

Social Sciences and COVID-19

Subjects: **Sociology**

Contributor: Sandro Serpa

This entry seeks to provide an answer to the question of what is the relevance of Social Sciences for understanding the multiple implications and challenges posed by the COVID-19 contagion pandemic.

COVID-19

social sciences

pandemic

contagion

inequality

digital society

1. Introduction

Following Ferreira, Sá, Martins and Serpa (2020), Coronaviruses (CoV) entail a large group of viruses, some of which are pathogenic to humans, whose infections are usually associated with clinical respiratory manifestations, without high severity. The COVID-19 pandemic is generating a global threat. This pandemic has most significantly affected the older population and/or individuals with respiratory complications and other similar pre-existing diseases.

The vast majority of countries (yet not all) have imposed a set of preventive procedures and devices, in addition to medical tests, namely isolation, quarantine, community containment and physical distancing, travel restrictions, hand hygiene and the banning of events and gatherings. These measures have led to the temporary closure of several economic and social institutions, a relative national lockdown in several countries and enormous pressure on health systems. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are multiple: social, economic, health, political, educational, on labour and employment, ethnic-racial, on freedom and on citizenship rights. Furthermore, there is a growing increase in inequalities and even poverty and exclusion.

The uncertainties and partial mistrust of medical knowledge and information, together with the publication of conspiracy theories, have also added some disturbances, which are characteristic of uncertainty/unpredictability, and the lack of self-control in the relationship with oneself and with others has also emerged. These various measures have a profound impact on everyday life, and the future consequences for the reconfiguration of social life are in the increasingly digital society.

2. Social Sciences and COVID-19 Contagion

The pandemic, as a global threat, is, therefore, imbued with a constant state of crisis, in which the crisis becomes permanent and the cause that explains everything. This global threat has an epidemiological and medical dimension, but also a political and governance one. The clinical and epidemiological approaches imbricate to a

political component (power, violence, constraint) and a governance component (state structure, governments' behaviour).

Pandemics may be viewed as one of the main risks of modernisation. The consequences of scientific and industrial development are a set of risks that cannot be contained in space or time, for example, in addition to ecological risks, environmental degradation (causing viruses spill-over between different species), and the exponential development of the transport network (commercial aviation has been instrumental in the rapid spread of pathogens).

The contributions of the perspectives developed by the various Social Sciences on the disease, contagion and epidemics remain in a relatively secondary position in the public arena in this process of pandemic crisis.

Besides studying society, Social Sciences are also part of it. They develop a permanent self-reflexivity as a social practice and system of representations, stage of conflicts of interest and power games, on the practices of Social Sciences as a socially conditioned scientific and professional activity.

The knowledge and representations that individuals, groups and societies have and use—generally referred to as “common sense”—are, in modern societies, increasingly shaped by Social Sciences.

A pandemic is a complex phenomenon as it is always a point of articulation between natural and social determinations. This economic, social and health crisis has serious and profound implications that raise questions to which the contribution of Social Sciences does not seem to be sufficiently mobilised by policy-makers. Social Sciences can collaborate more intensely in better knowing and managing this epidemic. This discussion would be developed from the systems of relationships between social phenomena in the coordinates of time and place and in the socio-historical contexts where they are integrated (Table 1).

Table 1. Social Sciences in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Psychology	Mental health consequences of social isolation; analysis of psychological resilience
Social Psychology	Social representations on the pandemic; attitudes towards risk; health attitudes and behaviours; assessment and intervention in adaptation to disease and health promotion; violence and social confinement; social ties and new forms of solidarity
Political Science	International governance and multilateralism; governance and public policy; political institutions, political attitudes and behaviour; public opinion and political communication; pandemics and nationalism
Economy	Dynamics of capitalism and pandemic; economy and health; structure of employment and unemployment; macroeconomic vulnerabilities; Lay-off; teleworking
Geography	Genesis and pandemic spread of SARS-Cov-2; metropolises, city networks and pandemic spread; migrations and pandemics
Demography	Demographic structure and prevalence of the disease; demographic vulnerability and COVID-19
Communication	Digital transformation, ICT and health surveillance; digital literacy; telemedicine and teleconsultation
International Relations	Articulation and/or competition between countries in fighting the pandemic
History	History of epidemics, pandemics and contagion; history and collective management of the disease and contagion
Anthropology	Cultural analysis of risk and contagion; processes of stigmatization of the "other"; cultures of fear; an ethnography of zoonoses
Sociology	Social order and crises; social inequalities in health; social construction of epidemic and contagious diseases; social space of health and collective management of disease and contagion; public health policies; social distance and confinement; science and scientific controversies

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3. Conclusion

It is, therefore, important to promote an interdisciplinary scientific project characterised by the interdependence between the epidemiological, medical and biological knowledge, as well as the knowledge produced by the Social and Human Sciences, to better understand an economic, social and health crisis of such a huge scale and to shape the medical and political management of this and future epidemics and pandemics [\[1\]](#).

Note: This text is a short version of Ferreira, C.M.; Sá, M.J.; Martins, J.G.; Serpa, S. The COVID-19 Contagion–Pandemic Dyad: A View from Social Sciences. *Societies* 2020, 10, 77. For further developments, see this text.

References

1. Ferreira, C.M.; Sá, M.J.; Martins, J.G.; Serpa, S. The COVID-19 Contagion–Pandemic Dyad: A View from Social Sciences. *Societies* 2020, 10, 77.

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