

# Individual Public Crisis Ability of Tourism Service Workers to Depression and Anxiety: Regulated by Psychological Flexibility

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## Abstract

In the context of COVID-19, the work of tourism practitioners has been severely affected, causing depression and anxiety. Under the individual public crisis ability, the effect of psychological flexibility on tourism practitioners will improve the psychological condition. Although repeated epidemics and blockades have had a major impact on the mental health of tourism practitioners, the standard has provided suggestions for the psychological recovery of tourism professionals.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Individual Public Crisis, Depression/ Anxiety, Psychological Flexibility

## Research background

The novel coronavirus COVID-19 has had a profound impact on the world economy and personal lives, and various countries and cities have adopted corresponding control measures. Tourism is one of the worst-hit industries (Hall, Scott & Gösslig 2020; UNWTO, 2020; Yang et al., 2020; Zenker & Kock, 2020; Baum & Nguyen, 2020; Ntounis et al., 2021; Wiczorek- Kosmala, 2022; Luu, 2022), according to the estimates by the United Nations World Tourism Organization, the COVID-19 pandemic has reduced the number of international tourists by approximately 1.1 billion, which has put roughly 100 million jobs at risk (UNWTO, 2020). To help contain the COVID-19 pandemic, governments of countries have formulated policies to restrict personal travel (De Vos, 2020). In China, during the epidemic, the National Health Commission and the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) provided comprehensive guidelines on how to protect themselves from infection, in which reducing unnecessary travel is an important recommendation.

In April 2020, China's domestic epidemic was effectively controlled and mass vaccination began (Jamison & Wu, 2021). High-risk areas were gradually disappearing, the domestic tourism industry had recovered and tour guides continue to work thanks to that most of the domestic scenic spots were low-risk areas. The diagnosis and

isolation of a Zhangjiajie tour guide after finishing the tourism group work caused a mixed evaluation of tour guide in the society although the area had become a low-risk area again after a closed inspection of the scenic spot.

Front-line workers in the tourism industry are the most affected by the epidemic (Luu, 2022). After the cycle of unemployed-on-job-unemployed-on-job, the capability of individuals to respond to public crises, as well as the regulating effect of their psychological flexibility for tourism practitioners are worthwhile to study and take into account.

## Research purposes

Tour guides are precisely the spirits of travel, and they are also the arrangers and organizers of travel activities, and they can be said to be figures in the travel industry. In tourism activities, the mental state of tour guides will affect personal work mood. The tourist experience of COVID-19 has led to work problems for tour guides. Outbound tourism in China is now in a state of arrogance, and domestic tourism is spreading with the spread of the epidemic. And appeared. Change and choose open or not. In the event of a disaster, how to adjust the depression/emotion of tour guides and how to deal with it is the main research purpose of this article.

## Concept analysis

### Individual capability to respond to public crises

A crisis is an unexpected and unconventional event that brings threats and uncertainty to the organization and its public (Seeger et al., 1998).

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PS: The main idea of this article comes from the doctoral thesis to be written

The so-called public crisis, in short, refers to the status of serious damage or threats in the public life within a certain range, including social members' life, property safety and normal public order in society (Zhao Qingwen, 2010). Novel coronary pneumonia is a typical public health emergency (Parthasarathy & Vivekanandan, 2020), which has caused various disorders and disruptions to the social system, which has triggered a public crisis. The public's own crisis awareness, crisis prevention capabilities, and crisis response levels can often provide support to the government on multiple levels, including material, spiritual, and technology, and reduce losses caused by public crises (Zhang Juan, 2007); During the previous SARS epidemic, it was also found that the adjustment and cognition of the people's own psychology played an important role in reducing psychological pressure and panic (Li Ru, Fu Wenqing, Wang Yuqiang, 2004)

### **Depression and anxiety**

Torales et al. (2020) pointed out that the global COVID-19 pandemic may cause additional mental health problems, such as stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, insomnia or anger. The government's restrictive response to COVID-19 severely affects daily activities, social activities and living conditions, and may increase loneliness, anxiety, depression, insomnia, alcohol and drug abuse, self-harm, and suicidal behaviors (WHO, 2020c). The huge psychological and physical stress of people can induce anxiety and depressive behaviors (Wu et al., 2021). The occasional cases will cause the area where the tour guides are located to become a high-risk area, and render them to face the unemployment again. Under such uncertain circumstances, emotional overload and increase in symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress are resulted in. (Bonanno et al., 2010; Brarovskaia et al., 2021).

### **Psychological flexibility**

Psychological flexibility, that is, the ability to recognize and adapt to the needs of the situation in order to pursue meaningful long-term results for the individual, is such a process (Dawson & Golijani-Moghaddam, 2020). Psychological flexibility represents the implement capability to continuously change and update cognitive and behavioral output according to environmental changes, enabling people to effectively interact with and adapt to the surrounding environment (Armbruster et al., 2012; Dajani and Uddin, 2015). Psychological flexibility has also been shown to

reduce the adverse effects of major life events on depressive symptoms (Fonseca, Trindade, Mendes, & Ferreira, 2020). By definition, it is closely related to flexibility (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010). The higher the flexibility, the higher the ability of people to accept external events and the better their mental health. It can be seen as the cornerstone of mental health (Pakenham, 2020).

### **The relationship between individual public crisis ability and depression/anxiety**

In response to the increasing number of cases and deaths caused by COVID-19, many countries/regions around the world have initiated national measures such as isolation and lockdown (Pan et al., 2021). When this kind of public crisis event occurs, it will actually increase people's psychological burden (Schweda et al., 2021). People are increasingly worried about the mental health sequelae of the COVID-19 crisis due to concerns about the uncertainty of the future (Holmes et al., 2020). In fact, data from Germany and Israel show that levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms are higher at the beginning of the pandemic (Benke et al., 2020; Elran-Barak, 2021).

### **The role of psychological flexibility in the moderation and regulation of individual public crisis and depression/anxiety**

When people are faced with stressful times, higher psychological flexibility can prevent negative emotions from happening (Masuda et al., 2011). Masuda et al. (2011) research proves that people with higher mental flexibility experience lower depression and anxiety when faced with major stress events than others. This shows that when a person is mentally inflexible, the negative impact of stress caused by COVID-19 on depression and anxiety will increase (Tindle & Moustafa, 2021). Psychological flexibility may have an impact on psychological problems through other coping behaviors (Dawson & Golijani-Moghaddam, 2020), and it can make changes when individuals need to compromise, while also being able to adapt to changing circumstances (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010)

## **Discussion**

### **Research significance**

In theory, The research in terms of dealing with the psychological problems caused by public crises is still in the stage of continuous development and improvement, and the existing research is mainly

aimed at doctors and government personnel. The research is oriented towards the response of tourism practitioners to public crisis events, which helps to fundamentally understand the development trajectory of the psychological abilities of front-line tourism practitioners, and provides reference for tourism enterprises. From the perspective of individuals public crisis ability, the research could analyze the root causes of the psychological changes of tourism front-line workers during this period in depths, and also encourage tourism practitioners to understand their own psychological change trajectory, and strive to enable them to calmly face the public crisis and well perform the psychological management of themselves during the normalization of the epidemic.

In practice, it could be seen from previous research that the tourism practitioners are overall characterized with low psychological maturity, and greater limitations on self-cognition and coping capacity. Taking the context of the epidemic as the starting point, and through the discussion of the factors that affect individuals public crises ability, this article aims at providing guidance to the tourism practitioners to lay emphasis on the improvement of personal psychological coping capabilities, and to cultivate good psychological literacy, and to improve the individuals' response-to-the-public crisis ability so as to ensure them have a good psychological response to the instability caused by repeated epidemic during the normalized control period.

Besides, to guide and lead the society attention to the tourism practitioners in order to aid their improvement in mental health.

Thirdly, as far as the tourism practitioners are concerned, the research in this article provides certain theoretical sentences and guideline opinions for improving their coping capability in the face of public crisis events.

#### **Response suggestions**

The main pressure of tourism practitioners comes from the instability of work during the epidemic, family financial pressure and their own mental health. In the context of COVID-19, it can be effectively alleviated through the moderation and regulation of personal public crisis response ability and own psychological flexibility.

#### **Suggestions for the above situations:**

To begin with, keep abreast of the epidemic situation and news in time. The uncertainty and repeatability in the early stage of the epidemic

have a huge impact on the work of tourism practitioners. The repetition of closed-open scenic spots will increase the depression and anxiety of practitioners. In the unknown, people will feel fear and affect their mental health. Therefore, maintaining the immediacy of information will increase the personal public crisis ability and effectively resist bad mental states.

Additionally, strengthen communication with family members. During the lockdown and isolation period, the time spent with family members are increased, but many people would feel irritated or quarrel with their family members as a result. In fact, this is caused by the lack of personal psychological flexibility and the poor ability of individuals in public crisis. The adverse effects caused by the epidemic will not be completely resolved in the short term. Tourism practitioners could take advantage of this "vacation" to enjoy more family life with their families, which promises the improvement of their psychological conditions.

Thirdly, enhance one's own psychological flexibility. When tourism practitioners take themselves as the main body, poor personal psychological flexibility will exacerbate the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and blockade risk factors on mental health. In this case, accepting the reality may be the most challenging, because it means accepting the unknown fear caused by the epidemic and the inconvenience caused by the

social distancing policy. Under these circumstances, if the psychological flexibility of tourism practitioners cannot be improved, depression and anxiety will increase. Therefore, high psychological flexibility will alleviate the negative impact of COVID-19 on tourism practitioners.

#### **Insufficient research**

This study only theoretically discusses the impact of psychological flexibility on tourism practitioners. In future research, questionnaire can be used to collect survey data of tourism practitioners. According to the data analysis, we can more specifically test the impact of psychological flexibility on tourism practitioners.

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