

CONVERGE COVID-19 Working Groups for Public Health and Social Sciences Research

Research Agenda-Setting Paper

This paper was written to help advance convergence-oriented research in the hazards and disaster field. It highlights areas where additional research could contribute new knowledge to the response to and recovery from the pandemic and other disasters yet to come. Questions about the research topics and ethical and methodological issues highlighted here should be directed to the authors who contributed to this paper.

Working Group Name:

Social Distancing in Marginal Settings in Latin America

Working Group Description:

Many countries in Latin America have experienced a surge in the number of infected people in urban, impoverished, and overpopulated areas that also suffer high levels of criminality and violence. This Working Group focuses on the complexities and obstacles for maintaining social distancing in these settings, where control by law enforcement is not possible.

Priority Research Topics and Specific Research Questions:

Priority Research Topics	Potential Research Questions
<p>1. Impact of Community Confinement Regulations – Due to the complexity and difficulty to maintain social distancing, some governments opted to isolate/confine entire communities to prevent the spread of the virus into surrounding areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Research Question 1</u>: What is the impact of community confinement measures on the identities and outlooks of individuals? • <u>Research Question 2</u>: How do community confinement measures affect the adequate provision of products and services? • <u>Research Question 3</u>: Were the community confinement regulations discriminatory?
<p>2. Import of Mitigation Measures – The global expansion of COVID-19 and the fact that it started outside of Latin America indicate that mitigation measures in Latin America might not have been necessarily developed according to local needs, as much as they were “imported” from what was known to be done in other countries outside the region.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Research Question 1</u>: To what extent was local scientific information and cultural sensitivity used/considered in the development of local mitigation measures? • <u>Research Question 2</u>: In what ways have practices and policies in the Global North aimed at mitigating the impact of the pandemic, influenced practices and policies in the Global South?

<p>3. The Political Nature of a Pandemic – Since the beginning of the pandemic, in the Global North the health sector had a leading and predominant role in the establishment of social distancing regulations. This might have not been necessarily the case in Latin America, which warrants further investigation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Research Question 1</u>: What aspects of the unwillingness to abide by social distancing regulations can be explained by distrust in the government? What other social, economic, and political factors have influenced this outcome? • <u>Research Question 2</u>: How did governments in Latin America benefit, if at all, from enforcing social distancing and confinement regulations? • <u>Research Question 3</u>: What mechanism did the governments use to define who was eligible to receive special permit to circulate during times of national and local quarantine?
<p>4. The Prioritization of Benefits – The enforcement of national quarantines was confronted with the need to decide discretionarily who, among the general population, would receive priority in the reception of certain products and services, as well as who would be allowed to not follow the confinement regulations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Research Question 1</u>: How were decisions made regarding what population group would be allowed to leave their homes and for what reason? • <u>Research Question 2</u>: What processes, if any, were designed to collect data used to identify minority groups that might not have been considered a priority, but that for their unique circumstances they did not have available channels to communicate their needs.
<p>5. The Legality of Actions – For different reasons, not all the people adhered strictly to the regulations of social distancing and confinement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Research Question 1</u>: How did governments manage the non-adherence of those citizens to the regulations of confinement and social distancing? • <u>Research Question 2</u>: What was the reaction of different social groups to the non-adherence of citizens to these regulations? • <u>Research Question 3</u>: What mechanisms were used to resolve ethical dilemmas associated with these regulations? Which were considered harmful to the well-being of certain groups?
<p>6. Champions in an Uncertain Context – Information related to the virus and associated mitigation measures were many times confusing and contradictory. In these circumstances, people looked for alternative leaders and champions to follow.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Research Question 1</u>: What was the role of local leaders in guiding the general population through the decisions to follow mitigation measures? • <u>Research Question 2</u>: How and why did government leaders engage local leaders? Did this engagement alter pre-existing highly contentious relations? • <u>Research Question 3</u>: Did regulations and selective confinement heighten animosities against governments? Did this open up spaces for new types of leadership?

Ethical / Methodological Considerations:

The preliminary data supports that the current state of knowledge about social dynamics in Latin American contexts is low. What is more, from the media and interviews with social leaders in these communities, we have identified that adaptation and resilience measures are changing constantly and at a rapid pace. The need for research in this context but also the barriers to collecting data highlight the need to engage local citizens in research efforts. It is difficult, however, to reach members of some of the most violent and marginal communities in times when physical connections are almost impossible, and where access to the internet and the possibility to connect digitally is almost nonexistent.

A possible workaround to confront this methodological deficiency, could be to have local leaders and personnel working in these areas such as law enforcement officers, religious and health workers, etc., trained as research assistants capable of collecting data. However, there are ethical concerns with this approach. For example, researchers must balance the benefit of the research with the potential impact of stress regarding their ability to participate in or support research. There are also concerns with residents playing a dual role in any study. Lastly, there are difficulties at present with helping potential research collaborators to complete online human subjects protection courses.

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