

## **Mothers Community, COVID-19, and Family Resilience**

### **Komunitas Ibu, COVID-19, dan Ketahanan Keluarga**

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#### **Abstract**

*The COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on all the aspects of human life. One of the things that changed drastically during the crisis was the change in human activities from offline to online. This happened because of the physical distancing policy that was enforced to prevent the spread of the virus. In that situation, family resilience has been challenging. This study aims to explore the role of women in the family, about family resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, by specifically conducting studies on the 'Ibu Profesional' community. As a country where patriarchal values are still attached, in Indonesia, women are always placed exclusively in the private space and do not receive respect because of this position. Nevertheless, it is very interesting to explore the extent to which the private space contributes to family resilience in times of crisis. By conducting interviews with 6 members of the community from the Surakarta branch, Indonesia, this research concluded as follows: (1) Women play an important role in family resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic, both in the private and public space: (2) Women have the ability to master technology internet due to the changing mode of community activity from offline to online regardless the impression that women and technology is a no match. Furthermore, they also prefer online activities compared to offline activities because of their simplicity.*

**Keywords:** *Community; COVID-19; Family Resilience; Women*

#### **Abstrak**

Pandemi COVID-19 memiliki dampak ke semua aspek dalam kehidupan manusia. Salah satu perubahannya selama krisis adalah perubahan aktivitas manusia dari offline ke online. Hal ini dikarenakan kebijakan menjaga jarak untuk menekan penyebaran virus. Dalam situasi ini, ketahanan keluarga memiliki tantangan tersendiri. Maka dari itu, tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengeksplorasi peran perempuan dalam keluarga sebagai ketahanan keluarga dalam menghadapi pandemic COVID-19, khususnya pada komunitas wanita karir, dimana Indonesia sebagai negara yang mengedepankan nilai patriarki, dimana perempuan identik dengan pekerjaan domestik dan terabaikan. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan mewawancarai 6 anggota komunitas Wanita karir di Surakarta. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa (1) Perempuan memiliki peran penting dalam ketahanan keluarga

selama pandemic COVID-19, baik sektor privat maupun public; (2) Perempuan memiliki keahlian dalam menggunakan teknologi internet sebagai perubahan aktivitas dari offline ke online, dimana impresi teknologi lebih identik pada laki-laki. Selain itu, perempuan lebih memilih beraktivitas secara online dibanding offline karena kemudahan akses.

**Kata kunci:** COVID-19; Ketahanan Keluarga; Komunitas; Perempuan

## **1. Introduction**

Currently, there has been an increase in the use of the Internet, both globally and domestically. Data from We Are Social and Meltwater shows that in January 2023, the penetration of internet users among the world population is 64.4%, where around 5.16 billion people use the internet. It shows a rise of 1.9% compared to the previous year's data. Moreover, in the context of Indonesia, there has also been a quiet increase of 5.2% in terms of internet users. On January 2023, 77% of Indonesian are internet users, at about 202.9 million (Kemp, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic mainly caused this increase, since the physical distancing policy due to the limitation of spreading the virus forces people to keep connected online.

It was started at the end of 2019, when there was a report from Wuhan, China about an unidentified pneumonia-like case, then by the second week of February 2020, WHO announced that the disease was caused by the novel coronavirus which is called COVID-19. The spread of this virus beyond China was rapid. In the second week of January 2020, Thailand and Japan reported their first cases which were followed by other countries such as the United States of America, France, Vietnam,

and The United Arab Emirates (WHO, nd).

In Indonesia, the first COVID-19 case was on early March 2020, and the president together with the health minister themselves announced it publicly (Gorbiano, 2020). Later on, there were several policies to reduce the spread or even cut the chain of the virus. One of the policies is physical distancing which is applied in Indonesia, instead of area isolation or lockdown. It was considered a potential strategy to suppress COVID-19 cases in terms of the Indonesia context. While applying a physical distancing policy, all of the activities be done remotely, including working from home and school from home (Galih, 2020). The increasing use of the internet has an impact on various fields, including community activities.

Several studies about community and the COVID-19 pandemic mostly cover how the community's role to deal with the pandemic, such as a study of the community of Chinese international students in South Korea. It is concluded that the function of the community is as a virtual hub that produces and disseminates up-to-date and essential information about COVID-19 and provides a platform for users to share experiences and emotions accompanying the unprecedented situation (Jang &

Choi, 2020). Another research about community and the pandemic COVID-19 is a study on two communities in Karachi, Pakistan that more specifically relates the pandemic COVID-19 to the mental health coping mechanism in those communities. It is concluded that community members were able to point out some of the coping mechanisms such as getting closer to God, connecting with family, participating in mental health sessions, and resetting lives by indulging in diverse activities field (Ali, et al., 2021). Moreover, a study about a local NGO in Semarang, Indonesia concluded that it employs several online strategies to keep running the NGO's vision, which was threatened to fail due to the minimal offline interaction during the pandemic COVID-19. The online strategies are the convergence of programs, the use of e-PR tools, especially social media, and help empower people online (Abdillah, 2021).

Moreover, this paper will explore the activity of one of the mother's communities in Indonesia, namely *Ibu Profesional* during the physical distancing time, more specifically in the context of women and family resilience. It is crucial to study this issue considering not many articles investigate this matter on the other hand, the shift of interaction and communication from face-to-face to online must have impacts that will affect the community and the relationship between the members. More specifically, the research questions of this research are: (1) How are *Ibu Profesional* Community activities in improving family

resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic? (2) How does mastery of internet technology of *Ibu Profesional* community members give impact to family resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic?

## 2. Literature Review

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused several impacts that affect many people's life. It is a kind of crisis that needs strategic mitigation to overcome it clearly. However, it is common that the pandemic cannot simply be solved quickly. There have also been unpredictable and uncertain impacts that can pose a threat to the well-being of the families (Gayatri & Irawaty, 2021); (Skinner, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, a leader of a family is also considered to hold the responsibility to raise hope, maintain relationships and emotional security, and negotiate family rules, rituals, and routines. They have to be done along with several undetermined situations, like tremendous levels of uncertainty, family upheaval, and fear. They will finally affect the children (Prime, Wade, & Browne, 2020).

Family resilience can be defined as the ability of the family, as a functional system, to withstand and rebound from adversity. There are several aspects of family resilience, such as flexible structure, connectedness, and social and economic resources field (Walsh, 2003). In this case, family resilience relates to the stability of a family from the negative impact of a crisis, which is the COVID-19 pandemic that gives impacts family conflict.

In Indonesia, several studies on family resilience have been done. An

original psychological approach was used in a study about perceptions of family hurdles among emerging adults in relation to family resilience had done using a qualitative perspective. It was found that developing adults in Indonesia interpret positively the problems in their families. In addition, most of the participants indicated that they had self-efficacy toward problem-solving. The concept of sense of coherence also is involved to explain the positive meaning and self-efficacy that positively impacts adults who emerge in developing into resilient individuals in response to the challenges of developmental tasks in the transition to adulthood (Ediati, Salma, & Kaloeti, 2020).

In a working paper about the resilience project of several NGOs in Uganda, Myanmar, Sudan, and London, LeMasson found that disaster impacts gender groups in different ways as well as underscores the patriarchal social norms that disproportionately restrict women and girls' equal access to rights and resources. The resulting inequalities are likely to undermine women and girls' resilience, and ultimately that of their households and communities. Moreover, some structural barriers prevent access by women, girls, and other marginalized populations regarding the key information that can reduce their vulnerability (LeMasson, 2016). Also, in terms of response preparedness, it is essential to recognize and engage the broadest diversity of stakeholders, including the effective participation and leadership of women's organizations, other marginalized populations, and individuals, in the design of

emergency preparedness and response strategies (UNDRR & UN Women, 2022).

From the studies cited above, it can be seen that generally, women will be in a position where they are the vulnerable group during disaster and crisis situations. So, it is almost impossible for them to have power in terms of resilience. However, there are also possibilities that women play a crucial role in contributing the resilience in a disaster situation. Community resilience would improve if these women were engaged at the local operational level of the disaster management field (Islam, Ingham, Hicks, & Manock, 2017).

In addition, in terms of mastering internet technology, during the pandemic, COVID-19 is almost "a must" for women (mothers) in a family. It plays a huge contribution in terms of family resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as in terms of education aspect. The physical distancing policy makes mothers considered as being responsible for their children's education who have to do it online. Therefore, there is an urgent need for technology mastery of technology among mothers (Harini, Suhita, & Itasari, 2020).

The challenges faced by women concerning mastering communication technology are quite large, considering that several studies highlight the barriers perceived by women in relation to the internet. Time and money, lack of confidence, and negative experiences of the internet have been studied as barriers for them (Goulding & Spacey, 2002).

### 3. Methods

This research studied *'Ibu Profesional'* community chapter Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia. Six members of the community took part in this study as informants using the snowball sampling method by contacting the administrator of the community. Using specific characteristics, which are becoming a member for at least 5 years, already having a family – husband, and child, joins community activities both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic era, six informants were willing to join the research as suggested by the community administrator. In addition, since the collecting data was done during the pandemic COVID-19 (October 2021) when the restriction was extremely strict at the moment, the in-depth interview was done using Zoom. Although it was not a direct face-to-face interview, rapport building can still be done, since video technology enables researchers to view research settings, also by notifying the facial expression from the video (De Villiers, Farooq, & Molinari, 2021). This rapport-building can help to gain more information during the interview process, by also studying informants' facial expressions, eye and eyebrow movements, as well as smile and laughter.

### 4. Result and Discussion

In this part, the result and discussion are presented in two main parts, based on the research questions. The first part is about women's role in family resilience during the pandemic COVID-19 and the second part is about mastery of information

technology by women. However, before dwelling into those matters, there will be an explanation of how the *Ibu Profesional* community has been dealing with the physical distancing situation. From the interview with the community member, it was found that his community has been doing some of their activities online even before the pandemic hit. It is because this community has a wide scope of regions, which covers 57 cities in Indonesia, even across the country and the latest data shows that there are members, Indonesian women who live in 10 other countries (*Ibu Profesional*, nd). With that wide scope, several activities were held online, mainly using Whatsapp, Youtube and Facebook Page.

*"Ibu Profesional"* is a community in Indonesia that accompanies mothers, both those who take part in the domestic and public spaces, to be able to learn together, grow together, and strengthen each other in the process of educating children and managing their families. Since it is a community for learning and sharing, it is possible to be done effectively in an online way. Based on the Social Presence Model, there are five elements that provide a framework to establish increased social presence, or connectedness, among instructors and students for a more enriching educational experience, which are Affective Association, Community Cohesion, Interaction Intensity, Knowledge and Experience, and Instructor Involvement. All of the elements can be found in their online activities field (Dickers, Whitesode, & Lewis, 2012). Therefore, the physical distancing condition did not

necessarily keep them from continuing their activities.

However, there are also some obstacles that come when the initial activities are held in offline modes, such as cooking or handicraft training. So, during the pandemic, offline activities were stopped, and everything went online. The differences are, there have been more online platforms that are used, not only Youtube and Facebook Page, but also Whatsapp, Zoom, Streamyard, and Instagram. The more platform they use able to reduce the boredom of doing online activities all the time since the physical distancing policy was announced. It is as mentioned by an informant:

*“...the bored feeling is not because of so many activities in the community. It is more... it is possible I think because of the similar mode of the activity itself. Because of that, the activities during the pandemic are not only relied on Whatsapp but also on other channels, such as Zoom, Streamyard, and Instagram Live. We try to be active on all of the platforms so that the member will feel enjoyment, not bored. It is also because by having several platforms, the member will have new knowledge and experience, as well as new variation” (Informant 1, personal interview).*

The multiple platforms also help to find the exact match for each purpose. We reflect on the relationship between users' agency and the structures where it is enacted. WhatsApp for example, is a multifaceted communication domain; Facebook is a space for displaying the

socially-acceptable self; Instagram is an environment for stylized self-presentation; Twitter is a venue for information and informality; and Snapchat is a place for spontaneous and ludic connections. These constellations are shaped socially and comparatively and are relatively autonomous from technical affordances (Boczkowski, Matassi, & Mitchelstein, 2018).

In the next section, the findings of this research will be explained. The first finding relates to the role of women in family resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. From the data obtained through interviews conducted with informants, it can be classified into two parts, which are the role of women in the domestic space and in the public space. Both of these are related to the knowledge gained while participating in the activities of *Ibu Profesional* community. Furthermore, in relation to women's abilities in using communication media with internet technology in community activities during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically from the data in the field it shows how the efforts they made, the obstacles they faced, and how they as women faced the obstacles, which are ultimately related to the family resilience amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Women's Role in Family Resilience**

While participating in activities and programs of *Ibu Profesional* community during the COVID-19 pandemic, the knowledge gained was not much different from what was gained during the pre-pandemic period. Generally, there are two main kinds of knowledge that the members

gain from the community regarding family resilience, which is the knowledge and skill about productive communication and the knowledge and skill in generating income. In terms of the knowledge and skill of productive communication, the *Ibu Profesional* community, is part of *Bunda Sayang* program. It is a basic knowledge that is given regardless of the crisis or normal situation, and it has a strong role in contributing the family resilience during the hard crisis time, the COVID-19 pandemic. It reflects how to have good productive communication with the family member, including parenting and any other family issues.

During the pandemic, most all of the activities must be done in the online setting, and there was an increase in terms of spending time together in the house. More interaction between family members will also increase the possibility of having some conflicts. In a crisis situation, when an issue arose, talking about it is the best way to cope. However, communication is also risky specifically during a crisis situation.

The productive communication in this context is the way to communicate with all of the member of the family that able to achieve a good result, that's why it is called productive. This is in line with the principle of communication in the context of family communication. Clifford Notarius in Wood (2016) describes three elements in family communication that can maintain long-term relationships within the family, which are words, thoughts, and emotions. All three are complementary to each other. In

terms of words, every family member has the same opportunity to be able to contribute to the communication that occurs, by using words like speaking, or even behaving. How each family member speaks and acts is influenced by the second element, namely thought. Included in this element are the thoughts of each family member about each other, including thoughts in understanding the concept of the family itself. Furthermore, these two elements affect the next element, namely emotion. Specifically, emotions are feelings that exist in every family member, where one of the things that influences is how fellow family members talk to each other and treat each other. From this explanation, it can be seen that equality is one of the keys to carrying out communication within the family.

Regarding the equality between member of the family also be mentioned by the informants, where they specifically said that both husband and wife has the same opportunity to talk about everything.

*"Maybe in some other family deciding (something) is hard, especially when the husband and wife have their own idea. But luckily, my husband and I could talk well about our children's education, for example. And it is because of productive communication". (Informant 2, personal interview).*

*"I got married in very young age, so the productive communication I got from this community has been helping us much. This will help me to communicate with him (husband) as well as with our children. It is easier to talk with them so the misunderstanding is*

*minimal. Good communication will result a stability” (Informant 5, personal interview).*

Regarding women’s position in the family, society already has an understanding that private space is women’s world as if they only can live in this part, not to get the opportunity as much as men have in the public space. Married women include responsible for household chores as well as maintaining relationships between extended family members (Tilly & Scott, 2016). It seems that the burden to deal with the family relationship is only on the women. However, during the crisis situation, it plays a huge role, including during the COVID-19 pandemic to maintain the integrity of family resilience. This skill for some reason is able to keep the family in harmony, regardless of the conflict that may arise due to the increase of togetherness time. When all of the activities are done from home, it means that the amount of time to spend with all of the family members also increases.

This situation was supposedly able to change the perceived feeling relates to how women’s work in the private space does not get to be valued, and is considered as not as significant as men’s work in the public space.

Moreover, another role that also important regarding the family resilience during COVID-19 pandemic from this study relates to public space, where women contribute to the family economically by generating income to support family. For several informants, they are not only supporting, but became

the main source, since the husband got fired because the small company cannot deal with the finance problem which happened to many small companies.

In the *Ibu Profesional* community, there are several programs that can contribute to this matter, which are *Bunda Produktif* – program that relates to housewife productivity where the activities are training in several kinds of skill, such as craft and cooking, and *Bunda Saleha* – program that relate to socialpreneur. Not only the activities that relate to the skill to produce something, in *Ibu Profesional* community, the member also get the privilege to be supported financially through the *Koperasi Ibu Profesional Mandiri* – cooperation that provides space and funding for the member to market their product and start their small business.

*“from the workshops, I can learn to sell something to get money. They even give loans for startup capital, for a newbie like me. It helps so much” (Informant 1, personal interview).*

*“...so I can join the craft session that fit to my passion, and they are so supportive so that I have this courage to sell the craft products. I don’t have to worried, because they provide cooperation to sell them. It affects my family so much, I can get income from it” (Informant 4, personal interview).*

This condition is quite different from the women working in a traditional public setting, where there are still many cases where women face several restrictions to improve



their position at the workplace which will give impact to the wage they get. In traditionally male blue-collar work, women often don't even get in the door. Women have trouble getting hired because of intensely gendered job descriptions. In the white-collar context, the problem is not access but advancement (Williams, 2000). So, the wage obtained by women workers is generally will be lower than men. The wider work experience leads to higher wages for men but not for women, implying that women receive promotions without raises more often than men (Kaori, Yuki, & Hideo, 2017).

However, the challenging crisis is giving women more of a burden, because starting a new business is not an easy thing. Moreover, the condition of the COVID-19 pandemic of course presents more and more obstacles. It can be seen from the study by Fernando (Fernando, 2022) that concluding several problems to be solved by the women who run small business enterprises during COVID-19 pandemic. It is starting from optimizing digital media, and managing business flexibility to achieve the resilience needed in times of crisis, including taking the risk of losses and fluctuations that must be faced.

### **Mastery of Information and Technology by Women**

In relation to the use of technology, women are always in the second position after men. Several studies show this. However, from the data in the field it can be seen that women members of the Professional Mother community have qualified skills related to the use of digital media.

This happened because all activities during the COVID-19 pandemic had to be carried out online. This inevitably forces them to get acquainted and learn to use it, until eventually they get used to it. On the one hand, this is not too difficult for them, because they have been using online media since before the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the members still faced difficulties, especially in the early days. This is because they optimize multiplatform to avoid boredom.

The difficulties faced by community members can be handled well, because there are sufficiently detailed tutorials to explain the various online platforms used in community activities. In addition, fellow members also help each other, so that if there is a problem faced by a member, other members will help provide a solution. This makes them eager to learn so that their mastery of various digital media used in activities in this community can be achieved properly.

*"Actually, even before the pandemic, we did many online activities. So, no problem at all. But still, I found some difficulties at first, because of the variety of the platforms"* (Informant 5, personal interview).

*"Sure, at first it was hard, more like shock with the change, because all of the activities had to be online. But luckily, other members provide tutorials, so it was easy to learn them"* (Informant 6, personal interview)

*“... it was hard at first, because have to adapt... (Informant 3, personal interview).”*

*“We are used to doing online activities, so it might be a little difficult at first, because there are more online platforms. But other members will be patient to teach (Informant 1, personal interview).”*

It is interesting to get this finding, considering that regarding women and technology, the digital gender divide is an issue that continues to be fought for in order to achieve equality. A report from the OECD (2018) shows that the digital gender divide occurs to barriers to access, affordability, (lack of) education and skills and technological literacy, as well as inherent gender bias and socio-cultural norms.

The gender gap in the use of internet also be mentioned in the report published by Intel, specifically in the context of low and middle-income countries. It is shown that around the world, the Internet is helping people imagine new possibilities — and then, make them happen. But women and girls are left behind. On average across developing countries, nearly 25 percent fewer women than men have access to the Internet. Bridging the gender gap on the Internet is an opportunity of enormous proportions (Intel, 2012).

Another interesting regarding the use of internet technology in this study is all of the informants thought that online mode is better than offline mode, for the simpler reason. They said that if doing offline activities, they will need more time to prepare themselves, and also to prepare the

children. But having online session, they need to prepare the activity only in 5 or 10 minutes.

*“... but now I like online more than offline” (Informant 3, personal interview).*

*“... and even I prefer online. If you go offline, it's really troublesome to have to prepare everything before leaving, it's not practical” (Informant 6, personal interview).*

## **5. Conclusion**

From the study, it can be concluded that, first, women play a crucial role in supporting family resilience in two ways, which are in family management to reduce the conflict in the crisis context and also in improving family income by starting a small business. It shows both women in the private and public space where both of the aspects are quite important.

Second, women have the ability to master in the communication technology, specifically that relates to the internet regardless the obstacle they face. Solving them by having a great collaboration among the member in the community is the source of their success. Moreover, the online mode finally become their choices than offline mode, because of its simplicity.

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