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

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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.
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 4th: ‘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
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)
£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

Smith, L.E., et al. CORSAIR (18 Sept, 2020)
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
t1 Strategies
- Horizontality
- Coms
- Group care
- Alliances

t2 Experiences
- Community efficacy
- Wellbeing
- Burnout

Sustained participation
- Group Identification
- Perceived support
- Community identity
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

Independent SAGE briefing note on use of punishments in the Covid response
Contacts, acknowledgements, links

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Groups & Covid:
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