

A Socio-Psychological Perspective on Flattening the COVID-19 Curve.

Description

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Abstract

In the fight against the COVID-19 outbreak, slowing the spread of the virus (flattening the curve) ultimately depends on citizen participation and community engagement in public health measures such as social distancing and self-isolation. To ensure effective citizen participation in such measures, countries need to adopt public health policies and protocols that are aligned with their culture and underlying societal values. Using Hofstede's cultural dimensions framework as a basis of comparison with other countries, Canada constitutes a low power-distance and short-term orientation culture, and Canadians exhibit high individualism and indulgence attitudes. These cultural traits can help explain various types of unscrupulous public behaviours such as panic buying and hoarding, and nonconformity with social distancing guidelines. This paper highlights the implications of socio-psychological cultural traits for community engagement and public health practice, and outlines examples of non-pharmaceutical public health measures that are relevant in the Canadian context. Some of these measures include improving specificity of situational information in public health messaging, developing a public health strategy that combines compassion and competence, implementing stringent social distancing measures with penalties for non-abidance, applying enhanced and longer-lasting restrictions over entertainment and recreational venues, expanding the use of e-Public health interventions including mobile applications and social media for tailored public health education and advisories, and using innovative infodemiology and infoveillance tools and best practices.

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