

The Covid-19 Crisis in the Cali-Baja Region

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General Information

The central research question posed was “what have been the economic, public health, and social impacts of the Covid-19 crisis in the Cali-Baja region?”

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted several communities around the world, and economic and health consequences have also exacerbated existing issues. In Cali Baja, the nature of having a population dependent upon cross-border travel and collaboration has resulted in unique ramifications for businesses, governments, and individuals. Understanding the ways in which this pandemic has, and continues to, spread as well as how it disproportionately affects specific populations provides needed insight for governmental responses for the inevitability of another pandemic or crisis.

Despite the closure of nonessential travel, the patterns of epidemiology continued roughly parallel on both sides of the border. About 100,000 essential travelers crossed daily from Mexico to supply labor to American companies, supporting the U.S. economy and its production. Deep socio-cultural connections have also been nurtured as families establish links within both nations. What can be drawn from this report is the identification of the interconnectedness of the Cali Baja community, and the need for binational governance to take place when crises such as this occur. In interviews with local stakeholders many recommendations were presented. Of these include the need for:

- Adopting a binational perspective in government responses
- Promoting cross border collaborations
- Advancing border processes and technology
- Redefining the border narrative more generally

Health Impacts

The healthcare response in Tijuana emulated what was originally observed in the US. Health systems were overwhelmed, with low allocation of resources and personal protective equipment leading to high numbers of infection among healthcare workers.

In Mexico, some hospitals were designated as what has been titled “fever clinics” or Covid-only sites. The idea from the government was to allocate proper attention and resources to the pandemic, however this resulted in a restriction of healthcare access for individuals with other health needs, leaving entire communities vulnerable.

It is important to reflect on the way in which government messaging impacted the spread of Covid across both nations. Failure to promote proper medical protocols resulted in many ignoring necessary health guidelines. This politicization created stigmatization which played a large role in the continuous spreading of the virus, as well as the underreporting of cases.

Vaccine Efforts

Within the United States, the vaccination campaign faced few barriers, however the same cannot be said for Mexico. For local stakeholders whose labor is dependent on the cross-border population, it was integral for business operations to get vaccines for their workers. In response to a prolonged wait for a national vaccine campaign, these local leaders collaborated across the border to initiate their own efforts. A notable example is a pilot drive that resulted in an estimated vaccination of 26,000 workers.

For those with a binational perspective, the progression of both nations is dependent upon the vaccination of the entire cross-border population.

Looking at the national vaccination efforts in Mexico, many barriers have risen. One example being the requirement of proof of identification to register for a vaccine, as well as upon receiving it.

Social Impacts

An aim of this research is to place the pandemic and its impacts into the context of larger social issues that progressed alongside. For the United States, Covid-19 hit during a time of political turbulence, and a mass movement for racial justice among Black Lives Matter protests that saw new exposures after the murder of George Floyd. The border presents a complex set of challenges for handling the pandemic, given the existing social and economic disparities that have worsened due to the health impacts. Marginalized communities such as the Hispanic and Black populations make up the majority percentage of essential workers leading to a disproportionate rate of risk of exposure. It is important to reflect on how the United States has failed to protect the very workers it has deemed essential.

Other populations who have faced serious implications in response to the U.S. pandemic policies have been migrants and asylum seekers. The implementation of Title 42 paired with the instability of the MPP program has neglected to protect these persons. Detention centers have failed to supply proper personal protective equipment or space for social distancing protocols. As for those persons who have been denied entrance to the U.S., they await a decision across the border without security and shelter.

In Mexico, many social impacts have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Currently, femicides are a critical issue, and the lock down policy forced many women and children to remain at home with their abusers. A lack of government aid only further frustrated this problem as shelters and organizations aimed at protecting these populations were forced to close or limit operations.

National Epidemiological Patterns

