

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON INDONESIAN WOMEN WORKERS BASED ON SOCIAL-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The declining economic performance in Indonesia due to the COVID-19 pandemic has also affected women's lives in Indonesia. Women get many additional burdens because of this pandemic situation, such as earning more money to fulfill household needs, teaching children during online school, and even the weakness of sexual autonomy. To help their family to survive, women are trying to expand their power not only in the domestic sphere but also in the public sphere. Unfortunately, the imbalance of power relations between men and women is still strongly existed in Indonesia. As a result, this pandemic amplifies the inequality rights that women face. Therefore, it is necessary to make efforts to eliminate the discrimination against women. By using descriptive analysis, this paper analyzes the impact of the pandemic on Indonesian women workers and the measures to address the impact severity.

Key words: women workers, power relations, gender equality, pandemic, COVID-19

I. INTRODUCTION

The power relations between men and women in Indonesia are still strongly existed. A patriarchal society puts men in a more dominant position than women. The perception that see women are not the primary breadwinners and that their main task is only to take care of the household is still alive in society today. This view distinguishes between men's and women's duties and roles, namely that men are in charge of earning money, while women are in charge of taking care of children and household. If men do not have regular jobs or income, then women help in various ways to fulfill household needs. Unfortunately, when women work, it is very rare to find men who fill the role of taking care of children and the household. They tend to enjoy the comfort of being husbands who are free from duties. Thus, domestic and public activities become women's responsibilities.

The existence of the COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed all countries' lives in the world, including Indonesia. These changes do not only occur in the health sector but also affect all social, political, and economic aspects. The declining economic performance in Indonesia certainly has impacted even the smallest community in the society, namely family. Many households have experienced financial difficulties and they have taken various ways to raise income. For instance, online sales have emerged rapidly on WhatsApp group applications to target friends as customers. Nevertheless, not all of these means are successful in fulfilling the household needs.

It shows that this pandemic requires families to adapt to the current situation quickly. Family heads – both men and women – must think strategically to obtain additional income sources to fulfill the family's needs. Unfortunately, the power relations of men and women in the family remain unchanged. During this pandemic, women receive heavier responsibilities than men, especially in the domestic sphere. For instance, when schools are forced to close to cut the chain of coronavirus transmission, women as mothers are forced to obtain additional tasks to replace the teachers' roles in educating children – especially children from early childhood to junior high school. All these additional tasks are carried out among her primary duties as workers, especially those who are in the middle class – to save families from the coronavirus. Women have become more 'superwomen' with their multitasking skills during this pandemic.

This pandemic situation has significantly affected the women's lives in the family. The low appreciation for women amidst those many burdens that they bear during this pandemic shows that women are still considered subordinate in society. The explanation above shows that the power relations between men and women in Indonesia are still deeply rooted. The imbalance in power relations means that this pandemic amplifies the inequality rights that women face. Therefore, this paper attempts to answer two problems, as follows:

1. How does the COVID-19 pandemic affect Indonesian women workers?
2. How to address the gendered impacts during the pandemic and post-pandemic?

II. METHODOLOGY

This paper is a literature study conducted by collecting data from books, journals, legislation, and other literature related to gender. These data collection results were analyzed using descriptive analysis techniques with Liberal Feminism approach. Liberal Feminism believes that every individual – both man and woman – has the freedom to develop themselves. Nevertheless, society tends to limit women's freedom through unequal distribution of opportunities. Therefore, this theory tries to improve this injustice situation by fighting for gender equality.

This paper has two objectives, namely 1) to examine the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Indonesian women workers, and 2) to formulate the measures to address the gendered impacts during the pandemic and post-pandemic. There are several papers that have been written about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women. However, none of them are focused on Indonesian women – especially women workers. In addition, some of them only discuss about psychological impact, or only focus on pregnant women. Meanwhile, this paper focus on Indonesian women workers and tries to comprehensively analyze the impact of the pandemic on all aspects of women lives. Thus, this paper must be written to achieve the objectives mentioned before.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Historically, the concept of men being greater than women has started in Indonesia since the 1800s period. Whereas in the Pre-1800s period, many positions as leaders of a kingdom and the highest positions in the kingdom were held by women, such as Queen Sima, Tribhuwana Wijayatunggadewi, Dyah Suhita, Commander Malahayati, and Queen Kalinyamat (Nastiti, 2016). The division of tasks in managing prehistoric life is established clearly. For instance, men provide food needs in remote areas, while women manage food around houses (Bellwood, 2007). Sometimes, they also collect food and life necessities together. Food processing is carried out together so that the food remains in the form of shells, and animals' bones are in one place at the cave's mouth.

Moreover, the past life can also be seen from the temple reliefs. The roles of women and men are different but complement each other. Women can hold the highest leaderships, such as princesses and queens, as the ruler's successors (Nastiti, 2016), such as during Mpu Sindok's era. Then in the following period after Mpu Sindok's era, women also still held the supreme ruler of the kingdom and warlords.

Nevertheless, the equality between men and women depicted during those periods changed drastically during the Dutch colonial period. Life changed because women were protected by men, so that they were not chosen as wives by colonial soldiers and rulers. The communication between local people in the archipelago at that time with the colonial party was carried out only by men so that slowly women became known as *kanca wingking*, which means "friend in the backside" in Javanese (Saraswati, 2016). This condition then labels power relations between men and women, namely between men and their *kanca wingking* – between public and domestic roles.

A. THE IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 ON INDONESIAN WOMEN WORKERS

1. FINANCIAL ASPECT

The number of women with the new professional roles has increased rapidly nowadays. In the past, women were considered only to fill activities in the domestic sector, while only men were considered capable of filling the public sector. Subsequently, since the beginning of the 21st century, many women have been able to fill important social life positions. However, the involvement of women in the public sector cannot guarantee that the quality of life for women will automatically improve. Many women workers still work in the informal sector or the formal sector but with the middle to the lowest level (Abdullah, 2006).

Women's journey in fighting for their new identity, namely not only being mothers and wives but also as workers, is a long journey that still needs to be continued even today. International Labor Organization's data for 2020 show that women still earn less than what men receive for the same workloads (United Nations, 2020). The idea that only men support family income is one of the main reasons for this wage difference. This difference in wages is only based on gender without considering the qualification aspect between them. When women have succeeded in entering the world of work, there are still many cases where women's performance is not appreciated in Indonesia, even though their qualifications and quality of work are above average. This situation occurs not only for women with low educational backgrounds but also for those with high education degrees and skills. This is due to the weak bargaining position of women in the labor market.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there are many additional expenses, such as internet data, gadget, nutrition, vitamins, and sanitation. When the husband's income is not enough to fulfill these additional expenses, the wife tries to help in many ways. However, when the wife is busy to work does not necessarily make the husband replace taking care of children and household – this role remains with the wife. The wife must provide nutritious food to maintain the family's body resilience amid limited mobility, limited access, and rising prices for essential commodities. As a result, women workers who have families have to receive many burdens, while men as husbands and fathers seem very passive in participating the domestic activities. The familiarize ideology has supported this inequality of power relations because this ideology states that women are supposed to be good mothers and wives (Abdullah, 2006), while husbands tend to enjoy their comfort zone because they do not have such expectations from society.

Ironically, even though women have tried to help earn more money for the survival and welfare of the family, it turns out that domestic violence in Indonesia has increased during this pandemic (National Commission on Violence against Women/ Komnas Perempuan, 2020). The high intensity of meeting between husband and wife because they have to stay at home can be a reason for the conflicts. Moreover, the triggers of financial difficulties caused the situation become more turbulent. Husbands become depressed because they cannot fulfill family needs, so instead of giving appreciation to wives who have already helped the family's financial income, husbands tend to commit violence. This violence committed by a husband against a wife is a sign of his concern over the weakening of his control over his wife so that violence is used to reaffirm his dominance as a man in the house.

This situation became worse when it has been the character of a husband to often commit domestic violence against his wife – even before the pandemic. With the social distancing policy during the pandemic, women as victims are isolated with their husbands. Social restrictions make it more difficult for women to receive help from family or friends. It is even more difficult for them to report violence to the authorities. Actually, there is already a solution to overcome this situation, namely using hand gestures as a signal that has recently been socialized to the public (Republika, 2020). Nevertheless, this hand gesture practice receives many mocks from the public on social media because they think these women are only seeking for public attention

(Wijana, 2020). This act of mocking victims shows that there are still many people who normalize domestic violence. As a result, the victims choose not to report the violence because they are afraid other people will only mock it.

The women's roles have increased due to this pandemic. It can be seen that economic factors have triggered changes in household life during this pandemic. The factor of the economic decline is a domino effect that never stops. Family financial problems must be managed effectively so that the available funds can be sufficient. If there are no savings, it means that family heads – both men and women – have to start looking at other opportunities to be used as a source of living. Therefore, maintaining clear communication between family members is an important thing that must be done.

2. EDUCATION

The closure of physical schools replaced by online schools has made women receive an additional burden, namely assisting children to study. Unfortunately, many teachers only try to make their work easier by giving a lot of assignments to students so that mothers must divide their time to work and help children complete these assignments. Also, online schools certainly need learning media, such as laptops or smartphones. For middle to lower-class families who have a limited number of gadgets, children have to use the parents' devices that should be used for work so that it can lead to the decrease of the parents' work productivity. As a result, the women's working hour is increasing because they can only do their work after the children's online school time is over. Moreover, many families in Indonesia do not have any gadget at all, so mothers have to borrow from neighbors or relatives for the sake of children's education.

For women who work in sectors that still require them to enter the office, online schools will undoubtedly have a more negative impact on them, such as nurses who are filled mostly with women. Initially, children who used to be at school during working hour, but now they must be at home so that they need their mothers. In normal conditions, the mother may still be able to entrust her child to grandparents, but this is nearly impossible during this pandemic because of the high risk of death for the elderly. Leaving children to friends or neighbors is also uneasy because of the social distancing policy that must be obeyed. This dilemma is another burden for women, namely by adding their worry about childcare during their working hour.

The teaching related to The Clean and Healthy Behavior during the pandemic that is usually taught in schools ultimately has to be done by women. The burden increases when women have to check the availability of water and soap to wash family member's hands, take care of the availability of hand sanitizers, and take care of family clothes' hygiene. All these additional tasks are carried out while completing her duties as a worker. Moreover, online schools need knowledge from a mother to deliver the school materials effectively to children. However, there are still many women who do not have the opportunity to receive higher education in Indonesia. How is it possible to deliver junior high school course materials when the mother is only an elementary school graduate? Even if the mother has a higher education background, it is not a guarantee that she will be able to teach her children well because she is not equipped with good teaching skills like a professional teacher. There was a case in one of the provinces in Indonesia, Banten, where the mother was beating her child to death while accompanying online learning merely because she was impatient. This additional responsibility to teach children can be dangerous if it is not managed properly.

In addition, women workers need to learn about digital literacy during this pandemic. The social distancing policy obligates people to stay at home so that it makes them spend their time more on social media. On the one side, social media has a lot of benefits, but on the other side, it also has harmful effects. When people feel lonely and start to use social media to interact with strangers, it could be very dangerous because a lot of cybercrime happens, such as online fraud, grooming, love scams, and others. If women have this knowledge, they can be more cautious to protect the family members from those dangerous sides of social media.

These online schools also have an impact on children's mental health. If we return to the previous domestic violence problem, online schools mean that children have to stay home and see the conflicts between their parents often. The psychological burden experienced by children due to parental conflicts makes children experience difficulties in learning. This means, once again, women as mothers must be able to find ways to help their children understand lessons when at the same time, they are also vulnerable due to domestic violence by their husbands. This burden is supported by society's expectations that women must be able to be good mothers so that children's failure makes women labeled as bad mothers, regardless of the real reason was the fathers who commit violence.

By and large, the ability to complement and support each other between husband and wife – father and mother – is essential. Otherwise, it will only add strains to women during this COVID-19 pandemic.

3. REPRODUCTION

The emerge of COVID-19 also affects women in terms of reproduction. Pregnancy rates in Indonesia increase significantly during the pandemic, including unplanned pregnancy (Kompas, 2020). Besides the fact that husbands and wives spend more time together at home, this is also because there are restrictions or even closure in Family Planning services during the pandemic. As a result, they cannot have birth control services from hospitals. The existence of financial difficulties can put pregnant women's mental and physical health at risk during the pandemic. When a woman is pregnant, she often feels nauseous so that she does not want to eat. At the same time, she also needs to fulfill nutritional intake to maintain her body's resistance against the coronavirus. Women's double or even triple roles can also disrupt their rest hours, making pregnancy during pandemics very vulnerable – not only for women but also for the fetus.

Unplanned pregnancies during this pandemic also demonstrate the weakness of women's autonomy over their highly private areas. Women often do not have the power to decide about their reproductive and sexual life in a marriage. Moreover, this view is supported by religious teachings that said a good wife must comply with the husband's wishes, including his sexual needs (Siburian, 2020). Meanwhile, there are various risks of pregnancy during the pandemic. Besides, when women are faced with financial problems, they cannot access health services during pregnancy. During Ebola and Zika virus, it shows there was a high rate of maternal mortality or death for pregnant women (Wenham, 2020). Therefore, women should have more power in managing their private areas. If society can control women's bodies' autonomy, then it means that women no longer have freedom (Abdullah, 2006). The efforts to understand that reproduction is a common affair between husband and wife need to be built.

This condition can be avoided if the Bill on Indonesian Law concerning Elimination of Sexual Violence is agreed upon because it regulates marital rape. Although marital rape has been introduced with Indonesian Law concerning Elimination of Domestic Violence, this regulation does not have a broader scope like the Bill concerning Elimination of Sexual Violence. For example, this Bill includes not only repressive measures against marital rape but also preventive measures. Unfortunately, this Bill has received many pros and cons. One of the reasons is because there are still many people who do not accept the concept of marital rape. Whereas this concept, which is comprehensively regulated in the Bill, will show the progress of human rights in the Indonesian legal system that will protect women, especially in this pandemic situation.

The description above shows how far the imbalance of power relations between men and women in carrying out family functions during the pandemic. There are a lot of sufferings that women experience during this pandemic situation. Therefore, the Indonesian government must protect women during this pandemic and make efforts to achieve gender equality, especially in the household, so women do not have to obtain too heavy burdens. The following discussion in the second section tries to answer how to address these gendered impacts due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

B. THE MEASURES TO ADDRESS THE GENDERED IMPACTS DURING THE PANDEMIC AND POST-PANDEMIC

Article 27 paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia has recognized the principle of equality for all citizens without any exception. Indonesia also has several regulations that guarantee women's rights, includes Law Number 7 of 1984 concerning Ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Law Number 39 of 1999 concerning Human Rights, Law Number 23 of 2003 concerning the Elimination of Domestic Violence, and Law Number 13 of 2003 concerning Manpower. These regulations should be used to seek the prevention as well as eradication of discrimination against women. However, gender inequality still exists today in Indonesia and even during this pandemic. This means that these regulations are insufficient so that other efforts are needed to achieve gender equality, especially in the household during the pandemic and afterward.

The imbalance of power relations that we already discussed in the previous section shows that patriarchal culture has contributed to the practice of gender inequality, particularly during this pandemic. However, gender is not natural, but it is a sociocultural product that can be changed (Rohmaniyah, 2014). Therefore, it is essential to have a non-patriarchal scientific construction to find efforts that should be done to achieve gender equality for women workers during this pandemic. As a result, it is expected to lead to more fundamental social changes in the future. The following explanations are the efforts that can be done to achieve gender equality, especially in household.

Firstly, family management must be started at an early stage. What has happened so far is that couples have married without understanding gender equality. Consequently, the division of roles and responsibilities becomes unbalanced where the wife often has more burdens than the husband. From the beginning, the family must be equipped to solve problems together based on gender equality. Thus, it is necessary to periodically conduct training or workshop on marriage before and during the marriage. The pre-marriage workshop will be essential for the formation of a family based on each partner's plans. In the workshop, they need to introduce the role of each partner in shaping the future family. The openness of heart, mindset, and ability to adapt to external conditions that arise in their lives must be addressed calmly and strategically. This can be done when the couple can think ahead, receive information openly, and have discussions with their partner to determine what is best for their family. In the workshop, the ideal family concept should be introduced in the sense that each individual must complement and ease the burden on his or her partner, respect each other, and understand how to prepare great generations for their offspring. Thus, families will be well-prepared when they have to face with unexpected situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Secondly, the increase in education that Indonesian women have must also be accompanied by an open mindset that they should have. Women must open themselves to accept criticisms or feedback for their works. Resilience at work, emotional stability, always ready to make improvements, and making workable innovations, must be a way of life for every woman. There are some essential elements in work, such as making the best performance without complaining about their womanhood characteristics. Women must have an ethic that work is not a place to complain about work or colleagues, but work is how to solve problems with "out of the box" innovation. Also, that work is not about competition, but doing the job as much as possible with a sincere heart. With this kind of mindset and mentality, women will be more ready to carry out their jobs that have changed drastically during the pandemic, for example, when they have to work from home while also teach their children.

Thirdly, all forms of social rules and norms that are gender-biased must be eliminated. There should no longer be any prohibitions or obligations based solely on stigmatization and stereotyping of women. We should not let society participate in normalizing gender inequality just because this perception has been deeply rooted in society's life. Thus, social and legal institutions must be directly involved in overcoming the inequality experienced by women, both in the domestic and public sphere. Nevertheless, the regulations and policies concerning women often are still represented using masculine language and thinking (Rahman, 2005). The representation of women has always been leaving behind men. Power relations should be balanced by ensuring women's representation in every policy and regulation.

Fourthly, Gender Responsive Budgeting also needs to be ensured to guarantee that the budgets issued by the central and regional governments in Indonesia are in line with all people's needs, including women. Gender budgeting does not mean only looking at the number of funds allocated to men and women but also looking at how the budget impacts men and women (Yusnaini & Saftiana, 2012). The government's commitment to manifest gender equality can be assessed from its budgeting policy. This gender mainstreaming can take the form of a particular gender target budget, a gender equality budget, and a gender equality institutional budget (Nurhaeni, 2014). Hence, the implementation of the Regulation of the Indonesian Head of the National Disaster Management Agency Number 13 of 2014 concerning Gender Mainstreaming in the Disaster Mitigation Sector needs to be encouraged for its implementation so that the budget for tackling this pandemic situation can be arranged and implemented based on gender equality principles.

Fifthly, regarding online schools, learning independently must be more clarified so that women as mothers will organize the transfer of knowledge for their children. Until this moment, the online school's model is still conducted in one direction where the teachers give assignments then the children finish them. Ideally, the mothers should not only do what the teachers ask, but they should be able to develop the materials by modifying the existing assignments. What happened usually is if the children feel their assignments are challenging, then the mother or other family members will complete the assignments. Moreover, as mothers, there are times when women feel impatient in accompanying their children to do online schools. The mothers sometimes forget and do not realize that online learning is different from learning in schools to deliver the materials from the teachers in an old model. There should be an exploration in independent learning. Most importantly, men as fathers should also participate in exploring this new learning model.

Sixthly, the communication skills between men and women in the family must be improved. From good communication, they can find weaknesses, strengths, and abilities of each party. They should try to analyze themselves to see what type of intelligence that they have. Based on the multiple intelligences' theory by Howard Gardner, they will divide the tasks based on their intelligence so that they can handle family life optimally. Gardner (2003) stated that each person has potential intelligence from these nine types of intelligence, as follows:

- 1) Language (Linguistics),
- 2) Mathematical-Logical (Cognitive),
- 3) Image and Space (Visual-Spatial),
- 4) Music,
- 5) Motion (Kinesthetic),
- 6) Social (Interpersonal),
- 7) Self-intelligent (Intrapersonal),
- 8) Nature, and
- 9) Existential.

With an open communication and growth mindset from each party, they can ease each other's burdens and complement each other (Kasali, 2017). Healthy communication with an open heart and open mind by controlling emotions will obtain maximum results. Husbands will share duties with their wives in managing the house and independent online learning for children. Husbands and wives will still be able to work according to their responsibilities, and the needs of families can also be handled properly. The power relations can be balanced between husbands and wives so that consequently, the power relations between parents and children can also be better, calmer, and happier.

These communication skills will open up each party's opportunities to mutually develop themselves according to the market needs. Women's and men's abilities will be balanced so that the job market becomes more flexible and women can have the same job opportunities as men. With a fair and balanced division of duties and roles between men and women, women will have sufficient time to develop. In the end, there will be happy women and harmonious family welfare, regardless how difficult the situations such as the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Besides the sixth effort mentioned above, the most critical component of women empowerment is women themselves. It is necessary to build confidence and awareness in women that they are capable and have potential in managing themselves, their families, and their works. The ability to understand why she decided to have a family and work should be done by creating a self-management plan. The arrangement of this plan must be made with communicating together with the partner.

The inner spirit of women combined with a supportive environment will create gender equality naturally. Therefore, this pandemic should be used as a momentum to erode power relations by making equal communication between woman and man, between mother/wife and father/husband, and between parents and children. By and large, post-pandemic recovery should lead to an equal rights and obligations between women and men so that Indonesia can be more resilient to such future crises.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the explanation that has been discussed above, two conclusions can be drawn, as follows:

1. The pandemic has put more burdens on women than men in Indonesia. However, instead of receiving appreciations, women receive violence and inequality treatments. The imbalance of power relations between husband and wife puts women workers in a weaker position during this pandemic, starting from its role in the family's financial prosperity, children's education, and reproductive function.
2. Current regulations that contain women's rights provisions in Indonesia are still unable to guarantee gender equality. It is necessary to make various efforts to achieve gender equality during the pandemic and post-pandemic. Starting from managing the family from an early stage, increasing the open mindset of women in the work environment, eliminating all forms of gender-biased social rules and norms, following up on gender-responsive budgets, exploring independent learning models during online schools, and mastering communication skills in the family.

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- Peraturan Kepala Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana (BNPB) No. 13 Tahun 2014 tentang Pengarusutamaan Gender di Bidang Penanggulangan Bencana