God's Inclusive House: Narrating the Views of Religious Figures on Accessibility and Services for Houses of Worship

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Abstract
This article will discuss how the accessibility of places of worship for persons with disabilities in the Banjar community and also the views of religious leaders regarding these services and accessibility. The research method used is qualitative with a phenomenological approach. The interviews were chosen data collection techniques with 5 religious leaders with a purposive sampling technique as the subject. This study found that the house of worship in the Banjar community in South Kalimantan was still not referred to as an accessible congregation. This means that places of worship for religions in South Kalimantan, both physically, in communication, and in attitudes, cannot be easily accessed by persons with disabilities. However, even so, indicators of community displayed by all religions are already open and friendly to people with disabilities. This is evidenced by the forms of religious services provided by the management for Jemaah or people with disabilities. The second finding explains that the views of religious leaders show great and positive concern for people with disabilities in South Kalimantan. In general, the views of religious people can be categorized into 3 major views: (1) There is a government-owned house of worship which is as a pilot; (2) The house of worship has a special room for persons with disabilities; (3) Disability-friendly houses of worship are the focus of religious services.

Keywords: Accessibility, Religion, Persons with Disabilities, Banjarese Community

1. Research Background

Don't all people become more religious when they get old, but why are our mosques not friendly to parents?" (Salim & Maftuhin, 2022). This statement was by Arif Mahtuhin in his discussion with Hairus Salim in one of Hairus Salim-Gading’s Youtube podcasts. It makes us reflecting on our memories and religious experiences about how vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, sick people (patient) and people with disabilities are positioned in the religious community.

Religion, in its various manifestations, plays an important role in determining how disability is understood and how it is treated or persecuted in particular historical and cultural contexts (Schumm & Stoltzfus, 2011), including how they have difficulty accessing public services to accessing religious practices. The difficulty in accessing places of
worship is caused by the stigma and social construction of the majority group which considers them as marginal citizens who are unproductive and unable to contribute to society and their environment so their rights are often neglected (Irwanto et al., 2010; Amin, 2018, p.1). This can be seen from the rare availability of accessibility and forms of services that can facilitate and accommodate their needs (Syafi’ie, 2014).

Even though the rules of article 14 of Law number 8 of 2016 concern Persons with Disabilities, it has been stated that persons with disabilities have "religious" rights. In addition, this article is also supported by article 73 which reaches out to and covers the fulfilment of equal opportunities for persons with disabilities in all aspects including providing comfort and a sense of security, as well as providing adequate accessibility and accommodation for persons with disabilities to worship. By their respective beliefs, all social elements and components related to the management of places of worship must be aware of and able to provide friendly and affordable services for persons with disabilities to obtain their religious rights.

Based on our research, the writer found some literatures discussing disability and its relation to the accessibility of religious services, for instance the phenomenal book written by Schumm and Stoltzfus entitled *Disability and Religious Diversity: Cross-Cultural and Inter-Religious Perspectives*. This paper examines how different religions in the world represent, understand, theologize, theorize, and respond to disability issues. Based on their research, religious teachings and practices broadly help set cultural standards for what is considered "normal" in the physical and mental behavior of persons with disabilities. In general, this book combines literature and theoretical analysis from the field of disability studies (Schumm & Stoltzfus, 2011).

In addition research written by David K. Hughes (1995) entitled *The Accessibility of Faith Communities and Their Places of Worship* has shown that in both the United States and the United Kingdom, many religious communities still have a long way to go before they can claim their places of worship are fully accessible to persons with disabilities. Hughes proposed a proactive, not reactive, approach to meeting the needs of congregations with disabilities so that resources and facilities are identified and made available even before the need arises, with the hope that people who need them will join the religious community. Hughes in his article also appealed to religious people to be open and friendly towards newcomers, whether they have disabilities or not.

Some researchers have previously discussed accessibility in places of worship, such as Maftuhin, (2014) entitled *Accessibility of Worship for Disabilities: A Study of Four Mosques in Yogyakarta*. He stated that in the research he was inspired by a project in the United States called "Accessible Congregation", a project that promotes accessibility in places of worship. While the idea of "Accessible Congregation" is less well-known in Indonesia. So, this research examines the four main mosques in Yogyakarta. The results of this study indicate that most of the mosques are inaccessible and one mosque is less accessible. This study indicates that there are no mosques in Yogyakarta that are fully accessible.
Syafi’ie (2014) in *Fulfillment of Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities* expressed the testimony of activists from organizations of persons with disabilities in Yogyakarta about their experiences with obstacles that were not friendly to the conditions of persons with disabilities, according to observations and experiences that were still discriminatory so that the results of this study concluded that even though Indonesia had enacted regulations regarding accessibility for persons with disabilities, the implementation is ineffective and discrimination still occurs among groups of persons with disabilities.

A Research by Awik Retyaka A and Dwi Aries Himawanto, *Accessibility for Disabilities in Mosque Buildings*, examines the accessibility of the Great Mosque of Al Aqsa Klaten. In this case, the researcher made observations at the location using measuring devices and cameras and conducted unstructured interviews with mosque officers. The researchers concluded that the Great Mosque of Al Aqsa cannot be considered as fully accessible for persons with disabilities. It is because the accessibility of facilities in the building do not meet the principles of good design and Ministry of Public Works Regulation 30/PRT/M. /2006 (Retyaka & Himawanto, 2018).

Based on the literatures above, the writers have found several studies on accessibility in mosques or other places of worship, but did not find any research that raised research issues or themes regarding the views of religious leaders on accessibility and services in places of worship of the Banjar people of South Kalimantan.

### 2. Methodology

This article overviews of how an overview of the accessibility of houses of worship for persons with disabilities and how religious leaders perceive persons with disabilities in services and accessibility in houses of worship in the Banjar community, South Kalimantan. By the existing phenomena, in this study, the authors used a descriptive-qualitative method with phenomenology perspective. In selecting the subjects, the authors used a purposive sampling technique, which means the process of selecting research subjects was carried out deliberately and then adjusted to the desired categories and characteristics. To collect the data, the researcher interviewed some religious leaders in the South Kalimantan.

### 3. Discussion

The findings in this study are divided into two areas, namely a description of the accessibility of houses of worship for persons with disabilities and the views of religious leaders regarding this service and accessibility. It has been explained that every religious community is entitled and has the same rights in carrying out their respective beliefs. So the accessibility of houses of worship for them is also an important discourse, both in study and implementation. Apart from that, it is also important to provide an overview of the views of religious leaders on how religious institutions through houses of worship should provide these accessibility services.
3.1 Accessibility of Houses of Worship for Persons with Disabilities

This study found that the descriptions of houses of worship regarding the provision of facilities for people or congregations with disabilities in each religion have quite a lot of differences. Mosques, for example, are houses of worship with the most adherents in Banjarmasin, although there are only a few have disability-friendly facilities. In particular, the lack of mosques that provide access for wheelchair users and sign language interpreters for lectures or sermons being held. R1’s said:

“As far as I know, there may be one or two mosques. Like the Al-Jihad Banjarmasin mosque which has an escalator for the convenience of persons with disabilities. But in general, as far as I know, there are no mosques that have sign language interpreters” (Interview with R1-Indonesian Mosque Council of South Kalimantan, 2 February 2022)

As for Christian houses of worship, as stated by R2, some churches have facilities and are friendly to persons with disabilities, but some have not provided these facilities to the congregation.

"Some have, some haven’t. Among those that have, it is indicated by the existence of an elevator to the upper floor (for the church whose place of worship is above). Meanwhile, for places of worship below, facilities for wheelchairs have been provided. R2-Pastor

In addition to these facilities, the party or church assembly usually appoints special officers, called Diakonia, whose job is to help elevate congregations who cannot walk, for example. However, R2 acknowledged that for Deaf and persons with hearing disabilities, the assembly or the church had not prepared a sign language interpreter. Even if there is only Sunday School for children.

Meanwhile, the Catholic Church, R3 said, has not yet provided a house of worship that has facilities for persons with disabilities. The church, does not require people or congregations with disabilities to worship directly at the house of worship/church. But instead, there will be a priest who will come to the house in question with request. This form of service, of course, comes with conditions, for example, the people or congregation have been ordained and most of the family members are Catholics. The house must also meet the requirements for worship procedures such as altars, candles, and so on.

Regarding this form of service, as explained by R3, there is a certain religious figure who has been appointed by the Diocese and will provide worship guidance, namely called the Parish Pastor.

“In every region, there is a Parish Priest (Kelayan Parish, Veterans Parish and Ketedral Parish) and they have regional boundaries. Each parish then has several communities under it. So, if there is a congregation with disabilities who wants worship services at home, those concerned are asked to report to the community. Then the community will report to the parish.” (Interview with R3-Diocese Representative, 2 February 2022).
So, Catholic houses of worship do not provide special facilities for persons with disabilities, including sign language interpreters. Even if there are congregations who have problems walking (paralyzed), usually those concerned during worship are assisted by the family.

As Catholics, Buddhist and Hindu houses of worship also do not provide facilities for persons with disabilities. This is because, as acknowledged by R4 and R5, so far none of their followers has disabilities. So, there is no direction to prepare or create facilities. Although some have hearing difficulties, it is due to age, and they prepare hearing aids themselves.

From the explanation of all the religious leaders above, it can be concluded that the houses of worship of religions in South Kalimantan are not yet accessible for persons with disabilities. Accessible houses of worship, as stated by Maftuhin (2019) at least have architecture, communication, and a community attitude, does not prevent worshipers with disabilities from being able to pray, study, and lead congregations. This narrative is called Accessible congregations, which means that persons with disabilities can easily access places of worship both physically, in communication, and attitude.

The absence of wheelchair access or special spaces for persons with disabilities in of worship is one of the proofs that architecturally or physically houses of worship are inaccessible. Likewise in the aspect of communication, there is no sign language interpreter available in every ritual of worship such as religious sermons, which should be available and provided by the manager of the house of worship.

However, even so, the community attitude in all religions is quite open and friendly towards persons with disabilities. This is proven by the form of religious services prepared by the management for congregations or people with disabilities. Like, Paroki (Perish) Pastor in Catholicism or Diakonia in Christianity.

Apart from that, for religious cases where there are no congregations or people with disabilities, they should still pay attention to and prepare these facilities. It is the mandate of Law 2016 Number 8 Article 14 Part Ten, stated that:

1. Adhering to their respective religions and beliefs and worshipping according to their religion and beliefs;
2. Obtaining easy access in utilizing places of worship;
3. Obtaining easily accessible holy books and other religious literature based on their needs;
4. Receiving services according to needs when carrying out worship according to religion and belief; and
5. Taking an active role in religious organizations.

This view, as explained by Maftuhin (2014), also occurred in opponents of sidewalk accessibility regulation for wheelchairs for people with disabilities in Wisconsin, United States of America, in the 1970s. They were of the view that why they were preparing fund
allocations or budgets for communities that did not exist or did not visible in their environment.

So, from the explanation above, it can be concluded that in general houses of worship in the Banjar community are less accessible for persons with disabilities. Based on the presentation of all the figures interviewed, none of them meets the criteria for accessible congregations.

In his book entitled Disabled-Friendly Mosques From Jurisprudence to Accessibility Practices, Maftuhin (2019, p. 44) argues about accessible congregations that have been implemented in America for a long time, which is meant as a term that refers to a place of worship that physical, communication and attitude can be accessed easily by the members of the community and persons with disabilities.

Accessible Congregation in the United States is a movement not limited to the church but also includes the wider interfaith community. The Accessible Congregation expects a place of worship to be accessible to everyone, at a minimum it has architecture, communication, and a community attitude that is inclusive of all diverse human conditions (Maftuhin, 2019).

Darcy (1998) explained that accessibility has various forms, depending on the category of disability they have. Therefore, he categorizes access into four dimensions. First, physical access, involves persons with physical disabilities who require the use of wheelchairs or walking aids and require the provision of, for example, handrails, ramps, lifts and counters that can be raised and lowered. Second, sensory access, involves persons with hearing or vision impairments who require the provision of, for example, tactile cues, signs and labels, hearing aids, hearing systems and audio cues for lifts and lights to facilitate them. Third, access to communication, involves people who have difficulty with the written word, sight, speech, and language problems. Fourth, cognitive access, which involves people who experience impaired awareness, perception, reasoning and judgment.

3.2 Views of Religious Figures Regarding Services and Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities

As for the views of religious leaders, in general, they have the same view. That is the view that houses of worship should be friendly to people with disabilities. However, this view is also accompanied by certain notes.

R1, for example, even admits that people with disabilities have not been properly cared for. However, according to him, this cannot be a reason to blame the officials of mosques or houses of worship. Among the reasons are, first, so far, the number of people with disabilities in certain areas has not been properly recorded, resulting in a lack of attention. The problem is if the numbers are clear and well-recorded, then the officials know what to provide. Second, it seems that awareness about the importance of
responsibility for people with disabilities is also not carried out massively, such as mosque officials.

Normatively, R1 is very firm in saying that mosques must be friendly to people with disabilities. However, other things that need to be considered, according to him, the resources of each mosque are different.

“So normatively, mosques must provide facilities for people with disabilities. However, other factors also need to be considered. In my opinion, if we ask all mosques to provide facilities for people with disabilities, I don’t think we can force that. Because every mosque has its resources or limitations.” (Interview with R1-Indonesian Mosque Council of South Kalimantan, 2 February 2022).

So, according to R1, the solution requires courage, especially among observers of disabilities, for example, giving the idea that there should be a mosque or house of worship that is selected or concentrated for persons with disabilities who of course also mingle with people without disabilities. According to him, this is closely related to government programs.

“There are certain commissions or agencies that are responsible for managing this issue. Well, supposedly with the authority of the local government, there are many mosques under government supervision that can be selected as pilot mosques. Not only an appeal but there must also be clear support facilities” (R1-Indonesian Mosque Council of South Kalimantan).

Likewise, what R2 explained, according to him, service to people or congregations, such as poverty and also including people with disabilities should be the main focus, as taught by Jesus to the people. That is why in Christianity there is a name Diakonia Ministry.

“In my view, service to persons with disabilities should be the main focus, the focus of service as Jesus taught. Services should pay more attention to those who are in disadvantaged conditions, such as poverty and persons with disabilities. That’s why in Christian teachings there is a name for diaconia service, which is caring for people with disabilities and poverty. Those who pay attention to it are usually called idang or antegorial in the assembly. (Interview with R2-Pastor, 2 February 2022).

R3 also provides the view that services for persons with disabilities are necessary. According to him, this service can be in the form of specializing space in places of worship

“It would be better if there were special rooms provided for persons with disabilities in places of worship, in the sense that they are still one with the people, only separating space (for example focusing on the right, left or front) without any discrimination. This reason is that every religion certainly has its procedures and rules of worship. Like, in Catholicism there is a seat or a place to kneel. Meanwhile, some people with certain disabilities are not able to do this procedure.” (Interview with R3-Diocese Representative, 2 February 2022).
R4 and R5, although so far, they do not have congregations or people with disabilities, they still consider service to these parties as something important to pay attention to.

“Of course, the manager of the house of worship must prepare according to what we can provide and do. Because they also have the same right in worship. Precisely if we discriminate, we are not religious people” (Interview with R4-Head of Walubi, 2 February 2022).

"In my opinion, houses of worship need to provide services if there are people with disabilities"(Interview with R5-Chairman of PHDI, 2 February 2022)

It can be concluded that the views of religious leaders regarding services and accessibility for persons with disabilities are all positive and support the establishment of disability-friendly houses of worship. Normatively, all texts or teachings of every religion refuse to be discriminatory and are required to act equally. Based on the interview, it can be concluded that houses of worship must be properly designed and managed for congregations with disabilities.

Of course, these views are no longer the same as the views of religious leaders who used to view persons with disabilities negatively. German Heirich, a Catholic priest, for example, once stated that disabled children were the result of a mother's relationship with the devil. Likewise, Martin Luther, a Protestant figure, claimed to see the devil in children who experienced bodily and mental dysfunction (Ro'fah, 2015a).

In general, the views of religious leaders can be categorized into 3 major views:

1. There is a government-owned house of worship which is a pilot designated by the Regional Government, as a house of worship that has complete facilities for persons with disabilities. So, this can be the concern of all managers of houses of worship.

2. Houses of worship have special spaces for persons with disabilities.

3. Disability-friendly houses of worship are the focus of religious services.

Related to these views in a concrete way, for example by providing tools for holy books in braille, providing sign language interpreters for prayers and sermons, as well as facilities such as wheels, canes for the disabled and lifts or special road facilities.

From this view it can also be categorized into several suggestions:

1. It is necessary to have clear data on the number of persons with disabilities in certain areas so that managers of places of worship are aware of the existence of their followers which needs to be facilitated.

2. Disability observers actively and massively provide narratives, regulations, and attitudes that should be carried out for persons with disabilities to the
managers of places of worship. In addition, disability activists or observers play an active role in urging related parties to provide support to places of worship.

3. Regional Governments are requested not only to be active in giving calls to care for persons with disabilities but also to take real action in material form so that disability-friendly houses of worship will be born.

So, in general, from all the explanations above, it can be concluded that the views of religious leaders show great concern for persons with disabilities in South Kalimantan.

4. Conclusion

Houses of worship in the Banjar community in South Kalimantan still cannot be said to fulfil the components of what is known as Accessible Congregations. This means that places of worship for religions in South Kalimantan, both physically, in communication, and attitude, are not yet fully accessible to persons with disabilities. On the other hand, the views of religious leaders have shown great concern and positive nuances towards persons with disabilities as a form of full rights for citizens as well as religious people in South Kalimantan. This is certainly a good signal for the people or congregations, especially people and congregations with various backgrounds with disabilities. Because in that way, there is great support from the figures, of course with the hope of achieving accessible or disability-friendly houses of worship.

5. Suggestions/Recommendations

From the results of the research conducted, several suggestions can be taken by researchers. Among others are:

1. Observers with disabilities or disabilities are expected to be more massive in providing insights or narratives about the importance of houses of worship that are friendly for persons with disabilities to religious leaders or managers of places of worship

2. It is hoped that the Regional Government or the responsible party will not only provide appeals but also actually facilitate houses of worship so that disability-friendly houses of worship can be realized.

6. Thank-You Note

We would like to thank all religious leaders who have agreed to provide an overview and views regarding the issues in this study. We also thank the Management of Religious Harmony Forum of Kalsel (Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama/FKUB) for providing access to dialogue with religious leaders.

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