



Social Security for Vulnerable Workers in Aceh Province: Lessons from The Covid-19 Pandemic

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Article

Article History

Received: 10/11/2021
Reviewed: 24/03/2022
Accepted: 25/12/2022
Published: 26/12/2022

DOI:

doi.org/10.29313/mimbar.v0i0.8855



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Volume : 38
No. : 2
Month : December
Year : 2022
Pages : 240-249

Abstract

Conditions for vulnerable workers whose living conditions are uncertain have worsened since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. This study investigates the social assistance programs available to these workers and analyzes the beneficiaries and distribution flow of social assistance during the pandemic in Aceh Province, Indonesia. The data were obtained from agencies in Aceh and vulnerable workers themselves, with a total of 100 respondents. A descriptive qualitative method is used in this study. From the results of the field survey, the distribution of [what does JPS stand for?] (JPS) assistance in Aceh was carried out in the form of non-cash assistance that meets basic needs in 2020, and then in 2021 the distribution of JPS Covid-19 assistance was cash transferred directly by the Aceh Provincial Office to beneficiaries, through a cooperating bank account. There was no change in the expenditures of the beneficiary group (which in this case was vulnerable workers) during the pandemic, but there was a change in income.

Keywords: Social security; Covid-19 pandemic; vulnerable workers

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Introduction

Several epidemics and pandemics in history have had a significant impact on the sustainability of human activities; epidemics and pandemics can even shift the course of history and world civilization. The Marseille Plague, which occurred in 1720-1723, the Philadelphia Yellow Fever Epidemic (1793), the Flu Pandemic (1889-1890), the American Polio Epidemic (1916), the Spanish Flu (1918-1920), the Asian Flu (1957-1958), the AIDS Pandemic and Epidemic (1981-present), the West African Ebola Epidemic (2014-2016), and the Zika Virus Epidemic are just a few of the epidemics and pandemics that (2015-present) (Regulation of the Director General of Social Security No.03/3/BS.01.02/4/2020 Regarding the Mechanism for Distributing Social Assistance for the Hopeful Family Program (PKH) During the Corona Virus Disease 2019 Pandemic (Covid-19, 2020).

The pandemic that is currently engulfing the world is Covid-19 pandemic. This virus attacks the respiratory tract which can cause mild disorders of the respiratory system, severe lung infections, and even death. This virus first appeared in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. Although the mortality rate for this disease is still low, elderly people and

people with medical conditions who have a history of previous congenital diseases (such as diabetes, heart disease, hypertension) are at a higher risk of long-term illness or death from Covid-19. Keeping your distance from an infected person is one way to avoid catching this illness. Because of this, the government issued directives to restrict activities outside the home, and various phrases, such as "stay at home" and "social distancing," became commonplace. Staying at home, as well as routines such as wearing masks, washing hands frequently, maintaining physical distance when interacting with others, and other practices were dubbed the "New Normal".

This new normal brought about many societal changes and problems, one notably being the economic issues it caused. Various countries in the world were not only focused on reducing and treating Covid-19 cases, but also needed to deal with the socio-economic impacts. Economic turmoil ensued, weakening average household consumption and individuals' purchasing power. The occurrence of prolonged uncertainty meant investments weakened, which had a negative impact on industrial operations and the global economy, causing commodity prices and Indonesia's exports to fall.

According to Francisco (2013), this pandemic brought to light the uncertainty that many vulnerable workers live within. From March 2020 onwards, there was drastic economic downturn, sluggish economic activity, slowed production, interrupted distribution, and hampered consumption conditions. Several industries stopped operating completely and the problems were made even worse by the number of companies laying off their workers without complying with applicable laws that protect workers' rights. According to Ministry of Manpower data, by the second week of April 2020, 2.8 million workers had been laid off or furloughed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Layoffs increased the number of vulnerable workers in Indonesia, where the majority rely on informal sectors for a living. In 2019, approximately 57.27% of all workers were informal workers in Indonesia, and this population are the most vulnerable to the effects of an economic crisis due to low average income and lack of social protection or health.

As unemployment increased, the number of vulnerable workers also increased, including in the Aceh region of Indonesia. Secretary General of the Aceh Labor Alliance, Habibi Inseun, said that since beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, 7,918 workers have been laid off. This job loss means a higher number of vulnerable and poor people, who have little to no purchasing power. In the end, it made the rate of poverty also accelerate. The welfare of this population became more uncertain through Covid-19 as many of these vulnerable workers do not receive social welfare or are covered by health insurance. These two forms of protection are very important to maintain the wellbeing of this population.

According to studies by Dutta and Fischer (2021) and Ghosh et al. (2020), the Indian government invested in social security during the pandemic. Research from Retnaningsih (2020) about social assistance to workers concluded that the social assistance provided by the government still did not satisfy the sense of justice for other workers, namely informal workers with much lower incomes. Kim (2021) also mentioned that there is an urgent need of cash relief to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on the income of vulnerable people.

The definition of vulnerable workers in this study is the workforce whose working conditions are uncertain and below average. These workers are more likely to fall into poverty and include informal sector workers. Both workers who are employed by companies (formal workers) and those who work in the informal sector were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Indonesian government decided to provide social assistance in the form of a salary subsidy of Rp600,000 for three months for workers whose income is Rp. 5,000,000 and below. This study on social assistance for workers should be useful for governmental and political leaders because social policies should focus on the most affected people or the people who need social assistance the most.

Based on the Aceh Province economic report (2020), workers based on their employment status, workers/ Employees/ Employees absorb labor with the largest portion, which is around 34.3 percent. This figure decreased compared to the previous year which was at the level of 38.8 percent. The number of workers classified with self-employed employment status decreased to 21.6 percent from 21.7 percent in the same period the previous year. In connection with the background described previously, the purposes of this study are: 1) to investigate the social assistance program during the pandemic in Aceh Province; 2) to analyze the beneficiaries of social assistance and the distribution flow of social assistance during the pandemic in Aceh Province.

Research Method

This investigation on the Covid-19 pandemic's effects on vulnerable employees in the formal and informal sectors examine social security for these people in Aceh Province. The descriptive qualitative approach will be employed in this study, which explains and analyzes research findings by creating a methodical, factual, and accurate description of the facts, traits, and connections between the phenomena under study.

The research methodology employed combines field research, structured interviews, and in-depth interviews with literature review and field observation. Data were gathered in a variety of ways, including through questionnaires and interviews with workers in Aceh Province's unorganized sector. The selection of respondents was done by accidental sampling. Data collection in this way is intended to determine the characteristics of vulnerable workers in the formal and informal sectors due to the pandemic and to explore the aspirations of vulnerable workers in the informal sector regarding social assistance.

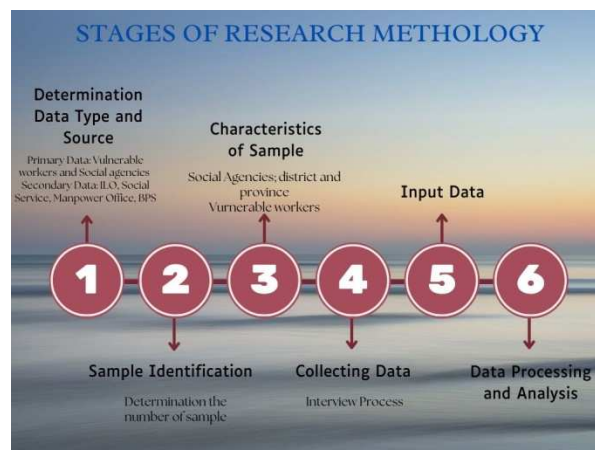


Figure 1. Stages of Research Methodology

The stages used in this research methodology are: This study uses both primary and secondary data. The primary data are used to investigate the social assistance program during the pandemic in Aceh Province and the beneficiaries of social assistance. Furthermore, we also analyze the distribution flow of social assistance during the pandemic in Aceh Province. Secondary data are used to determine samples that will later be used as exploratory materials in research from the ILO, Social Service, Manpower Office, Central Statistics Agency, and other sources and references related to research questions.

The Aceh Province consists of 23 regencies/cities, so the population is all vulnerable workers (in the formal and informal sectors) in Aceh Province. The number of samples in this study could not be detected, because data collection on vulnerable workers during the Covid-19 pandemic was not perfect, thus sampling was carried out using a large sample of $N \geq 30$ (Roscoe in Sugiyono, 2017) for 4 districts/cities spread across Aceh Province, consisting of: South Aceh Regency representing the West region, Bener Meriah Regency representing the Central region, North Aceh Regency representing the eastern region (which is also the Regency with the highest poverty rate in Aceh Province), and Aceh Pidie representing the middle area along with Aceh Province.

The samples in this study are the agencies related to the distribution of social assistance in Aceh Province and the vulnerable workers who have any of the following characteristics: people working in the informal sector, small business workers, people working in the formal sector (permanent/contracted workers in companies or government) who lost their jobs due to the pandemic, freelancers, and people who were already working before the pandemic. The agencies chosen in this study are Aceh Province Social Agency, District Social Agency, Development Planning Agency, and the heads of villages. The total samples of vulnerable workers are 100.

Interviews through open questionnaires were delivered to the agencies who understood the issue of social security and/or social assistance for vulnerable workers during the Covid-19 pandemic. On the other hand, the vulnerable workers chosen to be a part of the sample were given a closed questionnaire to explore the problem more deeply and to find the most basic problems they faced. This data collection is also intended to identify alternative solutions for social security policies for vulnerable workers based on the value of justice.

Input Data. Data Processing and Analysis. In this stage, we process the data using cross tabulation analysis by SPSS software. We use Cross Tabulation analysis (Sufahani et al., 2016) to explain the correlation between variables.

Results and Discussion

The Covid-19 pandemic had a socio-economic impact on all levels of society, especially vulnerable people who have low welfare. To reduce the burden directly felt by vulnerable communities, the government has implemented several social assistance programs as such as Social Safety Nets (JPS). JPS is a form of government concern for vulnerable groups in facing the economic crisis, therefore JPS in the form of social assistance is also continuously run by the government which in this case is in the scope of Aceh Province by assuming that during the pandemic vulnerable workers who are a small part of the community of vulnerable groups feel the impact negative in supporting the economic life of the family. Based on the results of identification and clarification to several agencies related to the distribution of social assistance, Social Security Disbursement, the distribution of social assistance during the pandemic in Aceh Province proceeded as follows:

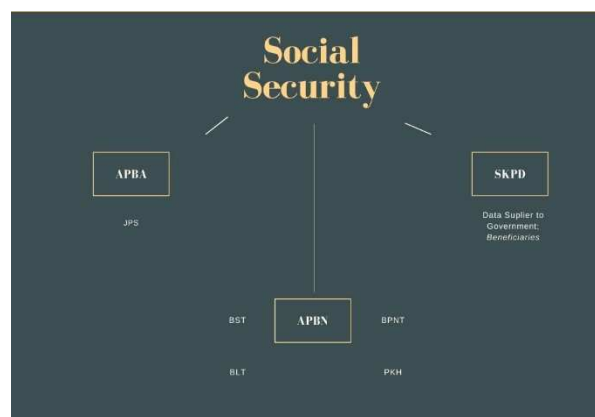


Figure 2. Social Security Disbursement in Aceh

The social security program in Aceh Province is a derivative of the social assistance program in the central government. Several social assistance programs during the Covid-19 pandemic were distributed through local governments supported by data on beneficiaries by the Regional Work Units (SKPD). Some social assistance services originating from the central government in the State Revenue and Expenditure Budget (APBN) and the Aceh Revenue and Expenditure Budget are: The Family Hope Program (PKH) is a social assistance program for Poor Families (KM) designated as PKH beneficiaries. Non-Cash Food Assistance (BPNT) is food assistance provided to beneficiaries and is given every month through an electronic account mechanism that is used only to buy food ingredients at vendors/stalls that have collaborated with related agencies. Cash Social Assistance (BST) is assistance in the form of money given to poor, underprivileged, vulnerable families, and also MSMEs affected by the Covid-19 outbreak. BST is also included in one of the JPS programs. Direct Cash Assistance (BLT) is financial assistance to the poor to reduce the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Welfare Rice Assistance (Rastra) is a rice assistance program for non-prosperous families to receive 10 kg of uncooked rice to beneficiaries every month. This program was changed to BPNT (What does this stand for?), where beneficiaries are given vouchers of Rp. 110,000/month to be exchanged for rice and eggs in cooperative stalls with related departments. Social Safety Net (JPS) is social assistance provided by the government to vulnerable communities as a form of assistance to relieve people affected by the crisis.

The JPS in Aceh Province that has been implemented has targeted vulnerable workers who are affected by the pandemic and are not beneficiaries of other assistance, such as BLT, BST, BPNT, PKH. The current organization of the JPS program in Aceh Province is shown in Figure 3.

In 2020, the distribution of JPS assistance in Aceh Province was carried out through non-cash assistance in the form of basic needs, and in 2021 the distribution of JPS Covid-19 assistance was carried out in cash which was transferred directly by the Aceh Provincial Office to beneficiaries, through a cooperating bank account. The following is the number of Heads of Families (KK) beneficiaries of JPS assistance in Aceh Province per regency/city:

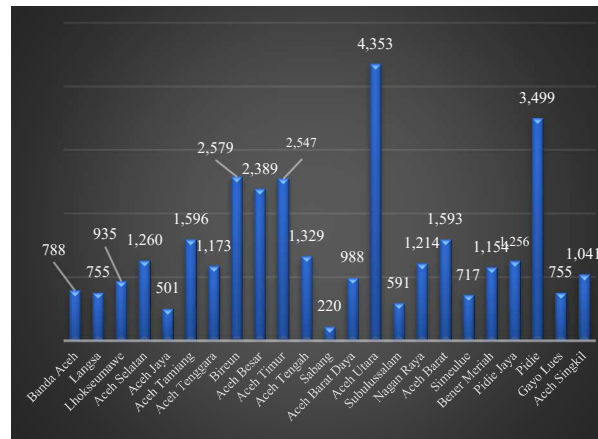


Figure 3. Number of families receiving social assistance from JPS money per Regency/City in Aceh Province in 2021

Based on Figure 3, it can be seen that of the total beneficiaries of the COVID-19 JPS assistance in Aceh Province is 33,233 families, with the largest amount of beneficiaries in Aceh Utara Regency, with a distribution of 13 percent of the total recipients throughout Aceh Province. The amount of money given is Rp. 300,000/family, and through the survey period, all aid distribution has been distributed.

Respondent Profile/Characteristics

Respondents who were targeted in the study were residents who worked in the scope of work and were vulnerable in certain situations, namely in this case those who were socially affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. They were directly interviewed using a questionnaire. From the survey, some information was related to the profile of vulnerable workers who receive the benefits of JPS assistance in Aceh Province, namely:

Education

Vulnerable workers based on their education level are widely distributed at the SMA (senior high school)/equivalent level by 54 percent. Only 14 percent have education at the undergraduate level or above, as shown in Figure 4. Based on this figure, it can be concluded that vulnerable workers in Aceh Province generally do not meet the administrative requirements of the labor market demand, and, in the creation of business fields, entrepreneurs are only in small-scale business circles.

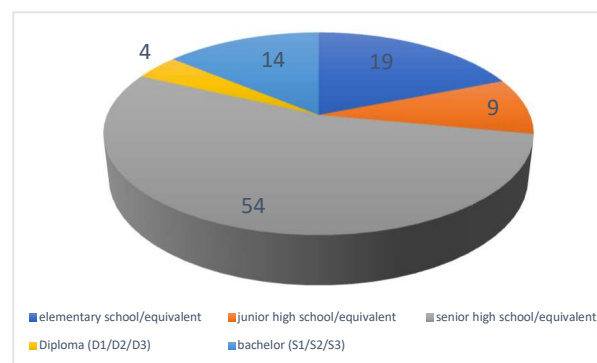


Figure 4. Respondent's Education

Prior to Covid-19, the majority of respondents (54 percent), were high school graduates/equivalent and were working as baristas, workshops, parking attendants, cake makers, honorary workers, freelancers, traders, tailors, farmers, drivers, handymen, salespeople, waiters, self-employed, or entrepreneurs. Additionally, 19 percent of respondents who graduated from elementary school/equivalent worked as cake makers, laundry workers, fishermen, traders, tailors, craftsmen, or entrepreneurs/small business owners. For the 9 percent of respondents with junior high school diplomas/equivalent, they had jobs as traders, tailors, farmers, entrepreneurs, while 4 percent of Diploma graduates (D1/D3) work as

internet cafe guards, traders, or entrepreneurs/small business owners. For respondents with a bachelor's degree or above (S1/S2/S3), as many as 14 percent work as pharmacists, workshops, farmers, temporary workers, private employees, traders, coffee processors, surveyors, rental businesses or entrepreneurs.

Income

In terms of income, respondents in general did not see much change in their income from before to after the Covid-19 pandemic. However, interestingly, with the classification of income levels in the first denomination of Rp1–Rp5,000,000 and fourth denomination of >Rp5,000,001, in general there is a change in monthly income at the distribution classification level due to the pandemic.

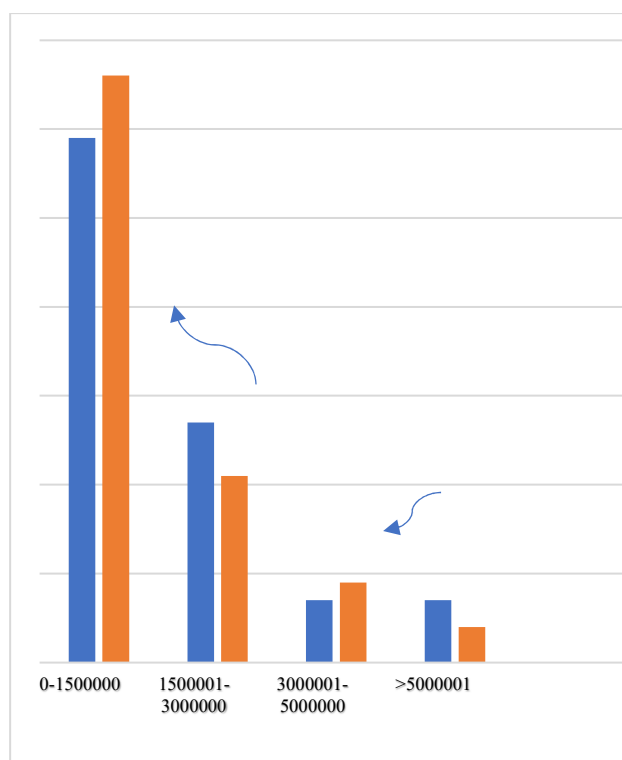


Figure 5. Changes in Income Before and After the Covid-19 Pandemic

Figure 5 illustrates the change in income in Aceh Province (the blue line depicts income prior to the pandemic, while the orange line depicts income following the pandemic). As shown, the decrease in monthly income only affects a single level, namely: the second range (Rp1,500,001–Rp3,000,000) to the first range (Rp0–Rp1,500,000), and from the fourth range (greater than Rp5,000,001) to the third range (Rp3,000,001–Rp5,000,000). This decline in income also demonstrates that workers from vulnerable areas have less purchasing power, which would ultimately lead to less non-food requirement consumption, especially given Aceh Province's current minimum salary of Rp. 3,165,031.

Many of the respondents were responsible for dependents, for example family. Some of these dependents were also earning income, and the number of dependents with income can have an effect on monthly expenses. In general, expenditure with income is a reflection, and expenditure for basic needs for all individuals is a basic constant that will not change much in the presence or absence of economic or societal shock, because all individuals need food, water, clothing, and shelter.

There were 20 percent of respondents with an income of less than Rp. 3,000,000 who had no dependents. The other 80 percent had dependents, of which 14 percent were respondents with a monthly income of more than Rp. 3,000,001. Ironically, 30 percent of the 41 percent of respondents who have more than 3 dependents, have a monthly income of less than Rp3,000,001.

Before and during Covid-19, out of 87 percent of respondents with a monthly income of less than Rp. 3,000,000, there are 32 percent who have more than 3 dependents, 24 percent

with 2 dependents, 13 percent with 1 dependent and 18 people who do not have any dependents. Meanwhile, of the respondents who have a monthly income of more than Rp3,000,001, 9 percent have more than 3 dependents, 2 percent have 2 dependents and 2 respondents have no dependents.

Expenditure

Expenditures reflect the amount of income of an individual or household. The pandemic in general did not drastically change the expenditures of respondents compared to before the pandemic. This can be expected because, regardless of the pandemic, spending on living necessities, especially food/basic needs, has not changed, and this is also true for groups of people who have income at the provincial minimum wage level.

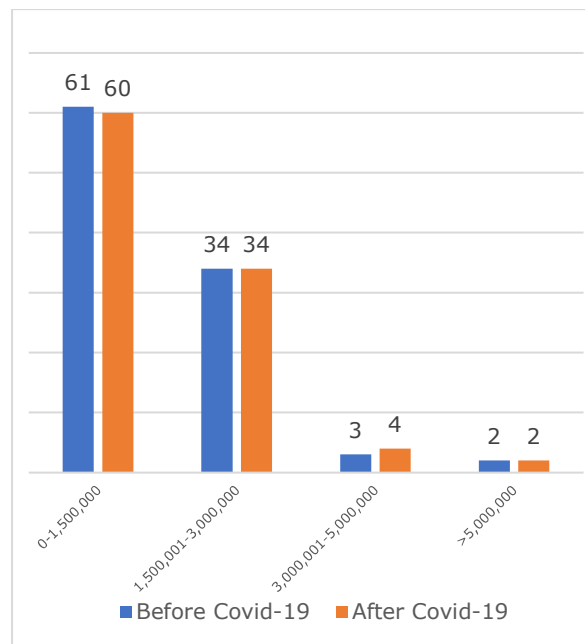


Figure 6. Expenditure Changes During a Pandemic

The number of dependents

The pandemic created a burden for workers belonging to vulnerable communities in meeting their basic daily needs. Several government policies were aimed at reducing crowds and weakening economic activity, causing income to decline, but with a high number of dependents of 3 people and more. Figure 6 shows how the pandemic affected the expenditures of people who have dependents.

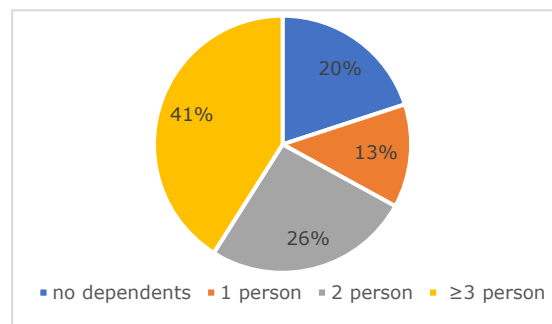


Figure 7. Number of Dependents

Figure 7 shows that most vulnerable workers have at least 2 dependents. This means a small income is stretched even thinner among multiple people in the household. Of all the vulnerable workers surveyed, 67 percent had 2 or more dependents.

Type of work

The variations in the types of vulnerable jobs that exist in Aceh Province are generally in the category of small traders/entrepreneurs which include grocery shop owners, coffee shop

owners and operators, noodle shop owners and operators, cake makers, nutmeg craftsmen, sandal sellers, tailors, fish and vegetable sellers, retail oil sellers, and stakeholders in other types of small businesses. Other types of work undertaken by vulnerable people are workers/laborers in food stalls, internet cafes, construction sites, laundry wash services, barbershops, and others.

Furthermore, these jobs are informal and these workers tend not to stay in one type of work. Of all respondents, none of the respondents have a side job. They only have a main job which is vulnerable to non-economic shocks, such as the pandemic.

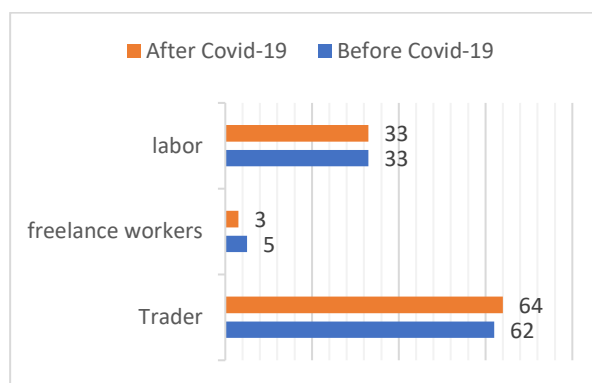


Figure 8. Respondent's Type of Work

Based on Figure 8, it can be seen that some adjustment was made by workers who switched their type of work. It can be seen that behind the great difficulties experienced by most of the people affected by the pandemic, but there are still respondents who are able to adapt and be creative and responsive to see opportunities. There was a shift in the number of workers who before the pandemic worked odd jobs (freelancers), or even did not work. They adapted to be able to open a small business and earn a small income. This change indicates that the pandemic is not only a burden for a small number of people, but can also be an opportunity to develop a business personally.

Furthermore, if you look at the relationship between type of work and income, before the Covid-19 pandemic, 59 percent of respondents who had a monthly income of less than Rp. 1,500,000 had jobs as baristas, cake makers, laundry workers, honorary workers, traders, parking attendants, tailors, fishermen, salespeople, internet cafe guards, farmers, drivers, surveyors, builders, waiters/waitresses, or entrepreneurs. Twenty-seven percent of respondents who work as traders, workshops, cake makers, tailors, farmers, coffee processors, drivers, handymen, car rental businesses, or entrepreneurs have incomes in the range of Rp. 1,500,001–Rp 3,000,000.

Of the respondents who have an income of Rp3,000,001–Rp5,000,000, 7 percent have jobs as private employees, traders, workshops, parking attendants, honorary workers, or tailors, or have a side job loading and unloading goods. Meanwhile, 7 percent of respondents who have an income of more than Rp5,000,001 work as pharmacists, workshops, traders, farmers and entrepreneurs.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a change in income in 66 percent of respondents who had a monthly income of less than Rp. 1,500,000 with jobs as baristas, workshops, cake makers, laundry workers, cashiers, honorary workers, traders, parking attendants, tailors, fishermen, motorcycle taxi drivers, online vendors, salespeople, internet cafe guards, farmers, drivers, surveyors, handymen, car rental businesses, waiters/waitresses, or entrepreneurs. There was a change in income for 21 percent of respondents who work as baristas, traders, workshops, cashiers, private employees, cake makers, tailors, farmers, artisans, or entrepreneurs have incomes ranging from Rp1,500,001 to Rp3,000,000. Of respondents who have an income of Rp3,000,001–Rp5,000,000, 9 percent saw a change in income and have jobs as pharmacists, traders, parking attendants, farmers, or entrepreneurs, or have a side job loading and unloading goods. Four percent of respondents who have an income of more than IDR 5,000,001 work as traders and entrepreneurs and saw a change in income.

Respondents' expenditures from various types of work owned by respondents. Before Covid-19, 61 percent of respondents had monthly expenses of less than Rp. 1,500,000; 34

percent of respondents have monthly expenses ranging from Rp.1,500,001–Rp3,000,000. Respondents who have a monthly expenditure of Rp3,000,001–Rp5,000,000 totaled 3 people. Two respondents have expenses of more than IDR 5,000,001.

By contrast, after Covid-19, 60 percent of respondents have a monthly expenditure of less than Rp. 1,500,000, seeing a decrease of 1 percent. Next, no change was seen in the percentage of respondents whose monthly expenses ranged Rp1,500,001–Rp3,000,000, maintaining 34 percent. Respondents who have an expenditure of IDR 3,000,001–Rp 5,000,000, 4 percent have jobs as private employees, traders and farmers, and the lowest percentage of 2 percent of respondents have expenses of more than IDR 5,000,001 working as entrepreneurs and baristas. Post-pandemic changes occurred in the expenditure of the respondent group in the range of less than Rp1,500,000 and Rp3,000,001–Rp 5,000,000.

Conclusions

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Aceh Province distributed assistance to vulnerable workers called the Social Safety Net (JPS) which came from the central government and was budgeted in the APBN. From the results of this literature study, the results of field studies, and the results of interviews, it is known that the flow of distribution of social assistance, especially JPS assistance in Aceh Province, was carried out by the relevant agencies at the provincial and district/city levels and in collaboration with several parties. The distribution of JPS assistance in Aceh Province was carried out through non-cash assistance in the form of basic needs. In 2021, the distribution of JPS Covid-19 assistance was carried out through direct transfers of money from the Aceh Provincial Office to beneficiaries, through cooperating bank accounts.

In the distribution process, in general, agencies related to the social assistance process had problems obtaining the latest data. By distributing this aid, the community in general felt relief from their dependents with the assistance of the pandemic JPS funds, and now the community expects social assistance in the form of cash because it allows more flexibility for them to determine what they want to buy to meet their basic needs.

Most workers belonging to vulnerable communities in Aceh Province have either a variety of jobs, are small-scale entrepreneurs, are laborers or work for other people, or are farmers. A small number of vulnerable workers initially did not have a job before the pandemic and became freelancers, but during or after the pandemic occurred, they were able to see opportunities for income.

There was a decrease in the incomes of these vulnerable workers during the pandemic, but there was no change in their expenditures. Due to the fact that the minimum salary in Aceh Province is currently Rp. 3,165,031, which decreased from Rp XXX in 20XX. This decline in minimum income means workers from vulnerable industries have less purchasing power, which means they are less able to buy anything other than necessary foodstuffs. The condition of vulnerable people's income range change is included in the range of basic necessities.

Therefore, there is a need for stricter monitoring and evaluation of the distribution process with the main effort being to keep the beneficiary data updated. In addition, it is also important to maintain existing assistance by prioritizing what is needed by the community, so that vulnerable communities are able to survive public health and other societal shocks that disrupt the local and national economy.

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