

Dignity in Indonesia's Governmental Food Aid Program



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MSc Thesis | RSO80436

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Master Thesis

Wageningen University & Research

Master's Program: Development and Rural Innovation

Chair group: Rural Sociology

Course code: RSO80436

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Date: 8 April 2025

Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all my research participants who were willing to share their stories and experiences with me. Their participation is extremely valuable for both my thesis and my personal growth. Without their participation, this thesis would never have been finished. As someone who was born and grew up in the field where I conducted my research fieldwork, I realized that I have been taking everything for granted. And through this research, they also taught me to be more empathetic towards my surroundings, especially people in my community.

I would also like to thank my supervisors, Oona Morrow and Thirza Andriessen, who have always been great mentors to me, helping me through every phase of my thesis process. Their feedback and advice contributed significantly to my academic success. I am more than grateful to get the opportunity to work with them.

To my study advisor, Lieke de Kwant, I am very grateful to have you in my study journey. You have always been very helpful to me. Because of your advice and help, I made it to this phase.

Special thanks to my family in Indonesia for their support and trust in me to pursue my master's studies abroad, away from home. And my friends in Wageniluck, MDR program, PPI Wageningen, Pengajian Wageningen, Kelurahan LPDP Master, thank you for becoming a home for me, for listening to my concerns and worries, and helping me stay sane in this crazy study life. Finally, I want to thank LPDP for providing financial support to my study here in the Netherlands, enabling me to achieve my dream of studying abroad.

Abstract

Building on previous research about food aid programs, such as food banks, SNAP, and social grocery stores, the study focused on investigating the dignity of recipients. While in the Bantuan Pangan Non-Tunai (BPNT), a governmental food aid program initiated by the national government of Indonesia, this topic is still understudied. Indonesia, with its social context that upholds collectivist culture, may give different insights into how recipients of the aid program experience their dignity. Therefore, this research aims to answer the main research question, “How do social dynamics shape the way BPNT program recipients experience a sense of dignity when receiving aid?”. This study employed a qualitative research method. In which the data were derived from semi-structured interviews, relational mapping, and participant observations. An inductive coding method was used to analyze all the data collected. The findings revealed that social dynamics such as social connection and socio-cultural norms may reinforce or undermine recipients’ experienced dignity. People with strong social connections tend to feel more dignified than those with fewer social connections, because they are prone to receive positive social treatment from others. In addition, the prevailing socio-cultural norms, such as reciprocity and sharing practices, create a sense of normalcy in receiving aid. This enhances recipients’ dignity because it reduces the stigma surrounding aid recipients. This research also included recommendations for the government to improve the implementation of the BPNT program itself, to be more inclusive and bottom-up-based.

Keywords: dignity, food access, poverty, social connection, socio-cultural norms, reciprocity, sharing practice, social treatment, stigma, governmental food aid, collectivist culture, Indonesia.

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List of Abbreviations

ARAS	Additive Ratio Assessment DSS
BPNT	Bantuan Pangan Non-Tunai
DSS	Decision Support System
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FNS	Food and Nutrition Service
GRFC	Global Report on Food Crises
KKS	Kartu Keluarga Sejahtera
RT	Rukun Tetangga
RW	Rukun Warga
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture

1. Introduction

1.1 Problem Statement

This research focused on a governmental food aid program called Bantuan Pangan Non-Tunai (BPNT) that is initiated to tackle food insecurity due to poverty in Indonesia. This study aimed to explore the impact of BPNT on the dignity of its recipients. Besides the topic of dignity remains understudied within this context, Indonesia with its social and cultural setting also might offer valuable insights into how dignity is perceived and experienced in food aid programs.

At present, the issue of food insecurity has become a major issue worldwide. The most recent Global Report on Food Crises (GRFC) reveals that approximately 281.6 million individuals across 59 countries and territories faced significant levels of acute hunger in 2023 (FSIN, 2024). This issue is experienced not only by developing countries but also by developed countries. However, the matter of food security in developing and developed countries encompasses different dimensions. In developing countries, the question of food security is about the availability and stability of food, while in developed countries, rather than a supply problem, ensuring access to food is the key to food security (FAO, et al., 2013). In a developing country like Indonesia, the issue of food security is not only the matter of food availability but also issue with food access due to poverty. One in ten people in Indonesia remains in poverty (BPS, 2018) which puts Indonesia ranked 69 out of 113 countries in 2017 on the Economist Intelligence Unit's Global Food Security Index. In Indonesia, most low-income households struggle to obtain enough food to meet basic energy and protein needs, primarily due to income constraints (Saliem et al., 2001; Ariningsih and Rachman, 2008).

In terms of residence, rural households are generally more food insecure than urban households as described by Usfar et al. (2007). This finding is primarily due to the significant income disparity between urban and rural areas as the result of unequal development in Indonesia. Households in provinces such as West Nusa Tenggara, East Nusa Tenggara, Central Kalimantan, North Sulawesi, Maluku, West Papua, and Papua are more likely to experience food insecurity (Amrullah et al., 2019). To address this issue, Indonesia's government has been initiating various social safety net programs to help families in poverty fulfil their daily necessities, including a food aid program named Bantuan Pangan Non-Tunai (BPNT) or non-cash food aid. The BPNT program aims to support low-income communities to help them stabilize their financial situations (Julianto, 2020). To support the implementation of the Non-Cash Food Assistance Program (BPNT), the President of Indonesia issued Presidential

Regulation Number 63 of 2017 concerning the Non-Cash Distribution of Social Assistance, making this mandatory program to be implemented by the government. As a national top-down program, the beneficiaries are chosen by the national government based on economic conditions. BPNT is distributed by the government through the provision of e-Warong that consists of kiosk or retail outlets (OJK, 2020) where the beneficiaries of the BPNT can redeem their food aid vouchers using the Kartu Keluarga Sejahtera (KKS) or the Prosperous Family Card (Kementerian Sosial Republik Indonesia, 2019). They usually collaborate with local merchants in villages to easily and closely distribute the aid to the beneficiaries.

The BPNT program is similar to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in the USA which is also a governmental food aid program aiming to reduce poverty by giving food access more easily to people in need. SNAP is also funded as an entitlement program which means that it is a mandatory expenditure in the U.S. federal budget, although the amount depends on the political administration. SNAP supplements a family's income, helping them to buy nutritious food (Gundersen, 2021). The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) manages the program via the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), collaborating with state and local partners for implementation (Gundersen, 2021).

Furthermore, the BPNT program encounters the challenges to accurately targeting beneficiaries. Saputra et al. (2022) found that the distribution of non-cash food aid (BPNT) faces several challenges, such as inadequate data systems for identifying beneficiaries as well as incomplete and inconsistent population management. These hinder the distribution of assistance to targeted recipients. To address these issues, researchers like Hutagalung et al. (2022) explored new ideas. They developed a Decision Support System (DSS) using a method called Additive Ratio Assessment (ARAS). This system uses both human and computer intelligence to create different solutions that can help decision-makers make better choices in determining the eligibility for BPNT beneficiaries in poor families.

Previous studies mostly focused on assessing the effectiveness of the distribution of the BPNT program to the targeted beneficiaries, but there has been insufficient research on how the program affects the beneficiaries, such as their dignity. It is important to study the impact of the BPNT on its recipients' dignity to see whether similar concerns about dignity arise, as seen in other food aid programs such as food banks. Van Der Horst et. al (2014) found that recipients of food banks are often stigmatized with a negative status, associated with poverty, laziness, social weakness, and personal responsibility for their situation. The negative stigma later discourages people from using food banks. Food bank receivers felt that food banks and society in general provide them with food that is often expired or close to expiration, which

they believe would otherwise be discarded (Van Der Horst et al., 2014). This undermines their dignity by making them feel like ‘lesser’ citizens, as they do not have the same options as others (Power, 2011).

Lack of autonomy among the recipients, leaving them with no choice but to rely on whatever is provided by food banks. Similar issues might emerge in the case of BPNT recipients. Unlike Social Grocery Store in Antwerp where users have more flexibility to choose what to consume based on the needs and preferences of their families (Andriessen et al., 2020), BPNT recipients in Indonesia are limited to a smaller selection of foods such as rice and eggs (Kementerian Sosial Republik Indonesia, 2019). This limits the recipients’ autonomy of product choices, potentially undermining their sense of dignity. Therefore, it is crucial to assess how BPNT affects the recipients’ dignity.

Furthermore, in most Western countries, which are characterized by individualistic cultures, there is little reciprocal exchange in food aid programs, such as food banks, that might position recipients as inferior. This leads to stigma or shame among food aid receivers since it positions them as receivers only without the ability to pay back. Individualistic culture emphasizes self-reliance (Syarizka, et al., 2021) causes sharing cultures and reciprocity are not the dominant culture. Thus, the practice of receiving food aid might be seen as unusual, since it implies reliance on something else, other than oneself. This may lead to a stigma of dependency, where recipients are viewed as unable to care for themselves, that potentially undermine their sense of dignity.

By contrast, Indonesia is identified as a country that possesses and practices a collectivist culture where people place the needs and objectives of the group above their personal interests (Hofstede, 1983). This culture allows the establishment of social connection in society. Especially in rural Indonesia where people often live in smaller communities, strong social connection is presented. This may reinforce the BPNT recipients’ dignity through communal support and the feeling of inclusion. In addition, collectivist culture nurtures the feeling of togetherness that makes the culture of reciprocity and sharing common things. As a result, receiving aid might not lead to a negative stigma that might undermine the BPNT recipients’ dignity. However, this collectivist value can also lead to social conflicts. Novela (2022) notes that there is social jealousy among community members who do not receive aid from the BPNT program towards those who do. It might affect the way the recipients are treated and respected by people in their community which also might influence their sense of dignity.

For the reasons explained above, this study focused on assessing how the social dynamics such as social connections and socio-cultural norms may shape the dignity

experienced by the BPNT program's recipients in relation to the way the aid is provided. Previous research (Andriessen et al., 2020; Garthwaite, 2016a; Garthwaite, 2016b; Gundersen, 2020; Van Der Horst et al., 2014) mostly studied dignity within food aid programs in middle-high income countries, and still insufficient similar studies in developing countries. Hence with the social context of Indonesia, this study is expected to provide new insights regarding dignity surrounding food aid programs.

1.2 Research Questions

Research Objective: This study aims to explore and understand how dignity is perceived and experienced by recipients of the BPNT program; a governmental food aid initiative in Indonesia, in relation to the aid provided.

GRQ: How do social dynamics shape the way BPNT program recipients experience a sense of dignity when receiving aid?

SRQ1: How is the BPNT program provided to recipients?

SRQ2: How do recipients describe their experiences with the BPNT program?

SRQ3: How is the recipients' sense of dignity related to their social connections with other village members and the socio-cultural norms in the village?

2. Conceptual Framework

In this study, I will discuss the concepts of dignity, social connections, and social and cultural norms. I will mainly use the concept of social dignity to understand how recipients' dignity is shaped by social dynamics such as social connection and socio-cultural norms. I will approach dignity by investigating the recipients' autonomy as well as how they are treated and respected by others or vice versa. I will also look at social connections to see how the relationships of BPNT recipients with people in their community may influence their sense of dignity. I will discuss socio-cultural norms in relation to shaping people's understanding and experience of dignity. In addition, employing all these concepts, I aim to see the dynamics between social connection and socio-cultural norms influencing dignity of the BPNT recipients. I will look at how social connection may affect the practices of socio-cultural norms, and the other way around, how socio-cultural norms may shape social connection. Understanding these perspectives may provide comprehensive insights into the recipients' social dignity.

2.1 Dignity

Dignity is described as two complementary but distinct forms: *human dignity* and *social dignity* (Jacobson, 2007). Human dignity is the inherent, universal value possessed by every individual solely by virtue of being human. Dignity is the God's blessing for humans to mark they are different to other creatures (Bayertz, 1996; Dales, 1977). Having dignity as human beings also commands respect (Killmister, 2016), meaning that every person deserves equal treatment, recognition of their autonomy and social inclusion. However, Killmister (2017) argued that some people uphold dignity to a greater extent, which influences how they treat and respect themselves and others. This suggests that the experience of dignity can vary based on how a person is treated and how they treat others. To explain this, the concept of social dignity can be used especially in the context related to the interactions among individuals, groups, and societies. Social dignity is socially constructed around the presentation of the individual's self and the reciprocal response of others (Mattson & Clark, 2011) which indicates that status in society might affect the sense of social dignity. From the lens of social dignity, how people experience dignity might be different, depending on the social context linked to social ranking and hierarchy (Meyer, 1987; Johnson, 1971).

In the context of the BPNT program in Indonesia, the recipients are situated in a social context where collectivist values are strongly maintained. Within collectivist culture, people prioritize mutual dependence, that creates the habit of relying on each other (Syarizka, et al., 2021). Thus, employing the concept of social dignity in this study might help give a comprehensive understanding of how society constructs dignity and influences the perception and experience of the BPNT recipients' dignity. In addition, according to Jacobson (2009), dignity is embedded within social hierarchies. It means that the way people experience their dignity is influenced by their social status which is affected by the values upheld in society, such as the collectivist culture. Using the concept of social dignity could help me analyze how receiving the BPNT program could affect recipients' social status and connections, which might influence the respect they receive and, subsequently, their sense of dignity, within Indonesia's social context.

Additionally, one's dignity is grounded with a sense of autonomy (Nordenfelt, 2004). It suggests that the freedom to make choices may influence how people perceive their dignity. To what extent they value their autonomy depends on their social environment, that shapes their perceptions and mindset on autonomy. Thus, how people perceive their autonomy might be different according to the social conditions in which they are situated. For example, living

in a society where choices are limited, autonomy might mean just having any choice. While in a society with abundant of choices, autonomy might mean fulfilling the best you can. Different understanding might lead to different experiences of dignity. In the case of BPNT, recipients are situated in a social condition known as a collectivist culture, and they have limited food choices, thus it might influence how the recipients experience their autonomy. Hence in this study, the concept of social dignity will be used to understand how social conditions may shape dignity of the BPNT recipients through its influence on the recipients' perception and experience of autonomy and respect.

2.2 Social Connections and Dignity

According to Holt-Lunstad et al. (2017), the term social connection (or social connectedness) encompasses a multidimensional concept that includes structural, functional, and qualitative elements of social relationships, all of which contribute to risk and protection. This study is set in a social environment where collectivist values are emphasized, and strong social relationships are maintained. Hence, the concept of social connection is relevant to explain the role of social relationships among BPNT program recipients in this research. Social connection involves a complex approach that encompasses (1) Connections with others through established relationships and their roles, (2) a feeling of connection arising from real or perceived support and inclusion, and (3) connections shaped by both positive and negative attributes among individuals (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2017). These characteristics help me to specify the focus of social connection topic I want to look at my research case. I aim to use them to identify roles of the BPNT recipients in different social connection they have, and how different social connection provides support and inclusion. By applying the concept of social connections, it can help to understand how the networks of BPNT recipients influence their sense of dignity. This includes understanding how their social ties impact their status and the way community members treat them as recipients of food aid. Also, it helps to explore how their social connections provide social support and foster a sense of belonging within the community.

Furthermore, social connection involves both the flow of compassion and a sense of social security (Matos et al., 2021). Compassion is interpreted as a drive to help others, involving sensitivity to suffering in oneself and others, and a commitment to alleviate it (Gilbert & Choden, 2014). It indicates that social connection is beneficial in managing crises because of compassion from society who are willing to help. This may potentially enhance feelings of security, support and inclusion for those receiving BPNT program, which are attributes linked

to dignity. Therefore, exploring this concept in this study could help understand how social connection might provide security and support to the BPNT's recipients. This could help assess the extent of social connection that influences the recipients' sense of dignity.

2.3 Socio-cultural Norms Impacting Dignity

In the realm of social sciences, social norms are generally conceived as customary rules that constrain behavior by eliciting conformity (Bicchieri & Mercier, 2014). Most conceptions of social norms, according to Mackie & Moneti (2014), revolve around individuals' perspectives regarding others within their reference group, commonly known as social expectations. These expectations are influenced by individuals' perspectives of others' actions and their perspectives about what others expect from them. This implies that social norms arise from collective expectations used to govern behavior and dictate how individuals should behave in social interactions within a community. According to Killmister (2017), all humans have dignity by virtue of being community members. Being a member of a community places normative standards on other members to treat you in ways appropriate to your status as a member of that community (Waldron, 2012). As part of a community, the BPNT recipients are also required to uphold certain values and standards. These standards might affect the way other people in the community treat them as well which subsequently might influence the recipients' sense of dignity.

While social norms can change over time due to the influences of various factors, cultural norms are ingrained and passed down through generations, thus are more stable. Cultural norms are mutual standards of behavior within a community that deeply influence social interactions (Chudek & Henrich, 2011). This indicates that cultural norms can influence social norms by shaping how people interact, which in turn establishes the unwritten rules. Cultural norms shape identity, values, prejudice, and stereotypes of community (Gelfand & Jackson, 2016) which might include customs, beliefs, traditions, and religion. Cultural norms act as essential means for individuals to communicate and form connections, while for societies, they function as mechanisms for adaptation, facilitating cultural evolution in response to changing socioecological conditions.

By integrating the concepts of social norms and cultural norms, this research will employ the term socio-cultural norms, to ensure clarity and avoid confusion. Because in practice, social and cultural norms are a bit vague, and the idea might slightly overlap. In addition, these norms represent collective beliefs and inherited traditions that shape identity and values within a community. Thus, employing these concepts might enable us to understand

the sense of dignity experienced by recipients of food aid through the BPNT program is connected to socio-cultural norms. For instance, it can influence people's beliefs, which in turn may affect their behavior and perceptions. These behaviors and perceptions can subsequently impact how individuals interact with and treat others within the community, especially BPNT recipients. As a result, it might reflect on how the aid recipients in the community experience dignity.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Qualitative Ethnographic Research

In this study, a qualitative research design was used, emphasizing ethnographic fieldwork to explore the experience and perception of recipients of the BPNT program. Ethnography can be defined as the study of people in their natural environments that allows the researcher to engage directly in the setting to collect data consisting of their social meanings and everyday activities (Brewer, 2003). Ethnography research enables the researcher to observe cultural phenomena from the viewpoint of the subject (Sharma & Sarkar, 2019). In this case, the subject is the beneficiaries of the BPNT program. LeCompte & Schensul (2010); and Goodson & Vassar (2011) argued that ethnographic research is worth using because of fundamental premises that (i) behaviors have meanings, (ii) actions make sense in context. This kind of information is valuable to understand social context in the field related to how people implement social and cultural norms through their behaviors and how they perceive particular issues. As mentioned by Morgan et. al (2017) ethnographic methods can enable insights not accessible from other data collection methods.

3.2 Sampling Methods

The Bantuan Pangan Non-Tunai (BPNT) program aims to help reduce the number of people experiencing poverty in Indonesia. According to Amrullah et al. (2019), the eastern province of Indonesia, including West Nusa Tenggara is less developed compared to the western part of Indonesia which causes much poverty, indicating a significant disparity in food security between peripheral regions and centrally developed areas. Additionally, rural areas tend to be more vulnerable in terms of food insecurity compared to urban areas (Amrullah et al., 2019). Therefore, this study was conducted in a rural village on Lombok Island, West Nusa Tenggara province, one of the places where BPNT was established.

To select research participants, the Snowball sampling method was used by asking initial informants to refer to other participants (Bernard, 2018). This method helped me to deal

with my familiarity with the field because it allowed me to find participants based on my research participants' networking. However, this approach might potentially lead me to get a group of participants from the same connections, thus I combined this with my networking as well. In this study, beneficiaries and local authorities were the research population. Local authorities might be the head of the village, *Rukun Tetangga/RT* (Neighborhood Association), *Rukun Warga/RW* (Community Association), and *Kepala Dusun* (Hamlet chief). Since they are involved in selecting the BPNT program recipients and actively interact with people in the community, they may provide valuable insights into what aspects contribute to influence the recipients' sense of dignity.

During the fieldwork, I got the opportunity to do the data collection with eight beneficiaries, the head of the village, and the operator of the BPNT program with more their general information as appeared on the table below:

Participant number	Role at BPNT	Gender	Kind of household	Native to village
1	Operator of BPNT	Male	Parents + children	Yes
2	Recipient	Female	Husband + wife	Yes
3	Recipient/ RT	Male	Parents + children	Yes
4	Recipient	Female	Husband + wife	Yes
5	Recipient	Female	Parents + children	No
6	Recipient	Female	Parents + children	No
7	Recipient	Female	Living alone	Yes
8	Head of village	Male	Parents + children	Yes
9	Recipient	Male	Grandparents + grand children	Yes
10	Recipient	Female	Parents + children	No

Table 1. List of participants

Additionally, the nature of my research focuses on more in-depth research. Hence, I used a small number of data to draw insights surrounding the topic of dignity within governmental food aid programs. To get more diverse data, I used snowball sampling methods in two different hamlet areas in the village, because that is what is feasible in a quite big village with thousands of aid recipients.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

The fieldwork of this research was conducted for around two months from October to November 2024. Interviews, participant observation, and relational mapping were used for data

collection during the fieldwork to understand the perception and experience of the BPNT program's recipients.

3.3.1 Semi-structured Interview

Semi-structured interviews are characterized by open-ended questions following an outlined framework and covering a set of topics (Bernard, 2018). This approach could guide me to maintain interview direction effectively while remaining open to discoveries and the stories of the interviewees. From this method, I aimed to explore the perspectives, stories, and experiences of recipients and local authorities with the BPNT program. I expected this method would help participants to share their positive and/or negative feelings about how they experience and understand their sense of dignity in relation to the food aid.

3.3.2 Participant Observation

Participant observation involves immersing yourself in a culture and then taking regular breaks to reflect on what you have observed and heard; thus, this method helps gain perspective to articulate experiences effectively (Bernard, 2018). According to Killmister (2016), dignity comes in different levels and needs varying degrees of respect and appreciation. Therefore, with this method, I aimed to observe how social connection, and socio-cultural norms shape how beneficiaries of the BPNT program treated other villagers and being treated by others within the community to see its impact on recipients' sense of dignity.

To deal with my familiarity in the field, this method were accompanied by field notes to help reflect on the research process as well as my position as not only a native but, most importantly, as a researcher. Employing this method, I aimed to collect non-verbal data such as behavior, social interactions, and how people exercise socio-cultural norms within the community that might influence people's perception and treatment towards the BPNT program's recipients. This approach could help me to observe and understand how receiving the BPNT program affects the beneficiaries' dignity and the extent of its impact. It might also reduce reactivity in which participants might alter their behavior in response to being observed.

3.3.3 Relational Mapping

To understand how and why the social dignity perceived and experienced by the BPNT beneficiaries is affected by their social connections, Relational Mapping was applied for data collection in this study. Using this method, I aimed to gain insights into social interactions and connections that facilitate food access to the BPNT beneficiaries. I investigated who was in the recipients' connection, the type of connection they maintain, and how those connections affected the recipients in terms of food access. During the fieldwork, I assisted the participants

to draw their map and review it with them afterward. This method helped me illustrate the pattern of recipients' social connection and how these provide support to recipients. I aimed to draw insights on the influence of support from social connection towards the experienced dignity of the BPNT program recipients.

3.4 Data Management

During the fieldwork, data were recorded in different formats based on the methods used for collection. For interviews, data was saved as audio recordings and written notes. Participant observation involved organizing data into photographs, which I used for personal reflection only to help me recall what was happening. Thus, I could give a better interpretation. It means that all the photographs were not included in the data analysis process or put into the research's final report. Along with it, research field notes were created whenever I visited the field to record all the observations and to reflect on the ongoing research process. Additionally, data related to relational mapping were stored through drawings. All collected data were stored on my laptop for offline access and backed up online using Google Drive and Microsoft Teams. The study was conducted for six months, with two months allocated to fieldwork.

3.5 Data Analysis

Since this research is qualitative research, to analyze the data, I would use a coding method to identify segments of meaning within the data (Saldaña, 2015). The data analysis would be carried out using an abduction coding method which was the mix between inductive and deductive coding (Leavy, 2017). Deductive coding would first be utilized to help create focus the coding on the issues that are known based on existing literature (Linneberg and Korsgaard, 2019). Then to fit the exploratory nature of this study, inductive coding would follow by developing codes from the data (Linneberg and Korsgaard, 2019). Software such as Atlas TI would be used to help with the coding.

During the data analysis process, some adjustments were made. Instead of the abduction method, I mainly used inductive coding methods due to the nature of the data collected are mainly exploration data. Therefore, it was easier to create codes from identifying the pattern of the data, to then be narrowed down according to the theme to help address the research questions. During the coding process, I first applied codes to mark information relevant to answer my research questions. Followed by grouping similar codes to find the pattern. Below are the codes I used for my data analysis:

Pattern/ Code Groups	Codes
Info about recipients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recipients' occupation • Recipients' assets • Family condition
BPNT distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Origin of BPNT program • Rules for selecting beneficiaries • Distribution information • Form of aid • Regulations related to BPNT • Eligibility criteria • Distribution location • Distribution mechanism • The process of nominating recipients • BPNT data management system • Distribution period
Experience with the BPNT program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom of choice • Social jealousy • How the aid is used • Villager perception towards recipients • Recipients' perception of the aid • Recipients's perception of the form of the aid • Perception of autonomy
Social connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food access • Backup support during hard times • Basis to decision-making for the aid consumption • Recipients' treatment to non-recipients
Social norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reciprocal actions • Social perception • Social condition • Community habits in the village • Social phenomenon • Impact of the aid

Table 2. Example of codes used in analysing interview and observation data

Not only interview data and field notes that were analysed, but data from mapping were also analysed with slightly different codes. For the mapping, I used slightly different codes as appeared on table below:

Pattern/ Code groups	Codes
People within network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family • Neighbours • Relatives • Strangers • Villagers
Sharing practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share food surplus • Share crop yields • Food debt

Table 3. Example of codes used to analyze relational mapping data

3.6 Ethical Consideration

To ensure ethical integrity in this research, all participants were provided with information about the study's purpose and their rights as participants through informed consent. This consent also included participants' right to withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences. Informed consents were obtained through verbal or written and signed consent forms. All data collected were anonymized, and any identifying information would be securely stored and accessible only to the research team to protect participants' privacy. Any published reports or presentations would be maintained by using aliases to ensure confidentiality.

Additionally, my positionality were also be taken into account in doing this research. I approach this study with a reflexive awareness of my own positionalities and biases. I realized my personal background and experiences as a native Indonesian might influence my perspective, prejudice, and judgment toward the research process and findings. For example, since I am familiar with the field, the way I interact with my research participants, what I am most curious about, and what I think is important for this study might be different, which could shape the research direction. As a scholar situated within academia, I also recognized the privilege and power dynamics inherent in the researcher-participant relationship and strive to engage in fair and ethical research practices.

4. Findings

In this chapter, I will present the findings I gained from the field related to how BPNT recipients experience their dignity within their social context. I will first explain the context of the field and program, moving to the recipients' experiences with the BPNT program, as well as social dynamics and socio-cultural norms related to how people perceive their dignity. Throughout this part, I try to answer my main research question about "*How do social dynamics shape the way BPNT program recipients experience a sense of dignity when receiving*

aid?” by presenting the data I collected from interviews, relational mapping practices, and my field notes from the participant observation.

4.1 The BPNT Program in Practice

4.1.1 The Origin and Eligibility: Understanding the BPNT Program

Bantuan Pangan Non-Tunai (BPNT), a non-cash food aid program initiated by the government is one of the programs that aims to help reduce poverty in Indonesia. As a government program, it receives a certain portion of funding from the government's annual financial plan. Since this program launched for the first time in 2017, the regulation has been transformed several times and reflected on how the aid is being distributed. Apparently, the BPNT program originated from an older program that also focuses on food aid. In one of previous research about BPNT, it was stated that BPNT in a village in Tidore is the substitute for a program named Beras untuk Keluarga Sejahtera (Rastra) (Djaenal et al., 2021). It is the same to the village where this research was conducted, as mentioned by the head of the village:

"Back then, the program was called Bantuan Sosial Tunai. It was initially from the program launched by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. It was around 2010 if I'm not mistaken" (interview 9 October)

It highlights that food aid programs to fight poverty have long been part of the government initiative and people's lives in Indonesia. Along the process, there has been refinement of that program, including the policy in regard to the aid distribution system. This change seemed to influence the recipients' perceptions and experiences of dignity by shaping social dynamics within the village. The former program initially used an equitable distribution model rather than a needs-based approach. It means that food was distributed equally to all villagers regardless of their economic condition, as explained by the participant:

"So the initial system was a distribution system where food aid was shared equally to the villagers regardless of their status as recipients or not. Back then, it was just divided equally" (interview 9 October)

The former food aid program focused on an equal distribution basis to ensure everyone in the village equally received aid regardless of their economic condition. Hence, there was no eligibility check to determine the recipients. The existing food aid program, the BPNT program, instead uses an equity basis to distribute the aid only to those who are eligible based on their economic condition. One participant explained the regulations that rule out the system of the BPNT program:

"So, whoever's name is on the data list from the national government, that is who should receive the BPNT program. Because that was the law from the beginning, and now, it is being implemented according to those rules, the person whose name is listed is the one entitled to receive it. They must receive it directly, it cannot be represented unless by a family member listed on the family card, then they can receive it" (interview 9 October).

According to Bandura (2001), the government or economic system may shape behavioral change. In this context, the change of regulations of the BPNT program shapes villagers' behavior since it influences the practices of socio-cultural norms in the village. The former food aid system allows the villagers to maintain the cultural norms of sharing and generous giving and receiving in the village, through the equal distribution of aid, regardless of economic condition. This reflects the practice of sharing. But at the same time, this has also caused villagers to be accustomed to aid being distributed equally. On the other hand, the existing regulations have altered the status quo regarding equal aid distribution within the village. The regulations from the BPNT program prioritize people in low economic conditions as recipients. From observations, I found that this change is affecting socio-cultural norms surrounding the practice of generous sharing in the village, which seemed to have led to social jealousy among those who do not receive the aid. This created social divisions within the village between recipients and non-recipients, which might affect the recipients' sense of dignity, especially related to their social connection that usually gives a sense of belonging and social security.

The preceding regulations of aid programs that allowed equal treatment also seemed to create perceptions among villagers. They believed that the aid received was not meant to help people in need. Instead, it is considered as a gift from the government. Therefore, everyone is entitled to that. But the national authority in fact sets eligibility criteria and a quota system that limits the number of recipients of the BPNT program. The quota is determined according to the territorial area and total populations. The head of the village explained below about this quota system:

"Yes, there is a quota. So, we cannot arbitrarily add or cut them off. What we can do is replace it. For instance, if someone who was previously receiving it has improved economically, maybe they became successful or started a business and are now financially stable, we can replace them with someone whose economic situation is still worse off. Then, there are certain requirements if it needs to be replaced with someone else" (interview 9 October).

Due to the limited quota to receive the BPNT program, the process of determining the eligibility for the BPNT program's recipients is quite complex. Because it means that there is a possibility for those who deserve the aid but could not receive it because of quota. This system forces the local authority to choose the poorest among the poor. It might be unfair for people who live on the edge of poverty because it prevents them from receiving the aid they need. The belief of unfairness from this group of people might create a stigma towards recipients, as they get labelled as undeserving by those who were excluded. This stigma can lead to social tensions within the community. It may affect the BPNT recipients' dignity, as they may feel judged and less supported by society.

This issue becomes more complicated due to unclear definitions and indicators of poverty to determine one's economic vulnerability. According to the operator of the BPNT, a person in charge of managing the program at the village level, there are several criteria to be eligible for the aid.

"The criteria, for example: do they have their own place to live? Also, if they do not have regular income because they do not work in the formal sector. Do not own productive land can be the indicator for the eligibility criteria as well" (Interview 7 October).

In practice, criteria to assess poverty can create ambiguity due to the influence of social conditions within the community. What a local authority and other villagers define as poverty is quite different. For local authorities, poverty is defined as a lack of stable income and unemployment status, consistent with the criteria set out in the BPNT regulation. In contrast, villagers tend to associate poverty with the absence of material possessions. Thus, if one owns a house and motorcycle for example, but does not have stable income, villagers will consider them as privileged. According to Adams (2007) and Palinscar (1998), reality is constructed by what most people in a particular group agree on as the result of social interactions and shared activity. Therefore, local authority must still take social perceptions and perspectives into account when selecting recipients, to avoid protests arising from any misalignment with the public's beliefs. It is potentially to be a subjective assessment that might make the aid system unfair and, over time, weaken trust in the aid program.

"Because when it comes to the criteria for poverty nowadays, sometimes it is quite confusing. For example, if you determine based on their house, they have a house, and it is very decent, even nice—ceramic floors, a permanent roof, basically a fully constructed house. But they have no source of income. Then you might wonder, how could they build such a house without any income, right? Well, it turns out their child

was working abroad and sent remittance to build a house. So, we cannot just rely on the house as the sole criterion either" (interview 9 October).

Due to the complexity of eligibility criteria, local authorities at the village level are required to approach this with a multidimensional perspective by considering more than one factor to ensure fairness. However, considering too many factors may result in some factors being overlooked, leading to biased judgments. During my fieldwork, the BPNT operator in the village assisted me in finding participants for my research. I noticed that some participants were related to the operator, as they used a specific kinship-based nickname when addressing him during the interviews. Thus, I assumed that the verification process at the local level might be influenced by personal relationships at certain points. Individuals with closer ties to the local authority might have a bigger chance of being selected. This could create a bias, as local authorities may prioritize people they know or have political or social connections with, potentially affecting the fairness of the process. This also may worsen the stigma of undeservingness towards recipients and potentially undermine their dignity. The head of the village explained the process of selecting potential recipients:

- *"The replacement process starts with discussions at the neighborhood level or Rukun Tetangga (RT). We always begin at the grassroots level. First, the RT level, then it's deliberated at the hamlet level. After that, it moves to the village level. At the village level, the hamlets provide a formal report stating, 'Here are the proposed replacements.' Then, at the village level, we also make decisions regarding the candidates proposed by each RT. Why? Because RT A and RT B might have differing opinions. So, while they have the right to propose, we will screen them later at the village level to determine who is more deserving of receiving it. For example, let's say the quota is four, but five candidates are proposed. Naturally, one person will not receive it. That's why we conduct a follow-up cross-check to identify which of these candidates truly deserves it" (interview 9 October).*
- *"We simply submit suggestions from the village, either through the operator or the hamlet head. There must be photos of the house, both the exterior and interior, taken with a GPS map camera to capture the exact location and coordinates of the house. There's also a set of questions to be answered" (Interview 7 October).*

Technically, the recipients at the end are selected by the national government using the survey data. Yet the data used as basis to select recipients are provided by the local authorities at the village level. Therefore, all these verification processes are meant to evaluate people's

economic condition to determine whether they deserve the aid or not. Thus, judgement based on village authorities' close relations might lead to unfairness. It could potentially undermine the recipients' dignity. Those who truly deserve the aid without the influence of social ties might get labelled as privileged and undeserving, too.

5.1.2 Distribution System

Aligned with the name, Bantuan Pangan Non-Tunai (BPNT) provides food assistance to its recipients. To receive the food, recipients are given electronic cards that can be used to buy food at e-warung; local retail outlets. *"We have a Kartu Keluarga Sejahtera (Prosperous Family Card) and I use it to claim the aid," (Interview 26 October)* stated one participant. Food items provided to be purchased are mainly stapled foods with high protein, which also can be stored for a longer time period of time. Rather than purchasing food with allowance on their card, it was more like food vouchers that can be redeemed for specific types of food. That is why recipients in the village usually receive similar food items even though they got them from different places. *"So, if people are given the freedom to buy basic necessities, it is completely up to them, right?"* I asked the operator of BPNT in the village. *"As long as the product is high in protein,"* he replied. It explains the basis of determining the food item choices to be given to recipients.

From interviews, I found that recipients received various types of food items. *"It depends on what the recipients want at the e-warung. Whatever is provided, such as high-protein items, is aimed at preventing stunting as it is now"* (Interview 8 October) one of the recipients explained. *"Rice, then there were beans and kitchen spices like shallots and garlic,"* added another recipient. *"So, there are rice, eggs, and then fish or meat as well. For instance, this month, they might get meat, and next time, maybe fish. It is like that, sometimes dried fish,"* explained the head of the village. It may seem that recipients have the freedom to choose what to receive because they receive various types of food items. However, there is a rule that recipients can only purchase high-protein products. It limits the options that can be chosen by recipients. It might undermine recipients' autonomy because they are not given the authority to fully manage their choices based on their needs.

During my interview with the BPNT recipients, I found that there has been a change regarding the assistance provided. For the last four years, the assistance has no longer been food vouchers. Instead, it has been changed to provide cash, which is expected to be used for purchasing food by the recipients. The BPNT operator told me that it is a new rule from the Ministry of Social Affairs. He stated, *"The recent policy from the Ministry of Social Affairs*

allowed it to be withdrawn in cash". With this new regulation, recipients could redeem their aid not limited only to e-warung, but also at the bank cash withdrawal machine (Kementerian Sosial Republik Indonesia, 2019). This is intended to improve the system of the BPNT program itself, by providing more flexibility to recipients to access the aid. It is in line with the statement of recipients I talked to in an interview, *"Now, the cash assistance is 400,000 rupiahs per person, but 10,000 is deducted as an administrative fee at the distribution point"* (Interview 17 October), a 90-year-old grandmother told me. Although the form of assistance is no longer food items, it is still the BPNT program, non-cash food aid program.

There is inconsistency and uncertainty regarding the time and frequency of the BPNT program distribution. Unlike food assistance, such as social grocery stores in Antwerp, it provides clear regulations for purchasing food, in which people are allowed to come only once a week to buy groceries (Andriessen et al., 2020). The store also has fixed opening hours that could be used as a reference point by users for when to go shopping (Andriessen et al., 2020). It means that users may come whenever they are available, if it is within operating hours. It gives a feeling of certainty and autonomy to the users. While the BPNT program operates differently. *"It has not been consistent from the start. Sometimes, it is on a monthly basis, and sometimes, it is every two months. If we receive it within 2 months, it would be 400,000 rupiahs, and it is 200,000 rupiahs for a month,"* a recipient who is also a local authority explained. It shows that the aid distribution process does not respect recipients. Because it leaves recipients with uncertainty that could exacerbate the feeling of helplessness. This inconsistency could lead to instability for BPNT recipients as well and potentially trigger stress and anxiety among recipients since they cannot plan their expenditures. This might undervalue the recipients' sense of dignity. The aid provided is also only for one-time spending that must be collected by recipients all at once. This might limit the recipients' autonomy because they have nothing left for future consumption.

Although the distribution system seemed to undermine recipients' autonomy, the process of sharing information about aid distribution strengthens social relations. When I asked my participants about how they receive distribution information, they showed similarities in their answers. Someone referred to *"People from around here"* (Interview 26 October) when asked about how she got information on the aid distribution. One mentioned, *"They have groups of recipients in each hamlet, and the group leaders will pass on the information"* (Interview 7 October). *"There are the PKH facilitators, then from other friends, maybe from the village as well, such as the village operators"* (Interview 8 October) added others. The closest level of the local authority, such as the head of the hamlet, also takes a role in this issue: *"The head of*

the hamlet was the one who informed us” (Interview 26 October). It could establish a connection among recipients of the BPNT program because they rely on each other in regard to distribution time. This connection provides social support that might enhance the recipients' sense of dignity. By having this connection, recipients feel involved in the community because there are people who are like them.

4.2 Recipients’ Experiences with BPNT

4.2.1 Perception of the BPNT Program

Rather than feeling ashamed of becoming BPNT recipients, the findings of my study reveal that beneficiaries specifically look forward to this program. From my fieldwork, my participants expressed positive feelings toward the BPNT program. One of them said, *“It feels great, I feel very supported. I am grateful that there is a way for me to receive assistance” (Interview 26 October),* showing this program as something that has been waited by people with low income. Similarly, a man in his 60s stated, *“Yes, of course, I am happy. After all, we are being given something, how could we not be happy?” (Interview 31 October).* Others added, *“Not to mention 400,000 rupiahs, even if I am given just 100,000, I would be happy because it is a gift. It is my luck, so I just accept it” (Interview 15 October).* At this point, the BPNT program enhances the sense of recipients’ dignity by presenting positive experiences. It provides care and support to the recipients that make them feel recognized within their social context.

Since there is a change of the aid from providing food vouchers to cash, I was curious to know the beneficiary's perception of this. Whether they have different experiences when receiving food items and cash, and do they have a preference on what should be provided as aid. Turned out, whether it was cash or food, recipients viewed this positively. There is no issue with what type of aid is better.

“It is the same. If given money, Alhamdulillah. If given rice and eggs, also Alhamdulillah. There is no difference. Because in the end, if given money, it will be used to buy rice and other necessities” (Interview 31 October).

It highlights that the recipients do not pay much attention to what type of aid is being distributed to them because, for them, the aid is still helpful and can be used for the same purpose, to fulfill their daily necessities. According to participants, receiving something is better than nothing at all. Thus, recipients never complained about whatever is given, as mentioned by one participant:

"I do not mind what kind of assistance is given. I am just grateful because it is better than getting nothing at all" (Interview 15 October).

I suppose the recipients care more about the existence of this aid rather than how it is being provided. This might be caused by severe poverty conditions within the community. From what I observed, most recipients in the village are struggling to make a living due to a lack of income resources. Most of them live as small-scale farmers who are unable to earn a stable income every month. Their agricultural products are mostly for self-consumption. Even if they could sell some of their yield, it could not provide enough for their needs, not to mention they must cover production costs as well. In addition, there are limited job opportunities in that region, followed by the low educational level of the recipients, restricting them from getting decent work to make a living. Consequently, they pay less attention to what is given as long as they receive aid and are able to continue their life. This can be understood as they desperately need the aid due to their economic condition and feel a sense of competition to access the BPNT program due to the quota system. In one of my interviews, I had someone state her preference for how the aid should look. But eventually, she mentioned that she is still grateful for whatever.

"For me, it is better to be given rice and eggs so I have ingredients to cook. Sometimes, money is not enough to buy rice. But, well, that is just how it is, and I am grateful for whatever is given" (Interview 2 November).

In this case, gratitude and positive feelings of recipients towards the BPNT program could be associated with a mix of feelings of resignation and acceptance. Recipients might feel hopeless about their condition, thus lowering their standards and creating a habit of willingness to accept anything. It indicates poverty challenges the recipients' dignity because they involuntarily lower their living standards to survive. They lack access to food due to poverty and gain that access again through the BPNT program. Thus, no wonder they do not pay much attention to the type of aid given. It was emphasized by some participants:

- *"Well, how can I put it? We just feel grateful because programs like this can help meet our daily needs, like buying rice, especially for people like us who do not have land to farm." (Interview 8 October).*
- *"Well, it is up to whatever is given. The important thing is that I receive something. Because I do not have a stable source of income" (Interview 17 October).*

This implies a hierarchy of needs where recipients prioritize their basic needs before their own tastes and enjoyment. Align with the hierarchy of needs from Maslow (1954), people tend to fulfill their basic necessities before their enjoyment. It may be because of some reasons, such

as lack of resources and socio-cultural norms. Nevertheless, some of my participants mentioned their hope to keep receiving this aid as a means to help improve their economic condition. A woman in her 50s expressed her hope and stated, *"Yes, I do hope the amount of assistance could be more. If possible, I hope to keep receiving assistance. I pray all the time that I can continue to get it"* (Interview 26 October). Similarly, one participant shared her hope, *"If possible, it would be better to have more. Like I said, 400,000 rupiahs only lasts for a week"* (Interview 26 October). One of the local authorities also said, *"I also really hope the government can provide assistance to those who truly deserve it but have not received it yet"* (Interview 8 October) showing his hope for this program to reach more people in the village.

At this point, the benefits of the BPNT program might bring up a feeling of gratitude that reflects dignity. By showing their gratitude, the recipients indicate their acknowledgment of help from others. Expressing their thanks towards the program demonstrates that recipients recognize they are being cared for and supported. Feeling supported might make recipients feel more valued; thus, it enhances their self-worth which is part of their dignity. The BPNT program makes the recipients feel involved in the community because of the support they receive.

4.2.2 Perception of Autonomy

Based on literature, autonomy is one of the attributes of dignity, highlighting human's capacity to being autonomous individuals (Nordenfelt, 2004). Autonomy can be defined as the ability to manage one's necessities without intervention from other parties (Kant, 2020). When looking at other food aid programs (Andriessen et al., 2020; Gundersen, 2020), autonomy is usually associated with the ability of recipients to freely choose food items to purchase, including how they get those foods. In the case of the BPNT recipients, the way people experienced and perceived autonomy is slightly different. I asked my participant to describe their experiences when the aid was still distributed as food vouchers:

Me: What kind of food items do you used to receive?

Interviewee: Like everyone else, basically, rice, eggs, frying oil

Me: Can you choose the type of items you want to receive?

Interviewee: Yes, you can, but usually it has already been decided by the distributor
(Interview 26 October)

I found similar answers from other interviews in which participants mentioned that they could still choose what they wanted to get in exchange for their food assistance allowance, but the distributor had already prepared it. It is likely because at that time, the aid was more like food

vouchers to get redeemed with food packages instead of aid allowance to purchase food. Hence, recipients have more limited choices. As a result, this practice might undermine the BPNT recipients' dignity by limiting recipients' autonomy. However, what people say about this issue is the opposite. My research participants many times mentioned that this issue does not really affect their sense of autonomy. They do not really mind the type of food items they receive and willingly accept whatever is given to them. As discussed on previous chapter that this aid program helps recipients regain access to food they were lacking. Availability of food is the main issue they prioritize rather than the type of food aid given. From my observation, villagers tend to assume that food aid items should consist of specific staples like rice, eggs, sugar, and cooking oil as those are basic food items needed by most of Indonesian households. People's perceptions create a norm on how food aid should look like. Thus, recipients of BPNT program never expect something more.

- *"No. It is already prepared from there, so what is there to question?" (Interview 31 October)*
- *"I have never complained about what is better. Whatever is given, it is fine with me" (Interview 15 October).*

This phenomenon could be understood from a charitable gift morality, in which receiving aid is expected to be accepted with gratitude because of the status of recipients as receivers (Van Der Horst et al., 2014; Schwartz, 1967). That is why participants always associate their experience receiving BPNT aid with the willingness to receive anything given to them. There are giver and receiver relations established in the case of BPNT program as well, as depicted in the vignette below:

A Gift: Between Giver and Receiver

It was raining a lot last night, it makes water puddles fill the holes in the road. Today is also cloudy. I park my motorbike in front of a small shop with a blue rolling door. While walking in with Dewi, I see one or two people have finished shopping. *"Do you want to collect the aid?"* asks someone from the cashier's desk. *"Yes, I heard that the aid is distributed already"* answers Dewi, a mother of three children. *"Yes, give me your card so that I can check it for you"* replies the shop's clerk. Dewi hands her Kartu Keluarga Sejahtera and, after a few minutes, money is given to her.

This reveals the reason why recipients never complained. Because they felt like they did not have the right to do so since they considered their status as receivers, not consumers. It is in

line with the idea of Schwartz (1967) who believed that in charitable gift morality, receivers must accept whatever is provided by the givers. Furthermore, complaints in this context go against prevailing socio-cultural norms that strongly emphasize the importance of showing gratitude. It is considered inappropriate since it implies greed according to the community's beliefs. It is the same when the aid is changed from receiving food to cash. The recipients have no issue with this either. They feel no difference in either type of assistance regarding their autonomy to manage the aid, as highlighted below:

"It is the same whether it is rice or money. There is no difference. The e-warung owner prepares and gives us items according to what has been decided by the national authority. Whether it is eggs, beans, or anything else, it is all already determined. We just accept it" (Interview 31 October).

This suggests that recipients cannot choose what they want to buy with the money, because the aid they receive is already pre-determined and fixed. That is the reason why recipients do not criticize the type of aid they receive since they might feel it is useless to express their opinion and try to change something that has already been decided. One participant mentioned:

"Still, if I had a choice, I would prefer rice and eggs so I can cook and have something to eat before heading out to the farm" (Interview 2 November).

This reveals a perceived limitation in how recipients understand their autonomy within the BPNT program. Because of social perceptions on how food aid should look like, it did not give space for recipients to express their preferences. The fear of not receiving aid anymore from protesting could also influence how recipients express their wishes.

Although my research participants did not tell differences of their experienced autonomy regarding the aid given, I observed that recipients seem to have more autonomy when they receive cash, despite frequently stating that any type of aid works for them. According to both interviews and observation, I found that the recipients explained various ways of spending the cash. They could purchase products that they have never received before when they received food items, such as gas for cooking. They also explained that the cash could be allocated to pay for urgent matters, other than food needs. One participant said *"Sometimes I use the assistance to buy my children's school essentials"*. Others added that *"The assistance is used to pay off my debts here and there"*. It proved that receiving cash aid allows the recipients to practice their autonomy by enabling them to allocate the aid for whatever is necessary.

On the other hand, receiving food items seemed to undermine the recipients' autonomy because most of the time, they receive products that they do not really need. Continuously

receiving food that does not meet their actual needs may lead recipients to lose their sense of freedom (Riches and Silvasti, 2014). Losing part of autonomy might undermine recipients' dignity, as it shows the loss of their ability to be autonomous individuals. One of my participants mentioned *"It was too much if I consumed it alone, so I shared it with others. I even heard some people sold their food aid"* (Interview 17th October). This phenomenon also showed the ability of recipients to practice their autonomy, when it comes to how they consume or manage their aid. Either by sharing their aid with others or selling the aid. Even though the recipients most of the time receive something that they do not really need, to some extent they still get the freedom to manage their consumption of their aid.

4.3 Social Dynamics and Dignity within the BPNT Program

4.3.1 Recipients' Social Treatment in the Community

To investigate how the BPNT recipients experience their dignity in the village, it is interesting to look at the aspect of social treatment. It might help explain how people in the community treat the BPNT recipients and how this aspect might affect the dignity of recipients. The following vignette illustrates how recipients are treated in the village by other villagers.

Normal Chat, Unchanged Relations

Two benches made of bamboo faced each other. Placed in the yard in front of a house with a small kiosk selling products for daily necessities. It was a perfect spot for casual chat, especially during the day. The area was calm and breezy, shaded by the branches of small trees. A pathway to the right allowed people to pass by. *"How much do you receive this month from the aid?"* I heard a woman across me began conversation with Aminah. *"Just like usual, only Rp 400 thousand, to help pay my debt"* Aminah responded. *"Alhamdulillah. Then how is your son in Dubai?"*, that middle-aged woman continued. *"Alhamdulillah he is in a healthy state, he is now starting to build a house from the remittance he sends every month"* Aminah replied. I am on the other side, *"Would you like some sweet potatoes? I cooked a lot this morning"* the owner of the house offered me. *"Yes, sure, thank you"* I responded. That day was filled with chatting and warm sweet potatoes.

From this short visit, I noticed that most of the villagers already know each other, and some even have really close relations. This allows visiting neighbors' houses, like what Aminah did is common in the village. Offering food or drinks to those visiting is also common; it is a kind of unwritten rule among the villagers. But I realized that this could happen only among those

who are close to each other. In the case of Aminah, this neighbor's house is only ten meters away from her house. I also remember she mentioned this neighbor a lot during the interview. I thought that Aminah would receive inappropriate treatment, knowing that everyone in the village knows that she is the BPNT recipient, as she mentioned during the interview. But during this visit, I did not notice Aminah received inappropriate treatment, everything is normal. I suppose it is because those people already know Aminah and have close relations with her. Hence, they did not treat her inappropriately.

In my interviews, participants also mentioned that there is nothing special about the treatment they receive from other villagers, even when other villagers know that they are recipients of the BPNT program. They would say, *"No one says anything. It is just like usual"* (Interview 31 October), *"There is no one who complains"* (Interview 17 October), *"There is none. Everything is normal. They say it is my luck"* (Interview 26 October).

During my fieldwork, I also realized that, apparently, some of my participants receive more than one type of aid program. It seems that in the village, there are many people who receive aid from various aid programs. The BPNT operator also told me that a family who lives in one house but has two registered family cards might receive more than one aid program if eligible. One person said, *"Most people here receive aid, and everyone gets it"* (Interview 26 October). It implies that most of the villagers receive aid programs. Others added, *"Because most people here also receive assistance"* (Interview 15 October) when referring to the reason why other villagers treated her the same way even after receiving aid. It explains why most of my participants would say everything is normal when referring to how people treat them as aid recipients. Someone said, *"No, nothing out of the ordinary. It is because we all receive assistance anyway"* (Interview 26 October). This suggests that due to the commonality of aid programs in the village, there are a majority of recipients rather than the majority of non-recipients. Receiving aid then becomes a normal state in the village. It is in line with Killmister (2016) who argued that dignity is linked to upholding particular standards. In this context, receiving aid has become a standard or norm that people uphold, therefore, there is no shame experienced by recipients.

Based on the data collected, I also discovered that social relationships seem to influence how recipients are treated in the village, particularly in terms of how their eligibility is perceived by others. This might affect recipients' experienced dignity in a way that those with stronger social connections are treated with more respect and acceptance, while those without such ties may face stigmatization or skepticism regarding their eligibility. From the recipients' perspective, some non-recipients were convinced about their eligibility. They believed that the

recipients deserved the aid because they lived in poverty or needed support. As explained by some of the participants:

- *"I think they know that we do not have any land for farming, so no one ever says anything"* (Interview 2 November).
- *"There is nothing. In fact, they say I am lucky to receive assistance because they see that I am old and can only sit at home"* (Interview 17 October).

I found from my observation that this is true. However, this is only applicable to those they have a close relationship with or those they consider not to have material possessions such as productive land. If that is not the case, then the non-recipients would present jealousy towards recipients, though they rarely show it explicitly. I witnessed this through interactions with non-recipients in the village during my fieldwork. When talking about the BPNT program, I heard non-recipients frequently say, *"Why do they always get it? It should be someone else's turn. If I cannot have it, at least give it to my kids"* when describing their feelings towards recipients of BPNT. They believe that the aid should be distributed in turns to ensure equality. It indicates that non-recipients tend to overlook or disregard the official eligibility criteria of the BPNT program as long as they or people in their social network are included as recipients.

In the previous chapter, I noted that social jealousy arises from the impact of the former food aid program system, where everyone received aid regardless of their economic condition. I believe this leads to the current condition of social jealousy in the community. It worsens due to the ambiguous definition of poverty. Because how villagers define poverty is different than the prevailing law. The villagers define poverty as merely a lack of tangible assets such as a big house, motorcycles, farming land, etc. The regulation prioritizes indicators such as income level and employment status as the main eligibility criteria. It happened because there is a complicated economic condition that people have in the village. If we look back to Aminah's story where she receives remittances from her son apart from becoming an aid receiver, it complicates the definition of poverty and might question her eligibility status. In most cases, similar to Aminah, remittances do not always mean helping people get rid of poverty. The remittances are usually spent for the benefit of the one who sends the remittances; in Aminah's case, it was for the benefit of her son. Therefore, only a small amount of the remittances are given to their parent to help fund daily necessities. The non-recipients would protest because they would consider the recipients to be not eligible to receive the aid. The BPNT operator once said, *"Even though they say they are financially stable, why do they still receive assistance?"* to refer to the protest usually conveyed by the villagers. This might undermine

the dignity of current recipients because it creates a stigma of undeservingness. Recipients may be viewed as people who are not truly in need or who are taking advantage of the system, despite meeting the official criteria. This stigma can lead to feelings of shame, social exclusion, or humiliation. Additionally, the constant questioning of their eligibility can diminish their sense of self-worth and contribute to social divisions within the village.

Because aid programs have become common, it might make non-recipients feel left out or unfair because they do not equally receive the governmental food aid program. Despite some recipients often sharing their aid with those who do not receive it, it certainly feels different to be the one receiving the aid as a recipient than receiving the aid as gifts from the current recipients. It is because the amount of aid received varies, and according to my interviews, recipients mentioned that they do not share their aid every time, but only occasionally. I asked the BPNT operator about the reasons why non-recipients also wanted to receive the aid:

***Me:** Oh, so they feel that because we are in the same government, they should get the same government assistance?*

***BPNT Operator:** Yes, but we do not know their economic status, whether they are eligible or not (Interview 8 October)*

It indicates that non-recipients wanted to be treated equally as citizens of Indonesia. This perceived unfairness may lead to social jealousy among non-recipients. My participants mentioned that it is common in society to express their jealousy. Most of the time, social jealousy is shown through gossip. *"It actually becomes a topic of conversation between those who receive assistance and those who do not. Nothing more because they feel jealous if they do not receive assistance,"* explained the BPNT Operator. This explains why recipients said that they have no negative experiences regarding how people treat them. They probably do not know whether people are gossiping about them or not since it is likely to happen behind them, as highlighted by participants:

- *"As for what I have seen with my own eyes, I have never heard anyone talking about it, but I do not know what is said behind my back" (Interview 15 October).*
- *"I do not know because I rarely socialize with others" (Interview 2 November).*

Since social jealousy is mostly expressed through gossip, this may not directly undermine recipients' dignity, as they are unaware of negative opinions from other villagers. One of my participants also considered confrontations from non-recipients merely as humor between them. It has become a habit, and it is just the way villagers communicate with each other; no need to take it personally. *"Yes, that is how it is. They are joking, but it comes across as if they*

are angry. But that is just how they communicate” (Interview 8 October). This may enhance recipients’ dignity because they are used to that treatment; they have adjusted to it. Hence, that treatment did not feel like humiliation that undermined their self-worth; and affecting their dignity. From what I found on the field, it seems that recipients do not really mind what others think about them receiving aid. They believe it is not their business to worry about other people’s perspectives. I witnessed it as well from my observation that recipients tend to mind their own business and interact with other villagers moderately, only when necessary. They typically engage with individuals who are close to them, as these are the people who provide a lot of support to the recipients. On the other hand, those who speak negatively about the recipients are often people who have limited interaction with them.

4.3.2 Social Relations in the Practices of Reciprocal Activities

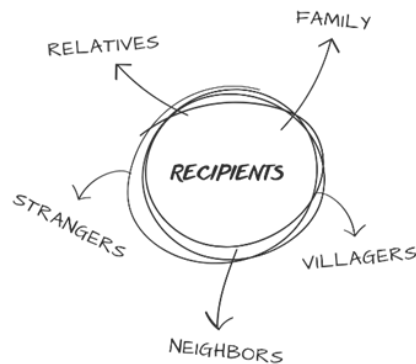
The experienced dignity of the BPNT recipients is influenced by their social relations with other people in the village. Food aid programs such as BPNT are closely related to the practice of giving and receiving. Therefore, in this study, I tried to discover which people are part of the recipients’ social connection as well as what kind of relationships they established in relation to sharing practices. By looking at this, I expected to further explore how social relations could impact the experienced dignity of the BPNT. Throughout the fieldwork, I got interesting findings when it came to social relations related to sharing practices in the village. Sharing practice apparently has become a norm in the village. A vignette below illustrates how sharing practice is ingrained within the community:

No Empty Plate

In the afternoon, many children were playing hide and seek in the small field in the village. Some villagers had just returned from rice fields, some were gathered to have a small talk. A voice broke my daydream “*Wait a minute here, I want to return Mrs. Suri's bowl first*” said a woman to me with hands brought a bowl filled with vegetables dish. I just nodded to respond.

This moment demonstrates a custom in the village where you are not allowed to return one’s stuff empty. If someone gives you a plate full of food, you have to return the plate filled with something. Although no one ever asked to do so, that is the rule. It is considered impolite to return it empty. This kind of practice is considered to be part of the social relations and solidarity of human beings. In the case of the BPNT program, recipients also demonstrate sharing practices with various categories of people. According to the data I collected from the mapping exercise with my participants, I made a map to illustrate the pattern of the BPNT

recipients' social network. The following social network map illustrates the categories of individuals the recipients share food with and ask for help with.



Picture 1. People within BPNT recipients' social network

The map shows that recipients' social relations in regard to sharing practices mostly consist of the category of people who are closely related to them, such as family and other relatives. Regarding sharing practices, I found that my participants do not consume their food aid alone; instead, they share it with people within their social network, which falls into the categories shown in the picture above. One participant said:

"I shared the aid with neighbors who did not receive any. I gave things like rice and shallots, so they could also experience the aid program" (Interview 26 October)

As quoted above, my participants shared the assistance they received with other villagers who did not receive the aid. This may enhance recipients' dignity since this practice of sharing food aid allows them to reciprocate with others in the village. It influences their status, from only people in need to people who are generous enough to offer something to others. I also found an interesting finding, where there is a moral belief that family and relatives should be prioritized before outsiders. It is supported by participants' answers:

"Yes, family. We cannot share with others before with our family" (Interview 31 October)

It suggests that recipients typically share their assistance with other villagers who do not receive it, but they prioritize helping their family members first. In addition, participants mentioned that they usually share their aid with neighbors as well. Some of them stated:

- *"There are neighbors, and then there is family, too, right next door" (Interview 26 October)*
- *"Yes, those who are closely related, such as family members and neighbors" (Interview 15 October)*

These quotes indicate that apart from having close relations with their family relatives in the village, recipients also establish social relations with their neighbors. But what I found interesting is that recipients' neighbors are also their family relatives, as explained by one participant:

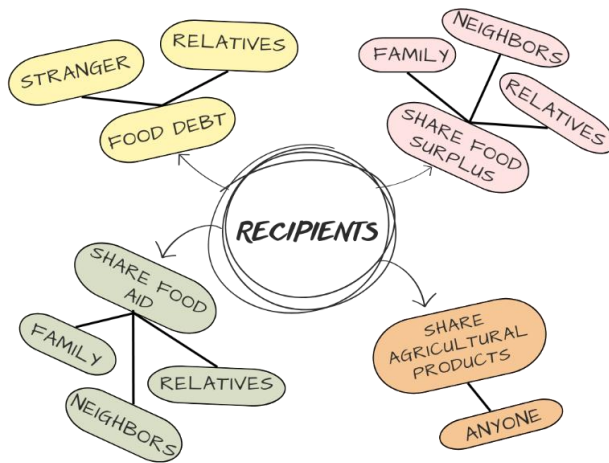
"Sometimes we share the aid with neighbors around the house as well. But they are still family, not strangers" (Interview 31 October)

I witnessed this from my observation that almost everyone in the village shares some degree of kinship. I discovered this through how people address each other, as villagers use specific terms for their relatives. Due to the land inheritance process, a lot of villagers ended up living in the same area with their family relatives. During relational mapping practices, some of my participants identified the houses next to them as their relatives' homes, proving that nearly all of my participants live in a neighborhood consisting of their family members. These people might make recipients of the BPNT program feel more dignified since they are surrounded by people who can provide support and care towards them. It also gives more nuanced insights to our discussion in the previous chapter. In which people with close ties tend to be treated more kindly by non-recipients. Because there is moral belief that expects people to prioritize those with close ties, such as family and relatives. It could provide more support for them. Thus, this might also enhance recipients' dignity because their social relations are full of people who have close ties to them.

Within their social network, recipients also practice reciprocal actions by offering and sharing help with each other. Apart from sharing their aid with other villagers, the BPNT recipients admit that they also receive help from others. It is not a taboo among villagers to ask for help when necessary.

"Yes, it is possible. If we need something, we ask for help from relatives" (Interview 26 October).

Some showed that this is also the way to establish or even strengthen one's social relations. From the relational mapping exercise with my research participants, I was able to draw a map illustrating reciprocity practiced by recipients with people in their networking that also strengthen their social bonding. The map is seen below:



Picture 2. BPNT recipients' sharing practices

From the map, sharing food practices was done by recipients with various categories of people. The practice is also varied from sharing food surplus to taking into food debt. Based on observation, most of the time, recipients practice sharing food aid and food surplus with people they have close ties with. These are what they practice frequently that presents reciprocal actions. This kind of sharing practice strengthens social bonds between recipients and those they share food with since it presents emotional ties as well. It shows care and mutual support. Unlike the practice of food debt, it does not present emotional ties. Apart from happening occasionally, it is mostly business-based, not relations-based.

The culture of sharing seems to be ingrained among the villagers; hence, the way other villagers perceive the recipient's status as food aid receivers could be different too. Unlike in European countries, where receiving aid is seen as lazy (Van Der Horst et al., 2014; (Garthwaite, 2016b)), in this context, helping others by sharing help is considered as doing a good deed towards others. People in the village believe in karma, in which you will receive what you give. Thus, sharing culture is based on reciprocal exchange, fostering mutual support and reducing social hierarchy. Because of this custom, other villagers might not undermine the status of the BPNT recipients.

- *"That is just how it is, we rely on each other. If we need money, we lend from each other." (Interview 26 October)*
- *"Well, it is like that, we help each other. If someone needs money, we lend it to each other. Basically, if we feel awkward asking neighbors for help, they also feel the same way if they need help from us. If we just stay quiet and do not ask for assistance, no one will care" (Interview 26 October).*

This illustrates that villagers rely on each other in daily practices to share and offer help. The recipients and other villagers seem to be aware they contribute to the existing norm in the village by asking or offering help. This proves that asking for help is normal within the village. It makes the recipients do not feel alienated for receiving food aid to help them survive. Furthermore, reciprocal exchange is a value highly upheld in the village. People believe that you are responsible for paying back what you have received. Inability to reciprocate might be the reason that undervalues recipients' dignity. However, referring to what I mentioned earlier where recipients also shared their aid with others, allowing them to feel involved in their community. Because it enables them to reciprocate with others. This may positively affect recipients' experienced dignity.

The reciprocity practice is also influenced by values upheld in society that emphasize the importance of being considerate of others' conditions and feelings. My participants expressed this situation as a sign of willingness. They stated that it has nothing to do with other villagers forcing them to share what they have received, but it is more like they feel bad if they do not do that, especially if other people are nice to them. As explained by some participants:

- *"It is like our feeling when we are given something, we are always so happy. So that how we are given, that is also how we give it back" (Interview 26 October)*
- *"The thing is, they also often share with me. Give me money and other stuff" (Interview 17 October).*

This reciprocal action is not only presented in how recipients share their aid with other people within their social network but also on a daily basis. People in the village are also used to the practice of sharing excess food with others.

"Alhamdulillah, we also share often. If there is an extra blessing, we share" (Interview 8 October).

There is a specific characteristic when talking about which neighbors established close relations with the recipients of BPNT. It seemed that they were most likely to socialize with their neighbors who lived really close to their house. Some also mentioned that they tend to interact with people with similar economic conditions because they feel more comfortable than interacting with wealthier people.

- *"It is usually me accompanying the youngest one to play around here, like with the neighbors behind the house" (Interview 2 November)*
- *"If I socialize, it is just with those around here. I feel awkward visiting neighbors who are wealthier" (Interview 26 October).*

One of my participants said that the reason they feel less comfortable communicating with wealthier people is because they feel insecure about their economic condition. They might also feel concerned about their inability to reciprocate. During observation, I discovered how reciprocity has become a burden at certain points because people are required to pay back what they have received. Also, wealthy people tend to spend less time interacting with other villagers, which is why they do not have more time to know each other.

"But they tend to leave the house only to buy food supplies and then go straight back home once they're done, they don't sit and chat with other residents" (Interview 26 October).

I asked my participants whether there was a change in their social relations after becoming the BPNT program receivers. Most of them said that it has always been the same as before receiving the aid. *"It is just the same as before receiving the assistance, nothing has changed," (Interview 31 October)* explained one recipient. However, I noticed that some of them also indirectly create new social relations, especially with the aid distributor. A 50-year-old woman stated, *"Not to mention that the food items were also shared to the aid distribution agent at the place where I used to pick it up" (Interview 15 October)*. It seemed that they established new social relations due to the practice of food sharing, which has been done frequently. In my perspective, recipients do not pay much attention to new social relations they might establish after receiving the BPNT program. They probably feel this way because, from my observation, I witnessed how people mostly already know each other in the village. It is, instead, considered to be weird not to know other villagers. Thus, I think this is why recipients do not feel like they establish new social relations. Not to mention changing existing social relations, they probably are not aware of this as well.

4.3.3 Food Debt & Collectivist Culture in the Village

Indonesia is known for its collectivist culture, which I perceived as contributing to the establishment of moral beliefs, such as the idea that every human being is responsible for helping each other. Hence, as I discussed earlier, sharing practice is common in the village, which reflects collectivism. I believe collectivism may influence how the BPNT recipients experience their dignity. Through my fieldwork, I found another interesting finding that I believe reflects the collectivist culture within the community, that is food debt, a practice where people can obtain food and defer payment until later. Food debt helps my participants afford food when they do not have money, providing alternative food access for villagers. Discussing food debt is relevant in this case, especially due to the social context of this research. By

looking at this practice, I aim to understand how food debt influences recipients' social relations and social treatment and how these then affect dignity. Below is the vignette depicting the practice of food debt:

Food Debt: A Small Push

It was 7.30 in the morning in a quite rural village, but the sun was already high in the sky. Only the sound of the cows and the broomstick touching the ground could be heard. Women in every house were busy cleaning their yards while their husbands went to the field to do some jobs. "Tiiit...tiiiit...tiiiit" the sound of the motorcycle horn seemed to call people to pause their work for a moment. That was the sound from the mobile grocery vendor's motorbike locally known as 'tukang sayur keliling'. These vendors move from one place to another with their carts full of vegetables and other food items. Siti, a housewife in her 40s, began selecting a few items while engaging in small talk with other villagers and the vendor. When she finished, she handed over the money with a slight smile while saying, "*This is to pay off the last debt; this one, I will pay it later*". The vendor nodded, slipping the money into his waist bag, and continued chatting with the buyers.

As I observed this interaction, I realized there was no written agreement in place. This exchange is based on mutual trust between Siti and the vendor. This is only possible due to the collectivist values upheld in the village. Despite the nature of food debt as based on business, this flexible rule reflects the influence of collectivism in the village, in which people create a sense of togetherness to help each other. My participants also mentioned that food debt has become one of the options for accessing daily food necessities. "*Yes, when we are in a difficult situation, we end up taking debt. For example, if we really crave something to eat and have no money to afford it, we will take food debt*" (Interview 17 October) explained one participant when referring to the condition that forced her to food debt. "*Yes, debt is inevitable; there is no way to avoid it*" (Interview 26 October) added others. Because there is no written agreement between the seller and buyer, I assumed that it might be difficult to make sure both parties are committed to settling the food debt. However, from my fieldwork, I found that sellers and buyers mostly know each other as explained by one participant:

Me: *Do you already know the people who are selling the food?*

Interviewee: *Yes, we already know each other. Other villagers are the same, they take food debt, too (Interview 26 October)*

It reveals that social relations influence a quite high level of trust among people who are involved in food debt in the village, even without a specific written agreement. Also, from my

observation, I noticed that people tend to buy food from the same place over again. It allows sellers and buyers to meet each other many times and establish social connections. Hence, sellers could be sure to let people go into debt because they already have close ties.

Additionally, people who buy food from the same sellers also know each other. This helps the sellers to find those in debt more easily if issues come up in the future. Due to this reason, my participants also mentioned that they were never asked to pay, they are allowed to pay when they have money. This also highlights the influence of social relations in the village. This phenomenon might enhance the dignity of villagers, including the BPNT recipients, by providing support to access food and preventing them from falling into despair when they are in difficult situations and are not able to afford food. According to the data collected, paying off previous debt before taking on new ones seemed to be one of the rules here as well. As explained by participants:

- *"It is already normal, later when we have money, then we will pay the debt" (Interview 2 November)*
- *"We have never demanded payment by the food vendors, but we have our own common sense to pay our debt first, especially if we want to take into debt in the future. So we usually pay our previous debt and take into a new debt when we do not really have money" (Interview 26 October)*

From my conversation with villagers, I discovered that you tend to be hesitant to take a debt if you have not paid off the last debt. People would label you as a debtor if you never paid your debt in the village. This is a kind of social punishment that might ruin your image. Apart from food debt, collectivist culture is also still reflected in other practices, such as helping each other without expecting something in return. At the same time, a belief in appreciating others' help is deeply rooted in the village.

"Yes, we help each other. Whatever needs to be done, we do it together. We never asked for anything in return, but they would just give us something. Every time we help, there is always something given in return. It is just how things are. We, too, when we were being helped, we usually give sugar or noodles as an appreciation, if we have any" (Interview 26 October).

This shows the giver and receiver feel responsible for giving and helping each other. When you are in need, people would do their best to help, despite their ability at that moment. Thus, it creates reciprocity within the community. A vignette below describes how collectivism is being practiced in the village:

The Power of Collectivism

The Feeling of cold grief covered the hot sunny day. A 7-year-old boy passed away. It was not only grief for the family but also for the entire village. People cried, witnessing the mother of the boy cry. To accompany the pure soul to paradise, the village would hold a 9-day 'Tahlilan'; a religious tradition where people will gather to remember and pray for the late young boy. The family left behind then needed to provide food and drinks for those who come to Tahlilan. "*Eh let's help for the Tahlilan preparation*" I heard a familiar middle-aged woman passed by my house brought a machete knife with her. While inviting others to come, she explained what was happening, and small talk took place. Others were getting ready to join.

This kind of event is common within the village, and it is based on moral beliefs that every human being is responsible for helping others. That is why when someone needs help, others willingly to help. It is also influenced by people's belief in the concept of karma, where good deeds are believed to lead to positive outcomes, emphasizing that you get what you give. If you are willing to help others, people believe that they will return the favor and help you when you are in need. Therefore, on this kind of occasion, other villagers usually gather to help with anything necessary. At the end of the event, people who come to help are typically given something in return, such as sugar, rice, or other food items as a sign of gratitude for their help. This is a kind of unwritten norm in the village, where no one asks for help, yet others are willing to help; no one asks something in return, yet others feel responsible to appreciate it.

One of my participants also mentioned how this practice is reflected in activities related to the BPNT Program. "*If I ask for help to collect the BPNT aid from someone, I need to give them a fee,*" (Interview 15 October) stated a woman in her 50s. She also explained that no one asked her to do that. It is purely because she feels responsible for appreciating help from others. This might enhance recipients' dignity because reciprocal exchanges are presented, allowing recipients to act not only as aid receivers but also as givers. From my observation, I found that this also might help to strengthen social bonding among the villagers. Because when you are known to be generous, other people will act the same to you. It seems that the existence of the BPNT Program has strengthened reciprocity through the practice of sharing aid among the villagers. For recipients, the aid program not only helps them to access food but also allows them to pay back what other people give to them. It increases their social status in the village, thus, the way people treat them could be different. Especially in the village, people strongly believe in karma and good deeds practice. That is why people in the village maintain reciprocal exchanges. This has turned reciprocity into collectivism.

5. Discussion

This research findings indicate that the way the recipients of governmental food aid programs, namely BPNT experience their dignity is shaped by the social dynamics in the village where this research was conducted. In the following paragraphs, I will mainly discuss social relations and how collectivist values such as sharing practices and reciprocal exchanges shape experiences of dignity for the recipients. I will also pay attention to the deservingness debate within the context of the BPNT program. This section will be concluded by discussion about the limitations of this research as well as recommendations for the BPNT program.

According to existing literature, it was stated that the recipients of food aid programs in Western countries are often negatively stigmatized as lazy and shameless (Van Der Horst et al., 2014; (Garthwaite, 2016b). In another case, food banks users were accused of abusing the eligibility system (Garthwaite, 2016a), and were portrayed by the media as a failure to reinforce stigma of deservingness (Garthwaite, 2016b). This kind of stigma puts spotlight on people's vulnerability that may undermine their dignity. On the other hand, BPNT recipients are generally viewed more positively. It is due to different social context that shapes the social relations between recipients and non-recipients. In food aid programs in Western countries, there are a minority of food aid receivers, while in the BPNT program, especially within this research context, the majority of people receive aid. By becoming a majority, it allows the BPNT recipients to establish wider social connections with other recipients. These social relations shape how the food aid recipients experience their dignity, because it provided the feeling of social inclusion. Thus, it might reduce stigma and create the feelings of involvement for those receiving aid. In contrast, being a minority of aid recipients such as in food banks case, might lead to social stigma and feelings of exclusion since social connection that were established could be smaller. It is in line with Social Identity Theory which explained that the feeling of attachment to a particular group may influence well-being and behavior while also providing a sense of self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In the case of BPNT program, having social connections with people from similar background could make recipients feel attached to the group and not feel left behind. Moreover, the presence of the majority of food aid recipients also creates a sense of normalcy. According to Social Norm Theory by Killmister (2016), dignity can be understood as upholding shared standards. This suggests that if individuals uphold the prevailing standards, they may experience a greater sense of dignity. In this BPNT context, receiving aid has become a normalized standard within the community. As a result, people are more likely to feel dignified rather than ashamed when receiving aid.

Additionally, sharing practices are very common within the village. Receiving aid thus is not seen as a taboo. In western context, with more individualistic culture, sharing practices are less frequent, especially sharing practices for basic needs. Depending on others for basic needs is seen as humiliation because it goes against the norm of being independent individual in western society (Andriessen et al., 2025). It is the opposite with the BPNT program, people mostly share help or food with people in their social connections. However, in the village, most people are family relatives, including their neighbors. Thus, sharing practices are more frequent and it minimizes social divisions between recipients and non-recipients. Especially because the BPNT recipients sometimes share their aid with non-recipients, leading to a more positive experience of receiving aid. This practice also allows recipients to be able to reciprocate with other villagers which makes them feel included and change their status from only receivers to givers as well.

At the same time, the BPNT program also affects the social dynamics in the village. Social jealousy arises due to different perspectives of poverty between the authorities and society. It sparks debate about deservingness of the aid program. Research in Western countries frames deservingness as being associated with vulnerability, with eligibility often tied to economic difficulties (Brennan-Tovey et al., 2023; Gundersen, 2020). Those perceived as not meeting the criteria may be viewed as abusing the system and create a stigma of undeserving as highlighted in research about UK food banks (Garthwaite, 2016a). In BPNT case, recipients' eligibility is sometimes questioned based on material possessions. People above average material wealth, even if they experience unstable income, are often seen as undeserving of aid, despite being eligible based on official criteria. Instead of blaming the recipients for abusing the system, non-recipients thought that this was unfair for themselves, for not receiving the aid as well, since they consider the aid as a gift from the government in which everyone is entitled for that. It might get worsened by the issue with connection with local authorities. In which, people with closer ties with local authorities have a bigger chance to receive aid. It could create stigma of undeserving towards the BPNT recipients, even if they have no relations with the local authorities and are eligible for receiving aid.

This research mainly focuses on exploring the experiences and perceptions of dignity within a governmental aid program from the perspective of the recipients. Since the nature of this research is mostly built on social dynamics that are upheld in society, it would also be interesting to look at the non-recipient's perspective on the BPNT program for future research. Looking at the perspective of non-recipients might give more nuanced insight into how social

dynamics shape the perception of stigma and dignity surroundings BPNT program, and how these perceptions, in turn, impacts the dignity of its recipients.

In terms of research methodology, this research employed semi-structured interviews. It is meant to allow more open discussion and stories from recipients. However, the setting of interviews needs to be taken into account in order to achieve that goal. Because during the fieldwork, the setting of the interview was a bit formal, thus I felt like recipients were not that open to answering interviews questions. Having interviews while walking or doing something might create a more comfortable environment for the participants, stimulating participants to be more open. Moreover, alternative tools could be used for relational mapping practices, enabling participants to create their own maps despite literacy limitations. It could possibly produce varied maps and stories compared to what I did in my research last time where I mostly used paper and pens to do this mapping. I also did not consider the literacy conditions of my participants; thus, I ended up being the one who drew the map according to the description of my participants. Based on my fieldwork experience, I also realized how important it is to use multiple qualitative data collection methods. In my case, apart from using interviews, I employed participant observation methods, which are valuable to draw insights on topics people were not always willing or able to openly discuss.

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be proposed to enhance the implementation of the BPNT program. This program is mainly a top-down approach; thus, it still cannot effectively eradicate poverty because everything is decided by the government, and recipients have no choice but to take everything for granted. To improve the implementation of this program to eradicate poverty, adopting a bottom-up approach is essential. Reflecting on the nature of people in the village who uphold collectivist values by fostering sharing practices and reciprocal exchanges, shifting to a community-based food aid program might be a good option. It enables people to collectively design what the program should look like. Also, they are the ones who know better their condition and their needs. Hence, it might make this program more aligned with its target. And finally, for the policy itself, it needs to be adjusted. Because if the BPNT program is intended to eradicate poverty in Indonesia, there should not be a quota system, nor a targeted system. Especially in regions with lack of development, instead of using targeted systems, it would be better to use a universal approach; a method designed to benefit everyone within a particular area. Because in regions with lack of development, it is likely that most people live in low economic conditions. Therefore, it is crucial to employ community-based solutions to ensure that the policy fits the needs of people.

6. Conclusion

Food insecurity has become a major issue worldwide. To tackle this problem, various food aid programs have been initiated by organizations and governments. One of which is the Bantuan Pangan Non-Tunai (BPNT) program from the government of Indonesia. This initiative is aimed to help people living in poverty to get access to food due to unequal income distribution and development. Previous research (Andriessen et al., 2020; Garthwaite, 2016a; Garthwaite, 2016b; Gundersen, 2020; Van Der Horst et al., 2014) in food aid programs mostly highlights the investigation of experiences and stigma created towards food aid receivers in relation to recipients' dignity in Western countries. In the case of the BPNT program, this topic is still understudied. Also, in Indonesia, with its social context that differs from the context of Western countries, this research was conducted to investigate how the recipients of the BPNT program experience their dignity. In this chapter, I will draw conclusions that answer my main research question: *How do social dynamics shape the way BPNT program recipients experience a sense of dignity when receiving aid?*

To begin with, the BPNT program or non-cash food aid is a government initiative to help people living in poverty access food. There are eligibility criteria to choose the recipients, which is mainly related to economic condition. According to my research findings, I found that social dynamics that include social connection and socio-cultural norms affected the way recipients of the BPNT program experience their dignity. Social connections can either undermine or reinforce the sense of recipients' dignity. It is proven that people with strong social connections tend to be treated with more respect and acceptance, preventing them from facing negative stigma as aid receivers. Thus, it enhances the recipients' experienced dignity. While those with less social connections are prone to face social jealousy from non-recipients. It triggers confrontation and gossip towards them, which may undermine their sense of dignity. Apart from that, it also helps recipients to strengthen their social connections in a way that allows them to frequently interact with other recipients.

Moreover, the socio-cultural norms also provide meaningful insights on how the BPNT recipients experience their sense of dignity. Indonesia, with its collectivism value, highly upholds sharing practices and reciprocity. It influences other villagers' perceptions towards recipients. In this research, I found that the existence of the BPNT program helps recipients to contribute to the prevailing socio-cultural norms. Hence, it allows them to reinforce their dignity. In the practice of the BPNT program, recipients in the village shared the aid received with those who did not receive the aid. It helps recipients to uphold sharing practices and

reciprocity amidst their economic conditions. With the aid they received, they got the ability to pay back what other people gave to them. It enables them to not only act as receivers but also givers. It then prevents them from facing negative stigma as aid receivers.

In addition, socio-cultural norms shape the way recipients perceive their forms of autonomy as part of their dignity. In the village, it seemed that this aid was seen as a gift from the government. According to charitable gift morality (Van Der Horst et al., 2014; Schwartz, 1967), it is believed that aid receivers should be grateful for whatever is given to them. That is why recipients in general, view this aid with positive experiences, by showing their gratitude. However, it shows that this norm limits recipients' autonomy since they perceive their status as receivers to not have power to complain or choose what to receive. Lack of reciprocity also undermines recipients' dignity. Unlike in social grocery (Andriessen et al., 2020) where food aid users practiced reciprocity through the act of paying like consumers, in the case of BPNT recipients, the practice of reciprocity between aid distributor and recipients is minimal. Instead of relations between consumers and sellers, the relations between recipients and aid distributors in the case of the BPNT program are more like giver and receiver. This causes the recipients to not prioritize their freedom to choose what to receive because they do not feel like they have the right to do so.

The nature of this study focuses on exploring the concept of social dignity; however, this study is limited to recipients' perspectives; thus, future research could benefit from examining non-recipients' views' to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the program's impact on dignity. In terms of research methodology, I recommend future study to explore alternative approaches to conduct interview and relational mapping to encourage openness and generate more comprehensive data. Additionally, for the BPNT program itself, I recommend shifting the aid program from a top-down to a community-based approach. Given the collectivist nature of village communities, allowing recipients to co-design the program could improve its effectiveness, better align it with local needs, and reduce social jealousy caused by differing poverty definitions in policy versus community perceptions.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1. Interview Guide with Recipients

General Information

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself? (Age, job, family situation)
2. How long have you been receiving aid from the BPNT program?

Recipients' Experiences with the BPNT Program

1. How would you describe your experience with the BPNT program?
2. How do you feel about the way the aid is distributed?
3. How do you feel about the items provided?
4. Have you ever felt uncomfortable or ashamed about receiving aid from the BPNT program?
5. In what ways did receiving BPNT aid affect your condition?

Recipients' Social Connections

1. How do you feel about your interactions with other people in the village after receiving aid through the BPNT program?
2. Do you think your relationships with other members of the village have changed since receiving aid?
3. Have you made new social connections or strengthened existing relationships because of the BPNT program?
4. Besides the BPNT program, do you also receive support from others to access food?

Social and Cultural Norms

1. In your opinion, how do people in the village generally view the BPNT program?
2. How do people in the village expect you to behave as aid recipients?
3. How do people in the village see and treat you as a recipient of BPNT?
4. Do you think that receiving aid affects your status?
5. Are there any specific cultural or community events where your status as a BPNT recipient affects how you participate or are treated?
6. How do you think the cultural or social values of the village affect the way you and others experience receiving aid?
7. Is there any specific stereotype associated with receiving aid in your village's cultural context?
8. How do people in the village feel about the BPNT recipients?

Appendix 2. Interview Guide with Local Authority

Information about Local Authorities

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself? (Age, job/ role in the village, and the BPNT program)
2. How long have you been working with the BPNT program?
3. How do you inform people about the BPNT program?
4. Do you work with others, like BPNT officials, to manage the program?

Aid Distribution

1. Can you explain how the BPNT program is managed in this village?
2. How are recipients chosen to receive BPNT aid?
3. What do recipients need to do to get the aid?
4. How is the aid given to them?
5. How do you make sure the aid reaches the right people?
6. What challenges have you faced in running the BPNT program here?

Program Impact

1. Do you think the BPNT program has helped people in this village?
2. Has the program changed in any way since it started?
3. How do people in the village feel about the BPNT program?

Appendix 3. Relational Mapping Prompt

1. Who are the people you interact with most often?
2. Can you tell me what kind of relationship you have with them?
3. Who helps you the most when it comes to accessing food? Can you explain how they help you?
4. Do you help others with food as well? Who are they, and how do you do that?

Note:

- Do not forget to write the key points of each relationship on the map to understand the differences of every relationship
- Use different colors of sticky notes to mark different relationships

Appendix 4. Consent Forms for Recipients (English Version)

Consent Form for Participation in Research

My name is Rima, a student at Wageningen University, The Netherlands. Currently, I am doing my thesis about “Dignity in Indonesia’s Governmental Food Aid Program” as one of the requirements to finish my master’s study. You are being asked to participate in this research that aims to explore how the BPNT (Bantuan Pangan Non-Tunai) program affects the sense of dignity of its recipients.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate, the research will involve the following stages:

1. Interview
You will take part in a one-on-one interview, lasting approximately 40-60 minutes. The interview will focus on your experiences with the BPNT program and its impact on your experienced dignity. You may refuse to answer any questions during the interview. The interview will be recorded and stored securely by the researcher.
2. Relational Mapping

Following the interview, you will participate in a relational mapping exercise individually. You can draw your relational mapping yourself or you can ask me as the researcher to draw it for you. If you choose the second option, I will keep checking on you during the process. This activity aims to explore your social connections as BPNT recipients with people in the village to see how your relationship facilitates your access to food. The mapping exercise will take approximately 1 hour.

3. Participant Observation

As the researcher, I will accompany you during your daily activities that are related to food, such as going to the grocery store to use the BPNT assistance, going to the farm to harvest vegetables, or activities of receiving and giving surplus food to your neighborhood. The goal is to observe how you and the people in the village interact and treat each other.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary, if you choose to participate, you will be involved in all three stages; interview, relational mapping, and participant observation. However, you may withdraw from the study or any of its stages at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

Confidentiality:

Your privacy and confidentiality will be strictly protected. Personal information collected during the study will be anonymized, and no identifying details will be shared in any reports, presentations, or publications resulting from this research. All the data collected will be used only for academic purposes.

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read and understood the information provided above. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study, including the interview, relational mapping, and participant observation stages, and I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

Participant's Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 5. Consent Forms for Local Authorities (English Version)

Consent Form for Participation in Research

My name is Rima, a student at Wageningen University, The Netherlands. Currently, I am doing my thesis about “Dignity in Indonesia’s Governmental Food Aid Program” as one of the requirements to finish my master’s study. You are being asked to participate in this research that aims to explore how the BPNT (Bantuan Pangan Non-Tunai) program affects the sense of dignity of its recipients.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate, the research will involve the following stages:

1. Interview

You will take part in a one-on-one interview, lasting approximately 30-40 minutes. The interview will focus on your experiences in providing the BPNT program. You may refuse to answer any questions during the interview. The interview will be recorded and stored securely by the researcher.

2. Participant Observation

As the researcher, I will accompany you during your activities that are related to your job as the local authorities, including your activities when providing the BPNT program or when selecting the recipients if possible.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary, if you choose to participate, you will be involved in all the stages; interview and participant observation. However, you may withdraw from the study or any of its stages at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

Confidentiality:

Your privacy and confidentiality will be strictly protected. Personal information collected during the study will be anonymized, and no identifying details will be shared in any reports, presentations, or publications resulting from this research. All the data collected will be used only for academic purposes.

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read and understood the information provided above. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study, including the interview, relational mapping, and participant observation stages, and I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

Participant's Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 6. Consent Forms for Recipients (Indonesian Version)

Formulir Persetujuan untuk Partisipasi dalam Penelitian (Penerima Bantuan)

Nama saya Rima, seorang mahasiswa di Wageningen University, Belanda. Saat ini, saya sedang mengerjakan tesis tentang “Dignity in Indonesia’s Governmental Food Aid Program” sebagai salah satu syarat untuk menyelesaikan studi magister saya. Anda diminta untuk berpartisipasi dalam penelitian ini yang bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana program BPNT (Bantuan Pangan Non-Tunai) memengaruhi kehidupan sehari-hari para penerimanya yang kemudian merefleksikan bagaimana pengalaman mereka terhadap martabat (*dignity*) yang mereka miliki.

Aktivitas:

Jika Anda setuju untuk berpartisipasi, penelitian ini akan melibatkan tahapan-tahapan berikut:

1. Wawancara

Anda akan berpartisipasi dalam wawancara tatap muka, yang berlangsung selama kurang lebih 40-60 menit. Wawancara ini akan berfokus pada pengalaman Anda dengan program BPNT dan dampaknya terhadap martabat yang Anda rasakan. Anda boleh menolak untuk menjawab pertanyaan apapun selama wawancara. Wawancara ini akan direkam dan disimpan dengan aman oleh peneliti.

2. Menggambar Jaringan Sosial Seputar Akses Makanan

Setelah wawancara, Anda akan berpartisipasi untuk menggambar dan memetakan jaringan sosial Anda yang berkaitan dengan akses makanan Anda. Kegiatan ini akan Anda lakukan secara individu. Anda dapat menggambar sendiri atau meminta saya, sebagai peneliti, untuk menggambar untuk Anda. Jika Anda memilih opsi kedua, saya akan terus melakukan pengecekan bersama Anda selama proses tersebut untuk memastikan data yang terinput sudah sesuai. Kegiatan ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi hubungan sosial Anda sebagai penerima BPNT dengan orang-orang di desa untuk melihat bagaimana hubungan tersebut memfasilitasi akses Anda terhadap pangan. Aktivitas ini akan memakan waktu sekitar 1 jam.

3. Pengamatan dengan Partisipasi

Sebagai peneliti, saya akan menemani Anda selama aktivitas sehari-hari yang berkaitan dengan pangan, seperti pergi ke toko menggunakan bantuan BPNT, pergi ke ladang untuk memanen sayuran, atau aktivitas menerima dan memberikan surplus pangan

kepada tetangga Anda. Tujuannya adalah untuk mengamati bagaimana Anda dan orang-orang di desa saling berinteraksi dan memperlakukan satu sama lain

Partisipasi dalam penelitian ini bersifat sukarela. Jika Anda memilih untuk berpartisipasi, Anda akan terlibat dalam ketiga tahap; wawancara, pemetaan relasional, dan pengamatan partisipan. Namun, Anda dapat mengundurkan diri dari penelitian ini atau salah satu tahapannya kapan saja tanpa dikenai sanksi atau kehilangan manfaat.

Kerahasiaan:

Privasi dan kerahasiaan Anda akan dilindungi dengan ketat. Informasi pribadi yang dikumpulkan selama penelitian akan dianonimkan, dan tidak ada rincian yang dapat diidentifikasi yang akan dibagikan dalam laporan, presentasi, atau publikasi yang dihasilkan dari penelitian ini. Semua data yang dikumpulkan akan digunakan hanya untuk keperluan akademis.

“Dengan menandatangani di bawah ini, saya mengakui bahwa saya telah membaca dan memahami informasi yang diberikan di atas. Saya dengan sukarela setuju untuk berpartisipasi dalam penelitian ini, termasuk tahap wawancara, pemetaan relasional, dan pengamatan partisipan, serta saya memahami bahwa saya dapat mengundurkan diri kapan saja tanpa sanksi”.

Nama Peserta: _____

Tanda Tangan: _____

Tanggal: _____

Jika Anda ingin menghubungi saya terkait hal-hal tentang penelitian ini, saya dapat dihubungi melalui nomor (0853-3717-3886).

Appendix 7. Consent Forms for Local Authorities (Indonesian Version)

Formulir Persetujuan untuk Partisipasi dalam Penelitian (Otoritas Lokal)

Nama saya Rima, seorang mahasiswa di Wageningen University, Belanda. Saat ini, saya sedang mengerjakan tesis tentang “Dignity in Indonesia’s Governmental Food Aid Program” sebagai salah satu syarat untuk menyelesaikan studi magister saya. Anda diminta untuk berpartisipasi dalam penelitian ini yang bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana program BPNT (Bantuan Pangan Non-Tunai) memengaruhi kehidupan sehari-hari para penerimanya yang kemudian merefleksikan bagaimana pengalaman mereka terhadap martabat (*dignity*) yang mereka miliki.

Aktivitas:

Jika Anda setuju untuk berpartisipasi, penelitian ini akan melibatkan tahapan-tahapan berikut:

1. Wawancara

Anda akan berpartisipasi dalam wawancara tatap muka, yang berlangsung selama kurang lebih 30-40 menit. Wawancara ini akan berfokus pada pengalaman Anda sebagai penanggung jawab program BPNT di tingkat desa. Anda boleh menolak untuk menjawab pertanyaan apapun selama wawancara. Wawancara ini akan direkam dan disimpan dengan aman oleh peneliti.

2. Pengamatan dengan Partisipasi

Sebagai peneliti, saya akan menemani Anda selama aktivitas yang berkaitan dengan pekerjaan Anda sebagai otoritas lokal, termasuk aktivitas Anda ketika menyediakan program BPNT atau ketika memilih penerima jika memungkinkan.

Partisipasi dalam penelitian ini bersifat sukarela. Jika Anda memilih untuk berpartisipasi, Anda akan terlibat dalam semua tahap; wawancara dan pengamatan partisipan. Namun, Anda dapat mengundurkan diri dari penelitian ini atau salah satu tahapannya kapan saja tanpa dikenai sanksi atau kehilangan manfaat.

Kerahasiaan:

Privasi dan kerahasiaan Anda akan dilindungi dengan ketat. Informasi pribadi yang dikumpulkan selama penelitian akan dianonimkan, dan tidak ada rincian yang dapat diidentifikasi yang akan dibagikan dalam laporan, presentasi, atau publikasi yang dihasilkan dari penelitian ini. Semua data yang dikumpulkan akan digunakan hanya untuk keperluan akademis.

“Dengan menandatangani di bawah ini, saya mengakui bahwa saya telah membaca dan memahami informasi yang diberikan di atas. Saya dengan sukarela setuju untuk berpartisipasi dalam penelitian ini, termasuk tahap wawancara dan pengamatan partisipan, serta saya memahami bahwa saya dapat mengundurkan diri kapan saja tanpa sanksi”.

Nama Peserta: _____

Tanda Tangan: _____

Tanggal: _____

Jika Anda ingin menghubungi saya terkait hal-hal tentang penelitian ini, saya dapat dihubungi melalui nomor (0853-3717-3886).

Appendix 8. Use of ChatGPT

ChatGPT (GPT-4, accessed via chat.openai.com) was used as a writing assistant tool during my thesis. The tool supported two main tasks:

1. **Paraphrasing:** To improve sentence clarity, enhance academic tone, and vary structure while preserving the original meaning. All AI-generated outputs were carefully reviewed and edited to align with the author's intentions.
2. **Translation:** To assist in translating text from Indonesian to English accurately and fluently. All translations were reviewed and refined to ensure they matched the intended context.

Example Prompts and Responses:

Prompt 1 – Paraphrasing:

“Paraphrase this : Too many factors to be considered may cause some factors to be overlooked, thus, create bias judgement.”

Response:

“Considering too many factors may result in some being overlooked, leading to biased judgments”

Prompt 2 – Translation (Indonesian to English):

“Translate this to english : kadang-kadang saya pakai bantuannya buat beli keperluan sekolah anak-anak, untuk peralatan ngaji”

Response:

“Sometimes I use the assistance to buy my children's school supplies and religious study equipment.”