



## Better Understanding of Norm-breaking Behaviors During the Coronavirus Crisis in Iran Using the Causal Layered Analysis (CLA)

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### Dear editor,

On February 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially announced the disease caused by the novel coronavirus 2019 as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Due to the rapid transmission of the disease, the outbreak of COVID-19 was unique, creating an emergency in global health in less than few months, which came as a shock to the international community, especially health policymakers across the world (1). In Iran, the coronavirus was officially confirmed on February 20, 2020. In mid-March, Iranian health officials announced that the virus had spread to almost all the provinces of the country, causing a pandemic in these areas (2).

Due to the failure in discovering the coronavirus vaccine and treatment, different countries have adopted disease control strategies, including patient diagnosis and tracking, blocking epidemic areas, quarantine, social distancing, environmental measures, and personal protection, in order to reduce the spread of this new disease and control the disease as soon as possible (3). In March, Iranian health officials proposed and implemented a social distancing plan in the form of closing all educational centers, some offices, and crowded areas, and social distancing was intensified in the following weeks. During Nowruz holidays, restrictions on intercity travel were imposed as well (4). Since the Nowruz holidays was a good opportunity for most Iranians to travel, a significant number of people traveled during Nowruz holidays despite recommendations and traffic control. The condition led to the widespread outbreak of the virus in some of the most tourist-friendly provinces of Iran, including the Northern provinces.

Studies have shown that the degree of quarantine has a great impact on the process of epidemics. As the rate of quarantine increases, the spread of a disease decline (5, 6). Evidently, if people do not adhere to quarantine, the risk of virus transmission will increase dramatically. Therefore, the effectiveness of COVID-19 control measures largely depends on the behavior of each citizen within the community. Coronavirus has a high degree of uncertainty, and we may experience complicated and dangerous conditions unexpectedly. Hence, careful analysis of past society behaviors and trying to improve it, will help to provide a more appropriate response in the future.

Studying and understanding the community is an important part of the literature on behavior modification policies. It is quite difficult to make policies and legislation for human behavior as there is inadequate knowledge of human behavior and its roots (7). In order to persuade people to comply with the current quarantine, it is essential to recognize the root causes of social behaviors and preferences in compliance and non-compliance with the quarantine, so that appropriate solutions could be provided. An appropriate tool for this purpose is the causal layered analysis (CLA), which enables the deep understanding of the underlying factors of various issues, as well as the deconstruction of different social phenomena. Furthermore, this approach provides more comprehensive, in-depth, and effective insights in the pursuit of long-term public policies (7).

CLA is a future research method that determines the reasons for the formation of social realities in the four layers of litany, social causes, discourse/worldview, and metaphor/myth. CLA is a theory of knowledge and an approach to creating more efficient policies and strategies

(8). Litany is the most superficial layer in this method, which represents the accepted views of reality. The second level pertains to social causes and represents a systematic perspective. On the third level, argumentative assumptions are explored, which are based on worldviews and ideologies and are considered unconscious. In the fourth layer, we look for the metaphors and myths that are deeply ingrained into our subconscious (7). Behind every empirical problem (litany), there is a social and cultural context, and behind each context, there is a discourse and a worldview that is based on myths (8).

In times of crisis, people often have different patterns of behavior, ranging from negative selfishness to self-sacrifice. Some people think only of their own survival, even at the cost of destroying others; such example is the hoarders of personal protective equipment in the current pandemic. Meanwhile, some people tend to sacrifice their own wellbeing for the salvation of the society. In any case, the society cannot be regarded as merely black and white as it operates within a gray spectrum. However, abnormal behaviors are usually more noticeable in crises and have more consequences.

In the CLA approach, abnormal behaviors are modified in the society by observing the underlying factors. The society's response to its critical problems has certain historical, cultural, and political roots, through which the causes of reactions and their formation could be identified (8).

While the Iranian community deals with the coronavirus crisis, factors such as the financial needs of some sections of the society, receiving false information, and the carelessness of some personality types are primarily regarded as the main causes of inappropriate behaviors and their inconsistency with social norms. However, these reasons only scratch the surface, and it seems that a deeper insight into the living conditions of the community is required. Most importantly, the behavioral patterns of people must be thoroughly studied during a crisis for adequate knowledge in this regard.

Today, mistrust is a deeper cause of the confusion in the mind and actions of the people in the community. Historically, Iran has been severely attacked by foreigners, and these numerous attacks have led to the formation of a new perspective toward communication with others. The institutionalization of ideas embodying as "Don't rock the boat, don't make waves." indicates that mistrust has been instilled in the people of the society, causing them to experience a form of cognitive suspension and distrust that is rooted in genetic inheritance. Moreover, ideas such as "All men think all men are mortal, but themselves." signify indifference to events, which implies the preference of personal interests over collective interests in times of crisis.

The behaviors of people in the society during crisis

have deep causal roots, which must be discovered so as to better respond to crises. In order to change the mentality and behavior of the public, it is critical to consider the deep layers of behavior and adopt long-term strategies in this regard; these changes require time and patience. The CLA approach enables planners to integrate and modify social behaviors and inculcate social control.

## Footnotes

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