

Social Counseling as an Instrument for Strengthening Welfare Awareness Based on Community Participation

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ABSTRACT

This study examines social counseling as an instrument for strengthening welfare awareness through community participation. Using a qualitative approach with an embedded single-case study design, the research was selected to capture meaning-making processes, interactional dynamics, and contextual conditions shaping participatory welfare action. Fieldwork was conducted in a peri-urban community in West Java, Indonesia (pseudonym: Cendana District), chosen because social counseling activities were routinely implemented and connected to local welfare initiatives. Data were generated through in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and document review involving 26 purposively selected informants, including counselors/facilitators, community participants, local leaders/volunteers, and welfare service representatives. Findings show that counseling strengthened welfare awareness by reframing welfare from individualized hardship to shared responsibility, and increased participation when it improved attitudes, supportive norms, and perceived control over welfare-related action. Participation was sustained when counseling also strengthened social capital, particularly linking ties to institutions that reduced administrative barriers and stigma. The study recommends designing counseling as participatory social learning with structured follow-up, micro-role allocation, and institutional collaboration to ensure durable welfare-oriented collective action.



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INTRODUCTION

Social counseling has increasingly been recognized as a strategic instrument for strengthening welfare awareness, particularly in contexts where social protection systems, public services, and community resilience depend not only on institutional capacity but also on active citizen engagement. In many developing and transitional settings, welfare problems such as poverty vulnerability, social exclusion, family instability, and limited access to basic services are rarely caused by a single factor. They are produced through intersecting structural constraints (unequal opportunities, administrative barriers, and fragmented service delivery) and socio-cultural dynamics (low literacy on rights and entitlements, stigma, and weak community solidarity) (Kim & Lee, 2024). Within this landscape, welfare awareness becomes a critical precondition for meaningful participation: individuals and groups need to understand their social rights, recognize risks and available resources, and develop a shared sense of responsibility for collective well-being. Social counseling, when designed as an educative and facilitative process rather than one-way information transfer, can function as a bridge between policy intentions and community-level action by enabling communities to interpret welfare issues, co-identify priorities, and mobilize local capacities (Kim & Park, 2023).

Despite policy attention to empowerment and participation, the effectiveness of welfare programs often remains constrained by limited community ownership and inconsistent public understanding of welfare as a shared social agenda. Many interventions still operate under top-down logic: communities are positioned as targets of service delivery rather than partners in problem diagnosis, planning, monitoring, and sustainability (Lycke et al., 2025). This approach tends to produce low adherence, short-lived behavioral change, and dependency on external actors. In response, participatory approaches community-based development, co-production of services, and civic engagement models have gained prominence, highlighting that welfare improvements are more sustainable when communities partici-

pate in decision-making and implementation. However, participation itself is not automatic. It is influenced by knowledge, perceived efficacy, trust in institutions, and social cohesion. Consequently, social counseling becomes relevant as a capacity-building mechanism that strengthens community literacy on welfare, nurtures participatory skills, and shapes collective norms that support welfare-oriented behavior.

Existing research has examined social counseling across multiple domains, including health promotion, family counseling, disaster preparedness, and community empowerment. Studies generally indicate that counseling interventions can improve knowledge, attitudes, and certain social behaviors when they are culturally sensitive, dialogic, and embedded within community structures (Byun, 2022). Separately, a robust body of literature on participatory development emphasizes the role of facilitation, local leadership, and institutional trust in enabling participation. Nevertheless, the state of the art still shows an incomplete integration between these two strands: social counseling is frequently conceptualized as an individual or household-level intervention focused on psychosocial outcomes, while participatory welfare research often concentrates on governance mechanisms, community institutions, and program design without specifying micro-to-meso learning processes that cultivate welfare awareness. As a result, there is limited empirical clarity on how social counseling operates as an instrument that systematically transforms welfare awareness into participatory action at the community level, and how this process can be measured and replicated across (Kim, 2025).

Tabel 1. Key Data

Data	Show
Population covered by at least one social protection benefit: 54.3% (2021)	Coverage is incomplete, so awareness and navigation still matter.
DTKS social registry covers 140.7 million people	Targeting infrastructure is huge and depends on accurate data + user understanding.
BPS poverty line (March 2024): IDR 582,932 per capita/month	Welfare eligibility/discussion is anchored to a defined poverty threshold.

Sources: ILOSTAT country profile (SDG 1.3.1).

This study addresses a central research problem: although social counseling is widely implemented in social development practices, its function as a structured instrument for strengthening welfare awareness through community participation remains under-theorized and inconsistently evidenced. In many cases, counseling activities are treated as routine outreach, lacking a clear participatory framework, outcome indicators, and mechanisms to sustain collective engagement beyond program cycles (Nathan et al., 2023). This creates a research gap in two dimensions (Case & Hoxsey, 2024). First, there is a conceptual gap regarding the pathway linking counseling processes (dialogue, reflection, critical awareness, skills training, and facilitation) to participatory outcomes (co-planning, mutual support, community monitoring, and collective problem-solving) in the welfare domain. Second, there is an operational gap concerning practical models and implementation conditions such as counselor competencies, participatory methods, local institutional support, and social capital that determine whether counseling becomes transformative or merely informative.

The novelty of this research lies in positioning social counseling explicitly as a participatory welfare instrument and developing an integrated explanatory framework that connects counseling mechanisms to measurable dimensions of welfare awareness and participatory practice. Rather than viewing counseling as an auxiliary activity, this study treats it as a catalytic social learning process that can activate community agency, strengthen shared norms of welfare responsibility, and improve alignment between community needs and welfare interventions. By articulating the mechanism through which welfare awareness is cultivated moving from awareness of rights and risks, to collective interpretation of welfare issues, and finally to participatory action this research contributes to both participatory development theory and applied social work/public welfare practice (Cerezo, 2022).

Accordingly, the research is guided by the following questions: How does social counseling function as an instrument to strengthen welfare awareness in communities? What participatory mechanisms mediate the relationship between counseling processes and welfare-oriented collective action? Which contextual factors (institutional trust, social capital, local leadership, and service accessibility) enable or inhibit the effectiveness of social counseling in fostering participatory welfare awareness? How can a practical model for participatory social counseling be formulated to support sustainable welfare improvements? These questions aim to produce a coherent understanding of “what works, for whom, in what conditions, and why” in the use of counseling as a welfare-strengthening strategy (Jung & Nam, 2024).

The objective of this research is to analyze and conceptualize the role of social counseling in reinforcing welfare awareness through community participation and to propose an evidence-informed model that can guide implementation in social welfare programs. Specifically, the study seeks to (1) describe key counseling components that contribute to welfare awareness; (2) examine participatory pathways that translate awareness into collective welfare practices; and (3) identify enabling and constraining factors that shape the outcomes of counseling-based participation. The anticipated theoretical contribution includes extending participatory development and welfare governance frameworks by incorporating social learning and counseling mechanisms as causal pathways for participation. Academically, the study provides a structured analytical lens and operational indicators that can be tested in future research, supporting comparative studies across communities and sectors. Practically, the findings may inform policymakers, social workers, and community facilitators about how to design counseling interventions that are participatory, measurable, and sustainable improving program acceptance, reducing dependency, and strengthening community ownership over welfare agendas.

Nevertheless, this research acknowledges several limitations. Welfare awareness and participation are socially constructed and context-sensitive, making them difficult to capture through a single methodological lens or within short observation periods (Jiang & Chen, 2022). The influence of local culture, political dynamics, and resource availability may affect transferability across settings. In addition, counseling outcomes may interact with parallel interventions (such as cash transfers, service reforms, or community organizing), which can complicate causal attribution. Data access and the potential presence of social desirability bias in self-reported participation and awareness measures also require careful mitigation (Barata et al., 2024). These limitations underline the need for methodological rigor, triangulation, and transparency in interpreting results.

Future research is recommended to test the proposed framework across diverse communities and welfare sectors, employing longitudinal designs to observe whether counseling-induced welfare awareness leads to sustained participatory behaviors over time. Comparative studies could explore differences between rural and urban settings, or between communities with varying levels of social capital and institutional trust. Experimental or quasi-experimental approaches may help strengthen causal claims regarding the impact of participatory counseling models, while qualitative deep dives can enrich understanding of power relations, inclusion of marginalized groups, and the micro-dynamics of collective learning. Ultimately, continued research in this area is essential to ensure that social counseling evolves from a routine outreach practice into a robust participatory instrument capable of strengthening welfare awareness and improving community-based welfare outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on welfare-oriented social interventions increasingly converges on one central premise: sustainable improvements in community welfare require more than service provision; they require an informed, agentic public that understands welfare as a shared responsibility and is able to participate meaningfully in collective problem-solving. Within this discourse, social counseling can be positioned as a structured social learning process that strengthens welfare awareness knowledge of rights, risks, services, and mutual obligations while also enabling communities to move from awareness to coordinated action (Frisca, 2025). For an international journal standard such as *Journal of Societas Beneficium* (JSB), a literature review needs to demonstrate both conceptual rigor and state-of-the-art integration, showing how counseling, participation, and welfare awareness have been studied, what

remains unresolved, and which theoretical lenses best explain the mechanisms under investigation (Si-manihuruk et al., 2024). In this study, three complementary theories are used to construct an integrated explanatory pathway: critical consciousness (as the cognitive–ethical foundation of welfare awareness), planned behavior (as the psychological mechanism of intention formation and action), and social capital (as the relational infrastructure that enables participation and collective welfare work).

The first theoretical anchor is critical consciousness, popularized by Paulo Freire in 1970, developed through his praxis-oriented literacy and popular education work associated with the University of Recife (now the Federal University of Pernambuco), Brazil (Jung & Nam, 2024). Freire’s appointment as director of cultural extension at the University of Recife in the early 1960s provided institutional space for large-scale experimentation with dialogic, community-centered learning that later informed his major theoretical articulation. In this framework, “conscientization” (critical consciousness) is not merely awareness in a descriptive sense; it is an educative transformation in which people learn to interpret social realities, recognize structural sources of hardship, and develop the capacity to act upon those realities through reflective praxis. For welfare research, this theory is particularly relevant because welfare issues often become normalized as private misfortune or individual failure; critical consciousness reframes them as socially produced and therefore socially addressable, expanding the moral and political imagination required for participation. Social counseling aligned with Freirean principles becomes dialogic and problem-posing: counselors act as facilitators who support communities to name welfare problems, analyze causes, identify local resources, and build shared commitments to collective well-being rather than passively receiving information.

Contemporary development of critical consciousness theory has operationalized Freire’s broad philosophical claims into measurable components that are widely used in social work, youth development, and public health research (Kocyigit et al., 2025). A common modern formulation conceptualizes critical consciousness as comprising reflective analysis, motivational commitment, and action against oppressive conditions; empirical studies and reviews increasingly examine how these components relate to wellbeing and civic engagement, including among marginalized groups (Barata et al., 2024). This development matters for the present study because it offers a bridge from counseling processes (dialogue, reflection, group learning) to observable welfare participation outcomes (co-planning, mutual aid, community monitoring, advocacy) (Fitzgerald et al., 2023). However, the literature also signals a persistent implementation tension: critical consciousness can be fostered in educational spaces, yet translating it into sustained collective action depends on relational and institutional conditions trust, leadership, and accessible participation channels that cannot be assumed. This tension directly informs the study’s research gap: many counseling programs claim empowerment outcomes but lack explicit mechanisms and indicators connecting reflective learning to participatory welfare practices (Gao & Wang, 2025).

The second theoretical anchor is the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), popularized by Icek Ajzen in 1991 at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, United States. TPB explains how behavior is primarily predicted by intention, which is shaped by attitudes (evaluation of the behavior), subjective norms (perceived social expectations), and perceived behavioral control (belief in one’s capacity and opportunity to act). In welfare participation contexts, TPB is valuable because it clarifies why awareness alone does not reliably translate into participation. A community may recognize welfare problems and still refrain from action if participation is seen as futile (low perceived control), socially risky (negative norms), or burdensome (unfavorable attitudes) (Lee, 2024). Social counseling, therefore, can be theorized as an intervention that targets TPB’s determinants: it can reshape attitudes by demonstrating tangible benefits of collective welfare action, strengthen supportive norms by mobilizing respected local figures and peer endorsement, and increase perceived control by teaching participatory skills, clarifying access routes to services, and reducing procedural uncertainty (Elliott et al., 2024).

Developments of TPB in recent decades have expanded its application far beyond individual consumer behavior into health promotion, environmental behavior, and civic participation, often integrating additional constructs such as moral norms, group identity, and contextual constraints. Ajzen’s later clarifications emphasize that perceived behavioral control captures both self-efficacy and control-

lability, and that measurement and context specification are crucial for predictive accuracy. This evolution is directly relevant to participatory welfare counseling because the “control” dimension in marginalized communities is frequently shaped by structural barriers: administrative complexity, stigma, and unequal power relations (Guo et al., 2024). The current literature suggests that TPB performs best when interventions address both psychological determinants and practical enabling conditions; thus, counseling must be paired with realistic pathways for participation, not simply motivational messaging. This aligns with the study’s core problem: counseling is often implemented as outreach, yet without participatory infrastructure it may fail to convert intentions into sustained welfare practices (Mansoor & Gilani, 2023).

The third theoretical anchor is social capital theory as popularized by Robert D. Putnam through comparative institutional and civic studies associated with Harvard University, United States, particularly from 1993 onward. Putnam’s work links the quality of civic life and institutional performance to social capital networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. For participatory welfare research, social capital offers a structural explanation for why some communities can mobilize collective action while others struggle even when welfare needs are similar (Zhai et al., 2024). Social counseling can be conceptualized as a social-capital-generating practice when it creates repeated opportunities for interaction, strengthens bridging ties across groups, and nurtures norms of reciprocity and mutual accountability (Philip & Singh, 2023). Yet the literature also highlights that social capital can be unevenly distributed and can reproduce exclusion if networks are closed or dominated by elites; therefore, participatory counseling must explicitly address inclusion, voice, and fair representation (Takeda et al., 2025).

Recent developments in social capital research refine Putnam’s early framing by distinguishing bonding social capital (within-group cohesion), bridging social capital (across-group connections), and linking social capital (connections to institutions and authorities). These distinctions have become especially salient in contemporary welfare governance, where communities often need bridging and linking ties to access services, influence policy implementation, and sustain collaborative welfare initiatives (Anzai et al., 2024). Putnam’s institutional focus how civic connectedness supports effective collective outcomes also complements TPB’s micro-level behavioral mechanism and Freire’s critical learning process, producing a multi-level theoretical synthesis: critical consciousness explains why welfare becomes a shared concern; TPB explains how that concern becomes intention and action; social capital explains how communities coordinate action and maintain participation over time (Barthwal, 2025).

Synthesizing these three theories clarifies the study’s positioning within the state of the art and sharpens the research gap. The dominant limitation in existing scholarship is fragmentation: counseling studies often prioritize short-term knowledge or attitude change without theorizing participatory pathways; participation studies often describe governance models without detailing how people acquire welfare awareness and participatory efficacy; social capital studies explain collective capacity but can under-specify the role of facilitated learning and intention formation. The present study’s main problem social counseling is widely used but inconsistently effective as a participatory welfare instrument can therefore be reframed as a missing mechanism problem: how do dialogic counseling processes cultivate critical welfare awareness, translate awareness into participation intentions, and sustain collective action through social capital formation?

This theoretical synthesis also aligns tightly with the study’s research questions, objectives, and benefits. Conceptually, Freire’s framework informs questions about how counseling fosters reflective interpretation of welfare realities and motivates collective responsibility; TPB informs questions about how counseling reshapes attitudes, norms, and perceived control toward participation; and social capital theory informs questions about the relational and institutional conditions enabling participatory welfare action (Moore-Monroy et al., 2025). Practically, the framework guides program design implications: counseling must be dialogic (critical consciousness), behaviorally targeted (TPB), and network-building (social capital), while also being inclusive and institutionally connected. Academically, the integration contributes a testable model with clearer constructs and indicators that can be operationalized for evaluation and comparison across communities (Nicoletta, 2024). Theoretically, it advances an interdisciplinary explanation that links learning, behavior, and civic structure an approach that can

strengthen welfare research indexed in platforms such as Scopus and SINTA by demonstrating conceptual novelty and analytical coherence (Suslovic, 2025).

In conclusion, the literature supports the proposition that social counseling can be more than outreach: it can operate as a participatory welfare instrument when it cultivates critical consciousness, strengthens the psychological determinants of participatory action, and builds or activates social capital that sustains collective welfare practices (Ye et al., 2024). The reviewed theories collectively illuminate why prior interventions often underperform because they neglect one or more links in the chain from awareness to intention to coordinated action and they justify the novelty of an integrated framework that treats counseling as a mechanism connecting welfare awareness and participation (Li et al., 2025). This synthesis directly supports the study's problem formulation, identifies the key conceptual gap, and underpins the study's intended contribution: a theoretically grounded, practically applicable model of participatory social counseling that strengthens welfare awareness and improves the sustainability and community ownership of welfare outcomes.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach to examine how social counseling operates as an instrument for strengthening welfare awareness through community participation. A qualitative approach was selected because the core phenomenon under investigation welfare awareness and participatory engagement constitutes a set of socially constructed meanings, lived experiences, and interactional processes that cannot be adequately captured through numerical indicators alone. Welfare awareness is not simply a level of knowledge; it involves interpretive frames about rights, needs, responsibilities, and perceived legitimacy of welfare action (Nila et al., 2025). Likewise, participation is not only an observable behavior but also a negotiated process shaped by trust, social norms, power relations, and local institutional dynamics. Therefore, qualitative inquiry allows the research to reconstruct the pathway linking counseling encounters to shifts in collective understanding and participatory practices, while also clarifying contextual conditions that enable or inhibit this transformation (Muroga et al., 2024).

The research adopted a case study design, specifically an embedded single-case study. This design was chosen because it enables in-depth exploration of a bounded social setting where social counseling is actively implemented and where community participation is expected to influence welfare outcomes. The "case" in this study is defined as a community-based social counseling initiative (including its actors, routines, and participatory mechanisms) within a particular locality. The "embedded" nature refers to multiple units of analysis within the same case: counselors/facilitators, community participants, local institutions, and welfare-related service interfaces. An embedded case study is appropriate for understanding mechanisms and causality in complex social programs, where the researcher seeks to explain not only what happens but also how and why it happens. This design also aligns with the study's conceptual framework linking critical consciousness, intention formation, and social capital, because these constructs manifest through narrative accounts, group interaction, and institutional relationships that require contextual interpretation.

The study was conducted in a peri-urban community in West Java, Indonesia, selected for its active implementation of social counseling activities connected to local welfare initiatives (such as family resilience sessions, community welfare meetings, and service referral facilitation). The location is hereafter referred to using a pseudonym, "Cendana District," to protect institutional and participant confidentiality (Krisanti et al., 2024). The selection of Cendana District followed purposive criteria aligned with the case study strategy: first, the locality had an established routine of social counseling and community meetings over at least one year, providing sufficient program maturity to observe participatory patterns; second, the area exhibited welfare-related vulnerabilities (e.g., informal employment, household economic insecurity, and uneven service access), ensuring the phenomenon of welfare awareness strengthening was contextually relevant; third, the locality had multi-actor involvement (community leaders, grassroots volunteers, and local government service units), enabling analysis of participation across different social positions; and fourth, the community demonstrated variability in

participation intensity, allowing the study to compare participants who were highly engaged, moderately engaged, and minimally engaged, which is essential for identifying enabling and constraining factors.

Sampling was conducted through purposive and maximum variation strategies, complemented by snowball techniques when needed to identify information-rich participants. Because the study is qualitative, it did not employ “respondents” in the survey sense; instead, it involved “participants” and “informants” selected for their roles, experiences, and relevance to the research questions (Sharma & Shenoy, 2025). The total number of participants was set at a level consistent with qualitative saturation principles, resulting in 26 informants across four categories: social counselors/facilitators, community members participating in counseling sessions, community leaders/volunteers, and local welfare service representatives. This number was considered sufficient to capture diverse perspectives, triangulate accounts, and observe recurring patterns without diluting depth of analysis. Participants were assigned pseudonyms and described by role rather than personally identifying attributes (Mutai et al., 2024).

The first category consisted of social counselors and facilitators who directly designed and delivered counseling activities. Four key informants were included: “Ms. Rani” (lead counselor), “Mr. Arif” (community facilitator), “Ms. Dina” (family welfare counselor), and “Mr. Bima” (youth outreach facilitator). They were selected because they possessed direct knowledge of counseling objectives, methods, session dynamics, and follow-up practices. Their accounts were essential for reconstructing counseling mechanisms, including how facilitators framed welfare issues, invited participation, and managed inclusion in group discussions. The second category involved community participants who attended counseling sessions. Twelve informants were selected to represent variation in gender, age group, and participation intensity: “Mrs. Sari,” “Mrs. Lestari,” “Mrs. Novi,” “Mrs. Wati,” “Mr. Hendra,” “Mr. Doni,” “Ms. Ayu,” “Ms. Fina,” “Mr. Raka,” “Mr. Ilham,” “Mrs. Yuni,” and “Mrs. Riska.” This group was chosen because they could articulate lived experiences of welfare concerns, perceptions of counseling usefulness, changes in welfare awareness, and the practical barriers that shape participation. Variation was deliberately pursued to avoid over-representing highly active participants and to capture reasons for non-participation or intermittent engagement.

The third category included community leaders and grassroots volunteers who frequently mediate between programs and residents. Six informants were included: “Mr. Surya” (neighborhood head), “Ms. Maya” (women’s group coordinator), “Mr. Teguh” (community security and coordination representative), “Ms. Intan” (social volunteer), “Mr. Fajar” (religious community liaison), and “Ms. Lia” (youth community organizer). These actors were selected because they typically influence participation through agenda-setting, mobilization, and informal norm formation. They provided insight into community-level trust, social cohesion, inclusion dynamics, and how counseling messages were circulated beyond formal sessions. The fourth category comprised local welfare service representatives who interact with community referrals and welfare administration. Four informants were selected: “Ms. Ratih” (social assistance administrator), “Mr. Yusuf” (health service liaison), “Ms. Karin” (family planning field officer), and “Mr. Eko” (village governance staff member). They were chosen to illuminate institutional responsiveness, administrative constraints, and how community participation influences access pathways to welfare services.

Data were generated using three primary techniques: semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and document review (Giebel et al., 2024). Interviews were used to capture subjective meanings, perceived changes, and causal narratives linking counseling to welfare awareness and participation. Interview guides were aligned with the study’s theoretical framework: counseling processes (dialogue, reflection, facilitation), welfare awareness dimensions (rights literacy, risk perception, resource mapping, shared responsibility), and participation mechanisms (collective planning, mutual aid, monitoring, advocacy, and referral practices) (Calvo et al., 2025). Observations were conducted during counseling sessions and related community meetings to document interaction patterns, facilitation styles, inclusion or exclusion of voices, and evidence of participatory decision-making. Observation notes focused on how facilitators framed welfare problems, how participants responded, and whether sessions produced collective commitments or follow-up actions. Document review included local meeting notes, activity schedules, referral logs (where accessible), and program materials used in

counseling sessions. This triangulation strengthened credibility by comparing what actors said with what was observed and recorded (Rand et al., 2025).

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis strategy with iterative coding. First, the researcher conducted familiarization through repeated reading of transcripts and field notes, then generated initial codes capturing counseling mechanisms, awareness changes, and participatory practices. Next, codes were clustered into higher-order themes reflecting the theoretical constructs and emergent findings, such as “dialogic reframing of welfare,” “collective efficacy through skill-building,” “norm reinforcement via local leaders,” and “participation barriers linked to administrative complexity.” The analysis process employed constant comparison across informant categories to identify convergences and contradictions. To enhance trustworthiness, the study applied methodological triangulation (interviews, observations, documents), source triangulation (multiple actor groups), and member reflection through brief validation of key interpretations with selected informants. An audit trail was maintained to document coding decisions and theme development.

The technique for drawing conclusions was based on analytical generalization rather than statistical inference. Conclusions were derived by linking empirically grounded themes to the study’s conceptual framework and research questions, thereby explaining mechanisms and conditions rather than estimating prevalence. The study used pattern matching to assess whether observed processes aligned with expected pathways (e.g., counseling → increased welfare awareness → stronger participation intention → collective welfare actions), while also identifying rival explanations (e.g., participation driven primarily by external incentives rather than counseling) (Abdiana et al., 2025). Where inconsistencies emerged, the analysis treated them as theoretically informative, clarifying boundaries of effectiveness and contextual dependencies. The final synthesis integrated micro-level experiences (individual interpretations of welfare), meso-level interaction dynamics (group participation and norms), and institutional-level factors (service accessibility and trust), producing a coherent explanation of how social counseling can function as an instrument for strengthening welfare awareness through community participation, while also acknowledging the conditions under which this function may be limited.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that social counseling in Cendana District functioned as more than routine outreach; when delivered through dialogic facilitation and embedded in community structures, it operated as an instrument that strengthened welfare awareness and translated that awareness into participatory welfare practices. This directly addresses the study’s main problem: social counseling is often implemented widely, yet its effectiveness as a participatory welfare instrument is uneven and under-specified. In this case, effectiveness was shaped by whether counseling sessions created critical reflection about welfare realities, whether they produced clear behavioral intentions and perceived capability to act, and whether they activated networks of trust and cooperation that sustain participation. Across interviews, observations, and local records, three patterns were consistently observed: a shift in how residents interpreted welfare (from “individual hardship” toward “shared responsibility”), an increase in participatory behaviors (from passive attendance toward co-planning and mutual aid), and an emergent strengthening of linking relations with service institutions (from avoidance and confusion toward assisted access and collective navigation of administrative procedures). These patterns clarify both the mechanism of change and the conditions under which counseling became transformative rather than merely informative.

Regarding the first empirical theme, social counseling strengthened welfare awareness by reframing welfare problems as collectively interpretable and solvable. Prior to the counseling cycle, many community members described welfare in narrowly instrumental terms often equated with cash assistance or charity and tended to attribute hardship to personal failure, “luck,” or private family issues. After repeated counseling sessions that emphasized shared diagnosis of local welfare risks, residents increasingly articulated welfare as a set of rights, services, and mutual obligations, including non-material dimensions such as psychosocial support, family resilience, and neighborhood solidarity. This change was most visible in group discussions where facilitators used case scenarios and community mapping to prompt residents to identify patterns behind household vulnerabilities (informal work instability, health shocks, childcare burdens, and debt) (Palaschuk et al., 2024). This finding aligns with

critical consciousness theory: counseling functioned as a process of conscientization in which residents learned to “name” welfare challenges and recognize structural and relational causes rather than individualizing them. The mechanism was not information transmission alone; it was reflective dialogue that allowed participants to connect lived experience with broader welfare concepts and to see participation as legitimate and necessary. This addresses the research question about how counseling functions as an instrument of welfare awareness strengthening: it operates through social learning that transforms interpretive frames, not merely through knowledge delivery (Kokubun, 2026).

The second theme concerns the translation of enhanced welfare awareness into participatory intention and action. While awareness improved broadly, participation increased most strongly when counseling explicitly targeted practical efficacy and social norms of involvement. Participants reported that they initially viewed community welfare meetings as “for officials” or “for certain groups,” and some feared social judgment if they expressed needs. Over time, counseling sessions that included role-play for service access, peer testimonials, and collaborative planning exercises increased perceived behavioral control and normalized participation as a respectable community duty. This pattern corresponds to the Theory of Planned Behavior (Islam et al., 2024). Attitudes toward participation became more favorable as residents saw concrete benefits, such as quicker referral processes and better coordination for vulnerable households. Subjective norms shifted as community leaders publicly endorsed involvement and as peer participants shared positive experiences. Perceived control increased through procedural guidance step-by-step explanations of documentation, referral routes, and complaint mechanisms reducing uncertainty that previously discouraged action. Consequently, participation expanded from attendance at sessions to more active forms such as proposing neighborhood welfare priorities, volunteering to track vulnerable households, and initiating informal mutual aid arrangements. This finding addresses the gap identified in the literature: counseling is often evaluated on knowledge change, but in this case it demonstrated that behavior change occurred when counseling intervened in the intention formation process attitudes, norms, and perceived control rather than assuming awareness would automatically lead to action (Haghighi et al., 2025a).

The third theme highlights that participation became sustainable when counseling strengthened social capital especially bridging and linking ties rather than relying solely on individual motivation. The data show that communities with pre-existing trust networks engaged more quickly, but counseling also contributed to network building by creating repeated structured interactions and by encouraging cross-group collaboration. For example, women’s group members, youth organizers, and neighborhood leaders began coordinating welfare-related activities that previously occurred in silos. Counseling sessions provided a shared vocabulary and facilitated interpersonal trust through cooperative tasks and collective commitments. This reflects Putnam’s social capital perspective: networks, norms, and trust increased the community’s capacity to coordinate welfare action. Importantly, the most consequential change involved linking social capital connections to service providers and local administrators. Residents reported reduced anxiety in approaching institutions when facilitators served as intermediaries, translated bureaucratic language, and organized collective visits or referral days. Observations corroborated this: counseling sessions sometimes ended with concrete “next steps” lists, including who would accompany whom to the village office or health post. These linking ties altered the institutional interface from an intimidating barrier into a navigable pathway, improving welfare access and reinforcing the perceived usefulness of participation.

These findings collectively address the study’s main problem by showing that counseling becomes an effective welfare instrument only when it functions simultaneously as critical learning (critical consciousness), behavioral enabling (planned behavior), and relational infrastructure (social capital). Where one element was weak, outcomes were limited. In segments of the community where counseling remained lecture-like, residents’ welfare awareness improved at the level of vocabulary but did not translate into participation. Similarly, when counseling built motivation but did not improve institutional responsiveness or access routes, participation intentions declined due to frustration. These boundary conditions clarify why many social counseling programs appear inconsistent: effectiveness depends on the integration of dialogic reflection, practical efficacy-building, and network activation.

In relation to implementation and the identified research gap, the study found that the earlier gap limited integration between counseling mechanisms and participatory outcomes can be addressed through a counseling model that explicitly incorporates participatory design features. Three implementation components were especially influential. First, dialogic facilitation methods (problem-posing questions, community mapping, and reflective storytelling) fostered collective interpretation of welfare issues, supporting critical consciousness development. Second, structured action planning (micro-task allocation, role clarification, and follow-up scheduling) strengthened intention formation and perceived behavioral control, consistent with TPB. Third, intentional network weaving (connecting participants across groups and linking them to institutions) strengthened social capital and created continuity beyond sessions. These components were not automatically present; they depended on facilitator competence and local leader collaboration. Thus, the study's novelty is not merely stating that counseling matters, but specifying a mechanism-based model that explains how counseling can reliably produce participatory welfare outcomes.

The findings also respond to the study's formulated research problems by providing empirically grounded answers. On how counseling strengthens welfare awareness, the evidence indicates that dialogic learning transforms residents' interpretive frames from individualized welfare perceptions to collective welfare consciousness. On participatory mechanisms that mediate the relationship between counseling and action, the mediators were intention formation (attitudes, norms, perceived control) and network activation (trust, reciprocity, bridging and linking ties). On contextual factors enabling or inhibiting effectiveness, institutional responsiveness and the inclusiveness of community leadership were decisive. Where service providers cooperated with facilitators by clarifying requirements, attending sessions, or providing referral channels participation expanded and became more stable. Conversely, when administrative procedures remained opaque or when leaders selectively mobilized only "usual participants," counseling produced limited inclusion and weaker outcomes among marginalized households.

The research objectives are also met through these results. The study set out to analyze and conceptualize the role of social counseling in reinforcing welfare awareness through community participation and to propose an evidence-informed model. The results identified key counseling components that contribute to welfare awareness (dialogic reframing, rights and resource literacy, and normalization of collective responsibility), clarified pathways translating awareness into participation (intention formation plus network activation), and identified enabling factors (facilitator competence, inclusive leadership, and service accessibility) as well as constraining factors (stigma, bureaucratic complexity, time poverty among informal workers, and elite capture of participation spaces). This analytic mapping provides a practical model for participatory social counseling that is replicable and evaluable.

The theoretical benefit of the study lies in its integrated explanation of how learning, intention, and networks interact in participatory welfare change. Rather than treating the three theories as parallel references, the findings indicate a sequential and mutually reinforcing pathway. Critical consciousness provided the interpretive and moral foundation for welfare awareness, enabling residents to see welfare participation as legitimate and meaningful. TPB clarified how counseling translated this awareness into action through attitudes, norms, and perceived control. Social capital theory explained how participation was sustained through trust and networks, especially linking ties that improved access to welfare institutions (Haghighi et al., 2025b). This integrated pathway contributes theoretically by specifying mechanism-level linkages that are often absent in counseling or participation literature, thereby addressing the earlier conceptual fragmentation (Sartor et al., 2025).

Academically, the study contributes operationalizable constructs and indicators that can be used in future qualitative or mixed-methods work. For welfare awareness, indicators emerged as rights literacy, risk recognition, service navigation knowledge, and shared responsibility norms. For participation, indicators included co-planning behaviors, mutual aid actions, monitoring and referral activities, and engagement with institutions. For counseling quality, indicators included the degree of dialogic interaction, the presence of action planning, and network-building practices. These indicators support scholarly replication and comparative research across communities. Practically, the findings inform social workers, facilitators, and local policymakers that counseling effectiveness depends on design choices:

facilitators should move beyond lectures toward participatory methods, incorporate practical service-navigation exercises, and actively collaborate with local institutions to build linking capital. This has direct implications for program implementation, especially in contexts where welfare systems are administratively complex and where community trust in institutions is fragile.

In the discussion, these results can be positioned against previous research in a way that strengthens the contribution. Prior studies on social counseling commonly report improvements in knowledge and attitudes but note variable effects on sustained behavior change, particularly when counseling is not followed by enabling environments. The current findings reinforce and extend those observations by showing that sustained participation emerges when counseling targets intention determinants and builds relational infrastructure. Previous participatory development literature emphasizes co-production and community ownership, yet often under-explains how communities acquire the interpretive capacity and efficacy to participate; the present study contributes by identifying counseling as a micro-to-meso mechanism of social learning and efficacy-building. Likewise, prior social capital studies highlight trust and networks as conditions for collective action, but the current findings show that counseling can actively generate or strengthen those networks, particularly linking ties to institutions an aspect frequently assumed rather than empirically demonstrated.

The study also clarifies the earlier research gap through discussion of divergence and boundary cases. Where counseling sessions were delivered with low dialogic quality, participants reported “understanding more” but did not change behavior, consistent with a partial activation of critical consciousness without the TPB and social capital pathways. Where community leaders were inclusive and facilitators allocated micro-roles, participation broadened; where leadership was selective, participation remained concentrated among familiar actors, reproducing exclusion. This finding resonates with contemporary critiques of participation that warn against tokenism and elite capture. In addition, where institutions responded slowly or inconsistently, counseling-generated participation sometimes produced frustration, reducing perceived control and undermining intention directly illustrating TPB dynamics and demonstrating the necessity of linking social capital for sustainability.

Finally, the results connect back to the study’s intended benefits and future orientation. Theoretically, the study advances a mechanism-based model of participatory social counseling that integrates three theories into a coherent pathway from welfare awareness to collective action. Academically, it offers constructs and indicators that can guide subsequent research, including comparative and longitudinal designs. Practically, it provides actionable guidance for program design and governance: embed counseling within participatory structures, align it with service access pathways, train facilitators in dialogic and inclusion-oriented methods, and institutionalize follow-up mechanisms to maintain participation over time. Taken together, the findings demonstrate that social counseling can function as an instrument for strengthening welfare awareness through community participation when it is intentionally designed to cultivate critical reflection, enable behavioral intention and capability, and activate the trust-based networks that sustain collective welfare practice.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that social counseling can operate as a robust instrument for strengthening welfare awareness when it is intentionally designed to cultivate participation rather than functioning as one-directional outreach. Drawing from the results and discussion, the primary contribution is the clarification of a mechanism-based pathway through which counseling influences community welfare outcomes. In the Cendana District case, counseling strengthened welfare awareness not merely by increasing information about programs or services, but by transforming how residents interpreted welfare problems and their role within them. Repeated dialogic sessions encouraged participants to move beyond individualized explanations of hardship and to recognize welfare as a shared agenda involving rights, service navigation, mutual obligations, and collective problem-solving. This shift in interpretive framing addresses the study’s main problem uneven counseling effectiveness by showing that effectiveness depends on whether counseling functions as social learning that enables communities to “name” welfare issues, link them to their local determinants, and develop shared responsibility for welfare-oriented action.

The findings further demonstrate that welfare awareness becomes consequential only when it is translated into intention and action through clear behavioral and participatory mechanisms. The study shows that counseling increased participation most strongly when it influenced the determinants of engagement that shape whether residents feel willing and able to take part in welfare initiatives. Participants' accounts and field observations indicate that counseling reshaped attitudes toward participation by making collective action appear useful and achievable, strengthened supportive subjective norms by leveraging endorsement from community leaders and peer narratives, and enhanced perceived behavioral control by providing procedural guidance and practical skill-building (e.g., service referral steps and documentation literacy). In this respect, the study's conclusions align with the Theory of Planned Behavior and clarify why awareness alone is insufficient: participation emerges when counseling also reduces uncertainty, increases efficacy, and normalizes involvement as socially valued. Consequently, counseling shifted participation from passive attendance to more substantive forms such as co-identifying welfare priorities, allocating micro-roles in follow-up activities, and initiating informal mutual aid arrangements.

A central conclusion is that participation was sustained only when counseling simultaneously strengthened community social capital, especially bridging and linking ties. The evidence indicates that counseling helped create repeated spaces for interaction, built reciprocity norms, and encouraged coordination across community subgroups that previously engaged in welfare-related activities in fragmented ways. More importantly, counseling enhanced linking social capital by improving residents' relationships with welfare-related institutions and administrative actors. When facilitators acted as intermediaries translating bureaucratic procedures, organizing collective access efforts, and creating structured referral pathways residents reported increased confidence and reduced stigma in approaching services. This linking function was decisive for sustainability because it prevented counseling from becoming merely motivational; it created real opportunities for action by aligning community participation with service accessibility. Where institutional responsiveness was weak or administrative complexity remained opaque, counseling-driven participation declined, illustrating that participatory counseling requires supportive institutional interfaces to maintain perceived control and trust.

The study also concludes that the observed inconsistency of social counseling programs can be explained by partial implementation of the counseling mechanism. When counseling was delivered in lecture-like formats, welfare vocabulary improved but participatory behaviors did not develop strongly. When counseling improved motivation but lacked follow-up structures and network weaving, participation tended to be episodic and concentrated among familiar actors. These boundary findings sharpen the research gap identified in the literature and strengthen the novelty of this study: it is not enough to assert that counseling supports empowerment; counseling must be operationalized as a participatory instrument that integrates dialogic reflection, intention formation support, and network activation. The evidence therefore supports a practical model of participatory social counseling with three core components: dialogic welfare reframing, structured participatory action planning, and deliberate social capital strengthening (including institutional linking). This model responds directly to the research questions regarding how counseling functions, what mediates outcomes, and which conditions enable or inhibit effectiveness.

In theoretical terms, the study's conclusions synthesize three theories into a coherent explanatory chain. Critical consciousness explains the transformation of welfare awareness from private perception to collective understanding and moral commitment. The Theory of Planned Behavior explains the transition from awareness to intention and engagement through attitudes, norms, and perceived control. Social capital theory explains how participation becomes coordinated and sustained through trust, reciprocity, and bridging/linking networks. This integrated framing advances welfare participation research by offering a mechanism-based explanation rather than parallel theoretical references. Academically, the study contributes a set of operational indicators for evaluating counseling as a participatory welfare instrument, including markers of welfare awareness (rights literacy, risk recognition, service navigation capability, shared responsibility norms), participation (co-planning, mutual aid, monitoring/referral, institutional engagement), and counseling quality (dialogic intensity, action-planning presence, network-building actions). Practically, the study suggests that social workers, counselors, and

local authorities should prioritize facilitator capacity in dialogic and inclusion-oriented methods, institutionalize follow-up and role allocation to translate counseling into action, and build formal channels with service agencies to reduce administrative friction and strengthen linking capital. Overall, the study concludes that social counseling strengthens welfare awareness effectively when it is embedded in participatory practice and supported by institutional responsiveness, enabling communities not only to understand welfare challenges but also to act collectively and sustainably to address them.

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