

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Social resilience of indigenous community on the border: Belief and confidence in anticipating the spread of COVID-19 through the *Besamsam* custom in the Dayak community

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Abstract

The Dayak indigenous community has belief and confidence in taking a stance and taking actions towards a situation and circumstances that affect their social life. This belief is based on their customs and traditions passed down from generation to generation until now. The Dayak traditional custom is a form of social resilience for the community on the border to anticipate the spread of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, which has become a problem in all aspects of community lives. Despite facing various issues and difficulties in dealing with the pandemic, the indigenous Dayak community in Indonesia has managed to survive and resolve these problems. In dealing with the social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Salako Dayak indigenous community on the Indonesia-Malaysia border carried out a traditional ritual called *Besamsam*. The indigenous Salako Dayak community believes this ritual boosts the social and psychological resilience of the Salako Dayak indigenous community. The research findings showed that the *Besamsam* ritual had changed people's beliefs about lifestyle, behaviour and perceptions in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. The *Besamsam* ritual can specifically affect the community's personalities, attitudes and actions towards the spread of COVID-19. Indigenous peoples have become easier to organize, dynamic, empowered, resilient, motivated to meet their needs, and capable of facing

various challenges and social problems during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. These findings prove that indigenous communities psychologically have strong confidence in their customary beliefs rather than cautionary advice from outside their community. The social impact of the Besamsam custom can serve as a model of awareness and a driving force for indigenous peoples' elements to work cooperatively to break the chain of COVID-19 spread.

KEYWORDS

Besamsam custom, COVID-19, Dayak community, indigenous community on the border, social resilience

1 | INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian government declared a state of emergency and extraordinary circumstances on Saturday, March 23, 2020, in response to the increasing number of cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) since 2020. Emergency measures were taken based on the government's decision to reduce the infection rate and spread of COVID-19 in Indonesia, such as increasing awareness of social distancing (Mukhlis, Widyastuti, Harlianty, Susanti, & Kumalasari, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the social resilience of communities in various regions in Indonesia, be it in cities, villages, hinterlands or border areas. Social resilience is intended to show how people survive the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic (Fernández-Prados, Lozano-Díaz, & Muyor-Rodríguez, 2021). As we know it, the border area is vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19. The border area is vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19 because it is the entry point for Indonesian citizens and foreigners (Sulistyarini, Dewantara, Purnama, & Mirzachaerulsyah, 2021). Generally, border areas are situated far from the city, which affects the availability of facilities and health workers (Martono, Dewantara, Efriani, & Prasetyo, 2021). As a result of the lack of facilities and health workers, the community does not have information on how to prevent and deal with the spread of COVID-19. The lack of health facilities in Indonesia's border areas has motivated people to use their own ways of dealing with problems that occur in their area through customs that have been practiced from generation to generation. Basically, the Indonesian people already have local wisdom in the form of social resilience with regard to preventing the spread of COVID-19, considering that the community has an important role on the front line in minimizing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic (Nadeem & Khaliq, 2021). It is different from urban society, which is plural in nature (Paul, Arif, Pokhrel, & Ghosh, 2021) and a heterogeneous culture is common, as in the case of Sajingan, Indonesia, an area that directly borders Malaysia. This border community is more homogeneous, belonging to the Bidayuh Dayak tribe (Sada, Alas, & Anshari, 2019). The Salako Dayaks live in the Indonesia-Malaysia border area on the island of Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo), and some live on the Indonesian side of the border, and there are also Bidayuh Dayaks who live in Malaysia (Sim, 2001).

The local communities in Aruk, Indonesia-Malaysia border area, which are predominantly Salako Dayaks, have their own way of overcoming the spread of COVID-19. This is based on the local knowledge of the Dayak community, which is locally known by the term *Besamsam* (Milka, 2021). It is also explained that the *Besamsam* custom is a traditional ritual of the Rara and Salako Dayak tribes (as indigenous people) of West Kalimantan (Borneo). Originally, the *Besamsam* ritual was a hereditary custom performed once a year as a supplication to *Jubata* (God) to protect their area. The *Besamsam* custom is also performed when an extraordinary event occurs, or when there is an imbalance of life in the community, such as a disease outbreak that results in many deaths, or an outbreak of rice pests that results

in crop failure, causing human distress or misery. This *Besamsam* custom is important for the indigenous Dayak community to “clear up” the village from dangers such as preventing the entry of disease outbreaks and the disturbance of evil spirits. Therefore, to minimize the spread of COVID-19, the Dayak indigenous people in the Aruk border area performed the *Besamsam* traditional ceremony twice, namely in March and July 2020.

As is generally known, there have been many studies on community social resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic, but most of them focused on social resilience in urban communities (Prasetiyo, Kamarudin, & Dewantara, 2019; Van Beek & Patulny, 2021); and rural communities (Hidayah, 2011); communities in developed countries such as the United States and other European countries (Fernández-Prados et al., 2021). However, studies on the social resilience of indigenous peoples on the border are quite rare. Therefore, this research seeks to examine the extent to which the indigenous Dayak community is able to anticipate the COVID-19 pandemic through the *Besamsam* traditional ritual. The *Besamsam* custom is expected to change people's behaviour psychologically as they believe it has a major impact in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, so that through this custom, the spirit and belief in the Dayak community are strengthened and they can anticipate and overcome the virus spread. The *Besamsam* custom is expected to be the morale and driving force for elements of society to jointly fight the spread and face the impacts of COVID-19. The *Besamsam* is essentially a period of abstinence from leaving the house for a few days. For those who believe that by observing a period of abstinence, they will be able to minimize the spread of COVID-19 because during this period, they do not make contact with outsiders. This moral belief is important as they make efforts not to violate the prohibition or taboo. With this belief, they hope to get protection from *Jubata* (God) from the extraordinary events of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the protection creates a feeling of security for the community. Also, the concept of social resilience is related to social capital and individual confidence (Aldrich, 2018). The connection between social resilience and belief and community welfare can be felt from the psychological satisfaction of the community (Ng & Kang, 2022). Based on the background above, this article aims to prove that the *Besamsam* custom is able to strengthen belief and have a psychological influence on the social resilience of the Salako Dayak indigenous community in the border area in overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic through positive actions.

2 | RESEARCH DESIGN

This research used a qualitative, descriptive approach. This qualitative approach focused on an event that stems from human consciousness and experience (Creswell, 2015). This approach employed a descriptive method to describe social phenomena, facts, circumstances and symptoms that appear in the *Besamsam* custom of the Salako Dayak Tribe in Aruk Sub-District of Sajingan, Sambas Regency, West Kalimantan in the form of the social resilience of border communities in minimizing the spread of COVID-19. The indicators for this qualitative research are social resilience, which includes the community's behavioural awareness in anticipating the spread of COVID-19, *Besamsam* ritual performance and road blocking and border closing.

3 | RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

A research instrument is a design used to determine research targets and informant selection techniques to ensure the research subjects are right on target according to the object of research (Efriani & Dewantara, 2018). For this research instrument, the researchers were directly involved in collecting research data related to the research subject, background, and location to observe and record the phenomena found in the *Besamsam* custom and its procession performed by the Salako Dayak Tribe in Aruk Sub-District. The next step was to determine informants using the pre-determined purposive sampling technique, taking into account that the informants were involved in the procession and understood the research context (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The informants consisted of three groups,

namely: (1) community leaders, namely the *Timanggung* (customary leader) and religious figures; (2) village government representatives and security forces; and (3) border community representatives. The categories of informants used as samples are: (1) having knowledge and understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic situation on the border; (2) having knowledge and understanding of the purpose of the *Besamsam* ritual, and (3) being involved in road blocking during the lockdown period. The time allocated for research in the Aruk border area was 4–5 hr per week observing community activities during the COVID-19 pandemic, the *Besamsam* ritual performance and the road blocking during the period of prohibition/taboo after the *Besamsam* ritual. Then, at the stage of collecting research data, which took place for 4 months from June to November 2020, the information collected from the border communities was used as indicators, including exposure to COVID-19, the *Besamsam* ritual performance and the road blocking period. The data collection techniques consisted of non-participatory observations, in-depth interviews and documentation. During field observations, the condition at the border was observed, and the area was guarded by the security forces and voluntary community participation. In addition, observations were also made on the ritual performance and on villages that were closed during the prohibition/taboo period of the *Besamsam* ritual. Meanwhile, in-depth interviews were held before and after the *Besamsam* ritual was performed.

Furthermore, during the interview period, semi-structured and in-depth interviews were held. Each interview lasted between 1 and 3 hr for each meeting. The target was 90 questions regarding the activities of border communities during the COVID-19 pandemic, during the *Besamsam* ritual, and during the period of prohibition and taboo. Appointments with informants were adjusted to the informants' schedule, especially when they were not working in the rice field. Sometimes in the afternoon or evening, but on holidays, meetings were held in the morning. During the interview, a translator from the Dayak language to Indonesian was hired, because some of the informants were not fluent in the Indonesian language. The interview was held in Indonesia and translated into English for academic literacy purposes.

4 | RESEARCH DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is the process of simplifying data into simple formulas that are easy to read and interpret. The purpose of data analysis aims to provide not only ease of interpretation, but also clarity on the meaning of each observed phenomenon in data reduction (Francis & Reynolds, 2015). These activities include sorting and categorizing data based on the context of the focus and locus of research. The data reduction in the context of research focus consisted of data on community behaviour awareness, *Besamsam* ritual activities and the closing-down of locations to avoid the COVID-19 outbreak in the village. The research locus consisted of research locations such as the sub-district office, village office, the site for procession activities, and the environment around the Dayak community. With the data reduction activities completed, the next step was to display the data in the form of a narrative presentation and interpretation (analysis) of the acquired research data. The answer to the research question was a narrative or analysis according to the research sub-theme consisting of the *Besamsam* procession and road blocking activities as a form of community social resilience in anticipating the COVID-19 outbreak. Meanwhile, the next technique was data rechecking, namely the compatibility between theoretical studies and field data. Data rechecking is discussed in the next section. After rechecking the data, the next step is to draw a final conclusion as a series of research data analysis activities (Hjeltnes, Binder, Moltu, & Dundas, 2015). Furthermore, this conclusion raises a new question that can be developed for further research activities that are considered relevant by using different studies.

5 | RESEARCH DATA VALIDATION TECHNIQUE

Furthermore, the collected data was verified through the data validation technique. The nature of the validity of the data is seen from objectivity in subjectivity, where objective data is derived from the subjectivity of the object of

research, namely how to interpret social reality with regard to existing phenomena (Zygmunt & Naidoo, 2018). The view of subjectivity explains human behaviour so that it can be understood, and therefore it is often called humanistic studies (Dewantara & Wahyudi., 2020). Objective data comes from the subjectivity of the object of research, namely how to interpret social reality through existing phenomena. Social reality is a condition that changes easily through human interaction in daily life. The existing phenomena are merely temporary. Furthermore, the data validation technique is to employ the triangulation technique, namely the existence of rechecking the degree of reliability of the data collected from interviewed informants, resource persons and referentials. Data validation techniques in the form of data rechecking include:

1. Rechecking data from informants, namely the *Timanggung*, village heads and community leaders. The informants were asked and given a draft in the form of research theme points, whether there was a match between the knowledge of the informants and the research team.
2. Rechecking data from resource persons, such as experts in the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences.
3. Rechecking data from referrals in the form of references related to the research theme.

6 | ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN RESEARCH AND AN EMIC & ETIC STATEMENT

The nature of data validity can be seen from the emics or objectivity and subjectivity of the data. It aims to obtain objective data derived from the subjective element of the object of cultural research especially how to interpret social reality to existing phenomena. The emic or subjective view is seen as being able to describe a phenomenon in society from their point of view, which means that the way they view something in their mind. In conducting analysis in this study, there was no involvement of the researcher's ethical thoughts, but the subjectivity of the research data came from the views of the indigenous people. On the other hand, the ethical view seeks to explain a phenomenon in society that is analysed objectively, or a point of view from "outside their mind." The researcher as "being outside the community" is not involved subjectively, but explains objectively what is experienced by the community itself. The emic explanation in this study is how the Selako Dayak people interpret themselves through the Besamsam custom as a form of social resilience in minimizing the spread of COVID-19 pandemic through the Besamsam custom as a form of appeal to Jubata to avoid the transmission of COVID-19. While the ethical view in this study is when the author objectively interprets Besamsam customs according to their point of view, the community's confidence in the Besamsam customs can build awareness of solidarity to break the chain of the spread of COVID-19.

7 | BACKGROUND OF RESEARCH LOCATION IN ARUK HAMLET OF SAJINGAN BESAR SUB-DISTRICT, SAMBAS

Aruk Hamlet is one of the hamlets located in Sebunga Village, Sajingan Besar Sub-District, Sambas Regency. Aruk Hamlet directly borders Sarawak, the neighbouring country in Malaysia. Most of the people here work in the agricultural sector and traditional rubber plantations. Most of the people's occupations are farmers, rubber tappers, pepper farmers and oil palm plantation workers. In addition, some also make a living by fishing in rivers, hunting animals in the forest and looking for forest products such as medicinal plants, fruits and vegetables for daily needs. These agricultural and plantation products are sold to Sarawak because the selling price is higher than that in their own country. The condition on the border illustrates the interaction relationship with the border communities of Sarawak and Malaysia. The distance from the border to the nearest town in Malaysia can be reached by motorcycle in about half an hour, which is about 20–40 km. Therefore, the proximity makes it easier for people to cross the border between the two countries. In addition, public transportation facilities are also provided by the two countries. The primary

reason for entering the neighbouring country, particularly by Indonesian residents, is to work as labourers in Malaysia, trade or visit relatives. It is widely known that the border communities of the two countries are people who are the descendants of the same forebears. There are familial relations between the people of the two countries, especially those who are of Dayak ethnicity of the Selako sub-ethnicity, as well as the Sarawak Malays, who are closely related to the Sambas Malays. Therefore, many of them have marital ties and kinship, and thus it is normal for them to freely cross the border. As in the case of the Aruk border communities, most of them come from the Selako Dayak ethnic group. The Dayak ethnic groups are characterized by a strong adherence to customs passed down from their forebears.

The term *Dayak* was initially introduced by European scientists around the 1800s, which was used for the natives of Borneo (currently called the island of Kalimantan). The word *Dayak* comes from the word *Daya'* which means *upstream* or *inland*, as opposed to those living in coastal areas. Therefore, the Dayaks are considered natives of Kalimantan because their distribution is found only on the island of Kalimantan (Humaedi, 2020). In fact, the existence of the Dayak ethnic groups is very diverse. Scientists have stated that the ethnic diversity of the Dayak consists of sub-tribes (according to the popular term for naming the Dayak people). The Dayak consists of approximately 450 sub-tribes spread throughout the island of Borneo, including those in East Malaysia. Many Dayak sub-tribes within the Dayak ethnic groups themselves are usually known by the name of the area, or village which they come from, but basically they are bound by the ties of the Dayak people in general (Arenz, Haug, Seitz, & Venz, 2017). This is also characterized by the existence of a bond of ethnicity, customs and traditions that come from common forebears. The focus of this research is on the Dayak Selako sub-tribe in Sajingan Sub-District. The Selako Dayak sub-tribe lives on the border of West Kalimantan, Indonesia and Sarawak, Malaysia. To be precise, most of them are found on the border of Aruk, Sajingan Sub-District, Sambas Regency.

8 | BESAMSAM RITUAL PROCESSION IN THE SELAKO DAYAK COMMUNITY AT THE ARUK SAJINGAN BORDER

The belief of the Dayaks is inseparable from the customs that have been passed down from generation to generation from their forebears. This custom is still preserved by the Selako Dayak ethnic group through the *Besamsam* traditional procession (ritual). The *Besamsam* ritual is a tradition that must be performed; otherwise it will be subject to religious, customary and social punishment. Therefore, the Dayaks are very obedient to customary regulations as the penalties are very severe. One of the Dayak community's rituals is the *Basansam*, which semantically means prohibition or taboo. This ritual signifies a condition for applying a prohibition that has been regulated according to applicable customs. The prohibitions include: people are prohibited from doing *mangas* (killing blooded animals), cutting trees or *ngingso*, doing farming activities, and leaving the village for 2 (two) days. They are also not allowed to shout, whistle, fight, enter the village (both people in the alliance and outsiders), or leave the house. When entering the period of prohibition, there are certain activities that are prohibited, such as working in the rice field, cutting down trees, killing animals, and leaving the village for a certain number of days. In relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, the *Basansam* ritual is a *tolak bala'* (to ward off misfortune) ritual that aims to keep the village safe, especially to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The *Basansam* ritual was performed twice, namely in March 2020 and in July 2020, lasting 2 days each. Before the *Basansam* ritual was carried out, usually 2 days before locking down the village, people performed a ritual called *Basapat*. During the *Basapat* ritual, the customary leader and the villagers went to the ritual site to perform a kind of prayer or supplication to *Jubata* (God), so that the villagers would be protected from various disease outbreaks. The following day, the traditional leader and the villagers went to *Panulak* or *Kapanulak* (a place to hold traditional rituals to get *air tawar* [water that has been offered with prayer, believed to have magical power], which is also known as "*tolak bala,*" believed to be able to ward off disease outbreaks). This water is also used for the *Basansam* ritual the following year. Then the following day, a village lockdown ceremony was held, which is a

period of abstinence for several days in accordance with the agreement. After the prohibition period ended, a village opening ritual was performed as a sign of the end of the prohibition period. Therefore, this Basansam ritual also serves to maintain nature's conservation. Local Basansam wisdom is a form of community social resilience in anticipating the occurrence of danger that threatens their village. This traditional ritual serves as a territorial defence enforced by the local people communally, so this custom contains the value of local wisdom that is highly respected by the community. In an interview, the *Temenggung*, a Dayak customary leader, explained that:

The aim of performing the Besamsam ritual in 2020, which was held twice, was related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though in modern times, some people don't believe in customs which are considered irrational, the Besamsam custom is a tradition that is passed down from our forebears; it is still used as an alternative solution to disease problems. According to people's belief, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was considered an emergency, so through the Besamsam ritual, it was believed to be able to minimize the spread of COVID-19.

The *Besamsam* custom is performed at the end of each year, aiming to avert danger, such as natural disasters, disease outbreaks and human-made chaos. Therefore, this custom is considered important in order to maintain the safety and security of the village. At the time of emergency, the *Besamsam* custom can be performed at any time in response to emergency circumstances. Likewise, during the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Dayak community considered that the COVID-19 pandemic was a dangerous disease outbreak, so the performance of this custom should not be postponed until the end of the year. In a normal atmosphere, the purpose of the Basansam ritual is to ask for blessings for fortune (in the form of a plentiful harvest), to comply with all forms of *Jubata* prohibitions. The term *Dayak religion* comes from the Dayak ancestors' belief called "Kaharingan," which refers to "a belief or customary religion" of the Dayak people, namely a belief system of the Dayak people (Tanasaldy, 2012). The influence of the Dayak ancestors' belief mostly comes from the influence of ancient Hindu religion or teachings (Katarina & Diana, 2020). This can still be seen from the aspects of their belief and customs which are almost similar to Hindu teachings (Rufinus, Syam, Sinju, & Atang, 1996). Regarding their ancestors' belief, the Kaharingan, there is recognition of a being that is beyond human power, a being that creates, which is a belief in the existence of a God Almighty. The term used by the Dayaks is "Jubata" (Katarina & Diana, 2020). This belief indicates the existence of a cosmological understanding, which concerns the relationship between humans and the natural environment (Efriani, Dewantara, Fransiska, Ramadhan, & Agustinus, 2021). According to the Dayak people's belief, every object or living creature in nature has a "magical" power. Therefore humans must be able to coexist and maintain a balance with nature so as to preserve it. If it is damaged, then the balance of nature is also damaged and the creatures in it become extinct.

However, at certain times, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, the *Besamsam* custom as a form of social resilience aims to keep the safety and security of the village and anticipates all forms of threatening dangers. Therefore, the community is very obedient to the Basansam custom as it gives them a sense of security. At a critical time, the goal is to prevent villagers from all kinds of diseases or danger. *Besamsam* is also a means to maintain order and security in society in order to maintain good conduct among the people, to maintain good relationships and natural harmony so as not to be ruined by irresponsible human hands. Semantically, Basansam means prohibition/taboo. This ritual signifies a condition to impose prohibition in order to prevent negative actions. In addition, people are also prohibited to do routine activities for several days. The purpose of such prohibition is a form of village "cleansing" from destructive influence, and serves as a means to exercise patience when facing difficulties. It is held twice to ward off disease outbreaks and increase public awareness to keep the village safe as reported by a Dayak elder, Mr. MS, in an interview which is as follows:

The performance of the Besamsam ritual at normal times is once a year after the rice harvest, with the aim of expressing gratitude to Jubata who has given rice harvest, as well as asking for a blessing

for next year's planting season. However, in situations that are considered dangerous, this ritual can be held more than once as needed. This year, it was held twice, namely in March 2020 and July 2020. The reason it was held twice was that the COVID-19 pandemic was considered a dangerous disease outbreak, and [the ritual] was held twice with the intention of warding off the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.

In the performance of the *Besamsam* ritual according to the advice of village elders, there are two stages, namely the stage of performing the ritual and placing barrier signs at the corner of the road, which can be explained as follows:

The first stage is to perform a ritual prayer to *Jubata* on a predetermined day. This ritual is called *Besapat* (see Figure 1). During the *Besapat* Ritual, the customary leader, namely the *Timanggung* and community leaders and villagers flocked to the ritual site to perform a kind of prayer or supplication to *Jubata* (God). Traditional rituals are accompanied by ceremonial objects or offerings as a means of ritual. The ceremonial objects for offerings include: (1) a set of ingredients for offerings or called *bantar* consisting of yellow rice, glutinous rice, eggs, betel leaf, *anjuang* leaf, coconut and a rooster; (2) *tolak bala'* water which is also called "water to ward off evil influences" or "water aims to get rid of all kinds of disturbance and evil influence," (3) chicken blood, as a form of sacrifice that serves to cleanse the natural environment. The purpose of various kinds of offerings is to ward off evil influence in the village. In addition, a shaman or *orang pintar* (literally means a "smart" person/a person regarded as having access to supernatural world) recites a spell on all the ceremonial objects. The shaman's job here is to serve as a mediator, a liaison with a supernatural power or *Jubata*, while offering prayer. Traditional or ceremonial objects used as objects in traditional rituals serve as a deterrent to various disturbances or danger.

The second stage, putting up "barrier signs": This is done by placing a set of offerings on the corner of the street as a magical barrier. A set of customary objects or offerings and *tolak bala'* water, on which a *mantra* has been recited, is placed at the corner of an access road. The offerings and *tolak bala'* water contain supernatural powers so as to prevent anyone from crossing. If violated, it will cause misfortune. The purpose of placing a set of offerings is to maintain security in some areas, as a sign of prohibition/restriction so that people are not allowed to cross. The purpose of the barrier is to cleanse the village from the evil influence of invisible (unseen) beings that disturb humans.



FIGURE 1 Basansam ritual prayer procession

9 | SOCIAL RESILIENCE AND PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN THE BASANSAM RITUAL IN ANTICIPATING THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF COVID-19

The Basansam ritual is believed to be a form of supplication to Jubata so that the villagers will be protected from destructive influence or danger. Prohibition against cutting down trees, farming and killing animals shows the value of human care in preserving nature from damage, as it is feared that it will disrupt the balance of nature. The occurrence of a natural imbalance, such as natural disasters and the danger of diseases, rice pests and conflicts (social conflicts) that result in an imbalance in human life, causes suffering for humans. According to the belief of the Dayak people, all forms of disturbance are the incarnation of evil spirits that disturb humans. In relation to the COVID-19 outbreak, it is considered that the damage to nature is caused by irresponsible human hands, so that nature is wrathful because of human actions. The *Besamsam* ritual serves to cleanse nature and ward off misfortune, acting as a deterrent to negative disturbances to the village. Through this ritual prayer, people hope that *Jubata* will ensure the safety and security of the Dayak community.

9.1 | Road-blocking period

After reciting the prayer, the next step is to block the road during the period of prohibition/taboo. As previously discussed, one of *Besamsam* prohibitions is that people are not allowed to fight, do activities outside the home, but required to stay at home. This prohibition is a form of lockdown and self-quarantines to be carried out with full awareness, without anyone dares to violate. The fact that people stayed at home during the period of prohibition was reported by one of the border residents:

When the prohibition period was in progress, there was no-one passing by. The village looked quiet; usually there were many people doing activities outside their homes. However, the prohibition did not apply to all. There were exceptions given to public vehicles traveling the main highway for destinations to other areas.

Putting up roadblocks for several days is also known as *pagar gaib* (invisible fence) signifying a fence that contains supernatural powers which comes from a set of offerings, *tolak bala'* water and chicken blood so that no one dares to violate the prohibition. Figure 2 shows a handler placing *bantar* (offerings) consisting of a set of offerings,



FIGURE 2 Placement of offerings on the road corner

chicken blood, and *tolak bala'* water (believed to have magical powers). The offerings are placed at the corner of the road to serve as a magical fence (believed to have supernatural powers) as a barrier to prevent people from crossing for several days. If someone violates the prohibition by crossing the barrier, it is believed that misfortune will befall them, including their family members and people in their village. People obviously complied with the Basansam prohibition as no one did any activities outside the home, as evidenced by their respect and appreciation of their ancestral customs, which they believe to have good values applicable to both humans and the entire natural environment. The area that has been sprinkled with *air tawar* (*tolak bala'* water/water that wards off misfortune) serves as a medium to avert destructive influence, especially disease outbreaks that hit the area. Based on experience, the Basansam tradition becomes a turning point in human awareness to protect the environment in order to avert danger or extraordinary events that could disrupt the balance of nature. This "*toldak bala'*" water is believed to have the benefits of cleansing the natural environment while protecting it from *Jubata*. In an interview with the *Timanggung*, he explained as follows:

In connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Basansam ritual is a ritual of *tolak bala'* (warding off misfortune) intended to maintain the safety of our village, especially to prevent the spread of COVID-19 which is currently still endemic. Through the Basansam ritual, it creates morale and belief for the Dayak community to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in their village.

Regarding the prohibition that people complied with, it is also a form of social distancing or self-quarantine by complying with the appeal not to do activities outside the home, while maintaining environmental security. As is the case in other regions, basically it is very difficult for many people to comply with social distancing or not to leave the house. We can see in big cities people crowding and travelling in vehicles on the highway, not taking the COVID-19 outbreak seriously despite warnings from the police. People's behaviour, as if they "did not care," is of course difficult to minimize the spread of COVID-19, so this awareness is very difficult for the community to practice. This is in contrast to the situation of social distancing or self-quarantine in the Aruk border area. People on the border have their own awareness to comply with social distancing during the *Besansam* period. Regarding social compliance, of course, it concerns an element of "belief" which concerns a higher power beyond human ability (*Jubata*). If they violate the prohibition period, then according to their beliefs, one day, they along with their families and the entire villagers, will be affected by disasters. Although there are many short cut roads along the Aruk border, and people may go in and out of the two countries, because it is difficult to detect, but during the *Besansam* period, no one dared to violate the prohibition. Therefore, the implementation of social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic on the border is more effective than the regulations made by the government.

Self-quarantine also applied to workers working in Sarawak Malaysia. During the COVID-19 pandemic as many of them were laid off and returned to their hometowns. When they arrived at their homes, they were not allowed to leave the house, especially those from neighbouring countries that also experienced the COVID-19 outbreak, fearing that they might carry the virus which could spread to family members and villagers. Current developments are related to the Indonesian government's policy of enacting a "new normal" by providing flexibility for those who must carry out activities outside the home to do economic activities in order to meet daily family needs for the survival of family. Although the new normal policy has lifted the ban for activities outside the home in the Aruk border area, the people of the two countries are still not allowed to cross the border, meaning that the two countries, Indonesia and Malaysia, are still in the state of lockdown. This policy is marked by a one-way arrangement for the entry of Indonesian citizens at the National Border Checkpoint through official route with the health protocol requirements imposed. Meanwhile, the authorities from the two countries agreed not to allow their citizens to cross the border.

The issue regarding the entry and exit requirements for citizens of the two countries through the short cut roads, in fact, is difficult to handle. There are many who violate the restriction from the government. People seem to ignore the warning not to cross the borders of the two countries. Obviously, people will not obey government policies and anticipate the spread of COVID-19 as a form of self-awareness without being compelled to do so. This fact

shows that the community is more obedient to the rules of the Dayak customs applied through the local wisdom of Basansam. Access to the entry and exit at the Aruk border checkpoint is still closed, but the flow of people in and out the two countries via the short cut roads cannot be prevented. The two countries agreed to close the checkpoints the Aruk border for people and goods, but on the other hand, the Malaysian government provides exemption to Indonesian workers to work in Sarawak, Malaysia with strict requirements because the Malaysian government needs “labour” that is hard to get from its own citizens. Those workers who cross the border prefer the footpath to cross to neighbouring Malaysia. During the COVID-19 pandemic, since the Basansam ritual was performed in March and July 2020, the Dayak people who live around the Aruk border have served as the “border guards,” checking people enter and return from Sarawak. The Basansam, with regard to the spread of COVID-19, gave responsibility to the people to protect their village from harm. The community has the responsibility to secure their village from people who cross the border. They must go through inspection and permission from the local village head to minimize the spread of COVID-19 in their village.

9.2 | Stages of prohibition period

The abstinence period lasted for 3 days. During this period, based on the interview held with the *Timanghung*, the main thing was that people were prohibited from leaving their homes for 3 days and were supposed to do all activities at home. They were not allowed to make contact with anyone except their own family members. During the period of prohibition, the streets of the village were empty.

Through such prohibition, people are expected to restore the balance of nature and stability of the village. The prohibition was intended to prevent people from doing bad things which cause chaos to the village. In addition, it is also associated with the Dayak people's belief in Jubata's power, so as not to incur his wrath because of the evil deeds of humans. Therefore, the prohibition on bad deeds not only harms the villagers, but it is also feared to get a “curse” from Jubata.

The period of prohibition without anyone doing activities outside the home aimed to cleanse the environment while maintaining environmental security. As is the case in other regions, basically it is very difficult for many people to comply with social distancing or not to leave the house in order to break the chain of spread of COVID-19. Through the *Besamsam* custom, people are more obedient to the implementation of social distancing voluntarily due to self-awareness. In an interview, one of the residents reported as follows:

During the period of prohibition, leaving home was not allowed for a specified period, which was 3 days; at this time people were not allowed to leave home and do their activities outside as usual. In addition, there were other things that were prohibited, such as killing animals, cutting down trees, doing farming activities, entering and leaving the village, making trouble. During this prohibition period, people only did their activities at home for a specified time. If the benefits are taken from this period of prohibition, people did not have activities outside the home, meaning that they did not make contact with other people, it was a form of social distancing. Regarding the prohibition on making trouble, they were prohibited from cutting down trees and killing animals, it is intended as a period of self-introspection to refrain from doing bad things so as not to destroy nature.

In contrast to the situation in the Aruk border area, even though it is far from the district city centre, it has better health facilities, while in the border areas elsewhere health facilities are still inadequate, so it is difficult for the people living there to have access to good health facilities.

As Figure 3 shows the village road is empty. During the period of prohibition, all residents did not leave the house. Also, during this period, there were no raids from the village security as people obeyed the prohibition voluntarily due to their self-awareness. To them, it was for the sake of the village's safety to minimize the spread of the



FIGURE 3 Empty road



FIGURE 4 Prayer recital on the road corner attended by the customary leader, religious leaders, community leaders, youth and housewives

COVID-19. People on the border have their own knowledge of how to deal with the spread of a disease. They even have awareness to comply with social distancing in order to break the chain of disease outbreaks. The following is an excerpt interviews with the *Timanggun*:

This social compliance certainly contains an element of “belief” which concerns a higher power beyond human ability (*Jubata*). To prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, people believe that the *Besamsam* custom can prevent the spread of the COVID-19 outbreak through supplication to *Jubata*, while asking for forgiveness from *Jubata* and asking for the safety of residents and the village.

After all the stages of *Besamsam* ritual were completed, the closing ceremony was held with a prayer recital attended by the customary leader, religious leaders, community leaders, youth representatives and housewives. Community involvement is a form of concern and shared responsibility in protecting their village. The recital of prayer as a form of supplication to *Jubata* for the safety of the village and warding off all forms of danger of the COVID-19 pandemic disease is shown in Figure 4. The *Besamsam* ritual creates a perception and moral belief among

TABLE 1 Social Resilience through *Besamsam* Custom in the Aruk Border Area

The <i>Besamsam</i> custom of the Dayak people	<i>Besamsam</i> ritual	Social resilience through prohibition
The Basansam ritual is performed when an area experiences an emergency that threatens human survival and causes natural destruction, and disease outbreaks, and it also aims to cleanse the natural environment.	The <i>Besamsam</i> ritual procession gives offerings or <i>Bantar</i> , accompanied by the recital of mantras to ward off evil spirits Offerings are called <i>bantar</i>	Not having social contact with the outsiders will break the chain of the COVID-19 transmission
Asking <i>Jubata</i> for protection to avert the spread of COVID-19	Making a “barrier sign” by placing a set of offerings on the corner of the road, as a form of prohibition on going through the road, and people are prohibited from doing activities outside their homes for several days	The period of prohibition requires people to stay at home as self-introspection to do good and believe in <i>Jubata</i> 's help
Basansam ritual is believed to have magical power	Overwhelmed with a magical atmosphere, containing magical elements; there is a higher power beyond human ability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Raising human awareness of maintaining the safety of their village from the spread of COVID-19. 2. People's compliance to the traditional prohibition is stronger than that of the government.

Source: Processed from observations and interviews.

the community members that they are protected by *Jubata* from COVID-19 transmission, thus creating a sense of security among the people. Therefore, the implementation of social distancing through traditional ritual during the COVID-19 pandemic in the border area is more effective than the regulations made by the government. This fact shows that the community is more compliant to the prohibitions or customary rules of Basansam compared to government regulations. Thus, the period of prohibition on interacting with the outsiders serves as a form of community social resilience in breaking the chain of the COVID-19 pandemic transmission (see Table 1).

10 | DISCUSSION

The *Basansam* essentially aims to abstain from certain community activities for several days. It is believed to be a form of supplication to *Jubata* so that the villagers are protected from destructive influence or harm. The Basansam custom prohibits people from cutting down trees, farming and killing animals. It embodies the value of human concern in saving the environment from damage and preserving the balance of nature. Therefore, in the Dayak community, there are human rules related to the universe (Efriani, Gunawan, & Judistira, 2019). The events of a natural imbalance in human life, such as natural disasters and the danger of diseases, rice pests, and social conflicts, result in misery and grief for humans (Crevello, 2004; Haug, 2014; König, 2016). The Dayak community believes that all forms of disturbances are the incarnation of evil spirits that disturb humans (Jay, 1989). The Dayak community's efforts to eliminate the threat are made through the *Besamsam* ritual. This means that the *Besamsam* ritual serves the following purposes: (1) to cleanse the natural environment. With regard to the COVID-19 outbreak, it is considered that the damage to nature is caused by irresponsible human hands, so that nature is wrathful because of human actions. If nature is preserved, humans will be protected from disease outbreaks, especially COVID-19; (2) This Basansam ritual has become a means to repel destructive influences that befall humans and, at the same time, serves to restore nature; (3) Prohibition on fighting aims to create security and stability in the village. The prohibition was intended to

prevent people from doing bad things that cause chaos in the village. In addition, it is also associated with the Dayak people's belief in Jubata's power, so as not to incur his wrath because of the evil deeds of humans (Haug, 2014). During the COVID-19 pandemic that occurred in Indonesia, many indigenous people ignored the warnings from the Indonesian government that the spread of COVID-19 was getting worse. This is natural because the attitudes and actions of indigenous peoples are only based on the customary beliefs they observe. Therefore, the prohibition imposed through the ritual of *Besamsam* is behaviour based on concern over the "bala" (misfortune), which is a form of Jubata's wrath. Thus, people can be controlled through communities that are shaped on the basis of civic activities that create progress in society rather than political institutions (Chua, Kadirvelu, Yasin, Choudhry, & Park, 2019; Gattino, Rizzo, Gatti, & Albanesi, 2021; Mannarini et al., 2021; Xie, Sundararaj, & Rejeesh, 2021).

One of the main requirements of the Basansam Ritual is to prepare ceremonial objects for the ritual in advance. The ritual objects are not merely objects; each has philosophical significance with its own purpose. Should one of these objects be unavailable, the ritual procession cannot be performed, as it is considered imperfect and the ritual will fail. Ceremonial objects used as items in traditional rituals serve as a deterrent to various disturbances. Among the ceremonial objects used in the ritual are offerings or *bantar* to ward off misfortune. These ceremonial objects have been blessed with a prayer or mantra by an *orang pintar* (a "smart" person regarded as having access to supernatural powers) as a mediator, so that they contain supernatural powers that function as guards, roadblocks or "invisible fences," so that humans cannot cross the barrier. If someone violates the taboo or crosses the barrier, it is believed that he will be in misfortune or get a disaster or "revenge." Not only he, but also his family members or people in his village will also get a disaster. There are other things that must be fulfilled; that is, the person is subject to a customary penalty by paying a fine in accordance with the applicable customary law. Hence, people are very obedient to this taboo because the penalty is very severe. Customs are used as a source of norms that regulate people's lives in social life, culture, conflict management, and their way of life (Dewantara, Darmawan, Hijjang, & Tamambaloh, 2020; Efriani et al., 2021; Jailani, Dewantara, & Rahmani, 2021). Therefore, the Dayak ethnic cultural orientation has a value orientation related to social and religious life (Sada et al., 2019), while Efriani et al. (2021) explain that religious belief is observed through customs and customary law (Efriani et al., 2021). The Dayak people believe that there is a belief in the existence of a higher power beyond human ability, namely the power of Jubata. This belief is the foundation for the Dayak people to maintain vertical harmony and natural balance (Efriani, Dewantara, Utami, & Listyaningrum, 2020). The functioning of customs in certain communities reflects the existence of an order and adherence to customary values and social norms (Short, 2010).

Balbach (1988) explained that eastern societies such as those in Asia tend to believe in the existence of supernatural things, cosmology and spirits (Balbach, 1988). This belief exists due to acculturation, social resilience and the culture of a homogeneous community and still holds traditional values from generation to generation (Casmana, Dewantara, Timoera, Kusmawati, & Syafrudin, 2022; Halimah, Arifin, Yuliariatiningsih, Abdillah, & Sutini, 2020). Psychologically, this is even significant between the geographical and cultural aspects of the way people think, behave and believe during the COVID-19 pandemic (Hardy et al., 2021). In indigenous peoples, beliefs rooted in cultural traditions have a stronger influence on people's psychology than government policies (Efriani, Donatianus, & Dewantara, 2020). This proves that indigenous communities have a strong belief in their values and traditions. These traditional values shape their mindset, behaviour and attitudes towards nature and social environment (Miles & Ebrey, 2017). This is also true when a disease outbreak occurs, as in the case of the Basansam local wisdom discussed above which serves as a form of social resilience in anticipating the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is based on the mindset of the Dayak people that is influenced by ancestral values that contain religious and communal elements (Sukanda, 2010). The significance of religion to them is that all Dayak people's lives and the universe are concerned with religion/magic such as marital procession, rice planting, death, etc., all of which have a close relationship with the power of the Almighty (called Jubata). Meanwhile, the communal significance is that the Dayak people are inseparable from their communal life. Everything is an inseparable entity; if a Dayak individual is involved in agricultural activities or traditional ceremonies (rituals), then all Dayak people are involved in it (Rufinus et al., 1996). This traditional belief is a form of social resilience of the community during the COVID-19 pandemic and functions as

social capital in overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic. Social capital is needed in a crucial situation, because it helps to improve people's mental conditions and confidence as a form of community reinforcement and social resilience. (Fulkerson et al., 2021).

The indigenous peoples' involvement in predicting the spread of COVID-19 can be used as a forum for information, socialization, and education to help people understand the danger of COVID-19 and apply health protocols to anticipate the spread of COVID-19 in their area. Such involvement also has a positive impact on the government to take important steps and make policies in order to control the community (Brown & Keast, 2003; Loewenson et al., 2021). In general, the Dayak indigenous peoples operate on the basis of customary norms and traditions prevailing in their area (Anggerainy, Wanda, & Hayati, 2017; Boulanger, 2002; Gerke, 1997; Nugraha & Hasanah, 2021). Psychologically, they are bound by the culture they adhere to as a law they have to obey, so that all forms of behaviour and character of indigenous peoples must be in accordance with the culture they believe in (Efriani et al., 2021; Efriani, Dewantara, et al., 2020; Taufika, Simaremare, Chairunnisa, & Nadhira, 2021). For indigenous peoples who live and settle in areas under customary law, such as the Salako Dayak on the border of West Kalimantan, their response to the pandemic is manifested by closing or limiting entry to their areas. The response is based on their agreement and compliance with the traditional rituals they have performed, namely the *Besamsam* traditional ritual. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Salako people have severely restricted outsiders from entering their villages, and thus they can keep their villages free from COVID-19 cases.

11 | CONCLUSION

The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic is a concern for all Indonesians in general and the people in the Aruk border area of Sajingan Sub-District in particular. However, the spread in the border areas can be anticipated through the local wisdom of the Selako Dayak community in the form of the *Besamsam* ritual. This ritual is held when a situation is considered "dangerous" and capable of destroying or threatening the security and stability of the natural and social environment. Through the *Besamsam* ritual, it is believed to be able to ward off negative disturbances and cleanse the environment with the protection of *Jubata*. The social resilience of the community in preventing or minimizing the spread of COVID-19 is by restricting the uncontrolled movement of people as a form of social solidarity through social control to protect their environment together. The *Besamsam* tradition is an effort made by Dayak people to raise awareness among the community to comply with prohibition for the common good in order to minimize the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The *Besamsam* is a benchmark for strict restrictions without having to control anyone who violates the prohibition. The *Besamsam* custom is an effective social control based on people's self-awareness. In fact, even though the government has implemented a social distancing policy and continues with a policy of easing the restrictions through several requirements according to the health protocol, people, without having to be notified in advance, however, can spontaneously do what was recommended by the government while maintaining the safety and security of the social environment from the danger of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The people's compliance with the customary prohibition is reflected in the strict social punishment, because if someone violates it, they will receive severe punishment. Not only did they have to pay customary fines, but they would also be alienated and asked to leave the village. Social resilience also serves as social capital to develop social solidarity among community members. Solidarity enables people to remain alert and prevent the transmission of COVID-19 by complying with customary rules. Although the prohibition period for several days has ended, the practice of social distancing to overcome the COVID-19 outbreak remains the main goal. People's ability to maintain and protect their social environment as a form of social deterrent automatically "fortifies" their social environment from threats and danger. Therefore, through the *Besamsam* custom, they can raise awareness by working together to break the chain of the spread of COVID-19 transmission. The *Besamsam* custom not only functions as a means to prevent the spread of COVID-19, but it is also a turning point for humans to preserve nature in order to create natural stability for human survival.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Fatmawati: Conceptualization, formal analysis, data collection, data curation, investigation, methodology, supervision, writing—original draft, writing—review and editing. **Jagad Aditya Dewantara:** Conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, data collection, investigation, methodology, supervision, writing—original draft, writing—review and editing.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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How to cite this article: Fatmawati, & Dewantara, J. A. (2022). Social resilience of indigenous community on the border: Belief and confidence in anticipating the spread of COVID-19 through the *Besamsam* custom in the Dayak community. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology, 1–18*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2611>