

# How have the public responded to the Covid-19 pandemic? Understanding the role of group processes

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*Crowds &  
Identities*

**US**  
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## Covid-19: NPIs -- **behaviour** is key:

- Physical distancing
- Regular hand-washing
- Staying home
- Wearing face-coverings
- Self-isolating

# Overview

Public adherence:

1. Variations over time
2. Variations by type of behaviour required

# 'Fatigue'?

Adherence rates for staying home and distancing were very HIGH on both behavioural and self-report measures

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Views And Reviews

**The concept of "fatigue" in tackling covid-19**

BMJ 2020 ; 371 doi: <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m4171> (Published 02 November 2020)  
Cite this as: *BMJ* 2020;371:m4171

Read our latest coverage of the coronavirus outbreak

*Susan Michie, director<sup>1</sup>, Robert West, professor of health psychology<sup>2</sup>, Nigel Harvey, professor of judgment and decision research<sup>3</sup>*

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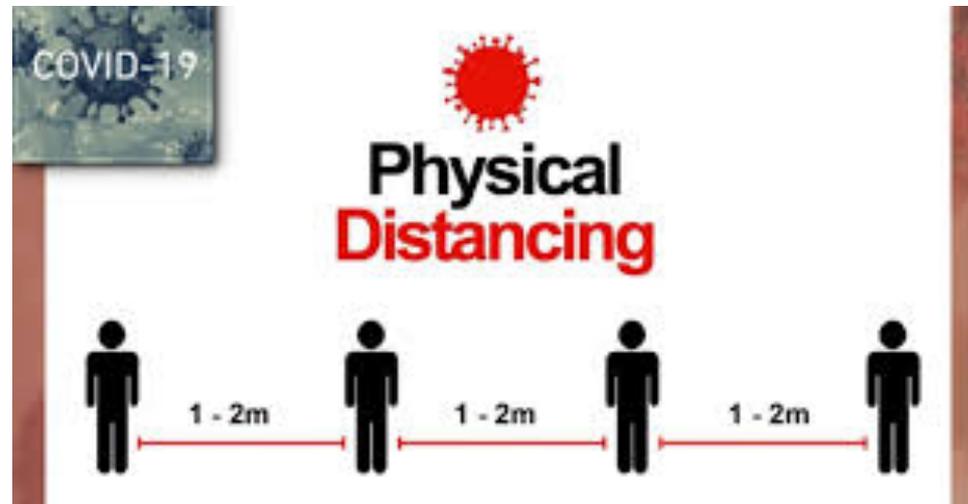
Instead of using the concept of "fatigue" to understand a lack of adherence to covid-19 rules, we should focus on—and tackle—people's capability, opportunity, and motivation, say **Susan Michie, Robert West, and Nigel Harvey**

The concept of fatigue has been used to describe a presumed tendency for people naturally to become tired of the rules and guidance they should follow to prevent the spread of covid-19.<sup>1</sup> The idea appears to be gaining currency and has been referred to as "behavioural fatigue," "pandemic fatigue," "emergency fatigue," "public fatigue," and "adherence fatigue." A Google search for "pandemic fatigue" resulted in around 200 million hits, with articles on the first page with titles such as "10 reasons why pandemic fatigue could threaten global health," and "Europe experiencing pandemic fatigue." The question is whether the concept of fatigue accurately captures what is happening. This is important because it affects policies aimed at maximising adherence.

Outside of covid-19, the term fatigue has three main uses. One is a subjective feeling of mental or physical tiredness, which can be caused by mental or physical exertion.

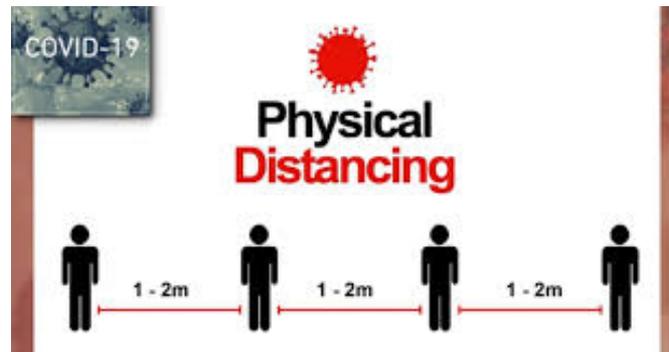
# Predictors of physical distancing adherence

1. Knowledge and perception of risk
2. Belief that physical distancing is effective



# Predictors of physical distancing adherence:

3. Social norms: whether relevant others are doing the same
4. National identification and identification with the family
5. Empathy for those most vulnerable to the virus
6. Low trust in government and confidence in government action



# 1. Variations over time

# Decline in adherence: May, July 2020

(i) From 'stay home' to 'stay alert'.

(ii) Cummings scandal – 'one law for them'. (Fancourt et al., 2020)

(iii) July 4<sup>th</sup>: 'freedom' / 'end of lockdown'

Public **knowledge** of the rules declined

Decline in sense of 'we're all in it **together**' / **Trust** in government

Signalling effect – **risk** perceived to be lower



STAY HOME  
PROTECT  
THE NHS  
SAVE LIVES



STAY  
ALERT

## 2. Variations over type of behaviour required

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- Hand-washing – consistently high
- Mask wearing – has gone up over time
- Social contacts – vary with level of pandemic and regulations
- **Self-isolation – low: ~20%** (Smith et al., 2020)

A photograph of a busy street at night, likely in London, with a large crowd of people. In the background, the London Eye is visible against a dark blue sky. The text is overlaid on the image.

£10,000 fines for  
breaching self-isolation rules

## Using coercion in the test, trace & isolate system

- Modelling found that increased fines would put people off self-reporting & coming forward for testing(Lucas et al., 2020).
- Surveys found intention to self-isolate higher than behaviour.

# Why is self-isolation low?

- Not understanding rules
- Mild or fading symptoms
- Key predictors of non-adherence are financial:
  - **Financial given as a reason**
  - **Low paid workers are the demographic**

# Self-isolation: Alternatives to coercion

1, greater financial support

2, non-financial practical support



# Community aid groups set up across UK amid coronavirus crisis

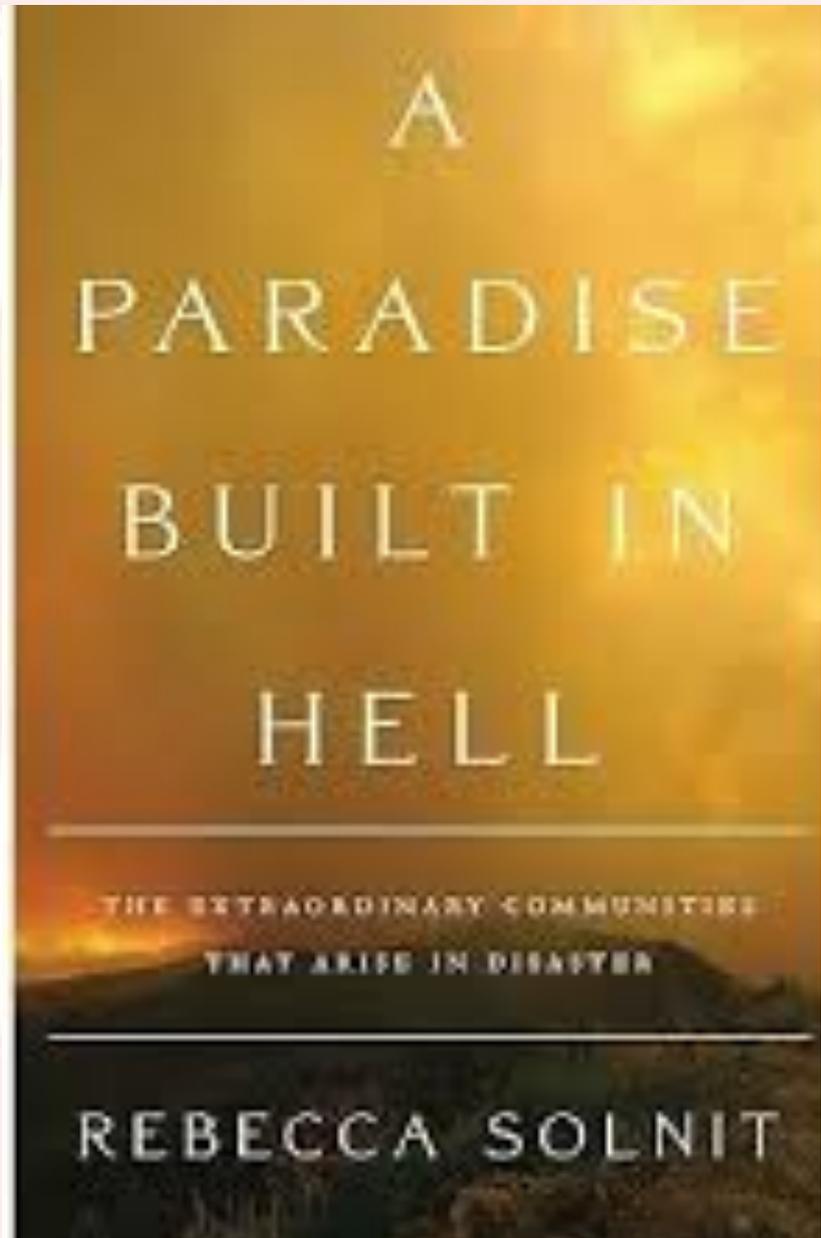
**Tens of thousands volunteer to pick up shopping or deliver medicine to vulnerable citizens self-isolating**

- [\*\*Coronavirus - latest updates\*\*](#)
- [\*\*See all our coronavirus coverage\*\*](#)

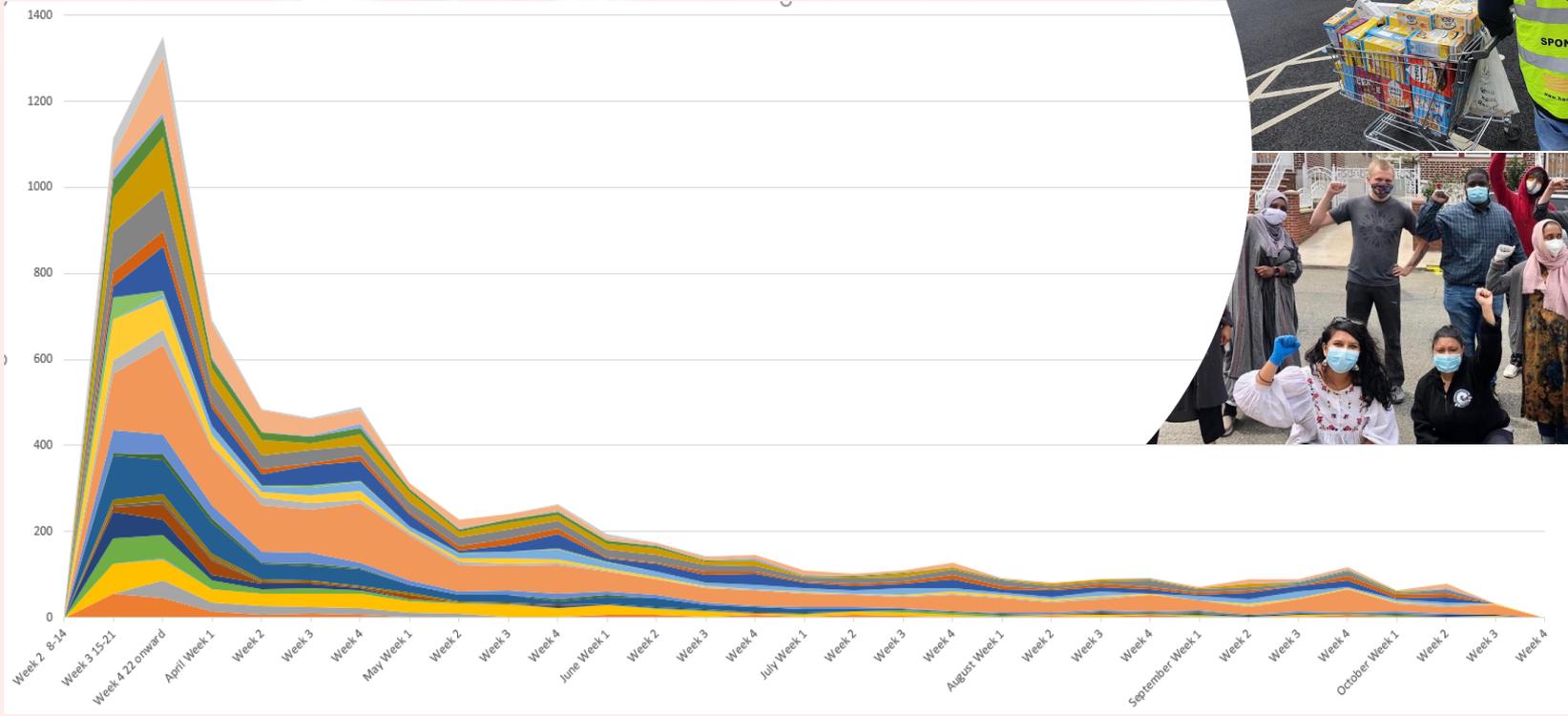


# 'Disaster communities'

- are common
- decline over time (Kaniasty & Norris, 1996)



# 110 mutual aid groups, March to October 2020, posts on Facebook



# Strategies sustaining community solidarity

- Group care
- Horizontal organisation
- Regular communication
- Alliances between groups and organisations (e.g., shared resources).
- Financial support for organizers



Maria Fernandes-Jesus

## Stories of community solidarity

Examples of successful COVID-19 mutual aid and community support groups.

We are collecting experiences from groups and communities across the UK. Would you like to share yours? Please contact us at [m.fernandes-jesus@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:m.fernandes-jesus@sussex.ac.uk)

### Harnham Harvest Table



"The Harvest Table operated for ten weeks every Saturday from the end of July to the end of September. It was a huge success, also providing a venue in the open air for people to meet and socialise with friends in a way that Covid had been denying them, whilst operating under distancing and tracing rules. A survey on the last Saturday was 100% in favour of it continuing the next year, Covid or no Covid."

### How Harnham Harvest Table (HHT) Was Set Up: A Guide To Community Groups

Guide and material provided by Harnham Harvest Table group.

- [Harnham Harvest Panflet \[PDF 72.05KB\]](#)
- [Harnham Harvest Table Good Practice Guide \[PDF 196.00KB\]](#)

### Wixams and Wilstead Community Shopping Club

### NR2 Covid Community Response

## t1 Strategies

## t2 Experiences

- Horizontality
- Coms
- Group care
- Alliances

- Community efficacy
- Wellbeing
- Burnout

- Group Identification
- Perceived support
- Community identity

Sustained participation



# Conclusions

1. Public responses to the pandemic have been key
2. Group processes are a significant part of public adherence
3. Government actions affect adherence by affecting group processes
4. It's not all psychology – practical, material factors are crucial (e.g., self-isolation)

# Readings

Mitigating the new variant SARS-CoV-2 virus: How to support public adherence to physical distancing

<https://blogs.sussex.ac.uk/crowdsidentities/2020/12/27/mitigating-the-new-variant-sars-cov-2-virus-how-to-support-public-adherence-to-physical-distancing/>

Independent SAGE briefing note on use of punishments in the Covid response

<https://www.independentsage.org/independent-sage-briefing-note-on-use-of-punishments-in-the-covid-response/>

# Contacts, acknowledgements, links

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## Groups & Covid:

<https://www.sussex.ac.uk/research/projects/groups-and-covid/>

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## Colleagues

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