

On the Information Dissemination and Legal Responsibility during the Outbreak of the Epidemic

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Abstract: This paper aims to explore the importance of information dissemination during an epidemic outbreak and the associated legal responsibilities. During such crises, accurate and timely information dissemination is crucial for public safety and health. However, the spread of misleading or false information can also lead to panic, discrimination, and other adverse consequences. Therefore, establishing a legal framework to ensure the accuracy of information and clear accountability has become imperative.

Keywords: Epidemic outbreak; Information dissemination; Legal responsibility; Public health

1. The Importance of Epidemic Information Dissemination

Throughout the course of history, humanity has faced numerous epidemics, from the Black Death in the Middle Ages to the COVID-19 pandemic in the 21st century. Each outbreak of an epidemic has had profound impacts on society. In times of health crises, the correct, precise, and timely dissemination of information becomes particularly critical. This paper delves into the necessity of epidemic information dissemination and its influence on public behavior and attitudes.

First and foremost, the dissemination of accurate health information, protective measures, and modes of virus transmission can aid the public in making informed decisions. During an epidemic, people confront numerous decisions related to health and safety, such as choosing personal protective equipment, assessing their own infection risk, or ensuring a safe living environment for their families. These decisions often carry life-or-death consequences, and making incorrect choices can increase health risks. Therefore, accurate information can provide robust guidance to the public, ensuring that their choices are based on facts rather than rumors or misconceptions.

Secondly, the accurate dissemination of information can significantly reduce public panic and anxiety. When an epidemic erupts, people tend to experience excessive worry and panic due to the fear of an unfamiliar virus, compounded by the opacity and uncertainty of information. This heightened sense of panic not only has negative impacts on individual psychological well-being but can also lead to social disturbances, such as hoarding supplies or discrimination against specific groups. However, when the public receives accurate information about the disease, protective measures, and treatment options, their fears can be appropriately alleviated, thereby avoiding unnecessary societal turmoil.

Lastly, timely and transparent information dissemination can enhance public trust in public health recommendations. During an epidemic outbreak, public health agencies and government bodies are often the primary sources of information. If they can consistently and accurately convey relevant information, and promptly correct erroneous or misleading information, the public's trust in these organizations will significantly increase. Conversely, if information dissemination is chaotic, contradictory, or conceals facts, public trust in these institutions may rapidly decline, leading to a refusal to follow official recommendations and increasing the risk of disease transmission.

2. Adverse Effects of Misinformation Dissemination During Epidemic Outbreaks

During epidemic outbreaks, information becomes the primary guide and reference for the public. Accurate information dissemination is crucial for dealing with epidemics, protecting people's health, and maintaining social order. Unfortunately, inaccurate or misleading information often spreads rapidly through social media, certain news channels, and even word-of-mouth communication. The adverse impacts of such erroneous information dissemination on society are not to be underestimated, covering multiple aspects, from health to social cohesion

and unfair treatment of certain individuals or regions.

Firstly, erroneous information often leads to public trust in harmful medical advice. For instance, some unverified treatment methods or medications may be wrongly promoted as “miracle cures.” Trusting these misleading medical recommendations can lead people to abandon validated and effective treatment methods or misuse substances that may be harmful. What’s worse, such incorrect practices can not only harm individuals but also pose a greater threat to public health. When a large number of people choose not to accept validated treatments or fail to follow recommended preventive measures, controlling the epidemic becomes even more challenging.

Secondly, misinformation dissemination triggers baseless panic. Whether it is excessive concern about the disease or an overestimation of its transmission capabilities, baseless panic can lead to many irrational behaviors. For example, hoarding food and medical supplies, implementing unnecessary travel restrictions, and delaying decision-making may occur. This panic not only fails to address practical problems but may also have adverse effects on the economy and social stability. People often find it more difficult to make rational decisions in a state of panic, further exacerbating the crisis.

Most significantly, misinformation dissemination can exacerbate discrimination and prejudice against certain groups or regions. When a disease is wrongly associated with specific ethnic groups, countries, or regions, residents of these areas or people originating from them may face discrimination and bias from others. They may experience discrimination in job seeking, housing, or social activities. Worse still, this discrimination can lead to physical harm, verbal attacks, or even more serious crimes. This not only violates the basic human rights of the victims but also further divides society, weakening community unity and cohesion when facing an epidemic.

3. Reflections on Legal Responsibilities During Epidemic Outbreaks

Epidemic outbreaks pose a significant challenge to any nation and society. In addition to medical and health challenges, epidemics bring forth a range of legal and ethical issues, particularly regarding legal responsibilities related to information dissemination and public behavior. In times of emergency, ensuring the accuracy of information, the propriety of public behavior, and the protection of rights becomes paramount.

Firstly, there is a legal responsibility concerning information dissemination. During an epidemic outbreak, accurate and timely information dissemination is of utmost importance. This encompasses information about the nature of the virus, its modes of transmission, as well as preventive and treatment measures. Erroneous or misleading information can lead to the public adopting incorrect preventive measures or even harmful medical advice, resulting in harm to health. Therefore, individuals or entities providing or disseminating false, misleading, or inaccurate information should be held legally accountable. This includes, but is not limited to, medical institutions or individuals offering false treatment methods to the public, users spreading false information on social media, and media organizations intentionally creating confusion or panic.

Secondly, legal responsibility for public behavior should not be overlooked. During an epidemic, public health and safety become the foremost consideration. Therefore, individuals who violate quarantine regulations, fail to comply with health and epidemic control measures, or intentionally spread diseases should be held legally accountable. This is not only to protect public health but also to ensure effective epidemic control. In this regard, many countries have enacted relevant laws or policies stipulating that actions violating such regulations during specific public health emergencies will be subject to legal sanctions.

Furthermore, discrimination or prejudice against certain groups or regions may increase during an epidemic outbreak. This discriminatory behavior may be based on false or biased information, such as wrongly associating a particular disease with specific ethnicities, religions, or regions. This epidemic-based discrimination not only violates the principles of human rights but may also lead to more serious harm to the victims. Therefore, individuals or organizations inciting, encouraging, or engaging in such discriminatory behavior should bear legal responsibility.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the issue of legal responsibility during epidemic outbreaks is complex and of utmost importance. Handling this matter

correctly not only safeguards public health and rights but also contributes to maintaining social order and stability. In this era of globalization, every nation and society must recognize that in the face of epidemics, we must address not only medical and health challenges but also ensure the implementation of justice and fairness in the legal realm. Therefore, there is an urgent need to establish a clear legal framework that defines the responsibilities and obligations of all parties during epidemic outbreaks, balancing individual freedoms and societal responsibilities while taking into account scientific evidence and public health recommendations. Furthermore, governments and international organizations should enhance cooperation and develop transnational epidemic legal guidelines to address global health threats. Only through collective efforts can we ensure societal stability and legal fairness amid the shadows of epidemics.

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