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Community Activities Amid Activity Restrictions during the Coronavirus Disease-19 Pandemic in North Sumatra

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during_the_Coronavirus_Disease-19_Pandemic_in_North_Sumatra.pdf

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Scientific Foundation SPIROSKI, Skopje, Republic of Macedonia
Open Access Macedonian Journal of Medical Sciences. 2021 Oct 02; 9(E):964-968.
https://doi.org/10.3889/oamjms.2021.7088
eISSN: 1857-9655
Category: *E - Public Health*
Section: *Public Health Education and Training*

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Community Activities Amid Activity Restrictions during the Coronavirus Disease-19 Pandemic in North Sumatra

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Edited by: Sasho Stoleski
Citation: Rudianto R, Hidayat FP, Hardiyanto S, Priadi R, Thariq M. Community Activities Amid Activity Restrictions during the Coronavirus Disease-19 Pandemic in North Sumatra. Open Access Maced J Med Sci. 2021 Oct 02; 9(E):964-968. https://doi.org/10.3889/oamjms.2021.7088
Keywords: Communication activities; Coronavirus disease-19; Online communication; Emergency PPKM
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Received: 17-Aug-2021
Revised: 09-Sep-2021
Accepted: 22-Sep-2021
Copyright: © 2021 Rudianto Rudianto, Fadhil Pahlevi Hidayat, Sigit Hardiyanto, Ribut Priadi, Muhammad Thariq
Funding: This research did not receive any financial support
Competing Interests: The authors have declared that no competing interests exist
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Abstract

BACKGROUND: The increase in coronavirus disease (COVID)-19 transmission cases in Indonesia has caused the government to impose restrictions on community activities with emergency PPKM since July 3, 2021. Activity restrictions prevent community from being able to meet, interact, and communicate face-to-face freely even though communication activities are very essential in human life.

AIM: This study aimed to explore and analyze the communication activities of community living in Medan City during the implementation of emergency PPKM.

METHODS: The research method used was a qualitative approach by conducting open online interviews with 20 Medan people with various backgrounds, ranging from students, traders, and formal workers to housewives. The interview was conducted personally. The data obtained were analyzed qualitatively using Nvivo12 application. To maintain the credibility of the research data, triangulation was conducted by carrying out confirmation of the research results to the informants.

RESULTS: The research results indicated that communities encountered obstacles and problems in communication activities because they cannot meet other people freely due to the activities restriction conducted by the government. The students then adjusted to the obstacles by conducting online communication to meet the needs of communication.

CONCLUSION: The communities carried out communication activities online to interact and fulfill the necessities of life. People who are inhibited from doing activities outside their homes are still looking for information about the development of COVID-19 cases and where the vaccination site is. In addition, people rely on online shopping applications for daily needs and access social media more to fill boredom because they stay at home all day.

Introduction

The worldwide spread of coronavirus or coronavirus disease (COVID)-19, including in Indonesia, has made the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended several steps and strategies to prevent the transmission of the coronavirus, including physical distancing. The reason is because the coronavirus can spread through droplets when a person coughs, sneezes, or discharges from the mouth when talking to other people within less than 2 m. Therefore, maintaining a distance of at least 1 or 2 m from other people is one of the keys to break the chain of COVID-19 transmission [1]. In addition, after the COVID-19 vaccine was discovered, vaccination became one of the most important efforts to suppress the spread of COVID-19 virus [2].

The spread of COVID-19 virus in Indonesia experienced a very drastic increase after the Eid al-Fitr holiday in mid-May 2021. On July 1, 2021, the number of cases per day reached 24,836 cases with 504 deaths. One month later, on August 1, 2021, the number of cases increased to 30,738 new cases with the death toll exceeding 1604 people. This made the Indonesian government took steps to implement the community activity restriction program starting in July 3, 2021, for several regions in Indonesia. One of them is Medan City, a city located in North Sumatra with a population of more than 1 million people [3], [4].

The emergency community activity restriction program (PPKM) is a government policy taken to suppress the spread of COVID-19 cases in Indonesia [4]. Emergency PPKM was officially applied in Indonesian since July 2, 2021. However, it is limited to Java and Bali Islands. For North Sumatra Province, the implementation of the emergency PPKM was implemented within July 12–20, 2021, specifically in Medan City, the provincial capital which has a population of 2,983,868 people. Furthermore, it was extended until July 25, 2021. After that, the activities restriction which is through emergency PPKM was extended to August 23, 2021. Furthermore, the term of emergency PPKM was changed into PPKM Level 4 since July 11, 2021, but the regulation and provisions are the same, in this case are the community activities restrictions. The implementation of emergency PPKM officially refers to the Instruction of the Minister of Home Affairs which essentially limits the community activities, among others, the community is not allowed to dine in

restaurants, instead, they have to carry out food take away. In addition, work from home for employees in non-essential sectors was also applied. In addition, schools and colleges were also closed, thus students could only study online. Shopping centers are also completely closed. Activities outside the home, public places, and sports facilities are all closed. In addition, the local government also blocked and closed several roads that became the entrance and exit of Medan City.

This study aimed to analyze the community communication activities in Medan City, North Sumatra, which must limit their daily activities including direct interaction and communication. Humans actually cannot stop communicating in any situation, especially in a disaster situation such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This research is urgent and important to be carried out due to the fact that Medan people are used to having face-to-face communication, but due to restrictions on activities by the government, the communities are forced to stay at home and cannot meet people face to face. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the situation and condition of the community when there are restrictions on activities outside the house, whether there has been a change in the communication pattern and how do the communities overcome the existing communication restrictions? Moreover, the communities in Medan are basically like other humans, who are social creatures. Humans are social creatures. Each individual will interact with one another through communication. Communication is an inseparable part in individual's life to meet each other, meet face to face, and share messages. Scheidel argued that we communicate primarily to express and support our identity, to establish social contact with those around us, and to influence others to feel, think, or behave the way we want, but the basis for our communication is to control our physical and psychological environment. In the past, communication was limited to space, distance, and time, now along with the times, communication media are also developing [5], [6].

Effective communication among the community is very important to manage the outbreak [7]. Good communication between the government and the community really needs to be implemented. In addition, maintaining the trust of the media and the general public is very important to ensure compliance with public health measures [8], [9]. To build trust, the government's response to an emergency must be effective, credible, and orderly. Disasters require many modes and intensities for communication [10]. Communication must occur within an interaction matrix, must be diverse, moving in multiple directions, between and among support agencies, humanitarian agencies, first responders, support staff, victims, family and friends, and the media. When a disaster occurs, usually without prior notification, there must be adequate and accurate communication about the disaster that has just occurred. Since disasters have direct local impacts, communication about disasters must begin locally. When a disaster occurs, emergency calls are made to local emergency services, such as the police, fire department, ambulance, and local authorities. Information is communicated in a complex maze among victims, eyewitnesses, family and friends, and authorities [11].

According to Littlejohn (2006), "one of the important aspects in communication is the concept of uncertainty reduction." Communication itself arises because of the need to reduce uncertainty, to act effectively to protect or strengthen the ego concerned in interacting individually or in groups [12], [13].

Methodology

This article is using qualitative study as research method with case study as research approach. This research applied a qualitative interview method involving 20 residents who lived in Medan City with ages varying from 20 to 60 years old. The social backgrounds of the informants were also varied, of which some of them are students, formal workers, traders, and housewives. Data collection was carried out through open and interviews conducted online using cellular phones and WhatsApp conversation application. Interviews were conducted personally. Data were collected from July 15, 2021, to August 1, 2021, which were then analyzed qualitatively using *in vivo* 12 application, for coding, determining the themes, and categorizing the data that had been collected. In this process, the interview data were organized by sorting and categorized according to the codes. Furthermore, the themes, categories, and memos were identified. In addition, this study has limitations, mainly due to the interviews which could not be performed face to face and the absence of observations of the informants regarding their activities, thus the data collected are not maximal.

Results and Discussion

Medan, the capital city of North Sumatra Province, is one of the largest cities in Indonesia. The population of Medan City in 2020 reached 2,983,868 people. Medan city is known as a multiethnic city, where there are various tribes, ethnicities, and religions living in this city with a width of 265 km^2 (Figure 1). In addition, Medan has various socioeconomic backgrounds in which as a metropolitan city, business, industry, and services are the most dominant economic sectors in this city [14].

This research showed that people in Medan city gave various responses to the implementation of emergency PPKM which started on July 12, 2021

(Table 1). Some research informants said that they were worried about the restrictions on community activities that made them unable to work, study on campus, eat at restaurants, drink coffee with friends, and limited face-to-face communication activities. However, there were also informants who supported the implementation of emergency PPKM by seeing the skyrocketing number of COVID-19 cases in Indonesia, especially in Medan (Table 2).

Despite experiencing an unpleasant situation due to restrictions on daily activities, community still tried to adjust their daily activities, especially in terms of communication activities. In a disaster situation, communication approach plays a very important role in reducing uncertainty due to a crisis situation [15]. Regarding disaster events, communication is the best way for successful disaster mitigation, preparation, response, and situation recovery during the disaster. The ability to deliver messages about disasters to the public, government, media, and community leaders can reduce the risks and impacts of disasters as well as reduces the victims [16].

Communication is human's basic activity that must take place in any situation. Even in a very limited situation for community to interact directly, communication activities are still pursued through the use of media or communication channels. Based on the research findings, during emergency PPKM, community communication activities in Medan can be categorized into four main activities, namely, face-to-face communication which was changed into online communication, accessing media to get information about COVID-19 and vaccinations, utilizing social media to fill spare time and using online shopping application, as well as ordering online to fulfill daily needs.

Online communication carried out by the community in Medan during emergency PPKM was applied to meet communication needs and interact for many things. Informants who are also students said that during the emergency PPKM, they could not go to campus at all because of the prohibition of face-to-face learning. Therefore, formal learning interactions were carried out through e-learning media provided by the campus. For formal sector workers, the informant said that those who served in government offices could still enter the office. However, informants who worked in the private sector are forced to work from home. Meetings, coordination, and work completion

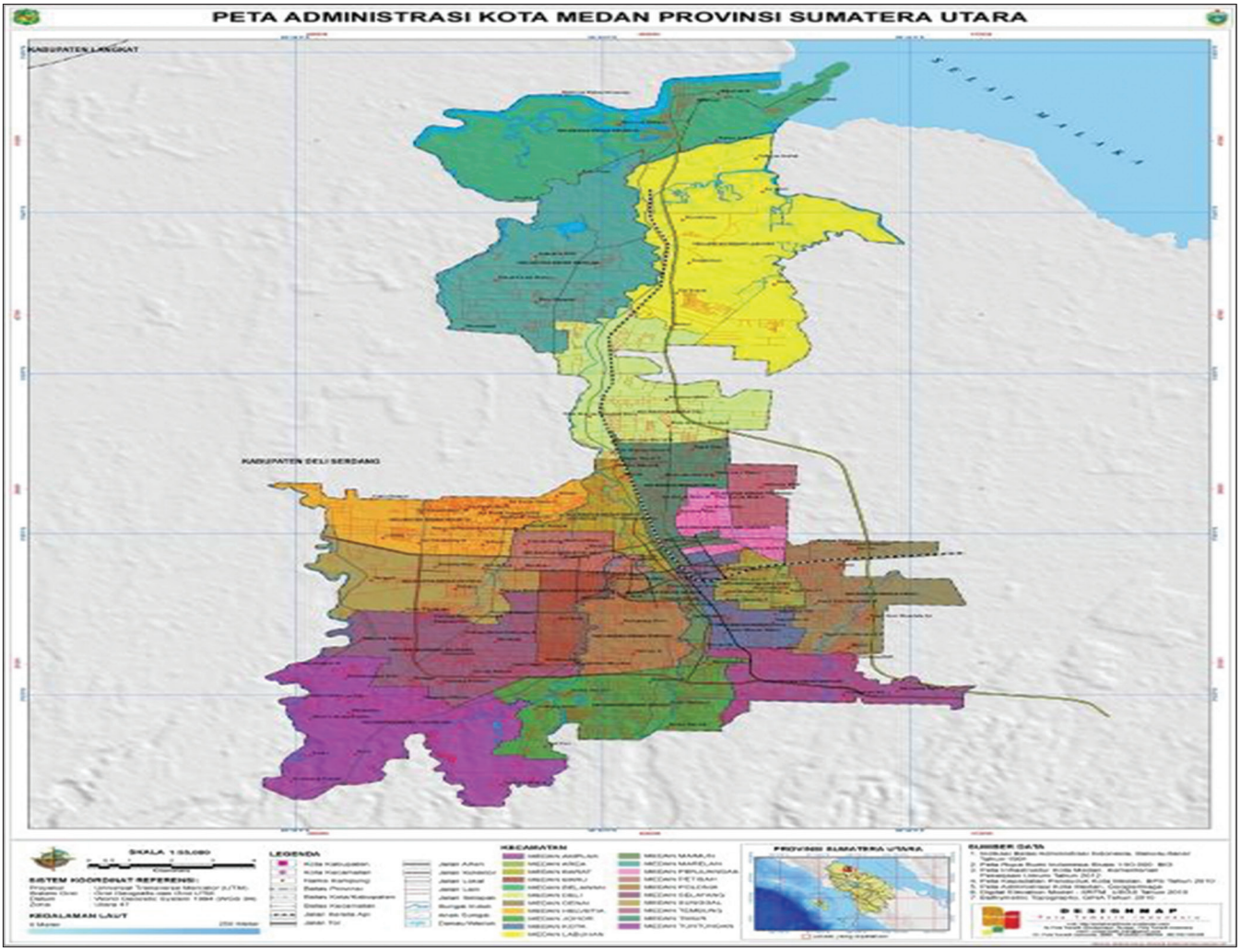


Figure 1: Map administrative of Medan city. Source: www.pemkomedan.go.id

Table 1: Informant's occupation

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Formal workers	4	20
Informal workers	3	15
Students	7	35
Housewives	6	30
Total	20	100

were carried out using online communication facilities in the form of WhatsApp and Zoom applications. Since humans were born, communication has indeed been carried out so on until the end of life. Thus, we can say that communication is an activity that cannot be excluded from humans' life. This confirms that there is no activity that is more basic to our personal, social, or professional life except communication.

Table 2: Informants gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	13	65
F	7	35
Total	20	100

Source: Data collection

Before the emergency of the activities restrictions, communities could easily interact with other people. This makes it easy for the communities to get information about many things. In this case, the information is limited to daily needs, but also about the development of COVID-19 cases. The community of Medan City, during the emergency PPKM, needs much information, even though most of them were at home. People follow the daily news and information related to the development of COVID-19 and the government's efforts to deal with it, including the vaccination program which is known to be one way to overcome the COVID- 19 pandemic [17]. Residents through mass media such as television and social media including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube seek information about the number of daily cases, the number of deaths, and recovered cases. According to several sources, by looking at the statistics of COVID-19 cases, they can gain hope for a better situation if the numbers decrease. On the other hand, if the government announces increase of cases, they are worried that the emergency PPKM will be extended. Some of the informants also admitted that they proactively sought information on the implementation of vaccinations in Medan through local mass media and government social media accounts. The community was enthusiastic about getting vaccinated because based on the information they obtained, one they are vaccinated, the effects of COVID-19 will be reduced or even removed at all even if someone is infected with the COVID-19 virus. The involvement of the mass media in every development activity for handling the COVID-19 disaster can also be seen as a form of disaster communication carried out by the government [18], [19]. In a such situation, the WHO and the government recommended several steps to anticipate the spread of the virus, namely, through prevention of transmission, maintaining cleanliness, and doing social distancing or physical distancing as well as various other steps that have been frequently published in various media [20].

The limited activities outside the home during emergency PPKM have made Medan residents to have more free time. Such spare time can be filled with activities of being in social media more intensely than usual. Social media such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are the closest friends in community communication activities. Although this resulted in an increased expenses to buy internet data packages, it was not a problem for some of the informants. Social media activities were carried out simply by updating status, uploading photos, looking for information, or watching entertainment shows [21], [22].

Community communication activities during emergency PPKM were also filled by online shopping from home. Meeting daily needs is now much easier using applications such as Grab, Gojek, Shopee, Tokopedia, Bukalapak, Halodoc, and others. People use the application to buy food, basic daily needs, medicines, and even having health consultations. Based on the research findings, restrictions on community activities actually make the community's economic expenditure increase. This is because the communities try to meet their daily needs using online shopping applications. This certainly requires additional costs. During the COVID-19 pandemic situation which makes the government limit community activities, communication is really needed both by the community and the government [23]. Communication activities can be a means of moving the functions of management and coordination between the government with communities, health workers, volunteers, and even the media. Based on the explanations of the informants in this study, the communication activities conducted by Medan communities are basically part of community involvement to adapt and even take a role to reduce the communication crisis due to the implementation of emergency PPKM. Good crisis communication management will make the government's coordination and decision-making functions stable. On the victim's side, suffering can be reduced because assistance is faster and easier to provide with adequate information. It is important for the victim's family and the wider community to get information about the current conditions of the victim, both survivors and deceased to avoid anxiety [24]. Volunteers also really need smooth communication with various parties to be able to go to disaster locations. Meanwhile, the mass media, in an emergency, really need a credible source of information so that the news delivered provides benefits to the wider community [20].

Conclusion

The main focus of this study was to find out how the community conducts their communication activities

during the emergency activities restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic in North Sumatra. The emergency implementation of the community activity restriction program by the government makes the community unable to carry out daily activities as usual. Such restriction makes the interaction and communication activities encountered obstacles. This limitation causes people to rely on online digital communication facilities to meet the needs of interacting with other people. In addition, communities continue to monitor the development of the spread of COVID- 19 which is announced by the government every day through various media. Communities are also looking for information about vaccinations that are being programmed by the government. The presence of social media in the midst of an emergency PPKM has also become a close friend for the communities who spend more time at home. Meanwhile, to meet various daily needs, the communities of Medan city take advantage of various existing online shopping applications to order various needs.

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