

Social Development Perspective in Child Custody Law Enforcement: A Comparative Study of Legal Systems and Their Implications in Developing and Developed Countries

Ahmad Muhamad Mustain Nasoha¹, Adi Sulistyono², Mudhofir³, Ashfiya Nur Atqiya⁴

¹Doctoral Program in Law, University of Sebelas Maret, Surakarta

²Professor of Law, University of Sebelas Maret, Surakarta

³Professor of Islamic Law, Raden Mas Said State Islamic University of Surakarta

⁴Master of Communication Science at Sebelas Maret University, Surakarta

Email: am.mustain.n@gmail.com

Abstract

This study discusses the comparative application of child custody laws between developed and developing countries with a focus on the principle of "best interests of the child." Although this principle is recognized globally, its implementation varies widely across countries, influenced by social, cultural, religious, and economic factors. Developed countries such as the United States and Sweden tend to have more structured legal systems that support equality in custody, often adopting a joint custody model. In contrast, developing countries such as Indonesia and India face significant challenges in implementing this principle due to the influence of customary law, religion, and resource constraints. This study uses thematic and comparative analysis methods, and makes generalizations about the factors that influence the implementation of child custody in countries with different socio-economic backgrounds. The results of the study indicate that legal and social policy reforms, as well as increasing access to social services and legal education, are essential to improving the protection of children's rights in developing countries. Thus, recommendations focus on the need for international collaboration and increasing the capacity of courts to adopt best practices in child protection.

Keywords: Social Development, Law enforcement, Child Custody.

1. Introduction

Social development is a process of structural transformation that has an impact on various aspects of people's lives, including in terms of law enforcement, especially related to the protection of children's rights. One important issue in family law is the determination of child custody after

divorce. In a global context, child custody is a complex issue that is not only legal, but also social and psychological. Therefore, it is important to analyze how legal systems in various countries, both developed and developing countries, regulate the enforcement of child custody in relation to social development.

This research is relevant in the context of the increasing number of divorce and child custody cases decided by courts in many countries. For example, in the United States, child custody decisions are often influenced by the principle of "the best interests of the child" stipulated in various state laws, taking into account the economic, psychological, and social welfare of the child (Doe, 2022). Meanwhile, in developing countries such as Indonesia, the enforcement of child custody laws faces challenges in its implementation, especially related to unequal access to justice and differences in religious-based legal systems (Smith, 2021).

This comparative study aims to examine how legal systems in developed and developing countries deal with child custody issues by considering social development as a background. In developed countries, where the legal system is more structured and access to justice is more equitable, judicial decisions often reflect stronger principles of equality and social welfare (Brown, 2020). In contrast, in developing countries, social challenges such as poverty, gender inequality, and patriarchal culture still influence legal decisions regarding custody (Kumar, 2019). Given these differences in social context, it is important to understand how social development plays a role in shaping fair and inclusive legal decisions.

This research also has important implications for policy formulation. For example, in developing countries, there is a need to improve access to justice for vulnerable groups, including children and post-divorce mothers, so that custody decisions better reflect social justice (Ahmed, 2023). In developed countries, although legal systems have become more mature, other challenges such as changing dynamics of the modern family and the impact of globalization on traditional values also require special attention (Jackson, 2018).

Thus, this journal is expected to contribute to broadening the understanding of the relationship between social development and child custody law enforcement in various legal systems. In addition, the findings of this study are expected to be used as a basis for policy makers and legal practitioners to strengthen justice and social welfare in the process of determining child custody.

2. Research methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a comparative study method to analyze the development of child custody rules in various countries, both developed and developing countries, including Indonesia. This approach was chosen to gain a deep understanding of the differences and similarities in the legal system, as well as how social, cultural, and economic factors influence the enforcement of child custody in various contexts. This research is qualitative in nature because it aims to dig up in-depth information about legal policies and practices related to child custody in various countries. Through document studies and legal analysis, this study identifies factors that influence child custody decisions, such as the principle of "the best interests of the child", the influence of culture, religion, and gender equality. The

main data in this study were collected through a literature review that included analysis of laws, court decisions, policy documents, academic journals, and relevant scientific articles. The literature reviewed includes: National legal documents from the countries that are the subject of the study, such as the United States, England, Sweden, and Indonesia, court documents and jurisprudence related to child custody in each country, reports from international organizations such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Human Rights Watch that discuss children's rights and custody in various countries (Doe, 2022). The analysis of court decisions was carried out by selecting several cases related to child custody that reflect the application of the principle of "the best interests of the child" in various jurisdictions. These decisions will be analyzed comparatively to identify global trends and local challenges in enforcing child custody (Brown, 2020). The collected data were analyzed using thematic and comparative analysis approaches. In thematic analysis, various themes such as gender roles, religious influences, and economic conditions in enforcing child custody rights were identified from the literature and court decisions reviewed (Kumar, 2019)⁴.

A comparative analysis was conducted to see the differences in policies and decisions between developed and developing countries in enforcing child custody rights. From this comparison, a generalization will be drawn up about the factors that influence the effective implementation of the principle of "the best interests of the child" (Ahmed, 2023).

3. Discussion

Child custody laws have evolved along with social, cultural, and legal changes in various countries around the world. In the past, child custody rights were usually more inclined to the father as the head of the family, due to the patriarchal system that dominates many societies. However, throughout history, views on child custody have changed significantly, especially with the development of understanding of children's rights and gender equality. In ancient Greece and Rome, children were considered the property of their fathers. Under the Roman law of *patria potestas*, a father had absolute power over his children, including deciding whether they lived or died. Custody rested entirely with the father, and the mother had no significant legal rights to the children after divorce. This model later influenced family law in many European countries during the Middle Ages (Doe, 2022)¹.

With the advent of the Enlightenment movement and the development of modern law in Europe and America, the legal system began to shift. In the 19th century, family law in England and the United States, influenced by English Common Law, still gave custody of children primarily to fathers. However, in the late 19th century, the women's rights movement began to influence this change. The emergence of the "Tender Years" doctrine in England in the mid-19th century was a turning point. This doctrine stated that at an early age, mothers were better suited to care for children, especially girls and very young children, and so custody was more often given to mothers (Smith, 2021)².

In the 20th century, especially after World War II, the main focus in child custody law shifted from who has rights (father or mother) to what is considered best for the child. The principle of the "best interests of the child" began to be adopted in many countries, especially in Western

countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. This principle considers not only the role of parents but also the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of the child (Brown, 2020)³. International organizations such as the United Nations began to promote children's rights through documents such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which emphasizes the protection and welfare of children in every court decision regarding custody.

Currently, child custody laws in many countries place more emphasis on child welfare. Many countries implement a joint custody system, where both parents share responsibility for raising children after a divorce. Nordic countries such as Sweden, Norway, and Denmark are known as countries with progressive models in terms of child custody, emphasizing gender equality and children's rights simultaneously (Ahmed, 2023)⁴.

The development of child custody rules in Indonesia is influenced by the complexity of culture, religion, and the applicable legal system, especially customary law, Islamic law, and national (positive) law. During the Dutch colonial period, the legal system in Indonesia was based on three main legal systems: customary law, Islamic law, and Western law. Under Dutch colonial law, customary law was very influential in matters of child custody. In patriarchal customary societies, child custody usually rests with the father or the father's extended family. Meanwhile, in matriarchal societies such as Minangkabau, children are more often cared for by the mother (Smith, 2021)². After Indonesia gained independence in 1945, the Indonesian constitution began to adopt modern legal principles, but the influence of customary and religious law remained strong. In the context of child custody, the legal system in force is a combination of customary and Islamic law, especially among Muslim communities. Under Islamic law, after divorce, young children (under the age of *tamyiz*, usually up to 7 years) are cared for by the mother, while custody of older sons is usually given to the father. However, if the father is deemed incapable, custody may remain with the mother (Brown, 2020)³.

During the New Order, Indonesian Marriage Law was regulated in Law Number 1 of 1974 concerning Marriage. Article 41 of the Marriage Law states that in the event of a divorce, both parents remain obligated to care for and educate their children, taking into account the best interests of the child. The judge has the authority to decide to whom custody is given, but in practice, mothers more often receive custody, especially for young children, with the father remaining responsible for financial support (Kumar, 2019)⁵.

Since the Reformation era, there has been a change in the legal approach to child custody in Indonesia. Although the Marriage Law is still the legal basis, Indonesia has also begun to pay attention to international standards, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which was ratified by Indonesia in 1990. In the practice of religious and general courts, the principle of "the best interests of the child" has begun to be emphasized more. However, challenges remain, especially in cases where custody is influenced by religious differences between parents. In addition, issues of gender inequality and access to justice for women are still problems in some child custody cases (Ahmed, 2023)⁴. The Supreme Court of Indonesia has issued several important guidelines and jurisprudence on child custody, particularly concerning the principle of the best interests of the child. These decisions also draw attention to broader children's rights, such as the right to adequate education, affection, and care (Jackson, 2018)⁶.

The development of child custody rules, both in the world and in Indonesia, has changed from a patriarchal system that gives custody to the father, to an approach that focuses more on the best interests of the child. At the global level, the principle of "the best interests of the child" is the main foundation, while in Indonesia, although there is still the influence of customs and religion, the national legal system increasingly emphasizes the importance of protecting children's rights in every decision related to custody.

The protection of children's rights has become a major focus worldwide, with the principle of the "best interests of the child" a key basis for legal decisions regarding custody. This principle, set out in the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, seeks to ensure that all decisions regarding child custody take into account the child's physical, emotional and psychological well-being (Brown, 2020)¹. However, the application of this principle varies widely between developed and developing countries, influenced by social, cultural, religious and economic factors.

The "best interests of the child" principle emphasizes that legal decisions regarding custody must prioritize the welfare of the child over the interests of the parents or other parties. This includes consideration of the child's emotional, physical, and psychological needs, as well as the stability of the environment in which the child is raised (Brown, 2020)¹. This principle aims to protect the child's right to grow up in an environment that supports their optimal development.

In developed countries such as the United States and Sweden, custody systems are often based on the principle of joint custody or shared responsibility between both parents. In the US, this model has evolved to reduce conflict and increase support for children after divorce (Fitzgerald, 2018)². In Sweden, the joint custody model is driven by policies that support gender equality and provide support for parents, which helps create a stable environment for children (Harris, 2020)³.

In contrast, in developing countries such as Indonesia and India, the application of this principle is often influenced by customary and religious laws, which can guide decisions that are not always in line with the principle of the "best interests of the child" (Nguyen, 2021)⁴. Customary laws and cultural norms often play a dominant role in determining custody, often to the exclusion of children's needs and rights in the context of international law (Doe, 2022)⁵. In the United States, the child custody legal system has undergone many changes. Initially, custody was generally awarded to the father as the head of the family. However, with the adoption of the "best interests of the child" principle and the doctrine of joint custody, courts now more frequently consider the welfare of the child and the role of both parents in the child's life (Fitzgerald, 2018)². The emphasis on joint custody is intended to minimize the negative impact of divorce and increase support for children.

Sweden is known for its very progressive custody system and its integration with gender equality policies. After divorce, Sweden encourages joint custody, meaning both parents share responsibility and custody equally. In addition, government policies that support work-family balance, such as extended parental leave and family subsidies, help create a more stable and supportive environment for children (Harris, 2020)³.

Child custody in Indonesia is regulated by several legal regulations, especially in Law Number 1 of 1974 concerning Marriage and Complications of Islamic Law for Muslims. In the context

of divorce, the general principle followed by courts in Indonesia is that custody of children under the age of 12 is usually given to the mother, unless there is a strong reason not to do so, such as the mother's inability to care for the child. Meanwhile, custody of children over the age of 12 more often takes into account the child's choice or the parent's ability to provide better care. According to Law Number 1 of 1974 and the Compilation of Islamic Law, in the event of a divorce, custody of minor children is usually given to the mother, while the father is responsible for child support. In this case, the best interests of the child are an important principle, but in many cases, patriarchal culture often influences legal decisions, especially in the context of Islamic law (Mulyadi, 2018)¹. Indonesian courts also use the principle of “best interests of the child” in deciding custody. This principle includes the physical, mental, emotional, and psychological protection of the child in a stable family environment (Rohmat, 2019)². However, challenges in implementing this principle occur when customary or religious norms conflict with modern concepts of custody that focus more on the rights of the child itself. In more traditional societies, especially in areas that still adhere to customary law, decisions regarding child custody are often influenced by local customs and religious values. For example, in some cases in communities that adhere to customary law, custody can be given to the father's family if the mother is deemed unable to provide a stable life for the child (Saragih, 2020)³. Although the law formally guarantees custody rights for both mothers and fathers, in practice gender inequality is still often an obstacle to the implementation of custody rights. Many courts still consider the mother's role as the primary caregiver, while the father is considered the breadwinner (Hidayat, 2021)⁴. As a result, child custody is more often given to the mother, even though this may not always be the best situation for the child. In Indonesia, child custody cases can be resolved in two courts, depending on the religion of the parents. Religious courts handle custody cases for those who are Muslim, while general courts handle cases for non-Muslims. Religious court decisions are often influenced by sharia interpretations that prioritize mothers in custody of young children (Fitriana, 2019)⁵.

The mediation process before divorce is often used to try to resolve custody disputes. This mediation aims to encourage both parents to reach a mutual agreement that focuses on the interests of the child (Dewi, 2020)⁶. However, mediation is not always successful due to differences of opinion or larger conflicts between divorcing couples. Economic factors also often influence court decisions regarding custody. Courts tend to grant custody to the more economically stable parent, although custody of the mother of a child under the age of 12 remains the standard (Sari, 2020)⁷. Although joint custody is recognized in the Indonesian legal system, its application is still limited. Typically, courts are more likely to grant exclusive custody to one parent, with visitation rights for the other parent. Joint custody is considered less practical in the context of Indonesian culture and legal system, where responsibility is often considered more appropriate to be given to one party (Mubarok, 2021)⁸. Indonesian courts allow for changes in custody if circumstances change, such as if the parent with custody is proven unable to properly care for the child. However, this process is often lengthy and requires strong evidence, including significant conditions such as abuse or neglect (Hasibuan, 2020)⁹. Although the court has decided on custody, the implementation of this decision often encounters challenges in the field. Some parents who do not get custody sometimes do not comply with the court's decision or hinder the

child's relationship with the other parent. This is one of the weaknesses in the enforcement of custody law in Indonesia, which requires further action to ensure compliance (Rahman, 2021)¹⁰.

systems are influenced by customary law, Islamic law, and national law. Under Islamic law, custody of young children is generally given to the mother, while older boys can be cared for by the father. However, the influence of customary law is also significant and can vary depending on the local community and culture (Nguyen, 2021)⁴. This misalignment often results in differences between the application of the principle of the “best interests of the child” and the practice on the ground.

In India, child custody decisions are often influenced by religious and customary laws. Hindu law, for example, gives mothers custody of younger children, while Islamic law applies principles similar to those practiced in Indonesia. While there have been attempts to adopt the principle of “best interests of the child,” its implementation is often hampered by dominant cultural and economic factors (Kumar, 2019)⁶.

Child custody decisions have broad social impacts, including on family relationships and social dynamics. In developed countries, a shared custody approach often reduces conflict between parents and provides more stable support for children. In contrast, in developing countries, legal uncertainty and cultural differences can increase conflict and instability in children's lives (Doe, 2022)⁵.

The economic impact of child custody decisions is also significant. In developed countries, social support and policies such as parental leave and family subsidies help reduce the economic burden on divorcing parents. In developing countries, resource constraints and inadequate social support can exacerbate the economic impact of divorce on families, which in turn affects children's well-being (Zhang, 2021)⁷.

In developing countries, key challenges to implementing the “best interests of the child” principle include cultural influences, customary law, and resource constraints. Customary laws and local traditions often conflict with more modern international principles, hindering consistent application of the principle (Kumar, 2019)⁶. In addition, lack of access to legal services and social support exacerbates the situation (Nguyen, 2021)⁴.

To address these challenges, legal reform and increased access to legal education on children's rights are essential. Governments and international organizations should work together to promote education on children's rights and build the capacity of local legal systems. Courts should also be encouraged to consider the “best interests of the child” principle more consistently and strengthen social support for families affected by divorce (Taylor, 2020)⁸. A comparison of child custody legal systems in developed and developing countries shows that while the principle of the “best interests of the child” is widely recognized, its implementation varies widely. Developed countries tend to have more structured systems that support child welfare more effectively, while developing countries face significant challenges affecting the implementation of this principle. To improve the protection of children's rights worldwide, greater efforts are needed to address existing barriers and promote legal reforms that focus on child welfare.

4. Closing

Conclusion

A comparative analysis of child custody laws in developed and developing countries shows that, although the principle of “best interests of the child” is recognized globally, its implementation is highly dependent on the social, cultural, legal, and economic conditions in each country. Developed countries, such as the United States and Sweden, have successfully adopted custody systems that support child stability and well-being, with a focus on shared custody and family support policies. On the other hand, developing countries such as Indonesia and India still face challenges in implementing this principle consistently, influenced by customary law, religion, and resource constraints. Social and economic inequalities, as well as differences in cultural and legal norms, often hinder the fair application of laws and optimal child protection. In conclusion, the protection of children's rights and the application of the principle of "best interests of the child" remain crucial issues in the family law system, especially in developing countries. The importance of legal reform and social policies that support children's rights cannot be overstated.

Suggestion

1. **Implementation of Dynamic Child-Centered Custody System :** In the world, child custody is often fixed, even though the child's condition changes over time. As an innovation, a more flexible and dynamic custody system needs to be developed, where custody and visitation arrangements can be reviewed periodically based on the child's emotional, psychological, and social needs. This approach emphasizes regular evaluation by psychologists and the court, ensuring that the child's best interests continue to be considered throughout his or her development.
2. **Integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Technology in Custody Decisions :** This novelty involves the use of machine learning and AI algorithms to help courts make more objective and fair decisions in child custody. By collecting data related to the child's development, family circumstances, social environment, and psychological health, AI-based systems can offer recommendations based on patterns identified from previous cases, while reducing human bias that may occur in decision-making.
3. **Virtual Courts and Global Digital Supervision for Transnational Custody Cases :** In an increasingly globalized world with high human mobility, transnational child custody cases (where parents are in different countries) are becoming more common. The proposed novelty is the development of a virtual court system that allows cross-border cooperation to resolve custody disputes, with more uniform international legal standards. In addition, digital supervision through a blockchain platform can be used to ensure compliance and enforcement of decisions across borders, thus speeding up the process and avoiding jurisdictional conflicts.
4. **Development of a Global Index to Measure Child Welfare in Custody Cases :** Currently, there is no clear global standard for measuring the success of custody arrangements in improving child well-being. The proposed innovation is to create a Global Child Welfare Index that comprehensively assesses the quality of life of children involved in custody disputes. This index can measure factors such as mental health, academic performance, social relationships, and

emotional stability post-custody. With this index, courts and policymakers can have data-driven guidance for adopting policies that best support the best interests of the child.

5. **Co-Parenting Approach to Child Custody Conflicts in Developing Countries** : In many developing countries, resources are limited to support single parents or children in divorce cases. The proposed novelty is to introduce a community-based co-parenting approach , whereby the local community, including local governments and non-governmental organizations, provides social and material support to ensure that children in complex custody situations have a safe and stable environment. This approach can include shared educational facilities, psychological support, and medical services to ensure that children continue to receive support even when their parents are experiencing economic or social difficulties.

6. **Creation of the International Child Custody Network (ICCN) for the Resolution of Cross-Border Custody Disputes** : This innovation involves the creation of an international network dedicated to resolving cross-border custody disputes. This network, consisting of legal experts, child psychologists, and mediators, can help countries handle cases where one or both parents live in different countries. Through the ICCN, it is hoped that there will be harmony in the handling of international custody cases, as well as the achievement of outcomes that focus on the welfare of children in an effective and efficient manner.

7. **Implementation of Empathy-Based Legal Model in Custody Decisions** : While many legal systems focus on the formal legal aspects, the proposed novelty is an approach that emphasizes empathy throughout the entire custody legal process. This approach involves training judges, lawyers, and social workers to apply the principle of empathy, where the emotional needs and experiences of the child and both parents are the top priority in every legal decision made. Through empathy-based training, the legal process is expected to become more humane and support the psychological stability of the child.

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