



# Study on the Stigmatization Process and Coping Mechanism of COVID-19 in Nanjing—Take COMMUNITY B in Z City as an Example

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**Abstract.** Social mobility has spread the novel coronavirus pandemic. In a state of high mental tension, rumors tend to grow, and the sense of self-protection drives the masses to alienate, label, and eventually stigmatize all those from the affected areas. The stigma associated with over-immunization has created psychological anxiety among people from affected areas. Based on the construction process of stigma, this paper takes COMMUNITY B in Z City as an example and proposes a path to solve stigma.

**Keywords:** Stigmatization · Community governance · Nanjing outbreak

## 1 Introduction

Nanjing suddenly announced that there were confirmed cases at the airport on July 20, 2021. The airport workers were infected with the highly contagious Delta virus, which can be transmitted to other people in just ten seconds and can be carried in the environment. Nanjing is no longer a desirable place [1]. Stigma about regional outbreaks is prevailing among human.

Referring to COVID-19 related studies, it can be seen that most of the medical researches focus on the rehabilitation and follow-up psychological counseling of infected people, and preventive measures for the general population. Political scholars mostly study international disputes caused by COVID-19 [3]. Education experts are focus on the transformation of students' educational methods nationwide [5]. Some sociologists interpret it from the perspective of social policies, some put forward suggestions from the perspective of social governance, and some focus on the social integration of patients after recovery [6–8]. Throughout the study, scholars focused on populations highly associated with the epidemic. So are low-risk people stigmatized in medium-high risk areas of the city? Why are people who are not close contacts, subcontacts, or people who have not traveled to medium-high risk areas also stigmatized? How did this stigma get them into trouble? What can they do about these dilemmas? How can people around them help them?

## **2 The Process of Stigmatizing Dangerous “Security People”**

### **2.1 Negative Labels**

Panic showed in this small town when the government announced that the virus was the Delta virus. The group has been dubbed “rat dung” by an extreme group of people. People have cognitively labeled people who have visited the place, and this labeling is equivalent to negative self-defense, which reinforces group bias. The danger of sudden events stimulates people to sort out risk factors and attributive behaviors of responsibility and synthesize them into an emotional expression of disgust. Ultimately, this emotional expression drives individuals to draw mental and physical boundaries.

### **2.2 Differentiation**

The local government asked people who have a history of living in Nanjing within 14 days to report it to the community. Harsh words are delivered to the ears of those, and they are resistant to reporting them. In an interview with a resident, he reported to the community four days after his return. However, it can be found during the trip that he walked to the hospital for testing and then returned home for isolation after returning home, which shows that he has perfect awareness and knowledge of prevention. The concern about delay in reporting is largely due to people’s fear of abuse and misbehaviors. Danger has become the group of people to convey the signal to everyone.

### **2.3 Create Social Isolation Between “Them” and “Us”**

Z city issued a “double code query” notice. Although this policy has improved the reporting rate, it has brought more troubles to this group. A middle-aged man was banned from shopping in a supermarket because he had lived in Nanjing. Considering the health and safety of all the people, the treatment of infectious diseases tends to be closed management, which is actually a kind of exclusionary design. The isolation intensified the panic of infected people psychologically.

### **2.4 Status Loss/Identity Anxiety**

The control of the travel code exposes the fact that people want to hide. This special group’s worry about the strange look collides with the strange. A 30-year-old woman who clashed with hospital staff when they refused to let her in for a test was angry about the conflict between state and local policies. Actually, this group recognized the doctrine issued by the state psychologically, but the pressure of public opinion produced resistance. For them, voluntary isolation and repeated testing is a kind of self-sacrifice, which is not accepted by the public, but accused and marginalized. The policy of segregation has isolated this group in terms of system and space. The social relations of this group have been gradually weakened. The formal and informal support has reduced the pressure on them to have identity anxiety.

## 2.5 Create Stigma

A news report said the Yangzhou outbreak was caused by an elderly woman from Nanjing sneaking out of the city. The publication of the news led to the complete stigmatization of those who came out of Nanjing. “These people who left Nanjing, regardless of their risk level, should be locked up.” The old lady was inadvertently equated with the “security person in the dangerous area” who did all the relevant measures required by the state in these low-risk areas. In this small city with abundant elderly people, people ignored all the differences and only grasped the common point that they had been to Nanjing, labeling people in this group as “selfish”, “virus carriers” and other negative labels, defining them as “pathogens”.

## 3 The Plight of Dangerous “Security People”

### 3.1 The Atmosphere of Panic Turns into a Demand Dilemma

The local government have formulated policies according to their own needed and the requirements of the Central Government. However, the policy had left this group to a dilemma. In the investigation of community, there is a special case of the respondents, for business contained in nanjing city, can't stay in the hotel. Although the general public has a scientific understanding of the COVID-19, the instinct for fear of infectious disease still stereotypes people coming from prefecture-level cities affected by the epidemic, associating them with the virus. Domestic media reports on the epidemic contain a mass of contents about concealing the epidemic and leading to serious consequences, which not only plays a positive role in warning and deterrence, but also forms an atmosphere of panic and criticism, which not only makes the public colored glasses, but also intensifies the concealing psychology of those who have been to the epidemic. The mistakes of the minority group are magnified to the whole group, resulting in a crisis of trust between them and the public, leading to difficulties in their daily shopping needs, health needs, accommodation needs and other aspects.

### 3.2 The Joint Impact Intensifies Family Conflicts

Some enterprises in the region are requiring a 14-day quarantine for anyone who has been in contact with people from affected areas, high, middle, and low-risk areas. The request has left some families in an awkward situation. A 20-year-old girl reported to the community 14 days after her return, saying she was under pressure from her family to do so. While browsing the short video platform, her mother saw that a college student had been given a demerit by the school for concealing that he had been to medium-high risk areas, so she was worried. The cases of “concealing travel and residence history led to the medical observation of 1,000 people” and “failing to report illness led to the closure of the whole building” increased the pressure of parents virtually. The sense of responsibility to comply with the requirements of the state and the unit, the sense of duty to contribute to epidemic prevention and control, the need for stable income of families and the multiple psychology that the report will have a serious impact, and the pressure of parents infects their children and causes family conflicts.

### **3.3 Internal and External Factors Continue to Transmit Pressures**

Ten days after the outbreak, Nanjing issued a news release that 1,633 yellow-coded taxi drivers had been suspended. Concerns and questions arise, such as whether people returning to their hometowns have taken these cars, how the yellow cars carry passengers everywhere, and whether they have been disinfected. The suspicion and alienation of those around them, the external push of the news of the epidemic's expanding trend in Nanjing and the internal pull of self-fear are frantically squeezing the breathing space of this group. Many respondents agreed that they paid close attention to the typical symptoms of the epidemic due to the fear of accidents, compared with their current physical conditions, and at the same time, they spontaneously increased the number of nucleic acid tests prescribed by the community. One respondent mentioned that experts of the epidemic had reminded people of the long incubation period. So after the isolation period, he still went to the hospital for nucleic acid testing when there were few people. A total of eight nucleic acid tests were taken.

## **4 “De-stigmatization”: a Coping Strategy to Solve the Dilemma of Group Stigma**

“De-stigmatization” is one of the urgent issues that need to be addressed as the epidemic becomes normal. The social integration and psychological counseling of stigmatized groups are not only related to the mentality of these groups themselves, but also related to the stable operation of the whole society. Therefore, a correct understanding of the infected, the outflow from the epidemic area and the close contacts is a social safety valve to ensure social stability and harmony and eliminate the negative emotions of the epidemic. Information occlusion is an important cause of stigmatization. Government, community and media all play important roles in the process of information transmission.

### **4.1 Rely on the Government: Mobilize All Forces with Authority**

The government is what citizens can depend on. From the perspective of the formation process of stigma, information asymmetry and distortion are the beginning of rumors. Official timely release of case information to achieve transparency and sharing of information has become an important way to avoid further difficulties. Governments can use their authority to ask professionals to establish medical awareness that it is the virus, not the crowd, that spreads the disease, to remove barriers between stigmatized people and those who stigmatize them, and to unite people to fight the virus instead of dividing themselves. In addition, the government can rely on the strength of psychological experts to understand the public's behavior as a way to overcome fear and disappointment, vent negative emotions, provide psychological counseling and support for the public, excavate their empathy psychology, and reduce stigmatization of groups from affected areas.

### **4.2 Activate Communities: Promote Community Resilience with Social Capital**

Individuals in a society belong to a community or village, and daily life management is provided by the community. Studies have shown that communities and individuals have

resilience in the face of sudden disasters. This resilience is equivalent to community resilience proposed by Xu Xuanguo and other scholars, that is, community resilience, as a collective force, comprehensively activates social capital, infrastructure and culture to resist disasters and protect communities and residents. Communities can use wechat groups to transparently show the residents' voluntary cooperation with the epidemic prevention to other residents, so as to help the quarantined people establish a good image of active epidemic prevention in others' minds. The bond function of neighborhood committee organization can arouse residents' mental toughness to a great extent, make information transparent, reduce the anxiety of other people, eliminate the loneliness of isolated people, improve the sense of community belonging, establish trust relationship and construct community emotional community.

### **4.3 Integrate into the Time Domain: Create a Positive Atmosphere with Industry Responsibilities**

In the multimedia era, the right to speak is no longer confined to the hands of media people, and everyone has the opportunity to become an amateur media person with a large number of page views. The benefits brought by the traffic era are visible. On many short video platforms, people ridicule the parties in multiple ways, such as titles, limericks and comments, in order to increase page views. In order to change the current situation of stigmatization and reshape the image of people from low-risk areas of affected areas, these two important forces of information dissemination must be utilized. For professional media workers, they should always adhere to their own industry bottom line, keep in mind the ideal goal of not hurting the reported, and make it clear that the purpose of reporting is to let the masses know the truth. For the users of other media platforms, they must always shoulder the responsibility of building a harmonious society, and maintain a rational understanding of the media.

## **5 Conclusions**

The epidemic swept in like a storm, and the unknown fear made people panic and affected the social order. Along with the introduction of isolation policies and the role of potential self-preservation consciousness, stigmatization, differentiation, social isolation and status anxiety all lead to stigmatization. While stigma causes unnecessary social panic, it also brings problems such as difficult to guarantee life needs, limited activities of family members and great psychological pressure. The authority of the state, the guidance of the media and the bond of the community are all important forces in eliminating stigma. All parties should give full play to their advantages to eliminate stigma together.

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