

## ‘Physical Distancing’ is Appropriate than ‘Social Distancing’ during COVID-19 Pandemic

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### INTRODUCTION

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.<sup>1,2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> On 11th March 2020, WHO declares COVID-19 outbreaks of a pandemic.<sup>4,5</sup> As of 12th August 2020, there have been more than 21 million confirmed cases COVID-19, with 741 thousand deaths and more than 13.3 million recovered.<sup>6</sup> COVID-19 had affected both developed and developing countries too.<sup>2,6</sup>

Physical distancing means keeping our distance from one another and limiting activities outside the home. When outside your home, it means staying at least 2 metres (or 6 feet) away from other people whenever possible. According to WHO physical distancing helps limit the spread of COVID-19- this means we keep a distance of at least 1m from each other and avoid spending time in crowd or in groups.<sup>7</sup> 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.

### Case History

Recently a Nepali medical doctor who was identified COVID-19 positive and was in quarantine in his own house in Chitwan District of Nepal was abused by his own community people. A group of his own community people gathered with a flex banner written “House of COVID-19 infected” and tried to hang in his house fence. Later the doctor disseminated this fact writing on social media on his wall of Facebook. He was writing instead of providing social support to him people tried to socially isolate to his family. No one should be victims of such a type of activities.

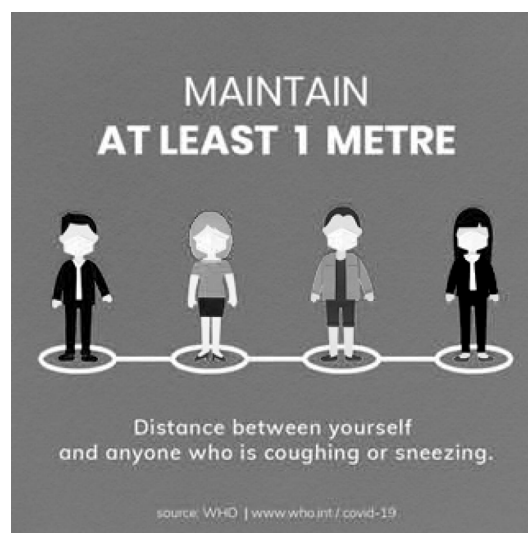
### DISCUSSION

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? If we magnify 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 — b u t 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. But to stay well during this time, people



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will need to actively seek ways to stay social.<sup>8</sup> 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 religious organizations, it's time to pray by myself. But the COVID-19 pandemic is going to be around for a while, and we need to feel connected.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> So, it clearly shows that it is not a phase 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.<sup>10</sup> We should be preserving as much community as we can even while we keep our physical distance from one another.<sup>11</sup>

Fear of stigma hampered contacting tracing in Nepal. People do not want to associate themselves with the coronavirus. "They are ashamed and try to hide their condition"-Fear of being ostracised and abused. This is a serious issue, "Infected people are afraid of what others say or do". A lot of people seem to have misinformed about COVID-19. If someone is infected, they see it as the person's fault. There is a clear lack of accurate information in the public about this disease and at the same time they want to avoid the fear created by COVID-19.<sup>12,13</sup>

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. We need to maintain physical distance to protect everyone's physical wellbeing, but mental wellbeing cannot be neglected, and social isolation is by no means good for mental wellbeing.

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