

The Significance of Postal Clerks in the United States Postal Service During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Skinner N*

School of Education, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Alaska, United States

*Corresponding author: Skinner N, School of Education, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Alaska, United States;

E-mail: natashaskinner@gmail.com

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Abstract

*The world was heavily saturated with Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) in 2020. This crisis led the president of the United States of America to declare a national emergency regarding the Covid pandemic. All Americans were advised to remain at home as communities, states, businesses and all non-essential businesses were closed in order to stop the spread of this deadly virus. But the United States Postal Service, an essential business, more than ever paid heed to their objective to ensure through its postal duties that they delivered consistently and within its means the universal service of mailing and distributing mail pieces across the nation. This shutdown and with the death toll of Covid-19 continuously spiking did not prevent the U.S.P.S from standing by its objective and delivering billions of mail to Americans during this horrific time. This paper addresses how, as an essential business, the U.S.P.S stood postally and withstood all the implications of Covid in order to ensure that Americans continued to receive their mail, how Postal clerks were impacted by the pandemic, and what made the work of postal clerks so significant during the pandemic. **Approach**—This paper utilizes online resources that date back to the time of the pandemic giving various accounts of what happened to this essential government business and its postal clerks during the nation's stretch of what was called the Covid-19 pandemic. Each online resource, albeit an online periodical, postal websites, PBS, and other online media sources, discusses how the U. S. P. S. and its postal clerks were able to endure the day-to-day challenges of Covid-19 pandemic. **Findings**—The results determined that in the face of climatic catastrophes or national pandemics the United States Postal Service is like a juggernaut of a force that will not cease its operations or workforce as was evident in the actions it took during the Covid-19 pandemic.*

Keywords: Postal; USPS; Clerk; United States Post Office; Covid

1. Introduction

Because the U.S.P.S. is a government agency that provides a vital public service to the nation's framework it was important that a Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Command Response leadership team be created that focused on implementing a plan to ensure postal employees and customer safety in the dawn of this unprecedented pandemic.

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The U.S.P.S employs more than 650,00 postal employees who play a continuous role in transporting, processing, delivering mail and parcels for the American people, as per the CDC and public health departments concerning the Coronavirus they had the follow approaches and procedures that involved changing workplace behaviors and customers interactions to ensure that human contact mirrored proper methods for healthy human exchanges and social distancing practices to prevent exposure and contracting the virus. The year 2020 was a year unlike any other in the history of America. Life as we know it was disrupted by Coronavirus disease (Covid-19), an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. This severe acute respiratory disease had its first known case in China in December 2019 hence the name Covid-19. World-wide 362,705 people lost their lives [9]. In the U.S. there were 103,700 deaths numerical listing [9]. In the face of the growing loss of lives, the president of the United States of America declared a national emergency regarding the Covid pandemic and states issued a shutdown of all schools and non-essential businesses in order to mitigate the spread of this deadly virus.

2. Postal Clerks Strength and Patience Against Covid

Yes, many lives were being lost and there were more questions and confusion than answers. Fear loomed large in the wake of this pandemic. But one essential business, the United States Postal Service, continued with business as usual in the face of this fatal virus.

The world doesn't know it but during the Covid pandemic, Postal clerks were just as tired, scared, and overwhelmed as everyone else as they were coping with the constant pressures of their postal duties which involved the sortation, processing, and delivery of all mail pieces promptly and effectively. Additionally, these workers made sure that they were properly protected as postal employees by wearing masks and gloves when interacting with customers but still engaged in mail processing duties to the best of their ability, despite the global and social challenges imposed by this pandemic.

3. What and Who: U.S.P.S and Postal Clerks

Clerks are postal employees who distribute, sort, and process a variety of mail pieces, as well as perform other mail processing functions for a government agency called the United States Post Service (U.S.P.S). According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, the U.S.P.S is an independent government agency in charge of processing and delivering mail, plus ensuring that the mail is kept from being loss, stolen or abused as defined by U.S. postal laws that employs postal clerks to sort, distribute, process mail, and perform other mail processing functions [1]. Working for the U.S.P.S makes postal employees essential. And during the pandemic, the workload and health risks for postal employees increased [3]. Through their postal services, they made sure that while being on the front line, customers received their necessary medicines, free at-home Covid-19 tests, any supplies, benefit checks, and financial documents, plus vital communications that they relied upon [2].

4. Online Media Reviews

To reduce health risks for postal employees and customers, the U.S.P.S. implemented social distancing at postal retail and mail processing facilities and placed floor tape in postal areas to stimulate social distancing. This agency also

illustrated and mandated the use of face masks and were always compliant with social distancing in their interaction with customers and reinforced these procedures in workplace behaviors [2]. Regardless of the Covid pandemic restrictions, postal clerks were still capable of performing the essential U.S.P.S. services through their postal duties. An example of this is demonstrated when a Postal Service booth was set up at the 2019 Consumer Electronics where the postal team created a virtual trade show booth to teach customers about postal services that included U.S.P.S. delivery services, informed delivery, and direct mail [4].

To continue to grow the U.S.P.S business and delivery services in the face of the pandemic, the Postal Service booth focused on industries in supply chain management fields, fashion, beauty, finance, automotive, consumer goods, medical, political, retail, and hospitality for the virtual trade show.

Even though the Covid pandemic loomed darkly all around, it was still in the nature of postal clerks to be fully committed to their postal duties. The increase of online purchases during the pandemic created a constant pandemic workload and virus exposure that caused postal clerks undue stress and fatigue. Postal clerks at the Louisville, Mississippi Post Office revealed emotions and experiences as they commence their daily safety protocol meetings by coming together in a circle at least six feet apart [5]. The post office's portrayal of the experiences of postal clerks during the pandemic is an example of their commitment to the postal duties no matter how trying times are and how important and crucial they are as being part of an essential government organization and the vitality of their existence.

According to [5], there are 630,000 U.S. Postal Service workers who sort and deliver mail to millions of American customers each day, but not without the risk of contracting Covid. This is because more than 2,500 Postal Service employees tested positive for Covid and according to the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) more than 60 of these postal employees died from this virus. The APWU is a U.S.P.S labor union in the United States that represents over 200,000 employees and retirees of the U.S.P.S who belong to the divisions of Clerk, Support Services, Maintenance and Motor Vehicle [6]. In spite of the risk of Covid, its effect on the well-being of postal workers, and the shutdown of many businesses, the postal service continued without fail to sort and deliver all mail pieces to every address in the nation every day [7]. Additionally, it can be said that according to a May 2020 Harris Poll Survey that tested the reactions of America's 100 essential companies to the Covid-19 pandemic, the postal service was at number one when it came to determination, reliability, consistency, and durability [8].

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Additional evidence of these postal qualities is illustrated in an interview with Sonja, a Postal clerk with twenty-two years of service at Somerset Post Office in Somerset, New Jersey (personal communication, August 6, 2022). In this brief interview, Sonja recounted to me that during the Covid pandemic, she contracted the virus. But unlike the Covid reactions from Postal clerks at the Louisville, Mississippi Post Office, her only concern was not regarding the impact of the virus, but her children. According to Postal clerk Sonja, having the virus was a part of what happens in life, and when she was free of the virus she went back to work. Furthermore, she communicated that other postal clerks who also contracted the virus returned to work after they had fully recovered from the virus and continued their postal service

duties. To them, this was like any other situation that they had faced. It did not matter what part of the nation postal clerks lived and worked because they each had their own personal responses to Covid.

While the presence and constant challenges of the virus gave postal clerks across the nation a fight, it didn't matter the number of employee absenteeism of those contracting the virus, the increase in mail volume due to massive online shopping, unending changes in postal operations to withstand the virus, or any other unforeseen and uncontrollable challenges faced by postal clerks because like the employees of an essential business, they were still standing and continued to proceed with their postal duties. In the end, the only thing left to say is "thank you" for their postal service during the nation's chaos of the Covid-19 pandemic, a disease that continues to this day to impact lives around the world albeit to a lesser degree than it did during the 2020 Covid -19 pandemic.

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