

## Social Welfare of Rural Communities as a Function of Social Workers' Empowerment

Dewi Kurniasih<sup>1</sup> and Maisya Chaluela Anjani  
*Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia*

**Abstract:** Social workers play an important role in uplifting rural communities' living standards. Considering the important role of social work services in dealing with the existence of potential issues of poverty and poor economic conditions in rural communities, more specifically in emerging economies, the current study integrated the community-based targeting view with empowerment theory to determine the social workers' role in achieving community welfare in rural areas. Using rural household survey data from 597 households from 15 rural communities in two provinces of Indonesia, modern statistical tools, that is, SmartPLS analyzed the data. Results showed that social workers' work relationships, skills and varieties, and moral alignment with rural communities enhance their empowerment qualities. The empowerment of social workers further transmits the significance of their role in helping rural communities bring economic development and welfare by providing basic needs of education, health facilities, employment opportunities, etc. The current study findings are valuable for practitioners and policymakers, specifically for focusing on rural community development programs by utilizing social workers' efforts and extending their social networks to extract maximum benefits.

**Keywords:** Moral alignment, rural community, skills, social worker, empowerment, community welfare, community-based targeting

Rural communities in developing economies face poverty, poor living conditions, and limited access to healthcare services, education, and employment opportunities (Wilson et al., 2022). Most welfare organizations apply community-based targeting in rural regions of developing nations to deal with the potential issue of asymmetrical information availability (Ngo & Creutz, 2022). This targeting helps identify socially disadvantaged groups/families using local information. Such social organizations employ local knowledge to add information to improve the welfare of rural communities by specifically targeting poor and needy families (Ferguson et al., 2022). This information is essential in identifying these families; however, a conflict exists between the definition of poverty central governments use and its existence (Liu et al., 2021).

Social workers have an important role in improving the quality of life and sustaining the communities by creating awareness and providing employment opportunities to a large extent (Ashcroft et al., 2022). Previously, research has primarily focused on social workers' efforts to improve the health conditions of poor or disadvantaged groups and provide them with food and shelter facilities during natural disasters (Nordesjö et al., 2022; Nurani et al., 2022, Rusfiana & Kurniasih, 2024). However, the role of social organizations and social workers in enhancing community welfare has been given scant attention (Ashcroft et al., 2022). Therefore, to deal with this potential issue, the current study mainly focused on social workers' role in

---

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding Author: A Permanent Lecturer at the Government Science Study Program, Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia. Email: [dewi.kurniasih@email.unikom.ac.id](mailto:dewi.kurniasih@email.unikom.ac.id)

enhancing community welfare in rural areas where people face issues related to substandard life and poor living conditions, specifically in developing countries. Thus, the study explicitly focused on empirically examining social workers' work performance through their work relationships, skills and varieties, and moral alignment to evaluate their level of empowerment leading to community welfare.

Social workers' relationship with rural communities reflects their affiliation with such communities to help them attain basic living standards (Cosgrave et al., 2019). Regarding social workers, their skills and varieties depict their abilities to help the poor and socially disadvantaged groups in rural areas by providing them with job opportunities and improving their well-being (Amadasun, 2020). The moral alignment of social workers with the rural communities shows their interest in helping the poor by voluntarily following the laws and regulations (Davis & Mirick, 2022). Moreover, social workers' empowerment reflects their efforts to help poor people in rural areas build autonomy and control their lives based on the available opportunities for employment to fulfill their basic needs (Kjellberg & Jansson, 2022).

These assumptions are further based on the empowerment theory, which postulates the significance of certain drivers or motives to attain a certain level of empowerment achieved by individuals or groups based on their experiences (Wu et al., 2022). Therefore, by integrating the empowerment theory with community-based targeting, it can be asserted that social workers' work relationships, skills and varieties, and moral alignment with the communities empower them. This empowerment further helps them resolve the issues of rural communities by facilitating them with jobs and other necessities of life to improve their well-being and living conditions.

The current study was conducted in a developing country, Indonesia, where many people (42.7%) live in rural areas with limited resources (Syahputra & Soesanti, 2021). Poverty is among the potential problems in Indonesia. According to 2019 statistics, the number of poor people living in rural areas of Indonesia was 12.60%, which grew to 12.82% in March 2020 (Anirwan et al., 2021). However, the number of people living in rural areas is declining due to migration to urban areas, searching for employment opportunities and education (Nakajima et al., 2021). This migration trend highlights the challenging living conditions and scarcity of necessities in rural areas. They also underscore the urgent need for research into the factors that can improve living standards in these regions, as well as the motivations of individuals who choose to remain in rural communities and contribute to their development (Permatasari et al., 2022; Yusri, 2022). This study addresses these issues, offering insights that align with broader efforts to improve rural welfare and sustainability.

In this context, previous research reports government initiatives regarding thematic village programs to enhance community welfare in rural areas (Hutagalung et al., 2022). However, the role of social workers has not been previously explored in terms of enhancing community welfare in rural areas of Indonesia, regardless of the active participation of social workers in different areas (Dwinantoaji & Sumarni, 2020). Hence, to bridge this literature gap, the current study follows community-based targeting and adds empirical evidence regarding the role of social workers in rural areas of developing countries with aims to:

- Examine the impact of social workers' work relationships, skills and varieties, and moral alignment with the community on their empowerment and community welfare in rural areas;
- Examine the influence of social workers' empowerment on community welfare in rural areas; and
- Investigate the mediating role of social workers' empowerment in between the association of their work relationship, skills and varieties, and moral alignment with community welfare.

## **Theoretical Founding and Hypothesis Development**

### **Theoretical Foundation**

Empowerment reflects the value orientation of individuals to work in a community and provides a theoretical base to understand the process and consequences of individuals' efforts to influence and control certain decisions (Ismawati & Yazid, 2022). Those decisions may affect others' lives or an organization's functions. It may also improve the community conditions. It further shows that certain motives or individual attitudes and motivations help them to make certain decisions for the welfare of communities (Utomo & Dewi, 2022). This empowerment is further linked with the individual capabilities and capacities and their control over the circumstances (Wu et al., 2022). Previously, researchers have applied the empowerment theory in organizational studies by presenting leadership's role in executing services and dealing with employees (Arshad et al., 2022; Dennerlein & Kirkman, 2022). Researchers also highlighted the significance of applying empowerment theory in decision-making at government levels for the welfare of the societies (Sharma et al., 2022).

While empowerment theory has been widely discussed in organizational and governmental contexts, its application in rural settings requires further exploration to provide depth and specificity. Rural communities often face unique challenges, such as limited resources, infrastructure, and access to opportunities, which require tailored approaches for empowerment (Ma et al., 2024). This study addresses these gaps by examining how empowerment theory operates in rural contexts through the lens of social workers who act as change agents. While extending the previous literature and focusing on the dynamics of individual capabilities, collective efforts, and contextual constraints, the study sheds light on how empowerment theory can be adapted to address rural communities' specific needs and challenges, thereby contributing to their sustainable development and welfare.

### **Social Workers' Work Relationships, Skills and Varieties, Moral Alignment with Rural Community, Empowerment, and Community Welfare**

Social workers play an important role in economic development and enhancing people's physical and mental health conditions in any area (Nurani et al., 2022). Researchers have explored the several characteristics of social workers, including their social connections with the poor and their interest in resolving the issues of disadvantaged groups in society (Poole & Zerafa, 2022). Likewise, the role of social workers during natural disasters can be witnessed worldwide. Scholars have also highlighted their efforts during COVID-19 in recent years (Ashcroft et al., 2022). Despite the important roles played by social workers to improve the standards of living in different regions, the literature lacks empirical evidence linked to their efforts in terms of community improvements. On the other hand, the working relationship of social workers has been identified as an important predictor of their community services (Sipahi Dongul & Artantaş, 2022).

Likewise, Gosak et al. (2021) asserted that the skills and varieties possessed by social workers reveal their efforts to improve the physical and mental health conditions of socially deprived people, specifically in developing nations. Research also shows that social workers' empowerment depends upon certain characteristics in terms of their abilities to work for the benefit of others (Arshad et al., 2022; Kurniawan et al., 2024). The current study adds value to the sociology literature by presenting social workers' work relationships, skills, and varieties, as well as their moral alignment with the rural communities, empowering them to work for the welfare of those communities. Hence, establishing the assumptions of empowerment theory, the current study assumes that social workers' empowerment based on their several

characteristics helps them improve the living conditions of rural communities, resulting in enhanced welfare. Thus, the following hypothesis is posited.

*H<sub>1</sub>*: There is a positive influence of social workers' (a) work relationship, (b) skills and varieties, and (c) moral alignment with the rural community on community welfare.

*H<sub>2</sub>*: There is a positive influence of social workers' (a) work relationship, (b) skills and varieties, and (c) moral alignment with the rural community on their empowerment.

### **Social Workers Empowerment and Community Welfare**

Social workers' empowerment depicts their ability to utilize their skills and talent to benefit other individuals or communities (Watson et al., 2022). Empowerment has been discussed previously in different disciplines based on its psychological and affirmative nature (Albar et al., 2012; Kunyanti & Mujiono, 2021). More specifically, this psychological empowerment of leaders in controlling their employees and decision-making has remained the prime focus of academicians (Zhong et al., 2023). Likewise, in public administration research, political parties and public sector employee empowerment have been given attention in various ways (Ye, 2024). In contrast, minimal research is available regarding social workers' empowerment and their abilities to perform for the betterment of societies and play their role in the socio-economic development of the nations (Kunjuraman, 2022; Kunyanti & Mujiono, 2021). The current study bridges this gap by empirically investigating the influence of social workers' empowerment in creating rural community welfare in a developing nation context. Hence, based on the empowerment theory, the following hypothesis is posited.

*H<sub>3</sub>*: There is a positive influence of social workers' empowerment on rural community welfare.

### **Social Workers' Empowerment as a Mediator**

By framing the study in empowerment theory, the current research considers social workers' empowerment as a bridge to transmit the significant nature of their work-related skills and varieties and moral alignment with rural communities to improve the welfare of rural areas in a developing country. As stated earlier, once social workers feel empowered based on their abilities to perform for a system to improve its conditions, they are more confident to implement their decisions (Nordesjö et al., 2022). Previously, scholars have reported work relationships among employees as predictors of their high performance and enhanced organizational productivity (Mukendi & Manda, 2022). Likewise, a study conducted in medical sciences reveals that work relationships between healthcare professionals and patients help improve those patients' health conditions (He et al., 2022). Simultaneously, individual skills and varieties are important predictors of decision-making and productivity in a system (Santoso, 2021).

On the other hand, the moral alignment of individuals with a system or a community has been regarded as a key to the success of that system by following rules and regulations devised by the government and working in close associations (Sun et al., 2018). Considering these previous findings in different disciplines, the current study relied on empowerment theory and connected this literature evidence to social workers' performance. It further assumes that when social workers are in close relationships with the local networks following the community-based targeting and apply their skills in varieties to benefit those communities, they are in a better position to productively initiate the projects for the welfare of the poor and socially disadvantaged groups. Likewise, when they are morally aligned with the rural communities in the best interest of those communities, they utilize their empowerment to

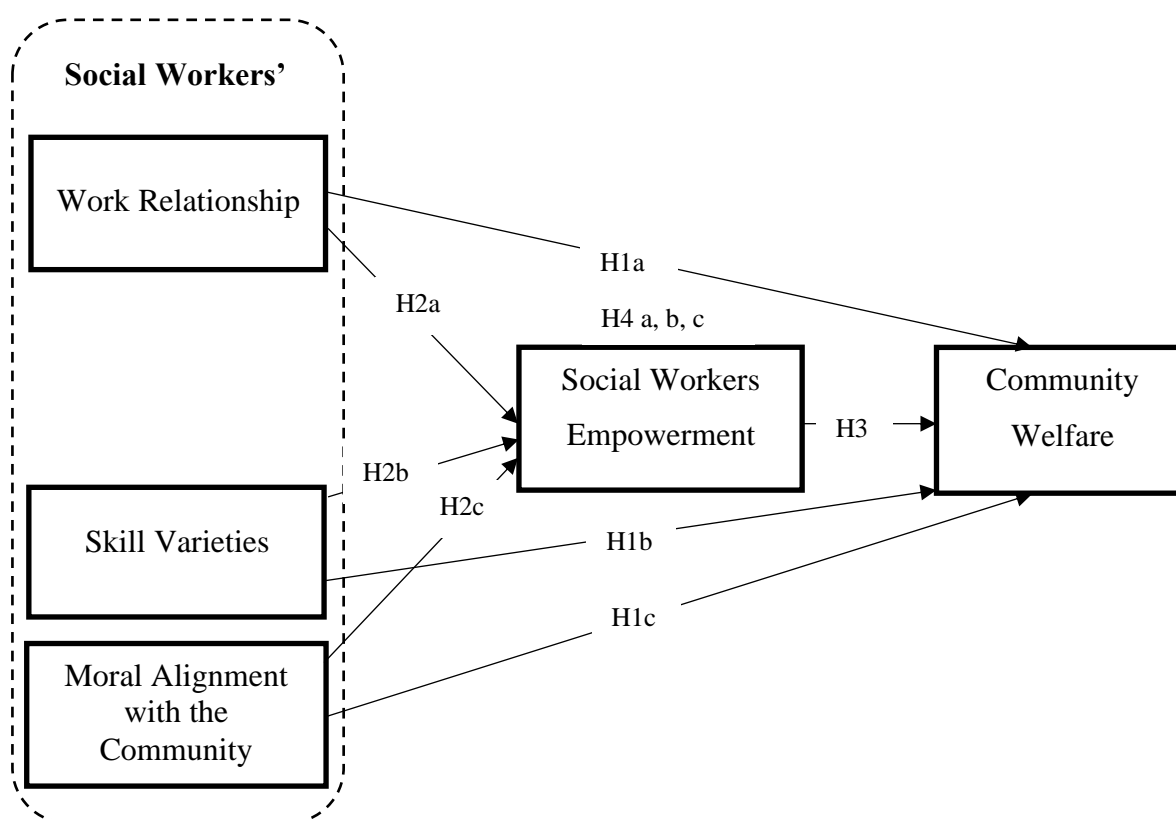
improve the living conditions of those communities (Sun et al., 2018), which is depicted in terms of their welfare. Thus, based on the above evidence, the following hypothesis is posited.

*H<sub>4</sub>*: Social workers' empowerment mediates the relationship of their (a) work relationship, (b) skills and varieties, and (c) moral alignment with the rural community with community welfare.

### Theoretical Framework of the Study

Figure 1 presents the integration of empowerment theory with a community-based targeting view to devise the theoretical framework of this research study.

**Figure 1**  
*Theoretical Framework of the Study*



### Methodology

#### Population and Sample

The statistical population for the data collection of the current study comprises all the households in rural communities where social workers provide their community services. More specifically, to narrow down the overall population to extract the sample of the current study, we primarily focused on 15 villages and rural communities in East and South Kalimantan province Indonesia. Moreover, focusing on community-based targeting, we advanced the services of data collecting individuals who were the natives of the rural communities and were well aware of the household receiving aid from social workers in the form of education, safety, shelter, food, employment opportunities, etc. Researchers approached the data-collecting people and requested them to highlight the deserving households (Hartanto et al., 2021).

Moreover, the number of households was selected based on the population of each area. Starting in March 2022, the researchers had a brief meeting with data-collecting individuals to guide them about the purpose of the study to communicate the same with the sample households. The survey for this study was distributed and presented through in-person interactions. The data-collecting individuals, who were natives of the rural communities, approached the selected households in person. Researchers approached the selected households in person. They explained the purpose of the survey to the households and requested their participation. The head of the household, who was informed about the purpose of the study and provided consent, filled out the survey. After the initial briefing, they approached the households and requested them to participate in the survey by explaining the authors' purpose for conducting the study. In total, 660 households agreed to participate in the survey. The survey consists of three parts. Part 1 explains the study's purpose with the consent letter from the households to participate in the survey. Part 2 had the questionnaires related to the demographic characteristics of the households, and Part 3 comprised the items related to study variables (Wallwey & Kajfez, 2023). By the end of October 2022, researchers received 597 valid responses, which were further included in the analysis part. This study was conducted in accordance with ethical research standards and received approval from the authors' Institutional Review Board (IRB). All participants provided informed consent, and their confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process.

### **Instrument**

The survey, conducted in Bahasa Indonesian, consisted of three parts. Part 1 explained the study's purpose with the consent letter from the households to participate in the survey. Part 2 contained questionnaires related to the demographic characteristics of the households, and Part 3 comprised the items related to study variables (Wallwey & Kajfez, 2023). By the end of October 2022, researchers received 597 valid responses, which were included in the analysis. Likert scale 1=*strongly disagree* to 5=*strongly agree* was used to record responses.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study followed ethical research standards and received approval from the authors' Institutional Review Board (IRB) before administering it. All participants provided informed consent, and their confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process.

### **Respondents Characteristics**

Participants' characteristics revealed that 82.1% of the respondents were male and 17.9% were female. 49% of the participants were married. The average age of the participants was 42 years, with a standard deviation of 17. 47.9% of the participants were undergraduates, 39% were graduates, and 12.1% were postgraduates. Approximately half of the respondents (51.3%) reported receiving aid from social workers for 1-5 years, and 31% had been receiving the aid for 6 to 10 years. In contrast, the remaining 18.7% reported receiving aid for more than 10 years from social workers/organizations. Results also revealed that most respondents were used education facilities for their children, had been employed in the last five years in different projects, received aid to start their small business ventures, and received health facilities. These results depict the active participation of social workers in providing social services to rural communities.

## **Study Measures**

The current study's questionnaire comprised 30 items presenting five study constructs. Work relationship was measured with 6 items adapted from Anasi (2020). Skills variety was measured with 6 items adapted from Ahsan et al. (2013). Moral alignment with the rural community was measured with 3 items adapted from Sun et al. (2018). Social workers' empowerment was measured with 10 items adapted from Albar et al. (2012). Finally, 5 items were adapted from Utomo and Dewi (2022) to measure community welfare.

## **Data Analysis and Results**

### **Measurement Model**

The current study used structural equation modeling in SmartPLS v.4 software to investigate the role of social workers towards community welfare. After assessing the descriptive statistics in skewness and kurtosis with acceptable values of +1 to -1 and +2 to -2, respectively, the current study performed a simulation analysis. This analysis was performed to empirically test the impact of individuals' demographic characteristics on the dependent variable. Results showed that households' age limit significantly influenced their perceptions regarding social workers' role in enhancing community welfare by providing different aids and facilities to poor households. Therefore, a respondent's age was controlled while measuring the structural model to test hypothesized relationships empirically.

In the next step, variables' normality and validities based on factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha (CA), Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were assessed (Noor et al., 2022; Sarstedt et al., 2017). All the factor loadings exceeded the threshold values of 0.70 (Mansoor et al., 2022; Sulasmi & Dalle, 2022). The values of CA and CR were higher than 0.70, demonstrating the composite reliability and content validity of the study measures (Sarstedt et al., 2017). At the same time, the AVE values of all the study variables were above 0.70, establishing the convergent validity of the measures (Mansoor et al., 2021; Sarstedt et al., 2017). See Table 1.

**Table 1**  
*Factor Loadings, Reliability, and Validity*

Constructs/Indicators	Factor Loadings					AVE	CR	CA
	1	2	3	4	5			
Work Relationship						0.617	0.906	0.872
WR1	0.739							
WR2	0.798							
WR3	0.743							
WR4	0.821							
WR5	0.816							
WR6	0.792							
Skills Variety						0.562	0.885	0.816
SAV1		0.748						
SAV2		0.709						
SAV3		0.776						
SAV4		0.777						
SAV5		0.758						
SAV6		0.726						
Moral Alignment with the Community						0.641	0.842	0.798
MAWC1			0.780					
MAWC2			0.744					
MAWC3			0.873					
Social Workers Empowerment						0.560	0.927	0.834
SWE1				0.790				
SWE2				0.787				
SWE3				0.734				
SWE4				0.712				
SWE5				0.750				
SWE6				0.703				
SWE7				0.779				
SWE8				0.700				
SWE9				0.772				
SWE10				0.748				
Community Welfare						0.571	0.869	0.780
CW1					0.755			
CW2					0.727			
CW3					0.764			
CW4					0.806			
CW5					0.723			

*Note.* CR= composite reliability; CA= Cronbach Alpha; AVE= average variance extracted.

To overcome the potential multicollinearity issues, researchers also calculated the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio (Henseler et al., 2015). Scholars believe that to present valid results and establish discriminant validity, the values of the HTMT should be less than 0.85. The results presented in Table 2 show that all the values of the HTMT were below the threshold level suggested by scholars (Mansoor et al., 2021), establishing the discriminant validity of the measures.



**Table 2**  
*Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio*

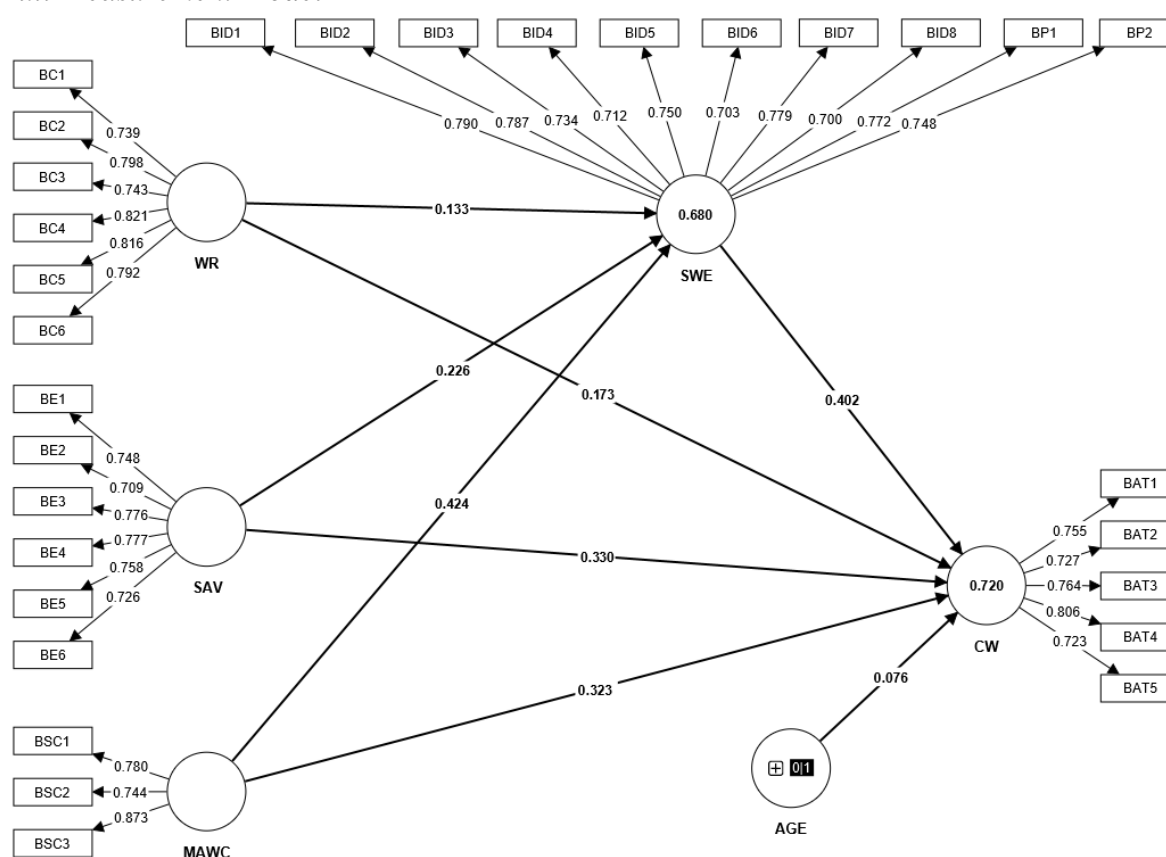
Constructs	Mean	Std	1	2	3	4	5
Work Relationship	3.86	1.07	<b>0.785</b>				
Skills and Varieties	4.12	0.93	0.460	<b>0.749</b>			
Moral Alignment with the Community	3.81	1.14	0.410	0.693	<b>0.800</b>		
Social Workers Empowerment	4.05	1.00	0.50	0.418	0.591	<b>0.748</b>	
Community Welfare	3.90	1.04	0.483	0.508	0.487	0.501	<b>0.755</b>

*Note.* The square roots of AVEs of the constructs are shown in bold in the diagonal.

### Measurement model

Figure 2 presents the full measurement model.

**Figure 2**  
*Full Measurement Model*



### Structural Model

The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) reflects the variance of a dependent variable based on all the independent and mediatory variables affecting that dependent construct. It further reflects the overall fitness of the model based on the significant influences of independent variables on dependent variables (Sarstedt et al., 2017). Figure 2 illustrates that the  $R^2$  value for the influence of social workers' work relationships skills and attributes, moral alignment with rural communities, and social workers' empowerment on community welfare was 0.720, presenting a variance of 72% in community welfare based on independent and mediatory

variables. Results also showed that the  $R^2$  value for the influence of social workers' characteristics on their empowerment was 0.680. Hence, a variance of 68% in social workers' empowerment was observed. These results further indicate the significance of the theoretical framework of the current study based on high levels of variance under the influence of independent variables.

### ***Direct Hypotheses***

The current study findings, as presented in Table 3, illustrate the significant positive impact of social workers' work relationship ( $\beta = 0.173^{**}$ ,  $t = 3.006$ ), skills and varieties ( $\beta = 0.330^{***}$ ,  $t = 5.777$ ), and moral alignment with the community ( $\beta = 0.323^{***}$ ,  $t = 5.456$ ) on community welfare. Moreover, social workers' work relationship ( $\beta = 0.133^{**}$ ,  $t = 2.346$ ), skills and varieties ( $\beta = 0.226^{**}$ ,  $t = 3.953$ ), and moral alignment with community ( $\beta = 0.424^{***}$ ,  $t = 7.798$ ) had a positive influence on their empowerment. Simultaneously, social workers' empowerment positively influenced community welfare ( $\beta = 0.402^{***}$ ,  $t = 7.611$ ). These results support hypotheses H<sub>1</sub> a, b, c; H<sub>2</sub> a, b, c; and H<sub>3</sub>.

### ***Mediation Hypotheses***

The study findings supported the mediation hypotheses H<sub>4</sub> a, b, and c. The indirect influence of social workers' work relationship ( $\beta = 0.160^{**}$ ,  $t = 2.876$ ), skills and varieties ( $\beta = 0.231^{**}$ ,  $t = 4.132$ ), and moral alignment with the community ( $\beta = 0.311^{***}$ ,  $t = 5.435$ ) on community welfare via the mediatory role of social workers' empowerment was supported by results as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
*Hypothesis Testing Results*

	Hypotheses	Std. Beta	t-value	p-values	Supported
H <sub>1a</sub>	WR→CW	0.173	3.006	0.007	Yes
H <sub>1b</sub>	SAV→CW	0.330	5.777	0.000	Yes
H <sub>1c</sub>	MAWC→CW	0.323	5.456	0.000	Yes
H <sub>2a</sub>	WR→SWE	0.133	2.346	0.011	Yes
H <sub>2b</sub>	SAV→SWE	0.226	3.953	0.005	Yes
H <sub>2c</sub>	MAWC→SWE	0.424	7.798	0.000	Yes
H <sub>3</sub>	SWE→CW	0.402	7.611	0.000	Yes
H <sub>4a</sub>	WR→SWE→CW	0.160	2.876	0.009	Yes
H <sub>4b</sub>	SAV→SWE→CW	0.231	4.132	0.003	Yes
H <sub>4c</sub>	MAWC→SWE→CW	0.311	5.435	0.000	Yes

*Note.* WR=Work Relationship; SAV=Skills and Varieties; MAWC=Moral Alignment with the Community; SWE=Social Workers Empowerment; CW =Community Welfare

## **Discussion**

### **Study Findings**

Considering the important role of social workers in enhancing living conditions and improving the socio-economic development of developing nations, the current study has been established in empowerment theory by focusing on the welfare of rural communities. For that

purpose, a quantitative study was conducted by empirically examining the influence of social workers' work relationships, skills and varieties, and moral alignment with rural communities on their empowerment, leading to community welfare. Data were analyzed using structural equation modeling in SmartPLS software.

The results presenting the differentiable impact of social workers' work relationship skills, varieties, and moral alignment with communities in empowering social workers and bringing community welfare were interesting. Results showed that social workers' alignment with rural communities had the highest impact in empowering social workers to perform their social services in rural communities, followed by their skills and varieties and work relationships. These results further revealed that social workers work productively in an area after aligning their interests and motivations with the needs and requirements of the rural communities (Watson et al., 2022).

This productivity can be explained with the help of literature, which shows that the results become multifold once the individual goals of social workers are aligned with the collective goals of a society or a community (Nurani et al., 2022). For instance, in terms of improving the living conditions of an area, policymakers can introduce community-based tourism that aligns with the community's interests (Kunjuraman, 2022; Ngo & Creutz, 2022). Similarly, in terms of improving community welfare, the current study results showed that once the social workers feel affiliated with the communities and work on a community-based targeting view, they will be in a better position to identify the needs and requirements of the rural communities and improve their standards of life resulting in improved community welfare.

Additionally, the significant impact of social workers' skills and varieties cannot be ignored in their empowerment and community welfare. Previous researchers have asserted the significance of individual skills and varieties in improving individual performances, resulting in overall system productivity (Sawatsuk et al., 2018; Tasman et al., 2021). When social workers performing their volunteer duties in different rural areas apply their skills and varieties, they are in a better position to identify the issues and requirements of those areas and work for the best interest of the people (Nordesjö et al., 2022), resulting in improved community welfare. The same is the case with the working relationships of social workers. They should not only be closely knit with each other to execute their social services for the benefit of the poor and needy, they should also align their work preferences with the local inhibitors to achieve the maximum benefits.

The results also showed the significant role of social workers' empowerment toward community welfare. These findings reveal that it is essential for social workers to feel empowered to solve the issues of others and help the communities by generating employment opportunities and providing them with the basic needs of food, shelter, health, and education. They should be strong enough to devise and implement micro and macro-level decisions with the power to execute them (Ismawati & Yazid, 2022; Kunyanti & Mujiono, 2021). This empowerment can be explained through the abilities and skills of the social workers, as well as the availability of monetary and non-monetary resources to help rural communities achieve their life goals and improve their living standards.

Previously, the empowerment literature focused on the organizational or public administration contexts (Amor et al., 2021; Kunjuraman, 2022). In contrast, the current study relied on social workers' empowerment to benefit the community and socially disadvantaged groups. Finally, the results also presented the significance of social workers' empowerment as an underlying mechanism to transmit the significance of their relationships with local communities. Likewise, social workers' skills and varieties and applying their moral alignment with the rural communities can improve the socio-economic condition of the rural communities by attaining welfare.

## **Theoretical Implications**

Relying on a quantitative research methodology by collecting data from the socially disadvantaged groups in rural areas of two provinces in Indonesia, the current study is a valuable addition to the existing literature in empirically presenting the evidence regarding the role of social workers in bringing community welfare. The current study also uniquely integrated community-based targeting with empowerment theory. Research regarding social workers' role for the benefit of society primarily relies on qualitative methodology (Cosgrave et al., 2019). In contrast, the current study empirically investigated the role of social workers in determining their level of empowerment, resulting in community welfare. Also, empowerment has previously been considered a mediator in transmitting leaders' personality characteristics to extract individual and organizational benefits (Amor et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2022). Likewise, psychological empowerment has also been considered a mediator in realizing the benefits of organizational offerings in terms of customers (Albar et al., 2012). The current study applied that empowerment in sociology literature, considering it as a bridge between social workers' characteristics and the community welfare of rural areas in a developing nation. Hence, the current study adds value to the theory and literature by extending the previous findings of social workers' role and empowerment literature in the sociology context to benefit the masses.

## **Practical Implications**

The current study also adds value for the practitioner's policymakers, government bodies, and local administrative units by highlighting the significance of social workers' roles and improving the community conditions in rural areas. Policymakers can utilize the current study findings to initiate programs and projects that create employment opportunities for rural communities and engage them in activities that enhance their living standards. For that purpose, social organizations can also be motivated to use their services in urban areas. They also make close bonds with the rural communities to identify their issues and problems and exert potential efforts to solve them. In this context, community-based targeting is a valuable solution to identify specifically those individuals and groups who are socially disadvantaged and need help morally and in terms of money. Such people are deprived of education and health facilities. Once they feel important based on the approach of social workers, they are more motivated to use their skills and talents to improve their living conditions. For that purpose, government organizations and social workers should provide opportunities for handicrafts, civic education, initiation of entrepreneurial services, etc. Government organizations should also encourage social workers by highlighting their efforts at international forums to motivate them to expedite their efforts to enhance community welfare in rural areas. However, there is a need to encourage children in educational institutions by spreading awareness regarding rural communities and their poor living conditions to motivate them to impart their role in the future to improve the living conditions of those areas and people. Most importantly, it is the era of social media. Therefore, rural communities should benefit by highlighting their problems and issues through digital media platforms to attract more people and resolve them effectively and efficiently.

## **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

Along with several strengths, the current study has limitations that future researchers must consider. First, self-reported data may introduce potential biases due to respondents' subjective perceptions, social desirability, or recall inaccuracies. Second, survey administrators could influence participants' responses, intentionally or unintentionally, through their interactions or presence. Third, future research should consider employing triangulation

methods, such as combining self-reports with observational data or interviews, to mitigate these biases and enhance the validity of the findings. Fourth, the social worker's point of view was not considered while collecting the data. Future researchers can use a triangulation methodology while collecting data from socially deprived people, those enjoying all the facilities in those rural areas, and social workers. This variety of data may generate different results compared to the current study findings. Fifth, future research can use a mixed methodology where qualitative (interviews and focus groups) and quantitative data can be considered for extracting valuable insights regarding social workers' role in improving community welfare in rural areas. Sixth, the current study only relied on the mediatory mechanism rather than considering the contingent role of different important constructs in the study area. In contrast, future researchers can also add the moderating variables in the form of quality of life, limited education, scant employment opportunities, and poor health conditions to find out their contingent role in extracting the benefits of social workers' role at the community level.

## Conclusion

This study explored the role of social workers in improving the welfare of rural communities in Indonesia, focusing on 15 villages in the East and South Kalimantan provinces. Grounded in empowerment theory, the research examined how social workers' moral alignment with communities, diverse skills, and work relationships contribute to their empowerment and, subsequently, to community welfare. Data were collected from 597 households through a structured survey, ensuring ethical research standards and participant confidentiality. The study adopted a quantitative approach, utilizing structural equation modeling to analyze the data and provide empirical insights into the interconnectedness of social workers' characteristics, empowerment, and rural development. The findings revealed that moral alignment with communities plays the most significant role in empowering social workers, followed by their skills and work relationships. Empowerment enables social workers to address critical issues, improve living conditions, and foster socio-economic development in rural areas.

The study contributes to the existing literature by extending empowerment theory into the sociological domain, emphasizing the importance of community-based targeting, and offering practical recommendations for policymakers and social organizations. While the study highlights the transformative role of social workers, it also identifies limitations, such as the reliance on self-reported data. It suggests future research directions, including mixed-methods approaches and broader perspectives, to further enhance understanding in this field.

## References

- Ahsan, N., Fie, D. Y. G., Foong, Y. P., & Alam, S. S. (2013). Relationship between retention factors and affective organisational commitment among knowledge workers in Malaysia. *Journal of Business Economics and Management*, 14(5), 903-922. <https://doi.org/10.3846/16111699.2012.701226>
- Albar, M.-J., García-Ramírez, M., Jiménez, A. M. L., & Garrido, R. (2012). Spanish adaptation of the scale of psychological empowerment in the workplace. *The Spanish Journal of Psychology*, 15(2), 793800. [https://doi.org/10.5209/rev\\_sjop.2012.v15.n2.38891](https://doi.org/10.5209/rev_sjop.2012.v15.n2.38891)
- Amadasun, S. (2020). Social work and COVID-19 pandemic: An action call. *International Social Work*, 63(6), 753-756. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872820959357>
- Amor, A. M., Xanthopoulou, D., Calvo, N., & Vázquez, J. P. A. (2021). Structural empowerment, psychological empowerment, and work engagement: A cross-country

- study. *European Management Journal*, 39(6), 779789. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2021.01.005>
- Anasi, S. N. (2020). Perceived influence of work relationship, work load and physical work environment on job satisfaction of librarians in South-West, Nigeria. *Global Knowledge, Memory and Communication*, 69(6/7) 377–398. <https://doi.org/10.1108/GKMC-11-2019-0135>
- Anirwan, A., Ibrahim, M. A., Hasniati, H., & Lambali, S. (2021). Target group behavior for policy performance impact: on poverty reduction implementation in Makassar, Indonesia. *Journal of Asian Multicultural Research for Social Sciences Study*, 2(3), 3339. <https://doi.org/10.47616/jamrsss.v2i3.174>
- Arshad, M., Qasim, N., Farooq, O., & Rice, J. (2022). Empowering leadership and employees' work engagement: social identity theory perspective. *Management Decision*, 60(5), 1218-1236. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MD-11-2020-1485>
- Ashcroft, R., Sur, D., Greenblatt, A., & Donahue, P. (2022). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on social workers at the frontline: A survey of Canadian social workers. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 52(3), 17241746. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcab158>
- Cosgrave, C., Malatzky, C., & Gillespie, J. (2019). Social determinants of rural health workforce retention: scoping review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16(3), Article 314. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16030314>
- Davis, A., & Mirick, R. G. (2022). Microaggressions in social work education: Learning from BSW students' experiences. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 58(3), 431-448. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2021.1885542>
- Dennerlein, T., & Kirkman, B. L. (2022). The hidden dark side of empowering leadership: The moderating role of hindrance stressors in explaining when empowering employees can promote moral disengagement and unethical pro-organizational behavior. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 107(12), 2220–2242. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0001013>
- Dwinantoaji, H., & Sumarni, D. (2020). Human security, social stigma, and global health: COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. *Journal of the Medical Sciences (Berkala Ilmu Kedokteran)*, 52(3), 158165. <https://doi.org/10.19106/JMedSciSI005203202014>
- Ferguson, H., Kelly, L., & Pink, S. (2022). Social work and child protection for a post-pandemic world: The re-making of practice during COVID-19 and its renewal beyond it. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 36(1), 524. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650533.2021.1922368>
- Gosak, M., Duh, M., Markovič, R., & Perc, M. (2021). Community lockdowns in social networks hardly mitigate epidemic spreading. *New Journal of Physics*, 23(4), Article 043039. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1367-2630/abf459>
- Hartanto, D., Agussani, A., & Dalle, J. (2021). Antecedents of public trust in government during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia: of perceived religious values. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, 8(4), 321341. <https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/975>
- He, L., Mu, L., Jean, J. A., Zhang, L., Wu, H., Zhou, T., & Bu, H. (2022). Contributions and challenges of public health social work practice during the initial 2020 COVID-19 outbreak in China. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 52(8), 4606-4621. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcac077>
- Henseler, J., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2015). A new criterion for assessing discriminant validity in variance-based structural equation modeling. *Journal of the of*, 43(1), 115-135. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-014-0403-8>
- Hutagalung, H., Purwana, D., Suhud, U., Mukminin, A., Hamidah, H., & Rahayu, N. (2022). Community self-reliance of rural tourism in Indonesia: interpretative phenomenological analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 27(7), 1151-1168. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5215>

- Ismawati, I., & Yazid, H. (2022). Empowerment of productive economic business for the poor in Serang City. *MOVE: Journal of Community Service and Engagement*, 1(3), 74-79. <https://doi.org/10.54408/move.v1i3.36>
- Kjellberg, I., & Jansson, B. (2022). The capability approach in social work research: A scoping review of research addressing practical social work. *International Social Work*, 65(2), 224239. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872819896849>
- Kunjuraman, V. (2022). Community-based ecotourism managing to fuel community empowerment? An evidence from Malaysian Borneo. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 47(4), 384-399. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2020.1841378>
- Kunyanti, S. A., & Mujiono, M. (2021). Community empowerment-based corporate social responsibility program in Panglima Raja Village. *International Journal on Social Science, Economics and Art*, 11(1), 12-19. <https://doi.org/10.35335/ijosea.v10i1.2>
- Kurniawan, F., Sigit, F. S., Trompet, S., Yunir, E., Tarigan, T. J. E., Harbuwono, D. S., Soewondo, P., Tahapary, D. L., & de Mutsert, R. (2024). Lifestyle and clinical risk factors in relation with the prevalence of diabetes in the Indonesian urban and rural populations: The 2018 Indonesian Basic Health Survey. *Preventive Medicine Reports*, 38, Article 102629. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pmedr.2024.102629>
- Liu, F., Li, L., Zhang, Y., Ngo, Q.-T., & Iqbal, W. (2021). Role of education in poverty reduction: macroeconomic and social determinants form developing economies. *Environmental Science and Pollution Research*, 28(44), 63163-63177. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11356-021-15252-z>
- Ma, L., He, Q., Long, H., Zhang, Y., & Liao, L. (2024). Rural return migration in the post COVID-19 China: Incentives and barriers. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 107, Article 103258. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2024.103258>
- Mansoor, M., Awan, T. M., & Paracha, O. S. (2021). Predicting pro-environmental behaviors of green electronic appliances' users. *International Journal of Business and Economic Affairs*, 6(4), 175-186.
- Mansoor, M., Awan, T. M., & Paracha, O. S. (2022). Sustainable buying behaviour: An interplay of consumers' engagement in sustainable consumption and social norms. *International Social Science Journal*, 72(246), 1053-1070. <https://doi.org/10.1111/issj.12372>
- Mukendi, S., & Manda, S. (2022). Micro-financial institutions and processes of women empowerment in Zambia. *World Development Perspectives*, 28, Article 100466. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wdp.2022.100466>
- Nakajima, N., Hasan, A., Jung, H., Kinnell, A., Maika, A., & Pradhan, M. (2021). Built to last: of early childhood education services in rural Indonesia. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 57(10), 1593-1612. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2021.1873283>
- Ngo, T. H., & Creutz, S. (2022). Assessing the sustainability of community-based tourism: A case study in rural areas of Hoi An, Vietnam. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 8(1), Article 2116812. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2022.2116812>
- Noor, U., Mansoor, M., & Shamim, A. (2024). Customers create customers!—Assessing the role of perceived personalization, online advertising engagement and online users' modes in generating positive e-WOM. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Business Administration*, 16(2), 392409. <https://doi.org/10.1108/apjba-11-2021-0569>
- Nordesjö, K., Scaramuzzino, G., & Ulmestig, R. (2022). The social worker-client relationship in the digital era: configurative literature review. *European Journal of Social Work*, 25(2), 303-315. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2021.1964445>
- Nurani, V. H. H., Sugiyanto, S., & Hermawati, I. (2022). Internalization of Yogyakarta cultural local wisdom values in the duties of social workers as state civil apparatus. *Asian Social Work Journal*, 7(5), 28-35. <https://doi.org/10.47405/aswj.v7i5.227>

- Permatasari, D., Maski, G., & Manzilati, A. (2022). Implementation of poverty reduction in North Maluku Province. In B. S. Sergi & D. Sulistiawan (Eds.), *Modeling in Indonesia* (pp. 123-133). Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Poole, J. M., & Zerafa, S. (2022). No more deadlines? Tracing transcarceral time in 'critical' social work education. *Critical and Radical Social Work*, 11(3), 132-144 [doi.org/10.1332/204986022X16703251226390](https://doi.org/10.1332/204986022X16703251226390)
- Rusfiana, Y., & Kurniasih, D. . (2024). The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Promoting Social and Political Change in Indonesia. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, 11(3), 187–206. <https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/2154>
- Santoso, G. (2021). Civic education based on 21st century skills in philosophical, theoretical and futurist resolution dimensions at Muhammadiyah University of Jakarta (UMJ). *World Journal of Business Research and Project Management*, 1(2), 103-113. <https://doi.org/10.29138/brpm.v1i02.67>
- Sarstedt, M., Ringle, C. M., & Hair, J. F. (2017). Partial least squares structural equation modeling. In C. Homburg, M. Klarmann, & A. Vomberg (Eds.), *Handbook of market research* (pp. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-57413-4\\_15](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-57413-4_15))
- Sawatsuk, B., Darmawijaya, I. G., Ratchusanti, S., & Phaokrueng, A. (2018). Factors determining the sustainable success of community-based tourism: Evidence of good corporate governance of Mae Kam Pong Homestay, Thailand. *International Journal of Business and Economic Affairs*, 3(1), 13-20. <https://doi.org/10.24088/IJBEA-2018-31002>
- Sharma, S., Kar, A. K., Gupta, M., Dwivedi, Y. K., & Janssen, M. (2022). Digital citizen empowerment: A systematic literature review of theories and development models. *Information Technology for Development*, 28(4), 660-687. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02681102.2022.2046533>
- Sipahi Dongul, E., & Artantaş, E. (2022). Exploring the link between social work, entrepreneurial leadership, social embeddedness, social entrepreneurship and firm performance: case of SMES owned by Chinese ethnic community in Turkey. *Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy*, 17(3), 684–707. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEC-11-2021-0162>
- Sulasmı, E., & Dalle, J. (2022). The impact of external factors on the acceptance of educational technology among the Indonesian junior school teachers. *Electronic Journal of e-Learning*, 20(2), 211-223. <https://doi.org/10.34190/ejel.20.2.2647>
- Sun, I. Y., Wu, Y., Van Craen, M., & Hsu, K. K.-I. (2018). Internal procedural justice, moral alignment, and external procedural justice in democratic policing. *Police Quarterly*, 21(3), 387-412. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098611118772270>
- Sur, W., Machfiroh, I., & Nurmaliņa, R. (2021). Structural equation modeling on the post-flood regional public welfare in South Kalimantan. *Journal of Physics: Conference Series*, 2106, Article 012012 <https://doi.org/10.1088/1742-6596/2106/1/012012>
- Syahputra, R., & Soesanti, I. (2021). Renewable energy systems based on micro-hydro and solar photovoltaic for rural areas: A case study in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. *Energy Reports*, 7, 472-490. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.egy.2021.01.015>
- Tasman, T., Siregar, Z. M. E., & Nasution, M. F. (2021). The influence of work environment, promotion, and job satisfaction on employee performance. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute (BIRCI-Journal): Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4(3), 4026-4031. <https://doi.org/10.33258/birci.v4i3.2170>
- Utomo, U. W., & Dewi, F. G. (2022). The effect of village fund management accountability and village policy on community welfare. *Arkus*, 8(1), 210-221. <https://doi.org/10.37275/arkus.v8i1.173>



- Wallwey, C., & Kajfez, R. L. (2023). Quantitative research artifacts as qualitative data collection techniques in a mixed methods research study. *Methods in Psychology*, 8, Article 100115. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.metip.2023.100115>
- Watson, K. R., Capp, G., Astor, R. A., Kelly, M. S., & Benbenishty, R. (2022). “We need to address the trauma”: social workers' views about student and staff mental health during COVID-19. *School Mental Health*, 14(4), 902-917. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-022-09512-7>
- Wilson, K., Harrington, S., & Kevill, A. (2022). A taxonomy of rural micro-enterprises: Disembedded or bedrock of the community. *The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, 23, 188-202. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14657503221099212>
- Wu, S.-Y., Wang, W.-T., & Hsieh, Y.-H. (2022). Exploring knowledge sharing behavior in healthcare organizations: integrated perspective of the empowerment theory and self-determination theory. *Kybernetes*, 51(8), 2529-2553. <https://doi.org/10.1108/K-01-2021-0028>
- Ye, Y. (2024). Discussion on the impact of campus culture construction on ideological and political education and learning style construction. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Public Administration*, 2(2), 77-81. <https://doi.org/10.62051/ijsspa.v2n2.13>
- Yusri, A. (2022). Does government expenditure affect poverty, health, and education? Evidence from Aceh, Indonesia. *Jurnal Perencanaan Pembangunan: The Indonesian Journal of Development Planning*, 6(1), 120-133. <https://doi.org/10.36574/jpp.v6i1.249>
- Zhong, W., Hu, Q., & Kapucu, N. (2023). Robust crisis communication in turbulent times: Conceptualization and empirical evidence from the United States. *Public Administration*, 101(1), 158-181. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12855>

## Notes on Contributors

**Dewi Kurniasih** obtained a bachelor's degree in social sciences (S.Sos) in government science, a Master of Science (M.Si) degree in Sociology, and a Doctoral degree (Dr) in Sociology from Universitas Padjadjaran Bandung in 1998, 2004, and 2011 respectively. Currently working as a Permanent Lecturer at the Government Science Study Program at Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung.

**Maisya Chaluela Anjani** was born in Bandung on September 15, 2006. She is currently student of Study Program of Government Science of Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia. Her interest writing focus is governance social anthropology.

## ORCID

**Dewi Kurniasih**, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4921-2093>

**Maisya Chaluela Anjani**, <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-5256-3972>