



Analysis of Policy Changes in Response to Public Health Emergencies

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Abstract. Responding to public health emergencies is a long-term systematic project, which requires the state to resolve social crises in extraordinary times objectively, flexibly, effectively and maximum meet the urgent needs of the population. Based on this, this paper takes the prevention and control of COVID-19 as an example and uses Maslow's hierarchy of needs to analyze the changes of China's anti-pandemic policies.

Keywords: Public health emergencies · COVID-19 · Maslow's hierarchy of needs · Public policy

1 Introduction

COVID-19 epidemic lasted for three years and three months from the massive outbreak in December 2019 to the essential end in February 2023, during which China attached great importance to the epidemic prevention and control work and optimized policies dynamically. At the same time, China's epidemic prevention and control can always be recognized by the people, which shows that it meets the needs of the public at all stages, so among the many factors affecting the adjustment of epidemic prevention and control strategies, the public needs play a unique role.

In existing research, on the one hand, some scholars have sorted out the transition and development of China's epidemic-against policies. Wang Yifei (2021) analyzed the anti-pandemic measures from three stages of ex ante, interim and ex post and studied China's emergency management mechanism. On the other hand, most scholars focus on a certain stage or specific stages. Liu Zhidong et al. (2020) conducted research on coronavirus cases as of March 2020 and summarized the core capacities of China's emergency management. Ma Sini et al. (2022) emphasized the concept of "balanced anti-pandemic" based on the epidemic control in Shanghai in the pre-Omicron period.

This paper focuses on the changes of epidemic prevention and control policies, analyzes the applicability of Maslow's hierarchy of needs to China's epidemic defense policies and studies the internal mechanism of policy changes in order to further construct the dynamic logic of solving public health emergencies.

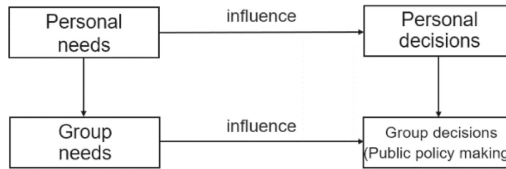


Fig. 1. The logical relationship between Maslow's hierarchy of needs and public policy

2 Analysis of the Applicability of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to China's Anti-pandemic Policies

Maslow's hierarchy of needs analyzed the psychological roots of behavior from the perspective of personal needs. On this basis, the individual incentive is extended to the dimension of social governance, the subject of social governance is human, the object is human-centered social affairs, the practice process is actually the psychological activity of group decision-making and public policy is the final result of group decision-making [1], so grasping the psychological needs of the group within the scope of policy application affects the formulation and implementation of public policy (Fig. 1).

The applicability of this theory to China's epidemic control policies is mainly reflected in the fact that the changes in China's anti-pandemic policies obey the progressive law of needs level basically. COVID-19 epidemic is a major public health emergency, which compels people's needs to return to a low-level. The lower the hierarchy of need, the more fundamental and urgent it is and more dependent on others to obtain satisfaction from external, so policymaking prioritizes meeting the inferior needs of the public. Coupled with the broad extensibility of needs, on the premise that people's own safety is guaranteed, they will further extend secondary needs or derive higher-level needs, at which time the government optimizes the original policies or formulates new policies to meet people's new needs, which realizes the formulation and change of epidemic prevention and control policies. Due to the sizable population base, even if there are cases of dropping low-level needs and pursuing high-level needs, from a holistic perspective, people's needs and corresponding epidemic prevention policies still conform to Maslow's progressive law of needs level. However, in the context of public health emergencies, people's security needs are always at the core, and policy changes are only applicable to specific stages of the progressive law.

3 The Process of Changes in China's Epidemic Prevention and Control Policies

On January 20, 2020, the National Health Commission issued the Announcement on the Inclusion of Novel Coronavirus Pneumonia in the Management of Statutory Infectious Diseases, which officially kicked off China's epidemic prevention and control work. As of February 2023, the CPC Central Committee has promulgated a total of 237 relevant policies [2].

3.1 December 2019 to April 2020: Emergency Containment Stage

The policy measures at this stage were mainly emergency management. Due to the unknown and high risk of the virus, the decision-making window period was extremely short so the country was in a passive defensive state. Adhering to the general strategy of “prevent the coronavirus from entering and spreading within the city/region”, China exercised management by sealing off entities to cut off the sources of infection.

3.2 May 2020 to June 2021: Normalized COVID-19 Control Exploration Stage

In this stage, active control, long-term control and routine control were realized. China had entered a stalemate phase with the epidemic. Under the strategic guidance of “prevent the coronavirus from re-entering the country to cause a new epidemic”, epidemic prevention and control had been extended from the original emergency management to omnidirectional protection, preventing the outbreak of cluster epidemics.

3.3 July 2021 to December 2021: Chain-Wide Precise Control Stage

Because of the spread of Delta and other variants, epidemic control had placed more emphasis on accuracy in a short period of time and anti-pandemic measures became more informatization, digitalization, precision and scientific. This stage surrounded the policy of “dynamic zero-Covid”, actively grasped the initiative of epidemic prevention and realized the organic unity of normalized control and local emergency treatment.

3.4 January 2022 to November 2022: Comprehensive Control Stage

On the basis of precision and science, the prevention work at this stage focused on taking comprehensive control measures to prevent the social spread of the coronavirus. In the face of the Omicron variant with strong transmissibility and short incubation, nucleic acid testing and antigen screening were promoted nationwide and the war of annihilation against the coronavirus in key areas was won.

3.5 December 2022 to February 2023: Smooth Completing Stage

The epidemic prevention measures at this stage had been further optimized, and everyone had become the first responsible person for their own health. China adjusted the control strategy scientifically and each region gradually “unblocked” and “opened”. In February 2023, Liang Wannian, an expert in the field of public health management, introduced that the COVID-19 epidemic in China has ended basically.

4 Explanation of the Needs Hierarchy for Changes in China’s Epidemic Prevention and Control Policies

According to the progressive law of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Fig. 2), the change curve of people’s needs during the epidemic is drawn (Fig. 3). According to the specific content of public needs (Table 1), this paper further analyzes the development characteristics and impact paths on policy changes of different needs.

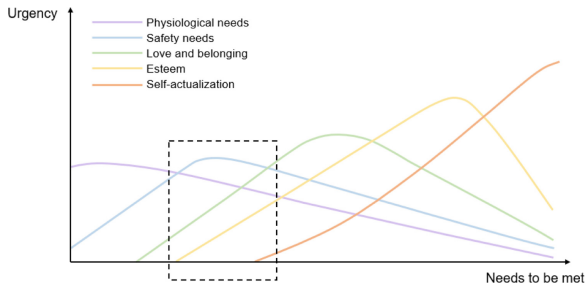


Fig. 2. The progressive law of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs

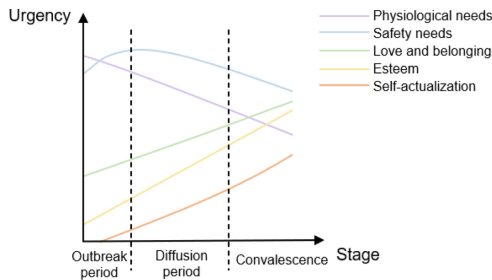


Fig. 3. The change curve of people’s needs during the epidemic

Due to the abruptness and perniciousness of the epidemic, people’s deficiency needs are always more urgent and the safety needs are in the main position. The original growth needs are forced to be “suppressed”. Early prevention and control policies mainly play a role in resource allocation. On the one hand, in a state of psychological crisis, people scramble for materials resulting in large-scale gathering and unreasonable price gouging, so the government issues policies such as the National Special Rectification Action Plan for the Quality of Epidemic Prevention Material Products and Market Order to integrate resources and establish unified emergency supply system. On the other hand, under the background of the COVID-19 epidemic, people have intense safety needs such as physical health, property security and emotional stability. The government accelerates implementation of phased and targeted prevention and control policies, promotes the resumption of work and production in a flexible approach and stabilizes residents’ income. At the same time, grasping the sensitivity, conformity, plasticity and other characteristics of people’s psychology and leveraging media to carry out emergency science popularization to alleviate people’s anxiety in the early stage and “pandemic fatigue” in the later stage [3].

With the normalization of epidemic prevention and control, people’s deficiency needs have been satisfied gradually and the growth needs have become urgent increasingly. Since love and belonging, esteem and self-realization needs rely on self-satisfaction and self-replenishment from within, the later policy measures are more inclined to public education and psychological counseling in addition to control interventions [4]. At the aspect of love and belonging, the lack of personal space in lockdown induces family

Table 1. Relevant indicators and specific content of people's needs

Type	Index	Specific Content
Physiological needs	Food Water	1. Worry about the supply of daily necessities such as food and water
Safety needs	Healthy Property Career Sentiment	1. Worry about the supply of epidemic prevention materials 2. Worry that you or your family will be infected with the coronavirus 3. Worry about property losses caused by the epidemic 4. Worry about the impact of the epidemic on your employment
Love and belonging	Contact Ascription	1. The problem of family conflicts 2. Less contact with family and friends
Esteem	Confidence Ability Honor Influence	1. Worry about whether you can adapt to the life and work mode during the epidemic 2. Care about whether your families, friends and leaders give you a positive assessment according to your performance 3. Special groups such as patients want to be respected by others
Self-actualization	Morality Potential Value	1. Consciously abide by the epidemic prevention policies 2. Become a volunteer or contribute to the epidemic prevention cause 3. Create personal value or realize personal ideals during the epidemic

conflicts and with the blessing of the policy of resuming work and production, which stimulate person's willingness to socialize with other society members. However, due to the transmission of COVID-19 through respiratory droplets, everyone is the mobile source of infection. China adopts measures such as limiting social distance and using health QR code to enter and exit public places to awaken people's fear through psychological hints, thereby establishing a risk perception of preventable epidemics, so people's willingness to socialize has been suppressed. At the aspect of esteem, the need for self-respect is capital in the early stage. The sudden major infectious disease arouses public negative emotions and the increase in suicide rate highlights the psychological stress caused by insufficient self-adaptation ability under stressful events [5]. The government intervenes in the people's emotions management through online publicity to enhance their healing powers. As people's sense of self-perceived control increases, the need to gain respect from others becomes more and more urgent. The government strengthens publicity of positive deeds and guides the public to meet respect needs in the correct way. At the aspect of self-realization, self-realization during the epidemic is a sense of spontaneous morality. With the adjustment and optimization of anti-pandemic policies, people assume epidemic prevention responsibilities through quarantining consciously, participating in volunteer service activities, donating to affected areas, etc., which improve the epidemic prevention efficiency. This model that citizen and government cooperate with

each other also enables government to formulate epidemic prevention policies that truly represent public interests.

5 Conclusion

From above analysis, it can be seen that the public needs promote and influence each other with the epidemic prevention and control policies. People's needs accelerate policy formulation, the implementation of policies satisfies people's original needs and generates new needs and so on and so forth. In the end, people's satisfaction increases constantly and epidemic prevention and control achieves development. Accordingly, in order to respond to public health emergencies, this paper puts forward the following suggestions. The state should adhere to the fundamental position of "people-centered", investigate public psychology timely and adjust policies according to the most fundamental requirements of the population. It is necessary to insist the guideline of "learning war in war" and the principles of prudence, flexibility, suitability and sustainability in policy formulation. People should strengthen their trust in the government and follow public policies duly in the face of social disorder and psychological crisis. It is necessary to improve the sense of responsibility and rely on the improvement of personal moral awareness to meet their high-level needs.

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