



Policy Brief

INCLUSIVE RISK COMMUNICATION: THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN SOUTH SULAWESI DURING THE PANDEMIC



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Executive Summary

More inclusive risk communication efforts are required to accommodate the need to access information on COVID-19 for people with disabilities (PwD) in South Sulawesi. In answering the question of how to address the need, this qualitative research emphasizes the importance of understanding different abilities and socio-economic backgrounds affecting the accessibility of information and technology for PwDs.

Introduction

People with disabilities (PwD) face unique challenges in accessing communication, information, and education (IEC) related to COVID-19 prevention. According to Salim and Yulianto, a survey conducted among 1,683 persons with disabilities in May and June 2020 pointed out that communication media were not sufficiently accessible to nearly 60% of respondents with sensory disabilities¹.

Information regarding risks and prevention is required to encourage the implementation of health protocols to prevent COVID-19 transmission. A study on inclusive development in South Sulawesi revealed that people with disabilities faced challenges in accessing health services and information on financial assistance provided during the COVID-19 pandemic². Meanwhile, access to information and digital technology opens up greater economic opportunities for people with disabilities². This points out the importance of increasing risk communication for PwD to encourage equitable COVID-19 pandemic management in South Sulawesi, which has the second-highest number of persons with disabilities (18–59 years) in Indonesia³.

The qualitative research was held through 4 focus group discussions involving 5 persons with visual impairments (4 female, 1 male), 10 persons with mobility disabilities (6 male, 4 female), and 9 persons with hearing impairments (4 male, 5 female) from Gowa and Maros Districts. Discussions were separated for male and female respondents to ensure convenience among them in exchanging information. Each discussion was facilitated by two sign language interpreters.

Results and Conclusion

The research identified challenges related to risk communication among persons with disabilities in Maros and Gowa Districts, South Sulawesi Province, as follows.

1. Insufficient information received by people with disabilities

People with disabilities often receive risk communication messages that are too short and not comprehensive. Research respondents stated that they need more information regarding booster vaccines, side effects of each vaccine brand, COVID-19 treatment, vaccination schedule, and updates on the number of cases.

¹ Salim, I., & Yulianto, M. J. (2021). *Memantau Pemenuhan Hak-Hak Disabilitas* (Monitoring the Fulfillment of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities)

² Millott, M., & Wulandari, F. T. (2021). *Disabilitas-pembangunan inklusif di Sulawesi Selatan* (Disability-Inclusive Development in South Sulawesi). Melbourne. Accessed via <https://pair.australiaindonesiacentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/PAIR-background-01-2021-Bahasa.pdf>

³ Kementerian Kesehatan Republik Indonesia (MoH). (2018). *Hasil Riset Kesehatan Dasar Tahun 2018* (Basic Health Survey 2018).



2. Limited access to information for persons with disabilities

Different abilities and accessibility among people with disabilities are often overlooked in the design and implementation of COVID-19 risk communication strategies. For instance, people with visual impairments living in rural areas do not always have smartphones, thus are most likely to do verbal or face-to-face communication rather than visual communication through illustrated content on social media. People with hearing impairments who have geographical and socio-economic vulnerabilities also tend to be more fluent in communicating with natural body gestures, instead of Indonesian sign language (BISINDO). This emphasizes the importance of creating communication media in various forms, to ensure risk communication accessibility for all people with different abilities and backgrounds.

3. Persons with disabilities, especially women, are more vulnerable to misinformation on COVID-19

Women with disabilities are more likely to report misinformation on COVID-19 compared to men with disabilities. The types of misinformation reported by the female respondents are diverse, such as herbal substances being effective as COVID-19 treatment. However, efforts to validate information are mostly made by female respondents with disabilities. This shows that efforts to correct misleading information for persons with disabilities must also consider the gender aspect.

4. There are different ways that people with disabilities validate information on COVID-19

In South Sulawesi, we observed that efforts to validate misleading information, such as searching the internet or asking family/doctors, were mostly carried out by people with hearing and mobility impairment. People with visual impairments, especially those living in areas or households with geographic, economic, and social vulnerabilities, are less likely to validate information on COVID-19. One of the reasons is different preferences for communication channels among people with disabilities. People with hearing and mobility impairments have more intense digital behavior, with social media platforms (e.g. Facebook and Instagram) and instant messaging (e.g. WhatsApp) as one of the main sources of COVID-19 information. People with visual impairments are more likely to get information about COVID-19 through face-to-face communication or phone calls, which limits the range of information.

5. Lack of representation and involvement of People with Disabilities in the planning and implementation of COVID-19 risk communication

People with disabilities in South Sulawesi perceive that they are not sufficiently involved and represented in the preparation and implementation of COVID-19 risk communication. Their issues are not only about different abilities, but also specific issues related to culture, geographical conditions, gender, socio-economic order, and local policies. When the issues are not covered in the COVID-19 risk communication delivery, they are becoming increasingly “marginalized” in the efforts of COVID-19 eradication in South Sulawesi Province.



Policy Options

Improving risk communication efforts for people with disabilities (PwD) in South Sulawesi can be done by developing a communication strategy that accommodates their needs based on gender, different ability, socio-economic and geographical backgrounds, through the following options:

1. Risk communication for persons with visual impairments

People with visual impairments rely on communication by voice. People with visual impairments often use the 'TalkBack' feature on smartphones to access information. Therefore, risk communication using digital media can be equipped with a voice feature or with text which describes the content in detail. Printed media can also be presented using Braille. Face-to-face communication and family/companion are also important to accommodate persons with visual impairments who have geographical, social, and economic vulnerabilities.

2. Risk communication for persons with hearing impairment

Risk communication for persons with hearing impairment who could not use BISINDO can be done through face-to-face communication supported by their family/companion. Digital communication content such as video should be equipped with a sign language interpreter feature with a fairly visible size and text using simple type font (e.g. sans serif typefont). Communication for people with hearing impairments can be done through official government social media handles, considering that many of them refer to the government's official social media accounts (Facebook and Instagram) to access information on COVID-19. In addition, women with hearing impairments usually trust information presented by female leaders. Therefore, women's involvement and representation are important in delivering risk communication for PwD.

3. Risk communication for persons with mobility impairments

Dissemination of digital information can increase access for persons with mobility impairments to information on COVID-19 information. However, persons with mobility disabilities often have socio-economic vulnerabilities that limit their opportunities to access such information. Membership in local Disabled Persons Organizations (DPO) can expand their network and access to information. Face-to-face risk communication needs to be delivered in locations that are easily accessible by persons with mobility impairments, such as the ground floor of a building or door-to-door.

4. Risk communication for family and companions of PwD

Strengthening risk communication for people with disabilities needs to involve their families and companions. However, it is also necessary to pay attention to the challenges and vulnerabilities of the family members and their companions. Family member / companions facing geographical, economic, and social vulnerabilities need a face-to-face communication approach with uncomplicated diction. Reaching families / companions can also be done in collaboration with local DPOs to better deliver the specific issues experienced by people with disabilities and their families/companions.



Recommendations

1. Disseminate risk communication through social media, face-to-face, or through families/ companions to reach people with disabilities from various groups.
2. Present more comprehensive information content to address people with disabilities' concerns. They require information about booster vaccines, side effects of each vaccine brand, COVID-19 treatment, vaccination schedule, and updates on the number of cases.
3. Cooperation between Disabled People Organisations (DPOs) and local government agencies to develop strategies and implement COVID-19 risk communication which particularly targets people with disabilities.
4. Capacity building for frontline staff, such as vaccinators and field educators, in communicating risk for people with disabilities.

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For more information

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