

## A Generation Shaped by a Pandemic: Indonesian Youth's Experiences with COVID-19

*Sita Hidayah<sup>1</sup>, Azrial Abyad W.<sup>2</sup>, Eliesta Handitya<sup>3</sup>, Julius Brahmantya<sup>4</sup>, M. Affan Asyraf<sup>5</sup>, and Nur Hafifah K.<sup>6</sup>*

### Abstract:

**Aims:** This paper examines young people's experiences amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, unravelling their everyday lives that has been impacted by COVID-19.

**Method:** This paper summarizes the four months of remote, internet-mediated interviews, and "adjusted" participant observations that describe the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic among young people aged 16 to 24 years old during *Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar* (the Large-Scale Social Restrictions) in four Indonesian cities. The participants were selected from the "pandemic generation"—the biggest age group in Indonesia and considered as COVID-19 vectors

**Results:** The behaviours and daily lives of the young participants were influenced by their cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. The characterizations of the everyday experiences amidst the pandemic are seen from the Javanese concept of *rasa*—the myriad feelings of *rasa*—feeling, thinking, trust, and obligation as subjective measures in navigating interpersonal relations in the context of a pandemic. The use of *rasa* is attributed to the notion of care and obligation towards others.

**Conclusion:** This study concludes that the COVID-19 pandemic is both a medical and societal problem. This paper also argues that social and cultural responses to the COVID-19 pandemic contributed positively to the overall COVID-19 transmission and protective measures. The premises of this study tackle care practices based on *rasa* that could have enabled young people to limit COVID-19 infection progression and reduce the severity of outbreaks in Indonesia.

*Keywords: COVID-19, youth, experience, rasa*

### INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 was first detected in Indonesia on 2nd March 2020. By mid-2020, Indonesia had the highest numbers of COVID cases, close to 500,000 people, as well as the highest COVID mortality rate in South East Asia. In Indonesia and elsewhere, the numbers of COVID cases determine the level of surveillance and controls, as well as enforcement of new norms to prevent breakout and limit the spread. The Indonesian government has not yet imposed a total lockdown, but a city-based social restrictions policy. Since then, COVID outbreaks in Indonesia have been relatively low.

In the second week of April 2020, the Indonesian government introduced *Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar* (PSBB) - Large-Scale Social Restrictions in high-risk areas, such as Greater Jakarta, Greater Surabaya, and West

<sup>1</sup> Junior lecturer at Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Cultural Sciences-Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) Yogyakarta-Indonesia.

<sup>2,3,4,5,6</sup> Undergraduate students at Department of Anthropology, UGM-Indonesia.

Java Province. In August 2020, the Intensification of Discipline and Enforcement of Health Protocol Laws in the Prevention and Mitigation of COVID-19 was introduced. Following the introduction of the Health Protocol Law, the Indonesian government has begun to ease up COVID-19 rules, moving towards the new normal, an urge to live alongside COVID-19. Nearly three months after the first case in Indonesia, the central government abandoned the Large-Scale Social Restrictions regulations, and moved to *Pemberlakuan Pembatasan Kegiatan Masyarakat* (Community Activities Restrictions Enforcement).

Health regulations are important in preventing the infection and death rates of a population. Nonetheless, feelings and emotions of the population also matter, especially those who are most controlled, but less represented in the whole discussion of COVID-19 measures. This study is interested in understanding young people's responses and emotions of living through a pandemic because young people's voices seem to be neglected in implementing COVID-19 measures. Prior observations show that many young people experienced anxiety because of uncertainty and loneliness caused by social isolation. Research suggests that the young generation is more stressed and depressed (McMullen, 2020), evoking anger because the rules keep changing and restrictive; fear because of the ever-increasing rates of infection and mortality; depressed of feeling inadequate and unproductive; and the worst of all, grieving because of the loss of a loved one (ILO Survey Report, 2020).

This study seeks to understand COVID-19 pandemic as systems of meaning as systems of shared experiences and values that extend beyond the clinical sphere. Thus, it follows the argument that "infectious diseases are never only biological in their nature, course, or impact. What they are and what they do are deeply entwined with human sociocultural systems, including the ways humans understand, organize, and treat each other," (Singer 2015). This study focuses on subjective constructions of the pandemic from youths' experiences. This study also analyses the individuals' emotions (Skoggard & Waterson, 2015) on COVID-19 and the health measures imposed by the state and community.

In due course, public interests in what governments do supplant the interest in subjective views on COVID-19 measures. This conventional governments' approach prevented the apparently compelling merits of understanding the support or the resistance towards COVID-19 prevention measures of young people. Thus, this study draws on the youths' emotions on COVID-19 and their position towards state health controls. The approach articulates a way of describing youths' feelings and behaviours in a socially situated pandemic.

The study asks a question of how young people experience the COVID-19 pandemic. This study uses the Javanese notion of *rasa* in its wider senses to translate "experience": feeling, thinking, tasting, and considering. *Rasa*, according to Geertz (1973), suggests "the type of indirection and allusive suggestion that is so important in Javanese communication and social intercourse". *Rasa*, as a conceptual framework, is translated into the following questions: who and why young people care about COVID-19; who needs to take care of COVID-19; and who deserves care. As the way Indonesians use the notion of *rasa*, it entails the concept of care. The notion of care is often attached to the social construction of family and societal obligations. Furthermore, the concept of care is also attributed to the notions of trust and responsibility towards others. This study uses the notion of care as in "the general importance of care practices for the (re)production of significant relations," (Thelen 2015, p.2) and described the characterizations of the youths' everyday experiences amidst the pandemic in Java, Indonesia.

The notion of care in the COVID-19 pandemic measures often has to do with controlling, monitoring, and surveillance of the populations. In many respects, government policies tend to consider older adults and children to receive the utmost care while the young—active, and mobile—are people to be managed. In recent months, COVID-19 measures have restricted many young people's activities. In Indonesia, from April 2020

until recently, almost all schools were closed (97, 6 %). This has made 68. 8 million students to study from home. According to a 2020 survey conducted by the Indonesian Ministry of Education, remote-online education has stressed out parents and students due to homework, difficulties with the new way of communication, and challenges in adjusting to distant learning systems (Liputan6, 2020). Only those with sufficient support systems, opportunities, and access to services and support programs were able to manage and cope with this difficult time (Andrina, 2021). This is to say that socio-cultural backgrounds make differences in one's experience amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, and their backgrounds are imperative to gain young people's support for COVID-19 policies.

For young people, the “generation pandemic” –a collective term that refers to those who are living through the COVID-19 pandemic–the brunt of the pandemic is palpable. In terms of resilience against the virus, the young population may fare better than the older generation, as statistical numbers show the mortality rate and severe cases among youths are relatively low (Maragakis, 2020). COVID-19 measures in many countries demonstrate the view of this “less severe, but more likely to transmit” young people affected by the virus (WHO, 2020). There is a widespread supposition that if young people get the virus, it will not be severe and that they would develop immunity against the virus. Epidemical evidence indeed suggests that the virus is less severe in young people, and the recovery is speedy and complete. Unlike many countries in the world, the Indonesian government prioritized the vaccination of the young population. It was a controversial decision, but the Indonesian government considered the young population as the “vector group”–the most active and mobile population–of the Indonesian government's effort to prevent the virus transmission and build herd immunity (Reuters, 2021; Widiyanto & Diela 2021).

Young people experience the COVID-19 pandemic differently depending on their sociocultural backgrounds. The poor and marginalized young people seem to have had it worse. Many young people are in a disadvantaged position because of the existing social structures cantered around adults (Gabriel et.al., 2020). WHO reported that even prior to the pandemic, young people aged between 14 to 24 years are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults. Young workers are also more likely to work in informal and precarious jobs (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020). The pandemic carries a bigger impact on the economic situations of young people. In Indonesia, the pandemic has increased child poverty. It was clear that without government assistance, such as social protection programs, the impact could have been worse (Andrina et. al., 2021).

Young people in Indonesia care about COVID-19, which can be seen in various forms of action. Many young people play a role in stemming the virus transmission and helping the hard-hit members of society. The social media campaign hashtag “#tetapdirumah” (#stayathome) garnered support from the young generation. Social programs alleviating economic hardship were driven by young people, such as Dapur Umum (Public Kitchen), food banks and food distributions; and personal protection equipment (PPE) shortages mobilized through various social network services and platforms had driven young donors (Antara News, 2021). In March 2020 alone, the Ministry of Education and Culture reported that there was 15, 000 students registered as COVID-19 volunteers. Young people's engagement with voluntarism during the COVID-19 pandemic, however, does not mean that young voices are properly addressed in government policies that have ultimately governed their lives.

Young people's experiences, concerns, and aspirations are underrepresented in government policies and general discussions about the COVID-19 pandemic. Current knowledge about young people's experiences and response towards the pandemic have mostly been provided by the masses and social network services (SNS) or social media. A rapid and thorough report about “living with” COVID can be found in Lazuardi's descriptions of Yogyakarta's rapid responses to COVID-19, a special autonomous city in Java It is worth to note that there has been a sustained interest among Indonesian social scholars on Indonesians cultural responses to the COVID pandemic (Rahiem, 2021; Suhandjati & Fanani, 2021; Suwignyo, 2020). The Indonesian government focuses on COVID-19 measures and economic recovery side line problems pertaining to the young population. This study presumes that considerations on how young people care and how they navigate their lives during the pandemic provide valuable insights to the government's policy that focuses on the prevention of virus transmission and treatment of COVID patients.

In the next section, this study considers cultural context as an important aspect in understanding young people's responses to COVID-19. A rapid study conducted by Yanti et. al. (2020) examined people's responses and behaviour towards the pandemic. The study suggests the importance of behavioural insights to manage the pandemic, and this assertion is pertinent to WHO statements those behavioural modifications decrease the virus transmission up to 80% (West et. al., 2020). Standardized questionnaires have been distributed in early 2020 in 34 provinces in Indonesia. Based on the rapid research, the study shows that the general population has sufficient information about COVID-19 and a positive attitude toward the government's COVID-19 measures. Dhailante et. al. (2020) investigated both the Indonesian government and mass media responses towards COVID-19 policies and recommended the importance of communal initiatives to reduce the government's burden in providing social-health assistance. It is also recommended that the Indonesian government uses a more inclusive approach in dealing with the pandemic. These prior studies conducted in Indonesia show that COVID-19 measures need to include social and cultural understanding of the pandemic.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In early March 2020, the proposed research was an ethnographic study of how young people in several cities in Java experience the COVID-19 pandemic. The proposal was formulated to include five undergraduate students to conduct fieldwork and to write reports. The team was formally formed in April 2020, but were unable to meet in person because Universitas Gadjah Mada put the lockdown in full effect. In April 2020, the university issued an indefinite moratorium on face-to-face interactions in social research, and all fieldworks were suspended. Given the situation, the team dropped the methods of participant observations and in-depth interviews and shifted to internet-mediated interviews. Only after the government's Society Activities Restrictions were lifted that the researchers were able to manage to conduct face-to-face interviews and limited observations. The remote-ethnographic research was conducted from July to October 2020. Young participants living in Yogyakarta, Jakarta, Semarang, and Magelang, all on the island of Java, Indonesia, were selected.

Preliminary observations and interviews in May 2020 were conducted, and it was concluded that the Social Restrictions and the unclear circumstances were detrimental to the overall participation of this study. All things considered, the decision on gathering research participants was not particularly selective; Young people aged 16 to 24 years who gave consent to in-depth and internet-mediated interviews (and participatory observation when possible) were selected. A total of 20 participants from different social backgrounds and educational levels were gathered. Most participants were university students, and there were two early-career young workers. There were 14 male and 6 female participants, and in the second part of the research, six participants were chosen as the main interlocutors. Thus, every researcher selected one key interlocutor to gain deeper insights and contexts. These key interlocutors, all have aliases: are Aksan, Tati, Warih, and Adi. Almost all participants lived with their parents, since schools, universities, and offices were shut down. Only a minority stayed in their dorms during the research period, the number fluctuated as participants moved back depending on the government's policy and restrictions.

The research was mostly intermediated by the internet and social media, as it minimized face-to-face interactions while adhering to the partial lockdowns imposed at various times and degrees in Indonesia. When possible, the team adopted COVID-19 health protocols (i.e., six feet distance, masks, hand sanitizer) in face-to-face meetings and participant observations. When the partial lockdowns were put in place, internet-mediated interviews were utilized over google meeting and zoom. This research added auto ethnography and participant observations in the immediate researchers' surroundings/areas. All interviews were transcribed and coded based on categories, topics, feelings, and actions to identify patterns and chronological "biography" of COVID-19 according to individual participants' experience and points of view.

The varying dynamic of COVID-19 measures posed a distinctive challenge. Transitions of participants' lives before and after lockdowns and the implementation of the new normal were observed and noted. The decision to shift from in-depth interviews to online meetings and interviews was inevitable considering the situation during the pandemic. Different from the conventional fieldwork, rapport over the internet and social media was established because of COVID-19 restrictions, and it had not been easy, as most potential interlocutors rejected the invitation to participate.

Because of COVID-19 measures, the research processes and all people involved were significantly affected. The research was done when COVID-19 cases were soaring. This created a situation where researchers and participants mutually expressed “boundary issues”, both mentally and physically, about when and how to conduct face-to-face meetings safely. Even after rapports were established, there were issues that emerged during research hindering data collections: interactions were mainly reduced to video meetings or SNS exchanges. It was also hard to determine the contexts of online interviews because many gestures and societal backgrounds were missing. The answers were taken for granted, provided that the interviews were later substantiated with face-to-face meetings and observations. There was also a temporal issue: it was hard to focus on certain rules or behaviour, as the situation continued to change aspects in response to the increasing infection and mortality rates. Participants’ emotions and behaviours “fleeted” before it was properly discussed or observed. Secondary data from the mass media, SNS, and online daily journals of research team members were also gathered (Hodges, 2020). The secondary data from the mass media and SNS substantiated data collected from the interviews.

On the account of COVID-19 measures and the lack of sufficient participant observations, the research analysis was inferred from interpretations of in-depth interviews. The researchers examined the participants’ personal lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, and situated the meaning-making activities within the broader socio-cultural contexts. This approach is not radically different from Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), only with an emphasis on a broader cultural aspect to understand behaviour and meaning-making activities of the participants.

### ***Rasa: Care, Trust, and Social Responsibilities during a Pandemic***

While the semester ended and he received a good grade as he always planned, a university student, “Aksan”, felt like things were not right. He had not yet absorbed the whole information about the new Coronavirus, but by the end of March, his university imposed a total lockdown, and all his courses were abruptly migrated to online classes. The university blocked him out of the campus buildings, turned off the campus WIFI, and closed all its gates. Immediately after the university locked down, his mother called and asked him to return to his hometown, as soon as he possibly could. Not just his university, upon his return to his hometown, his kampong (village) was also in lockdowns.

It was not just Aksan’s neighbourhoods, which had a “community lockdown”. From March to April 2020 the roads in his neighbourhoods were cordoned off 24/7. Those who were permitted to travel were the village and villagers’ COVID task force. In June 2020, the village gates were closed from 21: 00 to 05: 00, and the neighbourhood’s 24-hour-store was closed at 20: 00 p.m. Aksan could not go out beyond his kampong for months. He resented the fact that there were many village people guarded off the village entrance gates, “[We are] not allowed to go, but they gathered around. Weren’t they violating the [social distancing] rule?” This “community lockdown” was common in Java from March to July 2020. Aksan felt his life had been “suspended” since then.

Half of the participants reported “community lockdowns” where the community “barricaded” their hamlets and only allowed emergency travels. Surveillance and tracing were done through communal means of communications coordinated by Ketua Rukun Tetangga (the head of the neighbours’ association). In June 2020, the village barricades were taken down and the social restrictions were uplifted. Even during the strictest social restrictions, there was no city-wide curfew or severe sanctions enforced by the government and the community.

Around the same time, the government forbade the annual Eid Al-Fitr holiday travels or mudik, one of the biggest mobilizations of people in the world, from April 24 to May 7 of 2020. From March to May 2020, COVID-19 controls have been mostly imposed by the community. All participants reported COVID-19 communal restrictions in various forms and lengths, and none reported Level-3 COVID cases, which required restrictions and involvement of government agencies to enforce COVID-19 rules. The failure to enforce travel restrictions during Eid-Al-Fitr of 2020 pushed the worst COVID-19 mortality rates in the months of July and August 2020.

Aksan’s story was not unique. Most students and young people felt that their lives were put on-hold because of COVID-19 measures. Restrictive COVID-19 measures had significantly implicated young people’s social and mental wellbeing. In the initial period of social restrictions, Aksan and many of his friends focused inwardly on what would happen to their personal lives, their education, hobbies, friends, and family. Later in the pandemic period, they started to be worried about their future. They shared experiences of adjusting to new Technology

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and communication systems, but they did so in isolation. Social media was inundated with sentiments of “social hallucination” – that they were in the pandemic together, but they were so far apart. Frustrated by the sense of isolation, most participants reported that they immediately met their friends after the restrictions were lifted in June 2020, and they tried to maintain COVID-19 health protocols.

During the social restrictions and lockdowns, Tati, a student in Magelang Central Java, limited her interaction with others. After three months, completely homebound, Tati started to meet her friends. When she had an urgent need to socialize, she only met her close friends. She felt safer meeting people she knew well.

“I went out only when I had a clear intention. My destination is clear. I know the people...When I need my friends the most, I visit them in their homes...I was not afraid, but I was worried, and it made me aware [of the seriousness of the pandemic] ... One thing I could insist on, [is the] health protocols. I met only my close friends; I was not sure [about the safety] of meeting new people. I was worried, but what’s more to say?”

One important aspect that Tati was confident about was that she trusted her friends, and the trust was a mutual feeling (*sama rasa*) between her and her friends. It was not just a mutual trust, but also mutual care. Tati and her peers had regularly observed COVID-19 protection measures.

In Indonesian urban areas, one may suggest that wearing a mask has been part of social courtesy, a tradition instituted mostly by young people in Indonesia. Most research participants had been taught and practiced COVID-19 health protocols in schools. Currently, the health COVID-19 protective measures have been partly institutionalized. Most participants agree with the changing social norms in Java. Wearing masks, keeping a safe distance, new greeting gestures, and crowd-avoidance behaviours have been transformed from health measures to become social norms among young people. It is not to say that these new norms and restrictive conditions are not without resistance and resentment.

Many young people are now living back with their parents because of COVID-19. Warih, a 20-year student in Jakarta, had been living in a “family live arrangement” like many students. While the majority of participants returned to their hometown and lived with their parents during the research period, only a handful of them were back to cities where their universities are located. Warih expressed his uneasy feeling of balancing “care work and work time” because he felt obliged to help their parents to do chores while he worked online.

This study highlights the impacts of the pandemic on family relations. One of the frequent problems conferred by the participants was the issue of intergenerational family relations during the pandemic. As participants were withdrawn from education and working sectors, family was the only institution young people could return to. It also shows the economic dependence of the research participants to their parents. All participants still received financial allowance from their parents, including those who worked part-time. However, it has little to do with the pandemic. In Indonesia, a child is considered a dependent until she or he gets married or gets her or his own place. In many Javanese families, “that parents will always remain “givers”, while their children will be “receivers” ...” (Riany, Meredith, & Cuskelly, 2016). Children’ dependency towards their parents entails familial obligations (Martin & Yanagisako, 2020).

Depending on the circumstances, each family has had different sets of pressures, especially in terms of financial burden. A minority of participants helped their parents working part-time. It confirmed the previous research elsewhere that unpaid care work has increased during the pandemic (Power, 2020; United Nations Reports, 2020). All students received the government “data internet credit”, and their parents also received COVID-19 social aids ranging from free electricity, cash, food, and workers incentives. However, there were reports on government aid distribution problems and the decreasing quality of food being distributed. All participants acknowledged that the government paid COVID-19 vaccination, hospitalization, and burial; nevertheless, the participants were also aware that there was the stigma of getting a positive COVID-19 test. COVID-19 positive tests were communal problems, because the whole neighbourhoods would usually be isolated as well, and the community would provide persons with COVID-19 positive assistance with communal funds. In Indonesia, COVID-19 positive status has been a communal matter, not just an individual matter.

This study records the dynamics of COVID-19 pandemic from the participants' accounts. The first months of social restrictions and school lockdowns were the hardest. Participants panicked and were anxious about the bad things that might happen as infection and mortality rates soar. As the pandemic dragged on, these students started to think and behave beyond the clinical sphere of COVID-19—not just their health, but also their mental wellbeing. The discussion, which shifted from medical health measures to mental health, was apparent in the general sentiments expressed in various SNS and social media platforms. Viral among these phenomena were memes related to the struggles of online schooling; “herd stupidity” memes were bountiful and frequent. The participants were particularly active on social media during the pandemic.

Aksan, Tati, and Warih were aware of the stereotypical view on gen-Zs as the lazy, entitled shut-ins generation, consumed by their handphones and internet; and most of these participants agreed. They labelled themselves with a sarcastic, self-deprecating label: “mager/malas gerak (lazy)” or the lazy-bum generation. Together with mager, rebahan (laying down, do-nothing-at-home) rebahan is considered the favourite activity among participants. This is the defining point of the success of the stay-at-home campaign #dirumahaja (#stayathome) because it resonates with the aspirations of young people's: “if you want to be a superhero and save millions of people, we need just lay down.” While in the past rebahan was considered shameful and became the object of mockery, rebahan, these days, has been lauded as a heroic action.

The changing meaning of rebahan warrants a new understanding of productivity and mobility of young people in Indonesia. During the pandemic, young people have adapted, not only their behaviours, but their way they relate to others as well. Participants were disillusioned with online meetings; the feeling of “social hallucination” of internet-mediated communication transformed the way they socialize with others. Adi, a student in Semarang, explained how he felt about video call/meeting services:

“We used Google Meet to discuss trivial matters. [Should] we talked about serious affairs, we chose face-to-face meetings. I personally need to see how others respond to my words. I cannot be serious [online]. [Online meeting] is impassioned...and we used video conferencing only to talk about general concerns and problems...but we did use video calls to check our friends when they travel...”

Common among the participants is a statement that “Gak ketemu kalau gak ada urusan, gak keluar kalau gak ada tujuan” (“no need to meet [someone] if there is nothing to talk, and no need to go out if there is no destination to go.”) This is an important statement that all could repeat more to prevent COVID-19 transmissions.

The socially situated experiences amidst the pandemic have informed participants how to behave and to adapt to their relations, boundaries, and responsibility towards others. The fear of infecting their family and loved ones had been the main reason why participants remained homebound and reduced their social interactions. Adi summed up young people's perceptions about the COVID-19 pandemic: “this virus, this pandemic, is a social problem. Yes [it is] a social problem, [a] societal issue, not just a medical issue. If we want this to be over, what's the word, [this] can't be done individually. We need to do this together, as a unity, as a society.”

As the Indonesian government relaxed COVID-19 restrictions, the efforts to protect the society lies in the members of society. “The government put more instructions and rules and random [health] checks, but it is more up to us now how to behave in public,” In many instances, the Indonesian government's “withdrawal” from public COVID-19 protection measures has been superseded by the local communities.

The youths' dilemma of strategizing social interactions, who to meet and how, and whether going out is one's option is all but trivial in the overall measures of preventing COVID infections and transmission in Indonesia. There was a general awareness among the participants that their behaviours had consequences beyond themselves. Even if there were “affective gaps” between individual decisions and COVID-19 measures, it led to communal responses. Our participants reported heightened community control over young people. Community surveillance and patrols and communal assistance were also reported by all participants, and it was not at all a

constructive development. The participants also reported the use of divisive “native” and “migrant”—insider and outsider categorization in the community rules enforcements; it indicated discriminatory practices in controlling and assisting the community against COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered a critical shift in participants’ views about inequality and mental health. Among the participants, mental health was observed to get worse further down the economic scale. The inequality of access and support affected the participants’ ability to endure the pressures from the pandemic. They were aware about the inequalities on internet access and quality of online education. The participants were aware that for someone who is poor, they had to work harder and to pay more to get their online education. Some participants had friends who had to “drop out” of their online classes because of poor internet quality or expensive internet data credit. While most participants got through the pandemic quite well, they credited their resilience to their supportive family and community.

Strong family relationships, membership to a community, and close-knit group of friends granted our participants’ ability to withstand COVID-driven hardships. The youths’ resilience is evaluated as being able to live, as restrictive as it may, without changing their identity and their social positions and orders (Rotarangi & Stephenson, 2014). Our participants show strong kin identity and connectedness to their community, despite the fluctuating social and economic situation following pandemic measures. These communal sentiments and collective forms of care “enabled individuals to more effectively draw on their diverse knowledge, skills, and resources to sustain their communities” (Leap & Thompson, 2018). As members of one of the biggest population groups in Indonesia, these youths’ sentiments are encouraging progression in Indonesia’s effort to prevent COVID-19 transmissions and deaths.

### **CONCLUSION**

As the pandemic rages on, and governments of the world have spent optimum efforts to curb COVID-19, young people’s views and perspectives have not been represented properly in the Indonesian government’s COVID-19 measures. As the “vector group”, the biggest and the most likely to transmit COVID-19 in Indonesia, it is imperative to understand how the young population makes meaning, reacts to, and acts upon the pandemic.

The significance of affective sentiments in the pandemic experiences indicates young people’s subjectivities as central features and products of larger social and political conditions in Indonesia. Youths’ feelings and behaviours towards the government’s COVID-19 measures are influenced by the socio-cultural environment and dynamics.

One of the main arguments of this study is that the COVID-19 pandemic is a communal crisis, not just a medical crisis. Socio-cultural contexts contribute to the prevention and progression of COVID-19 transmissions. The Javanese concept of *rasa* is crucial to understand young people’s experiences during the pandemic. The use of *rasa* and the entailed care practices could have enabled young people to limit the progression of COVID-19 and reduce the severity of outbreaks in Indonesian cities. Second, the use of socially and culturally situated notions of care, trust, and obligations have helped transform the new “health protocols”, such as mask-wearing, hand sanitizing, and social distancing as new social norms. Third, this study challenges the supposition that the state has the sole responsibility of taking care of COVID-19. The evocative descriptions of the pandemic echoes what Appadurai has suggested about the importance of society at large, in establishing and maintaining COVID-19 protection measures: people need to rediscover the “social” to overcome the global COVID-19 crisis.



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