

Strengthening Access to Justice through Legal Aid Institutions and Community Legal Empowerment for People Facing Legal Problems

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ABSTRAK

Kegiatan pengabdian kepada masyarakat ini bertujuan untuk memperkuat akses terhadap keadilan melalui peningkatan kesadaran masyarakat mengenai lembaga bantuan hukum dan pemberdayaan masyarakat yang menghadapi permasalahan hukum. Keterbatasan pemahaman mengenai hak-hak hukum, prosedur, dan layanan bantuan hukum dapat menghambat masyarakat dalam memperoleh perlindungan hukum yang memadai. Kegiatan dilaksanakan pada 22 Juni 2026 di Institut Kesehatan Mitra Bunda Batam melalui sosialisasi dan edukasi hukum. Pelaksanaan kegiatan meliputi penyampaian materi, diskusi interaktif, tanya jawab, serta penjelasan praktis mengenai peran lembaga bantuan hukum, hak masyarakat ketika menghadapi persoalan hukum, dan mekanisme memperoleh bantuan hukum. Kegiatan juga menekankan pentingnya konsultasi hukum sejak awal ketika muncul permasalahan hukum. Hasil kegiatan menunjukkan peningkatan pemahaman peserta mengenai fungsi lembaga bantuan hukum serta meningkatnya kesadaran untuk memahami dan melindungi hak-hak hukum serta mencari bantuan yang tepat. Kegiatan ini menunjukkan bahwa edukasi bantuan hukum berbasis masyarakat dapat memperkuat literasi hukum dan memberdayakan masyarakat dalam menghadapi permasalahan hukum secara lebih tepat. Edukasi hukum secara berkelanjutan dan kolaborasi dengan lembaga bantuan hukum diperlukan untuk mempertahankan hasil kegiatan dan memperluas akses masyarakat terhadap keadilan. Secara keseluruhan, kegiatan ini berkontribusi dalam mewujudkan akses keadilan yang lebih inklusif dan berkeadilan.

ABSTRACT

This community engagement activity aimed to strengthen access to justice by increasing community awareness of legal aid institutions and empowering people facing legal problems. Limited understanding of legal rights, procedures, and available legal assistance can prevent communities from obtaining adequate legal protection. The activity was conducted on June 22, 2026, at Institut Kesehatan Mitra Bunda Batam through legal education and socialization. The implementation involved presentations, interactive discussions, question-and-answer sessions, and practical explanations of the role of legal aid institutions, community legal rights, and procedures for obtaining legal assistance. The activity also emphasized the importance of seeking legal consultation at an early stage when legal problems arise. The results showed increased participant understanding of the functions of legal aid institutions and greater awareness of the importance of protecting legal rights and seeking appropriate assistance. The activity indicates that community-based legal aid education can strengthen legal literacy and empower communities to respond more appropriately to legal problems. Continuous legal education and

collaboration with legal aid institutions are recommended to sustain these outcomes and expand community access to justice. Overall, the activity contributes to promoting more inclusive, equitable, and community-oriented access to justice.

INTRODUCTION

Access to justice is a fundamental element of a rule-of-law society because it ensures that individuals are able to recognize, exercise, and defend their legal rights regardless of their socioeconomic circumstances. In practice, however, access to justice is not determined solely by the availability of courts and legal institutions. It is also influenced by people's legal literacy, awareness of their rights, ability to identify appropriate legal remedies, and access to professional assistance when facing legal problems. Communities with limited legal knowledge may experience difficulties in understanding legal procedures, determining the appropriate institution to approach, and obtaining adequate protection. Consequently, strengthening community awareness of legal aid institutions is an important component of efforts to create a more inclusive and equitable justice system. Legal protection should be understood not merely as a formal guarantee but also as a mechanism that enables citizens to obtain effective protection of their rights within the legal system (Hadjon, 1987; Setiawan, 2015).

Legal aid institutions have an important strategic role in bridging the gap between formal legal rights and people's practical ability to obtain justice. Legal aid is particularly significant for economically disadvantaged and marginalized groups who may lack the financial resources, legal knowledge, or institutional access required to resolve legal disputes independently. Non-litigation legal aid can serve as an important mechanism for improving access to justice, particularly when it is developed through approaches that are responsive to local community conditions. Legal assistance should therefore not be limited to courtroom representation but should also include education, consultation, mediation, and preventive legal empowerment (Firmansyah et al., 2022). Similarly, legal aid institutions play an important role in increasing access to justice for poor communities in Indonesia and reducing disparities between individuals who possess adequate legal resources and those who are structurally disadvantaged (Hadri, 2025).

The importance of legal aid for vulnerable communities is also evident in efforts to improve access to justice among marginalized groups. Marginalization can create multiple barriers to obtaining legal protection, including limited information about legal rights and insufficient knowledge about available legal services (Harahap & Nababan, 2025). From a broader human rights perspective, community efforts to obtain access to justice constitute an important dimension of the realization of human rights. Access to justice therefore requires not only formal legal institutions but also empowered citizens who understand how to use those institutions (Yulia Erika, 2021). Legal aid also plays an important role in protecting individuals who experience injustice, particularly those who face unequal positions when dealing with legal problems (Ritonga & Alfiansyah, 2026).

These previous studies provide an important foundation, but they also reveal a practical gap that remains relevant to community-based legal empowerment. Existing discussions have largely focused on the institutional role of legal aid, access to justice for poor and marginalized groups, or the normative importance of legal protection. Less attention has been directed toward community engagement activities that translate these institutional and normative principles into practical legal awareness among ordinary community members. In particular, there remains a need for educational interventions that explain, in accessible language, what legal aid institutions do, who can obtain legal assistance, what rights individuals possess when facing legal problems, and how communities can seek appropriate legal assistance before their problems become more

complicated. This gap is important because the existence of legal aid institutions does not automatically guarantee access to justice if communities do not know about their functions or how to access their services.

The present community engagement activity responds to this gap by positioning legal aid socialization as an instrument of community legal empowerment. Rather than treating legal aid merely as a service provided after a dispute has occurred, this activity emphasizes preventive legal education that enables community members to recognize legal problems, understand their rights, identify available legal aid institutions, and make informed decisions when facing legal processes. The novelty of this community engagement lies in integrating access to justice, legal awareness, and community empowerment into a practical educational intervention. This approach seeks to transform legal aid from an institution that is perceived as reactive and procedural into a more accessible community resource for legal protection and early assistance.

The activity was conducted on June 22, 2026, at Institut Kesehatan Mitra Bunda Batam through legal education, material presentation, interactive discussion, and question-and-answer sessions. The program addressed the functions of legal aid institutions, community rights when facing legal problems, mechanisms for obtaining legal assistance, and the importance of seeking appropriate legal consultation. Accordingly, this community engagement aims to strengthen community understanding of legal aid institutions, increase legal awareness regarding rights and available legal remedies, and empower community members to access appropriate legal assistance when facing legal problems. Ultimately, the activity seeks to contribute to a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable realization of access to justice through community-based legal empowerment.

METHOD

This community engagement activity employed a participatory legal education approach designed to strengthen community awareness and empowerment regarding access to legal aid. The activity was conducted on June 22, 2026, at Institut Kesehatan Mitra Bunda Batam, with community participants who were considered potential beneficiaries of legal aid services. The approach was selected based on the understanding that legal awareness cannot be effectively developed through one-way information delivery alone. Instead, participants need opportunities to interact, ask questions, discuss practical legal situations, and relate legal information to problems that may occur in their everyday lives. Accordingly, the activity emphasized accessible legal education, interactive communication, and practical understanding of legal aid mechanisms.

The implementation began with the preparation of educational materials concerning the role and function of legal aid institutions, the rights of individuals when facing legal problems, the importance of obtaining appropriate legal consultation, and the general mechanisms for accessing legal assistance. The materials were presented using language that could be easily understood by participants without a formal legal background. The facilitators also provided contextual explanations concerning the potential consequences of handling legal problems without adequate information or assistance. This approach was intended to help participants recognize that legal aid is not merely a service for individuals who have already entered litigation but can also function as a preventive mechanism for identifying legal risks and determining appropriate legal responses at an early stage.

The main activity was implemented through a combination of legal presentations, interactive discussions, and question-and-answer sessions. During the discussion process, participants were encouraged to raise questions and describe general legal situations that they or

people within their communities might encounter. The facilitators responded by explaining the relevant legal principles, available forms of assistance, and appropriate steps for seeking further legal consultation. This participatory process enabled the activity to move beyond theoretical explanations and encouraged participants to develop practical awareness of their legal rights and available institutional resources.

Evaluation was conducted through observation of participant engagement, responses during discussions, and questions raised throughout the activity. Changes in participants' understanding were assessed descriptively by comparing their initial questions and responses with their understanding demonstrated after the educational sessions. The evaluation focused on participants' ability to identify the function of legal aid institutions, recognize basic legal rights, and understand where and how to seek legal assistance. The results of this process were subsequently analyzed descriptively to assess the contribution of the activity to strengthening legal literacy, community empowerment, and access to justice.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Enhancing Community Legal Awareness of Legal Aid Institutions and Access to Justice

The community engagement activity on strengthening legal awareness began by introducing participants to the fundamental concept of access to justice and its relevance to everyday legal problems. The activity emphasized that access to justice is not limited to the ability to appear before a court, but also includes the ability of individuals to understand their legal rights, obtain relevant information, seek legal advice, and access appropriate assistance when confronted with legal problems. This perspective was important because individuals with limited legal knowledge may hesitate to seek assistance, misunderstand legal procedures, or make decisions that could negatively affect their legal position. Through the initial presentation, participants were encouraged to recognize that understanding basic legal rights is an essential element of self-protection and an important foundation for meaningful participation in the legal system.

The facilitators subsequently introduced the role and functions of legal aid institutions as mechanisms for bridging the gap between formal legal rights and the practical ability of community members to exercise those rights. Participants were provided with an accessible explanation of the types of legal assistance that may be available, including legal consultation, legal advice, assistance in resolving disputes, and representation in accordance with applicable legal mechanisms. The discussion also clarified that legal aid should not be perceived solely as a service for people who are already involved in litigation. Rather, legal assistance can play a preventive role by enabling individuals to obtain appropriate information before making decisions or taking actions that may produce further legal consequences. This understanding was particularly important in developing a more proactive community attitude toward legal problems.

The activity further addressed the relationship between socioeconomic limitations and access to legal protection. Participants were encouraged to understand that financial difficulties, limited educational backgrounds, or unfamiliarity with legal institutions should not automatically prevent individuals from seeking legal assistance. The facilitators explained the importance of identifying appropriate legal aid institutions and seeking information about available services when individuals encounter legal disputes, become involved in legal proceedings, or require clarification concerning their rights and obligations. This discussion helped shift the perception of legal institutions from being distant and complicated structures toward resources that can be approached when legal problems arise. Such an approach is consistent with the broader principle

that legal protection should provide meaningful opportunities for citizens to defend their rights rather than merely offering formal recognition of those rights (Hadjon, 1987).

An interactive discussion was then conducted to connect the educational material with situations that participants could potentially encounter in their personal, family, employment, or community environments. Participants were given opportunities to ask questions concerning how they should respond when facing a legal problem, when legal consultation becomes necessary, and what considerations should be taken when selecting appropriate legal assistance. The facilitators responded by providing general legal explanations while emphasizing the importance of obtaining professional assistance for specific cases. This process encouraged participants to become more confident in identifying legal issues and recognizing when they should seek further assistance. The interactive nature of the activity also allowed the facilitators to identify areas of legal knowledge that remained unclear among participants and provide additional explanations accordingly.

The outcomes of the activity indicated increased awareness of the importance of legal aid institutions and their relationship with access to justice. Participants demonstrated greater recognition that legal problems should not simply be confronted through personal assumptions or informal responses without sufficient legal information. The activity also strengthened participants' understanding that seeking legal assistance at an early stage may help prevent misunderstandings, protect legal rights, and facilitate more appropriate responses to legal disputes. These outcomes reinforce the findings of Firmansyah et al. (2022), who emphasize the importance of legal aid in expanding access to justice through non-litigation mechanisms. They are also consistent with Hadri (2025), who highlights the strategic role of legal aid institutions in improving access to justice for economically disadvantaged communities, and Harahap and Nababan (2025), who demonstrate the importance of legal aid for marginalized groups.

From a community empowerment perspective, the activity demonstrated that legal awareness is an important prerequisite for meaningful access to justice. Individuals cannot effectively exercise rights that they do not understand, nor can they access institutional assistance if they are unaware of where and how such assistance can be obtained. Therefore, the socialization of legal aid institutions should be understood not merely as the transfer of legal information but as an empowerment process that enables communities to recognize legal risks, understand their rights, and identify appropriate institutional support. This finding is in line with Yulia Erika (2021), who places community efforts to obtain access to justice within the broader realization of human rights. Accordingly, strengthening community legal awareness through accessible legal aid education represents an important preventive strategy for building a more informed, confident, and legally empowered community capable of pursuing fair and inclusive access to justice.

Strengthening Community Empowerment and Self-Protection in Facing Legal Problems

The second stage of the community engagement activity focused on strengthening participants' capacity to respond appropriately when encountering legal problems and on developing practical awareness of self-protection within the legal system. This stage was designed as a continuation of the initial legal awareness session, moving participants from understanding the existence and function of legal aid institutions toward developing the confidence and ability to seek appropriate assistance. The facilitators emphasized that legal empowerment does not mean requiring community members to resolve legal disputes independently. Instead, it involves developing the capacity to recognize potential legal problems, understand basic rights and obligations, identify appropriate sources of assistance, and make informed decisions before taking

actions that may have legal consequences. Such empowerment is particularly important because unequal access to legal information can place individuals in vulnerable positions when dealing with legal institutions or parties who possess greater legal knowledge and resources.

The activity began by discussing common situations in which community members may become involved in legal problems, either directly or indirectly. Participants were encouraged to recognize that legal problems may emerge from everyday interactions, including disputes concerning agreements, employment relationships, family matters, financial transactions, consumer issues, property, administrative procedures, or conflicts within the community. The facilitators explained that the first step in protecting oneself is to identify whether a particular situation has potential legal implications. Participants were therefore encouraged to avoid immediately responding based solely on emotion, assumptions, or information obtained from informal sources. Instead, they were introduced to the importance of collecting relevant information, maintaining important documents, recording significant events, and seeking appropriate legal advice when the circumstances require further clarification.

The facilitators then emphasized the importance of early legal consultation as a preventive mechanism. Participants were informed that legal assistance should not only be sought after a dispute has escalated or formal proceedings have commenced. Early consultation can provide an opportunity to understand rights and obligations, assess possible legal risks, consider alternative solutions, and determine whether a matter can be resolved through negotiation, mediation, or other non-litigation mechanisms. This perspective is consistent with the findings of Firmansyah et al. (2022), who demonstrate that non-litigation legal aid can contribute to the realization of access to justice by providing assistance outside formal judicial proceedings. The activity consequently encouraged participants to view legal consultation as a form of preventive self-protection rather than as an indication that a person has already failed to resolve a problem independently.

Another important component of the activity was the introduction of appropriate responses when individuals become involved in legal proceedings. Participants were encouraged to understand that every person facing a legal problem has rights that must be respected within the applicable legal framework. These rights include the opportunity to obtain information concerning the legal process, seek appropriate assistance, and receive protection in accordance with applicable law. The facilitators stressed that individuals should not ignore official communications, sign documents that they do not understand, or make important legal decisions without first obtaining adequate information. Such practical guidance was intended to reduce the risk of individuals unintentionally weakening their own legal position because of a lack of knowledge or fear of legal institutions. The discussion also reinforced the principle that legal protection is closely related to the ability of individuals to understand and exercise their rights effectively (Setiawan, 2015).

The participatory discussion provided an opportunity for participants to explore practical questions regarding where to seek assistance and how to communicate their legal problems to legal aid providers. Participants were encouraged to understand that seeking legal assistance requires the presentation of relevant information honestly and systematically, including the chronology of events and available supporting documents. The facilitators explained that accurate information enables legal aid providers to assess the nature of a problem and determine the most appropriate form of assistance. At the same time, participants were reminded that not every legal dispute necessarily needs to be resolved through litigation. Depending on the nature of the problem, consultation, negotiation, mediation, or other appropriate mechanisms may provide

more constructive solutions. This understanding supports a broader conception of legal aid as an instrument of empowerment and problem resolution rather than merely courtroom representation.

The activity also sought to strengthen participants' confidence in approaching legal aid institutions. In many communities, legal institutions may be perceived as complicated, expensive, or difficult to access. Such perceptions can discourage individuals from seeking assistance even when they are experiencing serious legal problems. Through the socialization process, participants were encouraged to replace these assumptions with a more informed understanding of the function of legal aid institutions and the importance of verifying available services. Hadri (2025) emphasizes the strategic role of legal aid institutions in improving access to justice, particularly for communities with limited economic resources, while Harahap and Nababan (2025) highlight the importance of legal aid for marginalized communities. These perspectives demonstrate that institutional availability needs to be accompanied by community awareness and confidence if legal aid is to produce meaningful improvements in access to justice.

From the perspective of community empowerment, the activity demonstrated that self-protection should be understood as the ability to make informed and responsible decisions when facing legal uncertainty. Empowerment does not imply that community members must possess the same legal expertise as lawyers or legal professionals. Rather, it means that individuals should possess sufficient basic knowledge to recognize when a situation may involve legal rights or obligations, avoid potentially harmful decisions, and seek competent assistance when necessary. Maspaitella and Rahakbauwi (2014) explain that community empowerment involves strengthening people's capacity to participate actively in addressing problems that affect their welfare. Applied to the legal context, this principle means enabling communities to become more capable of identifying legal challenges and accessing institutional resources.

The results of the activity indicated that participants became more aware of the importance of taking appropriate and informed steps when confronted with legal problems. Their questions and participation during the discussion reflected an increased interest in understanding practical legal responses, particularly regarding when to seek consultation, what information should be prepared, and where assistance may be obtained. This outcome supports the view that legal education can function as a practical empowerment mechanism rather than simply a transfer of abstract legal knowledge. Ritonga and Alfiansyah (2026) similarly emphasize the protective role of legal aid for individuals experiencing injustice, reinforcing the importance of ensuring that vulnerable individuals have pathways toward legal assistance.

Strengthening community empowerment and self-protection contributes to the broader realization of access to justice by connecting legal knowledge with practical action. Communities that understand their rights, recognize potential legal risks, preserve relevant information, and know where to obtain assistance are better positioned to respond constructively to legal problems. The activity therefore demonstrates that community-based legal aid education can contribute to a preventive model of legal empowerment in which individuals are encouraged to seek appropriate assistance before legal problems become more complex. Such an approach strengthens not only individual legal awareness but also collective community capacity to respond to legal challenges in a more informed, confident, and responsible manner.

Discussion

The findings of this community engagement activity demonstrate that strengthening access to justice requires more than the formal availability of legal institutions. It requires

communities to possess sufficient legal awareness and practical capacity to recognize legal problems, understand their rights, and identify appropriate mechanisms for obtaining assistance. The socialization activity conducted at Institut Kesehatan Mitra Bunda Batam demonstrated that legal aid education can function as an important bridge between the formal legal system and community members who may otherwise experience difficulties in accessing legal protection. This finding reinforces the fundamental principle that legal protection must provide citizens with meaningful opportunities to defend their rights rather than merely establish legal guarantees in normative terms. Hadjon (1987) conceptualizes legal protection as an essential instrument for safeguarding citizens against unlawful actions, while Setiawan (2015) emphasizes that legal protection is closely connected with the realization of human rights. From this perspective, legal aid institutions become particularly important because they translate formal legal rights into practical opportunities for individuals to seek protection and justice.

The first important finding concerns the relationship between legal awareness and access to justice. Participants' increased understanding of the role and function of legal aid institutions indicates that limited legal knowledge can constitute a significant barrier to the utilization of available legal services. A person may theoretically possess legal rights but remain unable to exercise those rights effectively when he or she does not understand the relevant procedures or available sources of assistance. This condition illustrates that access to justice has both institutional and informational dimensions. Yulia Erika (2021) argues that community efforts to obtain access to justice constitute an important part of realizing human rights, suggesting that communities need sufficient knowledge and capacity to interact with legal institutions. This perspective is consistent with Firmansyah et al. (2022), who demonstrate that legal aid, particularly through non-litigation mechanisms, can expand access to justice by bringing legal assistance closer to community needs. Therefore, the results of the activity suggest that legal aid socialization should be viewed as an initial intervention for reducing informational inequality between communities and the legal system.

The second finding relates to the strategic role of legal aid institutions in addressing socioeconomic disparities in access to justice. Legal problems frequently place individuals in unequal positions because not all community members possess the same financial resources, legal knowledge, social networks, or ability to obtain professional assistance. Such disparities may become more pronounced when individuals encounter formal legal procedures that are difficult to understand without professional guidance. Hadri (2025) emphasizes the role of legal aid institutions in improving access to justice for poor communities, while Harahap and Nababan (2025) highlight their significance for marginalized communities. These studies reinforce the finding that the availability of legal aid can contribute to reducing structural barriers that prevent vulnerable groups from exercising their rights. Consequently, the socialization conducted through this activity is important not merely because it introduces a legal institution but because it increases the probability that community members will recognize legal aid as a legitimate and accessible resource when they face legal difficulties.

The third finding concerns the importance of preventive legal assistance. The activity encouraged participants to seek legal consultation before legal problems develop into more complex disputes or formal proceedings. This approach represents an important shift from a reactive model of legal aid toward a preventive and empowering model. Legal aid should not be understood exclusively as representation in court after a dispute has already escalated. It can also include consultation, information provision, negotiation assistance, mediation, and guidance concerning appropriate legal responses. Firmansyah et al. (2022) demonstrate the relevance of

non-litigation legal aid in expanding access to justice, particularly by providing alternative mechanisms for resolving legal problems. This approach is particularly valuable at the community level because early intervention may prevent misunderstandings, reduce unnecessary escalation, and enable individuals to make more informed decisions. Accordingly, the activity contributes to a broader understanding of legal aid as a preventive instrument that can strengthen community resilience in dealing with legal uncertainty.

The fourth finding concerns the connection between legal awareness and self-protection. Participants were encouraged to understand that self-protection in legal matters does not mean resolving disputes without professional assistance but involves recognizing potential legal risks, preserving relevant information, understanding basic rights and obligations, and seeking competent assistance when necessary. This dimension of empowerment is important because individuals may unintentionally weaken their legal position by signing documents they do not understand, ignoring official communications, relying on inaccurate informal information, or delaying consultation until a dispute becomes difficult to resolve. The principle of legal protection articulated by Hadjon (1987) and the human rights perspective developed by Setiawan (2015) provide a normative foundation for emphasizing the ability of individuals to protect their rights within the legal system. The activity therefore demonstrates that legal education can provide communities with practical tools for preventing avoidable legal vulnerability.

The fifth finding relates to community empowerment. The activity did not position participants merely as passive recipients of information but encouraged them to ask questions, identify potential legal problems, and discuss appropriate responses (Ikhwan et al. 2025); (Parinduri et al. 2025); (Pakpahan and Hodriani 2025). This participatory dimension is important because empowerment requires more than the transfer of knowledge. Maspaiteella and Rahakbauwi (2014) explain that community empowerment involves strengthening people's capacity to participate actively in addressing problems that affect their lives and welfare. Applied to the legal context, community empowerment means enabling individuals to recognize legal problems and utilize available institutional resources. The findings therefore support the argument that legal aid education should be designed as a participatory process in which community members can connect legal concepts with situations that occur in their everyday lives. The interactive discussion used during the activity strengthened this process by allowing participants to clarify misconceptions and develop greater confidence in seeking appropriate assistance.

The findings can also be interpreted from the perspective of equality before the law. Formal equality is difficult to realize when individuals have substantially different capacities to understand and utilize legal institutions. A person with extensive legal knowledge and financial resources may be better positioned to protect his or her interests than an individual with limited knowledge and resources. Legal aid can therefore serve as a corrective mechanism that contributes to substantive equality by helping disadvantaged individuals navigate legal processes. Hadri (2025) and Harahap and Nababan (2025) both emphasize the importance of legal aid for communities facing economic or social marginalization. The present activity complements these findings by demonstrating that institutional legal aid needs to be accompanied by community-level awareness. Without information about where assistance can be obtained, even legally available services may remain underutilized. Thus, socialization becomes an important connecting mechanism between legal aid institutions and the communities they are intended to serve.

The discussion also has a broader human rights dimension. Access to justice should be understood as part of the effort to ensure that individuals can exercise and defend their fundamental rights. When people are unable to obtain legal assistance because of economic limitations, lack of knowledge, or institutional barriers, their formal legal rights may become difficult to realize in practice. Yulia Erika (2021) places community access to justice within the broader realization of human rights, while Setiawan (2015) emphasizes the relationship between legal protection and human rights. The findings from the Batam activity therefore suggest that legal aid socialization can contribute to human rights protection at the community level by increasing people's capacity to recognize and defend their rights. This is particularly significant for individuals who may be unfamiliar with legal procedures or reluctant to approach formal institutions.

The recent findings of Ritonga and Alfiansyah (2026) further strengthen this interpretation by emphasizing the role of legal aid in protecting victims of injustice. Their study supports the proposition that legal aid is not simply an administrative service but an instrument for protecting individuals who may be disadvantaged in legal relationships. The present community engagement extends this perspective by emphasizing the preventive dimension of legal protection. Rather than waiting until injustice has occurred, legal education can equip individuals with the knowledge necessary to identify potential problems and seek assistance at an earlier stage. In this sense, legal empowerment and legal protection are mutually reinforcing. Increased awareness enables individuals to recognize the need for assistance, while accessible legal aid institutions provide the institutional mechanism through which that awareness can be transformed into effective action.

The activity also has implications for the development of a sustainable model of community legal empowerment. One-time socialization activities cannot, by themselves, eliminate all barriers to justice. However, they can serve as an entry point for developing a culture in which communities are more willing to seek accurate legal information and professional assistance. The effectiveness of such interventions can be strengthened through continuous legal education, collaboration between legal aid institutions and community organizations, accessible consultation mechanisms, and the dissemination of information concerning available legal services. Firmansyah et al. (2022) demonstrate the importance of contextualizing legal assistance within community conditions, while Maspaitella and Rahakbauwi (2014) underline the importance of participatory empowerment. These insights suggest that future community engagement should move toward sustained legal literacy programs rather than isolated awareness campaigns.

The discussion demonstrates that the principal contribution of this activity lies in connecting three dimensions that are often treated separately: legal awareness, community empowerment, and access to justice. Legal awareness provides communities with the knowledge necessary to recognize their rights and legal problems; empowerment transforms that knowledge into the capacity to make informed decisions; and legal aid institutions provide the institutional pathway through which individuals can obtain appropriate protection and assistance. The findings therefore support the proposition that strengthening access to justice should begin not only within courts and legal institutions but also within communities themselves. Community-based legal aid education can function as a preventive, participatory, and empowering strategy for reducing informational and structural barriers to justice. By strengthening people's confidence and capacity to seek appropriate assistance, the activity contributes to the broader objective of

establishing a legal environment in which access to justice becomes more inclusive, equitable, and meaningful for people facing legal problems.

CONCLUSION

The community engagement activity demonstrated that strengthening access to justice can be effectively supported through community-based legal aid education and empowerment. The socialization conducted at Institut Kesehatan Mitra Bunda Batam increased participants' understanding of the role and function of legal aid institutions, their basic legal rights, and the mechanisms available for obtaining appropriate legal assistance when facing legal problems. The activity also strengthened participants' awareness that legal protection should not be approached only after a dispute has escalated, but can be pursued preventively through early consultation, informed decision-making, and appropriate institutional support. These outcomes confirm that legal awareness is an essential foundation for community empowerment because individuals who understand their rights and available legal resources are better positioned to recognize legal risks, protect their interests, and seek justice. Accordingly, community legal aid education can contribute to developing a more informed, confident, and legally empowered community while supporting more inclusive and equitable access to justice.

For future community engagement activities, it is recommended that legal aid education be developed through continuous and community-based programs rather than limited to one-time socialization activities. Subsequent programs should involve legal aid institutions, universities, community organizations, and relevant public institutions to establish accessible legal consultation and referral mechanisms. Future activities should also incorporate structured pre- and post-assessments to measure changes in participants' legal knowledge, awareness, and confidence in accessing legal assistance more objectively. In addition, digital legal literacy materials, practical case simulations, and periodic legal consultation sessions could be introduced to strengthen the sustainability of the intervention. Such follow-up programs are expected to transform legal awareness into lasting community capacity, enabling people to identify legal problems earlier, seek appropriate assistance, and participate more actively in protecting their rights and pursuing fair access to justice.

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