facilities, but in people, relationships, and the social fabric that sustains everyday life. Ultimately, *Rumah Anak* is not just a solution to a childcare gap it is a vision of how communities can care for one another in ways that are equitable, dignified, and deeply human. It reminds us that in the heart of the city, care can still be collective.

Refrences

Auliya, F., Pranoto, Y. K. S., Sunawan, S., & Sunarso, A. (2021). The Permissive Non-Parental Childcare and Moral Intelligence: Indonesian Setting. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (Ijere)*, *10*(2), 569. https://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v10i2.21032

Behbehani, F., Kowalski, A., Selam, H., Dombrowski, E., & Black, M. M. (2024). Childcare Centre Attendance and Health, Growth, and Development Among Children Aged 0–3 Years in Low- And Middle-Income Countries: A Systematic Review. *Journal of Global Health*, *14*. https://doi.org/10.7189/jogh.14.04028

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101.

Busłowska, A., & Marcinkiewicz, J. (2023). Social Cohesion of Functional Urban Areas (Example of Eastern Poland). *Social Indicators Research*, *167*(1–3), 451–473. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-023-03119-4

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (4th ed). SAGE Publications.

Halim, D., Johnson, H. C., Perova, E., Oloo, L., Elsey, H., Abboah-Offei, M., Kiyeng, M., Amboka, P., Okelo, K., Kitsao-Wekulo, P., Kimani-Murage, E., Langat, N., Nampijja, M., Li, M., Laughlin, C., Setyonaluri, D., Utomo, A., Li, L., Li, J., … Firmansyah, G. (2023). Negotiating Work, Family, and Traffic: Articulations of Married Women's Employment Decisions in Greater Jakarta. *Gender Work and Organization*, *31*(6), 39–61. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2024.1454537

Hunter, L. J., Bayly, B. L., Bierman, K. L., Welsh, J. A., & Gest, J. M. (2022). Predicting School Readiness Program Implementation in Community-Based Childcare Centers. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1023505

Indarwati, F., Firmansyah, G., Li, L., & Li, J. (2022). Division of Childcare Policy Actors Under Health-Oriented Goals: Thematic Analysis of China's Policy Texts From the Social Constructionist Perspective. *Bali Medical Journal*, *10*(3), 1192–1198. https://doi.org/10.15562/bmj.v10i3.2881

Jegathesan, T., Yousafzai, A. K., Mantel, M., Sereni, V., Armstrong, R. W., & Minhas, R. (2023). Informal Settlements and the Care of Children 0–3 years of Age: A Qualitative Study. *Frontiers in Public Health*, *11*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2023.1110578

Kumalasari, D., & Alhasyimi, A. L. A. (2023). Social Childcare Concept: Social Community as a Childcare Partner for Working Parents. *Jurnal Ilmiah Psikologi Terapan*, *11*(1), 39–47. https://doi.org/10.22219/jipt.v11i1.15523

Lansing, A. E., Romero, N. J., Siantz, E., Silva, V., Center, K., Casteel, D., & Gilmer, T. (2023). Building Trust: Leadership Reflections on Community Empowerment and Engagement in a Large Urban Initiative. *BMC Public Health*, *23*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-15860-

z

Li, L., & Li, J. (2024). Division of Childcare Policy Actors Under Health-Oriented Goals: Thematic Analysis of China's Policy Texts From the Social Constructionist Perspective. *Frontiers in Public Health*, *12*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2024.1454537

Limaki, A. K. (2024). The Potential of Community-Led Development Initiatives for Addressing Urban Inequality: Strategies and Challenges of Successful Models in Practice. *International Journal of Architecture and Planning*, *4*(1), 13–24. https://doi.org/10.51483/ijarp.4.1.2024.13-24

O'Brien, C., Leavens, L., Ndiaye, C., & Traoré, D. (2022). Women's Empowerment, Income, and Nutrition in a Food Processing Value Chain Development Project in Touba, Senegal. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *19*(15), 9526. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19159526

Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, *42*, 533–544.

Patton, M. Q. (1999). Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis. *Health Services Research*, *34*(5), 1189.