Social Distancing and Flattening the Curve

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Abstract

The general topic of my paper is social distancing and virus prevention. My main inquiry question is how does social distancing flatten the curve and prevent viruses from spreading. My main arguments include: Statistics on other diseases that used social distancing (Spanish Flu etc.) and how effective it was, Explaining what exactly social distancing and flattening the curve means, and why these things are important in preventing a massive pandemic. My conclusion is simple, the less people you come into contact with during your everyday life the less likely you will get sick and put other people at risk from catching the disease.

Social Distancing and Flattening the Curve

During this global pandemic we are hearing the term “social distancing” now more than ever. Everytime you turn on the news or go on social media it is all you hear about. Just because we hear it all the time that does not mean that we actually know what social distancing actually means. We need to understand what social distancing means in order to effectively execute it so “Social distancing, also called “physical distancing,” means keeping space between yourself and other people outside of your home.” (“Social Distancing, Quarantine, and Isolation”, 2020). That makes things more specific however how can we properly socially distance? Well for starters you should stay at least six feet apart from people who are not living with you. Gathering in groups and massive crowds is completely forbidden and breaks the guidelines to social distancing. Many people think social distancing is about never leaving your house for anything, which is completely not even close to the case. It is one hundred percent valid to go outside for a walk or going to the grocery store as long as you are protecting yourself and others around you. People also believe it is ok to see family members and friends, however that is a major violation to social distancing. The main point of social distancing is to not expose yourself to a lot of people to prevent the spread of viruses.

Many people fail to understand that social distancing helps keep diseases from spreading and that this is all some new concept to keep us controlled, however this is not a new concept at all. Which brings me to my topic question… How does social distancing flatten the curve and further prevent viruses from spreading? I think now more than ever is the perfect time to research social distancing and how it helped with many other diseases. Many people around the world have forgotten the history of social distancing. I believe that if you do not know about history it will eventually repeat itself, which is the predicament that we are in right now. Before coronavirus I have never heard of the term social distancing, so finding out that social distancing was used in multiple pandemics in the past comes as a shock to me. I feel like this topic is very educational and will bring some type of hope for the current situation that we are in right now.

We also hear the term “flattening the curve” a lot but what does it actually mean? Flattening the curve is about “The ideal goal in fighting an epidemic or pandemic is to completely halt the spread. But merely slowing it — mitigation — is critical. This reduces the number of cases that are active at any given time, which in turn gives doctors, hospitals, police, schools and vaccine-manufacturers time to prepare and respond, without becoming overwhelmed.” (Roberts, 2020). So after reading a proper definition we know that flattening the curve is more about slowing down the infection rate so our health care workers are not overwhelmed. A complete halt is completely unrealistic because at the end of the day not everyone is going to follow the rules but if we try our best the curve of confirmed cases will slowly flatten when put onto a graph.

So how does social distancing help flatten the curve? Well as I stated previously if you social distance properly the only people you will be exposed to are the people in your family. So if people are hypothetically only being exposed to their own family, the chances of them coming in contact with the virus in question goes down tremendously. Even if you do not believe in social distancing there is a ton of proof that it does actually work. Take the Spanish Flu for example, while the flu ended up killing one hundred million people the numbers would have been a lot higher if they did not have social distance measures.

There are 5 main takeaway lessons that we can take from the Spanish Flu presented German Lopez from the website Vox. The first being early action saved multiple lives “Perhaps the most important takeaway from the 1918 flu: We need to take action quickly, we need to sustain interventions until the virus truly goes away, and we need to do all we can in the meantime.” (Lopez, 2020). As shown in the article Philadelphia was warned about the Spanish Flu a little later than St.Louis. The chart shows that Philadelphia had a huge spike in their death rates in comparison to St.Louis whose death rate did not peak nearly as high.

The second thing we can take away from the Spanish Flu is cities who eased restrictions too early saw a spike in cases. “Another point worth emphasizing from the research: Social distancing practices have to be sustained. As obstructive as it is that we might need to do some social distancing for months, that really might be what’s necessary to save as many lives as possible.” (Lopez, 2020). As I said before St.Louis was doing amazing in terms of social distancing however they eased restrictions prematurely which resulted in a spike of cases in December. This reminds me of all the states in the US right now who are easing restrictions way too early and there is no doubt in my mind that they will begin to have a spike in coronavirus cases.

The third thing we can take away from the Spanish Flu is the fact that social distancing also does harm and is not sustainable in the long run “The question, given the reality of how long social distancing may be necessary, is how people are going to get through this. Even beyond the damage to the economy and the loss of income involved, people are going to miss out on a lot of the experiences that enriched and validated their lives before. Experts worry social distancing, even if it’s necessary, just won’t be sustainable for weeks or months.” (Lopez, 2020). As much as we want social distancing to work to fix coronavirus the fact of the matter is that we can not social distance forever. People need to pay rent, put food on the table, and clothes on their back. Not to mention all the psychological effects of social distancing “Many [quarantined individuals experienced both short- and long-term mental health problems](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)30460-8/fulltext), including stress, insomnia, emotional exhaustion and substance abuse. For instance, one study compared quarantined versus non-quarantined individuals during an equine influenza outbreak. Of 2,760 quarantined people, 34 percent, or 938 individuals, reported high levels of psychological distress, which can indicate mental health problems such as anxiety and depression, during the outbreak compared with 12 percent of non-quarantined individuals.” (Sujata, 2020).

The fourth thing we can take away from the Spanish Flu is we need to have a good leader through all of this “This, experts say, is key: Americans are being asked to make sacrifices — potentially isolating themselves from their loved ones, giving up activities they value, and maybe losing income. It’s on the nation’s leaders to guide Americans through this, assuring them that they’re doing the right thing and that there’s a light at the end of the tunnel.” (Lopez, 2020). I believe we do not have a strong leader right now, whenever you turn on the news everyone is just being negative. I have not seen a single good statistic on the news and it just feels as if the news is trying to instill fear. We need to work together to get through this current pandemic or more people will start protesting.

The fifth and final thing that we can take away from the Spanish Flu is we are much better equipped to fight a pandemic than we were one hundred years ago. “From the development of vaccines to all sorts of antibiotics to all kinds of other medications, the world is much better equipped to deal with any sort of disease. To this point: Some of the people at greatest risk of Covid-19 are those with chronic conditions like cancer, diabetes, HIV, and so on.” (Lopez, 2020). The most important mindset is knowing we have much better medical care these days and while many people are dying today, our healthcare system is doing the best it can. We should be grateful that the majority of people will survive the coronavirus.

So how is this information useful in today’s pandemic? As I said previously we need to know the history of past pandemics in order to not make the same mistakes in today’s pandemic. It is clear now more than ever that social distancing is the most effective method in preventing viruses from spreading at a rapid pace. In regards to learning from coronavirus at this point, in future pandemics we need to put lockdowns in place much sooner rather than downplaying the severity of the virus at hand. We also need pandemic plans of some sort, ways to protect the economy and keeping people from losing their jobs would help a lot.

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