

Psychologists' responses to policies initiated in connection with COVID 19

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This *comment* has been posted in the on-line version of *The Psychologist* following an entry entitled *Following, listening, or genuinely engaging?* [September 2021(Vol.34,p.12)]

However, the comment relates specifically to a paragraph headed '*Mass infection not an option*' which appeared in the published version of *The Psychologist* which is not included in the on-line version but *is* mentioned in the above entry. The paragraph itself consists largely of a quotation, with approval, from a multi-author letter in *The Lancet* to which a tinyurl is given. The authors of the letter include John Drury, Stephen Reicher, Robert West, and Susan Michie.

The main problem with the *Lancet* letter is that it fails, like so much “policy-relevant” research and so many of the systems dynamics models generated in connection with COVID, to offer anything approaching a *comprehensive* evaluation of the effects of alternative policies which might have been pursued. Specifically, it deals only with COVID infections among children. Comprehensive evaluation implies an assessment of *all* personal and social, short and long term, desired and desirable, and undesired and undesirable outcomes of the proposed policy. Without at least an approximation to such an evaluation, it is not possible to make meaningful decisions. The letter therefore offers yet one more illustration of the horrors that reductionist – viz. non-systemic – science has wished upon us. [For a discussion of the problems posed by reductionist science in connection with the evaluation of educational policy see Raven (2000) and, in relation to COVID, Raven (2020, 2021)]

In reality, something approaching a more balanced evaluation of COVID policy than the *Lancet* letter will be found in an *Open letter from several healthcare professions to the UK government/administrators* entitled *Our Grave Concerns About the Handling of the COVID Pandemic by Governments of the Nations of the UK* <https://www.covid19assembly.org/doctors-open-letter/> A more general commentary is available in Hodgkinson (2021).

However, while the comprehensive/systemic/reductionist science issue merits much wider exposure among psychologists, COVID – and government policies justified by reference to it – has brought to light a number of issues that seem to me of direct importance to psychologists.

One has to do with the role of psychologists in implementing these policies. I voiced my concerns about the role some psychologists seem to be embracing in my comment on the contents of the July/August 2020 issue of *The Psychologist* in Raven (2020).

However, it has been reported that some psychologists have been involved in advising government on how to further enhance the climate of fear (amounting to nothing less than terror for some people) which has surrounded this whole episode in order to induce more people to follow government directives.

Many readers will, of course, assume that this is entirely justified given the assumed public interest of those directives.

Unfortunately, a claim to be acting in the public interest is, as Reicher is, in the above post, reported as saying in the above post, something that demands psychologists' urgent attention. It is a claim that has lain behind many activities which governments have promoted since (and during) the Second World War that have later turned out to be entirely otherwise.

So it would appear to behove us to examine, very carefully, the evidence put forward to support such claims (including the claim that it is important to vaccinate children)... and to insist that it is among our responsibilities *as psychologists* to do so.

As far as I can make out, there has been no convincing comparison of the costs – including the deaths and destruction of lives and livelihoods now and in the future – of the policies which have been pursued with the benefits that have nominally been achieved. [An early study was published by OECD (2020) and, more recently, *Recovery* has reported that, the UN World Food Programme has warned that 270,000,000 people – ie more than were killed by Mao, Stalin and Hitler combined - face starvation as a result of the global impact of these policies.]

My more general point is that one would have expected professionals, *qua* professionals, to demand such evidence before rushing to deploy their expertise to advance goals chosen, in this case contrary to the advice offered by the World Health Organisation over many years, largely in private, by a few politicians.

To elaborate a little more, we have, as professionals, connived in a situation in which government has, though the Emergency Powers Act contrived to stifle discussion of such issues. Largely unknown to us, the government has imposed on Ofsted a duty, enforceable by enormous fines and imprisonment, to censor all information which runs counter to government policy (Monteith, 2021). How could we possibly, as professionals and scientists, countenance such behaviour? The lockdown of information is the most destructive of all the Lockdown measures. It contributes directly to the situation found in totalitarian regimes where hardly anyone has any meaningful information for or against the policies they are being asked to support.

But, something amazing, far from promoting discussion of this issue, *The Psychologist* has been promoting activities designed to purge “misinformation” from public debate ... and doing so without seriously engaging with the question of how to distinguish information from misinformation, still less disinformation achieved by, like the BBC and *The Guardian*, failing to report counter information. (For a fuller discussion see Raven, 2021.)

One specific question I have been surprised to find few psychologists engaging with is: How has it been possible for governments across the world to orchestrate support for such policies which were, as the above article notes, specifically rejected by the WHO until 2020? How was it possible for governments across the world to implement essentially similar policies while everywhere attributing them to local politicians and experts.

While this is perhaps a sociological question it has unmistakable psychological components.

Then again, how is that people have been so willing to give up their civil liberties and support clearly corrupt centralised governments? It would seem that this story, repeated again and again over history with dire social consequences is something psychologists most urgently need to understand.... yet few psychologists seem to have raised it the context of the current experiment. What are the psychological dispositions that make it so easy? And what dispositions would enable us to guard against it. (I find it of more than passing interest that Hodgkinson has indicated that he proposes to give up his lifelong career as a journalist to investigate this question.)

By way of conclusion and without claiming that it is a specific responsibility of psychologists, qua psychologists, to contribute to the task, it is, with some relief that I am able to report that it seems that some people (See https://brandnewtube.com/watch/dr-reiner-fuellmich-covid-crimes-against-humanity-and-the-coming-war-crimes-tribunals_3npaUgRzyifXKdc.html) are instigating criminal proceedings against those who have, with so little opposition, found ways to inflict these destructive activities upon us.

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