

## Understanding the Mass Trance Phenomenon in Indonesia: Between Traditional Beliefs and Community Mental Health

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**Abstract.** The study on trance phenomenon is hardly ever done, in view of the fact that in Indonesia, trance or known as *kesurupan* tend to be accepted as a common cultural phenomenon, especially at many areas where traditional and mystical beliefs are profound, and spiritual practices are still carried out. While Indonesia is making a hard effort to build up its nation, and whereas modernization could be seen in many parts of Indonesia, mass trance may perhaps be a paradoxical explanation of everyday social problems. By way of culturally based approaches and ways of thinking of the Indonesian societies, an alternative of social participation and increasing access to economic resources were the determinants that came forward among the research results. Access to supportive relationships, social influence, and opportunities for social engagement which create meaningful roles, resources and opportunities for contact were among the problems for a better community mental health approach.

Key words: trance, mass trance, community mental health

**Abstrak.** Studi tentang gejala kesurupan hampir tak pernah dilakukan, mengingat kenyataan bahwa di Indonesia, kesurupan cenderung diterima sebagai gejala budaya biasa, terutama di banyak daerah yang kepercayaan tradisional dan mistiknya menonjol, dan praktik spiritual masih dilakukan. Ketika Indonesia berupaya keras membangun bangsa dan modernisasi terlihat di banyak tempat, kesurupan massal mungkin merupakan penjelasan paradoksikal atas masalah sosial sehari-hari. Melalui pendekatan berbasis budaya dan cara berpikir masyarakat Indonesia, sebuah alternatif partisipasi sosial dan peningkatan akses ke sumber ekonomi merupakan penentu yang muncul di antara hasil penelitian. Akses ke hubungan yang mendukung, pengaruh sosial, dan kesempatan untuk keterlibatan sosial yang menciptakan peran bermakna, sumber dan kesempatan untuk bersentuhan merupakan bagian masalah untuk mencapai pendekatan kesehatan mental masyarakat yang lebih sehat.

Kata kunci: kesurupan, kesurupan massal, kesehatan mental masyarakat

People and the mass media called it mass trance. It is an episode when someone or a group of people experience a sudden state of screaming, crying and fainting. Some of them couldn't move, while others who tried to help, started to get stiff soon in a kind of domino effect. Other sufferers might develop extraordinary physical strength, and have such a kind of aggressive, wrestling and grappling movements, weeping and jerking their bodies around. Some of the sufferers woke up from the trance in a very exhausted condition, and fell asleep. When they awoke

they remembered nothing. Those conditions are said to be contagious, and in some ways defined as epidemic, since they are rapidly diffused among and adopted by people of the same group well beyond usually expected frequencies (Sirois, 1974).

It was mid 2004 when at least two mass trance episodes were reported to occurred among school-girls in the Riau Province, Sumatera, and in the late 2005 when the same school experienced another episode. Other outbreaks occurred in the beginning of 2006, and since then a series of mass trance took place simultaneously in many parts of Indonesia up until the first quarter of 2008. The outbreaks involved groups of school children and factory workers, almost all of them are female across ages during various occasions. Trance, known in Indonesian language and local dialects as *kesurupan*, obtained more awareness from the mass-media ever since.

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