

Op-ed:
**Too Awful to be Mentioned?: Uncovering the Existence of Underprivileged
Gen Z in Indonesia**

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June 7, 2022

The biggest disadvantage for underprivileged Gen Z is that we do not have a choice on how we live, we just stay alive.

I was scrolling through my Instagram explore on a Friday night when I stumbled upon a post about underprivileged Gen Z or sometimes referred to as “millennials” from [Project Multatuli](#), a non-governmental journalism company in Indonesia. I have been scrolling Instagram since a few days ago, whenever I feel helpless and powerless. Obviously not a good activity for someone with a vulnerable condition, but I could not sleep because I have things to do while at the same time not having energy to do it.

Some days ago, I was having my regular meeting with some of my friends. Since the pandemic started and we cannot meet each other in person, we always have this regular meeting to keep us in touch. This topic was being addressed that night. Why is it so different for us now? Why can't we live peacefully? It feels as if we are required to be perfect all the time. We must reach a particular level of achievement to correspond to society's standard. My friend said that it is because the needs of our generation are far more varied and everything becomes more significant over time, setting a high standard for us. Like skincare was not a primary need for people back then for example. That is right, I thought. But then I realized I had not been thinking about skincare since a long time ago.

Our family is struggling so much to keep me in the university, even after I get financial assistance from the government throughout my four-year study period. Recently, I was granted a scholarship to study abroad, which has always been my dream. These past few days though, consecutively, I was informed that the awardees need to pay with their own money first for accommodation and visa. Surely it will not be a problem since they will be reimbursed once the fund has been distributed. That is indeed the policy and the scholarship provider can do nothing about it. But what about the ones who truly do not have money?

In the midst of my confusion, I found the earlier post I talked about. It is about an underprivileged girl named [Anida](#), a 23 years old university student. She is financially struggling and yet she still has to deal with her mental illness. In further research regarding this topic, I also met [Adit](#), a 22

year-old driver who lives with his family-of-nine in Jakarta. Reading their stories more or less helped me to not feel alone anymore.

Every day we are exposed to the portrayal of ideal role models that are even encouraged by the government. I could never understand the thought-process which underlies the obsession of the current regime in portraying perfectly-characterized youths instead of coming up with issues faced by [underprivileged Gen Z](#) which actually dominates the population. It is nice to set a decent example for the new generation, but what is the use of all that if the standard itself is impossible to achieve?

Some of my friends back home in Madiun, a small yet equipped town, do not even go to college. Some of them are married and even have a child or some, in their early 20s or even younger. On the surface there seems like nothing wrong with that. However that fact in any way contradicts the exaggerated portrayal of the government version of the so-called [Indonesian millennials](#). Would they still be married at a young age had they had other choices?

The inability to achieve the life standard the society and media proposes often contributes to the decline of mental health of the underprivileged Gen Z. Trying to make ends meet while having to stay relevant in society gives a lot of pressure. Once again, we do not have many choices. Clinical psychological help unfortunately have yet to be accessible for everyone. Many youths find their enjoyment in a relationship, where they can share their problem with their loved ones who will most likely to understand since most of them come from the same social, economic, and cultural background. Thus, unequipped, they choose marriage as the solution, not expecting the more complex problem that comes with it.

Marriage is not the only solution, though. The ones who are not yet ready or more aware of the consequences of the option, channeling their pressures in many other ways. Anida, diagnosed with schizophrenia, chose to busy herself and contribute to her society by managing voluntary activities. Adit, on the other hand, participated in a percussion practice with fellow youths in his village. I, coping in a far less beneficial way, listening to hard music, watching movies, and writing, wishing to never lose interest, since lately I sometimes do not find excitement in doing that.

Those who are often glorified as the perfect example of Indonesian youths, such as Maudy Ayunda, Putri Tanjung, Jerome Polin, have these resources to be as excellent as they are now. Let us do a little background check on them. As we can see in [Maudy's mother's](#) instagram account, she worked hard in her youth to provide for Maudy's needs including her education. She went to an international school because they considered the school as the best for her. Her mother claimed that the cost was not expensive since it was a newly built school back then, but how inexpensive was the international school exactly? Are children from underprivileged families still able to go to that "inexpensive school"?

What I contest the most is the excessive portrayal of ideal youth in mainstream media, which ironically is supported by the government. Instead of imposing an unrealistic portrayal of the current generation, I think the government and independent media can do better by bringing more awareness and exposure to those underprivileged Gen Z who are currently struggling, to serve as a reflection of how exactly the true condition of our society is. Stop supporting this bias and let us face reality. Build the right vision and make the accurate arrangement to diminish the root of the problem.