

Effects of Social Distancing, Self-Quarantine and Self-Isolation during the COVID-19 Pandemic on People's Well-Being, and How to Cope with It

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ABSTRACT

Lessons are to be learned during the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper discusses similarities and differences of the three social alteration methods: *social distancing*, *self-quarantine*, and *self-isolation*. Although many use them interchangeably, these three approaches only share psychological challenges. This paper argues that they in fact differ in various aspects ranging from social, medical to professional dimensions. Furthermore, this paper offers a practical suggestion, namely *COVID* against COVID-19. The suggested protocol is an acronym for contract other people with care, organization of daily routines which maximize psychological and physical fitness, viral protection practices on a daily basis, and diagnostic tests which can be self-monitored. It is believed that this theoretical discussion would provide both conceptual understanding of the virus itself, practical approaches for mitigating viral spread, as well as recommended daily activities for readers to stay physically healthy and psychologically strong during the pandemic.

Keywords: *COVID-19, social distancing, self-quarantine, self-isolation, viral pandemic*

INTRODUCTION

a. COVID-19 pandemic

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a new virus that abruptly emerged in late 2019. Research has shown that this virus belongs to the genus Betacoronavirus, where Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome

(MERS), diseases that had caused a threatening global pandemic were also classified in (Prompetchara et al., 2020). Coronaviruses are known to be zoonotic, or primarily host animals before being transferred to humans (Rothan & Byrareddy, 2020). It was reported that the disease appeared to have originated in Wuhan, China where wild animals, including bats and snakes, are traded illegally (Guo, et al., 2020). Thus, it was confirmed that the first patient was found in the aforementioned area on December 8, 2019 (Wu, 2020). Within a short period of time, the virus was spread to many countries and continents, starting from destinations near China where Bogoch, et al., (2020) anticipated that Bangkok, Hong Kong, Tokyo and Taipei acquired the highest potential due to the highest commercial air travels from Wuhan. Subsequently, the first confirmed case in Europe and Africa was reported in January, 24 (Spiteri et al., 2020) and February, 14 (Gilbert et al., 2020), respectively. Over the course of time towards April 16, approximately 1,991,562 cases have been confirmed and 130,855 deaths are reported associated with a substantial number of people suspected globally, updated on April, 17th (World Health Organization, 2020).

Regarding its initial transmission to citizens in China, due to frequent contact between people, the disease was gradually spread to other regions around the globe,

causing a fatal outbreak and a sharp rise in the numbers of infected people (Sohrabi et al., 2020). Meanwhile, on March 11, the World Health Organization officially declared that the COVID-19 outbreak is a pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020). Although a number of countries are found to successfully cope with the situations, for instance Singapore (Lee et al., 2020) and Taiwan (Oxford Analytica, 2020), there is still a myriad of them suffering from an exponential increase in confirmed and suspected cases and most importantly, rate of deaths globally. As reported by Mahase (2020), despite the lower fatality rate, COVID-19 has so far resulted in a higher number of deaths than SARS and MERS combined which occurred in 2002-2003 and 2012-2019, respectively.

As a result of the following pandemic, there has been strong cultivations for people to take care of their own health (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). Whereas apparent alteration in terms of people's daily schedule including *social distancing*, *self-isolation* and *self-quarantine* are strictly performed in order to prevent further infection and facilitate health authorities to tackle the disease (Anderson et al., 2020).

b. Three types of social alteration

Emphasizing on the mentioned changes in societies; *social distancing*, *self-isolation* and *self-quarantine*, although a majority of people have already come across these three technical terms, they are found to use them interchangeably while in fact there are distinct differences between them which are suitable for people in different conditions.

According to research, *social distancing* (also known as *physical distancing*) is designed to minimize interactions between people living in a wider community, in which individuals have tendencies to be infectious but have not yet been identified thus not yet isolated (Mack, 2007). Moreover, it is advised for individuals to be apart from one another for

at least 6 feet (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). Due to the disease's ability to be transmitted by respiratory droplets, a certain level of people proximity is required (Wilder-Smith & Freedman, 2020). Therefore, *social distancing* of people to not gather themselves in such areas will reduce transmission.

Self-quarantine is a term for the travelling restriction of people who are presumed to have been exposed to a contagious disease but are not ill, either because they did not become infected or because the disease is still in the incubation period which is approximately 6.4 days, ranging from 2.1 to 11.1 days (Backer et al., 2020). People who are strongly advised to perform *self-quarantine* are those who had direct contact with any infected people, travelled to countries with widespread ongoing transmission and had symptoms including fever and coughing after travelling to crowded areas (World Health Organization, 2020). Quarantine may be applied at the individual or group level which normally involves restriction to their home or a designated facility (Cetron & Landwirth, 2005).

Self-isolation refers to the separation of ill persons with contagious diseases from others for the purpose of protecting non-infected persons. For infected people, *self-isolation* usually occurs in hospital settings under the care of medical professions. Moreover, it is advised for patients to be situated in a private negative pressure room with airborne-droplet-contact precautions in order to prevent transmissions via aerosols (Marchand et al., 2020). For other people who are still not infected, it requires staying apart from the infected ones for the prevention of receiving the disease.

c. Our synthesized summary of the similarities and differences between the three types of social alteration

Overall, people with *social distancing*, *self-isolation* and *self-quarantine* are not used to the situations there are in. Thus, this may lead to

challenges in psychological, health and social aspects. As the three terms obtain similarity and slight differences, the table below depicts our synthesized summary on how people in different situations encounter some variation in each of their feelings, emotions and health.

Main aspects	Social Distancing	Self-quarantine	Self-isolation
Psychological	X	X	X
Social	-	X	X
Medical	-	Possible	X
Professional	-	Possible	X

From the table above, it is considered that people under all three types of social alteration obtain psychological challenges. According to research, for those who are undergoing *social distancing*, it is likely to be associated with feelings of ostracism, abandonment and being neglected (Jiloha, 2020).

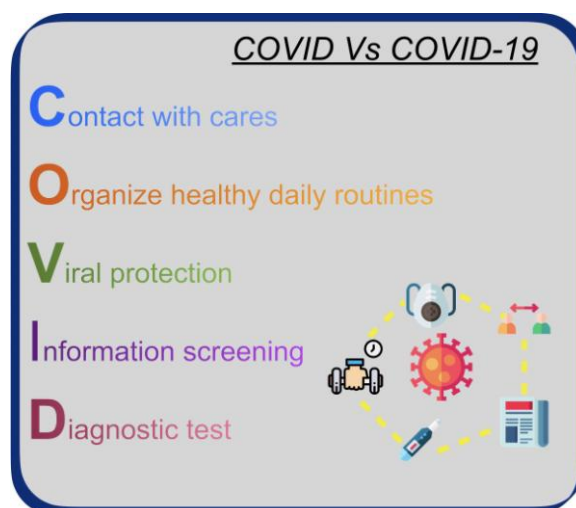
For those in *self-quarantine*, most reviewed studies report negative psychological effects including post-traumatic stress symptoms, confusion, and anger. (Brooks et al., 2020). In addition, Zhang et al., (2020) state social consequences among those in the quarantine period as a stressful phenomenon due to the loss of face-to-face connections and traditional social interventions. In regards to their medical challenges, it is considered possible for people in self-quarantine to later be found infected with the disease (Mizumoto et al., 2020). Likewise, their profession obtains a tendency to be affected due to the alteration in working schedule including working remotely from home (Mossa-Basha, 2020). Although little may affect those whose work can be alternatively done online, it severely affects those who rely on face-to-face contact such as waiters/waitresses, taxi-drivers, people in the entertainment business, among many others. Another ample evidence could be learned from the 2005 pandemic, influenza was found to be a leading cause of the substantial loss in income during quarantine and employment after the quarantine period (Rothstein & Talbott, 2007). Meanwhile,

Hopman et al. (2020) mention that during this particular policy, large gatherings are cancelled.

During *self-isolation*, it is reported that the patient complains of psychiatric symptoms such as depression, insomnia and suicidal (Lim et al., 2020). In terms of social challenges, Remuzzi and Remuzzi (2020) state that in the case where a constant rise in patients is identified, social problems will take on unmanageable dimensions, which are expected to have catastrophic results. Regarding the increase in those being affected and face medical challenges, such demands are believed to create the need to ration medical equipment and interventions (Emanuel et al., 2020). Another apparent challenge is that due to family financial loss, it can have problematic and enduring effects on children and adolescents (Wang et al., 2020)

COVID vs COVID-19

There are many guidelines created to assist people on how they could adjust their various lifestyles to live in the world with an ongoing disease outbreak. In addition, this article provides readers with a simple and straightforward principle by using COVID against COVID-19.



Contact with cares

From the past to this day, contact with families and relatives has always been a part of every person's life. However, when

there is an epidemic occurring, the story changes, people cannot commute to visit their relatives or companions anymore. Furthermore, even families living in the same residence are cautious about one another catching COVID-19. It is advised to stay connected with families, friends, and relatives via technology such as FaceTime, Skype, and other video-based alternatives or social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, to name a few (World Health Organization, 2020). The main reason for this is because it is difficult to recognize who actually has been infected or who is actually free from COVID-19; therefore, it is advised to stay away from others in order to prevent the viral spread (CDC, 2020). Chan (2020) also states that there are a number of symptoms of COVID-19 that previously did not appear to be related to COVID-19 such as fever and/or dry cough. As a result, it has put us behind our ability to identify people with COVID-19 infections. In addition, it is claimed that signs similar to COVID-19 infection may not actually be caused by the virus itself. Unless the test is done at a molecular level, it is likely to define who actually has the infection. Therefore, it is wise to remain curious that anyone we meet may be the source of infection.

Organize healthy daily routines

Most working humans are used to their jam-packed schedule in their everyday life. They are required to work overtime to be able to gain promotions or salaries to pay their hefty bills so they do not have to worry if it is associated with their work. Nowadays, citizens are commanded to stay home, isolated from the communities and workplaces; this may lead to the cause of abundant psychological and physical problems in the long term (World Health Organization, 2020). For example, in Thailand the government orders the closures of public entertainments and services such as pubs, bars, restaurants, and gyms between 22:00 and 04:00 (Chotipol, 2020). It is likely that prolonged homestay could

lead to increased sedentary behaviors; for example, spending excessive amounts of time on social media. Fortunately, the solution is pretty straightforward, organizing healthy daily routines such as various implementable exercises at home such as walking at home or to supermarkets, alternating leg lunges, or chair squats. Exercise has proved to have clear health benefits for both healthy individuals and patients with various diseases as Chen et al. (2020) suggest that the aim should be at least thirty minutes of moderate exercises every day and at least 20 minutes of vigorous exercises every other day. Maintaining regular physical activities and exercises at home is a crucial strategy for maintaining a healthy condition during the COVID-19 pandemic. Turning to consuming healthy foods for beneficial nutrition instead of fast foods is also recommended. Good nutrition is crucial for health especially when the immune system is required to fight against the virus. It is important to both remain physically active and consume healthy foods in order to achieve optimal health (World Health Organization, 2020).

Viral protection

During the pandemic, everyone seeks for ways to prevent them from being infected by the lethal virus. From a top-down level, this includes *social distancing* and other social alterations to ensure that the virus may not infect people within the communities. However, only following the mentioned principle would not be effective enough because there is still a high possibility of people getting infected in the public on a daily basis without routine viral protection to maximize their safety. These protections may include wearing a mask when meeting people, avoiding using hands to touch facial parts such as eyes, nose, and mouth, washing hands for at least twenty seconds using soap (recommended) or alcohol (alternative) regularly, as well as proper protection like practicing respiratory

hygiene and coughing etiquettes (World Health Organization, 2020).

Information screening

In a world full of social media, nothing can be hidden from the public sight, news reporters are fast to publish their article and people are quick to take in the information, sometimes without having a thorough thought on the validity of the news. As a result, numerous fake news roams the internet, fooling the innocent minds of countless residents. This fake news can sometimes be dangerous especially in the circumstances of the pandemic; thus, information screening is much more crucial than ever before. The assumption underlying this is that people in *self-isolation* become increasingly anxious and stressed about the ongoing situation; therefore, the more they consume stressful or fake news, the worse their psychological health will be which will then lead to the decrement of their overall health. The example of information screening is only watching or reading news articles made from trustable and reliable sources: World Health Organization (World Health Organization) and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in general, or the Centre for Covid-19 Situation Administration (CCSA) in Thailand in particular. Although it is essential to stay informed about the current situation of the viral pandemic, it is advised just to be alert but not too alarmed.

Diagnostic test

In the present, governments around the world are arranging curfews (Gostin et al., 2020) and other actions to try to prevent the spread of the virus COVID-19. While infected patients are being treated at local hospitals and temporary healthcare units, the rest suffer from anxiety and cautiousness from the effort of evading the minacious disease. Fortunately, there are various ways to monitor the symptoms that could signify the occurrence of COVID-19 which they can do by themselves. Firstly, it is recommended to check body temperature by

a thermometer for at least two times daily which should remain in the range between 36.0 and 37.5 degree Celsius. The second way is to watch for symptoms such as fever, respiratory illness (cough, sore throat, runny nose, shortness of breath), mild flu-like illness (fatigue, chills, muscle aches), and loss of taste and smell. However, it is advised to attend medical check or consult medical assistance promptly if you develop the mentioned symptoms (Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Local authorities may publish instructions on checking symptoms and reporting information which citizens can follow (CDC,2020).

Specific suggestion for each of Social Alteration

Other than the COVID principle that can be obtained as a general guideline for people in different situations, specific recommendations are also provided in order to particularly cope with the aforementioned stages including *social distancing*, *self-isolation* and *self-quarantine*.

Social Distancing

Between the phase of *social distancing*, it is strongly advised for people to avoid travelling to highly-populated areas due to risk of being infected (Desai & Patel, 2020). However, as people are still allowed to be situated in areas other than their house, if it is requisite to do so, regarding personal issues, prioritizing your hygiene is a necessity. To be more precise, it is crucial for everyone to follow basic suggestions of prioritizing personal hygiene including hand-washing whenever possible, using alcohol to clean substances that are touched, use surgical face masks rationally when exposed to high-risk areas (Feng et al., 2020) and undergoing cough etiquette (Wolff, 2020).

Self-quarantine

During the *self-quarantine* period, primarily monitoring yourselves to check if COVID-19 symptoms are expressed is a

must. If that is the case, it ought to be followed by consulting your medical assistant and query for further instructions. It is also vital to subsequently continue to check whether new or worsening symptoms either with mental or overall health are found. Nevertheless, keeping your stress levels low and maintaining good mental health should be prioritized during this disruptive period (World Health Organization, 2020). Finally, students and working adults can still pursue their academic or business interests and sharpen their skills by online learning courses on the internet which also provide certificates for learners.

Self-isolation

For the infected people in *self-isolation*, it is mandatory to keep away from the public to prevent further infections to others. They are counseled to continuously seek medical assistance and stay in touch with doctors because the consequences from the severity of the virus can be fatal. Ensure to get help and support if breathing difficulty or other emergency warning signs are found (CDC, 2020). Furthermore, they are also required to resume personal treatments and medications as they have to maintain a healthy condition in order to be cured (Chen et al., 2020). Lastly, it is important to remind that any course of actions that exercise selfishness should be refrained in order to prevent the possibility of spreading the disease to other innocent people. Therefore, everyone should at least contribute to the society by being honest and truthful to healthcare providers to get cured from the disease so the whole can survive the pandemic.

CONCLUSION

Coronavirus, a zoonotic disease that has emerged in late 2019 and has rapidly spread throughout the globe, infecting millions of people and obtaining the tendency of death increases. Regarding its frequent transmission, it has abruptly been announced as a pandemic and a number of

social alterations are applied to a multitude of countries in order to prevent further spread and alleviate the situation, including *social distancing*, *self-quarantine* and *self-isolation*. Although, these alterations share similarity and are often used interchangeably, slight differences are present and should be recognized for the purpose of effectively tackling the disease. In this review, the three terms are thoroughly described associated with a synthesized explanation as to how these encountered situations affect people in different aspects. A principle called “COVID” is later established which elaborate guidelines for adjusting personal lifestyles to cope with the disease. Specific suggestions are also provided for those undergoing each of the aforementioned social alterations, assisting them to safely pass through this stressful occurrence.

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