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Андриевская А.М., студент 2 курса магистратуры
факультета социологии направления «Европейские общества»
Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет
Andrievskaia A.M., 2st year student of the master's program
Faculty of Sociology, Direction "European Societies"
Saint Petersburg State University
Россия, Санкт-Петербург

Overview of research on emotional change during the COVID-19 pandemic

Обзор исследований эмоциональных изменений во время пандемии COVID-19

Annotation: the article explores existing research on emotional change during the COVID-19 pandemic. This article provides an overview of research related to the study of changes in the emotional background during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Аннотация: в статье исследуются существующие исследования эмоциональных изменений во время пандемии COVID-19. В данной статье представлен обзор исследований, связанных с изучением изменений эмоционального фона во время пандемии COVID-19.

Key words: emotions, COVID-19, pandemic.

Ключевые слова: эмоции, COVID-19, пандемия.

The sociology of emotions is a relatively young field of sociological knowledge. Modern sociology is moving along the path of increasing detail in the behaviour of the individual and now includes the analysis of emotions, which are changing significantly in modern societies. Over the past three decades, one can observe an increase in interest in the study of the role of emotions in social action. Emotions as typical and normative internal states of actors act as a necessary link between personality and social structure. Emotions help maintain social solidarity and at the same time promote social change.

On the one hand, a person tends to manage emotions according to cultural and social rules, but on the other hand, they are not always subject to social control. All actions of such an individual, even rational ones are always emotional. Therefore, considering how an individual is guided by different semantic meanings, it is necessary to take into account his specific emotional experiences as a willingness to

act on the basis of these meanings. However, despite being emotional, in modern societies the individual has an extraordinary reflexivity about what he experiences. In addition, individuals develop and manage ways of "working with emotions" depending on the social context. The strengthening of these trends in sociology means that the subjective dimensions of the behaviour of individuals, namely emotional experiences, conscious and unconscious, are increasingly included in the theoretical analysis of social structures, and are also widely introduced into the practice of empirical sociological research.

It is especially important to explore emotions in new and changing conditions for people, for example, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some research results (Lampraki et al., 2022) show that distancing and reducing social contact had negative side effects, such as mental (emotional) health problems.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the lives of people around the world. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization officially declared COVID-19 a pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020). More than two years later, the pandemic is also affecting public health. Much of the research has focused on the public's reaction to the emerging crisis. In particular, at the moment there are studies aimed at identifying emotional and behavioural responses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research during the pandemic has revealed different kinds of emotional responses. Most studies have found evidence of widespread fear, worry, and anxiety. For example, this is shown in the very first study (Kleinberg et al., 2020) that provided reliable data on emotional responses to COVID-19. Bennett Kleinberg, Isabelle van der Vegt, Maximilian Mozes used the participants' writing method to express their emotions. As a result, a dataset of 5000 texts (2500 short texts + 2500 long texts) was created. Researchers' analysis shows that emotional reactions correlate with linguistic indicators. The topic modeling also showed that people in the UK are worried about their family and economic situation. The study found that people used the shorter texts as a vehicle to call for solidarity, while the longer texts gave a glimpse of their real concerns.

Another Chinese study (S. Li et al., 2020) published at the beginning of the 2020 pandemic showed similar results. Li S., Wang Y., Xue J., Zhao N., Zhu T. selected and analyzed Weibo messages from 17,865 active users using an online environmental recognition (OER) approach based on multiple machine learning prediction models. Based on the collected data, the scientists calculated the frequency of words, the number of emotional indicators and cognitive indicators. The results showed that negative emotions (e.g, anxiety, depression, and resentment) increased, sensitivity to social risks increased, while positive emotions and life satisfaction decreased.

Another study (Ahorsu et al., 2020) presents the development of a new scale, the COVID-19 Fear Scale. The sample consisted of 717 Iranian participants. The

scale items were constructed on the basis of an extensive review of existing fear scales, peer review and interviews with participants.

The following study (Emery et al., 2021) showed how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the mental and behavioural health of young people in the US. The participants in the study were 670 young adults in the United States. Among the sample, 84% reported pandemic-related changes in mood or stress, and 33% reported changes in substance use.

Another study (Lwin et al., 2020) looked at global trends in the four emotions (fear, anger, sadness and joy) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researchers analyzed over 20 million social media posts made between January 28 and April 9 2020. The data shows an increase in public anxiety related to general public stress due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, during the pandemic, public emotions changed from fear to anger, as well as sadness and joy. The results of the analysis of messages show that "Anger shifted from xenophobia at the start of the pandemic to discourse around lockdown notices. Sadness was highlighted by the themes of losing friends and family members, while joy-related themes included words of gratitude and good health."

Another Italian study (Stella et al., 2020) used MERCURIAL (Multi-Level Co-Emergence Networks for Emotional Profiling), a framework that uses linguistic networks of words and hashtags to reconstruct social discourse describing real-world events, to study emotional responses. The scientists used MERCURIAL to analyze 101,767 tweets from Italy and the data was collected between March 11 and March 17, 2020. The study reveals the emergence of complex emotional profiles in which "anger and fear (in relation to political debate and socio-economic consequences) coexisted with trust, solidarity and hope (in relation to institutions and local communities)".

It is important to note that discrepancies between studies conducted at different stages of the pandemic may simply reflect changing emotional responses as the pandemic progresses. For example, there is a study (Li Y at al., 2021) that was conducted in the US and China at four stages of a pandemic. The scientists measured emotions, life satisfaction, preventive behaviour, receiving information related to COVID-19, and risk perception. The researchers used the Emotional Recall Task (ERT) to explore people's emotions. By allowing people to describe their emotional experiences in their own words, ERT evaluates each person based on emotions relevant to their personal experiences, making it more appropriate for a wider range of contexts and social groups. Emotional negative reactions (boredom, anxiety, fear and worry) emerged early in the pandemic. However, the researchers emphasized that instead of negative emotions building up as the virus spread, emotions soon returned to normal. Therefore, the researchers suggest that there is a possible life cycle of emotional responses to a pandemic.

It is important to note how the use of social media sites during the COVID-19 pandemic and its relationship to people's emotional responses has been studied. For example, one US study (Tuck A at al., 2021) suggested that due to social distancing, the use of social networking sites (SNS) changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study interviewed online college students in a city in the United States. Participants completed the same social media use questionnaires twice: once for the month prior to the onset of COVID-19 and a second time for the month since. The results showed that after "onset of COVID-19, participants had increased daily time spent on social media; in addition, enjoyment of social media has decreased and the emotional impact of social media activity has become more negative." In addition, some components of the use of social networking sites are "positively associated with loneliness".

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a variety of studies that focused on the virus itself and the psychological and social impact of the pandemic on people's health. In particular, at the moment there are quite a lot of studies (discussed in the second chapter) that study people's emotions during the covid-19 pandemic. However, it may be noted that most of the research on emotions is carried out within the framework of psychological discourse. As a result, a variety of emotional reactions were identified in people: stress, anxiety, depression, anger, etc.

For now, it is important to examine people's emotional responses during the pandemic from a sociological perspective. For example, among vulnerable groups such as migrants and refugees, the elderly, children, the homeless, people with disabilities. It is important to study the characteristics of emotions from a gender point of view (differences or similarities in emotional reactions in men and women).

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