

## **Family Communication in Light of the Spread of the Coronavirus in Algerian Society A Field Study in the City of Ghardaia, Algeria**

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### **Abstract:**

The study aimed to know the impact of the spread of the Coronavirus on family communication in Algerian society, through a field study in the city of Ghardaia – Algeria – and the study relied on the descriptive approach. The study sample consisted of 60 families in the city of Ghardaia that were chosen randomly. The study relied on a questionnaire tool designed for parents of families to determine the extent of the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on family communication. The results of the study confirmed that the Coronavirus crisis had a positive impact in terms of family communication.

**Keywords:** Family, communication, family communication, Coronavirus, Algerian society

### **1. Introduction:**

The crisis of the spread of the Coronavirus, which we are still experiencing, has affected the world in all economic, social, health, and even political aspects. Algeria, like other countries in the world, is among the nations affected by this pandemic on all levels, including social relationships, especially family relationships, which have reinstated the importance of many societal concepts. Family relationships were reshaped, as some people renewed their attempts at family communication after the easing of initially strict lockdown measures that prevented movement between families to curb the spread of the virus. Even within the same household, interaction among family members was restricted to prevent infection in case of illness, alongside implementing health regulations and preventive measures against the virus.

We are all aware of the importance of family communication. The more positive the family relationships follow their natural course, the more harmony, cohesion, and solidarity prevail among family members. Conversely, when communication is fragmented, discord and reluctance to bear responsibilities emerge among parents and children. From this arises the research problem:

Has family communication been affected in the context of the spread of the Coronavirus in Algerian society?

The significance of this study lies in uncovering the extent to which the spread of the Coronavirus pandemic affected family communication, as well as clarifying the relationships among family members and ways to strengthen and sustain these relationships. The reason for

choosing this topic is that it is a current issue that needs to be addressed, and due to the importance of family communication.

This study aims to understand the impact of the spread of the Coronavirus on family communication in Algerian society and to provide advice, guidance, and suggestions regarding the topic.

To answer the research problem, we followed the exploratory study and the descriptive approach, which aims either to observe a phenomenon or a specific topic to understand its content, or its main purpose may be to assess a specific situation for practical purposes.

We proposed the following hypothesis: The spread of the Coronavirus negatively affected family communication in Algerian society.

The scope of the study was limited to the city of Ghardaia, Algeria. We used a questionnaire as a research tool to collect information, distributing it to a randomly selected sample represented by parents of families.

## **2. Definition of Concepts:**

### **2.1. Definition of Family:**

Burgess and Locke defined family in their book *The Family* as “a group of individuals connected by strong ties resulting from marriage, blood, and adoption, living in one household, whose members maintain cohesive social relationships based on shared interests and goals” (Saleh, 2020, pp. 125-126).

The *Dictionary of Social Science Terms* defines it as “the first social unit aiming to preserve the human species, based on the provisions accepted by collective reason and the rules established by different societies” (Al-Jaafra, 2021, p. 14).

### **2.2. Family Communication:**

Linguistically, communication comes from the root meaning ‘connection’ and is the opposite of abandonment. According to Ibn Manzur in *Lisan al-Arab*, communication is “connecting one thing to another, connection and link, opposite of separation.” In *Al-Mukhasas* by Ibn Sida, it is “the opposite of separation; something connects with another without interruption, reaching and attaining it” (Maysaa, 2014, p. 60).

Terminologically, Hasan Al-Ashraf defines family communication as “the interaction between two parties (the spouses) or multiple parties (parents and children), taking various communicative forms such as dialogue, consultation, understanding, persuasion, agreement, cooperation, guidance, and assistance” (Sanaa, 2014, p. 122).

### **2.3. Definition of the Coronavirus:**

Named COVID-19 in English, derived from (Co) for Corona, (Vi) for virus, and (D) for disease, it is a new strain of the SARS family and some types of the common cold. It is a contagious virus that first appeared in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 and spread worldwide (Samah, 2020, p. 27). The United Nations defines it as “a large family of respiratory viruses, some of which cause milder illnesses such as the common cold, while others cause more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome. Some of these viruses transmit easily from person to person, unlike others.”

### **3. Importance of Family Communication:**

Family communication has significance that reflects on the individual's psyche and behavior, including:

- It develops relationships among family members, serving as a foundation for close family bonds, understanding, and harmony.
- It helps in raising children properly, free from moral and behavioral deviation.
- It facilitates interaction between children and parents, allowing parents to understand the child's needs.
- It makes the family like a fruitful tree, producing wholesome results and joy in life.
- Each family member learns to respect others' opinions, easing interaction with children, parents, teachers, and the broader community.
- It strengthens trust among family members, enhancing their ability to achieve their goals.
- It teaches acceptance of criticism from others.
- It supports the psychological, intellectual, and social development of children.
- It reduces feelings of repression in children.
- It frees individuals from internal conflicts, hostility, fears, and anxiety.
- It is a constructive therapeutic tool to solve many family problems (Shaimaa, 2013, p. 3).

### **4. Types of Family Communication:**

Family communication takes various forms, including:

#### **a. Marital Communication:**

Interaction between spouses, based on rights, duties, responsibilities in raising children, making family decisions, and social and economic roles.

#### **b. Parental Communication:**

Father-child communication is a cornerstone of social upbringing and personality development, teaching values, social norms, and behavioral patterns while preventing inappropriate behaviors.

#### **c. Maternal Communication:**

Mother-child communication, through care, love, and affection, is essential not only emotionally but also for the child's physiological, mental, social, and emotional growth.

#### **d. Sibling Communication:**

Occurs especially with older siblings acting as parental figures, giving guidance or discipline. Relationships are built on affection and cooperation (Amira, 2021, p. 77).

### **5. Family Communication Guidelines:**

To make family communication positive and constructive:

- Accept others, recognize their rights, and respect differences of opinion.
- Use polite, calm language to resolve family issues.
- Maintain mutual respect among participants.
- Establish trust between parties.

- Learn the art of listening attentively.
- Avoid ridicule during discussions between spouses or parents and children.

## **6. Mechanisms and Methods of Family Communication:**

Family communication has various methods, with dialogue being the most widely used in Arab and Muslim families.

### **a. Definition of Dialogue:**

A verbal interaction that supports bonds between spouses, develops understanding with children, requiring skills in expression and listening.

### **b. Forms of Dialogue:**

- **Casual Dialogue:** Common, spontaneous exchanges within families about events or topics, serving as entry points for deeper conversation.
- **Eye Dialogue:** Expressing meaning through eye contact and gestures, sometimes more informative than words.
- **Positive Poetic Dialogue:** Emotional exchange between spouses or positive reinforcement of children's behaviors, fostering love and cohesion.
- **Mirror Dialogue:** Placing oneself in another's position, promoting understanding and adjusting behavior based on others' perspectives (Shaimaa, pp. 4-5).

## **7. Factors for Lack of Family Communication:**

Factors leading to absence of communication include:

- Parents not raising children with values of communication.
- Dominance of negative values requiring children to obey without discussion.
- Work and family pressures causing neglect of children, resulting in communication gaps.

### **Effects of Lack of Communication:**

- Inability to communicate socially (loss of social maturity).
- Low self-esteem and confidence.
- Impact on psychological stability and social adaptation.
- Decline in social skills usually acquired through communication (Jamila, 2013, pp. 11-12).

## **8. Patterns of Social and Family Communication during the Coronavirus Pandemic:**

The spread of the Coronavirus imposed lockdowns and social distancing across social, economic, educational, cultural, religious, and political domains, affecting communication and altering communication patterns:

- Use of the internet regularly.
- Use of modern technology devices (phones, computers) for external communication.
- Adoption of distance learning and mobile apps for education.
- Use of remote conferencing technologies (Google Meet, Zoom) for academic and professional meetings.
- Prolonged home stay enhanced communication among spouses and children.

- Phone calls between extended and nuclear families for celebrations or condolences to avoid infection.
- Use of social media platforms like Facebook to follow news and events.
- Use of online platforms for shopping to avoid going out (Afrah, 2020, pp. 13-14).

### **Methodological Procedures of the Study:**

#### **a. Scope of the Field Study:**

- **Spatial Scope:** Applied in the central neighborhood of the city of Ghardaia, Algeria.
- **Human Scope:** Families in Ghardaia, Algeria.
- **Temporal Scope:** Conducted during August and September 2022.

#### **b. Method Used:**

Any scientific endeavor aiming to clarify a topic requires following a precise scientific method. Angers defines it as “a set of specific procedures adopted to reach solutions” (Angers, 1997, p. 9). Selecting the method is essential as the objectivity and credibility of results depend on it. Since the research aims to assess the impact of the Coronavirus on family communication in Algerian society, the descriptive method was used, “which aims either to observe a phenomenon or specific topic to understand its content, or its main purpose may be to assess a situation for practical purposes” (Nadia, 2017, p. 217).

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#### **c. Research Population:**

The research population consisted of families in the city of Ghardaia, Algeria.

#### **- Research Sample:**

The research sample consisted of 60 participants represented by parents of families, selected randomly.

#### **d. Data Collection Tools :**

- **Questionnaire:** “A list of questions prepared according to a set of methodological rules, recorded on papers and distributed to respondents to answer in writing or orally, depending on the circumstances and research objectives. Its purpose is to collect targeted information for analysis and discussion in order to draw conclusions” (Jamil, 2014, p. 85).

According to the subject requirements, the questionnaire was presented to the sample, and the questions were answered. The questionnaire was organized into the following axes:

- **First Axis:** Personal data information.
- **Second Axis:** Data on family communication among individuals within the same household during the spread of the Coronavirus.
- **Third Axis:** Data on family communication among individuals outside the household during the spread of the Coronavirus.

#### **b. Statistical Method:**

We distributed the research results using percentages, calculated by counting the frequency of each statement within its axis and then calculating its percentage.

Percentage for each statement =  $(\text{Frequency} / \text{Sample size}) \times 100$

**Commentary on First Axis Statements:****Statement 1: Gender****Table 1:** Frequencies and percentages for Statement 1

Gender	Frequency	Percentage %
Male	39	65%
Female	21	35%
Total	60	100%

It is clear from the table that the majority of the sample were males at 65%, and females were 35%, the lower percentage. Therefore, we conclude that males are more represented, mainly fathers.

**Statement 2: Age****Table 2:** Frequencies and percentages for Statement 2

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage %
Less than 40	31	52%
40 to 50	20	33%
Above 50	9	15%
Total	60	100%

The table shows that the highest percentage (52%) is for participants under 40 years, followed by 33% for ages 40–50, and 15% for above 50. We can conclude that the age group with the highest percentage has an age suitable for activity and the ability to perform parenting roles.

**Statement 3: Number of Family Members****Table 3:** Frequencies and percentages for Statement 3

Number of Members	Frequency	Percentage %
2–5	22	37%
2–6	10	17%
2–7	17	28%
More than 7	11	18%
Total	60	100%

The table shows that families with 2–5 members represent the highest percentage (37%), followed by 2–7 members at 28%. Families with more than 7 members are 18%, and the lowest is 2–6 members at 17%. The highest percentage represents families with 5 members only, indicating nuclear families.

**Summary of First Axis:**

The sample consists of adults and small nuclear families, suggesting they can manage family communication effectively and achieve harmony.

**Commentary on Second Axis Statements:**

**Statement 4:** How do you describe family communication within the household during the spread of the Coronavirus?

**Table 4:** Frequencies and percentages for Statement 4

Indicator	Frequency	Percentage %
Good	52	87%
Average	5	8%
Weak	3	5%
Total	60	100%

The majority (87%) reported that family communication was good, 8% said it was average, and 5% said weak. Regardless of pre-pandemic communication, we can say the families in the study maintained good communication and harmony within the household during the spread of the Coronavirus.

**Statement 5:** Did the spread of the Coronavirus affect communication among household members? (Increase or decrease)

**Table 5:** Frequencies and percentages for Statement 5

Indicator	Frequency	Percentage %
Increased	47	78%
Remained the same	9	15%
Decreased	4	7%
Total	60	100%

The table shows that 78% reported increased communication, 15% said it remained the same, and 7% said it decreased. We conclude that the Coronavirus positively influenced household communication.

**Statement 6:** How did you apply physical distancing during the lockdown?

**Table 6:** Frequencies and percentages for Statement 6

Indicator	Frequency	Percentage %
Gather at the table during meals and watch TV together with precautions	54	90%
Apply physical distancing and do not gather	6	10%
Total	60	100%

The majority (90%) gathered for meals and TV with precautions, while 10% applied strict distancing, possibly due to illness in the family.

**Summary of Second Axis:**

Households maintained communication during lockdown, with increased interaction due to extended time together. The minority applied distancing out of concern, reflecting a positive impact of the pandemic on family communication.

**Commentary on Third Axis Statements:**

**Statement 7:** What means did you use to communicate with family outside the household during the Coronavirus?

**Table 7:** Frequencies and percentages for Statement 7

Indicator	Frequency	Percentage %
Phone and social media	52	87%
Visits	6	10%
No communication	2	3%
Total	60	100%

Most respondents (87%) used phones and social media; 10% visited relatives, and 3% did not communicate. Families maintained contact despite restrictions, mostly remotely.

**Statement 8:** To what extent did you communicate with family outside the household?

**Table 8:** Frequencies and percentages for Statement 8

Indicator	Frequency	Percentage %
Frequently	55	92%
Sometimes	5	8%
Never	0	0%
Total	60	100%

The majority (92%) communicated frequently with family outside the household, using remote means, while 8% communicated sometimes.

**Summary of Third Axis:**

Families maintained frequent contact with those outside the household using modern communication tools, reflecting a positive impact of the Coronavirus on family communication in Algerian society.

**Conclusion:**

This research aimed to determine the impact of the Coronavirus on family communication in Algerian society by examining communication among household members and families living separately. The literature review and field study results indicate that the studied families, like Algerian families in general, recognize the importance of family communication in all circumstances, supporting each other during crises. Communication increased during the pandemic, while health protocols such as sanitation, distancing, and mask-wearing were observed. The Coronavirus positively affected family communication, reinforcing cohesion, disproving the proposed hypothesis.

**Recommendations:**

Conduct seminars, conferences, and TV/radio sessions under the supervision of health and family authorities, with experts (advisors, counselors, psychologists, epidemiologists, and physicians) to educate families on the importance of maintaining communication while ensuring safety.

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