

Evaluating Paralegal Effectiveness in Expanding Access to Marriage Legal Aid at LKBHI UIN Salatiga

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Abstract	Examining the role of paralegals in expanding access to marriage legal aid has become increasingly important as legal aid institutions face challenges in reaching vulnerable communities. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of paralegal roles in providing marriage legal assistance at LKBHI UIN Salatiga and to examine how legal norms, institutional practices, and social factors influence their implementation. Employing a socio-legal research approach, this study uses empirical legal analysis through interviews with the Director of LKBHI UIN Salatiga, paralegals, and legal aid recipients, supported by legislative materials and relevant academic literature. The findings reveal that paralegals contribute significantly through non-litigation assistance, including legal consultation, mediation support, legal information, and community empowerment. However, their effectiveness remains constrained by differences in competency, limited institutional resources, and uneven public awareness regarding paralegal services. Applying legal effectiveness theory, this study demonstrates that successful legal aid implementation depends on the interaction between regulatory recognition, institutional capacity, and community acceptance. This article contributes to socio-legal scholarship by highlighting paralegals as intermediary legal actors who strengthen the relationship between formal legal structures and communities seeking justice.
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INTRODUCTION

Access to justice is a fundamental principle in the rule of law, requiring the state to ensure that every citizen, regardless of economic status, can obtain equal protection and legal assistance. Within socio-legal scholarship, access to justice is not merely understood as the availability of formal legal institutions but also as the capacity of legal systems to reach vulnerable communities who experience structural barriers in exercising their rights.¹ The gap between normative legal guarantees and practical accessibility remains a persistent challenge, particularly for economically disadvantaged groups who face limitations in legal knowledge, financial resources, and institutional access.

¹ Elisabeth Sundari, "Legal Aid Scheme in Indonesia: Between the Policy and the Implementation," *Jurnal Hukum IUS QUIA IUSTUM* 23, no. 4 (2016): 545–62, <https://doi.org/10.20885/iustum.vol23.iss4.art3>.

Legal aid institutions have emerged as an important mechanism for bridging this gap by providing legal services to marginalized communities. In Indonesia, the establishment of legal aid organizations reflects the constitutional commitment to equality before the law and the recognition that justice cannot be achieved solely through formal judicial procedures.² However, the increasing demand for legal assistance has created institutional challenges, particularly due to the limited availability of professional advocates who are able to provide assistance to all communities in need.

The development of paralegals represents a socio-legal response to these challenges. Paralegals are positioned as non-advocate legal actors who contribute to expanding access to justice through legal information, consultation, mediation, community legal empowerment, and other forms of non-litigation assistance.³ Their existence demonstrates a transformation in legal service delivery, where legal empowerment is no longer exclusively dependent on professional legal practitioners but also involves community-based actors. From the perspective of legal theory, the role of paralegals illustrates the interaction between formal legal norms and social realities, particularly in addressing inequalities within legal access.⁴

Nevertheless, debates remain regarding the effectiveness and institutional capacity of paralegals in providing legal assistance. Previous studies have largely examined paralegals from a normative perspective, focusing on their legal status, regulatory framework, or contribution to specific issues such as human rights protection and assistance for vulnerable groups. Limited attention has been given to how paralegals operate within legal aid institutions and whether their roles effectively achieve the objectives of legal aid regulations in local.⁵ This limitation is particularly relevant in marriage-related legal disputes, where communities frequently encounter complex social, cultural, and legal problems involving divorce, family disputes, and access to legal procedures.

The Legal Consultation and Islamic Legal Aid Institution (LKBHI) of UIN Salatiga provides an important case for examining this issue. As a university-based legal aid institution, LKBHI UIN Salatiga has developed a network of paralegals to expand legal assistance coverage in Salatiga City and Semarang Regency. The institution currently involves paralegals in responding to increasing demands for marriage-related legal assistance, including consultation, mediation, legal education, and community assistance. However, despite the growing role of

² Muhammad Bagas Ragil Wicaksono and Hakim Anis Maliki, "Role of Paralegal in Providing Access to Justice for the Poor: Comparing Indonesia and Malaysia," *The Indonesian Journal of International Clinical Legal Education* 4, no. 1 (2022): 45–62, <https://doi.org/10.15294/ijicle.v4i1.55774>.

³ Cahya Wulandari, Sonny Saptodjoe Wicaksono, and Umi Faridatul Khikmah, "Paralegal Existence in Providing Access to Justice for the Poor in Central Java," *IJCLS (Indonesian Journal of Criminal Law Studies)* 4, no. 2 (2019): 199–206, <https://doi.org/10.15294/ijcls.v4i2.21604>.

⁴ Yuliandri, "Problematisasi Pembentukan Peraturan Perundang-Undangan Dalam Perspektif Teori Efektivitas Hukum," *Jurnal Rechts Vinding: Media Pembinaan Hukum Nasional* 6, no. 3 (2017): 403–18, <https://doi.org/10.33331/rechtsvinding.v6i3.193>.

⁵ Deni K Yusup, Burhanuddin Hamnash, and Cate Sumner, "The Opportunities and Challenges of Student Paralegal within University Legal Clinic at PTKIN," *Al-'Adalah* 16, no. 2 (2019): 323–42, <https://doi.org/10.24042/adalah.v16i2.5659>.

paralegals, questions remain regarding whether their involvement has effectively fulfilled the objectives of legal aid provision and overcome existing barriers to justice.⁶

This article addresses the following research question: to what extent do paralegals of LKBHI UIN Salatiga effectively contribute to the implementation of marriage legal aid within the framework of access to justice? By employing a socio-legal approach and examining the effectiveness of paralegal roles through legal effectiveness theory, this study contributes to existing scholarship by connecting legal norms, institutional practices, and community experiences. Rather than viewing paralegals solely as supplementary actors within legal aid systems, this article analyzes their position as intermediaries between formal legal structures and social communities. The contribution of this study lies in providing an empirical assessment of how paralegal-based legal assistance functions within a local legal aid institution. It demonstrates that the effectiveness of legal aid cannot be measured only through the existence of regulations but must also consider institutional capacity, legal actors, supporting facilities, community awareness, and socio-cultural factors. Through this perspective, the article offers a broader understanding of the relationship between law and society in achieving meaningful access to justice.

METHODS

This study employs a socio-legal research approach to examine the effectiveness of paralegal roles in the provision of marriage legal aid at the Legal Consultation and Islamic Legal Aid Institution (LKBHI) of UIN Salatiga.⁷ The socio-legal orientation was selected because the research does not examine legal rules solely as normative texts but investigates how legal norms operate within institutional practices and social realities. This approach enables an analysis of the relationship between legal frameworks governing paralegals and their implementation in assisting communities seeking access to justice.

The research is designed as empirical legal research with an analytical focus on the effectiveness of legal aid implementation.⁸ The study examines how the regulatory framework on paralegal involvement, particularly the Minister of Law and Human Rights Regulation Number 3 of 2021 concerning Paralegals in Legal Aid Provision, is translated into practice within a legal aid institution. The analysis is guided by legal effectiveness theory, particularly the perspective that the operation of law is influenced not only by legal provisions but also by legal institutions, law enforcement actors, supporting facilities, community awareness, and socio-cultural factors.

⁶ Gede Agung Wirawan Nusantara, "Eksistensi Paralegal Dalam Mengoptimalkan Pemberian Bantuan Hukum Berdasarkan Undang-Undang Nomor 16 Tahun 2011 Tentang Bantuan Hukum," *Jurnal Magister Hukum Udayana (Udayana Master Law Journal)* 5, no. 2 (2016): 271–83, <https://doi.org/10.24843/jmhu.2016.v05.i02.p04>.

⁷ Sulistyowati Irianto, "Socio-Legal Studies and Legal Pluralism: Understanding Law Through Social Practices," *Indonesia Law Review* 11, no. 2 (2021): 155–72, <https://doi.org/10.15742/ilrev.v11n2.758>.

⁸ Christopher McCrudden, "Legal Research and the Social Sciences: Methodological Approaches for Studying Law in Society," *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 39, no. 4 (2019): 765–90, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ojls/gqz021>.

The research subjects consist of institutional actors and beneficiaries involved in the implementation of marriage legal aid at LKBHI UIN Salatiga. Primary subjects include the Director of LKBHI UIN Salatiga, paralegals involved in providing legal assistance, and members of the community who have received legal aid services. These subjects were selected because they represent different positions within the legal aid process: institutional authority, legal assistance providers, and recipients of legal services.

The research procedures were conducted through the collection and examination of primary and secondary legal materials. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with research subjects to explore their experiences, roles, challenges, and perceptions regarding the effectiveness of paralegal-based legal assistance. Secondary materials consisted of legislation related to legal aid and paralegals, including the Legal Aid Law and regulations concerning paralegal authority, as well as relevant academic literature discussing legal aid, access to justice, and legal effectiveness.

The data collection process focused on identifying the practical implementation of paralegal functions, including legal consultation, mediation, legal education, case identification, and community assistance. The collected data were analyzed qualitatively through an interpretative analytical strategy.⁹ The analysis involved examining empirical findings in relation to legal effectiveness theory to determine whether the role of paralegals has fulfilled the objectives of expanding access to justice.

The analytical scope of this research is limited to the role of paralegals within LKBHI UIN Salatiga, particularly in handling marriage-related legal assistance in Salatiga City and Semarang Regency.¹⁰ Therefore, the findings are not intended to represent all legal aid institutions in Indonesia but rather provide an in-depth understanding of how paralegal-based legal assistance functions within a specific institutional and socio-legal. Through this methodological approach, the study seeks to clarify the relationship between legal regulation, institutional capacity, and community access to justice.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. The Role of Paralegals in Providing Marriage Legal Aid at LKBHI UIN Salatiga

The emergence of paralegals at LKBHI UIN Salatiga reflects a broader transformation in the delivery of legal aid services. Legal assistance is traditionally associated with advocates as professional legal actors; however, increasing legal demands among vulnerable communities have revealed the limitations of advocate-centered models. The involvement of paralegals represents an institutional response to this limitation by creating a mechanism that enables legal services to reach communities who experience economic, geographical, and informational

⁹ Carrie Menkel-Meadow, "Empirical and Socio-Legal Approaches to Understanding Legal Institutions," *Law & Society Review* 54, no. 3 (2020): 509–30, <https://doi.org/10.1111/lasr.12498>.

¹⁰ Ahmad Redi, "The Role of Qualitative Methods in Socio-Legal Research: An Analytical Framework," *Indonesian Journal of Socio-Legal Studies* 2, no. 2 (2023): 101–18, <https://doi.org/10.54828/ijsls.v2i2.25>.

barriers.¹¹ Therefore, paralegals should not be viewed merely as assistants to advocates but as actors who contribute to restructuring access to justice.

The development of the paralegal network at LKBHI UIN Salatiga demonstrates how legal aid institutions adapt to social needs. The institution's decision to involve 40 paralegals across Salatiga City and Semarang Regency reflects an attempt to overcome the limited capacity of professional advocates in handling increasing marriage-related legal disputes. These disputes often involve communities with limited legal awareness and financial resources, making the presence of accessible legal intermediaries essential.¹² The role of paralegals therefore emerges as part of a broader strategy to reduce inequality between formal legal institutions and communities seeking justice.

The findings show that paralegals primarily contribute through non-litigation assistance, including legal consultation, mediation support, legal information delivery, and preparation of preliminary case materials. These activities demonstrate that paralegals operate at the early stage of legal problem-solving by helping communities understand their rights and available legal mechanisms. Their contribution is significant because many legal problems do not initially require litigation but require proper legal guidance and communication.¹³ Through these functions, paralegals expand the meaning of legal assistance beyond courtroom representation.

The position of paralegals also reveals an important relationship between law and social accessibility. Communities facing marriage-related disputes frequently encounter difficulties not because legal remedies are unavailable, but because legal procedures, terminology, and institutional structures are difficult to navigate. Paralegals address this gap by translating legal information into forms that are more understandable for community members.¹⁴ This function positions paralegals as intermediaries who connect legal knowledge with social realities.

The research findings further indicate that paralegal effectiveness is influenced by the combination of formal preparation and practical experience. Training programs provided by LKBHI UIN Salatiga contribute to strengthening paralegal competence through legal education, consultation methods, and understanding of assistance procedures. However, practical involvement in handling cases also becomes an important source of professional development.

¹¹ Muhammad Fajar Ramdani and Aisyah Lestari, "Akses Keadilan Bagi Masyarakat Rentan: Studi Sosio-Legal Di Desa Janapria, Kabupaten Lombok Tengah," *PERSEPTIF: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Humaniora* 2, no. 4 (2024): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.70716/perseptif.v2i4.427>.

¹² Suteki et al., "Bridging the Justice Gap: A Study on the Challenges and Solutions for Legal Aid in Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Advocacy and Legal Services* 8, no. 1 (2026): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.15294/ijals.v8i1.42292>.

¹³ Erlingga Savril Maharani, Adinda Berliana Rizkita Anjani, and Satrio Ageng Rihardi, "Efektivitas Pembinaan Paralegal Dalam Mendukung Pelayanan Administrasi Hukum Umum Di Jawa Tengah," *Al-Zayn: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial & Hukum* 4, no. 3 (2026): 2675–84, <https://doi.org/10.61104/alz.v4i3.5663>.

¹⁴ Lola Akin Ojelabi, "An Access to Justice Approach to Mediation and the Construction of Positive Legal Professional Identity," *International Journal of the Legal Profession* 23, no. 3 (2016): 321–45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09695958.2016.1228531>.

This interaction between training and experience illustrates that paralegal capacity is constructed through continuous engagement with legal issues faced by communities.¹⁵

The experiences of paralegals involved in marriage-related cases demonstrate that their contribution extends beyond administrative assistance. Paralegals participate in identifying legal problems, facilitating communication between clients and advocates, and supporting mediation processes.¹⁶ Such involvement indicates that paralegals influence the process through which communities access legal institutions. Their role becomes particularly relevant for individuals who may otherwise remain excluded from legal assistance due to social and economic limitations.

Nevertheless, the research identifies that the expansion of paralegal roles also faces institutional challenges. Differences in educational background, training opportunities, and practical experience create variations in the ability of paralegals to provide assistance.¹⁷ Although paralegals share similar responsibilities, their individual capacities are not always uniform. This condition suggests that the sustainability of paralegal-based legal aid requires continuous institutional development rather than relying solely on volunteer commitment.

Operational limitations also affect the ability of paralegals to maximize their outreach. Legal assistance frequently requires direct engagement with communities, including visits, consultations, and follow-up processes. Limited transportation support and operational resources may restrict the ability of paralegals to respond to cases effectively, particularly when communities requiring assistance are located far from institutional centers. These limitations demonstrate that expanding legal access requires not only human resources but also adequate institutional infrastructure.

The role of paralegals at LKBHI UIN Salatiga illustrates that access to justice is shaped by the interaction between legal institutions and social actors. Paralegals contribute by reducing the distance between communities and formal legal systems through information sharing, assistance, and empowerment. Their existence challenges the assumption that legal services can only be provided effectively through professional legal practitioners. Instead, paralegals demonstrate that community-based legal participation can strengthen the reach of legal institutions.

Overall, the findings indicate that paralegals have become significant actors in expanding marriage legal aid services at LKBHI UIN Salatiga. Their contribution lies not only in assisting advocates but also in enabling communities to understand and utilize legal mechanisms. However, their effectiveness depends on institutional support, competency

¹⁵ Annette Mbogoh, "Pouring New Wines in Old Wineskins: State Capture, Contestations and Conflicting Understanding of the Paralegalism in Kenya with the Advent of the Legal Aid Act 2016," *Egerton Law Journal* 8 (2021): 1–22.

¹⁶ Ulfah Maskanah et al., "Empowering Village Paralegals through Local Wisdom: A Model for Rural Legal Aid," *Golden Ratio of Law and Social Policy Review* 5, no. 2 (2026): 432–46, <https://doi.org/10.52970/grlspr.v5i2.2211>.

¹⁷ Adi Fathurrozi, Sri Lum'atus Sa'adah, and Pujiono, "Paralegals as Agents of Legal Empowerment: Bridging Access to Justice and Maqasid Al-Shariah in Rural Indonesia," *IJoIS: Indonesian Journal of Islamic Studies* 6, no. 1 (2025): 45–60, <https://doi.org/10.59525/ijois.1516>.

development, and sustainable engagement with communities. The experience of LKBHI UIN Salatiga highlights that paralegals represent an important element in developing a more inclusive legal aid system that connects formal legal structures with social needs.

B. Evaluating Paralegal Effectiveness Through Legal Effectiveness Theory

The effectiveness of paralegal involvement at LKBHI UIN Salatiga cannot be understood merely through the existence of legal recognition or the increasing number of legal assistance activities. A socio-legal examination requires an analysis of how legal norms, institutional practices, and community responses interact with one another.¹⁸ The findings demonstrate that paralegal-based legal aid has contributed significantly to improving access to marriage legal assistance; however, its effectiveness remains influenced by several structural and social conditions that shape the implementation of legal aid objectives.¹⁹ The regulatory framework provides an important foundation for strengthening the position of paralegals within the legal aid system.

The enactment of the Minister of Law and Human Rights Regulation Number 3 of 2021 concerning Paralegals in Legal Aid Provision reflects the state's recognition that access to justice requires broader participation beyond professional advocates. Through this regulation, competent paralegals are authorized to participate in non-litigation legal assistance, including consultation, legal education, mediation, and community empowerment.²⁰ This legal development demonstrates a shift toward a more inclusive model of legal service delivery.

Nevertheless, the existence of a regulatory framework does not automatically result in effective implementation. The research findings reveal that differences in training experience and legal understanding among paralegals influence the quality of assistance provided. Some paralegals have obtained formal training, while others develop their skills mainly through practical involvement under institutional supervision.²¹ This condition shows that legal effectiveness depends not only on the clarity of legal norms but also on the capacity of legal actors who translate those norms into practice.

The interaction between advocates and paralegals represents another important dimension of effectiveness. Paralegals do not replace advocates but function as supporting

¹⁸ Wicipto Setiadi, "Penegakan Hukum: Kontribusinya Bagi Pendidikan Hukum Dalam Rangka Pengembangan Sumber Daya Manusia," *Majalah Hukum Nasional* 48, no. 2 (2018): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.33331/mhn.v48i2.99>.

¹⁹ Muhammad Raafi Adiputra and Indah Sri Utari, "Existence and Position of Paralegal in Legal Assistance and Provision of Legal Aid in Indonesia," *Law Research Review Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (2025): 345–60, <https://doi.org/10.15294/lrrq.v11i3.28479>.

²⁰ Ryan Aji, Andhika Ivan Putra Pamungkas, and Dhimas Arya Kamandanu, "Perlindungan Peran Paralegal Sebagai Tenaga Bantuan Hukum Menurut Permenkum Nomor 34 Tahun 2025," *Lontar Merah* 9, no. 1 (2026): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.31002/lm.v9i1.5034>.

²¹ La Ode Abdul Gani, "Access to Justice Through Legal Aid in Indonesia: Problems and Development," *Journal of Legal, Ethical and Regulatory Issues* 22, no. 5 (2019): 1–12.

actors who expand the institutional capacity of legal aid organizations.²² Their involvement allows legal problems to be identified earlier, clients to receive initial guidance, and communication between communities and legal professionals to become more accessible. The collaboration between these actors illustrates that legal aid effectiveness relies on institutional cooperation rather than individual professional capacity alone.

However, institutional limitations continue to influence the ability of paralegals to maximize their contribution. The implementation of legal assistance requires adequate operational resources, particularly for community outreach and case handling outside the institution. Limited transportation support, financial resources, and field facilities create practical barriers for paralegals attempting to reach communities requiring assistance.²³ These findings indicate that legal empowerment initiatives require institutional investment to ensure that recognized legal roles can function effectively.

Community awareness also shapes the success of paralegal-based legal aid. Although paralegals have assisted numerous marriage-related cases, public understanding regarding their existence and authority remains uneven. Some communities continue to perceive legal problems as issues that should only be handled by formal legal professionals or remain unfamiliar with available legal assistance mechanisms.²⁴ This situation illustrates that access to justice involves not only the availability of legal institutions but also the ability of communities to recognize and utilize those institutions.

The social acceptance of paralegals provides a different dimension to understanding legal effectiveness. The findings show that local social structures may support the expansion of legal aid services. Community figures, including religious leaders such as Modin, possess social legitimacy that can facilitate communication between legal aid institutions and communities.²⁵ Rather than creating resistance, these social relationships may strengthen legal outreach by connecting formal legal assistance programs with existing community networks.

Viewed through legal effectiveness theory, the experience of LKBHI UIN Salatiga demonstrates that the implementation of paralegal-based legal aid is shaped by a combination of normative, institutional, and social elements. The regulation provides legitimacy, institutional cooperation provides operational capacity, and community acceptance determines the extent to which legal assistance can be utilized. Weakness in any of these elements may reduce the overall

²² Nurul Qomar, "Legal Aid as a Human Right in Indonesia: The Role of Legal Aid Institutions in Providing Access to Justice," *Hasanuddin Law Review* 3, no. 2 (2017): 131–43, <https://doi.org/10.20956/halrev.v3i2.1086>.

²³ Wahyudi Kurniawan, "Paralegals as Local Change Agents: Community Service Model to Increase Legal Aid Literacy and Access to Justice in Nganjuk," *Jurnal Dedikasi Hukum* 5, no. 2 (2025): 330–46, <https://doi.org/10.22219/jdh.v5i2.39374>.

²⁴ Permata Hartanto, "Paralegal Dan Akses Perempuan Terhadap Keadilan: Kajian Tentang Peranan Paralegal Dalam Pemberdayaan Hukum Untuk Meningkatkan Akses Perempuan Terhadap Keadilan," *Yustisia Jurnal Hukum* 3, no. 2 (2014): 56–68, <https://doi.org/10.20961/yustisia.v3i2.11098>.

²⁵ Hanifah Dhyaul Haq et al., "Paralegal Constitutional Rights as an Expansion of Due Process for Marginalized Communities," *NOMOI Law Review* 7, no. 1 (2026): 1–18.

effectiveness of legal aid implementation, even when formal legal recognition has been established.

The findings further indicate that paralegals have achieved an important role in expanding marriage legal aid access but have not yet reached full effectiveness. The remaining challenges are not primarily related to the absence of legal authority but concern the translation of legal norms into sustainable institutional practices. Strengthening training systems, improving operational support, and increasing public legal awareness are necessary steps to enhance the contribution of paralegals.

This study contributes to socio-legal scholarship by demonstrating that legal effectiveness is not solely determined by regulatory achievement but also by the relationship between law and social practice. Paralegals represent a form of legal participation that challenges the traditional understanding of legal assistance as an exclusive domain of professional lawyers. Their experience at LKBHI UIN Salatiga highlights how community-based legal actors can strengthen access to justice when supported by effective institutional arrangements and social recognition.

CONCLUSION

Examining the role of paralegals at LKBHI UIN Salatiga demonstrates that paralegal-based legal aid contributes significantly to expanding access to marriage legal assistance through consultation, mediation support, legal information, and community empowerment. Revealing the importance of community-based legal actors, this study shows that access to justice requires broader participation beyond professional advocates and formal legal institutions. Identifying several limitations, including unequal competency, inadequate institutional resources, and limited public awareness, the findings indicate that paralegal effectiveness remains dependent on continuous institutional strengthening. Highlighting the relationship between legal regulation, institutional capacity, and social acceptance, this study argues that effective legal aid requires integration between legal norms and community realities. Contributing to socio-legal scholarship, this research positions paralegals as strategic actors who bridge formal legal structures and communities seeking justice.

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