

# Here's why some university students complied with lockdown rules and others didn't

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By studying the behaviour of nearly 7,000 university students across seven European countries during COVID lockdowns, researchers from Trinity Business School and Erasmus University Rotterdam have discovered which aspects of someone's personality determines compliance.

The study investigates the relationship between impulsive personality traits and compliance with COVID-19 restrictions. They also distinguish between compliance with social distancing measures and compliance with hygiene measures.

Annelot Wismans, PhD candidate of the Erasmus University Rotterdam, states "When starting the study, we had two expectations. Firstly, we expected that students with a more impulsive personality would have more difficulty to comply with COVID-19 restrictions, as they often respond automatically and tend towards risky behaviour. Secondly, we focused on another aspect related to impulsivity, time-preferences. Individuals differ in the degree to which they are focussed on immediate benefits over long-term benefits. We expected that students more focussed on the present, in other words those more impatient, would be more likely to violate the regulations. For example, choosing the immediate benefits of throwing a party over the more long-term benefits of slowing the spread of the virus."

Discussing the outcomes of the study, Professor Andrew Burke, Dean of Trinity Business School says "In line with our expectation, we found that the self-reported personality trait 'impulsivity' lowers compliance with both social distancing and hygiene measures. Surprisingly, we found that impatient students who are more focussed on immediate benefits complied more with the covid-19 regulations".

"There are several potential explanations for this finding", says Roy Thurik, Professor at Erasmus University Rotterdam. "COVID-19 related stress may have affected both students' impatience levels as well as their compliance. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic was surrounded by a lot of uncertainty regarding its duration. It is possible that students believed that compliance with regulations would have benefits in the short-term."

The study highlights the importance of individual differences in impulsivity in regard to compliance with public health measures during a pandemic. For highly impulsive individuals, dealing with these situations may be harder, as they tend to deliberate less about the consequences of their behaviours.

Policy makers should take these findings into account to communicate messages in a more tailored and targeted manner. As more impulsive individuals rarely engage in extensive forethought, emphasizing the consequences of noncompliance or facilitating alternative outlets for impulses, for example physical activity, could be encouraged to decrease the increased risk of high-impulsivity individuals to engage in risky behaviour during pandemics.

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For more information, a copy of the research paper, or to speak with the researchers, contact Kate

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