

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Impact for Sub-Urban Society in Yogyakarta, Indonesia: A Qualitative Study

by Bayu Achmad

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Introduction

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) was firstly recorded in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 and shortly after that, it was transmitted widely around the whole world. In 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared pandemic status of COVID-19.¹ The easy transmission of the virus combined with the absence of previous immunity and vaccine has made this as one of the most severe pandemics and fatal diseases in the human history.²

Since it was firstly reported, more than 17 million cases have been confirmed and caused almost 700 thousand casualties around the world. Indonesia is a country which has the most cases in the South East Asia (ASEAN) and is ranked 24th worldwide having more than 108 thousand positive cases and more than 5 thousand casualties.³ This very circumstance has driven a worldwide campaign of public health in order to slow the transmission of the virus, given several suggestions to increase hand washing, to reduce face touching, to wear masks in public areas and to have physical distancing. It is also highly recommended to restrict or prohibit upon the functioning of educational institutions; such as schools and universities, places for communal objectives, public transportation, in addition to other places where there are many people gather⁴

Patients infected with COVID-19 complain of respiratory and gastrointestinal disorders with symptoms ranging from mild self-limited disease to severe pneumonia, acute respiratory distress syndrome, septic shock, and even systemic multiple organ failure syndrome. The source of transmission of the virus comes from patients who have been previously infected. In addition, asymptomatic infected patients can increase the transmission, since they claim that themselves as healthy individuals, thus they can have limitless contact with others.⁵

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic gives psychological, social, and economical impacts towards the society. In an early study investigating immediate psychological response during COVID-19 epidemic among general population in China, 53.8% of participants rated the psychological impact of the outbreak as moderate or severe.⁶ The psychological impact can be influenced by age, gender, marital status, having a child, and a composition of the household.⁷ In general, psychological disorder symptoms experienced by the society of Indonesia are anxiety, sadness, anger, fear, boredom, and despair.⁸

Social distancing applied by the government has its function to limit the viral transmission, otherwise this government program has caused stressful situation, especially for the society which has high social interaction history and culture such as Indonesians. Generally, the social distancing can increase negative psychological effects; including confusion, anger, and post-traumatic distress. Further duration of social distancing, infection fears, boredom, frustration, lack of information, and fear of financial loss emerge to increase the risk of negative psychological outcomes.⁹

Subsequently, other impacts which are experienced by the society are financial instability due to unemployment has been enriched, the supply side has been damaged, economic growth, tourism level and sale of the traveling sector have been reduced.¹⁰ In particular, within these populations, which are the most economically vulnerable groups, there is a high rate of stress which raises the need for special attention.¹¹

Therefore, our study aims to understand impact of the COVID-19 pandemic for sub-urban society in Yogyakarta, Indonesia through semi-structured interviews and to analyze the data using hermeneutic phenomenology approach. We hope, our study would provide a better understanding of psychological, social and financial needs for government officials, researchers and health professionals to better target their actions during a pandemic and expand the research in the area.

Research design

Research design which was employed in this study was Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis method to qualitatively analyze impact of the COVID-19 pandemic for sub-urban society in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The data analyses applied hermeneutics phenomenological approach.

Study subject

We determined the participant in this study by applying purposive sampling. Inclusion criteria in this study were those who were (1) residing in the sub-urban area of Yogyakarta province, (2) family members who are the breadwinner, (3) married and having family, (4) over 18 years old. Exclusion criterion was the ones who were working as civil servants.

Interview outline

We determined the interview outline by consulting relevant literature and seeking experts' opinions. The main interview questions posed to the participants are the following: (1) How do you feel about COVID-19? (2) What has changed in your social life? (3) What are the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic towards your financial burden and your family?

Data collection

The data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews to the participants. First, we communicated the purpose and significance of the study to the participants in advanced and scheduled for the interview time at their convenience. The study subjects were allowed to withdraw consent at any time. Moreover, the researchers guaranteed the participant that the data recorded were kept strictly confidential and considered as their privacy. The researchers remained neutral in collecting the data and established good relationship with the participants. The researchers implemented several techniques; namely unconditional acceptance, active listening, and clarification to promote the authenticity of the data and to avoid bias.

The data collection was conducted in June 2020 through communicating with the participants via private message through *WhatsApp*. This was applied with the consideration when the data collection was conducted, Indonesia was implementing Large-Scale Social Restriction (lockdown), hence it was impossible to meet in person, beside that, the implementation of WhatsApp application was chosen since this application is considerably the most popular application for the society in the research location. Furthermore, this application is believed to be more popular than telephone.

Data analysis

Within 24 hours of each interview, the WhatsApp chat was copied and analyzed by Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis method. The researchers (1) read the materials repeatedly and thoroughly, (2) implemented taking notes initially upon content of words, sentences, and languages which were used by the participant, (3) developed the emerging theme, (4) anticipated the relation between the emerging themes, (5) moved on to the next participant, and (6) found the pattern raised among the cases/participants.

Ethical review

This study was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Medicine, Public Health and Nursing UGM. The authors promise that there will be no academic misconduct such as plagiarism, data fabrication, falsification, and repeated publication.

Result

In this study, the researchers enrolled 7 participants consisting of 5 males and 2 females between age of 36 and 55 with an average age of 44.29 ± 6.73 having the range of educational background of junior high school to associate's degree. All of the participants are married and have families. The participants have occupations; from entrepreneurs, private employees, security staffs, to labors who earn less than Rp 4,000,000.00 per month. Table 1 outlines the baseline characteristics of the participants.

Table 1. Baseline characteristics of participants (n = 7)

Characteristics	N (%)	Mean (SD)	Median (range)
Gender			
Male	5 (71.42%)		
Female	2 (28.58%)		
Age		44.29 (6.73)	43 (36 – 55)
Education			
SMP (junior high school)	1 (14.29%)		
SMA (senior high school)	5 (71.42%)		
Diploma III (associate's degree)	1 (14.29%)		
Occupation			
Entrepreneur	1 (14.29%)		
Private employee	2 (28.58%)		
Security staff	1 (14.29%)		
Labor	3 (42.84%)		
Marriage and offspring			
Married with children	7 (100%)		

We explored the psychological, social and financial experience of participants applying hermeneutic phenomenological approach. The researchers found 3 themes which are summarized below. Exemplar quotes for each theme are displayed in Table 2.

Theme 1: Negative emotions

Most participants (n = 5) experienced anxiety and fear of the COVID-19 pandemic. This anxiety was based on the fact that participants have occupations requiring them to meet with many people thereby increasing the risk of exposure to the virus, in addition to the stereotype that neighbors who had tested positive for COVID-19 will be a threat to the whole community. Moreover, social and electronics media in Indonesia continuously reported the news upon the expanding COVID-19 pandemic, thus it also caused a source of fear for the society.

Psychosomatic symptoms suffered by one of the participants was a clinical manifestation of anxiety disorder due to a pandemic.

Theme 2: Social interactions

The participants (n = 2) experienced limitations in establishing social interactions where social interaction is a common thing which they usually do on a daily basis. The participants realized that to prevent transmission of the COVID-19 virus, they were expected to stay at home and avoid traveling without urgent matters.

Theme 3: Financial Burden

The participants (n = 3) dealt with burden in their occupations and income due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Their roles as heads of the family and the breadwinners provided a massive psychological impact. They complained that they were laid off from work, causing financial problems for the family. Furthermore, the Indonesian economic crisis due to the pandemic resulted in an increase in inflation and prices of goods.

Table 2. Themes identified through interviews with participant (n=7)

No	Theme	Subtheme	Quotations*
1	Negative emotions	Anxiety caused by COVID-19 exposure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I experience a little feeling of psychosomatic because of the large number of news regarding COVID, my GERD and anxiety disorder are often relapsed." (R1) • "As a durian seller, every day I interact with many people. I'm actually also worried of getting exposed to this virus." (R2) • "Nowadays, social media and television continuously share news regarding COVID pandemic, so that it makes me and my family more worried." (R3)
		Fear of exposed to COVID-19 infection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Actually, I'm afraid if my wife gets exposed to COVID virus, because she suffers from diabetes mellitus which makes her very vulnerable." (R4) • "My neighbor who lives only 500 meters from my house is a COVID-19 positive, so it makes me and my family feel afraid to go outside of our house." (R5)
2	Social Interaction	Limitation in social interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Now, we cannot be free anymore in social interaction. All social activities must be limited and be very careful" (R3) • "What we experience is the limitation to do activity outside and have to refrain from going outside if it's not important" (R1)
3	Financial Burden	Occupation and income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "what I experience as the head of the family is from financial side. I got lay off because of this COVID pandemic, so I cannot meet the needs of my family." (R5)

No	Theme	Subtheme	Quotations*
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “During the COVID-19 pandemic, I have not been working for 3 months...” (R6) • “The one causing stress is economic situation. We used to have a job, now we have nothing to do, and everything becomes pricey, whereas we have to meet our needs...” (R7)

* Translated from Bahasa Indonesia

Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic brings serious impacts towards the society in Indonesia. Based on the result of the study, it was found that there were 3 issues which were experienced by the participants in dealing with the pandemic, namely negative emotions, social interactions, and financial burden. Negative emotions theme in this study were divided into two issues, they were anxiety due to COVID-19 exposure and fear of exposed to COVID-19. Negative emotions of the society were seen from the occurrence of anxiety disorder such as GERD. Based on the survey regarding emotional reaction during COVID-19 isolation in Indonesia, it was found that anxiety was the most occurring impact which was experienced by the society in Indonesia.⁸ Negative emotion will develop perception towards COVID-19 which eventually increases family protective behavior.²

Furthermore, in Indonesia, a kind of stereotype was also formed that a neighbor which was proven to be a COVID-19 positive was a source of threat for the society, hence this neighbor must be avoid, where eventually they would build an insignificant fear to only go outside their house. Negative stereotype has proven to cause harmful impact, such as avoiding behavior, hostility, social isolation, and the loss of humanity in the society.¹² An education which can reach out families and the society to avoid social prejudice and discrimination from a healthcare center is needed.¹³ The implemented education may be in the form of discussion regarding incidence, prevention, management, vaccination as an effort to eliminate stigmatization in the community.¹²

Moreover, the stereotype of COVID-19 patients is caused by excessive reporting by mass media coverage in Indonesia. This will not only cause burnout but also lead to anxiety. In developing countries, mass media and social media are the main sources of information, which greatly influence the perception and behavior patterns of public health.¹⁴ Furthermore, the characteristics of secondary education possessed by most rural societies have caused failure in comparing news on social media with factual news, thus they assume that factual news is news that is exposed on social media.¹⁵

Several participants in this study have occupations which require them to interact with others. This creates a dilemma for them, since on one hand they are afraid of being exposed to the virus, yet on the other hand they must also work to meet their family needs. Recommendations for working online are not always successful in rural areas of Indonesia. Limited network access and lack of ability to operate online systems are obstacles for the middle class. Besides occupational resistance to work from home might be a result of traditionalism, lack of trust, type of occupation, and the level of common knowledge as well.¹⁶

The COVID-19 virus transmits through person-to-person interaction, thus social distancing is an effort to prevent the spread of COVID-19 domestically and globally.¹⁷ Social distancing has been proven to significantly decrease the numbers of daily confirmed-cases and daily casualties due to COVID-19 in 10 highly infected countries.¹⁸ It is also highly recommended to restrict or prohibit upon the functioning of educational institutions; such as schools and universities, places for communal objectives, public transportation, in addition to other places where there are many people gather. On the other side, restriction upon social interaction is not always an easy issue, especially for the society of which has high social culture. This can trigger stress which ultimately affects the immune response to viruses. This issue requires support from government officials, health agents, and researchers, hence they can take these facts into their consideration and direct their actions during the pandemic, as well as encourage studies to better understand these characteristics.¹¹

The COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of lockdowns in various countries have been proven to cause public economic shocks. This makes society, especially the lower middle class, becomes a group that is vulnerable to bankruptcy. It is further explained that education, family income, government positions, and location of residence are factors which influence one's financial disturbances.¹⁹ Individual coping and family support are needed in the current situation where many people lose their jobs and income. A worker needs innovation through more creative work methods; thus, their business continues to run and earn appropriate income.²⁰

Conclusions

This study provided a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the psychological, social, and financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic for sub-urban society through a hermeneutics phenomenological approach. In the early days, negative emotions were dominant. The

substantial problem to deal with is financial burden where the economic crisis causing a wave of lay-offs and loss of income. This problem causes financial vulnerability of the society. This study provided fundamental data for government officials, health professionals, and researchers ²to better target their actions during a pandemic and ²expand the research in the area.

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