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# The Impact of Movement Control Order on Rural Livelihood in Malaysia

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**Abstract** - In 2020, the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19) had a global impact on normal daily life. The Government of Malaysia officially declared the Movement Control Order (MCO), an official national lockdown, to reduce the virus's spread. In the face of the unprecedented global health pandemic, Malaysia had struggled to protect its citizens' welfare and livelihoods, particularly in the hardest-hit rural areas. Therefore, this study uses the sustainable livelihood approach (SLA) focusing on the aspect of financial assets and government intervention to enhance understanding on the vulnerability in rural area's livelihood. Pasir Puteh, Kelantan was identified as the rural area for this study. The analysis was performed on a questionnaire survey based on convenience sampling of 62 respondents. Cross table analysis and a correlation test were used to examine the livelihood of the rural area concerning the financial assets, government intervention and vulnerability. The findings indicated that the MCO had a substantial impact on the rural area regarding the vulnerability toward the financial assets, such as employment status, job loss, increasing living costs, and an insufficient response to rural economic challenges. At the same time, there is no substantial government intervention in the welfare of rural areas. According to the results, the study concluded that the government should set up training courses to assist in the long-term recovery of rural areas due to the enforced lockdown, which has adversely affected rural livelihoods.

**Keywords** – *Financial Assets, Government Intervention, Movement Control Order, Sustainable Livelihood, Vulnerability*

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## **I. Introduction**

Coronavirus (COVID-19) was first detected in Malaysia on 23rd January 2020. However, it became a national outbreak two months later where the World Health Organization (WHO) also declared it a global pandemic on 11th March that same year. As a response to curb its spreading, Malaysia declared the Movement Control Order (MCO) under the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Act and the Police Act 1967 on 16th March 2020, issuing a national lockdown. The pandemic has since deconstructed normality into devastating consequences in all facets of livelihood not just in Malaysia but worldwide. It not only raised civilians' death rate, but it also depleted the medical system, disrupted the economy, and put a strain on both social and mental health. The government's hasty implementation of the MCO placed many economic sectors in jeopardy.

Almost every industry is experiencing dramatic changes. This situation continues to put pressure, especially in the economic sector. The enforced MCO has had a huge impact on most Malaysians' lives, and the economic crisis that will occur due to the pandemic's spread will mostly affect people's livelihoods in rural areas. Many employees have been laid off or put on unpaid leave due to directives that have badly affected the tourism and travel, manufacturing, construction, mining, and agriculture industries (Shah et al., 2020). Small businesses' forced closure, mainly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and services, could probably lead to permanent shutdowns. Many were losing their jobs and individuals going bankrupt. Traders lost their income source during the early stages of the order, and although some shops could be opened, the restrictions limited their operation (Lim, 2020; Ismail, 2020). The agriculture and service sectors are the most common employment sources in Malaysia's rural areas (Mohiuddin et al., 2020). Given the economic turmoil, the devastation to rural areas causes major concern, particularly because Hashim (1998) estimates that 71 per cent of poor rural households are self-employed. All of these issues impacted the livelihood of the rural area. As livelihoods become increasingly embroiled in major global changes in the environment, economic and social structures, the concept of livelihood resilience has risen (Quandt, 2018).

The Economic Stimulus Package "PRIHATIN", which was budgeted at around RM250 billion and planned to benefit all Malaysians during the MCO, was unveiled on 27th March 2020 by the Malaysian government. RM100 billion was allocated to help businesses, including small and medium-sized businesses. It was also announced that contributors under the age of 55 may withdraw RM500 from their national pension scheme, Employees Provident Fund (EPF), for up to 12 months. Even though the stimulus package was estimated to benefit Malaysians, an early survey done by Flanders et al. (2020) concluded that a small minority of PRIHATIN receivers are still likely to run out of money in the next few months, especially among low-income households in rural areas. Despite the government's assistance designed to ease the financial burden on low-income households and SMEs, most small and medium-sized businesses could not maintain their financial situation, despite lowering wages, reducing the number of employees, and even granting unpaid leave indefinitely due to uncertain economic conditions. Furthermore, Ong (2020) revealed that a study conducted during the MCO reported by the Department of Statistics revealed that 71% of self-employed workers only have a savings of less than one month. All of these government interventions would help on the financial aspect for the people within the rural areas, but it is unknown whether this intervention does really benefit the people of the rural areas.

Some of the worst affected sectors were agriculture, livestock, and fisheries, where 70% of workers have seen their income reduced and 21% have lost their jobs as of the end of March (Sharudin, 2020). Similar report found from the Malaysian Department of Statistics that the unemployment rate in March 2020 was 3.9% and rose to 5% within a month (NST Business, 2020). More alarming was that the pandemic impacted precarious livelihoods in rural areas that were already facing higher poverty rates, lower incomes, and lower education levels than urban areas (Mohiuddin et al., 2020). The states of Sabah, Kelantan, and Perlis were the most economically impacted by the partial lockdown due to substantial rural populations (Othman & Ibrahim, 2020). This shows the vulnerability of the livelihood of the rural area.

According to the development discussed above, it clearly stated the vulnerable livelihood of the rural areas had been impacted during the implementation of MCO, especially on the financial aspect. As a result, it investigates the impact of the MCO on the sustainable livelihood focusing on financial aspects, government intervention and the vulnerability in the rural area of Pasir Puteh, Kelantan.

## **II. Sustainable Livelihood**

Brundtland Commission on Environment and Development introduces sustainable livelihood as an approach to poverty eradication linking to socio-economics and ecology (Karki, 2021). Sustainable livelihood focuses on the rural area primary to people involved in self-managed production, such as agriculture and local services. The sustainable livelihoods approach is methodologically based on participatory research, applied anthropology, and

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rapid rural appraisal (Henningsen et al., 2020). This approach states that livelihoods should be considered in terms of people's access to capital assets. Furthermore, it is studied to conceptualise livelihoods holistically, capturing the many complexities of livelihoods and the constraints and opportunities they are subjected to through numerous factors. Livelihood considerations are strategic and complex, based on evolving relationships between individuals, their opportunities for access and power, the use of local resources, and their willingness to make use of those opportunities for subsistence and income-generating purposes (Stone & Nyaupane, 2020). A livelihood asset is a fundamental condition that affects and reflects basic livelihoods. There are five assets in the livelihood theories known as financial assets, human assets, physical assets, social assets, and natural assets. This research will focus on financial assets due to it being the most impacted livelihood during the MCO implementation.

A financial asset is about savings, in whatever form, access to financial services, and regular inflows of money. According to Schenck et al. (2018), financial assets include economic sources that allow vulnerable households and individuals to generate income and make an investment that, in turn, ensures the sustainability of their livelihoods. It consists of stocks of cash in the bank, disposable assets like livestock, and a multitude of income sources, such as off-farm labour, government transfers, and remittances from relatives, which improve livelihood outcomes (Bajwa, 2015). Financial asset implies a range of economic sources that empower households and individuals to accumulate wealth, make an investment, and develop a livelihood strategy to sustain their livelihood (Ibrahim et al., 2016). Thus, financial assets are a compilation of how an individual or household makes income to maintain livelihoods and invests in accumulating more assets and staying away from insecurity associated with unstable outcomes of livelihoods. Therefore, Kasim (2017) asserted that financial assets influence livelihood outcomes.

There is a need for a rural household to do diversification activities to increase their financial assets. According to (Ellis 2000), the meaning of diversification activities is performed by family members to raise their social status and living quality. Diversification can also apply to individuals' or households' attempts to find new ways of survival to increase incomes and cope with shocks, such as disasters and disease outbreaks (Nguyen & Australia, 2018). This research will look into these diversification activities during the MCO implementation in rural areas, indicated through the chosen case study.

Vulnerability defined by Ibrahim et al (2015) as a set of interrelated natural and human made phenomena that constitute a threat to the livelihoods. When it is related to livelihood, vulnerability embodies uncertainties of events that can destroy the socioeconomic well-being of households. Added further by Yang and Pan (2021) that vulnerability could be part of the product of risk that attributes to nature that have affected individual or households' action. It is important for this research to look into the vulnerability related to the rural area welfare and their resilience resisting and recovering from the implementation of Movement Control Order during the pandemic.

### ***The Impact of Movement Control Order on the Vulnerability of Livelihood in Rural Area***

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the global economies around. The economic fallout is reversing development gains, and for the first time in three decades, global poverty is expected to increase. Supply chain disruptions and price hikes (short term), business bankruptcies and job losses (medium-term), and social unrests (long term) are three macro-categories of economic problems created by the implementation of MCO that produce direct human consequences. Therefore, according to Ferlito and Perone (2020), smaller businesses and vulnerable groups, such as low-income people and rural employees, would be affected disproportionately by this. The MCO's impact on economic aspects affected hawkers, traders, taxi drivers, jobs with daily income status and those without standard employment contracts. Many companies have their employees working from home, and some workers have had to stop working. Expectantly, rural areas in Malaysia face higher poverty levels, lower wages, and lower education levels than urban areas and are growing after the pandemic hit (Ong, 2020). According to Dube and Kathende (2020), not all people could stay silent at home without doing any economic activities to generate income for their families during the closure and social restrictions.

Most communities, especially those who rely on the informal economy, such as small businesses in the agriculture sector such as vegetables, fruits or even household or trade essential items, cannot carry out their business activities during the period. Due to supply chain disruptions resulting from the closure of the support sector, a lack of workers, and a lack of cash savings during the MCO, small-scale businesses began to lose a source of daily income (Kawi, 2020; Saari, 2020; Abdur Rahman, 2020). Leong and Benson (2020) explain more that an area with high informal workers experience higher economic stress due to job losses, high cost of living and insufficient savings. Added further by Sharples (2020), most businesses, primarily in rural areas, are under substantial financial pressures, thus dislodging income. The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting rural residents of vulnerable livelihoods with detrimental economic consequences due to MCO conditions.

### ***Government Intervention During Movement Control Order***

The lockdown around the globe has a significant impact on the world economy, and there is a vagueness to the global growth forecast. There is a forecast estimation of Malaysia's economy to decline by 1.7 per cent for the year 2020 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). Therefore, the government's aid is crucial to sustaining liveability and employment, especially within rural areas. On 20th March 2020, Malaysia's Prime Minister had announced a stimulus economy initiative called PRIHATIN where the three main objectives of the initiatives are: (i) to protect the people, (ii) to support business, and (iii) to strengthen the economy (Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia, 2020a). An additional stimulus economy package focused on SME and micro-enterprises was announced a month after that, known as PRIHATIN SME Plus (Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia, 2020b). Meanwhile, a new short-term policy was unveiled on 5th June 2020 as part of its economic recovery plan to kick start the economy, known as Pelan Jana Semula Ekonomi Negara or PENJANA. Three key initiatives of PENJANA are empowering the people, propelling businesses, and stimulating the economy (Ministry of Finance Malaysia, 2020). It was also announced that contributors under 55 years old could withdraw RM500 for up to 12 months from their EPF account, an initiative known as i-Lestari. Later that year, the EPF added other schemes known as i-Sinar divided into two categories that could benefit those who need to sustain their livelihood during the economic challenges.

Even though the stimulus package will benefit Malaysians, an early survey done by Flanders et al. (2020) concluded that a small minority of PRIHATIN receivers are still likely to run out of money in the next few months, especially among the low-income households within the rural areas. Despite government assistance that developed to aid the monetary burden and the SME, most of the SMEs unable to sustain the financial situation resorted to cutting wages, cut back the number of workers, furthermore decided to give unpaid leaves indefinitely due to uncertain economic standing (Shamugan et al., 2020). It concurred with the Department of Statistics Malaysia report on the unemployment rate in March 2020 was 3.9% and increased to 5% within a month (NST Business, 2020). Consequently, there is a need to look at the effectiveness of government aid and other available schemes that could help their financial assets, especially for people living within the rural areas.

### **III. Research Methodology**

#### ***Questionnaire Survey and Sampling of Respondents***

Pasir Puteh is a district with a total area of 42,302 hectares. It is Kelantan's fifth largest district. Pasir Puteh is bordered on the north by Kota Bharu, the west by Machang, the north by Bachok, and the south by Terengganu's Besut. Furthermore, Pasir Puteh agricultural activities contribute to 63.9 per cent of total land use (Table 1). Its population is only 117,383 people, accounting for only 7% of Kelantan's total population (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). Based on land use, population density and regional location, it is appropriate for the research context.

Table 1: Current Land Use District of Pasir Puteh

<b>Landuse</b>	<b>Hectare</b>	<b>Per cent (%)</b>
Residential	2,539.89	6.00
Commercial and Service	108.39	0.26
Industry	94.78	0.22
Public Facilities & Institution	516.96	1.22
Open Space & Recreation	383.62	0.91
Forest	1,718.25	4.06
Agriculture	27,038.31	63.92
Vacant Land	4,904.92	11.60
Infrastructure & Utilities	407.25	0.96
Water Body	3,507.14	8.29
Transportation	886.86	2.10
<b>Total</b>	<b>42,302.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Local Plan of the District Pasir Puteh 2020

The questionnaire survey was carried out by adopting convenience sampling based on the District of Pasir Puteh population. The respondents' sample size follows the small sample technique created by Morgan and Krijcie (Berawi, 2018), where 377 respondents have substantial size. Due to the current situation of the Movement Control

Order, only 62 respondents answered the questionnaire survey. Under this special circumstance, the Central Limit Theorem has been applied. In the Central Limit Theorem, 30 sample sizes are sufficient for this research because the t distribution (sample distribution) approximates normal distribution (Kim & Park, 2017). Therefore, the t distribution is generally used instead of the z distribution for large and small sizes. Hence, the total number of respondents of 62 for this research is an adequate sampling size. The questionnaire surveys were distributed to the rural people of Pasir Puteh to gauge their perception of the Movement Control Order's impact on livelihood. Table 2 shows the background of respondents by gender, race, marital status, age group, educational level, employment, and income level.

Table 2: Background of Respondents

Variables	Per cent (%)
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	48.4
Female	51.6
<b>Marital Status</b>	
Married	54.8
Single	38.7
Widower	3.2
Single Mother	1.6
Divorce	1.6
<b>Household Income</b>	
< RM1000	48.4
RM1001-RM2000	32.2
RM2001-RM3000	12.9
RM3001-RM4000	0
RM4001-RM5000	3.2
RM5001-RM6000	1.6
RM6001-RM7000	0
RM7001-RM8000	1.6
<b>Occupation</b>	
Self-Employer	21.0
Farmers, Breeders, Fishermen	19.45
Private Sector	14.5
Government Sector	14.5
Traders, Hawkers	11.3
Housewife	9.7
Student	4.8
Unemployed	3.2
Pensioner	1.6

### *Method of Analysis*

The data were analysed using frequency, cross-tabulation, and correlation analysis in the IBM SPSS Statistics software. Cross-tabulation provides a way of analysing and comparing the results for variables with the results of another. Correlation analysis is meant for exploring the degree of relationship between variables under consideration. In this research, the variables are financial assets, government intervention, as well as vulnerability. Correlation coefficient is the measure to quantify such degree of relationship between the variables (Senthilnathan, 2019). The purpose of this analysis was to determine MCO's impact on the financial assets of sustainable livelihood and government intervention toward the rural area's vulnerability. The correlation analysis will indicate the impact of the Movement Control Order on the rural area. The results and findings of the analysis are explained in the next section.

## **IV. The Result and Finding**

### *Household income affected during Movement Control Order*

According to Table 3, the Movement Control Order's introduction has impacted 75.8% of the total respondents' household income. Some respondents claimed that salary deductions ranging from 10% to 50% had

a detrimental effect on their income. In contrast, all self-employed households' income are the most impacted (21% effect rate), followed by agriculture-related occupations (19.4%). During the Movement Control Order, the highest percentage stated that their household income have not affected are from the government sectors and traders (9.7%), as predicted. This is because the government sector has a fixed income, and "essential needs" traders can still work under a strict set of guidelines.

Table 3: Household Income Affected by Movement Control Order according to Occupation

Occupation	Yes	No
Self-Employed	21.0%	0.0%
Farmers / Breeders / Fishermen	16.1%	3.2%
Private Sector	8.1%	6.5%
Housewife	8.1%	1.6%
Government Sector	4.8%	9.7%
Students	4.8%	0.0%
Traders & Hawkers	1.6%	9.7%
Unemployed	1.6%	1.6%
Pensioner	1.6%	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>75.8%</b>	<b>24.2%</b>

#### *Job Loss and Cost of Living During the Movement Control Order*

The rural region of Pasir Puteh experienced a high percentage of 35.5 percent job loss during the implementation of MCO. The increasing trend of the unemployment rate was expected (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020) due to the closing of businesses and the inability to go to work, especially for those who are self-employed and working in non-essential need sectors. The findings of the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2020) survey recently also found that the agriculture, services, and self-employed sectors which evidently are the top two occupations in this research (Table 2), experienced the highest rate of job loss during the first phase of the Movement Control Order. Meanwhile, according to Table 4, the living costs also increased during the lockdown due to the rising prices, especially for daily necessities (Bukhari, Hyun & Idris, 2018).

This shows the vulnerability of the rural area in terms of their sustainability livelihood. During the early days of the transmission of COVID-19, all the health items that were on-demand, such as face masks and hand sanitisers, were costly. Simultaneously, most rural area populations were pressed to buy essential items, further increasing their expenses and disrupting their survival levels. (Ciolac et al., 2017).

Table 4: Loss of Job and Cost of Living During the Movement Control Order

		Cost of Living			
		Increase	Stay the same	Decrease	Total
Loss of Job	Yes	27.4%	6.5%	1.6%	35.5%
	No	38.7%	24.2%	1.6%	64.5%
<b>Total</b>		<b>66.1%</b>	<b>30.6%</b>	<b>3.2%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

#### *Diversification Activates During the Movement Control Order*

Many citizens worked at home during the MCO; consequently, their salaries were deducted. Moreover, due to employment loss, many were forced to engage in diversification practices to maintain their financial assets. This is very similar to Pasir Puteh. According to Table 5, 62.9 percent of respondents, especially those from agriculture and the self-employed, reported that they engage in diversification activities. Even though the respondents were compensated in full by the government, the ability to operate from home allows them to diversify their activities.

Table 5: Diversification Activities According to Occupation During Movement Control Order

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Farmers / Breeders / Fishermen	14.5	4.8
Self-Employed	11.3	9.7
Government Sector	11.3	3.2
Housewife	8.1	1.6
Private Sector	6.5	8.1
Traders & Hawkers	4.8	6.5
Students	3.2	1.6
Unemployed	3.2	0.0
Pensioner	0.0	1.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>62.9</b>	<b>37.1</b>

### *Sufficient Savings After the Movement Control Order According to Occupation*

Table 6 shows the data analysis about type of occupation and financial savings period during Movement Control Order and shows that 80.7% of respondents have less than three months' worth of savings. Only 3.2% have savings of more than six months. This analysis shows that the rural area does not have enough savings to survive the MCO if it continues for more than three months. In terms of occupation, only those who work in the government sectors have a significant amount of savings over six months due to consistent payroll. Most of the respondents stated that they had more than six months' worth of savings before the economic restriction. The MCO's abrupt announcement forced the respondents to use their earlier savings to cover rising living costs, making their savings insufficient to last through the continuous movement restriction. As stated previously, household income was affected by a combination of factors, such as work losses, salary deductions from 10% to about half, and forced unpaid leave. This demonstrates the impact of the MCO on the financial assets of rural areas.

Table 6: Sufficient of Saving After the Movement Control Order According to Occupation

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>&lt; 1 Month</b>	<b>2-3 Months</b>	<b>4-6 Months</b>	<b>&gt; 6 Months</b>
Self Employed	2.9%	3.2 %	3.2 %	0.0
Farmers, Breeders, Fishermen	11.3%	4.8%	3.2%	0.0
Government Sector	3.2 %	3.2%	4.8%	3.2%
Private Sector	4.8%	6.5%	3.2%	0.0
Traders, Hawkers	4.8%	6.5%	0.0	0.0
Housewife	4.8%	4.8%	0.0	0.0
Students	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%	0.0
Unemployed	1.6%	0.0	0.0	0.0
Retired	0.0	1.6%	0.0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>45.2%</b>	<b>35.5%</b>	<b>16.1%</b>	<b>3.2%</b>

### *Government Intervention During the Movement Control Order*

During the MCO, government intervention helps the people with their livelihood by assisting them through various financial schemes. For example, during the first MCO phase, the government has PRIHATIN as monetary assistance to low- and middle-income households. Table 7 shows that 91.9% of the respondents in Pasir Puteh have received government assistance. Apart from monetary assistance, they reported receiving essential goods during this period from the government. The higher number of respondents who received government assistance resulted from i-Lestari and i-Sinar from the Employee Pension Fund (EPF), Bantuan Sara Hidup (BSH), and state government schemes. Apart from financial aid, there were also discounts on utility bills, such as electricity. The main electricity supplier here, Tenaga Nasional Berhad, a government-linked company, released a discounted bill for the year 2020. Finally, only 8.1% of those surveyed did not receive assistance from the government. This result suggests that the government schemes were committed to easing the rural area's financial assets burden.

Table 7: Receive Government Intervention According to Occupation During the Movement Control Order

Occupation	Yes	No
Self-Employed	19.4%	1.6%
Farmers / Breeders / Fishermen	19.4%	0.0%
Private Sector	14.5%	0.0%
Government Sector	14.5%	0.0%
Traders & Hawkers	8.1%	3.2%
Housewife	8.1%	1.6%
Unemployed	3.2%	0.0%
Students	3.2%	1.6%
Pensioner	1.6%	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>91.9%</b>	<b>8.1%</b>

### ***The Relationship Between the Vulnerability of the Rural Area to Financial Assets and Government Intervention***

Based on the result of the survey above, a correlation has been measured between the four aspects of vulnerability, working status, job losses, increased cost of living and sufficient saving with financial assets and government intervention. Among the four aspects of the rural area's vulnerability during the MCO implementation, only one aspect (working status) shows a significant correlation (relationship) with the financial assets and government assistance. Meanwhile, two-aspect (increase cost of living and sufficient saving) correlates with financial assets only (Table 8). Only an increase in living costs during the MCO with government assistance shows a negative relationship.

Table 8: The Correlation between Vulnerability with Financial Assets and Government Intervention

Vulnerability	Financial Assets		Government Intervention	
	Significant (p) value	Coefficient (R) Value	Significant (p) value	Coefficient (R) Value
Working status during the Movement Control Order	0.00	0.561**	0.024	0.299*
Loss of job during the Movement Control Order	0.077	0.183	0.229	0.096
Increase of cost of living during the Movement Control Order	0.000	0.513**	0.237	-0.093
The sufficient of saving after the Movement Control Order	0.011	0.289*	0.267	0.080

Notes:

\* Significant value shows a significant level at 0.05 level

\*\* Significant value showing a significant level at 0.01 level

## **V. Discussion and Conclusion**

The findings indicate that working status changes have a significant relationship with financial assets and government intervention during the MCO. It means that in a rural area, the implementation of working from home has affected their financial assets, such as deduction of salary, job loss, and unpaid leave. These active statuses are eligible for government assistance, such as i-Lestari, i-Sinar, PRIHATIN, NGOs' donations, and energy bill discounts. It is possible to see the importance of government involvement in working status. Since 64.4 percent of the respondents (Table 4) did not lose their jobs, there was no substantial job loss for both financial assets and government interference.

Nonetheless, at 35.5 percent (Table 4), the number of people who have lost their jobs is on the high side of the unemployment rate (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). Owing to additional spending on necessary items such as housing, the cost of living has risen substantially with additional financial assets required (face mask and hand sanitiser). However, there is no connection between the cost of living and government intervention, even though the latter resulted in a negative correlation (-0.093). The result demonstrates that government action has



little impact on the rising cost of living in rural areas. Therefore, they must evaluate the employed intervention strategy to ensure that it is truly beneficial to rural residents as economic assistance.

During the MCO, there is a significant relationship between the amount of money saved and financial assets. As previously mentioned, due to the rising cost of living during the MCO, rural residents must rely on their savings to maintain their livelihood. Similarly, as Martin et al. (2020) noted, many household incomes in the United States were severely affected by employment losses, burdening their savings through survival during the lockdown and sustaining their livelihoods towards economic recovery. Therefore, financial asset strain is observed across cultures, impacting all backgrounds, indicating the need for effective government action and better economic policy that factors in high living costs.

In conclusion, the Movement Control Order (MCO) does impact the sustainable livelihood of the rural area, especially regarding their financial assets. The loss of jobs during the MCO needs critical addressing due to this unprecedented outbreak leading to the economic downturn. There is a need for more government economic initiatives that contextualise rural people's needs. Even though 91.9% of the respondents reported having received government's assistance, the research finding indicates a negative relationship and no significant contribution to the rural area to sustain the cost of living in uncertain economic recovery. As a recommendation, the government should consider developing training courses for people who have lost their jobs to help them regain their sustainable livelihood and support their increasing living costs towards diversifying livelihood recovery alternatives.

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