



COVID-19: SOCIAL-CULTURAL INFLUENCES AND ADHERENCE TO GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES OF SOCIAL ISOLATION IN PERU

COVID-19: INFLUENCIAS SOCIOCULTURALES Y ADHERENCIA A LAS ESTRATEGIAS GUBERNAMENTALES DE AISLAMIENTO SOCIAL EN EL PERÚ

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"During this pandemic, informality, lack of adherence, the loss of the rule of law, and the natural fear of an invisible enemy becomes more present day by day." R.D.

EDITORIAL

On March 15, the President of Peru Martín Vizcarra, in a message to the nation, announced that 71 positive cases were detected, and he decreed a state of emergency just 9 days after announcing on national television the presence of the first positive case, a worker from a well-known airline^(1,2). In hindsight, it was considered a very drastic, and even hasty decision at the time. The Head of the Nation was already completely soaked by world reality. On March 11, 2020, four days after the WHO declared COVID-19 as a pandemic⁽³⁾. It was likely that as an engineer the president understood the cold numbers that grew exponentially in Italy and Spain from the end of February until that day in March when it was reported that the infected individual had contact with 43 children in the district of Comas. On March 15, Martín Vizcarra decided to confront the problem in the face of the uncertainty of insufficient data that announced an invisible enemy harming his people. His response, and the international data available, led the informed population to applaud the president and trust with optimism in the outlined course; but there were already certain fears. 80% of those infected were asymptomatic or with mild symptoms, therefore, zero patient was not the only one with the disease. On March 17, a Spanish newspaper, just two days after the presidential announcement, came forward pointing out a serious problem that ended up being an idiosyncratic factor of the national reality that would play against the strategy to face the pandemic of the 21st century. In the editorial titled "Health emergency in Peru. The drama of suspending a country due to the coronavirus" published by the newspaper La Vanguardia on March 17, 2020, 4, commented that since 70% of the population belong to informal sectors, where they live day to day and without economic security, how can the population be forced not to go out to work if they don't have anything to eat? The second problem is social conflicts which have always been a critical factor in Peru for various reasons, although the best known are for the exploitation of mining resources. The Peruvian people have the habit of getting up, taking bridges, highways, private property, and even murdering police without major consequences. The state is always attentive to respect Human Rights and has always yielded the negotiated. The non-confrontational strategy has avoided true massacres on multiple occasions and always putting aside violence in search of dialogue. This is usually due to media pressure leaving the current government in a bad position retreating, yielding, and closing multiple projects and investments. The argument, "the united people will never be defeated" left a large part of the population, not respecting rules and authorities⁽⁵⁾. The third problem is the cultural factors deeply rooted in the province and the need to honor their dead. This allows friends and family to protect the infected person, even after their death, and honor them with mass wakes that promote new sources of infection⁽⁶⁾.

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The fourth problem is very low adherence due to a serious lack of comprehension and understanding that reveals the intellectual and social deficiency in the poorest sectors of Peru. These actions are a result of the failure of the educational system, nutritional deficiencies, and other reasons. As a result, human masses do not respect the rules in markets, facing attacks by policemen⁽⁷⁾.

It is understood that there are independent, informal workers that live day to day but the laws must be respected, and the authorities must be respected. Unfortunately, in this third world situation, there are sectors that escape these norms simply because there is no authority to respect, complicating the current situation. These factors unfortunately explain a possible partial failure of the national strategy and that can even become a dangerous seed of the beginning of disorder and looting. The

wealthy districts would prohibit contact with the most peripheral and poor areas that would pass quickly to phase 4, further collapsing the healthcare system and massively increasing mortality. It is the government's need to take into account these intervening variables in order not only to control the pandemic but also to prevent a social overflow. The intervention of companies, anthropologists, psychologists, educators, advertisers and journalists, all of them with the intention of modifying cultural factors, as well as the need of the government to guarantee the supply of food and social support (while generating new respect for the Rule of Law, without falling into messianism or autocracies), is a hard job that the President of Peru, Martín Vizcarra, will have to face to increase the chances of success of his strategy against COVID-19.

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