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ARTICLE COMMENTARY



## Indonesia's fight against COVID-19: the roles of local government units and community organisations

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### ABSTRACT

Indonesia is the country with the most COVID-19 cases in Southeast Asia. Indonesian older adults are facing the biggest threat and risk of infection. There are millions of underprivileged families expecting government aid during the pandemic. This article discusses the active role of local government units and community organisations, such as sub-districts or village offices and officially affiliated youth organisations, in ensuring unprivileged Indonesians' safety and welfare. Local government and community organisations are also involved in the delivery of government aid to beneficiaries during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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COVID-19; pandemic; public administration; public health management

## Introduction

According to data from the World Health Organisation (WHO), more than 95 percent of COVID-19 related deaths are individuals who are over 60 years old. According to government census data, 10.3% of the Indonesian population or 27.5 million people are over 60 (Cicik 2019), and at high risk for COVID-19. In Indonesia, most COVID-19 deaths have been in the age group of around 60 years. The age group between 41 and 80 years old, especially those 61–80, is more prone to suffer death-related complications caused by COVID-19.

The Indonesian government is trying hard to contain the outbreak by enforcing partial lockdowns in various provinces. The government has paid particular attention to the physical and mental health of the senior citizens for their high risk of being infected by the coronavirus (Pradana et al. 2020). More attention needs to be given if the senior citizens have a history of health problems and a decline in physiological conditions.

The involvement of local government and community organisations across Indonesia deserves attention. These units play an active role in taking care of vulnerable parts of society, mainly the poor and the elderly. The community units act as an extension of the central government in reaching the smallest member of society.

## Indonesian older adults' risk of COVID-19 infection

The weaker immune system of older adults is a primary concern during the COVID-19 pandemic (Sutrisno 2020). Decreased immunity occurs due to the aging process. It includes decreased hair colour pigments, hormone production, skin elasticity, muscle mass, bone density, tooth strength, and even limited body organ functions. Older people who have chronic diseases, such as heart

disease, diabetes, asthma, and cancer, are more exposed to the risk of COVID-19 infection (Sinombor and Anwar 2020). Complications may cause disruption and could reduce the functions of essential body organs. COVID-19 can exacerbate chronic disease and cause death.

As of July 11th, 2020, there are 3,535 confirmed COVID-10 deaths in Indonesia (Kawal COVID 2020). They were mostly caused by comorbid factors such as hypertension, diabetes, heart complication, lung disease, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. The older adults' weak immune system makes them more prone to COVID-19 infection (Pradana et al. 2020). In these circumstances, the coronavirus develops more easily and causes interference with various body functions (Sutrisno 2020).

Once infected, the elderly will feel physical deterioration, or even decreased brain function. Therefore, there is a demand for correct supervision in each COVID-19 case treatment. Older citizens are often reminded to minimise drug use to reduce side effects and drug complications, which can eventually worsen their health (Fundrika and Efendi 2020). The seniors who are diagnosed with COVID-19 are always a particular focus for treatment.

## The roles of Indonesian community units during the pandemic

One of the most effective ways to ensure Indonesian older adults' safety is by involving their families and neighbours. They must keep watch of the older citizens so they do not travel outside their houses unless there is an urgent need. The older citizens must also be frequently reminded to keep using masks and regularly wash their hands.

Considering the current situation, we agree with Nagarkar (2020) that older adults' safety and welfare rely on community initiatives. Local representatives, non-governmental organisations, neighbourhoods, and volunteers should play significant roles in this matter. The people who are active in civil society organisations, mostly younger citizens, are also essential elements for their active roles in delivering food supplies, daily essentials, and medicines to older citizens (Mashabi 2020).

Indonesian authorities continue to channel aid to COVID-19 affected groups. In Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia, government aid in the form of basic needs are provided by both the provincial and central government (Qonita and Annisa 2020), while in other cities and regencies, they are provided by the central, provincial, and city/regency (*kota/kabupaten*) governments. The assistance of the younger members of society is required to distribute the aid to reach the correct community units. From there, the aids can be distributed to the homes of the beneficiaries.

In Indonesia, the smallest local government unit is known as the *kelurahan*, which is equivalent to a village administration office. There are three officially recognised levels of administration beneath the *kelurahan*: *dusun* (hamlet), RW, and RT (neighbourhood association). Almost every *kelurahan* in Indonesia has a *karang taruna*, a youth group that organises local sports events and community service activities (Pramesti 2014). Along with the non-official society leaders, the role of *karang taruna* is essential in channelling aid from provincial and central government to older members of society (Baznas 2020).

The Indonesian government has given IDR 2.42 trillion (roughly USD 170 million) as financial aid to around 95,430,000 families in urban areas. Besides, the government has given up to IDR 4.3 trillion (roughly USD 300 million) of BLT (Direct Cash Assistance) funds to villages through *kelurahan*, RT and RW offices (Setyowati 2020). The assistance was distributed to 7,236,648 heads of families in villages and rural areas. The beneficiaries are mostly farmers and farm labourers, whose economic activities are severely affected by the pandemic.

## Conclusion

As smaller units under the Indonesian government, local government unites and community organisations play an essential role in ensuring people's welfare during the COVID-19 pandemic. Older adults are the most fragile members of society, so the units have to be vigilant in watching over them. Besides, local government and community groups such as village offices and *karang taruna*

can also help protect vulnerable members of society and distribute aid. Their role is to take the central and provincial government's aid to the older and underprivileged members of society.

Although the COVID-19 crisis is almost over in Indonesia's neighbouring countries, such as Thailand and Vietnam, Indonesia's fight against the virus is still far over. Even until the last week of June 2020, the number of new cases continues to rise. Therefore, Indonesian society needs to be more united. The local government units and community organisations also must be more active and vigilant than ever at this time.

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