

Gender-Responsive Strategic Policy Planning for Relocated Sex Workers: An Inclusive Public Service Governance Perspective

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ABSTRAK

Studi ini mengkaji kebijakan relokasi pekerja seks di Indonesia dan implikasinya terhadap perencanaan kebijakan responsif gender, tata kelola inklusif, serta kerentanan sosial-ekonomi perempuan. Meskipun relokasi kerap dipahami sebagai strategi manajemen perkotaan dan regulasi moral, dampaknya terhadap relasi kuasa gender dan mata pencaharian perempuan pasca-relokasi masih kurang dikaji. Untuk mengisi kesenjangan tersebut, penelitian ini menganalisis desain dan implementasi kebijakan relokasi serta responsivitasnya terhadap kebutuhan strategis gender dan partisipasi perempuan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan fenomenologis kualitatif di dua lokasi pasca-relokasi di Jawa Tengah melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan pekerja seks yang direlokasi, pekerja perempuan rentan, perwakilan komunitas, dan pejabat pemerintah daerah, serta analisis dokumen kebijakan. Data dianalisis secara tematis menggunakan NVivo 12 Pro dalam kerangka Perencanaan Kebijakan Responsif Gender Moser. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kebijakan relokasi bersifat top-down dan administratif, memprioritaskan ketertiban spasial dan bantuan ekonomi jangka pendek, sehingga kebutuhan strategis perempuan, partisipasi, dan kendali atas sumber daya belum terpenuhi. Akibatnya, perempuan mengalami peningkatan beban kerja, ketidakamanan ekonomi, keterbatasan pengambilan keputusan, dan stigma yang persisten. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa tanpa perencanaan responsif gender dan partisipatif, relokasi berisiko mereproduksi kerentanan struktural dan karenanya memerlukan tata kelola terintegrasi yang memprioritaskan partisipasi, data sensitif gender, dan akuntabilitas institusional.

ABSTRACT

This study examines sex worker relocation policies in Indonesia and their implications for gender-responsive policy planning, inclusive governance, and women's socio-economic vulnerability. Although relocation is commonly framed as urban management and moral regulation, its impacts on gendered power relations and women's post-relocation livelihoods remain underexplored. Addressing this gap, the study analyzes the design and implementation of relocation policies and their responsiveness to women's strategic gender needs and participation. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected in two post-relocation sites in Central Java through semi-structured interviews with relocated sex workers, vulnerable female workers, community representatives, and local government officials, supported by policy document analysis. Data were thematically analyzed using NVivo 12 Pro within Moser's Gender-Responsive Policy Planning framework. The findings indicate that relocation policies are characterized by top-down institutional design and implementation prioritizing spatial order and short-term economic assistance, leaving women's strategic needs, participation, and control over resources largely unmet. Consequently, women experience intensified workloads, economic insecurity, limited decision-making power, and persistent stigma. The study concludes that without gender-responsive and participatory planning, relocation risks reproduce structural vulnerability and therefore require integrated governance that prioritizes participation, gender-sensitive data systems, and institutional accountability.

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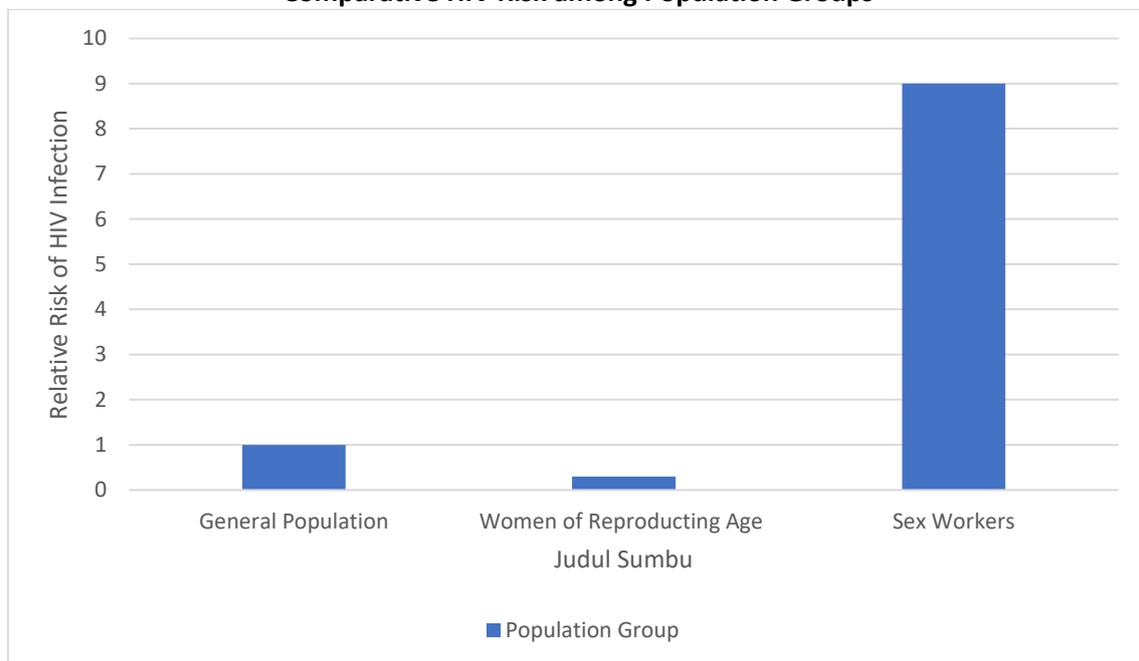
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INTRODUCTION

Sex workers are nine times more likely to be infected with HIV than the general population (UNAIDS, 2024) and 30 times more likely than women of reproductive age in general (WHO, 2020). The health risks for sex workers are not limited to HIV, but also include other sexually transmitted infections, including human papillomavirus (HPV). Among female sex workers aged 30 years and older, more than half were found to be infected with one or more types of HPV, with types 51 and 53 being the most common, while types 16 and 18 were relatively rare. In addition, sex workers living with HIV are more likely to be infected with HPV than those who are HIV-negative. A small proportion of participants, about 10%, tested positive on cervical screening (VIA/VILI-DC), indicating an increased risk of cervical cancer (Manga et al., 2024). These disparities in health risks are illustrated in Figure 1, which compares the relative risk of HIV infection among sex workers, women of reproductive age, and the general population.

Figure 1.
Comparative HIV Risk among Population Groups



Source: UNAIDS (2024)

Figure 1 illustrates the relative risk of HIV infection among sex workers compared to the general population and women of reproductive age. Based on global estimates from UNAIDS (2024), sex workers face a substantially higher risk of HIV infection, reflecting the compounded effects of occupational exposure, limited access to non-discriminatory health services, and structural vulnerability. This disparity underscores the importance of situating sex worker relocation policies within a broader framework of health protection, gender justice, and inclusive social policy.

These heightened health risks cannot be understood in isolation from broader structural conditions. Sex workers often experience overlapping forms of discrimination linked to gender, migration status, class position, sexual orientation, and criminalized behaviors (Rahaman & Shamma, 2025). Such intersecting vulnerabilities restrict access to non-discriminatory health services, legal protection, and social security (Acharya & Azhar, 2025). Fear of stigma, raids, or arrest discourages sex workers from seeking reproductive health care and HIV-related services despite their heightened risk (Kızıldağ et al., 2025).

Relocation is a policy instrument widely adopted to address sex work through spatial reordering, moral regulation, and public order enforcement. In policy discourse, relocation is expected to protect sex workers from violence, ensure access to health and social services, and provide alternative livelihoods (Green, 2024). However, relocation is frequently implemented through top-down mechanisms that exclude sex workers from decision-making processes. Rather than mitigating vulnerability, relocation often displaces it into new spaces, reinforcing stigma, economic precarity, and gender inequality (Chernick & Sweeting, 2025; Mellor & Benoit, 2023).

Despite extensive global and national interventions, a critical gap remains in understanding how relocation policies operate across different post-relocation contexts and whether they meaningfully integrate gender-responsive planning and inclusive governance principles. Existing studies largely examine relocation as a uniform administrative intervention, offering limited empirical insight into how diverse governance settings shape women's lived experiences after relocation. This gap obscures whether relocation functions as protection or merely reconfigures gendered vulnerability in new institutional and spatial forms.

Previous studies have examined prostitution regulation, criminalization, and health risks (Grenfell et al., 2022; Johnson & Porth, 2021), as well as socio-economic impacts of relocation (Chernick & Sweeting, 2025; Mellor & Benoit, 2023). However, research explicitly linking sex worker relocation to gender-responsive policy planning and inclusive governance frameworks remains limited. The involvement of sex workers as stakeholders in policy formulation is rarely analyzed, with policies tending to prioritize control and moral order over participation and social protection (Graham et al., 2022).

Regulatory approaches to sex work relocation vary across socio-political contexts (Johnson & Porth, 2021). In many settings, sex workers continue to be framed as victims or social deviants, overlooking the socio-economic complexity of sex work and limiting opportunities for sustainable livelihood improvement (Pitcher, 2015; Putnis & Burr, 2020). Evidence from community-based empowerment initiatives demonstrates that participatory approaches can reduce health risks and strengthen awareness of rights among sex workers (Goldenberg et al., 2021).

Against this backdrop of persistent stigma and policy-induced vulnerability, the inherent social stigma surrounding sex work increases women's exposure to violence, social exclusion, and violations of fundamental rights, including access to health services, workplace safety, and public participation. Rather than functioning as a protective intervention, relocation frequently operates as a mechanism of social exclusion that transfers stigma and insecurity into new institutional and spatial settings. These discriminatory conditions undermine economic well-being and adversely affect the mental and physical health of sex workers (Lahav Raz, 2025), thereby widening the gap between the normative objectives of relocation policies and their implementation in practice. This gap underscores the urgency of structural reforms that position human rights protection as a central pillar of social policy (Barakat & Redmiles, 2022).

Equitable policy reform requires more than normative commitments; it demands governance arrangements that recognize marginalized groups as active policy actors rather than passive objects of regulation (Bahasoan, 2024; Goldenberg et al., 2021; Lutnick, 2019; Priyanto, 2024). Within this context, gender-responsive policy planning offers a critical framework for ensuring that women's rights, participation, and differentiated needs are systematically addressed in policy design and implementation. Accordingly, more participatory public policies that involve sex workers as stakeholders are essential for advancing governance oriented toward rights, social equality, and the elimination of stigma.

Indonesia represents a critical case, as relocation policies have been aggressively implemented following the closure of red-light districts in several cities, including Yogyakarta and Surabaya (Mujiyanto & Sugiyanto, 2025; Rahma et al., 2022). While legally justified under Law No. 21 of 2007 on the Eradication of Human Trafficking, relocation has frequently resulted in livelihood loss, intensified stigma, and declining economic security (Dewantary et al., 2023; Setyawan et al., 2024).

This study advances the literature in three key ways. First, it conceptualizes sex worker relocation not merely as a regulatory or welfare intervention, but as a governance process that restructures access to resources, participation, and protection. Second, it integrates gender-responsive policy planning with inclusive public governance frameworks—an analytical combination that remains underexplored in existing relocation and prostitution policy studies. Third, by examining differentiated post-relocation experiences across multiple economic and institutional contexts in Indonesia, this study moves beyond uniform policy assessments to reveal how governance arrangements reproduce or mitigate gendered vulnerability in practice (Hung, 2023).

Accordingly, the aim of this study is to analyze sex worker relocation policies in Indonesia through the lenses of gender-responsive policy planning and inclusive governance. Specifically, this study examines how relocation policies are designed and implemented, and how they are experienced by relocated women across different post-relocation economic and institutional contexts. By doing so, the study seeks to assess whether relocation functions as a protective intervention or reconfigures gendered vulnerability in new forms.

Literature Review

Sex Workers and the Vulnerability of Commercial Sex Workers

International and Indonesian literature shows that sex workers are in a position of structural vulnerability due to a combination of economic, social, legal, and gender factors (Nugroho et al., 2025). This structural vulnerability is also evident in health aspects. A qualitative study by Januraga et al. (2014) on migrant female sex workers in Bali found that migrant sex workers face multiple layers of vulnerability: lack of knowledge and self-efficacy regarding HIV prevention, a highly competitive work environment, dependence on pimps or cafe/brothel owners, and weak bargaining power with customers. This framework is reinforced by research by Rahmalia et al. (2021) in Bandung, which shows that vulnerability to HIV is constructed by social structures such as poverty, unequal gender relations, gender-based violence, and moral stigma against women involved in sex work.

Socially, sex workers often experience stigmatization and multiple layers of victimization. Diajeng et al. (2024) show that sex workers are in many cases positioned as “victim precipitation,” so that when they experience violence, they are blamed and considered deserving of it, rather than being recognized as victims who are entitled to protection. Reports from civil society organizations also note that sex workers face significant barriers to reporting violence due to fear of criminalization, raids, and negative labeling by authorities and the community (Suryandari & Tohari, 2024).

Gender-Responsive Policy Planning

The concept of gender-responsive policy planning is rooted in the gender planning framework developed by Moser (1993), which emphasizes distinguishing between practical gender needs and strategic gender interests in development planning to

transform unequal power relations. This approach is reinforced by feminist thinking in planning, which rejects the assumption of a “neutral” subject in public policy. Sandercock & Forsyth (1992) assert that planning must acknowledge women’s specific experiences in spatial, economic, and social relations, because policies that claim neutrality often reproduce masculine biases.

Further literature emphasizes that gender-responsive planning is not merely about including women as a target group but also about changing institutional structures and decision-making processes. Kabeer (1994) and Miller & Razavi (1995) show that without changes in policy mechanisms and governance, gender mainstreaming risks becoming a technocratic approach that loses its transformative agenda. In the context of public policy, Luong & Weinthal (2001) emphasize that gender mainstreaming requires political leadership, cross-sectoral coordination, and accountability systems so that it does not stop at policy symbolism.

In global practice, various international organizations have developed operational guidelines for gender-responsive planning. UN Women developed a gender-responsive planning and budgeting framework equipped with a gender responsiveness scale, which classifies policies from gender-blind to gender-sensitive to gender-transformative (Macarthur et al., 2022). This approach emphasizes the importance of context analysis, the participation of vulnerable groups, and the use of gender-disaggregated data throughout the policy cycle. In line with this, OECD (2015) and UNDP (2020) emphasize that gender-responsive planning must be integrated with the principles of inclusive governance, particularly in the provision of public services and urban policy.

In the field of urban planning and public services, the World Bank's Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning and Design (2020) shows that spatial policies, infrastructure, and urban design can either strengthen or reduce the vulnerability of women and marginalized groups, including sex workers, depending on the extent to which gender perspectives and inclusive participation are integrated. These studies emphasize that relocation and spatial planning policies cannot be separated from issues of access to health services, security, livelihoods, and social protection.

In Indonesia, the implementation of Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting (PPRG), initiated by Bappenas since the late 1990s, is an effort to institutionalize gender mainstreaming in national development planning. PPRG uses instruments such as the Gender Analysis Pathway (GAP) and Gender Budget Statement (GBS) to identify gender gaps and direct more equitable budget allocations (Fithriyah, 2017). However, various evaluations show that the implementation of PPRG is still often administrative and procedural in nature and has not fully influenced the substance of policies or power relations in the planning process (OECD, 2019; Pratiwi & Yunas, 2025).

Based on this review, it can be concluded that although the literature on gender-responsive policy planning has developed, its integration with inclusive public service governance in the context of sex worker relocation is still very limited. Most previous studies have focused on issues of health, morality, or criminalization, while the dimensions of strategic policy design—which include gender analysis, participatory mechanisms, and cross-sectoral coordination—have not been systematically explored. Therefore, this study offers a new contribution by developing an integrative conceptual framework that brings together gender-responsive policy planning and inclusive public service governance in order to produce an evidence-based and transformation-oriented policy model for gender inequality.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach to explore how gender-responsive policy planning is understood, implemented, and experienced in the context of sex worker relocation policies. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate for examining complex social phenomena that involve power relations, lived experiences, institutional practices, and meaning-making processes (Creswell, 2018; Miles et al., 2014). Rather than measuring outcomes quantitatively, this approach enables an in-depth understanding of how policies operate in practice and shape the everyday realities of affected actors. A phenomenological approach was chosen because this study focuses on the lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of multiple stakeholders, especially relocated sex workers (ex-PSK), vulnerable women workers, and policy actors involved in relocation and post-relocation programs. This approach enables the researcher to capture how gendered impacts, participation, and governance dynamics are experienced and interpreted by actors situated at different institutional and social levels (Mulyadi, 2011; Wita & Mursal, 2022).

This research was conducted in two post-relocation sites with distinct socio-economic and spatial characteristics, which are Rowosari Culinary Area in Semarang City and the Karaoke Tourism Area in Kendal Regency. The Rowosari Culinary Area represents a government-led livelihood transition model that formally integrates former sex workers and vulnerable women into informal culinary micro-enterprises. The area is publicly framed as a space of “economic normalization” and moral rehabilitation, where women are expected to shift from stigmatized occupations to socially acceptable informal work. In contrast, the Karaoke Tourism Area in Kendal Regency reflects a more ambiguous post-relocation setting. While officially designated as a regulated entertainment zone, it continues to host informal and gendered labor relations, exposing women to economic precarity, stigma, and limited labor protection. These contrasting characteristics allow this study to examine how relocation policies operate differently across spatial, institutional, and socio-economic contexts, and how gendered vulnerabilities are reproduced or transformed in each location.

The research population comprised stakeholders directly involved in or affected by sex worker relocation policies, including government officials, community leaders, relocated sex workers, vulnerable women workers in post-relocation economic sectors, and street vendors. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, which allows researchers to identify participants relevant to the research objectives and capable of providing rich, in-depth information (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025; Sugiyono, 2022).

Former sex workers involved in this study were not treated as a homogeneous group. Instead, informants were selected to reflect variations in socio-economic background, work trajectories, and market segmentation prior to relocation, including differences in income levels, work settings (street-based, karaoke-based, or venue-based), and dependency relations. This differentiation was essential to capture how relocation policies produce uneven impacts on women depending on their prior position within the sex work economy and their subsequent access to alternative livelihoods.

The criteria for informant selection included:

1. Individuals who were directly affected by or involved in the implementation of sex worker relocation policies, particularly those experiencing livelihood transitions and social impacts following relocation.
2. Individuals engaged in post-relocation economic activities, especially women working in informal sectors, who are vulnerable to financial insecurity and gendered risks.

3. Community-level actors who play a role in mediating policy implementation, social order, and community responses to relocation.
4. Government officials and policy implementers responsible for designing, implementing, and evaluating relocation and social protection programs.

Thus, informants were selected based on their direct involvement in relocation policies, their lived experiences of post-relocation impacts, and their institutional or community-level understanding of gendered policy dynamics. The profiles of each informant involved in this study are presented in the following table.

Table 1.
Research Informants Profile

Group	Definition	Stakeholders	Number of Informants
Affected Women Groups	Individuals directly affected by relocation policies and experiencing livelihood transitions, social stigma, and gendered vulnerability.	1. Former Sex Workers (Ex-PSK) 2. Vulnerable Women Workers in Culinary Areas 3. Street Vendors (Pedagang Kaki Lima)	n = 6
Economic Actors	Actors involved in entertainment or informal economic activities are affected by policy enforcement and post-relocation restructuring.	1. Karaoke Business Operator	n = 1
Community Representatives	Community-level actors are responsible for maintaining social order, mediating the impacts of policies, and representing local community perspectives.	1. Neighbourhood Head (Ketua RW)	n = 1
Local Government	Parties responsible for formulating, implementing, and administering relocation and social protection policies at the local level.	1. Head of the Social Affairs Agency (Kepala Dinas Sosial) 2. Staff of the Social Affairs Agency	n = 2

Source: Data processed by researchers (2025)

This study involved ten informants using primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were obtained through face-to-face, in-depth semi-structured interviews, allowing informants to express their experiences, perceptions, and reflections on relocation policies and gendered impacts, supported by field notes and audio recordings to ensure data accuracy. Secondary data were collected from policy documents, local regulations, program reports, activity documentation, media coverage, and administrative records from village and local government institutions, which were used to contextualize and triangulate interview findings by linking lived experiences with formal policy frameworks.

Data analysis followed an interactive qualitative analysis model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, which were conducted iteratively throughout the research process. Data condensation involved transcribing interviews verbatim and systematically selecting, simplifying, and coding data related to gender-

firmly attached to them. The frequent appearance of the term *burden* signals that these overlapping roles are experienced as physically and emotionally exhausting, reflecting persistent double and, in some cases, triple burdens. This pattern suggests that economic role shifts are not accompanied by a redistribution of domestic or community responsibilities.

Interview findings show that relocation policies reshape women's gender roles across productive, domestic, and social spheres, but these changes are uneven across post-relocation sites and insufficiently anticipated in policy planning.

In the Rowosari Culinary Area, former sex workers and vulnerable women workers described longer working hours in informal culinary businesses to compensate for income instability, while domestic responsibilities remained unchanged. One informant stated:

"I used to have clear working hours, even though it wasn't considered 'official' work. Now, after the relocation, I work at two places, sometimes until night. If I don't, my children and household will suffer."

Despite increased economic activity, domestic responsibilities remained unchanged: *"Even though I'm exhausted when I come home at night, I still have to finish my household chores. Sometimes I help my children with their homework while my body is already exhausted."*

Similarly, female street vendors in Rowosari emphasized that trading activities extended daily working hours without reducing domestic workloads. Although husbands occasionally helped, responsibility for household tasks largely remained with women.

In Kendal's Karaoke Tourism Area, women experienced similar role accumulation under more precarious and informal conditions. The closure of nightlife venues forced women to seek alternative income sources without labor protection, while family expectations regarding domestic roles persisted. As a karaoke business operator explained:

"Women who used to work at our place now have to find additional work outside. Meanwhile, their families still expect them to take care of the house as well."

At the community level, a neighborhood association chair observed that women appeared more economically active after relocation, yet without a corresponding redistribution of care responsibilities:

"We see mothers now more often outside the home looking for work. But childcare and household matters are still handled by the mothers themselves. Those who should help are not always there."

Despite these observable shifts in women's roles, interviews with local government officials revealed that gender-specific role analysis has not been systematically integrated into relocation policy planning. The Head of the Social Affairs Agency acknowledged:

"We rely on general employment and household data. We have not mapped women's specific working hours or multiple roles after relocation."

Planning staff further noted capacity and administrative constraints that limit the use of triple-role analysis in routine policy formulation.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that relocation policies not only shift women's economic activities but also intensify their triple roles as income earners, caregivers, and community members. Evidence from both Rowosari and Kendal shows that increased productive roles are not accompanied by reductions in reproductive or social responsibilities. The absence of policy

support—such as childcare services, informal work protection, or mechanisms to redistribute care work—contributes directly to women’s cumulative workload.

From a gender-responsive policy planning perspective by Moser (1993), this reflects a failure to meet the indicator of gender role identification. Policies are designed using gender-neutral assumptions without systematically mapping women’s productive, reproductive, and community roles. As demonstrated by interview evidence and NVivo analysis, this disconnect limits the capacity of relocation policies to anticipate gendered impacts and undermines their potential to improve women’s welfare and gender equality in a sustainable manner.

2. Practical and Strategic Gender Needs

Within Moser's (1993) gender planning framework, practical gender needs refer to women’s immediate requirements related to income, basic services, and daily survival, while strategic gender needs concern long-term structural changes, including economic independence, bargaining power, participation in decision-making, and the reduction of stigma. Analyzing both dimensions allows assessment of whether relocation policies merely mitigate short-term vulnerability or contribute to gender-transformative outcomes (Chant & Sweetman, 2012; Rao & Kelleher, 2005).

Figure 3.



Source: NVivo 12 Pro (2025)

Figure 3 shows a word cloud derived from interview transcripts related to practical and strategic gender needs. Dominant terms such as “needs”, “economic”, “assistance”, “capital”, “business”, “income”, and “support” indicate that relocation policies are strongly oriented toward addressing women’s immediate economic survival. These words reflect policy emphasis on short-term assistance, skills training, and access to small capital following the loss of previous livelihoods. In contrast, terms associated with strategic needs—such as “power”, “bargaining”, “stigma”, “change”, and “gender”—appear less frequently, signaling that issues related to women’s bargaining power, social recognition, and long-term economic independence remain marginal. Overall, the word cloud illustrates an imbalance in policy orientation: practical needs are relatively visible and addressed, while strategic gender needs receive limited attention.

Interview data confirm that relocation policies were relatively effective in addressing women’s practical gender needs during the early post-relocation phase. Former sex workers and

vulnerable women workers in the Rowosari Culinary Area highlighted the importance of skills training, small capital assistance, and facilitated entry into culinary businesses as temporary economic buffers after losing their previous livelihoods. As one informant explained:

“At the beginning, the assistance was very helpful. At least it was enough to eat and pay the rent.”

However, informants consistently emphasized that this support was short-term and lacked continuity. Once initial assistance ended, women were required to rely on their own survival strategies amid uncertain market conditions: *“There was training, but after that we were left on our own. If business is slow, we have to deal with it ourselves.”*

Similar experiences were reported by women street vendors who received access to trading locations. While location assistance initially created economic opportunities, limited capital, market competition, and the absence of protection rendered their businesses fragile:

“If it’s busy, we make money. If it’s quiet, there’s no guarantee.”

Beyond practical assistance, interview findings indicate that women’s strategic gender needs remain largely unmet. Across both Rowosari and Kendal’s Karaoke Tourism Area, informants described how relocation shifted them from one form of vulnerability to another. Although employment in socially acceptable sectors reduced overt social sanction, stigma persisted:

“Now we are no longer sex workers, but the stigma remains.”

The transition to informal sector employment also increased economic precarity due to the absence of labor protection and social security. Community-level interviews further revealed that women’s increased economic participation did not translate into greater bargaining power within households or communities. A neighborhood association chair noted: *“The women now work, but when it comes to big decisions at home, it’s still the husbands.”*

These findings demonstrate that while practical needs related to income are partially met, strategic needs concerning decision-making power, social recognition, and long-term security are not addressed.

Interviews with officials from the Social Affairs Agency confirm that post-relocation programs were intentionally designed to prioritize immediate economic survival. As one official stated:

“Our priority was how they could continue to live and earn an income.”

However, officials acknowledged that strengthening women’s strategic position—such as asset ownership, bargaining power, and stigma reduction—has not yet been incorporated into policy design due to budgetary, institutional, and capacity constraints:

“For issues of stigma and gender inequality, there are no specific programs yet.”

Overall, these findings show that relocation policies are more responsive to women’s practical gender needs than to their strategic gender needs. Short-term economic assistance helps women survive the immediate impacts of relocation, as evidenced by interview data from both Rowosari and Kendal. However, the absence of sustained support, labor protection, and interventions targeting power relations limits women’s ability to achieve long-term economic stability and social empowerment.

From the perspective of gender-responsive policy planning (Moser, 1993), this imbalance indicates that relocation policies remain focused on practical needs associated with women’s

"I earn the money, but once I get home there are already 'must-pay' expenses. I can't always decide for myself."

Another added: *"When I want to save for business, I'm told the family needs come first. In the end, there is nothing left."*

Although women are registered as business operators or assistance recipients, strategic decisions—such as savings, reinvestment, or business expansion—are frequently negotiated or dominated by spouses or male family members. As a woman trader noted:

"I manage the stall daily, but big financial decisions are still discussed with my husband."

In Kendal's Karaoke Tourism Area, women's access to resources was more informal and precarious. Income was obtained through side jobs and informal work, but without institutional protection or asset ownership. This informality further weakened women's control over resources, as income was primarily used for immediate household needs rather than long-term security.

At the community level, a neighborhood association chair observed that despite increased economic activity, women's influence over collective resource decisions remained limited:

"Women work actively, but when it comes to meetings about aid or economic arrangements, men usually attend and decide."

On the other hand, interviews with the Head of the Social Affairs Agency and staff confirmed that women are administratively designated as primary beneficiaries of post-relocation assistance. However, policy mechanisms to ensure women's control over income and assets are absent.

"We make sure the assistance goes to women, but how it is managed at home is beyond our monitoring."

Officials acknowledged that monitoring systems focus on distribution and business continuity rather than on gendered control over resources: *"We don't yet have indicators to assess women's economic control."*

Taken together, these findings indicate that relocation policies have been relatively successful in expanding women's access to economic resources but have not ensured corresponding control or long-term benefits. Evidence from Rowosari shows symbolic ownership without decision-making power, while Kendal illustrates how informality further weakens women's control. In both contexts, income generated by women is largely absorbed by household needs, limiting opportunities for savings, asset accumulation, or strengthened bargaining power.

From the perspective of gender-responsive policy planning (Moser, 1993), this reflects a partial and limited form of responsiveness. Access alone enables short-term survival but does not produce strategic benefits when control remains constrained by household and community power relations. As demonstrated by interview evidence and NVivo analysis, relocation policies risk reproducing gender inequality not because women lack access to resources, but because control and benefits remain unequally distributed. Without explicit interventions to strengthen women's economic control—such as asset ownership schemes, savings protection, or gender-sensitive monitoring—relocation is likely to perpetuate dependence rather than advance substantive gender justice.

Although institutional actors acknowledged the importance of paying attention to women, interview findings indicate that gender considerations remain largely normative and are not translated into systematic policy analysis. Gender awareness exists as an assumption rather than as an evidence-based framework supported by formal studies or indicators. As explained by an official:

“We know that affected women need special attention, but there has been no specific impact study discussing women.”

This absence of structured gender impact analysis was echoed at the community level. The neighborhood association chair noted that policy discussions and socialization activities focused primarily on order and spatial regulation rather than on women’s experiences:

“What was discussed was environmental order and what businesses were allowed. There was no specific discussion about the impact on women.”

These findings demonstrate that gender is not integrated across the policy cycle, from planning to implementation and evaluation.

Institutional priorities further reflect a policy orientation rooted in spatial control and urban order. Officials acknowledged that relocation policies initially emphasized regulation and structuring, with empowerment emerging only as a reactive response to social impacts:

“Initially, the focus was on structuring and order. Empowerment followed as a subsequent impact.”

This orientation was also perceived by community actors, who viewed the policy as prioritizing area “clean-up” over sustainable capacity building for women:

“The important thing is to clean up the area first. What the women will do for work later is a matter for later.”

In both Rowosari and Kendal, this institutional logic positioned women primarily as objects of regulation rather than as policy subjects with agency and voice.

Taken together, these findings indicate that institutions involved in relocation policies have not fully integrated a gender-responsive perspective into policy planning and implementation. The reliance on aggregate data, the absence of gender impact analysis, and the prioritization of spatial order over empowerment contribute to policies that are formally gender-neutral but substantively gender-blind. As evidenced by interview data, this institutional approach limits the capacity of relocation policies to address women’s differentiated vulnerabilities and reinforces existing power asymmetries.

From the perspective of Gender-Responsive Policy Planning proposed by Moser (1993), institutions function not merely as implementers but as active producers of gender relations. When gender analysis is absent, institutions inadvertently reproduce inequality by failing to challenge existing power structures. In this study, relocation policies did not transform institutional practices but instead relocated women’s vulnerabilities into new economic and social spaces. Consequently, institutional influence renders relocation policies only partially gender-responsive, as they have yet to embed gender sensitivity as a foundational element of policy design, implementation, and evaluation.

“So far, we have considered it gender-responsive if the recipients of assistance are women.”

Organizational understanding of gender is further shaped by a strong emphasis on policy neutrality. Officials described their approach as treating all affected groups equally, without differentiation between men and women:

“We strive to be fair by treating everyone equally. We do not distinguish between men and women.”

However, this principle of neutrality effectively obscures gendered differences in vulnerability and responsibility. By assuming that men and women are positioned similarly, organizations overlook unequal workloads, social expectations, and access to resources. This limitation is compounded by the absence of technical guidelines or evaluation tools to assess gender bias in policy design and implementation, as acknowledged by staff:

“We don’t have technical guidelines to assess whether this policy is gender biased or not.”

Without such instruments, gender bias remains implicit and unaddressed.

At the community level, the limited institutionalization of gender awareness is evident in policy implementation practices. The neighborhood association chair explained that responses to women’s vulnerability after relocation depend largely on individual officials’ attitudes rather than organizational standards:

“Some officials understand the women’s circumstances, but others only focus on the rules.”

In the absence of standardized gender-sensitive guidelines, frontline officials rely on personal judgment, resulting in uneven and inconsistent responses across relocation sites.

These findings demonstrate that gender awareness within government organizations remains at a normative and procedural level. While gender is acknowledged rhetorically, it has not been embedded into institutional routines, training systems, or policy evaluation mechanisms. Consequently, gender functions as an administrative label rather than as an analytical framework guiding policy decisions.

Within the framework of Gender-Responsive Policy Planning proposed by Moser (1993), this condition indicates that organizations have not yet reached a transformative level of gender awareness. Instead of using relocation as an opportunity to address structural inequality, institutions maintain a gender-neutral approach that risks perpetuating bias. Thus, organizational practices not only shape policy outcomes but also serve as arenas where limited gender awareness constrains the potential for genuinely gender-responsive relocation policies.

6. Involvement of Women and Women’s Organizations

The involvement of women and women’s organizations in public policy refers not only to their presence in programs but also to their meaningful participation in policy formulation, decision-making, and evaluation (Cornwall, 2002; Goetz, 2003; Htun & Weldon, 2010). Within the framework of Gender-Responsive Policy Planning by Moser (1993), participation is a key indicator of whether policies position women as active political actors or merely as beneficiaries of predetermined interventions.

Officials cited time constraints, budget limitations, and perceptions of representativeness as barriers to broader participation.

“Involving all parties is ideal but technically and financially difficult.”

The absence of formal mechanisms mandating women’s participation means that participation is treated as optional rather than as a policy requirement. As a result, women’s perspectives are excluded at the formulation stage, contributing to programs that are poorly aligned with lived experiences.

“If we had been consulted from the beginning, perhaps the program would have been more appropriate.”

These findings demonstrate that relocation policies address women primarily as program beneficiaries rather than as decision-making actors. The limited and symbolic nature of participation—evidenced by one-way socialization, fear of stigma, and the exclusion of women’s organizations from planning—explains why interventions tend to meet practical needs while failing to strengthen women’s bargaining position, access to decision-making, or social recognition. From the perspective of Gender-Responsive Policy Planning as proposed by Moser (1993), this situation indicates that the indicators for the involvement of women and women’s organizations have not been substantively met. Moser asserts that policies will continue to reproduce gender inequality as long as women are not positioned as political actors with a collective voice. Because the relocation was designed without meaningful consultation with the affected women, the resulting program tended to address practical needs but failed to strengthen women’s bargaining position, access to decision-making, and social recognition. Thus, the absence of substantive participation is not merely a procedural issue but reflects how public institutions still view women as objects of policy rather than subjects with the right to determine the direction of social change.

Research Findings in the Perspective of the Law on Sexual Violence Crimes and Instruments for the Protection of Female Workers

This study demonstrates that the relocation of female sex workers does not merely reorganize spatial arrangements but reconfigures women’s vulnerabilities in structurally gendered ways. Post-relocation conditions are marked by intensified multiple workloads, economic insecurity within informal employment, limited control over productive resources, and marginal involvement of women in policy formulation. These patterns indicate that relocation functions primarily as a mechanism of social regulation rather than as an instrument of gender-responsive protection and empowerment.

When examined through the framework of Law No. 12 of 2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes (TPKS Law), the findings reveal a clear gap between normative legal mandates and policy practice. Article 4 of the TPKS Law positions the state as responsible for structural prevention by addressing unequal power relations and socio-economic conditions that increase women’s vulnerability. Articles 5 and 6 further emphasize that prevention and recovery must address structural factors such as economic dependence, lack of access to resources, and conditions that expose women to exploitation, even in the absence of direct physical or sexual violence. However, the relocation policies examined in this study were implemented without systematic gender analysis, resulting in women’s transition into informal livelihoods characterized by long working hours, weak labor protection, and heightened economic dependence—conditions that contradict the preventive and protective mandate of the TPKS Law (UU Tindak Pidana Kekerasan Seksual, 2022).

A similar misalignment is evident in relation to national policy instruments on the protection of female workers promoted by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection. These frameworks emphasize gender mainstreaming, women's control over income, access to productive resources, and the strengthening of bargaining power, particularly within informal employment sectors. Yet, empirical evidence shows that relocation policies remain disconnected from these instruments. Women are positioned largely as recipients of short-term assistance, such as training or initial capital, without institutional mechanisms to ensure livelihood sustainability, income control, or protection from stigma and discrimination.

The absence of meaningful participation further reinforces the inconsistency between policy practice and legal principles. Article 10 of the TPKS Law underscores women's participation as a prerequisite for effective prevention and protection, particularly in policies affecting women's livelihoods and bodily autonomy. However, interview data indicate that women's involvement in relocation policies remains largely symbolic, confined to post-decision socialization rather than substantive participation in planning and decision-making processes. This exclusion limits the policy's capacity to address women's strategic gender needs, including bargaining power, social recognition, and long-term economic security.

From a gender-responsive policy planning perspective, these findings suggest that relocation policies address women's practical needs only superficially while neglecting the structural conditions that reproduce inequality. Rather than functioning as preventive and protective mechanisms as envisioned in Articles 4, 5, and 6 of the TPKS Law, relocation policies risk generating new forms of vulnerability by relocating women into precarious economic and social positions. In this sense, gender-insensitive policy implementation may constitute a form of indirect structural violence, as it sustains unequal power relations and weakens women's capacity for recovery and autonomy.

Overall, situating the empirical findings within the framework of the TPKS Law and female worker protection instruments demonstrates that relocation policies remain oriented toward controlling prostitution as a social problem, rather than safeguarding women from exploitation, economic precarity, and social marginalization. This study therefore argues that integrating Articles 4, 5, 6, and 10 of the TPKS Law, together with gender-responsive worker protection frameworks, into relocation policy design and implementation is essential to transform relocation from a regulatory intervention into a mechanism for sustainable protection and empowerment. Without such integration, relocation risks perpetuating the very vulnerabilities it is intended to resolve.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that sex worker relocation policies in Indonesia have not yet fulfilled their normative objectives of protection, empowerment, and social reintegration. Rather than reducing vulnerability, relocation often reconfigures and reproduces gendered risks by transferring women into informal and precarious livelihoods marked by intensified workloads, limited labor protection, restricted control over resources, and minimal participation in decision-making. The findings reveal a persistent gap between policy intentions and lived realities, as relocation remains predominantly driven by administrative, moral, and spatial-order imperatives, while gender responsiveness is largely procedural rather than transformative. Although women gain access to alternative income opportunities, these shifts do not translate into strengthened bargaining power, economic security, or social recognition, and women continue to shoulder disproportionate productive, reproductive, and community responsibilities under male-dominated household and institutional decision-making structures. When examined

through the framework of Law No. 12 of 2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes (TPKS Law) and national instruments for the protection of female workers, these policies demonstrate significant misalignment with the state's mandate for structural prevention and gender-equitable protection, risking the reproduction of indirect structural violence through economic dependence, stigma, and exclusion.

The core contribution of this study lies in reconceptualizing sex worker relocation not merely as a regulatory or welfare intervention, but as a governance process that actively reshapes women's access to resources, participation, and protection within gendered power relations. Based on these findings, this study recommends that local governments prioritize three interrelated policy actions: institutionalizing meaningful participation of women and women's organizations throughout the policy cycle; strengthening gender-sensitive data systems, including gender-disaggregated data on workloads, livelihoods, and post-relocation vulnerabilities; and embedding institutional accountability mechanisms to ensure women's control over resources, access to social protection, and freedom from stigma and exploitation, in line with the mandates of the TPKS Law and female worker protection frameworks. Without the integration of these elements, relocation risks perpetuating the very vulnerabilities it is intended to resolve. While this study is limited by its qualitative and context-specific design, future research employing comparative, mixed-methods, or longitudinal approaches could further assess the long-term impacts of gender-responsive relocation policies across different governance contexts.

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