

SOCIAL FACTORS, PARAMETERS AND EFFECTS OF FORCED SELF-ISOLATION IN RUSSIA

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Abstract: The COVID-19 outbreak announced by the World Health Organization as a pandemic in January 2020 led to the unprecedented response measures in most countries around the world who are seeking to contain the spread of this disease. Among such responses were imposed quarantine and self-isolation. The purpose of the paper is to identify social factors and trends, and to predict the effects of forced self-isolation in Russia during the COVID-19 pandemic in spring and summer 2020. The primary challenge in the research was to reveal differences in the impacts of lockdown on various social groups across Russia differentiated by their quality of life, living standards and lifestyle, fields of occupation and forms of ownership (state or private, including small businesses).

Keywords: self-isolation, pandemic, social factors, social stratification, coronavirus, COVID-19, Russia.

1 Introduction

On January 30, 2020, The World Health Organization has declared a public health emergency of international concern that constitutes a public health threat going beyond the affected state's national border (WHO, 2020).

Unprecedented measures have been taken by the governments of many nations, including the Government of Russia, to prevent the spread of COVID-19 for a multitude of valid reasons, primarily, the dedication to protect the population of their countries from infection, as this disease poses a high risk of a large number of people contracting the infection at the same time, which is related to the properties of its causative agent, the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

The unwitting social experiment instigated by the pandemic with forced self-isolation of the global population and its social, psychological, economic and political effects have yet to be thoroughly investigated by the researchers.

2 Literature Review

The studies currently underway in different countries may be roughly divided into those focusing on medical aspects and those focusing on social aspects of the pandemic. As noted by M. Haghani et al. (2020), based on the analysis of more than one thousand texts on the pandemic, the medical research dominates, while social aspects remain understudied.

T.L. Huynh (2020) analyzed the role of the cultural dimension in practicing social distancing across the world. By drawing the data from the Google COVID-19 community mobility reports and the Hofstede cultural factors for 58 countries over the period from 16 February to 29 March 2020, he found that countries with higher 'Uncertainty Avoidance Index' predict the lower proportion of people gathering in public such as retail and recreation, grocery and pharmacy, parks, transit stations, workplaces.

A group of French researchers has revealed some specific social effects of self-isolation during the pandemic. Having analyzed the perceived health status of the population before and after the pandemic, they found that self-reported health and well-being have improved during the lockdown in comparison to previous years. They described this counterintuitive phenomenon the "eye

of the hurricane" paradox: the large majority of individuals who are not infected by the virus may be seeing their current condition in a more positive light than they normally would. There are, however, divergences across social groups that reflect socioeconomic inequalities. In particular, blue-collar workers deviate from the prevailing trend as their level of self-reported health declines over the lockdown period, Parisian residents experience a sudden drop in their subjective well-being, and people working long hours at home exhibit higher levels of stress during the quarantine (Recchi et al., 2020).

J.E. Stokes and S.E. Patterson (2020) focused their attention on the intergenerational relationships in families and the magnitude of infection risk. They assert that families and intergenerational relationships are important sources of risk for COVID-19 infection, especially for older adults who are at high risk of complications from the disease. If one family member is exposed to the virus they could serve as a source of transmission or, if they fall ill, the resources they provide to others could be severed. These risks may be especially heightened for family members who work outside the home and provide care, or for those family members who care for multiple generations. Policies have the potential to help families bear the burden of these decisions. This essay argues that policies that address health, employment, and other social issues have implications for families, and that policies aimed at families and caregivers can affect the health, employment, and the general well-being of the nation (Stokes & Patterson, 2020). It is highly important to capture this consideration in the Russian situation, where, as evidenced by research, family relationships are very strong and form a part of national culture (Maximova et al., 2018).

E. Goffman (2020) draws attention to the aspect of self-isolation at the global level. He underlines that the coronavirus pandemic provides opportunities for a new kind of a globalization, in which people live far more local lives than in recent decades but with greater global awareness through a connective world brain.

The authors have explored various socio-economic and political effects of the pandemic based on the evidence from different countries. In particular, the evidence came from the studies in China (Pan et al., 2020), Vietnam (Xuan et al., 2020; Tran et al., 2020), Africa (Okoi & Bwawa, 2020; Amadasun, 2020), Australia (Beck & Hensher, 2020) and others.

Thus, the topic of social effects of the pandemic spread and implemented self-isolation measures has already received certain coverage in the scientific literature; nevertheless, the studies pivoting around the Russian specifics of the above processes are rather scarce so far.

3 Research Methodological Framework

The purpose of our research was to identify social factors and trends, and to predict the effects of forced self-isolation in Russia during the COVID-19 pandemic in spring and summer 2020.

The primary challenge in the research was to reveal differences in the impacts of lockdown on various social groups across Russia differentiated by their quality of life, living standards and lifestyle, fields of occupation and forms of ownership (state or private, including small businesses).

The methods used in this research are interdisciplinary in nature and based on the methodological principles of Digital Humanities. The research employed analytical methods at the interface between the precise and social sciences, as well as methods of qualitative sociology, i.e. the in-depth interviews. In order to obtain the vastest possible array of representative and diverse data, we carried out the analysis of the available unstructured big data using Big Data Mining tool (via the IQBuzz service), the analysis of economic statistics, the network analysis of communications between social media users, along with the substantial discourse analysis of the content posted on

social media and the narrative analysis of the records from the in-depth interviews with representatives of various socio-demographic groups of Russian residents (n=20).

4 Results and Discussion

In general, the effects of self-isolation in Russia include both social functions and dysfunctions. Paradoxically, there are also signs of social eufunctions, strengthening the Russian society at both national and local levels. Such eufunctions should be divided into explicit and latent. By explicit functions we mean objective results which facilitate adjustment and adaptation of a system and which are planned and realized by the participants in this system (Merton, 1968).

As the interviews have revealed, the explicit functions of self-isolation in Russia as a social phenomenon include socio-economic, socio-political, and socio-cultural effects. The socio-economic functions of self-isolation are implemented in the following areas:

- 1) Loss of habitual routines and pastimes has given an impetus to the search for new ways to structure a day, most common of which include: a) mastering the modern ways for completing main job tasks remotely by taking advantage of digital technology; b) time and money savings on commuting; c) advanced training and, especially, retraining for new professions and acquisition of new specialties; d) a more rational approach to the finding a right balance between time and efforts spent on work and on personal life (coping with household duties, more productive communication with children and other family members).
- 2) Changes in the sectoral structure of employment resulted in an additional injection of employable population into the vital economy sectors and an outflow of the employed from the sectors that generated excessive or induced consumption, as well as from the advertising sector.
- 3) A shift in the perceived socio-economic and general social importance of jobs in certain fields, in particular: (a) revision of the social value of medicine toward its higher appreciation, with the attitude to such fields as show business, professional sports, etc., becoming less positive in terms of their reduced social importance and prestige; b) during the period of self-isolation, the importance of the hotel, catering and tourism industries have plummeted, the services of guides, animators, customs officers fell out of demand, as well as a fairly common in Russia unofficial sector of employment - the street trade with souvenirs and the services of amateur tour guides; while the role of volunteers and courier delivery of goods has increased; (c) import replacement and domestic production grow stronger to the detriment of imported goods, and urban and suburban infrastructure is being developed through the reconstruction of water and sewage systems, the construction of roads, telephone and electricity networks and the improvement of urban landscapes.
- 4) The implemented measures of social and financial help to the most vulnerable population categories (children, partially - senior citizens and the unemployed, temporary - bank debtors, etc.) restored the living standards (but not the quality of life) of the people in the referred social categories and their families.
- 5) Social restrictions have led to the pursuit of legal ways out, such as temporal or permanent relocation to suburban houses (dachas), to small settlements to re-unite with relatives.

The socio-political functions of self-isolation are as follows:

- 1) Decline in the outdoor political activities and, in general, non-parliamentary public activities made it easier to hold a public vote on amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation and elections in some regions and secured the win of the official political course.
- 2) Unclear position of non-systemic liberals swinging from condemning the authorities for the extremely harsh self-

isolation measures, to criticizing inadequacy of such measures, does not add any popularity to the opposition.

- 3) The imposed measures have reinforced the loyalty (albeit temporarily) of the majority of population to the authorities.
- 4) There was a quick and mass transition to the digital (and therefore swift) means of communication between the authorities and the people, accelerating responses of officials to complaints, requests and applications of citizens.
- 5) The social stratification has become more pronounced with people falling into the broad categories of those who watch official TV channels, those who give preference to the Internet and those who read books (which, however, also leads to further political diversification of citizens).

The socio-cultural functions of self-isolation in Russia include:

- 1) Gnoseological function consists in obtaining and replenishing knowledge, skills and abilities not only for remote jobs, but also for strengthening sanitary and hygienic competencies of millions of Russians.
- 2) Communicative function implies the development of new communication skills through the Internet, social media and phones by those who used to be distant from this.
- 3) Cultural and educational function means learning new languages, and professions, getting information about movies, books, performances from mass media and the Internet due to more time for leisure.
- 4) Recreational function means restoring health and energy depleted in work and household running.
- 5) Function of legal conscience and rule of law means prevention of delinquent and even deviant behavior due to the higher social control from the nearest, home environment and less time out of home.

Latent functions represented by some eufunctions and multiple dysfunctions include the following:

- 1) Psycho-physical-somatic effects: a) the visual consumption of digital information is growing, which leads to vision impairments b) physical activity has sharply decreased due to the stay-at-home lifestyle, which causes hypodynamics and overweight, c) "domestication" of people has not resulted, as expected by some authors, in higher birth rates, but brought the mortality rates to the record high (from January to May 2020, the natural decline in the population of Russia was 221.3 thousand people). Whereas earlier the decline was due to the falling birth rate and drop in the mortality rate, in May the birth rate was low while the mortality rate increased. At the same time, as we learned from the interviews, wider possibilities to take care of each other in the family and more intra-family communications may strengthen the family-marital and sexual relations.

2) Socio-economic effects:

- according to the Federal State Statistics Service, on the background of the restrictive measures imposed to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, during the four months of 2020 (from March to June) unemployment rate among the economically active population was as follows: 4.7% (3.485 million people) in March; 5.8% (4.286 million people) in April; 6.1% (4.513 million people) in May; and 6.2% (4.606 million people) in June. Economically active population (15 years of age and older) in June 2020 accounted for 74.7 million people, which is 51 percent of the total population of the country. Unemployment rate in the country is the highest for the last eight years, since March 2012 (6.3%);
- the pandemic has led to the economic restructuring, which is not always beneficial: according to the Federal Tax Service of the Russian Federation the most affected industries are road haulage, air, water and rail transport, tourism and hospitality, exhibitions, culture and leisure, public catering, consumer services, non-food retail, dental services, additional education, mass media. These sectors employ 6.7 million people, of which 3.4 million are in

small and medium businesses, with half of the shopping malls already hovering on the verge of bankruptcy;

- the economy and wages plunged leading to protracted stagnation: in January, before the novel coronavirus pandemic, the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation forecasted the economic growth at 1.9% in 2020, and at 3.1% in 2021. Decrease in business revenues and expected further worsening of the conjuncture already at the end of the first quarter, ahead of the impact of stringent quarantine measures, has negatively affected payment discipline in the Russian economy. Amid high uncertainty due to the impossibility to predict lifting of the quarantine measures, any positive changes in the Russian economy are rather improbable;
- latent function of the quarantine regime is the destruction of the model of demonstrative consumption of goods and services in order to inflate own social status;
- dysfunction is expressed in the growing gap between regions, when depressed regions after the mass loss of last jobs are dropping down the scale of welfare in the times of crisis; the Russian economy even before the pandemic suffered from the lack of innovations, which was flagged by O.T. Astanukulov et al. (2019), who noted that the particularities of business processes in innovative activities of organizations lead to uneven distribution, specific cost structure in the crisis and a traditional situation of the lack of innovations in financing. So, during the economic slowdown exacerbated by the pandemic, the further decline in these indicators is inevitable.
- such failures in medicine as the elimination of FOS (Feldsher-Obstetric Stations) in villages and no vertical governance in this area, as well as managerial mistakes that incited panic when each and every patient was admitted to hospital, had a negative impact on the fight against the virus. It is obvious that in this scenario even infinitely large pool of ambulance cars and crews would be insufficient.

3) Socio-political effects:

- a) social protest and discontent, no longer present in the public space, just congest in people's minds and at times break through into mass protests, as is currently happening (July 2020) in Khabarovsk. At the same time, the reasons for the protest are compounded by frustration with the imposed preventive measures, the overall decline in the welfare of the population and the growing social fatigue and discomfort from self-isolation and remote work;
- b) the rise in dysfunctional effects of quarantine is accelerated by unsuccessful measures of regional authorities in the fight against the virus: both frequent underreported cases, concealment of true figures, and overreported cases (including other diseases) to "squeeze" additional financing from the central budget.

4) Sociocultural effects:

- a) the increasing influence of advertising, due to the longer time spent in front of TV, drives a behavior of excessive and prestigious consumption (although not always);
- b) virtualization of education leads to the ultimate loss of its formative functions, its capacity to nurture humanistic traits;
- c) in many ways, the one-sided nature of distance learning, the lack of live contact with a teacher deprives students of the opportunity to create, think, or even experiment;
- d) online education de-structures school and university teams of students, the mutual support and responsibility for others, the high discipline of teams are lost, the possibility of "parallel mentoring" is lost, and the number of foreign students and professors is reduced;
- e) the out-of-school and extra-curricular (at universities and technical colleges) activities of students disappear;
- f) prerequisites are created for further social stratification of students, when the majority of them will receive only distance education, while children of the "elite" and the rich will receive full-time education. In this context, as

O.E. Ivanova (2019) rightly notes, with the introduction of information technologies for learning, the strategy of utilizing critical thinking is increasingly abandoned, which negatively affects the level of human capital development.

The coronavirus pandemic and its effects, in particular, changes in the living conditions of people, quite naturally found their expression in the postings of social media users.

A number of certain search word combinations related to the coronavirus pandemic, such as "self-isolation", "distance or remote work", "rest", "income", have been set up to analyze the big data using the IQBuzze service.

We analyzed a time span from December 1, 2019, when the world mass media, including social media, hotly discussed a situation with the novel coronavirus and its spread to different countries, and until July 2020, when the pandemic in Russia, according to official statistics, showed signs of receding.

The analysis has yielded the following results.

It is explainable that the problems associated with lockdown did not concern Russian residents in the period from December 2019 to the end of March 2020, as it did not directly affect their interests and habitual lifestyle.

Reports related to the coronavirus and self-isolation during the indicated period, except for the blatant fakes dumped to incite panic, are in the overwhelming majority wait-and-see and neutral.

The situation has changed a little in the second half of March. More and more authors view the self-isolation regimes of different kinds positively and call on the authorities to impose more restrictive measures, even such as introducing quarantine. In particular, a survey on the website of the EADaily news agency at the end of March on the support of restrictive measures showed that more than 70% voted for the restrictive measures, 15% voted for further toughening of measures, and very few voted against this.

At the same time, there is a growing number of postings expressing concerns about the negative implications of restrictive measures, from civil rights violation to the negative impact of self-isolation on businesses across the vast majority of industries.

The peak of postings related to self-isolation falls on a period from March 30 to April 3, when after the nationwide non-working week, a self-isolation regime was announced by the President of the Russian Federation.

Within the indicated period, there was the highest number of both positive and negative postings related to the self-isolation regime. However, it is worth noting that the vast majority of comments from social media users in the Russian-language segment of Internet are neutral. The IQBuzze service identified 97.8% neutral statements related to the self-isolation regime in the entire array of analyzed comments. They are either judgement-free or balanced, pointing to both positive and negative aspects of the self-isolation regime.

Only 1.5% of analyzed postings give a strong positive assessment of the regime and only 0.7% convey a negative assessment.

Thus, we can conclude that Russian Internet users in the vast majority were quite calm about introduction of the regime of self-isolation in Russia.

Another aspect analyzed using the IQBuzze service is distance or remote work amid coronavirus.

The coronavirus pandemic has significantly changed the traditional working interactions at the enterprises. Forced transition to remote working in most companies not only

demonstrated the viability of such working arrangements, but laid bare upsides, as well as downsides of such work.

It is quite understandable that the majority of comments in the initial period are negative, as most companies are not used to this mode of work. Among the downsides, social media users mention the web resources overload due to a large number of videoconferences, the information security concerns, certain inconveniences suffered by employees due to the impossibility to setup effective work from home and a number of other negative aspects associated with the forced changes in the usual working routine. At the same time, the upsides of remote work are also highlighted, such as time savings on commuting, reduced production costs due to no need to create new jobs, a possibility to hire narrowly focused specialists for remote work, and many more, with all this predetermining the overall tone of postings in social media.

Thus, almost 97% of postings are neutral, slightly less than 3% are positive and only 0.1% are negative.

It can be concluded that the Russian labor market has now adapted to remote working, and in the future the remote work will become increasingly demanded by most enterprises and organizations.

5 Conclusion

Thus, the analysis of social effects of self-isolation in Russia makes it possible to draw a conclusion about institutionalization and even ritualization of self-isolation in Russia as a social phenomenon and social institution. Having emerged as one of the measures in the fight against the virus, self-isolation has influenced all economic and social activities and ways of leisure, becoming a ubiquitous factor in social relations, axiological, ideological and moral-aesthetic structures and performing important economic, socio-political and cultural functions in the Russian society.

The social effects of self-isolation are quite ambivalent, which applies both locally in the regions and nationwide (Russian Federation). As shown by the research results, the transition to self-isolation has led to a very clear division of the Russian society into five social groups, which may be briefly described as follows:

1. "Domestic" - these are people who, before the new social communication regime, spent most of their time at home; these are unemployed pensioners and the disabled, children not attending preschool institutions or schools, housewives, and the temporary and permanently unemployed);
2. "Deprived" - those who (temporarily or permanently) lost their jobs and earnings due to the new regime of isolation - small entrepreneurs and hired workers from small businesses, such as public catering and beauty salons, domestic and international tourism, film distribution and management of events, weddings, festivities, religious services, partially - show business; the culture preservation and dissemination sector and professional sport have undergone dramatic downsizing, though the branches of public administration and political parties, as well as public organizations have been little affected so far; many people in the above industries transitioned to working online or were sent to vacations;
3. "Remoters" - those are scientists, teachers at colleges, technical schools, higher education institutions, primary and secondary schools, as well as tutors, counsellors, students and others, including those who worked remotely before the pandemic (remote work, freelance, stringing, work as editors, copywriters, home-based distributors, etc.); in most cases, the workload of this category has increased due to their transition to remote working and a need to collect written, audio and video materials to be included in their work progress reports, but, on the other hand, it became more convenient for them to plan working time and work with children, they improve their digital

skills in the online channels of work, which previously were underdeveloped;

4. "Underground" - those are people who have illegally or semi-legally attended their workplaces - in private firms for the installation and repair of equipment, furniture, apartments and summer houses, for some time many now legalized employees of hairdressing salons and other service sector firms fell into this category;
5. "Legalized" - those who were instructed to go to work: police and other law enforcement agencies, government officials, people employed in the official mass media, volunteers, people engaged in essential services sector (medicine, including pharmaceuticals, trade, delivery of goods, utility providers, builders, workers from continuous and extractive industries, agriculture, communications operators, transport workers).

Thus, public sector employees and other workers in the state-owned enterprises were least affected, while those working in small and medium businesses were most affected.

The social settings of each category differ significantly. For example, the welfare, lifestyle and way of life of the first, fifth and, partly, third groups remained substantially the same. The social shift in the lifestyle of these categories is only manifested in less frequent visits to cultural institutions, communications offices, government agencies, polling stations, even polyclinics and hospitals, as well as in their more frequent resettlement for a definite time to their summer houses, to reunite with their relatives in small and medium-sized towns and villages. The second category was strongly affected; while the fourth category was ambivalently affected by the COVID-19 crisis.

At the same time, in real life, many of the above categories intermingle in the families where one family member belongs to one category and the other to another. This partially dampens living conditions, counterbalancing the negative implications of isolation.

As a result, there are families that have socially benefited from isolation - mainly those who have received additional orders at the expense of those who lost their jobs, and help from the state - especially when such 'bonuses' were provided to several family members.

Certainly, there are families that have been completely deprived - those where social opportunities have narrowed for all family members (including single-parent households), who sometimes are forced to join the ranks of poor and even extremely poor (i.e. living at the official subsistence level and below).

Long-term isolation has rather acute implications for the elderly people, as hypokinesia can make their condition worse. Hypokinesia is known to cause sarcopenia and osteoporosis, which in turn can adversely affect the health of population, especially in older age groups, and increase the burden on medical organizations. In addition, the reorientation of medical organizations to provide care to patients with COVID-19 has led to the suspension of routine medical interventions, which increases the likelihood of chronic diseases aggravation and may lead to further undermining of the community health and higher mortality.

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