

Survival Strategies of Madurese Ethnic Street Vendors in Surabaya City During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Since the emergence of Covid-19, the lives of informal workers have changed, and street vendors are no exception. This happened because government policies limited the space for people to move, impacting informal workers' income. There is a demand to survive amid declining income during the Covid-19 pandemic, requiring strategies so that informal workers can survive. This article explores the problems experienced by overseas street vendors during the Covid-19 Pandemic. It analyzes the survival strategies by conducting a case study of ethnic Madurese street vendors in Surabaya, Indonesia. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method with a knife of theoretical analysis survival mechanism of James C Scott. This research was conducted in 2021 in the city of Surabaya. Data collection was carried out utilizing observation and in-depth interviews. The results show that several survival strategies are used by overseas street vendors, especially ethnic Madurese as urban people, namely reducing employee salaries, spending management and making priority scales, doing side jobs, and relying on social relations.

Keywords: urban sociology; poverty; street vendors; subsistence ethics; social relation

INTRODUCTION

Since the emergence of Covid-19 for the first time, this virus has had many influences on human survival. WHO defines this situation as a global pandemic. Based on the data published on September 3, 2021, there were 47,905,123 confirmed cases, including 793,209 deaths. This number is not a small amount for a global pandemic. In Indonesia, cases of people infected with Covid-19 have increased daily since the beginning of 2021; according to data published by BNPB (National Disaster Management Agency), daily cases of Covid-19 have reached 14,536 cases. This figure is the highest record in history during the Pandemic in Indonesia.

The continuous increase in Covid-19 cases has led the Indonesian government to make various policies to mitigate the Pandemic. One of the policies the Indonesian government has established is contained in Government Regulation 21 of 2020 concerning the discourse on large-scale social restrictions (PSBB) in the framework of accelerating the handling of corona Virus Disease 2019 or COVID-19 (Indonesia, 2020). Then at the beginning of 2021, namely in January, the Indonesian government formed a new policy in response to the increase in Covid-19 cases, namely the implementation of PPKM (Implementation of Restrictions on Community Activities) came into

force from 11-25 January. As long as this policy is implemented, many restrictions will be made, such as applying WFH (Work From Home), tightening health protocols, and switching learning methods from offline to online (Wibisono et al., 2021).

Various policies that have been enacted have created new polemics for the people's economy, especially in the informal sector (Kadeni, 2020). The informal sector can be exemplified by small traders and service sellers such as street vendors (PKL) and hawkers (La Ode Sawaludin & Upe, 2020). Since the policies were enacted, small businesses, especially street vendors, have been threatened with losses. People from lower economic groups and small traders can earn income by interacting directly with many people (Heath et al., 2020). However, since implementing the policy and activity restrictions, street vendors cannot generally sell like before the Pandemic. This also affects buyer interest which results in a decrease in the income of street vendors (Prasetya, 2020).

Street vendors generally offer their wares and services at affordable and economical prices. As a result, their existence is liked by people who need food at affordable prices, such as students and factory workers. Because many consumers are found in crowded places, many street vendors sell in public places, such as shopping centers, schools, campuses, hospitals, squares, etc. The existence of these street vendors is easy to find in big cities in Indonesia, one of which is Surabaya. Surabaya, the capital of East Java, has become a destination city for immigrants to try their luck. Usually, street vendors in Surabaya spread their wares on almost all roads and sidewalks. This place is a strategic location where they choose to sell their merchandise because these places are locations that many people generally visit. An interesting fact was found that most of the street vendors in the city of Surabaya were dominated by ethnic Madurese who incidentally were immigrants or newcomers to the city. Madurese ethnicity or people are known to be a group that likes to go abroad, so, unsurprisingly, this ethnicity can be found in many cities in Indonesia. Migration carried out by Madurese people outside Madura Island, especially on Java Island, has occurred since the 18th century (Syamsuddin, 2018).

Becoming a street vendor from overseas during the Pandemic was challenging for the perpetrators. Street vendors, who are a group whose income is affected by various policies imposed by the government, are a complex problem for them. In addition, the demands for overseas street vendors to survive on overseas land are increasingly burdening them, such as house rent, food, transportation, etc. The problem is that they are required to finance their lives overseas with declining income conditions. With these problems, a strategy is needed so that overseas street vendors can survive. On the other hand, strategies for survival in the street vendor community, especially those who live as nomads, are urgently needed in current conditions to make a living, as stated by James C Scott (Scott, 1985) regarding survival mechanisms that the concept of survival is illustrated by the problem of hunger experienced by Asian farmers. From the problems disclosed, conducting in-depth research on the survival strategy of overseas street vendors during the Covid-19 Pandemic is very important by conducting a case study on Madura street vendors in Surabaya.

METHOD

This research was conducted in 2021 in the city of Surabaya. The method used in this research is a descriptive qualitative method. This method was chosen because it is suitable for analyzing research. In addition, this method is also more sensitive and able to adapt to the phenomena that researchers face. Data was collected using observation and interviews with key informants, namely street vendors from Madurese ethnicity in Surabaya. Because this research was conducted during a pandemic, the researchers conducted observations and interviews at the locations that the researchers had chosen while adhering to health protocols, namely by keeping their distance, not visiting crowds at the study site, and continuing to wear PPE (Personal Protection Equipment such as Masks, face shield and using hand sanitizer).

Criteria for informants who were used as research subjects were street vendors of Madurese ethnicity who had migrated to Surabaya for a long time (more than ten years), lived and settled in Surabaya, and had a family (married). Then the data obtained is tested for validity, and an analytical study is carried out to serve as a reference in concluding. After the data is obtained, it will be analyzed using interactive analysis techniques, including data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 2013; Silverman, 2013).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Economic Conditions of Madurese Ethnic Street Vendors During the Covid-19 Pandemic

One of the locations to seek sustenance for ethnic Madurese street vendors is the city of Surabaya. Like other metropolitan cities, Surabaya is a favorite location for people in rural areas to try their luck. As the second largest

city after Jakarta, Surabaya is indeed a paradise for migrants to make money in the city. Many residents from East Java and outside choose to move to the capital city of East Java. For migrants with limited education and skills, becoming an informal worker is the primary choice. Usually, they will work as street vendors, parking attendants, barber shop workers, freelance workers, tire patch workers, and even become scavengers (Asiyah, 2012). In Surabaya, almost all roads and sidewalks are favorite locations for informal workers to display their wares and services, such as Jln. Embong Malang, Jln. Semarang, Praban, Ketintang, Kali Tile, Wonokromo, Joyoboyo, and the Heroes Monument. These locations were chosen because they are strategic for selling because of the crowds of people passing by, ranging from the general public to workers and students. However, since the Pandemic took place, especially after implementing several policies by the city government, the crowds of these locations are no longer experienced by ethnic Madurese street vendors.

Since the Covid-19 Pandemic, the socio-economic conditions of street vendors have worsened. Their daily income has decreased since various policies were enacted, limiting people's space for movement, such as closing schools, malls, and other public places. The closure of these places made it difficult for street vendors to find buyers, resulting in decreased income. The number of buyers who continue to decrease makes it difficult for street vendors to get income. Informal actors, especially street vendors, admit that their income has dropped dramatically during the Covid-19 Pandemic. For those who sell around campuses and other educational institutions, the decline in income is increasingly felt because the main customers or buyers, usually students, have returned to their areas of origin. Thus making their merchandise not as popular as before the Pandemic.

This condition increasingly complains about street vendors because of the demands of life's needs that they still have to fulfill amidst declining incomes. Also, there is the cost of renting a place to live; boarding houses or rented houses make it more difficult for migrants such as Madurese Ethnic Street Vendors. Indeed, migrants, especially street vendors, choose to rent boarding houses or rent a place for them to live and take shelter (Sawaludin, 2020). Another change in conditions experienced by street vendors is the shorter operating hours. Where with this new condition, their sales hours are limited, which are usually almost 24 hours, now they are less and limited to only ten at night. Not infrequently, they do not get a buyer in a day and go home empty-handed.

James C Scott's Survival Strategy

Survival strategies can be interpreted as plans or activities to survive in certain conditions. The activities carried out become a priority plan for achieving a goal (Scott, 1985). Therefore, a survival strategy can be understood as a person's skill to apply specific ways to overcome various problems in his life (Suharto, 2014). James Scott (Scott, 1985) also put forward the concept of survival in the theory of survival mechanism. This theory was born from a condition experienced by farming communities during the famine that hit. Farmers are concerned about their survival efforts in the face of the conditions. With the conditions that occur, farmers are required to survive by carrying out tactics to meet their food needs.

Scott opines that rural farmers' relationships when facing poverty will be influenced by their gradual ethic of life. Farmers hold to an ethic of principles known as an ethic of subsistence, "safety first; subsistence economy". This principle tends to be understood that farmers prioritize their crops for self-consumption rather than selling. This happens because they hold the principle that it is better to prioritize their family's survival so they can eat than to get profit (money). Survival itself has the meaning of effort in the process of sustaining life in difficult situations and conditions. Its application has differences between each individual and group depending on the characteristics in the pattern of each community. According to Scott (Scott, 1985), the theory of survival mechanism consists of three parts: using networks outside the family, tightening the belt more tightly, and subsistence alternatives. Scott's statement, in theory, can be used as an analytical knife in the survival strategy of local street vendors during the Pandemic. Based on the study's results, Madurese street vendors have several survival strategies used as follows.

Reducing Employee Salaries

Street vendors have used various efforts to deal with the pandemic situation. Based on research that has been conducted on ethnic Madurese street vendors, reducing the amount of employee salaries is one of the strategies used during this Pandemic. Informants who choose this strategy are street vendors of Madurese ethnicity who have relatively large businesses and need the help of other people as workers (employees). This strategy is used because it considers the large number of dependents that are borne, namely, meeting the living needs of employees and the needs of their core family. Dependents covered include food costs, personal belongings, basic household needs, rent for housing, and internet quota. Because all the necessities of life of his employees have

been covered apart from monthly wages, the salary he gives to his employees has been reduced during this Pandemic. With this reduction in employee salaries, they find it helpful to manage expenses amid this challenging situation.

However, not all ethnic Madurese street vendors do the same. Those who do not have employees or work individually are not burdened with paying employees such as meatballs, fruit, fried rice, tofu, and so on. Their income is only used to meet personal and family needs and capital for further production without any responsibility to set aside income for other people. Hence, this employee salary reduction strategy is generally carried out by ethnic Madurese street vendors with quite large businesses.

Expenditure Management and Making Priority Scale

Reducing the amount of spending by making a priority scale is a strategy that is widely used. This strategy is carried out to minimize spending money. Low-income families generally carry out a strategy of minimizing expenses to survive (Kusnadi, 2000). They will minimize various expenses by managing them and prioritizing between ordinary and urgent needs. According to the presentation of all the informants, it was acknowledged that by reducing their spending, they could help them survive. The reduced expenses are daily needs such as staples and other household needs.

Most informants revealed that prioritizing certain items based on need is a common survival strategy during this Pandemic. The type of expenditure chosen tends to prioritize items that have more benefits and are more urgent such as children's milk and porridge, rice, side dishes, etc. Not only that to minimize spending, they also reduce the quality of necessities by buying relatively affordable items. In terms of food needs, for example, the quality of the rice they buy is lowered by buying rice that is cheaper than usual. Not only rice for street vendors who have babies tend to buy milk as the primary need for the child with a lower brand and price. Although, according to several informants, they complained that their baby had gotten sick and had diarrhea due to the change in formula milk.

They have to choose these steps to minimize expenses amid the decrease in income they are experiencing. They do not pay attention to quality and nutrition anymore. The most important thing for the families of the Madurese street vendors who are classified as poor is that they still consume necessities, even though the quality is not as good as before. This strategy is carried out to balance the income earned with the amount of expenditure. With a decrease in income, they inevitably reduce the amount of expenditure by prioritizing certain items and buying a product at a lower price.

Doing Side Jobs

The decline in income due to the Pandemic has caused street vendors to try to find other alternatives to earn a living (Armansyah & Taufik, 2020). From the presentation of the informants, one of the strategies to survive in this challenging situation is to do a side job. This strategy is known as diversification of income sources, where a strategy is used in dealing with difficult situations in the economic field by adding new sources of income (Chaudhuri, 2018). Another concept of side jobs was also put forward by James Scott (Scott, 1985) in his theory of survival mechanisms at one point about subsistence alternatives. This concept is closely related to the strategy to obtain other income besides the primary income.

Several informants admitted that they did side jobs to supplement their income apart from being street vendors. The side jobs he took were weekly porters at the market, on-call workers, buying and selling used goods, selling masks, and motorcycle taxi drivers. This strategy is carried out by ethnic Madurese street vendors who have flexible working hours and who sell at certain hours so that they have more free time to utilize. However, ethnic Madurese street vendors with fixed selling hours do not use this strategy and are still based on one source of income. These methods are an alternative way to increase income so that you can still meet your daily needs during a pandemic. The Madurese ethnic street vendors must rack their brains and not just wait and give up. They are looking for other alternatives by doing side jobs to earn additional income.

Relying on Social Relations

Street vendors, especially the Madurese ethnic group, are known as an ethnic group that has a solid social kinship network with one another. The Madurese have a high sense of solidarity in their kinship system, making this social relations strategy widely used by street vendors. Social relations strategies are usually carried out by

utilizing the kinship system between Madurese street vendors, such as borrowing money from relatives, friends, or neighbours. According to some informants, they usually borrow money from relatives and friends from Madura. This is due to a feeling of security and comfort when borrowing money from friends and relatives compared to borrowing from a bank. Because in addition to interest, borrowing at a bank also has a payment term, which will be subject to fines if not paid immediately (Harahap & Harahap, 2022). In contrast to loans to friends and relatives, they have flexible time to repay their debts agreed upon in advance on the principle of kinship (Rosavina et al., 2019). This is relevant to Kusnadi's statement (2000), which states that utilizing social networks such as friends and relatives can help low-income families when they need money in urgent conditions.

The relationship between the Madurese street vendors was established because they were immigrants from Madura who worked in Surabaya (Das, 2017). The existence of the motto used by the Madurese, who are in overseas lands, strengthens the kinship network between them. They consider the motto "*Sittong dhere*" (One Blood) when assisting fellow street vendors from the Madurese ethnicity. The similarities in their origins and inherent mottos make them selfless in assisting those in need. The opinion of street vendors from Madura Island is that those born in the same land, on the same island, and in the same language are all brothers. Additionally, several informants stated that the involvement of fellow Madurese street vendors showed a stable and well-established relationship. Many Whatsapp groups contain ethnic Madurese street vendors working in Surabaya and its surroundings. The group is a forum for establishing friendships between ethnic Madurese street vendors, such as coffee invitations, sharing information about work, etc. Not only that, the existence of several communities of street vendors from Madura that they follow proves that the existing kinship network is maintained as well as possible. Like one of the communities called "Tretan Madura Community," those from Madura can enter the group. The function of an existing Whatsapp group is to use it as a container for sharing information and keeping in touch.

Establishing good relations with fellow street vendors, especially those from the Madurese ethnicity, becomes a valuable social capital for the survival of overseas street vendors. Because with this social network, street vendors can get help when they have problems. This aligns with Stamboel's statement (Stamboel, 2013) that social capital functions as a social safety net for low-income families. Assistance provided by a community or social relations of friends can save many family lives, especially for lower-middle-class families (Donner, 2016; Hussein, 2017).

CONCLUSION

The survival strategy used by ethnic Madurese street vendors as urbanites, namely reducing employee salaries, spending management and making priority scales, doing side jobs, and finally relying on social relations. Of the four strategies, the most widely used are spending management and relying on social relations. Certain regional street vendors only carry out reducing employee salaries and side jobs. The survival strategy implemented by ethnic Madurese street vendors has enabled them to survive the economic pressures caused by the Covid-19 Pandemic. By implementing some of these strategies, they tend to be able to cope with economic pressures in the face of changes in socio-economic conditions. The challenges for informal workers during the Covid-19 pandemic are not accessible. Informal actors, especially local street vendors, must have a good survival strategy to adapt to these problematic conditions. In addition, it is better for informal operators, especially those who continue to sell offline, to keep selling according to health protocols such as maintaining distance, wearing masks or face shields, and preparing and sanitizing when transacting.

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