

Men and young people are more likely to disregard COVID-19 regulations, research finds

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Men, younger people, and those with conservative political views are less likely to comply with COVID-19 measures such as social distancing, finds new research from BI Norwegian Business School (<https://www.bi.edu/>). The findings also confirm that detailed instructions on the virus and health behaviours can help increase adherence to COVID-19 measures.

The most important solution to combat COVID-19 so far has been to regulate contact with each other and increase personal hygiene, including handwashing. Therefore, it is important to understand what can be done to improve hygiene and social distancing behaviours.

Occupational psychologist Professor Adrian Furnham, and colleagues, investigated the relationship between personality and reactions to COVID-19 advice. They measured participants' reactions to advice given by local authorities and media including opposition and compliance with restrictions, health behaviour, such as handwashing, and social distancing. Participants were from the UK, Italy, Spain, Poland, Portugal, the US, Canada, and Mexico.

The results show that those with conservative political views, males, younger people, extraverts, and those with low neuroticism, low agreeableness, and low conscientiousness are more likely to disregard government advice on COVID-19 and put others at risk. Those with high externalising personality disorders, including antisocial and narcissistic personalities, are also less likely to be compliant.

The researchers then tested a possible strategy to modify behaviour and improve social distancing and hygiene behaviours based on principles suggested in a previous study. These principles were incorporated into experimental instructions including facts on COVID-19, explanations behind restrictions and associated rewards, how the environment can be restructured to reduce infection, implications for breaking rules, and risks of infection.

Participants were measured on their likelihood of opposition, compliance, social distancing, and hygiene behaviours before reading the detailed experimental instructions or less-detailed ordinary instructions to continue current government advice. They were then surveyed on their future reactions to COVID-19 measures. They found that lengthy and detailed instructions related to health behaviours, compared to ordinary instructions, have a positive effect on behaviour.

Professor Furnham says,

“Intentions to comply with government restrictions in the future increased in the experimental group with good hygiene behaviour also improving. However, opposition to regulations increased in both groups, but to a lesser extent in the experimental group. Similarly, social distancing behaviours decreased in both groups, but less so in the experimental group. This may reflect that social distancing behaviours are more difficult to handle in the long-term than improved personal hygiene.”

Individual differences appear to be important predictors for health behaviours during the pandemic and

experimental instructions could be used to increase desirable hygiene behaviours and diminish the increase in undesirable social behaviours.

The preliminary main findings of the study were recently presented at a COVID-19 research seminar at BI Norwegian Business School. The research has been submitted for a peer-reviewed journal and is yet to be published.

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For more information, a copy of the presentation, or to speak with the researchers, please contact Kyle Grizzell from BlueSky Education on 07904706136 or kyle@bluesky-pr.com