

# The Socio-Cultural Transformations among Samin Tribe in Response to COVID-19

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**Abstract.** The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has brought several changes to people's lives worldwide. Responding to this global pandemic, socio-cultural transformation and adaptation are needed. The purpose of this study is to reveal the impact of the pandemic on the traditions of the Samin Tribe in Blimbing Village, Blora. Besides, the socio-cultural transformations and the role of opinion leader are also investigated. This qualitative study was conducted using two-step flow theory through in-depth interviews with Mbah Pramugi Prawironegoro, an elder for Samin Tribe of Blimbing Village, Blora. To define the concept of the Samin tribe and opinion leaders, a literature review was also conducted. The results of the study indicate that the social life of the Samin Tribe is not much affected by COVID-19, because they work as farmers. On the other hand, their traditions are adapted to the government policies by implementing health protocols. A Javanese analogy 'wong urip nek mudeng keiket' makes them obey the government and the opinion leader and believe will not be affected by the virus. Previous studies were limited to the concept of the Samin Tribe and their history, traditions, and beliefs. The contribution of this study is that the socio-cultural aspect of the Samin Tribe is analyzed concerning the COVID-19 impacts.

**Keywords:** COVID-19; opinion leaders; samin tribe; public trust

## 1 Introduction

Since the end of December 2019, the world has been shocked by the outbreak of a new deadly disease originating from Wuhan City, the People's Republic of China to almost all parts of the world. After examining the patient, the virus was announced as Novel Corona Virus Disease 19, which was later abbreviated as COVID-19. The outbreak of this disease is caused by the *genus betacoronavirus* and has made early 2020 a bitter year for all humans worldwide [46, 49, 60]. The World Health Organization, declared COVID-19 a global pandemic and ordered countries in the world to prevent it [35].

The first case of COVID-19 in Indonesia was identified in early March 2020. Since the first case, the number of virus cases have increased. The Indonesian government continues to make various prevention efforts [6, 11, 49]. Before the discovery of vaccines, the government imposed physical distancing to prevent the spread of this virus of to the community [46, 48]. The implementation of this policy is a non-medical effort to respond to and prevent a

pandemic [15, 46]. Thus, COVID-19 makes human mobility so limited that many activities in several places have to be stopped [28, 49].

The imposed physical distancing certainly has an impact on the economic sector because many public facilities are disabled [28]. Other economic impacts are also caused by capacity protection on profit-based public services [8]. The implementation of lockdowns also affects the social and psychological life of the people who are required to be adaptive and change behavior at a fast pace [8, 49]. A study finding show culture to be crucial in the success of the virus prevention [7]. However, it is also discovered different response of communities regarding the COVID-19 policies [17, 33]. The public response to the policies is affected by the consumed mass media. Whatever is displayed by the media, is what the public thought [5]. Therefore, the public response to policies during the COVID-19 pandemic was affected by the mass media.

Indonesia is a country that is rich in ethnicity, language, and beliefs. This wealth is disseminated from Sabang to Merauke [13, 58]. As social beings, humans have a desire to coexist with other people. This human relationship reveals to a social structure based on ethnicity [21]. Ethnic identity can create solidarity in society who share the similar cultural identity and values [27, 54]. The life of Indonesian society is inseparable from a social system that differentiates duties and obligations in society. The existence of this social system serves as a reminder to the community that must be carried out together both when functioning as individuals and as part of society [22]. Indonesia as a plural country who highly values social relations, so it has a very low individualism score [19]. High social relations often occur in rural areas, one of which is the Samin Tribe.

The Samin Tribe that was born at the end of the 19th century is a tribe with local wisdom, simplicity, honesty, and positive behavior [1, 42]. Their 5 life goals, namely *demen*, *becik*, *rukun*, *seger*, and *waras* reveal to a positive attitude and the closeness of harmony and solidarity between their society [13, 41]. The local ideology of *manunggaling kawulo gusti* makes the Samin people admonish every adherent for good deeds, hard work, patience, and avoiding badness [36, 59].

In this study, the author conducted a case study on the Samin Tribe located in Blimbing Village, Bora, Central Java. In this village, most of the people work as farmers to seek for living. The similar job making the people of Blimbing Village have a high level of social life. The tradition of working together hand in hand during religious events or weddings is still very strong. According to Kaelan (2018), the community's habit of living in groups like the Samin Tribe in Blimbing Village is one of the important social capitals, including in overcoming crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Culture plays an important role in determining a person and community's behavior [20]. Community's behavior that refers to certain cultures provides room for COVID-19 either to spread or extinct its spread [14]. Several studies have shown that countries with a strong culture and high social norms have low rates of infection and death from viruses [17]. Furthermore, countries with a high level of individualism are less exposed to the viruses [29, 46]. Existing literature indicates the ignorance to the COVID-19 pandemic among middle to lower-class society with low literacy skills. Those who live in rural areas tend to have resistance to government health protocols under the alibi of cultural values [33]. Collectivism culture signifies high social relationships [52, 17] and makes lockdown and physical distancing policies difficult to implement.

The strong culture and social norms also make Indonesian to live in a society with a high level of social solidarity. This solidarity is manifested in activities that are often carried out collectively [16, 39]. This is a challenge for the government in all policies related to COVID-

19 pandemic because many people are still ignorant and uncompromising [7, 33]. The public response is related to culture, values, and norms in society [17]. This quote is following the phenomena in this study. What attracts the attention of the author to research the Samin Tribe is that they do not ignore COVID-19 and often have trust and obedience to the government and its policies during this pandemic.

With high social relations, Indonesia is a country with a high level of power distance. This means that Indonesian society upholds relationships based on hierarchies. People who are elders, have certain positions, with higher education, and/or are considered influential will be more appreciated and listened to [19]. This also happened to the Samin Tribe in Blimbing Village who still listened to opinion leaders.

As one of the communities/tribes in Indonesia, the Samin Tribe has high solidarity due to good social interactions between the people. The interaction is built by working together, deliberating wisely, and helping those in need [21]. This attitude can reveal to activities that are often carried out collectively [16, 39]. The Samin Tribe in Blimbing Village regularly holds meetings. Thus, the opportunity for an opinion leader to be heard by the indigenous people of the Samin Tribe is getting bigger and has an impact on their behavior.

In the perspective of mass communication, there are times when media messages do not entirely reach the audiences directly, but most of the message delivery process takes place in stages [31]. According to Lazarsfeld & Katz, most people act because of the influence of opinion leaders who are influenced by the mass media at the first place. This is under one of the assumptions in the theory of two-step flow of communication where mass media messages are not entirely direct on the audience, so the power of mass media is indirect and is reduced by the influence of local opinion leaders [4].

With the high social relations, the Samin Tribe in Blimbing Village trust certain figure, so the role of opinion leader is very much needed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mukarom (2020) argues that an opinion leader is actively seeking information. Thus, mass communication messages will be effective in influencing the audience in changing attitudes and behavior (behavior change), when combined with interpersonal communication, namely in the process of delivering mass media messages from opinion leaders to the community, like the Samin Tribe in Blimbing Village.

From 2020 until now, research related to COVID-19 are still trending, including by researchers and academics from social science groups. Unfortunately, from many of these studies, the majority were carried out by survey methods that were distributed via google form to comply with physical distancing. This means that most the research is only distributed among people who have access to the internet, so it can also be concluded that the representation of the middle to lower class people is still rarely carried out directly. This is the background for author to research village communities.

Based on the background described and the thoughts and phenomena described above, the author is interested in digging deeper into the lives of the Samin Tribe in Blimbing Village during the COVID-19 pandemic. The problems examined in this study are as follows:

1. What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the traditions of the Samin Tribe in Blimbing and how they trust the government?
2. What is the role of Samin Tribe's opinion leaders socializing COVID-19 and increasing public awareness in Blimbing Village?
3. How does the Samin Tribe transforming their socio-cultural lives in responding to the COVID-19 impacts?

The author's interest is realized through a study entitled 'The Socio-Cultural Transformations among Samin Tribe in Response to COVID-19'.

## 2 Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach, with the type of case study research. This type of research seeks to obtain a complete description (wholeness) of an object. This means that the data collected in the study are studied as a whole and integrated data. Exploration must be done in-depth, where the researcher not only understands the case from the outside but also the inside as a complete and detailed entity. Therefore, one of the data collection techniques in case studies is in-depth interviews to understand more about the subject, case study researchers can also obtain data through their biographies [48].

A case study is a series of scientific activities carried out intensively, in detail, and in-depth on an event and activity, whether an individual, a group of people, an institution, or an organization. Usually, the selected event (case) is not something in the past but is an actual and ongoing event (real-life events). The events under study can be very simple or complex by selecting one that is specific and unique. An event is considered unique if it occurs only at certain site or place [38]. This case study was conducted on the Samin Tribe who live harmoniously in Blimbing Village, Blora, Central Java.

Data in this study was collected using in-depth interviews and observation. This means that the process of collecting data for research is carried out utilizing questions and answers between researchers and informants, and informant is involved in a relatively long social life [55]. The informant in this study is Mbah Pramugi Prawironegoro who is an elder of the Samin Tribe in Blimbing Village. He is a descendant of the previous elders in the village which is located in Sambong District, Blora, Central Java.

Before conducting the interview, the author also made observations on the Samin Tribe in Blimbing Village. Observations are made with clear, detailed, complete, and conscious observations of the actual individual's behavior in a particular situation. This is done to obtain data directly from primary sources [53]. In this study, the authors made direct observations to reveal the problems in this study.

A literature review was also conducted to explain various definitions and understandings of the Samin Tribe concept and opinion leaders. This method is useful in constructing a research and linking it to existing knowledge, regardless of the discipline [51, 57], to help researchers understand where the study fits into the 'bigger picture' and previous studies analyzed help to direct where research needs to go [44] because this method allows researchers to perform summaries, assessments, and critical analysis of relevant past literature, both interdisciplinary and non-research research [10, 51].

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has highly determined as a current research trend. It is discovered that the spread of this virus has occurred into a global pandemic [35] and has spread into countries worldwide with numerous impacts [60]. Some research already investigated the imposed prevention efforts by the government [6, 11, 49]. One of the most controversial policy responding to this pandemic is by implementing the lockdowns, in which attracted previous researchers [8, 28] to examine the economic impacts. Some research [8, 49] also focus on the social and psychological aspect of the pandemic and analyzed the behavioral changes in society. A study finding show culture to be crucial in the success of the virus prevention [7].

The research trend has done to different respondent and informant in various background and status [7]; Djalante, et al., 2020; [28, 30, 48]. Unfortunately, they are lacking in the representation of the middle to lower class society and the result generalized those society to

become ignorant and uncompromising [7, 33]. Whereas not all villager against the COVID-19 and its policies. A unique phenomenon could be investigated, in which Samin Tribe do not ignore COVID-19 and undergo the imposed health protocols.

Previous literatures have finally begun to develop its research by only defining the concept of the Samin Tribe in different regions in East Java and Central Java [1, 12, 13, 32, 37, 41, 45]. The other existing literatures used in this research have finally begun to develop its research by investigating the tradition and belief of the Samin Tribe [12, 42]. However, no research discusses the adaptation and socio-cultural of the Samin Tribe amidst the COVID-19 pandemic which also investigates the role of elders as opinion leaders.

The role of opinion leader among the society has well-clarified in previous literatures and considered to be important in socializing certain information to society through socialization. They can educate the public [3, 26] and often persuade people [23]. It is needed for opinion leader to build the public awareness [26, 40] and increase individual participation in the society [40]. Nonetheless, current research trend does not investigate the role opinion leaders, in fact these people have the crucial in educating the society regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, especially among the Samin Tribe.

It can be concluded that no research discusses the socio-cultural transformations of the Samin Tribe amidst the COVID-19 pandemic which also investigates the role of elders as opinion leaders. Previous studies only focused on the concept of the Samin Tribe and its traditions and beliefs. On the other hand, most of current studies focus on COVID-19 disruption amongst urban people. To fill the literature and theoretical gap, this case study is conducted to the Samin Tribe in Blimbing Village.

### 3 Results and discussion

This study was conducted to reveal the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the traditions of the Samin Tribe in as well as their trust in the government policies. Furthermore, the author wants to examine the role of opinion leaders in the Samin Tribe in socializing COVID-19 and increasing public awareness in Blimbing Village regarding the dangers of this virus. The socio-cultural transformations among the Samin Tribe in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic is also investigated. The analysis was performed using the two-step flow model theory in the perspective of mass communication. The research results are discussed in 4 different sections, with 1 section to define the concept of Samin Tribe.

#### 3.1 The Origin and Belief of Samin Tribe

Samin is a tribe that has existed in Indonesia since the end of the 19th century. This tribe has local wisdom, simplicity, honesty, and positive behavior [1, 42]. Samin comes from a sentence in Javanese, namely *'tiyang sami-sami'* which means the same. The Samin Tribe views all humans as the same [1, 42, 45] and *sedulur* or siblings [12, 32], the only difference of human-being is their desire [42]. Historically, the word Samin was adopted from a Javanese figure named Ki Samin Surosentiko [1, 12, 43, 47]. He was a noble who prefers to live with the villagers and fight against the Dutch colonizers. Therefore, the Samin Tribe has existed since a long time ago and was born in Blora, Central Java until it spread to other areas/cities in Central Java and East Java [1, 13, 37, 45].

The Samin Tribe calls themselves the *Sedulur* (Sibling) *Sikep*. The word *sikep* (attitude) contains two meanings. As a noun it refers to *'bakohing kalbu'*, which means persistence.

Meanwhile, as a verb, '*sikep*' means to embrace, namely the unity of the heart. The whole meaning of *sedulur sikep* is brothers (humans) who have good and honest behavior, as in Samin's values [32, 56]. Positive behavior is reflected by the Samin Tribe because of their ideology, namely '*manunggaling kawulo gusti*' which is interpreted as a view that pays attention to the divine nature in humans. With this ideology, the Samin Tribe emphasizes every adherent or people to do good, work hard, be patient and avoid badness in their life [36, 59].

The local wisdom that is still practiced by the Samin Tribe is their 5-life purposes which consisted of *demen*, *becik*, *rukun*, *seger*, and *waras*. There are also 5 norms prohibited by this tribe, namely *jrengki*, *srei*, *panasten*, *dahpen*, and *kemeran*. The life purpose and prohibitions in the Samin Tribe are manifested into positive attitudes and behaviours and strengthen harmony and solidarity between them [13, 41].

Mbah Pramugi Prawironegoro in his interview explained the 5 life purpose of the Samin Tribe. *Demen*'s meaning is similar to happy, in which when one of the people in the the Samin Tribe is happy, so the whole tribe is happy. *Becik* means kindness and is also important to the tribe to realize the harmonious society. While *Rukun* as the pillar of their social life means harmony. The tribe hopes that each and every one of the is healthy as they wish for *Seger*. Last but not least, healthy mental is also important to the Samin Tribe and they value every *Waras* that god has given to them.

Mbah Pram also stated that the most important thing for the Samin Tribe is to believe in good things and not take the rights of others. Through the 5 life purposes and prohibited norm, they always strive for kindness and harmony. He also mentioned that the Javanese wall reads '*tepo sliro*', in which the Samin Tribe emphasizes that humans can position themselves as other people when they are about to take certain actions. To put it simply, if a person does not want to be harmed, then he cannot harm other people.

The Samin Tribe defined as a community which calls themselves *Sedulur* (Sibling) *Sikep* that means brothers (humans) who have good and honest behavior, as the Samin Tribe values their life purposes [32]. The behavior of cooperation, deliberation, and mutual assistance is still carried out by the Samin Tribe in their daily life [21]. Farmer is the majority profession of the Samin Tribe due to geographical conditions. From this living, the independence of the Samin Tribe is manifested by exploring the natural resources of their village to survive and avoiding assistance from outside parties [45]. These findings on previous literatures were also mentioned by Mbah Pram.

### **3.2 The Socio-Cultural Impacts of COVID-19 and Government Trust among the Samin Tribe in Blimbing Village**

Since it was declared a global pandemic, COVID-19 has made every country in the world take prevention efforts [35]. Non-medical efforts to prevent the virus [15, 46] are the imposed policy called physical distancing to the community [46, 48]. Community's mobility is affected because many places are temporarily closed [28, 49]. As a result, the economic sector is affected [28] because there are capacity limitations [8].

Although various policies to limit activities such as lockdown and social restrictions (PSBB and PPKM in Indonesia) have been obligated, the Samin Tribe in Blimbing has not much affected on the economic sector. This is due to most of the people in this village work as farmers. So, they spend a lot of time in the fields. This unaffected social life does not limit the Samin Tribe to be very obedient in implementing 3M as obligated by the government in dealing with a COVID-19 pandemic.

The similarity of identity, culture, and values can create solidarity in society [27, 54]. Inevitably, the same livelihood and tradition makes the Samin Tribe in Blimbing Village solid. This solidarity is manifested in activities that are often carried out collectively [16, 39], such as cooperation and weekly meetings. The collectivity culture indicates high social relationships in their daily life [52, 17].

High solidarity and collectivism in society create a mutual attachment to a relationship that is supported by moral values and public trust [16, 39]. The characteristic that stands out in the Samin Tribe is high collectivism, both in the family and in their interactions in society. In their relationship, they continue to strive to preserve their values and life goals [45]. This kind of collectivity is one of the important social assets owned by the Samin Tribe [22], including in overcoming crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The writer also found the same phenomenon in the Samin Tribe in Blimbing. Although the customs and traditions of the Samin Tribe are deeply rooted, they still follow current developments and current issues. The Samin Tribe routinely holds gatherings which are held every *Legi* Friday. The gathering discussed the latest issues associated with Old Javanese Adat and Philosophy. Usually, they also discuss harmony and Javanese culture. Furthermore, Mbah Pram added that at *Suro* Night the people of Samin gathered to hold a celebration called *Brokohan*. This thanksgiving is intended to continue the friendship and be grateful for the '*seger lan waras*' which God has bestowed on them. That is why the role of opinion leaders for the Samin Tribe in Blimbing is still so strong.

Before the spread of the virus, Mbah Pram said, the Samin Tribe regularly held the *Legi* Friday and *Brokohan* meetings to realize their harmonious tribe. The meetings were attended by numerous of participants, some are the Samin Tribe of other regions in East Java and Central Java. In addition, cultural and religious festivals were also established to preserve their culture. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 has drastically impacted these traditions and forced the Samin Tribe to adapt. As the result, the Samin Tribe in Blimbing Village has postponed some of the meetings and events.

People in Indonesia respond differently to the implementation of policies in regarding the COVID-19 pandemic [17, 33]. Community groups with middle to upper economies and high levels of education certainly have good literacy skills so that they are sensitive to government policies, including anticipating and preventing the spread of the virus by implementing health protocols. On the other hand, the ignorance to the COVID-19 pandemic occurs to the people in the middle to lower-class society with low literacy skills [33].

However, government policies that bind and limit the society in a particular crisis can be strongly rejected by the community [5]. Evidently, during the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the people of middle to lower class with lower-income who live in rural areas still ignore government policies [33]. Especially for people with high power distance, it tends to be difficult to be controlled by the government [29]. In addition, high collectivity indicates high social relations in society [17, 52]. This condition makes government policies difficult to comply with.

The differences in levels of trust and compliance with government policies are based on social status, occupation and income, education level, religion, and gender [30]. Culture, values, and norms in society also influence the public responses to government policies [17]. For instance, people who apply culture and social norms tend to have high and collective solidarity [16, 39], so that not many comply with policies related to COVID-19 [7, 33].

The high level of solidarity and collectivist-based activities reveal the government policies to be uncompromised [16]. An interesting fact that was found in this study is that even though the Samin Tribe in Blimbing Village live in rural areas surrounded by rice fields, they are not

ignorant of COVID-19 and often have trust and obedience to the government and all policies during this pandemic. Social collectivity and solidarity due to the similarity of identity in the Samin Tribe are important social assets [22], especially in preventing the COVID-19 pandemic.

In their social life, they are not much affected by COVID-19, because most of them work as farmers, making them only spend a lot of time in the rice fields. However, it is unique that the Samin Tribe has the high obedient to the government's policies amid the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Mbah Pram in his interview, during the pandemic, they complied with government policies because the government was not foreigners and the row of government seats were already held by Indonesians themselves, not colonizers. Regarding their obedience to the government, an existing literature explained that the tribe were fighting the Dutch colonialist in the past and supports the present government which led by the local people who they considered as *sedulur* or siblings [37].

Previous literatures stated that their belief and obedience to the government refer to the origin of their name. The word Samin means that to achieve prosperity, the descendants of the Samin Tribe must unite in defending the country and fighting against the colonizers [1, 43]. The historical value of the Samin Tribe also affects their compliance with the government. At first, Samin's values were brought by a nobleman named Samin Surosentiko who live with the local people and fight against the Dutch [1, 13, 37, 45]. The Samin Tribe has opposed the Dutch colonial hegemony since the 19th century [1, 42] has made them obey the government which is considered to be *sedulur* (siblings).

Besides, the Samin believe in cause and effect. Mbah Pram gave a Javanese analogy, namely '*wong grip Nek mudeng keiket*'. The analogy means that every conscious (understand/sane) living person must be bound. This means that humans are born free, but are bound by the norms and regulations in society. This is what makes the Samin Tribe obey the government. Likewise, during the COVID-19 pandemic, they are a tribe with high trust and adherence to government policies. Mbah Pram said that the Samin Tribe views the virus as a lesson to test their belief as they uphold the value of honesty and positive behavior.

### **3.3 The Role of Samin Tribe's Opinion Leaders in COVID-19 Socialization**

As a culturally rooted community, the Samin Tribe considered to preserve the cultures and traditions. Therefore, the people are living in the local wisdom of this community [1]. Another research also agrees the consistency of Samin Tribe in preserving their values and life goals. It clarifies the high collectivism of the, both in the family and in their interactions in society [45]. This kind of society exposed the opinion leader to be heard and its role is important especially in communicating the government messages to the community [31].

Opinion leaders play a significant role in disseminating certain ideas to society through socialization [3, 26]. The role of opinion leaders can educate the public [26] and often persuade people [23]. Thus, the presence of opinion leaders in a community can increase awareness [26, 40] and increase individual participation in certain communities [40]. During the COVID-19 pandemic, opinion leaders has important role in awakening the public, especially in rural areas and villages with low education level.

Each community group has different views and responses to policies during the COVID-19 pandemic [17, 33]. The different responses of the people are also influenced by the level of their consumption of the mass media. The content in the mass media influences what the audience thought [5], including in matters related to the COVID-19 pandemic and all policies which are set by the government in preventing its spread.

In his interview, Mbah Pram, as the elder of the Samin Tribe in Blimbing Village, stated that the Samin Tribe is one of the communities who are active in consuming news. With the technological development and adaptation of the Samin Tribe [18], they usually get information through television. Likewise, with the younger generation of the Samin Tribe who have also used social media. Mbah Pram himself as an opinion leader, watches a lot of news on television to keep up with the latest developments, including to COVID-19-related news. So, he could discuss the information and educate his tribe regarding the prevention of COVID-19 spread.

Even though the traditions of the Samin Tribe are deeply rooted, they still follow current developments and current issues including COVID-19. With their openness to information and technological developments, it means that the existence of the Samin Tribe has undergone a transition from traditional to modern society [21]. The Samin Tribe upholds the value of honesty and positive behavior [1, 42], making them respect the truth, including the truth of the news they watch on television. The regular meetings are used to discuss current issues. Just like other tribes/communities in Indonesia, the Samin Tribe also has high solidarity, so they often carry out associative activities collectively [13, 21] such as cooperation, deliberation, and help when someone is in need [21]. Although many government policies are not suitable for rural communities, the Samin Tribe have high obedience to the government.

Collectivity in the Samin Tribe, including in Blimbing Village, is marked by various routine gatherings that are held. For example, the gathering which is held every *Legi* Friday discusses current issues related to old Javanese tradition and philosophy. Usually, they also discuss harmony and Javanese culture, in which the elder could give certain advices. There is also a *Brokohan* tradition every *Suro* Night to continue the brotherhood and be grateful for their gifted '*seger lan waras*' (health and sane). It is not surprising that the role of opinion leader for the Samin Tribe in Blimbing is still very strong.

According to Lazaesfeld & Katz in the two-step flow theory, the behavior of a person or community group is influenced by opinion leaders and then exposed to mass media exposure. The two-step flow theory assumed that not all mass media messages directly hit the audience. This means that the power of mass media is indirect and can be reduced by the influence of local opinion leaders [4]. With the social relations between the people of the Samin Tribe in Blimbing Village who still respect their elder, the role of Mbah Pram as an opinion leader is very much needed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Opinion leaders are those who mediate in the exposure of messages from the mass media to the audiences. In the two-step-flow model theory, mass media messages are first received by opinion leaders and then passed on to society through interpersonal relationships. Opinion leaders are considered to play a role and function strategically to clarify, strengthen and/or clarify information received from the mass media [31]. Mass media audiences are considered passive, while opinion leaders are active in consuming media messages and give them the whole or reduced exposure [4, 9].

Because the Samin Tribe upholds the truth, the news on television they consume is discussed in every meeting held. Mbah Pramugi Prawironegoro as an elder of the Samin Blimbing Village is a vocal opinion leader who always informed current topics to his tribe, including in socializing the COVID-19 and government policies. With numerous regular meetings held, giving Mbah Pram a greater opportunity as an opinion leader to be heard by the Samin Tribe in Blimbing Village.

An opinion leader is considered as a person who has high authority and can determine/influence the attitudes and behavior of the community as audiences who are considered passive in mass media. A person can be used as an opinion leader not only because

of his political position, but because of his authority, charisma, and myths attached, considered more competent or knows more about the procedures for maintaining norms in society [34]. Like Mbah Pram, who became an opinion leader for the Samin Tribe in Blimbing Tribe because he was a descendant of previous elders.

The role of opinion leaders for the Samin Tribe in Blimbing Village during the COVID-19 pandemic was able to change their behavior. The Samin Tribe in the village applies health protocols in their daily life. For example, using a mask when going out/traveling to distant places or when attending routine gatherings. Mbah Pram as an opinion leader does not only socialize with the Samin Tribe but also provides an example of the implementation of the health protocols obligated by the government. The most visible example is that he still uses a mask during routine gatherings of *Legi* Friday and *Brokohan*.

### **3.4 The Socio-Cultural Transformations among the Samin Tribe in Responding to the COVID-19 Impacts**

The openness of the Samin Tribe to information and technological developments indicates that they have transitioned from traditional to modern society [21]. The transition is marked by changes in housing, the use of machinery in agricultural activities, and the use of motorized vehicles. The level of education of the community continues to improve, there are even young Samin who graduated from university and serve to build their village [13, 25]. The Samin Tribe, which is open to information, indicates the development of their mindset and lifestyle because they are willing to accept outside views, including government policies [13; Huda & Anjar, 2013). Differences in people's responses to government policies are also influenced by culture, values, and norms in society [17]. The news and information they got on television were collected to be discussed later in the regular meetings.

The Samin Tribe considers COVID-19 to be a disease epidemic that exists like a disease in general. The Samin believe that everything in this world is interconnected and related to one another. It could be that an incident is a certain sign. This is thought to happen when nature is angry, then nature will imprison humans. This is similar to what is being faced by humans during the COVID-19 pandemic who are imprisoned by the situation. Public trust in government policies during this pandemic tends to vary and based on economic level or cultural background. Many of them are still ignorant and uncompromising [7, 33]. For example, the resistance of rural communities to government health protocols based on culture [33]. Uniquely, this is not found in the Samin Tribe's community in Blimbing Village, Blora.

The Samin Tribe believes that they will be spared and not affected by any disease outbreaks including COVID-19 that has hit if they comply with the government and established health protocols. According to Mbah Pram, the Samin Tribe believes that of humans are good to nature, then nature will be good to humans. They also have an awareness of the dangers of COVID-19 and try to prevent it. During the COVID-19 pandemic, people and society are required to adapt to the new normal and government policies. Adaptation is the ability to adjust as well as change oneself according to environmental developments [49, 18]. The Samin Tribe believes that they will be spared and not affected by any disease outbreaks including COVID-19 that has spread across the globe if they comply with the government and established government-imposed health protocols.

An adaptation is said to be positive if it can adjust well and make a mature and efficient response [2]. Through adaptation, individuals and societies strive to achieve equality in the environment. Positive self-adjustment is achieved when the community tries to cope with changes/developments that occur, instead of ignoring and not compromising on change [50].

This is what the Samin Tribe did. In their social life, they are not much affected by COVID-19, because most of them work as farmers, making them only spend a lot of time in the rice fields. However, they are very obedient in implementing 3M as obligated by the government in dealing with a pandemic. The adherence of the Samin Tribe to the government, said Mbah Pram, was because the government was not foreigners and the row of government seats had been held by Indonesians themselves, not Dutch colonialists.

In responding to environmental developments, people carry out socio-cultural adaptations and transformations to create better social interactions [49, 18]. Although the social life of the Samin Tribe is not affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, their tradition such as routine gatherings were affected. However, they do not give up on preserving their tradition and strengthening their brotherhood. As a socio-cultural adaptation to the pandemic, the traditional Samin Tribe is still being held, but with a limited number and not more than 200 people attending. Besides, the Samin Tribe from outside Blimbing Village do not dare to enter the village, to prevent the spread of the virus.

#### 4 Conclusions

From the study findings that have been stated and described above, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The social life of the Samin Tribe in Blimbing Village is not much affected by COVID-19, because most of them work as farmers, so that they only spend a lot of time in the rice fields. However, they are still adherent to government policies and implement the imposed health protocols. COVID-19 is considered an epidemic that does exist like any other disease. They believe that they will be not affected to any disease outbreaks, including COVID-19, as long as they comply with the government and established health protocols. It is also a manifestation of the Javanese analogy '*wong grip nek mudeng keiket*'. This indicates that the Samin Tribe has awareness of the COVID-19 dangers.
2. The collectivist culture of the Samin Tribe is revealed from their high social solidarity and is manifested through routine gatherings. It is not surprising that the role of opinion leader for the Samin Tribe in Blimbing is still very strong. Mbah Pramugi Prawironegoro as an elder of the Samin Blimbing Village is a vocal opinion leader, including in disseminating COVID-19 and government policies. With regular meetings held, giving Mbah Pram a greater opportunity as an opinion leader to be heard by the Samin Tribe and can change their behavior. The Samin Tribe in the village applies health protocols in their daily life.
3. The Samin Tribe has transitioned from a traditional to modern society, marked by their openness to information and technological developments. On the other hand, the tradition of gathering every Friday night for *Legi* is affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a socio-cultural adaptation during the pandemic, the Samin Tribe continues to hold this tradition by adhering to health protocols and restrictions on the number of participants. At this routine gathering, the Samin Tribe from outside the Blimbing Village did not dare to enter the village.

Previous research only focused on the concept of the Samin Tribe, while the focus of current research trends is COVID-19 which mostly targets urban communities. Through the results of this study, the authors contributed to examining the socio-cultural aspects of the Samin Tribe regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Theoretically, the study adds and strengthens the two-step flow model theory which is still valid in a village community who have transformed and adapted like today. Practically, the authors hope that this study can

become input for Mbah Pram as the opinion leader for the Samin Tribe in Blimbing Village. Furthermore, the authors hope that this research can become a reference for future researchers, considering that this research is limited to the socio-cultural aspect and has not delved deeper into aspects of economic, political, psychological, and other studies.

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