

## **Faith-Based Women's Organization Philanthropy in Fighting against the COVID-19 pandemic and Its Impacts: The Case of Aisyiyah in Sidoarjo, Indonesia**

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Received: 2021-02-23; Accepted: 2022-04-18; Published: 2022-04-29

**Abstract:** Since the emergence of the global COVID-19 pandemic, faith-based philanthropic activities have become widely attractive topics to be investigated. Yet, there has been little exploration related to gender issues. This study examined faith-based women's engagement in dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak and its impacts focusing on a local context in Sidoarjo, Indonesia. Notably, the investigation aimed to explore the extent to which Aisyiyah's philanthropy in addressing the global issue. To achieve the purpose of the study, it carried out a qualitative method incorporating three data collection techniques: semi-structured interviews involving 17 informants; participant observations focused on Aisyiyah's programs conducted to overcome the COVID-19; and a desk study gained from documents, reports, media (and social media) such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube channels. The result delineates that while some scholars divide two paradigms of community engagement which are utilitarian and social justice, Aisyiyah in Sidoarjo has played vital contributions oriented toward social justice. This approach has been done through various programs; public awareness building, embracing the COVID-19 patients and their families, and enhancing social solidarity to reduce the outbreak effects. These findings contribute to fill the literature gap on religious-based women's philanthropy in dealing with the pandemic. Yet, this study remains some limitations. The time of investigation which was only in the first year of the pandemic and a lack of attention to the relationship between religiosity and the spirit of philanthropy are the weak points of this study. Therefore these issues need to get further attention for future research.

**Keywords:** COVID-19; engagement; faith-based Organizations; Philanthropy.

**Abstrak:** Sejak munculnya pandemi global COVID-19, kegiatan filantropi berbasis agama menjadi topik yang sangat menarik untuk diteliti. Sayangnya, hanya ada sedikit perhatian yang diberikan pada keterlibatan perempuan berbasis agama. Kajian ini membahas tentang aktifitas filantropi yang dilakukan oleh Aisyiyah dalam menghadapi wabah COVID-19 dan dampaknya, terutama difokuskan pada konteks lokal di Sidoarjo, Indonesia. Secara khusus, investigasi ini bertujuan untuk menggali sejauh mana partisipasi Aisyiyah dalam menyikapi pandemi global tersebut. Untuk mencapai tujuan yang diharapkan, penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan tiga teknik pengumpulan data: wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan melibatkan 17 informan; observasi partisipan terfokus pada program-program Aisyiyah yang dilakukan untuk memerangi COVID-19 di Sidoarjo; dan studi pustaka yang diperoleh dari dokumen, laporan, media (dan media sosial) seperti Facebook, Twitter, dan channel YouTube. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ketika beberapa ilmuwan membagi dua paradigma keterlibatan masyarakat, yaitu; utilitarian dan keadilan sosial, Aisyiyah di Sidoarjo telah memainkan kontribusi yang cukup penting yang berorientasi pada *social justice*. Pendekatan ini dilakukan dengan menetapkan beberapa strategi partisipasi; membangun kesadaran masyarakat, merangkul pasien COVID-19 dan keluarganya, serta meningkatkan solidaritas sosial untuk mengurangi efek wabah pada masyarakat. Temuan-temuan ini telah berkontribusi untuk mengisi kesenjangan literatur ilmiah tentang respon komunitas

perempuan berbasis agama terhadap pandemi. Namun, penelitian ini masih memiliki beberapa keterbatasan. Waktu investigasi yang hanya pada tahun pertama pandemi, dan kurangnya perhatian terhadap hubungan antara religiusitas dan semangat filantropi menjadi titik lemah penelitian ini. Oleh karena itu permasalahan tersebut perlu mendapatkan perhatian lebih untuk penelitian selanjutnya.

**Kata Kunci:** COVID-19; keterlibatan; Organisasi berbasis Agama; filantropi.

## 1. Introduction

The emergence of the COVID-19 outbreak declared as a pandemic by The World Health Organization on 11<sup>st</sup> March 2020 (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020) has attracted scholars to explore Islamic groups' philanthropy on this issue (see e.g., Burhani, 2020; Rachmawati et al. 2022). Yet, little has been paid attention to investigate women-based religious contributions. This article aims to examine the extent to which Aisyiyah's philanthropy at the local level in dealing with the coronavirus disease and its impacts.

Philanthropy is a term rooted in a Greek word, *Philos*--love, and *Anthropos*--humankind (Sulek, 2010). Recently, this term is used to delineate "private giving of time and valuable resources for public purposes" (Barman, 2017). This concept can be traced back to Auguste Comte's notion of altruism (Barman, 2017) and Durkheim's perspective on social order and social solidarity, referring to the kinds of social ties binding members of a society to one another (Barman, 2017; Durkheim, 1984). The forms of philanthropy can be voluntary engagement, charitable giving, and the establishment of philanthropic foundations (Adloff, 2009).

During the COVID-19 pandemic in the last years, the term philanthropy has become widely used in scientific literature to depict any kind of public contribution to address the pandemic. In Indonesia, the earlier study, Burhani (2020), has revealed that religious group's orientations which are "inner-worldly" and the "other-worldly" influence patterns of religious' responses against the pandemic. While the latter groups have passive responses, the former groups actively engage in various philanthropic actions. In line with this finding, Hidayah (2020) views that theological perspectives determine religious groups' response to the pandemic. Her study classifies three different faith-based responses. The *Jabariyah* theology forms fatalistic attitudes, the *Qadariyah* understands the outbreak as a disaster and attributed the pandemic to human error in managing nature. Whereas, the influence of *Islam berkemajuan* (the progressive Islamic) theology has led to be responsive in handling the pandemic. Moreover, Rachmawati et al. (2022) investigating the two largest Islamic organizations, Muhammadiyah & NU posit that these faith-based organizations have critical roles in overcoming the pandemic. Both organizations establish special units to perform various countermeasures against COVID-19 involving grassroots levels.

However, there has lack of attention to the investigation linked to gender issues while at the same time women are recognized as the most vulnerable groups during the pandemic (Ilska, Kołodziej-Zaleska, Brandt-Salmeri, Preis, & Lobel, 2021; Kouassi et al., 2012). The United Nations identifies there are four potential risks experienced by women; a) economically, women feel the impact directly because they generally earn less; b) neglected women's health reallocation of health resources and priorities, including reproductive health services; c) women have an increased workload at home due to changes in social behavior where most activities are carried out from home, including children's school activities; d) there is an increase in gender-based violence increasing exponentially (United-Nation, 2020).

Hence, this article intended to examine female Muslim groups' contribution to the COVID-19 outbreak that focused on Aisyiyah at the local level. Aisyiyah is a female wing of Muhammadiyah that was established in 1917 that has been recognized for its contribution to women's empowerment through various programs (Pimpinan Pusat Aisyiyah, 2020). Institutionally, this organization has a strong hierarchical network from the villages up to the national comprising 5 levels; national, provincial, district, sub-district, and village. At the grassroots level, this organization has been

established in 9,781 villages (Aryanti, 2013; Pimpinan Pusat Aisyiyah, 2020) which means this organization has existed in almost all villages in Indonesia. The networks are completely helpful as social capital in implementing its programs in all areas of Indonesia.

As an organization oriented toward empowering people, particularly women, Aisyiyah has developed programs addressing a wide range of issues based on community needs analyses such as public health, human resources, welfare, and poverty alleviation. According to the latest data, this organization operates hundreds of healthcare services including hospitals, clinics, and maternity hospitals. In the education sector, Aisyiyah has established 13 higher educations, including universities and colleges, and 23.772 schools at lower levels from kindergarten to high school. It also organizes thousands of non-formal education to enhance women's life skills. In addition, the spirit of social solidarity and empowerment has encouraged this organization to provide hundreds of orphanages, nursing homes, rehabilitation centers, and Islamic-based financial institutions (Pimpinan Pusat Aisyiyah, 2020).

Recently, Aisyiyah has developed some community-based programs to handle any vital social issues. Tuberculosis (TB) care is an example of the programs to prevent the spread of tuberculosis in Indonesia. "MAMPU", The Empowering Indonesian Women for Poverty Reduction Program is another program aimed to improve the lives of poor women in Indonesia by empowering them through various activities covering over 750 districts and 2,390 villages (Ode-Brief, 2015).

In regards to the global pandemic, it is pivotal to investigate Aisyiyah's participation in dealing with this issue, particularly at the grassroots level. Sidoarjo is one of the most relevant areas to locally portray Aisyiyah's dynamics for several reasons. During the first year of the pandemic, this district was the highest number of confirmed coronavirus cases, and it was categorized as the black zone of the global pandemic in Indonesia (Pusat Informasi dan Komunikasi & COVID-19 Sidoarjo, 2020). Even the Acting Regent, Nur Ahmad Syaifuddin, died from exposure to COVID-19 (David Oliver Purba, 2020). Besides, Sidoarjo is an industrial city where this sector was one of the most seriously affected by the outbreak (Debata, Patnaik, & Mishra, 2020; Tan, Wu, Guo, & Santibanez-Gonzalez, 2022). Considering the circumstances, we would like to see Aisyiyah's dynamic in this area in responding to the global pandemic.

To portray the extent to which Aisyiyah engages in dealing with the pandemic, a theoretical framework developed by Brunton et al. (2017) is one of the most pertinent concepts to be adopted to portray Aisyiyah's involvement at the local level. Brunton et al. (2017) conceptualize two paradigms of community participation, namely utilitarian and social justice. The former explains a community involvement approach oriented towards community engagement in order to increase the effectiveness of public service interventions for a particular purpose. It is a kind of instrumental participation targeting to improve the interventions' efficacy with little concern to impact living conditions. The intervention form may have been decided in advance by planners or policymakers while community participation is necessary to support the programs. The latter paradigm deals with expanded interventions focusing on community empowerment and development. This model departs from the idea that the way to address social problems is through changing social and structural living conditions. Therefore, communities are expected to participate, negotiate, influence, and control health decisions and actions (Bispo Júnior & Morais, 2020; Brunton et al., 2017).

These two participation paradigms try to synthesize some community involvement perspectives, particularly on improving health services, which are generally hierarchical. An example of the hierarchical participation model that is widely adopted by researchers is "the continuum of community participation". This concept was developed by Rifkin (1986) and adapted by George et al (2015) dividing the level of community participation based on the balance between community and professional into three levels. The least level is "community mobilization" which is characterized by a situation where the community participates in suggested and recommended by professionals or stage-holders. The next level is "collaboration" which means a community involves by providing donations, providing time and energy, or other assistance needed by professionals to oversee the success of an intervention program. The highest degree of participation is "community

empowerment". At this stage, a community acts as a program planner who uses professionals' staffs as resources and facilitators to support the programs.

Another hierarchical participation model that has been widely adopted by researchers in public health issues is "the pathways from community empowerment and engagement to health improvement," formulated by Popay (2010). She classifies community participation into five levels; informing, consultation, co-production, delegated power, and community control (Popay, 2010). Through this model, she explains that the level of community involvement is directly proportional to the targeted results.

The hierarchical participation models mentioned above according to Brunton et al., (2017) can be classified into two primary categories which are utilitarian and social justice. The least levels which are community mobilization (George et al., 2015; Rifkin, 2009), or informing and consultation (Popay, 2010) are classified as the utilitarian paradigm. Meanwhile, the higher level of participation namely collaboration and community empowerment (George et al., 2015; Rifkin, 2009), or co-production, delegated power, community control (Popay, 2010) represent the social justice orientation. The participation approaches contribute different effects. The higher the degree of engagement is, the better the results. The higher the degree of engagement is, the better the results. Conversely, the lower the participation is, the less significant impact will be on the community.

In this regard, we credit Júnior & Morais (2020) for formulating a conceptual framework of community involvement in fighting against the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil. According to them, the utilitarian and social justice models are inseparable in addressing the global pandemic (Bispo Júnior & Morais, 2020). This work is insightful to capture any public participation models. Therefore, these approaches are used to capture religious group engagement in the Indonesian context, particularly Aisyiyah, in addressing the global COVID-19 outbreak and its impacts in Sidoarjo.

To achieve the goal of this study, it established a qualitative investigation that incorporated three data collection techniques; participant observation, semi-structured interview, and desk study. Participant observation focused on Aisyiyah's programs implemented in order to fight against COVID-19 in Sidoarjo. The observation started from September 2020 up to February 2021. The interviews involved 17 informants selected through purposive sampling representing Aisyiyah's leaders at the district, sub-districts, and village levels. In addition, we interviewed two patients who recovered from the coronavirus infection. Lastly, this study employed a desk study involving analysis of documents, reports, and media (including social media) such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube channels owned by either the organization or individual informants. To analyze the data, it carried out Miles and Huberman's interactive model of analysis; data reduction, data display, verification, and conclusion. To deal with the analysis process, the collected data from three approaches were compared and contrasted in order to construct comprehensive findings.

## 2. The Social Justice model of philanthropy in fighting against the pandemic

The empirical investigation of Aisyiyah in Sidoarjo delineated its critical contribution to addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. Its religious orientation which is "inner-worldly" (see, Burhani, 2020; Weber, 1978), and its progressive Islamic (*Islam berkemajuan*) theology (Hidayah, 2020) had led this organization to actively took part in overcoming the global outbreak and its effects.

To understand the extent to which Aisyiyah engagement in addressing the global pandemic and its impact, it is good to analyze using Brunton's community participation approaches. When Brunton et al. (2017) frame two paradigms of community participation namely utilitarian and social justice, the empirical study showed that Aisyiyah in Sidoarjo predominantly showed its social justice orientation in dealing with the pandemic. It implies that Aisyiyah's participation is oriented to change living conditions rather than just to get service interventions.

Aisyiyah's social justice approach had been applied through various philanthropic programs. This article classifies three programs conducted by this organization in Sidoarjo during the pandemic, which are public awareness building, embracing the COVID-19 patients, and enhancing social

solidarity to reduce the outbreak effects. This article will elaborate on the detailed engagement of each category while the summary can be seen in table 1.

Table 1: The Aisyiyah's Philanthropic Forms based on the Brunton's participation models

Aisyiyah Philanthropic forms	Types of Participation	
	Utilitarian	Social Justice
Building Public Awareness		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Involvement as program organizers on public awareness campaigns.</li> <li>- Participation on donations: money, time, materials (masks, disinfectants, hand sanitizers etc).</li> <li>- Mobilizing financial support from other elements.</li> </ul>
Embracing the COVID-19 patients		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Providing &amp; controlling healthcare services, especially for the COVID-19 patients.</li> <li>- Hiring professional staffs to achieve the healthcare services goals.</li> <li>- Building network to work collaboratively with both government and private sectors.</li> <li>- Organizing programs to provide social and financial support for the patients and their families.</li> </ul>
Enhancing social solidarity to reduce the outbreak effects		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Organizing programs to distribute immediate aid for vulnerable groups such as; online drivers of the public transports, kindergarten teachers, and the affected residents in a remote area.</li> <li>- Collaborating with other elements to build a family food security programs.</li> </ul>

#### *Building public awareness*

At the beginning of the pandemic, most Indonesians tended to ignore and were less responsive to the preventive measures from the spread of the SAR-COVID-19 virus. This circumstance encouraged Aisyiyah in Sidoarjo organized programs to build public awareness directed to control the spread of the virus. It conducted various voluntary activities such as appealing to the public to pay attention to the health protocols of the coronavirus outbreak and providing immediate aid for vulnerable groups.

To build public awareness, on every occasion, Aisyiyah Sidoarjo used to urge the public to care about COVID-19 prevention efforts, such as campaigning to avoid a crowd and to keep social distancing, as well as urging the public to not pray Eid and other religious rituals that potentially cause a large crowd of people. These messages were not only for the Aisyiyah members of Muhammadiyah but also for the wider communities in Sidoarjo.

Moreover, Aisyiyah provided various immediate aids, such as distributing disinfectants, and hand sanitizers, spraying public places as well as providing masks for the public. According to the Aisyiyah leader of Sidoarjo, Siti Zubaidah, thousands of masks had been distributed to the residents.

Some of the masks were obtained from the Sidoarjo Government (around 5000 masks) while others were provided by the Aisyiyah fellows.

To get effective results from this campaign, Aisyiyah organized a team to work targeting some communities while distributing masks and other properties. The program targeted some public areas, such as around traditional markets located at Larangan, Gading Fajar, and Bluru Sidoarjo. At the locations, the team did public orations using loudspeakers to educate the local communities about how to comply with regulations regarding efforts to prevent covid 19.

Beside this, Aisyiyah unfurled some banners calling to respond to the potential spread of COVID-19. One of the campaigned banners was "*Gerakan tetap bermasker, dari Aisyiyah untuk ummat*" meaning "remains in mask movement, from Aisyiyah to the *umma*". Other slogans that were actively promoted at the grassroots level through banners and other media were "*saya peduli, saya pakai masker*" (I care, I wear a mask), "*Aisyiyah peduli, melindungi*" (Aisyiyah cares, protects), and "*maskerku melindungimu, maskermu melindungiku*", (my mask protects you, your mask protects me).

These creative public awareness campaigns had been uploaded on a personal Facebook account of the Aisyiyah's leader of Sidoarjo "*Zubby Aidah*", and had been published by several local media, such as an online media, *Zonajatim.com* (2020). According to Zubaidah, the Aisyiyah leader of Sidoarjo, the programs above were Aisyiyah strategies to build public awareness to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus, particularly in Sidoarjo. As she stated:

..... Yes, we are concerned if we see people who do not care about protecting themselves. But, we believe that it's just because they don't understand what they should do. That is why we as an Islamic organization have to engage to make them aware.... (Zubaidah, Personal Communication, December 15, 2020).

As a commitment to build public awareness of the preventive action against the spread of COVID-19, Aisyiyah also temporarily postponed programs that involve large numbers of people. For instance, Aisyah has a quarter-month meeting followed by around 10.000 people called "*tabligh akbar*" where during this period, it was stopped. Aisyiyah also closed its schools while the teachings were established online. The other programs organized together Muhammadiyah and Aisyiyah also temporarily did not establish, such as *Eid* prayer and *tarawih* in the meantime of Ramadhan.

Thus, the way of Aisyiyah builds public awareness building in Sidoarjo is an example form of its philanthropic actions that the government might not be able to reach. Interestingly, this organization involved humanitarian actions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 even before the government declared the disease as part of the national disaster on 13 April 2020 (BNPB, 2020). Aisyiyah had actively engaged in dealing with this issue since the Central Board of Muhammadiyah issued a notice (*Maklumat*) on the 16th of March 2020 about the countermeasures to COVID-19 (Muhammadiyah Covid-19 Command Center, 2020). It means that this organization work pro-actively and independently from the state.

To optimize the programs, Aisyiyah mobilized any support from third parties either private or the government, such as from the Regent of Sidoarjo, Regional House of Representatives, and *Lembaga Amil Zakat Infak dan Sadaqah Muhammadiyah* (Muhammadiyah Philanthropic unit). Thus, driven by the spirit of Islamic values and supported by its strong social capital, Aisyiyah took collaboration (George et al., 2015), or co-production (Popay, 2010) through various programs as efforts to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission in Indonesia in the local context.

The humanitarian activities aforementioned above are typical of social justice engagement (Brunton et al., 2017). It is a community engagement where Aisyiyah takes part as a planner as well as organizer to arrange programs aimed to change social and living conditions from ignorance to awareness about handling COVID 19.

#### *Embracing the COVID-19 patients and their families*

The coronavirus 2019 disease is a new phenomenon in recent years where the patients experience two sides of suffering; physical and psychological aspects. On the one hand, the patients



suffer physically since COVID-19 is an acute disease in humans that is characterized mainly by fever and cough and is capable of progressing to pneumonia, respiratory and renal failure, blood coagulation abnormalities, and death (Oxford English Dictionary, 2020). On the other hand, they could affect mental health problems such a feeling of negative emotions, alienation (Zhu, Zhang, Zhou, Li, & Yang, 2021), as well as a negative stigma towards someone diagnosed with Covid-19 (Rahadi, 2021). Even those psychological circumstances are experienced not only by the patients but also by their families and the wider community (Hassan, Ring, Tahir, & Gabbay, 2021).

Considering these two effects, Aisyiyah in Sidoarjo had established essential strategies signifying its high level of engagement. These programs were directed to social justice orientation (Brunton et al., 2017) to embrace the COVID-19 patients through providing healthcare services, and giving social support for patients and their families to recover from the impacts.

*Firstly*, Aisyiyah in Sidoarjo through its hospital namely Siti Fatimah provided special healthcare services to treat COVID-19 patients. This involvement was taken after obtaining approval from the Governor of East Java to be one of the referral hospitals for Covid-19 patients in east Java through Letter of Decree (SK) 198/310/2020.

Following the approval from the government, these two parties agreed to work collaboratively to prevent the spread of the coronavirus disease. As a form of collaborative action, Aisyiyah provides its healthcare services while the government supported some equipment to provide better health services, especially for the COVID-19 patients. For instance, after the Provincial Government of East Java issued the Letter of Decree (Surat Keputusan--SK) for the Aisyiyah hospital, Siti Fatimah, as one of the referral hospitals for Covid-19 patients in east Java, the government granted a ventilator to improve the quality of the hospital services (Portal Kabupaten Sidoarjo, 2020). Whereas, Aisyiyah's hospital provided professional staff which were at least 22 nurses and other medical officers to support the healthcare services (Poernomo, 2020).

Responding to the status of the hospital, the Aisyiyah Chairperson of Sidoarjo said;

.....Yeach, this is a mandate, I hope all employees and medical staffs can keep their immune systems, so they are not exposed to the virus. In addition, the greatest hope is that the patients who are treated in the hospital can be recovered optimally (Zubaidah, Personal Communication, December 15, 2020).

This collaborative participation between Aisyiyah and the government was a good point since in the first semester of the pandemic, many hospitals, especially private hospitals, tended to not accept the patients. One of the reasons was that the hospitals avoided negative images from the public or customers (Dian Erika Nugraheny, 2020). So, the readiness of the Siti Fatimah hospital to treat coronavirus patients indicated its strong dedication to humanitarianism though at the same time many others avoid handling this issue.

Moreover, as an autonomous organization of Muhammadiyah, it is uncommon that Aisyiyah at local levels has its own hospitals. Generally, the health facilities are organized directly by Muhammadiyah. Yet, Aisyiyah in Sidoarjo is an exception. It has its own hospital located in Tulangan Sidoarjo. This organization provides the hospital as an effort to build equal access to health for the public, especially for those from the southern and western parts of Sidoarjo.

The Aisyiyah's way to provide healthcare services for coronavirus-19 disease patients was an essential contribution to the public portraying social justice goals (Brunton et al., 2017). This organization did not only show its ability to participate collaboratively with the local government indicating a moderate level of participation (George et al., 2015), but also show its contribution at the highest level of participation which is "community empowerment" (George et al., 2015), or "community control" (Popay, 2010), where Aisyiyah involves as a program planner who hires professionals' staffs as resources and facilitators to support the programs of the COVID-19 countermeasures in Sidoarjo.

*Secondly*, Aisyiyah had greatly paid attention to the COVID-19 patients and their families by organizing a program of providing social support for them. This was another approach to dealing

with the psychological problems of patients and their families as an attempt to change living conditions during the pandemic.

This approach is admissible for the patient because when somebody was diagnosed as infected with the coronavirus, he must be isolated which could impact further mental health problems. Some empirical evidences have also shown the contribution of social support in reducing stress and depression. For instance, Wang et al., (2014) examining 632 undergraduate students in Chongqing City-China reported that students with a high social support group were less depressed than those who had a low social support group.

To achieve effective results in social support, in some sub-districts or villages, Aisyiyah in Sidoarjo organized its fellows to take turns delivering daily needs to the patient's family. Some of the congregations delivered foods, detergents, and others. An interesting example occurred in Tanggulangin, Sidoarjo. When there were some residents confirmed as COVID-19 patients and treated in the Sidoarjo hospital for a few weeks while their families underwent self-quarantine at home, Aisyiyah came to decrease their burdens by providing some help such as meals and other daily needs during the treatment.

Yanik best explained Aisyiyah's contribution to the patients. She and her family members, including her husband and child were infected with the coronavirus disease and had to undergo treatment in a hospital for a couple of weeks. She stated:

The COVID-19 disease is indeed an extraordinary disease. When I was diagnosed as infected with the virus, all people even avoid me. But *alhamdulillah*, I felt the presence of Aisyiyah's members who used to take care of my circumstance. Even Ibu Zubaidah, (the Aisyiyah leader) almost every day asked about my progress. So, I felt when I was sick and got messages, WhatsApp, these were part of medicine, which were very calming for me (Yanik, Personal Communication, December 29, 2020).

Similar to this recognition was stated by Husnul, a COVID patient who was treated in "RSUD Sidoarjo" for a few weeks;

When I was sick, I was shunned by my neighbors, even by my big family, no one of my siblings came to see me. Fortunately, the organization (Aisyiyah) gave extraordinary support. I cried and was moved when I saw this kind attention. The help keeps flowing. Some people sent rice, *nasi Padang* (a special food menu from Padang, West Sumatera), meatballs, and others. The leader of Aisyiyah in Tanggulangin also used to motivate me through WhatsApp to get well soon (Husnul, Personal Communication, December 26, 2020).

The second way of Aisyiyah's contribution providing social support for the COVID-19 patients and their families described above denotes its strong engagement to overcome the pandemic. Though the support might not directly address the coronavirus disease, it could contribute significantly to reducing their psychological pressures. This involvement is helpful for the society to reduce the social panic experienced by the public during the pandemic, particularly for those infected people and their families. Moreover, this approach indicates that Aisyiyah in Sidoarjo aimed its philanthropy to result in social change in living conditions as characterized by the social justice paradigm of participation (Brunton et al., 2017).

#### *Enhancing social solidarity to reduce the outbreak effects*

The COVID-19 pandemic is not just about a health issue. The outbreak has impacted various aspects, including the economic crisis, at either local or global levels. About a month after the Indonesian government declared the COVID-19 disease as a non-natural national disaster, millions of Indonesians had experienced a financial crisis. In Indonesia, a survey institute, Saiful Mujani Research and Consulting (SMRC) said that around 29 million people experienced layoffs due to Covid-19 (Tira Santia, 2020). At the local level, Sidoarjo, until July 2020, thousands of people had experienced termination of employment (Runik Sri Astuti, 2020). The number excludes the affected people who work in informal sectors.



The terrible effects of the coronavirus outbreak had encouraged Aisyiyah Sidoarjo collaborating with Muhammadiyah and other autonomous organizations to immediately carry out philanthropic programs in order to minimize the social and economic impacts. For this reason, this organization had actively involved in optimizing its financial and social capital such as time, energy, money, and other assistance to overcome the pandemic and its social and economic consequences.

In the first semester of the pandemic, this organization distributed immediate aid which consisted of packages of foods directed to vulnerable people. The first target of the program was online drivers of the public transport; motorcycles and taxis, as well as pedicabs in Sidoarjo. The program targeted these groups as they were the most affected ones as a result of the social distancing policy to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus causing their customers dropped

The Nyai Walidah successor organization also paid attention to Kindergarten teachers. Alongside the momentum of its 106th anniversary, this organization distributed groceries aids to the teachers. The allocation of the aids for the teachers, according to the chairperson of Aisyiyah Sidoarjo, was because most of them had low incomes. Even a few months since the emergence of the pandemic, some of the teachers' salaries had to be postponed since the kindergartens' incomes dropped. It happened as there was a significant decrease in public participation in paying for tuition fees as a result of a significant decrease in the public incomes. Hence, according to Zubaidah, they urged to be aided. She further explained that to cover all of the teachers in Sidoarjo, Aisyiyah had provided hundreds of packages of basic foods containing rice, oil, sugar, instant noodles, and eggs. The distribution technique was delivered through 18 branches of Aisyiyah in sub-districts in Sidoarjo.

In addition, Aisyiyah in Sidoarjo also looked after residents affected by the COVID-19 outbreak. In the first semester of the pandemic, Aisyiyah Sidoarjo delivered immediate aid to affected residents namely Pucukan, Sidoarjo. This village is a remote area that must be reached only by small boats which are far from secure to cross the river for around 1 hour. However, the Aisyiyah's team was willing to deliver by themselves by renting boats to reach the location under the mission of caring for the residents in the remote village.

Aisyiyah's philanthropic actions in Sidoarjo had been even more massive when becoming one of the targeted areas of the GETAPAK (a family food security movement) program. The program was initiated by *Majelis Pemberdayaan Masyarakat (MPM - the public empowerment council)*, Central Board of Muhammadiyah. The main aim of the program is to build food self-sufficiency based on local wisdom. The top-down program was located only in two sub-districts, namely Candi and Buduran.

However, according to the Aisyiyah's Chairperson, this program was adopted to be disseminated in all sub-districts in Sidoarjo with self-funding by Aisyiyah. This organization was interested in adopting the program since the program was appropriate to the needs of the Sidoarjo people, especially during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, the food security program had been replicated in some other areas in Sidoarjo with various modifications due to the potential of each area. To start the replication, Aisyiyah in each sub-district was asked to map the potentials of each area before deciding to develop what kind of programs that was possible to be applied to achieve the food security program in the urban area. As result, various programs had been developed in the sub-districts, such as urban hydroponic farming and potted plants even though most of them were not the target of the MPM's program.

Even before the existence of the GETAPAK program, Aisyiyah had developed a community-based program for food security called "*Sedekah Cantolan*". This program was a community-based food security movement by placing or attaching foodstuffs or basic needs to the certain space provided, whereas people who needed them (particularly poor) could take them based on their needs. This program aimed to open community participation in giving alms, to instill the values of generosity, honesty, and care in society. For this reason, the slogan campaigned in this program was: "*Mengambil Seperlunya, Sedekah Semampunya, Sedekah Akan Membuatmu Kaya*" meaning "Take as you need, Alms as you can, Alms will make you rich".

These philanthropic strategies played by Aisyiyah in Sidoarjo denote that this organization does not simply attempt to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic as the main end, but also tries to address its

social consequences. For this reason, Aisyiyah had shown a significant level of participation through optimizing its financial and social capital such as time, energy, money, networks, and other assistance in order to deal with the global pandemic.

The Aisyiyah's engagement is greatly relevant humanitarian action since during the pandemic, some public health and social welfare issues had become critical. The efforts to recover the social circumstances during the pandemic primary in Sidoarjo are in line with the Brunton et al., (2017) idea of social justice paradigm. This means a community participation addressed to reach community development and empowerment as a typical of the highest level of public participation (Brunton et al., 2017).

### 3. Conclusion

The Aisyiyah's philanthropy to overcome the COVID-19 outbreak and its impacts on the local context in Sidoarjo has shown pivotal roles. While scholars construct two paradigms of community engagement which are utilitarian and social justice, Aisyiyah in Sidoarjo has played predominantly on the social justice orientation of its philanthropy. These approaches have been carried out by establishing some participation strategies; public awareness building, embracing the COVID-19 patients, and enhancing social solidarity to reduce the outbreak effects. These findings contribute to fill the scientific literature gap on religious-based women's responses against the pandemic where there has been a lack of exploration.

However, this study remains some limitations. Firstly, this investigation was conducted only in the first year of the pandemic whereas the pandemic has been going on and no one can even predict when it will end. So, further study is necessary to seek the extent to which Aisyiyah's philanthropy addresses this issue for a long-term period. The social distancing policy applied to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic was another constraint that could prevent us to be able to gain deep data from the informants. Lastly, even though the study results show the strong philanthropic engagement of Aisyiyah in Sidoarjo as a faith-based organization, we did not pay attention to the correlation between religiosity and the spirit of philanthropy. Therefore, it is another interesting issue for future research to examine the relationship between these aspects.

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