

Health Worker Coping Strategies when Serving Patients During A Pandemic Situation

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Abstrak

Tujuan dari artikel ini adalah untuk mengeksplorasi apa saja strategi yang membuat tenaga Kesehatan (nakes) tetap melayani pasien di saat pandemi Covid-19 sebelumnya. Meskipun cukup banyak penelitian yang memperlihatkan dampak pandemi terhadap nakes, namun masih minim riset-riset yang memperlihatkan coping strategi nakes di saat pandemi Covid-19 agar tetap melayani pasien, khususnya di Indonesia. Pada penelitian ini, jumlah partisipan sebanyak 56 nakes yang aktif saat pandemi Covid-19 di diberikan pertanyaan terbuka; “Apa-Apa Saja yang Anda Lakukan Agar Tetap Melayani Pasien” yang kemudian disusun oleh peneliti dan diproses menjadi 10 tema utama. Berdasarkan analisis kualitatif, peneliti menemukan bahwa tema menjaga kesehatan diri sendiri terlebih dahulu dan kebermaknaan hidup subyektif dalam bekerja memiliki persentase lebih tinggi dibandingkan dengan tema lain. Penelitian selanjutnya diharapkan ada bantuan dari lingkungan untuk mendukung coping strategi tenaga kesehatan yang bekerja di garis depan.

Kata kunci: Nakes, tetap melayani, kesehatan diri, coping strategies

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to explore the factors that make health workers continue to serve patients during the Covid-19 pandemic. Although there are quite a number of studies that have had a pandemic impact on health workers, there is still a lack of research showing the coping strategies of health workers to continue serving patients, especially in Indonesia. In this study, the number of participants as many as 56 health workers who were active during the Covid-19 pandemic were given one open question; “whatever you do to keep serving patients” which was then compiled by the researcher and processed into 10 main themes. Based on the qualitative analysis, the researcher found that the theme of taking care of oneself first and the meaning of life at work had a higher percentage than other themes. Further research is expected to provide assistance from the environment to support the management strategies of health workers working on the front lines.

Keywords: Health worker, continue to serve, self-care, coping strategies

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1. Introduction

There are several research results that show the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on health workers who are actively working in pandemic. One of them was at the start of the pandemic, various obstacles faced by health workers, generally leading to a lack of PPE supplies, lack of operational support related to self-isolation and quarantine, improvements to financial aspects, management, and the quality of information networks that needed to be improved (Qaniah, 2021). However, sometimes later, there were several shifts in problems and stressors. The stressors received by health workers then tend to come from psychosocial factors. For example, incorrect information or hoaxes about health service facilities, people who do not undergo health procedures, to the lack of recognition and incentive programs as well as discrimination that can

come from any party (WHO, 2020; Qaniah, 2021; Kusumawardani et al., 2020; Billings et al., 2021).

The effects of stressor can be manifested by stress, depression, anxiety, incorrect information about the virus, workload that can become heavier, or fear of being infected (Zhang et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2020; Qaniah, 2021). The consequences of this psychological impact can make health workers give up their intention to actively work. In addition, inadequate health facilities and management that is less prepared to deal with difficult situations can increase the risk that work performance and caring quality will decrease (Perez et al., 2017). Of course every area can be affected. Especially areas with several health facilities that are not fully connected to each other, geographical or layout problems as well as socio-economic problems before the pandemic had an impact on infrastructure, which then increased consent during the pandemic (Carbajal et al., 2020).

American Psychological Association (APA) defines coping strategies as an action, series of actions, and thought processes used in dealing with stressful or unpleasant situations to reduce stress (APA, 2018). Compared to the impact received by health workers during the Covid-19 pandemic, there is still minimal research showing the coping strategies of health workers active in Southeast Asia to continue serving patients. In particular, the participant subjects came from Indonesia. There is some research that shows the coping strategies used by health workers to motivate themselves and reduce stress levels. However, this may vary for each individual. This also includes in Indonesia health workers due to differences in culture, region, belief system, customs, climate and seasonal changes, geographical location, economy and quality of health facilities.

Despite these hardships, many health workers continued to serve with resilience and dedication. Understanding the coping strategies they employed during this crisis is crucial for shaping future policies and support systems. While previous studies have extensively documented the mental health burden on healthcare workers, research on their adaptive strategies in Indonesia itself remains limited. Exploring these coping mechanisms can provide valuable insights into how healthcare professionals sustain their motivation and well-being under extreme circumstances.

This study seeks to address this gap by identifying and analyzing the coping strategies used by Indonesian healthcare workers during the pandemic. This research itself aims to contribute on healthcare sustainability. The findings also can inform policymakers and healthcare institutions about the necessary interventions to enhance the well-being of health workers, ensuring their continued ability to provide quality care during public health crises.

In the future, the role of health workers may become more complex. According to several experts, there are three new skills and roles needed by health workers in the future, namely: (1) being able to provide services in the virtual or digital world, (2) the health industry needs to intend to invest in the health of its own employees, including mental health, and (3) increase insight with currently received data (Elsevier, 2021). Then, researchers hope that the results of this research can add insight regarding the new skills needed by health workers, especially in Indonesia. And also, see the alignment of the research results with the three points of projection of the role of health workers in the future after the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. Method

A total of 56 health workers who were active during the pandemic in Indonesia were asked open questions. The research participants were obtained using a convenience sampling approach. Some participants were met in person and some were also online considering that during the pandemic it was difficult to meet in person and they needed to keep their distance. This research also uses content analysis to look for various copings in the answers given by participants. The content analyzed is in the form of texts and documents originating from participants. Respondents are health workers based definition in Indonesia Undang-Undang law number 36 of 2014. So in this study, health workers consist of several diverse professions who serve the community, have

knowledge or skills in carrying out health efforts.

Researchers asked active health workers an open question, "What makes you continue to serve patients in pandemic situation?" This question seeks to find out the coping strategies carried out by active health workers in order to continue serving. The answers are then written in an offline questionnaire or on the Google Form website. Then the results were analyzed using the content analysis method to identify and unite themes from similar answers. To increase reliability, the sample was rated by a second rater. Second rather is bachelor in psychology study. What was then. obtained an inter-rater agreement of more than 70 percentage similarity.

3. Results

There are ten themes obtained from the study, indicating the coping strategies carried out by health workers, including (1) Maintaining one's own health/self-care, (2) Worker meaning of life at working, (3) Continuing to improve one's abilities, (4) Focusing on patient needs, (5) Operational support, (6) Increasing spirituality, (7) Maintaining enthusiasm, (8) Gratitude, (9) Patience and sincerity, and finally (10) material support.

Table 1. Themes in Study

NO	Health Worker's Coping Strategies during Pandemic	TOTAL	%
1	Maintaining one's own health/self-care	12	20%
2	Meaning of life at working	9	15%
3	Continuing to improve one's abilities	6	10%
4	Focusing on patient needs	6	10%
5	Operational support	6	10%
6	Increasing spirituality	6	10%
7	Maintaining enthusiasm	6	10%
8	Gratitude	4	6,7%
9	Patience and sincerity	4	6,7%
10	Material support (worker's payroll)	1	1,7%

4. Discussion

Attention to maintaining personal health first for health workers who are active during the pandemic, has been called for by WHO since the beginning of the pandemic in 2020. Both mental health and physical health so that health workers can still serve patients well. This is also in line with the projected role of health workers in the future, namely that the health industry intends to invest in the health of its own workers, including mental health (Elsevier, 2021).

The results of this study really show that health workers need to maintain their own health before serving patients. Even the health industry, whether operating in the curative or preventive sector, needs to invest in the health of their own employees, including mental health, and at critical times, for example during a pandemic (Elsevier, 2021). Another research in shows that health workers develop their self-care by increasing their feelings of social connection and having life values while working (Lewis et al., 2022). These health workers demonstrate practices and self-care that lead to the meaning of life in interpersonal relationships. This is in line with the second theme in the transcribe research, namely, the subjective meaning of life that health workers having.

For the second theme, the subjective meaning of life that health workers have in their work is quite varied in this research. For example, (a) Health workers remember their goal before work, it's serving patients or clients, (b) Feel emotional experiences that are considered personally memorable when working, (c) Try to be professional when working, (d) Consider the profession as a calling, and (e) The assumption that every little thing you do also has meaning for other

people.

Another research in the different country shows that their participants (health workers) experienced a significant reduction in self-care strategies compared to before the pandemic occurred (Miller et al., 2021). The aspects of personal health in that research include professional support, self-development, life support, cognitive awareness, and life balance. They also suggested the need to build a professional work culture and support employee self-care in the form of self-development and sustainable programs. Certainly, atmospheres and environments can make someone feel happy and maintain well-being (Kyttä et al., 2016; Stefansdottir, 2018; Qaniah, 2021).

This research also shows that health workers **(a)** Try to increase their spirituality, **(b)** Be patient, **(c)** Be sincere, and **(d)** Maintain a sense of enthusiasm when serving patients during the pandemic. These themes can differentiate between other research. Where, not only interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships, but also building spirituality and transpersonal or transcendental relationships. This transpersonal research can be developed further for a richer and more varied meaning in life for health worker.

Several other intangible themes show that health workers need to develop themselves: **(a)** Remain focused on the quality of services they have and **(b)** Try to improve their abilities as health workers. Apart from that, strategic coping is tangible or visible, such as operational support for health facilities and decent wages. These two forms of strategy are important and complement each other.

Both intangible coping strategies (e.g., spirituality, maintaining enthusiasm, patience, and sincerity) and tangible coping mechanisms (e.g., operational support and material benefits). Spirituality, patience, and emotional intelligence help health workers remain resilient despite stressful conditions. Meanwhile, tangible coping strategies like adequate wages and proper healthcare facilities play a crucial role in sustaining their motivation and performance.

5. Conclusion and Suggestion

Based on studies, in order for health workers to continue to serve well, they need to maintain their own health (self-care) so they can work effectively. Then there is a need for meaningfulness in life at work, and intangible coping, for example; self-development, spirituality, development of emotional intelligence (maintaining enthusiasm, patience and sincerity). Tangible coping is also needed, such as operational and material assistance. Although, both types of strategies are still needed.

Self-care is one of the most crucial coping strategy in pandemic situation. Health workers must maintain both their physical and mental well-being to perform efficiently. A sense of purpose at work serves as a psychological motivator. Workers who find meaning in their profession are more likely to remain committed despite challenges. Intangible coping strategies, such as spirituality, patience, enthusiasm, and emotional intelligence, contribute to resilience. Tangible coping strategies, including operational and financial support, are necessary for sustaining motivation and performance.

This research has several limitations, for example the lack of more detailed participant data including ethnicity, participant beliefs, background, employment status, marital status, work location, age, gender, etc. So there are still many things that can be added. Then, there needs to be various forms of assistance/enhance, including social interventions, workshops, training, as well as improving facilities and operations to help health workers when implementing coping strategies when serving patients or clients. In particular, strategies for maintaining personal health of health workers, subjective meaningfulness in work, and increasing spirituality.

Social interventions, training programs, and better operational facilities, to aid healthcare workers in coping with crises effectively. Additionally, enhanced support systems. In particular, strategies focusing on personal health maintenance, meaningfulness in work, and spiritual resilience should be prioritized for long-term healthcare sustainability.

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