ADRU
Academy of the
Disaster Research Unit

INCREASE
Health
Corona

INCREASE-HEALTH-CORONA: WORKSHOP PROTOCOL

REAL TIME EVALUATION OF GLOBAL ACTIONS IN RESPONSE TO THE SARS COV 2 PANDEMIC & IDENTIFICATION OF BEST PRACTICES TO STRENGTHEN HEALTH SYSTEMS IN IRAN AND GERMANY

Rationale:

The international exchange between technical experts on evolving strategies, technological and medical solutions and the discussion of gaps and challenges but also the identification of best practices and sharing of experiences in the response to the SARS Cov 2 pandemic are at the forefront of the workshops organized by the Academy of the Disaster Research Unit at the Free University of Berlin.

The workshop protocols are documenting the conversational course with an emphasis on key findings rather than as word for word transcript. All participants will have had the opportunity to review and comment on the draft version of the workshop protocols prior to their publication

Workshop № 02, date: 22.09.2020

Workshop Topic:

Community engagement, risk communication and community perceptions in times of a global Pandemic

Moving onward from the clinical and public health discussion of the previous workshop we are turning towards key questions pertaining engaging with communities, understanding community perceptions, and tailoring risk communication towards strategies that communicate risks and mobilize communities to engage in controlling an outbreak.

Key highlights

- Ground for communication has to be build before the actual crisis
- Communication messages must be clear, structured and easily accessible (importance of free access to information)
- Communication agencies have to display empathy, transparency and expertise to gain and maintain people's trust
- narratives that are adapted to concerns and fears in the population will most likely result in changing behaviour
- Relevant communication chanels are variating very much between countries; communication is very situational and one needs to adapt to it
- "one voice policy" is not always the best option in crisis communication
- Availability of data collected by national institutions is important for further research on crisis management

- Communication barriers regarding certain communitites in society have to be taken more into account

Follow up

- Public trust in govermental information
- Plans for vaccine in the future
- Public participation and volunteer management in Germany and Iran
- Prolonged risk communication
- Socially vulnerable groups in the pandemic
- Individual and community resilience

Follow up workshop subjects:

- Communication and social trust

→ Finding concrete solutions for the discussed topics, connecting to relevent institutions

- Vulnerable groups and language barriers

Detailed summary of workshop notes:

General considerations

- A pandemic is a highly complex social, cultural, economic and psychological phenomenon. For this reason communication and exchange of experts with multiple perspectives is essential

- Risk- and crisis communication is always embedded in the regional and global context and multiple circumstances (political, social, ecological, cultural, economic etc.)

- How people perceive information depends very much on their cultural and social background and on learned behavior. People need to be involved in decisions on risk management. Risk communication depends on trust and the ground for proper risk communication has to be build before the crisis

  As an example: Germany has learned from mistakes made in crisis communication during the 80s and 90s when confronted with the flood of 2004

Google trends as an indicator for disease prevention in Iran

- Official data in Iran could not meet society`s need for prognostic information, so people made use of information available on the Internet

- Google trends could provide real time data that allowed valuable insights on possible factors in reducing cases

- a correlation and negative association between the number of certain Google searches (regarding the keywords: *corona symptoms, masks, desinfetion methods* etc.) and number of new cases of COVID-19 in Iranian Provinces could be measured

- this highlights the importance of free access to information for reducing the spread of COVID-19 in Iran.
  → Potentially effective policies: flow of information, removal of restrictions on internet and social media

Face masks and community engagement in Germany

- when COVID-19 case numbers were rising in Germany during March and April people applied all kinds of preventive behaviour but didn't wear masks. This changed drastically after face masks became mandatory in Germany at end of April

- at the very beginning of the pandemic it became clear that not all groups in society are equally vulnerable to get infected by the virus to the the same level of severety

- studies conducted in March show a strong fear of Germans to unknowingly infect vulnerable individuals and thus risking their health. This fear was much higher than the fear of being infected themselves

- there were already people in official positions that communicated publicly that normal masks do not protect people from infection but infact even could raise the vulnerability of the wearer, so most people rejected wearing face masks during that time

- studies show that Germans have much trust in state institutions and are very comliant in general, but in subsequent interviews people told they would be wearing masks anyway – independent from official rules

- from April to August there had been a shift in peoples` attitudes regarding mask-wearing towards the majority of people considering mask wearing as reasonable. This might be because emphasis was put on the fact that mask wearing protects other people.

- By changing the narrative in this way people were convinced to change their behaviour, because of their initial fear of infecting others – this was crucial for acceptance

- **regression analyses show a strong correlation between official trust, fear of infecting others and believe in mask wearing in Germany**

Risk communication and community engagement (RCCE)

- Risk communication is aimed at enabling people to make informed decisions to protect themselves and others. It is basically an **exchange** between experts and people who are facing the thread of the pandemic

- Community engagement is basically involving communities in decision making

- RKI and partner institutions looked at governmental RCCE strategies (Design, Implementation and Effectiveness) during Covid-19 response in a multi-sited study. Focus on key stakeholders, their RCCE strategies and perception of these strategies

How to enable trust?

- Communication agencies have to display empathy, transparency and expertise to gain and maintain people's trust

- Communication messages must be clear, structured and easily accessible (awareness for linguistic barriers e.g. in migrant communities)

- Information about hazards should be accompanied by information about possible solutions

- A comprehensive approach to Disaster Risk Reduction is much needed since social, economic and environmental aspects have to be included

→ Relevant communication chanels are variating very much between countries; communication is very situational and one needs to adapt to it. For example: the impact of social media information is probably overrated in Germany and people do trust conventional media like radio and televison.

Public participation and community engagement in Iran

- There is an increasing risks of disasters and Iran is generally moving from active to proactive disaster management strategies trying to create resilience and prepare for unknown diseases and other disasters

- Need for a comprehensive approach including communities, risk communication etc.

Public participation in the Health System

- Evaluations from a sample of 250 Tehran Nurses and 500 Health volunteers show the an overwhelming majority of health workers thought the performance of health volunteers was very good. Vice versa volunteers were overwhelmingly satisfied with the cooperation and collaboration with health professionals.

- Main facilitators for public participation in Iran are: social solidarity, presence of NGOs, Charities, etc., political will, religious and cultural motivators / drivers

- Barriers to public participation: fear and social stigma, lack of organization and networking, lack of institutional, logistics and spontaneous public participation

- There is a need for investment in: Planned public participation, organized public participation, and institutionalized public participation

- One of the main challenges is the decreased social trust during the pandemic

Vaccination strategies and their communication

- Right now the Iranian gouvernment is discussing influenca vaccination strategies because the capacities (number of vaccine doses) are not sufficient

- The national scientific community in Iran has weekly briefings on developements regarding a possible COVID-19 vaccine. Also the problem of priotizing certain groups of people is discussed

- in general most people in Iran trust vaccination

Public trust in gouvernment and institutions

- there has been a survey regarding social and government trust: between April and June social trust has increased and then decreased during a second wave

- there is a problem in communicating scientific knowledge to the general pulic

Availability of Data

- only at the beginning of the pandemic data was made available by the Iranian gouverment that showed case numbers at a province level in Iran. Such data enabled research like the "Google it up" study which unfortunately could not be extended due to the lack of further province level data

Critical consideration of a "one voice policy" in crisis communication

- in Germany there has been a public discussion of experts from the beginning, who shared many opinions on COVID-19 management but were not completely in agreement. This probably let to more trust in government within society, eventhough administrations often favor a "one voice policy"

- usually assesments by experts in these cases are very similar and a public discussion can increase trust