Suicide Phenomenon Among Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic (A Case Study on the Suicide Phenomenon Among Students in Tarakan, North Kalimantan)

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Abstract: This article discusses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on human life, particularly in the field of education. In an effort to address the pandemic, the government has implemented Distance Learning Education (PJJ) as a relevant solution, but it has resulted in unintended consequences, including increased stress and suicide among students. This research uses a qualitative method with a case study and sociological analysis using Emile Durkheim's theory of suicide. The analysis results show that suicidal behavior among students occurs due to social symptoms, especially in facing rapid changes and social isolation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Students face greater pressure to adapt to these changes, both in their education and social environment. Therefore, appropriate and comprehensive prevention and intervention efforts need to be taken to address this problem and prevent suicide among students.

Keywords: suicide; distance learning (DL); stress; Emile Durkheim

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic that has hit the world has not only had worrying impacts on physical health, but also significant psychological effects on the community, especially on school children and teenagers. Since February 2020, this coronavirus pandemic has successfully changed the lives of the Indonesian people. Many things have been delayed and obstructed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, including in the field of education. The teaching and learning process has been suspended and then replaced with online learning or distance learning methods carried out from home. The direct impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused limitations on face-to-face and social interactions. With social distancing and self-isolation policies implemented in many countries, including Indonesia, the daily lives of many people have undergone drastic changes that can affect their mental and emotional health. One serious psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is the increase in suicide cases among students. Those who are required to undergo distance learning or online education experience social isolation and a lack of social interaction, making them more vulnerable to feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression. In addition, academic pressure and worries can also increase stress.

There are many pros and cons to the distance learning process (PJJ), and many students are not mentally or physically ready to adjust to this new situation. Some students may lack the necessary internet media and gadget facilities, or they may not be prepared for self-directed learning. These are just a few examples of the various forms of unpreparedness. Unfortunately, distance learning solutions have created new issues for the education world, such as the inability to fully cover the course material, the lack of interaction between teachers and students, and internet connection issues. As a result, students become

increasingly stressed about all the new challenges they face. The mental readiness of students is being put to the test during this pandemic. Many students experience mental and emotional pressure during the PJJ process, with some even resorting to suicide (Ruci Pawicara & Maharani Conilie, 2020).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, suicide among students has become a concerning phenomenon that requires attention from various parties. For example, a junior high school student in Tarakan, North Kalimantan committed suicide due to stress and depression from dealing with piled-up school assignments. This is also supported by previous research that shows an increase in stress during the COVID-19 pandemic due to social distancing policies. A study titled "The Psychological Impact of Quarantine and How to Reduce It: Rapid Review of the Evidence" by Samantha K. Brooks, Rebecca K. Webster, Louise E. Smith, Lisa Woodland, Simon Wessely, Neil Greenberg, and Gideon James Rubin (2020) explains the psychological impact of quarantine and social distancing adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researchers found that anxiety, depression, and psychological stress increased during quarantine. Furthermore, another study titled "Stress and Anxiety Among University Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic" by Amir H. Pakpour, Elham Alimoradi, and Hui Chen (2020) found that the level of stress and anxiety among university students increased during the pandemic.

Regarding the phenomenon of student suicide during the COVID-19 pandemic, research is needed to provide a better understanding of this phenomenon in order to take appropriate action to prevent it in the future. By understanding the background and causes of this phenomenon, we can evaluate existing policies and develop more effective solutions to help students cope with the pressures and challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Analysis of this phenomenon is important because it will help us understand the impact and implications of the significant changes that have occurred in daily life due to the pandemic. In this regard, a sociological framework is used to analyze the phenomenon, with reference to theories produced by the prominent sociologist Emile Durkheim. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, significant changes have occurred in many aspects of human life, including education. Lockdown policies and social restrictions implemented by the Indonesian government have made all educational activities have to be conducted virtually or online. This research uses Durkheim's theory to understand the social factors that influence student suicide, how social and psychological factors affect students' decisions to commit suicide, and how the COVID-19 pandemic may increase the risk of student suicide.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The method used in this research is a qualitative approach with a case study. This research focuses more intensively on a specific object to be able to answer the question of "how" (Creswell, 2007) because this type of question can explore information more deeply (Anita Wardhani & Yulia Asriza, 2021). Data in this research were obtained through reliable secondary data such as articles, journals, in-depth interviews, and observations carried out with informants who were the families of suicide victims. The interview technique was utilized, which involved a dialogue between the researcher and the informants with the objective of acquiring in-depth information about their perspectives, thoughts, experiences, and attitudes. Meanwhile, the observation technique aims to obtain a deeper understanding

through observations of the behavior, processes, and contexts of the informants. The interviews were conducted in December 2020 The interview was conducted with family members of the suicide victim, namely SK, the victim's mother, and AN, the victim's sibling. The research informants consisted of The family of the suicide victim. This study utilized qualitative data analysis with triangulation, a method of data analysis that utilizes multiple sources or different data collection techniques to obtain more valid and reliable conclusions. Triangulation can be performed in various ways, such as comparing data from different respondents, comparing data from different data collection methods, or comparing data obtained from different researchers. Thus, triangulation helps to reduce research bias and can increase confidence in the conclusions drawn.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Emile Durkheim was a French sociologist who is considered one of the founders of modern sociology. Durkheim developed a theory about suicide that emphasized social factors that influence a person's decision to commit suicide. Durkheim identified three types of suicide. Alfan Biroli (2018):

1. Egoistic, altruistic, and anomic. Egoistic suicide occurs when an individual feels disconnected from society and less bound to social values.
2. Altruistic suicide occurs when an individual is too closely bound to a particular social group, such as the military or religious organization.
3. Anomic suicide occurs when an individual feels too weak or too strong in the face of rapid social change.

The COVID-19 pandemic and Distance Learning (DL) can increase the risk of student suicide due to various complex social and psychological factors. Distance learning is an online form of learning that has been implemented during the pandemic to reduce the number of new COVID-19 infections. Students can access and learn from home using communication tools and platforms such as WhatsApp, Google Classroom, Zoom, Google Meet, and others. In DL, students are required to have adequate technology skills and abilities to access and operate the platforms and applications used. One of the main advantages of DL is flexibility in time and space. Students can access learning materials and assignments from anywhere and anytime, so they can adjust their learning time with their daily schedule. Furthermore, DL also allows students to learn independently and gain a more personal and interactive learning experience.

However, DL also has several disadvantages. One of the most obvious disadvantages is the limitation of access and facilities. Not all students have access to computer devices, fast and stable internet connection, or software and applications. As a result, they may not be able to access all the materials provided or have difficulty in attending DL classes. Additionally, DL can also affect family economics. The cost of internet and devices required to participate in DL is an additional burden for families that are already facing financial difficulties. This is consistent with the information obtained from informant SK, the mother of a student who committed suicide:

> *"Selama Covid biaya anak-anak meningkat berlipat mulai dari yang besar sampai yang kecil meminta untuk dibelikan HP dan Paket internet. Harganya bukan murah, belum lagi harus memikirkan kebutuhan rumah. Belum lagi kadang jaringan di rumah sulit itu membuat anak-*

> *anak sering belajar di luar rumah jadi anak-anak juga sering tidak paham setelah itu tugas mereka juga sepertinya semakin banyak tugas dari guru, kata mereka kepada saya"* (23 Desember 2020)

> *"During the Covid pandemic, the cost of raising children has multiplied, with expenses ranging from big to small, including requests for smartphones and internet packages. These expenses are not cheap, and it adds to the need to consider household necessities. Furthermore, the poor home internet connectivity often causes children to study outside of the home, resulting in difficulty in comprehending the material. In addition, the teachers are giving more assignments, which is causing an increased workload, as they have mentioned to me." (23 December 2020)*

In the interview results, it was revealed that the cost of raising children has increased during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is due to the need for electronic devices such as smartphones and internet packages to support distance learning and to access education during the pandemic. The increased expenses can have a significant impact on families, especially those who were already facing financial difficulties. With these additional expenses, families must sacrifice other needs such as food. This highlights the importance of internet access and electronic devices during this pandemic, especially in supporting distance learning. However, not all families can afford expensive electronic devices and internet packages. The constraints that can be analyzed from the informant's statement above are that distance education applied during the Covid-19 pandemic brings many challenges and stress to students. Based on the data provided by the informant, some of these challenges include:

1. Limited Internet Access and Electronic Devices Limited internet access and electronic devices are the main challenges for students in participating in distance learning.
2. Lack of Social Interaction and Emotional Support Distance learning can make students feel lonely and isolated from classmates and teachers, forcing them to struggle on their own to achieve the desired learning material. Students may find it difficult to build social relationships and have difficulty communicating effectively with classmates and teachers. This can affect their mental health.
3. Limited Learning Facilities Learning facilities can make it difficult for students to access learning materials and get a balanced learning experience.
4. No Time Limits for Learning Students have difficulty managing their study time during distance learning. Without clear time limits, students may find it difficult to limit their study time and may feel too tired and stressed.
5. High Academic Pressure Distance learning can increase academic pressure on students. Students may find it difficult to understand the learning material and complete their assignments without direct help from teachers.

The above obstacles create a feeling of pressure and demand on students, leading to stress. This situation can be oppressive and force individuals to feel incapable of meeting the demands placed on them, ultimately leading to a sense of resignation and disengagement. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus is one of the sociological theories that explains how social and cultural environments shape an individual's way of thinking, behavior, and worldview. Habitus is defined as specific patterns in an individual's way of thinking, behavior, and actions that have been internalized and adopted unconsciously from the social and cultural

environment in which they grew up and developed. In the context of social class, Bourdieu states that class habitus is formed as a result of the interaction between individuals and the social and cultural environment in which they originate. Individuals from dominated classes are required to absorb the dominant class habitus in order to adapt to a wider environment and have access to more social and cultural capital. However, economic limitations such as costs, social capital, and cultural capital often pose obstacles for students from lower-class backgrounds to obtain an education.

Students from lower social classes often have limitations in knowledge and understanding of academic culture, as well as limited access to the resources needed to obtain distance education. This causes the gap in access and quality of education to widen. In the context of habitus, distance education also affects how students from dominated classes develop their academic habitus. Students who are used to learning in an environment that is less conducive or do not receive adequate support from their family and surroundings tend to have difficulties adjusting to new learning methods and styles. In this situation, an increase in stress can occur in students from dominated classes. They may find it difficult to adjust to changes in learning methods and the new learning environment. They also feel stressed and burdened by greater academic demands and the lack of support from their environment. An increase in stress can affect the mental and physical well-being of students. This is consistent with the information obtained from informant AN (the older sister of the student who committed suicide) as follows:

> *"Alamarhum terus mengeluh tentang sekolahnya katanya sibuk dan sangat capek tugas-tugas bertambah, dia juga mengaku tidak begitu mengerti menyelsaikannya dari online" (25 Desember 2020)*

> *"That late student kept complaining about school, saying it was busy and the assignments were very tiring. He also admitted that he didn't quite understand how to complete them online." (25 December 2020)*

The students are having difficulty adapting to changes in their learning methods and styles. The late student admitted to complaining about his busy school and very tiring assignments, which resulted from the changes in his learning methods and the new learning environment. This shows an increase in stress. In the context of Emile Durkheim's theory, difficulties in following tasks and not understanding how to complete them in a distance learning environment can be interpreted as a lack of preparation and adequate support in following online education. This shows that individual success in education depends not only on personal ability and effort but also on adequate support and social environment. In this regard, the COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning policies adopted by many schools can affect social solidarity by reducing interaction and social relationships within the school environment. Complaints about workload and learning difficulties can also reflect the negative impact of the lack of social solidarity and support among individuals in the distance learning environment.

The lack of social factors affecting suicide decisions is the academic stress and higher pressure during online learning. Inability to follow online learning or pressure from high academic demands combined with other psychological factors such as lack of social interaction and support can increase the risk of loneliness and social isolation, and make

students feel disconnected from their social group. According to Durkheim's theory, this situation can increase the risk of egoistic suicide, where individuals feel disconnected from society and less tied to social values. They feel alienated or disconnected from others, or feel that no one cares about them and has no strong bond with others. Individuals who feel socially isolated tend to feel lonely. Durkheim viewed that individuals naturally need social integration, the need to connect and feel part of a community or group. Social integration is a factor that helps individuals find meaning in life and feel they have a clear purpose in every activity they go through. Therefore, individuals who feel disconnected from society are more likely to experience feelings of worthlessness, emptiness, and loss of meaning in their lives. Durkheim emphasized that individuals who feel disconnected from society are more vulnerable to suicide than those who feel connected to society

In the context of distance learning, students may feel disconnected from their community because they do not physically interact with teachers and classmates in person. This can result in feelings of loneliness, lack of adequate social support, and a sense of disconnection from their surroundings. In distance learning, students must be able to build social interactions with teachers and peers through online media such as video conferences, chats, and discussion forums. However, these social interactions may be more challenging to establish because students are not physically present in a more familiar and structured school environment, as in face-to-face learning. Therefore, as cited in Siburian (2021), parents play a crucial role in education, as they can support their children's motivation to learn and increase their readiness to feel connected (Wahyu Trisnawati & Sugito, 2021). This can help prevent feelings of loneliness and provide adequate social support to balance the lack of support and social interactions during the Covid-19 pandemic.

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of student suicide indicates that in this context, Durkheim's theory of suicide can be applied to understand the factors that influence student suicide during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Durkheim's theory, one of the factors that can influence the high suicide rates is the lack of social integration or disconnection from society. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused students to experience greater social isolation than before, especially with social distancing policies such as lockdowns and restrictions on activities outside the home. This can make students feel lonely, not have adequate social support, and feel disconnected from their environment. In addition, high academic pressure can exacerbate the situation. Therefore, it is important for educational institutions, families, and communities to pay attention to and strengthen students' social integration, provide adequate social support, and reduce unhealthy academic pressure. In this regard, technology and distance learning can be used as a means to facilitate social interactions between students and teachers, but it must be directed towards building strong social ties. Additionally, it is important for educational institutions to facilitate counseling programs that can help students manage stress and academic pressure.

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