

In global health, speaking politically correct is not always the right thing

En salud global, hablar políticamente correcto no siempre es lo correcto

Jesus David Cortes Gil^{1*}  Diana Milena Cortes Gil² 

 *jdcorgilpt@gmail.com

¹ Escola Nacional de Saúde Pública - Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Lisboa, Portugal

² Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Morelos (UAEM), Morelos, México

Recibido: 3/12/2024 aprobado: 10/12/2024

Abstract

In the complex landscape of contemporary global health, the interplay of social, political, and environmental factors presents significant challenges, particularly affecting younger demographics. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that prioritizes innovative strategies, international collaboration, and data-driven insights. However, political correctness often stifles crucial conversations, leading to suboptimal health outcomes. Wars, corruption, and hunger further complicate global health efforts, disrupt healthcare systems and increase disease spread. Scientists play a crucial role in bridging the gap between research and policy, advocating for evidence-based discussions to foster sustainable solutions.

Keywords: Global health; World Health; Policy; Violence; War Exposure

Resumen

En el complejo panorama de la salud global contemporánea, la interacción de factores sociales, políticos y ambientales presenta desafíos significativos, afectando particularmente a las generaciones más jóvenes. Abordar estos problemas requiere un enfoque integral que priorice estrategias innovadoras, colaboración internacional e insights basados en datos. Sin embargo, la corrección política a menudo sofoca conversaciones cruciales, lo que lleva a resultados de salud subóptimos. Las guerras, la corrupción y el hambre complican aún más los esfuerzos de salud global, interrumpen los sistemas de salud y aumentan la propagación de enfermedades. Los científicos desempeñan un papel crucial en cerrar la brecha entre la investigación y la política, abogando por discusiones basadas en evidencia para fomentar soluciones sostenibles.

Palabras clave: Salud Global; Salud Mundial; Política; Violencia; Exposición a la Guerra

Suggested citation: Cortes J, Cortes D. In global health, speaking politically correct is not always the right thing. 2025; 57:e 25v57rt01. doi: <https://doi.org/10.18273/saluduis.57.e:25v57rt01>



In contemporary global health, a complex system is influenced by an intricate interplay of social, political, and environmental factors^{1,2}. The challenges encountered in preserving physical and mental health are numerous and formidable, particularly impacting younger demographics. Health and human rights organizations are issuing critical alerts, emphasizing that this era poses significant challenges for children and young adults, potentially marking it as one of the most demanding periods in recent history. The large-scale displacement of populations, primarily due to violence and conflict, significantly increases their susceptibility to health-related vulnerabilities. This threat transcends physical health issues, as the psychological repercussions can be profound and enduring, underscoring the imperative for prompt and decisive intervention³. Addressing these issues with delays or excessive caution exacerbates the situation, highlighting the dangers of inaction in the face of such global health crises.

Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires a comprehensive and audacious approach that prioritizes innovative strategies to enhance the health and rights of those most affected. By fostering international collaboration and engaging diverse stakeholders, sustainable solutions can be devised to tackle the root causes and enhance resilience against adversity. Moreover, integrating technology and data-driven insights can significantly improve the effectiveness of health interventions, enabling timely responses to emerging threats. Utilizing these tools makes global health initiatives more precise and efficient, ensuring that resources are directed towards those in greatest need.

Ultimately, the path forward demands unwavering commitment and a concerted effort. By adopting a holistic, forward-thinking strategy, we can navigate the complex challenges of contemporary global health issues and aspire towards a healthier, more equitable future for all.

The pervasive violence and destruction reported by the media and observed in our daily lives raises significant concerns. This issue extends beyond adults to encompass the most vulnerable groups, including children, the elderly, and animals, across nearly all countries. The prevailing approach, which often involves maintaining a politically correct stance, seems ineffective. It tends to obscure and downplay the severity of the situation, preventing proper acknowledgment of the problem's magnitude. Without such recognition and focused attention, addressing these global phenomena becomes challenging. Consequently, the likelihood increases that these significant challenges will continue adversely impacting societal well-being.

While important for respectful discourse, political correctness can sometimes overshadow crucial conversations about sensitive health issues. For instance, in the context of diseases like AIDS, there has been a tendency to prioritize politically correct language over direct epidemiological discussions, potentially leading to gaps in public understanding and response strategies⁴. This emphasis on political correctness can hinder open discussions about effective health strategies, resulting in suboptimal health outcomes⁵. For example, in some regions, the reluctance to discuss culturally sensitive topics such as sexual health has impeded efforts to implement comprehensive education and prevention programs, which are vital for disease control and health promotion.

Wars and conflicts present formidable challenges to global health by creating complex humanitarian emergencies that severely disrupt healthcare systems. These disruptions make it challenging to control the spread of diseases and effectively manage public health⁶. The aftermath of armed conflict often includes a breakdown in infrastructure and healthcare delivery, leading to increased vulnerabilities among affected populations. The impact on public health is profound, with mental health suffering significantly due to trauma and stress. At the same time, the spread of infectious diseases is exacerbated by overcrowding and poor sanitary conditions⁷. For instance, the Syrian conflict has led to the re-emergence of polio due to the disruption of vaccination programs.

Corruption and hunger are critical issues affecting global health, particularly in developing countries. Corruption undermines food security by diverting resources from those in need, impacting overall health and reducing life expectancy⁸. Hunger, exacerbated by political instability, leads to widespread malnutrition and increases the prevalence of preventable diseases⁹. In many African countries, corruption has hindered the distribution of international aid, leading to persistent hunger and nutritional deficiencies that weaken immune systems and impede development. This cycle of poverty and poor health perpetuates socio-economic disparities and challenges global health equity.

In all countries, the prevalence of violence has severe implications for mental health. Exposure to violence increases the risk of various mental health problems, highlighting the urgent need for interventions aimed at reducing violence and supporting mental health¹⁰. Programs that focus on violence prevention and mental health support can transform communities. For example, community-based mental health initiatives in Latin America have demonstrated success in reducing the stigma associated with mental illness and improving access to care for those affected by violence.

Some political decisions can often lead to the re-emergence of diseases that were once considered under control. For instance, changes in vaccination policies can lead to the resurgence of vaccine-preventable diseases, posing serious threats to global health. The resurgence of measles in several developed countries serves as a stark reminder of the consequences of declining vaccination rates due to misinformation and vaccine hesitancy. This highlights the need for robust public health campaigns and policy decisions prioritizing scientific evidence to prevent disease outbreaks and protect public health.

Identifying tasks requiring attention is only part of the responsibility. Scientists must rigorously and transparently communicate the truth across diverse platforms, from specialized academic forums and everyday environments to major symposiums, conferences, medical institutions, and even prominent international stages. Engaging in discussions thoroughly, without evading potentially contentious subjects, is crucial. Such forthright dialogue is indispensable for authentic solutions to the world's critical issues. Within the scientific community, there is an ethical imperative to seek and convey truth, regardless of prevailing societal or political pressures. This obligation is global, transcending disciplines and shaping wider public dialogues. Scientists must champion evidence-based discussions and foster an environment that promotes open inquiry and critical analysis. By doing so, they contribute to a deeper understanding of complex phenomena and help in formulating well-informed, effective strategies to address pressing global challenges. Additionally, scientists' responsibilities extend beyond mere observation and analysis. They play an active role in shaping policies and influencing decision-making processes. By leveraging their expertise and credibility, scientists can bridge the gap between research and practical application, ensuring that scientific insights are translated into meaningful action. This commitment to truth and transparency is vital for building public trust and fostering collaboration among diverse stakeholders, ultimately paving the way for sustainable and impactful solutions.

Addressing these challenges requires a departure from politically correct narratives and a shift toward more candid discussions and actions that prioritize public health outcomes over political considerations. This may involve addressing sensitive issues directly and implementing policies that prioritize the common good despite potential political backlash.

Authors' contributions

JC proposed the idea, conducted the study, and wrote the final version of the paper. DC wrote the article's final version.

Ethical Declarations

The data used in this study are public sources of information, and ethical approval was already obtained by the institutions responsible for its implementation in each country. Databases are anonymous, ensuring data confidentiality.

Competing interests

We declare no competing interests.

AI Technological Support

In preparing this paper, the program Hyperwrite was utilized to assist with grammar correction and translation into the English language.

References

1. Cortes Gil JD, Vargues Aguiar PM, Ferrinho P. One Health defines an emerging sixth wave of public health development. *J Glob Health*. 2023; 13: 03062. doi: <https://doi.org/10.7189/jogh.13.03062>
2. Cortés J, Aguiar PMV, Ferrinho P. COVID-19-related adolescent mortality and morbidity in nineteen European countries. *Eur J Pediatr* [Internet]. 2023; 182(9): 3997–4005. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00431-023-05068-z>
3. Gil JDC, Aguiar PMV. Children and Adolescents during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Analysis of Some Protection Aspects of 10 Latin American and Caribbean Countries. *Portuguese Journal of Public Health*. 2023; 41(1): 26–33. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1159/000530093>
4. Chin James. *The AIDS pandemic : the collision of epidemiology with political correctness*. Radcliffe; 2007. 230 p. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/17459265200700016>
5. Rey J, Koplan P, Bond C, Merson MH, Reddy S, Rodriguez MH, et al. Towards a common definition of global health. *Lancet*. 2009; 373: 1993–5. doi: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(09\)60332-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(09)60332-9)
6. Brennan RJ, Nandy R. Complex humanitarian emergencies: A major global health challenge. Vol. 13, *Emergency Medicine*. 2001. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1442-2026.2001.00203.x>
7. Garry S, Checchi F. Armed conflict and public health: Into the 21st century. *Journal of Public Health (United Kingdom)*. 2020; 42(3): E287–98. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdz095>
8. Uchendu FN, Abolarin TO. Corrupt practices negatively influenced food security and live expectancy in developing countries. *Pan African Medical Journal*. 2015; 20. doi: <https://doi.org/10.11604/pamj.2015.20.110.5311>
9. Uchendu FN. Hunger influenced life expectancy in war-torn Sub-Saharan African countries. *J Health Popul Nutr*. 2018; 37(1). doi: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41043-018-0143-3>
10. Ribeiro WS, Andreoli SB, Ferri CP, Prince M, Mari JJ. Exposição à violência e problemas de saúde mental em países em desenvolvimento: uma revisão da literatura. *Braz J Psychiatry*. 2009; 31(2): s49-57. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1590/s1516-44462009000600003>