

Social Security and Poverty Alleviation during the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Case Study in Pekalongan, Central Java, Indonesia

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Abstract

In Covid-19 pandemic, poverty rate is getting worse. To tackle this condition, the government made comprehensive programs to help the poor. However, the problems arise as whether the implementation of poverty reduction policies during the Covid-19 pandemic is in accordance with the established rules and how the level of vulnerability of the poor whose scope is increasingly widespread. This study aims to explore what factors influence poverty during the Covid-19 pandemic in Pekalongan Regency and the role of social security program to alleviate poverty during the pandemic. More specifically, this study aims to analyze the factors that influence poverty during the Covid-19 pandemic. The research is conducted in Pekalongan Regency with the aim of analyzing the factors that influence the increase in poverty in Pekalongan Regency. The results of the study show the factors of vulnerability, accessibility, termination of employment, and the narrowness of doing business due to social curbs for the poor. Meanwhile, factors from the local government were also found, namely the limited budget for poverty alleviation and the not yet optimal policies implemented.

Keywords

poverty; social security; vulnerability; covid-19 pandemic; government policy



I. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the view of poverty. Covid-19 is the cause of poverty that is very fast and urgently requires affirmative policies. Indonesia's Covid-19 data as of January 31, 2021 reached 1,078,314 cases. The number of recovered patients increased by 873,221 and the number of patients who died increased by 29,998. The condition of Central Java, which includes the province with the largest number of cases, confirmed 168,152 cases, suspected 3,544 cases, 5,790 were treated, 151,796 were declared cured, and 10,566 people died (<https://corona.jatengprov.go.id/data>). The high number of cases has an impact as well.

Statistics Indonesia (BPS/*Badan Pusat Statistik*) report noted that the number of poor in urban and rural Indonesia in 2020 was 26.42 million. This figure increased by 5.09% compared to the previous year which was 25.14 million (Annur, 2008). The same condition occurred in Central Java, which increased 11.41 percent or increased by 301,500 people in 2020 (3.99 million people) compared to the poor population in September 2019 which amounted to 3.68 million people or 10.58 percent. Conditions that occur also in urban districts in Central Java. One of them is Pekalongan Regency.

In October 2020 Pekalongan Regency was included in the red zone. In 2021 there were 2420 confirmed cases with 69 people being treated, 2070 were declared cured, 155 were self-isolating and 126 people died (<https://corona.pekalongankab.go.id/>). Pekalongan Regency also experienced a case of change in terms of poverty. In 2019 the poor population in Pekalongan Regency has decreased compared to 2018. In 2019 it was 9.71 percent, while

in 2018 it was 10.06%. The pandemic conditions that hit the country increased the number of poor people to 10.19 percent higher than in 2018.

The poverty line of Pekalongan Regency over the last five years has continued to rise every year. The condition of the Pekalongan Regency poverty line in 2020 increased to IDR 403.662,-/capita/month compared to 2019 which was IDR 382.832,-/capita/month. The poverty line of Pekalongan Regency in 2020 is above the Central Java Province average of IDR 395,407,-/capita/month and the National IDR 454,652,-/capita/month and ranks highest compared to the surrounding districts, such as Pemalang, Purbalingga, Banjarnegara and Batang. The relative position of the poverty line in Pekalongan Regency shows that the expenditure of the poor in Pekalongan Regency is higher than that of other regencies around it.

The problems that arise are two things, whether the implementation of poverty reduction policies during the Covid-19 pandemic has not been in accordance with the established rules or the level of vulnerability of the poor whose scope is increasingly widespread. This study will explore what factors influence poverty during the Covid-19 pandemic in Pekalongan Regency and the role of social security program to alleviate poverty during the pandemic. The research will be conducted in Pekalongan Regency with the aim of analyzing the factors that influence the increase in poverty in Pekalongan Regency.

II. Review of Literature

Poverty is a problem that shackles most of the developing countries. This phenomenon becomes interesting because the longer poverty becomes an icon of the state in the welfare of its people. Poverty is no longer just a lack of clothing, food, shelter, but has spread in various dimensions such as dependence, marginalization, gender inequality, vulnerability and even powerlessness. Poverty also shackles on who interprets poverty itself. For example, the World Bank, UNDP, ADB, the Ministry of Social Affairs, TNP2K, local governments, are trying to translate poverty in the perspective of how and programs are formulated.

The World Bank (2010) defines poverty as pronounced deprivation in well-being, and comprises many dimensions. It includes low income and the inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity. Poverty also encompasses low level of health and education, poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical security, lack of voice and insufficient capacity and opportunity to better one's life (Haughton & Khandker, 2009).

Shaffer (2008) revealed that the development of thinking and attention to aspects of poverty shows a fundamental change where the concept of poverty is getting wider (not only physiological deprivations, but to include social deprivations), the causes of poverty are broadening (including social, political, cultural, violence and natural resources), and the focus of poverty is deepening (covering to social protection, mitigation and risk reduction strategies).

The outbreak of this virus has an impact of a nation and Globally (Ningrum *et al*, 2020). The presence of Covid-19 as a pandemic certainly has an economic, social and psychological impact on society (Saleh and Mujahiddin, 2020). Covid 19 pandemic caused all efforts not to be as maximal as expected (Sihombing and Nasib, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic has contributed greatly to poverty. The Central Statistics Agency noted that the number of poor people in Indonesia was 27.55 million people or equivalent to 10.19 percent in September 2020. The head of BPS Suhariyanto described the factors that influence the poverty rate during the period March 2020 to September 2020. The

ongoing Covid-19 has an impact on changes in behavior and economic activity of the population so as to encourage an increase in the poverty rate.

Indonesian economy in the third quarter of 2020 compared to the third quarter of 2019 experienced a growth contraction of 3.49 percent. This figure is much lower than the achievement in the third quarter of 2019 which grew by 5.02 percent. The growth in household consumption expenditure in the third quarter of 2020 Gross Domestic Product (GDP) slowed down. Household consumption expenditure contracted by 4.04 percent, a decrease compared to the same period in 2019 which grew by 5.01 percent.

During the period March 2020 to September 2020, the general inflation rate was recorded at 0.12 percent, meanwhile, the core inflation rate for the same period was recorded at 0.84 percent. For the March 2020 to September 2020 period, nationally the retail prices of several basic commodities rose, including beef 1.51 percent, sweetened 1.07 percent, cooking oil 2.67 percent, wheat flour 2.76 percent, and mackerel 1.07 percent, although some commodities that experienced a decline in prices such as rice fell 0.49 percent, chicken meat 3.52 percent, sugar 6.54 percent, cayenne pepper 32.37 percent, chicken eggs 6.12 percent.

In August 2020, the open unemployment rate (TPT) was 7.07 percent, an increase of 1.84 percentage points compared to August 2019 which was 5.23 percent; A total of 29.12 million people of working age or 14.28 percent were affected by Covid-19 in August 2020, with details of 2.56 million people being unemployed, 760 thousand people being out of the labor force, 1.77 million people temporarily not working, and 24 .03 million people work with reduced working hours. Also, in August 2020, the percentage of underemployed workers was 10.19 percent, an increase of 3.77 percentage points compared to August 2019 which was 6.42 percent.

As covid-19 widespread, social security becomes one of main instruments of government policy. The government's social assistance, both central and regional, is very helpful for the population, especially the lower class population, although it is recognized that not all those affected have been able to take advantage of the assistance (Hendartyo, 2021). Social distancing and general lockdowns are part of everyday life in many countries with enormous social and economic consequences, including in Indonesia. At this time the Government is starting to put in place plans to stabilize the economy and support people's livelihoods, the Government of Indonesia has made and delivered several poverty reduction policies through economic stimulus and compensation programs to cope with the unprecedented impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic by a total of a budget of IDR 563 trillion (USD35.9B).

The Social Safety Net (JPS) during the Covid-19 pandemic in Pekalongan Regency was allocated through state funding, Central Java budget and Pekalongan budget, as well as village funds and also pre-employment cards. More specifically, state funding is allocated for the Family Hope Program (PKH) as many as 33,781 families, BPNT/Sembako is allocated to 55,508 families, Ministry of Social Affairs's cash transfers are allocated to 32,460 families. Central Java Province budget funding was allocated for social assistance as many as 8,846 families, Pekalongan regional budget for social assistance as many as 75,034 families, and village funds allocated for cash transfers.

Based on the results of the BPS demographic survey followed by 87,379 respondents, the large-scale social restrictions (PSBB) due to the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in changes in behavior and economic activity, and income from all walks of life declined (BPS, 2020). Interventions for poverty reduction programs/projects are clear, but the reality of poverty as measured by indicators of the number of poor and near-poor people is still relatively high. Although various programs have been implemented, both sectoral programs aimed at increasing the dignity of the lives of many people as well as specific programs with the theme

of community empowerment, urban/rural poverty alleviation, coastal community economic development, savings and loan village economics and so on. However, the welfare of society is far from expectations.

III. Research Method

The study used a qualitative descriptive method. Qualitative descriptive design formats have many similarities with quantitative descriptive designs, therefore qualitative descriptive designs can also be called quasi-qualitative or quasi-qualitative designs. The qualitative descriptive format analyzes more on the surface of the data, and only pays attention to the processes of occurrence of a phenomenon, not the meaning of the data or the depth of the data.

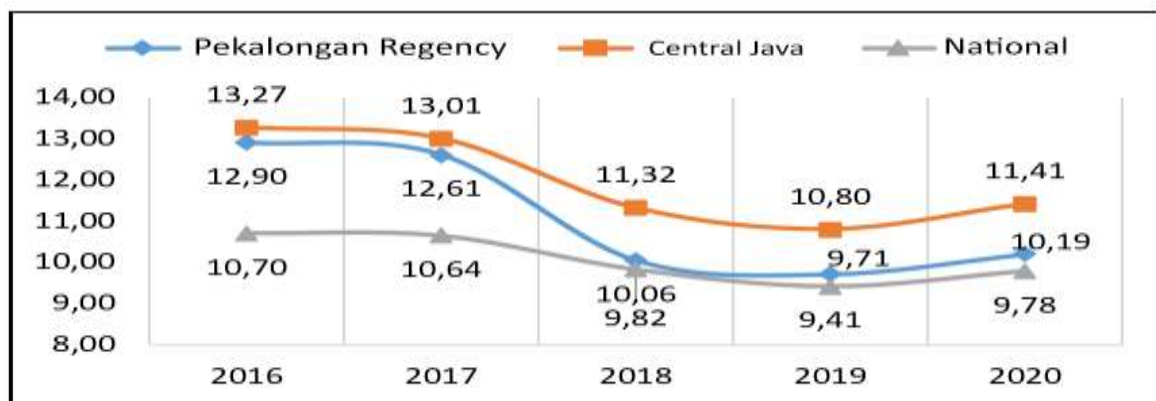
The informants of this research are the implementers of poverty alleviation in Pekalongan Regency, namely Regional Apparatus Organizations that handle poverty alleviation programs, namely Bappeda, Social Service, Community Empowerment Service and agencies that are members of the Regional Poverty Reduction Team, community leaders in the District, District and Village. This research will also touch the affected communities who will use the questionnaire as a data collection tool. It is estimated that there are approximately 150-200 respondents.

Data collection techniques used are in-depth interviews, questionnaires, observation and documentation. Data processing explains how the procedures for processing and analyzing data are in accordance with the approach taken. Suyanto & Sutinah (2013) said that data processing in qualitative research is done by classifying or categorizing data based on several themes according to the focus of the research. Data processing in this study consists of: data reduction, data presentation (data display) and drawing conclusions.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

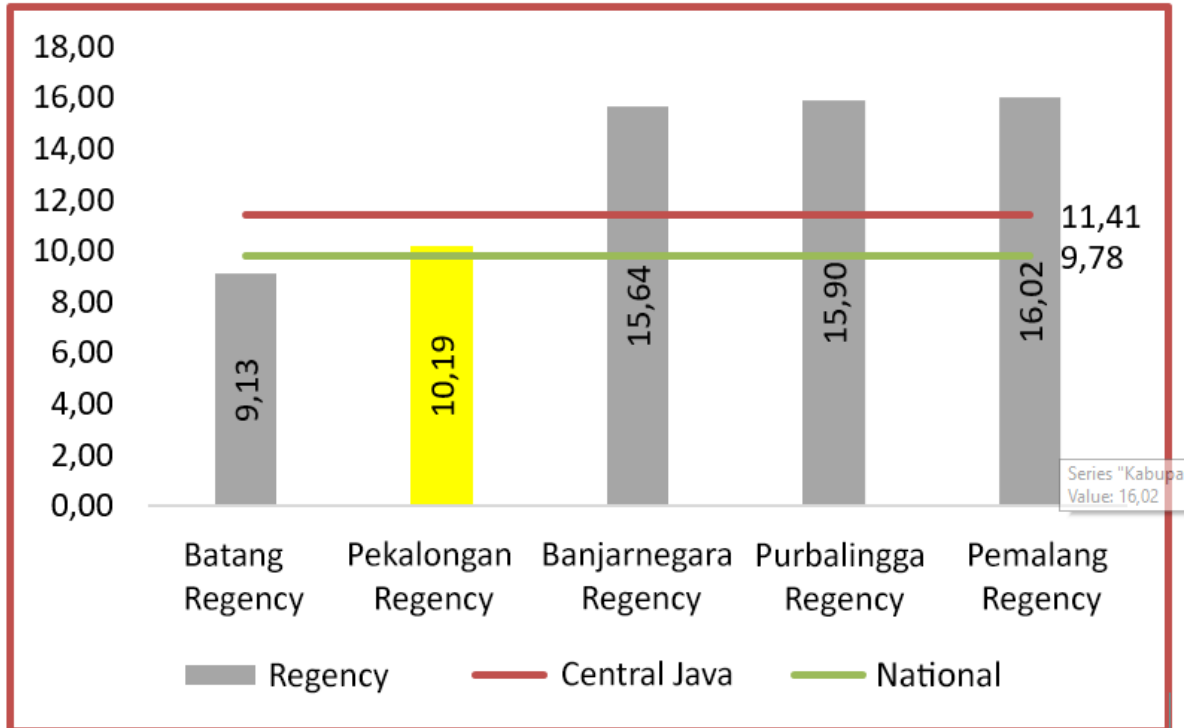
The number of poor people in Pekalongan Regency in 2020 amounted to 91.90 thousand people (10.19 percent), an increase of 4.9 thousand people compared to the poor in 2019 which amounted to 87 thousand people (9.71 percent). The increase in the number and percentage of poor people in 2020 also occurred at the National and Central Java provincial levels. This can be seen in Figure 1.



Source: Central Java BPS, 2021, processed (<https://jateng.bps.go.id/>)

Figure 1. Percentage of Poor Population in Pekalongan Regency in 2016-2020 (%)

The relative position of the percentage and number of poor people in Pekalongan Regency in 2020 compared to the surrounding districts is the second lowest after Batang Regency, and the percentage of poor people in Pekalongan Regency in 2020 is below the Central Java Province average of 11.41% and above the average National 9.78%.



Source: Central Java BPS, 2021, processed (<https://jateng.bps.go.id/>)

Figure 2. The Relative Position of the Percentage of Poor People in Pekalongan Regency in 2020

To see the average expenditure gap of each poor population towards the poverty line, it is indicated by the Poverty Depth Index (P1), while the description of the distribution/inequality of expenditure among the poor is indicated by the Poverty Severity Index (P2). P1 and P2 of Pekalongan Regency in 2020 experienced an increase, compared to the development of P1 and P2 of Pekalongan Regency in previous years which continued to experience a decline. In 2020, Pekalongan Regency P1 increased to 1.42 and P2 increased to 0.29.

In relative position, the Poverty Depth Index (P1) and Poverty Severity Index (P2) Pekalongan Regency in 2020 are below the average of Central Java and National Provinces, and compared to the surrounding regencies are in the lowest position. This condition indicates that the expenditure gap of the poor against the poverty line and the disparity of expenditure among the poor in Pekalongan Regency is lower than other regencies in Central Java.

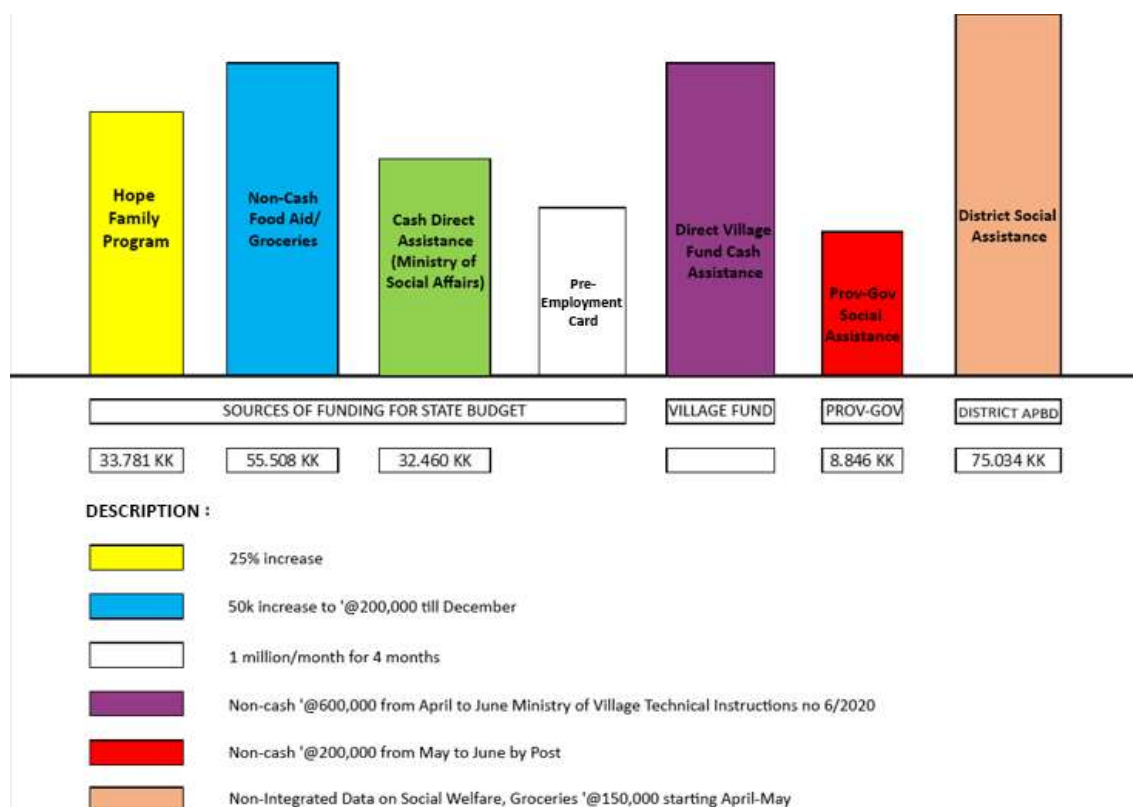


Figure 3. Overview of the Social Safety Net (JPS) of Pekalongan Regency during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The increasing number of poor people has prompted the government to make public policy affirmations, namely the issuance of various regulations that regulate so as not to spread the poor population as well as overcome this covid-19 pandemic. Initially, before COVID-19 hit, the Government implemented a Four Track Strategy, namely: pro growth, pro job, pro poor, and pro environment. This 4-track strategy is aimed at promoting equitable economic growth (growth with equity) through expanding employment opportunities, reducing poverty levels, and maintaining sustainable growth with an emphasis on environmental sustainability. Through this strategy, it is hoped that the problem of inequality can also be further reduced. The big national development agenda has been contained in the Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) from the 2004-2009 period to the 2020-2024 RPJMN (<http://www.setneg.go.id>).

In the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2020-2024, the government has determined that the poverty rate will decrease to 7% to 6.5% by the end of 2024. It is targeted that the number of poor people at the end of 2024 will be in the range of 18.34 million up to 19.75 million. That way, there must be a decrease in the number of poor people between 5.04 and 6.45 million in the period 2020 to 2024.

The soaring poverty rate was also influenced by the increase in retail prices of basic commodities, such as rice, broiler meat, cooking oil, broiler eggs, and sugar. In the period September 2019-March 2020, the retail prices of several basic commodities increased. Rice prices rose 1.78 percent, chicken meat 5.53 percent, cooking oil 7.06 percent, chicken eggs 11.10 percent, and sugar 13.35 percent. In addition to the issue of rising food prices and making a major contribution to the national poverty profile, the tourism sector also contributed to Indonesia's poverty rate as of March 2020. Although the government officially announced the Covid-19 case in March, the tourism sector and its supporters have been

affected since February, tourist visits Foreigners to Indonesia in March 2020 fell 64.11 percent compared to March 2019 (Kurnia et al., 2020).

Although Covid-19 is predicted to cause an economic crisis, the current government is relatively more prepared because it has social assistance and protection programs that can be used as anchors to reduce the burden of socio-economic problems. The government's policy to provide stimulus to anticipate the Covid-19 pandemic by increasing and expanding social safety nets is considered appropriate. Social assistance and protection programs that serve as anchors can serve as initial instruments in increasing program benefits, with the government in parallel expanding the coverage of beneficiaries. The following is a table of changes to the Social Assistance Program, Non-Contribution Scheme for residents affected by the Covid-19 Pandemic.

The issuance of Perppu No. 1/2020 (currently has been stipulated as Law Number 2 of 2020 concerning Stipulation of Government Regulation in Lieu of Law Number 1 of 2020 concerning State Financial Policy and Financial System Stability for Handling the Covid-19 Pandemic and/or in Facing the Threats Endangering the National Economy and/or Financial System Stability Becomes Law) and Presidential Decree no. 54/2020 provides a w instrument to minimize the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on social and economic conditions.

The government's efforts in poverty alleviation have inspired local governments to come up with similar policies. The Governor of Central Java issues the Decree of the Governor of Central Java as Chair of the Task Force for the Acceleration of Handling Corona Virus Disease (Covid-19) in Central Java Province Number 440.1/108 of 2020 concerning Standard Operating and Law Enforcement Procedures for Corona Virus Disease (Covid-19) Health Protocols in Central Java Province. Previously, the Governor of Central Java had issued Central Java Governor Regulation Number 60 of 2019 concerning the Regional Poverty Reduction Strategy of Central Java Province for 2019-2023. Although it does not specifically regulate poverty during the Covid-19 pandemic, this policy is still maintained to overcome the spike in poverty.

The same condition occurs in Pekalongan Regency. The Regulation of the Regent of Pekalongan Number 33 of 2020 concerning Guidelines for the Implementation of Adaptation of New Habits towards a Healthy and Productive Society during the 2019 Corona Virus Disease Pandemic In Pekalongan Regency is the basis for the formulation of programs and activities of regional officials. Previously, the Pekalongan Regency Government had Pekalongan Regent Regulation Number 39 of 2019 concerning Poverty Reduction. Article 15 states that the strategy for accelerating poverty alleviation is carried out by reducing the burden of spending on the poor in the regions, increasing the capacity and income of the poor in the regions, developing and ensuring the sustainability of micro and small businesses in the region, and synergizing poverty reduction policies and programs in the regions with the provincial and central governments. Furthermore, Article 17 of this Regent's Regulation formulates that the Poverty Reduction Program is grouped into 4 programs, which consist of some programs. Firstly, family-based integrated social assistance programs aimed at fulfilling basic rights, reducing the burden of life, and improving the quality of life for the poor. Secondly, community empowerment-based poverty reduction program groups, aiming to develop the potential and strengthen the capacity of poor community groups to be involved in development based on the principles of community empowerment. Thirdly, poverty alleviation programs based on the empowerment of micro and small economic enterprises, aimed at providing access and strengthening the economy for micro and small-scale business actors. Lastly, other programs that can directly or indirectly improve economic activities and the welfare of the poor.

4.2 Discussion

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the government through the Pekalongan Regent Regulation Number 36 of 2020 concerning Changes in the 2020 Pekalongan Regency Government Work Plan which formulated poverty reduction policies was carried out with two approaches, namely the fulfillment of basic life access to reduce the burden of expenditure, and sustainable livelihoods to increase community income. The target of this policy is primarily for the poor and vulnerable to the poor, as well as people affected by Covid-19 socially and economically. Meanwhile, the policy to reduce unemployment is directed at expanding employment opportunities, improving the quality and productivity of the workforce, as well as protecting workers and job seekers affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. In particular, the poverty alleviation policies are as follows. The first is social protection guarantees, especially for heads of non-productive poor households. The second is improvement of protection, rehabilitation, provision of guarantees and empowerment of socially vulnerable groups (PMKS). The third is the development of productive economic business based on local potential, empowerment of SMEs, capital for joint ventures, training and work skills in various job training centers, empowerment, training and provision of capital for socio-economic vulnerable families and vulnerable women. The fourth is youth entrepreneurship development to improve skills and foster youth entrepreneurial spirit and new SME-based entrepreneurs. The fifth is the expansion and development of employment opportunities, improvement of the quality and competence of the workforce, competitive working conditions, improvement of the climate and strengthening of labor industrial relations, and improvement of labor welfare (Sadma, 2021; Ulwan, 2021).

What has been done by the government indicates that public policies in poverty alleviation have been implemented, but have not been optimal (Han et al., 2020; Suryahadi et al., 2020; Gibson & Olivia, 2020; Olivia et al., 2020; Sparrow et al., 2020). Easton as quoted by Sapru (2004) provides a definition of public policy as the authoritative allocation of values for the whole society or as the coercive allocation of values to all members of society. Laswell and Kaplan also define public policy as a projected program of goals, values, and practices or a program of achieving goals, values in directed practices. Pressman and Wildavsky (1984) as define public policy as a hypothesis that contains initial conditions and predictable consequences (Taufiqurakhman, 2004; Winarno, 2002; Nasirin & Lionardo, 2021).

Sahya (2014) explained that policy is an effort to influence the system to achieve the desired goals. These efforts and actions are strategic, namely long-term and comprehensive. Meanwhile, according to Sururi (2019) explained in more detail, that public policy is a product that can fight for the interests of the people and in the process always involves the people who are also the target group. Even though a policy is directed at the interests of the people, in the decision-making process it falls in the hands of the government. The government has the right to determine whether the policy needs to be implemented or not. As stated by Nugroho (2018), according to him whatever governments choose to do or not do and it is what government do, why they do it, and what difference it makes. Public policy is an effort to understand and interpret what the government does or does not do in response to existing problems, as well as what causes or influences it, and what effects and impacts will occur from the public policy (Dye, 2013; Gerston, 2014; Birkland, 2019).

Some of the factors found in this study relate to two things, namely internal and external factors of society. The internal factor of the poor group in a very poor condition, apart from losing their jobs, is also the narrowing of business opportunities. PPKM is considered to hinder the efforts of the poor. The factors of limited conditions, low accessibility to aid and declining purchasing power have an impact on deeper vulnerability.

The policies that are formulated will only be dreams and good plans that are stored neatly in the archives if they are not implemented (Wahab, 1997).

External factors refer to the government's role in implementing policies. Grindle (2017) states that implementation is a general process of administrative action that can be investigated at the level of a particular program. The success of implementation according to Grindle (2017) is influenced by two major variables, namely the content of the policy and the implementation environment (context of implementation). The implementation process will only start when the goals and objectives have been set, the activity program has been structured and the funds are ready and distributed to achieve the targets. If this understanding is directed at the locus and focus (change) where the policy is applied it will be in line with the views of Van Meter and van Horn (1975) that policy implementation is an action taken by government and private organizations both individually and in groups intended to achieve goals (Parsons, 1995; Wibawa et al., 1994).

The Pekalongan government has made many efforts, but the limited regional financial condition and limited transfer of funds have an impact on solving the problem of poverty. Local government officials affected by Covid-19 are also an unavoidable factor. The policy's ability to systematize the implementation process includes clarity and consistency of goals, accuracy of resource allocation, hierarchical integration within and between implementing agencies, clarity of decision rules from implementing agencies, conformity of the recruitment pattern for implementing officials and formal access from outsiders. The categories of factors outside the policy that affect the implementation process are shown through socio-economic and technological conditions, public support attitudes and resources of the group, support from officials or superiors, and commitment and leadership ability of implementing officials (Keban, 2007). In terms of poverty reduction, the policies implemented will be an important reference for implementation. The above variables will be applied in poverty reduction. The poverty approach is in line with the decentralization policy paradigm in handling social problems, including the problem of poverty. This approach recognizes the importance of community capacity to increase independence and internal strength through the ability to exercise internal control over material and non-material resources (Han et al., 2020; Acosta & Nestore, 2020).

V. Conclusion

The results of the study concluded that the Covid-19 pandemic affected the increase in the number of poor people. The Covid-19 pandemic that hit and contributed to increasing poverty became an inseparable follower variable. Covid-19 provides stress, especially particularistic policies whose implementation will be different from other programs. The policy will specifically pay attention to groups not only paying attention to the poor, but also those who are affected and become poor due to the pandemic.

The factors that influence the increasing number of poor people found in this study are vulnerability factors, job loss, low accessibility in getting assistance and weak purchasing power. Meanwhile, factors from the government side were found, in addition to the limited coverage of funds for poverty alleviation, as well as in the implementation of special policies that were not optimal due to the large number of apparatus affected by Covid-19.

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