

Foreword



Human beings have never been free of infectious disease. Countless such diseases have brought serious challenges, some of which have been catastrophic. We have overcome such crises by exerting our wisdom, solidarity, and resilience. To combat the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, we need to examine its effects empirically. However, the health protocol to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 strongly encourages us to maintain social distance and avoid face-to-face meetings. Under these conditions, how can we collect information about the impact of the pandemic on various groups in society?

Social distancing makes surveys on people's daily lives very challenging, but such surveys are increasingly necessary as COVID-19 is creating a massive impact on people's lives throughout the world. The 'Older People and COVID-19 in Indonesia: A SILANI follow-up survey' employed the phone survey method and is a good example of a feasible method that can be implemented in the era of social distancing. We were able to maintain social distancing throughout the procedures required to implement this survey – from the preparations to the interviews and data processing. All meetings amongst team members, as well as interviews with respondents, were conducted remotely. Phone surveys have limitations as to the extent of data collection (e.g. the duration of interviews is limited to about 30 minutes because people do not like to spend long on the phone), and in-person interviews can collect more extensive data. However, even phone surveys can collect very valuable information which can contribute to effective policymaking. At this point, let me express my gratitude to the members of this project team for proposing the idea of conducting a phone survey during the pandemic.

This phone survey focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on older people. As many other reports have confirmed, COVID-19 disproportionately affects older people and those with chronic health conditions. Human beings have never before had the current population structure, which has a vast number of older people. In the case of Japan, the 2015 census showed that the proportion of people aged 75 years or older is as high as 12.7%, whereas it was only 1.3% in the 1920 census. According to the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the chance of mortality of people aged 75–84 years is 220 times that of people aged 18–29 years and as high as 630 times for people aged 85 years and above. While population ageing reflects the success of human development, COVID-19 touches a sore spot in contemporary society. As responsible cosmopolitans, contemporary humans are required to participate in global collaboration and pool our knowledge and wisdom to mitigate and overcome the impacts of COVID-19.

Indonesia is the country most affected by COVID-19 amongst the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Member States, in terms of the number of confirmed cases and deaths. As stated in this report, Indonesia's older population has much higher COVID-19 fatality rates than younger generations. This trend is common all over the world. Although the Government of Indonesia has made the utmost effort to slow down or stop the spread of this epidemic in the country, including large-scale social restrictions or *Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar* (PSBB), the battle against this disease is not straightforward. At the time of writing, the confirmed cases are still steadily increasing, even accelerating, and PSBB is still in effect. The persistent epidemic in the country, and the pandemic in the global sense, have pushed Indonesia into recession for the first time since the 1998 Asian financial crisis. COVID-19 is seriously affecting people's health status, social interactions, and economic activities – particularly underprivileged people, including many older people. The government is under pressure to respond swiftly to this crisis, so precise information on the actual daily lives of various groups of people is desperately needed. This survey was proposed by the Indonesian Ministry of National Development Planning (Bappenas). Considering the urgent need and critical importance, the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) was pleased to collaborate with Bappenas on this survey.

This survey succeeded in revealing the actual lives of older people during the COVID-19 epidemic in Indonesia. More than half of the respondents reported decreased incomes and almost half of them reported that they had reduced the quality of the food they consumed during the pandemic. Such severe hardship runs the risk of undermining the health status of older people. However, this survey confirmed that government services have expanded to cover the higher number of people needing support during the epidemic, and the mutual support in families and communities has played a significant role in mitigating the impact of COVID-19. Such solidarity – often cited as the tradition of *gotong royong* – will bring great strength to the Indonesian people in this battle with the infectious disease, and can be shared with other countries as a good practice during the pandemic.

Finally, we would like to express our sincere appreciation to all the respondents and the people who supported them. As stated above, this survey was conducted by employing the phone survey method, so the kind support of their family members was indispensable. Indeed, in many cases, we called the contact telephone numbers of family members. In other cases, the selected respondents were incapable of answering the interview due to impaired cognitive function or other reasons, and families were requested to answer the questions as proxies. It seems to me that without a deep understanding of the importance of this survey, the respondents and families would not have remained on the phone throughout the interview. Our sincere thanks thus go to the respondents and their families for their patience, to Bappenas for the firm leadership of our colleagues, and to SurveyMETER for its dedicated work. The second report of this survey will be published in 2021, using the data from the second-round survey to compare the first and second surveys. As the President of ERIA, based in Jakarta, I am extremely happy to continue the collaboration with Indonesia, and I sincerely hope that the outcome of such cooperation will inform the government's policymaking to benefit the Indonesian people.



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