

Project Title

Exploring The Role of Trust in COVID-19 Information from Different Sources in Singapore

Project Lead and Members

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Organisation(s) Involved

Institute of Mental Health

Hong Kong University

Healthcare Family Group(s) Involved in this Project

Allied Health

Applicable Specialty or Discipline

Epidemiology and Health Services Research

Project Period

Start date: May 2020

Completed date: June 2021

Aims

The research objectives were:

- a. Explore the trust in COVID-19 information from different sources and trust in the ability of World Health Organisation (WHO), government departments and related institutions in handling the epidemic in Singapore
- b. Explore its association with perceived risk of infection among Singapore residents.

Background

Public trust in the government's competence is crucial in preventing the spread of misinformation and reducing psychological distress during the pandemic.

Methods

A total of 1129 participants (aged 21 years and above) were recruited from a cross-sectional study examining the well-being and resilience of Singapore's population between May 2020 to June 2021. Trust in COVID-19 information from different sources was measured on a 10-point scale and an ordinal 7-point scale was used for perceived risk of infection. Descriptive statistics and multivariate linear regression model were analysed.

Results

85.5% reported high trust in COVID-19 information from the government and their ability in handling the pandemic. Participants also reported high trust in COVID 19 information from local public health or infectious disease experts (84.4%) and traditional media (77.2%). Low trust in the ability of government departments and related institutions was associated with higher future (one month) perceived risk of infection (OR: 5.7, 95% CI 1.02-32.45) and low trust in social media was associated with higher current perceived risk of infection (OR: 2.4, 95% CI 1.09-5.27).

Lessons Learnt

In summary, effective public health messaging during epidemic is crucial as it influences public compliance, advocates health behaviours, decreases health risks and helps in the management of the crisis.

Conclusion

The present study provided insight on the level of trust on COVID-19 information from different sources, the ability of different institutions in handling the epidemic in Singapore and its associated perceived risks of infection. Future qualitative studies is

recommended to facilitate better understanding of public trust and identify strategies for how it can be effectively addressed to support future public health responses.

Additional Information

Singapore Health & Biomedical Congress (SHBC) 2022: COVID-19: Our response to a new challenge (Oral category) – (Silver Award)

Project Category

Applied/ Translational Research

Quantitative Research

Keywords

Covid-19, Multi-Ethnic, Trust, Perceived Risks Of Infection

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Exploring the role of trust in COVID-19 information from different sources in Singapore

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INTRODUCTION

Public trust in the government's competence is crucial in preventing the spread of misinformation and reducing psychological distress during the pandemic. The study aimed to (i) explore the trust in COVID-19 information from different sources (e.g., traditional media, social media, local public health experts, government and World Health Organisation (WHO)) among Singapore residents and (ii) its association with perceived risk of infection in Singapore.

METHODS

Participants

A total of 1129 participants (aged 21 and above) were recruited from a cross-sectional study examining the well-being and resilience of Singapore's population between May 2020 to June 2021.

Data Analysis

Trust in COVID-19 information from different sources was measured on a 10-point scale and an ordinal 7-point scale was used for perceived risk of infection

Data Collection

Descriptive statistics and multivariate linear regression model were tabulated for the responses to the questions.

RESULTS

Sample Characteristics

- The mean age of the sample was 42.20 (SD= 14.97) years.
- The sample included 53.3% males; 60.3% married; 35.3% Chinese, 26% Indians, 23.3% Malays and 15.5% of those of other ethnicities.

Trust in information from different sources and ability of WHO, government departments and related institutions in handling the epidemic

- 85.5% reported high trust in COVID-19 information from the government and their ability in handling the pandemic.
- Participants also reported high trust in COVID-19 information from local public health or infectious disease experts (84.4%) and traditional media (77.2%).

Perceived risk of Covid-19 infection (self)

Current

- Low trust in social media was associated with higher current perceived risk of infection (OR:2.4, 95% CI 1.09–5.27).

One-month

- Low trust in the ability of government departments and related institutions was associated with higher future (one-month) perceived risk of infection (OR:5.7, 95% CI 1.02–32.45).

Figure 1: Trust in information from different sources and ability of WHO, government departments and related institutions in handling the epidemic

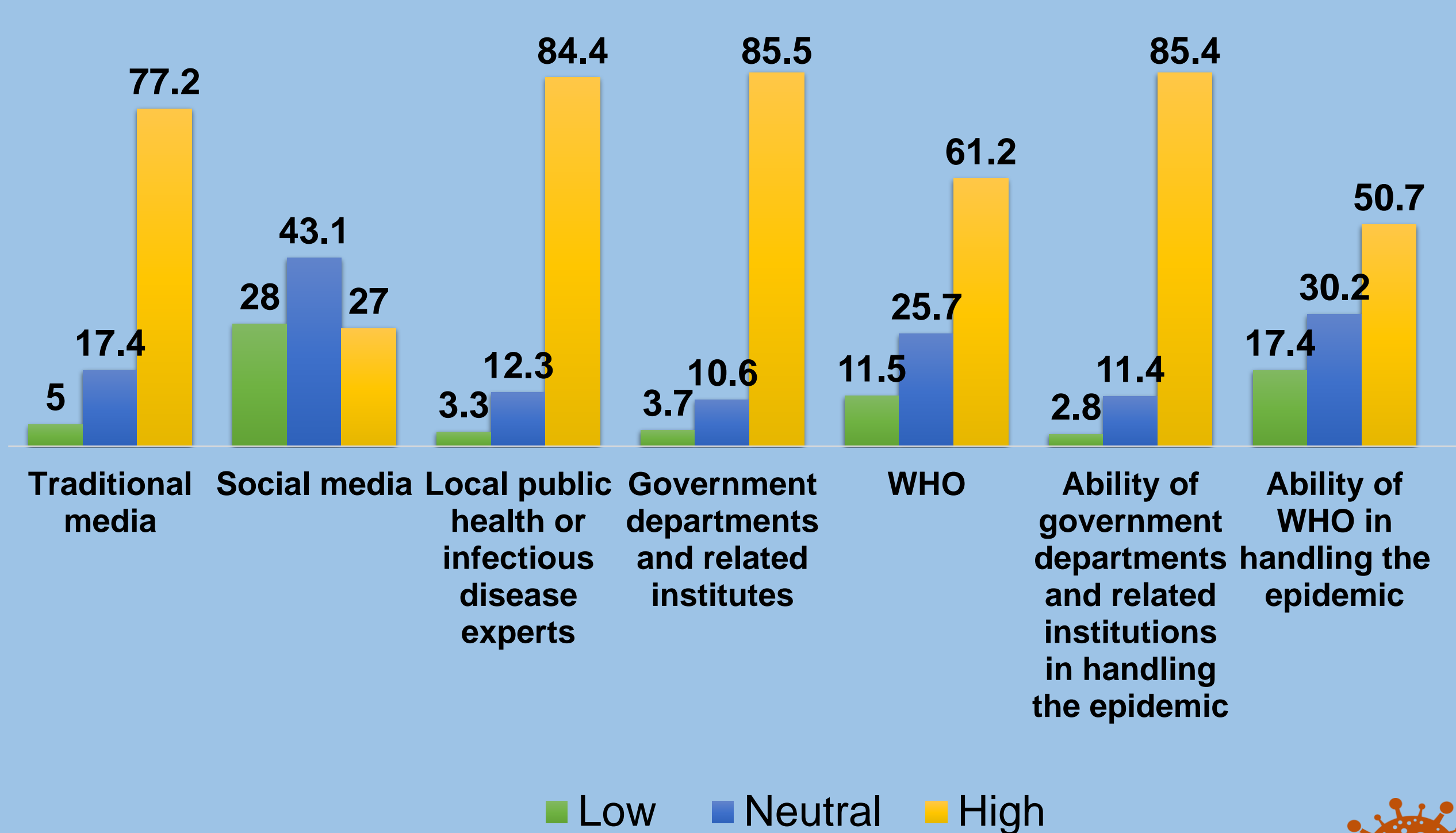


Table 1: Association of trust in different sources of information and the ability of handling Covid-19 with high perceived risk of infection (Self)

Variables	Current perceived risk of Covid-19 infection (Self)		One-month perceived risk of Covid-19 infection (Self)			
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI		
		Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	
Age						
65+	2.05	0.63	6.69			
35-64	2.70*	1.26	5.80			
21-34	Ref.			Ref.		
Ethnicity						
Malay	1.26	0.61	2.61			
Indian	0.41*	0.18	0.93			
Others	0.59	0.25	1.38			
Chinese	Ref.			Ref.		
Religion						
Yes	3.87*	1.27	11.81			
No	Ref.			Ref.		
Trust in Social Media						
Low	2.39*	1.09	5.24			
Neutral	1.59	0.74	3.39			
High	Ref.			Ref.		
Trust in the ability of government departments and related institution in handling epidemic						
Low				5.75*	1.02	32.45
Neutral				2.75*	1.08	7.04
High	Ref.			Ref.		

*Indicates p<0.05

Note: OR = Odds ratio, 95% CI = 95% Confidence Interval, Ref. = Reference categories

DISCUSSION

The present study provided insights on the level of trust on COVID-19 information from different sources, the ability of WHO, government departments and related institutions in handling the epidemic and its associated perceived risks of infection. In summary, effective public health messaging during epidemic is crucial as it influences public compliance, advocates health behaviours, decreases health risks and helps in the management of the crisis. Future qualitative studies are recommended to facilitate better understanding of public trust and identifying strategies for addressing future public health responses.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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