



A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY ON MBG (MAKAN BERGIZI GRATIS) IN THE PRABOWO-GIBRAN CABINET: EVALUATING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND HEALTH IMPACTS OF THE POLICY ON UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

The Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) initiative, launched under the Prabowo-Gibran cabinet, aims to tackle food insecurity and malnutrition in Indonesia by providing free nutritious meals to underserved populations. This study evaluates the impact of the MBG program on both physical health and psychological well-being, focusing on how access to free, balanced meals influences the health and mental health outcomes of beneficiaries. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining qualitative interviews with stakeholders, quantitative health data, and psychological assessments of MBG recipients. The results indicate significant improvements in physical health, including reductions in malnutrition rates, stunting, and underweight, particularly among children. Furthermore, the study finds that MBG positively impacts psychological well-being by reducing anxiety, alleviating stress related to food insecurity, and enhancing self-esteem. Participants reported feeling more secure and less stressed about their daily nutrition, which translated into improved mood and cognitive function. However, logistical challenges, such as distribution delays and quality control, remain obstacles to the program's widespread effectiveness. The study also underscores the importance of integrating psychological support services with nutritional assistance to maximize the program's holistic impact. Overall, the MBG initiative has proven to be a promising model for improving both physical health and mental well-being, providing insights for other nations grappling with food insecurity and malnutrition.

Keywords: MBG, mental health, public health, food security, psychological well-being.

INTRODUCTION

Food insecurity is a pressing issue in many developing nations, with Indonesia being no exception. Despite the country's significant economic growth, a substantial portion of its population continues to face difficulties in accessing sufficient and nutritious food. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), food insecurity affects nearly 25% of Indonesia's population, contributing to widespread malnutrition, particularly in rural and low-income urban areas. Malnutrition, in turn, leads to a range of health problems, including stunting, undernutrition, and impaired cognitive development, which negatively impact not only the individuals affected but also the broader society by hindering productivity,

educational outcomes, and overall economic development.

In response to this challenge, the Indonesian government, under the leadership of President Joko Widodo and the contributions of key political figures such as Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka, introduced the Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) initiative. The MBG program aims to provide free, nutritious meals to underserved populations, focusing particularly on children, the elderly, and families living below the poverty line. This program is part of the government's broader strategy to combat food insecurity, improve public health, and promote socio-economic equity.

One of the critical components of MBG is the recognition that nutrition plays



an essential role in both physical and psychological health. Historically, food security policies have been primarily concerned with ensuring physical health outcomes, such as reducing the prevalence of malnutrition and improving growth and development. However, recent research has increasingly highlighted the importance of considering the psychological impacts of food insecurity. Psychological stress, anxiety, and depression are frequently reported by individuals experiencing food scarcity, as constant uncertainty about access to food can exacerbate feelings of vulnerability and insecurity.

Psychological theories, particularly those related to human needs and well-being, support the idea that addressing basic survival needs, such as food, can have a profound impact on psychological stability. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the fulfillment of basic physiological needs (including nutrition) is essential for individuals to achieve higher levels of self-actualization and mental well-being. In this context, programs like MBG not only aim to meet the nutritional needs of vulnerable populations but also have the potential to alleviate psychological distress associated with food insecurity.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the MBG initiative in improving both physical health and psychological well-being. This research will investigate the program's impact on reducing malnutrition rates and improving cognitive functions, while also assessing its role in alleviating stress and anxiety among beneficiaries. By examining the psychological outcomes associated with MBG, this study aims to provide a more holistic view of the program's benefits and its potential to address both the physical and

mental health challenges faced by Indonesia's most vulnerable communities.

The paper is structured as follows: First, we will review existing literature on the links between nutrition, food insecurity, and mental health. We will then describe the methodology used in this study, including both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The results section will present the key findings of the research, followed by a discussion of the implications for the MBG program and its broader socio-economic impact. Finally, the conclusion will offer recommendations for improving the program and expanding its reach to maximize its impact on the health and well-being of Indonesia's underserved populations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Food Insecurity and Public Health in Indonesia

Food insecurity is a significant and persistent issue in Indonesia, particularly in rural areas and low-income urban communities. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Health, food insecurity is closely linked with both malnutrition and public health challenges, contributing to high rates of stunting, underweight, and micronutrient deficiencies among children (Ministry of Health, 2020). These health issues have long-term consequences, including impaired cognitive development, reduced school performance, and a higher susceptibility to chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease.

Indonesia has made substantial strides in reducing poverty and improving access to food in recent decades, but food insecurity remains disproportionately high among the nation's poorest groups. The World Food Programme (WFP) reports that nearly 30% of Indonesian households



experience food insecurity, with the highest prevalence found in rural areas, where access to nutritious food is often limited by geographical and economic factors (WFP, 2022). Furthermore, malnutrition among children under five remains a significant public health concern, with stunting rates exceeding 30% in some provinces (Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021). These statistics illustrate the urgency of addressing both food insecurity and malnutrition through targeted welfare programs.

Psychological Impact of Food Insecurity

While the physical health consequences of food insecurity are well-documented, recent studies have increasingly highlighted the psychological effects of inadequate access to food. The mental health of individuals facing food insecurity is often compromised by stress, anxiety, and depression. Research indicates that food insecurity can lead to elevated levels of chronic stress, with individuals experiencing uncertainty about where their next meal will come from being more likely to suffer from anxiety and other mood disorders (Holben & Pheley, 2006).

In children, the psychological impact of food insecurity is particularly concerning, as it can interfere with their emotional and cognitive development. Studies have shown that food insecurity during early childhood is associated with higher levels of behavioral problems, such as aggression, anxiety, and difficulties in learning (Cook et al., 2006). In Indonesia, where many children live in food-insecure households, the psychological effects of hunger and poor nutrition are compounded by limited access to mental health resources, making it crucial to

consider both physical and psychological aspects when addressing food insecurity.

A study by the Indonesian Psychiatric Association (2021) found that food insecurity was a major stressor for households, leading to increased anxiety and depression, particularly among caregivers and mothers. The stress of not being able to provide adequate food for their children exacerbates feelings of shame and helplessness, negatively impacting the caregivers' mental health and overall family dynamics. Therefore, policies aimed at improving food security, such as the MBG program, have the potential to reduce these psychological burdens by alleviating one of the primary stressors in vulnerable households.

The Role of Public Welfare Programs in Addressing Food Insecurity and Mental Health

In response to the dual challenges of malnutrition and psychological distress, various public welfare programs have been introduced globally to provide food assistance to low-income populations. One notable example is the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) in the United States, which has demonstrated significant improvements in both nutrition and school performance for children from low-income families (Gordon et al., 2019). Similarly, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) program in India has improved child nutrition and has been associated with better mental health outcomes, such as reduced rates of anxiety and depression in children who have access to nutritious meals (Patel et al., 2018).

In Indonesia, the government has historically implemented various food security initiatives, such as rice subsidy



programs, but these have often been criticized for their limited reach and impact on improving overall nutrition. The MBG program, however, represents a more comprehensive approach, focusing not just on food distribution but also on providing balanced, nutritious meals to address deficiencies in essential vitamins and minerals. By targeting the most vulnerable groups, particularly children and the elderly, the program aims to improve both health and well-being on a broader scale.

The MBG program also aligns with the growing recognition of the need to address psychological factors in public health initiatives. By providing free, nutritious meals, MBG addresses the physiological stress of food insecurity, which can have a direct impact on mental health. Psychological theories, such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, suggest that the fulfillment of basic survival needs, like nutrition, can foster greater emotional stability, reduced anxiety, and enhanced self-esteem (Maslow, 1943). MBG's role in alleviating food insecurity thus has the potential to promote mental well-being, particularly in communities that are otherwise subject to chronic stress due to economic hardship.

Food Security and Mental Health: A Holistic Approach

A holistic approach to food security and public health recognizes the interconnectedness of physical and mental health. Several studies have shown that when food insecurity is addressed, both physical health and psychological well-being improve. For example, a study conducted in the United States found that access to free meals in schools led to a reduction in stress and anxiety among students, contributing to

improved academic performance and behavior (Zilanawala et al., 2020).

In Indonesia, where mental health resources are often limited, addressing food insecurity through MBG could have a broader social impact. Alleviating food-related stress could reduce the prevalence of depression and anxiety in vulnerable populations, particularly in children and their caregivers. Additionally, providing free nutritious meals could create a sense of community cohesion and collective action, which has been shown to improve social support networks and mental health outcomes in underserved populations (Friedli, 2009).

The MBG program, by directly tackling both food insecurity and its psychological effects, represents a promising model for addressing the dual burden of malnutrition and mental health in Indonesia. However, for the program to reach its full potential, it must be implemented in conjunction with efforts to strengthen mental health support services, ensure consistent food quality and delivery, and raise public awareness about the program's benefits.

Challenges and Opportunities for MBG

While the MBG program shows promise in addressing food insecurity and improving health outcomes, several challenges must be overcome to ensure its long-term success. First, logistical issues related to food distribution, especially in remote and rural areas, must be addressed to ensure that nutritious meals reach the intended beneficiaries in a timely manner. Delays in delivery and inconsistent quality of food are major barriers to the program's effectiveness (Kawthar & Yusuf, 2021).

Second, while the MBG program has the potential to improve mental health



outcomes by reducing stress and anxiety, the integration of psychological support services could further enhance the program's impact. Collaborating with mental health professionals to provide counseling or psychosocial support alongside nutritional assistance could create a more comprehensive solution to the challenges faced by food-insecure households.

Lastly, public awareness of the MBG program needs to be increased to ensure that the most vulnerable populations are aware of their eligibility and can access the meals provided. Public education campaigns and community engagement strategies will be essential for the success of the program.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive approach to evaluate the impact of the Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) program on the physical health and psychological well-being of its beneficiaries. The research focused on understanding the effects of providing free, nutritious meals on participants in areas where the program is actively implemented.

Data collection involved both qualitative and quantitative methods. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a range of MBG beneficiaries, including low-income families and local community leaders. These interviews aimed to capture personal experiences with the program, focusing on perceived changes in health, nutrition, and emotional well-being. Respondents were also asked about the challenges they encountered in accessing the meals, the quality of the food provided, and any noticeable improvements in their daily lives since participating in MBG.

In addition to interviews, a survey was distributed to households benefiting

from the program. The survey gathered basic demographic information, as well as data on physical health indicators such as weight, malnutrition rates, and any significant health changes. Psychological well-being was assessed through questions about stress, anxiety, and overall satisfaction with the program.

The collected data were analyzed descriptively, meaning that responses were categorized into common themes such as improvements in physical health, reductions in food-related stress, and changes in community cohesion. The survey results were summarized to identify trends in the health and emotional impacts of MBG. This descriptive approach provided an overview of the program's effects and highlighted both the positive outcomes and the challenges faced by beneficiaries.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Physical Health Outcomes

The most notable outcome of the MBG program was its impact on physical health. The majority of respondents reported improvements in their overall nutrition, with a decrease in signs of malnutrition and stunting, particularly among children. A significant portion of participants indicated they felt healthier and more energetic after joining the program, which they attributed to the regular availability of nutritious meals. Beneficiaries reported better access to balanced meals, including essential nutrients such as protein, vitamins, and minerals that were previously lacking in their diets.

In terms of specific health indicators, nearly 40% of children who participated in the program showed a reduction in malnutrition-related symptoms, including stunting and underweight. Furthermore,



adults reported weight gain and improved general health. These improvements were particularly evident in rural and remote areas, where access to nutritious food is limited. This finding aligns with previous studies on food assistance programs that highlight the positive correlation between nutrition and improved health outcomes (Gordon et al., 2019).

Psychological Well-Being

Beyond physical health, the psychological impacts of the MBG program were also significant. Respondents reported a marked reduction in anxiety and stress related to food insecurity. For many families, the constant worry about not having enough food was a major source of stress, which diminished once they began receiving regular meals through MBG. Several participants shared that the program alleviated emotional burdens, allowing them to focus on other aspects of life, such as work and education.

One of the most profound effects was the improvement in self-esteem and emotional well-being, particularly among caregivers and children. Parents, especially mothers, reported feeling more confident in their ability to provide for their families, which positively impacted their mental health. Children, on the other hand, exhibited increased energy levels, improved concentration in school, and fewer behavioral issues. These changes suggest that the MBG program not only addresses immediate physical needs but also contributes to emotional and cognitive development, particularly in children.

While the overall findings indicate positive changes in mental health, it is important to note that the psychological effects were not uniform across all participants. Some families, particularly in

areas where logistical challenges hindered timely meal distribution, reported continued anxiety about food availability. In some cases, the delay in receiving meals was linked to increased stress, which underscores the importance of a reliable and consistent delivery system.

Community Impact and Social Cohesion

The MBG program also had a noticeable effect on social cohesion within the communities. Beneficiaries expressed a sense of solidarity and mutual support, as the program fostered a collective approach to addressing food insecurity. In many areas, local government representatives and community leaders took an active role in the distribution of meals, helping to strengthen social bonds. Many respondents reported that the program provided them with a sense of security, both in terms of food and social connection.

This aspect of the program aligns with findings from other studies, which show that food assistance programs can enhance community cohesion and reduce social isolation (Friedli, 2009). Moreover, the sense of shared purpose among community members created a stronger support network, which can be particularly valuable in times of crisis or economic hardship. However, not all regions experienced the same level of community engagement, and some respondents noted a lack of participation or awareness about the program in more isolated areas. This suggests that the success of MBG in fostering community cohesion may depend on local leadership and the active involvement of community members.

Challenges and Areas for Improvement

Despite the positive outcomes, several challenges were identified that need



to be addressed for the program to reach its full potential. One of the primary issues reported by participants was the inconsistency in meal distribution. In some areas, delays in meal delivery were common, particularly in remote and rural regions, where transportation and infrastructure challenges made it difficult to ensure that meals were delivered on time. As a result, some families experienced periods of uncertainty about when they would receive their next meal, leading to renewed stress and anxiety.

Furthermore, there were instances where the quality of the meals did not meet the expected nutritional standards. While many beneficiaries appreciated the effort to provide nutritious meals, some reported that the meals were occasionally insufficient in variety or lacked essential nutrients. Addressing these concerns will be crucial for improving the overall effectiveness of the program. This is consistent with findings from other food security programs, which have struggled with ensuring the consistent quality and delivery of meals (Kawthar & Yusuf, 2021).

Another challenge faced by the MBG program was the limited public awareness in some areas. Several respondents noted that they had not heard about the program or were unaware of how to access it until they were informed by local leaders or fellow community members. This lack of awareness can limit the reach of the program and prevent it from benefiting the most vulnerable populations. Greater efforts are needed to increase outreach and communication, particularly in remote areas.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be made to improve the MBG program. First, addressing logistical challenges and ensuring the timely delivery of meals is critical to reducing stress and anxiety among beneficiaries. A more robust distribution system, including better transportation infrastructure and regional coordination, would help alleviate this issue. Second, maintaining consistent meal quality is essential for the program's success. Regular monitoring of food quality and variety, along with ongoing feedback from beneficiaries, could ensure that the meals meet the nutritional needs of all participants.

Third, the program should include a stronger focus on public awareness and community engagement. Local governments and community leaders should work together to ensure that all eligible households are informed about the program and know how to access it. Additionally, integrating mental health support into the program could provide more holistic assistance to beneficiaries. Offering counseling or psychological support alongside nutritional services would address both the physical and emotional needs of participants.

CONCLUSION

The Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) program has shown notable success in addressing food insecurity and improving both physical health and psychological well-being among its beneficiaries. This study demonstrates that the program has contributed to better nutrition and health outcomes, particularly for children and families in vulnerable communities. Beneficiaries reported improvements in their



general health, with a significant reduction in malnutrition and stunting, especially in children. The availability of nutritious meals has directly impacted their physical well-being, allowing individuals to experience weight gain, better energy levels, and an overall improvement in their quality of life.

In addition to physical health, the program has had a positive effect on mental health. Many participants noted a reduction in stress and anxiety that was previously linked to the uncertainty of where their next meal would come from. By alleviating this concern, MBG has helped individuals feel more secure and less anxious, which in turn has improved their mood and self-esteem. Particularly, caregivers and children have reported feeling more hopeful and empowered, which is critical for maintaining mental and emotional well-being.

The MBG program has also fostered a sense of community. Participants shared that they felt more connected to their neighbors and local government as the program promoted collective support in addressing food insecurity. The program has encouraged community cohesion, offering both a tangible solution to hunger and a platform for building social networks.

However, several challenges remain. The study highlighted logistical issues, including delays in meal distribution, especially in remote areas, which caused periods of uncertainty for some beneficiaries. Moreover, there were concerns about the consistency and quality of the meals, with some respondents suggesting that the meals lacked sufficient variety or nutritional value at times.

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