(Discussion on "When Scientists Dissent, Part 1 - Do Lockdowns Work" by Andy Smith on Integral World).

Edward· Feb 4, 2021

From a newspaper today:

"Faced with the scourge of Covid, developed States have reacted by enacting border closures, curfews, administrative closures of companies, and even generalized lockdown of the population.
This was a first in history: never before had generalised lockdown – i.e. confinement of healthy populations – been used to combat an epidemic." The social and economic cost of these lockdowns has been horrific, far beyond the potential impact of the virus itself. In the USA Dr. Fauci recommended closure under the assumption we would be re-experiencing the killer flu of 1918. He was completely wrong, as a very small percentage of young people have died from Covid....only the very sick elderly are at high risk for a fatal Covid infection.

Peter Collins· Jan 22, 2021

Andy,

Congratulations on such an informative piece.

There are some points that immediately strike me however.

Firstly the nature, implementation and effects of lockdowns can vary considerably. For example in Ireland we are now in what is called a Stage 5 lockdown, which is our most severe category.

However this varies from the lockdown in the earlier months of the pandemic. For example, though people are being asked to stay at home whenever possible, far more people are in fact now travelling to work, which may be an important contributory factor in the high spread of the virus.

Also, whereas, the over 70's were asked to completely cocoon in the earlier lockdown, they are free (within limits) to take exercise on this occasion.
And a general criticism I would have regarding our overall approach to lockdowns is that it has concentrated unduly on curtaining commercial type activity, while not being sufficiently focussed on preventing gatherings in private houses (which I believe has been the main cause here of the spread of the virus).

Also it would seem to me that insufficient attention has been given to the possible importance of seasonal factors (at least in some parts of the world) with respect to spread of the virus.

For example both here and in the UK there was a sharp fall in infections during the

peak Summer months of June and July (even though restrictions had largely been removed). In fact so many people were heading for the beaches in Britain that the local authorities in some places were unable to cope. And yet this had little discernible impact on infection rates at the time.

Then over the Christmas period at the height of our Winter, the very sharp rise in infection seemed to take the statisticians completely by surprise. However perhaps it should not have done so with seasonal festivities taking place indoors in rooms that are often poorly ventilated, greatly assisting spread of the virus. So personally I am not surprised that lockdown measures at present are proving much less effective in reducing numbers (though new more contagious strains of the virus are undoubtedly an added problem). I am confident however that they will start to naturally fall more rapidly as we approach closer to Summer, even if inoculation rollout remains quite slow.

If this analysis is correct the pattern of Covid-19 in future is likely to resemble seasonal flu with breakouts in infection largely confined to the Winter months and those not yet inoculated especially vulnerable. However with new strains of the virus constantly emerging, repeated inoculation (using suitably modified vaccines) may be necessary.

However with the enormous disruption, both social and economic, that has already resulted, I would be more than happy to accept this outcome.

Andy· Jan 22, 2021

@Peter Collins, Yes, I did touch on those points, that the elements of lockdowns vary, and that the recent surge in many countries, certainly in the U.S., is almost certainly due to cold weather driving people indoors. With regard to travel to work, one of the points I made about Sweden's relative success without a lockdown was that a very large fraction of the population is working at home. And in the cold weather, family gatherings are more of a problem. In fact, this is an important point vs. those who argue masks don't work, because while most people, in the U.S. at least, tell pollsters they wear a mask in public, most people don't wear them in their own homes. So mask mandates may not help much in the winter.

David Christopher Lane· Jan 22, 2021

This is very well presented and super clear. Thank you!

Edward· Jan 23, 2021

A quote from last month's newspaper: " But the conventional wisdom that more lockdown means fewer deaths simply does not hold true in the real world. There is globally no association, let alone causation, between lockdowns and Covid deaths.

And yet the harms of the policy are extreme. Developed countries have this year experienced record drops in economic output. Britain, for instance, has experienced its worst recession in 300 years (since the Great Frost of 1709, if you were wondering). The burden of this has fallen overwhelmingly on the poorest in society, while billionaires have watched their wealth multiply. In the developing world, the World Bank estimates that an additional 150million people will fall into 'extreme poverty'." In America tens of millions are on the verge of starvation. In other words, the cure (lockdowns) is much worse than the disease (covid), at least if you are below the age of 90 and not in the hospital with a fatal disease.

Andy· Jan 23, 2021

@Edward, "There is globally no association, let alone causation, between lockdowns and Covid deaths." Show me the evidence for that assertion. I've just provided evidence that lockdowns do reduce both cases and deaths.

"Developed countries have this year experienced record drops in economic output." Show me the evidence that if nothing had been done to stop the spread of the virus, there would have not been severe economic consequences--from people unwilling or unable to work, the medical system collapsing, voluntary boycotts of large gatherings, and much more.

"In America tens of millions are on the verge of starvation" Many people aren't getting enough to eat, it's not true that millions are on the verge of starvation. Tens of millions of people depended on various forms of support or charity for food even before the pandemic. That number has definitely increased since the pandemic, but we're not talking about mass starvation.