

PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

BACKGROUND OF CORONAVIRUS	3
STRATEGIES FOR MEASURING, MONITORING, AND CONTROLLING THE INCIDENCE OF CORONAVIRUS	3
LOCKDOWN	3
PHYSICAL/SOCIAL DISTANCING	4
CONTACT TRACING	4
HEALTH POLICY FOR INCIDENCE CONTROL	5
MODELS AND THEORIES OF HEALTH BEHAVIOUR CHANGE	6
SOCIAL COGNITIVE THEORY	6
THE THEORY OF REASONED ACTION/PLANNED BEHAVIOR	6
SELF-EFFICACY	6
IMPACT OF LEGISLATION AND POLICIES ON HEALTH OF INDIVIDUALS.....	7
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	8
RECOMMENDATIONS	8
CONCLUSION	9
REFERENCES	10

BACKGROUND OF CORONAVIRUS

The COVID-19 virus comes from coronavirus which belongs to the Coronaviridae family in the Nidovirales order and its name comes from the fact that the outer surface of the virus looks like a crown-like spike. Initially, the virus was predominant in animals but in 2019 there was an outbreak in Wuhan, China that changed the general perspective of the virus as humans of all ages were greatly affected and the virus spread to other parts of the World. According to (Shereen, et al., 2020), COVID-19 which has affected over 120,000 individuals recorded a mortality rate of 2.9% across 109 countries while the SRAS-CoV which infected 8098 individuals recorded a mortality rate of 9% across 26 countries in the world; therefore this makes the Covid-19 virus the most transmittable virus in history and this could be due to the genetic recombination event like the S protein in the RBD region of SARS-CoV-2. The COVID-19 virus tends to affect the lung and respiratory system which in the process causes pulmonary failure and severe acute respiratory problems that normally result in fatality.

STRATEGIES FOR MEASURING, MONITORING, AND CONTROLLING THE INCIDENCE OF CORONAVIRUS

LOCKDOWN

One of the first control measures that were implemented by the government in order to control the spread of the virus in the population was the lockdown order in which businesses, schools and places that usually attract crowds were shut down. The lockdown effect was mainly to reduce the amount of contact between individuals and control the movement of people in order to easily ascertain the migration of the virus within the population. According to (Violato, et al., 2021), studies carried out in different countries showed that there is a relative decrease in mortality rate caused by the virus because the related covid-19 cases showed a mortality of 2.0% (95% confidence interval -2.0% to 0.9%) daily. Research carried out by (Alfano & Ercolana, 2020) highlighted the importance of lockdown especially towards reducing the spread of COVID-19 contagion because the lockdown order caused a reduction in the number of affected 3 weeks after the initiation and the cases continued to decrease even 20 days later. This was a similar measure that was implemented by the Australian government, and they were very strict with the order because the lockdown remained longer than was seen in any other country. Compared to UK that eased the lockdown after few

months, Australia recorded a lower number of new cases and the virus was able to be contained because the government was focused on providing the best services to the affected ones.

PHYSICAL/SOCIAL DISTANCING

Physical distancing which was a term that was made popular during the outbreak of the virus as people were advised to maintain certain distances between themselves especially in the public in order to keep individuals within a secured distance of at least 6 feet from the spread of the virus. Social distancing involved the ability of people being able to stay in a secured space which is usually their home and away from people as possible and most communication processes involved the use of online video and phone communication. The implementation of this measure was beneficial to the control of the virus because the curve was able to flatten as individuals continued to maintain safe distances and reduced interaction mitigated the spread. The flattening of the curve was a resultant effect of the social/physical distancing because there were no new cases and people in the hospitals were mainly the already admitted people which means that fewer patients arrived at the hospital at a slower rate (Maragakis, 2020).

CONTACT TRACING

The contact tracing was employed by the government to provide active tracking of people that have shown symptoms of the virus and the people that they might have been in contact with in order to quarantine and self-isolate while waiting for the result of the test. According to (Eames & Keeling, 2004), contact tracing is an extreme form of control measure that is implemented in the battle against infectious diseases and it requires accurate modeling of contract tracing that would provide essential information that would enable the tracing of the disease-transmission pathways from each individual. The main advantage of contact tracing was the ability to easily identify potentially infected individuals before severe symptoms emerge and proactive measures after identification could prevent the onward transmission from the secondary cases (Keeling, et al., 2020). Contact tracing was employed by the government and they were able to trace the individuals who come in contact with infected individuals and further transmission of the disease from the secondary cases that came in contact with the infected could be controlled to mitigate the spread.

HEALTH POLICY FOR INCIDENCE CONTROL

The health policies that were implemented by the UK government were aimed at flattening and mitigating the spread of the virus as the medical communities seek an effective vaccine for the virus. The UK government responding to the Covid-19 outbreak in England by setting up a 3 phase policy which were containment (e.g. contact tracing, education for effective hand washing), delay (slow and flatten the peak of the outbreak to protect the NHS and give more time for research to develop effective tests, treatments and vaccines) and mitigation (the implementation of herd immunity in which the people are allowed to contact the virus and the antibodies are given the opportunity to develop resistance to it) (Calnan, 2020). The policies implemented by the UK government were further explained by (Wu, et al., 2021) especially the aggressive containment that was introduced to the communities in order to produce zero community transmission for more than 28 days and the strategy enabled a rapid reduction of the disease burden by lowering the covid-19 cases, deaths and risk of overwhelming the health system. Also the government implemented more drastic policies in order to reduce the number of infected people coming into the country by introducing border control measures which were a travel restriction for travelers from high-risk countries or required mandatory quarantine requirements. These policies were not popular with the population because their daily lives were interrupted and lifestyle changes were enforced. The travel ban was seen as an aggressive approach that targeted travelers from African countries and other poor or under-developed countries and this was criticized by affected countries who in turn applied the same policies in order to stop UK travelers coming into their own countries. Despite the negative impact of the policies, the approach applied by the government to contain and delay the spread of the virus were certainly effective because they were able to reduce the rate of transmission and control of the virus was easy through proper contact tracing.

MODELS AND THEORIES OF HEALTH BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

SOCIAL COGNITIVE THEORY

The social cognitive theory was developed by Thomas Bandura who conceptualized the influences on behavior that showed the concept of the person in terms of basic human capacities that are cognitive in nature. Application of the theory towards health behavior shows the ability of humans to develop techniques and lifestyle changes that would enable them in respect to prevention, health promotion and modification of unhealthy lifestyles for many different risk behaviors (Redding, et al., 2000). The SCT endeavors to explain the dynamic relationship between the individual, the environment, and behavior because the reciprocal determinism which is used in the theory enable the individual to choose between any of the factors, and the factors are determinants of each other.

THE THEORY OF REASONED ACTION/PLANNED BEHAVIOR

The theory of reasoned action is another theory that endeavors to explain human behavior toward health and this theory were mainly used to predict the characteristic behavior of people in order to provide clarity about their opinions on their health-related behaviors which include weight loss, smoking, alcohol abuse, HIV risk behaviors and mammography screening. The TRA was mainly designed to predict behavior from intention and proposes quasi-mathematical relationships between beliefs, attitudes, intentions and behavior (Redding, et al., 2000). The theory of reasoned action produces two assumptions which are behavior is under volitional control and people are rational beings. Despite the circumstances, the theory explains that the behavior of individuals is determined by them and they are regularly under control and people tend to compare and contrast situations/choices before making a decision.

SELF-EFFICACY

This is seen as the confidence an individual has in his or her own ability to successfully carry out a behavior that would be beneficial to their health. According to (Redding, et al., 2000), self-efficacy shows the ability of individuals to set on the right path despite opposing factors and it shows that individuals with low self-efficacy are most like to have a lower expectation of successfully performing a behavior and they are more prone to temptations that would deviate them from the right path. This theory would explain individuals' behavior to conform to the policies and regulations established by the government such as the social distancing and quarantine because people with low efficacy would find it hard to stay in their homes

during the lockdown order and they would tend to socialize with their family and friends despite the consequences.

IMPACT OF LEGISLATION AND POLICIES ON HEALTH OF INDIVIDUALS

One of the major impact of the legislation and policies on the individuals is loneliness especially during the physical/social distancing and lockdown order mandated by the government. The decline of interpersonal relationships and communication during the distancing rules increased the rates of loneliness among the population and this was detrimental to health and wellbeing of these individuals. According to (Groarke, et al., 2020), there was an increase in the rate of loneliness, and it increased the prevalence of mood disorders, self-harm, and suicide and exacerbate pre-existing mental health conditions. The increase in loneliness during the period shows that individuals despite the impending fear of contact the virus required human interaction that was beneficial to the mental health because there was an increase in suicide rates and attempts as most people felt disconnected from their friends and loved ones who acted as their coping mechanisms.

Another impact of legislation on the health of individuals is the increase of lifespan and this could be seen in the UK in which people tend to be living longer than was recorded in the past. This is essentially down to the effective health policies and legislation implemented by the government such as the NHS long-term plan in which the government has set out its priorities in improving the services of the healthcare systems and promoting better lifestyles among the individuals. The NHS long term plan endeavored to promote healthy lifestyles among the population by providing the necessary tools and provisions that would ensure they are able to eat healthy and carryout exercises that would keep the body at an optimum condition. The main aim of the long-term plan was to reduce the amount the NHS spends on medical care by reducing the number of people that are brought to the hospitals and in the process utilizing the available funds for dire health problems like cancers (NHS, 2019).

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Honesty and transparency are the essential ethical consideration for the implementation of policies by the government because the individuals would love to be assured knowing that the policies implemented were done to provide the best outcome for their health and wellbeing. The Covid-19 vaccines have been criticized by numerous anti-vaxxer who keep publicizing false messages and impact on individuals but the government has endeavored to be clear about the vaccines and proper education and clarity have been provided to guide the public in making their decisions. Also the government have ensured to respect the individual's rights and opinions by not enforcing the vaccines but the population are advised to take it due to the benefits it would impact on the general population and save the vulnerable people among us.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation would be made toward the duration of the lockdown and regulation because the quick dismissal of the physical distancing and lockdown order has been felt due to the increasing new cases and variants of the virus. According to (Haseltine, 2021), the immediate response of Australia towards the Covid-19 virus was quick closing of international borders and implementation of a mandatory home isolation program for every returning Australian citizen and the police were used to ensure that the directives were obeyed and people were in their houses. The proactive measures taken by the Australian government made other countries envious because they were able to control the surge of the virus during the second wave last year in which the affected never rose over 1000 for a population of 25.36 million and these were achieved without the use of vaccines,

Therefore the government would be advised to implement strict rules and provide accessories that would ensure the rules are obeyed and followed. Lockdown order could be detrimental to the economy of the country but the control of the spread of the virus would be more beneficial in the long run because the government would continue investing resources in order to seek active vaccines and protective measures against the virus.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the work was able to critically examine the recent developments in the health and social care policy especially the legislations and policies that affect the health and wellbeing of individuals. The impact of the novel coronavirus is still being felt since the first case was discovered in 2019 and individuals are still adapting to the lifestyle changes they were forced to implement in order to protect and mitigate the spread of the virus. The work was able to show the governing theory that could be used to evaluate human behavior towards changes in lifestyle such as the impact of COVID-19 policies on their lifestyle.

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