

International Research Collaboration Amid COVID-19 Outbreak: An Experience for Iranian Young Researchers

Received: 25 Mar 2020

Accepted: 29 Mar 2020

Early Career Psychiatrists (ECP) section of World Psychiatric Association (WPA) was officially launched in 2014, while this global organization had been developing the collaboration of ECPs in different activities, more specifically, by inviting several fellows to attend world congresses of psychiatry since 1999 (1).

Fortunately, I joined the section in the 17th World Congress of Psychiatry, where I could attend as one of the ECPs fellowship awardees in Berlin, Germany. After a while, the section provided collaborative platforms as Google and WhatsApp group which have been developed by participation of more young psychiatrists and psychiatric trainees all around the world for 3 years. It should be noted that social gathering of members during the last three annual World Congresses of Psychiatry which were held in Berlin, Lisbon and Mexico City have had a substantial role in developing relationships and collaborations.

During the early weeks of COVID-19 outbreak, when people all around the world were staying at home because of lockdown protocols, 15 colleagues and I joined together for performing research on different dimensions of mental health during and after the COVID-19 outbreak. One of the most important features of the group was the presence of at least one representative of each World Health Organization (WHO) zones in the group. Less than two weeks after launching of the group, we decided on several topics and consequently, started to write different manuscripts. Indeed, an incredibly motivating event took place for the group on 3 April 2020 when our first paper entitled “COVID-19 effect on mental health: patients and workforce” was accepted for publication as a correspondence in “The Lancet Psychiatry”, the second ranked journal of psychiatry (2). After a while, other manuscripts about mental health issues amid COVID-19 outbreak were prepared and three others were published in high quality international journals; another one was accepted to be published and several others are now under review (3-5).

It should be noted that this collaborative group provides not only research support but also emotional support. We arranged three social gatherings via applications to get to know each other. Interestingly, all members of the group share their concerns and fears about development of the disease and follow news about countries of other members. In case of Iran, I had a lot of encouraging messages when the pandemic was peaking in the first and second waves of the infection in Iran. The member from New York, United States, who is originally from Spain, sent me this message in the group: “Few Iranians I know have taught me that Iran has invaluable people willing to make things better and help. Indeed, you are contributing a lot to the wellbeing of your neighbors there. You have our support!” .

After publication of our papers, we have had a lot of applications from all around the world for joining the group. Therefore, we have launched a broader research group for providing more collaboration named “COVID-19 Think Tank”. Fortunately, several Iranian ECPs have joined the group and they have collaborated in other new projects.

All in all, international collaboration is extremely important, more specifically for young Iranian researchers, to develop not only scientific but also inter-cultural interactions. In fact, COVID-19 tough days may provide

us closer relationship beyond the usual borders of the scientific societies of the globe and it, probably, will go on after the outbreak. In addition, participating in international meetings facilitates achieving this goal and the government is responsible to support Iranian young researchers to attend the meetings during these difficult economic conditions (6).

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