



## Accessibility of Worship in Mosques for People with Disabilities

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### Abstract

People with disabilities often face challenges in fulfilling their rights, including the right to worship in mosques. This research aims to investigate the worship accessibility for people with disabilities in the Tana Luwu area and the role of religious mosque authorities in supporting the fulfillment of the religious rights of people with disabilities in Tana Luwu. This is qualitative research with case study approach, where the researcher interviewed five individuals with disabilities and three mosque authorities. Additionally, the researcher observed several mosques and collected relevant documentation. The research results show that people with disabilities in Tana Luwu face difficulties in accessing mosques in the area due to the lack of disability-friendly facilities. However, the absence of disability-friendly mosque facilities can be overcome with positive attention from mosque authorities and Jemaah or congregants. In general, physical barriers do not pose a significant obstacle for people with disabilities to worship because of the social support they receive from the surrounding community. Discussions about the religious rights of people with disabilities should be expanded, and real improvements in mosques are needed to make them inclusive places of worship.

**Keywords: Accessibility; Worship; Religious Inclusion; Mosque; People with Disabilities**

### Introduction

Disability is a term that refers to the condition of a person who has limited body structure, which causes inhibition of his activities and participation in society (Gutterman, 2023). These limitations are created from various meanings, both medically, environmentally, and personal conditions (Hastuti, Dewi, Pramana and Sadaly, 2020). The term person with a disability is not the only term used in Indonesia, there are also other terms such as disabled, special needs, people with disabilities, disabled, or more specifically the terms deaf, blind, people with mental disorders, and other terms that come from regional languages in Indonesia (Nursyamsi, Ramadhan, Palani and Yazid, 2021). However, if referring to the applicable rules, then the appropriate term used is Persons with Disabilities. People with disabilities are synonymous with excluded conditions Hastuti et al., (2020) and have not fully received the expected welfare (Nursyamsi et al., 2021).

Discrimination from the community has worsened their condition. In fact, this group of people with disabilities is often considered by the community as a carrier of bad luck, cursed, and disaster (Yesterday, 2021). This then continues also in their access to the social sphere Amnesty (2021), economics (Abriansyah, Apsari & Mulyana, 2019), education Sholeh (2015), technology Mulyani and Ade, (2019), even religion (Tarigan, 2021). They are often excluded in fulfilling their rights because of the limitations they have. The rights of groups of persons with disabilities are regulated in Law Number 8 of 2016 concerning Persons with Disabilities, including the right to religion. The existence of this legal basis is expected to ensure the welfare and respect of people with disabilities in Indonesia (Nursyamsi et al., 2021).

This group of people with disabilities, in accordance with the concept of SDGs, strives to prosper in three aspects (Nursyamsi et al., 2021), namely well-being, access to education and employment, and access to technology and financial inclusion. This aspect of well-being also includes aspects of worship for people with disabilities. This then makes the term disability no longer seen as a problematic individual, but it is the surrounding environment that is problematic about their disability condition and does not provide access and inclusive conditions for them (Santoso & Apsari, 2017). There is no major religion in the world that justifies discrimination against people with disabilities (Aydoğdu, 2019; Chen, Brown & Kotbungkair, 2015; Mubarok, 2018).

Especially Islam, Islamic teachings teach its adherents that this group of people with disabilities is part of society and should not be discriminated against and unjust. (Bengtsson, 2018). They must be provided with facilities and accessibility (Santoso and Apsari, 2017), including access to worship in houses of worship. Currently, the number of people with disabilities in Indonesia reaches 22.97 million people or around 8.5% of the total population of Indonesia (Supanji, 2023). South Sulawesi Province is recorded as the region with the highest number of people with disabilities, reaching 638,566 people or around 2.78%. The high number of people with disabilities is not balanced by the accessibility of houses of worship. From several research results, it was revealed that the number of disability-friendly mosques in Indonesia is still very low (Fatuheen, 2014; Ramadan, 2023; Yasin, 2021).

As a result, it is difficult for people with disabilities to worship in mosques due to the lack of adequate access for them. Based on the results of the initial interview with the Head of the Social Rehabilitation Section at the Social Rehabilitation Center for Persons with Physical Disabilities (BRSPDF) Wirajaya Makassar, Luwu Regency, North Luwu Regency, and Palopo City are the areas in South Sulawesi that send the most people with disabilities to BRSPDF Wirajaya Makassar. This indicates that people with disabilities from these three regions have the awareness and willingness to develop themselves and actively participate in society, including worship. This willingness and awareness to worship is actually difficult for them to implement, because the condition of the house of worship, in this case the mosque, is not friendly to them.

Initial observations show that the Grand Mosque and also the Great Mosque, which are representatives of all mosques in the area, have not provided access for people with disabilities. Places for ablution, bathrooms, and also special paths for people with disabilities are not available at all. This condition resulted in a lack of people with disabilities worshipping at the mosque. Research by Maftuhin (2014) revealed that the lack of disability-friendly mosques is caused by the lack of attention from the community regarding accessible congregations. People with disabilities are considered obligatory to adjust to the mosque building. In contrast to the United States, Indonesia tends to adhere to "architectural" uniformity, making mosque designs that are difficult to reach for groups with disabilities. The existence of this architectural uniformity is due to the fiqh of disability which has been vague (Hadi, 2017). Then, research by Yasin (2021) also revealed that mosques in Malang City are not yet friendly to disabilities.

Although there have been local regulations that require facilities that are friendly to people with disabilities, including mosques, in fact it has not been realized. This condition is caused by less than optimal socialization of regulations. Apart from the socialization of the rules, another factor that affects the accessibility of mosques for people with disabilities is the role of religious elites. Ramadan (2023) revealed that several houses of worship, including mosques and churches, in South Kalimantan already provide disability-friendly access. This is due to the role of mosque administrators and church administrators who are beginning to pay attention to this condition. Departing

from this reality, research on the accessibility of worship for people with disabilities is interesting to be conducted. There has been a lot of research on house of worship facilities for people with disabilities, but there has not been much research on the accessibility of worship in mosques for people with disabilities and the views of mosque administrators in providing friendly worship facilities for people with disabilities, especially in the Tana Luwu area.

## **Method**

This research is a qualitative research, which is sourced from speech or writing and behavior that can be observed in depth from individuals or groups of people. In this study, the main instrument is the researcher himself. The approach used is a case study, where the researcher seeks to interpret the values, behaviors, and beliefs of a special community group, in this case people with disabilities and religious elites regarding people with disabilities (Evaluation, 2004). The research, which was carried out during January-August 2023, interviewed five people with disabilities and three mosque administrators in Luwu Regency, North Luwu Regency, and Palopo City. In addition to the interviews, the researcher also collected data through observation in three mosques and also collected relevant documentation. The collected data is then analyzed inductively (Spradley, 2006).

## **Results and Discussion**

The findings in this study are divided into two parts according to the formulation of the problem, namely a description of mosque accessibility for people with disabilities and the views of mosque administrators regarding this service and accessibility.

### **1. Mosque Accessibility for People with Disabilities**

For people with disabilities, access can be interpreted as the right to participate actively without any physical or non-physical obstacles (Jaeger and Bowman, 2005). The concept of access means that it can include the affordability of people with disabilities to enter the mosque without obstacles and also social support from people around them so that people with disabilities can participate in the mosque. In Indonesia, the rules regarding access to houses of worship for people with disabilities are regulated in Law Number 8 of 2016 concerning Persons with Disabilities. In the regulation, it is not expressly written about the criteria for houses of worship that are said to be accessible for people with disabilities. As a result, the fulfillment of access to worship cannot be carried out optimally. Of the three research locations, there is one area that does not have a regional regulation regulating people with disabilities, namely luwu regency.

While the other two locations have derivative rules from the previous rules. First, North Luwu Regency Regional Regulation number 8 of 2021 concerning the Protection and Services of Persons with Disabilities, where in this regulation it is also not expressly written about the requirements for a house of worship building that is accessible to people with disabilities. Second, Palopo City Regional Regulation number 10 of 2021 concerning the Protection and Services of Persons with Disabilities, Article 46 paragraph 2 stipulates that persons with disabilities have the right to be given facilities to facilitate entry and exit, getting on and off houses of worship and in paragraph 3 where persons with disabilities have the right to a holy book that is in accordance with their respective degrees of disability. In this regulation, there has begun to be clarity regarding indicators of facilities that are friendly to people with disabilities. However, it is also not expressly written about the type or form of facilities that must exist in the mosque to support the worship of people with disabilities.

The infirmity of this rule eventually had an impact on the facilities in the mosque at the research site. Of the three mosques used as the location of the study, the researcher did not find a single facility that was friendly to people with disabilities. Of the three mosques that are the object of the research, none of the facilities are friendly to people with disabilities. This can be seen in the high physical position of the three mosques. To enter the three mosques, the only access to enter the mosque is through a staircase that has high steps and is not accessible to wheelchairs (Figure 1). One of the informants, Bilal, with a disability condition that makes his body dwarfed, revealed that when he wanted to enter the mosque, he needed the help of others to climb the stairs. Not only Bilal, another informant, namely Ma'ruf, with a blind disability, also had difficulties when he wanted to go through the stairs. The condition of the high stairs and not equipped with stair railings makes it difficult for him to enter the mosque.



Figure 1. Access To the Entrance Of The Mosque With Stairs  
(Source: Researcher Documentation)

The condition of the high staircase in the mosque for the size of the mosque was also found in the Bashiti & Uhim study (2016) Where high stairs are not suitable for use in public facilities due to the existence of community groups such as people with disabilities, the elderly, and children who will certainly have difficulty accessing them. Entering the mosque, the researcher did not find an assistive chair that could be used by people with disabilities to pray, recite, or listen to Friday sermons and lectures (Figure 2). The Qur'an in the three mosques is also not intended for people with visual disabilities, because there is no braille Qur'an stored in the mosque. People with deaf disabilities also find it difficult to find out the information conveyed by the speaker or Friday khatib because there is no person who serves as a signal guide.

A research informant, Madi, revealed that the only way for him to understand the sentences delivered by the Friday speaker or khatib is to pay attention to the lip movements of the Friday speaker or khatib. Reading lip movements is one of the main strategies that is often carried out by people with deaf disabilities in order to understand what others are talking about (Mailinda & Azeharie, 2019). To be able to see the lip movements of the preacher or Friday khatib clearly, he must sit in the front row/shaf. This condition is not a problem for other pilgrims, on the contrary, pilgrims always provide an empty place in the front row that is specifically for them.



Figure 2. Conditions Inside the Mosque  
(Source: Researcher Documentation)

Inside the mosque, there are also no signs installed to distinguish the rows of worshippers with disabilities and signs that show the location of the restroom or ablution place. This condition will make it difficult for pilgrims, especially for the wearer. According to Isa et al., (2016), this difficulty will have an impact especially on users with visual or hearing impairments when they are traveling alone. Poor sign design has also been proven in previous studies Abd Samad, Abdul Rahim and Said (2019); Asiah Abdul Rahim (2014); Bashiti and Rahim (2016) in public buildings.

Restrooms and places for ablution are also designed to be unfriendly to people with disabilities (Figure 3). Access to the restroom and ablution place can only be passed by pedestrians due to the condition of the stepped floor. The washrooms provided are also very narrow and there are no special facilities for wheelchair users. This condition makes people with disabilities never perform ablution in the mosque, and immediately go home when they want to urinate. There are also no chairs available at that location that can help those who have difficulty bending during ablution. Purifying oneself before worship through ablution is one of the conditions for accepting prayer. Therefore, providing access to purification is one part of virtue in Islam (Rahim, 2014).



Figure 3. Ablution Place  
(Source: Researcher Documentation)

The physical facilities in the mosques in the three research locations, namely Luwu Regency, North Luwu Regency, and Palopo City, are not yet friendly to people with disabilities (Table 1). The concept of accessibility of worship to be applied to houses of worship is still very lacking. It is not only found in Indonesia, but also in Malaysia Shobri, Zakaria & Salleh (2018) and Riyadh; Tariah, Ghasham, Alolayan, Alahmadi &

Alqarni (2018), where the number of disability-friendly mosques is still very small. This is because of the concept of universal architecture in designing mosques (Hastuti et al., 2020). The architectural beauty of the mosque is the top priority in building the mosque, so that worship facilities for people with disabilities are not a priority when designing a mosque (Shobri et al., 2018).

An accessible house of worship means a house of worship that is accessible to everyone, at least has architecture, communication, and an inclusive community attitude to various diverse human conditions (Maftuhin, 2016).

Table 1. Condition of Mosque Facilities

Mosque Facilities	Mosques in Palopo	Mosques in North Luwu	Mosques in Luwu
Ladder	x	x	x
Signs	x	x	x
Chair	x	x	x
Ablution Place	x	x	x
Washroom/Bathroom	x	x	x

Source: Data analysis, (2023)

Darcy (1998) explained that accessibility has various forms, depending on the category of disability that the individual has. There are four dimensions of access in the categorization of disability. First, physical access, involves individuals with physical disabilities who require the use of a wheelchair or walker and require the provision of, for example, handrails, elevators, and tables that can be raised and lowered. Second, sensory access, involves individuals with hearing or vision impairments who require the provision of, for example, instructions, signs and labels, hearing aids, hearing systems, and audio instructions for elevators and lights to facilitate them. Third, communication access, involves individuals who have difficulties with written words, vision, speech, and language problems. Fourth, cognitive access, involves individuals who experience difficulties in awareness, perception, reasoning, and judgment. Of the three mosques that are the location of the study, there is not a single dimension of worship accessibility for people with disabilities. As a result, worship services for people with disabilities run tentatively and are often ignored (Tarigan, 2021). The absence of accessibility is also influenced by the mosque administrator's view of people with disabilities.

## 2. Views of Mosque Management on the Provision of Facilities for Persons with Disabilities

In the context of a society that is increasingly aware of social inclusion, religion must be an inclusive and accessible forum for all individuals, including people with disabilities. One of the parties that is considered to play an important role in the provision of disability-friendly facilities is the mosque management as a religious elite. Disability-friendly mosques need to be realized in order to achieve inclusive conditions in religion. Regional regulations in Palopo City and North Luwu Regency which were passed in 2021 were not necessarily followed by the provision of disability-friendly mosque facilities. Building a worship facility that is friendly to people with disabilities is not considered a simple thing. A careful planning concept is needed from various parties, one of which is the provision of a budget. Budget issues are a classic obstacle to any appropriate empowerment efforts for people with disabilities (Amnesty, 2021).

This is as revealed by the three mosque administrators interviewed, where they consider that the local government must provide funds to renovate the mosque and provide disability-friendly worship facilities. In addition to budget issues, other issues that need to be considered are information and data regarding the exact number of people

with disabilities in an area, including the location of the study. The absence of real and definite data from the local office makes it difficult for mosque administrators when they are required to build disability-friendly facilities. Similar things were also revealed in Ndauman's research (2020), where the data of people with disabilities has been not synchronized between agencies, so that many people with disabilities are not accommodated in fulfilling their rights. The problem of data collection is the main challenge in efforts to fulfill the rights of persons with disabilities so that their rights are often ignored (Andriani, 2017; Widjaja, Wijayanti & Yulistyaputri, 2020).

The absence of real data is due to negative stigma by the community, so that families with disabilities choose to lock their family members at home and do not allow them to interact with the surrounding environment and do not even report it in population data (Hastuti et al., 2020; Sharma, 2014). The approach to change people's mindset regarding people with disabilities has not been done much so that negative stigma still continues to develop in society, even in the families of people with disabilities themselves (Ndauman, 2020). Efforts to fulfill the rights of persons with disabilities through regional regulations are still running separately, there has been no connection, coordination, and participation from all stakeholders (Ndauman, 2020). The rights of persons with disabilities are seen narrowly rather than as something that must be fulfilled as a shared responsibility. The complexity of providing disability-friendly mosque facilities makes mosque administrators choose to socially help people with disabilities who want to worship in mosques. The mosque administrators in the three mosques always invite worshippers to help people with disabilities who have difficulty entering the mosque. There are even mosque administrators and mosque worshippers who take turns escorting and picking up worshippers with disabilities at their homes. The views and attitudes of mosque administrators like this are in accordance with the understanding of a rights-based approach where people with disabilities have the right to appear on the surface of society as one of the full parts of society that have intact and equal rights (Anshari, 2020).

People with disabilities have the right to live independently, make choices, and actively participate in society (Harahap & Bustanuddin, 2015). Research conducted by Woodall (2016) revealed that the management of houses of worship has an important role in making worshippers aware so that they are willing to accept and welcome groups of people with disabilities. The acceptance of the congregation shown through an attitude of acceptance, sourced from a sincere heart is the most important thing in realizing the inclusiveness of worship (Tarigan, 2021). In terms of adaptation, these mosques have not adapted adequately to meet the physical needs of people with disabilities. Adaptation in this context requires mosques to make infrastructure adjustments, such as providing easy access for wheelchair users, appropriate ablution facilities, and signs that help with navigation. Nevertheless, the positive attitude and concern of the mosque management shows that there is awareness and intention to achieve this goal of inclusion.

A positive attitude and support from mosque administrators are important elements in creating better social integration. To fully create inclusion in worship, it is important for mosque administrators to look beyond the physical presence of people with disabilities. Physical presence is only the beginning of worship inclusion, and then develops into attention, acceptance, care, support, recognition, familiarity, needs, and finally love (Carter, Boehm, Annandale & Taylor, 2016). Efforts to achieve full inclusion have been made by the mosque management where the mosque management in North Luwu has begun to ensure that in the mosque renovation plan, it will pay attention to the needs of worshippers with disabilities. The positive attitude and support shown by the mosque management helps to maintain and strengthen the values of inclusion and equality in the community.

Positive social support from mosque worshippers regarding people with disabilities cannot be separated from the theological view of people with disabilities (Hadi, 2017). The disabled group is a people created by God with extraordinary beauty according to the Image of God/Imago Dei (Miraji, 2021). Islam is a perfect religion that does not distinguish humans from their physicality. Every Muslim has the right to carry out his worship without any disturbances. It can be concluded that the views of religious leaders regarding services and accessibility for people with disabilities are all positive and support the establishment of disability-friendly houses of worship. Efforts to empower people with disabilities need to start from the local elite, in this case mosque administrators (Nwokorie and Devlieger, 2019), because religious opinions from them tend to be more easily accepted by the public (Amin, 2019). All texts or teachings of each religion reject discriminatory acts and require equal treatment, including the provision of houses of worship to be well designed and managed for worshippers with disabilities.

## Conclusion

Mosques in Luwu Regency, North Luwu Regency, and Palopo City cannot be considered to meet the criteria as disability-friendly mosques or known as Accessible Congregations. The physical infrastructure of these three mosques is not yet fully accessible for people with disabilities. Although the physical infrastructure of mosques in Luwu Regency, North Luwu Regency, and Palopo City has not yet met the criteria as a disability-friendly mosque, there is great potential for improvement thanks to the high level of concern and positive attitude from mosque administrators towards people with disabilities. The view of the mosque management shows a high level of concern for people with disabilities. They have a positive attitude towards the rights and needs of people with disabilities in the context of accessibility to worship in mosques. This view reflects an awareness of the importance of inclusion and equality for all worshippers, regardless of individual background or physical condition. The support provided by the mosque administrators to people with disabilities is a positive step towards creating a mosque that is friendly to people with disabilities. This awareness and support can be a strong foundation to encourage further efforts in improving physical accessibility, such as providing access points, disability-friendly ablution facilities, and easily accessible prayer rooms.

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