

Covid Online National Survey

Background and Preliminary Work

Summary

This project builds on a three-decade collaboration involving research partners in Africa, Asia, and Latin America as well as National Science Foundation (NSF) supported research on Zika and Ebola. We will be the U.S. wing of a ten country comparative study seeking to examine how social, political, and economic contexts shape responses to disease. Specifically, the component of the project for which funding is being sought will support an online survey exploring personal precautions and understandings of recommendations from health and government officials related to Covid19 and actions taken in response.

Description

This project is a collaboration with an NSF funded project exploring responses to Covid19 in ten countries that includes 50 face to face interviews in each country (Kenya, Ghana, India, UK, US, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, China, Turkey). This proposal, with its focus on a US sample, adds a significant comparison point. It includes a demographically balanced (region/race/gender) online survey of 10,000 US residents conducted using Alchemer software.

Research questions

The survey protocol is written and has been entered into Alchemer, one of the leading platforms for conducting online surveys. Broadly, survey responses will allow us to answer the following questions:

Recommendations: What were respondents told to do/not do? The importance of formal and informal sources of information for making decisions are weighed differently across groups and contexts and vary based on trust in public institutions and media. Understanding what respondents were told to do to prevent contraction and spread and by whom will provide insight to policy makers on how better to work with informal and possibly contradictory sources to ensure the recommendations and reasons for them are clearer.

Risk, safety, and effectiveness: How do respondents assess effectiveness of recommendations in terms of preventing spread? Below a certain threshold of cooperation on the part of the public, recommendations simply don't work for community safety. This survey will provide policy makers with insight into how the public interprets and understands recommendations and why.

Actions: Based on formal and informal recommendations and how these recommendations were assessed, what precautions were taken and how frequently did respondents do them? In order for policy makers to better respond to a variety of public emergencies (from communicable disease to protests and riots), it is essential to know not only what actions people take but why. Fear that actions on the part of the medical community and government are part of a secret agenda or simply incompetence ensures that any information, no matter why rooted in science or research, will not be incorporated into courses of action.

Hardships: How burdensome were certain actions? Using the lessons learned from interview results related to responses to Ebola and Zika in Africa and South America, we know that the

more burdensome the actions or prohibitions are and the longer they last, the less willing people will be to do them again. Might it be useful for policy makers to know if people in all countries said wearing face masks was too burdensome or if we notice differences in what different groups found to be burdensome or effective.

Research Setting, Methods, and Data

A combination of structured surveys and semi-structured interviews will be employed. The combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques will ensure we can both make systematic comparisons across groups of people, and also provide a more nuanced understanding of people's anxieties, fears, and behaviors.

Additionally, 50 semi-structured interviews will be completed with respondents drawn from nurses, teachers, unemployed, and small businesspersons. This will be approximately one hour in length and will focus on the same set of issues explored in the survey, permitting a more in-depth investigation. When possible, interviews will be face-to-face. Zoom or Blackboard Collaborate will also be used for respondents who are not local and in the event that Covid19 prevents close contact.

Dissemination

Public Talks: A presentation will be scheduled in the late spring semester of 2021. *Academic Conferences and Presentations:* Findings will also be presented at the annual meetings of the Wisconsin Sociological Society in Stevens Point, WI; the Midwest Sociological Society in Des Moines, Iowa. Students will present posters at the annual Fall Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity Gala on the home campus of the PI. *Academic Journals:* Finally, results will be submitted to academic journals. The PI and Co-PI's have strong publication records, individually and in collaboration. Undergraduate students attending the PI's home institution who assist with the interviews will be incorporated as co-authors.