

# The Role of Health Cadres in Dealing with COVID-19 Pandemic in Central Java: A qualitative Study

# Peran Kader Kesehatan dalam Menangani Pandemi COVID-19 di Jawa Tengah: Kajian Kualitatif

# Andika Mirza Fahriyan<sup>1</sup>, Vinami Yulian<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Health, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Sukoharjo, Indonesia <sup>2</sup>Faculty of Health, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Sukoharjo, Indonesia \*e-mail: <u>vy128@ums.ac.id</u>

## Abstract

**Objective:** This research aims to determine the experience and role of health cadres in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Methods:** This research uses a qualitative research method with an exploratory approach. The number of participants in this research was six health cadres using a purposive sampling approach. The data collection technique in this research used interviews.

**Results:** After carrying out the thematic analysis process, three themes were found from the results of the in-depth interviews, namely (1) The role of health cadres in dealing with COVID-19, (2) Factors that make it easier for cadres to deal with COVID-19, and (3) Factors that hinder cadres in dealing with COVID-19.

**Conclusion:** Health cadres are aware of their role and responsibility in dealing with COVID-19 in society. Health cadres have a role as mobilizers and supervise the community in complying with health protocols. However, in carrying out their role, many health cadres receive unpleasant treatment, namely in the form of rejection and discrimination from the community and local government assistance is still lacking.

Keywords: COVID-19, experience of health cadres, role of health cadres

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## Introduction

The high incidence of the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the health service system<sup>1</sup>, which can potentially increase risks to safety and health. Indirectly, the COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to hinder many people's accesses to optimal health services due to policies to minimize the transmission of COVID-19. The World Health Organization (WHO) announced the COVID-19 pandemic on March 12, 2020<sup>2–7</sup>, so that all countries in the world increase vigilance in preventing and minimizing the spread of COVID-19<sup>8</sup>.

Besides the health sector, the COVID-19 pandemic also impacts the social and economic sectors significantly<sup>9</sup>. In the economic sector, this pandemic that has been an unprecedented, extraordinary crisis<sup>10</sup> has caused the world economy to become chaotic<sup>11</sup>, increasing unemployment and poverty rates<sup>12,13</sup>. Efforts to minimize the spread of COVID-19 require efforts from all components of society, especially the health sector. Health cadres have an essential role in dealing with COVID-19 and inviting the public to comply with health protocols together with health workers<sup>14</sup>.

Health cadres are essential in improving public health status, especially during the pandemic<sup>15</sup>. However, literature discussing the role of cadres in overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic is still limited. Data about the experience of health cadres in efforts to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic is critical as information for stakeholders in making policies. Health cadres are expected to act as a source of public information about health protocols because cadres are trusted by the community and trained by health workers regarding health problems that often arise in the community<sup>8</sup>.

The implementation of the duties and functions of these cadres often encounters several problems, most of which are related to the cadres' inability to carry out the five steps mentioned above. Most cadres are only able to do a few things; apart from that, most cadres also do not have the knowledge and skills, and cadres do not play an active role in participating in posyandu<sup>16</sup>.

Apart from that, cadres are tasked with continuing the information conveyed by the community health center to the community and, at the same time, acting as a mobilizer in the community to participate in posyandu activities so that cadres need to continue to be encouraged and motivated so that successful implementation of posyandu can be achieved. Cadres carry out Posyandu management. Cadres play a role starting from the pioneering stage, liaising with institutions that support the implementation of Posyandu as implementing planners, coaches, and instructors to motivate the community to participate in Posyandu activities in their area. Therefore, cadres are at the forefront of health services for the community through Posyandu<sup>17</sup>.

## Methods

This research uses a qualitative research method with an exploratory approach. The exploratory approach aims to explore topics that are still new and are characterized by a lack of research related to the topic<sup>18</sup>. An exploratory approach can be carried out by surveying experiences in searching for information using interview techniques<sup>19</sup>.

## **Population and Participants**

The population of this study consisted of health cadres in the Tamangede Community Health Center working area, Kendal. Recruitment of participants in this study used nonprobability with a purposive sampling approach. In this research, the indicator that adequate data collection has been achieved is data redundancy. This research involved six health cadre participants, with the characteristics of all participants being female, aged 35-45 years. Five participants had a high school educational background, and one participant had a third diploma (D3) educational background. Three participants work as entrepreneurs, and three participants are housewives.

### Place and time of research

The research process has been carried out since a preliminary study in March 2022. Data collection was carried out in July 2022 in Kendal Regency.

### **Research Variables**

This research uses a single variable, namely the experience of health cadres in dealing with COVID-19.

## **Data Collection Tools and Methods**

Data collection was carried out using in-depth semi-structured interviews. The interview guide contains several question topics developed by researchers, which contain cadres' opinions regarding the role of cadres in dealing with COVID-19, supporting and inhibiting factors in carrying out tasks in dealing with COVID-19, experience and knowledge of cadres in dealing with COVID-19.

### Data analysis

Data from interviews were processed using thematic analysis<sup>20</sup>. Thematic analysis is a way to analyze data to identify patterns or find themes through the data that has been collected<sup>20</sup>. Terdapat lima tahapan dalam thematic analysis, here are five stages in thematic analysis, including (1) Understanding the data, (2) Compiling codes, (3) Looking for themes, (4) Reviewing themes, and (5) Identifying and naming themes<sup>20</sup>.

## **Research Ethics**

The ethical test or ethical clearance was obtained from the Health Research Ethics Commission (KEPK) of the Faculty of Health, Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta with No. 4547/B.1/KEPK-FKUMS/1/2023.

## **Results and Discussion**

The results of in-depth interviews with six research participants show that health cadres play an important role in overcoming COVID-19. Still, several factors influence its implementation, including knowledge, collaboration, support across sectors, stigma, and public trust. Several themes and sub-themes from the results of this research are summarized in Table 1.

Theme	Sub-Theme	
The role of health cadres in	1. Community mobilization to tackle	
tackling COVID-19	COVID-19	
	2. Liaison between the community and	
	NAKES	
Factors that make it easier for	1. Cross-sector collaboration	
health cadres to deal with	2. Knowledge regarding handling	
COVID-19	COVID-19	
	3. Support from the government,	
	family, and community	
Factors that hinder health	1. Public stigma regarding COVID-19	
cadres in dealing with		
COVID-19	2. Lack of public trust in cadres	
	3. Assistance efforts from villages are	
	still uneven	

#### **Table 1.** Theme and Sub-Theme

## The Role Of Health Cadres in Tackling COVID-19

Health cadres play an important role as community mobilizers in dealing with COVID-19. Apart from that, cadres also help the community monitor residents affected by COVID-19 so that residents continue to follow health protocols. The Indonesian Ministry of Health 2017 stated that cadres are considered agents of community health at the family level. Therefore, it is necessary to increase competence and motivation to support the community's health and independence.<sup>21</sup>.

"Bantuan yang saya lakukan sebagai kader kesehatan itu membantu mengawasi warga yang terkena COVID itu untuk tidak keluar rumah, membantu memantau juga supaya mereka tidak berkerumun." (Maria, 45 years old)

"Biasanya itu saya memberi penyuluhan kepada masyarakat, kadang mendatangi dan menganjurkan cuci tangan, pakai masker terus jangan berkerumun." (Wati, 40 years old)

The results of this research are supported by previous studies that state that cadres play a role as community mobilizers to carry out health efforts such as visiting Posyandu and living a clean and healthy life<sup>22</sup>. Cadres take an active role in encouraging people to wash their hands, wear masks and avoid crowds. Cadres usually carry out counseling regarding the prevention of COVID-19 to increase public awareness so that people know and are willing to implement health protocols<sup>23</sup>.

Health cadres also act as a liaison between Health Workers (NAKES) and the community. Cadres play a role in inviting and informing about COVID-19 prevention activities that NAKES will carry out. As community liaisons with NAKES, Cadres have a role in making the health program held by NAKES a success<sup>24</sup>. Cadres will receive information regarding public health programs scheduled by NAKES. After that, the cadre will inform the community so that people know and want to participate in the activity<sup>25</sup>.

"... Kalau dalam pemberian vaksin para Kader ikut dalam mengundang warga dalam kegiatan Vaksinasi." (Isti, 35 years old)

The literature also states that cadres are the link between the community and NAKES because cadres exist around the community<sup>26</sup>. In general, cadres cannot fully overcome health problems outside their realm. The cadre domain in question includes non-medical actions such as inviting people to participate in health programs, health

education, and other non-medical activities. For this reason, posyandu will usually involve the role of NAKES in terms of treatment and medical treatment. Posyandu usually involves related parties such as village midwives and community health centers. Posyandu collaborates with the community health center to obtain treatment and other medical needs.<sup>17</sup>.

## Factors that make it easier for health cadres to deal with COVID-19

The second theme from the results of this research is factors that make it easier for cadres to deal with COVID-19. The role of cadres in efforts to overcome COVID-19 is influenced by various factors, including 1) cross-sector collaboration, 2) knowledge, and 3) support from various parties.

## **Cross-Sector Collaboration**

Data from interviews shows that collaboration with various parties is essential in overcoming COVID-19. This cooperation is primarily needed to help people who are under quarantine as an effort to control the outbreak.

"Kalau bantuan biasanya saling koordinasi ke Desa, kita laporkan atas nama ini, rumah ini sedang terkena COVID, kan tidak boleh kemana-mana. Selanjutnya akan koordinasi dengan lurah agar dapat bantuan seperti sembako, agar dapat memenuhi kehidupan sehari-hari untuk makan." (Hayati, 42 years old)

It is impossible for epidemic control to achieve the desired results if it does not involve cross-sector collaboration from the central government, regional governments, related agencies, and the community, including community organizations<sup>27</sup>. The participation of health cadres and NAKES is needed to check the condition of residents affected by COVID-19. Apart from that, cooperation with the community is required to coordinate with cadres or NAKES when they find residents experiencing symptoms of COVID-19. This is supported by previous studies, which stated that the community will report to the relevant cadres or NAKES if residents in the surrounding area experience symptoms of COVID-19 so that other residents are not infected<sup>23</sup>.

### Knowledge regarding Handling COVID-19

All participants said that cadres gained knowledge about dealing with COVID-19 from carrying out training and counseling at the Community Health Center.

"Kegiatan pernah dilakukan di Desa menghadirkan narasumber dari Puskesmas, pelaksanaan dan pelatihannya yaitu melibatkan Puskesmas, Dinas Kesehatan tentang bahaya COVID dan penanggulangannya." (Wati, 40 years old)

"Kita mendapatkan jadwal khusus untuk ke Puskesmas hanya beberapa perwakilan, setiap perwakilan nanti kita akan memberitahu ke yang lainnya mengenai pencegahan COVID." (Isti, 36 years old)

Cadres need to receive training in the form of education to increase capacity, competence, skills, and motivation to support a healthy and independent society<sup>21</sup>. After being provided with training and counseling, the level of cadre knowledge regarding handling COVID-19 will increase. Previous studies show that there is a significant difference in cadres' knowledge regarding preventing COVID-19 before and after training<sup>16</sup>.

### Support from government, family and community

Working together and supporting each other is an essential factor in overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic. This research shows that cadres cannot work alone without support from various parties, including the local government, family, and community.

"...Karena kebetulan suami juga perangkat desa, dan dari pihak desa juga ada SATGAS COVID, jadi saling mendukung antara saya sebagai kader dan suami dari perangkat desa." (Isti, 36 years old)

Various literature has proven that support involving the government, related agencies, and the community is needed to optimize epidemic control<sup>27</sup>. In this case, the family provides information regarding health protocols by constantly looking after each other, reminding family members to be alert to the spread of COVID-19, and consistently implementing health protocols<sup>28</sup>. Community support is also very necessary so that the goals of dealing with COVID-19 can be achieved. Society is responsible for its family members. This responsibility will influence habits and mindset to provide an example for each family member to behave better by teaching health protocols to family members to avoid COVID-19 disease<sup>29</sup>.

## Factors that hinder health cadres in dealing with COVID-19

Apart from factors that make it easier for health cadres to deal with COVID-19, this research also shows that there are several factors that hinder the performance of health cadres in dealing with COVID-19, including 1) Community stigma regarding COVID-

19, 2) Lack of trust from the community towards cadre; and 3) Assistance from villages is not evenly distributed.

### Community stigma regarding COVID-19

Various stigmas have emerged in society regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. This is indicated by the fact that many people are still reluctant to take the vaccine and comply with health protocols.

"Banyak dukanya dari pada sukanya, dukanya itu dari penanggulan COVID, misalnya seperti vaksinasi, nanti ada presepsi dari masyarakat itu ada yang nanti habis di vaksin jadi sakit, lalu ada juga kasusnya yang di vaksin meninggal itu yang sulit, sehingga ketika jadwal vaksin banyak masyarakat yang menolak apalagi yang sudah lanjut usia." (Isti, 36 years old)

"...Kurangnya kesadaran masyarakat mengenai bahaya COVID dan masyarakat yang ngeyel dengan COVID." (Wati, 40 years old)

"...Masyarakatnya pada ngeyel disuruh memakai masker." (Ari, 37 years old)

Previous research revealed an attitude of distrust in the community towards COVID-19, and they don't even believe if someone or themselves is confirmed positive for COVID-19 but still have fear<sup>30</sup>. This attitude of distrust arises from a lack of knowledge regarding the methods, symptoms, and impacts of transmission of the COVID-19 disease. This is what can trigger an enormous effect on people who give stigma, resulting in serious health problems and difficulty controlling disease outbreaks where people are more reluctant to adopt a healthy life<sup>31</sup>.

### Lack of public trust in cadres

Information from interviews shows that many cadres receive unpleasant treatment through rejection and discrimination from society.

"Enggak ada sukanya kalau menanggulangi COVID(-19). Dukanya yang banyak, dukanya ya selain saya dianggap tidak terlalu penting ke masyarakat. Jadi, banyak masyarakat itu menyepelekan terus ya ikut terpapar karena kita ikut partisipasi." (Mufih, 45 t years old)

"Pernah Pak, banyak kesulitannya apa lagi saya kalau ke rumah warga itu kadang warga itu menolak. Karena merasa saya kan hanya kader sih. Bukan apa begitu, jadi mereka enggak terlalu peduli dengan saya." (Mita, 45 years old) The results of this research support previous studies that stated that the concern of cadres in carrying out health programs is the community. The public lacks trust in health cadres<sup>32</sup>. In this study, there were also no participants with a health education background, which is one of the causes of the lack of public trust in cadres. This is supported by previous research, which states that community rejection also occurs due to the educational background of cadres not from the health sector<sup>33</sup>.

### Assistance efforts from villages are uneven

Assistance efforts from villages are still unevenly distributed, resulting in obstacles in dealing with COVID-19. Some of the assistance provided contradicts the applicable protocols for handling the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Harapannya itu kalau yang kena COVID(-19) itu dari pihak Desa juga membantu. Kan biasanya dibantu hanya seminggu untuk akomodasi dan lain-lain. Yang kita harapkan kan isolasi 2 minggu Pak, kalau bisa dibantu selama 2 minggu itu kita diberikan akomodasi." (Mufih, 45 years old)

Research on the impact of Direct Cash Assistance (BLT) on community welfare shows that BLT funds can only be used to alleviate daily needs. Considering this, people feel they are not prosperous if they only rely on funds distributed by the government, such as BLT <sup>34</sup>. Apart from that, conditions are worsened by unequal assistance due to inaccurate data collection and confusion among the community due to a lack of socialization regarding this matter. Previous studies stated that providing social assistance amid the COVID-19 pandemic caused many polemics. The many policies issued regarding types of social assistance have confused the community regarding the assistance they can get, data collection that is not on target, and the period for aid distribution that is not simultaneous <sup>35</sup>.

### Conclusion

This research provides important information that health cadres are essential in assisting health workers and the government in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Various efforts are needed to overcome the various obstacles faced by cadres. Various training is required in order to improve the ability of health cadres to deal with the pandemic.

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