

Social Impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Outbreak in Algeria

التأثير الاجتماعي لتفشي فيروس كورونا (COVID-19) في الجزائر

L'impact Social de l'épidémie de Coronavirus (COVID-19) en Algérie

LAMRAOUI, Zakia*¹

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ملخص:

أسفرت جائحة COVID-19 عن أزيد من 21355 حالة مؤكدة و 1052 حالة وفاة في الجزائر، حتى وقت كتابة هذا المقال. وقد نفذت الحكومة الجزائرية تدابير مختلفة للحد من تفشي الفيروس؛ مثل: الحجر الصحي، التباعد الاجتماعي، الحجر المنزلي، الإغلاق الكلي وحظر التجول، حظر التجمعات العامة، إغلاق الحدود وتقييد الرحلات الجوية. استجابة لهذا التفشي، تصف هذه الورقة التأثير الاجتماعي لـ COVID-19 على المجتمع. ومن بين التأثيرات الرئيسية نجد انتشار العنف المنزلي، تفشي الفقر، توقف التعليم وإلغاء الصلوات الجماعية مثل صلاة الجمعة والتراويح. أخيراً، يمكننا القول إن تفشي فيروس كورونا في الجزائر يمكن أن يخلق انفصلاً اجتماعياً ناتجاً عن إجراءات التباعد الاجتماعي والسلوك الأناني في حالات الذعر مثل الإفراط في شراء المواد الغذائية التي يمكن أن تضر بالتماسك الاجتماعي للمجتمع بشكل عام.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكوفيد-19؛ التأثير الاجتماعي؛ الحجر الصحي؛ التباعد الاجتماعي؛ الحجر المنزلي

Abstract:

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in over 21,355 confirmed cases and over 1052 deaths in Algeria, at the time of writing. The Algerian government has implemented various measures to limit the outbreak of the virus. Such as: quarantine, social distancing, home confinement, Lockdown and curfew, Ban all public gatherings, and close borders and restrict flights. In response to this outbreak, this paper describes the social impact of COVID-19 on society. The main effects are the spread of domestic violence, the widespread poverty, the education disruption, and the cancellation of the collective prayers such as Friday and Taraweeh ones. Finally, we can say that the Coronavirus outbreak in Algeria can create social separation resulting from social distancing measures and selfish behavior in panic situations such as over buying of food items that can harm the social cohesion of society in general.

Keywords: COVID-19; social impact; quarantine; social distancing; home confinement

Résumé :

La pandémie COVID-19 a entraîné plus de 21 355 cas confirmés et plus de 1052 décès en Algérie, au moment de la rédaction de cet article. Le gouvernement algérien a mis en place diverses mesures pour réduire la propagation du virus. Tels que: quarantaine, éloignement social, confinement à domicile, et couvre-feu, interdire tous les rassemblements publics, fermer les frontières et restreindre les vols. En réponse à cette épidémie, cet article décrit l'impact social du COVID-19 sur la société. Les principaux effets sont la propagation de la violence domestique, la pauvreté généralisée, la perturbation de l'éducation et l'annulation des prières collectives telles que celles du vendredi et du Taraweeh. Enfin, nous pouvons dire que l'épidémie de coronavirus en Algérie peut créer une séparation sociale résultant de mesures de l'éloignement social et de comportements

* Corresponding author.

¹ العراوي زكية¹, larbi ben m'hidi university of oum el bouaghi : Algeria, lamraoui.zakia@univ-ueb.dz

égoïstes dans des situations de panique telles que l'achat excessif de produits alimentaires qui peuvent nuire à la cohésion sociale de la société en général.

Mots clés: COVID-19; l'impact social; quarantaine; éloignement social; confinement à domicile

Introduction

Health is fundamental to a prosperous productive society, whereas panic and illness can stifle production, consumption, recreation, travel, and overall well-being. Health disasters such as the rise of COVID-19 not only have global health impacts but also wide-ranging socioeconomic disruptions (Evans, 2020, p. 6).

The first COVID-19 case was found close to a seafood market in Wuhan city, China, on December 2019. It started spreading in China and then moved all over the world through travelers in early 2020. This sudden outbreak of Coronavirus has made big problems at international and national level, especially health concerns.

The outbreak of COVID-19 is affecting all segments of the Algerian population especially vulnerable one including people living in poverty, homeless people, elderly persons, persons with chronic diseases, and pregnant women .Because there is no treatment yet of this disease, prevention and rational social policy are the best options. "If the social crisis caused by coronavirus is not properly addressed through social policy, the COVID-19 pandemic may also increase inequality, exclusion, discrimination and global unemployment... in the medium and long term" (Ozili, 2020).

According to the President of the Republic of Algeria, the COVID-19 pandemic is an issue of "health safety" and "national security", and the State is completely aware of the sensitive crisis and is concerned with the respect of rights and freedoms as much as it assumes its responsibility in protecting people and property. However, the State cannot, alone, ward of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, if people do not satisfy their responsibility to protect themselves and do not conscientiously fulfill with preventive measures and hygiene rules. The State's efforts will remain imperfect, without the discipline, cohesion and understanding of the population, in particular through declaring suspicious human cases to decrease infection and contamination risks (Boukhatem, 2020, p. 3).

The main social impact of the Coronavirus outbreak in Algeria is to create social separation resulting from social distancing measures and selfish behavior in panic situations such as over buying of food items that can harm the social cohesion of society in general. This particular outbreak of Coronavirus revealed how a biological crisis can be transformed to a sociological subject.

1- COVID – 19 in Algeria: First Cases and the Outbreak

Algeria was one of three African countries at highest importation risk from China (Gilbert, 2020, p. 873). WHO considered Algeria as a part of the 13 top priority countries on the basis of their direct links and volume of travel to China (Gilbert, 2020, p. 875). However, the virus was confirmed to have appeared in February 2020, and the first case was an Italian man who arrived on February 17 to Algeria. He tested positive on February 25, in Ouargla province in the south of the country. This case has been well isolated and he was deported to his country via special flight without anyone being infected.

The true starting point of the epidemic in Algeria is reported on March 1 of two national citizens who came from France in the province of Blida (northern Algeria) which became the

epicenter of the epidemic (Lounis M. , 2020a, p. 1). Blida was a first outbreak and the origin of COVID-19 epidemic in Algeria, because since then, a COVID-19 outbreak has started in this province. Other provinces also started to be affected by different imported origins especially in provinces of Algiers, Oran, Setif, Bejaia, Tipaza, Ain Defla, Tizi Ouzou, Skikda and Soukahras. On April 15, 47 out of 48 provinces has recorded at least one positive case (Lounis M. , 2020b, p. 2). Since May 1, all the 48 provinces of Algeria were affected with a number varying from 2 to 865 of positive cases (Lounis M. , 2020a, p. 1).

On March 23, as a strategy implementation's date, from that day onwards, the main Algerian outbreak in Blida has been placed under full lockdown, and the other affected regions under partial containment (Hamidouche, 2020, p. 4).

At the time of writing, July 16, Algeria confirmed 21,355 cases of COVID-19 and 1052 COVID-19 related deaths. Geographically, the highest number of cases is reported in the north of Algeria, especially in the capital; Algiers (2074 cases), in its border the province of Blida (2049 cases), in the North eastern Setif (2011 cases), and in the North western Oran (1493 cases). The numbers in some provinces start to become alarming ; such as Constantine (832 cases) and Batna (753 cases), Tipaza (663 cases), Bejaia (521 cases), Tlemcen (495 cases) Ain Defla (442 cases), Tiaret (417 cases), Tizi Ouzou (416 cases), Khenchela (396 cases), Medea (378 cases), M'sila (373 cases), Boumerdes (363 cases), Annaba (346 cases), Oum El Bouaghi (343 cases), Bouira (336 cases), Tebessa (335 cases), Bordj Bou Arreridj (290 cases), Mascara (248 cases), Skikda (243 cases).

In some provinces, the numbers appear to be low compared to the previous ones; such as Tissemsilt (206 cases), Mostaganem (200 cases), Mila (198 cases), Guelma (194 cases), Sidi Bel Abbes (187 cases), Ain Temouchent (178 cases), Souk Ahras (171 cases), Jijel (159 cases), Relizane (113 cases), Chelef (104 cases), El Taref (79 cases), and Saida (51 cases).

Another outbreak of the disease is observed in the south, especially in the province of Ouargla (709 cases), Biskra (561 cases), El Oued (464 cases), Djelfa (441 cases), Laghouat (365 cases), Ghardaia (285 cases), Adrar (252 cases), Bechar (208 cases), El Bayadh (120 cases), Naama (832 cases), Tamenghasset (97 cases), Illizi (50 cases), and Tindouf (28 cases) (<http://covid19.sante.gov.dz/carte/>).

2- The Preventive and Control Measures and Strategies

Before the apparition of the disease in the country, Algeria like other countries has underestimated the gravity of this pandemic as not much was done to prevent it. The only action taken was the flight cancellation to china by the national airline company on February 3, 2020 (Lounis M. , 2020b, p. 2).

Since the number of the positive cases started to become alarming, the Algerian government has implemented various measures to limit the outbreak of the virus. Such as: quarantine, Social distancing or physical distancing, home confinement, Lockdown and curfew, Ban all public gatherings, and close borders and restrict flights.

2-1- Quarantine

Screening was introduced at all entry points including airports in March. Algerian citizens returning to Algeria from abroad were put under mandatory 14-day quarantine in hotels. “The isolation period was for all repatriated citizens at containment centers with medical care. A number of private and public hotel establishments were prepared to host all repatriated citizens” (Lounis M. , 2020b, p. 3).

In order to stop the outbreak of the COVID -19, people are being advised to self-isolate or to quarantine; they leave their homes only for getting food or for work with a special permit. By this way the virus can be trapped.

2-2- Social distancing or physical distancing

The spread of virus is mainly through person to person, between people who are in close contact with one another (Within about 6 feet) through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs (Narware, 2020, p. 40). In the absence of a vaccine, one of the most vital strategies for slowing the pandemic is social distancing (Bavel, et al., 2020, p. 466). People must be physically separated from each other. In this case, social media can play a great role in maintaining social relations.

2-3- home confinement

Several hospitals have reached maximal capacity, they were overcrowded with patients. So, Algerian authorities imposed home confinement as a part of the social distancing measures in the fight against the coronavirus. Partial and total confinement measures were imposed on some provinces that have reported a highest number of infected cases.

On March 23, with a number of 230 cases (125 in Blida) and 17 deaths, the Algerian authorities ordered a total lockdown of the province of Blida for 10 days, and then it was further extended by authorities, and a partial lockdown of the capital Algiers from 7.00 PM to 7.00 AM. On March 28, the partial lockdown procedures have been extended to 9 provinces: Batna, Tizi Ouzou, Setif, Constantine, Medea, Oran, Boumerdes, El Oued and Tipaza.

On April 2, the same measure was extended to 4 other provinces, Ain Defla, Bejaia, Bordj Bou Arreridj and Mostaganem. On April 4, the partial lockdown was extended to all provinces of Algeria from 3.00 PM to 7.00 AM.

2-4- Lockdown and curfew

The lockdown policy was enforced in Algeria to isolate the virus. Lockdowns were initially adopted to protect vulnerable people such as pregnant women, families with children, older adults and disabled people and were later extended to a nationwide lockdown.

The nationwide lockdown and curfew were enforced by the police; only individuals leaving home with a special permit are allowed to go to their workplace. Algeria imposed a two-week lockdown – all of which were further extended by the authorities. The lockdowns includes: schools and universities closure, workplace closure, public transportation closure, shops closure (except food shops), restaurants and cafes closure, markets closure, shopping malls closure, airports closure, borders closure and mosques closure.

Because of the rapid increasing in numbers of infected cases which became alarming, a curfew has been in effect in 29 of Algeria’s 48 provinces from 8pm to 5am, and all private vehicle travel between the 29 provinces has been prohibited for one week as of July 10, then it was further

extended by authorities for more ten days to prevent further province-to-province transmission. Also all public transportation was prohibited in the weekends until further notice. These 29 provinces are: the capital Algiers and its borders Boumerdes, Bouira, Tipaza, Blida and Medea. In the east: Souk Ahras Batna, Oum El Bouaghi, Khenchela Constantine, Bordj Bou Arreridj Setif, Annaba and Bejaia. In the west: Tissemsilt, Mascara, Relizane, Chlef, Sidi Bel Abbes and Oran. In the middle of the country: Djelfa, M'sila and Laghouat. In the south: Biskra, Ouargla, Bechar, Adrar and El Oued (<http://covid19.sante.gov.dz/carte/>).

2-5- Ban all public gatherings

COVID-19 is spread from person to person through direct contact. Thus, the spread of respiratory illnesses during the mass gathering is a major public health concerns with the potential of distribution of these infectious diseases (Chakraborty & Maity, 2020, p. 5) On march 10, the Algerian authorities announced the postpone of all types of cultural, social, scientific, religious, and political public gathering events all over the country in order to limit social interaction; Such as entertainment events, sports events, scientific conferences, business meetings, and social events; especially weddings and funerals which are proved to be the main cause of transmission between relatives.

2-6- close borders and restrict flights

Regarding movement restriction; on the international level, flights with China, Italy, Morocco and France have been restricted on February 3rd, 9th, 12th and 15th, 2020, respectively. Then, all land borders and air routes were suspended as of March 17, 2020, except aircraft carrying goods. Locally, all public transport means including rail traffic were suspended on March 22, 2020. In order to avoid cases importations and stem SARS-CoV-2 spread, a quarantine of 14 days in containment centers have been imposed on Algerian nationals repatriated since March 18, 2020 (Hamidouche, 2020, p. 4).

3- social impact of coronavirus on society

The outbreak of COVID-19 has become a clinical threat to the healthcare workers worldwide. The WHO had warned that countries with poor healthcare systems may not be able to cope with the coronavirus outbreak with many in Africa being of particular concern (Ozili, 2020). The health care infrastructure determines the quality of health services provided at the time of the epidemic. In Algeria, the health system was ill-prepared to deal with the coronavirus. There was shortage in medicines, sanitizers, masks and protective clothing for doctors and nurses. This has endangered the lives of many medical staff. In these circumstances, the epidemic spread rapidly, which led the authorities to take many measures to stop this outbreak. These measures had negative social effects on the individual and society.

3-1- domestic violence

The social effects of the pandemic also extend to the inside of our homes, where many people find themselves in sudden forced proximity with their immediate family. People subject to quarantine or self-isolation are at risk for confusion and anger, emotional tendencies that can be explosive when multiple household members simultaneously endure them for weeks or months on end. Indeed, some studies suggest that forced proximity is a risk factor for aggression and domestic violence (Bavel, et al., 2020, p. 466).

For most children, home represents a source of security and safety. But for a minority, the opposite is tragically the case. Violence by caregivers is the most common form of violence experienced by children. Children are also often witnesses to domestic violence against women... Such acts of violence are more likely to occur while families are confined at home and experiencing intense stress and anxiety (United Nations, 2020a, p. 10).

Lockdown and social distancing measures to prevent spread of COVID-19 have heightened fears of increasing levels of domestic violence, which includes physical, emotional and sexual abuse... The concentrated time spent in lockdown means that vulnerable people are more exposed to abuse and it is more difficult for them to seek help (Nicola, et al., 2020, p. 190).

3-2- poverty

Countries with a high number of poor people or people living close to the poverty line are at high risk in terms of both loss of lives and loss of livelihoods if governments do not urgently find a way of providing targeted relief and ensure access to essential services (United Nations, 2020b, p. 2).

The social distancing policy caused hunger to many poor households because of job lost and income disruption. Algerian authorities have used large public funds to mitigate the effects of the coronavirus pandemic by announcing a granting of 10,000 dinars to the poor and those affected by the quarantine.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) has warned that COVID-19 threatens the livelihoods of 1.6 billion workers in the informal economy- nearly half the global workforce. In the first month of the crisis it is estimated that informal workers lost 60% of their income. Workers in Africa and the Americas have been hit the hardest with an 81% reduction in both regions (United Nations, 2020b, p. 2).

Algerian authorities should design Legislations and programs to support those in need especially the poorest who may not survive a health or economic crisis. For example, homeless people are unable to find safe shelter and are highly exposed to the danger of coronavirus. Workers in the informal sector, who earn low wages, people without access to running water and refugees will also suffer from both the coronavirus pandemic and hunger.

3-3- education

The Algerian government temporarily closed all educational institutions (schools and universities) starting from March 13 as a precautionary measure, in an attempt to contain the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Ministry of Higher Education recommended the use of distance learning programs and the open educational platforms that universities can use to reach learners remotely and reduce education disruption. Through this technology, universities succeeded in publishing lectures. However, the problem remains with regard to supervised work and practical works that in some disciplines need physical presence in laboratories. Also students living in regions with limited infrastructure and no access to internet are particularly impacted.

In addition, the absence of online learning platform in educational institutions, schools, in addition to the young age of the learner makes the possibility of distance education impossible. This led to the suspension of studies for schools, the cancellation of the remainder of the annual program,

in addition to postpone and reschedule of some official exams and the reduction of the success average.

3-4- religion

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted religion in various ways, including the closing of mosques and the cancellation of the collective prayers such as Friday and Taraweeh ones.

On March 17, the minister of Religious Affairs and Wakfs ordered the closing of all mosques and cult places and the suspension of all collective prayers, even the weekly Friday Prayer. Also the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has provisionally banned Umrah and pilgrimage.

Algerian authorities announced on Thursday, April 23, that they would be easing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) lockdown and restrictive measures in particular areas from Friday, April 24, the first day of Ramadan. According to reports, the government agreed that the full lockdown which has been in place in Blida province since Monday, March 30, will be lifted and replaced with a nighttime curfew. The curfew will be observed from 14:00 to 07:00. Further, the nighttime curfew currently in place in the nine provinces of Algiers, Oran, Bejaia, Setif, Tizi Ouzou, Tipaza, Tlemcen, Ain Defla, and Medea, has been shortened to run from 17:00 to 07:00. Reports indicate that the curfew observed in the other provinces of the country between 19:00 to 07:00 will remain place without change (Garda World, 2020).

These measures were taken in order to control travel and gathering around Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr. These are two important religious occasions that the Algerians used to meet. In Ramadan, people gather in huge numbers in mosques for Taraweeh prayers, and friends and relatives gather at home at night. Eid al-Fitr is also an occasion for a meeting between relatives, acquaintances, neighbors and friends to exchange congratulations.

Conclusion:

This article discussed the social effects of coronavirus on Algerian society. It reveals that the coronavirus outbreak in Algeria affected the social and economic well-being of most citizens. We emphasize that the prevention is very important issue to control COVID-19 in the absence of vaccines. Therefore, all persons should follow the preventive measures strictly, and collective efforts of both public and government are needed.

The coronavirus outbreak in Algeria has many social effects. First, the spread of domestic violence; the vulnerable people are more exposed to abuse and it is more difficult for them to seek help because of the home confinement. Second, the social distancing policy caused hunger to many poor households because of job lost and income disruption which has led to widespread poverty. Third, education disruption because of the closure of all educational institutions (schools and universities). Fifth, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted religion in various ways, including the closing of mosques and the cancellation of the collective prayers such as Friday and Taraweeh ones. Finally, we can say that the Coronavirus outbreak in Algeria can create social separation resulting from social distancing measures and selfish behavior in panic situations such as over buying of food items that can harm the social cohesion of society in general.

As recommendations, we suggest the followings:

- Develop and reinforce capacities and infrastructures of health systems to withstand a public health crisis.
- Protecting health services and systems during the crisis by providing hospitals with the necessary protective equipment.
- Legislations and programs should be designed to support those in need especially the poorest who may not survive a health or economic crisis.
- Educate our new generation for science and technology to fight against any such disaster in future.
- Exploiting information and communication technology to support and develop distance education in schools and universities.
- Use of social media in maintaining social relationships.

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