

SARS-CoV-2 Pandemic – Implications for Society

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ABSTRACT: The year 2020 has started with an unprecedented situation in humanity's recent history by globally extending cases of SARS-CoV-2 virus infection, which has led the World Health Organization to declare pandemic status. In Romania, the COVID-19 pandemic did not only come with social and economic restrictions, but also with a whole series of psychiatric trauma, anxiety, isolation and uncertainty of tomorrow. The surgical mask has become an indispensable accessory without which access to closed spaces and crowded areas is no longer possible. The aim of this paper is to try to present, from its own perspective, issues related to society's evolution in a social and psychological plan, continuing with technological progress. Also, worth mentioning are the legislative changes during this period, as well as the transfer of education from the traditional form to the online. I believe that this subject is very topical and needs to be addressed from as many perspectives as possible in order to understand the scale of the transformations it has brought to today's society.

KEYWORDS: pandemic, isolation, mask, social distance, online work, health crisis

Introduction

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that can cause disease in animals or humans. It causes respiratory infections in humans, from the common cold to more severe diseases, such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The latest coronavirus discovered causes COVID-19 coronavirus disease.

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. This new virus and this disease were not known before the outbreak in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 (CDT-Babes.ro. 2020, Dr. Victor Babeș Medical Center for Diagnosis and Treatment).

Even almost a year after the first outbreaks, there are people who wonder if there is SARS-CoV-2. Some believe in the existence of the virus, others do not, and reject the idea of restrictions. SARS-CoV-2 affects people in different ways. It has been found that most infected people develop a mild to moderate form of the disease and recover without hospitalization.

The most common symptoms observed by specialists are fever, dry cough and fatigue. There are also uncommon symptoms such as headache, muscle aches, or loss of taste and smell. Researchers have shown that people who suffer from other diseases are much more likely to develop pneumonia-like complications.

The association between a highly globalized world and a rapidly spreading pandemic puts us in front of human, medical, economic and social challenges for which there do not seem (or do not want) to be solutions, only partial answers that give birth to us questions. The pandemic provides an overview of the ability of different models of society to manage large crises.

A main factor of this pandemic would be the launch of false news in the public space and the installation of a state of generalized panic among the population. In Romania, the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic changed the behavior of the population. It is now longing for a return to normalcy, but the reality is that the world has changed and is no longer as we know it. People's preferences, attitudes and behaviors are trying to adapt to the new reality in a society with new and more and more rules.

The economy, school, jobs and human life were definitely disturbed. The surgical mask has become the new mandatory accessory, although many do not agree, some opinions being even recurring during the censorship of the communist years. More and more people are wondering what other surprises await us this year until the end.

Pandemic in the economy

“Economics is the science of decisions aimed at improving living conditions” (Coșea 2006, 5). An interesting definition is given by the historian Niall Ferguson in *The Sunday Times*, saying that we have before us a “public health crisis with financial symptoms” (Lăzărescu 2020).

The existing pandemic has had an impressive negative effect on the global economy. If in the past the economy was massively affected by the housing bubble, now we are witnessing a health crisis, the fear induced by it causing panic in the financial markets. The novelty of the current crisis is its atypical origin.

Many people face the problem of unemployment and job insecurity and have begun to revise their consumer behavior, even by reducing comfort, which leads to a domino effect on all high value-added services, especially those that offer experiences in luxurious spaces or to large groups of people.

Small independent malls will suffer significant losses and will need financial support from the state to continue their operations in the coming years or will close, not to mention the fact that many employees will be laid off or they will go into technical unemployment (Mihălțianu and Gugoasă 2020).

Another major effect of the sanitary measures is the fact that several Europeans, including Romanians, will spend their holidays this year in their country.

More and more places have started to successfully develop services such as home deliveries, in some cases keeping their important customers who have used their services more often and even managed to increase their turnover.

Pandemic and school

“Education is a phenomenon and, at the same time, an individual and social process” (Suciu 2018). The closure of schools has put teachers in difficulty, as they have to experiment with new ways of teaching students who have stayed home during this period. Thus, educational platforms have taken the place of physical teaching, the learning process becoming predominantly digitally. Interest in home teaching, work from home, teleconferencing, timekeeping and online presence and workflow monitoring applications has grown exponentially. Now, since access to education has been brutally interrupted by the suspension of courses and their relocation to the virtual space, the school has been forced to apply the model of online teaching and examination.

Cristian Ștefănescu Journalist says that “Romania has one of the best internet speeds in Europe, but in many Romanian cities there is no fixed internet, and the signal for mobile data is somewhere between the branches of a cherry perched on a hill, in a curve, or on the railing of the bridge at the entrance to the village” (Ștefănescu 2020, dw.com).

It remains a mystery what Romanian students will do in the new school year, given that the course of the courses is still unclear. Attempts have been timidly resumed in the European Union, but without success, an eloquent example of this being France, which opened its doors to schools in the midst of a pandemic, and in less than a week since then COVID-19 cases have exploded.

Although in the first stage the children enjoyed the interruption of school, the pandemic also came with the temporary cessation of outdoor play and social distancing. After all, it is not the pandemic that is the ultimate problem, but social status. It is much easier to overcome the

pandemic in a pleasant environment such as a house with a garden and playground, but we should also think about what happens to those who do not have this opportunity and are forced to live more people in the same room in a block of flats.

Nobody knows exactly what the future holds for us, but surely society will change the economy, the medical system, the legal system, our lifestyle, etc. (Hegheş 2020a, 114).

Pandemic and Justice

Justice is the backbone of any democratic society (Dănilă 2009, 8). The COVID-19 pandemic had serious consequences on the Romanian judiciary and, in particular, on fundamental rights and freedoms during the state of emergency and the state of alert. Both in the case of the rights and freedoms provided by the Constitution, and of the rights established by legal acts of international law, strict rules are imposed on the possibility of the state to restrict fundamental rights and freedoms in certain situations. During this period it was issued Military Ordinances no 12 which restricted some fundamental rights such as free movement, the right to education, the right to health etc. (Hegheş 2020b, 90). During this period, several emergency ordinances were issued and the alert status was extended.

The COVID-19 pandemic has an impact on the exercise of procedural rights of suspects and defendants. Direct communication with lawyers, interpreters or third parties (when suspects or defendants are deprived of their liberty) is more difficult.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the procedural rights of suspects and defendants must be respected in order to ensure a fair trial. The limited derogations, which are provided for in the directives, if there are mandatory requirements, should be interpreted restrictively by the competent authorities and should not be widely used (E-justice.europa 2020).

The use of audio and video conferencing or other remote communication tools is encouraged. In addition, security measures should be taken, such as the installation of glass protection devices in police stations or detention centers, in order to allow the exercise of the right of access to a lawyer or an interpreter.

According to the Constitution, Romania is an independent, democratic and social sovereign state in which the rights and freedoms of citizens, the free development of the human personality, justice (...) are guaranteed (Romanian Constitution 2003 art. 1 and 2).

Although we are in a pandemic, we must not neglect justice so that Romania becomes a “criminal paradise” even if the crime rate has been kept under control by the authorities.

Crime is a social, objective and material phenomenon, but at the same time antisocial and particularly dangerous, both through the negative and distinctive consequences regarding the social and normative order, the integrity and safety of individuals and social groups, and through the social reaction that provokes also through the repressive-coercive sanctions adopted (Banciu 2017, 16).

In resolving this thorny issue, the European Union has adopted several directives. As an example, we mention the Victims' Rights Directive, Member States are obliged to ensure that all victims of crime have access to general and specialized support services that are confidential, free of charge and meet the individual needs of victims. Access to support and protection that meets the specific needs of victims should be available in all circumstances. This is also true in the specific context of the COVID-19 pandemic (E-justice.europa.eu 2020).

Psychological and social

Psychology is the science that studies the psyche, using a set of objective methods, in order to detach its legitimacy of functioning, in order to know, optimize and improve human existence (Zlate 2005, 11).

This pandemic came not only with social, economic or movement restrictions but also with psychological traumas. Isolation has brought insomnia and restlessness. A special case is the situation of victims of domestic violence which has been amplified especially by social distancing during this period of isolation. Victims of abusive behavior are, on the one hand, more exposed to control, violence and neglect and, on the other hand, have more limited access to support and protection. Most people in such a situation do not have a home, money, a job or can be mothers with one or more children in their care to take special support and protection measures for victims of domestic violence. In particular, it is essential to ensure effective access to online and offline support services, including psychological assistance and other social services. Victims of domestic violence should have, in particular, access to shelter, psychological assistance and support for overcoming trauma and counselling. National law enforcement authorities should also be particularly vigilant with regard to both registered and new cases of domestic violence. It is also essential to ensure the physical protection of victims.

The COVID-19 pandemic can have the effect of depression triggered by job loss or forced isolation. The emotional state can feel fluctuations from drama to ecstasy and *vice versa* (E-justice.europa.eu 2020).

Anxiety attacks or emotional problems can also occur, most of them springing from the past and brought to light due to the pandemic.

Everyday life has changed and nothing will be the same, but it is up to us whether we can get over it all so that in the end everything will be a bad memory.

The most important thing is to keep our calm and mental health so that we can make the best decisions regardless of the situations that will arise in the future.

Conclusions

Despite the countless warnings of specialists in the field, in Romania there are still two camps in which some believe in this virus and others do not.

What is certain is that this whole pandemic has had serious consequences for the economy, such as job losses and technical unemployment. Socially, measures of social distancing and isolation were imposed, generating states of depression and fear of the unknown. The health system was also caught unprepared, with few specialized medical staff and an acute shortage of medicines and equipment.

In my opinion, this virus exists and we must all show solidarity and respect for the rules imposed in order to succeed in overcoming this difficult period in our lives.

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