

Vergleichende Analyse von Individualismus vs. Kollektivismus in Pandemien:
Auswirkungen auf die psychische Gesundheit und Unterschiede in der
Befolgung pandemiebekämpfender Maßnahmen am Beispiel von COVID-19

BACHELORARBEIT

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Abstract

Diese Bachelorarbeit untersucht die Rolle von kulturellen Orientierungen, insbesondere von Kollektivismus und Individualismus, in der Reaktion auf die COVID-19-Pandemie. Das Ziel der Arbeit war es, den Einfluss von Individualismus und Kollektivismus auf die Durchführung pandemiebekämpfender Maßnahmen und den Schutz der psychischen Gesundheit zu erforschen. Durch eine umfassende Literaturanalyse und Expert:inneninterviews wurden Erkenntnisse über das Verhalten von Gesellschaften gewonnen, die kollektivistisch oder individualistisch geprägt sind, in Reaktion auf die COVID-19-Pandemie. Kollektivistische Kulturen zeigen aufgrund strenger sozialer Normen, enger sozialer Netzwerke und einer Priorisierung des Gemeinwohls über dem Eigenwohl eine höhere Konformität gegenüber Pandemiemaßnahmen und agieren somit effektiver in der Pandemiebekämpfung als individualistische Kulturen. Kollektivismus schützt auch die psychische Gesundheit während der Pandemie besser als Individualismus, indem ein stärkeres Gefühl der Gemeinschaft und sozialen Unterstützung geboten wird. Gleichzeitig werden in der Untersuchung mögliche Nachteile des Kollektivismus genannt, wie beispielsweise mangelnde Flexibilität und die Gefahr der Vernachlässigung individueller Freiheiten. Die Arbeit schließt mit praktischen Empfehlungen für die Politikgestaltung in zukünftigen Pandemien und betont die Notwendigkeit, die psychische Gesundheit stärker in den Fokus zu rücken. Diese Forschung trägt dazu bei, die Bedeutung kultureller Orientierungen in der globalen Pandemiebewältigung zu verstehen und liefert Einblicke, die für die Vorbereitung auf zukünftige Krisensituationen von Bedeutung sein können.

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1 Einleitung

Anfang 2020 brach die COVID-19-Pandemie aus und verbreitete sich innerhalb weniger Wochen weltweit. Menschen aus verschiedenen Ländern und Kulturen wurden mit dem Virus und seinen Auswirkungen konfrontiert. Diese Auswirkungen waren unterschiedlicher Natur und beeinträchtigten den Alltag vieler Menschen, was zu einer veränderten Realität führte. Innerhalb kurzer Zeit wurden länder- und kulturübergreifend verschiedene Maßnahmen implementiert, wie beispielsweise das Tragen von Masken oder soziale Distanzierung. Diese Maßnahmen hatten das Ziel, die Ausbreitung des Virus zu verlangsamen und somit die Gesundheit der Bevölkerung zu schützen. Im März 2020 begann ich mein Studium und wie viele andere Studierende weltweit machte ich damals zum ersten Mal die Erfahrung, virtuell von zu Hause aus, zu studieren. Auch Schüler:innen und Berufstätige mussten sich aufgrund neuer Regelungen an eine vorübergehend neue Normalität anpassen und entweder von zu Hause aus arbeiten oder Vorkehrungen für ein sicheres physisches Miteinander treffen und einhalten. Es stellte sich schnell heraus, dass diese Maßnahmen wirksam waren und somit die körperliche Gesundheit vieler Menschen vor dem Virus geschützt werden konnte. Eine negative Folge der durch den Virus bedingten Isolation und sozialen Distanzierungsmaßnahmen war jedoch eine Zunahme psychischer Erkrankungen sowie ein gesteigertes Empfinden von Einsamkeit (Herzlieb and Odenthal, 2021). Obwohl das Virus nicht an Landesgrenzen Halt macht, kristallisierten sich schnell unterschiedliche Herangehensweisen und Erfolgsbilanzen der einzelnen Staaten heraus. Diese Unterschiede können bei einer Infektionskrankheit in einer globalisierten Welt auf verschiedene Faktoren zurückgeführt werden. Es ist wichtig, die kulturelle Variable als einen möglichen Faktor zu berücksichtigen. Die kulturellen Orientierungen Individualismus und Kollektivismus können einen bedeutsamen Beitrag zur Erklärung der divergenten Ausgänge der COVID-19-Pandemie in verschiedenen Nationen leisten. Die vorliegende Arbeit diskutiert die kulturellen Einflüsse von Individualismus und Kollektivismus auf die Einhaltung der COVID-19-Maßnahmen und die psychische Gesundheit während der Pandemie. Es ist von Bedeutung zu verstehen, wie kulturelle Orientierungen das Verhalten und die psychische Gesundheit in Krisenzeiten wie der COVID-19-Pandemie beeinflussen, um daraus zu lernen und uns besser auf potenzielle zukünftige Pandemien vorzubereiten. Diese Themen sind für uns alle relevant, da sie eine signifikante Rolle in unserem vernetzten globalen Zusammenleben spielen und tiefgreifend in das Gefüge aller sozialen Interaktionen und des gesellschaftlichen Funktionierens eingebettet sind. Es ist eine Tatsache, dass die Kultur einen wesentlichen Einfluss auf die verschiedenen Ausgänge einer

Pandemie haben kann, wenn man den Kulturbegriff und die kulturellen Orientierungen Individualismus und Kollektivismus näher betrachtet.

2 Theorie und Forschungsstand

2.1 Kulturelle Grundlagen

Eine Kultur prägt die Art und Weise, wie Menschen Situationen interpretieren und Sinn zuschreiben. Sie wird als individuell erlerntes und kollektiv geteiltes Wissen beschrieben und resultiert aus menschlichen Handlungen. Dabei wirkt Kultur direkt auf menschliches Handeln aus, wie Hofstede (2001) es als mentale Programmierung beschreibt (Germ, 2006).

In einer Kultur legen die gesellschaftlich anerkannten Werte fest, welche Gedanken, Emotionen und Verhaltensweisen innerhalb des vorherrschenden kulturellen Kontextes als richtig gelten (Lustig and Koester, 1999). Heranwachsende Individuen übernehmen im Verlauf ihrer Sozialisation in einer Kultur sowohl Werte als auch Denk- und Verhaltensmuster von ihrem Umfeld (Lustig and Koester, 1999; Hofstede, 2001). Daraus folgt, dass die Kultur des Individuums einen maßgeblichen Einfluss auf das menschliche Verhalten hat. Es ist daher sinnvoll, unterschiedliche Pandemieausgänge aus einer kulturellen Perspektive zu betrachten.

2.2 Die Konzepte Individualismus und Kollektivismus

Um kulturübergreifende Unterschiede zu beschreiben, wird am häufigsten das Konzept des Individualismus und Kollektivismus angewandt (Oyserman et al., 2002). Diese Konzepte spiegeln das Ausmaß wider, in dem kulturelle Gruppen Independenz gegenüber Interdependenz bevorzugen (Kitayama et al., 2009, Markus and Kitayama, 1991). In Gesellschaften, die vom Individualismus dominiert werden, wird das Selbst nach den besonderen Merkmalen des Einzelnen definiert, wodurch lockere Bindungen zwischen den Individuen entstehen (Hofstede, 2001, Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Zudem wird in individualistischen Kulturen den Einzelnen zugestanden, ihre eigenen Ziele zu priorisieren und sich weniger um das Wohl der Mitmenschen in der umfassenderen Gemeinschaft zu kümmern (Schwartz and Melech, 2000). Kollektivistische Kulturen definieren das Selbst in Bezug auf die Beziehungen zu anderen. In diesen Kulturen stehen gegenseitige Abhängigkeit, Gruppenzusammenhalt, Aufmerksamkeit für die Bedürfnisse anderer und soziale Harmonie im Vordergrund (Song et al., 2018). Kollektivistische und individualistische Kulturen verkörpern somit zwei fundamental unterschiedliche Ausrichtungen gesellschaftlicher Wertesysteme.

2.3 Die COVID-19-Pandemie als kulturelles Prüffeld

Nachdem die Grundeigenschaften der kulturellen Prägung durch Individualismus und Kollektivismus erläutert wurden, ist das Ziel nun, sie vergleichend im Licht eines Ereignisses zu betrachten, das die verankerten Denk- und Handlungsmuster der beiden Kulturdimensionen aufzeigt und deren Leistungsfähigkeit testet. Die COVID-19-Pandemie hatte über einen längeren Zeitraum hinweg eine globale Präsenz und Relevanz, unabhängig von nationalen oder kulturellen Grenzen. Aus diesem Grund eignet sie sich für eine vergleichende Untersuchung von individualistischen und kollektivistischen Kulturen und deren Reaktionen auf eine Pandemie. Dabei werden Befunde zur Entwicklung von psychischer Gesundheit in individualistischen und kollektivistischen Kulturen während der Pandemie miteinbezogen. Zum anderen werden mögliche Unterschiede in der Konformität zu den staatlichen Maßnahmen und der Ausführung pandemiebekämpfender Handlungen in individualistischen und kollektivistischen Gesellschaften verglichen. Die Forschungsfrage lautet: Inwieweit begünstigt Kollektivismus oder Individualismus die effektive Durchführung pandemiebekämpfender Maßnahmen und den Schutz der psychischen Gesundheit während einer Pandemie? Da im Kollektivismus das Wohl der Gemeinschaft priorisiert wird, denke ich, dass kollektivistische Werte in einer Krise wie der COVID-19-Pandemie sowohl der psychischen Gesundheit als auch der Konformität zu Präventionsmaßnahmen, im Kontrast zu individualistischen Werten, förderlich sind. Kitayama et al. (2009) und Triandis (2018) fanden, dass viele europäische und angloamerikanische Länder zum Individualismus tendieren, während asiatische Länder eher kollektivistisch geprägt sind. Auch Hofstede (2001) argumentiert, dass kollektivistische und individualistische kulturelle Werte traditionell als Merkmale ostasiatischer bzw. westlicher Kulturen angesehen werden. Im Folgenden wird sich mit dem Vergleich der beiden Kulturausprägungen befasst, wobei auch Individualismus und Kollektivismus innerhalb eines Landes verglichen werden können.

Es werden nun wissenschaftliche Befunde präsentiert, die diesen Kulturvergleich bezüglich psychischer Gesundheit und pandemiebekämpfenden Maßnahmen behandeln.

2.4 Einfluss von COVID-19 auf die psychische Gesundheit

Die COVID-19-Pandemie hat Gesellschaften weltweit vor wirtschaftliche, politische und medizinische Herausforderungen gestellt. Sie gefährdete nicht nur die physische Gesundheit der Menschen, sondern erhöhte auch das Risiko für schlechtere psychische Gesundheit (Cullen et al., 2020, Kontoangelos et al., 2020).

Howell et al. (2023) untersuchten in separaten Studien die Rolle von Ungewissheit, Sorge und wahrgenommener Kontrolle über COVID-19 auf die psychische Gesundheit. Dabei wurden sowohl Stichproben aus China, einem kollektivistischen Staat, als auch aus den USA, einem individualistischen Staat, untersucht. Personen, die sich mehr Sorgen um ihr COVID-19-Risiko machten und das Gefühl hatten, weniger Kontrolle darüber zu haben, erlebten häufiger negative Gefühle, Ängste und schlechteren Schlaf. Eine weitere Studie von Howell et al. (2023) zeigt, dass auch US-Amerikaner:innen, die sich mehr um ihr COVID-19-Risiko sorgten und weniger Kontrolle darüber empfanden, vermehrt unter Ängsten, Depressionen, Stress und Schlafstörungen litten. Beide Studien zeigen, dass die Sorge um das Risiko, an COVID-19 zu erkranken, die wahrgenommene Kontrolllosigkeit bezüglich der Verhinderung einer Infektion und die Unsicherheit hinsichtlich des COVID-19-Risikos konsistent mit einer schlechteren allgemeinen psychischen Gesundheit verbunden sind. In beiden Ländern machten sich die Teilnehmenden, die unsicher über die Pandemie und das damit verbundene Risiko waren, mehr Sorgen um COVID-19. Mehr Sorgen um COVID-19 waren mit geringerer psychischer Gesundheit verbunden. Die empfundene Kontrolle über die Situation moderierte den Effekt von Sorgen und Unsicherheit auf die psychische Gesundheit. Je stärker die Kontrolle empfunden wurde, desto positiver war die psychische Gesundheit (Howell et al., 2023). Während Sorgen eine natürliche Konsequenz von Unsicherheit sind, können übermäßige Sorgen die psychische Gesundheit beeinträchtigen (Behar et al., 2005, McLaughlin et al., 2007, Watkins, 2008). Befunde aus der Gesundheitspsychologie legen nahe, dass Sorgen um ein gesundheitliches Ergebnis motivierend für präventives Verhalten sein können (Brewer et al., 2004, Hay et al., 2006). Mehr präventives Gesundheitsverhalten könnte zu einer höheren wahrgenommenen Kontrolle über das COVID-19-Risiko geführt haben, was die negative psychische Gesundheit mindert. Howell et al. (2023) fanden während ihrer Forschung in sowohl einer individualistischen als auch einer kollektivistischen Kultur identische Resultate. Kulturelle Unterschiede spielten bei dem Effekt von geringer wahrgenommener Kontrolle auf negativere psychische Gesundheit keine Rolle. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die COVID-19-Pandemie kulturübergreifend zu einer Verschlechterung der psychischen Gesundheit geführt hat. Es wurde jedoch nicht beantwortet, ob Individualismus oder Kollektivismus in einer Pandemie wie der COVID-19-Pandemie begünstigt ist.

Pan et al. (2023) verglichen in ihrer Forschung mit chinesischen und schwedischen Teilnehmer:innen, wie sehr die psychische Gesundheit während der COVID-19-Pandemie mit Prosozialität zusammenhängt. Dabei repräsentiert Schweden eine individualistische und China

eine kollektivistische Kultur (Eisler et al., 2020; Feng und Guo, 2017). Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass psychische Gesundheit mit Prosozialität in Verbindung steht. Es war unerheblich, ob es sich bei der Prosozialität um pandemiebezogenen COVID-Altruismus oder allgemeinen Altruismus handelte. Die Studie ergab unabhängig vom kulturellen Kontext dieselben Ergebnisse hinsichtlich des Zusammenhangs zwischen psychischer Gesundheit und Prosozialität. Diese kulturelle Invarianz deutet darauf hin, dass der Befund kulturübergreifend robust ist (Pan et al., 2023). So kann auch hier kein Unterschied in der psychischen Krisensicherheit zwischen individualistischen und kollektivistischen Kulturen festgestellt werden.

In einer China-internen Studie (Dong et al., 2022) wurde die psychische Schutzwirkung des Kollektivismus während der COVID-19-Pandemie untersucht. Obwohl China im Allgemeinen als kollektivistisches Land gilt, variieren die Ausprägungen von Kollektivismus und Individualismus innerhalb des Landes (Hofstede, 2023, Vandello and Cohen, 1999, Hofstede and Bond, 1984, House et al., 2004). Dong et al. (2022) fanden heraus, dass Kollektivismus mit weniger psychischen Gesundheitsproblemen in der COVID-19-Pandemie verbunden war. Ein hohes wahrgenommenes Risiko von COVID-19 und Individualismus waren mit mehr psychischen Gesundheitsproblemen verbunden. Niedriger Kollektivismus verstärkte den negativen Einfluss des wahrgenommenen COVID-19-Risikos, während hoher Kollektivismus ihn abschwächte. Kollektivist:innen hatten also ein höheres Sicherheitsgefühl und ein geringeres Maß an psychischer Belastung (Dong et al., 2022). Dies könnte darauf zurückzuführen sein, dass Kollektivismus mit mehr sozialer Unterstützung verbunden ist als Individualismus (Zhang and Han, 2021). Kollektivist:innen empfinden im Allgemeinen ein Gefühl der sozialen Verbundenheit und Zugehörigkeit (Kim et al., 2016, Murray et al., 2011). Dies kann in Krisensituationen, wie z. B. der COVID-19-Pandemie, einen schützenden Effekt haben und psychische Gesundheitsprobleme reduzieren. Individualist:innen hingegen betonen das Ich-Bewusstsein und die emotionale Unabhängigkeit (Zhang and Han, 2021) und schätzen sowohl Autonomie als auch Privatsphäre (Brewer and Chen, 2007). Daher empfinden sie bei hoher Risikowahrnehmung weniger soziale Unterstützung und Verbundenheit und verfügen nicht über diese psychologischen Puffer (Kim et al., 2016). Dies deutet stark auf eine Begünstigung des Kollektivismus gegenüber Individualismus in Bezug auf die psychische Gesundheit während der COVID-19-Pandemie hin.

In einer weiteren Studie widmeten sich Mohamed et al. (2022) der Untersuchung kulturübergreifender Unterschiede bezüglich psychischer Gesundheit und

Bewältigungsstrategien bei Student:innen während der COVID-19-Pandemie. Student:innen aus traditionell individualistischen und traditionell kollektivistischen Ländern (Hofstede, 2001) erfuhren eine Beeinträchtigung der psychischen Gesundheit mit einem höheren Maß an wahrgenommenem Stress. Wahrgenommener Stress und eine labile psychische Gesundheit standen in einem positiven Zusammenhang mit dem Einsatz dysfunktionaler Bewältigungsstrategien. Teilnehmer:innen aus kollektivistischen Ländern waren erfolgreicher in der Anwendung emotions- und problemorientierter Bewältigungsstrategien, setzten aber auch mehr dysfunktionale Bewältigungsstrategien, wie Vermeidung, ein (Mohamed et al., 2022). Dass Kollektivist:innen anfälliger für dysfunktionales Bewältigungsverhalten sind, kann dadurch erklärt werden, dass Personen aus kollektivistischen Kulturen dazu neigen, ihre Emotionen und Verhaltensweisen stärker zu kontrollieren oder zu unterdrücken als Personen aus individualistischen Kulturen (Hofstede, 2001, Shulruf et al., 2007). Dahinter steht die Motivation, sich in die Gruppe einzufügen und mit der Umwelt konform zu gehen. Im Gegensatz zu Individualist:innen neigen sie weniger dazu, sich unmittelbar mit externen Stressfaktoren auseinanderzusetzen oder diese zu verändern. Dies könnte darauf zurückzuführen sein, dass in kollektivistischen Ländern das Wohl der Gemeinschaft über dem Wohl des Einzelnen steht und daher persönliche Entscheidungen häufig zugunsten des Kollektivs zurückgestellt werden (Hofstede, 2001, Shulruf et al., 2007, Kuo, 2011). Diese Befunde weisen auf Vor- und Nachteile kollektivistischer Gesellschaften in Krisensituationen hin, indem emotions- und problemorientierte Bewältigungsstrategien erfolgreicher und dysfunktionale Bewältigungsstrategien häufiger eingesetzt werden.

Ein Aspekt, der in kollektivistischen Kulturen deutlich stärker ausgeprägt ist als in individualistischen Kulturen, ist die Betonung der Gemeinschaft. Ich vermute daher, dass Gemeinschaft in kollektivistischeren Kulturen ein wichtigerer Faktor für die psychische Gesundheit ist als in individualistischen Kulturen.

Joo et al. (2023) untersuchten die Rolle von Gemeinschaft bei der Bewältigung psychischer Probleme während der COVID-19-Pandemie bei koreanischen und US-amerikanischen Teilnehmer:innen. Allgemein als das Gefühl des „Miteinander Auskommens“ beschrieben, umfasst Gemeinschaft Solidarität, Verbundenheit und Hilfsbereitschaft gegenüber anderen Menschen (Abele and Wojciszke, 2007). Es ist bekannt, dass diese Gefühle als Puffer für die psychische Gesundheit in Krisensituationen dienen können. Insbesondere die Verbundenheit mit anderen erhöht die psychische Gesundheit (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Darüber hinaus gilt

Gemeinschaft neben Selbstbestimmung als eine Notwendigkeit für optimale psychische Gesundheit des Individuums (Bakan, 1966, Helgeson, 1994).

Die Forschung von Joo et al. (2023) hat bei Menschen in Südkorea und den USA gezeigt, dass die Gemeinschaft dazu beiträgt, die negativen Emotionen, die im Alltag aufgrund der Sorge um COVID-19 erlebt werden, zu reduzieren. Die Gemeinschaft wirkt hier als psychologischer Puffer. Während der durch COVID-19 verursachte Stress negative Emotionen verstärkt und positive Emotionen dämpft, hilft die Gemeinschaft, positive Emotionen zu verstärken (Joo et al., 2023). In Südkorea war die Unterstützung durch die Gemeinschaft mit weniger negativen und mehr positiven Emotionen verbunden als in den USA. Gemeinschaft hatte im kollektivistischen Südkorea einen positiveren Einfluss auf die Emotionen der Teilnehmenden als im individualistischen USA (Joo et al., 2023). In Übereinstimmung mit diesem Ergebnis wurde festgestellt, dass bei Personen mit einem interdependenten Selbst ein positiver Zusammenhang zwischen Gemeinschaft und Selbstwertgefühl besteht, im Gegensatz zu Personen mit einem independenten Selbst (Wojciszke and Bialobrzeska, 2014). Auch Uchida et al. (2008) fanden heraus, dass die psychische Gesundheit von Japaner:innen stärker von der wahrgenommenen sozialen Unterstützung durch nahestehende Personen beeinflusst wird als die der US-Amerikaner:innen.

Diese Ergebnisse sprechen kollektivistischen Gesellschaften Vorteile gegenüber individualistischen Gesellschaften in Pandemiezeiten zu. Durch die psychologischen Puffer, die sich aus der Gemeinschaft und der sozialen Unterstützung ergeben, können kollektivistisch geprägte Personen negative Emotionen reduzieren und somit die psychische Gesundheit während Pandemien wie der COVID-19-Pandemie besser aufrechterhalten als individualistisch geprägte Personen (Uchida et al., 2008).

Der Vergleich der psychischen Gesundheit von individualistischen und kollektivistischen Kulturen während der COVID-19-Pandemie zeigt, dass beide Kulturen während der Pandemie psychische Probleme hatten. Zusammenfassend lässt sich sagen, dass die psychische Gesundheit in kollektivistischen Kulturen in Krisensituationen besser geschützt ist. Der Grund dafür ist, dass der Kollektivismus dem Individuum einen psychologischen Puffer bieten kann, der negative Gefühle abschwächt und somit die psychische Gesundheit schützt. In Bezug auf die Forschungsfrage deutet dies auf Vorteile des Kollektivismus gegenüber dem Individualismus für die psychische Gesundheit während der COVID-19-Pandemie hin.

2.5 Kulturelle Ansätze in pandemiebekämpfenden Maßnahmen

Im Folgenden werden die beiden Kulturdimensionen Individualismus und Kollektivismus hinsichtlich der Konformität der Individuen mit Maßnahmen zur Pandemiebekämpfung gegenübergestellt. Für kollektivistische Gesellschaften erwarte ich eine höhere Konformität mit Präventionsmaßnahmen, was mit einer erfolgreicherer Pandemiebekämpfung einhergehen sollte. Zur Eindämmung der COVID-19-Pandemie wurden länderübergreifend gesundheitspolitische Maßnahmen ergriffen, um die Ausbreitung des Virus zu stoppen. Eine der am weitesten verbreiteten Maßnahmen war die Verwendung von Atemschutzmasken zur Infektionsprävention. Es konnte gezeigt werden, dass das Tragen von Masken sowohl vor einer Selbstinfektion, als auch vor der Ansteckung anderer Personen schützen kann (Behrens, 2020). Lu et al. (2021) untersuchten die Vorhersagekraft von Kollektivismus und Individualismus auf das Tragen von Masken während der COVID-19-Pandemie. In mehreren Studien beleuchteten sie den Zusammenhang zwischen Kollektivismus und Maskentragen auf verschiedenen Ebenen. Zum einen wurden in den USA Analysen auf der Ebene des Bundesstaates und auf der Ebene des Individuums durchgeführt. Beide Studien kamen zu dem Ergebnis, dass sowohl kollektivistischere Bundesstaaten als auch kollektivistischere Individuen positiv mit dem Tragen von Masken assoziiert sind. Darüber hinaus wurde in zwei weiteren Studien mit Daten aus 29 bzw. 67 Ländern festgestellt, dass kollektivistische Werte sowohl die individuelle Verwendung von Masken als auch die in der Gemeinschaft wahrgenommene Verwendung von Masken positiv beeinflussen. Zusammenfassend lässt sich schlussfolgern, dass Kollektivismus eindeutig mit einer höheren Bereitschaft zur Maskennutzung einhergeht (Lu et al., 2021). Ein Grund, dass Individualismus mit einer niedrigeren Bereitschaft zur Maskennutzung einhergeht, könnte der persönliche Komfort sein. Denn, obwohl Masken wirksam vor COVID-19 schützen (Chu et al., 2020), können sie körperliches Unbehagen und Unannehmlichkeiten verursachen. Da Menschen in kollektivistischen Kulturen stärker auf das kollektive Wohl bedacht sind, könnten sie möglicherweise eher bereit sein, körperliches Unbehagen beim Tragen von Masken zu tolerieren (Markus and Kitayama, 1991, Biddlestone et al., 2020). Im Gegensatz dazu neigen Menschen in individualistischen Kulturen eher dazu, ihr persönliches Wohlbefinden über das kollektive Wohlbefinden zu stellen und sind daher weniger geneigt, Masken zu tragen (Kitayama, 2020). Sie stimmen eher Aussagen zu wie „Ich mache oft mein eigenes Ding“ oder „Was mir passiert, ist mein Werk“ (Markus and Kitayama, 2010, Singelis et al., 1995, Brewer and Chen, 2007, Chen et al., 1998, Oyserman et al., 2002). 64% der US-Amerikaner:innen, die keine Maske tragen, gaben an, dass es ihnen unangenehm ist oder dass es ihr Recht als Amerikaner:in ist, keine Maske zu tragen (Vargas and Sanchez, 2020). In dieser Hinsicht lehnen viele Menschen in individualistischen Kulturen das Tragen von Masken ab. Sie betrachten das

Tragen von Masken als eine symbolische Einschränkung ihrer Selbstbestimmungsfreiheit (Kitayama, 2020, Stewart, 2020). Viele Menschen in kollektivistischen Kulturen, in denen Interdependenz und gemeinsame Ziele im Mittelpunkt stehen, betrachten das Tragen von Masken nicht nur als Bürgerpflicht, sondern auch als Symbol der Solidarität. Dies signalisiert, dass die Pandemie gemeinsam bekämpft wird, und diese Einstellung wird durch die überwältigende Zustimmung zu Aussagen wie "Ich opfere normalerweise meine eigenen Interessen für das Wohl meiner Gruppe" und "Mein Glück hängt sehr stark vom Glück der Menschen um mich herum ab" unterstrichen (Markus and Kitayama, 2010, Singelis et al., 1995, Brewer and Chen, 2007, Chen et al., 1998, Oyserman et al., 2002).

Dies kann erklären, warum Kollektivismus mit einer höheren Bereitschaft zum Tragen von Masken einhergeht, und bestätigt meine Vermutung, dass Kollektivismus bei Pandemien wie der COVID-19-Pandemie gegenüber Individualismus begünstigt ist.

Eine weitere Maßnahme, die sich als wirksam gegen die Verbreitung des COVID-19-Virus erwiesen hat, ist die soziale Distanzierung. Dies bedeutet, einen Sicherheitsabstand von mindestens einem Meter zu seinen Mitmenschen einzuhalten und sich nicht in Gruppen oder Menschenmengen aufzuhalten (WHO). Auch bei dieser Maßnahme gehe ich davon aus, dass Individualismus mit einer geringeren Konformität zu den Regeln der sozialen Distanzierung einhergeht, was im Umkehrschluss zu weiteren Nachteilen des Individualismus bei der Bekämpfung der COVID-19-Pandemie führen würde. Feng et al. (2023) untersuchten in mehreren Studien, wie kulturelle Bedingungen die Konformität mit sozialen Distanzierungsmaßnahmen beeinflussen können. In einer US-internen Studie fanden sie heraus, dass in stärker individualistisch geprägten US-Bundesstaaten Lockdowns während der COVID-19-Pandemie zu einem geringeren Anstieg von Personen führten, die sich ganztägig zu Hause aufhielten. Dieses Ergebnis konnte in einer weiteren internationalen Studie in 79 Ländern repliziert werden. So neigten Menschen in individualistischeren Ländern trotz der Aufforderung, sich sozial zu distanzieren, dazu, häufiger das Haus zu verlassen und öffentliche Orte wie Parks oder Geschäfte aufzusuchen. Zwei weitere Studien untersuchten den Zusammenhang zwischen Individualismus und der Einhaltung sozialer Distanzierungsregeln auf individueller Ebene. Der negative Einfluss, den Individualismus bereits in den ersten beiden Studien auf die Einhaltung sozialer Distanzierungsregeln hatte, blieb bestehen (Feng et al., 2023). Personen, bei denen eine stärkere individualistische Einstellung gemessen wurde, berichteten häufiger von Verstößen gegen soziale Distanzierungsregeln in Gebieten, die von einem COVID-19-Lockdown betroffen waren. Feng et al. (2023) fanden heraus, dass der

Zusammenhang zwischen Individualismus und der Verletzung sozialer Distanzierungsregeln durch Egoismus und Langeweile erklärt werden kann. Individualistischere Personen waren egoistischer, empfanden mehr Langeweile und verletzten daher eher soziale Distanzierungsregeln während der COVID-19-Pandemie als kollektivistischere Personen (Feng et al., 2023). Dies deutet darauf hin, dass kollektivistische Gesellschaften gegenüber individualistischen Gesellschaften insofern im Vorteil sind, als dass zum einen die Menschen in Pandemien eher bereit sind, Anweisungen zur Pandemiebekämpfung zu befolgen. Andererseits werden im konkreten Fall von COVID-19 die Regeln der sozialen Distanzierung in kollektivistischen Gesellschaften eher befolgt, was ein entscheidender Faktor bei der Bekämpfung des COVID-19-Virus sein kann.

Die bisherigen Ergebnisse zeigen, dass sowohl die soziale Distanzierung als auch das Tragen einer Maske in kollektivistischen Gesellschaften eher befolgt werden als in individualistischen Gesellschaften. Dies legt die Vermutung nahe, dass die Pandemie in kollektivistischen Gesellschaften durch die stärkere Befolgung der Maßnahmen auch besser kontrolliert werden konnte. Huang et al. (2022) untersuchten in weiteren Studien den Einfluss von Individualismus auf die Kontrolle der COVID-19-Pandemie. Zunächst untersuchten sie, ob Individualismus auf internationaler Ebene mit einem tödlichen Verlauf von COVID-19 assoziiert war. Auf der Grundlage von Daten aus mehr als 73 verschiedenen Ländern fanden sie heraus, dass Individualismus mit einer höheren Sterblichkeitsrate und mehr Todesfällen pro Million Menschen verbunden ist. Eine weitere Studie, die in China durchgeführt wurde, untersuchte die Korrelation zwischen unabhängigen Selbstkonzepten und der Geschwindigkeit, mit der die Pandemie unter Kontrolle gebracht wurde. Es wurde festgestellt, dass in Gebieten Chinas, in denen ein unabhängiges Selbstkonzept, also Individualismus, vorherrscht, die Kontrolle über das COVID-19-Virus länger andauerte. Das heißt, je geringer der Grad des Individualismus, desto schneller die epidemische Kontrolle. Dieser Effekt konnte jedoch auf der Seite des interdependenten Selbstkonzepts, d.h. des Kollektivismus, nicht signifikant repliziert werden. Abschließend untersuchten Huang et al. (2022) den Einfluss der Kultur auf die illegale Mobilität während der COVID-19-Pandemie. Dazu wurden Teilnehmende aus 23 Ländern befragt. Sie fanden eine signifikante positive Korrelation zwischen dem independenten Selbstkonzept und der Neigung zu illegaler Mobilität. Dieser Zusammenhang blieb auch nach Berücksichtigung weiterer Variablen wie Pro-Kopf-Einkommen, Bevölkerungsdichte oder Alter signifikant. Je individualistischer eine Person ist, desto höher ist demnach die Wahrscheinlichkeit illegaler Mobilität. Dieser Zusammenhang kann durch die Angst vor dem

Tod erklärt werden (Huang et al., 2022). In individualistischen Kulturen ist die Kontrolle über das eigene Schicksal ein zentraler Aspekt im Umgang mit dem Tod (Seymour et al., 2010). Individualist:innen messen dem Selbst einen hohen Wert bei und empfinden oft eine größere Angst vor dem Tod als Kollektivist:innen (Becvar, 2005). So ist der Wunsch, den eigenen Tod kontrollieren zu können, bei Individualist:innen stärker ausgeprägt als bei Kollektivist:innen (Kearl and Harris, 1981, Kimmelmeier et al., 2002). Im Kontext der COVID-19-Pandemie, die ein unkontrollierbares Risiko mit potenziell tödlichem Ausgang darstellt, könnte dieses Kontrollbedürfnis insbesondere bei Personen mit einem unabhängigen Selbstkonzept zu einer erhöhten Todesangst führen (Huang et al., 2022). In diesem Zusammenhang kann die Angst vor dem Tod Individuen von psychischen Konflikten oder Druck befreien, die durch die Verletzung moralischer Normen entstehen würden. Dies geschieht durch den Mechanismus der moralischen Vermeidung und der Verteidigung der eigenen Interessen (Huang et al., 2022). Es ist bekannt, dass Individualist:innen dazu neigen, ihre eigenen Interessen über das Wohl des Kollektivs zu stellen, was nicht im Einklang mit einer effizienten Ausübung gesamtgesellschaftlicher Maßnahmen steht und in diesem Fall zu mehr illegaler Mobilität führt. Zusammenfassend legen die Studien von Huang et al. (2022) nahe, dass Individualismus im Kontext einer globalen Krise wie der COVID-19-Pandemie potenziell schädlich sein kann. Die Betonung des Selbst und die Priorisierung persönlicher Interessen können zu Entscheidungen führen, die den kollektiven Anstrengungen zur Eindämmung der Krise entgegenstehen. Im Gegensatz dazu scheinen kollektivistische Ansätze, die das Gemeinwohl in den Vordergrund stellen, effektiver zu sein, da sie zu schnelleren und effektiveren Reaktionen auf die Krise führen und somit helfen, die Ausbreitung des Virus einzudämmen. Dies spricht wiederum, um auf die ursprüngliche Forschungsfrage zurückzukommen, für eine Begünstigung kollektivistischer Werte, wenn es um die Eindämmung einer Pandemie wie der COVID-19-Pandemie geht.

2.6 Historische Perspektive und kulturelle Dynamik

Betrachtet man die Geschichte von Kollektivismus und Infektionskrankheiten, wird schnell eine enge Verbindung deutlich. Die Befunde von Fincher et al. (2008) und Fincher und Thornhill (2012) deuten darauf hin, dass Gesellschaften mit einer höheren Prävalenz von Infektionskrankheiten dazu neigen, kollektivistischere Werte zu entwickeln. Dies ist zum Teil auf die Notwendigkeit zurückzuführen, die Konformität und Wachsamkeit gegenüber Fremden zu erhöhen, um die Ausbreitung von Krankheiten einzudämmen, was typische Merkmale kollektivistischer Kulturen sind (Fincher et al., 2008). Historische Beispiele wie der SARS-

Ausbruch im Jahr 2002 zeigen, dass chinesische Studierende, die in einer kollektivistischen Kultur leben, optimistischer waren und die Vorsichtsmaßnahmen besser befolgten als kanadische Studierende europäischer Herkunft (Ji et al., 2004). Ähnliche Beobachtungen wurden während der H1N1-Pandemie im kollektivistischen Südkorea gemacht, wo die Gesellschaft einen stärkeren sozialen Druck ausübte, die Schutzmaßnahmen zu befolgen, als in der individualistischen US-amerikanischen Gesellschaft (Cho and Lee, 2015). Die *Epidemic theory* erklärt, wie die Bedrohung durch ansteckende Krankheiten zu stärkeren Bindungen innerhalb von Gruppen und zu größerer Vorsicht gegenüber außenstehenden Mitgliedern führt (Schaller and Murray, 2010). Diese Reaktionen dienen dazu, die Ausbreitung von Infektionskrankheiten zu minimieren, indem soziale Barrieren gegenüber Fremden aufgebaut werden, die als potenzielle Überträger von Krankheitserregern angesehen werden, und fördern so die Bildung einer kollektivistischen Kultur (Schaller and Murray, 2010).

Morand und Walther (2018) unterstützen die Hypothese, dass kollektivistische Werte in Regionen mit hoher Erregerbelastung stärker ausgeprägt sind. So wurde festgestellt, dass Kollektivismus in Ländern mit einer historisch hohen Erregerbelastung vorherrscht und Individualismus mit einer höheren Anzahl von Krankheitsausbrüchen korreliert (Morand and Walther, 2018). Kollektivismus kann als eine adaptierte kulturelle Antwort auf die Herausforderungen von Infektionskrankheiten betrachtet werden, die Gruppenbildung fördert und soziale Normen etabliert, die das Gemeinwohl der internen Gruppe über das Wohl von Einzelpersonen außerhalb der Gruppe stellen, um die Gesundheit der Gemeinschaft zu schützen (Schaller and Murray, 2010).

Diese historische Verbindung zwischen Kollektivismus und Krankheitserregern deutet darauf hin, dass die Bedingungen, die durch interdependente Werte und kollektivistische Gesellschaften geschaffen werden, für die Bekämpfung einer Infektionskrankheit wie der COVID-19-Pandemie besser geeignet sind als individualistische Gesellschaften.

Im Einklang mit der historischen Komponente, die die Vorteile von Kollektivismus gegenüber Individualismus bei Infektionskrankheiten erklärt, bestätigten Na et al. (2021) die Auswirkungen von Stress durch den COVID-19-Erreger auf die Unterstützung von Kollektivismus in Südkorea. Hierzu wurden Koreaner:innen während der COVID-19-Pandemie zu ihrer Einstellung bezüglich Individualismus respektive Kollektivismus befragt. Obwohl Südkorea bereits zu den am stärksten kollektivistisch geprägten Kulturen zählt (Hofstede, 1980), konnte während der Pandemie ein Anstieg des Kollektivismus festgestellt werden. Der Anstieg des Kollektivismus kann als verhaltensbezogener Abwehrmechanismus

als Reaktion auf die Bedrohung durch den Erreger erklärt werden (Na et al., 2021). Darüber hinaus korrelierte der Tagesdurchschnittswert der Zustimmung zum Kollektivismus signifikant mit der Anzahl der COVID-19-Fälle an diesem Tag. Je mehr bestätigte COVID-19 Fälle es an einem Tag gab, desto positiver bewerteten die Teilnehmer:innen den Kollektivismus. Insgesamt sind diese Ergebnisse konsistent mit der Hauptannahme der Pathogen-Stress-Hypothese, dass Bedrohungen durch Krankheitserreger eine ökologische Grundlage für Kollektivismus darstellen (Na et al., 2021). Im Gegensatz dazu veränderte sich der Individualismus in Südkorea während der Pandemie nicht. Dies zeigt einmal mehr, dass Individualismus und Kollektivismus zwar entgegengesetzte Pole derselben kulturellen Dimension sind, aber dennoch unabhängig voneinander sein können (Brewer and Chen, 2007, Taras et al., 2014).

Diese Ergebnisse deuten erneut darauf hin, dass Kollektivismus ein geschätzter kultureller Wert bei Pandemien ist und Vorteile gegenüber Individualismus bei der Durchführung von Pandemiebekämpfungsmaßnahmen bietet.

2.7 Ableitung der Hypothesen

Basierend auf der detaillierten Darstellung und dem Vergleich der beiden Kulturdimensionen, insbesondere im Kontext der COVID-19-Pandemie, zeichnet sich ein konsistentes Bild ab.

Die empirischen Befunde legen nahe, dass kulturelle Prägungen nicht nur beeinflussen, wie Gesellschaften auf Pandemien reagieren, sondern auch, wie Individuen ihre psychische Gesundheit in Zeiten solcher Krisen erhalten und fördern können. Die angeführten Befunde deuten darauf hin, dass kollektivistische Werte eher als individualistische dazu beitragen, Pandemiebekämpfungsmaßnahmen effektiv umzusetzen und gleichzeitig die psychische Gesundheit des Einzelnen zu schützen. Daraus leite ich die beiden folgenden Hypothesen ab:

Hypothese 1: Kollektivismus ist im Vergleich zu Individualismus förderlicher für die effektive Umsetzung von Pandemiebekämpfungsmaßnahmen.

Hypothese 2: Kollektivismus ist förderlicher als Individualismus, um die psychische Gesundheit während einer Pandemie zu schützen.

Die Hypothesen werden im empirischen Teil dieser Arbeit anhand einer qualitativen Datenerhebung in Form von Expert:inneninterviews getestet, um die theoretischen Annahmen zu verifizieren oder zu widerlegen.

3 Methodik

3.1 Qualitative Datenerhebung mittels Expert:inneninterviews

Die Bachelorarbeit untersucht den Einfluss von Individualismus und Kollektivismus in der COVID-19-Pandemie. Ausgehend von der zentralen Forschungsfrage, inwieweit kollektivistische oder individualistische Werte die Umsetzung von Pandemiebekämpfungsmaßnahmen und den Schutz der psychischen Gesundheit begünstigen, wurden zwei Hypothesen formuliert: (1) Kollektivismus ist förderlicher als Individualismus, um Pandemiebekämpfungsmaßnahmen effektiv umzusetzen und (2) Kollektivismus ist förderlicher als Individualismus, um die psychische Gesundheit während einer Pandemie zu schützen.

Um diese Hypothesen zu testen, wurde ein qualitativer Forschungsansatz auf der Basis von Expert:inneninterviews gewählt. Die Methode ermöglichte eine tiefgreifende Analyse der subjektiven Erfahrungen und Einschätzungen von Expert:innen, die aufgrund ihrer beruflichen Expertise und Erfahrung einen fundierten und detailreichen Einblick in die Thematik bieten konnten. Durch das Verständnis der Expert:innen für die komplexen Zusammenhänge der Thematik konnten qualitative Daten darüber erhoben werden, wie kulturelle Orientierungen des Individualismus und Kollektivismus die Effektivität von Pandemiebekämpfungsmaßnahmen sowie den Schutz der psychischen Gesundheit von Individuen während der COVID-19-Pandemie beeinflussen.

3.2 Erstellung des Interviewleitfadens

Der Fragebogen, der als Grundlage für die Expert:inneninterviews diente, wurde sorgfältig entwickelt, um die aufgestellten Hypothesen zu testen und weitere Informationen für praktische Implikationen zu erhalten. Der Fragebogen war in vier Abschnitte unterteilt und enthielt insgesamt elf Fragen. Der erste Abschnitt des Fragebogens umfasste zwei Fragen. Diese zielten darauf ab, den akademischen Hintergrund und die Expertise der interviewten Person zu ermitteln und eine erste persönliche Einschätzung zum Thema Individualismus vs. Kollektivismus in einer Pandemie zu erhalten. Die Abschnitte zwei und drei bildeten den Kern des Fragebogens und enthielten jeweils drei Fragen zu den Hintergründen der beiden von mir aufgestellten Hypothesen. Der zweite Abschnitt beschäftigte sich mit dem Vergleich von Kollektivismus und Individualismus in Bezug auf Maßnahmen zur Bekämpfung von Pandemien. Im dritten Abschnitt wurde der Einfluss von Individualismus und Kollektivismus auf die psychische Gesundheit während einer Pandemie behandelt. Der vierte und letzte Abschnitt des Fragebogens enthielt drei Fragen: die Optimierung von Pandemiestrategien,

Politikempfehlungen in unterschiedlichen kulturellen Kontexten sowie die Übertragung von Pandemieerfahrungen auf die heutige Gesellschaft und Arbeitswelt. Bei den einzelnen Interviews gab es geringfügige Abweichungen vom ursprünglichen Fragebogen, um noch detaillierter auf das Fachgebiet der interviewten Person eingehen zu können. Wenn die Interviewpartner:innen aufgrund der offenen Fragen bereits Teile der weiterführenden Fragen ausführlich beantwortet hatten, wurden gegebenenfalls Fragen übersprungen, um Doppelantworten zu vermeiden. Bei umfangreichen Antworten wurden die anderen Fragen des jeweiligen Blocks kürzer behandelt. Der Fragebogen befindet sich im Anhang.

3.3 Auswahl und Vorstellung der Expert:innen

Für die Erhebung qualitativer Daten war es essentiell, geeignete Expert:innen für die Interviews auszuwählen. Es wurden gezielt Expert:innen ausgewählt, die als Autor:innen einiger wissenschaftlicher Texte, die für den Theorieteil der Arbeit herangezogen wurden, partizipiert haben. Diese Auswahl gewährleistete, dass die Expert:innen die notwendige Expertise mitbrachten, um tiefgreifende und fundierte Antworten zu der Thematik zu liefern. Um die Interviews zu vereinbaren, habe ich die Expert:innen per E-Mail oder telefonisch kontaktiert. Die Kontaktdaten der Expert:innen fand ich teilweise auf ihren wissenschaftlichen Artikeln. In den meisten Fällen recherchierte ich sie jedoch im Internet. Die Kontaktaufnahme erfolgte professionell und respektvoll. Ich stellte mich vor, verwies auf ihre Arbeiten und zeigte ihnen die Relevanz und Positionierung ihrer Expertise für meine Bachelorarbeit auf. Insgesamt habe ich rund 80 Expert:innen kontaktiert. Für ein Interview konnte ich schließlich sechs Expert:innen gewinnen, die bereits Artikel zu dem Thema veröffentlicht hatten.

Der erste Experte ist Dr. Zou Kunru, derzeit Professor für Finanzen an der Renmin Universität in China. Er promovierte in Finanzwissenschaften an der Nanyang Technological University in Singapur. Er forscht unter anderem über die soziale Verantwortung von Unternehmen und hat an mehreren wissenschaftlichen Artikeln im Bereich der Sozialpsychologie mitgewirkt.

Die zweite Expertin ist Dr. Liqin Huang. Sie hat an der Sun-Yat-sen-Universität in Guangzhou, China, studiert und promoviert und arbeitet derzeit als Postdoktorandin für Translationale Soziale Neurowissenschaften am Universitätsklinikum Würzburg. Ihre Forschung konzentriert sich auf das Lernen von Menschen in verschiedenen sozialen Kontexten, wie z.B. das Lernen sozialer Normen und prosoziales Lernen.

Der dritte Experte ist Dr. Amoneta Beckstein, Psychotherapeut und Professor für Psychologie am Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado. Zu seinen Fachgebieten gehören neben der

Positiven Psychologie auch die Interkulturelle Psychologie sowie die Auswirkungen von Pandemien auf die psychische Gesundheit.

Die vierte Expertin ist Dr. Min-Joo Joo, Professorin für Psychologie an der Duke Kunshan University in Suzhou, China. Sie promovierte in Psychologie an der Iowa State University in den USA. Seitdem konzentriert sie sich in Forschung und Lehre auf die Schnittstelle zwischen Sozial- und Kulturpsychologie. Sie beschäftigt sich mit der Frage, wie Kultur das altruistische Verhalten von Menschen in engen Beziehungen beeinflusst.

Der fünfte Experte ist Dr. Paul Hutchings, er promovierte in Sozialer Kognition an der Cardiff University. Heute ist er Professor für Psychologie an der University of Wales Trinity Saint David, wo er als Akademischer Leiter und Forschungsdirektor für Psychologie und Beratung agiert.

Der sechste und damit letzte von mir interviewte Experte ist Dr. Brian O'Shea. Er promovierte nach seinem Master in sozialer und kultureller Psychologie an der in sozialer und experimenteller Psychologie an der University of Warwick in Coventry. Aktuell ist er Professor für Sozialpsychologie an der University of Nottingham und seit 2021 als Present Affiliated Member der Harvard University gelistet.

3.4 Durchführung und Transkription der Interviews

Nachdem die Expert:innen ihre Zusage für das Interview gegeben hatten, habe ich ihnen einen Zoom-Zugangslink per E-Mail zugesandt. Da sich alle Expert:innen in einer anderen Zeitzone befanden, habe ich mich nach ihrem Terminplan und ihren bevorzugten Zeiten gerichtet. Auf Wunsch einiger Expert:innen habe ich den Fragebogen vorab per E-Mail geteilt. Die Interviews wurden zwischen dem 18. Dezember 2023 und dem 23. Januar 2024 auf der Videoplattform Zoom durchgeführt und verliefen ohne technische Probleme. Nach einer kurzen Begrüßung und Vorstellung habe ich systematisch die Fragen des Fragebogens abgearbeitet. Die Expert:innen wurden darauf hingewiesen, dass sie Fragen überspringen können, wenn sie diese nicht beantworten möchten oder können. Abschließend, nach Beantwortung aller Fragen des Fragebogens, habe ich den Expert:innen die Möglichkeit gegeben, eigene Gedanken hinzuzufügen oder Rückfragen zu stellen. Anschließend haben wir uns verabschiedet. Die Expert:innen sicherten mir ihre Unterstützung bei neu aufkommenden Fragen oder Unklarheiten zu. Alle Interviews wurden mit Einverständnis der Expert:innen über Zoom aufgezeichnet und anschließend mit dem Cloud-Dienst von Turboscribe.ai transkribiert.

4 Ergebnisse

4.1 Auswertung der Interviews

Nach der Transkription der Interviews wurden die Antworten der Expert:innen zusammengefasst und jedes Transkript in drei Teile gegliedert. Ein Teil enthält die Antworten auf die Fragen bezüglich der ersten Hypothese, ein weiterer Teil enthält die Antworten auf die Fragen zur zweiten Hypothese und der dritte Teil enthält die Antworten zu den Praxisimplikationen. Anschließend wurden die Antworten der Expert:innen jeweils einem der drei genannten Teile zugeordnet und in Bezug auf Unterthemen gegliedert. Die Antworten wurden verglichen und Schnittmengen sowie Unterschiede analysiert. Die Darstellung erfolgt thematisch strukturiert nach relevanten Inhaltspunkten, anstatt die Interviews separat zu behandeln. Für die erste Hypothese zu den Bekämpfungsmaßnahmen werden beispielsweise Unterthemen wie „soziale Normen“ oder „Folgebereitschaft“ in individualistischen bzw. kollektivistischen Kulturen auf Basis der Erkenntnisse aus allen Interviews zusammengefasst. Im Folgenden werden die Ergebnisse der Expert:inneninterviews aufgezeigt, beginnend mit den Ergebnissen bezüglich der ersten Hypothese.

4.2 Ergebnisse: Pandemiebekämpfende Maßnahmen

4.2.1 Soziale Normen und Folgsamkeit im Kollektivismus

Die erste Hypothese besagt, dass Kollektivismus förderlicher für die effektive Umsetzung von Pandemiebekämpfungsmaßnahmen ist als Individualismus. Die Expert:inneninterviews haben eindeutig ergeben, dass alle Expert:innen der Ansicht sind, dass Kollektivismus im Vorteil gegenüber Individualismus ist, wenn es um die Einhaltung von Maßnahmen zur Pandemiebekämpfung geht. Im Folgenden werden die Gründe erläutert, die von den Expert:innen genannt wurden.

Huang stellte fest, dass Länder mit einem höheren Grad an Kollektivismus eine niedrigere Sterberate in Bezug auf COVID-19 aufweisen. Die Expert:innen nannten als signifikanten Grund für die Begünstigung von Kollektivismus gegenüber Individualismus die strengen sozialen Normen in kollektivistischen Gesellschaften. Kunru beschrieb die engen Beziehungen und Verbindlichkeiten in kollektivistischen Gesellschaften, die dazu führen, dass soziale Normen besonders stark befolgt werden. Huang sagte, dass diese engen Strukturen zu strengeren sozialen Normen und einer Kultur der gegenseitigen Überwachung und sozialen Kontrolle führen, die es in individualistischen Kulturen in dieser Form nicht gibt. Joo verwies auf die soziale Erwartung in kollektivistischen Gesellschaften, Gruppeninteressen über die

eigene Bequemlichkeit zu stellen: *”The social expectation of having to put a group’s need above one’s own, this would be the key advantage of collectivism.”* In kollektivistischen Kulturen sind die Normen strenger und die Wahrscheinlichkeit von Sanktionen im Falle von Abweichungen höher als in individualistischen Kulturen, was zu einem höheren Maß an Vorsicht und Selbstkontrolle führt.: *”If you are in a society with a tighter norm, you are more likely to be punished when you do not follow the norm.”* Beckstein sagte, dass in kollektivistischen Kulturen auch Menschen, die nicht vollständig von den Maßnahmen überzeugt seien, dennoch Masken tragen würden, weil es die soziale Norm verlangt. Auch Hutchings sah kollektivistische Länder aufgrund ihrer sozialen Normen bei der Pandemiebekämpfung im Vorteil.

In kollektivistischen Gesellschaften sind die Bürger:innen aufgrund der sozialen Normen eher bereit, pandemiebezogene Regeln und Vorschriften zu befolgen. Kunru betonte, dass in solchen Systemen die Anweisungen der politischen Führung effektiver durchgesetzt werden können, da die Menschen eher dazu neigen, ihnen zu folgen: *„If they are more likely to follow the social norms, then they also more likely to follow the rules from the government.“* Huang und O’Shea sagten, dass Kollektivist:innen Regeln stärker befolgen und schnelles Handeln in Krisen fördern, was in der Pandemiebekämpfung hilfreich ist. Zudem, so O’Shea, werden in kollektivistischen Kulturen Autoritäten weniger in Frage gestellt und Schutzmaßnahmen besser befolgt als in individualistischen Kulturen. O’Shea sagte, Individualismus stelle die politische Führung stärker in Frage und betone den Eigennutz, außerdem gebe es einen starken Wunsch, sich abzuheben, was zu weniger Gehorsam führen könne: *”A disadvantage of individualism in this situation is that everyone wants to be different. So if a lot of people are wearing masks, you’re going to have a group of people that will just naturally want to show that they differ from this world.”* Joo sprach an, dass die hohen Werte von Freiheit und Autonomie in individualistischen Kulturen oft mit kollektiver Fügsamkeit kollidieren und daher die Bereitschaft, Maßnahmen zu befolgen, tendenziell geringer ist. Hutchings sagte, dass, obwohl die anfänglichen Zustimmungsraten zu Pandemiemaßnahmen in individualistischen und kollektivistischen Gesellschaften ähnlich waren, Kollektivismus mit der Zeit eine nachhaltigere und höhere Befolgungsrate zeigte: *”The difference started to come out as time went on, where you started to see a difference between individualistic and collectivistic societies.“*

4.2.2 Priorisierung des Gemeinwohls und Erfahrung mit Maßnahmen im Kollektivismus

Die vorteilhaften Auswirkungen kollektivistischer Kulturen bei der Bekämpfung von Pandemien lassen sich nicht nur durch strengere soziale Normen erklären, sondern auch durch eine grundsätzliche Priorisierung der Gemeinschaft gegenüber dem Individuum. Kunru stellte fest, dass in kollektivistischen Gesellschaften oft eine sozialistischere Einstellung vorherrsche, die sich in einer stärkeren Fürsorge für Risikogruppen und einem tieferen Verständnis für zwischenmenschliche Beziehungen und Abhängigkeiten manifestiere. Huang sagte, dass kollektivistische Gesellschaften der Gemeinschaft einen höheren Wert beimessen und daher eher bereit sind, persönliche Vorteile zugunsten des Gemeinwohls zu opfern: *“For collectivism, people are more willing to sacrifice their own benefits to afford a collective good.”* Auch Joo erklärte, dass im Kollektivismus das Gemeinwohl Vorrang vor der individuellen Freiheit habe, was eine schnelle und effektive Koordinierung von Maßnahmen ermögliche. Hutchings betonte die Rolle des Verantwortungsgefühls in kollektivistischen Kulturen: *“The greater feeling of shared responsibility for the well-being of the collective over the more individualized concern for well-being of the individual or the close group around the individual comes into play.”* Das Bewusstsein, dass jede/r Einzelne für das Wohlergehen der Gemeinschaft verantwortlich ist, sei ein entscheidender Faktor für die Umsetzung und Einhaltung von Schutzmaßnahmen. O’Shea sagte, dass kollektivistische Kulturen aus Respekt und dem Wunsch, andere zu schützen, eher bereit sind, Regeln zu befolgen, und verwies auf das konsequente Tragen von Masken in der japanischen Gesellschaft.

Ein weiterer Grund für die Bevorzugung des Kollektivismus gegenüber dem Individualismus bei der Umsetzung von Pandemiebekämpfungsmaßnahmen ist die bereits bestehende kulturelle Vertrautheit und Erfahrung mit Maßnahmen in kollektivistisch geprägten Ländern. Ein deutliches Beispiel hierfür ist das Tragen von Masken. Beckstein wies darauf hin, dass in einigen kollektivistischen Gesellschaften, wie z.B. Japan, das Tragen von Masken bereits als alltägliche Reaktion auf andere Krankheiten, wie z.B. Grippe, etabliert sei. Diese kulturelle Verankerung präventiver Gesundheitsmaßnahmen habe dazu beigetragen, dass kollektivistische Länder besser vorbereitet waren und schnell und effektiv auf die Anforderungen der Pandemie reagieren konnten. In individualistischen Gesellschaften, so Hutchings, war das Konzept des Maskentragens eine neue und teilweise fremde Praxis, die erst durch Aufklärung und politische Anstrengungen in der Bevölkerung verankert werden musste: *“Wearing a mask and social distancing in the UK was a completely alien concept for the vast majority of people.”* O’Shea erklärte, dass kollektivistische Gesellschaften sich in Reaktion auf extreme Bedrohungen entwickelt haben: *“The reason why they develop these tendencies is because they're in a highly*

threatening environment.“ So hat sich in Regionen nahe dem Äquator, wo viele Infektionskrankheiten auftreten, der Kollektivismus als effektives Konzept im Umgang mit Krankheiten erwiesen. Kulturen, die von vielen Infektionskrankheiten betroffen sind, haben eine größere Abneigung gegen Keime und entwickeln Verhaltensweisen, die sie vor Krankheiten schützen, so O'Shea.

4.2.3 Gefahren des Kollektivismus in Pandemien

Abschließend wiesen die Expert:innen auch auf Nachteile hin, die der Kollektivismus in diesem Zusammenhang mit sich bringt. Kunru nannte die mangelnde Flexibilität innerhalb kollektivistischer Systeme, die dazu führe, dass selbst bei sich ändernden Umständen die Politik selten in Frage gestellt werde. O'Shea sagte, dass eine kollektivistische Kultur aufgrund des mangelnden Hinterfragens im Vergleich zu individualistischen Kulturen schädliche Politiken und fehlerhafte Maßnahmen länger tolerieren könnte. Auch Beckstein kritisierte ein Übermaß an Konformität und einen damit einhergehenden Mangel an kritischem Denken, was dazu führen kann, dass Regeln befolgt werden, die möglicherweise nicht mehr die aktuelle Realität des Virus widerspiegeln. Er veranschaulichte dies mit einer Anekdote, in der er und seine Lebensgefährtin in einem Restaurant in Thailand an verschiedenen Tischen Platz nehmen mussten, obwohl sie die meiste Zeit außerhalb des Restaurants miteinander verbrachten. Huang sprach das Phänomen an, dass sich in kollektivistischen Gesellschaften aufgrund des hohen gegenseitigen Vertrauens Verschwörungstheorien schneller verbreiten können, wogegen die Regierung des betroffenen Landes aktiv vorgehen sollte. Joo erwähnte den Nachteil, dass in kollektivistischen Gesellschaften die Privatsphäre bei Nichtkonformität leichter verletzt werden könne, was die individuellen Freiheitsrechte untergrabe.

Die übereinstimmende Meinung der Expert:innen bekräftigt, dass kollektivistische Gesellschaften trotz einiger Herausforderungen effektiver bei der Bewältigung von Pandemien sind. Kulturell verankerte soziale Normen und die Tendenz, Gemeinschaftsinteressen über persönliche Interessen zu stellen, haben sich als entscheidend für die erfolgreiche Umsetzung von pandemiebekämpfenden Maßnahmen erwiesen.

4.3 Ergebnisse: Psychische Gesundheit

4.3.1 Soziale Strukturen und Gemeinschaft im Kollektivismus

In der Auseinandersetzung mit der zweiten Hypothese, die besagt, dass Kollektivismus förderlicher als Individualismus ist, um die psychische Gesundheit während einer Pandemie zu schützen, bewerten die Expert:innen Kollektivismus und Individualismus hinsichtlich der psychischen Gesundheit während einer Pandemie.

Huang sagte, dass Menschen in kollektivistischen Kulturen in sozialen Verbänden leben, die eine wesentliche soziale Unterstützung durch Familie und Freunde ermöglichen. Joo erklärte, dass Kollektivismus die Schaffung starker sozialer Unterstützungsnetzwerke fördere, die Isolation wirksam reduzieren können. Diese Netzwerke seien in kollektivistischen Kulturen größer und komplexer als in individualistischen Kulturen: *”According to my research, people in collectivistic countries tend to have a relationship or social network that is more spread out.”* Joo meinte, dass die komplexen Beziehungsstrukturen innerhalb des Kollektivismus ein umfassendes Sicherheitsnetz schaffen, das in Krisensituationen wie einer Pandemie von großem Wert ist. Auch Beckstein sagte, dass in kollektivistischen Kulturen das Zusammenleben intensiver sei und die Menschen weniger allein leben als in individualistischen Kulturen. Insgesamt zeigte sich, dass kollektivistische Gesellschaften über wertvolle soziale Strukturen verfügen, die während einer Pandemie eine gute Grundlage für den bestmöglichen Schutz der psychischen Gesundheit bieten können.

Die psychische Unterstützung durch die Gemeinschaft, die kollektivistische Kulturen bieten, ist das Hauptargument für ihren Vorteil gegenüber individualistischen Kulturen. O’Shea erklärte, dass der Kollektivismus durch stärkere Familienbindungen, engere Gemeinschaften und die daraus resultierende geringere Einsamkeit seinen Mitgliedern eine bessere psychische Unterstützung bietet als der Individualismus. O’Shea betonte, dass persönliche Kontrolle ein Schlüsselkonzept für positive psychische Gesundheit und den Umgang mit Ängsten sei. Vertrauen in die Regierung helfe in kollektivistischen Kulturen, mit Isolation umzugehen. Beckstein äußerte, dass kollektivistische Kulturen über ein starkes soziales Kapital verfügen, das auf der Abhängigkeit von Beziehungen und der Verbundenheit zwischen Menschen basiere: *”I think that a lot of people in collective societies have that strong social capital.”* Huang sagte, dass die psychische Gesundheit in kollektivistischen Gesellschaften durch die vorherrschende soziale Konformität und die Unterstützung für gemeinschaftliches Handeln weniger beeinträchtigt werde. Soziale Nähe und Unterstützung fungieren als psychologischer Puffer für Menschen mit psychischen Problemen. Demgegenüber leiden Menschen in individualistischen

Kulturen stärker unter Isolationsmaßnahmen, da ihnen die persönliche Freiheit wichtiger ist als kollektivistisch geprägten Menschen und die Maßnahmen daher einen größeren Eingriff in die gewohnte Lebensweise darstellen: *“These kind of measues will do more harm to the mental health of people in the individualistic cultures, or countries, than the collective cultures, because they will change their lifestyle or life way more than the collective cultures.”* Joo betonte, dass das Gefühl der Gemeinschaft und des gemeinsamen Schicksals, welches in kollektivistischen Kulturen tief verwurzelt ist, von immenser Bedeutung sei. Die Gemeinschaft wird nicht nur als ein zentraler Wert angesehen, der Schutz bietet und ein Gefühl der Zugehörigkeit sowie ein gemeinsames Ziel vermittelt, sondern auch die interdependente Selbstsicht, die das Wohlergehen der Gruppe über das eigene stellt, ist von entscheidender Bedeutung: *“Communion is a central value in collectivism. And it plays a protective role against mental health issues by providing sense of belonging and shared purpose.”* Auch Kunru war der Ansicht, dass die gegenseitige Hilfe und psychische Unterstützung, die in kollektivistischen Systemen geleistet wird, ein wesentlicher Vorteil des Kollektivismus gegenüber dem Individualismus in Pandemien ist.

4.3.2 Nachteile des Kollektivismus bezüglich psychischer Gesundheit in Pandemien

Auf der anderen Seite erwähnten die Expert:innen auch einige Nachteile, die Kollektivismus gegenüber Individualismus in Bezug auf die psychische Gesundheit während einer Pandemie hat. Kunru wies auf den Nachteil hin, dass in kollektivistischen Kulturen die strikte Befolgung von Regeln zu weniger sozialen Kontakten führen kann, was die Isolation verstärken könnte. Joo sagte, dass Individualist:innen aufgrund ihrer Unabhängigkeit von äußeren Umständen und Erwartungen der Gemeinschaft möglicherweise resilienter seien: *“I would say they are more resilient, and more in control of their own actions in this case.”* Ihre Fähigkeit, Motivation aufrechtzuerhalten und Normen zu befolgen, könnte unabhängig von der Entwicklung der Pandemiesituation stärker sein. Individualist:innen hätten auch mehr Vertrauen in ihre eigenen Fähigkeiten und könnten besser mit Unsicherheit umgehen, so Joo. Beckstein sagte, dass es in individualistischen Kulturen weniger Stigmatisierung gebe, bei psychischen Problemen Hilfe zu suchen: *“In our Western societies, there's less stigma about mental health, less stigma about asking for help, about counseling or mental health aspects.”* Individualist:innen, die allein waren, könnten auch besser mit der Situation umgehen als allein lebende Kollektivist:innen. Sie seien auch weniger anfällig für Ängste, die durch Medien und Politik ausgelöst werden, was ihre psychische Gesundheit schütze, meinte Beckstein. Hutchings war der Ansicht, dass Individualist:innen, die es gewohnt sind, für sich selbst zu sorgen, besser mit Isolation umgehen können, da sie weniger auf soziale Interaktionen angewiesen sind. Auf der anderen Seite kann

die erhöhte Verantwortung für das Wohlergehen der Gruppe in kollektivistischen Gesellschaften zu mehr Stress und psychischen Belastungen für das Individuum führen: *“That responsibility for them could be extremely detrimental to mental health if you were responsible for them, but had no way of being able to provide for them.”* Er wies auch auf die Rolle der Politik hin. Am Beispiel Großbritanniens erläuterte er, dass zu Beginn der Pandemie sofort finanzielle Hilfe geleistet wurde. Im Gegensatz dazu war die Unterstützung durch die Politik in Thailand geringer. Dies kann in kollektivistischen Gesellschaften, in denen die soziale Verantwortung ohnehin groß ist, ein zusätzlicher Nachteil sein.

Trotz einiger Vorteile, die individualistische Kulturen in Bezug auf Autonomie und Resilienz bieten, überwiegen die engen sozialen Netzwerke und die starke Gemeinschaft in kollektivistischen Gesellschaften, wenn es um den Schutz der psychischen Gesundheit während einer Pandemie geht. Somit lassen die Antworten der Expert:innen darauf schließen, dass Kollektivismus gegenüber Individualismus im Vorteil ist, wenn es darum geht, die psychische Gesundheit während einer Pandemie zu schützen.

4.4 Ergebnisse: Praxisimplikationen

Im dritten Abschnitt der Interviews habe ich die Expert:innen nach den Praxisimplikationen für Politik und Wirtschaft sowie nach Lehren, die wir alle aus der COVID-19-Pandemie ziehen können, befragt.

Huang sagte, dass Maßnahmen zur Bekämpfung von Pandemien kulturübergreifend flexibel sein müssen und sich immer an den neuesten wissenschaftlichen Erkenntnissen orientieren sollten. Auch O'Shea meinte, es sei wichtig, den Ratschlägen von Wissenschaftler:innen und Gesundheitsorganisationen wie der WHO zu folgen. Er fügte hinzu, dass Regierungschef:innen nicht gegen die Ratschläge von Gesundheitsexpert:innen verstoßen und sich nicht in die Vermittlung wissenschaftlicher Ratschläge an die Bevölkerung einmischen sollten. Als Negativbeispiel nannte er Donald Trump: *“Donald Trump should not have been telling the population what to do. It always should have been going to a professional. He's the person that knows what the strategy is. And the president should never counteract. Because if you do, that creates uncertainty among the people of, who should I listen to?”* Außerdem, so O'Shea, sollten Politiker:innen die Aussagen von Expert:innen nicht untergraben, da dies zu einem Vertrauensverlust in die Wissenschaft führen kann, insbesondere bei Empfehlungen für Maßnahmen, die die Wirtschaft schwächen.

Die Expert:innen haben verschiedene politische Empfehlungen für kollektivistische Kulturen formuliert. Joo hält es für unerlässlich, dass Regierungen den kulturellen Kontext in ihre Strategien zur Bekämpfung von Pandemien einbeziehen. Dies helfe nicht nur, die Wirksamkeit der Maßnahmen zu erhöhen, sondern auch, die verfügbaren Ressourcen zielgerichteter und effektiver einzusetzen. Kunru betonte, dass in kollektivistischen Kulturen die Konformität sehr hoch ist und daher keine zu strengen Maßnahmen ergriffen werden sollten. Dies gilt insbesondere dann, wenn sich die Pandemie in einem späteren, gesundheitlich weniger gefährlichen Stadium befindet und die wirtschaftlichen Kosten überwiegen. Da Menschen in kollektivistischen Kulturen ohnehin dazu neigen, der politischen Führung zu folgen, sollte die Politik diese Tendenz nicht ausnutzen, sondern die Meinung der Bevölkerung respektieren und berücksichtigen: *“The government should care more about the voices of people because people in collectivism countries, they just tend to follow and they do not voice out, unlike the people in individualist countries.”* Huang schlug vor, dass kollektivistische Regierungen die natürliche Bereitschaft der Menschen nutzen sollten, sich an Regeln zu halten, insbesondere zu Beginn einer Pandemie, wenn nur wenige Alternativen wie Impfungen zur Verfügung stehen: *“Governments could use or take advantage of people's intentions to comply with government's rules or regulations voluntarily.”* Auf Nachfrage stimmte sie Kunrus Bedenken hinsichtlich weniger strenger Maßnahmen in fortgeschrittenen Stadien der Pandemie zu. Sie fügte jedoch hinzu, dass Regierungen sich an wissenschaftlich fundierte Richtlinien halten und aktiv gegen Fehlinformationen vorgehen sollten. Huang und Kunru lobten unabhängig voneinander den Umgang Singapurs mit der Pandemie, der ihrer Meinung nach eine gute Balance zwischen dem Fokus auf die Gesundheit der Bevölkerung und der Wirtschaft des Landes darstellte. Joo empfahl die Stärkung des Gemeinschaftsgefühls und die Betonung der gegenseitigen Verpflichtung, um die Motivation zur Einhaltung der Vorschriften zu erhöhen. Ein starkes Gemeinschaftsgefühl kann dazu beitragen, die Einhaltung der pandemiebekämpfenden Maßnahmen zu verbessern. Hutchings wies darauf hin, dass Personen, die sich in kollektivistischen Kulturen um ihre Gruppe kümmern, mit ausreichenden Ressourcen versorgt werden sollten, um ihre Fähigkeit zur Fürsorge und Unterstützung zu maximieren.

Bei den Empfehlungen der Expert:innen für individualistische Gesellschaften betonten Kunru, Huang und Joo gleichermaßen die Wichtigkeit des Verständnisses und der Nachvollziehbarkeit von Maßnahmen für individualistische Bürger. Kunru sagte, dass die Politik die Gründe für Maßnahmen klar kommunizieren sollte, da die Menschen eher bereit sind, Richtlinien zu befolgen, wenn sie die Gründe und Konsequenzen ihrer Handlungen verstehen. Auch Huang

meinte, dass individualistische Regierungen darauf abzielen sollten, das Verständnis der Bevölkerung dafür zu fördern, wie individuelles Verhalten das Kollektiv beeinflusst. Anstatt die Öffentlichkeit zu verärgern, sollten individuelle Werte genutzt werden, um das Engagement zu erhöhen. Joo sagte, dass das Erkennen und Verstehen des Nutzens des eigenen Handelns für die Gemeinschaft entscheidend sei und empfahl die Betonung von Eigenverantwortung und Selbstmanagement. Sie wies darauf hin, dass individualistische Gesellschaften lernen können, sich an Normen zu halten, und dass Normen, obwohl sie in individualistischen Kulturen oft negativ gesehen werden, eine wichtige soziale Funktion erfüllen können, insbesondere in Krisenzeiten. Kunru, der das interkulturelle Lernen aufgrund der Beständigkeit von Kultur für schwierig hielt, vertrat die Ansicht, dass individualistische Kulturen dennoch von den Praktiken kollektivistischer Kulturen in Bezug auf Unterstützung und Zusammenarbeit profitieren können. O'Shea wies darauf hin, dass das Wissen um eine Maßnahme oft nicht ausreicht, um sich daran zu halten, sondern dass Motivation und Verständnis für die Gründe der Maßnahme erforderlich seien: *”Everyone probably knows that they shouldn't meet up with their friends. It's like everyone knows that you should eat healthy and, you know, work out. But not everyone does that, just because it's hard. It's an extra layer of work.”*

Hutchings empfahl vor allem, gefährdete Gruppen in politische Maßnahmen einzubeziehen und sicherzustellen, dass in individualistischen Gesellschaften niemand übersehen wird. Dies sei entscheidend für die psychische Gesundheit der Bevölkerung. Beckstein verstärkte diesen Gedanken, indem er auf den *Village Effect* auf einer kulturübergreifenden Ebene verwies. Er zog Parallelen zwischen dem traditionellen Dorfleben, in dem Gemeinschaftssinn und gegenseitige Fürsorge allgegenwärtig waren, und den heutigen Möglichkeiten, Wohlbefinden zu fördern. In solchen eng verbundenen Gemeinschaften war es früher schwierig, an Depressionen zu leiden, ohne dass andere es bemerkten und Unterstützung anboten. Er schlug vor, dass die heutige Politik darauf abzielen sollte, Interaktion und zwischenmenschliche Beziehungen zu fördern, und dass jede/r in der Lage sein sollte, psychologische Erste Hilfe zu leisten: *”I'd love to see a world where we don't need people like me, we don't need psychologists, because why? Because everybody on the street is caring enough to help you.”* O'Shea stellte fest, dass die Menschheit in einer Extremsituation wie der COVID-19-Pandemie in der Lage war, schnell und entschlossen zu handeln. Er erkannte an, dass die Innovationsfähigkeit, einschließlich der Entwicklung des Impfstoffs, und die Anpassungsfähigkeit der Menschen gute Eigenschaften der Menschheit seien, die uns bei zukünftigen Pandemien helfen können: *”So humans as a species were extremely innovative and adaptable, that we should just acknowledge that, that we do pretty good under bad situations.”*

Final hoben die Expert:innen die Notwendigkeit hervor, aus der COVID-19-Pandemie zu lernen und die gewonnenen Erkenntnisse für zukünftige Gesundheitskrisen zu bewahren. Huang sagte, dass Wissen bewahrt und geteilt werden müsse und dass Maßnahmen kultursensibel angepasst werden müssten. Joo und Beckstein erinnerten daran, dass wir alle miteinander verbunden sind und das gleiche Schicksal teilen, unabhängig von unserer Kultur. Sie betonten die Bedeutung von Gemeinschaftswerten sowohl in individualistischen als auch in kollektivistischen Gesellschaften. Joo sagte, es sei wichtig, die Bedeutung der psychischen Gesundheit anzuerkennen. Auch Beckstein meinte, dass alle Gesellschaften, unabhängig von ihrer kulturellen Ausrichtung, die Vernetzung und gegenseitige Fürsorge als entscheidende Faktoren für die psychische Gesundheit betonen sollten. Psychische Gesundheit und Prävention sind zentrale Themen, da eine gute psychische Verfassung die Produktivität und Leistungsfähigkeit steigert. Das Wohlergehen einer Gesellschaft verbessert sich insgesamt, wenn die psychische Gesundheit ihrer Mitglieder gestärkt wird.

5 Diskussion

In meiner Bachelorarbeit habe ich die Rolle des Kollektivismus im Vergleich zum Individualismus bei der Umsetzung von Pandemiebekämpfungsmaßnahmen und dem Schutz der psychischen Gesundheit während einer Pandemie untersucht. Anhand der Ergebnisse von Expert:inneninterviews konnte ich zeigen, dass Kollektivismus besser geeignet ist, um Pandemiebekämpfungsmaßnahmen erfolgreich umzusetzen und die psychische Gesundheit während einer Pandemie zu schützen. Strengere soziale Normen, größere soziale Unterstützung und die Priorisierung des Gruppenwohls vor dem Eigenwohl in kollektivistischen Kulturen sind dabei entscheidende Faktoren.

Nach der Darstellung der Ergebnisse der Studie, die einen bedeutenden Beitrag zum Verständnis der Rolle des Kollektivismus gegenüber dem Individualismus bei Pandemien leisten, ist es nun wichtig, eine kritische Perspektive einzunehmen. Eine Reflexion über die methodischen Grenzen und potenziellen Schwächen der Studie ist entscheidend, um die Reichweite und Anwendbarkeit der erzielten Ergebnisse vollständig zu verstehen und zu bewerten. Eine mögliche Einschränkung dieser Studie liegt in der Methodik der Expert:inneninterviews. Die Rekrutierung von sechs Expert:innen für die Interviews, von denen jeweils drei einen Großteil ihres Expertisenbereichs innerhalb einer der beiden Hypothesen hatten, stellte eine Herausforderung dar. Obwohl den Expert:innen die Möglichkeit gegeben wurde, bei Unsicherheiten Fragen des Interviews auszulassen, bemühten sie sich, alle Fragen zu beiden

Themengebieten zu beantworten. Dabei wurde deutlich, dass ihre Antworten außerhalb ihres primären Fachgebietes weniger sicher und fundiert waren. Dies kann einerseits die Glaubwürdigkeit einiger Ergebnisse beeinträchtigen und andererseits zu einer verzerrten Interpretation der Daten führen, was die Aussagekraft der Studie schwächen könnte.

Eine weitere Schwäche könnte sich aus dem theoretischen Teil der Arbeit ergeben. Hier wurden verschiedene Quellen verwendet, die sich auf unterschiedliche Phasen der COVID-19-Pandemie beziehen. Das Problem bei der Verwendung verschiedener Quellen, die zu unterschiedlichen Zeitpunkten in der COVID-19-Pandemie veröffentlicht wurden, liegt in der daraus resultierenden Vermischung unterschiedlicher pandemischer Kontexte. Dies birgt das Risiko, dass einige Ergebnisse ihre Gültigkeit für die gesamte Pandemie verloren haben oder abgeschwächt wurden. Beispielsweise könnten Erkenntnisse aus der ersten Welle der Pandemie für spätere Wellen nicht mehr relevant sein. Da sich meine Arbeit auf die gesamte Pandemie bezieht, ist es möglich, dass ich Informationen verwendet habe, die später nicht mehr vollständig korrekt waren.

Eine wichtige Implikation für die Praxis ist die Berücksichtigung der kulturellen Dimension für Maßnahmen bei zukünftigen Pandemien. Ein wesentlicher Aspekt, der sich aus den Expert:inneninterviews und der Analyse der Unterschiede zwischen Kollektivismus und Individualismus ergibt, ist die Notwendigkeit, die kulturelle Variable bei der Gestaltung und Kommunikation von Maßnahmen während Pandemien miteinzubeziehen. Insbesondere in individualistisch geprägten Kulturen ist es wichtig, die Gründe für bestimmte Maßnahmen und die Konsequenzen individuellen Handelns klar und verständlich zu kommunizieren. Dies fördert das Verständnis und die Akzeptanz der Maßnahmen und trägt zu einer effektiveren Umsetzung bei. Eine solche kultursensible Herangehensweise ermöglicht einen effizienteren Einsatz von Ressourcen und eine gezieltere Ausrichtung der Maßnahmen, was letztlich zu einer effektiveren Bewältigung von Pandemien führt.

Ein weiteres wesentliches Ergebnis ist die große Bedeutung der psychischen Gesundheit in der heutigen Welt. Die psychische Gesundheit spielt eine zentrale Rolle bei der Bewältigung von Pandemien und beeinflusst wichtige Bereiche wie die wirtschaftliche Leistungsfähigkeit und die erfolgreiche Umsetzung von Maßnahmen zur Bekämpfung von Pandemien. Daher sollten sowohl die Politik als auch jede/r Einzelne dieses Thema ernst nehmen und dem Schutz und der Förderung der psychischen Gesundheit sowohl im Alltag als auch in zukünftigen Krisensituationen wie einer Pandemie besondere Bedeutung beimessen. Dazu gehören präventive Maßnahmen ebenso wie weitere Unterstützungsangebote zur Stärkung der Resilienz und des Wohlbefindens der Menschen.

Die diskutierten Implikationen eröffnen ein Feld für zukünftige Forschung, insbesondere in Bezug auf den Zusammenhang zwischen psychischer Gesundheit und Befolgung von Pandemiebekämpfungsmaßnahmen. Ich vermute, dass eine gute psychische Gesundheit positiv mit der Befolgung von Pandemiebekämpfungsmaßnahmen zusammenhängt. Um diese Hypothese zu überprüfen, schlage ich eine quantitative Datenerhebung in Form eines Fragebogens vor. Die Teilnehmer:innen könnten über einen längeren Zeitraum per Selbstauskunft ihre empfundene psychische Gesundheit sowie ihre Folgsamkeit gegenüber pandemiebekämpfenden Maßnahmen angeben. Um die Validität der Antworten zu erhöhen, kann eine anonyme Befragung sinnvoll sein. Außerdem denke ich, dass nach dem Verstoß gegen eine Pandemiebekämpfungsmaßnahme, wie z.B. soziale Distanzierung, die empfundene psychische Gesundheit bzw. das Wohlbefinden höher eingeschätzt wird als vorher, da man sich z.B. mit Freund:innen getroffen hat. Aus diesem Grund schlage ich vor, dass bei einem berichteten Verstoß gegen eine Maßnahme zur Pandemiebekämpfung, die berichtete psychische Gesundheit kurz vor dem Verstoß als Vergleichswert herangezogen wird. Ich denke, dass die psychische Gesundheit vor einem Verstoß häufig als eher negativ eingestuft wird und dass eine negative psychische Gesundheit möglicherweise zu mehr Verstößen führen kann. Umgekehrt könnte dies zu einer weniger erfolgreichen Bekämpfung der Pandemie führen, was mit einer längeren Dauer der Maßnahmen und damit wiederum mit einer schlechteren psychischen Gesundheit korrelieren könnte. Vor diesem Hintergrund könnten die Ergebnisse dieser Studie hilfreich sein, um die Maßnahmen zur Bekämpfung der Pandemie entsprechend anzupassen und kulturübergreifend die bestmögliche physische und psychische Gesundheit zu erreichen.

Die vorliegende Arbeit betont die Bedeutung der kulturellen Orientierungen - Individualismus und Kollektivismus - für das Verhalten während einer Pandemie und für die psychische Gesundheit. Die täglichen Bilder von menschenleeren Straßen, geschlossenen Geschäften und Passant:innen mit Masken wurden zu Symbolen einer weltweiten Krise, deren Bewältigung auch von kulturellen Faktoren abhängt. Im Alltag beeinflussen kulturelle Muster, wie wir mit Distanzierungsregeln umgehen, Gemeinschaftssinn erleben und Unterstützung in schwierigen Zeiten suchen und anbieten. Es ist daher wichtig, den kulturellen Kontext bei der Gestaltung von Gesundheitsmaßnahmen zu berücksichtigen, um deren Wirksamkeit zu maximieren. Mit dem Wissen um die Bedeutung dieser kulturellen Dimensionen können wir uns nicht nur besser auf zukünftige Pandemien vorbereiten, sondern auch unseren Alltag in einer globalisierten Welt bewusster gestalten.

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7 Anhang

7.1 Interviewleitfaden

Section 1: Background and General Perspectives

1. Can you describe your experience and expertise related to pandemic response and social behavior?
2. In your opinion, how does cultural orientation (individualism vs. collectivism) influence public health policies and practices?

Section 2: Collectivism and Pandemic Control Measures

1. From your perspective, how does a collectivist society approach pandemic control measures differently than an individualist society?
2. What are the key advantages of collectivism in ensuring compliance with pandemic control measures like social distancing or wearing a mask?
3. In your view, are there any potential drawbacks or challenges associated with a collectivist approach in this context?

Section 3: Mental Health and Social Dynamics during Pandemics

1. How do you think collectivism/individualism impacts the mental health of individuals during a pandemic?
2. Are there particular aspects of collectivist societies that might offer better support for mental health during such crises?
3. In contrast, are there aspects where individualism might have advantages in terms of mental health during pandemics?

Section 4: Implementation and Policy Considerations

1. How can governments or health organizations in collectivist/individualistic societies optimize their strategies for pandemic control?
2. What lessons can individualist societies learn from collectivist approaches regarding pandemic response and mental health support?
3. What lessons do you think we can take from the COVID period into today's (working) world?

7.2 Transkripte Expert:inneninterviews

7.2.1 Zou Kunru

Luis:

Then I just started the recording and it's okay for you, right? Yeah, it's okay for me. Thank you. So should we start with a quick introduction round, maybe? So I can introduce myself real quick and then you can introduce yourself if you want. Okay, so again, my name is Luis.

I'm from Germany. I'm currently a bachelor student. I study business psychology and in my bachelor thesis, I focus on psychology and I try to compare the differences between individualism and collectivism, especially during pandemics.

And I focus on the COVID-19 pandemic as an example. And I choose this topic because I'm interested in these cultural differences. And I think it's fascinating to see how different cultures have different results in, for example, the pandemic.

And it's just a topic that really fascinates me. So I read many papers, including yours, and that's why I contacted you. And now I'm really happy that you joined and I have prepared some questions.

And I'm really excited for your responses. And yes, maybe you can say something about you.

Kunru:

Okay. Okay. Thank you.

So I'm Kunru. I'm currently an assistant professor of finance at Renmin University of China. So actually most of my research focuses on corporate finance, but I do have some collaboration with people from psychology.

So the psychologists, especially social psychologists. So in one paper with Krishna Savani and Zhiyu Feng, we examine how collectivism or individualism affects people's tendency to follow social distancing orders in the United States and across the globe. So maybe that's a short introduction.

Luis:

Yes. Perfect. Thank you.

I was also wondering because you have a finance background and your colleagues too, they have business and marketing and HR background, but you all published a psychology paper. So that was really interesting to me. And I think it's really cool.

Kunru:

Yeah. Actually, while I was doing my PhD at Nanyang Knowledgeable University, Krishna Savani was a professor of management in our school, in our Nanyang Business School. And Zhiyu is my, actually is my peer.

He's from the management. He was doing a management PhD during that time. So actually we discussed, actually I encountered a dataset.

This dataset records the mobility patterns of around 40 million US phones. So we can track whether this phone is at home or not. So, and the thing that using this data, we can identify whether the people who hold that phone stay at home during the social distancing order.

So we think we can examine this. And later we come up with the idea that we can link some regional variables such as psychology, social psychology variables, for example, individualism, collectivism, tightness, looseness to this dataset. Then we examine the effects of collectivism and individualism.

So my role is more about the archival data analysis. And actually the story is based on our discussion. I mean, so we discuss this story and we come up with this idea.

Luis:

Okay. Yes. That's a really interesting idea.

And I also think it's a nice approach how to, how to try to find the differences. Thank you. Then I would start with my first question, if that's okay.

Yeah. It is in your opinion, how does the cultural orientation, so collectivism and individualism influence the following of the public health measures and the public health policies? How do they differ?

Kunru:

Okay. Thanks for the question. So actually I think collectivism features the interdependence and individualism features independence.

For example, if you look at the papers examining the consequences of collectivism and individualism, you would observe that some papers find that people in collectivism countries are like, sorry, the people in like individualism countries are less likely to favor something like socialism. So they do not think they need to like spend their money for other people, but for people in collectivism culture, they care more about the interdependence between individuals. And actually this matters a lot during the pandemic because maybe you are young and you don't need to face the risk of getting COVID.

You don't worry about this, but people who are old may worry more about this. But if you wear the mask or if you follow social distancing order, there will be a very strong positive externality on other individuals. So actually your behavior not only matters for you, but also matters for other people.

So that's why we think collectivism that features interdependence affects people's behavior in the pandemic.

Luis:

Okay. That's a great answer. Thank you.

In your paper that you contributed to, in the theory section, there was a finding that individualistic people, they see themselves from their own eyes, but in the collectivistic people, they look at themselves out of the eyes from their peers. So from the other people, how do you think this might influence the different behaviors of them?

Kunru:

Okay. So if people think not only about themselves, but also think about other people's conditions or situations. For example, I'm a relatively young person and my risk of getting COVID and the consequences of getting COVID for me is relatively limited.

However, if I can think more about other people, like you said, in other people's eyes, then I will be more likely to follow the social distancing orders because this will not benefit for me, but also benefit for other people, especially the elder people and people with some unhealthy conditions.

Luis:

Ah, yes. Great. That's nice.

So my next question would be, what are the key advantages? You already answered it a little bit, but what are the key advantages of collectivism to ensure compliance with pandemic control measures like social distancing?

Kunru:

Oh, okay. The key advantage. I think there's another psychologist, social psychologist, actually she, Michelle Gilfen, actually she advocates another cultural dimension, if you know, it's tightness and looseness.

I think one of the channels that collectivism works in the social distancing, in people's tendency to follow social distancing orders is through the tightness and looseness culture. So this kind of, this is very highly correlated. So for people who are from a collectivism culture, they think people are interdependent and they are more likely to follow the social norms.

If they are more likely to follow the social norms, then they are also more likely to follow the rules from the government. So for example, if you look at during the initial break of COVID-19 in the United States, many people like fight against the policies from the government. But for people in collectivism countries, for example, in China, most people tend to follow.

So I think that's a key advantage.

Luis:

Okay. Yes. That's so logical.

Thank you. I think it is also true that the variables, collectivism and individualism, they are much more important than other variables, such as income or age or demographic status. So do you think that these two dimensions, individualism and collectivism, they have the most influence when it comes to how people might respond to a pandemic and pandemic measures?

Kunru:

Okay. So about the relative importance, I think that other variables also matter a lot. For example, your background, your educational background also matters a lot.

Because if people are better educated, it will be easier for them to understand the risk during the pandemic, the risk of getting COVID. However, cultural dimension is a very different perspective. It is not linked to the...

While people may think that with higher GDP per capita or higher income or more well-educated people, they will be more willing to follow the social distancing orders. However, they

use cross-country data and they find that the cultural dimension is one of the most important dimensions in following social distancing orders. Of course, education and income matters.

But we think that culture is one of the most important factors in determining people's tendency to follow social distancing orders.

Luis:

Okay, nice. In your view, do you see any potential drawbacks or disadvantages or challenges that are associated with a collectivistic approach in this context?

Kunru:

In this context, you mean fighting COVID-19 pandemic?

Luis:

Yes, right. Fighting the pandemic and complying to the measures.

Kunru:

Okay, there's also some disadvantages or drawbacks. For example, if you think about people's tendency to follow the rules of the government, you know that the coronavirus evolved during the pandemic. The initial coronavirus is a very very severe disease, if you get it, and the probability of the mortality rate is very high.

But in the later period, actually, the mortality rate is much much lower. But if people just tend to follow the rules set by the government, they may not propose some alternative policies. For example, you can see that in some countries, the lockdown period is so long and it actually hurts the economy and hurts the people's daily life.

But however, for individualism countries, the individualism people may fight against the government, and this may propose better policies that fit some conditions. So I think there are some drawbacks for collectivism.

Luis:

Okay, that's very interesting. Thank you. I know you focused in your paper on the pandemic control measures.

I also focus on the mental health variable. I also have some questions of these. Do you want to skip them?

Or do you want to hear the questions? And maybe you can also give input on the mental health, even though you have focused on the pandemic measures and not on mental health.

Kunru:

Oh, you mean mental health, like the culture will have an effect on the mental health of individual during pandemic?

Luis:

Yes, right. Right.

Kunru:

Oh, that's very interesting. So actually, I think I don't have a very clear prior, but I do think that collectivism may hurt people's mental health during the pandemic, if they think too much about other individuals. Yeah, if you think too much about other individuals, then yeah, then like they're wearing masks all the time, they follow the social disorder very strictly.

This will lower their probability of interacting with other peoples. So this may hurt the mental health actually, I think.

Luis:

Okay, that's an interesting view. Thank you. Do you think do you think there could also be advantages of collectivism when it comes to focus more on community and then the community can support each other mentally during a difficult time?

Do you think that can be an advantage as well?

Kunru:

Yeah, there can be some advantages. For example, like, actually collectivism, the law of collectivism in fighting the pandemic, if it is not only about following the rule of following the government policies, it is also about helping each other. Like what I said before, collectivism features in people's view about interdependence.

So people in collectivist countries, they think that other peoples are interdependent. And then they may be more willing to help others. Like they may, especially for the elderly people, you know, that there may be some food shortage.

Luis:

Okay, thank you. Now I also have some questions for the implementation of possible policy considerations. So one question would be how can governments and health organizations and collectivist societies optimize their strategies for pandemic control and also for individualistic societies?

Do you have any thoughts about this?

Kunru:

Okay, so I think for governments in collectivist countries, I think they know that people are more willing to follow the government policies, especially during the pandemic. The government should care more about the voices of people because people in collectivism countries, they just tend to follow and they do not voice out, unlike the people in individualist countries. And yeah, so if they just impose the containment measures or policies without listening to individuals' needs, then there may be some adverse effects.

However, for the governments in individualist countries, I think they need to, about the containment measures, they not only need to like enforce the social distancing orders, they also need to let the people know why they should follow. Actually, I think people in individualism countries, although they are more independent, but if you tell them the potential negative externality pose on other people, they may be more willing to follow the social distancing orders. So that's all for my answer.

Luis:

Okay, great. Thank you. And there's, I have one more question about the behavior of the individualists, because also in your paper, you found out that they are more likely to not conform to social distancing rules, for example, and to break the rules.

Why do you think are individualists more likely to break the rules of the COVID measures, such as social distancing, but also, for example, mask use? What can be the psychological explanation for this, in your opinion?

Kunru:

Okay. So, actually, I do not have a very good answer for this question for now.

Luis:

Okay. Yeah, that's no problem. Then, what do you think can individualist societies learn from collectivist societies regarding pandemic response?

Kunru:

Okay. So, I would say it's very hard to learn, because culture is kind of not, culture is quite, like, quite constant. That's why we call it a culture.

So, we can have an economic development, like, in 10 or 20 years, but there will be few culture changes across one or two decades. So, I think it's very hard for the people in individualism countries to learn. Actually, during the past, I think, past 20 years, I found many people, many papers are advocating the benefits of individualism, because individualism, like, fosters innovation, and this is good for the economy, and individualism, people in individualism culture kind of set up very clear incentive schemes, but people in collectivism countries do not use this.

For example, in the workplace, individualism countries will set up very clear incentive schemes, and this motivates people to, like, to work hard to achieve better performance. So, they tend to ignore the benefits of collectivism. However, I do think that collectivism, like, is a very, collectivism has its advantages when dealing with crisis, not only public health crisis, but also other kind of crisis, for example, the financial crisis and economic downturns, because if during the crisis, it is very important for people to help each other.

So, I think that's one way, like, people in individualism countries can learn from collectivism countries.

Luis:

Okay, great. Thank you. Then, one more question.

Are there any, like, pandemic measures, recommendations you would give for both collectivistic and individualistic societies, so that people stick to the measures and don't break the rules?

Kunru:

Oh, okay. So, I think for the collectivism countries, their government, it's better for them to do not enforce, like, to strengthen the enforcement too much. Because, like I said, if, because people in there are, have a higher tendency to follow the others.

And this may not be good for, I would prefer adherence at a moderate level. So, if the adherence is too high, then it may be bad for the economy. And if this adherence is too low, it may be bad for public health.

So, yeah. So, I mean, for people, for governments in collectivism countries, I mean, their policy can be a little bit, not that strict, but for, for, yeah.

Luis:

Oh, that's, that's so interesting. So, just for my understanding, you think, because in collectivistic countries, people tend to follow more.

So, the policy doesn't have to be that strict, because if it is too strict, people might follow too much. So, the economy is impacted in a negative way.

Do you have any, any personal example from your life during COVID, where this is, where this was applied by the politics of your own life?

Kunru:

Okay. So, yeah, maybe I can give you an example. So, you know that the, the policies from the Chinese government are quite strict during COVID.

They, the COVID-19 social distance orders are strictly enforced in around two years or three years. However, especially during the later period, the benefits of keeping this policy is relatively lower, relatively lower than the costs. I don't know whether you know it, but some people in some cities, they are, they are locked in their houses or apartments for around two months.

So, that's too long. Especially when the coronavirus in the later period is not that deadly. So, it's not that severe.

So, I think the government should think more about the policy, especially, yeah, I would, I would prefer moderate policy like Singapore. Yeah. Especially during the later period.

Yeah.

Luis:

Okay. Great. Thank you.

That, that answered my questions so well. Thank you so much. Are there any thoughts or comments or any questions from your side you would like to add?

Like anything, maybe I, anything you want to mention, but I forgot to ask you.

Kunru:

Oh, I would say I have said what I wanted. So, thanks a lot for the opportunity to, to have the opportunity to meet you. I also learned a lot from you.

Luis:

Yes. I have to say thank you. I think you helped me a lot.

And if you have any further questions also regarding my, my result of the thesis or my findings, you can always contact me. And yeah, maybe we can stay in touch.

Kunru:

Yeah, we can stay in touch.

Luis:

Okay. Thank you so much for your participation. Thank you.

Kunru:

See you. Bye

7.2.2 Liquin Huang

Luis:

Perfect, thank you. So then, first of all, I want to introduce myself really quick, and maybe after that you can also introduce yourself really quick if you want. So I will just start.

Hello again, I'm Luis. I'm a bachelor student in Germany and I study business psychology, and currently I'm working on my bachelor thesis, and I focus on the psychology part in my bachelor thesis, and I'm writing about the social psychology topic individualism and collectivism, and in specific I compare individualism and collectivism during the COVID pandemic, and I focus on how people in individualist and collectivist cultures, they behaved with the pandemic control measures, like social distancing and masks, and on the other hand I focus on the mental well-being differences in these two cultural dimensions, and I'm comparing these two cultural dimensions, and I'm finished with my theory part for now. I also used your paper, and from the theory part I can say that everything points to the fact that collectivism has many advantages over individualism when it comes to fighting a pandemic effectively, on the one side when it comes to keep the mortality rates low and the morbidity rates low, but on the other side also when it comes to the mental well-being of the people during a pandemic, and yes that's really interesting, and now I'm trying to get another view on this with expert interviews, yes, and that's why I'm really happy to be able to interview you today, and I have prepared some questions regarding these topics, yeah, that was my introduction, thank you.

Huang:

Thank you, yeah, and also thank you for referring to our paper. Yeah, it's a good paper. Thanks, actually it's originally written in Chinese, and yeah, and Juno asked us to translate it into English, and I think there are some ways or phrases to express still more friendly Chinese, and I hope you don't have too much difficulty in understanding the content, yeah, and I can also do a brief introduction of myself, and I think you might know that I have previously worked in Grithein's lab in UKW, right, and that's why how you contact me, and previously I'm working as a postdoc with Professor Grithein, and my expertise is the field of social learning and also decision making, and I use most of the techniques of computational modeling to model how people make decisions, like ethical decisions under different conditions, and also how people learn from others' behavior to make their own decisions, and this is the main topic I'm working in, and for my previous paper, that's one of my projects when I'm doing my PhD thesis, and the one you're referring to, yeah, and yeah, we're also interested in how cultural factors like individualism or collectivism would impact people's behavior when they make decisions, and because there's also a very special time back there, and we collect the data, yeah, from the, there is the open public data site for the World Bank, we can learn the case, a confirmed case of the COVID-19 for each day, so we use this open data to do the research on people's behaviors during the pandemic, and there's also some big projects, and my project, my previous project is one small part of it, yeah, and yeah, and that's pretty much, yeah.

Luis:

Okay, great, thank you. Then I would start with the questions, I've prepared some questions, if you, of course, I'm happy if you answer all of them, but if there's a question you don't want to answer, or you don't feel comfortable, then we can just skip it. First, I have questions, I have four sections in general, first, like the background, I think you answered it a little bit already, and then the collectivism and pandemic control measures, then the mental health and social

dynamics during the pandemics, and then, in the end, some practical implementation and policy considerations.

So, I will just start with my first question, and this is, can you describe your experience and expertise related to the pandemic response and social behavior topic?

Huang:

Yeah, as I have briefly mentioned before, one, actually, it's my major experience with the pandemic topic, and it's about that paper, the paper that you read before, and we, many studies how this different kind of culture, the individualism and collectivism would impact the propagations or the development of the pandemic in different countries. And we found that with the open data, the case from the World Bank, and also with the data from the measurements of 68 countries, the individualism and collectivism of 68 countries, we can build a relationship between these cultural factors and their severe, or we say, the development of the pandemic during the first wave of the pandemic. And, yeah, and we also do the, conduct an Asian-based simulation modeling to, and try to explore the mechanisms that how these cultural factors would impact the propagations of the pandemic.

And we also do an online experiment to survey people's attitudes about the pandemic and also their attitudes towards the individualistic or collective attitudes. We use the self-constructed scale. I'm not sure whether you have heard it before.

It's another way to measure collectivism or individualism, but at the individual level.

Luis:

I think, yeah.

Huang:

Yeah, the self-constructed scale. Yeah. And yeah, there is an independent factor and also interdependent factors of this scale, which could reflect people's attitudes towards individualistic or collective culture.

Yeah. And that's my major experience with this topic. I think we use the open data and we also conduct Asian-based simulation modeling, try to explore the mechanisms of how these factors impact the pandemic.

And also we do online surveys to collect data from 21 countries and to try to explore the psychological mechanisms that mediate these effects.

Luis:

Okay, great. Thank you so much. Then my second question would also be like having a look at your general perspective.

And it is, in your opinion, how does the cultural orientation, like collectivism versus individualism, influence the public health policies and practices?

Huang:

From my point of view, I think also from my experience about our own projects and also the experience of paper, literature interview, I think that collectivism is better than individualism to help the society to get through the pandemic. And also this is one of the questions from your email. Yeah.

And because with our own data, we found that countries with higher level of collectivism is associated with lower death rates and also confirmed case in the worldwide. Yeah. And we also use the data from China, one of the collective culture.

We found that the province which is less independent, which are more independent, associated with more confirmed case and also death rates. And so we combined the data from the worldwide and also the data from one country or one cultures. We both found the positive relationships between collectivism and efficiency of epidemic control.

And so, yeah. And also there are a lot of papers, as we have mentioned briefly, a lot of papers or literature is pointing to these directions as collectivism could do some help for the governments to contain the propagation of infectious disease. Yeah.

Luis:

Great. Thanks. And my next question would be, from your perspective, how does a collectivist society approach pandemic control measures differently than an individualist society?

Huang:

I think the most biggest difference, yeah, the difference between these two cultures is that for collective cultures, people would like to emphasize more on the benefits of the whole or the whole community. So therefore, and in these conditions, in the conditions of a pandemic, which affects a lot of people, which will, yeah, in a very wide range, and people will, in the people from the collective cultures, they will try to balance more the whole benefits and then between their and their personal benefits. So they will do more to sacrifice, they will sacrifice their own personal convenience and to maintain the good, the collective good.

So in all these countries or cultures, people are more easy or more likely to follow the regulations of the governments to keep their social distance and also wear masks in public. And also a lot of people will do that, do things like that. And this will help the whole communities or the whole regions to contain the disease more efficiently, especially at the early stage when there is no efficient treatments for the disease.

And for individualistic cultures, because people are more cared about or valued personal freedoms or convenience or preference, and also the governments will, it's more like, it's more hesitant to take such kind of measures, like lockdown of regions when there is a lot of these outbreak, and also more hesitance to require people to do something or not to do something. So this is something I can see from this cultural perspective, and how people will approach the pandemic differently in these two different cultures.

Luis:

Great, thanks for the very good answer. My next question, I think it's really similar to the question I just asked, but maybe still some differences. What are the key advantages of collectivism in ensuring compliance with pandemic control measures, like social distancing or wearing a mask?

Huang:

For collectivism, people, are more willing to sacrifice their own benefits to afford a collective good. So they are more likely to obey the government's regulations, and also the government will more efficiently to promote such kind of interventions to the public so that they can control

the propagation of the disease at a very early stage. And that's why countries with collective cultures do a better job at containing the disease. And also, in countries with collective cultures, people usually follow the social norms more willingly, I can say, because they usually have tighter social norms in collective cultures.

And during the pandemic, I think people, there is some kind of supervision between people, it's not just from the governments and to the public. People living in the neighborhoods, they will hold a very strong opinion that you should obey these behavior codes to do your job to keep, to cut off the progression of the disease. So the social norms formed in the collective cultures is also very beneficial I can say, advantage, it's also a very strong advantage for the community to contain the disease.

On the other hand, like in the countries with individualistic cultures, there is not such a kind of strong social norm, the social norm is very loose, and people want to hold a very strong opinion about what you should do or what you should not do. And so that's, yeah, and without this kind of, I don't know whether the word of supervision is appropriate, but I think you can get a meaning that people will watch each other, whether you have followed the rules or not. And yeah, and that's also one of the advantages of collective culture, I think.

Luis:

Ah, great. Thank you. Yeah, actually, in Germany, there was the pandemic control, it was not universal in the whole country, but the states in Germany, they could have their different approach in one city.

They decided also that there can be a supervision program where you can report your neighbors or some other people where you can see and when they disobey with the rules. And actually, it became, there was, people were very angry about this. It was in the news, and people didn't agree with this approach.

So I think that's just what you said, that in individualistic countries, maybe like Germany, measures like this don't work as well as in collectivist cultures, like the supervision. Yes.

Huang:

Yeah, yeah. Because the relationships in collective culture is also, interpersonal relationship in collective culture is also very tight. And even though you don't have such a supervision or reports systems, your friends and your parents, your families, they will kind of form this kind of supervision.

They will just talk into you. You should do what the others do. Yes.

To keep the others and the whole community safe.

Luis:

Great. Thank you. And the next question, in your view, are there any potential drawbacks or disadvantages or challenges associated with collectivistic approach in this context?

Huang:

Actually, in my own view, I think there, for sure, there will be some shortcomings of the collective cultures, because in collective cultures, people rely on each other more, and also they will trust each other more, especially when they come from the same group. And I think one of the obvious phenomenon is that you might notice that rumors or forced information may be

more easy to be transferred or transmit within the community in collective culture than individualism. Maybe in individualism, you will hear even kind of conspiracy theory or false information, but maybe not one of them will dominate the discussions.

But in collective cultures, you can do some research on that. This is just one of my deductions, I think, in collective cultures, because people trust each other more and they're more likely to conform to others' behaviors. And the conspiracy theory, if there is any, or false information, will be easier to pass between the group members and more fast.

And this is one of the shortcomings, because in this way, the governments will have to do more to contend to these kinds of rumors more efficiently, otherwise they will also do harm to the whole society.

Luis:

Oh, that's interesting. Thank you. Then one question I didn't note it before, but do you know if in a collective, collectivist cultures, there are also many conspiracy theories, because if it might spread faster than in individualist cultures?

Huang:

It's your question, because I didn't hear it clearly.

Luis:

So, do you know from your personal experience if there are many conspiracy theories in collectivist cultures as well? Because, as I just understood, you said that if there is one, they might spread faster than in individualist cultures, because people trust each other a lot more.

Huang:

From my personal experience, actually, I don't have the answer yet. Yeah. But just very, for my impressions, actually, because I don't do research on this topic.

And so I don't think I can give you a very, yeah, too much evidence on it. But you can search on the topic.

Luis:

Okay, yes, I will. Thank you. Then, that was the questions about the pandemic control measures.

Now I have prepared some questions about the mental health. How do you think that individualism and collectivism impacts the mental health of individuals during a pandemic?

Huang:

I also have done some research into this topic. And I noticed there is a paper saying that because for people in the individualistic cultures, they care more about their personal freedoms, whether they can go out more freely. And also, the people in the individualistic society, they are more willing to go out, to hang out with friends, and they also travel a lot to a larger distance.

And during the period of pandemic, because there are some measurements like lockdown. These kind of measures will do more harm to the mental health of people in the individualistic cultures, or countries, than the collective cultures, because they will change their lifestyle or life way more than the collective cultures. And they also found that people from this kind of measurements or measures will cause more distress or depressions in people from the individualistic culture.

Luis:

Okay, great. Thank you. Then my next question is, it's also a very related question, but are there particular aspects of collectivist societies that might offer better support for mental health during such crisis?

Huang:

I think that from my own experience, I could say it's not research. I think the answer is yes, because in collective cultures, we usually live in big families. And during this kind of quarantine, or social distancing, or lockdowns, we can still receive very good or well social support from the families and the friends, because we are close, usually.

And this is also very important during the period, I think. Yes, and also do a very good buffering for people from the mental health problem.

Luis:

Okay, great. Thank you. And in contrast, are there aspects where individualism might have advantages in terms of mental health during pandemics?

Huang:

Actually, for these questions, I also do some research. But I can't. Yeah, the answer is I don't know.

Yeah. Sorry about that.

Luis:

No problem. No problem.

Then we're already at the last section, the implementation and policy considerations. First of all, is there something that you think I forgot to ask you that you want to add about the mental health or about the pandemic control measures?

Huang:

No, I think you tap into most of the aspects of this question of this topic, I think.

Luis:

Great, happy, happy to hear that. Then the implementation and policy considerations, how can governments or health organizations and collectivist or individualist societies optimize their strategies for pandemic control?

Huang:

I think, based on the phenomenon we have observed, and based on the relationships we found between these cultural dimensions and the epidemic controls, we can provide suggestions for different kinds of cultures or countries. For collectivism, collectivist countries. Governments could use or take advantage of people's intentions to comply to the government's rules or regulations voluntarily. And also, the people are more willing to sacrifice their own personal benefits.

So, in these countries, governments could take more stricter measures at the beginning of the epidemic, because at that stage, it's a very critical stage for the government to control the whole pandemic. And so, they can take more stricter, because people are willing to follow, and you

won't cause too much chaos at this stage. But also, we have to mind the side effects, always, as I said, the disadvantages of these cultures, like we said, the rumors may force information more easily to pass between families or communities in this stage.

So, governments should do more to falsify the rumors in a very efficient way, and also provide scientific guidance for the communities to follow what they should do and what they should not do, but in a very scientific way. For individualistic culture, I think, actually, for this part, I don't have very clear recommendations for individualistic cultures. I've also thought about it before, because people are less willing to be locked down or to put on some extra burdens, I think, I should say, to change their lifestyle.

I think, in these countries, the government should use more, use their advantages in some big data analysis, or they can, like, I think this is also what the Western countries do in the pandemic. They've set up a very in-time follow-up of the case, and also give very specific scientific recommendations for people about the risk, about the provocations. I think, as in the whole country, they can also set up some role model.

I'm not sure whether it will work, but they can also try to advocate the idea that we should care more about the whole communities, and how your behavior will impact the entire community, and try to advocate for social behaviors in the stage. I think this is also one of the commitments or the core values of the Western countries, of most of the individualist countries. They are more prone to be equal and also they value each other.

So I think if we can advocate the commitment and the values of the individualistic cultures, people are also more willing to follow the government's instructions. But the government should pay more attention about how to advocate these kinds of measurements in individualistic cultures and try not to raise some anger in the public, I think.

Luis:

Okay, great. Thank you. The next question, I think you already went in the direction of the next question.

That's good. So what lessons can individualist societies learn from collectivist approaches regarding pandemic response and mental health support? And do you think it would be possible to implement them in an individualist culture?

Huang:

Yeah, just as you said, I think this is the last part of my last question. I think for the individualistic cultures, the government should pay more attention to how to raise the values of the society. Like we should care more about others' benefits, but just for the entire good.

And also, I think in this way, and try to combine the values of the individualistic societies with the measurements of the pandemic control. And yeah, I think this is similar to my last questions.

Luis:

Yes, thank you. Then I have two more questions. Then the next one is, are there any specific policy recommendations you would make based on your understanding of collectivism and pandemic response?

For example, I already had one expert interview. He was a Chinese expert. And he said, since in collectivist cultures, like China, for example, people already follow the measures, the pandemic control measures really well compared to other countries.

So he said, maybe it would have been better for the Chinese economy to not make that hard measures, because people already follow really well. So the hard measures, at some point, they didn't benefit the country anymore, because the economic sacrifices were too high. Do you have any recommendations like this?

Huang:

Yeah, actually, I agree with his opinion. And I think my recommendation is, we should learn, like, I think we'll take China as an example, which we could learn the way how the Western countries or the individualistic countries to, how they can report the data of the confirmed case, or the situations of the pandemic more efficiently or scientifically to the public. And so we should, we can also adjust our measurements more flexibly according to the data, to the scientific data, and not just keep stick to the original ones.

I think we can learn the experience from Singapore. I think Singapore is doing a quite well job in controlling the pandemic and also to try to balance the impacts of the disease and also the impacts on the economic. Yeah, and this would be one of the suggestions I would make.

Luis:

Okay, great. Thank you. And my last question is, what lessons do you think we all can take from the COVID period into today's normal world, but also working world?

Huang:

Sorry, I don't understand the question. Can you give me a more explanation?

Luis:

Do you think that anything that because COVID came and most of us or all of us, we had to change our behavior really quickly to take care of ourselves and our people around us? Do you think any of these behaviors, we can adapt them into today's world and life, even when COVID is almost like the pandemic is not that active anymore?

Huang:

Okay, I think maybe for the whole communities, we can build an idea that a pandemic like COVID-19, something like that, will come from time to time in the near future. Because for the whole global range, we are more connected than ever before. And that's also why the disease from any part of the world could be easily transferred to the different countries more fast than ever before.

So this would be something that we can build. And for rich persons, first of all, I think for most of us, we have learned a lot about infectious disease and how to protect ourselves or the family from an infectious disease with the experience of COVID-19. And for my personal experience, at least I learned how to distinguish different kind of mask, what kind of mask you should wear to protect different kind of virus.

I did just a very small example, but for a person, we should build such kind of idea in our head, and we should learn more knowledge about how to protect ourselves from this kind of disease if it just comes over again. And for the public and also for the institutes, they should develop

backup plans or something like that, or emergency plans, in case this kind of infectious disease will come over. Because they are very fast and it affects a lot of people.

But with this experience, I think they will have some lessons they learned from this experience, and they also know how to contain the disease at each stage, and what kind of policies work better based on different cultures. Yeah.

Luis:

Great. Thank you so much. That were all of my questions.

I think you gave really, really insightful answers. It will definitely help me a lot. Is there anything you want to ask or you want to add?

Huang:

I think I'm good. No. But yeah, and also thank you for your time and questions.

I also learned a lot from the interviews.

Luis:

Thank you. Happy to hear that. If you have any questions, you can always write me an email regarding your interview and how I will use it.

And yes, I wish you a nice Christmas. Thank you. And that you have a good New Year's as well.

Huang:

Yeah. Thank you. Also, have a Merry Christmas and have a good New Year.

And also, good luck with your thesis.

Luis:

Oh, thank you so much. Thank you.

Huang:

Okay. Thank you.

Luis:

Bye

7.2.3 Minjoo Joo

Luis:

Okay, nice. Let's start. First, I thought maybe I can introduce myself real quick.

And then you can also introduce yourself real quick if you want. And then I sent you the questions beforehand. And then I will just, then I will just start with the questions.

So first of all, hello again. My name is Louis. I'm a business psychology student in Germany.

And currently I'm working on my bachelor thesis and I'm writing my bachelor thesis in the psychology part of the major. And I'm focusing on individualism and collectivism, especially during the COVID pandemic. And there I focus on how individualist societies and collectivist societies, they comply with the measures and also how they have different success.

And also I focus on the mental health differences between these societies. And yes, I am writing about this topic, because actually, it's a really interesting topic for me. I have been to Korea in 2022 for six months.

And there I studied there at Hanyang University, maybe, you know, and yeah, for sure. And there I have, I've had the theory part about differences between individualism and collectivism before that. But when I was there, and it was during time, I really saw how different the people in Korea versus Germany, they behave like sticking to the mask, and everything that was not common for me in Germany.

So that's also one of the reasons why I was really interested in this topic. And yes, now I'm writing my thesis about this. I have already completed my theory part, also with the help of your text.

And now I'm interviewing experts for my method part, and try to test or to prove my hypothesis that collectivism is more suited for a positive pandemic handling. Yes. That's it from our side.

Joo:

Yeah, nice. Very interesting. I actually am in Korea right now.

So it's great to like sort of hear that you've been here. Hope you had a nice experience here. I'm you loved it.

Okay, I'm Minju. I'm currently an assistant professor at Kyokushin University. I study culture, cultural psychology, of course, I identify as a cultural and social psychologist.

I usually study like dynamic and close relationship and how that differs in East Asian versus Western culture. Okay, so shall we get started?

Luis:

Sure. Great. Thanks for your introduction.

Then I will just start with the first question. And it is, can you describe your experience and expertise related to the pandemic response and social behavior topic?

Joo:

Sure. So as I mentioned, I'm a cultural psychologist, and I usually study how dynamics and close relationship process differs in East Asian and Western culture. So my research in a sense has focused on how norms and values shape supporting behaviors or attachment function in times of difficulty, like pandemic, right?

So this real expertise important need to sort of realize more, more, generate more insight about how different culture sort of process information during this time, and support each other during this time.

Luis:

Great.

Joo:

If you have any follow ups, feel free to ask me. Okay.

Luis:

Okay, sure. Also, there's a question you don't want to answer or you don't feel comfortable with answering, we can also just skip the question and move on with the next one. I forgot to mention that in the beginning.

Then second, in your opinion, how does cultural orientation like collectivism versus individualism influence public health policies and practices?

Joo:

Public health policies and practices. So I think collectivism versus individualism is definitely significantly influences policies or practices. For example, in collectivist culture, it does emphasize group welfare, and cohesion, right, over personal rights.

So it does, they're more likely to implement or practice or adhere to policies that prioritizes health of community at the cost of individual convenience. For example, as you experienced, maybe in South Korea, there was a time that COVID was really well maintained, because the strict policy was implemented, and people were willing to follow it. However, in individualistic societies, they do value personal freedom and autonomy more.

And they do, they may may face challenges in enforcing measures that require more of a collective compliances. As you can imagine that it might be seen as infringing on personal rights. For example, in the, I don't know about Germany, but I was in the US during the COVID time.

And definitely, I could see more people resisting to adhere to, you know, mask wearing, for example.

Luis:

Yes, thanks for your answer. I think, in Germany, definitely more resistance than in Korea. Probably in the US, there was even more resistance than in Germany.

But I think Germany as an also individualistic country, also had many people that didn't follow the rules that well. Okay, great. Then let's start with the second section of the interview.

And it's about the collectivism and pandemic control measures. And here, my first question is, from your perspective, how does a collectivist society approach pandemic control measures differently than an individualist society?

Joo:

Meta differently. So it's the first thing that comes to my mind is different mindset about community. The collectivistic society typically approach, I would say, a pandemic control with a group first or community first mindset.

And they prioritize collective safety and compliance. And this helps really, you know, the swift and effective coordination action, because they do prefer to prioritize how groups are functioning over their personal needs. Versus individualistic societies, they do value innovation, individual responsibility, which in this case, cost deviation from group mindset, and causes the policy implementation to be less effective.

Luis:

Nice, thanks for the insightful answer. Then let's talk about the second question. It's similar to the first question, but what are the key advantages of collectivism and ensuring compliance with pandemic control measures like for example, social distancing, or wearing a mask?

Joo:

Yeah, it is very similar to this first question. So I would still say like, you know, the social expectation of having to put groups need above one's own, this would be the key advantage of collectivism. So, you know, how people in interdependent culture, usually collectivistic culture usually just prioritize how groups are thinking and functioning rather than what they want really in the moment and their own convenience.

So that would be the key advantage in this case. And I don't know if you know about Michelle Gelfand's tight versus loose norm theory.

It's a really useful theory to think about when it comes to it is less comparison in terms of pandemic, because it does provide insights about how people are more willing to stick to the norm, right? Because there's just a stronger tighter social norm.

And if you deviate it from it, there's just more punishment, right? So, East Asian cultures are usually tight cultures. So I would say, you know, because of the tight norm versus in other countries, like Europe or US, they have looser norms, in this case, because they have tight that gives an advantage in controlling for pandemic situation in the level of country.

And even like, you know, the theory itself, it is sort of inspired by the fact that the countries with frequent pandemic, who have suffered from frequent pandemic, they are, they're more likely to be have have tighter norm, according to Gelfand. So I would recommend that you also look into it, probably.

Luis:

Great. Thank you. So you think also the tighter norms and the more loose norms are also some influences on the psychological mechanisms that can give advantage to the collectivism?

Joo:

Yeah, because like, if you are in a society with a tighter norm, you are more likely to be punished when you do not follow the norm. And you know that and you internalize that, therefore, you

end up with a mindset or self control that is more independent, right? And more like vigilant and caring about what others are thinking of you.

Luis:

Okay, great. Then, my next question would be, in your view, are there also any drawbacks or disadvantages? Or just that come with the collectivistic approach in a pandemic situation?

Joo:

Sure. I would say, definitely, it's the possibility of, like marginalizing individual needs and opinions. So, for example, in Korea, I've seen a lot of cases in which people were willing to invade privacy of these individuals who disobeyed the policy, like mask wearing policy, for example, they were willing to take picture of them and post on the social media, which infringes on personal right and privacy, right?

Therefore, I think, in the perspective of personal needs and opinions, there are some drawbacks for sure.

Luis:

Okay, yes. What do you think that the infringement of personal rights and privacy is accepted by individuals in a collectivist society than an individualist society?

Joo:

Can you repeat the question?

Luis:

Yes. So, do you think that when, for example, the politics, they have an impact on your personal rights and also privacy? Do you think that people in collectivist societies, they accept the influence of personal rights more than an individual?

Joo:

So, whether they do accept such policy that sort of infringes upon their personal rights? Yeah, definitely. I think that's my experience, as well as something that is consistent with the literature.

Because, yeah, they feel like it's a bigger deal that group harmony, or community oriented goals are violated rather than their personal rights. So, they are sort of having this mindset of greater good, right? So, I can sacrifice this for the greater good of the society.

Luis:

Okay, thank you. Then, that was the questions about the pandemic control measures. Now, I have prepared some questions about the mental health differences during the pandemic.

And here, my first question is, how do you think that collectivism or individualism impacts the mental health of individuals during a pandemic?

Joo:

Yeah. So, in their basic sense, I would say, the impact is multi-phased. And collectivism can actually provide us strong support network.

And it does reduce the feeling of isolation. According to my research, people in collectivistic countries tend to have a relationship or social network that is more spread out. Rather than in independent culture, it is more focused on, for example, like your romantic partner, you know.

So, the relationship structure itself is more simple compared to collectivistic culture. Therefore, people in collectivistic culture, they tend to have a more of a social safety net compared to individualistic culture. So, I think that helps them to cope with the feeling of isolation.

Luis:

Thank you. Then, are there particular aspects of collectivist societies that help offering better support for mental health during such crisis?

Joo:

Yeah, I think it's similar to what I mentioned, like family and community networks. The feeling of, you know, we are trying to cope with this together. We're all in this together.

That's the advantage of having an interdependent self-control and being in the collectivistic society. This is crucial for mental health during crisis like pandemic.

Luis:

Okay, yes. Thank you. Then, one question which is also I have from reading your text.

How can communion, which has a high value in collectivism, protect against mental health problems in a pandemic? And why does it work better for collectivists than for individualists?

Joo:

Sure. So, communion is a central value in collectivism. And, it plays a protective role against mental health issues by providing sense of belonging and shared purpose.

And this is particularly effective in collectivistic culture because people in collectivistic culture tend to have interdependent self-control, meaning that who I am is consisted of other people like my mother, my father. And therefore, the well-being of the group is more sometimes important than my own well-being. Therefore, feeling the communion is internally more fulfilling to people in the collectivistic culture, I would say.

Luis:

Okay, nice. Thanks for the nice answer. The last question about the mental health topic is, in contrast, are there aspects where individualism might have advantages in terms of mental health during a pandemic?

Joo:

Hmm, right. I would say they're more independent, and it can foster resilience and self-efficacy because the situation is actually out of control, right? It can be controlled by some policies, it cannot be, we don't know.

There's some uncertainty out there. And therefore, for example, let's say, you know, feeling of communion, it depends on how the situation plays out, for instance, or how long it goes. People can start group conflict, for example.

That is really critical for people in collectivistic societies, for instance, because it doesn't really give you the sense of fulfilling in terms of communion in that situation. However, I would say

in terms of individualistic society, regardless of outside situation, what's going on, on the level of group context, they're more themselves, if they are internally motivated to comply to the norms and comply to these measures, they will do so no matter what the situation they have. So in that sense, I would say they are more resilient, and more in control of their own actions in this case.

Luis:

Okay, nice. Thank you. Then, before I move on to the section four about the practical implications, I want to ask you, if there's some perspective I didn't ask you yet, or it's like I forgot to ask you, but that you would just like to mention that could also be important for me.

Is there something you just feel like you want to add? I didn't ask about?

Joo:

Your questions were pretty thorough. But as I think I already mentioned it, I think you should look into type versus loose cultural norms. It's the theory that actually is originated from this sort of issues, like on the societal level, if they experience more of a crisis, they're more likely to develop this tighter norm, because it is more effective to control for these kinds of crisis on a country level.

Luis:

Perfect. Thank you. And let's come to the section four, then it's about practical implementations and policy considerations.

And here, my first question is, how can governments or health organizations in collectivists versus individualist countries optimize their strategies for pandemic control?

Joo:

Yeah, I mean, it's crucial for health organizations or governments to consider the cultural context, because they do spend a lot of money trying to implement these policies, right. And if they do not consider the culture into the picture, they're missing out the huge opportunity. For example, in collectivistic society, they can leverage community networks, or they can really market or, you know, really market their policy, market their policies based on this feeling of group coalition, trying to trigger people's motivation to obey, or feel more obligated about the group, group mental health, right.

In contrast, individualistic countries, they can leverage the feeling of personal responsibility, maybe a little sense of guilt, even, but that would be the most effective strategy for them.

Luis:

Okay, thank you. Then my second question here would be, what lessons can individualist societies learn from collectivist approaches regarding pandemic response and mental health support? And do you think that it would be even possible to implement it in an individualist culture?

Joo:

Implement?

Luis:

Because they have different, there are different mindsets. So do you think if there's something you would recommend for individualists that they can learn from collectivists, it would be possible to?

Joo:

I see what you mean. So I think one of the biggest lessons we can learn is, it's not that like this society is better than that society. Like, I think what we can learn from the perspective of individualistic culture would be, okay, so, so far in my country, for example, conforming to the norm is looked, is viewed as something that has negative connotation.

That happens a lot of times in individualistic societies, right? Whenever I teach like social norms and conformity, students would have, oh, that's a horrible thing to do kind of reaction. And I think this is an opportunity for them to sort of see this attitude of the people from collectivistic country that seems to be cowardly sometimes from their perspective, it actually carries a social function.

And it is there because of, for this reason, because there are crisis in these countries that need, they need to overcome together effectively. So that would be the lesson, right? Like, just try to understand the other person's perspective.

How can this be? What was the second question? I forgot.

Sorry.

Luis:

Yes. Do you think if there we have a lesson now, that collectivist countries can give to individualist countries? Do you think that individualist countries and the inhabitants of the countries would accept the lesson, or it would be able to implement the lesson because of, they have, there's a different mindset or cultural mindset?

Joo:

Their response and mental health support. Yeah, as I mentioned, one thing would be to understand where they're coming from. In terms of community and social support.

I think in the times like this, I don't think cultural mindsets are fixed. I think people can at least temporarily sort of change in response to outside reaction or our reality, such as pandemics. So I think in this case, it would be important to try to see the benefits of what you're doing on the community level, at least during this time of difficulty, because it is important to actually the group to act together in order to create a safer environment for everyone, which you belong to. Right. So that would be one lesson they could take.

Luis:

Okay, perfect. Thanks. And then my last question, what lessons do you think we all can take from the COVID period into today's world and also into today's working academic world?

Joo:

Interesting. I actually did not see this question until now. So let me think what lessons do I think you can take from today's working world?

Hmm. Well, there are so many lessons out there.

Luis:

True.

Joo:

Yeah. What would you say the lesson you learned is?

Luis:

Yes, I think, for example, one lesson in an individualist society, we can, it might be more effective to have COVID like prevention when we use like an individual person focused communication, whereas in collectivist societies, to do prevention and to to apply for the correct behavior, it might be better to have a we or group focused communication. Just for example.

Joo:

Yeah, that's a very practical lesson. But I, in my opinion, I would say like the biggest lesson is that we are very, so very interconnected. That's what I think we all learned in the times of COVID.

Right. Even in individualistic society. Yes, your rights are important.

You are independent human being for sure. However, there's a certain level of interconnectedness in our fates. We're all in this together in this world.

Right. So just, I think even in individualistic countries, they do need to sort of take this chance to recognize the value of communion and the group cohesion. That's, I would say, the biggest lesson.

Luis:

I think that's a great lesson for individualist countries to learn. Nice.

Joo:

Even in collectivist countries, I would say like just being reminded of our connected fates.

Luis:

Nice. Perfect. That was all questions from my side.

Thank you so much. I think you gave very, very nice answers. And also you really used the psychological terms, like the professional language, which will really help me a lot when transcribing the interview.

So thank you so much for that. Do you have any questions or do you want to add something?

Joo:

No, I think that was a very nice interview that you directed. And also I would like to add that, just email me if you have any follow up question. Okay.

Luis:

Okay, perfect. That's so nice. Thank you.

Thanks again.

7.2.4 Amoneeta Beckstein

Luis:

Okay, thank you. Then first of all, do you have further questions regarding the interview? I don't at this time.

Okay, great. Then I will just start with a quick introduction from my side. So, I'm Luis, I'm a bachelor student in Germany and I study business psychology.

And currently I'm writing my bachelor thesis in the ecology part. And I'm writing about cultural orientations, individualism and collectivism. And I am comparing them when it comes to COVID-19 differences.

On the one side, I'm comparing individualism and collectivism when it comes to following and complying to pandemic control measures. And on the other side, I'm comparing them when it comes to the mental health differences. And that's where I also read the text you participated.

And I have now finished my theory part. And from the theory part, I can say that everything points in the direction that collectivism has some differences over individualism when it comes to fighting a pandemic. And now I'm trying to prove this with expert interviews.

So, I have prepared some questions, some about the pandemic control measures in collectivism and individualism. Some about the mental health and social dynamics during pandemic. And then in the end, some about practical policy implementations and applications for the real world also for today after the pandemic.

And my first question would be for you. If you could describe your experience and expertise related to pandemic response and social behavior.

Beckstein:

Thanks for the question. And so, during the pandemic, I was the counseling center director at a small university in Thailand called Webster University Thailand. So, it was kind of my job to consider student mental health, college student mental health at that time.

And most of my students were international students. So, it's kind of an interesting conundrum for them given that they were all away from home. And some of them couldn't travel back home or once they travel back home, they couldn't come back to Thailand to continue their studies.

Or just they had to stay and do their studies online from home and those kinds of things. So, yeah, that was my role. I was mostly doing therapy with students, supervising interns that were also doing, you know, other counselors doing therapy with their students.

And then things like, you know, just considering general mental health of the university. So, I would put out a letter to the university about, you know, this is what's been going on. And these are some suggestions to help maintain your mental health.

And, you know, feel free to reach out, those kinds of things. And then I guess on the other side of it, I did some research also. So, probably the most significant one that you mentioned was the data that we collected on students' mental health during the pandemic there.

And we collected in, I think, six different countries. And then I did some other kind of theoretical papers like mental health, COVID in Malaysia. And I was an editor on a book for also kind of general mental health during pandemic times.

And the chapter that I contributed that book was about counseling during pandemic times. And I also wrote the intro and the conclusion of that book and edited it. So, I have some kind of, I guess, more theoretical background in the research.

But then also some practical experience and one actual collected data type of study.

Luis:

Okay, great. And I think that's a really huge background, both like practical experience but also lots of research. That's great.

Thank you. My second question, which also deals with the topic background and general perspectives is, in your opinion, how does cultural orientation like collectivism versus individualism influence the public health policies and practices?

Beckstein:

Yeah, good question. You know, I don't know so much about public health, given that my background is in psychology and counseling. But I can imagine that it would affect, from the psychology point, the framing, how we might frame messages.

And so, you know, from a health perspective, you might frame something in a collective way for a collectivistic community. Oh, this, let's take vaccine messaging or mask messaging or things like that. You might do a collective frame.

If you wear a mask, it might help others. It might keep your grandparents healthy. It might keep your children or your family or your community healthy.

You know, more of this. It's going to help all of creation, so to speak, and others. And then in an individualistic context, public health will probably be more recommended to do a more individualistic type of messaging.

You won't get sick. You will be healthier. You will be happier.

You will feel better. Kind of more of that individual type of framing. I don't know if they necessarily do that, but I can imagine that that will probably be more effective if you do that kind of messaging to those type of people.

I'm not sure if that quite answers your question there or not.

Luis:

I think it really does, and I think I've read this as well. I don't know in which text it was, but there were some examples about the communication. And as you said, in Hong Kong, which is more collectivistic, they are using the we framing, whereas in the U.S. or in Western European countries like Sweden, they use the you individualistic framing. So I think that's a really, really good point. Great. Then let's move on to the topic collectivism and individualism in pandemic control measures.

First of all, I forgot to mention this in the beginning. If there's a question you don't want to answer or you don't feel like comfortable answering, then we can just move on to the next question.

Beckstein:

Yeah, thanks for that. There may be some things that I just don't know about.

Luis:

Yes, yes, of course. I just forgot to mention this in the beginning. From your perspective, how does a collectivist society approach pandemic control measures differently than an individualist society?

Beckstein:

Yeah, good. Good question. Well, I would think, you know, quite similar to what we were just discussing.

Let's do this for others. Let's do this for the collective, for the betterment of everyone. Let's kind of take care of each other.

This is, again, from that more collective perspective. Or maybe I may not even believe it, but do it because everyone else is doing kind of that conformity thing. So let's take masks for example.

I was living in Thailand at the time whenever the lockdowns and everything happened like that. And it was pretty stark, obvious Thai people wore masks. Even the ones that really, for the most part, maybe didn't believe in masks or didn't care or something like that.

They did it because everybody did. And the only people, almost the only people at the time you wouldn't see wearing masks would have been what they call farangs, the foreigners, most primarily white travelers or people that were living in Thailand. And so, you know, that just based on skin color and nationality, you can probably make an assumption about more likely collective versus individualistic.

And so I think that, I think again, that was a big part of it was possibly the messaging, but also just, oh, everybody's doing it. Let me do it also or do it for others. I think an example of the collective mentality would be these masks.

Even way, way before COVID-19, when I first traveled to Asia, I was surprised because I'd never seen somebody wearing a surgical mask in public. But this was my first trip to Asia was in Japan, you know, so many years before COVID. And you would see some people wearing a mask.

And, you know, I even took pictures of them because I was like, oh, how curious. I've only seen somebody wearing a mask in a hospital or a dentist office or something. Right.

And so when I inquired about it, they said, well, that's not for themselves. It's because they're sick and they want to not get other people sick. And it's a courtesy to the rest of the world or anybody they encounter to keep their germs away from others.

So whether again, kind of whether you believe in masks being effective or not is beyond the point. It's that kind of collective. Let me do something for other people.

And again, you know, having grown up in America, I'd never seen somebody wearing a mask in public. They'll be coughing, sneezing, they'll get on an elevator coughing, but they're not going to put a mask on to protect other people. So I think that's a that's a kind of a nice analogy of kind of collective versus individualistic type of type of behavior.

Luis:

Yes. Great. Thank you.

I also would never have seen this before in Germany before. There's like zero percent chance that somebody is wearing a mask in public.

Beckstein:

Right. Even if they have a flu or something. Right.

And they're out there. Absolutely sick. It just it just doesn't happen.

Whereas, again, this is something I would see in Asia prior to the pandemic.

Luis:

Yes, especially in very crowded places like a public subway or shopping mall. Great. Thank you.

The second question, you already answered it a little bit. But the second question would be, what are the key advantages of collectivism ensuring compliance with pandemic control measures like social distancing or wearing a mask?

Beckstein:

Yeah, I think probably that aspect of, you know, everybody's doing it. Let me do it for other people. It just I think it's probably a bit easier to get people to to fall in line or those things.

Not not to say that there aren't kind of individualistic or or rebellious people in Asia or in collective countries, because there certainly are. In fact, I, you know, I I know Thai people, for example, that are, if you will, you know, conspiracy theorists that, OK, the pandemic is real and there's nothing to it. And so that exists also, but less probably less common than you would see in a more individualistic country.

So the question was, what about what what helps what helps about collectivism to help people fall kind of fall in line and follow protocols and things?

Luis:

Yes. Yeah, I think that answered it. Thank you.

Beckstein:

Yeah. I think I kind of a funny, funny story. It's you know, I think it helps people follow the rules or.

But but of course, it's it does. It may not always be logical. But, you know, collective societies, a lot of times they're maybe more likely to follow along, you know, conform rather than rather than think critically.

So so, for example, when as things were starting to ease up and some restaurants were opening and such, but then they they would have certain rules and restrictions. So, for example, I went to one restaurant with my girlfriend at the time and they their rule was you have to sit at separate tables. You can't have anybody sitting.

And I just found it kind of ludicrous. And I was laughing and even joking with the waitress. You know, I was like, I kissed this girl this morning.

And I'm going to kiss her tonight. And you think I'm going to share it with her across the table. But but that was the rule, you know, and it didn't it didn't it didn't matter how much logic or whatever.

We weren't going to sit together because that was the governmental rule that two people can't be at a table even if they come in together. So, you know, it's just kind of kind of funny like that, I guess.

Luis:

Yes, yes, that's true. That's that's that's really funny. OK, great.

Let's see. I have one more question regarding the pandemic control measures before moving to the mental health topic. In your view, are there any potential drawbacks or challenges that somebody associated with a collectivistic approach in this context?

Beckstein:

I think what I was just saying last night would probably be the only thing that comes to mind that maybe over conformity, not not critical thinking, just doing it because everybody's doing it or you're told to do it. You know, it's not a it's not it's not a collectivist thing, but it's a psychology thing. Right.

You're told by authority what to do. I mean, look at look at Nazi Germany, for example, where you come from. Right.

You can rationalize, oh, the government, the people in power said, do this. Then I do this, even if it's not necessarily the right thing to do.

Luis:

Yes, true.

Beckstein:

Absolutely. Like like the example I gave with the with with the with the eating, you know, you have to say the rule is you have to sit at a separate table. Even if you you came in with this person, you live with this person and you obviously are, you know, if you if either of you have COVID and are going to share it, you're going to you've already shared it kind of thing.

But that regardless, the rule is that that's how you do it, which, you know, sometimes that can that, you know, in this case, it was harmless for the most part. But it but it could it could cause damage to relationships or certainly somebody could get quite angry about that. You know, just that that kind of mindless thinking.

Yes, it's the rule.

Luis:

Right. So my next question would be about the mental health and social dynamics during pandemics. How do you think collectivism and individualism impacts the mental health of individuals during a pandemic?

Beckstein:

Yeah. Great question. Well, for the most part, it you could almost say that it affected everyone and kind of all aspects of mental health.

You saw, you know, from the research and the statistics, all these indices increasing more homicide, more domestic violence, more anger, more suicide, more suicide ideation, more depression, anxiety, addictions, kind of all of those types of things increased. On the other hand, certainly that that occurred, but then we also have this concept called post traumatic growth or peritraumatic growth, post meaning you grow after a traumatic experience and peri you might even grow during the traumatic experience. And so there's some research that shows that some people actually grew during those times.

They achieved their goals. They they they focused on their own mental health and their physical health, their relationships, whatever. They rose up to challenges.

They met goals, different things like that. And so you did see some people that maybe thrived some or or or improved some during that time. So while on average, probably a lot of people suffered and made and the other part is there could be people continuing to suffer, even if if the pandemic is over or not, you know, that depends on whose opinion it is, I suppose.

But anybody that, you know, yeah, yeah, there's some research saying that it's probably ongoing. We looked at some studies from the SARS epidemic from 2003, and I think that they followed up with some people. I forget the dates exactly, maybe 2013 or 2015, some 10 years or so later.

And they saw that people that were affected, their mental health was affected in 2003 from something even much less grand in scale. They also continue to have mental health effects later, years later. And so that's yet to be determined.

Some of these kind of long, longer term consequences of some of the mental health of that time. Certainly, you know, there were the research kind of talked about two prongs. On one hand, people that had pre-existing mental health conditions increased.

And on the other hand, new disorders developed, you know, take obsessive compulsive disorder. Even myself, I have this vast knowledge of mental health. I'm a mental health practitioner.

And it took me a long time, actually, to get comfortable again, kind of shaking hands with people and things, because I was almost kind of, not to that point of obsessive compulsive, but I got a little bit obsessive compulsive with the washing hands and the sanitizer and the not shaking hands kind of things, you know. And so certainly those things exist, yeah. But then let's not forget that other side.

So that was one other article, I guess I forgot to mention, which was I did an overview in SAGE Open Journal that is all about resilience. It's a kind of an overview of resilience to COVID-19.

And so, you know, that kind of talks about that peritraumatic growth, the strengths that people had, the fortitude, you know, the relationships that people built and depended on and helped strengthen during that time.

And, you know, from the kind of the collective question, that's pretty interesting type of research, I think.

Luis:

Yes. Great. Thank you.

That was really interesting. I never thought about the growing during epidemic or growing afterwards. Do you know if there were any differences between individualistic and collectivistic societies or individuals?

Beckstein:

In this growth aspect?

Luis:

Yes.

Beckstein:

I don't know specifically, but probably somebody's done a study on that. But yeah, I'm not sure myself. If not, it'd be an interesting, another interesting study to do.

Luis:

Yes. Yes. Maybe I will check it.

Okay, great. My next question would be, are there particular aspects of collectivist societies that might offer better support for mental health during such crisis as the COVID pandemic?

Beckstein:

Yeah. Good question. Better support or better for mental health based on collective?

Well, you know, the thing that is probably most quoted about collective is the reliance on relationships and the interconnectedness between people. And so, you know, basically what we might call social capital. I think that a lot of people in collective societies have that strong social capital.

And so, on the one hand, it might have been challenging for them to access if they were kind of in lockdown and encouraged or discouraged from socializing and meeting people. But I imagine that they also kind of banked on that in other collective ways. Okay, I'm going to drop some soup off at your door or, you know, communicate and meet online or those kinds of things.

Or I don't know the statistics on this, but I imagine that collective people on average live collectively more, even in modern age, right? As we know that, well, there is, I do know a little research on that as a society becomes more modern and more Western and more individualistic, you get more people living alone. One person in one room or apartment or whatever.

And I imagine that they probably had less of that. Certainly, there are Thai people or collective people living alone as students or, you know, independent workers that leave their homes. But,

you know, so I imagine you would probably fare a bit better mental health wise if you weren't locked up by yourself in a room, an apartment by yourself.

Rather than, you know, you have a partner, you've got kids, you have your other family members or friends or people kind of living in the same household as you. That said, of course, you know, there's also, of course, the negative side of that is you may be cooped up for months with the same people. And that may have damaged relationships also, of course.

It's just that aspect of having more people around. Initially, when something like a lockdown happens, it's probably good for a mental health.

Luis:

Yes, great. Thanks for the very, very nice answer. My next question would be, in contrast, are there aspects where individualism might have advantages in terms of mental health during a pandemic?

Beckstein:

Yeah. I'm not sure if it could be attributed directly to individualism versus collectivism. In our Western societies, there's less stigma about mental health, less stigma about asking for help, about counseling or mental health aspects. And there's probably more access also. So in that way, I think some folks in individualistic societies might have fared a little better.

For those that really might have needed it, they probably had less stigma and more opportunities to access a counselor or psychologist or something like that. Other advantages of being individualistic during that time? Well, maybe also, right?

If you happen to be one of those people that had to get locked up by yourself alone, maybe you could handle it better than somebody that's very social. I think that might be an extroversion, introversion continuum there also. But yeah, somebody that's like, oh, you know, I'm all right.

I'm used to living alone. Maybe that rugged individualism, I can handle this better than if I was a collective person and suddenly I'm isolated from everyone. Yeah, I think that's all I can think at the moment.

There's something else there. Great.

Luis:

Thank you. Before I move to the implementation and policy considerations, I want to ask you if maybe I forgot something to ask you that you think would be very interesting for my topic. So maybe from your job and from your everyday life, is there something that you just want to add without me asking you?

Beckstein:

Yeah, I'm trying to think of what I slipped my mind there. The last question was what might be the benefits of being individualistic for mental health during the pandemic thing. Yeah, I mean, maybe that aspect of, you know, not to say that collectivistic people can't do this or don't have it because I witnessed it also, but this may be for some people that were non-conformity, conformist or critical thinkers.

Rather than just take the status quo kind of thing, I think that, you know, the people that were like, I don't care. It's, you know, oh, maybe it's like a cold or let me just live my life or, you know, someone like that, that kind of attitude, you know, they probably weren't influenced as much as the more collective people that were conformist or fell for the fear, right? Because I think there was a lot of governmental fear-mongering of this is going to kill you and your whole community and your grandparents kind of thing, especially in a more collective context.

And so, yeah, I mean, if you have the confidence of like, okay, I'm not afraid of this virus. Let me go live my life kind of thing. That's probably, you're probably not going to have the anxiety and the depression and the things as badly as somebody that's kind of, you know, trembling for fear of death at every kind of interaction kind of thing.

Luis:

Great. Next. Then let's come to the last part of the interview.

I'm going to ask you some questions about the policy considerations and what individualism might be able to learn from collectivist approaches. So my first question here would be, how can governments or health organizations and collectivist versus individualist societies optimize their strategies for pandemic control or also mental health?

Beckstein:

Yeah, yeah. Great, great question. So I'm going to pull some from my Native American kind of Indigenous background.

And so kind of traditionally, you see Native people were very collective. And much part of kind of our traditional Indigenous philosophy is our happiness, our mental health, our well-being depends on balance and relationships. It depends on balance with nature and creation, kind of all of creation and those kinds of things.

And so I think when it comes to mental health or even just, you know, global crises like this and, you know, looking at things like global warming and the general future of our species, if you will, right? You know, taking care of the planet and not overusing and all of these kinds of things. I think that the whole world could benefit from this creation type of centric mentality rather than what they call anthropocentric.

Anthropocentric meaning human at the center, right? That we are the apex, we're the most important being in all the cosmos. And I don't know if it's necessarily collective, but certainly an Indigenous worldview and philosophy that we're not the most important beings in creation, that we're equal to trees and animals and the earth itself and even further out to the cosmos and those kinds of things.

And so we need to get away from that anthropocentric, that humans are the most important beings because we're, you know, we're destroying species of animals and species of plants and possibly the earth and ourselves as we go along, right? So if we really kind of think more about, you know, the rest of the world rather than just me, myself and I, and, you know, that gets back to your collective versus individualistic question. How can my behaviors affect others, right?

Here I am talking hypocrisy drinking out of a plastic bottle, right? But, you know, doing things like that, I know in my heart that that's not good for the creation, for the earth, for future generations, like that, but it's convenient, right? I was thirsty, picked up a bottle of water kind of thing.

So, yeah, you know, if I can try to make my choices, including my day-to-day, do I get a refillable bottle, find resources to refill those kinds of things, which I often do, not necessarily as easy when I'm traveling like I am now, then I think that that will be better, but for the kind of the general well-being of all of people and all of the earth and such. And so, yeah, I think those kind of collective philosophies, mentalities of focusing on not just our own pleasure, gratification, happiness, like that, but others. And, you know, research would support that also, that certainly part of our happiness and well-being can come from momentary pleasures.

That's one bucket, but it's not enough, right? And so research shows that if you do things for others, if you care about others, if you volunteer like that, it actually might have a more meaningful and lasting impact on your well-being than just what those positive psychologists call the hedonic treadmill, just pursuing pleasure and fun and what makes me feel good in the moment. It can be, again, one component, but it's not enough and it tends to be not lasting.

Luis:

Great. That was a very, very nice answer. I never saw this from this perspective, but I think I will definitely add it.

So, thank you. Absolutely.

Beckstein:

Good questions.

Luis:

The next question is, what lessons can individualist societies learn from collectivist approaches regarding endemic response and mental health support? And in addition to that question, do you think it would be possible to implement these things that you can learn in individualist societies, or do you think they would only work in collectivist societies?

Beckstein:

That was quite long. Do you mind just repeating it for me?

Luis:

Yes. Are there any lessons that individualist societies can learn from collectivist societies?

Beckstein:

It was cut off for a second, but I think it's okay now.

Luis:

Okay. So, I will repeat the question. First, do you think there are any lessons that individualist societies can learn from collectivist societies when it comes to mental health or mental support?

And if yes, do you think it would be possible to implement these lessons in individualist societies because there are different mindsets and different starting positions?

Beckstein:

Yeah. So, I think to start just this idea of being more collected, being more caring, even the most individualistic person on the very, very far end of the individualist spectrum doesn't function alone as an independent entity in the world, right? They still are social creatures.

They still need other people. And so, I think a greater focus on that, on the interconnectedness of us all, the sharing and the caring for others, I think that that can be beneficial for any society, whether collective or individualistic. And keep in mind, even in your very individualistic countries, you still have people on that spectrum that have collectivist values within them, right?

Let's say the most collective American is probably more collectivistic than the most individualistic Chinese person, for example, right? So, even within the same society, you have people along the continuum of collectivism and individualism. And so, yeah, just coming back to that, I think all societies can benefit from this more collective sharing social aspect because we know that relationships are important for happiness and well-being, mental health, even in collectivistic societies.

Maybe they look a little different, but it's still important. And if you go back into our evolutionary history, we all came from villages. There's a very interesting book by Pinker called *The Village Effect*.

And it basically argues that we are used to living in a village, maybe 200 people or something, where everybody knows us, everybody cares about us, we care about everybody, like that. And probably all of humankind originated in those types of communities. And to be probably the most, to have the best well-being, to be the happiest, that would probably be to start to recreate these types of village effects where people can really care about each other and be part of the community.

You know, think about our ancestors. It was impossible for someone to be depressed and disappear for a week into their bedroom and nobody know it. You know, if E.

Louis didn't come out one day, I'd wonder, well, what the hell happened to him? He was supposed to go fetch the water and chop some wood, you know? And I'm going to be, my fire is going to be cold and I don't have any water to drink, for example, you know, because that's your role.

And there's going to be 200 people wondering what happened to Louis today. And so probably this concept of like, you know, mental health disorders and certainly something like depression probably didn't exist in those types of environments.

Luis:

Okay, great. Again, a really amazing answer. So thank you so much.

Ben, are there any specific policy recommendations for mental health support you would make based on your understanding of collectivism?

Beckstein:

Yeah, I think very much in line with what we've been talking about, right? Policies that normalize socialization. You know, there are ways to design the streets that we live in.

You know, in the West, we drive our cars into our houses sometimes, you know, we literally make it where we don't have to interact with a neighbor if we didn't want to literally drive the car into the garage, close the door and not even, you know, wave at your neighbor, let's say. So, you know, there are ways to design, you know, walkable streets where you're interacting with people, you're seeing people, the way people sit, you know, that you don't put the music too loud so people can't really communicate with each other and want to leave quickly. You know,

there are things, policies that we can do to enhance the kind of the socialization, the trust between people, the relationships between people.

And let's see, yeah, kind of policies to based on collectivism to enhance mental health. Is that the question again?

Luis:

Yes, right.

Beckstein:

Yeah, I think I said it already, you know, that these ideas of of, you know, kind of caring for one another, building relationships, normalizing, normalizing that it's okay to talk about mental health, it's okay to discuss things. You know, ideally, I'd love to see a world where we don't need people like me, we don't need psychologists, because why? Because everybody on the street is caring enough to help you. one, not traumatize you, and two, it has the kind of the communication and and empathy type of skills that they can support each other.

You know, that said, it probably won't necessarily happen in our lifetime, but but yeah, you know, that kind of aspect of everybody, you know, in fact, that's something I talked about in that article with the, about the resilience. How do we build more resilient populations? Well, we need to train our lay people in psychological first aid.

Basically, any anybody that doesn't need a even a bachelor's degree in psychology to be a supportive friend, to be a supportive partner or a family member. And the more people that are able to do that, the less the professionals will see. Of course, you know, if somebody's very extreme, that's also part of psychological first aid is, well, you would refer them and you would do stigmatizing, you'd help them get professional help.

But hopefully that would reduce that. And then, of course, you know, we kind of don't have enough time to train people to be psychologists. It takes years and years either.

So I think that that aspect can go a long way, right? If I'm not just thinking about myself and what's going to benefit me, then I can then help others. And we know that helping others altruism can boost your own well-being also.

Luis:

Yes, definitely. I've also read a text regarding this, that altruism will also help yourself for your own mental well-being also during COVID. So thanks again for your nice, insightful answer.

One last question. I have one last question. It's again more related to today's world, like the present we're living now.

And it is, what lessons do you think we can take from the COVID period into today's world or also today's working academic world?

Beckstein:

Yeah. Well, I think that, you know, I guess I'll come from, again, the psychological or mental health aspect. I think that we can do more preparation, more prevention, you know, to try to prevent what they call the, I forget what they call it, the third wave mental health crisis, right?

That there's a whole mental health pandemic. And so I think that we can learn from that, right? If we focus on helping people's mental health, if people are happy and functioning well, have good well-being, everything else is going to increase.

We're going to have more productive society. We're going to have, you know, a better economy, better regular health. People are going to be more productive.

You know, basically any indice that you can think about would be positively affected if we had a population that had better mental health, if they weren't depressed, anxious, languishing, like that, right? And so I think that positive psychology and likely collectivism also can really contribute to these ideas of let's kind of take care of our people first, and then they'll take care of whatever else you're trying to accomplish for the betterment of the world.

Luis:

Okay, great. Yes, I definitely agree with you there. Thank you.

That was my questions. I think you gave very, very nice answers. So thank you for that.

Is there anything you want to add or anything you want to ask me?

Beckstein:

Yeah, I think nothing to add. You know, after the interview, great questions, great study. That's pretty admirable that you're doing this kind of qualitative research for just, I think you said your bachelor's degree, right?

Luis:

Yes, yes.

Beckstein:

That's really admirable. Qualitative is a big task to take on with all the time for interviews and analyzing data and everything like that. So yeah, cool.

I'm really interested to see the results when you finish. If you're willing to share that, it'd be great to read and hear about others' perspectives also and just kind of see everything kind of come together.

Luis:

Yes, definitely. I'm writing it in German, but I can send you the PDF and you can translate it, or also I can send you a translation. Definitely, of course.

Beckstein:

That'll be great. Yeah, that'd be really interesting.

Luis:

Okay, great. Then I will note it and when I get the result, I can give you the final paper.

Beckstein:

Sounds good. Yeah, I guess with the online tools now we can translate and at least get the main idea pretty quickly.

Luis:

Yes, it shouldn't be too complicated, I think.

Beckstein:

Yeah, I'd appreciate that. Well, yeah, good. Congrats on doing this.

It's a big task, but I imagine it's also pretty meaningful for you too.

Luis:

Thank you and thanks for joining today.

7.2.5 Paul Hutchings

Luis:

Nice, thank you. So again, thanks for joining. I would say that maybe I can introduce myself real quick.

Yeah, sure. Talk a little bit about my thesis and then you can introduce yourself and we can start with the questions. So my name is Luis, I'm a bachelor student and from Germany.

I studied business psychology there and right now I'm writing my bachelor thesis in the psychology part of my major. And in my thesis, I'm focusing on the differences between individualism and collectivism in the COVID-19 context. And there I compare how individualism and collectivism, they differ when it comes to the conduction of effective pandemic response measures during the COVID pandemic and also the differences between mental health, how they differ in the mental health between the different societies.

And yeah, I have completed my theory part also, thanks to your paper where you contributed. And in my theory part, everything points into the direction that collectivism has advantages over individualism when it comes to conduct measures effectively and also when it comes to keep up positive or more positive mental health during a situation like a pandemic. And now I'm trying to prove or not prove this hypothesis with expert interviews.

And yeah, and now I have contacted some experts like you and I have prepared some questions, some about the mental health part, some about the pandemic control part and also some questions about practical implications and policy considerations. And yes, I'm happy that you joined today. And yeah, that's it.

Hutchings:

Yeah, no, that sounds good. Excellent. Yes.

So, yes, I'm Paul Hutchins. So I'm a professor at, so I'm based in Wales and my actual research area normally is in prejudice and discrimination, although I do stuff on things like stigma in mental health and things like this. And so the research team that I was working with for this, we've worked on different projects over a number of years linked to stigma and prejudice and discrimination, but also with mental health.

There were a number of mental health experts, particularly from Malaysia, who we were working with there. So this paper came out of sort of five or six researchers in different countries working together. And especially during COVID, when we couldn't have contact with anybody else, then doing things with people on the other side of the world via email and things like that was just as good as any other type of research, I suppose.

So it's given, you know, it has given us some good insights into, you know, into how things are done in different countries. So as you'll have seen from the paper, you know, our primary focus was first of all upon these individual countries and how they may have differed or been the same with regards to mental health responses to COVID. But also, yeah, there is this element

of because of the countries that we had, being able to explore the individualistic, collectivistic side of things, particularly, you know, using Hofstede's broad definitions of those things.

So yeah, I'm happy to do what I can to help you with your thesis.

Luis:

Perfect. Yeah. Thanks for your introduction.

I think that also answered already the first question about your background in this topic.

Hutchings:

Well, that's true. Yes, I didn't realize that.

Luis:

That's perfect. Then I will just continue with the second question, which is, in your opinion, how does cultural orientation like collectivism or individualism influence public health policies and practices?

Hutchings:

Yeah, I mean, it wasn't the primary focus that we went into because, you know, we weren't really sure how well it would apply to, you know, particularly with a global pandemic. You know, we thought it may be more individualized because different countries were approaching things in different ways. But, you know, it does appear, and especially from the data, that there is a broad individualism, collectivism element to it.

Now, you know, we have to bear in mind that we were using only a select few countries to explore that. And so it's not that we were, you know, we weren't deliberately exploring individualism and collectivism. And so there are two individualistic countries and then the others being more collectivistic.

And so there is that limitation. But the individualism, collectivism side does seem to come out when it comes to issues with regards to, you know, the policies in particular. So, yeah, does it influence things?

Yes, I think it does. Yes. Yes.

Luis:

Yeah, I think so, too. Great. Thanks.

Nice. So, and then I would like to move on to the second part. I know it was not the focus of your paper.

Your paper was more in the mental health direction, right? Yeah. But still, if you want to answer the questions, I would be really happy.

Also, if there's a question you don't want to answer or you don't know the answer in detail, we can just skip it. It's no problem at all. So my first question in the collectivism and pandemic control measures section is, from your perspective, how does a collectivist society approach pandemic control measures differently than an individualist society?

Hutchings:

Well, it's interesting, as you say, it wasn't from our paper, but a lot of the authors of that paper, we got together and we wrote a book with different chapters. And I know a couple of them did chapters on this type of thing, particularly Balan and Rathnakrishnan did something looking at this. I don't know if you got access to that paper.

I can send it across to you. It was very much focused around control measures and the different types of control that were used. So you tended to see, it's a difficult one in a way, because many of the control measures used, even though they have different terminologies, were pretty much the same, right?

The way across the world. And so, I'm not sure what terms were used in Germany, but in the UK, for instance, we talked about lockdown and in Malaysia, they were using, it was a different terminology, but the ultimate behaviour and the things that were happening were very similar. And so the terms were different, but the behaviour was the same.

So I think that we saw very similar responses by government, for instance, to lockdown. And I think, again, I'm looking at it from a UK perspective, so a little bit of the individualist perspective. I think there was a large adherence, which was quite similar to what we saw in Malaysia from both the data and from speaking to colleagues out there.

At the beginning, I think the non-adherence in the individual societies started to come along later on. We actually carried out this research in the first lockdown period. I'm not sure how many you went through.

We went through about three lockdowns. I think so, too, yeah. Yeah, so I think adherence in that first lockdown period was quite global, certainly in individualistic and collectivistic.

I think it did change a bit, though, in the second and third lockdown, but we don't have the data for that in the paper that we wrote. But I think Balan's paper, I'll dig it out in a moment, actually, but his was looking at Malaysia, so the collectivist society and their engagement with lockdown. And my feeling is that they were a lot more compliant for longer than we saw in the UK and the US.

And so I think there is a potential difference there in that whilst going into the immediate thing was the same across both individualistic and collectivistic, I think there was a breakdown of adherence to these measures, not massively. A lot of people still did adhere. Even in the UK, adherence rates were still around 85 to 90 percent, so still a lot of people.

But we went from something like 2 percent of people not adhering in the first lockdown to 10 or 15 percent not adhering in the further lockdowns. I don't think they saw that much of an increase in non-adherence to lockdowns in their future ones. The difference started to come out as time went on, where you started to see a difference between individualistic and collectivistic societies.

Luis:

Yes, that's actually an interesting point, and I totally agree with you. I think Germany and UK probably are really similar when it comes to this. Also, in the beginning, everybody complied really well with the measures, especially in the first one, where it was only said that it's only for two weeks.

People were kind of excited because it was something new. But then when it got extended one more time, the compliance rate and also the motivation of the people, it went down a lot, and I think in the second and third lockdown, even more. So I think that's a really good point, and nobody has mentioned it so far that when the measures start, their compliance rate might be similar, but the longer it goes on, then individualistic countries might have some disadvantages in keeping up the rate.

So thank you for the point. And then my next question would be, which I think connects really well, why do you think this is so? Why does or what are the key advantages of collectivism in ensuring the compliance, also the compliance over time with the pandemic control measures?

Hutchings:

I think that you could go to the classical collectivism arguments. The greater feeling of shared responsibility for the well-being of the collective over the more individualised concern for well-being of the individual or the close group around the individual comes into play. But I think that it's also important to recognise the, because I know when you sent the questions over, when you talked about wearing a mask, for instance, and if you look at some collectivistic cultures, this is almost a part of their psyche, if you take with China and you do see it in areas of Malaysia as well, where, particularly in flu season and things like this, where they will wear masks because they know that they need to do that to protect the group anyway. And so they had far more of a, almost a preparedness, if you like. Whereas wearing a mask and social distancing in the UK was a completely alien concept for the vast majority of people.

And so it's a difficult one to say when it comes to compliance with the pandemic, purely because of what people are expected to do next, because many people in the collectivist societies almost had prior experience and prior practice at these things which many people in individualistic cultures didn't have. And so it's not just about the things that they were prepared to do in the pandemic. I think it was also the elements which have been ingrained into them from being in a collective in the first place has been, I think that played quite a big role in the pandemic.

So it's, that's certainly one of the advantages, not just adherence to the norms, but also that prior, you know, like I say, prior knowledge in a way, prior preparation.

Luis:

Yes. Yes. Great.

Thanks for the nice answer. In your view, are there also potential drawbacks or challenges associated with the collectivist approach in this context of the pandemic measures?

Hutchings:

I think that we saw some of that come through in the paper with regards to, you know, some of the sides of things with regards to mental health. Some groups did show lower levels of, you know, or showed higher stresses when it came to mental health. And I think that with concern about the collective and concern about others comes possibly an additional feeling of responsibility for those others as well.

And so, you know, if you, if you're, and we've got some evidence to back us up, but I can't, but I can't say this with, you know, with, with absolute certainty. But I think that when your concern is looking after yourself and a few others around you, that's a lot easier to take on than almost having to take responsibility for the, you know, for a far larger group and for the collective. And

so, you know, we did, we did see, you know, increased mental health issues with some of those groups from the collectivist cultures in our findings.

And that was, again, you know, from that first lockdown. But that's potentially a reason. So, you know, that could be a downside.

You are, you know, you're responsible for more than just yourself. And that's good. Yeah.

That is going to weigh on people.

Luis:

True. Yes. I never thought about this point, but it's, it's totally true that if, if you have like more responsibilities than just for yourself, it might be also more stress and more pressure.

Yeah. Great. Thanks for the good answer.

Okay. Then I would like to move on to the mental health section. Yeah.

Or would you like to add something for the pandemic control measures section or?

Hutchings:

No, whatever's, whatever's best, whatever's best for you. But yeah, I'm quite happy to move on to that one.

Luis:

Okay, sure. Then let's start with the first question. How do you think collectivism and individualism impacts the mental health of individuals during a pandemic?

Hutchings:

Um, so a little, a little bit comes back to the answer that I, that I just gave, but I think, um, we were, we were quite, and again, this, this could be to do with when we actually carried out the research. I, I expected the idea of isolation to be far more impacting upon the, um, the individualized ones, but it's, it's a bit of, it's a bit of an odd one because you would think it would impact upon the collectivists more. And I think, and I think we saw that it did, but the very nature of it being so isolating that it's, you know, we have far more people within, um, the UK, for instance, who are living in smaller units anyway.

And so, and so, um, you know, they were with the, with the, the way that lockdown came about of not being able to meet with people from other households, for instance, if you've got an extended and a larger household, you've got almost more contact with, you know, we had some, we had some people who they may have been living on their own or with one other person. And when they were that isolated then from anybody else, we expected that to have a profound impact upon people's, um, your mental health of they were really isolated. You know, if you, if you're in a more collectivistic grouping where you have a larger family, so for instance, you're around, you know, eight, nine, 10 people.

Uh, we thought that might be a bit more inoculating. It didn't seem to work out like that, but also our data was collected very early in the whole thing. So whether, whether that became an issue, the longer it went on, I'm not sure, but, um, you know, I, I think that there are, there are a number of things there that certainly we didn't pick up possibly because of some of the questions that we were asking, but also because of the, the timing of it, you know, it was, um,

we were a couple of months into what then became a, you know, a year long, even, I can't even, I can't even remember how long it was anymore in terms of all the different lockdowns.

But, um, I don't, I don't think we necessarily picked up on the longer term mental health issues that I think we would probably see there. Um, and I think that's, I know some of the research that's ongoing now is starting to look at those longer term effects and, um, you know, that's what we're hoping to just finish off with. We've got some things running at the moment, but at the moment, um, yeah, we haven't necessarily got the data to, to back that up.

You know, as, as was very much a snapshot of that initial, um, individualistic collectivistic thing. But I think that I would, I would expect the individualized, um, people to, to be quite affected longer term, but they didn't appear to be in the short term.

Luis:

Okay. Yeah. Great.

Thanks. Um, yes, I think, um, I've also read that it might take some many, many years to, to see the full, um, effects of a pandemic on the mental health.

Hutchings:

Yeah, I definitely think so.

Luis:

Yeah. Yeah. Okay.

Then my next question, I think you already answered it a little bit or a lot, but I will still ask it. Maybe you want to add something. Are there particular aspects of collectivist societies that might offer better support for mental health during such crisis?

Hutchings:

Yeah. I mean, as you said, you know, I think that, um, the, the increased connections that, that people already had, um, I, I do think, you know, had a certain inoculating role, as I said, certain, certainly not, um, not exclusively because we did see, we did see that greater negativity in mental health for specific elements of the collectivist culture. But, um, but I still think that there are parts of it that did protect people.

It's again, it's quite, it's quite difficult because of the, you know, when you've got so many different variations, particularly in terms of the things that were available. Um, again, I'm not sure what the approach was in Germany, but, um, the, in, in the UK, there was quite a fast response to, um, order the, to basically make payments to make sure that people who couldn't work weren't left without money. Whereas I think in some of the countries that we were looking at, that wasn't the case.

And so, um, in Thailand and Malaysia, for instance, there was far less of that, which meant that whilst people had those around them, you know, having nine or 10 people around you could actually be detrimental because you had no way of being able to, to feed those people for instance. And, you know, again, that, that, um, that responsibility for them could be extremely detrimental to mental health if you were responsible for them, but had no way of being able to provide for them. So it's quite a difficult one to answer in terms of purely psychological mechanisms, because so much about the policies of each nation or each culture do play a big role in that as well.

Luis:

Okay. Yeah, that's true. Thank you.

Um, then this, that it's difficult to answer only about the psychological mechanism, mechanisms. It will also apply for my next question, but do you think there are also aspects where individualism might have advantages when it comes to mental health during a pandemic?

Hutchings:

Yeah. And I think again, going back to earlier when I think when, when you're responsible for yourself, there are, you know, there is less concern about, about others. Um, you know, that, that can be, it, it can be, it can be an advantage again, you know, measured against, um, you know, the, the increased isolation, but also, you know, if people are used to being on their own and then it may be that being in a lockdown, you may not impact upon them as much.

Uh, I know that, you know, I, I like, I like spending time by myself. And so it was, it was nice and sunny in that first lockdown. And I spent a lot of time in the garden and stuff, which wasn't that, wasn't that much of a problem.

I wasn't, I wasn't that bothered about, uh, not seeing other people, but so, um, I think, I think that there is that side of it, you know, that's, um, you know, that less of a responsibility, you know, certainly, certainly can be, um, you know, can be seen as a bonus.

Luis:

Yeah. Perfect. Thank you so much.

Um, before I move on to the section four about the implementations and policy considerations, um, is there anything you want to add? Anything I have forgotten to ask you about this topic that you think, uh, I should include in my thesis?

Hutchings:

Um, no, I don't think, I don't think so. As I said, I'll have a look at a couple of the things that, um, others have done and, and send it over to you just in case there's anything in there that you can, that you can dig out from it. But, um, but no, that's it.

That seems, seems to cover it. I think.

Luis:

Okay. Perfect. Nice.

Then. Then I will move on with my first question there. How do you think can governments or health organizations and collectivists and individualist societies optimize their strategies for pandemic control?

Hutchings:

Yes, that's good. That's a, it's a, it's a, it's a fast, it's a fascinating question. And, um, I would imagine there are a lot of people working on that.

I don't know. I, I think that, um, I think one of the, one of the things for them in particular to think about is how to, um, alleviate or address the issues of, of mental health in particular that, that can come about. So like we said about, you know, in an individualistic society where you

have, um, you know, smaller pockets of groups, for instance, it may be that policy needs to be thought about in terms of how do you connect those groups?

Um, particularly those that are, those that are vulnerable. Uh, there was, if, if we think about people who are on their own, for instance of, you know, and they're impacted because they can't work and bring money in, making the ability to, you know, things like free wifi and stuff, or waving wifi charges to allow people to connect or allowing households to be able to get together is, you know, is one way that you can combat that. Individualized side of things on the other side with a collectivist group.

If you have got somebody who is responsible for, uh, you know, for a large, a larger group of people, um, making sure that they have the facility to be able to, to look after them. And so have the things that they can provide is going to be a lot better for, for their mental health. And not, um, well, I don't want to say that you don't have to worry about so much about them having the outside contact.

I think one of the, one of the things that came through, I don't think we reported it in the paper because we'd collected some qualitative data related to it and, um, if there were, we were getting all sorts of reports in of how people were, were coping. And it was things like, you know, in, in, uh, I think it was in Malaysia. Yeah.

There were, there were people climbing trees with computers to, um, to access sort of free wifi from businesses to carry on with their online schooling and things like this. And so, um, I think many of these things go, they, they are global and they go beyond the individualistic and collectivistic it's, it's quite, it's quite difficult to be able to narrow it down and say, you know, individualistic society should do this and collectivistic society should do that. Because I think that probably about 90% of the things that we learn to need to be done in God forbid, any future pandemic will probably apply across absolutely everything.

And it's only that small, you know, five or 10%, which needs to be tailored to each of those individual, you know, to, to either individualistic or collectivistic.

Luis:

Yeah. Yeah. Great answer.

Thank you very much.

So I'm really interested what you'd say about my next question when you when you say that everything is actually really similar across both cultural dimensions. Would you say that there are some lessons that individualist societies can learn from collectivist societies or the other way around?

Hutchings:

I think one of the one of the key things that certainly not not just from the from the paper we published, but also some of the other things that we've been researching and looking at is, it is about this attention to detail where it's important to to recognise almost when when not to apply the individualistic collectivistic label if you like, because there is, it can it can bring benefits in terms of being able to do things quite rapidly. But there could also potentially be a danger of doing something in error.

As I said, you know, if you take that example about thinking, well, you know, free Wi-Fi is far more important for people in little groups to be able to connect. But of course, that doesn't mean

that those in the collectivist cultures don't need that free Wi-Fi because they also even though they might have more people around them, they still need to be able to connect to all of those outside things like their for their schooling and for these different things. And so.

Understanding that individualism and collectivism is a, you know, it is it's such a broad term that it's useful in one respect, but applying it blindly without taking individual situations and circumstances into account may not necessarily be a good thing. It's, you know, it's it really is. It's a it's a real balancing act that that people have to make that the governments ultimately have to make.

And in a global situation, in a mass situation, it's very difficult to be nuanced about it and to try and, you know, make the right decision for absolutely everybody. But it doesn't mean that we shouldn't necessarily try. So I think that's that's the important thing there is that, you know, to be able to address that and probably that probably addresses the next question a little bit.

Luis:

Yes, yes, I think you you already answered it a lot. But do you want to add something on the next question about the policy recommendations?

Hutchings:

I think I think it is just just that that there is it's great to have a plan. It's great to be able to implement things as widely as possible. But that there's still a once that plan is implemented, there still needs to be a lot of work done underneath it to try and target it at individuals, particularly vulnerable individuals.

So with things like mental health, you know, being able to make sure that you're not just forgetting some of those people who are involved in it.

Luis:

Okay, great. Thanks. Then we're already at the last question, which is, what lessons do you think we all can take from the COVID period into our today's world and also today's working world?

Hutchings:

Yeah, and this is one of the areas that we're actually working on at the moment is that COVID has changed our working world. Well, our world as well, but our working world massively. I think that some of those things we were already moving towards.

But, you know, so if you take hybrid working or working from home, the different ways in which people work, there are there are so many changes. And one of the key challenges that we are seeing at the moment is whether people want to move back to the way it was before, or carry on with how it is now, or take where we are now and move forward in a different way to how we would have been moving forward five or six years ago. And I haven't particularly got any answers on that one at the moment in terms of what we should do.

But COVID has fundamentally changed the way that the world works. And I think there are two timelines have opened up. There is the way that things would have gone if COVID had never happened.

There is the way that things are now that COVID has happened. And they're not completely different things. They're moving along, but almost parallel is a sort of sliding doors situation of,

you know, they're going along and they may diverge a bit, but they're not completely different because it has changed things.

Some things have gone back. Many things haven't. Again, I don't know what the situation is in Germany.

But so I haven't carried cash on me for a long time now. I would five or six years ago, if I didn't have 20 or 30 pounds in my wallet, at least in notes or coins or something, I would feel as if there was something missing. I can't remember the last time I carried cash in my wallet.

Now, you know, these are and these are, they're not just, you know, they're not just business changes. They are psychological changes as well, in terms of thinking about the way that we do a lot of different things now.

Luis:

Yeah. To answer your question, Germans love cash. Especially not my generation.

We prefer to pay with cards, but my parents and grandparents generation, they just love cash. I think that didn't really change a lot.

Hutchings:

A lot of places in the UK now, you can't buy things with cash. So, you know, our university is cashless. You cannot hand over money.

Everything's done. Everything's done electronically.

Luis:

That's interesting. That's also...

Hutchings:

Even a cup of coffee. You couldn't buy a cup of coffee in our place with cash.

Yeah, yeah.

Luis:

Yeah, thank you. If you want, if I finish my thesis, I can send it to you if you're interested. It will be in German, but there are many, many translation tools.

Hutchings:

Yeah, that'd be fantastic.

Yeah, especially with AI. That's a positive thing. That'd be fantastic.

I'll just dig out Balan's paper now and I'll just email it across to you. I don't know if it'll be any use, but it's just on the control side of things in Malaysia. So that might just give you a little bit of information on that.

Thank you. Okay.

Luis:

Thank you again. Thanks very much. Have a great day.

Hutchings:

Yeah, you too. Thank you. Okay, bye.

7.2.6 Brian O'Shea

Luis:

Perfect, thank you. Then I will maybe explain the context real quick and then you can also introduce yourself if you want and tell something about your background. So as I already told you, I'm a Bachelor's student right now in Business Psychology and I'm writing my Bachelor's thesis in the Psychology part.

There I write about a cultural comparison and I compare individualistic and collectivistic cultures with the example of COVID-19 and specifically I compare the differences in psychological health and mental health and also the differences in how well these cultural dimensions comply to pandemic response measures. And for my theory part, I read many papers, including yours, that's also why I contacted you. And everything from my literature review points to the fact that maybe collectivist societies have advantages in both parts, in the mental health but also in the compliance to the pandemic measures.

And so I deviated two hypotheses from that. First, that individualism is less suited for maintaining positive mental health during a pandemic than collectivism. And the second hypothesis is that collectivism has advantages over individualism when it comes to bringing through pandemic control measures effectively and more successfully.

And yeah, so in this interview, I have prepared some questions about both parts, about the pandemic control measures, but also the mental health topic. And as a last section, I also have some questions about some maybe practical implementations and policy considerations from your own point of view. So yeah, thanks again for joining.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask them. And yeah, maybe you can introduce yourself real quick.

Brian O'Shea:

Yeah, cool. So hello, my name is Brian O'Shea. So I'm originally from Ireland, but I've got psychology training all over the world.

So I did an undergraduate in Ireland, my master's at the London School of Economics, my PhD at the University of Warwick. Before I did my PhD, I spent a year volunteering in a service that supports people with recovering from psychological illnesses. So originally, I, like a lot of psychologists, want to go into clinical psychology.

But from that experience of working with people on the ground, I realized I wanted to look at more policy level implications that I could, you know, like basically impact policy has more likely to have a positive impact on more people. So I did my PhD in social experimental psychology at the University of Warwick. And then I got some other small fellowships.

But then I got a large Marie Curie fellowship that meant I could go to the US and study more clinical related behavior connected to suicide and self-harm. And then I did some addiction research in the University of Amsterdam. But now I would say I do bridge between social and clinical psychology.

So I do the self-harm research, but I also do the parasite stress research related to social psychology, specifically connected to racism and racial bias and trying to understand environmental factors that drive racial bias. And also like political ideology, I think some of the explanations of why people have certain ideological views or, you know, religious beliefs or racial beliefs. A lot of the theories, I find them very surface level, don't go maybe into the evolutionary drives of what might create divergences in people's ideology or beliefs towards others.

And also connected to that is cross-cultural difference in individualism versus collectivism. So I did a master's in social and cultural psychology, and I was kind of disappointed that the explanations about why these cultures differed wasn't really adequate to me. It just kind of said, this is the way the world is and here it is.

And they didn't really explain why these cultures would have diverged these ways. So that's kind of then why I got more interested in research that looks at environmental factors or evolutionary factors, such as parasite stress theory, that might have an account for why cultures would diverge in their kind of more overarching beliefs about how to manage society or interacting with each other. So that's kind of just a general, and yeah, I should say that your two hypotheses that you had, they seem pretty aligned to what I would have also thought.

And there's ways that you could test that. But yeah, I think you're pretty much accurate with that prediction.

Luis:

Okay. Thanks for your introduction. I think you have a very interesting background, and I'm really sure that you have lots of knowledge that can also help me.

And I'm really happy that you like my hypothesis. I think it's a big part when you do a paper or a bachelor's thesis that they fit well. So I'm happy that I didn't fail at this point.

Brian O'Shea:

But even if you do, it's still a good thing, like people have hypotheses and are wrong, but that's still important knowledge. So don't worry about failing just as long as it makes sense. Yeah, literature and the data then backs it up.

That's all you really need to know.

Luis:

Yeah, true. Okay, then, if you don't have further questions, I will start with my first question.

Brian O'Shea:

Yep, you can just go Yeah, go.

Luis:

If there's a question you don't want to answer, or you don't, or you want to skip, we can just go on with the next question. My first question is, in your opinion, how does cultural orientation, like collectivism, or individualism influence the public health policies and practices?

Brian O'Shea:

So I would, for me, as a cultural psychologist, I do think that they have important implications for how, you know, a society can get behind a certain proposal. And rather than, again, the

whole idea of these different ideologies, those pros and cons. And I would think, you know, in a really threatening situation where something needs to be acted on really quickly, having a collectivistic view where people just kind of go along with their leader, that is a good thing, if a threat needs to be like immediately eradicated.

However, that can lead to a lot of errors. And, you know, people, you know, not thinking about it as in depth, and like policies can have very detrimental outcomes. So I think now, a detrimental policy that China implemented in the 1950s, 1960s was the one child policy.

So, you know, if they had more, you know, outside views of the long term impacts of this, they would have realized that if you keep doing this policy for this long, now China's having a huge population decline. Because there's just so little children, everyone is just born into a one person family. And that kind of collectivistic, that integration that they had is now like kind of falling apart, up to some extent.

So that's just one example of, you know, why individual societies are more individualistic societies, people are more willing to challenge, and like maybe protest or express their discontent towards the government or whoever's in power. And then that form of discontent or that challenging the authority makes people open to the possibility that maybe they're not right. And maybe they need to think about it and really defend their views.

So like everything, I see these as natural evolutions of these two systems based on the necessities of the environmental pressures that is occurring in these environments, why these different ideologies would diverge. And like all ways of thinking, some are beneficial, more beneficial than others, especially during certain time periods. So I would say in an extreme threat like COVID, having a more collectivistic ideology in a society might be easier to manage that threat, and people are more likely to go along with what the authority does.

Doesn't mean it's right, it could be morally wrong. But some things can be done easier to get rid of the threat. Like you can also see in individualistic societies when like a terrorist attack or there's a fear of the outsider, you know, during 9-11, society would have shifted towards a more kind of collectivistic way, we're all in this together against some kind of enemy.

So all societies, the most individualistic societies are susceptible to shifting towards more collectivistic thinking, if it's a necessity for them to survive. And that's kind of how I see these broader differences, these worldviews. They're just a necessity, and that you will adopt depending on the environmental constraints put on the person or the government.

Luis:

Okay, great. Thanks for your nice answer. I also like the examples you gave.

And you also went a bit to my next question already. So my next question would be, from your perspective, how does a collectivist society approach pandemic control measures differently than an individualist society?

Brian O'Shea:

So I would say, again, you maybe got to think back, the reason why a collectivistic society would have developed, you've got to understand why they might have developed these tendencies. And I would argue the reason why they develop these tendencies is because they're in a highly threatening environment. And one of the biggest threats that these collectivistic societies, so countries around, you know, the equator, essentially, the closer they are to the

equator, the more diseases will thrive in these environments are more like hot, temperate climates.

So if you're in an environment that you're constantly exposed to diseases, you constantly have children not making it to five years old. People are dying randomly. We know now why people are dying, we've got a better understanding.

But you know, before germ theory was developed, people just assumed they were dying for random reasons. And they didn't have a clear understanding. So I would have argued, and we do know this, that all of society is turning more individualistic from every single metric.

But you would have argued that, you know, three to 300 years, society would have been a far more collectivistic. And I would have argued is because this exposure to diseases. So because you're exposed to diseases, more, you have a better understanding of handling them.

So it's just like practice, the more practice you have with handling diseases. So, you know, there was SARS, for COVID, then there's H1N1, all these other diseases that were pretty common around where COVID would have started. So these collectivistic cultures, the relationship between these two things, these collectivistic cultures would have a better understanding of how to manage them just because they've had more experience.

And because of that more experience, that would then make them better capable of putting in solutions to reduce the threat. So some of the, so it's kind of just like trial and error for something as complicated as this. You'd hope that they would figure out the things that were working in the past.

So you could see COVID happened, the US, UK, just embarrassingly bad. But it's, you could say it's because they're individualistic. But also, it's probably just because they haven't had that necessity to actually manage diseases before.

And if the governments were thinking ahead, you know, like, they have, they were advised by experts to do all these things, you know, like Bill Gates was advising this way before COVID, we need to be prepared for these kinds of things. And a good way to do might be to observe how countries that are dealing with more diseases, how they manage it. So like Vietnam, it's like, you know, a hot, really poor country, but it just did phenomenally well at managing the early stages of it.

Eventually, it started to break down, and they maybe were too strict. But yeah, just phenomenally good at handling it at the very beginning compared to richer countries, like the US and the UK, that just like, kind of left everything open. So, so I have some research showing that I haven't published yet that cultures that are historically more have higher infectious diseases, they're more likely to have higher germ aversion on average, people say they have higher germ aversion.

So this challenges a PNAS paper by Tyber, where he says, there's no difference between historical infectious disease rates and disgust sensitivity. So I would think disgust sensitivity and germ aversion are different, slightly, like, they're related. But like, I've traveled to Asia and many countries before as in, you know, people are sweaty, there's a lot of, you know, dog feces, like things that are kind of disgusting, compared to, you know, really clean Japan, where everything is really pristine.

And, but the point is, if you're in a region where there's a lot of disgusting things, you get habituated to it. So your sensitivity will get habituated to it. But it, you still could respond in a very germ averse way.

So your behaviors will be still protecting you. So even though somebody would say they're not that sensitive, because they're around these things. If you actually measure their behavior, they will be adopting very germ averse behaviors, such as making sure so in China, for example, when you get tea, they give you the cups, like, no, no tea in them, and you get hot water to wash the cups yourself, just to make sure that the kitchen, like they mightn't have done the best job, you will do a better job.

And you can trust yourself cleaning these things. That's an example of something like that's pretty unusual for me, I would just assume the kitchen would do it. But also, like, the chances of me getting some disease in Europe is way lower if they don't wash the, if they don't wash the cutlery properly, I'd probably be grand.

While there, you could get a disease or like some respiratory illness, and it could, you know, make you pretty sick. So that's like the motivation, these kind of different behaviors that are really, you really observe in environments that have high infectious disease, it's really clear. And yeah, it should reduce the diseases.

But up. But then there's some examples of, you know, behaviors or superstitions that are just happen just because people connect this behavior with better outcomes, even though there is no scientific evidence for this behavior being effective. So you know, like praying that you won't get a disease or praying to God that he'll protect you, that's probably not going to be as effective, but it might give you some kind of control or some, like, ability of reducing your anxiety, putting the pressure of managing the disease onto God or onto your government.

And that's, I think, hugely crucial to the managing your anxiety and why people do so bad mentally in a pandemic in individualistic societies, because they can't rely on their government as much and they can't, well, it depends on the country, but they're less likely to believe in their government to sort out everything. And also, they're less likely to have religious beliefs that gives them some kind of comfort.

Luis:

Okay, great. I think that was an amazing answer.

Then my next question, you already answered a little bit of it. But besides the historical experience, what do you think are the key advantages of collectivism ensuring compliance with pandemic control measures, like, for example, social distancing, or wearing a mask compared to individualism?

Brian O'Shea:

A disadvantage of individualism in this situation is that everyone wants to be different. So if a lot of people are wearing masks, you're going to have a group of people that will just naturally want to show that they differ from this world. So, you know, just like, I'm not sure if anyone has done studies on this, but it would be interesting to see in like, collectivistic schools, are there less groups or tribes? And are they generally kind of following? Yeah, they're less divergent in groups.

So I don't know, in Western society, there's like, you know, the gots, the punks, like all these music groups will differ from each other, and they'll see each other is not as cool. And there'll

be the jocks, and, you know, all these different sports groups. Well, I would imagine in collectivistic societies, it's like, we're into music, we're into sports, it'll be like, an overarching, I'm probably going off on a tangent there.

But yeah, basically, the problem with an individualistic society, you're just going to challenge more, these rules that are being implemented, and you'll question them more, which is, again, sometimes a good thing. But for something like a pandemic, where it can spread really quickly, sometimes that questioning, you should just put more trust onto the authorities. So in a collectivistic culture, generally, so a good example is, I got a fellowship to go to Japan, it was a governmental fellowship.

Within this time, I could travel from the US to Europe, I was traveling all around Europe, but yet I couldn't enter Japan, even though I had a governmental fellowship. And even though I would have gotten, you know, two tests, and they still wouldn't let anyone in from the outside. And then when I eventually got in, I had to get a visa, I had to get a special business visa to go there.

But when I went in, I knew I wasn't wearing masks around Europe. In Japanese airlines, they made you wear a mask, I think maybe you had to wear a mask. Anyway, but I just did it because I knew Japan was really into it.

But then when I got to Japan, I knew they weren't required to wear a mask. And I got off at Shinjuku, like I usually would wear masks in the bus at this time, but when I got off, and everyone was wearing a mask in like one of the busiest places in the world. I was I had my mask taken off.

And I was really confused going, Oh, maybe there's a law that was just implemented. And I put it back on again. But I went to the, you know, to check in.

And I was like, why is everyone wearing a mask when the government said you don't need to. And it was just that people wanted to show, I don't know their respect or just because other people were doing it was a form of like, protecting, like they would frame it as we're protecting our elderly, it's our duty to do this, they would see it as a duty to others. It's not about yourself.

Well, in individualistic society, generally, you'll say, Oh, I don't want to do this, because it puts it puts me out. And in a collectivistic society, it's not about putting you out, it's about ensuring that other people are protected, and they're safe. And you're thinking about others more.

So in that sense, especially for disease, where they spread, you kind of need to be worrying about older people or those that might be more vulnerable. And even though you yourself, especially as a younger person, like COVID just wasn't really that threatening to anyone under you know, anyone younger that was in pretty good health. Some examples have been bad, but on average, you most younger people were fine, but older people were really, really negatively impacted them.

So in a collectivistic society, less older people will die, based on the probability that if everyone is wearing masks and doing more likely to do these protective mechanisms, it will protect them or reduce the likelihood of them getting getting a disease. So yeah, just basically, you're more likely to follow authority in a collectivistic society. You're less likely to challenge authority.

Again, there's pros and cons of this. That's a good thing in a pandemic that we know is killing people. But if, for example, they just, if a collectivistic government says, you know, we need to go to war, we need to restrict this group of like Muslims from ever leaving this area, because they might have a disease, you know, that's where it kind of gets a bit like, like scarier.

And you know, some people, if the majority dislikes this group, and they could follow along with this extreme behavior. So like, like everything, as I say, collectivism is not can be have good things in certain situations, but it can also be used to abuse others if it goes too far, or other groups or, you know, there was like a lot of discussion about how certain governments were using this to implement authoritarian regimes. And, you know, really strong control mechanisms around human behaviors.

And yeah, like a lot of people were challenging that, especially from individualistic societies. But, but at the beginning, when COVID was going out, we didn't really know how threatening it was. So it was probably smarter to be cautious to reduce the deaths of people, rather than just having mobility for a short period.

But yeah, probably governments, some governments kept the mobility, lack of mobility going on for too long based on the threats of COVID. So, but even still, some people will go, Oh, one person is too many that die from this disease. It's like, and that's where the that's where scientists struggle with figuring out the optimal point of is one person too much and mental health spikes, and then people die from suicide in a couple of, you know, months down the line, how do we capture that?

How do we measure that? You know, epidemiologists can do that. But that takes time to capture.

And I think some countries did implement too strict of policies of avoiding others and not meeting with others. And that could have had mental health outcomes, negative mental health outcomes.

Luis:

Okay, great. Thanks again for your answer. I think you also are already answered my next question.

Now, because what could be disadvantages of collectivist of a collectivist approach? But I think you already gave an answer.

Brian O'Shea:

Or Yeah, yeah. Yeah, just, again, each approach is good, more diversity of approaches we have in society. During these kind of huge events, the better, I get worried that society does seem to be going towards just a singular kind of capitalistic way of managing our resources.

You know, it seems like the best way of doing it. But without having diversity, we can't really observe and see, is there another way of managing it? And obviously, some societies are more socialistic.

And you know, China is basically a capitalistic society that has adopted some, you know, collectivistic. Well, yeah, that's probably going to get into more economic theory. But yeah, there's pros and cons, the more diversity we have, like in nature, the more we can do kind of naturalistic experiments to see what's effective and what isn't. Yeah.

Luis:

Great. Thank you. That was just about the pandemic control matters question.

My next section will be about the mental health during pandemics. And here, my first question is, how do you think collectivism or individualism impact the mental health of individuals during a pandemic?

Brian O'Shea:

So generally, we know that collectivistic societies have better mental health relative to individualistic societies. It's a correlation that you don't know the causation. But you probably would have assumed like loneliness is higher in individualistic societies.

And the logic is, is, you know, you have just more kind of family support, tighter knit communities where people know each other more, and they can rely on more support. And, you know, you have more kind of community set up a lot of these, there's a relationship between collectivism and religious belief or some kind of belief in higher order entities, such as government in China. So these kind of humans needs, I would argue, to offload some pressures of life.

And uncertainty, life is really uncertain. So if you can create some kind of scenarios in your head, like, God is giving us some certainty, or the government is giving us some certainty. So laws, so there's a relationship between when laws are created, and the courts work effectively, then there's less likelihood for the need for religious belief there, because you can actually go rely on a tangible mechanism of challenging whatever negative adverse event happens to you.

And, you know, so, so, but obviously, sometimes these things don't work. Courts don't work. Medical systems mightn't work as well as we hope they are.

So I do think humans naturally need to rely on a small group, a family, a religious belief, and get support from them. And collectivistic societies are just more likely to have that kind of talking and being around their family more. And again, there's obviously advantages.

So the advantage of that is, you know, you improve your mental health. But the disadvantage of that is that it takes time to spend hanging out with your friends and your family and creating relationships. And then that culture probably won't be as productive as individualistic cultures, where you just don't prioritize your family, you prioritize work. And that means, you know, there'll be higher, there'll be more people spending time in the workforce and GDP should improve. This is where like Japan is a really interesting case.

So pretty traditionally would be a collectivistic culture. But I would say it's really going towards individualistic ideals and views, same as in Korea, it's, it's, and there seems to be a huge traditional, or a gap between the traditional view of society from the older generation, and the younger generation is just really individualistic. So there's like a clash going on there.

And I think they're really struggling to manage that. And just the hours that Koreans worked, they just don't have as much time to build Japan and Korea, they don't have as much time to build communities and build kind of connections in this traditional collectivistic way. So that will be one mechanism, I would argue for why suicide and depression is really high in these regions.

It's just this mismatch between what their parents and grandparents expected and what their reality is, they're living in. So how that relates to COVID is, are like pandemics is, you know, if you can't hang out with your friends and family, and you're not able to interact with them, and maybe you don't in poor countries, they mightn't have had the internet access. They won't be able to engage with them.

But yeah, it's, again, there's pros and cons, I would imagine you would see people in collectivistic cultures would handle it a lot better. But there's not I don't, I think the reasons for that is just because they have more trust in managing it, they trust the government, they probably are connected more to their family, maybe work isn't as a priority. And hence, you know, they're not like in individualistic societies, I think people were just constantly felt they had to keep working, especially those that were high achievers, because they were just at home the whole time.

And that's where they're working. And they found it hard to separate it. And I think that led to negative outcomes as well as negative mental health as well.

But again, just not being able to interact with people in in face to face online, it was a substitute, but I think real, the nuances of body language that you can pick up when you're face to face, I think is super important for humans. And yeah, just not having that and not having that kind of, you know, these water fountain conversations just naturally occur, not naturally occurring, just spontaneously occurring conversations with people, I think is really important for humans that can't happen online, if you're organizing a time to meet, it just is so kind of orchestrated. So I think these subtle things, over a number of years, or over a number of months, or two, three years that COVID happened, I think they accumulate to make people really anxious and just not feel like this is the right environment.

But I guess it's the best we can do.

Luis:

Great. Amazing. Thank you.

My next question. In contrast, are there any aspects where individualism might have advantages in terms of mental health during a pandemic?

Brian O'Shea:

Um, so again, if you're totally isolated, and you can't meet people, I think individualistic societies have so much maybe technology to entertain them. And there's so much things there that they can do. And they're probably more accustomed to being isolated and by themselves a little bit more.

And it's kind of more acceptable. What I feel in collectivistic societies, you know, if you went for dinner by yourself, or if you went out to the cinema yourself, or they'd be kind of seen as unusual behavior, you should be doing that with your friends a bit more. Or you should have a group.

But yeah, I'm trying to think other benefits.

Luis:

But yeah, I think that's, that's one of the the highest benefits of maybe individualistic societies that if there are the same circumstances for both that you're both isolated in a collectivist and

individualist society, that maybe individualist people are better prepared because they are more used to it.

Brian O'Shea:

Yeah, I think it's just again, practice. And you know, you just have that experience. Yeah.

Like, I think, you know, and a lot, again, a lot of collectivistic societies, it also relates to, they're more densely populated. So in general, obviously, these are the big cities, people are living in these large cities, you are going to have more exposed exposure to people, and it's just gonna be more people around you. Yeah, maybe I'm just going on a tangent.

I don't know what that would, like, it's obviously creature, it increases your risk if picking up the disease, even if you're isolating yourself, it still could, if you're literally, you know, just a small wall away from another family. There are method mechanisms of the disease easily transmitting or just, you know, if you're going out in the hallway in these tight spaces, that's why like New York, it's spread so quickly in these huge buildings. And I imagine in China, that's where they had to lock them down and like literally lock people in, they couldn't leave, just because in the hallway, it probably is spreading, or, you know, we don't really know.

Well, I'm assuming now they have a better idea of exactly how it's spreading. But still, it's sometimes kind of random. It's like, even if you're around someone that has it, and you didn't have vaccinated, you still sometimes mightn't get it.

So it's not always, it's just a random chance, a lot of the times of getting it increases your chance, but it's just based on probability. But yeah, going on a tangent.

Luis:

Yeah, great. Thank you. That was it about the mental health questions.

Before I move on to the implementation and policy consideration questions, is there something you think I maybe forgot to ask you, you just want to add? Related to the mental health? Yeah, mental health and pandemic control both.

Brian O'Shea:

Like, I think I've mentioned everything, I think, I think personal control. So in that paper that I talk about personal control seems really important. So people have perceived personal control of their environment.

Generally, I think that has more positive outcomes. So they feel better in themselves. And I also reviewed another paper that looks at if you have high personal control, and you're high collectivistic, you're more likely to agree that governments should implement these really extreme policies.

So like, you know, killing pets, if the owner has COVID and just getting rid of these kind of things that are morally kind of what I would think they're wrong, you don't need to do that. But I think you're more likely to accept more authoritarian extreme mechanisms of controlling the environment is if you're collectivistic, because that's what the if that's what the government says we need to do, you'll just follow along what the government says. But also, if you have high personal control, meaning you still feel like you can manage your environment.

So I think it's important for governments to give people some kind of ability of controlling their environment. So you know, wear a mask, some people like felt that was a good thing, and they could do it. What I think if you tell them if you don't wear a mask will arrest you that reduces people's I kind of personal control.

So it's like this really like hard way of balancing it, you don't want to be like, like, for example, vaccines, you're required to get a vaccine or else you can't leave the country. I think that goes to extreme people should want to voluntarily sign up for these things. Because they because the government is highlighting the benefits.

And obviously, they should be counteracting like conspiracy theories. And, you know, all this misinformation. But yeah, personal control, figuring out a way of giving their citizens ways of managing the anxiety and having some kind of ability of creating stability and reducing the uncertainty from them will have also beneficial impacts.

And that will also beneficially impact their mental health if they have some kind of more personal control. So these are just generally questionnaires. But like, there's loads of research that would need to be done on, you know, how you implement this personal control.

So like I said, wearing a mask, that can be good for some people, but maybe it can go to extreme if you force somebody to do it, then they'll feel like they've lost personal control. But that also depends on the person like if they want to wear a mask, it doesn't matter. Just there's there's so much nuance going on at the individual level, that it's hard, you can get it at the mean level, sometimes detect these things.

But you just got to need to be careful that forcing population to wear a mask, that's a good thing. It might not be it might be just a mean effect. And some people really dislike it, or they did definitely dislike it.

Luis:

Right. Thank you. I will definitely be able to use this this answer as well really well.

So thanks for adding it. Good. So the final part of the interview, it will be about policy implementations.

My first question, how can governments or health organizations and collectivists and individualist societies optimize their strategies for pandemic control? So so in each society, there might be a different way how to optimize it? How is what could be this way, in your opinion?

Brian O'Shea:

Um, so I think individualistic societies do need to look at collectivistic societies, how they manage it, just because they have more experience with managing it, I think they did better with COVID. But also, it's really hard to unpack that because COVID did thrive better in colder climates rather than hot tropical climates. But yeah, it's, again, diversity is good.

But obviously, you don't want diversity to happen. You know, you don't you want to be doing the best things to reduce the disease and reduce it spreading among your population. Like I'm

not an exact like I do need to read a few books like Bill Gates's book on the pandemic, how to control it.

I would say just follow the science. And I think, you know, a lot of the countries, these experts do have a lot of parallels with how they think they should manage it. And usually it's the World Health Organization is guiding them.

And, you know, some countries diverge from it. So I think Sweden is an example of a country that diverged away from what the World Health Organization recommended. But like, as again, that's probably that can be a good thing from a data point of view, where you can see did that really was that a really bad decision.

But yeah, I would just recommend following what the World Health Organization recommends for that specific disease. So I should note that, you know, obviously COVID millions, or not sure about millions, but yeah, like a huge proportion of the population died. But if something like Ebola spreads, like the speed that COVID did, you know, that will be way more deadly to society.

And it's probably less likely to spread as fast because it's really contagious. What is this? It's on this like chart of it basically will, or it's, it's pretty contagious, but life, it doesn't spread.

Basically, like if you get it, you're going to die pretty much guaranteed, but you die pretty quickly. You don't spread it as fast as something like COVID, where you can walk around for like a few days spreading it. So if you ever have something like Ebola, that you can spread it for like a few days, and it like is really threatening and kill you, you're going to see like society becoming extremely conservative and closing all their borders and being way more extreme than what COVID is.

And even so in the US, the conservatives generally, they're more germ averse. But you found a lot of conservatives around the world. They were more germ averse, but they weren't afraid of COVID.

And they didn't perceive themselves to get it as much they were like on their perceived infectability for COVID was pretty low. So this could be connected to media and how the media talked about it, or if there's not alignment. So yeah, one thing that I think is the most important thing that governments should do is you don't you shouldn't have like the president advising people on what to do.

I think this is like a strategy. So Donald Trump should not have been telling the population what to do. It always should have been going to a professional.

He's the person that knows what the strategy is. And the president should never counteract. Because if you do that creates uncertainty among the people of who should I listen to?

Who should I follow? And I think that's one of the reasons why the US did so bad. That's also why like the UK did kind of bad, I would argue Johnson was sometimes in the face.

And he wasn't he didn't challenge it as this is Boris Johnson in the UK. He wasn't as bad as Trump. But I think sometimes he did kind of contradict what the representative of the health authority was saying.

I think. Yeah, so that's one thing that they definitely need to do, like, and it's probably easier for something like the Democratic Party where you don't have somebody as outspoken as Trump just wanting to get it get get there, get his voices heard.

Luis:

But yeah, that's like one thing that I think just from my understanding, you think it's better if experts say it because they don't might have a political motivation behind it. And if the if the people know that they only see it from a health point of view, they might be more likely to trust them. Right?

Brian O'Shea:

Exactly. Yeah. It's like, obviously, some people don't trust science.

But if they're seeing is nonpartisan, you're going to have more of the population going along with them. And like, yeah, COVID got really politicised, which is really dangerous. I'm not like, I'm not sure in other countries, generally, Europe wasn't so bad, but there were like Brazil was really politicised.

So yeah, try not to avoid it become politicised. And that's where you don't have politicians going contradicting what the health experts say. But this is where it gets problematic in the sense that that means experts, health experts can decide if we should shut down the whole country and stop the economy.

And that's where you know, where it's it gets really complicated, as in, there's no right or wrong answer. It's like, people will die of the disease, or people will die of not being able to work or get money. And it's trying to figure out that balance.

And humans are always trying to figure this out. So like, you know, it's a risk to go travelling or going to these these places historically. But if you do go to these places, you could find like a new maze, new ideas, new resources that you can bring back.

So taking these risks is a good thing. But if you get the disease, it will kill you and you could die. So it's a constant trade off that you have a cost benefit analysis that all governments need to do or people need to do about how much risk they're willing to tolerate.

And those that take on too much risk could die. But those that take on enough risk won't do as well in life. So we're constantly trying to manage this.

Luis:

Yeah, thank you. Another question, you said that individualist societies should learn from collectivist societies. I asked another expert, and he said, they should but he is not sure if it if it will work.

Because culture is so consistent. And he thought it'd be really hard to learn from each other and also then to implement it. What do you think about this?

Brian O'Shea:

Like, that's, that's a really good point. I think if it's just I was when I say like, look what they're doing, I was I kind of more like the healthcare strategies. If they're doing something different.

But yeah, I agree, like as in, it's easier to force a whole population into strict lockdown, where the government give you rations through your door. It's a lot easier to implement in collectivistic cultures than individualistic cultures. So yeah, they're, they're probably right on that.

Again, it's like, you've got to know if the population is going to challenge it and fight back. And that's, that's one thing that you definitely don't want to happen where, you know, it becomes politicised, it becomes anti-health, we don't want to the health authority telling us what to do. We don't think it's as bad.

So yeah, you have to figure out this is why they realise behavioural scientists are really important during a pandemic, because it's not as easy as like, we know that humans don't just follow what the best medical science says. It's like everyone knows that you should eat healthy and, you know, work out. But not everyone does that, just because it's hard.

Everyone probably knows that they shouldn't meet up with their friends. It's like everyone knows that you should eat healthy and, you know, work out. But not everyone does that, just because it's hard. It's an extra layer of work.

So they don't have to do this. They won't. So yeah.

Yeah, yeah.

Luis:

Thank you. Nice. And one last question.

What do you think we all can take from the COVID period into our today's world? So independent from the culture? What do you think we all as humanity can take from the pandemic into our everyday world, but also in our working academic world?

Brian O'Shea:

Yeah, I think it does highlight how adaptable humans are. If we really want to do something, you know, we basically shut down the whole world for like a month, where like flights and everything was impossible unless you had some special clearance. So I think, you know, if something else really bad, like everyone, there's a lot of, you know, like, related to climate change.

I think if people do see the threat as more imminent or something that's really could destroy society, I think then you will see people acting. So like, why I think people didn't act during COVID is because they just didn't perceive the threat as being that dangerous. And it was just like, oh, this is just like, a flu.

I've got it. I know loads of other people that got it. They didn't die.

But some will, but it's, this is where, you know, just your perceptions of the world, versus what the statistics say, this is what you do need the statistics to back up your perceptions of the world, because they can like diverge. But yeah, that's kind of the one thing that I think, like, you know, how fast we created the vaccine, that was crazy. So humans as a species were extremely innovative and adaptable, that we should just acknowledge that, that we do pretty good under bad situations.

And in general, I thought we handle COVID pretty well, it wasn't probably as threatening as a disease that, like, I thought, like, it was a really bad disease. But again, something like Ebola that spreaded, like spreaded around like that, that will be so much scarier to me. And, you know, it could happen potentially.

So like, you know, the bubonic plague, I'm not sure if something like that started spreading, we'll be able to control it as quickly, probably because we know how it was spreading. And we would, you know, get rid of rats and this kind of thing. But if something more extreme happens, I think humans will be able to handle it pretty well.

Because like, one thing that a lot of people challenged my research going like, oh, you saw conservatives, they didn't become very fearful. And they didn't become as fearful of COVID when that's what parasite stress theory would predict. But I was like, but yeah, but the whole world basically adopted conservative ideals.

So like, when I say conservative, I mean, like, they're less likely to want outsiders coming in to their country. So governments put in strict lockdowns, they they stopped movement of people. The whole world basically shifted towards conservative traditional kind of conservative view of stopping immigrants and stopping and part.

Parasite stress theory tries to explain that in some situations, that behavior can be useful at protecting you and your community from getting the diseases. And I think that's what social psychologists are missing a lot, they just try to not say that maybe these things are adaptable. And obviously, they're really negative, but they can have positive effects of not killing not you won't die, or your friends and your family might get the disease and die.

And that's like really crucial to think about.

Luis:

Great, thank you. Thanks for the answer. I think it's nice that we ended with like of kind of a positive outlook and that we appreciated also something that humanity did during the pandemic. I think I can also use this really well for my thesis. So thanks for the whole interview. Cool.

That was that was fun. Yeah, I think so too. It was.

How **have you** how many other people are you interviewing for this? With you? I interviewed six experts.

Brian O'Shea:

That's a lot. This is an in depth thesis.

Luis:

Yes I think so, too. Thank you very much again. If you have further questions please feel free to contact me.

Brian O'Shea:

Sure, it was a pleasure. Good luck with you thesis

Luis:

Thank you, bye.

Brian O'Shea:

Bye Luis

8 Eidesstattliche Erklärung

Ich erkläre, dass ich die vorgelegte Arbeit selbstständig angefertigt, dabei keine anderen Hilfsmittel als die unten und im Quellen- und Literaturverzeichnis genannten benutze, alle aus Quellen und Literatur, einschließlich des Internets, wörtlich oder sinngemäß entnommenen Stellen als solche kenntlich gemacht und auch die Fundstellen einzeln nachgewiesen habe.

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Diese Arbeit ist in gleicher oder ähnlicher Form noch bei keiner anderen Prüfungsbehörde eingereicht worden.

Wetzlar, den 30.01.2024

LuS Fat