

# Dancing as an Expressive Media in the Middle of Pandemic

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# Dancing as an Expressive Media in the Middle of Pandemic

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## ABSTRACT

The decrease of body immunity has occurred in everyone due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which requires people to study, work, pray and do lots of activities at home. Dancing is a medium of expression that can be used to restore immunity for choreographers. The purpose of this paper is to examine the choreographers' works that have been produced during this pandemic, with a focus on describing the dances during pandemic and other mediums that have been used as a media of expression. The method used in this study is analytical and critical descriptive qualitative. The data were collected through observation and document study and interviews. The results showed that dancing has become a medium of expression for choreographers during a pandemic. Even though the Covid-19 pandemic was initially a pressure on choreographers in East Java, it had a positive impact, namely encouraging choreographers to develop their imagination in their dances. The pandemic condition that requires them to stay at home has emerged various forms of movements. Even this pandemic condition has encouraged young choreographers to be creative in the virtual world, namely the digital world. Thus, the pandemic has motivated choreographers to produce various forms of contemporary dance works and has developed virtual dance works with virtual performances as well.

**Keywords:** Dances, Expression Media, Pandemic, Virtual Performance

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Corona or Covid-19 virus has influenced all areas of human life, including the life of choreographers. WHO has determined that all countries must break the transmission chain by staying at home, staying away from the crowds and stopping all activities outside. All activities outside are moved at home, starting from studying at home, working at home, and praying at home. Moving away from the crowd means not doing activities that involve a lot of people meeting and gathering. Organizing a show is one of the activities that causes people to gather. Therefore, organizing shows is an activity that should not be done during this pandemic. The Indonesian performing arts industry is in quite shocked because of the coronavirus global effect. It has been reported that approximately 40,081 artists have been eroded by Covid-19 due to the cancellation of art performances and festivals. 22 epicenter areas for art workers are predominantly West Java, Jakarta, Central Java, East Java, and Yogyakarta [1]

Dancing is the result of the process in achieving a dance work. A person who performs the process of

composing or working on a dance is called a choreographer. The work of the choreographer is moved by strong actions to create new works that reflect the unique reactions of one's life experiences. The process of work starts from the process of seeing, exploring, and realizing [2]. The media to express the meaning and to deliver the dance work is a performance space (stage)

When the space is limited or closed due to the pandemic, this caused tremendous pressure for the choreographers. It is physically clear that when people are only stay at home, what activities can be done in a limited house space. A choreographer may only be able to carry out the process of contemplation or develop imagination, but how can ideas be expressed both physically and spiritually.

As what has been known, there was a big event in April for dance artists and choreographers, namely the celebration of World Dance Day, which was precisely celebrated on April 29th. Besides, there was also Earth Day, which should be there are dance performances to honor the earth. However, during the limitation in the Covid-19 period, it has a psychological impact on dance artists, especially choreographers. Choreographers

cannot inspire, explore, express and create dances. Moreover, the obligation to stay at home was clear has the hardest impact for the choreographers. The only way to keep expressing and exploring for the dance artist is to create dance works to be expressed through the mass media. Fortunately, there is an event that offers to make a joint show via YouTube on Earth Day and the celebration of World Dance as a place to express the creativity that has been fossilized during the covid-19 quarantine time

The works of East Java choreographers that have been uploaded on social media have a different aesthetic value from the dance works that are prepared for live performances. As what has been known, the artistic value of the dance movements can be seen from the dance performance, its content and appearance [3]. This essence of the show will change when the performance of this dance work uses virtual media. When this dance work is performed through social or virtual media, there are boundaries of space and time.

During this pandemic, the dance works that had been produced by choreographers was performed through digital media. The form of dance works which are generally supported by art space such as stage layouts equipped with lighting. During the pandemic, they only relied on media movements with limited space in the environment around the house. It means that the form of movements has become the main element in dancing during the pandemic. Digital media is a new medium that is used to support the dance performance. This is a new concept of workmanship dance method, thus it is interesting to study more deeply.

This article aims to examine the new dance works that have been produced by choreographers and discuss the mediums of dancing used as a medium of expression by dance stylists in their dancing during this pandemic. Moreover, this paper also discusses the impact of creating dance during this pandemic. The assumption is that dance works created during the pandemic have a new aesthetic form, namely virtual dance aesthetics. In addition, art creation activities during this pandemic are not only producing dance works, but also maintaining body immunity.

### **1.1. Related Work**

There several researches related to the analysis of dance work as a medium of expression during the pandemic. One of those is Rustiyanti, et al. In their research, they found that the movements performed by dancers are expressive movements, distilled movements containing rhythm, so that they can touch the audiences' feelings. Expression and rhythm embody the expression

of motion, so that its beauty will appear. Beauty can also be enjoyed through advanced photo-motion technology. The motion that uses a variety of dance components is an ideal combination for a photographer, so that art communication is created between a single dancer and the photographer [4]. Rustiyanti's 'research is an interdisciplinary study, which looks at how the expressions of dancers' gestures can give photographers the imagination. The interdisciplinary approach used in this discussion is of relevance to this research.

Kiepe, Stöckigt, and Keil had tested the effects of dance movements and a ballroom dance as a therapeutic medium for people with cancer, breast illnesses, dementia, Parkinson syndrome, heart failure, type 2 diabetes, depression and fibromyalgia. The findings of this study showed that dance therapy (movement) has a positive impact on patients with breast cancer, improving quality of life, relieving depression... [5]. The relevance of this article is the dance movements and / or dance works for dance actors have a physical and psychological impacts. The impacts of this dance will also be used by the writers in discussing dance work as a medium of expression during the pandemic for choreographers.

An article that discusses contemporary dance or choreography that still has relevance to this article is Leach, who conducted research on several contemporary dance companies in Europe that had successfully conducted experiments by presenting digital choreography. The finding is that contemporary dance has produced knowledge which is said to be the knowledge of economy. The digital creativity of a dance company can be used as a prototype for relational engagement with audiences and the wider community [6]. This paper can be used as material for discussion in discussing how digital media is used as a supporting medium in the creation of dance works during the pandemic.

Eko Supriya or known as Eko PC has written an article entitled "*Tubuh Tari Indonesia Sasikirana Dance Camp 2015-2016*" in *Panggung* journal. Eko refers to the opinion of Sardono W. Kusumo, Indonesian dance maestro and choreographer, who stated that understanding dance must begin with studying one's body before moving on to the study of dance in its performative aspects. The finding showed that a dancer must be able to understand and explore the complexities of the body along with the nervous system and muscles of his body as a creative process for his body's confidence in the performance. Eko evaluated comprehensively which it can be used as a proof of the importance of a physical approach to the dancer's body before referring to other approaches in the arts [7].

Regarding to the virtual aesthetics, Martyastiadi explained that virtual reality as part of interactive media cannot be separated from the need of technology. Interactive media is rich of relationships among content, users, and the technology it uses. Interactive digital media is no longer just a visual aesthetic but can be used as a medium of communication in other kind of arts [8].

Based on the findings above, it appears that there has been no writing about virtual dance aesthetics. This will create a new aesthetic for the dance work produced by the choreographers. The emergence of this new aesthetic will lead to the emergence of virtual aesthetics in dance creations. This is an interesting phenomenon to be studied more deeply, therefore the researcher is interested in studying the dance works of choreographers especially in East Java as a medium of expression during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of this research are expected to contribute to the development of aesthetic science, especially virtual dance aesthetics.

## 2. METHODS

The methods used in this research were descriptive qualitative, analytical and critical research. Descriptive qualitative research method was used because the data in this study are dance works in the form of videos that have been uploaded on YouTube or Instagram. The descriptive method was followed by analytical and critical methods. Critical analytical method was used to critically analyze the form of dance work. Data sources were gathered from the respondents (choreographers in East Java), they are: Winarto Ekram, Robby Hidajat, Dimas Pramuka, Peni Puspito (Pepen), and the dance creations during the pandemic.

Data collection techniques used observation, interviews, and document study. Observations were made by observing the work through video, both live and from YouTube. This observation activity was integrated with the document study activity. Interviews were conducted online both with WAG and video call with respondents. The data analysis technique used the Creswell technique [9] which consists of six steps, namely: (1) Processing data and preparing data for analysis. Processing raw data, namely describing dance forms from dance video sources, interviews with resource persons. (2) Read the entire data by reflecting on the overall meaning and providing notes. (3) Analyze in more detail by coding the data. In this stage, what is done is to analyze the form of the dance work to find the aesthetics of the intrinsic-artistic form of the dance work. (4) Giving symbolic signs to the elements of form, content and appearance as choreographer expressions. (5) Shows how the dance work description and critical

analysis in the narrative. This stage produces a description of the form of dance work as a medium of expression for choreographers during a pandemic. (6) Interpreting data and final conclusions. This stage is interpreting the dance work as an expression of a choreographer in East Java.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Dance Creations during Pandemic

Art work is an expression or embodiment of something that is formed through harmonious elements as a whole to be enjoyed aesthetically. Artwork must be created through the artist's intention to communicate the ideas or emotions. Ideas are communicated through a form. This form is an aesthetic aspect which can be enjoyed by the audience [10]. Form is an element of all manifestations which the viewer can observe and feel.

The Covid-19 pandemic period is a time that requires people all around the world to be aware of coronavirus transmission. The virus has spread throughout the world, so it needs the attitude of all leaders in the world. The rule to stay at home and stay away from the crowd has been established in Indonesia as well, and this is also not an exception to the world of performance. The performance world was simultaneously paused, including the activities of dance artists, in this case the choreographers.

Choreographers are the ones who cannot be restrained. The condition of staying at home and not doing artistic activities was initially a tremendous suffering. Saturation and boredom happened to everyone including the choreographers. However, the habits that has shaped them into individuals who are always sensitive to any conditions and situations and has a high power of expression makes unable to stay still even though they have to stay at home. The habit to let them free to express their mind through exploration of whatever is happening in the surrounding environment makes choreographers in this pandemic become more imaginative

In order to free themselves, COVID-19 has turned into a source of imagination for choreographers. As expressed by Heri Lentho (a well-known choreographer in Surabaya), the pandemic period initially forced him to return to the village, but after that he created various imaginations such as creating a virtual dance performance event. The virtual show event was for a virtual Earth Day dance performance which due to April 11th. Heri Lentho composed musical from the Epi Martison's song and then distributed it to choreographers

in East Java to create expressive moves with the theme "Sujud Bumi". The movements that had been composed by the choreographers were virtually edited and uploaded on YouTube.

The results of the virtual performance event that has been built by Heri Lenthoo have inspired various dance communities, which then appeared together in virtual dance works with the World Dance Day event. Various dance communities created performances together in one frame to commemorate world days. Based on the results of the virtual performances entitled "Sujud Bumi" and also "World Dance Day", it can be seen that the choreographer has used the media of their own body individually to express his soul and imagination in appreciating earth day in this pandemic era. The body is the only medium that is always ready to be used as a medium of expression by dancers and dance choreographers during pandemic. Their body can be explored to do more complex motions which mean that body is the main elements in this new dance creation. This is like a body expression which is owned by dancer in the jungle outside Java which is different from the movement varieties in traditional dance creation in Java.

In line with Sardono W. Kusumo's expression as quoted by Eko Supriyanto, he explained that there was a significant difference in his body movements when he was in the middle of the jungle in Dayak compared to when he was dancing the Javanese *alusan* dance at the Ramayana Ballet performance at Prambanan Temple. His dance in Dayak contains very rich bodily elements because it is not shackled by certain characters. Javanese dances, for example, the study of the body of *bedaya* dance must involve the study of nine dancers with nine characters on the basis of individual meditation that is not interpreted individually, especially the movements. *Bedaya* dance is a concrete example as the pinnacle of artistic expression represented by the expression of personal body space with each dancer providing body expressiveness which is a solo / singular synergy in a dance arrangement [7].

The physical expressions of the choreographers during the Covid-19 pandemic can be seen in the movement patterns presented in the dance which are put together in virtual dance videos on Earth Day and World Dance Day. The movements of the body have become the main medium to expression the souls of the choreographers in order to release fatigue and boredom during this pandemic.

### 3.2. Mediums in Dance Creations during Pandemic

#### 3.2.1. Moves as the Media of Expression during Pandemic

The form of dance is the embodiment of the ideas or emotions of a dancer through the content of the motion. The movement of the human body is the main element of dance that moves on the body or limbs and even small parts of the body. Motion involves three dimensions, namely the dimension of space, the dimension of time, and the dimension of energy [11]. Movement is a sign of life. Dance movement is an expression of all emotional experiences. Imaginative experiences can provide the power of movement by providing opportunities for emotional experiences. The various forms of a dance (pure movement) are included in the forms that changeable, so they become practical figures of reality [4].

The gestures used as a medium for expressing the dance ideas by the choreographers in this pandemic are expressive movements to release the soul pressure because of the pandemic. A soul that has been shackled by staying-at-home mandatory is a depressed soul. The soul is what ultimately fills the movement patterns performed by the dance choreographers. It means, the soul is the content of movement. Thus, the movement patterns presented have high emotional strength. This power has regulated how much energy is expressed in carrying out moves or often referred as power. This regulation of the power of motion cannot be separated from the available time and space. How the relationship between the power of movement, time patterns and spatial awareness in dance creations that have been produced by choreographers in East Java during this pandemic is very different from dance creation created with a concept for live performances.

The movement patterns are built by choreographers during this pandemic, such as upper-level designs as symbols of glorifying God or prayer requests and gratitude. In addition, the lower level is as a symbol of prostration for gratitude and also prayer requests. There are also those who express the outbreak of Covid-19 that must be avoided. The examples of physical exploration movement patterns of choreographers can be observed as follows.



**Figure 1** The expression of Winarto Ekram's movement in "Sujud Bumi" 1

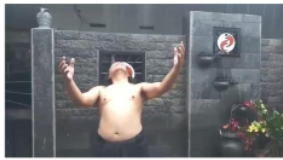
The movement patterns built by Winarto Ekram (choreographer from Malang) were created for "Sujud

*Bumi*". The movement patterns that are built are movement patterns with body exploration in the middle of the rocks in the forest. The lower designs are presented as a symbol of prostration on the earth at a low level with the position of the head and body directed downwards closer to the earth. This design is to express gratitude to Allah SWT who has given the earth as a place for human life.



**Figure 2** The expression of Winarto Ekram's movement in "Sujud Bumi" 2

The second image is a high level motion presentation. The head's position is facing upwards, with the hands directed upwards. This design expresses asking Allah SWT to always give safety and harmony in human life on the earth.



**Figure 3** The expression of Winarto Ekram's movement in "Dalam Hujan"

In the third figure, he expressed himself by exploring his body movements in the garden in front of his house during the rain. The movement pattern that is built with the position of the body, head and hands facing upwards is to show enjoyment of rainwater that has been given by Allah who has provided freshness and eliminates all fatigue and boredom.



**Figure 4** The expression of Arif Hidayat's movement in "Covid-19"

The movement patterns of Arif Hidajat (a theater actor) who has explored his body with movement patterns to appreciate World Dance Day during the pandemic is shown in figure 4. The form of the pattern that is built is starting from the lower level with the movement of the hand to the front side. This motion design expresses the existence of the widespread corona virus that has spread the world. The pattern developed as an attitude to avoid the virus, specifically by wearing a mask.

The descriptions of the images above are some examples of the forms of choreographed movement patterns that have been constructed in the form of dances arrangement to commemorate World and Earth Days in this pandemic era. Movement patterns that have been arranged in a dance work contain an aspect of time. This time aspect is a tool to strengthen the links of power in a series of motion. It is also as a tool to develop continuously and dynamically flow and create dance regularities [11]. In creating a motion design, a choreographer is aware of the structure of time. This time structure is inherent in motions.

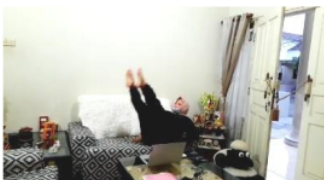
The choreographers in this pandemic have developed movement patterns by realizing the timelessness. Aspects of tempo, rhythm and duration are considered and stucked in motion. The life of this series of motion lies in the speed and slowness of the motion carried out, as well as the rhythm of motion that has been built. The tempo of motion has read the energy or sense of motion. In motion and dance is an activity that treats the body as a real approach to reference creative steps with clear trajectories in the process developed by contemporary dance in Indonesia [7].

### 3.2.2. Music as an Expressive Media during the Pandemic

The time or rhythmic structure of dance movements with their repetition and developmental patterns shows the framework and clarity for the observer toward the aesthetic awareness. The time structure in a dance is generally associated with the relationship between dance movements and the music instruments. As stated by Arlene Zaliman in Hagen's quote, the artistic nature of the assumption that one should somehow realize that dance and music are interrelated, through its artistic users, cannot be avoided [12].

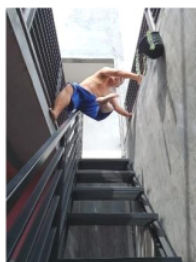
During this pandemic, the use of music in dance is more of an illustration to support the atmosphere of the dance theme. The songs sung by the dance choreographers constitute internal music individually and have strengthened the expression of the movements

they do. Internal music can also be seen from the thrill of the dancers' feet and hands in moving. External music is manifested through music editing of an existing song or song instrument. As an example for the music at the Earth Day event, Heri Lenthos as the main choreographer took part in the Epi Martison's song to build the atmosphere in the dance "Sujud Bumi". The musical characteristics of this song are flowing, filled with female vocals with high-pitched notes and no particular beats. This music is interpreted by each dance choreographer by filling in the movements. The interpretations of the dance choreographers for this music are very diverse. Therefore, it can also produce a very varied structure of the time movements. Music for World Dance Day, the main choreographers or directors had edited music in the form of songs and / or instruments, which then dancers and / or dance choreographers fill the movements according to their interpretive power, then edit it into virtual dance videos.



**Figure 5** A living room as a media of expression by Jajuk D.

Jajuk Dwi Sasanadjati has made use of the living room as a space in a dance movement. The curtain settings, half-open doors, chairs, a table equipped with a laptop, and small decorations around the room were explored to support the movement according to the demands of the theme. This space expresses that during a pandemic everyone lived at home, including working and teaching at home via a laptop as their online devices.



**Figure 6** House stairs as a medium of expression by Winarto Ekram

Winarto Ekram uses the stairs in his house as a medium of expression. The shape of the stairs and the existing space has imagined Winarto to be explored in finding the types of movements he does. The shape of the ladder in the house has formed lines, and the shape of the triangles and squares even makes it possible to make high-level motion by hanging. This staircase has created a form of motion with a unique setting design. This is the skill of a choreographer when confined at home but produces extraordinary creativity.

Different to Winarto who explored his home space during his stay at home to express his movements, Robi Hidajat doesn't need to leave the house to record his dance works, or doesn't need to think about space in moving. This is another facet of the dance form during a pandemic. Robi makes use of the Augmented Reality space in rich dance on earth day. The augmented forest background forms the background for her dance work. He moves anywhere, which is then edited on a computer or with a cell phone by inserting the forest image he has. The results of his work can be seen in the following image,

### 3.2.2. Space as a Media of Expression

The context of the Covid-19 pandemic has shaped the performance space. In Javanese dance, it is clear that the performance space is bound by the *saka guru* or internal pole in the *pendhapa* building [13]. *Pendhapa* is a house construction without walls that has four *Saka guru* in the middle and a *joglo*-shaped roof. Especially *pendhapa* in the Yogyakarta Palace and Surakarta. The architecture has a combination of function and meaning for the aristocrats in this palace. As a result, the dance that is performed in this space is also bound by the laws and norms that exist in the palace [14]. This differs from the proscenium stage which the space is formed by the shape of a stage with one direction of the audience, limited by the stage frame.

The period of the Covid-19 pandemic is a context that cannot be avoided by dance stylists. The house and its environment are spaces that dance choreographers who want to express themselves should be aware of. One of the examples is a small garden in the house; living room using the curtains; some use the ladders; as well as the yard and forest around the house. In short, the house and the environment become a new contextual setting in creating a dance. The following figures are an illustration of the motion space used by dance choreographers during the pandemic.



**Figure 7** Augmented reality as a media of expression by Robi Hidayat

The pandemic is not an obstacle for choreographers to create dance. Even though they stay at home, the choreographers are able to explore the space in the house. In fact, the augmented imagination space has developed the creative power of choreographers during a pandemic. The context of the house and the environment around it has become a new space that functions as a medium of expression. Dance works that are built and explored from this environment are included as environmental choreography [15].

### 3.2.2. Space as a Media of Expression

Virtual space has also become a new space for dance performances during the Covid-19 pandemic. This virtual dance performance is performed through social media YouTube, Instagram, and also through YouTube live streaming. The simplest thing is that dance choreographers create a dance work at home by exploring the existing space in the house and its surroundings, which is then edited with a real model, or with augmented reality. These digital media have become a new space for dance performances during this pandemic.

Virtual show is a show using computer media that uses 3-dimensional graphics and a combination of technology. Dixon explained that digital shows are becoming new media for creating theatrical spectacle, including virtual reality and robotic show work; telematic shows in remote locations are connected in real time, webcams, and online drama communities. It takes into account the "extra temporal" illusion created by some tech theatre work. [16]

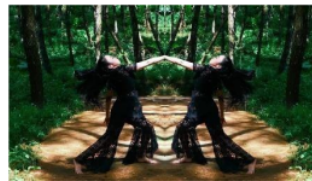
Virtual performance has made use of virtual reality's work system. Ji-Hwan Kim, et al., Explained that virtual reality refers to a computer-generated environment that is immersive, interactive, multi-sensory, audience-centered, three-dimensional, and a combination of technologies needed to build this environment. Virtual reality allows the artists to navigate and see the three-dimensional world in real time with six

degrees of freedom. The point is that virtual reality is an imitation of physical reality [17].

In the wrapping up of this show, technology collaboration is needed to build a contextual performance. The period of the Covid-19 pandemic has awakened choreographers and / or show management to the need for virtual performances at this time. Urgent needs that do not allow artists to perform lively, so virtual performances are now the last option.

Besides performances at World Dance Day and Earth Day events, a virtual performance which is complemented in this study is the "Merdeka Virtual Dance Festival" which was held on 17-18 August 2020. This performance was produced by Peni Puspito for 21 dance choreographers in East Java. This space can give young choreographers the freedom to create dances by utilizing technology in their work.

The appearance of the show is designed via YouTube live streaming. There are several kinds of dance work produced by the choreographers in the editorial, including a video recording of a dance performance at a place or at a location determined by the dancers; but there are also those who maximize the use of augmented reality in their work environment. Among those who take advantage of augmented reality is Ika Pratiwi from Malang.



**Figure 8** A dance creation based on technology by Ika Pratiwi

Ika Pratiwi can present dance works using computer technology to develop its designs. The actual motion design was only done by 1 dancer. She edited it so that it looked like there were two dancers. When two video images are edited together, there is a top design that overlaps the motion picture to another.

Dance creations using computer technology have produced interesting dances. The use of computer applications has been able to produce new digital-based dance works. It is as stated by Baker that Virtual Reality has undoubtedly attracted a lot of interest in recent years. This technology has offered great benefits in many areas. The user can watch and manipulate the simulated environment files in the same way as in the real world

without the need to study and set up complicated devices in the show [6]. Leach, also explained that currently in Europe many successful contemporary dance companies are experimenting with new ways of presenting choreography and movements by utilizing digital media [6].

The finding in this study is that the dance creations that have been produced by choreographers during the pandemic have led to digital dance works performed through virtual performances. These dance creations have produced a new form of contemporary dance in Indonesia, especially in East Java, namely digital-based dance performances. The media used in the creation of dance works at this time apart from gestures as the main media, is supported by music elements, environmental spaces around the house, even digital space. Digital applications have provided a new development space in the creation of dances at this time.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Dance work has become a medium of expression for choreographers during a pandemic. Even though the Covid-19 pandemic was initially a pressure for choreographers in East Java, it later had positive impacts which encourage choreographers to develop their imagination in dance creation. The pandemic situation that requires them staying at home has resulted in the emergence of various forms of expression of movement. Even this pandemic condition has encouraged young choreographers to be creative in the virtual world or the digital world. Thus the pandemic period has produced various forms of contemporary dance creations and has developed in virtual dance works with virtual performances as well.

Dance work that uses the medium of the body expression has had an impact on the health of the choreographer. It is obtained when the choreographers are in the process of making motion, then exploring the motion and available space they will automatically sweating. This is the same as sport activities, especially if the activity is in an open space and under the sun light. The immunity of the body will be awakened with all of these dance work activities. This will maintain and increase the body's immunity during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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