

The Psychological Dynamics of Prisoners Undergoing Assimilation Program During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

One of the problems in Indonesian penitentiaries is overcapacity. Most of the penitentiaries have exceeded more than 100% of their capacity. The implementation of the assimilation program that was previously carried out independently in a penitentiary or in cooperation with the third parties by providing skills coaching or social work activities is switched by undergoing the assimilation program at home. The Ministry of Law and Human Rights (Kementerian Hukum dan Hak Asasi Manusia) has released prisoners through an assimilation program as a precaution to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the penitentiary with the overcrowded condition which is likely to increase the probability of the virus spread. The purpose of this research is to know the psychological dynamics of prisoners undergoing assimilation programs at home during the Covid-19 pandemic. This research used a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods. The participants were selected by purposive sampling techniques, based on the criteria determined by the researcher that is prisoners of Class IIB Penitentiary of Manokwari (Lembaga Pemasyarakatan Kelas IIB Manokwari), West Papua, Indonesia, who were undergoing assimilation program at home during the Covid-19 pandemic as many as 3 people. The technique of data collection is to conduct observation and interview on the participants. The results of this study indicate that the implementation of the assimilation program at home during the Covid-19 pandemic gives psychological impact on prisoners. Behind their happiness for being able to get early release from the penitentiary, these prisoners also feel anxious, afraid, sad, and even inferior in facing other problems, especially for prisoners who are faced with financial problems which are getting harder during this pandemic. Therefore, social support is considered very important for offering them motivation so they will not feel hopeless and constantly devastated by the negative feelings within them.

Keywords : psychological dynamics, assimilation, asimilasi rumah, prisoners, anxiety, covid-19 pandemic.

1. INTRODUCTION

A Covid-19 pandemic is a worldwide event of the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Covid-19 is an infectious disease caused by a new type of coronavirus. The Covid-19 outbreak was first detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China, on 1 December 2019, and was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 11 March 2020 [1]. As of October 2020, more than 37 million cases have been detected from around the world, which resulted in more than 1 million people died. Meanwhile in Indonesia, since the confirmation of the first case from March to October 2020, more than 330 thousand cases have

been recorded and nearly 12 thousand people have died [2].

This pandemic has caused serious disruptions and impacts on almost all aspects of people's lives at large. The government has made various countermeasures to reduce the increasingly negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia. One of the efforts that need to be carried out to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 is to practice social and physical distancing by maintaining distance and avoiding crowds, especially in a closed room [3].

This may be attempted by some people by staying at home and limiting interactions with

others. However, this is different from the conditions in the Penitentiary. The overcapacity of the Penitentiaries in Indonesia is currently at an alarming stage. The problem of overcapacity that has occurred for years until now has not been resolved optimally. The number of prisoners in several Penitentiaries has even exceeded more than 100% of the capacity that should be filled [4]. So, the efforts to prevent and control the spread of Covid-19 will be difficult to be attempted because, with the current conditions of the Penitentiary, it is impossible to carry out social restrictions. Moreover, the spread of Covid-19 will also be very vulnerable to occur in Penitentiary with its overcrowded conditions, especially because many elderly prisoners are highly susceptible to disease.

At the beginning of April 2020, the Ministry of Law and Human Rights adopted a policy of implementing the release of prisoners through an assimilation and integration program based on the Decree of the Minister of Law and Human Rights of the Republic of Indonesia No. M.HH-19.01.04.04 of 2020 on the Terms of Providing Assimilation and Integration Rights for Prisoners and Children in the context of preventing and overcoming the spread of the coronavirus in the penitentiary environment. Assimilation is a process of fostering Prisoners and Children carried out by integrating Prisoners and Children into community life. The implementation of the assimilation program that was previously carried out without releasing the prisoners is transferred to undergo assimilation at home with guidance and supervision from the Probation Office (Balai Pemasyarakatan/Bapas) [5]. The provision of the assimilation program at home is only intended for prisoners who have committed crimes other than terrorism, narcotics and narcotics precursors, psychotropic drugs, corruption, crimes against state security, and serious human rights crimes, as well as transnational organized crimes, and foreign citizens. Prisoners who can be given assimilation must meet the following requirements: good behavior in the last 6 months/last 3 months for the Children; actively participate in coaching programs well, and have served $\frac{1}{2}$ of the criminal period/at least 3 months for the Children (Article 3 and 4 of [6]). It consists of those who have qualified as mentioned above. As of September 2020, there are more than 50 thousand prisoners who have received the assimilation program at home [7].

The implementation of the assimilation program at home is carried out by observing the health protocol for preventing Covid-19 and paying

attention to the rules and obligations that must be followed while undergoing the assimilation program, one of which is carrying out the mandatory report to the Probation Office (Bapas) as the responsible party for the guidance and supervision of prisoners who are undergoing the assimilation or integration program. The prisoners who obtained assimilation rights were not immediately released, but instead housed. Assimilation means that they are issued with the status of prisoner. So that, if they are committing another criminal offense or violating the conditions of the program, the program will be repealed then they are going to be put back in the prison to serve the rest of the original sentence and their new charges [8].

This program was well accepted by prisoners who will receive an assimilation program since they can breathe the free air outside the penitentiary. Yet, on the other hand, their status as prisoners often becomes an obstacle for them to be well accepted in society. The bad stigma that appears against prisoners is a challenge to return to their environment, especially coupled with the anxiety and other problems that have arisen due to the Covid-19 pandemic. So, the implementation of the assimilation program during the Covid-19 pandemic, to some extent, also has a psychological impact on prisoners.

This study is important to find out the psychological dynamics that arise in prisoners who are undergoing the assimilation program at home during the Covid-19 pandemic. What are the causes of unrest feeling in prisoners, how does the feeling influence them, and what the related parties can do to deal with such feelings. The previous studies mostly explain the implementation of the assimilation program before the Covid-19 pandemic. So this study is needed to be done to know the implementation of the assimilation program at home, the effects and the problems arising from the Covid-19 outbreak from the prisoners' viewpoint.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach that includes information about the main phenomena in the study with the phenomenological method, where the researcher identifies the nature of individual experiences about a particular phenomenon based on what the subject describes. The subjects of this study were selected by the purposive sampling technique, which means that

researchers select individuals based on certain criteria that can specifically provide an understanding of study problems and questions that arise in the study [9]. The subjects in this study were 3 prisoners in the Class IIB Penitentiary of Manokwari, West Papua, Indonesia, who were undergoing the assimilation program at home during the Covid-19 pandemic. The data was collected to gather information by examining document related to the participants (e.g. biographies and document from penitentiary), conducting observation, and open-ended interview. It was conducted in different types such as online group interview and telephone interviews with participants while carrying out their mandatory report to the researcher, as a probation officer, twice a month during April to August 2020.

The questions asked for collecting data were unstructured and related to the state of the subject while staying at home, their current activities or job, the problems that they were faced, subject's efforts to overcome the problems, and psychological development of the subjects during the implementation of the assimilation program at home during the pandemic situation. The data, then, are analyzed through several steps which include processing data from the interview result, reading the whole data, categorizing data based on theory, presenting categories in the description forms, and interpreting data.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of the assimilation program at home during the Covid-19 pandemic was well accepted by the subjects because they have the opportunity to undergo the assimilation program at home. But, based on the results of the analysis of interviews conducted on 3 subjects (RA, DY, HH), it shows that behind the happiness they felt, there are feelings and unrest felt by the prisoners such as anxiety, being afraid, and even inferior feeling. Those are caused by factors that are more or less the same as each other and also other factors based on the problems they face.

Anxiety is one of the personality dynamics that explain the driving forces behind people's actions. Anxiety may be triggered in response to particular situations, people, or events. It can also be triggered in anticipation of an event. The stimuli capable of eliciting anxiety may be both external and internal. The unpleasantness of this experience is such that the person attempts to avoid it by avoiding the stimuli associated with it. In defining anxiety, it is a felt, affective, unpleasant state accompanied by a

physical sensation that warns the person against impending danger [10]. The unpleasantness is often vague and hard to pinpoint, but the anxiety itself is always felt. There are three types of anxiety, namely: *Reality anxiety*, which is closely related to fear. It is defined as feeling unpleasant, unspecified feeling involving the possibility of danger; the second one is the *Neurotic anxiety*, which arises without knowing the dangers that threaten it; and also *Moral anxiety*, that comes from the conflict between the ego (the principle of reality) and the superego (moral and ideal conditions). This moral anxiety can occur when a person feels that he has failed to carry out his moral principles or has done something contrary to the existing moral norms.

3.1. Finding on the First Subject

RA is the head of the family, who was previously worked as a construction worker. He was grateful to be back in the middle of his family. But, during the pandemic situation, the job on construction projects in several places was temporarily suspended, and RA's status as a prisoner made it difficult for him to be accepted back to work. So, during the first few months of undergoing the assimilation program, RA just stayed at home a whole day, did house chores, and had to rely on his wife's income to supply their daily needs. This condition made him feel inferior and disappointed in himself because he felt unable to take responsibility as the head of the family for providing a living and fulfilling the needs of his family.

3.2. Finding on the Second Subject

As for the second subject (DY), he was a final year student at one of the universities in Manokwari. DY, as the eldest son in the family, hoped that he could be a good example for his younger siblings. DY felt like a failure and let his family down because of the crime he had committed. This made DY determine to complete his study at university for the sake of his parents and younger siblings. However, this pandemic has made DY's family experience financial difficulties. As a result, DY could no longer continue his study and must help his family financially. This situation made DY feel a little disappointed because even after leaving the penitentiary, it turned out that he had not been able to fulfill his desire to complete his delayed study. Yet, DY was also worried that in the end, he would not be able to help his family to the fullest, considering that he was having a hard time finding a job and for the last few months, he

only relied on his ability to catch a fish on the sea and sell his catch to help supply his family needs.

3.3. Finding on the Third Subject

Whereas the third subject problem (HH) is quite different from the two previous subjects. The feeling of happiness felt because of being able to reunite with the family could not be felt by HH. While in the penitentiary, HH must stay far away from his family who lives out of the town (Jayapura). After leaving the penitentiary, HH has not been able to meet with his family. As a result of the expanding pandemic, the local government has issued a policy on prohibiting travel in/out of Manokwari Regency to prevent the spread of the Covid-19. The entire use of out-of-town transportation at all points of travel (airport and port) is temporarily closed until further notice [11]. This policy made HH unable to go to Jayapura to meet his family and required him to stay in Manokwari. This made HH feel even sadder and confused, especially because he had no relatives in Manokwari. HH had to stay at the house of a fellow prisoner while looking for a temporary job. However, because he didn't want to be a burden to his friend, HH decided to move and live in a boarding house. HH felt very worried about the condition of his family amid this pandemic, remembering that while he was in prison, his wife, who was a housewife, had to work as a household assistant in one of their neighbors' houses to fulfill the daily needs of their family. As felt by the first subject (RA), HH also felt discouraged and failed to become the head of the family because he could not provide for the needs of his family properly. During the assimilation program in Manokwari, HH realized that during this pandemic, he was expected to stay at home as much as possible and must comply with health protocols. However, HH said that it was impossible for him to just stay at home because he had to work as best as he could to pay for the rent of the boarding house, food costs, and also daily necessities while living in Manokwari.

3.4. Analysis

Based on the conditions experienced by the subjects (RA, DY, HH), it shows that the crucial problems faced by prisoners who are undergoing the assimilation program at home cannot be separated from feelings of anxiety that arise due to economic or financial problems during the pandemic and their difficulties in being able to re-accepted in society. Their anxiety states are a response to a life crisis that has challenged them in

relation to stressful life events which act as triggers [12].

All of the subjects tend to constantly feel worried about the bad circumstances that will happen to them or their family. There are two types of anxiety felt by the subjects. The first is *reality anxiety*, in which the three subjects feel anxious that arises due to fear of the Covid-19 pandemic which is currently spreading. The subjects feel a deep fear if they or their family members will be infected by the virus. The second is *moral anxiety*, in which the subjects feel the fear that they cannot be accepted back in society. Given that the implementation of the assimilation program at home had received resistance from the wider community. Moreover, it is coupled with the bad stigma of a prisoner who has become quite a burden for them. Most people often look at the prisoners with mistrust or disapproval and still feel suspicious that the prisoners will repeat their crimes. This problem becomes a big challenge that made them feel that they are no longer able to return to their environment and to be a part of the community as a whole [13].

The subjects are faced with their obligation to comply with health protocols by staying at home and minimizing contact with people other than their family as much as possible. But on the other hand, they are also faced with the consequences of the pandemic that has made the economic slump. They had to continue to work to provide for themselves and their families amid the threat of the spread of the Covid-19 and amidst their difficulties to be able to return as a part of society. This is in line with the concept of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. A few assumptions from Maslow's theory of personality show that people are continually motivated by one or several needs, that all people everywhere are motivated by the same basic needs, and that needs can be arranged on a hierarchy. Maslow listed the following needs in order of their prepotency: physiological, safety, love and belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization. The lower needs must be satisfied or mostly satisfied before higher-level needs become activated [14]. As for the subject situations, they had to keep working to fulfill their and their families' *physiological needs* that are the most basic needs of any person, including food, drink, and so on. Before they fulfill the need for safety on the next level, including physical security and freedom from threatening forces such a fear, danger, or illness, which in this case is feeling safe from the threat of the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.5. Discussion

The prisoners of Class IIB Penitentiary of Manokwari come from various regions and have diverse criminal backgrounds. The subject of this study were 3 prisoners who had fulfilled the conditions of assimilation program at home. They were allowed to serve the rest of their criminal sentence outside the penitentiary under the guidance and supervision of Class I Corectional Center/Bapas Manokwari. During the implementation of the assimilation program at home, the subjects were faced with problems that occurred, especially during the pandemic, which had an impact on their psychological aspects.

Based on the various situations faced by the three subjects while undergoing the assimilation program at home during the Covid-19 pandemic, it is known that the psychological dynamics felt by the subjects arise because of differences in what they expect and what they have to face in reality. The feelings of anxiety, fear, sadness, and inferiority felt by the subjects have more or less affecting their lives. Therefore, the role of various parties is considered very important in helping prisoners to deal with that. The role of the family as the biggest social support they had will be very meaningful to them. The family is expected to provide full support to prisoners to change them into better and decent people. The role of the family as a home or facility that can always provide warmth for prisoners will be a source of strength for them in facing difficulties. With the support of the families, they will believe that no matter how hard the problems they have in their life after leaving the penitentiary, they still have a family to return to.

The second is the role of the Probation Office, especially the Probation Officer, who carries out guidance dan supervisory duties for prisoners during the implementation of the program. The Probation Officer can provide personality guidance in the form of counseling on religion, law, attitudes, and behavior, which can help in developing and strengthening the prisoners' self-capacity to be a better person. Besides, self-reliance guidance can also be provided through providing job training in certain fields as provisions for prisoners [15]. However, it must be remembered that the implementation of a guidance program during a pandemic must be carried out under health protocols through online media without direct interaction. So, the self-reliance guidance program can be implemented with the help of partners who

have worked with the Probation Office. In this case, the Probation Officer can communicate with the Correctional Care Community Group (*Kelompok Masyarakat Peduli Pemasyarakatan/Pokmas Lipas*) which is a working partner who participates in shaping prisoners to become whole humans and can be accepted again by the environment. The existence of cooperation between the Probation Office and this community group is an effort to involve the community in the process of empowering prisoners to be able to return to an active role as members of the community. One of the three key features for the successful monitoring and treatment of individuals on parole or probation is the network of community services. The reintegration into the community depends heavily on community-based treatment and monitoring [16].

Concerning the problems faced during the assimilation program during the Covid-19 pandemic, one thing that can be done by community groups is to provide access to information related to job vacancies or the distribution of labor according to the skills possessed by prisoners. As well as providing information in various other fields such as health, education, religion, law, and others according to the needs of prisoners who are undergoing assimilation or integration programs [17]. Besides, considering that the community has a very big role in the implementation of the assimilation and integration programs. However, there are still many people who do not understand the procedures of the program implementation for the development of prisoners as a whole and there is still high public suspicion about prisoners in general. So, it is necessary to do outreach to the wider community to prepare and increase public awareness of their role in helping prisoners to become part of society again. So, the communication and cooperation between the various parties in the guidance program are really important.

4. CONCLUSION

Psychological dynamics is the relationship between various psychological aspects that exist within the individual and the external factors. Based on the results of the previous discussion, it can be concluded that the implementation of the assimilation program at home during the Covid-19 pandemic has psychological impact on prisoners. Besides the happiness they feel for being able to release and stay outside the penitentiary and also being able to reunite with their families, the

prisoners also feel anxious, afraid, sad, and even inferior. The anxiety feeling is mostly caused by the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, then the financial problems that have become increasingly difficult during this pandemic as well as the difficulties to be re-accepted back in the community.

Therefore, social support from families, Probation Officers as an officer who provide guidance to clients, and the role of the community in general, are deemed very important to provide motivation and full support to prisoners so that they do not feel hopeless and keep falling into negative feelings that arise within them. The related parties are expected to work together and participate in order to help the prisoners get back into an active role as a member of the community in their environment. The government has tried to improve the implementation of the supervision program on prisoners who were undergoing assimilation programs at home, with the cooperation between the penitentiary, Probation Office, police office, prosecutors, and courts. While in the implementation of guidance for the prisoners is still carried out virtually by probation officers to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

This study is expected to provide information about the psychological dynamics felt by prisoners who are undergoing the assimilation program at home during the Covid-19 pandemic and provide an overview of the assimilation program at home and also the obstacles that exist for prisoners who are undergoing the program. It is expected to be used as a guide for all related parties regarding the roles and efforts that can be made in maximizing the practice of the correctional process. Better cooperation between relevant parties is also needed to be carried out, especially by optimizing the role of the Correctional Care Community Group (*Kelompok Masyarakat Peduli Pemasyarakatan/Pokmas Lipas*) to help the prisoners by providing information, job vacancies and support for the prisoners in various aspects to deal with their problems during the pandemic situation.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The author contributed to the design and implementation of the research, to the analysis of the results and to the writing of the manuscript.

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