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Collaborative Governance in Addressing Violence Against Women and Children: Evidence from Sintang, Indonesia

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Abstract

Violence against women and children (VAWC) remains a persistent barrier to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDGs 5, 10, and 16. Despite global and national commitments, non-metropolitan regions in the Global South continue to face structural constraints in protection governance. This study examines the implementation of collaborative governance in addressing VAWC in Sintang Regency, West Kalimantan, Indonesia, where recorded cases increased from 42 in 2022 to 65 in 2023, diverging from the broader downward trend at the provincial level. Guided by the collaborative governance framework of Emerson et al. (2012), which emphasises principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action, the study examines how collaborative governance is implemented and the extent to which it aligns with SDG Targets 5.2, 16.1, and 16.2. A qualitative descriptive design was employed, drawing on semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis involving twelve participants selected through purposive and snowball sampling across nine institutions, with appropriate ethical safeguards. The findings indicate that inter-institutional collaboration is functioning; however, shortages of psychologists and social workers, inadequate infrastructure, limited outreach, and geographical barriers constrain the effectiveness of protection efforts. The increase in recorded cases also appears to reflect, at least partly, improvements in reporting mechanisms. The study concludes that strengthening institutional capacity beyond procedural coordination is essential to developing more effective and sustainable governance for addressing VAWC, with broader implications for non-metropolitan settings in the Global South.

Keywords: *Institutional Capacity; Multi-Sector Coordination; Regional Governance*

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Introduction

Violence against women and children (VAWC) represents one of the most pervasive and consequential human rights challenges of the twenty-first century and directly undermines progress towards the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) explicitly address this issue through several targets. SDG Target 5.2 calls for the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls, including trafficking and sexual exploitation; SDG Target 16.1 calls for a significant reduction in all forms of violence and related death rates; and SDG Target 16.2 seeks to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence against children. In addition, SDG Target 10.2 emphasises social, economic, and political inclusion for all, recognising that marginalised populations, including victims of VAWC, may face compounded disadvantages requiring intersectoral policy responses (Gupta & Vegelin, 2016; Sachs, 2012). The persistence of VAWC in low- and middle-income countries reflects broader governance challenges that can impede SDG implementation, particularly in non-metropolitan and rural regions where institutional reach and service capacity may be limited (García-Moreno et al., 2015; Ellsberg et al., 2015; Hearn et al., 2016). Guedes et al. (2016) further document the intersecting nature of violence against women and children within households, reinforcing the need for integrated rather than fragmented governance responses.

Globally, approximately one in three women has experienced physical or sexual violence (Krug et al., 2002; Watts & Zimmerman, 2002), with intimate partners accounting for a substantial proportion of such violence (García-Moreno et al., 2006; Devries et al., 2013). Violence against children is similarly concerning, with studies indicating that more than one billion children aged 2–17 years experience abuse or neglect annually (Hillis et al., 2016; Gilbert et al., 2009; World Health Organization, 2024). The consequences extend well beyond immediate physical harm and include psychological trauma, adverse reproductive health outcomes, economic marginalisation, and the intergenerational transmission of violence (Ariani & Asih, 2022; Pallitto et al., 2013; Norman et al., 2012; Trevillion et al., 2012; Heise et al., 2019). In Indonesia, several legal and regulatory instruments have been established to address these concerns, including Law No. 39/1999 on Human Rights, Law No. 35/2014 on Child Protection, Law No. 23/2004 on the Elimination of Domestic Violence, and Ministerial Regulation No. 1/2020 on Integrated Service Standards for Women and Children Victims of Violence. Nevertheless, national SIMFONI-PPA data (Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak [KemenPPPA], 2024), recorded an increase in reported VAWC cases from 27,539 in 2022 to 29,883 in 2023, suggesting that legal frameworks need to be accompanied by sustained multi-sectoral implementation capacity (Ali et al., 2023; Htun & Weldon, 2012).

Collaborative governance has become an influential approach in public administration for addressing complex societal problems that extend beyond the mandate and capacity of any single agency (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003; Kettl, 2006; Ansell & Gash, 2008; Crosby & Bryson, 2010; Emerson et al., 2012). Emerson et al. (2012)

propose an integrative framework organised around three interrelated components: principled engagement, encompassing discovery, definition, deliberation, and determination; shared motivation, involving trust, mutual understanding, internal legitimacy, and shared commitment; and capacity for joint action, comprising procedural and institutional arrangements, leadership, knowledge, and resources. This framework has also been applied in studies of social protection governance (Cahyani et al., 2024; Rahmawati & Hertati, 2023). More recent scholarship further emphasises that the effectiveness of collaborative governance depends not only on formal institutional arrangements but also on how these arrangements are translated into coordinated implementation and effective service delivery (Bianchi et al., 2021).

This integrative perspective is situated within a broader body of collaborative governance scholarship. Bingham et al. (2005) demonstrate that emerging governance arrangements require robust mechanisms for stakeholder and citizen participation in public decision-making, whilst Innes and Booher (1999) show that collaborative planning can generate more durable outcomes when grounded in genuine consensus-building processes. Provan and Kenis (2008) further demonstrate that the effectiveness of network governance depends partly on the structural configuration of inter-organisational relationships, while Gaventa (2006) illustrates that meaningful participation requires attention to how power operates across different spaces and levels of decision-making. Building on this literature, and resonating with Purdy's (2012) critique of power dynamics in collaborative governance, this study distinguishes between "procedural collaboration", referring to the formalisation of coordination mechanisms such as memoranda of understanding and joint meetings, and "substantive protection", referring to the extent to which such arrangements contribute to meaningful protective responses for victims. This distinction, examined further in the Results and Discussion sections, is central to assessing whether Sintang's collaborative architecture translates formal coordination into effective protective capacity.

Sintang Regency provides a particularly relevant case because of the apparent divergence between institutional formalisation and reported protection outcomes. Whereas West Kalimantan Province recorded a slight overall decline in VAWC cases between 2022 and 2023, Sintang displayed the opposite pattern: recorded cases increased from 42 to 65, representing an increase of approximately 55%, while the number of female victims rose from 38 to 57 (Dinas Keluarga Berencana, Pemberdayaan Perempuan, dan Perlindungan Anak Kabupaten Sintang [Dinas KBP3A Sintang], 2024a, 2024b). This divergence constitutes the central empirical puzzle of the study. Rather than assuming that the increase reflects an absence of collaboration, the study examines whether structural and contextual conditions constrain the capacity of existing collaborative arrangements to generate effective protection.

The existing literature reveals three important gaps. First, many studies of collaborative governance in addressing VAWC in Indonesia have focused on urban settings such as Denpasar (Cahyani et al., 2024) and Surabaya (Rahmawati & Hertati, 2023), leaving non-metropolitan contexts comparatively underexplored despite their distinctive institutional and geographical constraints. Second, the predominant use of

Ansell and Gash's (2008) framework has tended to foreground procedural dimensions of collaboration, while capacity-related constraints may be particularly consequential in under-resourced settings. Third, relatively few studies explicitly examine the relationship between collaborative governance arrangements and the implementation of specific SDG targets. This study addresses these gaps by applying Emerson et al.'s (2012) integrative framework in a non-metropolitan Indonesian context, explicitly linking the empirical findings to relevant SDG targets and foregrounding the structural conditions that shape the effectiveness of collaborative governance.

Accordingly, this study is guided by three research questions: (1) How is collaborative governance implemented in addressing VAWC in Sintang Regency across the three dimensions of Emerson et al.'s (2012) framework—principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action? (2) To what extent does the collaborative governance structure in Sintang Regency align with the requirements of SDG Targets 5.2, 16.1, and 16.2? (3) What structural factors help explain the divergence between institutional formalisation and protective outcomes in a non-metropolitan context?

Research Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore how individuals and institutions interpret and respond to complex social problems (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2018). This approach was considered appropriate for examining collaborative governance in addressing violence against women and children (VAWC), as it enables detailed examination of participants' perspectives, experiences, and institutional dynamics that may not be fully captured through quantitative data alone. The analytical structure was guided by Emerson et al.'s (2012) integrative framework, comprising three dimensions: principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action.

The study was conducted in Sintang Regency, West Kalimantan, which was selected because of the increase in reported VAWC cases and its divergence from the broader provincial trend. Fieldwork was undertaken between August 2024 and May 2025. Participants were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling to include individuals with relevant knowledge, authority, or experience in VAWC governance. In total, 12 participants representing nine institutional categories were recruited, as presented in Table 1. The sample encompassed key actors involved in the local VAWC governance system, including government agencies, civil society organisations, legal practitioners, a psychological counselling specialist, and community representatives, thereby capturing perspectives from different components of the multi-sectoral collaborative network examined in this study.

Data were collected using three complementary methods: observations conducted at relevant offices and service units, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Documentary sources included written reports, official agreements, public records, and relevant media coverage. The interview guide was designed to explore participants' institutional roles, perceived challenges, experiences of inter-agency coordination, and

perspectives on VAWC trends. Annual victim data for Sintang Regency for 2017–2023, disaggregated by sex and type of violence, were obtained from the Sintang Office of Family Planning, Women's Empowerment, and Child Protection (Dinas KBP3A Sintang, 2024a). Statistical visualisations were generated using Python (Hunter, 2007). Secondary data were obtained from the Sistem Informasi Online Perlindungan Perempuan dan Anak (SIMFONI-PPA) / Online Information System for the Protection of Women and Children database (KemenPPPA, 2024), which provides disaggregated VAWC statistics at regency, provincial, and national levels and was the source of the 2024 age, education, and violence-type profiles of victims presented in Figures 3 and 4.

Table 1. Participant Profile
Source: Processed by the Authors (2025)

Institution / Organisation	Role / Position	No. of Participants
Unit Pelaksana Teknis Daerah Perlindungan Perempuan dan Anak (UPTD PPA) / Regional Technical Implementation Unit for the Protection of Women and Children	Head of Service Unit and Case Manager	1
Unit Perlindungan Perempuan dan Anak (Unit PPA), Kepolisian Resor Sintang / Women and Children Protection Unit, Sintang District Police	Investigative Officer and Victim Liaison	2
Kejaksaan Negeri Sintang / Sintang District Prosecutor's Office	Prosecutor specialising in VAWC cases	1
Pengadilan Negeri Sintang / Sintang District Court	Judge handling VAWC and child protection cases	1
Balai Pemasyarakatan Kelas II Sintang (Bapas Kelas II Sintang) / Sintang Class II Probation Office	Probation Officer and Juvenile Case Manager	3
Wahana Visi Indonesia (Non-Governmental Organisation)	Community Outreach and Child Protection Coordinator	1
Legal Practitioners	Private legal counsel for VAWC victims	1
Psychological Counselling Specialist	Clinical Psychologist and Trauma Counsellor	1
Community Leaders	Village Head and Community Representative	1

Ethical safeguards were observed throughout the research process. Before each interview, informed consent was obtained verbally and in writing, and participants were

informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage. Given the sensitivity of VAWC as a research topic, trauma-informed interviewing practices were adopted. Participants were not asked to disclose identifiable details of individual cases, interview sessions were conducted with attention to participants' comfort, and referral information was made available should distress arise. All data were anonymised and stored securely, and identifying information was removed from the transcripts before analysis. These procedures were designed to align with established ethical principles for qualitative research involving sensitive and potentially vulnerable subject matter (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Liamputtong, 2020).

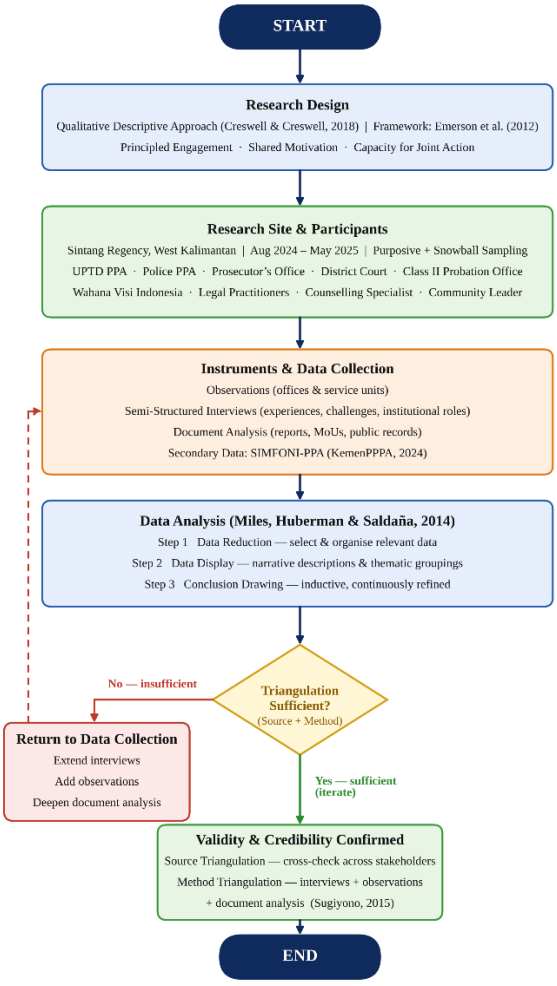


Figure 1. Research Methodology Flowchart of the Study
Source: Processed by the Authors (2025)

Data analysis followed the framework proposed by Miles et al. (2014), comprising three iterative processes: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting, organising, and focusing information relevant to collaborative governance practices; data display involved organising the material into narrative descriptions and thematic categories; and conclusion drawing involved developing and refining interpretations as additional evidence was examined. Interview transcripts were coded thematically using the three dimensions of Emerson et al.'s

(2012) framework as the principal analytical categories. Codes were developed both deductively from the framework and inductively from recurring patterns in the empirical data. The overall research process, from participant selection and data collection to analysis and validation, is summarised in Figure 1.

The adequacy of the sample was assessed iteratively during data collection. After the tenth interview, no substantially new thematic categories emerged, while the remaining interviews largely confirmed previously identified patterns. Credibility was strengthened through source triangulation by comparing information across institutional stakeholders and through method triangulation by cross-checking evidence from interviews, observations, and documentary sources (Sugiyono, 2015).

Results and Discussion

The results are organised according to the three analytical dimensions of Emerson et al.'s (2012) framework: (1) principled engagement, (2) shared motivation, and (3) capacity for joint action. Each dimension is examined using evidence from interviews, observations, and document analysis and is contextualised in relation to SDG Targets 5.2, 16.1, and 16.2. The broader analytical question is whether the formalisation of inter-agency collaboration is sufficient to generate meaningful protection for victims of violence against women and children (VAWC), or whether structural and contextual constraints limit collaborative effectiveness despite procedural coordination.

Table 2. VAWC Victims by Sex, 2017–2023
Source: Dinas KBP3A Sintang (2024a)

Year	Male	Female
2017	3	29
2018	6	28
2019	2	24
2020	3	43
2021	2	16
2022	4	38
2023	8	57

The findings suggest that procedural collaboration, when not accompanied by adequate institutional capacity, risks producing visible forms of coordination without consistently generating the intended protective outcomes. This tension may be understood as a form of "governance theatre", in which formal collaborative arrangements are present but their substantive effects remain constrained.

The recorded number of VAWC victims in Sintang fluctuated considerably between 2017 and 2023, as shown in Table 2. Female victims substantially outnumbered male victims throughout the seven-year period, and both categories reached their highest recorded levels in 2023.

As indicated in Table 2, total recorded victims increased from 42 in 2022 to 65 in 2023, representing an increase of approximately 55%. This increase contrasts with the broader provincial pattern and reinforces the need to examine the effectiveness and capacity of local collaborative governance arrangements. However, the rise may also partly reflect improvements in reporting and case detection rather than a straightforward increase in the underlying incidence of violence. Figure 2 further visualises these longitudinal patterns by presenting both the sex-disaggregated trends and the overall number of recorded victims.

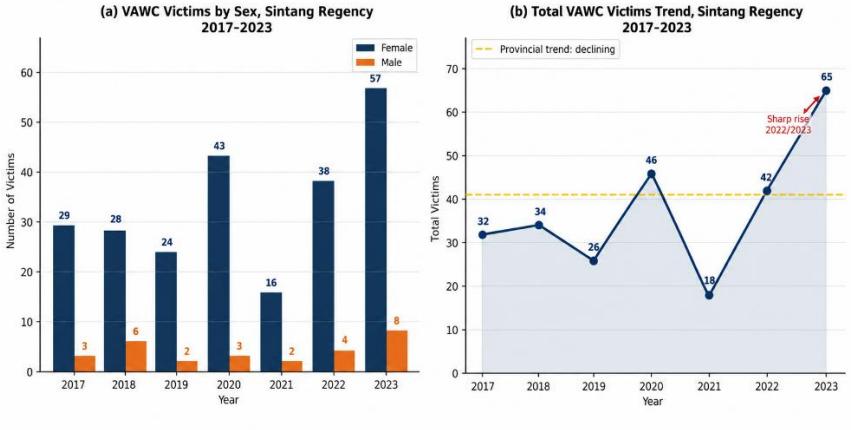


Figure 2. VAWC Trends by Sex and Total, 2017–2023
Source: Dinas KBP3A Sintang (2024a)

Figure 2 shows the sex-disaggregated pattern in panel (a) and the overall trajectory in panel (b). The sharp increase in 2023, when the total number of recorded victims reached a seven-year peak of 65, diverges from the broader provincial trend and constitutes the central empirical puzzle motivating this study. Rather than being interpreted solely as evidence of governance failure, this divergence may also reflect improved community awareness and reporting capacity facilitated by collaborative outreach activities. The distinction between an increase in reported cases and an increase in the underlying incidence of violence is therefore important when evaluating collaborative governance performance.

Before examining the three dimensions of collaborative governance, it is also necessary to consider the demographic and case characteristics of recorded victims. Figure 3 presents disaggregated data from the Sistem Informasi Online Perlindungan Perempuan dan Anak (SIMFONI-PPA) / Online Information System for the Protection of Women and Children, showing the age and educational profiles of recorded victims.

As shown in Figure 3, the 13–17-year age group constitutes the largest category of recorded victims (n = 66), followed by children aged 6–12 years (n = 29). Together, these groups account for more than three-quarters of the recorded victims represented in the

dataset. In terms of educational background, victims at the primary school level (Sekolah Dasar [SD] / primary school) constitute the largest category (n = 48), followed by those at the lower secondary level (Sekolah Lanjutan Tingkat Pertama [SLTP] / lower secondary school; n = 38).

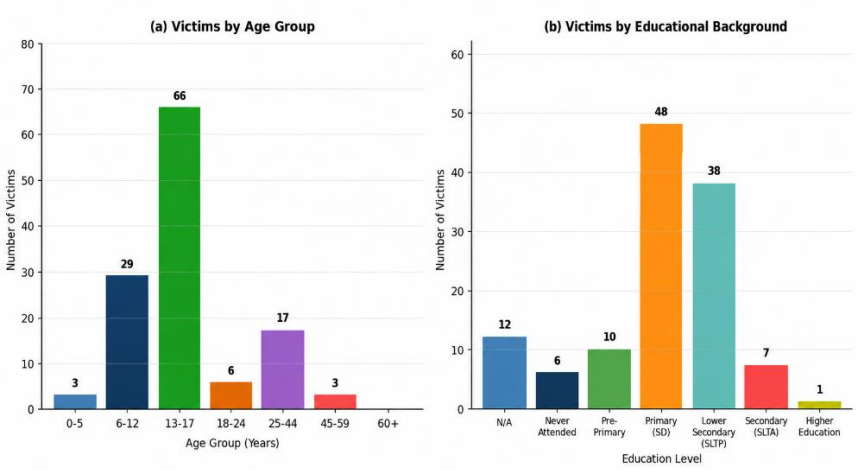


Figure 3. Victims by Age and Education, 2024
Source: KemenPPPA (2024)

The concentration of victims among children and adolescents is consistent with evidence documenting the substantial burden of gender-based violence among adolescents in low- and middle-income countries (Decker et al., 2015) and underscores the importance of school-based prevention programmes and strengthened child protection mechanisms in advancing SDG Target 16.2. The educational profile may also indicate that the accessibility and comprehensibility of formal protection pathways require particular attention among younger and less-educated populations, although educational attainment alone should not be interpreted as evidence of limited awareness.

The distribution of recorded cases by type of violence is presented in Figure 4, which also shows the number of violence types experienced by individual victims.

Figure 4 shows that sexual violence constitutes the largest category of recorded cases (n = 65), followed by physical violence (n = 23) and psychological violence (n = 14). The prominence of sexual violence has important service-delivery implications because such cases may require specialised psychological, legal, medical, and forensic support that remains limited in Sintang (Pujianto, 2022). These constraints are directly relevant to the capacity for joint action discussed below. Rather than demonstrating political indifference, the pattern raises broader questions about whether existing resource-allocation structures provide sufficient specialised capacity to respond effectively to the complexity of VAWC cases. Panel (b) further indicates that most recorded victims (n = 114) experienced one type of violence, while 10 experienced two or more types, suggesting compounded vulnerability among a smaller group of victims.

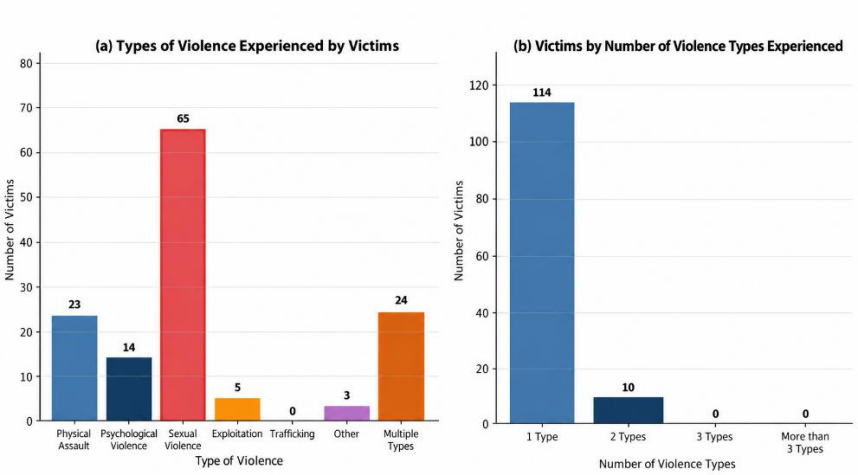


Figure 4. Victims by Type of Violence, 2024
Source: KemenPPPA (2024)

The longer-term distribution of reported cases by form of violence is summarised in Table 3, which shows that sexual violence remained the most frequently recorded category across the seven-year period.

Table 3. Violence Types, 2017–2023
Source: Dinas KBP3A Sintang (2024a)

Type of Violence	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Domestic Violence (Kekerasan dalam Rumah Tangga [KDRT])	9	4	7	10	3	17	16
Physical Violence	1	2	6	5	2	0	1
Psychological Violence	1	1	0	0	0	1	0
Sexual Violence	12	15	11	20	13	20	25
Trafficking	0	2	1	0	0	0	0
Neglect	1	0	0	3	0	1	5
Exploitation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Others	7	10	1	1	0	18	18

As shown in Table 3, sexual violence recorded the highest number of cases in each year, reaching 25 cases in 2023. Domestic violence (Kekerasan dalam Rumah Tangga [KDRT]) also remained a prominent category, although the annual figures fluctuated considerably. The increase in recorded neglect cases to five in 2023 warrants particular attention, especially because neglect may be comparatively difficult to identify and report. Taken together, these longitudinal patterns indicate the persistence of several forms of violence and reinforce the need to complement reactive case management with sustained preventive and protective interventions.

Principled Engagement: Inter-Agency Coordination and Structural Constraints

Principled engagement encompasses discovery, definition, deliberation, and determination—the processes through which collaborative partners identify shared problems and develop common responses (Emerson et al., 2012). In Sintang Regency, principled engagement is operationalised primarily through formal memoranda of understanding (MoUs) between the Unit Pelaksana Teknis Daerah Perlindungan Perempuan dan Anak (UPTD PPA) / Regional Technical Implementation Unit for the Protection of Women and Children and partner institutions, including the Police, District Prosecutor's Office, District Court, Balai Pemasyarakatan Kelas II Sintang (Bapas Kelas II Sintang) / Sintang Class II Probation Office, and Wahana Visi Indonesia. These arrangements establish institutional roles, referral procedures, and shared service commitments. Biannual evaluation meetings provide additional forums for deliberation and adaptation. These features broadly correspond with the procedural dimensions of collaborative governance described by Ansell and Gash (2008) and Bryson et al. (2006).

However, the interview findings reveal important limitations to substantive engagement. Some partner institutions participate in formal coordination mechanisms but experience operational constraints that limit their ability to fulfil collaborative commitments consistently. In particular, limited access to psychologists and counselling professionals can delay psychological assessment and disrupt continuity within the protection and referral process. As one UPTD PPA case manager explained: "When we refer a victim for counselling, sometimes there is no counsellor available for weeks. The victim has to come back, and often they don't." This finding is consistent with Vangen and Huxham's (2003) observation that asymmetries in resources among collaborative partners can weaken the quality and sustainability of joint engagement.

The increase in recorded cases between 2022 and 2023 also requires careful interpretation. Interview data suggest that the rise partly reflects increased community awareness associated with UPTD PPA outreach activities and community education programmes conducted by Wahana Visi Indonesia. Several community representatives indicated that greater awareness of available services and reduced reluctance to report violence had encouraged more victims or their families to seek assistance. This interpretation is consistent with evidence that social silence, stigma, and cultural inhibition contribute to the under-reporting of VAWC (Gracia, 2004). From this perspective, increased reporting may represent a partial achievement of principled engagement because collaborative outreach appears to have strengthened case detection even while prevention and response capacity remain constrained. Attributing the increase solely to governance failure would therefore overlook the distinction between the incidence of violence and its visibility within the formal reporting system. The Sintang case is better interpreted as one in which improvements in awareness and reporting coexist with continuing limitations in substantive service capacity.

In relation to SDG Targets 16.1 and 16.2, the principled engagement dimension reveals an important implementation tension. Formal coordination mechanisms exist, yet the institutions responsible for operationalising these arrangements do not always possess sufficient human and material resources to deliver services consistently. As a result, institutional commitment may be visible at the procedural level while remaining

uneven in practice, particularly when referral systems, counselling services, and follow-up mechanisms depend on limited personnel and shared resources. This creates a gap between policy commitments and implementation capacity, weakening the ability of collaborative arrangements to provide timely, continuous, and accessible protection for victims. The problem is therefore not simply the absence of coordination, but the limited capacity of participating institutions to convert agreed procedures into reliable service delivery. Such conditions may undermine progress towards reducing violence, strengthening protection mechanisms, and ensuring that vulnerable groups can access effective support in accordance with SDG Targets 16.1 and 16.2. This pattern is also documented in the broader literature on violence prevention and governance in resource-constrained settings, where formal policy commitments frequently exceed the institutional capacity available for implementation (Htun & Weldon, 2012; Colombini et al., 2008).

Shared Motivation: Trust, Legitimacy, and Commitment

Shared motivation in Emerson et al.'s (2012) framework encompasses trust, mutual understanding, internal legitimacy, and shared commitment. The findings indicate that trust among core institutional actors—particularly UPTD PPA, the Police Women and Children Protection Unit, and Wahana Visi Indonesia—is relatively well established and has developed through repeated case coordination and joint activities. This finding is consistent with Vangen and Huxham's (2003) argument that sustained interaction and successful completion of shared tasks can gradually strengthen inter-organisational trust. Commitment to victim protection was also consistently expressed across the 12 participant interviews, indicating broad normative agreement on the importance of collaborative VAWC governance.

Nevertheless, the depth and practical expression of shared motivation vary across institutional actors. While frontline service providers demonstrated strong commitment to collaborative action, translating this commitment into specialised resource provision at higher administrative levels remains more complex. Interview findings indicate that funding for VAWC-related services is available and operational but is embedded within broader institutional and public-service allocations rather than consistently structured as an exclusively dedicated VAWC budget. Consequently, specialised interventions such as clinical psychological services, legal assistance, and trauma counselling operate within a shared resource environment.

Partner institutions have responded to these limitations by developing informal coordination mechanisms to supplement formal service capacity. Such adaptations demonstrate collaborative commitment and are consistent with Emerson et al.'s (2012) concept of joint action. At the same time, reliance on informal arrangements creates potential vulnerabilities because continuity may depend partly on individual relationships and discretionary cooperation rather than fully institutionalised mechanisms. This finding resonates with Fung's (2006) argument that meaningful participation in governance depends not only on procedural inclusion but also on the availability of substantive and sustained resources.

Differences in institutional resources and authority also resemble what Scott and Thomas (2017) describe as disadvantages associated with actors' positions within governance networks. Resource-constrained organisations may carry substantial service responsibilities without corresponding authority over broader resource allocation. From an SDG perspective, this asymmetry can constrain progress towards SDG Target 5.2 because uneven institutional capacity affects the accessibility and continuity of protection services. Such constraints may be particularly significant for geographically isolated and economically marginalised populations, thereby intersecting with the inclusion concerns reflected in SDG 10.

Capacity for Joint Action: Human Resources, Infrastructure, and Geographical Access

Capacity for joint action—encompassing procedural arrangements, leadership, knowledge, and resources (Emerson et al., 2012; Crosby & Bryson, 2010)—emerges as the most constrained dimension of collaborative governance in Sintang Regency. The interview findings converge around three principal limitations: shortages of specialised human resources, inadequate infrastructure, and geographical barriers to service access. This pattern is consistent with a broader understanding of governance capacity, in which effective coordination depends on the availability of adequate resources, collective action, institutional learning, and resilience to translate collaborative arrangements into substantive service outcomes (Van Popering-Verkerk et al., 2022).

Human resource constraints are particularly evident in the availability of clinical psychologists, social workers, legal aid specialists, and supporting personnel across partner institutions. These shortages affect different stages of the protection process. From the victim-service perspective, as identified in the principled engagement analysis, limited counselling availability can delay psychological support and disrupt continuity of care. Constraints are also evident in rehabilitation and offender management. The Balai Pemasyarakatan Kelas II Sintang (Bapas Kelas II Sintang) / Sintang Class II Probation Office does not have a dedicated psychologist for offender assessment and rehabilitation. One Bapas probation officer explained: "We handle juvenile offenders and adult perpetrators who need psychological assessment to support rehabilitation and prevent re-offending, but we have no psychologist on staff. Every case that requires psychological evaluation must be referred externally, and that process often takes weeks—or does not happen at all." The absence of timely psychological assessment may therefore constrain rehabilitation planning and the system's capacity to address risks associated with repeated offending.

The shortage of psychologists is especially significant given that sexual violence represents the most frequently recorded form of VAWC in Sintang, as shown in Figure 4 and Table 3. Such violence can produce substantial psychological and social consequences requiring specialised intervention (Trevillion et al., 2012; Norman et al., 2012; Fulu et al., 2013). Limited access to timely psychological support may compromise recovery and potentially discourage continued engagement with formal services. This finding is consistent with the broader literature documenting gaps in VAWC services in resource-constrained settings (Colombini et al., 2008; García-Moreno et al., 2015).

Understanding these capacity constraints requires attention to the resource architecture within which VAWC services operate. Interview evidence indicates that budgetary provision for VAWC-related services exists and is utilised, but it forms part of broader institutional allocations rather than a fully ring-fenced VAWC-specific funding structure. VAWC services therefore compete within a shared resource environment encompassing multiple public-service responsibilities. This arrangement does not necessarily indicate a lack of political commitment; however, its practical effect may be to limit the resources available for specialised services such as clinical psychology, legal aid, and trauma counselling. The theoretical implication is that collaborative commitment at the operational level may be insufficient when broader resource-allocation structures constrain the material capacity required for joint action (Andrews et al., 2017; Zia ud din et al., 2023). Evidence from service-based interventions in low- and middle-income countries similarly indicates that sustainable responses to violence require system-level capacity strengthening rather than isolated programmes or referral mechanisms alone (Lewis et al., 2022).

Infrastructure limitations constitute a second important barrier. Interview and observational evidence indicates that Sintang lacks some locally accessible facilities required for specialised juvenile justice and child protection responses. Where appropriate local facilities are unavailable, children or juvenile offenders requiring specialised residential, rehabilitation, or justice-related services may need to be referred outside the regency. Such arrangements increase logistical burdens and can separate individuals from family and community support networks. These limitations raise concerns regarding the accessibility and child sensitivity of local protection and justice arrangements in relation to the objectives of SDG 16.2.

Geographical barriers further contribute to unequal access to protection services across the regency. Remote communities, including areas reached through river transport or poorly developed road networks, face longer response times for referrals and follow-up services. UPTD PPA has adopted digital communication and remote consultation mechanisms to address some of these constraints, demonstrating institutional adaptability. These responses are consistent with the adaptive dimension of collaborative governance described by Emerson et al. (2012). Low-cost digital tools, including WhatsApp-based referral communication and remote consultations, may help reduce some last-mile access barriers in geographically dispersed regions. However, such measures remain supplementary and cannot substitute for adequate professional staffing, physical infrastructure, and sustained institutional investment.

Geographical inequality also intersects with educational vulnerability and gender norms. Connell (2005) demonstrates how hegemonic forms of masculinity can contribute to the normalisation of gender inequality and violence, while Nilan et al. (2014) document how masculine norms in the Indonesian context can shape attitudes towards violence against women. As shown in Figure 3, a substantial proportion of recorded victims are of school age and have primary or lower secondary educational backgrounds. These characteristics highlight the importance of ensuring that reporting procedures, prevention programmes, and protection services are accessible and understandable to

children and young people across different educational and geographical settings. This pattern is consistent with the broader "last-mile" governance challenge identified in Global South contexts, where institutional services may have particular difficulty reaching geographically and socially marginalised populations (Htun & Weldon, 2012; Jewkes et al., 2015).

Taken together, the three capacity constraints—specialised human resources, infrastructure, and geographical accessibility—help explain why a procedurally functioning collaborative system may still struggle to produce consistently effective protection. The findings therefore suggest that, when Emerson et al.'s (2012) framework is applied to resource-constrained non-metropolitan settings, greater analytical attention should be given to baseline institutional capacity as an enabling condition for collaborative effectiveness (Emerson, 2018). Without sufficient capacity, formal collaborative arrangements may remain procedurally functional while their substantive effects are limited by material and organisational constraints.

Governance Formalisation versus Substantive Protection: Theoretical Implications

The central theoretical question arising from the findings is whether formal collaborative mechanisms—such as MoUs, referral protocols, and inter-agency meetings—are sufficient to generate substantive protection outcomes for VAWC victims. Evidence from Sintang suggests that formal coordination alone is insufficient. Although collaborative arrangements are operational, interview, observational, and documentary evidence indicates continuing constraints in service accessibility, specialised support, infrastructure, and geographical coverage. This finding contributes to an established critique within the collaborative governance literature that procedural compliance may coexist with substantial performance limitations (Purdy, 2012; Koontz & Thomas, 2006; Scott & Thomas, 2017).

The notion of "governance theatre" provides one possible analytical interpretation of this tension. In Sintang, the visible institutional architecture of collaboration—including formal agreements, referral arrangements, and coordination meetings—coexists with persistent constraints in the capacity required to translate these arrangements into consistent protective services. This dynamic resembles the organisational sociology concept of "decoupling" developed by Meyer and Rowan (1977), whereby formal organisational structures may become partially disconnected from day-to-day operational practices. The Sintang case therefore suggests that collaborative governance models developed primarily in institutionally well-resourced settings may require contextual adaptation when applied in resource-constrained non-metropolitan environments. Formal institutional design alone cannot substitute for the human, financial, infrastructural, and geographical capacities required for effective implementation.

From an SDG perspective, the findings indicate that progress towards Targets 5.2, 16.1, and 16.2 remains constrained by a governance-implementation gap that has implications for both rights protection and social equity. Sintang's collaborative arrangements are also relevant to SDG Target 17.17, which encourages effective

partnerships among public institutions, the private sector, and civil society. However, the findings demonstrate that the existence of partnership structures does not in itself guarantee substantive outcomes. The gap between global SDG ambitions and local implementation capacity observed in Sintang is consistent with challenges identified in other Global South governance settings (Gupta & Vegelin, 2016; Sachs, 2012; Stark & Landis, 2016; Walby et al., 2014). The Sintang case therefore offers a broader comparative insight: sustainable VAWC governance requires collaboration to be supported by trained human resources, adequate infrastructure, accessible service delivery, and sustained community engagement (Rodliyah & Sariroh, 2025; Sodah, 2023; Andrews et al., 2017).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that collaborative governance in Sintang Regency operates through formally established inter-agency arrangements but remains constrained in its capacity to address violence against women and children (VAWC) effectively. The apparent paradox of increasing reported cases despite established collaborative structures can be understood through two related findings. First, formal mechanisms of coordination do not necessarily provide the human, infrastructural, and organisational resources required for effective protection. Second, the increase in reported cases partly reflects improvements in awareness and reporting mechanisms, representing a potential achievement of collaborative engagement rather than straightforward evidence of governance failure. Recognising this distinction is important for avoiding overly deterministic interpretations of rising case numbers.

The study further shows that collaborative effectiveness depends not only on institutional architecture but also on resource availability, geographical accessibility, and the broader social context in which protection services operate. The coexistence of formal coordination mechanisms with persistent limitations in substantive service capacity indicates that procedural collaboration alone is insufficient to produce consistent protective outcomes. In resource-constrained non-metropolitan settings, baseline institutional capacity therefore constitutes an important enabling condition for translating collaborative arrangements into effective protection. This finding reinforces the need to assess collaborative governance not only through the existence of formal partnerships and coordination mechanisms, but also through the extent to which those arrangements generate accessible, continuous, and responsive services for affected populations.

The findings also have implications for progress towards SDG Targets 5.2, 16.1, and 16.2. Strengthening VAWC governance in non-metropolitan regions requires more than inter-institutional coordination. Policy priorities include expanding the availability of psychologists, social workers, and other specialised personnel; strengthening child-appropriate justice and protection facilities; extending digitally enabled services to reduce geographical barriers; and sustaining community-based initiatives that address stigma and victim-blaming norms. National and subnational governments should

therefore complement collaborative structures with sustained investment in frontline capacities that enable protection systems to function effectively and equitably. Such investment is particularly important in geographically dispersed areas, where institutional collaboration must be translated into services that remain accessible to vulnerable populations beyond administrative centres.

These findings should nevertheless be interpreted in light of several limitations. As a qualitative single-case study conducted in one non-metropolitan regency, the findings are not statistically generalisable, although they may offer transferable insights for comparable settings. The study involved 12 participants across nine stakeholder categories, but several categories were represented by only one participant, limiting the depth of institution-specific perspectives. In addition, the study did not directly incorporate the perspectives of victims or survivors, whose experiences could provide a more comprehensive understanding of service accessibility and protection outcomes. The analysis also relied primarily on interview accounts, supported by observations and documentary evidence, rather than extended direct observation of inter-agency interactions. Finally, the quantitative contextualisation was based on officially reported cases and should therefore not be interpreted as representing the full incidence or prevalence of VAWC.

Future research could address these limitations through longitudinal, comparative, and participatory designs. Longitudinal studies could examine whether collaborative agreements, community education initiatives, and service adaptations lead to sustained improvements in governance performance and protection outcomes. Comparative studies across non-metropolitan regencies could identify the institutional and contextual conditions associated with variation in collaborative effectiveness. Mixed-methods research could further strengthen understanding of the relationship between collaborative arrangements, reporting patterns, service accessibility, and protection outcomes. Future studies should also incorporate victim and survivor perspectives to provide a more comprehensive assessment of how collaborative governance is experienced by those whom the protection system is intended to serve.

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