

Leading Quarantines in the Time of COVID-19 Case Raparin-Area Kurdistan Region of Iraq

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Abstract

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Leading Human resource has never been easy for the state authorities, and that comes with rigorous challenges, typically in times of crisis such as wars, conflict, financial crisis, natural disasters as well as disease outbreaks. That is to say that not only controlling the contagious and transmittable disease in the community but working on managing people in a right way that contain the pandemic in the country.

To fight COVID-19 outbreak, governments around the world have started to practice quarantine, which has been a potent measure for restricting and containing the virus from spreading quickly. The novel COVID-19 outbreak in the Wuhan city of Hubei province in China in late 2019-early 2020, has led to a world pandemic in which Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, similar to the other countries, is affected. This paper addresses the quarantine in the Raparin area in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. According to the statement from the Ministry of Health of the KRG March 28, 2020, the number of infected individuals in the region is 122 individuals, 2 death, and 51 have totally recovered. While total number of people in quarantines in the region are as: 5273 individuals, in 35 different location, currently only 1422 persons are in quarantine, 425 in Erbil, 281 in Sulaimania, 628 in Duhok, 30 in Halabja, 5 in Garmian, 33 in Raparin, 20 in Koya. And 3651 individuals have been discharged in quarantines after 14 days stay. Besides, in last 24 hours, 129 more people are admitted to quarantine.

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Original Manuscript

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Abstract

Leading Human resource has never been easy for the state authorities, and that comes with rigorous challenges, typically in times of crisis such as wars, conflict, financial crisis, natural disasters as well as disease outbreaks. That is to say that not only controlling the contagious and transmittable disease in the community but working on managing people in a right way that contain the pandemic in the country.

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Keyword: quarantine, COVID-19, China, Kurdistan Region-Iraq, Iran

1.1. Introduction

The novel coronavirus is a new public health challenge not only for China but for developed and developing countries alike. Today March 27, 2020, the United States has surpassed China and Italy for the number of infected persons with COVID-19. From the data the outcomes and challenges are severe for the entire world. The pandemic outbreak has not only increased the price of food, but more essentially the price of basic health facilities and needs such as masks, gloves, sanitizers, liquid soap and other hygienic substances. This is not a surprise as the price of commodities even basic ones change with the demand, desire, and the situation.

Quarantine was the most effective measure implemented by the Chinese government in Wuhan city, in the late January-2020. From Chinese experience countries around the world started deploying quarantines, and preparing for it. The precautions have been highly influential not only in China but around the world. Unfortunately, crisis management especially when it is a national security, and linked tightly to public health and the survival of the people is a critical matter. In any state of being managing people needs policies, regulations and instruction. The outcomes depend upon the quality of management practiced and consequences upon the measures taken and the strategies adopted.

At the moment the world business, social activities, education, and entire works have been disrupted, cities are under lockdown, quarantine, self-isolation and the like. Streets that were populated with people are empty and people restricted to their homes. Life appears to have come to a standstill. This will not last forever. Managing and controlling the health of the people is the core point towards

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³Statement from the Ministry of Health Kurdistan Region of Iraq, March 28, 2020, Number 30.

sustainability. As Pan American Health Organization (2009) addressed leadership during a pandemic, stated that "Preparing for and responding to a pandemic requires coordinated actions and communications by all levels of government and all segments of society." Prior to COVID-19, Kurdistan Region and even Iraq have not needed quarantine of portion of its population, yet knowing that Coronavirus is transmitted to the other people from infected individuals this strategy has been enforced.

In quarantines, managing people is different from managing the same people in offices, at business, homes, in the work place, at the market or even at the schools and universities. At COVID-19 people are facing serious challenges, including health concerns, maintaining families, keeping in touch with their work, some people lose their jobs, and some families are separated. To conclude, a public health is a security concern of a nation, thus it requires the crisis management properly at right pace and time. During COVID-19 crisis, the health costs rise dramatically for Iraq as an oil dependent economy, yet the reality is these costs will be heavier for the country if it's in human resource. The National Law Review (2020) argues that "alongside with all the existing acts of treating people and employee in various conditions in the United States, there is a new consideration of COVID-19 outbreak entitled as 'HIPAA Privacy Considerations for Employers During the Covid-19 Outbreak' which few significant points are highlighted as the following:

Consider whether it makes sense for the company to designate someone as the person responsible for handling all Covid-19 employee information and inquiries, such as an HR manager or safety manager.

- ✚ Provide appropriate advance written notice to the employee, if needed then disclosure of information is required for people in contact with the infected employee.

The safety of people in quarantine is taken into account seriously, as this is a flu season and governments try to keep separating people returned from abroad, or being in contact with carrier, thus the strategy for safety at the moment is quarantine, combined with a lockdown. Quarantine is an obligatory option for reducing the impact of COVID-19 and isolation is mandatory. It has been observed that some people in the Kurdistan Region wanted to escape or skip being quarantined.

Basically, without proper strategies and toolboxes being available, dealing with people can be a challenge during a potential pandemic like COVID-19. In some instances, for mitigating the impact of COVID-19 preparedness and proper implementation of the strategies should be the top priorities for health authorities. That is to say, for any country especially the one that does not have experience with quarantine and combating flus, improving the capacities and enforcing preparedness toolkits is of utmost importance and Iraq is a country that needs to do it for the sake of public safety.

1.1. Review of Literature Quarantine during COVID-19

With the novel COVID-19 new measures are deployed among the most essential ones so far are lockdowns, quarantine, social distancing, better hygienic moves, and hand-washing. The Coronavirus has become a 21st century's pandemic, which has brought rigorous challenges for all countries similarly, yet country and continental conditions are different. The literature extensively documents quarantine measures that were practiced in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, America and other regions according to the need for preventing the transmission of contagious diseases. Patients with several waves of infection including but not limited to Cholera, Yellow fever, leprosy, plague, MERS, SARS, AIDS, Ebola, Avian and now COVID-19 have required quarantine. Whistle, "the problem of enforcing quarantine has always proved extremely difficult." (Hsieh, et al., 2005, Gensini, G.F., et al., 2004, Larry, G. et al., 1987. Musto, 1986., Tognotti, 2013, Gostin, O.L., et al, nd, Tomes, 2010).

Steven Taylor in his book the Psychology of Pandemics; preparing for the next global outbreak of infectious disease (2019), has emphasized a few crucial factors including: pandemic influenza as a threat to public health globally. Virologists expect next pandemic in the coming year, while people do not have pre-existing immunity to the pathogens causing pandemics, and drugs are not very effective even if available at all. Very crucially, he mentioned that there is a need to behavioral methods such

as hygienic practices, social distancing (limiting gatherings).

Quarantine is an old approach for controlling contagious disease, it has been practiced in Italy during the fourteenth century. The word quarantine is derived from Italian *quarantina*, means a forty-day period, which was the incubation time for the infection to appear in patients.⁴

Quarantine has been a very supportive measure for the COVID-19 in Wuhan City in China, the lockdown, and quarantine measures have been the core measure for fighting the outbreak. The real concern of quarantine comes from the fear of human-to-human transmission which creates serious challenges for state and society to fight. Thus, World Health Organization on 29 February 2020 published on quarantine of individuals, wherein it focused on quarantine as a measure for public health in which "healthy individuals who may have been exposed to the virus, are separated from the rest of the population, with the objective of monitoring symptoms and the early detection of cases."

O'Connor (2020) proposes four main criteria for the discharge of quantized individuals. In the case of Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Raparin area, a 14 days quarantine was exercised since February 2020. The four criteria are as the following:

- a. A normal temperature lasting longer than three days.
- b. Resolved respiratory symptoms.
- c. Substantially improved acute exudative lesions on chest CT.
- d. Two consecutively negative RT-PCR test results that were at least one day apart.

In addressing the government response, quarantine of individuals who have travelled abroad or returned from certain countries including China, Iran and Italy as the first most affected countries. Each country has specific measures to combat COVID-19, yet the governmental capacity, in terms of health essentials such as facilities, health workers, hospitals, and capital of financing the quarantine and lockdowns.

In focusing on the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, quarantine was the initial measure to respond to COVID-19, alongside with border controls, airport tests, lockdown, curfew, social distancing measures. In fact, quarantine and social-distancing are new to the people not only in Iraq but to the whole Middle Eastern population regardless of MERS outbreak practice in Saudi Arabia. The complete lockdown of the cities, in the Kurdistan Region since mid-March 2020, has been in line with the quarantine measure.

As part of a wider collaboration between the population and government, quarantine culture is promoted, now one month from the first quarantine of returned people from abroad, quarantine has been appreciated by people who has been in the quarantine stations and most are discharged safely. This proves that the KRG government is successful in creating public trust in COVID-19, while people were sensitive, emotional, reactive and fearful, but the context of panic is managed well.

Based on Nebraska Medicine-2020, the mentioned instructions are highly crucial including, staying home, separating self from other people, keeping away pets and animals, information for cleaning, contacting a doctor, avoiding sharing personal items, monitoring symptoms, etc.⁵

What is to be understood, is quarantine is an order not a personal choice based on desire, acceptance and need, but in order to protect individuals and contain the virus at the initial stage. Besides, quarantine, closing borders with countries that are heavily affected by COVID-19 is very significant, such as what Russia has done, closing borders with China since January, conducting tests and

⁴ History of Quarantine available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/quarantine/historyquarantine.html>.

⁵Self-Quarantine Instructions: <https://www.nebraskamed.com/patients/covid19/self-quarantine-instructions>. (Accessed on March 26, 2020).

implementing strict measures in airports have been crucial. As a guideline to limit the spread of COVID-19, government authorities at all levels are involved to support success of the Kurdistan Region's guidance to combat the virus. Apparently, "quarantine, has been considered as the most restrictive, as well as potential of limiting the spread of the infection." (Ferguson et al., 2006).

Yet, quarantine duration has been different from country to country, while the lockdown in Wuhan city has proven that it has been the most effective strategy to contain the COVID-19. Besides, the proposed-country based duration of quarantine, the post quarantine has been 14 days of home stay and social-distancing, for all cured patients who have been infected with the virus.

Based on Public Health Guidance for Community-Level Preparedness and Response to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) Version 2, (2004), similar measures were put into practice. 'Quarantine and home isolation' for SARS proposed isolation of persons who could not be accommodated at home or into a healthcare facility; thus a community-based place for isolating them is required."⁶

Smith and Freedman (2020) envisaged that "SARS-CoV was eradicated due to effective implementation of traditional public health measure in which quarantine was the most effective one." Likewise, "The source of notification for quarantine influenced understanding of the reason for quarantine." (Lawryluck, L, et al., 2004). Moreover, Larry, G. et. Al., (1987) emphasized that "An isolation statute could require a due process determination that a viral carrier is unwilling or unable to refrain from engaging in conduct likely to spread the disease."

In regard to the case of Kurdistan Region of Iraq, quarantine has been enforced and has been effective in preventing person-to-person spread of the virus in the region. Thus, two months since the outbreak of COVID-19, and despite being a neighbor to Iran, which today March 26, 2020, the country has "29,406" infected as is ranked as the 6th top countries affected by COVID-19, with the 4th highest death rate (worldometers, 2020),⁷ Iraq and the Kurdistan region has done relatively very well. It is crucial to mention that quarantine and social-distancing have both been new not only to Iraq, but to many countries likewise. Lesson from COVID-19 must be taken into consideration even from a small region like the Kurdistan Region, in which quarantine has been a factor for containing the virus from the early stages. Being objective and taking into account the resources, capacities and experiences of the region are of use at this point.

Most people do not understand that quarantine is very expensive for government, at the same time very difficult to manage. As this measure needs knowledge and expertise to increase the chance for containment of the virus.

In line with quarantine, social distancing or social disconnecting strategy has been effective yet this mainly depends on the level of compliance and cooperation from the public yet many countries have enforced fine and impediments to for citizens to comply with the measures. According to Public Health Guidance for Community-Level Preparedness and Response to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) Version 2 (2004), another guide is home quarantine, a status of being in your own residence for all citizens."

This is a shared responsibility for protecting everyone in the community, an effective measure, as isolation disrupts the spread of the virus, because it limits exposure of physical contact with other individuals. Quarantine, social-distancing, isolation, and lockdowns are not easy measures and adopting and digesting them from the side of population is difficult. Most people feel stuck at lockdowns, even while being conscious of the fact that they are engaged in a war against an unseen enemy, that they have to fight themselves and these are the front line measures in their fight.

1.3 Method of the Study

1.3.1. Description of Quarantine in Raparin Area

⁶See more on: <https://www.cdc.gov/sars/guidance/d-quarantine/app3.pdf>.

⁷See more data: <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/?fbclid=IwAR2Tv3iK2jKKty3uzJZee9a0cR-WJdHf364zZSSTTSOnupo-64zfORuWE#countries>. . (Accessed on March 26, 2020).

During the COVID-19 outbreak in Iran, Kurdistan Region of Iraq has decisive action towards opening quarantines for people who returned from China and Iran. As the region is close to Iran there have been many people who go for studying, getting medical treatment, as well as business, and some for tourism. This is a case study of Raparin area, in which data is from 3 quarantine locations, the data of quarantined people in one quarantine in Rania and 2 in Qaladze towns are used in this study. There have been few batches of people who have been admitted in quarantine and were instructed based on the guideline of the World Health Organization. Based on that, the quarantined persons were instructed to wash their hands frequently, wear masks (while discharged; to weak mask, not to share personal items with other family members, sleeping separately, in addition, to follow other health instructions that are provided by the quarantine team in charge of the places.

1.3.1.1 Study population

All individuals who were placed in quarantine during February-march 2020, yet some are still in quarantine. As Raparin borders with Iran, thus most returnees were from Iran, thus 213 individuals have returned from Iran to Kurdistan Region Raparin area, and most of them were students in Iranian Universities, 10 more people were there for business and trade, 6 other individuals were in Iran for their health follow ups. Among them only 70 were female, the rest 143 were male, the age range was from 3 months to 80 years, (mean age 29.7). The mode of age was 21. Among the people 167 individuals returned to Raparin area one week after the outbreak of COVID-19 in Iran- Qom city which is the most affected city in Iran similar to Wuhan of China.

Table.1. Quarantine admitted individuals

Raparin Area	Date	Number of Admitted	Discharged/results
Rania	26/2/2020	63 persons	No infected
Qaladze 1	10/3/2020	40 persons	No infected
Qaladze 2	16/2/2020	110 persons	No infected
Total	213		213

Source: Authors

1.4. Discussion and Results

The psychological impact of quarantine was difficult for many of the admitted individuals, yet not only for people who were in Quarantine but for their families outside and the public in the Kurdistan Region as this was a different and new approach for protecting the people who had been in Iran, their families and the entire population of Kurdistan Region. It has to be mentioned that quarantine is an effective strategy that can contain transmission of communicable diseases, and COVID-19 is one among them. Individuals were notified of their need to stay in quarantine for the first batch of people it was 14-18 days and then 2 weeks at home to isolate themselves for their families and other people. The people entered quarantine in 3 different places which have good access to roads, near to hospitals and security as well as medical and maintenance support are provided. It should be mentioned that with the outbreak of COVID-19, the Kurdistan Regional government has started plans for quarantine, taking other measures based on the outbreak in China, as our people are abroad not only in China but in many other countries for various purposes. Thus, some people have returned even before the COVID-19 outbreak in Iran, based on their personal concerns, awareness and government instructions.

As it has been mentioned the protocol of quarantine was new to all individuals, even most of them have never heard the word quarantine. For guiding the people in Quarantines four special teams were created to teach them the rules for decreasing their contacts, practicing better hygiene and well-being, and this helped the people to get familiar with the new rules and daily instructions for the sake of their well-being. Besides, psychiatric support is/was provided to those individuals who had fear, stress and anxiety. And their food was prepared and supervised by the nutritionist. We were contacting them daily by telemedicine for encouragement and reassurance. A young female with her

3 year daughter had psychological pressure due to the loss of her husband two months prior her quarantine time; she tried suicide several times. The quarantine team has been successful in following her case closely and providing full support to help her stabilize and post discharged we reassured with telemedicine many times and had great effect on her health and psychological well-being. All of the isolated persons have been vaccinated on Iraqi Vaccination Schedule, which contains BCG vaccine. And they had the scar on their deltoid region. Tuberculosis (TB) was extensive and common among the Iraqi people in 1959's. (Al Sheikh, 1999). That is to say, people who have been vaccinated with BCG vaccine, have more immunity due to activation of inert immunity. (Shimizu, et al., 2008).

The outcomes of the quarantine of those admitted were optimistic and none of them had respiratory or gastrointestinal signs and symptoms. All of them have remained in the quarantines for 14 to 18 days, according to the date of admission and discharge. Forty-six persons have returned from various Iranian cities, right 17 days after the outbreak and they have been put in other apartments so as to be isolated from the others because of highly risk of contamination suspicion.

Three special teams composed of molecular staff and ENT doctors has been arranged and they took nasal swabs from both nostrils deeply and through special VTM, the swabs have been sent for real time Polymerase change reaction (rt-PCR) test. After 24 hours of sequences of the test, all the results were negative. They were discharged and sent home but were asked to continue on the quarantine protocol at home for next 14 days. They have been told not to mix with their families, to accurately follow hygienic practices, sleep in separate rooms, eating in disposable dishes and use separate toilets if available in their homes. Among the mentioned numbers of individuals, it seems that 89% of them were obeyed and followed the instructions. From this we understand that public health is a national security concern in which pandemics like COVID-19 might be new to Kurdish people but developing the understanding has taken only two months'. A great deal of credit goes to the health staff, government support, the media and university campaigns; all together results seem—positive in the region.

Rothstein and Talbott (2007) discussed encouraging compliance with quarantine. A few of the points are highlighted here. Among them, the main obstacle for entering a quarantine were; loss of income during the quarantine period and loss of job in post quarantine. This has been true for the three-quarantine locations in Raparin area at the beginning of the outbreak compliance was very poor, and there was lack of cooperation for the people, and most rejected to get to quarantine places, and some returned illegally.

As it is difficult to predict pandemics and outbreaks, COVID-19 has brought economic, financial, health, and social issues to people in the Kurdistan Region yet people have to accept and understand that public health is the priority above all.

Fortunately, among the admitted individuals who returned from Iran, none of them have not been diagnosed positive for COVID-19, that was due to quick quarantine measures. Despite the challenges, public health authorities in the Raparin area have to learn from the lessons that COVID-19 have taught.

1.5 Findings

Based on the experience of the quarantines of the Raparin Area, the following finds can be highlighted:

- 1- Human resource management in crisis is difficult and full of challenges, and that is particularly in pandemics such as COVID-19.
- 2- The COVID-19 containment in Raparin quarantines were influenced by few factors including: the health infrastructure, health staff, availability and access of faculties, lifestyle of the people who were quarantined, and also culture.
- 3- From this study, and the experience of the three quarantine cases of Raparin area, it can be

stated that managing individuals with the support of expert guidance has led to an effective response to COVID-19.

- 4- Perhaps, the greatest threat and risk to be outlined from this study is the Kurdistan Region, and Raparin area alike need to prepare for other epidemics and pandemics, as the region has people who travel or live abroad.
- 5- For avoiding potential threats such as COVID-19 the decision-makers, the government, and the community have to focus on guidelines and coordinating in groups for overcoming the challenges and the complexity of pandemics.
- 6- From this study we need more social awareness and one comprehensive state-society approach for tackling contagious disease such as COVID-19, this approach feeds the preparedness for advanced and prior tackling of pandemics in the region

1.6. Conclusion

Given the effectiveness of quarantine, which has been enforced in the Kurdistan Region and the practices of Raparin area, the leadership and management of individuals who have been admitted to quarantined have been a successful experience, and it has increased the efficiency of the quarantine for the future for any unexpected pandemics in which Kurdistan Region might be affected. As COVID-19 transmits from person-to-person, it is pivotal to be noted that 605,262 coronavirus cases worldwide are infected, the most effected countries are (the United States, Italy, China, Spain, Germany, Iran, France, UK and Switzerland...etc). (Worldometers, 2020).

In order to see the road ahead more clearly, we need to focus on the need to meet the public health requirements at a proper time. It has to be remembered that Kurdish people similar to the other nations to are vulnerable to COVID-19.

To conclude, people who have been quarantined, at the initial stage were not happy, and worried about their lives, and they had limited information about quarantine and poor understanding of what may happen to them. For some of them quarantine was a prison and some felt that this is a kind of punishment, but while they are discharged from quarantine safely, their morale is boosted, and their well-being is much better and they have willingness of following up the quarantine protocol and practices. This study encourages more researchers to study the management and psychology perspectives of the masses in times of pandemic, as this provides better understanding and minizines the spread of communicable diseases. Importantly, regarding leading for the long run, Bennis (2006) mentions that "people want leaders with Winston Churchill's ability to articulate the common threat and inspire people to overcome it together.

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