Thinking about Social Phenomena

Constructing Puzzles

Lecture dt. Apr 2, 2020

Variation in Covid-19 mortality rates: methodological issues

Case fatality rate (CFR) end of March 2020

Italy: 11%
Germany: 1%
India: 2.7%

Sources: CEBM, Uni of Oxford; BBC News; Vox, 1 April 2020

Variation in Covid-19 mortality rates: methodological issues

- Case fatality rate (CFR): people who have tested positive for Covid-19 and then die from it

Why the spatial difference in fatality rates when the virus is not mutating very quickly?

Variation in Covid-19 mortality rates: methodological issues

Bias from how numbers are being reported, e.g. testing approach

- Let's say two countries A and B, each total population 100.

- In each country 50 people are infected, but only 10 show symptoms.

- Country A tests symptomatic and asymptomatic people; B tests only those who are symptomatic. How will CFR vary?

Variation in Covid-19 mortality rates: methodological issues

Bias from how numbers are being reported, e.g. testing approach

- Country A tests symptomatic and asymptomatic people. They manage to identify all 50 infected people. Infection rate is 50%

- Country B tests only the 10 symptomatic people. Infection rate is 10%

- Now, let's assume 5 people die among the infected in both countries. So, case fatality rate in country A (100*5/50)= 10%; country B will be (100*5/10) = 50%

Variation in Covid-19 mortality rates: methodological issues

A much higher infection rate will be reported in countries that test everyone; but a much higher CFR will be reported in countries that do not test everyone→ variation in number of cases (denominator)

- UK 7.9%
- Italy 11%

Low-testing countries compared to Germany (1%)

Variation in Covid-19 mortality rates: methodological issues

- Biases: unreported or missing cases; more likely to test severe cases (sampling bias)

- Better measures to avoid bias
    - Mortality or death rate, i.e. proportion dead to population per million or total population
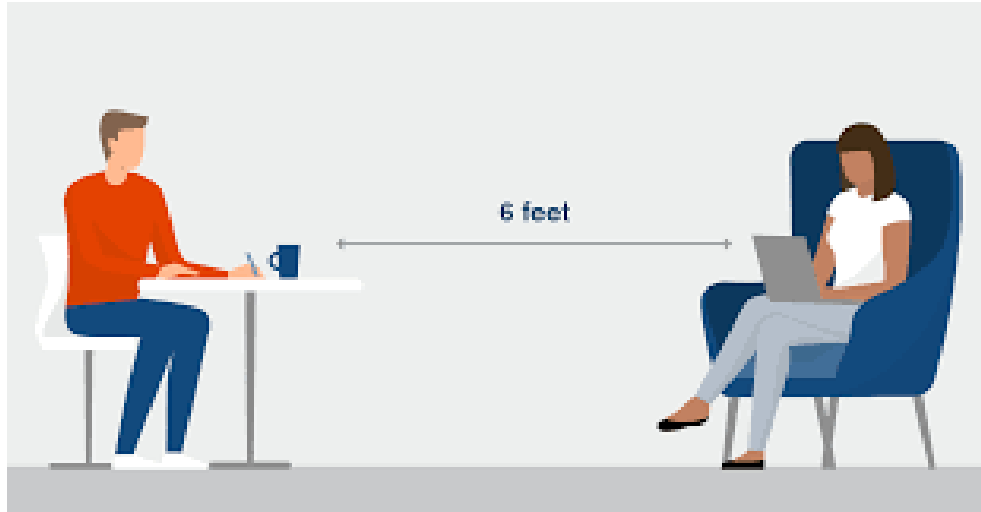   - Percentage of cases reported

Think about this

Is India's 2.7% a high or low CFR? Compare with those of other countries. See for example, https://www.cebm.net/covid-19/global-covid-19-case-fatality-rates/

If it is low, why so, since we also know that testing is low in India?

Social distancing vs. social distance

Social distancing vs. social distance

Social distancing: Physical or spatial distance between groups

Social distance: Perceived distance between groups (e.g. works of Georg Simmel; Robert E. Park; Emory Bogardus)

- The experience of familiarity between oneself and people from different ethnic, occupational, national, racial and caste groups.
- Familiarity = solidarity, empathy
- Spatial proximity does not necessarily lead to social proximity. Social distance may, in fact, lead to spatial distance

Intergroup threat

Israel-Palestine conflict

- Possibility of warfare
  - for Israelis → terror attacks
  - for Arabs→ targeted assassinations

- Possibility of taking over the cultural identity
  - dehumanization
  - disrespect

Intergroup threat

Israel-Palestine conflict

- Warfare: physical harm
  REALISTIC THREAT

- Group esteem: cultural harm
  SYMBOLIC THREAT

Intergroup threat

'They have designs on our prerogatives':
majority's <u>perception</u> of threat from the minority (Blumer 1958)

Realistic threat: harm to tangible resources → jobs, land, physical harm

Symbolic threat: harm to group esteem, identity → believing that the other groups perceives your morals, values, way of life inferiorly

Intergroup threat

Perception of threat is a function of

- numerical size of the minority (Blalock 1967)
- greater unemployment and sluggish economic growth
- relative power of the groups: heterogeneity breeds distrust in the dominant group; low power groups (e.g. ethnic minorities) *experience* greater threat, but high power groups react more strongly to feeling threatened

'Perceived threats have real consequences, regardless of whether or not the perceptions are accurate' (Stephan, Ybarra and Morrison 2009)

Why do perceptions of threat exist?

- Tribalism: Benefits of belonging to a 'group'; social support, acceptance, norms and values → self-esteem

- People predisposed to perceive threats from outgroups: less costly error (Haselton and Buss 2003); pattern-seeking

- Threats arise from apprehensions: will the outgroup exploit the ingroup? Will they challenge our values? Will they see us as perceiving them to be inferior?

- Negative stereotypes a significant predictor of both realistic and symbolic threat [NEXT WEEK]

Puzzle for Monday

A student once told the famous social psychologist Gordon Allport, 'I despise all Americans, but have never met one I didn't like.'

Using the concept of intergroup threat, can you think of the inherent contradiction in the statement and a possible explanation?

Readings

Blalock, Hubert M. 1967. *Towards a Theory of Minority-Group Relations*. New York: Capricorn Books.

Blumer, Herbert. 1955. 'Race Prejudice as a Sense of Group Position.' Pacific Sociological Review 1(1): 3–7.

Stephan, W. G., Ybarra, O., and Morrison, K. R. 2009. 'Intergroup threat theory', In T. D. Nelson (Ed.), *Handbook of prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination* (p. 43-59). Psychology Press.