

Barriers in Social Distancing during COVID-19 Pandemic – Is a Message for Forced Lockdown?

Ibad Ur Rehman¹, Hamza Rafique Khan², Wafa E Zainab³, Areeba Ahmed⁴, Muhammad Danial Ishaq⁵, Irfan Ullah⁶

¹Department of Internal Medicine, Shifa College of Medicine, Islamabad, Pakistan, ²Department of Internal Medicine, Quaid-E-Azam Medical College, Bahawalpur, Pakistan, ³Department of Internal Medicine, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran, ⁴Department of Internal Medicine, Dow Medical College, Karachi, Pakistan, ⁵Department of Internal Medicine, Allama Iqbal Medical College, Lahore, Pakistan, ⁶Department of Internal Medicine, Kabir Medical College, Peshawar, Pakistan

Address for correspondence: Irfan Ullah, Kabir Medical College, Peshawar, Pakistan.
Phone: +923340968239. E-mail: irfanullahecp2@gmail.com



The world currently faces the predicament of the fast-spreading COVID-19 which as of April 21, 2020, affects 210 countries over the globe.^[1] As the disease started spreading its shadow at an alarmingly rapid rate, new information about the novel coronavirus was extracted and it has been reported to be mainly transmitted directly from person to person, droplet spread by cough or sneezing or by fomites.^[2] Given the highly contagious nature and modes of transmission of the virus, it was recommended for everyone to comply with the concepts of “social distancing” also termed as “physical distancing.” Till an effective vaccine becomes available the most potent preventive measure that can be taken is for people to maintain distance and avoid gatherings. Importance of social distancing has been discussed on many forums and disseminated among the public but the problem arises when the practical implementation does not encompass the entirety of the theoretical concepts. Understanding the barriers that stand between applying social distance in community is imperative if authorities and public health sectors expect a substantial change in incident cases [Table 1]. COVID-19 the epidemic that has engulfed countless lives has recently emerged as a debilitating disease that is not only causing problems to the health departments of the third world countries but to the first world as well. We have tried to identify several barriers that are halting the implementation of social distancing. A study has reported that the economic impact COVID-19 has across industries and countries and it clearly mentions the negative impact it has on service oriented economies.^[3] A study conducted in 2020 has stated the how religious and social gatherings are making life

Table 1: Barriers in effective social distancing

List of main barriers	Subdivision in the barriers
1. Economical aspect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Daily wagers not being able to work ● Travel ban leading to slow trade
2. Religious aspect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Prayer gatherings ● Religious leaders not complying with the government
3. Social aspect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Spread of misinformation through social media ● Care-free attitude
4. Educational aspect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Delay in practical education at the basic and higher level ● Delay in degrees completion ● Loopholes in online education system
5. Health aspect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of information regarding distancing and its benefits

harder for the governments to tackle the disease^[4] and another study has shown how mass gatherings in the Middle East may prove to be a super spreader of the disease.^[5]

The study done in Annals of Medicine has mentioned how rapid and inappropriate reporting regarding cure and treatment of COVID-19 in terms of use of hydroxychloroquine and other antimalarials have not only raised hurdles in the current fight but also has given rise to more complications in the matter.^[6] In terms of social basis, the misinformation spread through social media has resulted in the masses developing care-free attitude and paying no heed to social distancing. On educational ground, many

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universities which were in mid-academic year had to halt their activities, and it would be very difficult for them to cancel the entire academic year, and since the government universities do not have proper online portals so they cannot switch to online education. The last but not the least the health barrier, people are not aware of the health benefits of social distancing, hence, they do not seem to care much about social distancing.

The key to success in prevention of COVID-19 is adjourning to the laws of social distancing and following them religiously.

Studying the measures taken by other countries we see the most robust ones for the implementation of social distancing were made by South Korea by introducing a tracking app which tracks the infected ones and additionally notifies if the quarantined person leave their house, and at the same time alerting those who might have come in contact with them. Moreover that app also sends a text message to the entire area if any person from their locality becomes infected – hence, this allowed them to quickly identify the infected individuals, and isolate them, thus stopping the spread.^[7] Moreover, the study done by Prem *et al.*,^[8] in which they created a simulation model for the current COVID-19 trajectory in Wuhan, China, reported that if social distancing measures are implemented to full extent, the epidemic peak can be flattened – this further cements the importance of social distancing. It is imperative that measures should be taken to stop the spread of misinformation and guide the masses regarding the importance of social distancing. Since the virus spreads by droplet transmission, so without these proper social distancing measures, the burden will increase and it will not be possible to put a stop to this pandemic.

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