

Publication

The second pandemic: Examining structural inequality through reverberations of COVID-19 in Europe

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While everyone has been impacted directly or indirectly by the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures to contain it, not everyone has been impacted in the same way and certainly not to the same degree. Media coverage in early 2020 emphasized the "unprecedented" nature of the pandemic, and some even predicted that the virus could be a global "equalizer." Ensuing debates over how the pandemic should be handled have often hinged on oppositions between protecting health and healthcare systems versus saving livelihoods and the economy, a dichotomy that we argue is false. Drawing on 482 interviews conducted in Germany, Italy, Ireland, Austria, German-speaking Switzerland and the UK over two points in a 6-month period as part of the 'Solidarity in times of Pandemics Research Consortium' (SolPan), we illustrate the ways that oppositions posed between saving lives or saving livelihoods fail to capture the entangled, long-standing nature of structural inequalities that have been revealed through the pandemic. Health- and wealth-related inequalities intersect to produce the "second pandemic," a term used by a research participant to explain the other forms of devastation that run in parallel with virus. Our findings thus complicate such dichotomies through a qualitative understanding of the pandemic as a lived experience. The pandemic emerges as a critical juncture which, in exacerbating these existing structural inequalities, also poses an opportunity to work to better resolve them.

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