

PUBLIC HEALTH, MEDICINE, AND ECONOMICS: A COMMUNITY SERVICE STRATEGY FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF INDONESIAN MIGRANT WORKERS (PMI) ON PENANG ISLAND, MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this Community Service Program (PKM) is to solve issues by providing assistance on nutritious food for children as a means of stunting prevention, offering support in stress management, and delivering guidance on financial management as part of the empowerment of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) on Penang Island. The method employed in this program was a mentoring approach, involving direct consultations with 17 Indonesian migrant workers who are members of the Indonesian Community Growth Association (PERMAI). The results of this Community Service Program show that 87% of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) have practiced good financial management, while 13% reported not managing their finances. Additionally, 88% of participants experienced stress but were able to manage it, whereas 12% felt they were unable to cope with stress. Furthermore, 90% of participants acknowledged the importance of providing nutritious food for their children. The implication of this Community Service Program is the need for its sustainability in the future, so that all Indonesian migrant workers can gain a deeper understanding and knowledge of the importance of nutritious food, stress management, and financial literacy as key aspects of strengthening the PMI community on Penang Island.

Keyword: Financial Management, Nutritious Food, Stress Management, PMI.

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has long been one of the largest contributors of migrant labor in the world, particularly to Asian countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong. According to data from the Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency (BP2MI), throughout 2024, a total of 51,723 Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) were recorded as being placed in Malaysia. Of this number, 20,381 were female workers and 31,342 were male workers. Out of the total 51,723 PMI, 76.3% were employed in the informal sector, working in areas such as plantation/agriculture, production operators, domestic workers, construction laborers, elderly caregivers, childcare providers, restaurant workers, and cleaning services.

The large number of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) in Malaysia still faces several challenges. Every year, there are always complaints reported to BP2MI (Hutasoit et al., 2023; Samad et al., 2023). Based on data released annually by BP2MI, several major issues consistently arise. Among these issues are economic problems, stress, and the health of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia.

From several complaint cases that frequently occur every year, it can be seen that there are health-related issues such as death, illness/hospitalization, pregnancy and childbirth, as well as depression/mental illness. The total number of health-related complaints is quite significant; based on the data in the table above, the average number of complaints can exceed 90 per year. This is because more than 75% of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) work in the informal sector. The informal sector is vulnerable to malnutrition-related diseases due to insufficient attention to nutritious food intake. The consequence of inadequate nutritious food intake in adults is the occurrence of illnesses, with the worst outcome being death. Meanwhile, for pregnant women, if they do not receive adequate nutritious food, it can result in stunting in the baby they are carrying, which will only become apparent when the child reaches two years of age (Wardhani, et al., 2025).

In addition to being vulnerable to diseases caused by malnutrition (such as stunting), informal sector workers are also susceptible to depression and other mental health issues. According to Setiawan (2019), factors such as age, length of employment, workload, interpersonal relationships, individual roles, and career development are risk factors for work-related stress among informal sector workers. Other research indicates that the prevalence of stress, anxiety, and depression among Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia is 25.6%, 52.3%, and 23.6%, respectively (Siregar et al., 2021).

Labor migration is often undertaken as a solution to overcome economic problems and to meet family needs in Indonesia. However, the complexity of migration procedures and the need to adapt to a new environment can lead to mental health issues for migrant workers. They often face challenges such as a drastic change in environment from their place of origin, pressure to adapt to a new culture and surroundings, and separation from their families—all of which can cause stress and anxiety (Siregar et al., 2021). The results of this Community Service Program (PKM) are also supported by the high number of complaints related to migrant workers losing contact with their families, having their passports withheld, working in jobs that do not match the employment agreement, and being victims of fraudulent job offers. The many challenges faced by informal sector workers contribute to stress, which is a major reason why "PMI requesting repatriation" remains the most frequently reported case to BP2MI each year.

Penang Island, Malaysia, has become a bustling hub for global industries, hospitality, culinary districts, and residential areas. As a result, Penang has become one of the preferred destinations for Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) seeking employment abroad. The main goal of PMI working overseas is to earn a better income than they would in their home country. With Malaysia's minimum wage at RM 1,500 (equivalent to approximately 5.4 million rupiah), it becomes an attractive option. However, since the average cost of living in Malaysia is nearly equal to the minimum wage in Jakarta, strict budgeting and financial management are essential for migrant workers. If salaries are not paid, it becomes a serious issue, as does the case when international insurance claims are not honored—both of which are reflected in complaint data submitted to BP2MI. These economic challenges faced by PMI can also lead to significant levels of stress among the workers.

PERMAI is one of the organizations focused on addressing the issues commonly faced by migrant workers on Penang Island. However, the efforts that have been made are still not sufficient to resolve the recurring problems experienced by Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) each year, particularly in the areas of physical health, mental well-being, and economic challenges. A key issue faced by PERMAI is the lack of professionals who can provide education (awareness programs/trainings) and assistance for migrant workers, especially those who are just beginning to work in Malaysia. Therefore, PERMAI is opening opportunities for collaboration with Indonesian citizens, including universities, to help address the challenges faced by PMI.

2. METHOD

The Community Service Program (PKM) activities were carried out by the UPNVJ team in the form of mentoring for Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) under the coordination of PERMAI. The mentoring sessions were delivered by the UPNVJ team according to their respective areas of expertise, namely public health, medicine, and economics. Before the mentoring began, the PMI participants were gathered and asked to fill out a questionnaire to assess their level of understanding regarding stunting, stress management, and financial management. The participants then received mentoring through consultations on financial management, stress management, and nutritious food, provided by each member of the team according to their expertise. After the consultation sessions were completed, the PKM team distributed the same questionnaire again to the participants to assess any changes in their understanding. It is expected that the participants will be able to answer the questionnaire more accurately, indicating that the knowledge provided has been well understood. The education on nutritious food for children, stress management, and financial management is also expected to align with the goals of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 3: ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The community service activity carried out by several teams from the Faculty of Economics and Business, Faculty of Health Sciences, and Faculty of Medicine at UPN "Veteran" Jakarta highlights that understanding and awareness of the importance of nutritious food, stress management, and financial management strategies remain urgent needs for Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI), especially those working in the informal sector and with limited educational backgrounds. This community service program successfully created a meaningful space for dialogue and mentoring, where participants not only gained basic knowledge on financial management, stunting, and stress management, but also felt heard as they shared the various root causes of the problems they face.



Figure 1: Proses of Mentoring with Participants (2025)

At the beginning, before the mentoring activities were carried out, the team distributed a questionnaire and obtained the following results:

Tabel 1. Respondent results before Consultations and Mentoring

No	Questions	Yes	No
Financial Management			
1	Do you have personal financial records?	88%	12%
2	Do you understand the difference between income and available cash?	76%	24%
3	Do you know how to calculate interest on debt or installments?	41%	59%
4	Do you already have savings for emergencies or future needs?	76%	24%
5	Do you have an understanding of investments?	65%	35%
Mean		69%	31%
Stress Management			
1	Do you think stress is normal?	65%	35%
2	Do you think you have the ability to manage stress?	82%	18%
Mean		74%	26%
Nutritious Food for Children			
1	Are you aware of malnutrition (stunting)?	100%	0%
2	Do you already have children?	76%	24%
3	Do you take care of your child's nutrition?	94%	6%
4	Did your child receive exclusive breastfeeding (ASI) for 6 months?	88%	12%
5	Do you routinely take your child for health check-ups at a clinic/health facility?	88%	12%
Mean		89%	11%

Source : data processed

Out of 17 PMI (Indonesian Migrant Worker) respondents, 69% of participants had an understanding of financial management, 74% were able to manage their stress, and 89% understood the importance of nutritious food for children of PMI living on Penang Island. After conducting consultations and mentoring sessions, the results from a more comprehensive follow-up questionnaire were obtained as follows:

Tabel 2. Respondent results after consultations and mentoring

No	Questions	Scale				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Financial Management						
1	I have a better understanding of the importance of recording income and expenses.	0%	6%	18%	12%	65%
2	I am more capable of creating a simple personal budget.	6%	0%	29%	6%	59%
3	I understand the risks and benefits of making an investment.	0%	6%	12%	18%	65%
4	I am able to distinguish between legal (official) and illegal (unofficial) loans.	18%	18%	6%	12%	47%
Mean		6%	7%	16%	12%	59%
Stress Management						
1	I believe stress is a normal reaction.	12%	12%	12%	18%	47%
2	I feel that I must have the ability to manage stress.	0%	0%	18%	24%	59%
Mean		6%	6%	15%	21%	53%
Nutritious Food for Children						
1	I have a better understanding of the importance of nutrition in children	0%	6%	6%	29%	59%
2	I understand the risks and benefits of the importance of nutritional intake for children.	0%	12%	6%	24%	59%
3	I understand the importance of regularly checking my child's health.	6%	6%	0%	29%	59%
Mean		2%	8%	4%	27%	59%

Source : data processed

From the results of the mentoring on the understanding and knowledge about the importance of nutritious food for the children of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) on Penang Island, 90% of participants felt that knowledge and understanding of the need for nutritious food for their children is important. This consists of 59% who strongly agree, 27% who agree, and 4% who responded neutrally. In this regard, 12% of participants still feel that nutritious food for children is not important. This is because those participants do not have children under five years old and are not currently pregnant.

The results of the consultation on stress management revealed that 88% of participants perceive stress as a normal experience and are able to manage it effectively, whereas 12% reported an inability to cope with their stress. Those who were unable to manage stress attributed their difficulties to trauma resulting from financial deception by trusted family members during their stay in Malaysia.

The financial management mentoring showed that 87% of the migrant participants already understand and practice financial management, although they have not made any investments, focus on meeting their basic life needs. Meanwhile, 13% of the participants have not yet engaged in financial management. It is expected that following this mentoring, participants will be able to manage their finances effectively, provide nutritious food for their children, and also manage stress well, thereby improving the quality of life for Indonesian Migrant Workers on Penang Island.



Figure 2: Documentation of Community Services in Pulau Penang, Malaysia (2025)

4. CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

The implementation of this community service program proceeded smoothly; however, there were several limitations that posed challenges for the development of the program, which the team must address moving forward. The first limitation was related to time. The Community Service Program was conducted in two stages: the first stage being a two-week preparation period, and the second stage a one-day implementation involving a considerable number of participants. Consequently, the time allocated to each participant was very limited, resulting in several important issues not being fully addressed. These include long-term financial management, managing stress related to more specific problems, and introducing affordable yet nutritious food options. Addressing these challenges will be crucial for the team to continue advancing the community service program.

The second limitation is that the community service program team has not yet conducted direct simulations with the participants for financial management, provided more personalized consultation services for stress management, assessed the stress levels of each participant, or offered guidance on preparing nutritious food for the children of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI). These limitations highlight the challenges faced by the Community Service Program team in enhancing understanding and knowledge about stunting, stress management, and financial management. It is hoped that this program will become a sustainable initiative aimed at providing effective solutions to the problems encountered by Indonesian migrant workers.

5. CONCLUSION

This Community Service Program (PKM) was conducted in August 2025 on Penang Island, Malaysia, and successfully contributed to improving the knowledge and understanding of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) in the areas of stress management, stunting prevention, and financial management. Knowledge enhancement and support were delivered through tailored consultation and mentoring sessions, addressing the specific challenges faced by the migrant workers.

The results of this program revealed that many Indonesian Migrant Workers in Penang initially had limited understanding of stunting, financial management, and stress management. However, following the intervention 87% of participants demonstrated the ability to manage their finances, including budgeting and investment planning, 88% reported being able to manage their stress effectively, and 90% showed improved understanding of adequate nutrition for their children. These findings clearly indicate that the program provided effective and relevant solutions to the real issues faced by Indonesian migrant workers in Penang.

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