
Ethnography of Legal Aid Post-Room: A Review of Equality in Legal Services at the Surabaya Religious Court

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Abstract

This article explores the opportunities and difficulties that exist for affective control in the Legal Aid Post-Room of the Religious Court (Pengadilan Agama) of Surabaya. Humans and non-human entities coexist in this space, entwined in a relational way to be present together. The ethnographic methodology was selected to get empirical data gathered via five months of observation and interactive discussion. Regarding interpersonal relationships, language use, and the physical space of the Legal Aid Post, the paper contends that Legal Aid workers, informants, and guests are all intertwined. The research findings show ethnographically the atmosphere of the service and reporting process in the Legal Aid Post space as part of the performance in the theater of equality and non-discrimination to demonstrate the sympathetic attitude of Legal Aid officers towards informants. These findings ultimately affirm the presence of emotional atmospheres at certain moments in the Legal Aid Post space, necessitating officers to exhibit creativity. The focus on linguistic expressions to approach feelings and atmospheres in the Legal Aid Post space, in turn, can affect the quality of service. The role of material arrangement, semantic content, and affective experience is utilized to serve the impoverished community in shaping their experiences in seeking justice and the semantic content of what is said.

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Introduction

The state strives to provide Legal Aid space for people experiencing poverty to gain access to Legal Aid posts, where applicants and plaintiffs can solve their cases. Law Number 16 of 2011 concerning Legal Aid; Government Regulation (PP) Number 83 of 2008 concerning Requirements and Procedures for Providing Free Legal Assistance; Supreme Court Circular Number 10 of 2010 concerning Guidelines for Providing Legal Aid. They all regulate the establishment of Legal Aid Posts in every Court, both the Supreme Court, the High Court, and the District Court. The presence of this state is essential to help people experiencing poverty get adequate access to justice. The Legal Aid Post-Room provides a variety of services such as providing information, consultation, and advice as well as providing accompanying advocates, all of which can be provided free of charge to defend the interests of litigants in court who cannot afford their legal counsel (Zaelani, 2020).

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However, it is essential to remember that judicial jurisdiction makes studying the socio-legal constitution through different levels of related power structures possible. Following the policy and legal objectives set out in this country's constitution, the poor are positioned micro and macro in institutional structures and public discourse to protect their human rights (Lanang Putra Perbawa & Perbawa Sukawati, 2020).

People experiencing poverty try to get Legal Aid services, which are expensive because they cannot afford to pay advocates to assist or fight in the court process later (Salamor, 2018). The highly organized law practice involves people experiencing poverty in the judicial process. They reflexively replicate and stabilize it as an object of knowledge and are also used as reference points in courtroom interactions and individual performance. As a result, these conflicts must be incorporated into the societal level and considered in empirical research (Mann, 1983).

Researchers seem to pay little attention to the observation of Legal Aid for poor space in the Court from an ethnographic perspective. Research in the Legal Aid Post currently leads to the role, implementation, and effectiveness of its services. In Indonesia, scholars are also keen to conduct courtroom research, research conducted by Aan Widodo et al. at the District Court in Jakarta observed patterns of interruptions (communication breakdowns) and analyzed the dynamics of interactions in the courtroom, including the types of interruptions, frequency, context, and function and their meaning in Indonesian culture and legal system. The study also examined courtroom layouts that reflected the power hierarchy and social status of the parties involved. Even though ethnographic research in the Legal Aid Post-Room is also interesting to research because it will present an atmosphere that is no less dramatic than that in the courtroom. The setting and atmosphere in the Legal Aid Post-Room present routines and performances from different actors. They conduct dialogue to fulfill their respective interests by considering the various roles, hierarchies, cultures, and legal ideologies involved (Walenta, 2020).

Research Methods

This study used ethnographic methodology, intensive participatory observations, and in-depth interviews. This study seeks to capture symbolic meanings, patterns of interaction, as well as identity and power constructs formed in processes within Legal Aid posts, participatory observations conducted intensively, and in-depth interviews conducted during five months (August-December 2023) at Religious Court (Pengadilan Agama) of Surabaya. This narrative plays an essential role in this context and is strongly influenced by the construction of normality for constructing women's roles in the courtroom (Gathings & Parrotta, 2013).

Result And Discussion

Legal Aid Post-Room and Physical Arrangement

The courtroom and litigation practice are spaces for creating processes that, until recently, received little attention from investigators (Benson, 2014). Therefore, the courtroom is considered a scary one for everyone who enters it. In the following, we will present in detail the architecture of the Surabaya PA Legal Aid Post-Room.

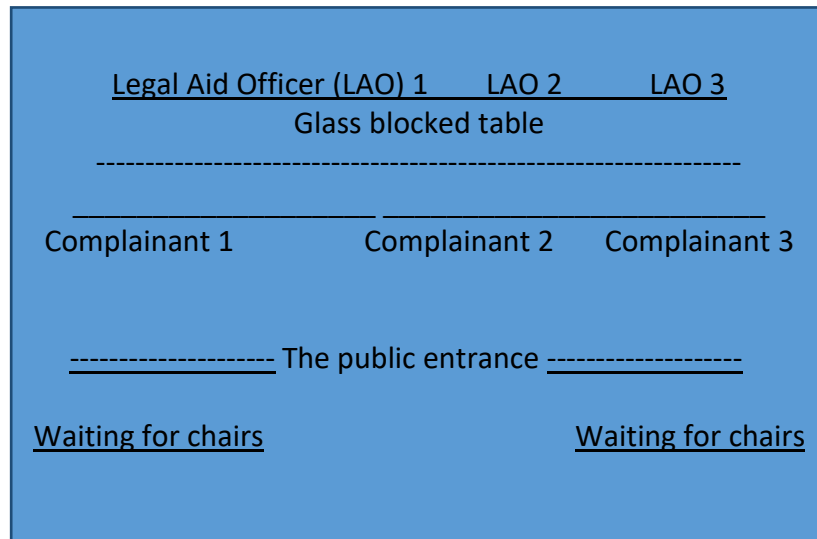


Figure 1. Entrance and seating arrangements in the Legal Aid Post-room

The entrance and seating arrangements in the Legal Aid Post-Room breathe symbolism. Symbolism of power, hierarchy, asymmetry, and authority. Three dimensions of the atmosphere: material and infrastructural influences, affective visual and sound influences. The Legal Aid Post-Room has six seats, which is quite adequate. It can be seen that there is a desktop computer unit, two laptop units, and a printer machine. There is no LCD projector that may be used to display any media that you want to show for more precise visualization.

The first interaction the complainant and visitor had with the Legal Aid Post-Room was the waiting chair outside the room. A transparent glass door separates the inner room from the waiting room. When there is no other complainant seen in the inner room, then whether welcome or not, the next reporter will go through a glass door to enter the space in the Legal Aid post measuring 4x3 meters. The Legal Aid post has only one entrance for officers, complainants, and visitors; this has not shown any signs of authority. New authority signs are visible on the table measuring 3x1 meters; this table has a glass partition that separates the officer and the complainant so they can sit face to face. Physically, this desk has three seats reserved for officers located on the inner side and three seats for the complainant on the outer side. When the seats and tables are complete, the next reporter will sit outside to wait in line. In the context of legal aid services, seat arrangement and the use of glass screens in public service spaces can increase efficiency and comfort for officers and complainants. Privacy, security and

comfort on both sides will lead to mutual trust, so that the goal of getting services will be achieved. Empathy is shown by officers by listening carefully and painstakingly, maintaining confidentiality by not speaking in a loud and loud voice, in the end officers will maintain the security of information provided by the complainant (Lindawaty et al., 2018).

One entrance for officers, complainants, and visitors, symbolizes their connection to the legal community. One entrance makes it easier for officers to provide services to complainants. Officers and complainants sitting opposite each other represent an attitude of equality; they are at a table specially designed to serve the Complainant. This desk is designed into three service sections, namely divorce, inheritance, and custody services. Visitors can observe the interaction of officers and reporters, but seats are not provided for visitors so that the space is not too full of humans. Officers limit the attendance of visitors in the room by giving two people a chance. A room that seems not crowded will provide psychological space for officers and reporters. Conversely, if the room is entered by more than two visitors, it will have a psychological impact on the Complainant in getting services to get information, consultation, or legal advice; assistance in the preparation of required legal documents; and information on a list of Legal Aid Organizations that can be provided free of charge. The complainant looked uncomfortable, reluctant, or reluctant to tell the story freely. The service desk in the Legal Aid Post-Room illustrates that both parties do not feel comfortable with the arrangement of this service desk and the queuing system can be arranged properly and efficiently, complainants look complaining or upset. The Post-Room Legal Aid Officer has not designed the room carefully in the operations management discipline, and there has been no knowledge that shows the partiality of the complainant who has come to get optimal service from the Legal Aid Post-Room officer. Complainants come to the Legal Aid Post-Room with problems that must be filed in court, the atmosphere of the room that does not show comfort makes them look lethargic and weak (Radnor et al., 2016), but they still look smiling in the hope that they can be helped to make a lawsuit or application.

The sitting position of officers and complainants is also symbolic in the Legal Aid Post-Room, where officers and complainants and visitors are on the same high platform. This shows equality, and there is no dominance of officers over complainants or visitors. The officer is seen not to use an identifying nameplate on the chest; this shows a symbol of respect and equality and does not dominate and makes the complainant feel comfortable in getting services. To distinguish from Religious Court employees including Legal Aid post officers, reporters, and visitors are required to drape identification marks that have been characterized in color by security officers outside the Religious Court building. In other words, the officer considers the complainant a servant who strives to provide quality service (Sembiring, 2021).

Psychologically, when the officer and the reporter communicate in the same seat, it can reduce the burden on the reporter in telling his story in front of the officer. Officers want to get the best story from the complainant. Legal Aid post officers do not have a ceremonial duty in providing services; the absence of auxiliary officers outside the Legal Aid Post-Room makes Legal Aid post officers look like they are sitting and standing when calling prospective complainants sitting in line outside the room (Sari, 2017).

Legal Aid Post-Room Atmosphere

From August to December 2023 (*Observation in Legal Aid for Poor in Pengadilan Agama Surabaya, August-December 2023, 2023*), we were in the Legal Aid Post-Room of the Surabaya Religious Court, we observed the cases submitted to the Legal Aid post, namely: determination of heirs, child custody, and divorce. In this article, we look at the complainant in the divorce case (whether the complainant came alone or someone accompanied). The complainant is a woman named X1 (X1, personal communication, 15 December 2023); she intends to file a lawsuit against her husband. The complainant entered the Legal Aid Post-Room and sat before the Legal Aid post officer named Y1 (Y1, personal communication, 5 December 2023). The complainant was wearing a cotton cloth shirt, jeans, jacket, and shoes and was seen wearing sufficient makeup; she entered the Legal Aid station room with an ordinary look on her face (not angry, sullen, afraid, or other expressions). He communicated with officers using Indonesian mixed with Javanese regional languages.

Legal Aid post officers and the complainant were seen communicating to discuss the model contents of the divorce lawsuit. Legal Aid postal officers focus on making a divorce lawsuit letter addressed to the Surabaya Religious Court, the date of making the letter, the inclusion of the identity of the parties, both the identity of the plaintiff and the identity of the defendant, making fundamental *petendi* or the basis of the lawsuit and *petitum* of the lawsuit. Legal Aid post officers and complainants communicate to make divorce petitions that are considered complete by the Religious Court administratively.

The Legal Aid post clerk looks serious when taking notes about the lawsuit letter on his laptop. The complainant wished to submit a written complaint letter to the Surabaya Religious Court. The complainant provides documents such as an Identity Card, Marriage Certificate, and other documents to make a lawsuit. The Legal Aid post officer wrote the complaint on his laptop while questioning the complainant about the complainant's address and the reported address to validate the correctness of the identity. The officer lists the date of making the letter and confirms it to the complainant. The officer asked about the reason for filing the lawsuit, and the complainant wanted the basis of the lawsuit to be domestic violence; the complainant was not provided for by her husband, and the complainant often quarreled because of differences of opinion with her husband.

The complainant claimed that she and her husband have been separated from the bed since early 2020 until now (X2, personal communication, 3 November 2023). The officer again asked the complainant whether, before the reported person left the house, there had been an argument and disagreements along with ongoing arguments; the reporter answered the officer's question. The complainant did not tell at length about the domestic violence case, and he did not tell about the causes and effects in detail. Since the complainant did not give details, the Legal Aid post clerk did not seem enthusiastic to ask for more information either. The Legal Aid post clerk listed the reasons for domestic violence as the basis for her lawsuit. The Legal Aid post officer asked the complainant more questions to lead to the need for making a lawsuit letter, so the reporter only answered as necessary.

The officer does not record all complaints but only the information needed to make a lawsuit. In contrast, other matters that are not related to the lawsuit material tend to be only listened to. The officer has a strategy of not recording other issues unrelated to this lawsuit material so that other complainants who have been queuing before can immediately be served by officers. So, the officer did not allow the Complainant to present the whole story (Y2, personal communication, 7 October 2023). Reporters tend to follow questions from Legal Aid post officers regarding the chronology or how long the separation has been, whether there are differences of opinion, and other things that may be included in the lawsuit letter material asked by the Legal Aid post officer.

Finally, the officer gave the letter of claim he had prepared and printed it on the printer. The officer asks the complainant to check the contents of the lawsuit letter, this is done to find out the completeness and accuracy of writing following the documents submitted, besides that the officer wants the reporter to check the date and basis of the lawsuit as he wishes. In essence, the Legal Aid post officer wants to make it easier for the reporter, so that, if there are things that are needed to be corrected immediately, the officer will immediately fix them. If the complainant is satisfied with the contents of the lawsuit letter and there are no typos, the officer asks the reporter to sign the lawsuit letter.

Sharing experiences and knowledge needs to be done by officers to complainants so that complainants feel confident that officers in the Legal Aid Post-Room can provide good service. Conversely, if officers are unable to share experiences and knowledge, it can disrupt the complainant's sense of security and trust, so it is feared that the complainant does not want to be frank and tell openly about the problems he faces (Mujahidin, 2018).

Body Gestures of Informant Legal Aid Post Officers

In gestures, the complainant spoke flatly every time he answered and explained to the Legal Aid post officer. The complainant rarely bowed his head and made eye contact

whenever he talked to the Legal Aid post officer. The complainant was seen nodding her head quite often in response to what was conveyed by the Legal Aid post officer. The complainant's hands did not clasp when talking to the Legal Aid post officer. The complainant put his hands and palms under the table. It is not clear whether the complainant smiled sincerely due to wearing a mask covering his nose and mouth. But from the eye line, it can be seen that the complainant is smiling. The complainant did not shake hands with the Legal Aid post officer. When the complainant stood up to enter or leave the room, they made a slight bow in front of the Legal Aid post officer. The complainant spoke without moving his hands. In expression, from the look in the eyes of the complainant, there was a change, from a flat expression to a sad expression and then to a flat expression again, along with answering the officer's questions (Goleman, 2007).

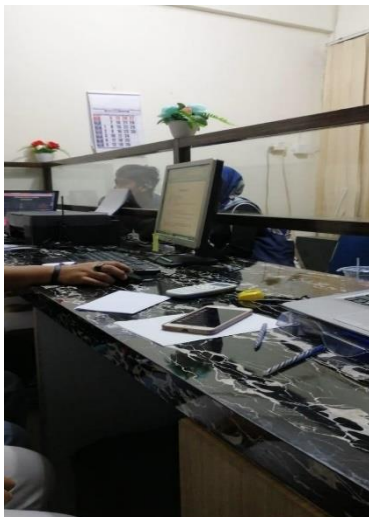
During the meeting, researchers also observed the gestures of the Legal Aid post officers. The Legal Aid post officer seemed to listen carefully and enthusiastically, and the officer did not try to interrupt or invite jokes. The officer makes eye contact when asking questions or answering the reporter's confirmation. The clerk didn't nod his head very often. The position of the clerk's hands was not crossed, he put his hands and palms on the table. Despite wearing a mask, the eye line shows the Legal Aid post officer smiling sincerely at the complainant. There was no handshake between the officer and the complainant. The officer stood slightly bent over to greet and release the complainant's departure. The officer spoke using hand gestures. The officer's facial expression looked ordinary. Public services need a humane approach through effective communication demonstrated by the behavior of officers and complainants. Effective strategies through empathy skills possessed by officers in dealing with differences in perception between service personnel and complainants. Non-verbal communication needs to be demonstrated by public service officers through hand gestures, postures, and facial expressions in communication (Hoerudin et al., 2020).

The officer did not attempt to record every detail of his conversation with the complainant. Although there are mobile phones, officers do not use them as a way to remember communications that occur in the Legal Aid room. When something is missed in the conversation, the officer double-checks and asks again what he wants to know. The complainant is asked to confirm that the information received and recorded by the officer is the same as that submitted by the reporter in the Legal Aid Post-Room.

The complainant did not appear to show photos from the tool or in printed form and also did not show his conversations on WhatsApp or others. In this study, observations can be described as follows:

1. The Legal Aid Post-Room has adequate seats also equipped with a computer unit and two laptops, but no LCD projector can be used to display any media to be shown more clearly

2. The complainant sat with a slight slouch and did not lean on the back of the chair, more inclined toward the officer
3. The reporter speaks at a relaxed tempo but sometimes a little fast
4. The officer replied at a relaxed tempo so that the complainant could easily understand
5. Legal Aid post workers seemed to listen attentively to every utterance
6. Legal Aid post workers are not seen laughing and annoying, while the other two officers can sometimes be heard throwing jokes at each other and laughing.
7. The process in the Legal Aid Post-Room does not seem so intense
8. The Complainant seemed ignorant
9. The Legal Aid Post-Room was considered quite comfortable, with adequate chairs and air conditioning that functioned quite well, but the complainant spoke slightly quietly to the officer.
10. The complainant's voice sounded like an ordinary person without sadness, anger, or other tones.
11. The complainant was not found laughing or crying when discussing the case or answering questions asked by the Legal Aid post officer.
12. The Complainant only tells the story when submitted by the Legal Aid post officer so that neither the Legal Aid post officer nor the student highlights the indexical meaning of the reporter.
13. The intonation of the complainant's voice is heard up and down, with a slight emphasis on tempo in some parts of the reporter's pronunciation. When telling stories.
14. The complainant mentioned that she had not been provided for a long time and said that her husband had not returned home for a long time.
15. The complainant and the Legal Aid post officer were not seen showing signs of dissolving in the atmosphere in the Legal Aid Post-Room.



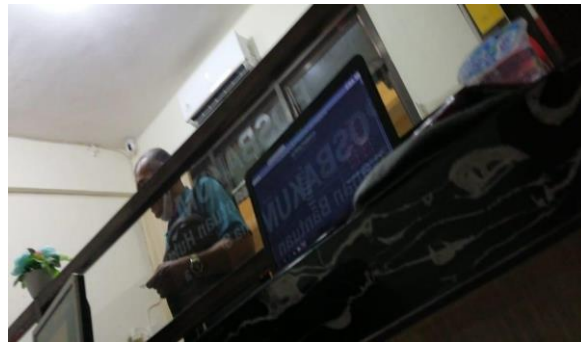


Figure 2-4. The atmosphere in the Legal Aid Post-Room

Conclusion

This research provides a deep insight into the experience of complainants in the Legal Aid Post-Room at the Surabaya Religious Court. The work of the Complainant in the Legal Aid Post-Room of the Surabaya Religious Court is discussed in this study. According to research conducted on the architecture of the space and the interaction that occurs between officers and reporters, the atmosphere created in the space significantly affects the comfort and effectiveness of communication. Complainants can share information openly in privacy-conscious environments, such as glass barriers between officers and complainants. In addition, the parallel sitting position between the complainant and the officer gives the impression that the two are equal, which reduces intimidation for the complainant. In addition, the body movements of the complainant and the officer provide an overview of how communication is proceeding in the Legal Aid Post-Room. The complainant looks calm and responds to the officer's questions, while the officer looks focused and enthusiastic to help the reporter. Understanding these elements can help legal services work better and provide a better experience for those seeking legal help in the future. These conclusions highlight how important it is to consider the physical environment and social interactions when making legal services fair and meeting the needs of society.

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