

Can Behavioral Science Help Us Fight COVID-19

Dear Editor,

Coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) has become a pandemic, saturating the world's health systems. Governments have implemented many actions to fight with the pandemic; in some cases they took effect and in others they did not. Government efforts such as quarantine and social distancing worked decreasing the number of infected with COVID-19. In some countries, such as Peru, people did not fully comply with quarantine or distancing for social reasons. We need more tools to help us with the same goal of defeating the pandemic. Implement measures in a large-scale population can be difficult and change the behavior of the population to fully comply with the quarantine. Recommendations of epidemiologists and government require to use social and behavioral sciences to align. We need to reduce the peak of the epidemic until the health system reaches its maximum usability.^[1] The purpose of this letter was to provide a tool that can be used in the fight with COVID-19 from the medical sciences.

When we talk about a great scale such as COVID-19 pandemic, individual and collective behavior can reduce the spread and transmission of the virus (SARS-CoV-2) and save lives.^[1] The behavioral sciences can be applied in the formulation of policies for the solution of problems by the government or international organizations.^[2] In people who are infected with COVID-19, this can be difficult to achieve. Loneliness is associated with a high risk of negative mental health, including problems such as depression and anxiety effect of self-isolation.^[3] In these cases, for example, authorities need to provide support and advice for people in isolation; the evidence for negative mental health is strong.^[4] Social supports can reduce the negative psychological effects of self-isolation, reducing the disincentive to isolate.^[5] In Peru, government applies communications techniques to change the behavior of the Peruvian population (send a massive text message, communications in the social network, and emotive speeches of the president). The need for large-scale behavior change is evident. A concept use in communication is Social Proof; people's behavior is influenced by what they perceive what others do or think. Another concept is Framing Effect; the way information is presented to us tends to influence our perception and decision-making. We also need information, regulation, and financial incentives. The example shows that the intersection of psychology and design can be a powerful tool for behavior change.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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