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Zika Virus and Its Aftermath on the Singapore Tourism Industry

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ABSTRACT

The Zika virus originated in Entebbe area of Zika Forest situated in Uganda in April 1947. It was obtained from a serum of pyrexial rhesus monkey those were caged in a canopy forest by the scientists of Yellow Fever Research Institute. Zika means “overgrown” in Luganda language. The Africans monkeys and rhesus monkeys were inoculated intracerebrally. The global spread of the Zika virus has been a major concern. This research looks into understanding how the spread of such a virus can have an impact on a country like Singapore which is an open port trading island known for being a business hub and its diverse culture. The Singapore Tourism Board is a statutory board coming under the Ministry of Trade and Industry of Singapore. The board has been highly successful in establishing the country as a major tourist attraction. We can say this as the statistics show that the country’s tourism sector accounts for about 4% of the total GDP. This has also helped the country in establishing themselves as a major attraction in terms of business, talent, and capital. The virus has been spreading rapidly and we wish to look at the impact that the virus will have on its tourism sector. This is especially important in the case of Singapore as the tourism sector contributes to about 4% of the GDP of the nation. So, if the virus does affect the state tourism sector, the economy will be hit hard.

Keyword: *Pyrexial, Global Spread, Singapore Tourism Board, GDP, Economy.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Zika virus originated in Entebbe area of Zika Forest situated in Uganda in April 1947. It was obtained from a serum of pyrexial rhesus monkey those were caged in a canopy forest by the scientists of Yellow Fever Research Institute. Zika means “overgrown” in Luganda language. The Africans monkeys and rhesus monkeys were inoculated intracerebrally. In the same month of January 1947, second isolation came from a mosquito which was encountered in the same site. The virus was regarded as highly subcutaneous and neurotrophic; meaning tending to attach nervous system first. The global spread of the Zika virus has been a major concern. This research looks into understanding how the spread of such a virus can have an impact on a country like Singapore which is an open port trading island known for being a business hub and its diverse culture. The research mainly looks into the tourism sector of the country and how the spread of the Zika virus can impact the industry. The Singapore Tourism Board is a statutory board going under the Ministry of Trade and Industry of Singapore. The board has been very successful in setting up the nation as a noteworthy vacation destination. We can state this, as the statistics of Singapore demonstrate tourism area represents about 4% of the aggregate GDP. This has additionally helped the nation in setting up them as a noteworthy fascination regarding business, ability, and capital.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is mainly based on the collection and analysis of secondary data and looks to quantify the impact the virus has had on the country of Singapore. Secondary data is easy to procure and is inexpensive hence making it a feasible source of information. To ensure authenticity, data has been collected from government websites and other reliable sources which have up to date information regarding statistics.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The most common symptoms of the Zika virus include fever, rash, headache, joint pain, muscle pain and conjunctivitis. The intensity of the symptoms is very mild and in most cases, hospitalization is never required unless circumstances prove otherwise. The symptoms usually last for about 3 days to a week and the probability of dying from a Zika virus infection is very low to none and considered rare. The symptoms of the virus are similar to other diseases which are spread through mosquito bites such as dengue or malaria. Once an individual has been infected, he/she is not likely to get infected by the virus in the future (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2017).

Although people infected with the Zika virus experience mild symptoms, the virus is highly contagious. The two most common ways for the virus to spread is by mosquito bites and participating in intercourse. The virus can be passed through sex even if the infected individual does not portray the symptoms of the virus. Zika infection during pregnancy is considered to be serious. This is because the virus passes on to the foetus and can cause serious birth defects such as *Microcephaly* which leads to incomplete brain development (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2017).

Due to its highly contagious nature, the Zika virus has been spreading rapidly across the globe although the virus is most prominently found in the African continent. The disease has been detected in 70 countries worldwide, of which 19 of them are in the Asia-Pacific region alone. According to the W.H.O, the virus is likely to spread even more in this region due to its high volume of travel. Although the virus has existed in the region for decades, the first sign of its presence came from travellers who were returning home from other countries (The British Broadcasting Corporation, 2016).

The Zika virus (zika meaning “overgrown” in Luganda language) originated in Zika Forest in the Entebbe area of Uganda. It was first isolated in April 1947, from the serum of pyrexial rhesus monkey whom the scientists from the Yellow Fever Research Institute had caged in the forest Canopy of Zika Forest. The African monkeys and rhesus monkeys were inoculated intracerebrally. The second isolation was from a mosquito which was followed in the same site in the month of January 1948. The virus is highly subcutaneous and neurotropic i.e. tends to attack nervous system first preferentially.

In the French Polynesia region, the Zika virus had broken out in December 2013 where a patient in Tahiti has sought treatment for hematospermia and ZIKV had isolated from his semen. This supported the possibility that the ZIKV can be transmitted sexually. At the same time, it was detected that ZIKV RNA was found in the saliva of a young child. This also suggested the possibility that the virus can be transmitted through saliva and the detection through saliva was more frequent and prominent than detection through blood (Musso, et al., 2015)

With the spread of the Zika virus, one of the hardest hit industries will be the tourism industry. Although the symptoms of the virus are mild, travellers are still expected to be cautious. Hotels are expected to cover water tanks and reservoirs as a precaution to not let mosquitos from getting in, to avoid build-up of garbage and stagnant water, and to install mosquito screening on windows and doors to reduce the contact with mosquitos. The travellers are recommended to use insect repellent and wear appropriate clothing to cover exposed skin so that they reduce the chance of getting bitten by mosquitos. Since pregnant women and unborn babies are at risk, multiple tourism based programs and packages are taking the virus into consideration and providing pregnant women with the flexibility of cancelling their plans without any penalty and providing refunds if necessary on cancellations. (Simpson, 2016)

The Singapore Tourism Board is a statutory board coming under the Ministry of Trade and Industry of Singapore, championing the development of Singapore’s tourism sector. It is also regarded as one of the country’s key service sector and economic pillars which also undertakes the marketing and promotion of Singapore. Currently, 4% of GDP is contributed by the tourism sector in Singapore. Singapore’s tourism plays a critical role in fortifying its status as a vibrant global city that acts a magnet for business, talent, and capital (Singapore Tourism Board, 2017).

On 27th August 2016, The Ministry of Health and National Environment Agency confirmed the first case of the Zika virus. The number of confirmed cases saw a rapid increase to 41 in just one day i.e. 28th August 2016. This shows us that Singapore is under threat of bursting out with the Zika virus epidemic (Government, 2017)

The year 2016 was a record break for Singapore, which saw exceeding forecasts with strong results. The tourism receipts reached up to \$24.6 billion which represented uptick of 13% year-on-year growth with China (\$3, 523 million), Indonesia (\$2, 698 million) and India (\$ 1, 534 million) making up to the top three markets, while the visitor arrivals were recorded at \$16.4 million which is an uptick of 8% year-on-year growth. This shows the vitality and importance of Singapore’s tourism sector and the tourism board’s energetic drive to create award winning products and engaging visitor experiences that would help in building feasible development.(Singapore Tourism Board, 2017)

4. CONTENT

The Zika virus is a vector borne disease that mainly spreads through mosquito bites and the symptoms of the disease are quite similar to dengue and malaria as they include the victim experiencing headaches, joint and muscle pain, fever, rashes, and conjunctivitis. Although these symptoms may be a cause of concern, the intensity of these symptoms is very mild in the case of the Zika virus. But, the major area of concern with the case of the Zika virus is its highly contagious nature. It can spread rapidly through sexual intercourse even if the infected person does not portray the symptoms of the virus. Also, the disease is considered dangerous if a pregnant woman gets infected with the virus can be transmitted to the unborn foetus and can lead to *Microcephaly* wherein, the foetus suffers from incomplete brain development. More recent studies suggest that the virus can also be transmitted through saliva.

Now, although we know that the symptoms of the disease are very mild and the only people at risk are pregnant women, the spread of such a virus in a country will definitely have an impact in various segments of operations of the country. For example, when we take the case of Brazil, the virus spread quite rapidly that the World Health Organization had to enlist the country as being in a state of a global public health emergency. This obviously would have a direct impact on its tourism sector thereby, having a negative impact on its economic development.

The state of Singapore is going through a somewhat similar crisis. The virus has been spreading rapidly and we wish to look at the impact that the virus will have on its tourism sector. This is especially important in the case of Singapore as the tourism sector contributes to about 4% of the GDP of the nation. So, if the virus does affect the state tourism sector, the economy will be hit hard.

5. FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

The Singapore Tourism Board is a statutory board coming under the Ministry of Trade and Industry of Singapore. The board has been highly successful in establishing the country as a major tourist attraction. We can say this as the statistics show that the country's tourism sector accounts for about 4% of the total GDP. This has also helped the country in establishing themselves as a major attraction in terms of business, talent, and capital.

Ironically, the spread of the Zika virus had a very negligible impact on the tourism of the country. In fact, the country had a record breaking statistics in the year 2016 (The year the Zika virus was detected). The total income from tourism was \$24.6 million which was an up stick of 13% year on year growth with China (\$3, 523 million), Indonesia (\$2, 698 million) and India (\$ 1, 534 million). The visitor arrivals were recorded at \$16.4 million which was an increase of 8% of the year on year growth.

Thus, we can say that the Singapore Tourism Board has taken vital steps in ensuring that the spread of the virus hasn't impacted the economy in a negative way and in spite of the spread of the disease, the board has managed to a wonderful job in breaking all statistical records.

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