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## Introduction: Women's Issues, Social Capital, and Resilience during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia

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## Introduction: Women's Issues, Social Capital, and Resilience during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia

By Siti Kusujarti,<sup>1</sup> Emy Susanti,<sup>2</sup> and Diah Arimbi<sup>3</sup>

### Background

Indonesia is the largest archipelago in the world and has the fourth largest population consisting of diverse cultures and social practices. The diversity and global influences result in complex gender relations and a multiplicity of positions for women. Past studies on gender relations in Indonesia show some debates and disagreements (i.e. Tickamyer and Kusujarti 2012); understanding women's roles, positions, and agencies requires comprehensive and in-depth study. The COVID-19 pandemic creates both more challenges to unravel the intricacy of gender relations in Indonesia and opportunities to analyze how the pandemic has affected gender relations in general and women's health in particular.

Theories and research on disaster demonstrate that gender is an essential factor influencing risk, vulnerability, and resilience (Enarson, Fothergill & Peek, 2018; Enarson & Meyreles, 2004). Women's locations within hierarchical social and cultural stratifications affect their ability to cope with disasters; however, women also develop agency and survival strategies to minimize their risk as well as to recover from disaster. The pandemic as a form of disaster results in similar outcomes. As women are not a homogenous group, gender relations intersect with other social factors such as class, ethnicity, religion, age, and economics, resulting in different impacts of the pandemic on women. The intersectionality of these factors increases the vulnerability and capability of certain marginalized groups who suffer from isolation, poverty, and social exclusion (Mulyasari & Shaw, 2013; Mollett & Faria, 2013). Since impacts of the disaster and the pandemic are contextualized and embedded within the existing social and cultural spaces, understanding this context requires in-depth critical analyses of the different manifestations of risk, vulnerability, resilience, and capability of the various social groups. This special issue explores the diverse manifestations of vulnerability, resilience, and capability of Indonesian women and their communities.

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The COVID-19 pandemic is a complex disaster involving biological as well as social, cultural, political, and economic threats. During the pandemic, the health or medical aspect of the disaster tended to be at the forefront of public attention. Access to medical services and degrees of vulnerability are not equal and create differing risks and outcomes. Similar to other types of disasters, the impacts of the pandemic often fall most heavily on those who are most vulnerable and marginalized (Tierney, 2019). In a society where patriarchal relations lead to gender inequality and injustice, certain groups of women are often the most vulnerable, especially when their gendered position intersects with their marginalized ethnicity, class, and other factors. These factors may affect women's mental and physical health, including their reproductive and family health. Women often bear additional burdens because of their multiple roles, cultural expectations, and economic pressures. Various studies have been conducted to analyze women's health status during the pandemic; however, in-depth studies on the interconnections of the pandemic, women's health issues, and the social and cultural factors in Indonesian society have been limited. This special issue provides a variety of cases from diverse Indonesian societies providing multiple perspectives and disciplinary approaches.

### **Themes**

The articles in this special issue are selected from papers presented at two conferences—"Women's Health, Social Capital and Resilience during the COVID-19 Pandemic" held in December 2021, and "COVID-19 from Asia to the World: Assessment and Perspective for a Common Future" (Women and Gender Studies Cluster) held in February 2022. Because of the diverse issues covered by the conferences, the articles in this issue are organized into three different themes. The first theme centers around the intersections of gender, local cultural and institutional practices, and health during the pandemic; the second theme addresses women's survival strategies and social capital during the pandemic; and the third theme focuses on more general social and cultural issues related to women's health.

The first theme includes articles addressing the roles of central and local government institutions and their policies in protecting women and children during the pandemic, and examples of collaboration between a governmental program and local cultural practices in enhancing community participation to reduce vulnerability and increase resilience. The articles in this theme also address the increased domestic violence among Indonesian career women, the shift from a spiritually oriented pilgrimage to a practice of sexual objectification of women endangering women's health, and the impact of mothers' knowledge upon their children's dental health. These articles demonstrate the complex interrelationship of the political, social, and cultural factors affecting women's positions and health during the pandemic.

Women's resources, social capital, and their agencies have been cited as important elements in increasing their resilience and adaptive capacity in facing the pandemic (Kusumasari, 2015; Shabrina, et al., 2018; Tickamyer & Kusujiarti, 2020). Articles in the second theme focus on women's survival strategies using local religious and community organizations to empower and build their resilience during the pandemic. Other articles analyze how women craft workers, low-income families, and coastal communities developed and enhanced their social capital through the pandemic.

The last theme addresses general issues connected to women's health and socio-cultural factors. These articles provide a broader perspective on the various impacts of gender inequalities on women's lives and health including their mortality rate, depression, exploitation, and multiple burdens.

This selection of articles provides an array of issues portraying both structural and cultural challenges as well as agencies and resilience of Indonesian women. These studies contribute to the voices and perspectives of women in the Global South, a perspective which is pivotal in decolonizing theoretical and methodological approaches in gender and disaster

studies.

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