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Underground Economy - A Parameter of Social Influence During the COVID-19 Pandemic.

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INTRODUCTION & AIM

The purpose of this research is to present a perspective on the cases of underground economy that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact they had on the general population, and the interventions that were implemented.

METHOD

The collection of data related to the cases of underground economy, during the pandemic, was carried out by electronic recording of calls, from the Call Center (11110) of Attiki Region (Greece) Operations Center and the Athens Medical Association. Statistical Analysis of the individual phone calls revealed the following: Overall during 2020 and 2021, a total of 159,656 calls were recorded. Of them, 115,622 (72.4%) were made in 2020 and 44,034 (27.6%) were made in 2021. Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) were used to describe quantitative variables. Absolute (N) and relative (%) frequencies were used to describe the quality variables.

RESULTS

A total of 1592 cases of underground economy were recorded. 35.6% of them were related to masks, 31.7% to general products and 27.9% to antiseptics. The underground economy cases during the pandemic were that extreme that the price of personal protective equipment was increased by 3000%. More specifically, regarding masks, antiseptics and gloves, the majority of cases of underground economy occurred at pharmacies, with the rates being 45.3%, 45.7% and 39.0% respectively. Regarding general products, 33.9% of profiteering incidents took place in supermarkets and 51.8% in another place. Apart from the cases of underground economy there were also cases of goods with false certification.

Figure 1 Phone calls received during 2020

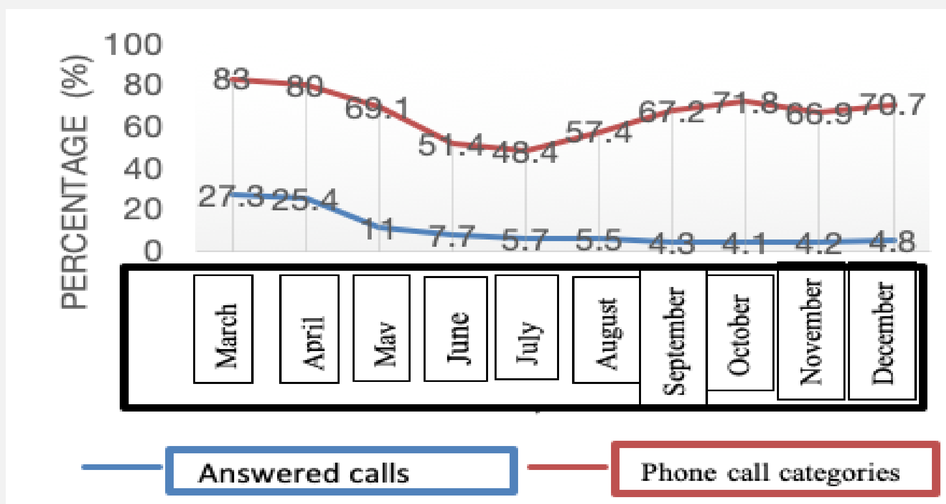


Figure 1 presents the percentage of answered phone calls during 2020. The highest percentage was recorded in March 2020 (27.3 %) followed by a reduction to the levels of around 4% during September to December 2020.

Figure 2 Phone calls received during 2021

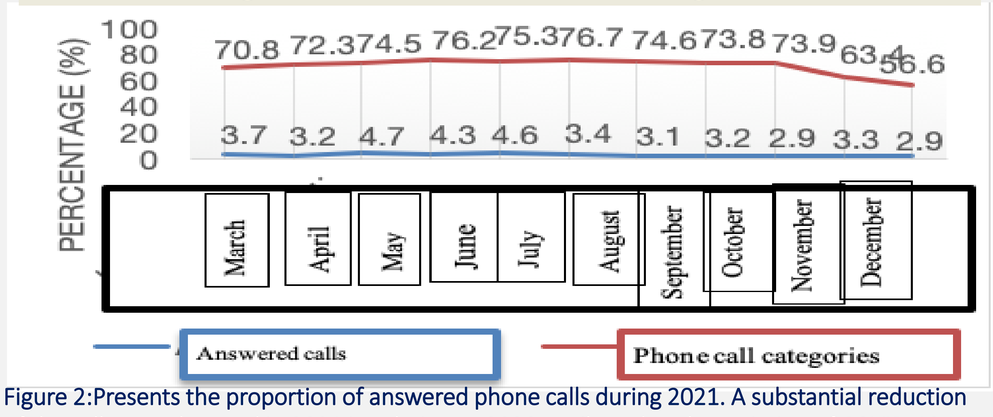
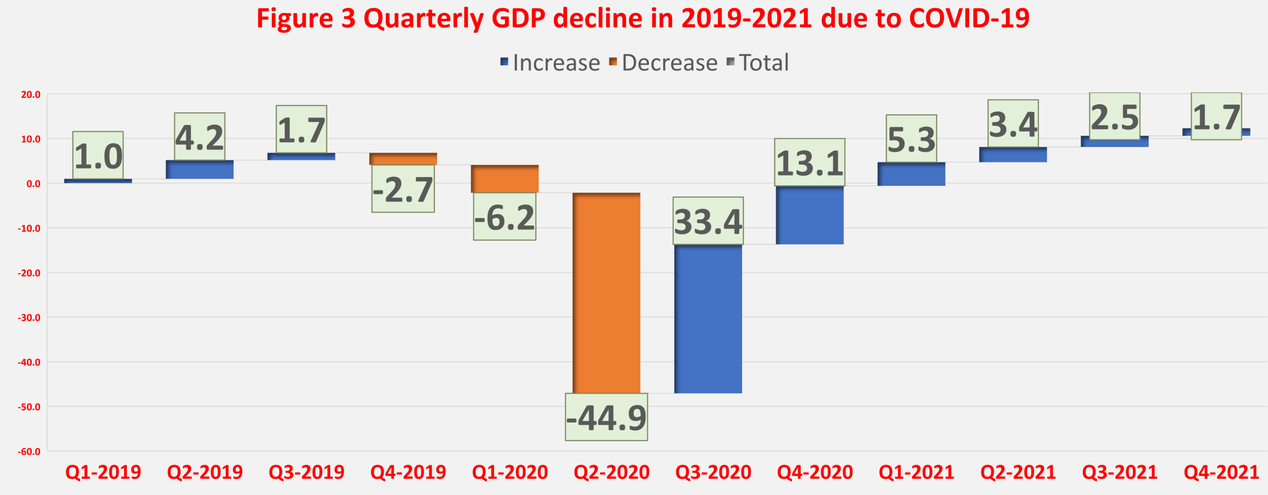


Figure 2:Presents the proportion of answered phone calls during 2021. A substantial reduction of the calls was observed in 2021 in relation to 2020 attributed to the variation of COVID-19 waves. The highest proportions of the phone calls were recorded during May (4.7%) June (4.3%) and July (4.6%), followed by a gradual decline to 2..9% in December 2021

Figure 3 Quarterly GDP decline in 2019-2021 due to COVID-19



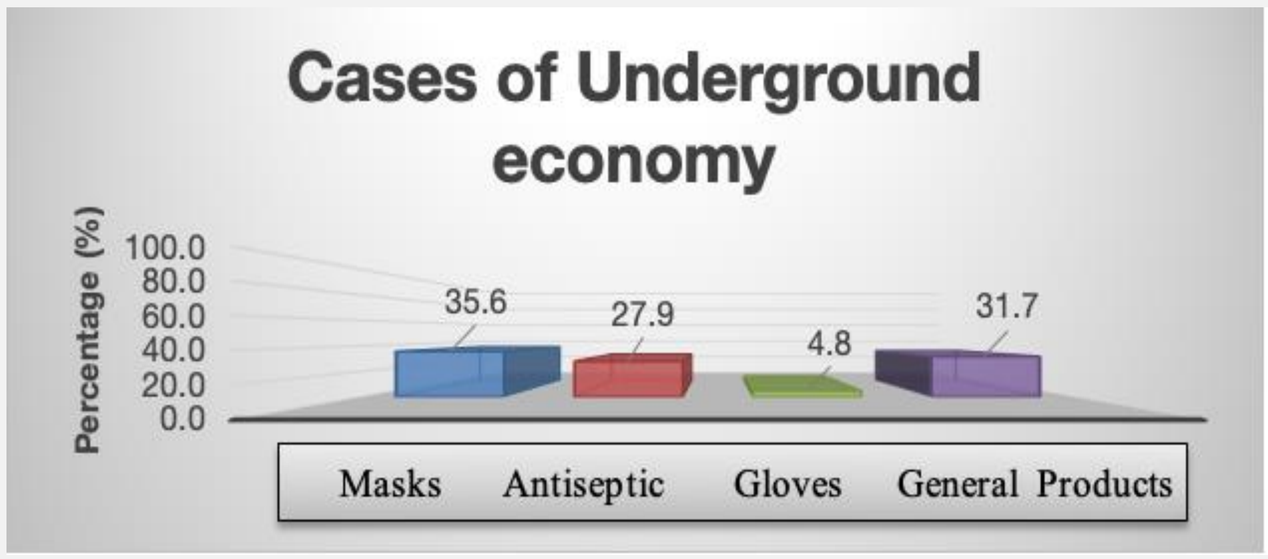


Figure 4: Overall 1592 cases of underground economy were reported. More specifically the percentage of masks was 35.6% , of antiseptic 27.9%, of gloves 4.8 & and of General Products 31.7%.

CONCLUSIONS

The strict lock down measures adopted during the pandemic had a profound impact on the Greek Economy. The restricted measures in relation to the lack of effective public health and public economic policies, created an economic uncertain environment with the emergence of underground economy. The study provides useful statistics on specific cases of underground economy in Greece related to overpriced of: Masks, Antiseptics, Gloves and General Products. and offers an extensive conceptual analysis of how business behaviors within the social context of lifestyle were affected, in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. This study hopes to contribute to the reduction of underground economy, which was recorded during the first waves of the COVID- 19 pandemic.

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