

## Why the Phrase 'Social Distancing' is Not Appropriate to Use during COVID-19 Pandemic?

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The coronavirus widely accepted as having originated in and spread from Wuhan, China, is considered by the World Health Organization (WHO) to be a severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2, or SARS-CoV-2 [1,2]. Till February 2020, China was the only country mainly affected by Covid-19. Starting from the beginning of March it started to spread rapidly to South Korea, in the second week of March cases increased rapidly to Italy and Spain including other European countries and in the third week of March to the United States and other countries too [3]. On 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020, WHO declares COVID-19 outbreaks of a pandemic [4,5]. As of 18<sup>th</sup> July 2020, there have been more than 14 million confirmed cases COVID-19, with 601 thousand deaths and more than 8.5 million recovered [6]. COVID-19 had affected both developed and developing countries too [2,6].

One of the phrases that is widely being used amid this pandemic is 'Social Distancing'. It is unbelievable to realize a few months ago, most of us did not know what social distancing actually was. But the fear that arises is that the term is misleading and can be counterproductive. All the health professionals have been urging us to maintain a good social distance with everyone. Yes, the suggestion is good but is the phrase an appropriate one, and most importantly is it conveying a healthy message to us, social beings who can't survive without other beings? Magnifying the phrase, 'Social Distancing' means not socializing, but 'Physical Distancing' means beings physically apart. One thing that we need to realize is that the awareness to urging people to stay at home isn't about breaking contact with their friends and family-but make sure that they maintain a good physical distance to play their part to stop the spread of the virus. In fact, social ties are vital in getting through such tough times. One thing that is shocking is Physical distance can be measured and easily implemented, while 'social distance' is a measure of the distance across social boundaries.

"Stay at home and when out, remain physically apart," is an essential message, Cormac Russell says, "one that we must all take on-board". But to stay well during this time, people will need to actively seek ways to stay social [7]. "Some people think the [term] social distancing literally sounds like, 'If I had friendships before, it's time to hunker down. Or, if I were a member of a church or synagogue, it's time to pray by myself' Aldrich said. "But the COVID-19 order is going to be around for a while and we need to feel connected" [8]. Isn't that completely different and confusing message?

We, being social beings it is not easy for us to be socially distant as it goes against our nature. In fact, we are physically distant from each other, nevertheless, we are in many ways becoming closer and more socially together to one another at this time. It has also given us time to get in touch with people with whom we lost our touch. The concept of "social distancing" was developed to improve the understanding of the processes of acceptance and alienation between groups of people belonging to different groups, but regularly coming into contact with each other [9]. So, it clearly shows that it is not a phrase to be used in this situation. How about rather using the phrase 'Physical Distancing'? Moreover, the social context must not be neglected, and it is clear that, at the same time as distancing physically from one another, we must strive strongly to preserve or strengthen social solidarity [9]. Even WHO accepts that it suggests people be 3m apart physically, but the social connection is necessary to only to combat, but also to get out and prosper from this tough unprecedented times "Social distancing makes it sound like people should stop communicating with one another, while instead, we should be preserving as

much community as we can even while we keep our physical distance from one another," Jeremy Freese, professor of sociology at Stanford University in the United States, told Al Jazeera [10].

It would be much more suitable to use the phrase "physical distancing", since, we still (despite of being isolated physically) socialize through an online platform with our loved ones and well-wishers. Since we are in this for a substantial time now, it seems to be utterly necessary to make it clearer what we need to do: "stay apart, but stay nicely connected". Thus, The term social distancing is misleading because in times like these we need to stay emotionally and socially connected and at the same time to avoid the fear created by COVID-19. 11 Yes, we need to maintain physical distance to protect everyone's physical wellbeing, but mental wellbeing is cannot be neglected, and social isolation is by no means good for mental wellbeing.

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