

The Endless Sunday: The Effects of Extended Lockdown on Adolescents Mental Health

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ABSTRACT

After nearly 18 months of a pandemic and lockdown used to combat this pandemic, it begs the question of why has the pandemic not ended yet and how is this extended lockdown affecting people. This paper aims to understand the effect of conspiracy theories on the continuous extension of the COVID-19 lockdown and the effects of this "Endless Sunday" on adolescents' mental health. By formulating a visual analysis, screenshotted images will be used as evidence to compare different situations with relevant theories for discussion. From this exploration, it can be seen that dissident citizens who do not believe in COVID-19 are responsible for the continual extension of lockdown which then leads to the continual degradation of the mental health of adolescents who are stuck in lockdown.

Keywords: COVID-19, social media, conspiracy theories, stress, and mental health.

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced billions of people globally to stay at home and reduce their social interactions outside as an effort to minimise the spread of the virus. The governments have taken unprecedented steps to restrain the escalation by encouraging social distancing and improving hygiene practices [1]. And yet, it resulted in the lost opportunities for children and adolescents to socialise and learn in person with others. The time of exploration, experimentation and discovery on friendships, intimacy, and personal self-concept

[2] is now restricted as many wonders when will this end. Its continuous exposure to limited access to connecting also resulted in stress, which then affects them mentally. At the same time, these measures have been challenged by an unmatched amount of conspiracy theories and fake news on the origin and severity of the virus [3]. Social media, which facilitates sharing ideas, thoughts, and information through virtual networks,

proposes how important it is for individuals to stay connected. Thus, it is not uncommon to use it as a vital news source despite its tendency to share the likelihood of misinformation on topics like COVID-19. For example, the exposure of social platforms like Facebook and Twitter posts can affect its users even on basic facts surrounding the pandemic. Furthermore, conspiracy theories have become a prominent feature of the pandemic [1] as they exacerbated beliefs on social distancing influences, masks interventions and fears on vaccination validity. Therefore, our exploration of this research would be on why, through Indonesian and Australian perspectives, are people still doubting the existence of COVID-19 and how these features of conspiracies and misinformation affects adolescents mental health, specifically on students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Being connected depends not on our distance but the available communications technology [4]. Designed to share practical information, we carry that technology to get the possible notion of life mix. This means that constant social media exposure helps us attain new information online. However, the likelihood of receiving fake content is not rare, especially contents that are pushed by popular platforms like Facebook and

Twitter. Moreover, such content could resurface as the heart of the problem are the companies' contentrecommendation algorithms, which are generally designed to boost content that engages the most people, regardless of what it is [5]. In contrast, conspiracy theories thrive when individuals are under threat and societies are in crisis [6]. They influence people's actions indirectly, for example, via feelings of powerlessness that translate into disengaged behaviour [3] or by endorsing widespread theories about the origin of the virus through social influencers. Thus, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the salience of conspiracy beliefs in public discourse is high since most of us don't spend time second-guessing the information given by experts. Additionally, people who endorse conspiracy theories tend to risk their own and other people's health by not adhering to state- supported preventative measures.

On the other hand, even people who do adhere to statesupported preventative measures find themselves suffering in different ways. These people have experienced increased stress due to fear of the disease, restrictions on many things that were part of normal life, and having to live in new life conditions among other things. A study by Son et al. [7] searched to find what sources of stress adolescents had which included many things such as worrying about the well being of their loved ones, worrying about financial problems, or worrying about their academics. This study also discovered that overall mental health for students had worsened during the pandemic which is inline with a study from Cohen et al. [8] which found

that stress can be a trigger for other diseases both physical and mental.

3. METHODOLOGY

Ethnography stated by Lindgren [9] poses a double demand on the researcher that to develop an adequate understanding, one must take part in the setting and maintain the role of a detached observer. As representatives who are aware of the effects of COVID-19, engaging through the materials from different lenses, namely from Indonesian and Australian perspectives, would be the ideal method to access various findings through the constant exposure of social media. Keeping detailed records of conversations and posts from these perspectives will help accomplish how reliable the verdicts are. Therefore, implementing the visual analysis to support our approach will benefit the fact that screen-capturing allows us to construct multiple interpretations of meanings [10].

4. **RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS**

Many of us still have doubts in believing the existence of COVID-19 and many of us still underestimate the severity of this virus despite the increased death rates. These dangerous outcomes occur because people tend to believe in false information and prominent conspiracy theories. One of them is the theory that vaccines have microchips from the government, which makes people reluctant to be vaccinated. With the combination of bad handling from the government, the pandemic situation in Indonesia becomes critical. There is no doubt about the emergence of the term "*Herd Stupidity*" as suggested by the Indonesian University Epidemiologist, Pandu Riono.

Social Psychologist Dicky Christhover Pelupessy, Ph.D., said that people who don't believe in COVID-19 are closely related to human status and cognitive creatures. Naturally, we as humans absorb and process information based on scientific disciplines and things that are believed and known.

Thus, knowing well COVID-19 is a new thing, it is natural for people to be hesitant in believing, especially if the justifications are appealed first by the government and so, the majority would look for other confirmation from other sources [11].

Evidence One: Bear Brand theory

Some time ago, crowds of people were hunting for Bear Brand milk which was believed to be able to cure COVID-19. People thought this milk has vitamins that help increase the body's immunity and are believed to be a good consumption for everyone, especially those with positive cases. Thus, stocks started to decrease as people bought bulk of it.

Responding to this viral phenomenon, Dr. Faheem Younus from the University of Maryland, United States stated that "this milk (bear brand) or vitamins or ivermectin has no role in COVID-19 treatment (figure 1).



Faheem Younus, MD O
My Indonesian Friends
This milk, or vitamins or ivermectin has no role in COVID treatment.
Susu ini, atau vitamin atau ivermectin tidak memiliki peran dalam pengobatan COVID.
2:03 PM - Jul 4, 2021 - Twitter for iPhone
36.4K Retweets 3,204 Quote Tweets 73.2K Likes
Faheem Younus, MD 🤣 @FaheemYounus - Jul 4 Bagaimana agar tetap aman?
Pakai masker KN95
Jangan berjabat tangan
Hindari pertemuan dalam ruangan dengan ppl
Jika Anda harus hadir, buka jendela, cuci tangan dan kurangi duras paparan
Dapatkan vaksinasi
Q 107 tl 3.7к ♡ 8.9к ⊥́

Figure 1. @FaheemYounus tweeted about the Bear Brand phenomenon (left) [32]; Figure 2.@FaheemYounus shares information on COVID-19 prevention (right).

It is true that bear brand carries a lot of health benefits; it contains a lot of protein, vitamins, minerals and fats that is good for growth and health. But there is no significant effect to help reduce the possibility of curing the virus. Instead what Indonesian people can do to avoid contracting the virus are by "wearing a KN95 mask, not shaking hands, and avoiding indoor meetings with people" (figure 2). This needs to be emphasised because the COVID-19 handling Task Force noted that there are still millions of Indonesians who have not complied with the 3M health protocol (table 1).

following the protocols in different areas [12]		
	Million people	Place where 3M protocol was not followed
	3.9	In markets
	1.1	On Roads
	0.786	In the office
	0.384	In places of worship

At tourist attractions

Table 1. Data number of Indonesians who aren'tfollowing the protocols in different areas [12]

Therefore, the public needs to be disciplined in implementing the 3M health protocol, namely wearing masks, maintaining distance and avoiding crowds, and washing hands with soap. This is important to further prevent the spread of COVID- 19 [12].

0.259

Evidence Two: Emergency PPKM protest in Indonesia

One protest that was carried out in Indonesia aims to protest against the existence of an emergency PPKM. The protest resulted in some casualties, with one vandalising private property. Figure 4 is the screenshotted image of the video where a Toyota Fortuner car was scribbled virally in Kuningan Regency, West Java.



Figure 3. A Toyota Fortuner was vandalised in Kuningan Regency due to protest.

The 31-second video was uploaded on @kuninganmass instagram account. In the video, the scribbles are inscribed with a sentence of the protest against the implementation of Emergency PPKM. The voice of a man who was suspected to be the owner of the car conveyed some concern regarding the issue by saying "we are victims of PPKM. Indonesia must eat, because we are a civil society." His action was a deliberate attempt to inform how the Emergency PPKM has affected individuals. According to him, the car scribbles were carried out so that many people could see Ali's heart as a culinary entrepreneur who was affected by the Emergency PPKM [13]. On the other hand, from an Australian perspective, originally the Australian government shared that if you're not sick, a mask isn't necessary to use. Thus, some information was contradictory and contributed to people's feelings of not being in control. For some, creating a myth about the pandemic will reinforce their view that it's not as severe as people assume [14]. Hence, denial becomes a strong motivator and powerful defence

mechanism for people to avoid the truth as they tend to rationalise the severity of the situation. Considered a threat, people develop strategies to protect themselves from anxious thoughts [14]. Additionally, denial can also come from a sense of helplessness and hopelessness about the overwhelming and uncertain nature of the covid situation [15].

Evidence Three: Australia Panic Buying

Panic buying was a phenomenon during Australia's first lockdowns announcement in March last year. People most likely to panic buy were those anxious about their health, people who perceived products would be scarce and those who saw others panicking [16]. Dr Melissa Norberg, deputy director of the Centre for Emotional Health at Macquarie University, also mentioned that the drive to stockpile comes from our psychological attachment to things in times of crisis. The "scarcity heuristic" principle gives us a false sense that a supply must be more valuable than others [17]. Toilet paper was one of them. Appearing to have no specific scientific explanation as to why people stock up on it, Norberg thinks it plays into people's "health" response. People like to think they are "doing something" when they feel at risk [17].

Conspiracy theories are also associated with underlining how people don't view the pandemic as a disaster and are prone to confirm personal biases. Common sense and critical thinking were overlooked to satisfy their personal beliefs. Australia has two ideals -"Out of Many, One", the country's original motto that reflects the belief of "all for one and one for all" and "Don't Tread on Me" - that signals Australians commitment to defend individual freedoms and liberties. Hence, Proffitt [18] mentioned one heated debate over how wearing masks reflects the disagreement about prioritising freedom versus regulation [18]. Our intelligence abandons us when trying to reason facts that conflict with personal biases because when confronted with facts that threaten our preconceptions, we become flummoxed.

Evidence Four: Anti-Lockdown Protest; #SydneyProtest

Concerning that, one recent case was the July 2021 antilockdown protest in Sydney. Around 3500 protesters were gathered for an anti-lockdown "freedom rally" that turned violent at times and provoked outrage from authorities [19]. And yet, social media channels claimed that the rallies authorities feared were never planned in the first place. Others warned people against attending, saying it was a "trap" set by the media. While some described it as a "false flag" event, using a term favoured by conspiracy theorists who believe government agents are behind this event. This huge exposure trended in Twitter trending topics, with #SydneyProtest as the highlighted term. As most were unmasked and packed tightly together shouting "freedom" while holding anti-lockdown and antivaccination signs, below (figure 4) are some opinions that share how ignorant and selfish these individuals are in protesting during a lockdown.



Figure 4. Opinions from those who watched from home as the lockdown was still proceeding (up & right).





#sydneyprotest #covidsydney #COVID19Aus



8:29 PM - Jul 30, 2021 from Sydney, New South Wales - Twitter for iPhone

375 Retweets 76 Quote Tweets 1,045 Likes Figure 5.

Moreover, thriving when society is in crisis, a social influencer and TikToker Jon-Bernard Kairouz pinpoint exactly how conspiracies work at best. Influencing people's actions indirectly by predicting NSW cases on TikTok, Kairouz dubbed himself as "the people's premier" and spoke to the sea of people waving Australian flags and holding signs decrying masks and vaccines [20] that he supports this movement.

COVID-19, Stress, and Adolescents

COVID-19 has created many new sources of stress for adolescents. A study from the Journal of Medical Internet Research on students found that although some worried for their own health, more than triple that amount worried for the health of their loved ones who were often the ones who were considered to be at higher risk of COVID-19 [7]. Being unable to visit these loved ones to offer them support and check in to ensure they are safe would only compound these worries to make the students even more stressed.

Other sources of stress include financial concerns. In Indonesia, the unemployment rate in August 2020 rose to 7.07% from the previous 5.23% the previous year[21]. The main reason for this increase in unemployment is that companies are suffering losses due to lack of customers, due to the customers staying at home. This in turn leads to the company to layoff employees to reduce the losses the company suffers. The target of the layoffs would be employees who do not have any work to do which is very likely to include students, interns, or part-timers [22]. Being unable to pay for necessities such as food, rent, bills, etc. would cause a great burden on the minds of adolescents and cause them even greater amounts of stress.

To make matters worse, COVID-19 deprives people of many of the most effective ways to manage stress. One of the most important ones is the severe lack of social interaction that the lockdown causes people to experience. Social interaction has been found to have short and long term benefits towards health due to reducing stress and giving people a sense of purpose in life [23]. Due to lockdown, most interactions happen over the internet, specifically using video calls. During calls people often choose not to turn on their video, or leave themselves muted. This causes people to feel like they are just talking to themselves and that no one is listening due to the lack of response. This can make them feel isolated and alone despite talking to people. This issue becomes even worse when communicating over messages or forums as tone or laughter cannot be expressed, or some people will feel no pressure to communicate which makes others feel even more ignored. These factors make interactions between people feel even less real and make people feel even more isolated.

Lockdown also prevents people from having access to another important stress reliever, which are their hobbies. Hobbies are very useful as it allows people to take their mind off the stress of work and focus on something enjoyable. Hobbies also allow people to focus on learning new skills and perhaps make new connections, which can help people feel more content and fulfilled with life [24]. Meanwhile other hobbies such as sports or exercise can have direct health benefits on top of the previously mentioned benefits. However, during lockdown many hobbies, particularly outdoor ones, cannot be done at all during lockdown. Although some of these hobbies can be done at home, at home there are no supportive elements to help encourage people to do these hobbies, and instead there are much more distractions to make them avoid doing them. All these factors combine to deny people of all these positive benefits that their hobbies could have provided.

The final major source of stress is one that only applies to students which is the difficulties of online learning. Learning that is carried out online creates several obstacles, such as the difficulty of concentrating on online classes because of the noise, poor internet connections and also the atmosphere at home that does not support learning. Learning in class helps create a more calm ambience that supports focusing on the task. Meanwhile continual usage of devices exposes people to blue light which has been found to suppress the creation of melatonin in the body, an important chemical for sleep, which can lead to sleep deprivation[25]. All these reasons make students less effective at studying which then leads to academic



problems, which is yet another major source of stress.

Combining all these sources of stress can lead to adolescents experiencing short or long term mental health problems such as: anxiety, clinical depression, and having low self-esteem[8]. The sooner adolescents can have all these new sources of stress removed from their life, the sooner their mental health can begin to improve. However, if the lockdown continues and the pandemic never ends due to stubborn conspiracy theorists, mental health will continue to worsen.

5. CONCLUSION

COVID-19 has changed the world as it affects various aspects of life in economics, health, education, and many more. The virus forces us to follow the protocols of wearing masks, self- quarantine, social distance and take vaccines as ways to reduce covid exposure. However, these constant pressure and overwhelming restrictions impacted more to those who think their freedom is at stake and are in denial. Thus, many protests took place. In particular, the research shared many examples of how conspiracy theories and false information shared via social media channels can change individuals beliefs. People would start believing in false claims about what to do to cure the virus. People would no longer know who or which information from organisations to trust. Therefore, further research that might be carried out is on how to track COVID-19 misinformation in real-time by involving the use of social media as an element to help protect public beliefs. On the other hand, COVID-19 also affects individuals mental health. Staying at home and not being able to connect with your loved ones resulted in lots of fears, stress and feeling of uncertainty. People of all ages suffer; adults with their employment risks, adolescents with their education system and elders sharing a higher risk of being infected. In particular, this research underlines the concern of stress and mental health problems as the most common features to happen among adolescents. Recognising that schools, universities and colleges have to change their learning systems online, students struggle to stay socially connected as most negatively impacted by their low self-esteem, frequent anxiety and panic attacks. Without proper treatments, it will only continue to harm their academic performance and psychological health. In addition, extended lockdowns could also cause problems like depression to arise. Experiencing emotional disorders, especially in individuals who do not understand how to deal with them, will be hard to fight. Thus, finding a supportive community through the pandemic can help aspire and inspire to start changing.

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