

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS DUE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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13

Abstract

Mental health problems are inevitable amid the Covid-19 pandemic. This paper aims to describe mental health problems in Indonesia due to the Covid-19 pandemic and to find out about the government's efforts to prevent and overcome the problems. Mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, and trauma due to Covid-19 are experienced by Indonesians. The government provides Sejiwa services to help people overcome psychological problems due to Covid-19 pandemic. Besides, the government also launched Guidelines for Mental and Psychosocial Health Support and developed the Covid-19 Alert Village. In this case, Commission IX DPR RI needs to support the Ministry of Health's efforts related to prevention, handling, and implementation of follow-up on mental health problems due to the pandemic.

Introduction

At the end of July 2020, a Covid-19 patient in Surabaya committed suicide by jumping from the 6th floor of the Surabaya Hajj General Hospital. He is suspected of being depressed because his seven swab tests showed he was positive (detik.com, 30 July 2020). This case indicates that Covid-19 pandemic can trigger serious mental health problems. Devora Kestel, Director of the WHO Department of Mental Health and Drug Users, warned of the possible increase in the number and severity of mental illness due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the government must prioritize

this issue (Republika.co.id, 15 May 2020). In line with Devora Kestel's statement, the Covid-19 Task Force report shows that this pandemic has resulted in 80% of psychological problems and the rest is physical health problems. This means that the government should pay more attention to mental health issues. Thus, this paper will answer the following questions: What is the picture of mental health problems in Indonesia due to the Covid-19 pandemic? What are the government efforts to prevent and overcome these problems?



Overview of Mental Health Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic

A mental health survey through online self-examination conducted by the Association of Indonesian Mental Medicine Specialists (PDSKJI) on 1,552 respondents regarding anxiety, depression, and trauma shows that the largest number of respondents are women aged 14 to 71 years (76.1%). Most respondents came from West Java 23.4%, DKI Jakarta 16.9%, Central Java 15.5%, and East Java 12.8% (pdskji.org/home, 23 April 2020).

The survey showed that 63% of respondents experienced anxiety and 66% of respondents experienced depression due to the Covid 19 pandemic. Symptoms of anxiety are excessive worry about bad things, irritability, and difficulty getting relaxed. Meanwhile, symptoms of depression include sleep disturbance, lack of confidence, fatigue, lack of energy, and loss of interest. Furthermore, 80% of respondents have symptoms of post-traumatic psychological stress due to experiencing or witnessing unpleasant events related to Covid-19. 46% of respondents experienced severe post-traumatic psychological stress symptoms, 33% experienced moderate symptoms, 2% of respondents experienced mild symptoms, and 19% had no symptoms. The most prominent symptoms of post-traumatic stress are loneliness, vigilance, and caution. Meanwhile, further examinations of 2,364 respondents in 34 provinces showed results that were not significantly different from the previous examination. As many as 69% of respondents experienced psychological problems,

68% experienced anxiety, 67% experienced depression, and 77% experienced psychological trauma. There are 49% of respondents who experience depression even think about death (<http://pdskji.org/hom>, May 14, 2020). This data shows that mental health problems (such as anxiety, depression, and trauma due to the Covid-19 pandemic) are serious problems experienced by Indonesians today.

Mental Health Risk Factors Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic is a new source of stress for the world community today. Globally, there are four main risk factors for depression due to Covid-19 pandemic (Thakur and Jain, 2020). First, social distancing and isolation. The fear of Covid-19 creates serious emotional distress. The feeling of isolation due to the existence of various health protocols related to Covid can lead to a decline in mental health leading to depression and suicide. Referring to cases in India, the United States, Saudi Arabia, and the United Kingdom, the isolation during the Covid-19 pandemic likely contributed to suicide. For example, a Chinese student in Saudi Arabia committed suicide after being isolated in the hospital because he was suspected of being infected with Covid-19.

Second, economic recession. The Covid-19 pandemic has triggered a global economic crisis that is likely to increase the risk of occupational and economic suicide. Uncertainty, hopelessness, and worthlessness increase the suicide rate. In Germany, for example, the Minister of Finance committed

suicide at the end of March 2020 out of despair about the impact of Covid-19 on the German economy. In Indonesia, until July 31, 2020, the Ministry of Manpower recorded 2.14 million formal and informal workers were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Many experts assess the possibility of a recession in Indonesia in the third quarter of 2020 (July-September 2020) based on BPS data which shows a decline in Indonesia's economic growth to -5.32% in the second quarter of 2020 (April-June 2020) (Kompas.com, 3 August 2020).

Third, stress and trauma to health workers. Health care providers have the highest mental health risk during the Covid-19 pandemic. The stress comes from extreme stress, fear of contracting Covid, feelings of helplessness, and trauma from seeing Covid-19 patients who die alone. These factors lead to the risk of suicide for health workers. A survey of 2,132 nurses from all over Indonesia by the Department of Mental Nursing, the University of Indonesia Faculty of Nursing, and the Research Division of the Indonesian Mental Health Nurses Association (IPKJI) in April-May 2020 showed that more than half of health workers experience anxiety and depression, and are even thinking about suicide (Kompas, 4 August 2020: 1).

Fourth, stigma and discrimination. The stigma of Covid-19 can trigger suicides around the world. In India, for example, a man committed suicide after experiencing a social boycott and religious discrimination on suspicion of being infected with Covid-19. In Bangladesh, a man killed himself after being isolated

by a neighbor after being diagnosed with Covid-19. In Indonesia, health workers experience stigma and discrimination. The nurses (and their families) are excluded from the social environment, evicted, prohibited from taking public transportation, prohibited from getting married, and possibly divorce (Kompas, 4 August 2020: 1).

Government Efforts to Prevent Mental Health Problems

Mental health problems due to the Covid-19 pandemic are of concern to the government. At the end of April 2020, the Presidential Staff Office (KSP) together with the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, the Ministry of Women and Children Empowerment (KPPA), the Ministry of Health, the Covid-19 Accelerated Handling Task Force, PT Telkom, Infomedia, and the Indonesian Psychological Association (HIMPSI) provided mental health psychology consultation services or psychology. This service serves to deal with the psychological pressure of the community due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In its implementation, people who need psychological services contact hotline 119 ext 8. They will connect with volunteers from HIMPSI and have the opportunity to conduct counseling for 30 minutes. The three steps of psychological treatment provided are public education, initial psychiatric consultation, and mentoring. In Batch 1, 162 Sejiwa service volunteers were consisting of Indonesian psychology practitioners. 17,088 calls contacted

Sejiwa from 29 April 2020 to 28 May 2020. 14,916 calls were successfully received by officers and 1,366 complaints received by volunteers (HIMPSI, 2020).

As a preventive effort, the government through the Ministry of Health launched a Guidebook for Mental and Psychosocial Health Support due to the Covid-19 Pandemic which refers to WHO policies. This book is a reference for the central government and local governments in taking preventive measures, handling and implementing follow-up actions in the mental and psychosocial health sector due to the Covid-19 pandemic. To be optimal, the Ministry of Health seeks to involve the community through the Covid-19 Alert Village. It refers to a village having readiness resources and the ability to deal with health problems, both physically and mentally, independently. These villages have smaller Siaga Sehat Jiwa groups in the community to improve synergy across professions, from the provincial and district health offices to public health centers. Here, clinical psychologists educate and provide practical skills guidance to the community so that they can apply the principle of mentoring independently. This is a comprehensive step, involving cross-sectoral, private, and community sectors, so that it can be a strategy for preventing and resolving mental health problems due to Covid-19.

Closing

Mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, and trauma due to Covid-19 are felt

by most Indonesians. Some of the main risk factors are social distancing and isolation, economic recession, stress and trauma to health workers, and stigma and discrimination. In response to this problem, the government launched the Sejiwa service to help deal with the psychological threat of the community due to Covid-19. Also, the government has launched a Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Guidebook due to the Covid-19 Pandemic and is working to develop the Covid-19 Alert Village.

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