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Counseling and Facilitation of Testament Deed Preparation for Older Adults and Low-Income Urban Families to Prevent Inheritance Disputes

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Abstract
This community service article examines a legal counseling and facilitation program on testament deed preparation for older adults and low-income urban families in an urban Indonesian setting. The program was designed in response to the continuing vulnerability of families who possess limited legal literacy, fragmented family communication, and inadequate access to formal legal assistance in inheritance matters. Indonesian civil law recognizes inheritance by testament, while the Civil Code also preserves mandatory portions for certain heirs and places formal requirements on valid wills, making legal understanding essential for prevention of future disputes. Using a qualitative research design embedded in community service, data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, field notes, and document review during counseling, screening, and facilitation stages. Program participants consisted of 40 individuals, including older adults, family members, community cadres, and neighborhood leaders. The findings indicate that counseling improved participants' legal understanding, reduced hesitation to discuss end-of-life property planning, and clarified the distinction between testamentary freedom and legal limitations under Indonesian inheritance law. Facilitation further revealed that the main barriers were fear of family conflict, incomplete civil documentation, low confidence in approaching a notary, and misconceptions that wills are relevant only for wealthy households. The article argues that community-based legal outreach can function as an early dispute-prevention strategy by combining legal education, family mediation, and referral pathways to formal legal services.

***Keywords**: Community Service, Low-income Families, Inheritance Dispute, Legal Counseling*

Introduction

Urban communities in Indonesia are increasingly confronted with legal and social complexity in matters of intergenerational property transfer. Population aging, migration, blended family structures, informal asset ownership, and uneven legal literacy have made inheritance arrangements more fragile than in earlier social settings. In many low-income urban neighborhoods, household property may consist not only of land or a house, but also movable property, savings, pension-related claims, or informal occupancy interests that carry high emotional and economic significance. When these matters are left without communication or documentation, the likelihood of misunderstanding among heirs becomes substantial. Under the Indonesian Civil Code, inheritance opens upon death and heirs acquire rights over the estate by law, while disputes over who qualifies as heir and who controls property may require judicial safeguarding of the estate (Kusumaningrum and Nasrudin 2026).

Testamentary planning occupies an important position within this legal landscape because a will allows a person to express wishes regarding posthumous distribution of assets, specific grants, or the appointment of heirs within the boundaries permitted by law. Indonesian legal sources define a testament as a deed containing a person's statement about what is intended to occur after death and that may be revoked by the testator. At the same time, the law does not grant unlimited freedom. The doctrine of legitieme portie protects reserved rights of certain heirs in direct lines, meaning that a will cannot simply eliminate mandatory portions guaranteed by law. Consequently, legal counseling on testament deeds is not merely a technical matter of drafting a document. It also requires explanation of legal boundaries, family communication, documentation requirements, and the relation between private wishes and statutory protection.

The urgency of this issue becomes sharper for older adults. Older persons often possess the strongest memory of family property history, yet they may also experience declining health, anxiety about mortality, emotional reluctance to discuss death, or dependence on particular children or relatives. These conditions can create vulnerability to pressure, misunderstanding, or silence in estate planning. Several practical legal discussions in Indonesia note that a valid will depends upon mental capacity, voluntary intention, and compliance with formalities, including writing and witness or notarial involvement depending on the testament form recognized by law. For elderly individuals, therefore, timely counseling is crucial not only for legal clarity but also for the protection of autonomy and dignity in expressing final wishes (Rahmah et al. 2026a).

Low-income urban families face a different but related set of constraints. They often assume that testament deeds are instruments designed only for affluent people with complex property portfolios. This assumption is problematic because economically modest households may still face serious inheritance conflict over a small house, shared land rights, compensation claims, bank savings, or family businesses. In conditions of scarcity, even assets of limited market value can have major significance for residence security and livelihood continuity. Yet households in such settings frequently have limited access to lawyers, notaries, or formal state information. Public access channels through legal-administrative platforms exist, including online services associated with the Ministry of Law and Human Rights, but digital access alone does not automatically resolve comprehension barriers for vulnerable groups.

Within the Indonesian context, inheritance law is also plural in nature. Scholars commonly describe the coexistence of civil, Islamic, and customary inheritance regimes, each with distinct principles and social legitimacy. For practical community service in urban mixed settings, this plurality creates the need for careful legal positioning. The present article focuses specifically on testament deed literacy within the civil law framework, because the activity addressed a need for understanding formal legal documentation and referral pathways to notarial or legal-aid support. The focus is therefore not to deny the coexistence of other systems, but to respond to a concrete community demand for civil-law-based preventive education concerning wills and inheritance disputes (Alioni and Badiani 2026).

From a public-service perspective, dispute prevention is a highly relevant objective. Litigation or formal dispute resolution over inheritance is expensive, time-consuming, emotionally exhausting, and often destructive to long-term family relationships. Even before a case enters court, uncertainty over asset control can delay use of property, trigger mistrust among siblings, and burden widows, elderly parents, or dependent family members. The Civil Code itself anticipates such contestation by allowing the judge to place estate property in safekeeping when heirship is disputed. This means that preventive action before death or before conflict escalation is socially valuable. Counseling on testament deeds can operate as a form of anticipatory justice, helping families understand rights, limits, and procedures before disagreement hardens into conflict.

Community service institutions, especially universities, are well positioned to carry out this preventive function. Indonesian higher education has long treated pengabdian kepada masyarakat as a vehicle for transferring knowledge, strengthening community capacity, and addressing social problems through participatory intervention. In legal community service, the role of the university is not simply to lecture communities but to translate complex legal norms into accessible understanding, identify local barriers, and facilitate practical next steps. This aligns with the broader principle that formal legal rules become effective only when citizens can understand, access, and apply them in daily life. Inheritance law is a clear area where doctrinal knowledge alone is insufficient unless communities can connect legal concepts to family communication, documentation habits, and institutional pathways (Rahmah et al. 2026).

The title of this article reflects that dual orientation: counseling and facilitation. Counseling addresses legal literacy, misconceptions, and awareness. Facilitation addresses the operational dimension: screening participant needs, mapping family situations, identifying incomplete documents, and referring appropriate cases for follow-up. This distinction is important because community members may leave a seminar with improved knowledge but remain unable to act due to fear, procedural confusion, or document deficits. By combining the two, the program aimed to move participants from passive understanding toward initial legal readiness.

The empirical basis of this article comes from a qualitative analysis of a community service program conducted in an urban neighborhood setting involving older adults, low-income families, community cadres, and local leaders. The activity explored how participants understood inheritance risk before the intervention, how they responded to legal counseling about testament deeds, what barriers emerged during facilitation, and what forms of perceived benefit appeared after the program. The analysis does not claim statistical generalization. Instead, it seeks to produce a thick description of participant experiences and a conceptually grounded interpretation of how community-based legal outreach can contribute to inheritance-dispute prevention (Deforche et al. 2025).

Method

The program used a descriptive-interpretive qualitative design. Descriptively, it documented the stages of outreach, participant profile, discussion dynamics, and facilitation outputs. Interpretively, it analyzed how participants made sense of testament deeds before and after the intervention and how legal information interacted with their social realities. The outreach activity was organized as community legal education followed by limited legal facilitation. The counseling component introduced participants to the civil-law meaning of testament deeds, basic validity principles, the distinction between wills and statutory inheritance, and the role of legal limits such as legitieme portie. The facilitation component helped participants screen their cases, identify relevant assets and heirs, reflect on family communication needs, and recognize when referral to a notary or legal-aid institution was necessary.

The field setting was an urban neighborhood characterized by mixed-income housing but with a concentration of economically vulnerable households and older residents. The target groups were: (1) older adults aged 60 years and above; (2) adult family members responsible for caregiving or household decision-making; (3) community cadres; and (4) neighborhood leaders who often serve as trusted local intermediaries. The total participant count in the activity was 40 persons. The program intentionally involved family members and community actors because testament preparation is shaped not only by the legal wishes of the elderly individual but also by family support, communication climate, and local referral networks.

Participant recruitment used purposive sampling. Inclusion criteria were adjusted to the goals of the service activity: older adults who expressed concern about inheritance or property transfer; households identified by local community networks as economically vulnerable; family members accompanying elderly participants; and local actors able to assist follow-up after the activity. This non-probability strategy was appropriate because the study did not seek representativeness in a statistical sense, but information-rich cases. Participants were approached through neighborhood leadership and community communication channels, then invited to attend the counseling and consultation session.\

The study relied on multiple qualitative data sources to increase interpretive depth. First, field observations were carried out during counseling delivery, question-and-answer sessions, and individual consultations. These observations captured participant attentiveness, recurring confusion, emotional reactions, and interaction patterns. Second, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with selected older adults, family members, and community facilitators after the session. The interviews explored prior understanding of wills, perceived benefits of the activity, concerns about family response, and willingness to pursue formal follow-up. Third, a focused group discussion with community cadres and local leaders was conducted to understand contextual barriers such as legal distrust, documentation issues, and social taboos regarding discussion of death.

Fourth, the program team collected consultation notes from facilitation desks. These notes summarized participant concerns, asset types discussed, document gaps, and referrals recommended. Fifth, simple pre- and post-session comprehension checks were administered as supportive program data, not as the primary method. These checks were used descriptively to identify shifts in basic understanding. Sixth, document review was conducted on relevant legal materials concerning the Indonesian Civil Code and testamentary inheritance to ensure doctrinal accuracy in the educational materials.

Data collection followed four stages. In the first stage, the team carried out a needs assessment through informal discussion with neighborhood representatives. This stage identified common anxieties: fear that talking about inheritance would be viewed as inviting death, uncertainty about whether modest assets justify a will, and concern over family jealousy. In the second stage, educational materials were prepared. The material focused on accessible explanation of inheritance opening upon death, the meaning of a testament, legal forms and validity issues, the existence of reserved portions for certain heirs, and the role of witnesses or notarial processes depending on testament form.

In the third stage, the counseling event was implemented. It consisted of a plenary presentation, interactive question-and-answer session, and distribution of a simplified testament-intent worksheet. The worksheet did not function as a legal deed. It served as a reflective aid allowing participants to list family members, identify assets, and note questions for later professional consultation. In the fourth stage, a facilitation clinic was conducted. Participants who wished to continue were invited to short consultations where the team clarified whether their issues required document completion, family communication first, notarial referral, or further legal aid.

Because this was qualitative research, the main instrument was the researcher-service team. To maintain consistency, several supporting instruments were used: an observation guide, semi-structured interview guide, consultation-note form, and participant worksheet. The observation guide included indicators such as participant participation, confusion points, and response to legal terminology. The interview guide included questions on prior knowledge, perceived relevance, family concerns, and intended next steps. The consultation-note form recorded participant category, main issue, assets mentioned, legal misunderstanding identified, document condition, and recommendation.

The comprehension checks contained short indicators rather than detailed testing. They asked whether participants could explain the legal function of a testament, basic validity requirements, the possibility of dispute prevention, steps toward formal follow-up, and the need for family discussion. These supportive data were useful for triangulation with qualitative findings and for constructing a descriptive picture of learning change during the community service program. Data analysis used interactive thematic analysis. The process began with data reduction, in which field notes, interview transcripts or summaries, FGD notes, and consultation records were read repeatedly to identify meaningful units. These units were then coded into preliminary categories such as legal misunderstanding, emotional resistance, family communication difficulty, document gaps, motivation for action, and institutional trust. The next step involved grouping codes into broader themes. Through this process, four major analytical themes were identified: (1) low baseline legal literacy; (2) counseling as a trigger for legal awareness and dialogue; (3) facilitation as a bridge from knowledge to action; and (4) structural barriers to testament formalization.

Supportive numerical program data were not treated inferentially. Instead, they were used descriptively to complement thematic findings. For instance, when post-session indicators showed higher counts of correct responses on validity requirements and referral steps, these shifts were interpreted alongside interview statements expressing greater clarity and confidence. This strategy allowed integration of descriptive tables and charts without changing the qualitative orientation of the study. Trustworthiness was strengthened through triangulation of sources and techniques. Observational data were compared with interview responses and facilitation notes. Statements made by older adults were cross-checked against the views of family members and community cadres. Legal content used in counseling was checked against available Civil Code sources and Indonesian legal analyses on wills and inheritance. In addition, peer debriefing was used within the service team to discuss ambiguous interpretations and reduce individual bias in coding participant responses.

Credibility was also enhanced through prolonged engagement during the event cycle, including pre-activity coordination, counseling interaction, and post-session consultation. Transferability was addressed by providing a rich contextual description of participants, setting, and service design, so that readers may judge relevance for other urban communities. Dependability was strengthened by documenting instruments, session flow, and coding logic. Confirmability was pursued by maintaining field notes that separated direct participant statements from researcher interpretation.

Ethical attention was essential because the topic touches on death, family tension, property, and older-adult vulnerability. Participation was voluntary and based on informed explanation of the activity’s purpose. Participants were informed that the worksheet and facilitation desk did not produce a legally valid deed and did not replace professional notarial services. Personal details disclosed in consultations were treated confidentially and anonymized in reporting. The counseling format also emphasized that testament preparation must reflect voluntary wishes and legal capacity, not family coercion, consistent with legal discussions on valid testamentary intent and mental soundness.

Results And Discussion

The findings show that the community service program generated meaningful changes in legal understanding, emotional readiness, and practical orientation toward testament planning among older adults and low-income urban families. At the beginning of the activity, most participants associated inheritance only with post-death family meetings or informal verbal distribution by respected relatives. Very few could explain the legal nature of a testament or the formal limits governing its validity. This baseline confirmed that inheritance dispute prevention in vulnerable urban communities requires more than general legal awareness; it requires targeted explanation of what a will is, how it differs from ordinary family promises, and why legal form matters under the Civil Code.

The program involved 40 participants drawn from several community categories, as shown in Table 1. The composition demonstrates that the activity succeeded in reaching not only elderly individuals as primary beneficiaries but also family members and local intermediaries whose support is critical for follow-up.

Table 1. Participant Composition

Category	Count
Elderly (60+)	18
Adult family member	14
Community cadre	5
Neighborhood leader	3

Table 1 indicates that older adults formed the largest group, followed closely by adult family members. This pattern is important because testament planning is rarely a purely private decision in practice; even when the legal authority lies with the testator, implementation readiness often depends on whether children or caregivers understand the process. The participation of cadres and neighborhood leaders strengthened the local legitimacy of the program and created potential support channels for future referrals.

The observational notes show that older participants were generally attentive but initially cautious when discussion moved to death-related planning. Several participants laughed nervously or redirected questions toward "later" family discussion, indicating discomfort with direct legal planning. Family members, by contrast, more often asked procedural questions, such as whether a modest house could be included in a will and whether notarial services were mandatory in all cases. This contrast suggests that emotional reluctance and procedural uncertainty coexist and must both be addressed in legal outreach.

Pre-session interaction revealed four dominant misconceptions. First, many participants believed a will is needed only by wealthy individuals. Second, some assumed that verbal family instructions are automatically binding after death. Third, several believed that a person may distribute all property entirely at personal discretion without legal limits. Fourth, many thought that discussing inheritance while alive is socially improper and likely to produce conflict. These misconceptions are highly relevant because they correspond directly to doctrinal realities otherwise stated in legal sources: a testament is a legally defined deed, it is revocable, and testamentary freedom remains subject to the protection of lawful heirs through reserved portions.

In interviews, one elderly participant explained that he had long intended to "leave things equally" but never wrote anything because he assumed only landowners with many assets needed a will. A family member accompanying another participant stated that siblings often rely on "what everyone already knows," yet no one can later prove such understanding when the parent dies. These accounts reveal that legal vulnerability stems not only from lack of legal text knowledge but also from habitual dependence on family assumption. Counseling therefore had to challenge everyday informalism without dismissing the importance of family trust.

The descriptive knowledge indicators show a clear increase in participant understanding after the counseling session.

Table 2. Participant Understanding after Counseling

Indicator	Pre	Post	Improvement
Understanding legal function of testament	22	35	13
Knowing basic validity requirements	18	33	15
Awareness of inheritance dispute risk	24	36	12
Knowing steps to consult notary/authority	16	31	15
Confidence to discuss testament in family	14	29	15

Table 2 shows that all five indicators improved after the session. The largest gains appeared in knowledge of validity requirements, knowledge of referral steps, and confidence to discuss testament issues within the family. These results are consistent with the content emphasis of the counseling, which combined doctrinal explanation with practical examples of what participants should prepare before approaching formal legal institutions.

The improvement in "confidence to discuss testament in family" deserves special attention. Although this indicator remains lower than purely cognitive indicators, its increase from 14 to 29 suggests that participants did not merely memorize information; many also became more willing to treat testament planning as a discussable family issue. Interview data support this interpretation. Participants reported that learning the legal purpose of a will helped them view inheritance discussion as a preventive and responsible act rather than an invitation to conflict.

The counseling session also succeeded in clarifying the relationship between testamentary freedom and legal protection of heirs. During the question-and-answer segment, participants frequently asked whether a parent can give everything to one child. The explanation that Indonesian civil law recognizes wills but preserves reserved shares for certain heirs helped shift conversation away from assumptions of absolute personal discretion. In several cases, this explanation diffused emotionally charged concerns and redirected discussion toward lawful fairness.

Beyond classroom-style counseling, the facilitation clinic generated practical outputs summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Facilitation Outputs

Outcome	Cases
Initial legal screening completed	40
Family consultation facilitated	28
Draft testament intent form completed	19
Referred to notary/legal aid follow-up	15
Supporting civil documents identified as incomplete	17

Table 3 demonstrates that all participants received initial screening, while a substantial portion proceeded to family-oriented consultation and practical follow-up. Nineteen participants completed a simplified testament-intent form, which functioned as a preparatory tool rather than a legally valid deed. Fifteen participants were assessed as requiring follow-up with a notary or legal assistance provider because their cases involved document formalization, more complex family structures, or uncertainty regarding legal shares and property status.

The high number of incomplete supporting documents, found in 17 cases, is one of the most significant operational findings. Participants often lacked orderly records of marriage, ownership, death certificates of prior family members, or consistent identity documentation. This confirms that barriers to testament planning are administrative as much as doctrinal. In other words, increasing legal understanding does not automatically produce legal readiness. Community service programs on inheritance prevention should therefore include a documentation audit or checklist as a standard component. The first major theme concerns low baseline legal literacy. Many participants had heard the term “wasiat,” but their understanding was broad, informal, or religiously generalized rather than tied to civil-law form. Very few could explain that a testament is a deed with legal consequences after death and that its validity depends on formal requirements recognized by law. The distinction between oral wishes, moral family expectations, and a formally valid will was largely absent at the outset.

This low literacy was especially visible when participants discussed fairness. Most used fairness in moral terms, such as equal division among children, helping the poorest child, or respecting caregiving effort. While these are socially meaningful criteria, they were rarely connected to the legal position of lawful heirs and mandatory shares. Counseling helped participants understand that legal fairness under the Civil Code includes structural constraints that must be respected when drafting testamentary instructions. The second theme is that counseling functioned as a trigger for legal awareness rather than mere information transfer. Observationally, participants became more engaged when the explanation moved from legal definitions to concrete dispute scenarios: for example, one child controlling a house certificate, siblings disagreeing over parental verbal statements, or a second marriage creating competing expectations. These examples helped participants realize that testament planning is not only about property distribution but also about reducing ambiguity before a conflict emerges.

This theme aligns with the increase in awareness of inheritance dispute risk in Table 2. Participants began to recognize that silence is not neutral; silence can itself create room for future dispute. Some older adults stated in interviews that they previously avoided the topic to “keep peace,” yet after counseling they saw that careful explanation while alive may better preserve peace than leaving relatives to guess later. The result suggests that legal outreach is most effective when it reframes planning as family protection rather than personal control. The third theme is that facilitation served as a bridge from understanding to action. After the plenary session, many participants still did not know what to do first. The clinic structure helped break down action into manageable steps: identify family members, list assets, review available documents, decide whether internal family dialogue is needed, and determine whether notarial referral is appropriate. This staged process reduced intimidation and made the legal path seem more attainable.

For low-income families, the bridge function was particularly important. Some participants openly stated that they had never imagined visiting a notary because they assumed the service was beyond their reach. When facilitators explained which cases genuinely require formal follow-up and how preliminary preparation can be done first, participants reported feeling less overwhelmed. This indicates that community service should not stop at lecture-based legal literacy; practical pathway design is essential. The fourth theme concerns emotional and cultural resistance. Despite improved understanding, a number of participants remained hesitant to begin family discussion. The most common reason was fear that children would interpret testament planning as favoritism or as a sign of impending death. Some elderly participants also worried that talking openly about assets would expose existing undocumented arrangements or revive dormant sibling tensions.

This resistance shows that testament planning is a socio-emotional process as much as a legal one. The legal validity of a will may depend on form, but the willingness to create one depends on trust, timing, and communication. As a result, future programs should include communication strategies, such as guided family dialogue sessions or scenario-based counseling, so that communities can translate legal knowledge into socially acceptable conversation.

The fifth theme is administrative incompleteness. During facilitation, participants discovered that will preparation cannot be separated from the quality of their civil documentation. Missing marriage certificates, unclear ownership evidence, inconsistent names across documents, and unresolved prior inheritance transfers all complicated the idea of immediate testament formalization. This finding is consistent with doctrinal emphasis on legal form and evidentiary order in civil law processes. In practice, this means that a valid testament may be conceptually possible but procedurally difficult if family records are weak. Therefore, the preventive value of community service lies partly in early diagnosis. Even where a testament is not immediately completed, the identification of document deficits can itself prevent future disputes by encouraging record correction before a death occurs.

The chart on participant composition shows that the intervention achieved a multi-actor outreach structure rather than addressing elderly persons in isolation. This is analytically important because inheritance dispute prevention requires family and community support around the testator, not only individual awareness. The predominance of elderly and adult family participants also confirms that the program reached its intended beneficiaries. The knowledge-change chart visually reinforces the qualitative finding that participants experienced both cognitive and relational movement. Gains in validity knowledge and referral knowledge suggest stronger procedural readiness, while gains in confidence to discuss testament issues indicate emerging family-level openness. Although the chart does not demonstrate long-term behavioral follow-through, it provides a useful descriptive representation of the program’s immediate educational effect.

Taken together, the results indicate that the counseling-and-facilitation model produced three layered outcomes. First, it improved legal understanding of testament deeds as regulated instruments rather than informal family statements. Second, it encouraged participants to reinterpret inheritance discussion as preventive care for the family rather than a taboo act. Third, it exposed the practical barriers—especially documentation gaps and procedural uncertainty—that must be addressed if participants are to move from awareness to formal testament preparation. These findings are significant for community service practice. They show that inheritance-dispute prevention cannot rely solely on post-conflict legal assistance. There is a meaningful preventive space in which universities and local communities can collaborate to cultivate legal literacy, foster dialogue, and prepare families for lawful formalization before disputes arise. The next section discusses the broader implications of these findings for legal empowerment, aging, urban vulnerability, and community-service design.

Discussion

The findings confirm that testament deed counseling for older adults and low-income urban families should be understood as a preventive access-to-justice intervention rather than merely a legal information session. Indonesian civil law gives testamentary instruments a clear juridical place, yet their practical use depends on whether citizens can understand legal concepts, recognize lawful limits, and navigate institutional procedures. In vulnerable urban communities, the distance between formal law and everyday life remains substantial. The present program narrowed that distance by translating inheritance doctrine into family-relevant situations and by creating an initial bridge to practical follow-up (Yusuf et al. 2026).

A first point of discussion concerns legal consciousness. Before the intervention, most participants had only partial or informal awareness of wills. This finding reflects the broader socio-legal pattern in which law is often encountered through rumor, habit, or family precedent rather than through direct comprehension of formal rules. When participants assumed that verbal wishes are enough or that a will is only for the wealthy, they were not simply "uninformed"; they were relying on alternative normative systems of family trust and social custom. Such systems are meaningful, but they may prove inadequate when conflict emerges, especially in urban contexts marked by migration, mixed families, or scarce housing resources. The community service intervention therefore functioned as a process of legal translation, showing participants where informal norms remain useful and where formal legal protection becomes necessary (Boonsang et al. 2026).

This raises a second point: effective legal outreach must integrate doctrine and social reality. The legal definition of a testament and the doctrine of reserved shares are essential, but participants respond most strongly when these are connected to concrete family scenarios. The discussion sessions showed that abstract explanation alone would have been insufficient. Participants became most engaged when the session described sibling disagreement, unclear control of certificates, or second-marriage complexities. This suggests that university-led legal community service should adopt scenario-based pedagogy, especially in topics such as inheritance where legal problems are deeply intertwined with emotion and kinship.

A third issue concerns older adults as rights-bearing subjects. In many families, elderly persons are treated as passive objects of care rather than autonomous legal actors. Yet testament law presumes intention, capacity, and revocability, all of which center the person making the will. The present findings show that counseling can strengthen this autonomy by helping elderly participants understand that they retain a lawful voice in planning future asset distribution, provided their actions meet legal requirements. At the same time, the findings also remind us that autonomy is relational. Older adults often want their wishes to be understood by children and caregivers, not merely recorded in a legal instrument. Accordingly, a rights-based community service model for the elderly should support both individual legal agency and mediated family communication (Hadson, Tungaturthy, and David 2026).

A fourth discussion point concerns low-income families and the myth that legal planning belongs only to affluent groups. This myth has serious consequences. It delays action, normalizes undocumented arrangements, and leaves economically vulnerable households exposed to conflict over modest but vital assets such as a small house or family savings. The results demonstrate that once participants understood that a testament can be relevant for ordinary households, they became more open to planning. This finding is important for community empowerment policy because it suggests that legal education should deliberately challenge class-based assumptions about who deserves formal legal protection. Preventive inheritance planning is not a luxury service; it is part of social legal inclusion (Simanjuntak and Yustikarini 2024).

The role of facilitation deserves deeper reflection. Many outreach programs stop after delivering information, implicitly assuming that knowledge will naturally produce action. The present study shows otherwise. Even participants who understood the session content often remained unsure about the next step. Facilitation was therefore not an optional supplement; it was the operational core that transformed legal literacy into initial readiness. Through screening, document review, and referral mapping, the facilitation process reduced procedural ambiguity and helped participants recognize that legal action can be staged. This finding aligns with access-to-justice thinking: barriers to justice are not only substantive but also procedural, psychological, and institutional (Safarina et al. 2026).

The discovery of widespread documentation gaps is particularly revealing. It shows that inheritance-dispute prevention must be conceived as an ecosystem of legal preparedness. A testament deed does not stand alone. Its effectiveness is linked to civil documentation, property proof, family status records, and institutional traceability. For low-income urban households, missing or inconsistent records can make later dispute resolution extremely difficult. From this perspective, the counseling program served as an early-warning mechanism. It enabled participants to diagnose weaknesses that may not be visible in ordinary family life but become decisive after death. Universities and community-service actors should therefore consider documentation audits, administrative assistance, or partnerships with civil registration support services as part of future inheritance-prevention initiatives (Bhatti et al. 2025).

Another significant issue is the social management of taboo. The results indicate that participants' hesitation to discuss inheritance is not simply ignorance but a culturally and emotionally loaded response. In many families, speaking about death is associated with disrespect, fear, or suspicion. This means that legal outreach on testament deeds must be sensitive in tone and framing. The present program was more successful when the issue was framed as protection of family harmony and prevention of future misunderstanding. Such framing allows communities to reinterpret planning as an act of care rather than greed. For practical program design, this implies that facilitators should use language emphasizing family protection, legal clarity, and dignity for older adults, rather than technical legalism alone (Breder, Jacob, and David 2025).

The findings also contribute to understanding how community service can generate academically meaningful knowledge. Too often, legal community service is reported as a sequence of activities without analytical engagement. This article demonstrates that outreach data can illuminate broader themes such as legal consciousness, dispute prevention, aging, and procedural access. In that sense, community service is not merely implementation; it is also a site of socio-legal inquiry. For SINTA-oriented scholarship, this matters because it shows how a service program can produce publishable knowledge when data are systematically gathered, interpreted, and connected to legal doctrine and social theory (Faustino et al. 2020).

A further discussion concerns the relationship between preventive and curative legal responses. Formal legal institutions often become involved only after conflict has escalated. Yet the Civil Code's attention to heir status, testament form, and dispute over estate control implies that uncertainty before or immediately after death already has serious legal consequences. The present findings support the argument that preventive legal outreach is a valuable complement to curative services. By increasing clarity before death, counseling and facilitation may reduce the probability, intensity, or complexity of later disputes. This does not mean that all conflict can be prevented; family dynamics are inherently unpredictable. However, preventive action can at least reduce ambiguity, improve documentation, and help lawful intentions become more legible (Zhou, Wang, and Yao 2025).

The results also suggest an applied model for future programs. First, a program should begin with a localized needs assessment to identify common misconceptions and sensitive points. Second, counseling content should combine doctrinal clarity with family-based scenarios. Third, a facilitation clinic should be provided immediately after counseling so that momentum is not lost. Fourth, participants should receive simple tools such as family-asset mapping sheets and document checklists. Fifth, referral networks with notaries, legal aid, and public legal-administration channels should be prepared in advance. Such a model can help universities move from one-off seminars toward sustained community legal empowerment.

There are also implications for interdisciplinary collaboration. Testament counseling intersects with gerontology, social work, public administration, and communication studies. Older adults may require capacity-sensitive explanation; low-income households may need social assistance referrals; document problems may need administrative support; and family dialogue may benefit from mediation techniques. Therefore, community service on inheritance prevention is ideally collaborative rather than confined to doctrinal legal expertise alone (Edmonds 2025). This would improve both humane delivery and practical effectiveness.

Conclusion

This community service program demonstrates that counseling and facilitation concerning testament deed preparation can serve as an effective preventive approach to inheritance disputes among older adults and low-income urban families. The intervention improved participants' understanding of the legal function of a testament, its basic validity requirements, the possibility of inheritance-related conflict, and the importance of obtaining professional assistance. Under Article 875 of the Indonesian Civil Code, a testament is a deed containing a person's wishes concerning the distribution of assets after death and may be revoked during the testator's lifetime. However, testamentary freedom is not unlimited because the legitieme portie protects the absolute inheritance rights of certain heirs in the direct line. The findings further indicate that legal counseling alone is insufficient. Participants also require practical facilitation, including family-asset identification, heir mapping, document verification, and referral to a notary or legal-aid institution. The program revealed that incomplete civil and property documents, limited financial capacity, fear of family conflict, and the perception that wills are only relevant to wealthy families remain significant barriers to formal testament preparation. Accordingly, a sustainable community-service model should integrate legal education, family communication, administrative assistance, and professional referral. Universities, local governments, community cadres, notaries, and legal-aid institutions should collaborate to expand access to preventive inheritance planning. Although this study was limited to one urban community and did not measure long-term behavioral outcomes, it demonstrates that early legal intervention can strengthen legal awareness, protect the autonomy of older adults, and reduce uncertainty that may later develop into inheritance disputes. It is therefore recommended that similar programs be implemented periodically and accompanied by post-program monitoring to assess the completion of testament deeds and the resolution of outstanding documentation problems.

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