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Readers discuss ways to keep people feeling empowered during the pandemic, ensuring DSE exam materials are relevant and overcoming prejudice

Letters
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People admire and take pictures of the blossoming yellow Golden Trumpet Tree flowers at Nam Cheong Park in Nam Cheong on March 17. Research suggests people are more likely to engage in healthy behaviours such as wearing masks when they feel empowered to take care of themselves during the pandemic. Photo: Nora Tam

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According to the chief executive, Hong Kong is at war with Covid-19. Without a doubt, the situation requires our collective attention and action if we are to protect the most vulnerable members of society. To achieve this, we must consider how best to encourage effective action by community members and how to do so while preserving everyone's mental health.

A group of us from the Experimental Psychopathology Lab at the University of Hong Kong recently conducted a study where participants read different kinds of Covid-related news articles. Our intention was to examine how to encourage the Hong Kong public to engage in healthy behaviours – for example, wearing masks and washing hands – without making them worry to the extent that their mental health is compromised.

People were more likely to say they would engage in healthy behaviours when they read news articles that emphasised the number of mild or asymptomatic cases present in the community. These articles also presented healthy behaviours that people could use to reduce their risk while also debunking myths such as the likelihood of infection from commercial packaging. Each of these things gave people the sense that, although there is risk of infection, there are things that they could do to protect themselves and vulnerable people in their community.

Other participants in our study read news articles that emphasised case and mortality data. These "threat-focused" articles also discussed ways infection could be acquired – such as touching lift buttons – without talking about the steps people can take to mitigate infection. These news articles discouraged participants and made them feel like the risks of Covid-19 were unmanageably high.

Scaring people with talk of war is unlikely to encourage action and could exacerbate the mental health crisis already present in Hong Kong. Instead, members of the government and media should be empowering people with the belief that the risks they face are manageable and that each of us possesses the power to protect ourselves and our loved ones through effective, science-based action.

'I feel like I'm talking to myself': living with Hong Kong's zero-Covid strategy



This should be coupled with clear communication about the direction that we are headed. This will enable people to imagine, plan for and derive hope from a future that makes the current sacrifices worthwhile.


Tom J. Barry, PhD, director, Experimental Psychopathology Lab (EPL), University of Hong Kong, Tiffany J. Tao and Frederick H. F. Chan, research assistants, EPL

English exam materials need greater scrutiny

We refer to the letter by Justin Chan on [March 8](#). We agree with your correspondent that Diploma of Secondary Education exam candidates need more support as the city battles the fifth wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

As schools are closed, candidates with limited access to their teachers might turn to DSE reference books for help. In the summer of 2021, through a service-learning project at Baptist University, we conducted a review of 40 DSE reference books on English writing.

We found that only three books offered high-quality model essays and detailed explanations of the exam requirements. Upon our recommendation, Hong Kong Public



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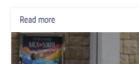
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Libraries agreed to purchase suitable copies of these books for their patrons.

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Unfortunately, the rest of the books we surveyed had little value for DSE candidates because of problems ranging from model essays from questionable sources and limited references to poor grasp of the exam requirements. Some books provide a list of words or grammatical structures without explaining how the candidates could use them in the exams.

We have shared our findings with the Consumer Council and the Education Bureau and urged them to educate DSE candidates and their parents to think twice before buying these reference books. The Customs and Excise Department should also investigate whether the authors and publishers of these books have violated the Trade Descriptions Ordinance for misleading consumers.

Andy Yu and Jenny Leung, Kowloon Tong

Hong Kong must rise above prejudice

These past few weeks, we have witnessed NGO workers in the front lines of Hong Kong's fight against Covid-19 calling out for emergency supplies, connecting with generous donors and distributing resources to families in need. In these difficult times, we often are brought together for the greater good, but our fears and prejudices can also bring out the worst in us.

While many people have been benevolent and giving, we have also seen how fears led to panic buying and discrimination against those perceived as different. This has highlighted the long-standing inequality that continues to linger in our city.

Ethnic minority youth are falling victim to such inequalities. One 16-year-old shared with us their struggle to keep up with the school work and the family's financial difficulties amid the pandemic. To top it off, they have to endure the casual discrimination behind remarks such as people in ethnic minority communities "do not know how to wear masks" or "mass gathering is their culture".

Surveys and studies tell us Hong Kong youth are showing symptoms of stress and depression during the pandemic. Ethnic minority youth have the added challenge of having to deal with racial divides and injustices.

We must rebuild our city into a better one. On March 21, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, we are reminded to take steps to consider everyone's collective experience in Hong Kong, regardless of their socioeconomic status and race. Let us take a culturally sensitive approach and nurture youth to be proud representatives of their own communities. Once young people feel safe and start looking out for each other, they will start making the best decisions for themselves and a truly better Hong Kong is around the corner.

Sky Siu, executive director of KELLY Support Group



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