

Original Article

Does Covid-19 pandemic influence the sustainability of health insurance membership among informal workers in Indonesia?

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ABSTRACT

Background: The phenomenon of decreasing NHI beneficiaries can be caused by several reasons, such as changes in the amount of premium contributions, as well as due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This study aims to find out the impact felt by informal sector workers due to the Covid-19 pandemic and their efforts to maintain the membership of the National Health Insurance (NHI) program.

Methods: This was qualitative research with a case study approach. Eight study participants from the district of Banyumas had been selected for this study. The study explored the experience of the informal workers regarding Covid-19 pandemic that influenced their household economic condition and their effort to maintain the membership of health insurance for protecting their access to health care. All interviews then transcribing verbatim for further data analysis. The analysis was conducted by using thematic networks approach.

Results: There were four themes emerged from the analysis. The themes covering issue about: i) the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on the informal sector; ii) coping strategies for maintaining NHI premium payment; iii) the role of social capital for supporting informal workers during Covid-19 pandemic; and iv) policy recommendation for protecting the informal sector for maintaining NHI membership.

Conclusions: This study highlights the strategic position of cooperatives in supporting their members from the burden of NHI premium payment. Government is needed to support the informal workers product so can improve the economic condition these such population

Keywords: covid-19, pandemic, health insurance, informal workers, Indonesia, sustainability

INTRODUCTION

The corona virus disease 2019 or Covid-19 was first discovered in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 and caused the infection of Covid-19 in some citizens in China which resulted in thousands of deaths. The virus continues to spread to other areas. Most areas in the world cannot cope with this virus quickly, so it spreads quite rapidly. The effect of this pandemic is that a number of countries have implemented lock downs or social restrictions, where people are limited in carrying out their daily activities. A number of traditional markets to supermarkets were also forced to close and caused a world economic crisis due to a lack of money circulation ^{1,2}. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on the condition of workers and the economy of the informal sector, which is a population that is very vulnerable to crises ³.

The informal sector is interesting to study in relation to the National Health Insurance (NHI) program in Indonesia. The NHI program has challenges towards universal health coverage due to the large number of informal sector workers in Indonesia who are not yet members of the NHI program ^{4,5}. Based on the 2021 national health profile, showed that the number of NHI beneficiaries in 2020 has decreased compared to 2019, from 224.1 million people to 222.4 million people. This shows a decrease in beneficiaries of 2.3 million people. In 2021, 87% of the population in Indonesia were coverage by NHI. Based on NHI membership coverage data by province, six provinces have achieved universal health coverage (UHC). However, to date, there are still many provinces that have not reached this target. One of these

areas is the province of Central Java, with an achievement rate of 84.9% ⁶.

The phenomenon of decreasing NHI beneficiaries can be caused by several reasons, such as changes in the amount of premium contributions, as well as due to the Covid-19 pandemic which has an impact on the ability to pay NHI premium among the informal sector workers. Informal sector workers have been deeply impacted by the pandemic which decrease the income they earn, but they persist in doing their business/activities to survive ³. Moreover, the government had made a new policy during the pandemic by increasing NHI premiums, which might resulted in a decrease in membership compliance ⁷.

This study aims to find out the impact felt by informal sector workers due to the Covid-19 pandemic and their efforts to maintain the membership of the NHI program. This study also explores the coping strategies made by informal sector workers to maintain NHI membership during and after the Covid-19 pandemic.

METHODS

Study design and participants

This was qualitative research with a case study approach. The study explored the experience of the informal workers regarding Covid-19 pandemic that influenced their household economic condition and their effort to maintain the membership of health insurance for protecting their access to health care. Eight study participants had been selected from the district of Banyumas, Central Java, Indonesia. They were local milk farmers, palm sugar farmers, and informal workers cooperation/association who had been member of national health insurance program and they had to pay the premium by themselves (without having premium subsidies from government). We conducted in-depth interview about 45 to 60 minutes with one-to-one conversation.

Interview guideline

The interview guideline were developed by the researchers with consist of several points: i) the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the informal economy; ii) the efforts for maintaining health insurance membership; iii) social support during pandemic period; and iv) coping strategies

Data collection

Data collection had been conducted from September to November 2022, meaning that the informal workers could reflected their experience during Covid-19 pandemic to their economic condition till the pandemic becoming decline. Before conducting the interview, the researchers asked for a consent to the informants assuring their willingness and voluntarily participation to this study as well as explaining that the confidentiality of the information.

Data analysis

All interviews then transcribing verbatim for further data analysis. The analysis was conducted by using thematic networks approach. First, reading the interview texts was conducted to understand the detail information that had been provided by the informants. second, coding was applied by using short statement for labelling the informant expressions. Third, inductive process for generating basic theme, intermediate theme and final theme. Fourth, interpretation of the themes.

Ethical issue

The ethical clearance has been obtained from the ethical commission of the Faculty of Health Sciences, Jenderal Soedirman University, Purwokerto, Indonesia (Ethical approval No. 924/EC/KEPK/XI/2022). The permission of conducting data collection had been approved by the district of Banyumas government.

RESULTS

All the study participants are male with mostly have lower education level. Most of the participants are above sixty year old as described in the Table 1.

There were four themes emerged from the analysis. The themes covering issue about: i) the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on the informal sector; ii) coping strategies for maintaining NHI premium payment; iii) the role of social capital for supporting informal workers during Covid-19 pandemic; and iv) policy recommendation for protecting the informal sector for maintaining NHI membership

Theme 1: the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on the informal sector

Study participants expressed the impact of Covid-19 pandemic that became obstacles and difficulties in selling their products, as follows:

"Yes, everyone, the peak of smooth exports will start in 2020. In 2021, the impact of the pandemic will begin to be felt. Apart from that, the impact of the war, there is also an increase in gas, and others. Our people's purchasing power is low, more expensive. Meanwhile, almost all exports are experiencing problems. There is discussion about the impact markets and others, almost all of Indonesia is experiencing problems" (Informant D, cooperation manager).

"Currently there is a recession between America and Europe, so that distribution is hampered... Yes, until now it is still unstable. The maximum production is 4 ounces and it depends on demand again because the basis is the export market so the constraints are there. Now many are moving" (Informant D, cooperation manager).

Table 1. Characteristic of study participants

ID	Gender	Age	Occupation	Educational attainment
A	Male	65	Milk farmer and cooperation manager	Junior high school
B	Male	67	Milk farmer and cooperation manager	Junior high school
C	Male	68	Milk farmer and cooperation manager	Junior high school
D	Male	48	Palm sugar farmer and cooperation manager	Senior high school
E	Male	65	Palm sugar farmer	Elementary school
F	Male	25	Palm sugar farmer	Elementary school
G	Male	61	Mild farmer	Elementary school
H	Male	70	Palm sugar farmer	Elementary school

"The members of the cooperative have gone down. Because in 2021 yesterday, the certification body changed, before it was a control union. So there is another selection of farmers. Now there are only 400 farmers left. Currently there is no ant sugar production, the farmers are back to producing cast sugar" (Informant D, cooperation manager).

"Fate is good, because changing is not easy. For domestic, it was not implemented before. Can't do much. For example, if it is sold domestically, there are three delivery notes, it is paid in one payment, only one note. The government's role is very important to educate the public, because there are still lacking" (Informant D, cooperation manager).

Theme 2: coping strategies for maintaining NHI premium payment

Several participants stated that the way out in maintaining the continuity of premium payments, as expressed as follows:

"My son support the premium during pandemic, because the palm sugar was not sold during pandemic. Thanks God, because of my son, we could still pay the premium" (Informant E, palm sugar farmer).

"I use my saving from the sale of milk. So, I always be able to pay the premium. I need the NHI because I have a son that need health services. NHI really helps us" (Informant F, palm sugar farmer).

"There were several supports from government for my dairy cow such as feed and fermenter. Those helped us so I could save may money and I could pay the premium regularly" (Informant G, milk farmer).

Theme 3: the role of social capital for supporting informal workers during Covid-19 pandemic

There were supports from the internal and external resources and networks for the informal workers for maintaining NHI premium payments as follows:

"Nira Satria cooperation (economic association among palm sugar farmers) provides social support for their members. The financial support is used to help the member when they have a trouble" (Informant D, cooperation manager)

"If the members have a problem for paying the premium, they can come to the *Pesat* cooperation (economic association among milk farmers). They can use their sales savings for paying the premium" (Informant A, cooperation manager)

Theme 4: policy recommendation for protecting the informal sector for maintaining NHI membership

The informal workers and stakeholders stated several recommendations for the policy makers related to the protection of informal workers for maintaining the membership of NHI, as follows:

"Government should change the status of NHI membership from independent member who has to pay the premium to subsidized member. That will help informal workers households who are affected by Covid-19 pandemic" (Informant H, palm sugar farmer).

"Dissemination of information about NHI program should be improved to enhance the knowledge among palm sugar farmers about the benefits of health insurance. The cooperation could take an important role for collecting the sales savings for paying the health insurance premium" (Informant F, palm sugar farmers).

"Cooperation like *Pesat* has a strategic position for helping the members. We have provided a national social security program for our members. It is possible in the next future for designing support system for our members to pay the health insurance premium" (Informant B, cooperation manager).

"The price of fresh milk is relatively stable. The members have also sales savings. They can use the saving for anything including NHI premium. The role of cooperation is supporting the system that facilitates our members for financial stability including maintaining the regularity of premium payment" (Informant C, cooperation manager).

DISCUSSION

The Covid-19 pandemic has influenced the economic condition of informal workers. Although there are several informal sectors that still survive passing through the difficult situation. The uncertainty of income for the amount and its regularity caused the sustainability of NHI premium payment became a challenge ⁸. A previous published study revealed that almost 28% of NHI members who pay the premium by themselves did not pay contributions on an ongoing basis ⁹. Social capital and networks could play an important role on supporting the informal workers to maintain the sustainability of NHI premium ⁵.

This study also highlights the strategic position of cooperatives in supporting their members from the burden of

NHI premium payment. Sales savings from the members is a mechanism that can be managed by the cooperation for supporting the members for maintaining sustainability of the premium payment ⁴. This study identified that cooperation among milk farmers has been able in implementing social security program coverage for all member by using sales savings. This scheme is potential to be expanded to the health insurance scheme. Regulation and the agreement of all members should be designed and token into action.

There were several challenges of the sustainability of NHI premium payment among informal workers that also been identified from this study. First, government support so that the production of informal sector workers who are not absorbed in the main foreign market can be transferred to the domestic market share, with policy and regulation supports ³. This effort will help the informal workers to maintain their income that will influence on their ability to pay for NHI premium. Second, the NHI program is considered to be of less economic benefit than the employment social security program (*BPJS Ketenagakerjaan*) in relation to the financial benefits obtained. Social capital support like cooperation has been prioritized the employment social security program rather than NHI.

BPJS Ketenagakerjaan has more advantages in the form of long-term savings compared to NHI which are "pay as you go" which means money will be lost even if you don't use it, which is only replaced with health services. This just perception that has to be corrected and improved, and government has an important role for conducting education and information dissemination ¹⁰.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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