The COVID-19 Pandemic: Public Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices in a central of Iran

**ABSTRACT**

**Aims** There is a rapid increase in the number of people infected with COVID-19 throughout the world. The present study aimed to determine people’s knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) regarding COVID-19 in an Iranian sample.

**Instruments & Methods** This was a population-based cross-sectional study conducted on people over 18 years of age in Saveh city, Iran, in 2020. A multiple-stage sampling method was used. Participants (N=471) completed an anonymous and self-report questionnaire assessing socio-demographic variables and KAP. Data were analyzed using ANOVA and independent t-tests by SPSS 21. The significance level was considered to be ≤0.05.

**Findings** Of participants, 74.5% did not have accurate knowledge of how the coronavirus is spread. In terms of attitudes, more than 63.2% considered COVID-19 to be a dangerous disease. About 59.6% of participants reported regular use of a mask in the past week. As compared to men, women reported attitudes and practices more aligned with recommended safety standards. Higher education level was significantly related to the mean KAP score (p<0.05).

**Conclusions** Although the sample evidenced appropriate attitudes and some safety practices in general, a significant percentage of individuals did not engage in protective behaviors.

**Keywords** COVID-19; Knowledge; Attitude; General Practice; Behavior

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1. Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) and ... 2. Global challenge of health communication: Infodemia in ... 3. Clinical features and outcomes of suspected and confirmed ... 4. Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): A perspective from ... 5. Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): A perspective from ... 6. Clinical features of patients infected with 2019 novel ... 7. Knowledge, awareness and practice of health care professionals ... 8. Population vulnerability to COVID-19 in Europe: a burden ... 9. Unique epidemiological and clinical features of the emerging ... 10. COVID-19 preventive behaviors and its related beliefs ... 11. A cross-sectional study on Oyo state health care ... 12. Assessment of Iranian nurses’ knowledge and anxiety ... 13. Mass gathering events and reducing further global ... 14. Study of knowledge, attitude, anxiety & perceived mental ... 15. Meta-analysis of the reasoned action approach ... 16. A health educator’s guide to theories of health ... 17. Recalculation of the critical values for Lawshe’s ... 18. Knowledge, attitude and preventive practices ... 19. Awareness and attitude of undergraduate medical ... 20. Knowledge, attitude, practice and perception ... 21. knowledge, attitudes, and practices towards COVID-19 ... 22. Risk factors associated with self-medication ... 23. The effectiveness of stress management training on ... 24. Does the theory-driven program affect the risky behavior ... 25. Knowledge of, and beliefs about, access to screening facilities ... 26. Knowledge and attitude toward COVID-19 among ... 27. Patients’ health locus of control and preferences about ... 28. A survey-based study on the knowledge, attitude, and the ... 29. Efficacy of face mask in preventing respiratory virus ...
The COVID-19 Pandemic: Public Knowledge, Attitudes and … 36

Introduction
Corona Virus Disease-2019 (COVID-19), caused by a new beta-coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2, started in China in late December 2019 and spread worldwide in less than four months [1, 2]. The World Health Organization (WHO) referred to COVID-19 as a pandemic on March 11, 2020, emphasizing the widespread prevalence of the disease [3]. Unlike pandemic on March 11, 2020, emphasizing the in less than four months [1, 2] . The World Health Organization (WHO) referred to COVID-19 as a pandemic in a matter of months [12].

The COVID-19 pandemic is considered by many to be the greatest challenge of the century to public health and the international economy, affecting oil markets as well as national and international policies [1, 10]. The greatest cost is in human life [11]. It appears that in diagnosis and lack of infection control methods at least in part led to the virus becoming a pandemic in a matter of months [12]. Governments, media outlets, doctors, researchers, celebrities, police, and other stakeholders in society have emphasized prevention methods such as avoiding travel and public gatherings (e.g., sports, religious ceremonies, family gatherings, school) [13, 14]. Despite these efforts, infection rates have grown, suggesting these messages have not been followed as needed to control infection [14]. Therefore, it is hypothesized that the public knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) about methods of preventing COVID-19 are inappropriate and need to be improved [7, 15].

Currently, there is no cure or vaccine for COVID-19; hence, the best way to cope with COVID-19 is to prevent it. Several frameworks for health behavior exist, including but not limited to the Health Belief Model, Theories of Reasoned Action and Planned Behavior, Social Cognitive Theory, and Trans-Theoretical Model [16]. In many of these, knowledge and attitudes figure prominently in behavior change. Since public knowledge, attitudes, and safety practices (i.e., social distancing, proper hand-washing, and face masks) are key elements in controlling the pandemic, the present study aimed to determine the knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding COVID-19 in central Iran.

Instrument and Methods
The present cross-sectional study conducted on people over 18-years who were referring to the Health Care Center of Saveh city in 2020. The sample size needed to obtain effects was estimated at N=460 with the precision of 5%, confidence level of 95%, knowledge level of 56.5% based on a previous study [12]. To increase the study power and given the probable leaves, the sample size was increased by 10% so that 500 individuals were selected totally. Multi-stage sampling was performed, wherein Saveh city was divided into north, center, and south of the city to cover the population’s cultural and social characteristics in these three different regions. Then, a Health Care Center was selected from each region using simple random sampling. From each Health Care Center file, 167 individuals were randomly selected for the invitation to participate in the study. Inclusion criteria included residence in Saveh city, being 18 years and older, and written informed consent. Exclusion criteria were the absence of written informed agreement in the study. The questionnaire comprised the following sections:

1) Socio-demographic characteristics such as age, gender, education, marital status. 2) Knowledge questions with five items such as, "Only the elderly are at risk of contracting the COVID-19 disease". Each item was scored as Correct=2, I do not know=1, and Incorrect=0, with a total score ranging from 0 to 10 that higher scores indicated correct knowledge. 3) Attitude questions with seven items such as, "I do not believe in wearing a mask to protect against COVID-19". Each item was scored as I disagree=3, I have no idea=2, and I agree=1, with total attitude score ranging from 7 to 21. Some attitude items are reverse coding so that higher scores indicate attitudes more aligned with reducing the viral spread. 4) Practice questions assessed for the past week included seven items: "After touching surfaces, I wash my hands with soap and water for 20 seconds". Each item was scored on a 5-point Likert scale from Always=4 to Never=0. Scores ranged from 0 to 28, with higher scores indicating practices reducing the risk of viral spread. These questionnaires (KAP) are derived from the previous literature [7, 11, 12, 14]. KAP was validated using the content validity method with the assistance of 10 experts in health education, internal medicine, and infectious disease. The content validity indicator (CVI) and content validity ratio (CVR) were used to examine the content validity using quantitative methods. Experts were asked about each item’s necessity or non-necessity to determine the CVI; any value greater than 0.62 was accepted according to the Lawshe Table [17]. Each item’s relevance, clarity, and
simplicity were examined to determine the CVR and values greater than 0.79 were accepted [17]. The questionnaire’s reliability was also measured by Cronbach’s alpha method on 15 participants that were not later included in the main study. Cronbach alphas were 0.85, 0.82, and 0.78 for KAP questionnaires, respectively.

The Saveh University approved the ethical code of Medical Science. A researcher contacted individuals, the study purpose was explained, invited to participate, and then consented as relevant. Following consent, questionnaires were completed in person with a trained researcher. Data were collected using written anonymous and self-administered questionnaires for the literate and by interviews with trained teachers for the low-literate.

Data were analyzed by SPSS 21. The descriptive analysis was carried out for socio-demographics and KAP variables. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and independent sample t-tests were used to compare differences in KAP scores by socio-demographic factors. A p-value under 0.05 was considered to indicate statistical significance.

Findings

A total of 500 consented, and 471 participants completed the questionnaires. About one-third of participants (31%) reported that one of their relatives had COVID-19, and N=23 reported that a relative had died of COVID-19. The majority of participants were male (52%). The mean±SD of age was 35.2±13.6 in men and 31.2±11.9 in women (Table 1). Women had attitudes and practice more aligned with reducing COVID-19 spread than men (p<0.05). Education had a significant relationship with KAP (p<0.05), with those graduating from a university having the highest scores. Married individuals had more knowledge and reported engaging in safer practices more frequently than single and divorced respondents (p<0.05). No differences were found for KAP by age (p>0.05).

More than 63.2% considered COVID-19 to be dangerous in terms of attitudes, 66% believed they might contract coronavirus if they were not careful, 69% were worried about their families and friends, 38.5% thought that disease and health are God-given (Table 3).

In terms of safety practices over the past week (Table 4), more than 70% of participants regularly washed hands, and 80.2% avoided shaking hands and kissing others. Rates were 63.9% and 59.6% for regular disinfectant use and regular use of a mask, respectively.

Table 1) Differences in KAP scores by socio-demographic group

| Variable         | N (%) | Knowledge±SD | Attitudes±SD | Practices±SD | p-value |
|------------------|-------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------|
| Age              |       |              |              |              |         |
| 18-29            | 112 (23.7) | 8.2±1.5 | 15.1±6.5 | 16.4±1.8 |          |
| 30-49            | 151 (32)   | 8.3±1.7 | 15.6±4.3 | 17.0±5.2 |          |
| 50-69            | 132 (28)   | 7.8±1.4 | 14.8±5.5 | 15.3±2.2 |          |
| 70≥              | 76 (16.1)  | 7.8±1.4 | 12.9±3.6 | 14.9±2.7 |          |
| p-value          |       | 0.439       | 0.401       | 0.260       |         |
| Sex              |       |              |              |              |         |
| Male             | 245 (52)   | 7.3±1.4 | 14.3±4.4 | 15.4±3.1 |          |
| Female           | 226 (48)   | 7.5±1.5 | 15.6±4.3 | 16.4±2.6 |          |
| p-value          |       | 0.378       | 0.051*      | 0.050**     |         |
| Education        |       |              |              |              |         |
| Uneducated/Primary | 50 (10.5) | 6.5±1.8 | 12.5±2.8 | 13.8±5.2 |          |
| Secondary        | 106 (22.5) | 7.1±1.6 | 14.2±3.1 | 15.0±5.1 |          |
| High school/diploma | 230 (49)  | 7.3±1.2 | 15.2±2.8 | 17.5±3.6 |          |
| University       | 85 (16)    | 8.7±1.5 | 16.1±4.2 | 18.7±3.1 |          |
| p-value          |       | 0.040**     | 0.039**     | 0.006**     |         |
| Marital Status   |       |              |              |              |         |
| Married          | 274 (58.2) | 8.7±1.2 | 15.2±4.5 | 18.5±6.6 |          |
| Divorced/Widow   | 18 (3.8)   | 7.5±1.2 | 14.2±2.5 | 13.5±4.2 |          |
| Single           | 179 (38)   | 7.8±1.4 | 14.1±2.6 | 15.4±5.0 |          |
| p-value          |       | 0.034**     | 0.745       | 0.050**     |         |

*Independent t-tests;**ANOVA

Table 2) Response of study participants to Covid-19 knowledge questions

| Question (Correct Answer) | N (%) |
|---------------------------|-------|
| 1  Coronavirus can be lethal (yes) | 410 (87) |
| 2  Only the elderly are at risk of contracting the COVID-19 disease (no) | 306 (65) |
| 3  Some people with coronavirus have no specific symptoms (yes) | 167 (35.5) |
| 4  Washing hands with soap and water can be effective in preventing the COVID-19 disease transmission (yes) | 386 (82) |
| 5  Wearing a mask can be effective in preventing the COVID-19 disease transmission (yes) | 387 (82.1) |
Of participants, 74.5% did not have accurate knowledge about healthy coronavirus vectors. As shown in Table 2, most participants (82%) understood that wearing a mask and hand-washing effectively prevents coronavirus.

**Discussion**

COVID-19 is a contagious and growing disease. This study aimed to determine people’s awareness, attitude, and safety practices to reduce the spread of COVID-19. In brief, higher education level, being married, and being female were related to knowledge, attitudes, and/or practices that reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19; many persons did not have accurate knowledge of how the disease is spread, more than 60% were concerned about dangers of the virus, and about 60% or more practice some safety measures. Findings were consistent with previous studies in this area [13, 18, 19] but inconsistent with a study in Bangladesh, probably because the Bangladesh study was conducted early during the pandemic [20]. Consistent with at least one previous study conducted in the United States [11], better knowledge, practices, and more favorable attitudes were found with higher education levels. However, this was inconsistent with a study in Pakistan, possibly because the Pakistani study included many participants under 20 years of age [18]. Since public health measures are vital to timely control of the epidemic, appropriate KAP among people regarding COVID-19 is important.

In the present study, as compared to men, women reported attitudes and practices that consistent with a reduced risk for spreading the disease. This is similar to other studies conducted in Pakistan and China favoring women outcomes [18, 21]. Several reasons may relate to this outcome for women, including women being more concerned with health than men [22] and cultural factors. Most Iranian women are housewives and have more time to use educational tools and media, such as television, that provide programming related to COVID-19 and ways to prevent it. In the present study, married people had more knowledge and engaged in more safety practices than single and widowed/divorced people. In a study by Zhong et al. [21], married people also had better KAP than single people. Previous studies have confirmed a healthier lifestyle in married people [23, 24]. This may be due to married people caring more about their health than single and divorced people [25].

In the present study, respondents in the current study appeared to be more knowledgeable regarding COVID-19 than those in a study conducted in India [26]. That being said, most participants in the current study did not have accurate knowledge of how the virus is spread, which could play a very important role in containing the disease [7]. Therefore, it may be essential to conduct more public education and outreach regarding the transmission of the disease, including transmission by asymptomatic individuals. About 35% of the sample was unaware that persons other than the elderly are at risk of contracting COVID-19; hence, public education and outreach on the risk for all age groups seem necessary. In terms of attitudes, more than 30% of the sample did not believe COVID-19 is dangerous and felt they did not need to engage in certain risk-reduction behaviors at times (i.e., washing hands because they drink herbal tea). In a study in Bangladesh [20], more than a third of respondents had less than optimal attitudes towards some protection strategies. Furthermore, more than a third of the sample believed that illness and death were in God’s hands; in other words, the individuals had an external locus of control [27]. Therefore, outreach and education for the public on strategies they can use and that are effective to reduce this disease may encourage and
facilitate behaviors to reduce the viral spread in the population. Evaluation of safety practices indicated that 41% of participants did not regularly wear masks in public places in the past week. The relatively poor practice of participants wearing masks, despite their good knowledge and attitude (about 80%) about the importance of masks, may be explained by the lack of masks and lack of access to the market. Consistent with our findings, a study in India [28] showed that half of the participants did not have access to masks. Because masks are particularly important in controlling the pandemic [29], health policymakers may be particularly interested in addressing masks' availability. Only 61% complied with home quarantining, probably because there were few restrictions on leaving home in Iran, and respondents needed to maintain their jobs. About a third of respondents did not properly disinfect hands or surfaces, perhaps due to lack of access to disinfectants. Given that human behavior is a powerful tool in managing the contagious diseases, it is essential to attend to access to masks and disinfectants, and to provide education and outreach on relevant safety practices. The study used a cross-sectional design; thus, causal relationships cannot be inferred. Not all questionnaires were completed (5.8% were not completed). Despite these limitations, findings can inform the formulation of public education campaigns, and the loss of only 5.8% of respondents is more than acceptable. Given the lack of knowledge for how the disease is spread, more educational interventions regarding COVID-19 are recommended, including protective practices to implement.

Conclusion
In particular, key safety practices were not regularly utilized by a relatively large percentage of respondents (i.e., masks, hand-washing). The use of multifaceted educational interventions, legislation, health-promoting policies, and a robust public health campaign is needed to enhance public safety.

Acknowledgments: We gratefully acknowledge the people who devoted their time to the research. The authors are grateful to the Vice-Chancellor for research, the Saveh University of Medical Science, to assist with study implementation.

Ethical Permissions: The ethics committee of the Saveh University of Medical Science approved this study, and permission to conduct the research was obtained from this committee (Number: IR.SAVEHUMS.REC.1399.001).

Conflict of Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions: Araban M. (First author), Original researcher (15%); Karimy M. (Second author), Methodologist/Original researcher/Statistical analyst (25%); Mesri M. (Third author), Introduction author (10%); Rohani M.R. (Forth author), Discussion author (10%); Armoon B. (Fifth author), Statistical analyst (10%); Koohestani H.R. (Sixth author), Methodologist (10%); Shamsi M. (Seventh author), Introduction author/Discussion author (10%); Stein L. (Eighth author), Methodologist (10%).

Funding/Sources: No financial support was received for this research.

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