

How Can Social Cohesion Be Fostered During the Covid-19 Pandemic?

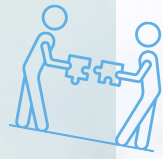
What is social cohesion and polarization?

Social Cohesion

- Degree of trust that the members of society have in each other and the society that they inhabit, as well as their willingness to cooperate, demonstrated through voluntary actions that are in accordance with social norms
- The degree to which certain ideals, such as equitable distribution of wealth, are present in a certain society

Polarization

- Degree of ideological differentiation among political parties
- The extent to which citizens view each other as a “disliked out-group”

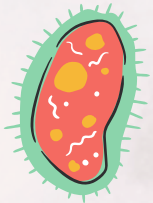


How can social cohesion be fostered in general?

- Members of the society have to feel a sense of belonging and unity with the other individuals in their community
- For social cohesion to function, members of modern society should repress their individualistic interests in favour of an integrated and inclusive community
- Through individual choices, each citizen makes in terms of the (un)willingness to restrict one's individual freedom to limit the spread of COVID-19 and hence show solidarity with risk groups

Problems during the pandemic

- Different opinions on the severity of the pandemic and the effective measures against it
- Lack of information, contradictory statements from authorities
- Protests against the government measures
- Skeptical against vaccination, conspiracy theories
- Lack of social contacts → increased psychological problems
- Increased economic divergences



Survey Participant Sample

- 152 people: 111 Germans, 8 Dutch, 6 Belgians
- 62% female, 36% male
- 88 living in Germany 47 in the Netherlands
- Over 70% of the participants are students between the ages of 18 to 25 years, 25% between 26 and 77
- Over 60% have secondary school diploma, 12.4% have bachelor's degree, 15.7% have masters degree, 4.6% have a PhD and 6.5% have not completed secondary education
- Most participants are leftist or centrist



Quantitative Data Analysis

- Students with and without a part-time job indicated to adhere significantly less to the guidelines compared to working people
- People who lost their job as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic adhere significantly less to the guidelines than those who kept their job
- Participants that adhere more to the guidelines also indicated that they deem a focus on the reduction on the spread as more important. On the other hand, people that indicated adhering less to the guidelines, prioritize supporting the economy
- Participants who have a higher level of the understanding of the guidelines also tend to adhere more to these guidelines
- Participants that have a higher level of understanding of the guidelines put more emphasis on reducing the spread
- Lower understanding of the purpose of the guidelines goes along with a more conspiracy-leaning attitude, which also goes along with a prioritization of the economy, as well as less adherence to the guidelines
- People that are more susceptible to believing in conspiracy theories also have a lower understanding of guidelines
- Dutch residents perceive the curfew as significantly less appropriate than their German counterparts



Qualitative Data Analysis

- The main types of sources used were relatively unbiased and legitimate, using scientific data, however some, respondents received their information regarding Covid-19 from less reliable sources
- Around 12% of respondents indicated that they were not planning to get vaccinated or were unsure about whether they would be vaccinated
- People in general were dissatisfied with how the government is handling of the Covid-19 pandemic
- People in general gave scientific and legitimate reasons for of the origin of the pandemic, however some respondents gave less scientific, conspiratorial reasons
- Generally, the reasons for the quick spread of the Covid-19 virus were: non-adherence to the Covid-19 measures, improper governmental handling,, “globalization”, “transport/travelling”, “high infectiousness of the virus”, “mutations”



Clear divergences in opinions regarding key aspects related to the pandemic which is a sign of **polarization**

Clear divergences in the behaviour of participants which is a sign of lack of **social cohesion**

There is significant evidence for a relation between **polarization** and **social cohesion**.
Polarization negatively impacts **social cohesion** in the context of the **Covid-19 pandemic**



Solutions to improve the handling of the pandemic, decrease polarization and foster Social Cohesion

Advice for the governments to limit the spread of the virus through more efficient testing and vaccination programmes an increase social cohesion

- Establish more vaccination centres so people can easily get the vaccine without too much bureaucracy
- People distrust politicians → use people liked by the society (e.g. celebrities) to make vaccination more appealing and combat hesitancy



Advice for the governments on the improvement of formulating and communicating measures

- Provide a more transparent overview of measures by using technology: dedicated applications and websites with clear timelines
- Better financial compensation for people who lost their jobs → increased following of measures since they will worry less about their economic situation

Usage of best practices in different countries



Digitalized healthcare system → speed the vaccination process up and allcoate the vaccines efficently



Granting more loans and instituting payment-deferral extensions



Use pool testing → faster testing and reduced PCR test shortages



Extensive public health network → quick testing, quarantining, and contact-tracing → leading to a Covid-19 free community without a lockdown. Partner up with telecommunications companies to enforce quarantine through mobile location tracing



Use of genomic sequencing and epidemiology effectively → allows the identification of who gave the virus to whom and in which environment



Have prior legislation in place (such as the Epidemic Preparedness Act of 2006 in NZL) that would empower the government with temporary powers



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