

Editorial

Improper social distancing practices: sample cases in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Social distancing is not always understood well by common people. The media's inaccurate information and the minimum of the government socialization create an excessive fear for specific groups. Then, the practices of social or physical distancing go beyond its real objectives.

INTRODUCTION

As the pandemic of Covid-19 has widespread worldwide, countries respond by regulating their citizens to prevent massive contamination. Indonesia is not an exception. It has issued a Large-Scale Social Restriction policy, known as *Pembatasan Sosial Bersekala Besar* (PSBB).¹ Unfortunately, the socialization of the scheme was not managed very well. It, then, has triggered some misunderstanding among society. Thus, illogical cases of social distancing practices are identified in the fields.

SAMPLE CASE 1

News of tribunbanyumas.com reported a hamlet in Purbalingga regency was quarantined. The people there visited a hospitalized patient, later known to have tested positive of the virus. As the whole hamlet were people under supervision and had to stay at home, the rural government and other communities should provide them with foods and other necessities. As the village did not have any hazmat suit, the delivery became a big issue. The volunteers put the packages at the terraces of the houses in a big alert. They were like in a big horror that the viruses might jump on their bodies. Some even gave the food packages using a long pole made of the bamboo trunk to make sure they were at a safe distance (Figure 1).²



Figure 1. a volunteer distributed food and mint money using a bamboo stick.

SAMPLE CASE 2

News from detik.com reported that two adjacent villages in a Malang regency district closed the boundaries between them (Figure 2). The people in a town did it by making a bordering fence made of bamboo trunks, while the other constructed a wall of concrete bricks. Due to the pandemic, the two villages implemented "village distancing" by closing each other's access. The emotional factor plays more than the logic, creating specific ridiculous measures to cut the chain of virus contamination.³



Figure 2. Building a wall to close the village access

SAMPLE CASE 3

Due to the social restriction, rural governments put a portal for external access and disinfectant spraying to every passerby (Figure 3). The latter method did harm and disturb some professions like those delivering drinking water and Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG). This case was experienced by an LPG dealer in Cikarang, West Java. In a day, he could get tens of disinfectant sprays. Once, he had 32 spurts, making him all drenched. He was so uncomfortable with the situation, then decided to quit his job.⁴



Figure 3. A team was spraying disinfectants to a passerby

The cases above can be avoided if the government has undertaken proper socialization about social or physical distancing. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), social distancing, or "physical distancing" means to keep a safe distance between persons living in different houses.⁵ It does not mean closing social access, but limiting contact to others.⁶ Basically, social or physical distancing is to keep connected to other people but keep it safe. It is not about keeping out other people from the neighborhood, and it is also not to discriminate the patient with Covid-19, the people under quarantine, and other risky groups, by labeling them with certain stigmatization.⁷

The government should have made use of all units of public health centers (Puskesmas) in maintaining a functioning health information system; in this case, the procedures of social distancing. Physical distancing has indeed been proven to reduce the number of instances Covid-19 up to 13% effectively (IRR 0.87, 95% confidence interval 0.85 to 0.89; n=149 countries). However, the misunderstanding of its implementation has shown some ridiculous practices among the communities, especially in Indonesia.⁸

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