



# Study of the Impact Covid-19 and Coping Strategies of Women with Disabilities in Facing a Pandemic in Palu, Central Sulawesi

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## Abstract

The Covid - 19 outbreak and government policies related to handling Covid - 19 certainly have an impact on all Indonesian people especially women with disabilities. This study explores the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the coping strategies implemented by women with disabilities in Palu City, Central Sulawesi. A total of 17 informants, consisting of 14 regular informants and 3 key informants, were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Data collection was carried out through field observations and in-depth interviews, using the content analysis method. Research findings reveal that women with disabilities experienced obstacles in carrying out work during the pandemic, accompanied by psychological impacts such as feelings of anxiety and worry due to lack of information about Covid-19. The coping strategies implemented involve a problem-focused approach, such as opening an alternative business and asking the family for a loan. Despite receiving assistance from the government, there are unmet needs, especially business capital assistance. The conclusions of this research provide an in-depth understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by women with disabilities during the pandemic, as well as their relevance in formulating policies that are more effective and supports.

**Keywords:** Covid-19; Coping Strategies; Women with Disabilities

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## 1. Introduction

The Covid-19 outbreak in Indonesia has made the government make decisions that affect many sectors of life such as economic, social, health, education, and so on. This change is very much felt in the community. Many people end up getting negative impacts such as losing their jobs, losses in business, or losing loved ones. SARS-CoV2 is a virus that attacks the respiratory tract so that sufferers experience severe shortness of breath and even death [1]. Indonesia as one of the countries affected by the Covid-19 outbreak is of course also taking measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19. Starting from the implementation of Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB), which began in DKI Jakarta, which was then followed by other regions in Indonesia, to the Implementation of Restrictions on Level 1-4 Community Activities or PPKM, which is still valid today. Indonesia, which previously occupied the top position as one of the most dangerous countries to visit due to the very high level of spread of Covid-19 in 2020. However, after the implementation of PPKM, Indonesia's condition changed for the better. As Indonesia occupies the 5th best position as the safest country from Covid-19 to visit on par with China. Disability is a condition where the biological body

experiences limited function or form caused by psychological, mental, or sensory damage. Disability in terminology is the obstruction of an individual's condition in carrying out his daily activity needs, where these needs are basic and important for him. From the basic health survey data conducted by the Ministry of Health, which shows the ratio of the adult population classified as disabilities, Central Sulawesi is the province with the highest proportion of disabilities at 40.6 percent of the total population. The city of Palu is one of the contributors to the high number of citizens with disabilities, until 2021 there were 985 (visual disabilities), 200 (speech), 314 (body), 271 (mental), and 62 (multiple). People with disabilities have a high risk of being exposed to Covid-19. Limitations and difficulties in implementing Covid-19 prevention protocols are the main factors for people with disabilities to be the most vulnerable group in a pandemic situation. The diversity of disabilities provides various difficulties depending on the impairments they have. Barriers that can be faced by people with disabilities are limitations in implementing basic protections such as washing hands, using masks, physical distancing, limited access to water, sanitation, hand washing facilities;

dependence on companions who can make physical contact; limited access to public health information; workplaces that do not provide inclusive facilities, and limited access to education and online work. These barriers are exacerbated for those living in informal settlements and/or affected by humanitarian emergencies [2]. In a survey conducted in March and April 2020 of 2,469 American adults with disabilities, 44% of participants reported experiencing new challenges to their health due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and most participants (86.3%) acknowledged that they were concerned about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their lives. 64% of participants reported receiving routine health care and more than half (56%) reported that their care had been disrupted by the pandemic (Drum et al., 2020). Further complicating the issue, many people with disabilities live in groups (i.e. nursing homes, institutions, group homes) where systemic tracking of Covid-19 is lacking, despite the higher risk of Covid-19 disease and death in these groups. From the data available up to August 2020, they have tracked over 70,000 deaths of disabled people from group homes (<https://autisticadvocacy.org/covid19/>), representing a sizable number and a traumatic sense of loss, especially for those who lost a housemate to the virus [3]. Prolonged social isolation can lead to many damaging cognitive, physical, and mental health effects, even increasing mortality risk itself. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, people with disabilities were at higher risk for social isolation and loneliness and their damaging effects, putting them in an already precarious situation when the pandemic occurred and required greater social isolation. Moreover, the high-risk status of many disabled people, as discussed above, may force them to engage in more conservative social distancing measures even as regions begin to relax social distancing guidelines. While such measures are necessary from an immediate health standpoint, they have the unfortunate side effect of also increasing social isolation and loneliness for people with disabilities, potentially leading to long-term health impacts. Necessary social isolation may create additional barriers to accessing social and emotional support for feelings of traumatic stress and grief associated with the Covid-19 pandemic [4]. Discrimination against people with disabilities is still an important discussion among social activists with disabilities in Indonesia, especially for women with disabilities, women with disabilities get multiple discrimination in the form of giving stereotypes or views that are not necessarily the truth. Beliefs about women who are already considered by society as someone who is weak, passive and low-ranking compared to men, of course women with disabilities automatically get double stereotypes (double stereotypes) from society regarding shortcomings, weaknesses and helplessness in sustaining their lives. Moreover, a woman with a status of physical disability, namely someone with a damaged or disrupted function of the shape of bones, muscles and joints caused by disease, accidents or can also be caused by inheritance from birth and they need tools to make it easier for them to move [5]. Many women with disabilities still experience multiple forms of discrimination and barriers that limit their ability to participate fully in society and reach their full potential. Barriers contributing to a reduced quality of life for women with disabilities include low employment rates, levels of domestic violence, and reduced access to facilities including Health services [6]. Physical disabilities, involving physical

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impairments that alter or reduce mobility, and strength or endurance that when combined with the environment and society, limit participation in daily activities as well as activities and access to health care [7]. Reducing the impact of stress on women with disabilities is done by choosing effective coping strategies. Coping strategies designate various efforts, both mental and behavioral, to master, tolerate, reduce or minimize a stressful situation or event. In other words, coping is a process where individuals try to handle the stress they face by means of cognitive and behavioral changes in order to obtain a sense of security within themselves [8]. Therefore, to observe the coping strategies of women with disabilities in facing the Covid-19 pandemic, Lazarus and Folkman's (1989) theory can be used [9]. According to them, individual coping strategies can be seen from various aspects. These aspects consist of aspects of self-activity, aspects of planning, aspects of self-control, aspects of instrumental social support, aspects of emotional social support, aspects of acceptance, and aspects of religiosity. Each aspect of the coping strategy used can be done consciously or spontaneously. The Covid - 19 outbreak and government policies related to handling Covid - 19 certainly have an impact on all Indonesian people, especially the city of Palu which has not fully recovered after the disaster. This includes women with disabilities in Palu. Therefore, women with disabilities must have the ability to create coping strategies that are in accordance with the pressure or conditions they are facing. So it is necessary to analyze the impact of the pandemic and explore the coping strategies used by women with disabilities in Palu City.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

This research used a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods, conducted in Palu City. The procedure for determining informants was carried out by purposive sampling, and the criteria for informants included women with disabilities, domiciled in Palu City, and willing to become informants. The total number of informants involved in this study was 17 people, consisting of 14 ordinary informants and 3 key informants. Data collection was conducted through field observations and in-depth interviews, while data analysis used the content analysis method. Qualitative data analysis involves three main steps, namely data reduction, data presentation and conclusion drawing. To ensure data validity, researchers applied triangulation techniques, involving source triangulation and technique triangulation. This process is expected to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study.

## **3. Results and discussion**

### **3.1. Exploring the experiences of women with disabilities**

From the informants' experience in dealing with the impact of Covid-19, there are those who really feel the impact of Covid-19, but there are also informants who do not feel the impact of Covid-19. "At the time of covid, I happened to have a collaboration with an NGO, an NGO from outside, so at that time, at the beginning of covid, our activities were automatically stopped first so we did not have any activities at that time while waiting for a new policy to come out related to our activities outside so that full time we were only at

home.” “It's the same, there's no difference. In terms of income, it's more crowded now (after covid). It feels very good when covid because I didn't sell this at first.” “For people with disabilities, it doesn't really feel like it because our days are only at home so it's the same whether or not there is covid.” Based on the results of interviews conducted by researchers regarding the experiences of women with disabilities in dealing with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, 2 out of 14 informants have different experiences, namely stating that there is no difference in daily life before and after the covid-19 pandemic, this is in line with key informants saying that there is no difference in the daily lives of women with disabilities because the activities of women with disabilities are only at home.

### **3.2. Analyzing the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the lives of women with disabilities**

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a difficult period for all countries experiencing it, including Indonesia. The pandemic not only has a direct impact on health, but also other aspects of life, such as economic and social aspects. “I'm scared because I'm used to seeing people die from covid on the news. But what else can do because the only income is from the kiosk so have to stay open”. “Very traumatized. At one point, we, the volunteers, were sent home and told to rest. Actually, only one person was positive for Covid-19 so we were all told to rest in the office. It's not good that we feel alone. I was hanging out with people in the office suddenly told to rest for 3 weeks.” “Don't be too afraid of that. Just relax. Sometimes I still go out and meet my parents, go to the market, that's all.”

### **3.3. Exploring coping strategies of women with disabilities**

Coping strategies are individual responses to a problem that arises based on what is felt and thought to be able to control, tolerate, and reduce the negative effects of the situation being faced. According to the results of interviews conducted with informants, informants chose the Problem Focused Coping method to overcome the problems faced by informants during the Covid-19 pandemic. “Alhamdulillah, sometimes my family orders cakes, so I make cakes only for my family first because of covid. We also have an NGO in collaboration with HWDI so that's where there is a little extra in one day. If we go to the field 120 / day. There are several NGOs that work with us, friends with disabilities are involved in the disaster. Actually, from the 2018 disaster, there has been cooperation but it is ongoing. There are NGOs so far that are still there and participate in meetings from the OPD, that's where we get the envelope money to replace our transportation, which is managed again for daily needs.” “That's just the economy. I just borrow here and there. That's the way it is, we only work in restaurants, my husband also works here as a driver. It just so happened that during the covid, everything stopped. People can't eat. So we try to borrow here and there to cover our needs.” “The economy is very difficult because we are not allowed to leave, we are forced to do as we are. We also want to look for other businesses, how do we want to get out. We need to get out. We need to serve people. Meet people again. I really want to have a business, especially if there are a lot of cars here, the post is right there at the sub-district office, a lot of people are

looking for food but that means we have to serve people while we are afraid. If it's people I know. The people around here I serve but if it's outsiders, I don't know them, I don't serve them”. Based on the results of interviews conducted by researchers regarding the coping strategies of women with disabilities in dealing with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, 4 out of 17 informants chose how to adapt to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, while other informants have coping strategies in dealing with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **3.5. Explore the care and support that women with disabilities have and have not received**

Several efforts have been made by the government to fulfill the basic needs of the community amid the Covid-19 Pandemic. President Joko Widodo said that he had delivered a policy regarding the beneficiaries of the Family Hope Program (PKH) for ten million recipient families. “There is, just basic necessities. All kinds of groceries, rice. If a friend says there is help, that is it, if there isn't, not really. There was also money at that time, five hundred thousand, three months I think. Yes, Alhamdulillah, it can be used to fill the kiosk”. “There is also aid from the government that is like giving basic necessities. If in one house how many people at least enough. Sometimes 5kg of rice 1kg of sugar 1 liter of oil, hehe. Sometimes there is 10kg of rice, sometimes 5kg”. “I don't get it from the government. I did not get the covid assistance at all, right, yesterday there was covid assistance directly from the Ministry of Social Affairs. Well, I did not get it and then what I got was only from NGOs. ” “In my opinion, we need to be given business capital, so that we can open our own businesses, especially thank God, even though I am disabled, I can still independently make cakes so that I can earn income so I don't become a burden to the government”. The results showed that informants experienced changes in their daily activities such as constraints in leaving the house to work, serving salon customers, serving stitching orders, serving food orders and stall operating hours. People with disabilities on average work in the informal sector, for example selling. The income of people with disabilities who generally work as traders, massage therapists, and other informal sector jobs has decreased because their customers do not dare to shop or use the services of people with disabilities, and coupled with social restrictions in a number of regions. Meanwhile, conducting electronic transactions also has its own barriers for people with disabilities. The results of in-depth interviews conducted with informants regarding the impact felt by informants during the Covid-19 pandemic showed that the psychological impact was the most felt by informants [10]. Lack of access to information about Covid-19 is the main factor. With some public information provided by the government, access to information in it for people with disabilities is still minimal. In this case, the media is also expected to present information that is easily understood by all parties. It is hoped that the media can present news or if there are infographics or videos made as easy as possible, starting from the language, equipped with images along with the text so that it can be understood by anyone, including people with disabilities who cannot read, it can be understood [11]. The results of in-depth interviews conducted by researchers to informants related to the problems faced by

women with disabilities during the Covid-19 pandemic. The results obtained that informants experienced economic problems. Most of their jobs require direct interaction so that during this pandemic it is very difficult to run. If they continue to work, they have the potential to contract Covid-19. In addition, they also do not have many job options and will certainly experience difficulties if they have to change professions. The results of in-depth interviews conducted by researchers to informants related to ways to overcome economic problems faced by women with disabilities during the Covid-19 pandemic showed that informants took various ways to overcome economic problems including finding other businesses, marketing sales on social media, selling cloth masks, moving business places, joining NGOs, and borrowing money. The dynamics of psychological self-adjustment in the realm of practical action towards self-adjustment require a coping strategy to achieve the desired state and free individuals from a state of stress due to efforts to achieve conditions of adaptation and conformity to the social situation around the individual [12]. Results coping strategies are individual responses to a problem that arises based on what is felt and thought to be able to control, tolerate, and reduce the negative effects of the situation at hand. In accordance with the theory of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) Problem Focused Coping is used to reduce stressors or overcome stress by learning new ways or skills. Individuals will tend to use this strategy if they believe they can change the stressful situation. The method chosen by the informant to overcome this obstacle is to follow the rules that have been implemented by the government. In accordance with the theory of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) Emotionally focused coping is used to regulate emotional responses to stress. If individuals are unable to change conditions that are full of stress, then individuals will tend to regulate their emotions. The results of in-depth interviews conducted by researchers with informants regarding the help and support received by informants. The results showed that the informant had received assistance in the form of PKH program assistance, assistance in the form of basic food supplies, and assistance in the form of money [13]. Through the Family Hope Program (PKH) and providing social assistance from the Family Hope Program (PKH) which was increased by 25 percent. The program is provided to three beneficiary components, namely people with disabilities, pregnant women and school-age children. Then, for people with disabilities who are directly affected economically, efforts will be made in the form of social assistance programs both from the State Revenue and Expenditure Budget (APBN) and from partners of the Ministry of Social Affairs. So the assistance provided can ease the burden on people with disabilities and motivate them not to lose their enthusiasm in facing the Covid-19 pandemic situation which is currently taking place, especially in Indonesia [14]. Based on the results of research on the Covid-19 Impact Study and Coping Strategies of Women with Disabilities in Facing Pandemic in Palu City, Central Sulawesi, several main points can be concluded. First, women with disabilities face obstacles in carrying out their work during the Covid-19 pandemic. Second, the psychological impact felt includes feelings of anxiety, worry, and pressure due to the fear of being infected with Covid-19 caused by the lack of access to information related to the pandemic. Third, coping strategies used by women with disabilities involve problem-focused

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approaches, such as opening alternative businesses and asking family for loans. Fourth, despite receiving assistance such as cash and basic necessities from the government, there is still an unmet need for business capital assistance in the form of both goods and cash. This conclusion provides an in-depth insight into the experiences, impacts, coping strategies, and assistance needs of women with disabilities during the Covid-19 pandemic in Palu City, Central Sulawesi.

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### **Ethical permission**

This research has been declared free from ethical problems based on the Decree of the Ethics Institute of the Faculty of Public Health, Hasanuddin University with the number 3806/UN4.14.1/TP.01.02/2023.

### **Author contribution**

Naswindah Amalia Lestari, Sudirman Natsir, Ridwan Mochtar Thaha: Study concept and design. Naswindah Amalia Lestari: Collecting and processing research data. All authors: the creation of publication manuscript.

### **Conflicts of interest**

There is no conflict of interest in this research.

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