

## Overview of Poverty Mentality, Social Assistance Interpretation, and Anomalies among Beneficiary Families of Direct Cash Assistance (BLT) in Bondowoso, East Java

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### ***Abstract***

Bondowoso Regency is one of the areas in East Java with a high level of extreme poverty. The government, as a policy holder, has allocated funds to address this issue. Cash assistance in the form of Direct Cash Assistance (BLT) has been distributed on a large scale to alleviate poverty. However, poverty and the recipients of BLT in Bondowoso Regency continue to increase from year to year. Researchers indicate the presence of other factors within the community that perpetuate poverty, known as poverty mentality. Poverty Mentality is defined as the mindset and attitude of individuals who see themselves as financially poor and limited, leading them to feel trapped in a cycle of negative thinking and struggling to overcome adversity. This study aims to describe Poverty Mentality among BLT recipients and identify the meaning of BLT for them. The research uses phenomenological research methods with snowball sampling techniques. The Atlas.ti tool is also used to enhance research objectivity. The research findings show that the depiction of Poverty Mentality can be identified through the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral tendencies of informants who show a tendency to become complacent with the assistance provided. Meanwhile, the meaning of BLT itself is categorized into six aspects: a source of income, provision, opportunity opener, right of the poor, privilege, and savior. On the other hand, researchers have found anomalies among BLT recipients in Bondowoso, which may be a concern for local policymakers.

**Keywords:** Poverty Mentality; Bondowoso; Beneficiary Family; Direct Cash Assistance.

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## 1. Introduction

Poverty alleviation is one of the key agendas in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030. Poverty is a multidimensional issue that has garnered the attention of various countries and researchers from multiple disciplines worldwide (Zhou & Liu, 2022). Poverty is a complex problem that affects various aspects of life. The World Bank defines poverty as the inability of an individual to achieve a minimum standard of living (World Bank, 2022). Poverty can be caused by several factors, including low levels of education, laziness, limited natural resources, lack of employment opportunities, lack of capital, and family burdens (Faritz & Soejoto, 2020). According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, a person is considered poor if their per capita expenditure is below the Poverty Line each month (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023). Central Bureau of Statistics states that Indonesia's Poverty Line as of March 2023 is Rp550,458 per capita per month (Kata Data, 2023)

Cultural Poverty can be defined as poverty resulting from the culture and habits adopted by a society (Muttaqin & Ismail, 2023). Poverty is seen as a part of the culture passed down from generation to generation. Cultural poverty impacts living standards, including in the areas of the economy, education, and religion (Manuaba, 2019). Cultural poverty gives rise to "shared poverty," a collective poverty experienced by certain communities. Shared poverty is caused by the belief that social inequality is accepted as an unavoidable reality, becoming a characteristic of communities trapped in the web of poverty (Ahmad, 2022).

Research conducted by Pakpahan et al. (2009) shows that children growing up in families with chronic poverty have a 35% probability of becoming impoverished adults. Ahmad (2022) in his research indicates that the causes of poverty are a fatalistic attitude or resignation to one's condition and high levels of consumerism. This research is supported by (Muttaqin & Ismail, 2023) who assert that poverty is caused by cultural factors, mindsets, and the poor lifestyle habits passed down to successive generations.

In relation to psychological well-being, the term Poverty Mentality describes a mindset that keeps individuals in poverty by making them self believe that they are poor because they deserve it. Poverty is often caused by the mental structures of a society that cannot break free from their previous condition (Zahrawati, 2020). This is inversely related to psychological well-being. Psychological well-being is described as an individual's ability to be independent, recognize their potential, master their environment, accept themselves, have a sense of purpose in life, and maintain positive relationships with others (Sesillia, 2020). Limitations and deficiencies influence how those experiencing poverty make decisions in their daily lives. As a result, impoverished individuals are highly vulnerable to a lack of psychological well-being. This is due to insufficient self-acceptance, lack of purpose in life, lack of environmental mastery, and lack of personal growth (Ryan & Vansteenkiste, 2023). Research by Haushofer & Fehr (2014) demonstrates that poverty has a mental impact on individuals, as evidenced by poor financial decision-making and the avoidance of risk-taking decisions. Additionally, the lack of psychological well-being affects social needs of impoverished individual, including dependency, inability to participate in the community, and social isolation (Suharo in Sesillia, 2020).

Poverty Mentality aligns with the theory of learned helplessness and the theory of scarcity. The theory of learned helplessness suggests that individuals feel incapable of overcoming or changing unpleasant and frequent situations, leading them to feel hopeless

and adopt a passive attitude due to repeated failures in their efforts. According to Seligman and Maier (1967), as cited in Raufelde and Kulakow (2022), learned helplessness arises from the repeated perception that the outcome of a stressful situation is independent of an individual's behavior when confronting that situation. According to Abramson et al. (1980) in Song & Vilares (2021), an individual only learns to be helpless if they perceive that the outcome of their actions is unrelated (response-outcome non-contingency) and if they attribute their failure to a specific cause. Stoeffler (2019) highlights that individuals may cease to respond or take action due to the perception that altering anticipated outcomes is unattainable. This phenomenon fosters a passive behavioral tendency when encountering economic pressures. The theory offers a conceptual framework for understanding how the social work profession aligns with the prevailing status quo, predicated on the notion that substantial changes in poverty alleviation are perceived as unachievable. Consequently, this perception often results in a diminished sense of agency among social workers, further perpetuating a cycle of economic helplessness. There are several characteristics of individuals who exhibit learned helplessness, including difficulty in recognizing opportunities, adopting a passive attitude, and having low expectations of success. Individuals experiencing hopelessness also tend to have minimal expectations for achieving success because they frequently encounter repeated failures, causing them to believe that they are incapable and will not succeed (Indah & Kartasasmita, 2017).

On the other hand, the theory of scarcity reveals that poverty shapes impoverished individual's mindset and behavior by assuming that they continuously experience financial hardship (De Bruijn & Antonides, 2022). The theory of scarcity posits that poverty creates a sense of lack, which then leads to poor decision-making and behavior. Mullainathan & Shafir (2013) argue that poverty causes people to feel deprived, which in turn affects how they make decisions and act. As a result, the lack of money causes poor individuals to act ineffectively, potentially perpetuating their poverty. When people feel they have less than they need, perceived scarcity occurs (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2014). Perceived scarcity can be experienced by anyone. According to Cook & Sadeghein (2018), individuals living in poverty experience long-term money scarcity, and their problematic behaviors have been discussed in social sciences. People living in poverty are found to be more likely to take risks, such as adopting an unhealthy lifestyle (Aue et al., 2016; Mena et al., 2017) and committing crimes (Wohl et al., 2014). Byrnes et al. (1999) in Liang & Liu (2020) state that risk-taking involves making decisions that may lead to negative consequences. The theory of scarcity is considered a unifying, compelling, and promising perspective on poverty and economic decision-making. This theory plays a significant role in the World Development Report (World Bank, 2015).

Poverty Mentality hinders individuals to improve their circumstances in life (Matthews, 2022). Previous research on Poverty Mentality was conducted by Henry (2022) in Nigeria, showing that poverty mentality occurs among beneficiaries of social assistance programs, leading them to engage in unbeneficial spending. According to Baqri et al. (2021), recipients of social assistance are the most at risk of developing a poverty mentality due to a lack of self-autonomy and a tendency to become easily dependent on the aid provided, particularly financial aid. (Widyawati et al., 2022) also revealed that the majority of social assistance beneficiaries have low educational backgrounds and are often in precarious employment or unemployed, relying on the distribution of aid.

The presence of Poverty Mentality among aid recipients is an intriguing subject for research in Indonesia, where the government has implemented numerous social assistance programs for the poor. Despite the significant disbursement of social assistance funds by the government, these funds have not had a significant impact on reducing poverty. Numerous government policies have been introduced to encourage people to break free from the cycle of poverty, one of which is the Direct Cash Assistance (BLT). Unfortunately, the community has not been motivated and seems to be overly reliant on these social assistance policies (Dewi & Andrianus, 2021)

This assumption does not automatically blame the implementation of the BLT program or deem it inappropriate. BLT is the government's program to fulfill the mandate of the 1945 Constitution and the Ministry of Social Affairs Regulation Number 1 of 2018 (Menteri Sosial Republik Indonesia, 2018). This program is proof that the Indonesian government genuinely desires the welfare of its people. However, the government's good intentions have not entirely hit the mark, and some have even resulted in counterproductive outcomes.

The large amount of funds allocated by the government corresponds to data indicating that Indonesia has a significant number of poor people. Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) recorded that in 2023, as many as 25.9 million Indonesians were living in poverty (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023). This figure represents 9.36% of the entire population of Indonesia. One of the provinces in Indonesia with a high poverty rate is East Java Province. This is evidenced by East Java's poverty rate of 10.49% in 2022, which only decreased by 0.1% from 2021.

Bondowoso Regency, often referred to as the "Kota Gerbong Maut," is located in the eastern part of East Java Province. The capital city of Bondowoso Regency covers an area of 1,560.10 km<sup>2</sup>. Despite having a relatively large area, Bondowoso is located in a less strategic region. The regency lacks roads that connect Bondowoso with other city and does not have coastal areas that could support the local economy. This situation makes Bondowoso a region that struggles to develop compared to other areas in East Java (BPK Perwakilan Provinsi Jawa Timur, 2024). According to data from the Bondowoso Regency Central Bureau of Statistics (2022), Bondowoso Regency is classified as an area of extreme poverty.

**Table 1.** Poverty in Bondowoso 2017-2022

	Kemiskinan					
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Garis Kemiskinan (Rp/Kapita/Bulan)	343124	363443	380350	408352	423150	449760
Indeks Kedalaman Kemiskinan (P1)	2	2	2	2	2	2
Indeks Keparahan Kemiskinan (P2)	0	1	0	1	0	0
Jumlah Penduduk Miskin	111660	110980	103330	110240	115175	105690
Presentase Penduduk Miskin	15	14	13	14	15	13

**Source:** Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Bondowoso (2022)

In 2020, the average monthly income in Bondowoso Regency was Rp408,352. This figure increased to Rp423,150 in 2021 and further to Rp449,750 in 2022. On the other hand, the poverty depth index, which measures the expenditure gap of the poor population relative to the poverty line, remained stagnant at 2. This figure is above Indonesia's poverty depth

index, which stood at 1.67 in 2021 (Kata Data, 2022). The number of poor people in Bondowoso Regency also increased from 14% of the total population or 10,240 people to 15% of the total population or 115,175 people in 2021. This figure then decreased again in 2022 to 105,690 (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Bondowoso, 2022). The percentage of poor people in Bondowoso Regency consistently remains above the poverty rate in East Java, which is 10.38 percent.

Direct Cash Assistance (BLT) in Bondowoso Regency has increased year by year. In 2023, the recipients of the Family Hope Program (PKH) in Bondowoso Regency reached 660,649, with the highest number of recipients being in the Tenggarang District.



**Figure 1.** Number of BLT Recipients in the form of PKH in Bondowoso Regency

Source: Dinas Sosial Kabupaten Bondowoso (2023)

Based on the above issues, it is suspected that the BLT recipients in Bondowoso Regency possess a Poverty Mentality that deserves investigation. The main focus of this research is to analyze the tendency of Poverty Mentality among BLT recipients in Bondowoso and their interpretation of the program. The findings of this study are expected to serve as a fundamental reference in formulating strategies to break the cycle of poverty, particularly in the Bondowoso region and its surroundings. In general, the study's results can serve as a supporting reference for other regions facing similar poverty issues. Furthermore, the findings can contribute to achieving the Golden Indonesia 2045 vision and the Zero Poverty SDGs 2030.

## 2. Methods

The research method chosen is Edmund Husserl's Transcendental Phenomenology. Transcendental phenomenological research is an approach that investigates the structures of consciousness and experience from a first-person perspective (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological study is used to explore the perceptions of BLT and the meanings of assistance itself among the Beneficiary Family. The primary subjects or informants in this research are the The Beneficiary Family (Keluarga Penerima Manfaat, or KPM) in Bondowoso. The research stages include: (1) determining interview questions (covering both social and personal aspects of the subjects), (2) determining the research location and subjects, (3) determining data collection tools (typically through in-depth interviews), (4) conducting the research (recording the interviews), and (5) organizing and analyzing the data (transcription of interviews) (Sari, 2023).

There are 9 key informants in this study, who will be thoroughly analyzed through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The analysis of this research will utilize tools such as Atlas.ti to enhance the objectivity of the research. The analytical technique used is the Van Kaam method of transcendental phenomenological research as outlined by Moustakas (1994), which involves the following stages: (1) horizontalization, (2) reduction and elimination, (3) thematic grouping, (4) data validation, and (5) describing the experiences of the KPM (Ronzani et al., 2020).

### **3. Results, Analysis, and Discussions**

#### **3.1. Current Conditions of Beneficiary Families in Bondowoso Regency**

KPM refer to the community members in Bondowoso Regency who receive cash assistance (BLT), including the Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH), Kartu Keluarga Sejahtera (KKS), and Bantuan Langsung Tunai Dana Desa (BLT-DD). According to field data, there are 60,649 KPMs in Bondowoso Regency, distributed across various districts. Several criteria are used to select KPMs eligible for BLT, including pregnant/postpartum/breastfeeding women, families with children under five or children aged 5-7 years who do not signing elementary school, families with children of elementary or junior high school age, and families with children aged 15-18 years who have not completed basic education.

To select KPM, the Social Affairs Office assigns the village administration to collect data on those eligible for the assistance. Unfortunately, the researcher found many errors made by the village government in the distribution of BLT. Some impoverished individuals who should have received assistance did not, evidenced by the absence of their data in the Data Terpadu Kesejahteraan Sosial (DTKS). On the other hand, individuals who were not eligible received assistance by being listed in the DTKS. Moreover, some informants receiving BLT owned substantial assets such as land, large rice fields, and luxurious homes. Recipients generally were reluctant to graduate from the BLT program, indicating that the community in Bondowoso may be experiencing a poverty mentality.

Although the Social Affairs Office of Bondowoso Regency acknowledges the inaccuracy of the DTKS data input by the village administration, they have implemented a solution. The solution involves utilizing the Social Protection and Security Division (Bidang Perlindungan dan Jaminan Sosial, or Linjamsos) to protect impoverished residents who do not receive their rightful assistance. The protection provided includes ensuring their basic needs, such a food are met three times a day. This way, the basic needs of the poor are still met, albeit through a different scheme.

#### **3.2. Overview of Poverty Mentality Among Beneficiary Families in Bondowoso**

Based on field research and analysis, the depiction of the poverty mentality among BLT recipients can be thematized as follows:



Figure 2. Depiction of Poverty Mentality

Source: Data Processed, 2023

The following is a detailed thematization:

**Table 2.** Thematization of Poverty Mentality

	<i>Cognitive</i>	<i>Feeling</i>	<i>Behavior</i>
<b>Thematization</b>	Respondents are proud of the assistance they receive.	Respondents feel a sense of solidarity with other residents.	Respondents have no desire to grow and strive.
	Respondents are envious of neighbors who receive a larger amount of BLT.		
<b>Informants' Response to the Assistance Received</b>	Respondents hope to receive additional assistance.	Respondents feel that the amount of assistance is insufficient.	Respondents prefer cash assistance.
<b>Informants' Dependence</b>	Respondents hope the assistance continues.		Respondents use the assistance to meet basic needs.
			Respondents are waiting for the assistance to be received.
<b>Scenarios When Assistance is Discontinued</b>		Respondents feel disappointed when they no longer receive assistance.	
		Respondents feel sad when they no longer receive assistance.	
<b>Informants' Children's Response</b>	Respondents' children wish to receive assistance when they grow up.	Respondents' children feel happy about the assistance	

**Source:** Data Processed, 2023

The depiction of the poverty mentality among BLT recipients can be explained based on several aspects of the field findings, including the informants' attitudes towards the assistance, their responses to the assistance, their dependence on the assistance, their responses to the scenario if the assistance is discontinued, as well as the responses of the informant's children. Based on interviews with the informants, the following results were obtained when asked about their willingness to start a business:

*"Susah kalau disini .... kan banyak toko-toko besar itu kan. Jadi buat toko kecil itu susah kayaknya kalau disini"- (Informant 1)*

The informant expressed doubts about starting a business, feeling that there was no opportunity. The following statement from another informant shows their dependence on the assistance provided by the government:

*"Pengen mbak, soalnya diem aja dapat dana (BLT) dari pemerintah ..."- (Informant 9)*

Based on these statements, it was found that some informants exhibited traits such as a lack of desire to develop, leading to a pessimistic attitude and a dependence on the BLT provided. The traits displayed by the informants point to a mentality and perspective of the informants towards social assistance as a tempting resource. The following is a statement from one of the informants when asked about their expectations regarding BLT:

*"Kalau harapan saya, jumlah BLT ini ya harap bertambah"- (Informant 4)*

This statement reflects the insufficiency faced by the informant regarding the current BLT amount. In addition to the informant's desire to receive more assistance by increasing the nominal amount already provided, other expressions were also found. These include the expectation of receiving additional assistance and the informant's preference for an increase in cash assistance over other types of assistance. The responses from the informants indicate that they feel the assistance they receive is inadequate and desire a larger amount.

The following is a statement from an informant when the assistance had not yet been disbursed to meet their daily needs:

*"Iya, nunggu. mengharap, gitu. Kalau sudah kepikiran pembayaran anak saya tuh, kapan ya cair."- (Informant 4)*

In addition to constantly awaiting the disbursement of assistance, the informant's dependence is also reflected in their hope for the assistance to continue. The dependence on the provided assistance shows that the informant does not have a fundamental economic foundation to support themselves and their family. This indicates that the informant does not have a job that can meet their basic needs other than relying on BLT.

The informants were also given a scenario in which the assistance would be discontinued. Here is one of the statements:

*"Sedih mbak, ini alhamdulillah ada bantuan, kalo dihentikan, kan bingung juga saya, anak-anak masih kecil"- (Informant 1)*

The informants expressed several responses to the scenario of the assistance being discontinued, with sadness being a prominent expression. Furthermore, other informants were found to feel powerless, disappointed, and confused due to not receiving the assistance. The informants also lacked the desire to graduate from the assistance program and obtain business aid. This response indicates that the informants do not have coping strategies to deal with various uncertainties and are not well-prepared for the future.

The findings in the field regarding the informant's attitudes toward the assistance, their responses to the assistance, and their dependence on it are also consistent with scarcity theory. Scarcity theory reveals that poverty shapes individuals to think and behave under the assumption that they are experiencing financial hardship. This theory explains why the



Found Meaning	Informant Disclosure
Source of income	<i>"Yang namanya orang ya dek ya, pokoknya pendapatannya nggak menentu dek. Tapi alhamdulillah nggak terlalu mikir karena tiap bulan ada yang bantu dari BLT"</i> -(Informant 1)
Provision	<i>"Rezeki dari Allah juga itu kan. Semua dikasih rezeki itu kan semuanya dari Allah yang kasih jalan"</i> -(Informant 4)
Opportunity opener	<i>"Iya mas, sekolah anak anak nggak jadi pikiran saya lagi Alhamdulillah karena bantuan-bantuan pemerintah"</i> -(Informant 1)
The right of the poor	<i>"Tapi harusnya ditambah sama pemerintah mbak supaya bisa cukup buat kebutuhan kami."</i> -(Informant 6)
Privilege	<i>"Senang mbak. Yang lain kan belum tentu dapat mbak jadi itu saya anggap sebagai rezeki keluarga saya."</i> -(Informant 4)
Savior	<i>"Alhamdulillah kalau pemasukan kurang saya nggak berhutang lagi"</i> - (Informant 6) <i>"Saya jadi bisa memenuhi kebutuhan dasar kami mba, untuk membeli beras."</i> - (Informant 7)

Source: Processed data, 2023

Based on the interpretation table above, it can be observed that informants interpret the distribution of Direct Cash Assistance (BLT) in various ways. One interpretation is that BLT serves as a source of income, where informants feel they have a reliable and stable source of income. They perceive BLT as earnings that fulfill their needs.

The next interpretation is that BLT is seen as a gift or blessing from God. Recipients feel that BLT is a grace to be grateful for and view it as a form of the government's concern. They feel economically supported and are able to meet their daily needs. Furthermore, BLT is seen as an opportunity, particularly for the informants' children to pursue education and as capital for informants' work. The presence of BLT helps informants' children continue their education to higher levels and delays early marriage. Some recipients are also able to use BLT as capital to start small businesses, thus improving their family's economic situation. This interpretation shows one of the positive impacts of BLT in improving the quality of life of beneficiary families (KPM).

Another interpretation conveyed by the informants is that BLT is seen as a right of the poor that must be fulfilled by the state. Informants demand that the assistance should be continued as a form of the state's responsibility towards their lives. This interpretation aligns with the reaction of informants who tend to feel dissatisfied and disappointed if the assistance is discontinued.

Another interpretation found is that BLT is considered a privilege. Informants feel fortunate, and BLT helps them meet their basic needs. This is because many people who do not receive BLT are in worse economic conditions than the recipients.

The final interpretation found is that informants consider BLT as a savior. The need for food, in particular, is an aspect fulfilled by BLT in their daily lives. BLT recipients also tend to avoid taking out consumptive loans to meet daily needs as they have BLT as a supplement.

These interpretations demonstrate a range of views, perspectives, and attitudes of the community toward the distribution of Direct Cash Assistance (BLT). Some feel satisfied and grateful for this assistance, while others believe that it is insufficient and that they are highly dependent on it. These findings reflect the complexity of how informants receive and interpret social assistance and its impact on their attitudes and actions in daily life.

### **3.4. Anomalies Among BLT Recipients in Bondowoso Regency**

The researcher conducted a focus group discussion (FGD) with the Social Service of Bondowoso Regency and BLT recipient facilitators, resulting in the following conclusions: (1) the poverty rate in Bondowoso is reflected in the high number of people receiving BLT; (2) delays in BLT distribution have led to social conflicts, anger, and disappointment among the KPM; (3) there are complaints from the community about BLT that is not well-targeted; (4) many people who are not eligible to receive BLT also wish to receive BLT.

Through the researcher's observations, several anomalies were found among the Conditional Cash Transfer (KPM) recipients in Bondowoso. Among these anomalies, some BLT recipients live in permanent homes with adequate facilities, and some own relatively new vehicles. There are informants who own extensive farmland with sufficient income to support their families. Additionally, some informants were observed wearing gold jewelry, either on themselves or on their family members.

Another interesting finding is that some informants pawned their PKH card to obtain loans. The pawning of the PKH card was done because the informants felt desperate and had no other options to meet their basic needs. The PKH card became collateral for the loans, with the amount of money disbursed monthly.

Additionally, it was found that several vulnerable groups, such as the elderly living alone, beggars, street musicians, and homeless individuals, were not included in the KPM category and therefore did not receive adequate social assistance. In these cases, the Social Service could only provide assistance through Linjamsos programs, which were insufficient to support the well-being of these vulnerable groups. This issue needs to be a concern for the government to ensure that assistance is provided to all vulnerable groups that deserve protection.

On the other hand, BLT recipients were reluctant to graduate from the BLT program and shift to a business assistance scheme. In addition to their pessimistic outlook, BLT recipients held mystical beliefs that their business success was influenced by supernatural factors beyond their control. The monthly guidance provided by the Social Service has also not been effective in instilling confidence in BLT recipients to start their own businesses.

## **4. Discussion**

The findings from the field indicate that cognitively, respondents are proud of the assistance they receive, respondents are envious of neighbors who receive a larger amount of BLT, respondents hope to receive additional assistance, and respondents hope the assistance continues. Pride in the assistance received and respondents' hopes for the

continuation of the BLT program reflect the presence of learned helplessness, where recipients feel that they cannot change their situation without external aid, which reinforces dependency on social assistance and reduces the motivation to seek long-term solutions. This pride in the assistance indicates acceptance of their current condition and an inability to alter the situation without outside intervention (Raufelde and Kulakow, 2022). On the other hand, respondents are envious of neighbors who receive a larger amount of BLT and respondents hope to receive additional assistance align with scarcity theory. According to the scarcity theory, when individuals feel a lack of resources, such as money or social assistance, they experience a sense of threat and strive to obtain more in order to meet their basic needs (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013). The envy towards neighbors who receive a larger amount of BLT reflects awareness of scarcity and the desire to gain more to alleviate the economic pressure they face. Similarly, the hope for additional assistance shows an attempt to cope with the scarcity they feel.

Based on the feeling criteria, in terms of learned helplessness, respondents feel a sense of solidarity with other residents, respondents feel sad when they no longer receive assistance, and respondents' children wish to receive assistance when they grow up. The feeling of solidarity can be linked to the idea that recipients of aid may have become dependent on the support, fostering a sense of helplessness where they believe they cannot change their situation without external intervention (Indah & Kartasmita, 2017). Additionally, the sadness felt when no longer receiving assistance reflects the emotional impact of losing a vital source of support, reinforcing feelings of powerlessness. Similarly, the children's wish to receive assistance when they grow up may reflect an internalization of dependency, with the younger generation perceiving that receiving aid is a norm or necessary part of their lives. On the other hand, scarcity theory applies to respondents feeling that the amount of assistance is insufficient and respondents feeling disappointed when they no longer receive assistance. According to scarcity theory, when individuals feel they lack essential resources, they experience heightened anxiety and dissatisfaction. The perception that the assistance is insufficient aligns with the scarcity mindset, where the lack of resources triggers a constant sense of need and discontent (De Bruijn & Antonides, 2022).. Furthermore, the disappointment experienced when the assistance is no longer available reflects the scarcity of resources and the feeling of loss when these resources are cut off.

In terms of behavior, respondents having no desire to grow and strive and respondents waiting for the assistance to be received reflect the key aspects of Learned Helplessness theory. Learned helplessness occurs when individuals perceive that their actions have little to no effect on changing their circumstances, leading to passivity and a lack of motivation to take initiative Song & Vilares (2021). In this case, the respondents' lack of desire to grow or strive could indicate that they have internalized the belief that their efforts will not result in meaningful change, thereby decreasing their motivation to pursue self-improvement. Additionally, the fact that respondents are merely waiting for assistance, rather than seeking other solutions or alternatives, aligns with the passive behavior seen in learned helplessness. From the perspective of scarcity theory, respondents preferring cash assistance and respondents using the assistance to meet basic needs are behaviors driven by the perception of limited resources. When individuals experience a scarcity of resources, such as money or time, they tend to focus on immediate survival needs and prioritize securing the most essential forms of assistance (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2014).. Cash assistance is seen as a flexible and immediate solution for meeting these needs, which aligns with the principles

of scarcity theory, where individuals in conditions of scarcity seek quick and practical solutions to address their basic needs.

In the context of interpreting the meaning of the BLT (Direct Cash Assistance) program, different perceptions highlight distinct psychological and economic theories. When BLT is seen as a source of income or a savior, it aligns with the theory of learned helplessness, as recipients may feel dependent on external aid and unable to change their circumstances without assistance. This perception can reinforce a passive mindset, where individuals rely on the support they receive rather than taking steps to improve their situation independently (Raufelde and Kulakow, 2022). On the other hand, viewing BLT as the right of the poor or a privilege aligns with scarcity theory, where recipients see the assistance as a valuable and limited resource that helps them meet immediate needs and is seen as a justified entitlement due to their socioeconomic status. These scarcity-driven views emphasize the limited access to financial support, making the aid feel essential for survival (De Bruijn & Antonides, 2022). Meanwhile, BLT as an opportunity opener counters learned helplessness, suggesting that the assistance provides recipients with the possibility to break free from their circumstances and create new opportunities for growth and improvement. Lastly, viewing BLT as provision contrasts with scarcity theory by implying that the assistance is a stable, reliable resource, reducing the perception of scarcity and providing recipients with a sense of security and stability.

On the other hand, the anomalies observed, such as BLT recipients living in permanent homes, owning new vehicles, farmland, or wearing gold jewelry, reflect the resource allocation issues tied to scarcity theory. These findings suggest that some recipients do not face acute scarcity, potentially leading to questions about the effectiveness and targeting of the program. Scarcity theory also explains the decision to pawn PKH cards, as individuals experiencing immediate resource scarcity are likely to make short-term, high-risk financial decisions to address pressing needs, even if these decisions exacerbate long-term vulnerability (Liang & Liu, 2020). The exclusion of vulnerable groups such as the elderly, beggars, and street musicians from the KPM category also aligns with scarcity theory. These individuals experience chronic scarcity, yet they are excluded from essential support systems. The scarcity of resources amplifies the stress and cognitive load on these groups, further marginalizing them and perpetuating cycles of poverty. From the perspective of learned helplessness, the reluctance of BLT recipients to graduate from the program and transition to business assistance schemes indicates a sense of dependency and lack of self-efficacy. Recipients' belief that their success is determined by supernatural forces reflects an external locus of control, which is a hallmark of learned helplessness. This mindset undermines their motivation to take proactive steps to improve their circumstances. Furthermore, the ineffectiveness of monthly guidance provided by the Social Service suggests that recipients remain trapped in a cycle of dependency, unable to envision or pursue a path to self-sufficiency. The pawning of PKH cards also aligns with learned helplessness, as it demonstrates desperation and a perceived lack of alternatives, reinforcing the belief that recipients are powerless to change their situations without external aid (Stoeffler, 2019).

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendation**

Bondowoso is one of the poorest regions in East Java with an increasing number of BLT recipients. The low impact of BLT in Bondowoso indicates the presence of other factors

contributing to poverty, particularly the poverty mentality. This study was conducted to identify the characteristics of Poverty Mentality and the interpretation of BLT among the Bondowoso community. To achieve the research objectives, the phenomenological research method was employed using the snowball sampling technique. Nine key informants were deeply analyzed through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. This research was analyzed using tools such as Atlas.ti to enhance the objectivity of the study. The results showed that the Poverty Mentality is reflected in the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of the informants, analyzed based on the nature of the informants, their responses to the assistance received, their dependency, scenarios when the assistance is discontinued, and the response of their generation. Additionally, six interpretations of BLT were identified in the field, including source of income, provision, opportunity opener, the right of the poor, privilege, savior. The researcher also discovered anomalies among BLT recipients based on observations, interviews, and field findings, which could serve as references for stakeholders. Based on the analysis conducted, several policy recommendations involving the Social Service in determining more accurate and targeted recipient criteria include:

1. Providing psychological support and counseling during weekly sessions with facilitators.
2. Organizing discussion groups or therapy sessions to share experiences and strategies for overcoming the poverty mentality.
3. Utilizing assistance sessions to educate the community on the importance of graduating from the BLT program and developing BLT funds into business assistance funds.
4. Adding recipient criteria, with several recommendations including:
  - Recipients have an income under poverty line.
  - Recipients do not own fixed assets (such as farmland, land, etc.).
  - Recipients do not have permanent employment.
  - Involving the Social Service in determining more accurate and targeted data collection and distribution stages for recipients.
5. Do not fully delegate the recipient data collection to the village; instead, it is necessary to form a committee from the Social Service to identify eligible recipients according to existing criteria.
6. Conduct monitoring and evaluation every 3 months by the Social Service.

On another hand, the findings from the study contribute significantly to the field of social science by deepening the understanding of poverty-related behaviors and the psychological impacts of aid programs. The observed behaviors, such as dependency on aid, reluctance to graduate from assistance schemes, and the pawning of PKH cards, provide empirical evidence for the theories of learned helplessness and scarcity. These findings illustrate how prolonged reliance on aid can diminish individual motivation and perpetuate dependency cycles, aligning with learned helplessness. Additionally, the scarcity of resources and its cognitive burden are evident in recipients' decisions to prioritize immediate needs, sometimes at the expense of long-term well-being. The study also highlights the influence of cultural and social perceptions, such as mystical beliefs about success, on recipients'

attitudes toward economic opportunities, offering a nuanced perspective on how local contexts shape behavior. These insights enrich social science discourse by emphasizing the interplay between psychological factors, cultural narratives, and structural inequalities in shaping human behavior in poverty. This research also encourages further exploration of how social assistance programs can unintentionally reinforce dependency or exclusion, contributing to theoretical advancements in understanding poverty and aid dynamics.

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