

The Influence of Individual Characteristics on Poverty and The Role of Churches in Poverty Alleviation: A Case Study in Cianjur Regency, West Java

Pengaruh Karakteristik Individu terhadap Kemiskinan dan Peran Gereja dalam Pengentasan Kemiskinan (Studi Kasus di Kabupaten Cianjur, Jawa Barat)

Yulianus Viktor*, Rilus A. Kinseng, Pudji Muljono

Department of Communication and Community Development Science, Faculty of Human Ecology, IPB University, Jl. Kamper Darmaga, Bogor 16680, Indonesia

*Correspondence e-mail: yulianusvictor99@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

A significant challenge for developing nations, including Indonesia, is the occurrence of poverty. An example of a poverty-stricken area based on the number of poor people is Cianjur Regency. Therefore, this study aimed to analyze the influence of religiosity, work ethics, age, education, occupation, and gender on the poverty level. It also intended to examine the perspectives of churches in Cianjur regarding poverty and its role in poverty mitigation. The methodology used was a mixed method with 100 respondents, and the sample size was determined proportionally and randomly from churches located in Cianjur Regency. The results from the BPS (Central Bureau of Statistics) showed that 18% of the 100 respondents lived in poverty, as opposed to the remaining 82%. In terms of work ethics, 71%, 29%, and 0% belonged to the high, moderate, and low categories, respectively. The independent variables that significantly affect the poverty level are religiosity, age, and occupation. The independent variables that were not significant were work ethics, education, and sex. This study also shows that the five churches had diverse perspectives on poverty. Some actively implemented programs are aimed at poverty reduction, while others lack specific initiatives to address poverty.

Keywords: churches, Cianjur Regency, poverty, religiosity, work ethics



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INTRODUCTION

Poverty is a pressing concern in developing nations, such as Indonesia. According to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) in 2023, there were 25.90 million poor people (BPS, 2023). It was also reported that Cianjur Regency is considered a poverty-stricken area, with the percentage of poor people reaching 11.18% in 2021 (BPS, 2023). Factors influencing poverty are often related to social characteristics, such as age, education, occupation, and gender (Cheteni et al., 2019; Kartika & Estiningrum, 2020; Liu et al., 2021; Vaalavuo & Sirniö, 2022).

The perspective of churches on poverty is generally based on a range of teachings in the Bible that tend to vary. According to Herlianto (1992), prosperity or success theory states that a life marked by material abundance, health, and success is perceived as a sign of God's blessings. Therefore, poverty is considered a curse and an indication that poor individuals lack faith. This perspective differs from the liberation and theology commonly embraced by mainstream churches. Liberation theology, which gained popularity in Latin America and was developed by a prominent figure, Gustavo Gutiérrez, viewed poverty as a structural and political issue. It does not measure blessings from God based on material prosperity. In this framework, poverty is not solely attributed to a lack of faith but is also seen as a consequence of structural, political, and discriminatory factors. Therefore, liberation theology seeks to liberate poor and marginalized individuals from exploitation and political oppression (Gutiérrez, 1973). Churches, particularly mainstream ones, generally view poverty as a result of these broader societal and political issues rather than a divine curse (Gultom, 2018).

Reducing the poverty rate requires a multifaceted approach, with participation from various entities, including churches. Churches have the potential to contribute significantly to the pursuit of prosperity by actively participating in initiatives aimed at increasing and improving society's economic conditions (Viktorahadi et al., 2021). However, many religious bodies do not play a substantial role in poverty alleviation.

Churches can contribute significantly to poverty alleviation among members by imparting teachings that promote a strong work ethic. This concept is in line with a prior study in which work ethics are influenced by religious values (Weber, 2001). Saragih et al. (2020) also stated that religiosity had a positive influence on work ethics, therefore, members with strong religiosity were also reportedly committed to the work ethic. Work is viewed as a realization of God calling in the life of a person, and it is expected that individuals should put in the best with a focus on quality (Sinaga & Jura, 2019). Members are encouraged to cultivate a strong work ethic (Wahyuni & Waani, 2020) because having good Christian work ethics can positively influence general performance (Pasaribu, 2022). It is also important to acknowledge that, in reality, not all members tend to possess strong work ethics.

The results of several previous studies conducted in Indonesia indicate that the factors causing poverty are education, unemployment, income distribution, health, and economic growth (Hasibuan et al., 2019; Prasada et al., 2020). Sjaf (2023) stated that policies to improve the conditions of poor families in rural Indonesia should address three main aspects: education, employment, and income.

The first objective of this research is to analyze the influence of religiosity level, work ethics, and respondent characteristics such as age, education, occupation, and gender on the poverty level of church members in Cianjur Regency. The second objective of this research is to analyze the perspectives of churches in Cianjur Regency regarding poverty and their role in poverty alleviation.

This study consists of three hypotheses. First, it is suspected that the level of religiosity influences poverty level. Second, it is suspected that work ethics influences poverty levels. Third, it is suspected that respondent characteristics (age, education, occupation, and gender) influence the poverty level.

The use of grand sociological theory as an analytical tool in this research, namely Weber's theory (2001), which states that work ethic is influenced by religious values or religiosity, is emphasized. Saragih et al. (2020), in their research findings, stated that religiosity has a positive influence on work ethic; church members with good religiosity also have a good work ethic. Bellah (1957) stated that religion plays an important role in the process of economic rationalization.

THEORETICAL APPROACH

Glock and Stark (1965) define religiosity as the conception and commitment of individuals to religion. Rogers and Konieczny (2018) state that religion has the potential to address issues related to poverty. It was further reported that the role of churches extends beyond spiritual matters, comprising members' well-being in both spiritual and material terms (Susanto, 2020). According to Ali and Hasan (2019), a positive relationship exists between religiosity and poverty level. Ampofo and Mabefam (2021) state that it has the potential to influence poverty levels. Weber (2001) reported that religiosity impacts work ethics and poverty. The significance of Protestant ethics in driving economic changes has also been reported. Bellah (1957), stated that religion played an important role in the process of economic rationalization. These perspectives offer meaningful insights into the multifaceted relationship between religiosity and poverty.

A robust work ethics, defined by the following attributes: hard work, rationality, frugality, achievement orientation, and integrity, is essential for sustaining the economic system. It particularly comes into play in the production of goods and services, including necessities such as food, and the pursuit of improved living standards, all of which are categorized under human work activities (Heller & Quintanilla, 1995). In accordance with David and Iliescu (2022), when these beliefs are integrated into the work environment, religion serves as a motivating factor. Etherington (2019) provided valuable guidance for assessing moral behavior in the workplace. According to Djie and Ariela (2021), high levels of religiosity empower individuals to apply religious values in all aspects of life, including work ethics. This connection with the religious community serves as a reminder to adhere to these values. Adherence to religious principles in the workplace has the potential to enhance productivity and overall quality of work. Individuals who hold a deep sense of devotion often strive for excellence, including professional capabilities (Lontoh & Chia, 2022).

Kartika and Estiningrum (2020) state that age has a positive and significant influence on income levels. In a related context, Liu et al. (2021) emphasized the crucial role of education, stating that it served as the foundation for personal, societal, and national development and contributed significantly to poverty reduction by providing employment opportunities. Vaalavuo and Sirniö (2022) stated that obtaining a job increases the chances of escaping poverty. Job type has been reported to influence well-being, while unemployment often leads to financial problems (Thompson & Dahling, 2019). Both men and women have equal employment opportunities, as reported in this study. According to Cheteni et al. (2019), women also play a critical role in household decision making, which could impact the poverty status of a family.

According to the BPS, the poverty line represents the minimum monetary value required to meet essential needs, comprising both basic food and nonfood necessities. When the income of a specific group does not sufficiently meet these fundamental requirements, namely food, clothing, and housing, members are considered to be living below the poverty line. This is defined as an approximated figure that signifies the minimum average expenditure (for food and non-food essentials) of a household to avoid being classified as poor. In September 2022, the poverty line as of September 2022 was IDR 535,547 per capita per month (BPS, 2023). Meanwhile, for the Cianjur Regency, the poverty line in 2021 was lower at IDR 387,631 per capita per month (BPS, 2021). In this study, households were categorized as either poor or poor based on their income levels relative to the poverty line.

METHODOLOGY

The post-positivist paradigm was used in this research. This study used a mixed method that integrated both quantitative and qualitative methods (Creswell, 2016). The field investigation was conducted for three months, from January to March 2023, in Sindangjaya and Kertajaya Villages, Ciranjang Sub-district, Cianjur Regency, West Java. Additionally, five churches or denominations were selected. The target population comprised members aged 20–60 years, amounting to a total of 843 individuals. One hundred respondents were randomly selected for the sample size. Quantitative data processing was performed using SPSS Version 20. Qualitative data analysis was performed using the interactive model designed by Miles et al. (2014), which included data condensation, display, and conclusion. Quantitative data were analyzed using binary logistic regression statistical tests.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The insights from interviews with church leaders show a consistent theme: these religious institutes place a significant emphasis on caring for economically disadvantaged members. This commitment to aiding the poor arises from the core teachings of Christian faith. Regarding the demographics of respondents, the majority were female, accounting for 57 individuals, while 43 were male. In terms of age distribution, the majority (30 individuals) were aged 51–60 years, followed by 28 individuals aged 41–50 years, 21 individuals aged 31–40 years, and another 21 individuals aged 20–30 years. Regarding educational background, 50 individuals had completed 5–9 years of education, 43 had achieved 12–16 years, and 7 had attained 17 years. In terms of occupation, 33 worked in the private sector, 10 were civil servants, 11 worked as daily laborers or farmers, and 46 had various other occupations, including miscellaneous roles, unemployment, and homemakers. In respect to monthly per capita expenditures, four individuals reportedly spent more than IDR 6,000,000. While 20 individuals spent between IDR 4,000,000 to IDR 4,500,000, and only two people spent between IDR 1,000,000 and IDR 1,500,000.

In September 2022, Indonesia established a poverty line (GK) at IDR 535,547 per capita per month (BPS, 2023). To determine the economic status of an individual, family expenses were converted into per capita monthly expenses, which were calculated by dividing the total family expenses by the number of members. Families with per capita monthly expenses less than the IDR 535,547 threshold were classified as poor, whereas those exceeding it were categorized as not poor. Furthermore, the poverty levels of respondents were evaluated against the World Bank global poverty line of US\$2.15 per person per day (World Bank, 2022), based on an exchange rate of IDR 15,215 per US\$ in September 2023 (Bank Indonesia, 2023). The results of this comparison are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Number and percentage of respondents categorized as poor and not poor based on BPS and World Bank criteria

Poverty Criteria	Poor	Not Poor
BPS	18 (18%)	82 (82%)
World Bank	50 (50%)	50 (50%)

Source: processed from primary data (2022)

The categorization of respondents based on the two distinct poverty criteria is presented in Table 1. Using the BPS GK standard, 18 of 100 respondents (18%) were identified as poor, while the remaining 82 (82%) were classified as not poor. However, when applying the World Bank GK criteria, 50 respondents (50%) were categorized as poor, which was a higher proportion than the BPS standard.

The religiosity level was measured using categorical statistical analysis; however, this assessment relied on data derived from a questionnaire that comprised indicators of spirituality, beliefs, knowledge, and religious teachings, as they relate to poverty. The outcomes of this analysis led to the categorization of religiosity into two distinct levels: high and low, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Number and percentage of respondents based on religiosity level

Category (Religiosity Level)	Number and Percentage
High	72 (72%)
Low	28 (28%)

Source: processed from primary data (2023)

The majority of the respondents in Table 2 exhibited a high level of religiosity (72%), with the low category comprising only 28%.

Work ethics level was measured using categorical statistical analysis based on data collected through a questionnaire that included indicators such as discipline, hard work, and rationality. The results were categorized into high and low levels of work ethics, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Number and percentage of respondents based on work ethic level

Category (Work Ethic Level)	Number and Percentage
High	71 (71%)
Low	29 (29%)

Source: processed from primary data (2023)

As shown in Table 3, the majority of respondents exhibited a high work ethics level (71%), followed by the low category (29%).

Influence of Religiosity, Work Ethic, Age, Education Duration, Occupation, and Gender on Poverty Level

A binary logistic regression analysis was conducted to investigate how religiosity, work ethics, age, education duration, occupation, and gender influence poverty levels. In this analysis, not poor was coded as 1 and poor as 0 to represent poverty levels. Categorical data were used to analyze religiosity and work ethics, assigning values of 1 and 0 to high religiosity or strong work ethics and other categories, respectively. Males and females were coded as 1 and 0, respectively. Additionally, a coding of 1 was used for specific occupations (private sector, civil servant, daily laborer/farmer), and 0 for all others.

Logistic Regression Analysis

The results of the logistic regression analysis were used to determine the factors influencing poverty levels, as assessed by both the omnibus and partial Wald tests. In particular, the Omnibus test was used to determine whether all independent variables collectively had a simultaneous influence on poverty levels. To determine whether the hypothesis was accepted or rejected, the significance value of the omnibus test results was compared to a significance level of 0.05. The hypotheses for the omnibus test are as follows:

H₀: None of the independent variables significantly affect the dependent variable when Sig > 0.05.

H₁: At least one independent variable significantly influences the dependent variable, assuming Sig < 0.05.

The results of the Omnibus test are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Omnibus Test Results

	Chi-square	df	Sig
Step	29,090	6	0,000
Block	29,090	6	0,000
Model	29,090	6	0,000

Source: data processing results (2023)

The output indicated that the significance value of the omnibus test was less than 0.05, implying that H₁ was accepted. This simply meant that at least one independent variable had a significant impact on the dependent variable.

The Wald test was used to evaluate the influence of each independent variable on the dependent variable in this study. To determine whether the hypothesis was accepted or rejected, the Sig value was compared with a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. The hypotheses for the Wald test were as follows:

H₀: The independent variable does not significantly influence the dependent variable when Sig > 0.05.

H₁: The independent variable significantly influences the dependent variable, assuming Sig < 0.05.

The Wald test results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Wald Test Results

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Religiosity	2,057*	0,852	5,827	1	0,016	7,820
Work ethic	-1,597	0,894	3,120	1	0,077	0,206
Age	-0,100*	0,037	7,310	1	0,007	0,905
Education	0,207	0,109	3,621	1	0,057	1,230
Work	2,2473*	1,108	4,102	1	0,043	9,426
Gender	0,627	1,101	0,325	1	0,569	0,534

Note: *sig. Level at 5%.

Source: data processing results (2023)

Based on Table 5, the independent variables that significantly affect poverty level are religiosity, age, and occupation. The insignificant independent variables were work ethics, education, and sex. Each independent variable is interpreted using the value of $\text{Exp}(B)$ or the odds ratio. The interpretation of the significantly influential independent variables can be explained as follows:

If one has high religiosity, the likelihood of not being poor increases 7,820 times. Saragih et al. (2020) also noted that religiosity has a positive influence. Furthermore, Bellah (1957) states that religion plays an important role in the process of economic rationalization. Rogers and Konieczny (2018) state that religion has the power to address poverty. According to Hasan (2019), there is a positive relationship between religiosity and poverty level. According to Ampofo Dan Mabefam (2021), religiosity has the potential to influence poverty levels.

If age increases by 1 year, the likelihood of not being poor increases by 0.905. It should be noted that the respondents in this study were between 20 and 60 years of age, which is considered a productive age range. In this productive age group, individuals tend to maximize their energy and time in the workforce. Age becomes a crucial factor in job search, as it influences the level of income that can be earned. During the productive age, individuals are inclined to optimize their physical energy to achieve a higher income. Findings from Kartika dan Estiningrum (2020) indicate that age has a positive and significant influence on income level.

If someone works, the likelihood of not being poor increases by 9.426 times. In this context, increasing employment refers to efforts or actions to increase the quantity or quality of jobs available in the economy or a specific sector. This includes increasing the number of jobs, improving the job quality, and increasing job opportunities. The type of job in which someone engages has a significant impact on their welfare level. Employment plays a crucial role in poverty reduction, as stated by Vaalavuo dan Sirniö (2022), who argued that having a job can increase the likelihood of escaping poverty. Additionally, Thompson dan Dahling (2019) also points out that individuals who are unemployed face financial and psychological damage, which negatively impacts individuals, families, and society as a whole. Based on Table 5, the independent variables that significantly affect poverty level are religiosity, age, and occupation. The insignificant independent variables were work ethics, education, and sex. Each independent variable is interpreted using the value of $\text{Exp}(B)$ or the odds ratio. The interpretation of the significantly influential independent variables can be explained as follows:

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If someone works, the chance of not being poor increases by 9.426 times. An increase in employment in this context refers to efforts or actions to increase the quantity or quality of jobs available in the economy or a specific sector. This includes increasing the number of jobs, improving the job quality, and increasing job opportunities. The type of job in which someone engages has a significant impact on their welfare level. Employment plays a crucial role in reducing poverty, as stated by Vaalavuo dan Sirniö (2022), who argued that having a job can increase the likelihood of escaping poverty. Additionally, Thompson dan Dahling (2019) reminds us that individuals who are unemployed face financial and psychological damage, which negatively impacts individuals, families, and society as a whole.

The Views of the Five Churches on Poverty

Table 6 presents the views of the five churches on poverty.

Table 6. The views of the five churches on poverty.

Churches	View
Bethel Revival Church (GBP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poverty is universally undesired. This statement implied that most people do not wish to experience poverty. Poverty is not a manifestation of divine will or a consequence of sin, rather, it is mainly attributed to factors such as lack of stable employment, limited job opportunities, insufficient facilities, and social injustices.
Advent Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poverty is a relative condition and may not necessarily conflict with the divine will. It is not solely a consequence of curses but rather results from a complex interplay of factors, including the impact of sin, structural challenges, political issues, and discrimination. Poverty can be categorized into four dimensions, namely physical, mental, spiritual, and social.
Pentecostal Movement Church (GGP) Kharis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> According to some beliefs, poverty is viewed as a result of human resistance to the will of God. In certain interpretations, poverty is attributed to the concept of sin. Poverty is commonly classified into two main categories, spiritual and physical.
Gospel Fellowship Church (GPI) Eliezer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor financial management, often associated with overspending, can lead an individual into poverty. Many argue that it contradicts the divine will. There are typically two recognized forms of poverty, spiritual, and physical.
Pasundan Christian Church (GKP) Palalangan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poverty can be attributed to both a lack of motivation and an insufficient work ethic. It is often categorized into four distinct types, namely mental, economic (physical), faith (spiritual poverty), and lack of knowledge poverty. Poverty is categorized as mental, economic (physical), faith (spiritual poverty), and lack of knowledge poverty.

Source: Primary Data, 2023

Table 6 shows that the viewpoints of the five churches on poverty differ significantly from the tenets of prosperity theology, as outlined by Herlianto (1992). A prosperous life, marked by material wealth, good health, and success, is considered a manifestation of God's blessings. However, churches also have diverse effects on poverty. Some stated economic and social factors as root causes, while others connected them to spiritual and theological dimensions. According to Kinseng (2019), spiritual capital not only plays a crucial role in social resilience but also in alleviating poverty.

The Role of the Five Churches in Poverty Alleviation

Churches play a crucial role in poverty alleviation by providing inspiration, encouragement, and motivation for congregation. In line with this responsibility, the perspective of Grassi in the work by Aritonang (2018) suggested that churches should actively engage in poverty eradication efforts. The practical manifestation of these efforts by the five churches can be observed in the poverty alleviation programs in Table 7.

Table 7. The programs of churches in poverty alleviation

Churches	Program
Bethel Revival Church (GBP)	No program
Advent Church	Skewer making program
Pentecostal Movement Church (GGP) Kharis	No program
Gospel Fellowship Church (GPI) Eliezer	Plasma program and use of idle land
Pasundan Christian Church (GKP) Palalangan	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Congregation Economic Development Program (PEJ) namely planting California papaya• Home industry online sales of local products

Source: Primary Data, 2023

Certainly, some churches actively engage in poverty alleviation efforts, as shown in Table 7. However, it is essential to recognize that not all religious institutes have established specific programs for poverty alleviation. Gordon (2006) stated that the responsibility of churches towards the less fortunate and their significant role in promoting the well-being of humanity (Nugroho, 2019) needs to be acknowledged. These efforts are crucial not only from a moral perspective but also in line with the broader mission of national development (Muljono, 2018). This emphasizes the necessity for churches to continue developing effective and sustainable programs aimed at alleviating poverty in the community, contributing to the realization of a competitive nation.

CONCLUSION

Based on the BPS standards, 18 respondents (18%) were categorized as poor and 82 respondents (82%) were categorized as not poor. Respondents' level of religiosity was dominated by the high category with 72 respondents (72%), followed by 28 respondents (28%) in the moderate category, and no respondents in the low category (0%). The respondents' work ethics level was dominated by the high category with 71 respondents (71%), followed by 29 respondents (29%) in the moderate category and no respondents in the low category (0%). The independent variables that significantly affect the poverty level are religiosity, age, and occupation. The insignificant independent variables were work ethics, education, and sex. The five churches have diverse views on poverty. Some churches emphasize economic and social factors as causes of poverty, while others link them to spiritual and theological aspects. Some churches have active programs for poverty alleviation. However, some churches do not have specific poverty alleviation programs.

Considering the research findings indicating that three independent variables significantly affect the poverty level, namely religiosity, age, and occupation, it is recommended that relevant parties, including churches, focus on strengthening these aspects in poverty reduction efforts. Work ethics, education, and gender variables were not significant, and further research is needed to understand their impacts more deeply. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the diverse views of churches regarding poverty; therefore, collaboration and dialogue among churches can be productive steps in designing more effective poverty alleviation programs that are relevant to the social and theological contexts of each church. Churches that have been active in poverty alleviation efforts can serve as models for other churches that do not have specific programmes for this purpose. To reduce poverty more effectively, it is important for churches and relevant parties to delve deeper into influential variables and collaborate to develop targeted programs.

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