

THE QUALITY OF PUBLIC SOCIAL SERVICES AT PANTI SOSIAL BINA REMAJA IN NAIBONAT, INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore supporting and hindering factors for the quality of public social service at *Panti Sosial Bina Remaja* in Naibonat, Kupang, Indonesia. A qualitative study using in-depth interview method was conducted in 2017 to collect data from the participants. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling technique. Data were analyzed using a qualitative data analysis framework. The results indicated that responsiveness, assurance and empathy of staffs or employees in delivering services to recipients were the factors supportive of the quality of the social services at PSBR. Other factors reported to also underpin the quality of social services provided by this organization included the awareness of the recipients or teenagers to obey rules and procedures applied in this organization, the strict application of regulations that proposed sanctions for the ones who violated them, organizational management committed to providing good services, and the willingness of the recipients or teenagers to develop their abilities and skills. Tangibility and reliability of the services, limited service facilities and limited number of employees in this organization were found to be the hindering factors for the quality of the services. The findings of this study suggest the needs for improvement in terms of service facilities and the number of employees with required expertise that could support the quality of the service delivery in this organization.

Key words: Quality, factors, public social services, PSBR, Naibonat, Indonesia

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INTRODUCTION

Service is an action of helping or doing work for other people. It is an action that benefits and offers satisfaction to other people. It is also an activity that occurs in a direct interaction between a person and other people with the aim to fulfill the need of the people (1, 2). Public service is an action undertaken by other parties such as an organization being responsible for a service delivery process to fulfill the needs of other people (3). It is also defined as a free service provision by government or private institutions for societies or communities with the aim to fulfill their needs or interests (4). Therefore, public service is basically seen as a service provided for societies or communities to create constructive opportunities for everybody to develop their ability and creativity with the ultimate aim to reach a common good (5).

Public service should therefore be provided with high quality standards. The term quality used here refers to everything that is able to meet the needs of recipients. Quality is characterized by several aspects including performance, reliability, easy to use and esthetics (6-8). There have been several indicators used to assess the quality of public services, including tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (9). Several previous studies have indicated that public services that take into account these aspects are successful in meeting the needs of the recipients. For instance, studies conducted by Suganda (10) investigating the quality of public service at a post office in Klaten, Indonesia, and Susanti (2) exploring the quality of public service in Gamping sub-district, have reported that good quality of public social services at these institutions were due to the services cover tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy aspects. Meanwhile, the results of other studies (11, 12) have also indicated low quality of public services which are reflected in the gap between the expectation of communities or recipients to receive good public services and the actual services being delivered. This is largely due to the providers of the public social services are unreliable, unresponsive, and have no empathy towards the needs of people within communities where the services are being delivered. This study therefore aimed to explore the supporting and influencing factors for the quality of public social services at *Panti Sosial Bina Remaja* (PSBR) in Naibonat, Kupang, Indonesia. *Panti sosial* is a social institution responsible for providing social services for abandoned children or teenagers (13). The children meant here are school dropout teenagers from East Nusa

Tenggara province, and the social services provided for them include skills in sewing, carpentry, automotive and makeup, and physical, mental and social needs.

METHODS

Conceptual framework

Indicators to measure the quality of public social services proposed by Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (9, 14) were employed as the conceptual framework of this study. They include tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Tangibility refers to the facilities that can be used to support employees to deliver social services. They could include the availability of building, beds, chairs, sport facilities, and so forth (9). Good facilities are believed to support the delivery of good quality services. Reliability refers to the ability of employees to do the services as planned and in a correct way. Each employee should be aware of working procedure and mechanism, and providing correct instructions for recipients, which could lead to positive outcomes (9). Responsiveness is related to the willingness of the employees to help recipients, and deliver the services. Their willingness to be responsive to the demands or needs of recipients or customers will contribute to the quality of service delivery (6). Assurance is about how the providers can assure that the services are delivered to the recipients. Quality assurance is the maintenance of a desired level of quality in a service, especially by means of attention to every stage of the process of delivery (15). Lastly, empathy refers to treatment or attention provided by the providers to any individual recipient. It could be the ease of contacting the service providers, and the ability of providers' employees to communicate with recipients about their needs (15).

Procedure and data collection

The study was conducted in *Panti Sosial Bina Remaja* in Naibonat, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia in 2017. Participants of the study included the head and employees of PSBR, and the teenagers or recipients of the public social services in this organization. The participants (n=14) were recruited using purposive sampling technique. Participants were informed about the nature and purpose of this study prior to their decision to participate in this study.

Data collection was conducted using in-depth interviews. The interviews focused on exploring factors that support and influence the quality of the public social services at the organization. Before the interview, each participant was advised that the interview would take approximately 30 to 45 minutes and be recorded using a tape recorder. They were also assured that data or information they provided during the interview would be treated anonymously and confidentially to prevent the possibility of linking them back to any individual in the future. Each interview was conducted in place and time recommended by each participant.

Data analysis

The recorded data were transcribed into coding sheets and translated into English. The analysis of the data was guided by a qualitative data analysis framework by Ritchie and Spence (16, 17). It includes familiarization with the data by reading them repeatedly and making comments, development and refinement of a thematic framework, indexing and coding of data using the framework, charting the data, and mapping and interpretation of the chart (16, 17). Open coding and close coding were made to produce a long list of themes, and group all the similar themes under the same theme to reduce the list of themes to a manageable number of themes.

RESULTS

The quality of public social services at PSBR in Naibonat

Tangibility

The quality of public social services could be measured using tangibility aspect as an indicator. Data from the fieldwork indicated that public social services provided by PSBR had been delivered as expected and in accordance with the procedures. However, interviews with the participants also found that aspects related to the supporting facilities needed to be improved in order to create a constructive physical environment and help employees or staffs to deliver the services at the maximum level:

“In relation to the facilities, there is a need to improve several aspects such as volleyball hall, football field, and rooms for the children. The physical environment needs to be improved as well because it is still dirty and not supportive for the children to carry out activities” (Participant 4).

Reliability

Good understanding of employees of the organization about the procedure of the services, working mechanism, and employees' ability to solve problem and guide the recipients or children to do the right things, seemed to have significant effect on the quality of the public social services at PSBR. Having a good understanding of the social services, and ability to deliver the services in accordance with the procedures made the employees and the services being delivered reliable. These could lead to positive results. Interviews with the participants indicated that reliability aspect of the public social services at PSBR was still low due to the complaint of the recipients regarding the duration of services which were considered too long, and unfriendly attitude of the employees:

“Recipients often complain about several aspects such as limited number of instructors who are computer literate, the duration of the services which are too long, the staffs who deliver the services are not friendly, do not smile, and smoke while providing the services. These are really distracting for us as the recipients” (Participant 10).

Responsiveness

Being responsive to the needs of recipients or willingness to help and provide services to the recipients in need was also discovered to play an important role in supporting the quality of public social services at PSBR. Several interviewees acknowledged that staffs were very responsive and willing to help the teenagers. This was reflected in their quick responses to the needs of the recipients, and spirit in delivering the services including guiding the teenagers to solve their problems:

“The staffs are very helpful, quick in responding to what we need, on time, and looking tidy. They are always available to guide each of us if we have personal or family problems or if we violate the rules here. They respect us and are very sensitive with our situation” (Participant 14).

Assurance

Assurance which is about how the providers can assure that the services are delivered to the recipients was also found to be another important aspect that supported the quality of social

services at PSBR. Data from the fieldwork showed that the employees at this organization did pay attention to every stage of the process of public social services in order to maintain the quality of the services provided by PSBR. In additions, it was found that all the services provided in this organization were free of charge:

“It is evident that the staffs always try to deliver good services for us, I see that they pay attention to everything they do for us” (Participant 3).

“This is a social organization providing social services for abandoned teenagers. All the services provided by this organization are free of charge. Budgets for food, transportation, and healthcare are handled this organization” (Participant 7).

Empathy

Caring about individual condition or situation of the teenagers receiving the services provided by PSBR was an important aspect brought up by the participants during the interviews. This was reflected in several aspects expressed by the interviewees, such as availability of staffs once needed by the recipients, and the ability of the staff to communicate with recipients about their needs, listen to their problems and guide them to take correct action or solution:

“The staffs are careful, easy to contact and always available for us. I feel proud of this organization because it provides services which seem simple but are very helpful. They include physical guidance, mental guidance, social guidance and skill training for the children” (participant 10).

Other supporting and hindering factors for the quality of public social services at PSBR

Findings from the fieldwork also indicated several factors that seemed to play significant role in supporting the quality of the public social services provided by this organization. Interviews with the study participants uncovered those factors including the awareness of the recipients to obey rules and procedures applied in this organization, the strict application of rules that proposed sanctions for the ones who violated them, organizational management committed to providing

good services, and the willingness of the recipients or teenagers to develop their abilities and skills:

“I as well as my other colleagues have decided to participate in the programs provided by this organization, so we are aware of the rules and procedures applied here and committed to obeying those rules and procedures” (Participant 1).

“We strictly apply the rules in this organization. Everything should be done in accordance with the rules and procedures that have been stipulated. If the recipients fail to obey the rules then they should be given sanctions” (Participant 6).

“PSBR is a social organization committed to providing social services for abandoned children or teenagers and school dropouts so that they can develop their abilities and creativities through the skill trainings we provide” (Participant 9).

“We have abilities and skills to be developed here in this organization. The potentials we have can be developed because this organization provides us with various opportunities” (Participants 5).

Limited service facilities and limited number of staffs were also found to be the hindering factors for the delivery of good quality public social services by PSBR. Several participants interviewed commented that limited service facilities and number of employees in this organization influenced the effectiveness of the service delivery, leading to low quality of social services provided for the children:

“Most of the facilities in this organization can still be used but should be replaced because they are old and inappropriate to use anymore. This condition can prevent us from delivering the services at the maximum level” (Participants 11).

“This organization has limited number of employees to carry out the services to the children. Likewise, most of the current employees do not have expertise in any specific field. This has massive impacts on the services and leads to low quality of social services provided by this organization” (Participants 12).

DISCUSSION

Public social services delivered by governmental and nongovernmental or private institutions are very important to help the ones in most need. Consistent with the findings of previous studies (2,

10, 15), the current study suggests that employees' responsiveness to the needs of the recipients or willingness to help them solve their problems was an important aspect that supported the quality of public social services provided by PSBR. The findings of the current study also support the previous studies (18, 19), confirming that employees' attention to every stage of the process of public social service delivery, and care about individual condition or situation of the teenagers receiving the services, were the factors that underpinned the quality of social services in this organization. Other factors identified to support the quality of social services in PSBR, as have also been reported in previous studies (18, 20), included the awareness of the recipients to obey rules and procedures applied in this organization, the strict application of rules that proposed sanctions for the ones who violated them, organizational management committed to providing good services, and the willingness of the recipients or teenagers to develop their abilities and skills.

Supporting the results of previous studies (11, 12, 14), the current study confirms that lack of tangible aspects or service facilities such as buildings, rooms, sports facilities and constructive physical environment, had negative impacts on the public social services provided by PSBR. They were unsupportive of good quality services and led to low quality of services for the children in this institution. Limited number of employees with required expertise that can help to support the delivery of the social services at the maximum level was another factor unsupportive of good quality services at PSBR. This factor was also found to lead to decreasing reliability aspect among the recipients towards the employees and the services.

CONCLUSIONS

This study reports several aspects supportive of the quality of public social services at PSBR including responsiveness, assurance and empathy of the employees in delivering services to recipients. Other factors reported to also support the quality of services provided by this organization are the awareness of the teenagers to obey rules and procedures applied in this organization, the strict application of rules or regulations that proposed sanctions for the ones who violated them, organizational management who are committed to providing good services, and the willingness of the recipients or teenagers to develop their abilities and skills. However, this study also suggests several hindering factors for the quality of social services including

tangibility and reliability of the services, limited service facilities and limited number of employees in this organization. The findings of this study suggest the needs for improvement in terms of service facilities, the number of employees with required expertise, which could help support high quality of service delivery to the recipients or children.

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