

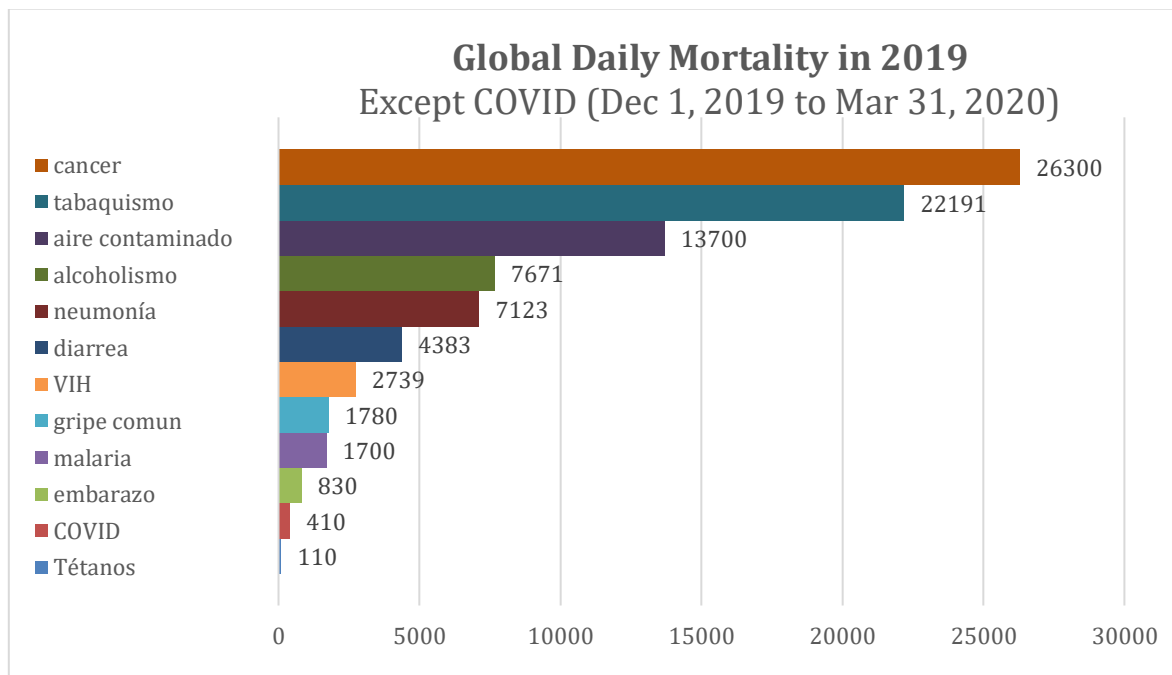


Asociación Latinoamericana de Medicina Social y Salud Colectiva ALAMES AGAINST THE PANDEMIC COVID 19

1. Origin / Generalities of COVID-19

In early December 2019, the Wuhan City Municipal Health and Sanitation Commission in Hubei Province, China, reported a group of 27 seafood market workers with a new type of pneumonia, identifying a new agent as the causal agent. a type of coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2. The disease was nominated by the WHO as COVID-19 (Acronym for CoronaVirus Disease 2019). On January 30, 2020, cases were reported from all provinces of China, which is why the WHO declared it a Global Health Emergency. For March 11 and due to its rapid spread to more than 100 territories, the WHO declared it a Pandemic. For March 26, the figure of 500,000 infected is reached worldwide and 4 months after starting, on March 30, 776,792 cases and 31,157 deaths were registered. The case-fatality rate in China was 17.3% initially, but it was decreasing reaching 0.7% in February, probably due to a better knowledge of the disease, improvements in preventive measures and in the management of hospitalized patients, and also due to greater case detection. not severe or asymptomatic; although the global mortality rate from covid19 cannot be specified until the epidemic ends

Although these figures show a worrying public health problem, it is important to consider that seasonal flu (which repeats year after year) infected more than 5 million people, of whom some 650,000 died in 2019. It is also important to consider that, although COVID causes since its appearance, an average of 410 daily deaths, the common flu in turn caused about 1,780 deaths every day during 2019. On the other hand, they also die DAILY:



Source: E. Espinoza Own elaboration based on data from <https://www.worldometers.info>



2. Global Context:

Why then does the presence of COVID-19 arouse such a level of panic?

We can cite a series of facts that come together to answer this question:

- a) It is a new infectious agent that was not present until now, which comes from a different species than the human one, which confers several peculiarities, among which stand out: there is no previous immunity or vaccine available, it is of medium lethality but of a high Contagiosity is particularly dangerous for the elderly, especially for those with concomitant and immunosuppressed chronic diseases and for those who meet the last two conditions: advanced age and concomitant chronic diseases.
- b) The crisis that has generated the virus is multidimensional: economic, environmental, biological, health, political, migration, energy, water, food: in short, it would be a true **Crisis of Civilization**. In a recent interview, Mario Róvere¹, Former Coordinator of ALAMES and Former Vice Minister of Health of Cristina Kirchner points out the reason for the jump of viruses from one species to another, attributing it to the unhealthy relationship between humanity and nature, emphasizing that we are facing the consequences of an hegemonic economic model that threatens to injure the system to death, showing precisely unprecedented virulence to accelerate and magnify the crisis of its economic model.
- c) It can be seen that the characteristics of the coronavirus and the population groups in which it is most cruelly been affected, especially the developed countries, both in human terms (which have the populations with the highest demographic density, the oldest and the highest incidence of chronic and degenerative diseases). Those who see their parents and grandparents dying are largely impotent, and also experience another terrible pain: the costs of facing the pandemic are extremely high, even to the point of unsustainability, leading to Malthusian approaches, such as the call of the Lt. Governor of Texas, to the American grandparents to sacrifice themselves for the sake of enabling the survival of the "American way of life". This in line with the statement of the former Director of the International Monetary Fund, Christine Lagarde, who affirmed that people lived too long and that an immediate solution to the economic problem that this meant had to be found.
- d) It is important to note that ALAMES since its foundation has denounced the ferocious privatization attack on health services and the dismantling that Public Health Systems have suffered, by the neoliberal governments, hindering and / or weakening their capacity to respond to epidemics or disasters, as evidenced by the very serious situation in the USA, the country that set itself as a model of health in the form of an insurance market. Observers from the People's Health Movement², contrast the above with the greater degree of resilience and capacity of strong public systems such as those of Hong Kong, Singapore and Japan, which have shown their ability to introduce containment measures, appropriate governance, structures management, planning and integration of other sectors to successfully face, absorb and adapt to the shock against the pandemic.

¹ <http://www.nuestrasvoces.com.ar/entendiendo-las-noticias/mario-rovere-la-salud-individual-se-defiende-colectivamente/?fbclid=IwAR0nphTEjTSQIK7uW6lUmSzVxNGeYYRWLABc-2MN8WmTjIFokJnHuNxXOZo>

² Wim de Ceukelaire y Chiara Bodini



- e) The paradigmatic example of health as a commodity is the United States, where the public system has been reduced to a minimum until it almost disappeared. In Latin America, this public / private contradiction is more evident when comparing Colombia, which represents the mercantile paradigm, and Cuba, which is the example of a public, universal, comprehensive and free system, financed by general taxes, as the ideal system model to guarantee a fast, effective and consistent response to this and future epidemics.
- f) For its part, the establishment tries to reverse causation, trying to attribute the current economic crisis and the stock market crash to the Coronavirus, hiding that the crisis has not subsided since its inception with the real estate crisis of 2007-2008. In February 2018, for example, the fall in stock indexes was already cited as higher than in 2008 and the biggest since 1987³. After a rebound in the stock market crisis, 2018 was cited again in December as “the worst year on Wall Street after the 2008 economic crisis⁴. In August 2019, a further decline in stock indices and a reversal of bond yields, making short-term loans more profitable than long-term loans, warned for the first time of an impending recession, dragging the drop in financial, energy (especially the fall in the price of oil) and non-essential goods sectors⁵. In February 2019, it was quoted in economic publications that 2019 would be a terrible year for finance and 2020 would be even worse, foreshadowing a drop of up to 50% in the markets and pointing out that this new crisis had started in September 2018⁶. Every time these crises have worsened, the solution to inject liquidity into the economy has been the printing of dollars by the US federal reserve and the counterpart central banks; But this time, although these actors will probably try again as in 2008, they do not have the necessary resources, experts say. In fact, Trump approved on March 27 an economic rescue of the US economy (with the excuse of the coronavirus) for 2.2 BILLION DOLLARS (10% of its GDP), which triples the amount approved to cushion the 2009 crisis (700,000 million) . "A wartime investment for our nation," said Senator McConnell, head of the Republican majority in the Senate. In fact, the current deaths from coronavirus in the United States have already exceeded those in their time due to the attack on the twin towers in New York⁷.
- g) The debt of the United States government thus exceeds 23 trillion dollars, more than 104% of its GDP. Trump's measure seeks to face the crisis while sustaining the markets (the money, as in 2009, is destined above all to the corporate rescue - loans, tax deferrals, subsidies - while offering the population to satisfy their basic needs - food, medications, health - while the epidemiological situation becomes normal or controllable). However, this multi-million dollar figure will not solve the fact that in the United States, more than 27 million people are not affiliated with health insurance, without including in these figures “illegal” migrants, which is why, in many cases, despite presenting symptoms, they abstain from seeing the doctor due to the high costs that it could mean. A 2019 West Health and Gallup survey showed that more than 20 percent of people delayed medical treatments or interventions due to their high prices, for example, it is not possible to access a coronavirus test, if you do not have the \$ 1,000 that private laboratories charge to

³ https://elpais.com/economia/2018/02/05/actualidad/1517863106_306024.html

⁴ <https://noticieros.televisa.com/ultimas-noticias/wall-street-2018-lunes-31-diciembre/>

⁵ <https://www.infobae.com/america/eeuu/2019/08/14/wall-street-sufre-fuertes-perdidas-por-la-caida-del-rendimiento-de-la-deuda-del-tesoro-de-eeuu-y-el-temor-a-una-recesion/>

⁶ <https://expansion.mx/economia/2019/02/13/wall-street-pinta-para-vivir-un-mal-2019-y-un-2020-aun-peor-advierte-experto>

⁷ <https://www.lavanguardia.com/internacional/20200328/48121779515/estados-unidos-trump-rescate-financiero-coronavirus.html>



do so. The scientific community is particularly concerned about Trump's 2018 shutdown of the Obama-created Epidemic Control Office and the cuts applied to the CDC.

- h) Therefore, COVID 19 not only escapes to serve as a **backdrop to the capitalist economic crisis (I)**, this is only one element that COVID evidences and sharpens (see literals e, f and g). Three other elements remain as yet undisclosed. The **second** of these elements corresponds to the large transnational companies, which concentrate the production, distribution and marketing of their products and in the search to deepen the efficient and productivist mode of production that capitalism promotes to increase their profits, they resort, without measuring the consequences, to genetic and transgenic manipulation, an element that could catalyze the leap of a virus like this towards the human species. In any case, **the entire global mediation of the pandemic does not attempt to explain either the genesis or the leap towards the human species of this virus (II)**. The **third** element that COVID mercilessly strips is **the rampant privatization of health systems (III)** in order to add them to the generation of profits. Stratification of quality is the norm: the best quality for those who can pay for it; for people with lower incomes, quality health that violates the Right to Health (see paragraphs c and d). It is the elderly and the chronically ill who on this occasion suffer the consequences of privatization, (and in developed countries additionally suffer the users of geriatric services) at the same time that their deaths are functional to the capitalist system, since they are considered a population of Discard that it is not productive, but it is expensive ("The elderly live too long and this is a risk to the global economy. We have to do something and now" Christine Lagarde, 2012, former Director of the IMF). Without any shame, the coronavirus pandemic talks about the statistics (infected, deceased, recovered) but does not talk about the peculiarities of the people who die, they hide the advantage of these deaths for the maximization of profits of private companies and the reduction of pressure on the government. The **fourth** element has to do with the slowdown in economic activity generated by quarantines since companies lose money and people lose money. However, governments prioritize the rescue of companies by injecting them with money so that they do not go bankrupt, since "they sustain the economy, growth and employment"; But governments do not allocate people very little and they are the ones who suffer the cost of unemployment from economic activity. Women are especially affected, since as they are confined to the home, the levels of violence may increase, and the burden of care too. **The pandemic talks about growing costs, but it remains at the macroeconomic or business level, it does not talk about the reality of people in general and women in particular (IV)**.
- i) In summary, the hegemonic media talk about the pandemic, statistics, growing costs, but do not question the model of agricultural production, the consequences of the privatization of health and geriatric services, or the costs and suffering of people.
- j) China and South Korea, it seems that they could control the situation. But the arrival of the epidemic in Europe caused a catastrophic overflow of the health system, mainly in Italy, followed by Spain.
- k) The fact that the USA quickly became the country with the highest number of cases in the world, surpassing China (despite being more populated), indicates to what extent the model of health commodification, taken to its extreme form, deteriorates caring for the population, even in the country with the highest health expenditure (18% of its GDP) in the world.
- l) The problem of the epidemic then, more than its lethality, is its contagion capacity, coupled with the fragility of the health and social protection systems, produced by the successive neoliberal reforms implemented in the welfare states of the countries considered developed. It is a



phenomenon that, like any epidemic, combines elements of the nature of the economy and politics, radically changing fields of representation and producing new trends. Among them a brake on the most harshly orthodox discourses of neoliberal thought. There is a reappearance of Keynesian or Neo-Keynesian proposals for state interventionism, together - in some cases - with deepening of nationalisms. Demands are also generated from societies and peoples in search of vindicating life and against their subordination to the accumulation and concentration of wealth generated by demands from fairer societies, in which health is a fundamental right guaranteed by the state and exercised with the maximum of popular participation under public systems.

- m) The manipulation of the pandemic has deepened the biopolitical control of the population but at the same time has introduced a new global factor in a system of high instability, revealing the most destructive aspects of neoliberal globalization. Given this, various possible scenarios are opened, but nobody can assure with certainty what their resolution will be. If the bubonic plague that killed a third of the European population at the end of the 14th century was a factor that influenced the transition from feudalism to capitalism⁸, why not think that now this stage may be marking a cycle of catastrophic instability in what capitalism was until now. This does not mean that a revolution or consolidation is expected. It means that a period of struggle opens.

3. What happens in Latin America?

The epidemic finds Latin America in a cycle of neoliberal advance aimed at deepening the submission of its peoples to the voracious depredation of life and nature. In many of their countries, the governments that established a regional alliance favoring a certain margin of autonomy have suffered major attacks in an articulation between lawfare, instrumentation of large media corporations and soft coups or directly coups d'etat of a repressive nature as in Bolivia.

The conditions of inequality and poverty have worsened and the level of segmentation and fragmentation of their health systems, added to the application of neoliberal prescriptions, places them in a very bad situation to guarantee the right to health and to face the pandemic and the rest of the diseases of the countries ..

For this reason, the appearance of COVID19 has and will have negative consequences of an economic, social and political nature in Latin American countries, considering the particularity of their political circumstances and also their own characteristics: number of inhabitants, degree of population aging, population density, amount of population concentrated in the urban area, level of industrialization, level of labor informality and unemployment, etc

In the case of Chile, the epidemic put an interval to the sustained level of popular mobilization that had led to the doorstep of a constitutional reform plebiscite, which had as one of its demands the right to health, after decades of commodification of the system, which weakened its response capacity. This was reflected in a curve that had an ascending form, reaching on March 29 a little more than 3,000 cases and 16 deaths, a curve greater than that of Argentina.

In Bolivia, the entry of COVID19, in which 132 cases and 9 deaths were registered today, halted the electoral process that announced as a winner the binomial made up of Luis Arce Catacora and David Choquehuanca, an opponent of the coup plotters. It also served as an excuse to militarize the streets

⁸ <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/255464-la- peste-negra-la-gran-depresion-del-siglo-xiv-y-el-coronavi>



and deepen the repression of the social movements that came out demanding their rights. The weakness of the health system and the lack of necessary supplies to face the pandemic, has generated the reaction of the citizens and the social movements, facing a de facto government that has not even been able to solve the clamor of more than 120 Bolivians. who are stranded on the border with Chile, demanding actions to allow them to enter Bolivia.

The same thing happens in Peru and Ecuador where there have been flagrant episodes of violation of rights. In Ecuador, the pandemic began with the resignation of the Minister of Health due to the lack of elements and services to deal with it and the weakness of the health system as a whole.

In Central America, the countries of the Northern Triangle (Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador) improvise uncoordinated measures between the government instances, on the basis of trial and error, resorting to the Army and its police forces to make effective states of emergency, exception or touches of it remains, in order to control the population by hiding in social distancing. This is accompanied by the absence of transparency, intolerance to criticism and human rights violations, repeatedly denounced by social organizations and the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman. In the region, Costa Rica stands out for having an effective, participatory and respectful human rights civil protection system.

In Argentina, the epidemic found a government that had just taken office after electorally defeating the force that had plunged the country into the most important debt in its history, dragging it into two consecutive years of recession and financial crisis, and degrading the Ministry of Health. to the Secretariat. It has allocated 2% of GDP to try to strengthen the system and add economic support policies to the most vulnerable groups, adding them to existing ones. Since March 13, preventive and compulsory social isolation has been applied, which confines all persons except essential workers to the home, with police control but without establishing a state of emergency. The epidemic so far has fundamentally affected the middle sectors and is only beginning to have community cases, without reaching the poor suburbs yet. As of April 1, there are 1,133 cases of infected, 31 of dead and 248 of recovered, a better result than expected. The problems registered in the isolation policy are multiple: first, the precariousness of households that depend on informal incomes, the problem of institutionalized people (prisoners, inmates in psychiatric and geriatric institutions) and that of victims of violence gender or family. Faced with this, a series of measures have been taken, ranging from the direct supply of food, provision of an extra financial benefit to family groups in precarious or unemployed situations, suspension of payments for services, rents, evictions, etc. Progress is being made in making private health services available to state management. It is fundamentally about buying time while strengthening health care services and buying emergency equipment.

Mexico has a much larger population in informal work and has had a way of approaching the epidemic that considers the characteristics of its country and its population and production structure. Although a good part of the international press has tried to standardize the attitude of President AMLO with the loss of Trump or Bolsonaro due to some public expressions of it, the measures taken have been with planning the stages and simultaneously trying not to break the economy productive. Considering that as of March 28, 12 people had died from COVID19, there were 2,475 suspected cases and 717 confirmed, the situation in this country is much better than that of its neighbor USA.⁹

Cuba, for its part, has once again become an example not only for the care of its own population but also for the solidarity displayed with other countries of the world by providing doctors and equipment. As of April 1, Cuba reports 6 deaths. Once again, Cuba imposes itself morally and technically,

⁹ https://www.telesurtv.net/opinion/La-4T-y-el-juego-de-suma-cero-ante-el-Covid-19-20200328-0017.html?utm_campaign



demonstrating that it has one of the best public health systems in the entire American hemisphere, offering the world "Interferon alfa 2b" as a probably successful treatment. At this point, it turns out that, in a situation of pandemic crisis, it has an efficient public health system to deal with, to which an organized people joins, responding to the community collective and not to commercial individualism.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The debate on the subject of the epidemic is not exclusively health, it is also ideological, political, economic and social. Different strategies and stages have been generated to confront the pandemic, from the isolation of vulnerable groups to the confinement of the entire population, suspending activities and services except the essential ones. In some cases, constitutional guarantees are also suspended, implementing a state of emergency with repressive authority, in others not. In any case, the most affected are always the social groups most vulnerable to poverty, gender, disability and / or belonging to indigenous peoples. In this sense, the social determination of health must be resumed, since it is the initial social, economic and labor conditions that define the measures to tackle the pandemic.

For this reason, the Coordination of the Latin American Association of Social Medicine - ALAMES, calls on all its activists and defenders of human rights, academic Associations, and especially our thematic networks and social movements that fight for health and life together with ALAMES, to demand as an essential role the intervention of the State to strengthen social protection, proposing:

- A. Preserve employment, housing and its rents, access to sufficient and variable food, transportation, access to an Individual basic Income, support to the self-employed, small businesses, cooperatives and the informal sector of the economy,
- B. Transparency and democracy both in access to epidemiological information and in decision-making,
- C. Universal access to health services, both at the first level of care and in hospitals.
- D. State intervention by the private sector, under a single authority, including urgent medical transport, both public and private.
- E. Coordination with all social organizations with general actions to care for the population and with public health at the command post, accompanied by a strengthened unified health information system, with epidemiological surveillance systems implemented throughout the country.
- F. Strengthen the role of the first level of care in necessary preventive and community practices, in the care of cases of non-serious evolution, in the detection of cases, application of tests and follow-up of contacts.
- G. Take special measures during the period of compulsory stay at home to prevent gender violence and abuse of children and adolescents.
- H. Manage the care of populations in confinement or institutionalized situations: prisons, Psychiatric, Geriatric Hospitals, and children's institutionalization centers.
- I. Establish citizen control over the police or military forces that assist in complying with the preventive regulations to report situations of abuse or institutional violence that must be avoided.
- J. Recover and incorporate those ancestral uses and knowledge and traditional medicines that can contribute to health care under an intercultural approach.
- K. Repudiate any attempt to use the pandemic as a cover-up argument to violate the self-determination and sovereignty of the peoples, as manifested in the onslaught that - arguing the epidemic - the United States tries to make with its intervention in Venezuela.



- L. We support Argentina's proposal in the G20 to lift the blockade against Cuba and Venezuela for humanitarian reasons.
- M. We demand an end to harassment and repression in the countries where they are used, prioritizing them over preventive measures and which have constituted a flagrant violation of rights.

As Atilio Borón says: nobody wants, except for the handful of tycoons who grew rich with the savage prey perpetrated during the neoliberal era, that the world be the same as before. A tremendous challenge for those of us who want to build a post-capitalist world because, without a doubt, the pandemic and its devastating effects offer a unique, unexpected opportunity that would be unforgivable to miss. Therefore, the slogan of the hour for all the anti-capitalist forces on the planet is: raise awareness, organize and fight; fight to the end, as Fidel wanted when in a memorable meeting with intellectuals held within the framework of the Havana International Book Fair, in February 2012, he said goodbye to us saying: "If you are told: be assured that the planet is ending and this thinking species is ending, what are they going to do, start crying?" I think we have to fight, it is what we have always done." Let's do it!

The crisis generated by the Covid 19 has been showing that "everything solid vanishes in the air" because in reality what seemed so solid was only a great fiction built and sustained by different power devices of a capitalist-patriarchal-colonial order that Today it seems to explode into a thousand pieces. Perhaps the time has come to build a New Order. Another World is possible: pluriverse, non-capitalist, non-patriarchal, non-colonial, profoundly just, democratic, solidarity and community. A world where many worlds fit

The "people's hour" is not over and the final outcome will depend on an urgent and necessary universal awakening "

FOR HEALTH AND LIFE! UNIQUE FREE AND UNIVERSAL PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEMS

ALAMES COORDINATION

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