



Social Distancing in the Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Epidemic: A Threat to Social Health

Letter to editor:

In accordance with the latest data published by the World Health Organization (WHO), since the first report of COVID-19 cases from Wuhan China to March 8, 2021, more than 116,363,935 confirmed cases of the disease and 2,587,225 death cases were reported in the world. The number of cases of COVID-19 afflictions and deaths in Iran during this period were 1,689,692 and 60,687 respectively (1). COVID-19 can be mainly transmitted through infected respiratory droplets from human to human (2).

In the lack of appropriate medications and studies need to be done on individuals and larger populations to see how much vaccines protect against transmission (3), one of the major strategies to control COVID-19 is Social Distancing (4-6). In communities, people may have been infected and have not yet been diagnosed, and thus they are not isolated; hence, social distancing could prevent the transmission of the disease as much as possible by limiting the movements of the population and decreasing the contact of people within the community (4, 6, 7). Social distancing can lead to a delay in the peak of the disease and lowers the occupation of hospital beds (6, 8). The results of a study in Iran showed that the trend of new case and deaths of patients with COVID-19 was increasing before the implementation social distancing, but it was decreasing after the implementation of the intervention (9). Therefore From the beginning of the occurrence of COVID-19 in Iran, social distancing was implemented as closing schools, universities, gathering centers such as traditional dining-rooms, barbershops, cafes, parks, promenades, gym, cinemas, decreasing the attendance of employees in offices, reducing gatherings in shopping malls, removing unnecessary travels at the national level, etc. All of these are associated with moral constraints, social problems, and economic consequences such as unemployment (5, 10). Therefore, it seems social distancing is a threat to social health.

According to the definition provided by Keyes, social health means a person's reports of the quality of his/her relationship with others (11). The quantity and quality of involvement and interaction with the community to improve the welfare of common units of the society is one of the definitions of social health. The counterpoint of this interaction is the increase in social problems such as unemployment, suicide, class gap (differences), violence against women, divorce, addiction, etc. (12). Simultaneous with the reduction in the COVID-19 cases in China, this country faced a wave of divorces of couples after social distancing. Many users understand the increase in an application for divorce as social distancing and the quarantine of families at home and take into account the event as another disaster after the Corona for China (13). Some users point out the next wave of divorce among Iranians. However, another group of users hopes the opportunity to stay at homes will enliven past loves and gifts for Iranian families (14). Concerns about the risk of domestic violence against women and children in vulnerable families, because of social distancing, are rising. Children's and women's rights activists and the State Welfare Organization (SWO) officials report an increase in calls with social emergency about domestic abuse and express that the number of calls by families has had a significant increase from February 20, 2020, until now (13).

Upgrading social health does not occur without the cooperation of various ministries (12), and its improvement is not merely within the scope of authority or power of the Ministry of Health. Thus, to design a comprehensive action plan, some interventions aimed to improve social health with the solidarity of triple powers (the executive, the legislature and the judiciary) and all military forces, the Welfare Organization, the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation (IKRF), and the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) seem to be essential.

References

1. WHO. Coronavirus disease (COVID-2019) situation report 79 2020. Available from: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novelcoronavirus-2019/situation-reports> (accessed April 9, 2020).

2. McIntosh K, Hirsch MS, Bloom A. Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). UpToDate Hirsch MS, Bloom A (Eds) Accessed Mar. 2020;5.
3. Mallapaty S. Can COVID vaccines stop transmission? Scientists race to find answers. *Nature*. 2021. [DOI]
4. Wilder-Smith A, Freedman D. Isolation, quarantine, social distancing and community containment: pivotal role for old-style public health measures in the novel coronavirus (2019-ncov) outbreak. *Journal Of Travel Medicine*. 2020;27(2):taaa020. [View at publisher] [DOI] [Google Scholar]
5. Lewnard JA, Lo NC. Scientific and ethical basis for social-distancing interventions against COVID-19. *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*. 2020;20(6):631-3. [View at publisher] [DOI] [Google Scholar]
6. Kissler SM, Tedijanto C, Lipsitch M, Grad Y. Social distancing strategies for curbing the COVID-19 epidemic. *Medrxiv*. 2020. [View at publisher] [DOI] [Google Scholar]
7. Zhang Y, Jiang B, Yuan J, Tao Y. The impact of social distancing and epicenter lockdown on the COVID-19 epidemic in mainland China: A data-driven SEIQR model study. *Medrxiv*. 2020. [View at publisher] [DOI] [Google Scholar]
8. Dalton CB, Corbett SJ, Katelaris AL. Pre-emptive low cost social distancing and enhanced hygiene implemented before local COVID-19 transmission could decrease the number and severity of cases. *The Medical Journal of Australia*. 2020;212(10):1. [View at publisher] [DOI] [Google Scholar]
9. Alimohamadi Y, Holakouie-Naieni K, Sepandi M, Taghdir M. Effect of social distancing on COVID-19 incidence and mortality in Iran since February 20 to May 13, 2020: an interrupted time series analysis. *Risk Management and Healthcare Policy*. 2020;13:1695. [View at publisher] [DOI] [Google Scholar]
10. Chinazzi M, Davis JT, Ajelli M, Gioannini C, Litvinova M, Merler S, et al. The effect of travel restrictions on the spread of the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. *Science*. 2020 ;368(6489):395-400. [View at publisher] [DOI] [Google Scholar]
11. Tajedin Mb. Social factors affecting social health: a case study of citizens of district one of tehran social work research. *Social Work Research*. 2017;4(13):1-36. [Persian] [View at publisher] [Google Scholar]
12. Damari B, Nasehei A, Vosough Moghaddam A. What should we do for improving iranian social health? situational analysis, national strategies and role of ministry of health and medical education. *Sjsph*. 2013;11(1):45-58. [Persian] [View at publisher] [Google Scholar]
13. China's Divorce Spike Is a Warning to Rest of Locked-Down World 2020-03-31. Available from: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles>.
14. Divorce of Chinese couples after quarantine 2020. Available from: <http://news.police.ir/News/fullStory>

Abdurrahman Charkazi ¹, Javad Salami ², Ehsan Allah Kalteh ³

1. Environmental Health Research Center, Golestan University of Medical Sciences, Gorgan, Iran
2. Lamerd Nursing School, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran
3. Infectious Disease Research Center, Golestan University of Medical Sciences, Gorgan, Iran

Correspondence: Infectious Disease Research Center, Golestan University of Medical Sciences, Gorgan, Iran.

Tel: +989119613240, E-mail: kalteh270@yahoo.com