

Optimism Bias Towards the Covid-19 Pandemic

Anita Englin Henukh¹, Indra Yohanes Kiling², M. K. P. Abdi Keraf³

¹⁻³Psychology Department, Public Health Faculty, Nusa Cendana Faculty

e-mail:* [1anitahenukh8@gmail.com](mailto:anitahenukh8@gmail.com), [2indra.kiling@staf.undana.ac.id](mailto:indra.kiling@staf.undana.ac.id),
[3mchart4s@yahoo.com](mailto:mchart4s@yahoo.com)

Abstract. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced people to be isolated from various things related to activities outside the home, both work and acquaintances and even families. Can only interact with people who live under the same roof. This is done to avoid the cause of the coronavirus. This transition to limited interaction with others may have influenced people's optimism bias. This study uses a qualitative method to describe the optimism bias of the people of Kupang City towards the COVID-19 pandemic. This research uses descriptive qualitative research with snowball data collection methods and interview sessions with 10 participants. This study shows that the people of Kupang City are indifferent or disobedient to government regulations, especially health protocols, because they consider COVID-19 only as a common disease, and they have an optimism bias even though they do not comply with health protocols, they are still healthy until now.

Keywords: *description, optimism bias, Covid-19 pandemic*

Abstrak. Pandemi Covid-19 telah memaksa masyarakat terisolasi dari berbagai hal yang terkait dengan aktivitas diluar rumah baik pekerjaan maupun kenalan bahkan keluarga di mana masyarakat hanya bisa berinteraksi dengan orang yang tinggal satu atap hal ini dilakukan untuk menghindari penyebab Virus Korona. Transisi interaksi terbatas dengan orang lain ini mungkin memengaruhi bias optimisme masyarakat. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif bertujuan untuk mengetahui gambaran bias optimisme masyarakat Kota Kupang terhadap pandemi Covid-19. Penelitian ini menggunakan jenis penelitian kualitatif deskriptif dengan dengan metode pengumpulan data *snowball* dan sesi wawancara pada 10 partisipan. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa masyarakat Kota Kupang menjadi acuh tak acuh atau tidak patuh terhadap peraturan pemerintah khususnya protokol kesehatan karena mereka menganggap Covid-19 hanya sebagai penyakit biasa dan mereka memiliki bias optimisme karena walaupun mereka tidak patuh dengan protokol kesehatan namun mereka masih sehat sampai saat ini

Kata kunci : *gambaran, bias optimisme, pandemi Covid-19*

Article history:

Received 16 June 2022

Received in revised 30 October 2022

Accepted 2 December 2022

Available online 20 December 2022

Introduction

According to WHO, Covid-19, stands for Coronavirus Disease, which was discovered in 2019, which means the coronavirus disease that was discovered in 2019. Covid-19 is a collection of viruses that can infect the respiratory system. This virus can attack anyone, including babies, children, adults, the elderly, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers. This virus was first discovered in Wuhan, one of the regions in China. The World Health Organization (2020) states that the coronavirus (COVID-19) is a disease with a speedy spread of the virus. The coronavirus (COVID-19) can spread through droplets, saliva, and exhalations released through coughing or sneezing from an infected person. Indonesia is one of the countries that is also affected by the coronavirus disease and experienced a significant spread during this pandemic.

In the KBBI, the pandemic is defined as an epidemic that spreads simultaneously everywhere or covers a vast geography. Meanwhile, according to ABC News, a pandemic is a global epidemic. An epidemic is an outbreak or increase in disease cases on a larger scale. According to data released by the Task Force for the Acceleration of Handling Covid-19 of the Republic of Indonesia, the number of confirmed positive cases as of March 25, 2021, is 1,476,425 people, with a death toll of 39,983 people. The more efficiently the virus spreads, the more victims there are so that between humans, one and another experience changes due to excessive fear of other people, known or unknown. So in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, people's attitudes are being divided, some people want every policy, and some people do not want government policies because they feel tired of the existence of Covid-19, which has been going on for about a year, from the government's decision to implement the Adaptation of New Habits (IMR) which began in June 2020. In addition to regulations to stay at home, the Indonesian government issued a New Habit Adaptation system (IMR) in which people carry out their respective lifestyles with an adaptation of new habits to be productive and avoid the transmission of the coronavirus. The New Habit Adaptation System (IMR) itself is carried out on the

condition that all people still have to follow the health protocols that have been determined.

According to the Decree of the Minister of Health of the Republic of Indonesia Number HK.01.07/MENKES/382/2020, the health protocol that applies when people are in public places and facilities is to use masks, wash hands regularly with soap or use hand sanitizers, avoid touching the face, keep a distance at least 1 meter with other people, avoid crowds, and increase body resistance with Clean and Healthy Living Behavior (PHBS).

However, there are still factors that cannot be controlled in the social order to reduce the number of coronavirus cases in Indonesia. One of these factors is community discipline in the use of health protocols. This behavior of not complying with health protocols makes the possibility of transmitting the virus from one place to another easier. In addition to the increasing number of victims, the condition of this pandemic also affects the optimism bias in the community. Where people's optimism is biased, some people do not use masks because they think they are safe and will not be exposed to the coronavirus. The chairman of the Indonesian Telemedical Alliance, Doctor Pumawan, also said that the most important thing at this time was to keep thinking positively (Inscription, 2020). Some mental health experts also advise the public to think positively because it can be an alternative strategy in dealing with a pandemic that affects the immune system (Zein, 2020).

Many Indonesian people apply positive thinking strategies. However, this turned out to have a negative impact. Positive thinking turns out to lead to a bias of optimism in society. Optimism bias can also be called unrealistic optimism or optimistic bias, which can make a person underestimate the possibility of bad things, namely subjective probabilities or degrees of belief that encourage individuals to interpret ambiguous information or uncertain situations in a self-serving direction (Rhee, Ryu, et al. & Kim, 2005).

This optimism bias makes people disobey the recommendations of health experts to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Such non-compliance includes not

implementing physical distancing, such as hanging out with friends, and even many who travel to their respective hometowns, which increases the potential for spreading the virus. This optimism bias appears in three forms (Zein, 2020). First is the illusion of control, namely the excessive belief that one can control external situations. Second, the illusion of superiority is the belief that one person has an advantage over the average person. Moreover, the third is the illusion of possibility, namely when a person feels less likely to experience negative things that contract or transmit disease in this context.

When faced with a mild threat (direct, brief, and easy to control), optimism positively affects cellular immunity. However, if what is being faced is a more severe threat (complex, persistent, and uncontrollable), then the opposite will happen. This is reinforced by the results of behavioral research in previous epidemic cases. In the case of swine flu (H1N1) outbreaks in Italy and the Netherlands, and bird flu (H5N1) in the UK, respondents with higher risk perceptions would be more compliant with expert advice to take preventive measures. Therefore, applying positive thinking in the current COVID-19 pandemic is dangerous and can increase the number of victims. This study was conducted to assess the picture of optimism bias.

Method

In this study, the approach used is qualitative. The data collected in the study are not in the form of numbers, but the data comes from interview scripts, field notes, personal documents, memo notes, and other official documents, so the purpose of this qualitative research is to describe the empirical reality behind the phenomenon in depth, detail, and thoroughly.

This study uses descriptive qualitative research methods. Lexy J. Moleong (2010) defines qualitative research as research that intends to understand phenomena about what is experienced by the subject, for example, behavior, perception, motivation, and action, holistically using description in the form of words and language, in a particular context naturally by utilizing various scientific

methods. This qualitative research method helps researchers collect information related to the Picture of the Kupang City Society Against the Covid-19 Pandemic that is happening in Kupang City.

This research is a qualitative descriptive study with interview data collection methods. The study was conducted in the city of Kupang in February 2022. The number of participants in this study was ten people with the inclusion criteria set as follows: The community is male and female with an age range of 18-50 years, residing in the city of Kupang, Willing to become a participant in the study as evidenced by the signed informed consent, Willing to participate in the entire interview process.

This research uses the snowball sampling method. In this study, interviews were conducted to provide an overview of the optimism bias of the people of Kupang City towards the COVID-19 pandemic. Data analysis was carried out through thematic analysis by examining the themes that emerged from the results of the interviews, and these themes were then described in the form of a qualitative report. There are two credibility tests for research results, namely peer debriefing and member check.

Results

The author then analyzes the data obtained from the interview process through manual thematic analysis. The data obtained from the author's interviews were analyzed and grouped into themes. Finally, the authors determine four main themes that describe understanding, attitudes toward the pandemic situation, vaccination decisions, and attitudes toward health protocols.

Table 1

Participant's Demographic Data

Pseudonym	Age (Years)	Education level	Location of residence
Moses	23	S1	Oepoi
Bulan	24	Senior High School	Oebobo

Cinta	22	Senior High School	BTN
Puspa	25	Senior High School	Naikoten
Joni	27	Senior High School	Naikoten
Indah	23	Senior High School	Koenino
Laura	19	Senior High School	Oesapa
Nur	23	S1	Oesapa
Pace	24	Senior High School	Oesapa
Melodi	22	Senior High School	Sikumana

Theme 1 Understanding

a. Understanding of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Individual understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic is related to beliefs about the existence of a pandemic caused by Covid-19 and the dangers and economic decline and unemployment caused by Covid-19 itself. Results of interviews with participants:

"It causes so many deaths because it attacks through the air so that it spreads quickly, many deaths due to this virus, many people died, many people lost, so in my opinion, this pandemic has caused many changes in life, changes in behavior, changes in habits" (Bulan)

"Okay, what I know about Covid-19 is a disease that attacks human respiration and can cause death" (Pace)

Participants also argued that the pandemic caused a decline in economic income

"I think because of the current pandemic we have the economy starting to die" (Cinta)

"Because of the pandemic, activities in public spaces are limited and unemployment is difficult because finding work is difficult and many can be laid off immediately, the economic level has decreased" (Nur)

In addition to understanding the dangers and consequences of Covid-19, there are different opinions where participants think that Covid-19 is like the common cold. Thinking of covid like the common cold causes an excessive positive response or belief that he is always healthy and will not be exposed to the Covid-19 virus, which was conveyed in his interview:

"The more you come here, you start to get used to covid, it's just like coughs, colds"

(Moses)

"Covid-19 is a virus caused by a coronavirus which if infected can cause symptoms that are almost similar to the flu" (Puspa)

b. Understanding of Health Protocol

It is the safety or the implementation of the community towards the health protocol that is the measure of the increase or decrease in Covid-19. However, protocol compliance health seemed to be a question in interviews with participants.

In the interview:

"For me to obey the health protocol, initially I was obedient but, as time went on, I did not comply anymore because I saw that the conditions were getting more and more normal" (Love)

"At the beginning of the pandemic, I followed the health protocol, I followed all the rules, but now I am starting to be negligent with the health protocol" (Nur)

"Yes, if for the first time we were told to obey the health protocol, it was because it was still early in the pandemic, we were afraid, so if we were told to wear a mask, we would always wear a mask, always wash our hands, but now we are getting used to covid, so we rarely wash our hands, even wearing masks is rare" (Pace)

Theme 2 Vaccination decisions

a. Obligations and Decisions

Participants vaccinate not because they follow government recommendations but because they should vaccinate. Participants also felt that the space for the movement was getting narrower if they did not vaccinate and the need for a vaccine card. Finally, those who were afraid or refused the vaccine decided to vaccinate as stated by the participants in the interview:

"Because there is already a regulation from the government for this, there must be a vaccine card, so whether we want it or not, we have to get a vaccine" (Pace)

"If I was asked to vaccinate because it is mandatory and taking care of everything, I needed a vaccine card, so I ended up getting vaccinated" (Love)

b. Attitude Towards Health Protocol

During the existence of Covid-19, there were many changes in attitude from the community where all activities that used to be done freely are now doing whatever it is like there is no freedom because of the rules that are carried out. This

has led to rejection and conformity from the public, which influences their thinking that Covid-19 has become a regular thing where they are no longer afraid of Covid-19 and have confidence that they will not be exposed to Covid-19. It is a change in attitudes and behavior by the community to align with existing norms or rules. Conformity can occur when individuals experience pressure in their social environment to behave in a way that follows the social rules that exist in society. In the interview participant, Bulan has a bias of Optimism. She is not afraid of Covid-19 from the beginning until now. She adheres to health protocols because of the demands of her environment.

Theme 3 Attitude to Health Protocol

a. Rejection and Conformity

A situation that has lasted long enough that there has been a change in adherence to health protocols until they feel confident about the body's strong immunity to Covid-19. There is an Optimistic Bias in every community where they become sure that they will not be exposed to Covid-19. as in the interview, participant Laura said:

"The thing that makes me sure that I don't get corona is because it's been two years since I've been out in crowds, I go to meet people, I don't wear a mask, and I don't feel any symptoms. I am sure because I have been going for two years, I have never been infected with this coronavirus." (Laura)

Discussion

The authenticity of this study is based on previous research, which has relatively the same characteristics in terms of the theme of the study, although slightly different in terms of the criteria of the subject and the number of respondents, and the method of data analysis. This research on the experiences of young Indonesians in the new normal was carried out by a research team from Timor, namely Indra Yohanes Kiling, Marleny Panis, Theodora Takalapeta, Shela

Ch. Pello and Beatriks Novianti Bunga (2020), entitled "On Indonesian Youth's Experience in the 'new normal' era".

The similarity between this research and the researcher is that it uses the same method, namely the qualitative method, and the same data collection technique, namely voice photos, and both research about Covid-19. There are several significant assessments of them; namely, social dynamics are influenced by the ability to behave like greeting each other in a usual way.

The study concludes that the 'new normal' period has made it possible to resume daily routines. Based on the description above, even though there have been previous studies both related to optimism bias and the state of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is still different from the research that the author did. Thus, the research topic that the author is doing is genuinely original. There are several new things in this study, of course, adding to knowledge, especially concerning the picture of the optimism bias towards the Covid-19 pandemic.

Changes in individual behavior in carrying out the rules or ways of implementing every health protocol and individual distrust of Covid-19 because of Covid-19 that has happened for a long time, and individuals ignore it. However, they are still waiting for something to happen to them, so they are very confident that they are strong and will not get Covid-19. This can be considered in thinking and acting to solve things, especially the public's view of the Covid-19 pandemic. Head of the Psychology Service Center of UIN Jakarta as well as a permanent lecturer at the Psychology Faculty, Mulia Sari Dewy, M.Sc., Psychologist (source RDK.uinfidkom), said positive thoughts are a way of how a person perceives, responds, and perceives all events experienced by responding to well and positively.

However, in the study, participants had excessive positive beliefs about themselves and were less likely to be infected with Covid-19. Note that thinking or believing excessively can affect their health where participants are very confident in their body's immunity but do not think that in the future they could be infected with

covid. 19 because of their excessive indifference. The suggestion of positive thinking in the hope of boosting the immune system risks creating an optimism bias that plays a significant role in causing disobedience from the community.

Conclusion

Opinions or images from people who have biased thoughts of optimism about the COVID-19 pandemic in Kupang City are described in three components: the understanding that emerges, the decision to vaccinate, and the attitude towards the health protocol. Individual understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic and attitudes toward health protocols are the main factors in forming an individual's image of an optimistic bias toward the COVID-19 pandemic.

Vaccination decisions can be judged as coercion on society. The attitude toward the health protocol of the individual is the final stage of the imaging process. At this stage, rejection and conformity occur if the individual has confidence in social groups and is afraid of deviation. There is a bias of optimism towards the COVID-19 pandemic when individuals begin to feel negligent and consider COVID-19 to be just an ordinary disease and no longer comply with the health protocols set by the government.

Suggestion

For Society, understanding the danger of Covid-19 is a component that every community must understand by accessing the correct information. Accessing the right information is not a factor that is difficult for people to obtain today, so people who have a good understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic are expected to be able to channel information into their environment. For related offices, the most significant decision to carry out all the rules that the government has set is in the hands of the community. It is necessary to form an initial understanding, and it is essential to follow existing health rules and protocols. Nevertheless, limitations due to the pandemic are the main factor that there is no direct socialization to the public about the importance of implementing all the rules that have been implemented

recommended by the government, both health protocols and their benefits to increase a good understanding of the community. The policy considered to suppress activities can lead to different thoughts or violates. Therefore, an equalization of the picture needs to be done to get good acceptance from the community of a policy or policy programs organized by the government. For further researchers, it can be suggested to research the optimism bias towards the Covid-19 pandemic. This study can examine how the perception of preventive behavior and the community's optimism bias towards the Covid-19 pandemic or the biased picture of student optimism during the pandemic can be suggested.

Reference

- Aqib Rizka Ar-Rachman (2018) The Effect of Overconfidence Bias and Optimism Bias on Investment Decision Making on Investors in Yogyakarta. Islamic University of Indonesia, Faculty of Economics.
- Farra Anisa Rahmania, Dean Nurul Azmi, and Hanifah Dwicahyaputri (2020) Bias Optimism and Community Preventive Behavior in the New Normal Era
- Indra Yohanes Kiling, Marleny Panis, Theodora Takalapeta, Shela Ch. Pello and Beatriks Novianti Bunga (2020), "On Indonesian Youth's Experience in the 'new normal' era.
- Ivan Muhammad Agung (2020) Understanding the Covid-19 Pandemic in the Perspective of Social Psychology. Faculty of Psychology, Sultan Syarif Kasim State Islamic University, Riau. Email: ivan.agung@uin-suska.ac.id
- Ministry of Health. (2020). Task Force for the Acceleration of Handling Covid-19, One of the Government's Responses to Slow the Spread of Corona.
- Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia. (2020). Guidelines for preparedness against coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Directorate General of Disease Prevention and Control, 1-88.
- Moleong L.J. (2010). Qualitative Research Methodology, Bandung. Youth Rosda Karya.
- Nina Nurdiani Snowball Sampling Technique in FIELD ResearchArchitecture Department, Faculty of Engineering, BINUS University.

Neuman, W. Lawrence. (2003). Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Petra Maria Juliana Pasaribu, (2020). Relationship of Public Behavior to the Increase in Covid /191101061. Email: petrapasaribu30072001@gmail.com

RA. Sista Paramita (2018) Cognitive Bias and Individual Personality: A Study of Young Investor Behavior in Surabaya. Faculty of Economics, State University of Surabaya. Email: sistaparamita@unesa.ac.id

World Health Organization (WHO). (2020). Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) Situation Report – 84. World Health Organization. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2020.2633>

Glanz, K., Rimer, B. K., & Viswanath, K. (2008). Health behavior and health education : theory, research, and practice (4TH Edition). USA: jossey-bass.