



What are People in Bali Doing in Pandemic: Understanding the Shape of Health Behavior and the Pitutur Tua

Ni Made Swasti Wulanyani^{1*}, Wahyu Rahardjo², Putu Yoga Sukma Pratama³, I Made Sudarmaja⁴, I Nyoman Sukma Arida⁵, Anak Agung Istri Via Aristyawati⁶

^{1,3,6}Psychology Department, Faculty of Medicine, Udayana University

²Faculty of Psychology, Gunadarma University

⁴Faculty of Medicine, Udayana University

⁵Faculty of Tourism, Udayana University

***Corresponding author:** Ni Made Swasti Wulanyani, Psychology Department, Faculty of Medicine, Udayana University

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ABSTRACT

In the early occurrence of the Covid-19 pandemic, Indonesian and the world regarded Bali having a unique mechanism. Balinese or Bali residents are assumed excellently immune or difficulty infected from Covid-19. Interestingly, Balinese do not show overwhelmed panic as occurs in other areas although the Covid-19 cases in Bali are not low. There are various reasons why Balinese's actions to protect their health consider beliefs, religion, and culture. This paper is a survey of the Balinese's distinctive perception and behavior to face Covid-19. The information was gained from comments, opinions, and information about typical behavior posted on mass media and social media. The main source of the information was the WhatsApp groups of Banjar community (60 people), Bali academicians (76 people), Hindu organization alumni (113 people), and Bali medical staff (30 people). This study collected the information and conversations during early months of the pandemic in 2020 and 2021 when the Covid-19 cases skyrocketed and the government implemented the Community Activities Restrictions Enforcement (PPKM). This study concludes that the belief in the power of nature makes the sincerity and acceptance more easily appear. Moreover, tradition strengthens the trust. Support in social life also increases cooperative actions to the rules or advices of the Bali government and the custom village assembly to protect society from the pandemic.

Keywords: *Bali, Covid-19 Pandemic, Beliefs, Rituals*

INTRODUCTION

Bali becomes the most affected tourism destination by the COVID-19. However, Bali has few COVID-19 cases compared to other regions in Indonesia and is considered the best province to handle the restrictions. Theoretically, Bali is predicted to become the worst-hit province and possibly suffer from chaos because of society's economic pressures.

Yasa (2020) explained that population density, human mobility, as well as connections to the entry of tourists from abroad, to the large number of elderly people have made Bali vulnerable to the impact of COVID-19. Unfortunately, no news broadcasts violence or resistance to government regulations as many cases occur in several regions in Indonesia.

The statistical data of corona cases in Bali has presented a small number but significantly increases from March to June 2020. Bali performs similar medical treatment as that of other regions. However, Bali tends to be under the spotlight. At a time, news broadcasted that Bali was immune from COVID-19 because no cases were found here and not many tests were conducted. The local Government and Balinese received a commendation from the Indonesian Government on various occasions or formal forums. Bali is considered successful in overcoming health procedures.

What did occur in Bali in the first months of the Covid-19 outbreak in Indonesia? This study aimed to (1) describe arguments and specific conditions of Balinese and (2) analyze arguments and specific conditions of Balinese.

METHODS

This study presented the results of a thematic analysis based on survey. This research goes through at least three stages of the data processing process, namely structural inputs, then the process of sorting themes to get a conical categorization, until the outcome is in the form of themes that will be interpreted with theories and other references as research results (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Thematic analysis can be done using data from trend on Balinese people's perception of the pandemic in social media conversations (Kordzadeh & Young, 2018; Samplaski, 2018; Shepherd, Sanders, Doyle, & Shaw, 2015), while still using the systematic coding stages in the process (Samplaski, 2018).

It is use for analyzing the trend on Balinese people's perception of the pandemic on several social media, such as WhatsApp group and comments or news on online media, including Bali pos, Denpasar, and Bali Express from the beginning of the outbreak in Indonesia. Social media becoming the information source was the WhatsApp group of Banjar community consisting of 60 members. They were the Bali academician association consisting of 76 members, alumni of Hindu organization consisting of 113 members, and a group of Bali medical personnel consisting of 30 members. The

information and conversation had been recorded from March to May 2020.

RESULT

The Balinese' responses in facing the Covid-19 outbreak are logical-based responses (*logos*), trust in government, trust-based responses, obedience/trust in Pitutur Tua, and believes in nature.

Logic-Based Responses (logos)

This response is influenced by logical items. The examples of Balinese logical responses are wearing masks, washing hands, social distancing, and staying at home. Massive socialization and education encourage the Balinese to more comprehend the virus spreads and self-protection. Moreover, in the circular letters, the central government and local government have mandated the people to study from home and close schools in mid-March 2020. Green and Kreuter (2005) asserts that there are cognitive aspects and beliefs in predisposing factors in a society's health behavior. As a result, the knowledge-based response becomes undoubtedly logical. At this point, the positive perception of the individual will encourage him to participate in displaying behaviors that support self and environmental health (Rottger, et al, 2017).

Trust in Government

For Balinese society, the belief system is strengthened by the government, religion, and customs. The institutions involved in the systems of handling the Covid-19 pandemic are the province and regency government, Majelis Desa Adat (Customary Village Assembly), Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia, Provincial COVID-19 Task Force, and COVID-19 Task Force of Gotong Royong Custom Villages. The last two institutions are ad-hoc institutions and are founded to respond to the pandemic. Custom villages in Bali receive not only de facto recognition but also de jure recognition regulated by Local Regulation number 49. The involvement of custom villages in preventing coronavirus spreads started on 28 March 2020.

One of the custom village elements is *pecalang* of which the tasks are ensuring security, peace, and public orders. However, during the pandemic, *pecalang* is also assigned to discipline the public to comply with health protocols. The existence of trust in customs and information sources from the legitimated institutions makes Balinese tend to comply with the health protocols. The existence of community, religion, and customs leaders in these institutions is a reinforcing factor in performing healthy behavior (Green & Kreuter, 2005). The existence of leaders and respected people in society is considered to help create conducive conditions for community members to participate in displaying healthy behaviors (Rottger et al., 2017).

Balinese society's closeness to nature influences their action. Milgram (as cited in Burger et al., 2011) found that obedience occurred not because of society's willingness to obey the government, instead of their need to obey nature's expectation. Pro-environmental behavior is part of the expectation of ownership of an environment that supports a good life. For the Balinese, this is behavior from a moral

perspective. That is, the need to create a good and healthy environment and life is not a personal impulse, but because this is indeed a good thing to do (Krettenauer & Lefebvre, 2021).

Trust-Based Response/Conscience

Balinese society, particularly Hindus, frequently perform actions based on their belief, customs, or conscience. This philosophy is legitimated by the government or society and frequently becomes a role model. The examples were the appeals to make offerings for *wong wongan* and the use of *tri* datu thread at the beginning of the outbreak (around mid-March and a week before Nyepi Day). Another response based on the society's belief was the requirement to offer *pejati* (an offering frequently used as media to show sincerity in conducting a ceremony) in *Pura Kahyangan Tiga* for two weeks and followed by prayer alternately conducted by the Gotong Royong Task Force. Philosophically, tridatu thread functions to ask protection of the Three World Ruling Gods: Dewa Brahma, Dewa Wisnu, and Dewa Siwa.



FIGURE 1: Various forms of Wong-Wongan Offerings

Source: circular letter from the Bali Province Community Advancement Service no. 472/1640/PPDA/DPMA

In implementing the appeals, several families had conducted at least three times of ceremonies. Furthermore, some others had conducted four times because they were considered incomplete. Some societies preferred obeying the appeals because they were sincere and felt that it was not disadvantageous. According to the positive-psychological approach, thanking and gratitude make people calmer and bring positive thoughts

that beneficially stop panic (Eagleson, Hayes, Mathews, Perman, & Hirsch, 2016; Emmons, McCullough, & Tsang, 2003).

At glance, these actions are the society's obvious obedience to the government institutions, but still, their action is based on their belief. Trust in the government encourages community involvement to participate in the success of

programs related to public health carried out by the government (Islm, Meng, Pitafi, Zafar, Sheikh, Mubarik, & Liang, 2021). However, some people do not want to comply with the appeals. Balinese internally see such a phenomenon as "... depending on kleteg bayu (conscience)". If a person does not believe in something, they should not do it because doing an action without a belief will be useless. However, searching for valid information is much better than milu-milu tuwung (acting without well understanding its benefits).

The previous explanation proves that trust and behavior beliefs play significant roles. The behavior belief is an individual's belief in the results of an action and evaluation of the results. The behavior belief will influence attitude toward behaviors. A study by Mardotillah, Gunawan, Soemarwoto, and Raksanagara (2019) shows that trust becomes the biggest aspect of changing society's health behavior. Balinese believes in the existence of alam niskala or realm (besides alam sekala = real). In daily life, they are accustomed to invisible things. It is in line with the attitude toward the behavior in the theory of planned behavior by Ajzen and Fishbein (2005) who assert that human behavior is related to their belief in performing certain actions.

What the Balinese do is actually a very good example in showing the combination of belief in religion and God, as well as obedience to the government. These two things are not collided but instead support each other to be implemented in creating better conditions. Humans pray to God to be healthy, and God is the most important factor that humans turn to when asking for health and goodness (Walters & Benjamins, 2020). Thus, obedience to the government is in line with the need to get closer to religion and God to get healing and a better environmental condition.

Obedience/Trust in Pitutur Tua

Balinese society is famous for strongly holding old *pitutur tua* (elderly's words of wisdom). One of *pitutur tua* is

[.. My dear child, today is the ninth season, sick season, severely ill season. Don't go out of the

house often. Diligently pray to God because this is called the haunted season in Bali ...]

One of viral obedience on social media is a way to handle Covid-19 by employing the concept of *Panca Suara*, the basic sound of the Balinese gamelan. *Panca Suara* consists of five basic tones: 'Nang, Ning, Nung, Neng, and Nong'.

"NANG means remaining calm though the plague situation is badly severe. NING means purifying behavior through silence and seeking an identity through silence (heNING). NUNG means reflecting (mereNUNG) or seeing positive sides of many problems and temptations. NENG means (*NENGI*) silence and a prohibition to go anywhere. NONG means a single command (*mekleNONG*) to always create good coordination and cooperation"

Another *pitutur tua* narrates the importance of maintaining the relation with other creatures such as animals, plants, and other invisible creatures such as viruses and bacteria. Furthermore, there is some more modern-wise advice from Balinese spiritual teachers though their advice is still derived from the virtues of old Balinese. Gede Prama, as an instance, is known as a spiritual teacher in Bali. One of his peaceful advice is:

"Balance your offerings to Gods and loves to others. Lower creatures, including the Covid-19, are not attacking. However, they help our souls shine brighter. If we diligently and sincerely practice this teaching, a very beautiful sun will rise from the island of Bali."

Based on Green & Kreuter's (2005) theory, the reinforcing factor or trust booster to change behavior is a recognized leader. Teaching sources recently influencing the behavior of Balinese Hindus are not the only ones. One of their teaching sources is a classical story discussed in social media groups of Balinese. It was mentioned that in the great war of Bharata Yudha there was a biological weapon resembling Covid-19. Yudhistira successfully overcame a disease outbreak without war. His war attitudes were by closing eyes, being silent, and meditating. The group members interpret these attitudes as Work from Home, a concept that people are recently doing. The epidemic of multiple diseases was finally destroyed by calm and honest knights.

This conversation finally concludes a solicitation statement: “let’s remain calm, don’t be panic until life is back to normal.” Furthermore, a calm attitude was initiated in the discussion of the medical personnel group. When news reports people who neglect COVID-19 and feel healthy, the response must be inviting colleagues to remain calm, be not emotionally provoked, and patiently deal with it. Related to implementing a calm attitude, Sugi Lanus, a philologist on Bali Pos online media, also advised Balinese community leaders:

“Pandemic (gering-mrana) must not be cursed—ten dados pisuh. If it is cursed, it can multiply—yening pisuh medal ngeluanang”.

This advice teaches people to prevent minds from hating the pandemic. Instead, the pandemic is interpreted as an opportunity to learn self-control. At a certain point there is an explanation that the output of religion and spirituality is to help humans get physical and mental health (Koenig, King, & Carson, 2012), especially when it comes to COVID-19 (Katsuki, Kubo, Yamakawa, Shinfuku, Sartorius, Sakamoto, & Kato, 2021; Schnell & Krampe, 2020).

Believes in Nature

As mentioned in previous sub-chapters, the Balinese believe in the existence of alam niskala (realm) and are familiar with incredible creatures. However, principally Balinese believe in the power of nature and always attempt to balance them. Most of the social media comments positively interpret nature and give attention to it.

Instead of cursing outbreaks or pests, Balinese farmers give an honorary title “jro” to planthoppers and rats. Pests are invited to talk and greeted in upakara (offerings): “Mekaon mekaon jro, mekaon jrone mekaon.” (Go away, go away master, go away). The sentences are uttered without hate or hostile feelings. This attitude is based on deeply respectful attitudes toward nature that become a Balinese way of life. It seems that Balinese ancestors fully understand that good thought and peace will bring healing power energy and protection energy from the universe. This way of life is inherited to the next

generation and to today’s generation who is facing the pandemic.

In general, the obedience of Balinese results in a controlled number of COVID-19 cases in the region. However, spiritualists and Balinese society are still searching for natural signs that are symbolic. One of the strong natural signs is the appearance of crown clouds on the summit of Mount Agung in mid-May 2020. This phenomenon is stated by Guru Gede Prama on his Facebook page.

“A day after Shiva Night and a day before Idul Fitri Day, on Saturday 23-5-2020, the most beautiful clouds appeared above two holy and sacred mounts in Bali. The clouds above the two holy mounts brought a message that the Covid-19 crisis had closed. Balinese society is supposed to gratitude by making offerings.”

The Dynamics of People’s Behavior during the Pandemic

After the Covid-19 outbreaks, custom activities have been conducted flexibly. Various activities of Balinese must adjust to the pandemic, for example, *ogoh-ogoh* parade, a complement series of celebrating Suci Nyepi Day. The parade would attract many people either men carrying the *ogoh-ogoh* or spectators. This was not in line with the government’s social distance policy. Therefore, the local government made a policy to postpone the parade. In the Ngaben ceremony, the society must not be present, but they can be replaced by replacement money as occurred in a region in Tabanan Regency. The group of medical personnel informs that handling of dead bodies is adjusted during the pandemic. The deceased are handled based on procedures recommended by hospitals or common procedures to handle deceased bodies with infectious diseases. Furthermore, the deceased can be handled in cultural procedures with medication adjustments.

Another example of Balinese’s willingness with the adjustment was presented by Banjar members who asked prayer when performing their mother’s cremation ritual. They did not ask people to mutually assist the ritual (*ngayah*) as usual. Meanwhile, youth’s willingness to change

their lifestyle is presented by their active participation in spraying disinfectant though, before the pandemic, they were busy with online games.

Cultural performances that are close to Balinese' lives are adjusted with the pandemic condition and become education media. *Pecalang*, for example, wore dancer costumes when asked people to wear masks and wash hands before entering their villages. Puppet comedy-drama, which used to perform live, is recently recorded on videos and frequently narrates stories of the Covid-19 pandemic.

As previously stated, the healthy behavior of the Balinese people in dealing with COVID-19 is an excellent example in describing the role of subjective norms represented by religious perspectives as well as a perspective on the balance of nature from a cultural perspective. Belief in religion that blends with culture can synergize to provide positive attitudes and perspectives. Religion is seen as able to construct belief and become the basis for healthy behavior (Khuan, Shaban, & van de Mortel, 2018; Zhou & Sun, 2019). Religious beliefs do not only affect religious activities, but also the view that individuals play a role in whether they are healthy and how healthy behaviors displayed have an impact on the environment (Holt, Clark, & Roth, 2014). Religion triggers the emergence of a sense of control from individuals to display healthy behavior (Khuan, Shaban, & van de Mortel, 2018; Krause, Hill, Emmons, Pargament, & Ironson, 2017).

This provides a positive perception and attitude towards government recommendations and regulations in regulating social life to minimize the spread of COVID-19 in Indonesia, and in Bali in particular. Ajzen (1991) states that the role of subjective norms will be felt stronger in generating intentions and certain behaviors with the support of positive attitudes towards these behaviors. Subjective norms that are considered, of course, are not only injunctive normative beliefs, but also descriptive normative beliefs (Ajzen, 2020; Schuz, Conner, Wilding, Alhawtan, Prestwich, & Norman, 2021). This means that the consideration of carrying out certain behaviors is not only a factor of the

closest people, but also people in a wider spectrum such as the government and society.

The healthy behavior of the Balinese in dealing with COVID-19 is in line with the findings of several previous studies that also used the theory of planned behavior (Bronfman, Repetto, Cisternas, & Castaneda, 2021; Coroiu, Moran, Lindsay, & Geller, 2021; Frounfelker, Santavicca, Li, Miconi, Venkatesh, & Rousseau, 2021). Knowledge will strengthen individual subjective norms in displaying healthy behavior (Bronfman et al., 2021). Intentions also have a strong role in healthy behavior (Xia, Shi, Chang, Miao, & Wang, 2021), especially in Balinese society, these intentions are also driven by subjective norms sourced from religious and cultural perspectives.

CONCLUSION

News in foreign media and appreciation from the Indonesian government related to the success of the local government of Bali in handling COVID-19 were possibly exaggerated commendations because it was praised without strong reasons. However, until entering the preparation toward new normal, Bali still receives special attention because its cases are low. Whereas status of Bali is a world tourism destination that possibly reports a high number of corona cases. The Balinese order of life possibly becomes one of the influential factors. Beliefs in the power of nature and invisible things make sincerity and acceptance easily appear from each Balinese.

The ancestors' tradition more strengthens Balinese belief and cooperative actions to the government or customary institutions. Furthermore, the Balinese habits that easily spread the COVID-19, such as shaking hands, hugging, and kissing checks, are rarely found in society or general interpersonal contacts.

Sugi Lanus names this typical- Balinese order of social life as Bali wellness culture. According to the social-psychological approach, social-cultural aspects of a certain area frequently influence the formation of individual behavior. It is seen in the behavior of every different ethnicity because they have distinguished and typical ways of life, including their behavior to manifest self-

care. Karr (in Notoatmodjo, 2014) asserts that there are several factors influencing health behavior, and one of them is social support. The surrounding community's supports influence individual behavior. In society's life, individual behavior tends to demand appreciation from society, and social support is considered successfully influencing an individual's health behavior.

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