

THE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL SERVICES OF SOUTH SUMATRA PROVINCE IN HANDLING DISORDERED PEOPLE DURING TRAVEL

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Abstract

The phenomenon of stranded travelers has become one of the social issues that has increased in recent years in South Sumatra Province. Data from the Social Affairs Office show that the number of stranded travelers rose significantly from 560 individuals in 2021 to 917 individuals in 2024. This study aims to analyze the role of the South Sumatra Provincial Social Affairs Office in handling stranded travelers by applying Sutarto's role theory, which encompasses role conception, role expectations, and role implementation. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method, with data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The results indicate that: (1) the role conception has been well understood through the implementation of service functions, data collection, and facilitation of repatriation; (2) the public's expectations for fast and comprehensive services have not been fully met due to limited budgets and human resources; (3) the role implementation has been fairly effective through administrative procedures, inter-agency coordination, and the provision of basic services. However, challenges such as inadequate shelter facilities, limited personnel, and the rising number of cases remain obstacles. This study recommends increasing budget allocation, strengthening cross-sectoral coordination, and optimizing digital services to ensure a more responsive and sustainable approach to handling stranded travelers.

Keywords: Public Administration, Role of the Social Affairs Office, Social Services, Stranded Travelers.

A. INTRODUCTION

Social welfare is a crucial component of national development goals, as enshrined in the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution, which affirms the state's responsibility to advance the general welfare while protecting all citizens without discrimination. In current public policy practice, this constitutional mandate is realized not only through the provision of social security, but also through various conditional assistance schemes and adaptive social protection programs designed to respond to increasingly diverse vulnerabilities amidst rapid socioeconomic change (Natsir et al., 2025; Wahyuni et al., 2023). Interestingly, although these policy instruments continue to evolve, their implementation often faces challenges on the ground, particularly when dealing with vulnerable groups with high mobility and difficult to reach by formal service systems (Kertati et al., 2023).

One group often overlooked by the public is the travel-stranded. This group refers to individuals who lose supplies, documents, or access to transportation, or even experience emergency situations while moving. It is noteworthy that in many cases, their vulnerabilities share characteristics with those of the homeless or urban vagrants, particularly related to their

lack of access to basic protection during times of crisis (Izudin, 2023; Yusuf et al., 2022). In other words, although they are not always seen living in public spaces like other marginalized groups, the risks they face are no less serious and often require swift government intervention.

Numerous studies also confirm that marginalized groups, including the homeless, beggars, and displaced persons, still face structural barriers in meeting their basic needs. These barriers include access to temporary housing, food availability, health services, and even recurring population administration issues (Surtiari et al., 2024; Yusuf et al., 2022). However, this situation demonstrates that the existence of a broad welfare policy framework does not automatically guarantee comprehensive protection, especially for groups who travel by car and lack stable social networks (Fadhilah, 2024).

South Sumatra Province, for example, is a region characterized by very high population mobility. Its strategic location, supported by the Trans-Sumatra land route, Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II Airport, Kertapati Station, and various major terminals, makes it a significant hub for inter-regional movement. While this flow of mobility contributes significantly to the economy, it also poses social risks, including an increase in the number of people stranded. Data from the South Sumatra Provincial Social Service shows a significant increase, from 560 cases in 2021 to 917 cases in 2024. This figure not only illustrates a trend of escalating problems but also indicates gaps in the reach of formal social protection programs, which have not been able to optimally reach high-risk groups (Natsir et al., 2025; Surtiari et al., 2024).

In this context, the Social Service's role as the frontline of social services cannot be underestimated. In addition to carrying out the normative mandate as stipulated in Law No. 11 of 2009 concerning Social Welfare, this agency also bears the strategic responsibility of linking national social protection policies with the structural needs of vulnerable groups at the local level. It is worth highlighting that the effectiveness of this role is largely determined by the institution's ability to adapt services to the dynamics of problems in society, especially when dealing with emergency situations that require a rapid but accountable response (Wahyuni et al., 2023; Natsir et al., 2025).

Table 1. Total Data on the Number of People Stranded in Travel in 2021-2024

<i>No.</i>	<i>Years</i>	<i>Number of People Stranded on Journey</i>
1.	2021	560 People
2.	2022	520 People
3.	2023	851 People
4.	2024	917 People
Total		2.848 People

Source: Researcher Processing from the Archives of the Annual Report of Displaced Persons Traveling_ Social Service of South Sumatra Province 2021-2024

Based on the table above, it can be seen that the number of stranded travelers in South Sumatra Province fluctuated during the 2021–2024 period. In 2021, 560 people were recorded, then decreased to 520 in 2022. However, in 2023, there was a sharp increase to 851 people, and again in 2024, with a total of 917 people. Overall, the number of stranded travelers during the four years reached 2,848 people. The significant increase that occurred in 2023 and 2024 indicates that the problem of stranded travelers is increasingly complex and

requires more comprehensive handling. The Social Service has a mandate to provide services, protection, rehabilitation, and social empowerment in accordance with Law No. 11 of 2009. Handling stranded travelers is carried out through data collection, provision of basic necessities, issuance of forwarding letters, and facilitation of repatriation. However, the implementation of this policy is often hampered by budget constraints, limited human resources, and the increasing number of cases. Considering the urgency of the problem and the important role of local government, this research was conducted to analyze how the Social Service of South Sumatra Province carries out its role in handling people who are stranded on their journey.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Role

Role theory explains that every individual and organization inherently embodies a set of expected behaviors consistent with their position, function, and authority (Sutarto, 2009). In the realm of public bureaucracy, roles are understood not only as formal duties but also as a bridge connecting organizational demands with public expectations regarding the quality of service they receive. Interestingly, this theory emphasizes that role effectiveness depends heavily on the actor's ability to understand tasks, interpret expectations, and execute obligations consistently with rules and procedures. When there is a mismatch between role conception, role expectations, and role implementation, role conflict and service ineffectiveness are highly likely to arise. Therefore, role theory provides an appropriate framework for examining how the Social Services Department operationalizes its responsibilities in handling displaced persons traveling. Indicators:

- Role conception (understanding of duties and functions)
- Role expectations (community & government expectations)
- Role implementation (service implementation)
- Role conflict/capacity constraints
- Compliance with SOPs

Public Service

Public service theory is based on the idea that government services should be oriented towards the needs of citizens, rather than the internal interests of the bureaucracy, which is often procedural and unresponsive (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2003). This approach strongly places the public at the center of the service process, particularly through practices oriented towards responsiveness, empathy, and fair and inclusive treatment. Furthermore, this theory emerged as a critique of the traditional bureaucratic model, which is considered rigid and unable to adapt to rapidly changing social dynamics. Public services are considered effective if they provide easy access, expeditious processes, and special protection for vulnerable groups. In the context of people displaced by travel, this theory provides an important basis for assessing the extent to which the Social Services Department is able to demonstrate a responsive, humane, and adaptive presence to the emergency needs of citizens. Indicators:

- Service responsiveness
- Accessibility and ease of procedures
- Quality of staff interactions
- Protection of vulnerable groups
- Effectiveness and timeliness of services

Social Welfare

Social welfare theory is based on the premise that the state has a moral and constitutional obligation to ensure that every citizen is able to meet basic needs and live a dignified life

(Suharto, 2010). Within this theoretical framework, social services are seen as a form of state intervention to help individuals cope with social risks they cannot address on their own. The scope of social welfare extends beyond fulfilling material needs such as food or shelter, but also encompasses psychosocial needs related to protection, security, and security of life. It is noteworthy that this theory also emphasizes the need for a comprehensive, integrated, and inclusive social protection system, especially for highly vulnerable groups. Therefore, social welfare theory is relevant for examining how Social Services meet the basic needs of displaced persons through emergency services and facilitating repatriation. Indicators:

- Fulfillment of basic needs (food, clothing, temporary shelter)
- Social protection and security
- Access to emergency assistance services
- Rehabilitation and referral services
- Administrative support (documentation, repatriation, assistance)

C. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at capturing social phenomena in greater depth through the perspectives of informants. This approach was chosen for a reason; in many situations, particularly when the phenomenon being studied is dynamic and complex, the reality on the ground cannot be simplified into mere numbers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The informants involved included the Head of the PSKBS Section as a structural role holder, volunteer officers directly involved in the service process, and individuals who experienced travel neglect firsthand. With this composition of informants, the research is expected to capture a diversity of complementary experiences and perspectives.

Data collection techniques were conducted through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation review—a combination aimed at enriching understanding of the research's empirical context. Interestingly, the data analysis process was not linear, but rather followed an interactive model that encompasses data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions iteratively within a reflective cycle (Miles et al., 2014). It is noteworthy that this process requires the researcher to be close to the data, as each stage of analysis influences and strengthens the meaning of the findings.

To ensure the validity of the research results, triangulation of sources and techniques was applied. This approach emphasizes the importance of cross-data verification as a prerequisite for achieving credibility and dependability in qualitative research (Morse, 2015). Thus, the quality of findings is not only supported by the variety of data used, but also by the researcher's diligence in tracing the consistency of information from various sources.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents research results and a discussion regarding the role of the South Sumatra Provincial Social Service in handling stranded travelers. The analysis focuses on three main aspects according to Sutarto's theoretical framework: role conception, role expectations, and role implementation. Each aspect is discussed based on data obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation, and analyzed to identify the understanding, constraints, and effectiveness of the role carried out by the Social Service.

Social Service Role Conception

The role conception describes the Social Service's understanding of its duties and functions. The research results indicate that:

- Understanding of Duties and Functions

The Social Service understands its duties as a social service provider, which includes:

- data collection and administration of stranded travelers,
- provision of basic services such as food and rest areas,
- facilitating repatriation to their areas of origin through forwarding letters,
- coordination with other district/city and provincial Social Services.

This understanding aligns with the authority stipulated in Law No. 11 of 2009 and the South Sumatra Governor's Regulation concerning the handling of stranded travelers.

- Understanding of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

The Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for forwarding stranded persons are understood and implemented, from identity verification and case record creation to departure. However, in practice, these SOPs are often hampered by limited accommodation facilities and repatriation budgets.

Role Expectations

Role expectations essentially reflect the expectations that develop among various stakeholders regarding how the Social Services Agency should carry out its social service functions for people stranded on the road (Suryanti et al., 2023). These expectations arise not only from the community as service recipients, but also from local governments, which play a role in formulating policy direction and overseeing the effectiveness of its implementation. It is noteworthy that a proper understanding of these expectations is crucial, given their direct implications for the legitimacy of public institutions; when expectations are not met, criticism of the bureaucracy and a decline in public trust can easily arise (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2003). Interestingly, contemporary public administration literature shows that an imbalance between external expectations and internal organizational capacity often creates institutional tensions that result in declining service quality (Osborne, 2010). Thus, an analysis of role expectations provides a critical insight into the Social Services Agency's ability to navigate social demands while still meeting applicable administrative requirements (Bovens & Zouridis, 2002).

Community Expectations

The public, as direct service recipients, generally expect the Social Services Department to provide fast, friendly, and comprehensive services, especially when someone experiences an emergency situation such as losing supplies, important documents, or access to transportation. These expectations align with the modern public service paradigm, which places citizens at the center of the service process and demands high responsiveness from state officials (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2003). However, the reality on the ground does not always align with these expectations. Various limitations, ranging from time-consuming administrative processes, minimal rest facilities, to the absence of special shelters for people stranded on their journeys, make it difficult to optimally fulfill some community expectations. This situation reflects the gap between the ideal standards expected by citizens and the actual capacity of the organization to provide.

Government Expectations

On the other hand, local governments have equally complex expectations. The government demands that social service programs be implemented effectively, accountably, and have a tangible impact in reducing the number of social cases. Furthermore, the importance of accurate data collection is continuously emphasized as it serves as the basis for policy formulation and evidence-based evaluation (Osborne, 2010). However, the annual increase in OTP cases indicates that some government targets have not been achieved, thus indicating the need to strengthen institutional capacity and improve cross-sector coordination. In the context of increasingly digitalized modern governance, the government is also pushing for administrative transformation to make services more efficient and less reliant on manual

procedures that can slow down processes (Bovens & Zouridis, 2002). Interestingly, these demands often clash with limited resources, creating new challenges in managing social policy.

Implementation of Roles

- Identification & Verification

Officers conduct interviews, check police/village/sub-district certificates, and collect identity data. This stage is crucial for determining the repatriation route.

- Data Collection & Administration

Officers create case records, complete forms, and prepare travel forwarding letters. This data is sent to the destination province/district.

- Inter-Agency Coordination

In handling stranded individuals, the Social Services Agency coordinates with various relevant agencies to ensure the service process runs effectively and according to procedures. This coordination includes collaboration with other provincial and district/city Social Services Agencies to exchange information and facilitate repatriation. In addition, the Social Services Agency also communicates with transportation agencies, both land, sea, and air, to assist in the relocation and repatriation of stranded individuals. The Social Services Agency coordinates with:

- Social services from other provinces/districts.
- Transportation agencies.
- Police.
- Hospitals, if needed.

Coordination is considered effective, but is often hampered by limited transportation and the distance between destinations.

- Provision of basic needs

Displaced persons are provided with rest, food, and assistance. However, shelter facilities are still limited, so repatriation is often carried out as quickly as possible.

Obstacles in Implementing the Role

In carrying out its role in handling displaced persons traveling, the South Sumatra Provincial Social Services Office faces several obstacles that impact the effectiveness of its services.

Some of the obstacles identified were:

- Limited budget, repatriation costs increase as cases increase.
- Limited human resources; the number of staff is not commensurate with the workload.
- There is no dedicated shelter; temporary facilities still utilize office space.
- The annual increase in cases increases the service burden.
- Lack of digital data support for manual data collection slows down the process.

Theoretical Analysis (Sutarto)

Based on Sutarto's role theory:

- Role conception is relatively well-understood.
- Role expectations have not been fully met due to capacity limitations.
- Role implementation is quite effective but not optimal.

The alignment between the three components is not yet stable, so service effectiveness still needs to be improved.

E. CONCLUSION

This research shows that the South Sumatra Provincial Social Services Office has fulfilled its role in handling stranded travelers through identification, administration, basic

service provision, and facilitation of repatriation. The role concept is well understood and standard operating procedures (SOPs) have been implemented. However, a significant increase in cases, budget constraints, minimal shelter facilities, and a shortage of human resources have prevented the implementation of this role from fully meeting the expectations of the community and the government. Handling stranded travelers will be more effective if institutional capacity is strengthened, services are digitized, cross-sector coordination is improved, and shelter facilities are added to accommodate stranded travelers prior to their repatriation.

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