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ANTH 231

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*Assignment 3 - COVID 19 Reflection*



1. **IMPACTS OF COVID**

COVID-19 has been a life-changing experience for most of us. For my family and me, the adverse effects of COVID have outweighed the positive impacts. My family back in Ecuador has faced significant economic losses. In particular, my parents' businesses, a shrimp farm, have all been negatively affected by the pandemic and caused substantial financial losses. This economic crisis is contributing to rising levels of stress among the family, including me. My dad's lifestyle has radically changed since he used to travel a lot for his job, but now he is attempting to work remotely through media platforms. My mom was forced to stop her recently launched business due to the lockdown, and my sister is now taking online classes. The city where they live is still implementing lockdown policies to keep social activities as safe as possible. Thus, COVID has certainly brought high levels of uncertainty and scarcity worldwide.

However, I believe that COVID has also served unexpected positive outcomes on a collective level, such as valuing our health, our families, and life overall. I will expand on these later on.

1. **INFORMATION OUTLETS**

Throughout the pandemic, I have relied on a variety of source materials from different countries. The country I was looking at dictated which sources I trusted or not. For Canada, I relied on the official government website to keep track of rising case numbers. However, in Ecuador, I did have some trust issues with the official government, so I relied on local news outlets such as *Ecuavisa*. I trust this news channel because it has been around for the longest time, and they were consistent in posting reports on social media every day, which was quite convenient for someone like me who did not have access to the national tv channels.

In contrast, the official government website posted numbers that were disconnected to those that the community had. For example, the government reported almost half of the casualties that the local news did. The severity of the situation that people and medical staff were saying deferred to what the government reported. I established trust in Ecuador's local news rather than on the government website because the former's numbers matched what local people were experiencing. Overall, people created this mindset of 'the higher the number of casualties, the more legitimate the source is.’

1. **COVID IMPACTS ON DAILY ROUTINE AND CHALLENGES**

The most prominent aspect in which COVID has impacted my daily routine is education. For school, however, I had avoided taking online classes in the past because I liked the social interaction that in-person classes provided me. For me, online classes were not the 'whole' experience of learning. Also, COVID forced us to shift classes to remote delivery, so I had to buy a new laptop for this new semester because I knew my old laptop would not be fast enough to perform throughout the whole day. This expense felt heavier than usual due to the economic tension that my family is experiencing.

Regarding my social life pre-pandemic, I did not use to go out to restaurants or clubs as much with friends, so I did not see a radical impact in that aspect. However, I miss the daily social interaction that I used to have with people before the pandemic. Simple daily activities such as talking to the cashier while ordering my coffee at Tim Hortons or talking to the person in front of me in the line at Harvey's are things that I took for granted and wish to experience them again without concerns.

One of the biggest challenges for me has been keeping an active lifestyle. When it comes to my daily routine, COVID did not allow me to remain physically active during the lockdown. I went from going to the gym every day to trying a home workout twice a week if I was in a good mood or had time. Before the pandemic, I spent the whole day on campus walking around and carrying heavy book bags, but now, I barely get out of my home. Currently, going on grocery trips almost feels like a social hangout or workout instead of an errand. Now that the cold weather has started, it will be even more challenging to go for a walk if I need to clear my mind and/or exercise. When it comes to going to public places, to the grocery store, sometimes I still forget to keep the 6 meters distance, and I would get reactions from annoyed people. By now, most people have gotten used to the 'new normal' situation that involves practicing social distance and wearing masks. However, sometimes I still forget to bring my face mask with me, and I have to go back home to get it because that is the only way I would feel comfortable running errands outside home.

1. **NEGATIVE IMPACTS**

Besides the concern about high mortality rates worldwide, another prominent issue has arisen cultural segregation towards the Asian community and their customs. I have seen many opinions stigmatizing wet markets in Asia by comparing the emergence of infectious diseases, COVID in this case, to[MK5] the SARS outbreak, which also appeared in China's meat market. People from different cultures have criticized the existence of wet markets and even labelled them as a threat to human health. This labelling is highly problematic because it undermines the symbolic meaning of certain customs such as wet markets. Stigmatization of cultural traditions also imposes western exceptionalism by suggesting a different approach to food production and distribution.

Furthermore, COVID has negatively affected many people's mental health and has increased stress levels worldwide. The frustration of seeing so many fatalities happening worldwide, along with the inability to make a change, have put much weight on people's shoulders. To worsen the situation, financial and job losses represent an extra concern for people who did not have savings to provide for their families. As a result, the pandemic has caused constant uncertainty and desperation around the globe. Many of us wonder when this situation will end and whether our lives will go back to normal even after a year or two.

Lastly, a concern of mine due to COVID is waste production and its impact on the environment. Because of COVID, the use of disposable products such as masks has increased. Single-use face masks lying on the ground have become common when going for a walk to the park on the way to the store. This also means that most of these non-biodegradable products are likely to end up in the ocean or sitting in landfills for the next few years.

1. **POSITIVE OUTCOMES**

While COVID has created several negative impacts worldwide, it has also created unforeseen benefits for society. First, lockdown limited human movement by forcing people to stay in to avoid contagions. During these lockdowns, I have noticed that people have reflected on their life priorities, for example, the importance of upkeeping our health and creating stronger bonds with our families and close friends. Reflections like this serve as a tool to improve people's well-being by raising social awareness around maintaining personal relationships.

Another unexpected positive outcome of COVID is that it has marked a turning point in technology. Activities involving travelling long distances, such as going to work or school, have now compressed into a single click, allowing people to save both money and time in transportation. Along with job losses, many people turned to alternative ways to make money online. Education has also faced a turning point since geography is no longer an obstacle for students worldwide to access classes typically offered just for a specific demographic.

Moreover, now that this pandemic has had far-reaching impacts in the west, there has been more focus on the lack of medical facilities and their size and technology limitations. Perhaps this awareness will help shift the emphasis on investing more money into the medical sector in the coming years. Besides, COVID has changed our social responses and behaviours towards hygiene and the importance of disinfection to prevent the spread of viruses and diseases. Lastly, an unexpected positive outcome of the pandemic was reducing greenhouse emissions and pollution, notably in massive countries such as China.

1. **CONCERNS AND HOPES**

Since the pandemic started, the international community has shared the hope of a possible vaccine that prevents people from getting the virus, which would lower the mortality poll. Overall, many people worldwide wish things to go back to normal soon to 'continue' with our lives. I realize that this pandemic has become a 'pause' in our lives because it has impeded us from living as usual.

On the other hand, one of the most significant concerns I have is the prevalence of COVID as an infectious disease, such as Ebola. In other words, we likely have to get used to living with the virus around us permanently. This could represent a constant threat to the health of many vulnerable communities that might not have access to health facilities and medicine. A possible vaccine could undermine this danger. However, the question revolves around the vaccine's accessibility for everyone in terms of price and location.

1. **CONNECTION TO THE COURSE**

This course helps understand how communities deal with diseases, in this case, COVID. The first part of the course explained the fundamental association between culture and the subjective experience of treating diseases. For example, the locus on health and the mindful body are helpful discourses that explain our reactions towards the virus. To illustrate this, in Latin America, I saw a tendency towards using holistic approaches to treat the virus. For example, at the beginning of the lockdown, when people began to worry about catching the virus, I heard someone was recommending drinking whisky so that the alcohol could 'kill' the virus on your throat. Simultaneously, many casualties in Ecuador happened because people did not trust the medical system. Even though they experienced the symptoms, they decided to stay at home to 'die at peace. ' The mistrust of both the political authorities and the medical system was prevalent among many Latin American countries, which might have contributed to even higher mortality rates in that region.

Besides, the course content provides us significant concepts such as the sick role and how it has been present among the pandemic phases or waves, from the separation of the typical social role to reincorporation to the new normal. Plus, the course has touched upon the difference between illness and disease, which helps us categorize the mental impacts of COVID vs. when people have gotten infected with the virus.

 The social determinants of health, such as cultural traditions, living standards, education, and age, are also an important topic to consider when examining the different contagion patterns worldwide. Ecuador had one of the highest infections and mortality rates. Contrary to the connection that some people have created between higher levels of capitalism and higher rates of infections, anthropology examines other social factors that might explain this issue. For example, how social celebrations of certain countries aligned to the spread of the virus. I think the pandemic provides an opportunity for a more in-depth analysis of how some regions and cultures were affected more than others. Also, COVID allows us to consider how infectious diseases such as the current pandemic can change virtually all life sectors, including technology, mental health, health care, and education.

Lastly, the section on re-emerging infectious diseases is especially important to understand the lessons acquired in past epidemics and diseases like SARS. Such lessons have shaped our current approaches to the treatment and management of COVID. At the same time, this narrative warns us about the possible factors that undermine the potential re-emergence of COVID in the years to come.