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## COVID-19 Pandemic and Mental Health Law in Indonesia: A Review of Regulations and Implementation Challenges

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**Abstract:** The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the mental health of people worldwide, including in Indonesia. This article aims to explore and examine the relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic and the legal policies governing mental health in Indonesia. Using a qualitative approach through literature review and legislation, this article highlights the main challenges in the implementation of mental health law during the pandemic, such as social stigma, limited access to mental health services, and a lack of resources. In addition, the opportunity for integrating community-based mental health services was also discussed as a reform step. Through this analysis, it is hoped that solutions can be found to strengthen the legal framework that supports mental health more effectively, including recommendations for policy improvements and implementation strategies for the future. Research findings indicate that policy reform and improved accessibility to mental health services are crucial steps for enhancing the mental well-being of the community during the pandemic.

**Keyword:** COVID-19 pandemic, mental health law, health policy

### INTRODUCTION

Since the transmission of the coronavirus-2019 (COVID-19) outbreak among humans in Wuhan, China on December 31, 2019, the pandemic of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) has spread worldwide. The transmission of this virus originates from the sale of meat from wild animals in seafood markets. The most common symptoms experienced are myalgia (fatigue), cough, and fever. Specific symptoms that appear include diarrhea, productive cough, hemoptysis (coughing up blood), and headache. Its complexity includes acute heart injury syndrome, acute respiratory distress, and secondary bacterial infections. Currently, the amount of information about this virus is growing every day, and there is an increasing amount of data regarding its transmission and routes, reservoirs, incubation period, symptoms, clinical outcomes, and survival rates being developed worldwide (Ridlo, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic that has swept the world since 2019 has not only affected the physical health of the population but has also caused serious mental health issues globally. Social isolation, economic uncertainty, and the loss of loved ones due to COVID-19 have triggered mental health disturbances such as stress, depression, and anxiety. Regulations related to mental health in Indonesia have been established in the form of Law No. 18 of 2014 on Mental Health, which aims to ensure the protection and fulfillment of mental health rights for every individual. However, in the face of the pandemic, the challenges of implementing this regulation have become increasingly apparent. Existing policies are often not fully implemented effectively, especially in remote areas with limited access to mental health services. Added to the strong stigma in society regarding mental disorders, many individuals in need of mental health care and support have not received adequate access.



**Pict 1:** Mental Health in the Age of Covid  
(source: <https://www.buzzback.com/covid-mental-health>)

Most of the general public is very aware of mental illness during the pandemic. This condition is commonly experienced by women, children, teenagers, and the elderly. This needs special attention because women often play a central role in managing households. Children and teenagers are also affected, especially by the policies aimed at limiting the spread of the virus, which have led to the implementation of remote learning systems. The lack of direct interaction with peers during this chaotic time can affect their mental health. Adolescents, as the age group most vulnerable to stress and anxiety, face an increased risk due to the new challenges that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the pandemic has made it difficult for individuals and communities to access social services as before, creating new challenges for vulnerable groups in facing this outbreak (Setyaningrum & Yanuarita, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted the shortcomings in coordination between government and non-governmental organizations in addressing mental health issues. Although the government has issued several emergency policies to address the psychological impact of the pandemic, the implementation on the ground often does not meet expectations. For example, many mental health service centers are overwhelmed by the surge in demand, while human resources and infrastructure remain limited.

These challenges indicate that existing regulations may not be sufficiently responsive to mental health needs during crises like a pandemic. Therefore, it is important to review the regulations governing mental health in Indonesia in order to identify gaps and seek solutions to strengthen the legal system that supports the mental well-being of the community. The COVID-19 pandemic provided an important momentum to improve the legal framework and mental health policies, so that Indonesia can be better prepared to face similar challenges in the future.

This research aims to explore regulations related to mental health in Indonesia, particularly in the context of the pandemic, as well as to identify the challenges faced in the implementation of these policies. Additionally, this study will provide recommendations to improve the legal framework and implementation strategies for mental health policies to be more effective in protecting and supporting the mental health of the Indonesian population.

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted a more serious discussion about the massification of mental health services, as one of the important issues in the world. Mental health disorders that often remain hidden from view have a wide spectrum. The WHO has established that mental health is an important part of the COVID-19 response strategy. Considering mental health issues in the context of this pandemic, this article aims to discuss global mental health policies, as well as to examine the policies and actions of the Indonesian government in addressing various mental health challenges that have emerged and are predicted to continue evolving due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Ridlo, 2020).

**METHOD**

This research uses a qualitative method with a literature study approach. The main reference sources come from articles, literature reviews on mental health regulations in Indonesia, and research related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health. Researchers also analyzed legislation, such as the Mental Health Law, as well as the latest policies implemented during the pandemic. The selection of this method and approach is due to the possibility for researchers to gather detailed and in-depth information from sources originating from various contexts in previous studies that have been conducted to reveal relevant theories.

**Table 1: Previous Research**

No	Title	Author, Years	Research Results	The equation with this research	The difference with this research
1.	Pandemi COVID-19 Terhadap Kesehatan Mental dan Psikososial	(Masyah, 2020)	This research discusses maintaining mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact this pandemic has had on the surrounding community.	The similarity in both studies is that they discuss mental health in society during the COVID-19 pandemic.	These two studies are different because the previous research did not discuss the legal framework.

2.	Pandemi COVID-19 dan Tantangan Kebijakan Kesehatan Mental di Indonesia	(Ridlo, 2020)	Identifying and optimizing mental health services into community-based services to expand service coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic.	Both of these studies discuss the importance of maintaining mental health among individuals in facing various events, one of which is the COVID-19 pandemic.	This research discusses how state law provides a strong framework for protecting individual rights related to mental health, whereas previous research did not include the legal framework aspect in its articles.
3.	Pengaruh COVID-19 Terhadap Kesehatan Mental Masyarakat di Kota Malang	(Setyaningrum & Yanuarita, 2020)	The result of the research from the study is to understand the impact caused during the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of the community in Malang City.	Both of these studies share the similarity that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on public health.	The difference between the two studies lies in the area; the first research specifically mentions the region of Malang City, while this research does not specify a particular location but encompasses the entire territory of Indonesia.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)

Sars-CoV-2 is the virus that causes COVID-19 and is a type of coronavirus that can spread between humans and animals. This virus is known as zoonotic, although the original source of COVID-19 transmission is still not fully understood. Transmission from human to human is suspected to occur through respiratory droplets or bodily fluids released during coughing. The individuals at the highest risk are those who are in close contact with COVID-19 patients, including individuals who are currently ill. (Masyah, 2020). Among the symptoms and infections of COVID-19, the general ones include acute respiratory disturbances such as fever, cough, and shortness of breath. The incubation period is 5–6 days, while the maturation period is 14 days. In severe cases, the infection can lead to pneumonia, acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure, and even death. Commonly reported clinical symptoms include fever, while some patients experience difficulty breathing. The X-ray results show the presence of extensive pneumonia infiltration in both lungs (Masyah, 2020).

## Mental Health

Mental health refers to an individual's state of being free from any kind of mental illness. A mentally healthy individual will be able to function normally in daily life and will be able to adapt to face the problems that arise in everyday life by using coping skills. Mental health is more important than mental disorders. The positive dimensions of mental health, as stated by the World Health Organization, indicate that mental health encompasses various physical, mental, and social health issues and is not limited to the absence of disease or injury. The concept of mental health encompasses emotional and intellectual potential, as well as self-efficacy, autonomy, competence, and self-control. The most common mental illnesses are depression and anxiety. Individuals with depression may find it difficult to get out of bed or meet their physical needs, while those with a history of anxiety may struggle to leave the house or may have urges to help them cope with their emotions (Masyah, 2020).

## Review of Mental Health Regulations in Indonesia

### a. Law No. 18 of 2014 on Mental Health

The analysis of the Law No. 18 of 2014 on Mental Health shows that this regulation has provided a strong legal framework to protect individual rights related to mental health. This law encompasses efforts for prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and social reintegration for individuals with mental health disorders. Additionally, there are provisions that regulate the rights of patients to receive adequate mental health services and access to sufficient mental health facilities. However, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the implementation of this law faces a number of significant challenges, particularly related to accessibility and infrastructure.

### b. Emergency Policies Related to Mental Health During the Pandemic

Along with the increasing mental health pressures due to the pandemic, the Indonesian government has implemented several additional policies to address this crisis. For example, the PSBB and PPKM policies include protocols for mental health, such as the provision of online counseling services and telemedicine. In addition, the Ministry of Health launched a program to enhance the capacity of mental health workers in responding to the needs of the community. However, these additional regulations often lack clear operational guidelines, resulting in limitations in their implementation on the ground. This indicates the need for further adjustments in regulations to respond to emergencies more effectively.

## Challenges in the Implementation of Mental Health Law in Indonesia

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed various challenges in the mental health system in Indonesia, including:

- a. **Social stigma:** Society still tends to view mental disorders as something shameful, causing many individuals to hesitate in seeking medical help, even though they desperately need care. This stigma also serves as an obstacle in the implementation of government policies, due to the community's rejection of the services provided. During the pandemic, this stigma was further reinforced by the growing fear of discrimination, both in the workplace and in social life.
- b. **Lack of mental health professionals:** Although various programs have been launched by the government, coordination between the Ministry of Health, local health offices, and non-governmental organizations is still fragmented. Some mental health programs are not well socialized at the local level, especially in areas with inadequate infrastructure. In addition, several non-governmental organizations reported that the lack of support and collaboration with the government has resulted in their services not being fully integrated with national policies.
- c. **Limited access to mental health services:** Although existing regulations theoretically grant all individuals the right to access mental health services, in reality, many people in

Indonesia, especially those living in remote areas, struggle to access these services. The pandemic has worsened this situation with mobility restrictions and limited healthcare facility capacity. Mental health services in many areas are lacking in professionals such as psychologists and psychiatrists, so the increased demand during the pandemic cannot be fully met. Data from the interviews show that although there has been an increase in telemedicine services, the limitations of digital infrastructure in some areas make these services difficult for many people to access.

### **Community-Based Approach as a Solution**

One of the proposed solutions to address mental health issues during the pandemic is a community-based approach. This model not only allows local communities to actively support individuals experiencing mental health issues, but also creates a more inclusive and sensitive environment regarding mental health matters. Through this approach, communities can play a key role in organizing programs such as group counseling, mental health training, and other supportive activities that enable community members to help one another.

Community-based approaches offer advantages in terms of affordability and accessibility of mental health services, especially in remote areas that often lack professional healthcare facilities. For example, training for community volunteers can help create facilitators who are capable of providing basic counseling to fellow community members, thereby alleviating the burden on limited professional healthcare workers. In the long term, this approach can also build a more sustainable social support system, where individuals not only rely on formal health institutions but also receive assistance from their own communities.

### **Factors Affecting Mental Health Since the Pandemic**

Globally, there are several key risk factors for depression that have emerged as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic:

**First**, the factors of distance and social isolation. The fear of COVID-19 can lead to serious emotional reactions. The negative impact of social distancing orders has affected the quality of life and mental health of many people, including depression and suicide. Considering several cases that occurred in Saudi Arabia, India, America, and the United States, isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic allowed people to contribute to their own well-being. (Setyaningrum & Yanuarita, 2020).

**Second**, the economic recession due to Covid-19. As mentioned earlier, the Covid-19 pandemic has caused a global economic crisis that potentially increases the risk of personal bankruptcy related to economic contraction and deflation. When large-scale social upheaval occurs, many businesses that initially functioned as suppliers or companies eventually shift their employees. This condition will lead to despair, disappointment, excessive anxiety, uncertainty, and ultimately, harmless self-harm that may drive someone to commit suicide. (Setyaningrum & Yanuarita, 2020).

**Thirdly**, the social and cultural issues that arise when psychological separation occurs. For example, young people who usually spend their free time playing games with friends should stay indoors during the pandemic. However, if this continues to happen repeatedly, it will negatively impact that person's calm demeanor and cause stress (Setyaningrum & Yanuarita, 2020).

### **Policy Recommendations That Can Be Proposed**

a. **Strengthening the legal framework**, this legal framework must include standard operating procedures for a rapid response to the increasing demand for mental health services during crises, budget management, as well as the allocation of adequate human resources and medical facilities. Regulations should also provide clarity on the obligations of local and central governments in the provision of sustainable mental health services.

- b. **Improving accessibility**, through the expansion of digitalization and telemedicine, especially in remote areas and underserved regions. There needs to be an enhancement of information technology infrastructure in these areas so that telemedicine-based mental health services can operate effectively. The government must collaborate with internet service providers and technology companies to ensure stable and affordable internet connectivity, while also training healthcare workers in remote areas to effectively use that technology.
- c. **Improving coordination among institutions**, in addressing mental health issues, both government and private agencies must strengthen the mechanisms of cooperation between the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Social Affairs, local governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector. This collaboration must also include the provision of targeted financial and technical support, whether in the form of grants, training, or the provision of medical equipment that supports mental health services at the local level. Good coordination will enhance the effectiveness of policy implementation in the field and minimize overlapping authorities.
- d. **Overcoming social stigma**, through more massive and inclusive community education campaigns. This campaign must reach various segments of society and utilize different media, both traditional mass media such as television and radio, as well as digital platforms. Campaign messages should be designed to reduce stigma and raise awareness that mental health is just as important as physical health. This program can involve community leaders, religious figures, and celebrities to expand the reach and impact of the campaign, as well as ensure ongoing training for healthcare workers in handling patients with mental disorders without discrimination.

### **Maintaining mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic**

A series of activities and messages that can be used as a form of communication and mental support during the COVID-19 pandemic include: (1) reduce watching, reading, or listening to news about COVID-19 that causes anxiety or stress, seek information only from trusted sources as facts can help minimize fear, (2) protect yourself and be supportive to others, working together as a community can help create solidarity in addressing COVID-19 collectively, (3) find opportunities to strengthen positive and hopeful stories as well as the positive image of someone who has experienced COVID-19, (4) respect the caregivers and health workers who care for COVID-19 patients and acknowledge their role in saving lives (Masyah, 2020).

### **CONCLUSION**

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated mental health issues in Indonesia and highlighted weaknesses in the implementation of existing mental health regulations. Although Indonesia has a strong legal foundation through Law No. 18 of 2014 on Mental Health, which provides a comprehensive legal framework for mental health protection, the implementation of this regulation during the pandemic has revealed challenges that need to be addressed. Challenges related to social stigma, access to services, and a lack of human resources continue to hinder optimal mental health care. Community-based service integration can be an effective solution for expanding coverage and improving the mental health system in Indonesia. To achieve this, policy reform and an increase in resources in the field of mental health are essential.

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