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EDITORIAL

MEN'S HEALTH IN INDONESIA: BREAKING THE SILENCE

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Indonesia is burdened with the steadily increasing chronic diseases, and men are quietly bearing much of it. Despite this, men's health remains an underpresented and under-addressed topic in both clinical practice and public health policy. This oversight contributes to disparities in life expectancy and lack health professional's attention to their general health and well-being (Handayani et al., 2021; Mboi et al., 2022). A notable example is the underreported of cases of erectile dysfunction (ED) a condition that is widely regarded as a significant marker of underlying cardiovascular disease (Hackett, G., 2018; Rakovac Tisdall et al., 2018). Despite its clinical significance, ED is often overlooked due to cultural taboos, limited provider training, overcrowding patients, and the absence of structured indications in the available guidelines (Hadisuyatmana et al., 2025).

Our recent qualitative research sheds light on this silent burden. Interviews with men diagnosed with T2DM in several regions of Indonesia revealed a strong desire for support, yet an equally strong fear of judgment or dismissal (Hadisuyatmana et al., 2021).

"I won't go to a Puskesmas if I can avoid it. It's always full of people and there is a very long queue."

"The Puskesmas was always busy, there will not be sufficient time for us to consult with the doctor."

This silence is echoed in the voices of healthcare professionals working at the frontlines in Puskesmas (Indonesia's public health centers), who often feel ill-equipped to manage such issues despite their clinical relevance (Hadisuyatmana et al., 2025).

"Personally, no patient has ever come to me for erectile dysfunction, and we've never asked them about it either," – A nurse.

"Based on my personal experience, they never asked us about ED," – A doctor.

This dual discomfort among patients and providers represents a critical gap in Indonesia's primary healthcare system. Sexual health is not a luxury; it is a vital aspect of holistic care. ED, in particular, is not only a quality-of-life concern but often an early warning sign of cardiovascular complications. Unfortunately, sexual health is not currently covered under Indonesia's national health insurance scheme (BPJS), leaving men with limited options and structured support for seeking care.

"We told him to get his blood pressure as normal as possible and make his lifestyle healthier to prevent his ED from getting worse," – A nurse (Hadisuyatmana et al., 2025).

Fortunately, the Indonesian Ministry of Health has recently acknowledged the consequences of longstanding neglect of men's health, including men's poor quality of health and shorter average life expectancy compared with women (Yang J., 2021). This disparity is not purely biological; it reflects systemic neglect, and potentially causing Indonesia to fail to upholding its commitment to health equity as articulated in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No. 3: "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages."

The Ministry's recent recognition of this issue can be seen as a positive sign, marking a future direction for research, policy development, and service improvement to ensure health for all citizens and a better Indonesia. The attention can be interpreted as an opportunity, indicating a pathway forward for innovation in health services and greater equity in care.

However, this moment must also be viewed through a sceptical lens. As researchers, we bear

the responsibility to ensure that such acknowledgements do not become rhetorical statements. Pioneering research and development must begin now, grounded in action, evidence, and accountability.

- Policy and system-level reforms are urgently needed, including:
  Integration of men's sexual health into chronic disease management guidelines,particularly within the Ministry of Health's T2DM protocols.
- Structured training for primary care providers to discuss men's health and sexual dysfunction with sensitivity and clinical confidence.
- Public health campaigns that reduce stigma and encourage men to seek help early before complications arise.
- Inclusion of men's health in national health indicators, ensuring equitable planning and resource allocation.

Without deliberate attention to men's unique health needs, we risk delivering incomplete care and worsening gender-based health inequities. Silence is not neutral it is harmful. These emerging concerns drive the need to build a responsive, inclusive, and empathetic health system. Now is the time to break the silence on men's health in Indonesia.

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