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Социальное поведение людей в пандемию COVID-19

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Аннотация. Цель исследования - раскрыть особенности проблем, связанных с социальным поведением людей в период пандемии и отношением людей к изменениям в условиях пандемии COVID-19. Научная новизна исследования заключается в выявлении специфических реакций людей на корона-вирус и классификации социальных оценок отношений к пандемии по субъективным и объективным основаниям. В результате исследования авторы аргументировали и доказали мысль о том, что люди к пандемии и вакцинации против неё испытывают противоречивые чувства, с одной стороны, страх и скепсис, а с другой - необоснованную надежду на то, что все само урегулируется. В работе раскрыта особая роль СМИ и социальных сетей в деле борьбы с пандемией. Авторы выражают уверенность в том, что для преодоления пандемии в мире необходимы сплоченность и солидарность.

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Peoples' Social Behaviour during COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract. The paper tackles the following issues: peoples' social behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic and public attitude towards restrictions caused by it. The authors describe individual reactions to the pandemic and classify social attitudes towards the pandemic situation, which constitutes the scientific originality of the study. The conducted research allows drawing the following conclusions: people manifest contradictory attitudes towards the COVID 19 pandemic and the COVID 19 vaccines - on the one hand, fear and scepticism, and, on the other hand, unreasonable hope that everything will settle down. The article reveals the key role of the mass media and social networks in struggle against the pandemic. The authors argue that coping with the coronavirus pandemic requires international solidarity and cooperation.

Introduction

The relevance of the study is determined by the serious changes that have occurred in people's lives due to the spread of COVID-19 around the world. This virus has grown into an unusually large pandemic, against which most countries have been fighting for two years. In this regard, people's way of life has changed, which can lead to changes in their material status, their views of life; moral values have changed as well.

The awareness of the ongoing pandemic in the world caused fear and anxiety among a lot of people. Mankind was not ready for such global and drastic changes, which caused confusion and shock in society. However, the onset, the rapid spread of the pandemic across countries and the increase in deaths require in-depth analysis, study of all aspects of the disease and the social behaviour of people during the pandemic. A scientific research of all the problems associated with the pandemic is necessary to develop effective methods of struggle, strategies and tactics, as well as to minimize the negative consequences of COVID on a person, his health, society, economy and life in general. It is quite possible to agree with A. Chakraborty and A. Shaw that they consider the coronavirus as an existential threat to humanity: "Now, the enormous human and economic toll of the rapidly spreading COVID-19 disease offers a vivid reminder that infectious disease pandemics are one of the greatest existential threats to humanity" (<https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/viruses-pandemics-and-immunity-1>).

The aforementioned aim determines the solution of the following specific tasks: 1) to understand and to recognize the current situation in the world in connection with the pandemic; 2) to analyse the behaviour of people and their reactions to what is happening; 3) to study what factors influence the consciousness of people and the development of their attitude towards the pandemic in order to develop the right strategy for pandemic response.

The study uses the following research methods: logical and philosophical analysis, which reveals the essence of the analysed problems, and the scientific method of an empirical level, which makes it possible to assess the situation in the world associated with the pandemic.

The theoretical background of the study is the scientific works of specialists from various fields of science who study the social, psychological and other aspects of this issue: for example, such scientists as E. I. Pervichko et al. (<https://psy.su/feed/8475/>), M. E. Pestova, A. E. Safonov (2020), R. Harris (2002), L. Zakharova, D. Yudchits (<https://www.kp.ru/putevoditel/zdorove/koronavirus/otkuda-vzyalsya-koronavirus/>), J. Gans (<https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/economics-age-covid-19>; <https://mitpress.mit.edu/contributors/joshua-gans>), etc.

The practical value of the work lies in the potential application of the research results on people's attitudes towards the COVID-19 pandemic to prevent such a situation in the future.

Originally, an outbreak of COVID-19 diseases was recorded in December 2019 in China, the city of Wuhan, and it began to spread around the world in the shortest possible time. "Such outbreaks of diseases caused specifically by coronaviruses have been occurring periodically for a long time, and the mortality rate from some of them was higher than from the last epidemic in 2019," writes biotechnologist Denis Yudchits (<https://www.kp.ru/putevoditel/zdorove/koronavirus/otkuda-vzyalsya-koronavirus/>). For the first time, the new coronavirus caused such an epidemic, which engulfed numerous states and countries. The obscurity of the virus, the speed of its spread and the results of the disease in society caused confusion and panic. The socio-psychological situation was aggravated by the fact that scientifically unfounded information about the virus varied in the media, thus confusing the public.

The panic caused by the pandemic forced governments to take urgent measures for the coronavirus prevention. Almost all countries closed their borders, placed densely populated areas under a full lockdown, imposed a ban on mass gatherings of people, closed cultural and leisure institutions, theatres, and museums. The education process was conducted online. As for business and industry, they suffered huge losses.

Along with the search for medical supplies and a vaccine against the coronavirus, governments began to take additional measures (<https://psy.su/feed/8475/>), introducing restrictions, mask requirements and tightening quarantine measures. However, it was not enough; the nature of a person and his psyche required additional measures in order to realize the tragedy and seriousness of the situation and understand what needed to be done in this situation, and what models of social behaviour would be the most effective, leading to solidarity and cohesion. In this regard, the role of the media is enormous, but it will be discussed later.

The pandemic that is destroying people's lives, confusing people's minds, businesses, etc., demonstrates how strong and competent governments are. All the steps taken by governments, the effectiveness of the measures taken by them will be adequately assessed later, after a certain time. There is also no doubt that the consequences of the pandemic for the global economy will be serious, while it is impossible to accurately determine their scale at this stage, but it is already quite obvious that the world community will have a hard time.

Results and Discussion

People's Attitudes towards the Coronavirus and Assessments of the General Situation

From the very first days of the COVID-19 onset, the doubt arose in the minds of people that this virus really existed. The majority of people believed that the virus was invented to create "artificial" panic. This circumstance and scepticism among people were interpreted in different ways. Some argued that the virus was invented in order to control the minds of people and control their actions; others were sure that such a situation was created by the leaders of some countries to prevent social and political unrest. Still others believed that the coronavirus was invented for business to make money on the creation and sale of vaccines, etc.

The fear of the epidemic spread opens up the possibility for the authorities to use any restrictive measures, total control or prohibition of any actions, including protest ones, referring to the "difficult epidemiological situation". In addition, in the fight against the invisible enemy in the face of COVID-19, officials have a chance to position themselves in front of society as good leaders, to emphasize the effectiveness of their work.

The noted opinions are untenable, because, firstly, the authorities are not ready to take such drastic measures to create a quarantine situation, closing the borders, causing the economic decline in the country and destroying the social foundations of millions of citizens in order to control the population. Secondly, vaccination in all countries is basically free of charge for their citizens. Such a distortion of worldview and mass consciousness only aggravates the overall socio-psychological situation and reduces the effectiveness of the pandemic response.

The widespread public opinion shows that people do not believe in what is happening because they do not have a full awareness of the situation that civilization is facing. A certain shock state of people remains. In the society, there is still not enough understanding of the need to comply with social norms and established rules, that everyone is responsible not only for themselves, but also for others (Харрис, 2002). It takes time to comprehend the "COVID-reality" that has come, which acts against a person and humanity.

The patterns of people's thinking are such that a person compares everything new with what is already known, finds similarities and differences, and thus tries to comprehend the new. This is what happens with the coronavirus. The history of civilization shows that there have already been such epidemics, including those from the "corona" group with various strains. All these near-philosophical arguments are superficial and not substantiated, but in reality, COVID-19 differs significantly from all familiar viruses in terms of its characteristics, spread rate, etc.

Some of the media began to use the natural feeling of fear of the pandemic as a means to manipulate the behaviour and consciousness of people (it will be discussed later). Fear of losing a job and livelihood, loved ones, freedom of movement, etc. undermines the human psyche, causes outbreaks of discontent, distrust, and destroys the usual way of life and the world order.

People's Attitudes towards Vaccination

The incidence of coronavirus infection remains at a high level to this day; it develops and “explodes” in waves. One of the necessary and effective methods of pandemic response, and according to many scientists and physicians, the only way to protect people from the virus, is vaccination (<https://www.medicina.ru/press-tsentr/statyi/chtounuzhno-znat-o-vaktsine-i-vaktsinatsii-ot-koronavirusa/>), the development of immunity against COVID-19.

Despite the fact that there is enough information about the importance and necessity of vaccination in society, nevertheless, 70% of Russians are against vaccination. The same socio-psychological situation is typical of many countries. What is the reason for such an attitude towards vaccination?

In our opinion, the reasons for what is happening are the lack of confidence in hastily created vaccines, the lack of scientifically based information on the consequences of vaccination, as well as the increase in deaths after vaccination in different countries. People are at a loss, doctors claim that vaccination is the only salvation from the disease, while the media point to an increase in death statistics after vaccination and publish its terrifying consequences. When it comes to life and its threat, and this threat is associated with vaccination and its consequences, then, naturally, a person prefers to refuse vaccination and unreasonably believes that the epidemic will pass him by. Of course, this approach is wrong and dangerous. Vaccination continues to be a vexed issue, fuelled by scepticism and perpetuated by concerns about the body's response to vaccination, and not just to COVID. In society, there is a fairly strong attitude to refuse or at least abstain from vaccination.

It is a mistake to think that everything will resolve itself without the assistance of a person. Naivety and unfounded hope do not help to improve the COVID situation, but only worsen it. Just talking and arguing about the current situation in the world will not lead to the problem solution. Only awareness of the complexity of life and the danger of the pandemic, as well as practical, reasonable and effective actions against the virus, will help people defeat it.

The Influence of the Media on the Consciousness of Society and Understanding of the Pandemic

One of the most powerful methods of joint and effective virus and pandemic response is the media. This so-called “fourth estate” plays a significant role in social development in general and especially in such extreme situations as we have today all over the world. Thanks to the media, information about the state of affairs in the world and in the country has been and is being brought to the attention of society. The media have shown the seriousness of this situation in the country, introducing people into all the details of this disease.

However, one can see cases of some media's irresponsible attitude to this situation. There are a lot of different publications on the Internet with incorrect and unfounded information, after reading which people get confused and embarrassed. Such publications, mixed with scientifically proven or unproven information, confuse people and form incorrect conclusions about the state of affairs. At the same time, similar negative events help our society realize which media are the most reliable; they help people understand that information should be taken only from official, verified sources. An increase in control over specific information promoted in social networks is considered inevitable, taking into account all the “powers” of social networks to promote incorrect information aimed at the formation of negative social views. In this case, it is necessary that control is extended to certain individuals who take steps that are inconsistent with national ethics.

The media also have taken on a manipulative and managerial function, influencing our cultural and socio-psychological values, changing our attitudes, behaviours and perceptions of reality. Forming myths and stereotypes, the media actively use the mechanism of “public perception” (<https://texterra.ru/blog/smi-i-koronavirus-spros-nanovosti-vyros-no-biznes-rukhnul.html>). Those people, who are unable to resist their own consciousness, become the object of information aggression or information war, when the media are trying to persuade them to a subjective point of view set by some groups. It is also happening with the coronavirus (Харрис, 2002).

At the moment, the dominating topic of discussion in the media around the world is coronavirus. It is discussed in every form of mass media, from radio and periodicals to television and the Internet. This topic is continuously covered by the world media (Пестрова, 2020, с. 168-170). This approach has become the reason that in front of listeners' and viewers' eyes the impression of a global catastrophe is created. There occurs a feeling of insecurity, apathy and confidence that the coronavirus can overcome any obstacles; that it is practically invincible, and humanity will have to live with it.

Since the virus began to actively progress and is still spreading in waves of varying intensity, decline and activation, the media do not stop discussing this topic. Some of them began to turn all the information into a shock sensation, began to spread panic in society. Such publications turned into a media attack, which led to fear and doubt about what was happening. As a result, this negatively affects people, since they do not know who to trust.

The fears that are exacerbated by the media and instilled in people's psyche, result in the perception of the coronavirus in the mind of a person as some kind of infernal “hellish” threat that can reach everyone, and it is impossible to save people from it, because the army and the police are also powerless here. And this is the way to unconscious or even deliberately exacerbated mass psychosis. As modern psychology says, psychosis, which is based on fear, is as dangerous as the epidemic itself. The fact is that people seized by psychosis are not able to soberly assess the reality that has arisen and begin to get lost in search of salvation from the virus “directed towards them”. The minds of such people are easier to control.

The spread of psychosis in the information space can be compared to the spread of the epidemic through a virus. In the pandemic, the virus infects a human body, and in psychosis, the “information virus” passes from one person's

thinking to another through emotional contagion. The instrument of infection with psychosis is information disseminated on social networks. When receiving such information through instant messengers, those communicating are emotionally loaded, “infected” with panic, fear, and “infect” with them those people to whom they send this information among their communication group. As a result, negative attitudes, fear and panic quickly spread to large audiences, and the number of “infected” grows exponentially. It is this method of sending resonant information that is called viral, and the technology for spreading such information is called a viral technology. The so-called fake news, which has a strong hold over the minds of gullible people, plays a negative role in creating a difficult psychological atmosphere during the pandemic. This situation in society has already found its name – “exaggerated viral hysteria”.

In conclusion, we should note that the post-pandemic world order in the history of civilization is a completely familiar phenomenon. The change in models and paradigms of the world order after the epidemics correlated with the change of eras from Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance to the New Age and the Modernity. It can already be said that the COVID-19 pandemic will also leave its mark on the history of mankind, but the question is in which direction the changes will go, and what the post-pandemic civilization will become.

Conclusion

As a result of the analysis, we have come to the following conclusions:

- there is still no adequate awareness of the corona-reality that has been emerged in the world, humanity will need time for it;
- each person has a different attitude towards the COVID-19 pandemic: some are afraid of the unknown, others are sceptical and distrustful, while still others naively hope that everything will resolve itself; behavioural models in society are selected spontaneously;
- opinions about vaccination vary greatly and people cannot come to a consensus;
- the media themselves contribute to uncertainty, giving ambiguous, sometimes unverified, and even “viral” information purposefully;
- the world will not overcome the pandemic without unity and solidarity.

This work may be useful in the field of studying people’s lives in the pandemic in order to consider the current situation in more detail, to predict the vector of world development in the post-pandemic era.

In the future, this work will be continued and may become a methodological guide for the research aimed at in-depth study of the socio-philosophical problems associated with the pandemic.

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