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Research on Information Anxiety in Different Epidemic Prevention and Control States of Public Health Emergency-- Based on Information Task Perspective

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1. INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

During the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, massive epidemic information, false news and negative reports will cause anxiety and panic among some people, and “infodemic” has brought unprecedented challenges^[1]. China had taken very active and precise prevention and control strategies to reduce the spread of infectious diseases and protect the lives of the public. Different quarantine strategies had been adopted for groups with different transmission risks to achieve precise prevention and control. Although isolation is necessary for public health emergency, it also have an impact on people's mental health^[2]. According to the precise quarantine strategies, the living state of residents can be divided into several different types. Different lifestyles caused by quarantine strategies also change the information behavior of the residents, which is reflected in the information tasks. The living mode and information task of residents under different prevention and control states are generally different, which may lead to different information anxiety^[3]. This raises an important question for us, that is, does information anxiety present different characteristics under different prevention and control states? How can we reduce information anxiety by effectively providing information services in different states? However, existing research on information anxiety in the context of public health emergency regard the epidemic prevention and control as the overall background, and rarely further classify it, ignoring the change of information anxiety caused by the difference of information tasks under different states. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the epidemic-related information tasks and corresponding information anxiety of community residents under different epidemic prevention and control states, and summarize precise suggestions to alleviate information anxiety. This could provide recommendations for information anxiety relief and information services delivery during future pandemics and enrich the theory of information anxiety under public health emergency.

The objectives of this study are as follows: (1) To explore the information anxiety of community residents under different prevention and control states. (2) Analyze the difference of information anxiety types of community residents under different prevention and control states. (3) To understand the burden and composition of information tasks of community residents under different prevention and control states, and to discuss the causes of information anxiety from the perspective of information tasks. This could provide recommendations for information anxiety relief and information services delivery during future pandemics and enrich the theory of information anxiety under public health emergency.

2. THEORY AND RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Based on information anxiety theory and information task perspective^[4], the existing information anxiety scale was revised according to the research scene and interview data. By reviewing China's COVID-19 prevention and control policies, the state of epidemic prevention and control was divided into five types according to the restrictions of residents' range of activity. Information tasks under the state of prevention and control was classified according to the content of the tasks. Through questionnaire survey, information tasks characteristic and information anxiety of community residents under different epidemic prevention and control states were investigated. Descriptive statistics, variance analysis and correlation

analysis were used to explore the difference of information anxiety, based on which the causes of information anxiety were discussed and corresponding mitigation strategies were proposed.

3. RESULTS AND MAJOR FINDINGS

This study observed some valuable and interesting findings: (1) There are great differences in information anxiety under different prevention and control states, including degree and type. (2) The anxiety of the information environment has caused a huge pressure, indicating the importance of information environment in the context of public health emergency. (3) The excessive burden of information tasks will further aggravate information anxiety. (4) Residents' information anxiety is positively correlated with the proportion of material/life tasks, and is negatively correlated with the proportion of daily epidemic notification tasks.

4. CONTRIBUTIONS

Our research discussed the information anxiety of Chinese residents under different epidemic prevention and control states from the perspective of information tasks. Our research provided recommendations for information anxiety relief and information services delivery during future pandemics and enrich the theory of information anxiety under public health emergency. The measures to relieve information anxiety under the background of public health emergency obtained in this research are as follows. It is essential to maintain a positive information environment during public health emergency. Because the excessive burden of information tasks will further aggravate information anxiety, it is suggested that the improvement of information services should focus on enhancing its convenience. The material/life information services under home and community isolation need to be improved, and directing the public to pay more attention to the official information can reduce the generation of information anxiety.

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