SPECIAL ISSUE ON PSYCHOLOGY OF SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME (SARS)

The psychology behind the masks:
Psychological responses to the severe acute respiratory syndrome outbreak in different regions

Cecilia Cheng
Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Kowloon, Hong Kong

Catherine So-kum Tang
The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, New Territories, Hong Kong

Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) was first reported in Guangdong, China in November 2002, followed by an outbreak in Hong Kong in early March, 2003. The disease spread to 29 regions, affecting over 8000 people worldwide. For the general public, the psychological impact of SARS may have been greater than the physical health danger of the disease. The present paper proposes the influence of psychological factors on people’s cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses during the SARS outbreak. The various papers in this special issue of the Journal reveal how people have reacted during the SARS outbreak: People’s general coping styles may be related to their health behavior during the outbreak. Cultural differences were evident in the perception of SARS, and individuals’ perceptual styles may have influenced their ability to cope with the outbreak. The way in which individuals coped with SARS-related stressful events was different from their usual practices of managing daily stress. Individual differences in the adoption of preventive measures were related to the distinct susceptibility to several social-cognitive biases.

Keywords: coping responses, physical health, psychological factors, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS).

Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) was first reported in Guangdong, China in November 2002, followed by an outbreak in Hong Kong in early March, 2003. The disease...