

## REVIEW ARTICLE

## A Review of the Partnership and Social Capital in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

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### ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on daily life worldwide. Multiple sectors have faced uncertainty in addressing the crisis, necessitating urgent and coordinated responses. One crucial approach is to foster partnership and social capital. Therefore, this paper aims to demonstrate the importance of partnership and social capital in managing COVID-19 outbreaks. A Boolean search strategy in Scopus and PubMed identified 1,454 published papers. Quality assessment was conducted using the Scale for the Assessment of Narrative Review Articles (SANRA). Inclusion criteria encompassed all COVID-19 implementation policies, regardless of publication type, including observational studies, health policy opinions, and policy briefs. After screening, 23 papers were deemed eligible for further analysis. Partnership and social capital were found to be effective in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic through specific components: relationships, networking, mobilization, and problem-solving for social capital; and collaboration, engagement, implementation, strengthening, and consolidation for partnerships. Furthermore, the relationships among government, stakeholders, and the community fostered resilience and solidarity during the crisis, facilitated by various health policy approaches employing both bottom-up and top-down regulations. The implementation of partnership and social capital strategies may serve as effective solutions for controlling the spread of COVID-19 and enhancing resilience during the pandemic.

**Keyword:** Partnership, social capital, COVID-19 pandemic

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### INTRODUCTION

The initial coronavirus outbreak, reported in Wuhan in December 2019, led to an exponential increase in global cases. As a novel strain, the coronavirus demonstrated a higher capacity for infecting definitive hosts compared to previous outbreaks in 2003 and 2013.<sup>1</sup> In February 2020, the General Secretary of the World Health Organization (WHO) declared an early public health emergency to mitigate potentially destructive impacts on health systems, particularly in middle- and low-income countries.<sup>2</sup> Despite these efforts, the policy was insufficient to contain the global spread of the virus. Over 169 million individuals became infected, and more than three million people died as a result.<sup>3</sup> This situation

triggered a global crisis affecting multiple sectors, including the economy, politics, and security, with the health system remaining the most vulnerable.<sup>4</sup>

To effectively control the COVID-19 pandemic, the health sector requires a comprehensive and multidimensional approach to prevent system collapse. Governments in countries such as Italy, South Korea, and Taiwan have implemented specific policies to enhance the capacity and resilience of their health sectors.<sup>5-8</sup> While standard interventions—including lockdowns, widespread contact tracing, and testing—are crucial, these must be supported by regulations that promote collaboration among intergovernmental organizations and private sector networks. Engaging the private sector

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is essential for capacity building, through the provision of medical equipment, resources, and financial support.<sup>9</sup> For example, the South Korean government collaborated with companies such as Samsung to track and detect suspected cases using mobile phone data and drive-through testing systems.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, Taiwan's experience with the 2003 coronavirus outbreak enabled the government to respond rapidly to the current pandemic by immediately closing borders and implementing swift policy measures.<sup>11</sup> Both countries possess significant resources and capabilities that facilitate the activation of partnerships and the mobilization of social capital. Lessons learned from South Korea and Taiwan can inform policy implementation in other countries seeking to contain COVID-19.

***The concept of partnership in the health sector:*** The concept of partnership encompasses a broad, multidisciplinary spectrum. Key elements of partnership include collaboration, engagement, implementation, strengthening, and consolidation.<sup>12</sup> Collaboration involves establishing networks across sectors, including government, public, and private entities, through formal agreements. Addressing community health challenges requires robust collaboration among stakeholders. Engagement refers to the application of information and technology to facilitate program implementation. The digitalization of information enables the rapid dissemination of scientific knowledge worldwide, making it an effective strategy for formulating health policy during the pandemic. Implementation consists of intervention programs that address societal challenges through training, workshops, and volunteer activities. These programs empower community members to increase awareness of health issues and seek alternative solutions. Effective implementation fosters a sense of belonging, collective awareness, and responsibility for environmental and community well-being. The final stages of partnership involve strengthening and consolidation. *Consolidation* is defined as the application of specific health policies to ensure regulatory compliance within the community, often accompanied by incentives or sanctions. Strengthening entails expanding the reach of interventions to additional communities or regions, thereby promoting independent problem-solving and disseminating best practices. In summary, partnership represents

a collaborative approach to engaging society in program implementation, consolidating community action, and extending the impact of interventions to broader populations.

***The concept of social capital in the health sector:*** Social capital has been widely utilized to support policy implementation across various sectors. Several scholars conceptualize social capital in terms of social structure, recognition, and organizational frameworks to enhance the scope of social interventions.<sup>13-15</sup> Nevertheless, these definitions do not fully encompass the nuances of social capital within the health domain. "Social" refers to relationships and networks within a community, shaped by socio-demographic factors, while "capital" denotes the mobilization of resources to address community challenges. Such resources extend beyond financial support and include human and natural assets. In the health sector, social capital comprises relationships, networking, mobilization, and problem-solving. Relationships within society range from close familial bonds to broader connections within the wider community. These bonds are fundamental for establishing networks that serve as bridges for engagement, involvement, and mutual benefit across community sectors. *Mobilization* involves expanding the reach of interventions to larger populations, often facilitated by information technology platforms. The role of social media platforms, in particular, is integral to health policy interventions, enabling the dissemination of health programs to rural and remote areas. Problem-solving constitutes the goal of policy interventions, aimed at addressing health issues. During the COVID-19 pandemic, adherence to health protocols by community members has been pivotal in reducing infection rates. This paper does not address two additional aspects of social capital implementation: community norms and local wisdom. Future research should explore how local wisdom, societal norms, and values serve as key determinants of successful health programs. Ultimately, these concepts seek to foster community bonding and bridging, thereby cultivating a sense of belonging, protection, and the maintenance of a conducive community environment. Social capital, therefore, can be understood as the relationships and networks that facilitate resource mobilization for problem-solving within communities, rooted in socio-demographic characteristics.

Based on the preceding discussion, this paper seeks to address two central research questions: First, how has the implementation of partnership and social capital influenced responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in specific countries? Second, what is the nature of the relationship between partnership and social capital in managing infectious disease outbreaks? Accordingly, this study aims to examine and elucidate recent trends in partnership and social capital policies as mechanisms for addressing extraordinary challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the paper will present a conceptual diagram illustrating how stakeholders can effectively integrate partnership and social capital to enhance collaborative responses.

## METHODS

This literature review employed a Boolean search strategy in two reputable journal databases: PubMed and Scopus. The Boolean method, widely recognized in academic research, was used to identify relevant publications from December 2019 through April 25, 2021. The screening process comprised three distinct stages. First, titles and abstracts were categorized as useful, not useful, potentially useful, or duplicates. Second, entries deemed not useful or duplicate were excluded, while potentially useful papers were further analyzed. Third, full-text manuscripts were

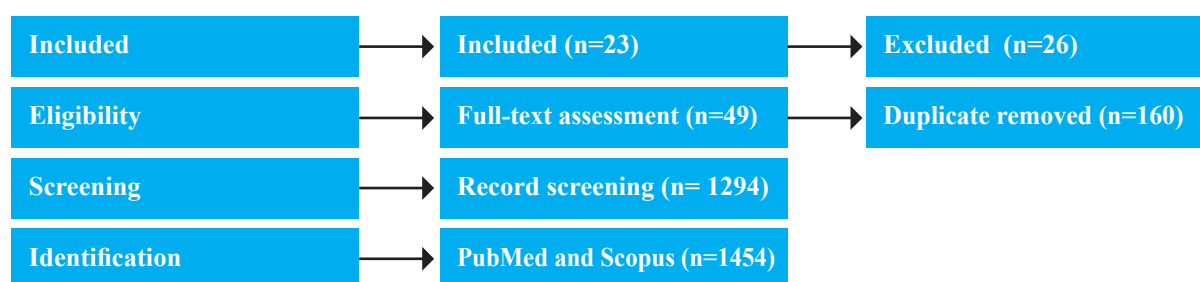
retrieved, thoroughly reviewed, and summarized. The inclusion criteria and search strategy for this narrative review were guided by the SANRA guidelines,<sup>16</sup> as detailed in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Inclusion criteria and searching strategy

Criteria	Description
Problems	COVID-19 pandemic
Concept	Implementation of partnership government to government, government to the private sector, or private to private partnership Implementation of social capital in the community in every sector, from small scale to the larger one.
Context	Implementation partnership or social capital in developed or developing countries, from the lowest scale in the community to the enormous scale at the national level.
Type of source	Any scientific research publications, such as systematic review, meta-analysis observational study, experimental study, or case study in English, excluded commentary, rebuttal, opinion, letter to the editor, short communication.
Searching strategy	social capital OR social cohesion OR social support AND partnership OR networking OR cooperation AND COVID-19 OR SARS

## RESULTS

According to the searching strategy, the number of published papers in Scopus and PubMed was 1454, as present in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Flowchart for the methods of selection of literature.

**Descriptive results:** As a result of the selection process, 23 eligible papers were identified, comprising five research articles and 18 case studies. Six studies originated from the United States, while four were conducted in South Korea. The remaining papers were distributed across Iran, Jordan, Slovenia, Japan, Canada, Norway, Italy, China, Malaysia, Brazil, India, Taiwan, and Ireland, each contributing one study.

**Partnership components:** The collaborative component underscores the necessity for local, regional, and national governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector to promote contact tracing, monitor suspected cases, and support vulnerable populations during periods of self-quarantine and isolation.<sup>17-20</sup> In terms of engagement, partnerships may be operationalized through the development

and utilization of extensive databases, information systems, and technology platforms, including the use of social media and digitalization to inform and guide stakeholders.<sup>21-25</sup> Implementation initiatives are realized through training programs and workshops aimed at enhancing the competencies of healthcare workers and volunteers, as well as by providing supplementary resources essential for pandemic response.<sup>26-28</sup> Strengthening is achieved through targeted programs established between government entities and stakeholders, such as the enforcement of emergency measures or movement control policies.<sup>6,24,29,30</sup> Lastly, consolidation refers to the successful extension of partnership programs to additional communities, regions, and even globally, thereby reinforcing societal empowerment.<sup>22</sup>

**Social capital components:** Communities characterized by high levels of social capital foster relationships that promote adherence to regulations and facilitate bonding among members, including family, friends, and neighbors.<sup>31,32</sup> Social capital also enables the formation of peer networks across sectors, such as the hospitality industry, the pharmaceutical sector, and between counties.<sup>33,34</sup> It serves to mobilize environmental resources, empowering community members and extending support to large-scale rural or remote areas through digitalization.<sup>22,35</sup> Policies supported by social capital result in effective problem-solving at the community level, exemplified by the distribution and accessibility of personal protective equipment (PPE), the enforcement of mobility restrictions, and the provision of daily necessities during isolation.<sup>20,21,26,30,36,37,38</sup> A detailed summary of the reviewed papers is presented in Table 1.

## DISCUSSION

This narrative review examines the various strategies employed by governments during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on the activation of partnerships and the enhancement of community capacity through social capital. Most studies address partnership at different levels, from local to national, highlighting the interactions among public, private, and governmental entities. Additionally, social capital is characterized by the community's capacity to comply with health policies aimed at controlling COVID-19 transmission within local environments. Countries that have implemented these approaches have demonstrated notable reductions in COVID-19

case numbers. Each component of partnership and social capital is interconnected, mutually reinforcing their effectiveness. Given the absence of universally accepted definitions, the concepts are interpreted based on the perspectives presented in the literature. For instance, collaboration is closely linked with consolidation, networking, and relationships, and vice versa. Several themes in partnership literature also intersect with those of social capital. Subsequent sections will address how the implementation of partnership and social capital has influenced responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in specific countries.

The implementation of partnerships, particularly those grounded in collaboration, facilitates interactions among public, private, and governmental sectors. Effective collaboration requires a shared vision and mission for addressing the disruptive effects of COVID-19 across various domains. This shared perspective must be supported by commitment, consistency, and continuity. Several countries, including Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, have successfully engaged multi-level corporations in collaborative initiatives, resulting in effective regional control of COVID-19.<sup>17,18,26</sup> The importance of strengthening collaboration is further supported by the literature, which emphasizes the necessity of coordination, cooperation, and collaboration within the health sector as fundamental components of pandemic response.<sup>40</sup> Recommended actions include establishing respiratory clinics, expanding testing centers, and repurposing public offices as shelters.<sup>24,26,27</sup>

The "approaching" strategy refers to the application of targeted approaches, such as the use of digital platforms. Digitalization enhances accessibility, affordability, and availability, thereby facilitating the dissemination and implementation of health policies.<sup>41</sup> Numerous studies report the effective use of platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp to achieve these objectives.<sup>23,35,38</sup> In the context of this review, the concept of "approaching" reinforces the need to transform public health interventions by leveraging digital tools for information dissemination and consultation.<sup>42</sup>

Implementation necessitates concrete actions through specific programs, such as training sessions and workshops, to enhance community capability and resilience.<sup>26-28</sup> Numerous non-governmental organizations have contributed by offering skill-based online training and case-

based webinars related to COVID-19.<sup>22</sup> Existing research demonstrates that such training effectively increases healthcare workers' awareness, skills, and capabilities.<sup>44</sup> Strengthening health policy is another essential measure, as evidenced by comprehensive policy implementation in several countries.<sup>6,24,29,30</sup> For instance, the Indonesian government introduced large-scale social restrictions, which proved effective in managing the pandemic.<sup>44</sup>

The final component of partnership is consolidation, which involves extending and scaling successful interventions to other communities or countries. Replicating effective interventions is critical for demonstrating efficacy and addressing challenges. Given the diversity of social and cultural contexts, it is essential for governments to assess both strengths and weaknesses when adapting interventions. This conclusion is supported by previous research, which highlights the necessity of accommodating diversity to ensure intervention effectiveness.<sup>45</sup>

Relationships fostered through social capital among community members play a critical role in pandemic management and policy implementation. These connections foster strong bonds and serve as bridges to enhance resilience, social support, and social cohesion.<sup>46</sup> Social capital operates at multiple levels, from individuals and families to larger community networks, as documented in previous studies.<sup>31,32</sup> For example, research in Oman demonstrates that community support significantly contributes to volunteerism, information dissemination, and the development of action plans rooted in local resources.<sup>47</sup> Networking, as a component of social capital, often involves forming peer groups at the community or regional level to address pandemic-related challenges. The creation of such networks among community leaders facilitates the sharing of experience and knowledge, offering mutual advantages for navigating unprecedented crises. Given the widespread disruption across industries, community survival strategies are imperative.<sup>33,34</sup> Evidence from India suggests that community-based networking has a substantial impact on pandemic control through various participatory actions.<sup>48</sup>

Resource mobilization—drawing on environmental assets—educates community members and extends the reach of intervention

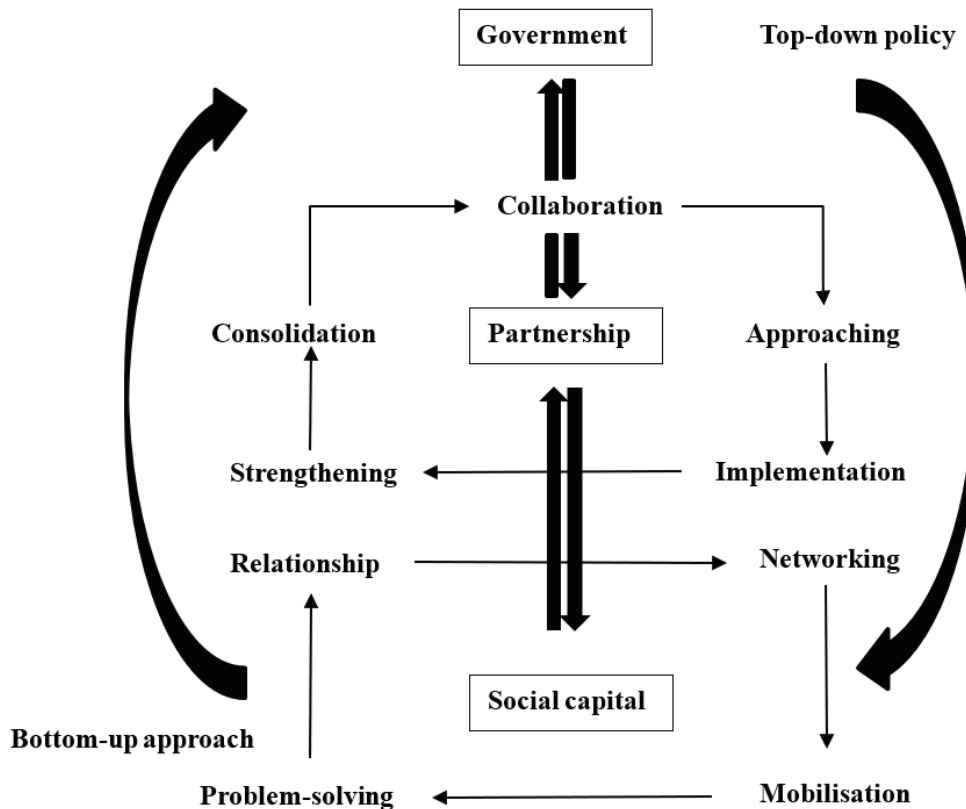
programs.<sup>22,35</sup> Mobilization efforts can be enhanced through digital platforms, which expand the capacity for response across broad societal segments. Further support for this approach comes from studies in India that highlight the importance of incorporating community mobilization into pandemic response plans.<sup>49</sup> The aim of social capital is problem-solving, specifically through the implementation of health protocols at the community level to support peer groups, particularly during periods of lockdown. Sustained innovation and creativity in community-based problem-solving are essential for reducing infection rates and strengthening societal resilience.<sup>50</sup>

Partnership and social capital are interrelated concepts in health policy, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. These elements should be integrated, as each reinforces the other. Partnerships serve to connect government and society by distributing resources and establishing networks that empower communities. In contrast, social capital emphasizes the community's capacity to mobilize resources following interventions facilitated through partnership programs. The primary objective of such collaborative approaches is to foster community empowerment and autonomy in addressing health challenges.

The scope of social capital extends beyond previous definitions, encompassing the utilization of local resources to promote behavioral change and solidarity within communities. The functions of partnership and social capital are complementary and often occur simultaneously. For instance, government regulations are operationalized through partnerships that implement programs and interventions at the community level; conversely, these programs and interventions should be subject to ongoing evaluation based on emerging local needs. Community-driven recommendations can inform government policy, leading to adjustments and refinements for subsequent interventions. The process from government to community via partnership is typically characterized as a top-down approach, whereas the provision of feedback and recommendations from communities represents a bottom-up strategy. Given the unique challenges faced by different communities, continuous evaluation is essential to improving the quality of health policy. Figure 1 illustrates the dynamic connection between partnership and social capital in this context.

This paper underscores the importance of reinforcing partnership and social capital in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These elements have proven effective in managing outbreaks by leveraging public-private-government networks, as demonstrated by several countries, and by empowering communities to build resilience and solidarity. However, the success of these approaches is contingent upon

the resources and implementation capacities of individual countries. A notable limitation of this review is the scarcity of research on partnership and social capital, with most available studies being case based. Further research is warranted to comprehensively assess the impact of partnership and social capital on enhancing community cohesion during the COVID-19 pandemic.



**Figure 2.** The conceptual framework between the partnership and social capital during the pandemic.

**CONCLUSION**

The unprecedented escalation of the COVID-19 pandemic across the globe since late 2019 necessitates comprehensive and coordinated action. Effective epidemic control has been demonstrated through the activation of partnerships and the empowerment of communities via social capital. The specific components of partnership and social capital foster mutually beneficial connections among governments, stakeholders, and communities. The implementation of these strategies supports health policy establishment

and enforcement, contributing to the flattening of the pandemic curve and promoting behavioral change.

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