Towards Better Survival - A Qualitative Insight into the Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Single Mother Entrepreneurs’ (SMPs) in Klang Valley

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Abstract
Since 2019, a global pandemic caused by the corona virus has been one of our worst worries. Due to the covid-19 shutdown, single mother entrepreneurs (SMPs) have been one of the most impacted groups, and while it required time to understand, the usage of technology proved useful for them. The objective of this article is to present what are the factors influencing SMPs in terms of sustaining their business, and whether they have taken any new strategy due to the change effected by the pandemic lockdown. This study applies qualitative approach of investigation that was conducted through online meetings for open group discussions. A total of 15 SMPs were interviewed, based in Klang Valley. The findings show that they have very low resilience level during covid-19 pandemic and until now, they are still struggling to live up to the standard of living within their means including bringing up their children.

Keywords: Covid-19, movement control order (MCO), single mother entrepreneur, business, strategy.

Introduction
Ever since the Covid-19 pandemic era hit this country, single mothers faced a great deal of difficulty to cope with the consequences
especially during the movement control order (MCO) which affected them severely. Single moms are often the worst afflicted by MCO, since they must juggle job and family obligations. was the title of an article in the Malay Mail based on a poll performed during the outbreak. (Lim, 2020). 12 percent of the 442 Selangor women, or 55 women, are single mothers, according to the Selangor Women's Empowerment Institute (IWB), which noted that this group of women was disproportionately affected by the MCO pandemic because they are both the primary breadwinner and sole carer for their dependents. (Lim, 2020). Most single moms in Selangor, according to an IWB poll, make less than RM3,000 per month. Moreover, 40% of them either closed their firms during the second week of the lockdown’s implementation or were forced to take unpaid vacation. Amirulmumin (2021) has further stated that the emergence of the Covid-19 epidemic, which necessitated the introduction of the Movement Control Order (PKP), had a devastating impact on the life of a single mom, as well as her relatively small frozen food company.

Thomas (2020) highlighted about how the Covid-19 epidemic has affected single moms without any employable skills, who are among the worst stricken demographics. To give an idea of how bad the SMPs suffered, a single mother entrepreneur who was the owner of a restaurant in Kedah, claimed that her business earning was severely impacted by the MCO. that came into effect in early January 2021 (Noor, 2021). The Malaysian Insight interviewed another SMP, Aisyah who was selling cookies and cakes through online business admitted that there she could not afford to pay electricity bills, and car loan due to MCO (Farid, 2020). She gained around RM1500 monthly which was clearly insufficient to cover her daily expenses with her two children.

This study has three major objectives. First, it will offer information on the impact of covid-19-induced MCO on SMPs. Second, this study can be used by any authorities that can take further action regarding the problems involved. Lastly, this research might aid those in charge of managing the regulations relating SMPs throughout the crisis. The remainder of the study is structured as follows: Section 2 examines the research on SMPs' businesses during pandemic outbreaks and survival methods. The third section explains the research technique. Part 4 outlines the study's results, and Section 5 closes with recommendations for policymakers, the industry, and further research.

Literature Review

SMPs have a difficult time sustaining their businesses and are one group of company owners that cannot become successful entrepreneurs, as discovered by Topimin, Fabeil, and Abdullah,
(2019) and Mahat, Mahat, and Ahmad Mustafa (2019). While the number of single mothers is rising rapidly, the attention devoted to them might be deemed insufficient as indicated by Topimin et al. (2019), Mahat et al. (2019), Mulia et al. (2017), and Ismail et al. (2016); in addition, it was found that single-motherpreneurs’ failures and difficulties are on the rise from year to year. Mahidin (2019) found that The number of single moms in Malaysia has increased from 50,314 (2017) to 50,356 (2018). (2018). The absence of financial assistance for single moms is among the most important factors leading to their poor physical and mental health (Topimin, Fabeil and Abdullah, 2019; and Mahat, Mahat, Ahmad Mustafa and Waismail, 2019). Single mothers have always been in the state of the insufficient income because of this problem together with the COVID-19 pandemic. In the worst-case scenario, it is not inconceivable that they will become the new faces of BN40, meaning that money will continue to be their largest issue (Free Malaysia Today, 2021). Furthermore, Che Omar, Ishak, & Jusoh (2020) and Fabeil et al., (2020) found that this epidemic has had a significant impact on the commercial operations of microenterprises. Among the problems experienced by microentrepreneurs include issues in cash flow owing to insufficient daily revenue, laying off employees, interruptions in operations, and disruptions in the supply chain.

Resource-based Theory and SMPs strategies in pandemic

Azmi et al., (2020) emphasizes that in a crisis, strategy is the most important organisational resource to shape company’s competitive advantages, performance, decisions, and capabilities. The resource-based perspective emphasised the significance of a company’s resources and capabilities in order to understand about competitive advantage for a company (Barney, 1991). In addition, Greeve (2020) indicated that the core tenet of the resource-based view (RBV) is that a country’s competitiveness is built on its enterprises, human capital, and skills. RBV is certain that a sustained competitive advantage must be supplied to fulfil resource needs. The resource-based perspective also includes the identification of resources that seem to give a sustained competitive advantage, but may in reality merely provide lasting benefits.

Method and Study Area

This study is qualitative in nature and the aim is to get an insight into and present the responses from selected SMPs relating to their experience during COVID-19 lockdown. This study was conducted in Klang Valley and the number of respondents is15 who are SMPs. It should be noted that social distancing was applied during the interview. These 15 SMPs are members of an NGO group of which their business is located at Klang Valley with an estimated income of
not more than RM500 per month. Given below in Table 1 is the profile of respondents of age, race, highest education, and their type of business.

Table 1. The Profile of Respondents and Company’s Background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Highest Education</th>
<th>Type of business</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INF-1</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>SPM</td>
<td>Tailor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INF-2</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>SPM</td>
<td>F&amp;B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INF-3</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>SPM</td>
<td>F&amp;B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INF-4</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>SPM</td>
<td>Health care products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INF-5</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>SPM</td>
<td>Transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INF-6</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>SPM</td>
<td>F&amp;B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INF-7</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>SPM</td>
<td>F&amp;B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INF-8</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>SPM</td>
<td>F&amp;B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INF-9</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>SPM</td>
<td>F&amp;B</td>
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<tr>
<td>INF-10</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>SPM</td>
<td>F&amp;B</td>
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<tr>
<td>INF-11</td>
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<td>Malay</td>
<td>SPM</td>
<td>F&amp;B</td>
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<tr>
<td>INF-12</td>
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<td>Malay</td>
<td>SPM</td>
<td>F&amp;B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INF-13</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>SPM</td>
<td>F&amp;B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INF-14</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>SPM</td>
<td>F&amp;B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INF-15</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>SPM</td>
<td>F&amp;B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 2, a list of questions was compiled. Just two question categories, Entrepreneur and Covid-19, and Current View and Approach, were asked. The questions were posed to the respondents via an online meeting platform-facilitated open group discussion. The interview lasted between 40 and 50 minutes and was taped with the consent of the subject.

Table 2: Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entrepreneur and Covid 19</th>
<th>EC1</th>
<th>Is the existence of your business threatened by the covid-19 pandemic? If yes, what has been affected?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EC2</td>
<td>Did you have to lay off staff due to the covid-19 pandemic? If yes,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
please state the number.

EC3 Did you start changing your plans or develop alternative plans? If yes, what is your latest plan?

EC4 Has the covid-19 outbreak had a positive effect on your business?

Current View and Approach

CV1 Do you get/apply for government/NGO assistance when facing a crisis? training? Financial assistance? A loan?

CV2 What is your personal strength during this crisis? How do you guys get that strength and from where?

CV3 What are your shortcomings and key problems in facing this crisis? What are our weaknesses and how do we deal with our weakness to make sure our weakness does not last? Please share your strategies in overcoming these shortcomings and problems.

CV4 How do you see the life of yourself and your children in the future? More successful or do not see anything good in the future?

CV5 If given the space to give suggestions to the government, what exactly from the point of view of a single mother, what is the actual need for help other than AIM that we all have?

Findings and Discussion

This section summarises the responses from the SMPs according to each category, as stated above:

- Entrepreneur and Covid-19

The first part focused on the impact of covid-19 on entrepreneur. For the EC1 question, majority of the respondent claimed that they were truly affected by the covid-19 (INF-6, INF 3, INF 2, INF1). Majority of the respondents could not do business during MCO (INF-2, INF-4, INF-7, INF-12, INF-14). Due to the pandemic, INF-3 could hardly make deliveries for her business. Respondents also claimed that they lose customers which resulted to reduction of their income (INF-6, INF-11, INF-13). What was worst is that some respondents had to lay off their helper(s) or employee(s) (INF-8, INF-15).

As for Question EC2, The majority of respondents said that they did not have to lay off any employees since they had no employees. This is because they carry out their business on their own as they could not afford to employ anyone. There were some respondents who had to lay off staff due to pandemic (INF-3, INF-8, INF-15).

The response for Question EC3 showed that all respondents did use online marketing platforms to survive during this pandemic, new to
them but they managed to adapt and adopt to the current style of marketing. These online platforms are WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok and many others. They also learned about online payment mechanism which had facilitated the buying and selling of products which was found to be safer in terms paying options. INF-3 innovated and offered lunch box menus instead, to ensure that her business sustains. As for INF-4, she turned herself into a runner herself to deliver important document(s) using her motorcycle. INF-5 who was selling ‘kuih’ as a side income, offered more variety from her current venue, and offered home-made rendang. She took weekly orders to cover her daily expenses.

Lastly for the EC4 question, most of the respondents agreed that COVID-19 had a positive effect on their businesses. INF-3 mentioned that it made her more aware of health care and future savings. INF-4 said that there were many positive bits of information that she could gain from online platforms ever since COVID began. INF-5 always ensured that she was clean, unlike before. INF-7 highlighted that people became more disciplined than ever and she learned so many new things thanks to the pandemic. INF-8 emphasized that the pandemic made her remember that she had a long and distant future.

• Current view and approach

This section focuses on the current perspectives of the respondents on the COVID-19 epidemic. On issue CV1, all respondents had been granted with government/NGO funding, such as Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM) and Geran Khas Prihatin (GKP). Other than that, they did not get any additional financial assistance from the government although they had applied. They mentioned that they can hardly get any financial assistance especially for single mothers.

Next for question CV2, there were two ways for the respondents must find the inner courage to continue operating amid the epidemic. First, they carried on doing business for their children’s sake. They did their best to provide for the family since they were the sole breadwinner. However, one respondent (INF-7) found the motivation in doing business by just being patient and persevere, as she only had herself to keep alive.

As for question CV3, one of the shortcomings and key problems in facing the crisis was the increase in the price of goods and raw material during the COVID-19 pandemic (INF-1, INF-2, INF-3). Next, the lack of business capital (INF-3, INF-10) and no employees to help with the business because they had lay off their employees due to the pandemic (INF-3, INF-4). INF-6 said she needed to do open stall to do business on the side of the road even though she was afraid and felt ashamed. In addition, to switch from direct selling to online and
internet mediums was something they had no knowledge, capability, equipment and support. One of the respondents said she could not do business at all for a month and the pandemic had increased fear among people for their safety (INF-7) and survival; “how and where will they find food for the children”. Moreover, the loss of more and more customers each day really affected INF-8 as she could not move freely to service her customers, during the pandemic. Also, she was not keen about anything related to online. Hence, it was hard for her to learn and adapt to new capacities needed currently since she is quite old, so was INF-9.

For question CV4, INF-1 wished to open a restaurant and tried her best with her children to find monthly income that could support her family. However, INF-2 saw herself switching to sewing in the future, rather than selling Nasi lemak. Another respondent, INF-4 had been selling health care products and as a single mother, she needed take care of her health and to always stay strong. She needed to move forward because she knew she did not have a complete family like others. INF-5 might switch her business from transportation into selling ‘kuih’ in the future. As for INF-7, she too wanted to buy a shop like INF-1 for her to leave behind for her children. It was unfortunate for INF-8 who did not see having any legacy to continue her business, since her only son was not interested in doing business. Nevertheless, she still planned to keep doing her business for as long as she could as her son wanted to continue studies in higher institution.

Lastly for question CV5 on funding support, one respondent said that there was no black and white document and that was why she refused to apply. When she asked for government assistance, she never got any because she was considered unworthy (INF-11). Next, INF-12 hoped that the relevant ministry had a channel for even small monthly help for single mothers so that at least there would be aid every month especially for single mothers with children. INF-15 was quite upset with Zakat’s system and her children did not get any education assistance for tuition fees. She hoped that Zakat will help single mothers more after this.

The above summaries are based on the input received from the interviews with the selected SMPs, which were personal to them, and therefore should not be generalised on a wider population. The SMPs had spoken out of their personal experience.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to find out the effect and hardship of single mother businesses in the Klang Valley during the COVID-19
epidemic, as well as to identify their company survival methods so they may continue to earn a living. To sum up, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the SMPs in that most of them could not run their business during the MCO, as expected and in line with the findings of Azmi et al., (2020), even as expected by Barney, (1991) in hard times. It should be noted that for the SMPs to survive, particular attention should be given to managing resources, as purported by and advocated in resource-based view (RBV) by Greeve (2020).

Sadly, some SMPs could hardly do delivery services. They faced lack of customers and reduced income, but what was worse, they had to lay off their assistants. There were strategies, though, that they have did use online marketing and learned about online payment platforms, delivering goods at customers houses, run businesses from homes, becoming a runner to deliver documents using a motorcycle, making lunch boxes, and applying for government assistance. Those are somewhat new to the SMPs, but they tried their best to make the best of the new ways of doing business. It could be seen that the SMPs are in need for better online marketing support so they can be more creative in doing their business to secure customers. They need to be more skilled in using digital marketing to ensure the survival of their businesses, as an outreach to claims made by Thomas (2020). In addition, it is also proposed that they need to be equipped with financial support for the facilities required.

Future study should concentrate on doing in-depth analyses with a larger population. It should be noted that SMPs should prepare themselves and save money in case of emergencies like pandemic lockdown before. SMPs are encouraged to have a deeper understanding of tactics that are interchangeable during times of crisis, and related training should be readily accessible. The government should also promptly tighten the distribution process for all business-related stimulus packages. Similar findings and warrants made by Topimin et al. (2019), Mahat et al. (2019), Mulia et al. (2017), and Ismail et al. (2016); on businesses, it is hoped that further support such as providing free and confidential business advisory services be enhanced by the relevant parties.

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