

RESEARCHERS BOOTCAMP

THEME 3: THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN ALLEVIATING THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

PURPOSE: To examine the role that culture has played in affecting government and everyday responses to COVID-19.

EDUCATION RESEARCHERS RESPOND TO LOCKDOWN



DATE

30 March – 30 April



NUMBER OF RESEARCHERS

10



APPROACH

Desktop research



AUDIENCE

Policy makers, Department of Basic Education, Funders, Civil Society



COUNTRIES RESEARCHED

Japan, Iran, Italy, South Africa, United States



PLATFORMS USED

Google Hangout
Google Forms
WhatsApp

FINDINGS

In all countries governments increased their level of communication with citizens, providing guidance, information and reassurance and in some cases, inviting the public to comment in advance on actions to be taken.

Through social media, citizens responded to COVID-19 and its measures with humour, shock, disappointment and confusion, but also spread misinformation and conspiracy theories.

Japan's health-conscious and compliant citizenry, and Iran's Islamic emphasis on personal hygiene, may have contributed to the success of measures put in place to manage the pandemic.

The closure of places of worship engendered varying reactions, from Papal displeasure, to Iranian protests, to South African legal challenges.

Cultural practices and beliefs vary within and between societies and must inform the responses to pandemics, recessions and other crises in order for them to be effective.

Italy's strong family ties, with extended family members living together and family members caring for the ill, and America's sharp political fault-lines and resistance to social distancing in the name of personal liberties, may have been their biggest weaknesses during the pandemic.

The success and extent of government regulations, such as social distancing and the closure of educational institutions, businesses and places of worship, strongly depended upon each country's existing cultural and social practices.

South Africa's lockdown, one of the strictest in the world, coupled with its spirit of Ubuntu, may have helped to reduce or mitigate the rate of infection.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Greater government and citizen awareness of and sensitivity to cultural nuances would make interventions and responses more effective.

The higher the levels of trust and transparency between a government and its citizens, the more effective its anti-COVID-19 restrictions, and the less effective the spread of misinformation, is a hypothesis that could be tested.

The respective influence of social independence (individualism) and interdependence (collectivism) within and between different cultures on efforts to combat COVID-19 should be investigated.

Further research should explore the cultural nuances of the educational experiences of learners, parents and teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown so that requisite transformative practices can be rendered more sensitive.

It would be useful to develop mechanisms through which measures and approaches from other countries can be more rapidly learnt, contextualised and applied in local settings.

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