

Fielding a National Survey during COVID-19 in the U.S.

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Research in the Time of COVID-19

- › When the pandemic hit, social science researchers wanted to understand how people's lives were impacted—and since things were changing fast, we needed to conduct studies right away
- › In *just* the first 6 months of the pandemic, about 1,800 social science articles about COVID-19 were published worldwide (Aristovnik, Ravšelj, & Umek, 2020)
- › In addition, social science researchers have been sharing survey content and data on an ongoing basis:
 - Societal Experts Action Network (SEAN) COVID-19 Survey Archive (weekly updates on AAPOR-net)
 - USC Center for Economic and Social Research's Understanding Coronavirus in America Tracking Survey & Data
 - Pew Research Center Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Surveys & Data

Research in the Time of COVID-19 (continued)

- › Data collection studies can take years to plan. To speed up the process during the pandemic, most early studies used pre-recruited panels.
- › These panels comprise people who have previously volunteered to do research on an ongoing basis
- › Since people who volunteer for panels may not be representative of everyone, you can't assume that findings from a panel describe the U.S. population



Westat's Partnership with Stanford

- › Stanford University School of Medicine and Westat began collaborating on a COVID-19 study in March 2020
- › Both institutions were interested in conducting a study that could be generalized to the U.S. population



Four Research Questions

Together, we developed a study to examine:

1. People's beliefs about the risk of contracting COVID-19 and probable health outcomes
2. How people's behaviors had changed since the pandemic began
3. The influence of stay-at-home orders on those behaviors
4. The economic impact of the pandemic on households

Study Methodology

Survey Methodology

- › The goal was to conduct a baseline with a followup
- › The baseline study took 3 months, April – June 2020
- › The next slides will discuss:
 - Developing the survey
 - Sampling
 - Collecting the data



Survey Areas (Quantitative and Qualitative)

- › Attitudinal and behavioral questions
- › Time spent on various activities
- › Knowledge about COVID-19-related compliance issues
- › Beliefs about COVID-19
- › COVID-19 symptoms and testing
- › Impact of COVID-19 on finances
- › Open-ended items about concerns and coping strategies



Developing the Survey (closed-ended)

- › How time spent on various activities changed (decreased a lot to increased a lot), such as:
 - Grocery shopping
 - Haircuts and manicures
 - Gym visits
 - Going to the movies
 - Eating in restaurants
 - Going physically into work
 - Taking shared transportation like buses, trains, and planes
- › Knowledge about and compliance with stay-at-home orders
- › Beliefs about the risks of getting COVID-19 and the severity of the disease
- › Reported symptoms and COVID-19 testing results
- › Changes to income, spending, and overall financial status

Developing the Survey (open-ended items)

- › Several open-ended questions about:
 - Worries that people have about COVID-19
 - What they're doing to cope with the worries
 - How they're doing financially



Sampling Approach: Address-based Sampling (ABS)



Determining Methodology

Reasons for opting for a single mode of data collection:



Telephone Survey

Expensive, and not many people answer the phone to take a survey these days, especially with caller ID



Paper Survey

People have to mail it back, so it can take a long time to collect the data, and people tend to lose the envelope

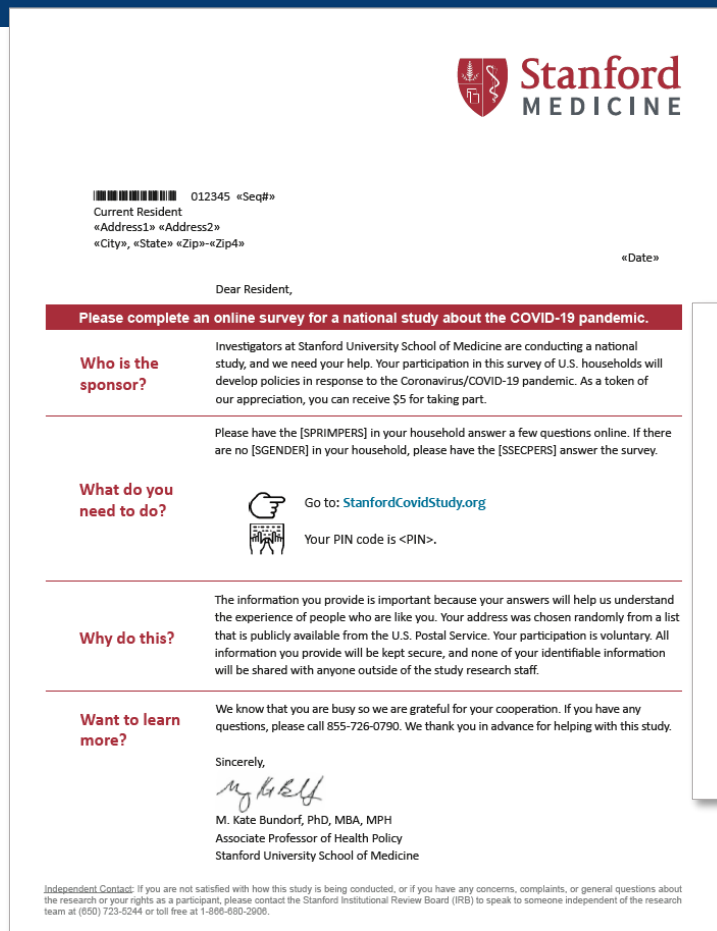


Web Survey

Quick and cost-efficient, allowing us to invite more people to take the survey

Data Collection

- We sent a letter with a \$1 incentive
- The sponsor was listed as Stanford Medicine, since it's well-known and trusted
- The letter included instructions on how to complete the web survey
- Anyone who completed the survey received \$5



- People were sent a followup postcard 5 days later, reminding them to take the survey

Recently, we sent you a letter asking you to complete a short online survey about the COVID-19 pandemic.

If you have already completed your survey, thank you! We will be sending you a cash token of appreciation for your time.

If you have not yet completed your survey, please have the [SPRIMPERS] in your household answer a few questions online. If there are no [SGENDER] in your household, please have the [SSECPERS] answer the survey. Please use the link and PIN provided below.

Survey link: StanfordCovidStudy.org
Your PIN: <PIN>



Study Findings

Response Rate

- › Sample size was about 13,600
- › Our response rate was 10%, using AAPOR's RR3
- › Sample was weighted and adjusted for nonresponse to yield a nationally representative sample for analysis

Today's Focus: Qualitative Findings

Worries and Coping Strategies

- › Currently, what worries you the most about the coronavirus pandemic?
- › What, if anything, are you doing to deal with these concerns?

Managing Financially

- › Please describe in your own words how you are managing financially during the pandemic.

What Were People Most Worried About? How Did They Cope?

3 Main Themes

Impact on Personal Health

The impact the pandemic would have on the health of themselves, families, and friends

Impact on Healthcare System

The impact of the pandemic on the availability of healthcare services

Impact on Economy and Society

How the pandemic would impact the U.S. economy and society, generally

Those Who Most Worried about The Impact on Personal Health...

Tended To Believe

- › Pandemic will last a while
- › Health consequences of getting COVID-19 could be severe

More Likely To Be

- › Female
- › Hispanic
- › Financially vulnerable

“[I worry most] that I catch it and I carry it to my grandma. I don’t want my grandma to die. I love my grandma.”

“[I worry most] that my parents will die from it and I won’t be able to go to them.”

“I have an underlying medical condition, and I am concerned that if I catch the virus, I will die.”

“Currently, I worry most about being asymptomatic and passing it on to my family, or someone with a compromised immune system.”

“I get my family sick and we all die.”

Those Who Most Worried about The Impact on Personal Health... (continued)

Tended to Cope By

- › Taking precautions, such as:
 - Staying home
 - Wearing a mask
 - Social distancing

“I can't control the stupidity of other people, so to the extent possible I will stay home, and if I have to go outdoors, wear a mask and maintain social distancing”

“Praying, wearing gloves, mask and asking others to do the same”

“Wearing a face mask to try and visually show idiots to back up. Hoping.”

“I am trying to stay indoors so I don't catch it. I wear a mask. I wash my hands after being close to people or going shopping. I am avoiding eating out.”

Those Who Most Worried about The Impact on the Healthcare System...

Tended To Believe

- › Pandemic will last a while
- › COVID-19 is serious, but they can take precautions to limit their own risk

More Likely To Be

- › Female
- › White
- › More highly educated
- › Financially secure

“[I worry most] that... the infection rate will increase to a level that hospitals won't be able to deal with... If I (or someone I love)... requires hospitalization, they won't be able to receive care because the hospitals will be overwhelmed...”

“Hospital staff... medical supplies and resources will not be sufficient.”

“The lack of a clear plan from the government officials on a Federal level and clear delineation of how all states on one accord should implement safety procedures collectively. The unknowns about the virus and hit affects different segments of people. The development of a vaccine.”

Tended to Cope By

- › Taking precautions, such as:
 - Staying home
 - Wearing a mask
 - Social distancing

“Staying home. Wearing a mask in public. Bitching on social media about how no one else is wearing a mask.”

“I am staying home as much as possible... I don't go to any public places... My husband or I go to the supermarket, we never go together because that would be socially irresponsible... I do not wear a mouth covering when I run because I find them hard to breathe in, and I feel guilty about this.”

Those Who Most Worried about The Impact on Economy and Society...

Tended To Believe

- › Pandemic wouldn't last long
- › Health consequences of getting COVID-19 would not be severe

More Likely To Be

- › Male
- › More highly educated
- › Financially secure with a higher income

“[I worry about] food insecurity and global economic collapse.”

“I am... very concerned about inequity and how different racial groups and different socioeconomic groups are being affected.”

“If this thing causes the next great depression, that will kill a lot more people than the coronavirus ever will.”

“Social isolation. Losing my business due to the pandemic.”

“Economic crisis and mass hysteria.”

Those Who Most Worried about The Impact on Economy and Society... (continued)

Tended to Cope By

- › Donating to charity
- › Supporting local businesses

“I try to buy locally when I can and support the many businesses we’ve always used before the pandemic.”

“Donating to local nonprofits, sharing our garden produce with others, paying taxes on time, cycling instead of driving.”

“Helping as I might, monetarily if possible, through work, seeking to keep informed and involved in community, largely through work or community social service supports, human rights organizations, direct or indirect political activity.”

How Are People Managing Financially?

Experiencing hardship

- › The pandemic created or increased financial difficulties

Finances the same—or better

- › The pandemic hadn't impacted finances or had actually improved them



Those Who Were Experiencing Financial Hardship...

Talked About

- › Losing a job or income
- › Being unable to pay bills
- › Increased expenses, such as grocery costs

More Likely To...

- › Have an income less than \$25,000
- › Be young
- › Work on commission
- › Be women

“I am managing by worrying. I have been juggling bills. I have been selling anything I can online.”

“Going to food banks since groceries are getting more expensive each week. Not buying as much meat, dairy and fewer eggs.”

“I’m not managing very well. Since I lost my job, it has been difficult since unemployment is so backed up. I’m still waiting.”

“I am 100% wiped out. I got my stimulus check, and a minor amount for the next 4 months... If I cannot get additional work, I will likely end up homeless.”

“My children have lost their jobs. I’m working from home. I’m now supporting my children.”

Those Who Were Experiencing Finances Are The Same—or Better...

Talked About

- › No change in job or income
- › Decreased expenses because of reduced spending on entertainment, travel, or eating out

More Likely To Be...

- › Aged 30+ › Married
- › White

“I am actually putting money in savings due to smaller expenditures on entertainment, gasoline and food.”

“We can’t do anything so we can’t spend a lot of money, which is good (I guess).”

“Since I am retired, my income has not been affected.”

“Lack of being able to leave my house means lack of shopping so I’m not buying as much stupid stuff.”

“Spending more on home furnishings (new furniture and organizational storage for pantry and closets) but not spending money on weekend trips so evening out. Spending the same on groceries and eating out.”

Next Steps

What Is Happening Now?

- › The data is being analyzed and data sets are being shared with other researchers
- › Journal articles and presentations are being prepared by the Westat and Stanford team
- › We are planning to field the survey again in 2021 to better understand how attitudes and behaviors have changed



Thank You

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