Families on the Edge

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Fact sheet

In May 2020, UNICEF and UNFPA jointly commissioned the Families on the Edge (FoE) study to explore the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on women and children in low income urban families in Malaysia.

FoE1 analysed the immediate socio-economic impact of COVID-19, with a focus on the MCO period (March 18, 2020 – May 3, 2020) and the relevance, adequacy and accessibility of key COVID-19 mitigation policies and other critical social services for these vulnerable groups.

FoE2 explored the extent to which families recovered from after the MCO ended in May 4, 2020, while also providing more in-depth analysis of the experiences of children, single mothers and households affected by disability and chronic illness.

FoE3 continued to track the impact of the dynamic COVID-19 crisis on low income families, focusing on how key socio-economic indicators changed over the CMCO period (October 14, 2020 – December 23, 2020). Insecurity of employment among female headed households is particularly highlighted. It also provides insights on fiscal pressures experienced by households, especially for single mothers, the disabled and those with chronic illness.

Incomes among female headed households and disabled-headed households fell since September by one-fifth (-20%) and one-third (-31%) respectively. As a result, about half of disabled headed households and 56% of female-headed households still registering less income compared to pre-COVID.

The poverty rate among these families remains high at 42%, although government assistance during the period helped to mitigate the severity of their deprivation. Poverty is more prevalence among PWDs HoH (55%) and female HoH, with a 1 in 2 and 6 in 10 lives in poverty.

Poverty incidence among female HoH increased from 47% in September 2020 to 61% in December 2020. Similar trend is observed among PWD HoH, where more than half (55%) live in absolute poverty. Almost all live in relative poverty (98%).

1. Recovery among the households is uneven. Many households have not yet recovered to pre-crisis level with many even worse off than in September 2020.

Although overall median household income recovered to pre-crisis level, 1 in 2 (46%) of the households* have not yet recovered to pre-crisis level. The median household income for female headed household and disabled-headed households remained 24% and 36% lower respectively than the pre-crisis level.

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2. Unemployment among heads of household has doubled between September to December 2020. Poverty rate remained high.

Unemployment among heads of household has doubled from 7% in September 2020 to 15% in December 2020. Unemployment among female HoH and PWD HoH also increased to 13.4% and 50%, respectively. Overall unemployment among adults in these households remains high, with 1 in 3 unemployed.

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Reduced employment opportunities and lack of precautionary savings have made it difficult for these households to cope with the economic impact of COVID-19.

Temporary government and Zakat assistance helped, but the coverage of mainstream social protection needs to expand to provide more sustained support.

Social safety nets for the self-employed need to be urgently expanded.

The families are more pessimistic about the future.

Mental health remains a major concern.