

Trust the directives and physical distancing during three COVID-19 lockdowns in Israel

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The emergence of the COVID-19 virus highlighted the importance of public trust in official directives during a pandemic. As part of the measures taken to reduce the spread of the coronavirus, people were asked to maintain physical distancing. Compliance with physical distancing influenced by trust levels which are generally lower in minority groups. The current study aimed to explore the trust level and compliance with the physical distancing relationship among Arab minority and Jewish populations during three lockdowns during the COVID -19 outbreak in Israel. Three cross-sectional online surveys were conducted among a convenience sample of Jews and Arabs adults (≥ 18 years old) citizens of Israel following the first (April to June 2020), second (October to November 2020), and third lockdown (January to February 2021). The surveys collected demographic data, compliance with physical distancing, and trust level in official sources. In total, 613 (N = 281 Arab, N = 281 Jewish) participants completed the first online survey, 542 (N = 223 Arab, N = 319 Jewish) completed the second survey, and 98 (N = 38 Arab, N = 60 Jewish) completed the third survey. In the three surveys, both populations, Arabs and Jews, reported higher levels of trust in health professionals than in politicians. The level of trust and keeping physical distancing during the three lockdowns were significantly lower among Arab compared to the Jewish participants. However, the association between trust and social distancing was significant only in the first lockdown (OR = 2.02, 95% CI 1.37-2.97) but not in the second and third lockdowns. Trust in official directives is an important determinant of citizens' compliance with physical distancing guidelines during a pandemic. Minority groups have lower trust levels and face more challenges for keeping physical distancing. This should be brought to the policymakers' attention to increase trust and physical distancing among them.

Key messages:

- Understanding the relationship between trust and compliance and its potential consequences during a pandemic warrant particular attention in the present context of a global pandemic.
- It is of utmost importance to identify the unique characteristics of sub-populations and minority populations in which there may be additional factors affecting compliance.