

Instantaneous perceptions of and responses to SARS in April and June of 2003

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Abstract

SARS has blazed a trail of anxiety, even terror, over Hong Kong, putting Hong Kong people's resilience and civic character to a severe test. Their instantaneous perceptions of, and responses to, aspects of SARS were sampled over seven days in April, and for another nine days in June (N=9,402). Preliminary results show, first, a Resonance Effect: Anxiety level fluctuated in-phase with the severity of SARS both actual and as perceived through media portrayal. Second, this RE generalized to job performance and interpersonal distancing, but stopped short at the trust/distrust that people placed in the medical profession and in the government. Third, irrespective of anxiety level, trust in the medical profession remained high, whereas trust in the government remained low, suggesting deep-seated sentiments toward these social institutions.

More fine-grained and multivariate analyses are in progress. The overall findings and the unique nature of the database are expected to facilitate future research on the role of media and relevant psychological processes in terror management, resilience building, and the social (re)construction of Hong Kong history and identity.

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