

Perception of Covid-19 and related public health measures among men and women in the Austrian general population – summary of results

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The first confirmed case of the infection with the novel coronavirus, known as the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), was officially reported on the 25 February 2020 in Austria. The number of new cases detected daily had been increasing for a month, peaking on 26 March 2020. This rapid growth in the number of people infected with the new coronavirus caused concern, mainly due to an uncontrolled spread of the disease that could cause deleterious effects on the health care system, similar to what was seen in Northern Italy. The Austrian government took an immediate action to prevent an overload of its own health care system and protect its population. People found themselves in an unprecedented situation, forced to stay at home and avoid human interactions.

To shed the light on the pandemic through the lens of the Austrian population and explore how men and women residing in Austria perceived the situation at the time of the peak of the pandemic, the Department of Health Economic, Centre for Public Health at the Medical University of Vienna, carried out an online survey, led by Univ.-Prof. Dr. Judit Simon.

In May 2020, 560 adult Austrian residents took part in the online survey and shared their experiences and opinions about the first Covid-19 lockdown that took place between 15 March and 15 April 2020.

In our sample of 416 (74%) women and 143 (26%) men with an average age of 40 years, 80% were employed or self-employed at the beginning of the lockdown (mid-March), 7% were students, 5% retired, 3% unemployed, and 5% were not in any of the above mentioned type of employment (e.g. household). 13% of the respondents (71 of 560) reported being sent on 'Kurzarbeit', and 3% (15 of 560) reported being fired because of Covid-19 pandemic.

Of all respondents, two-thirds (66%) felt that the government provided sufficient information about the Covid-19 situation (**Fig 1**) and 74% agreed that the implemented public health measures, restricting movement of members of the general public during the Covid-19, were necessary to limit outbreak of the disease (**Fig 2**).

Fig 1. Do you feel that you have been provided with enough clear advice about Covid-19 from the government?

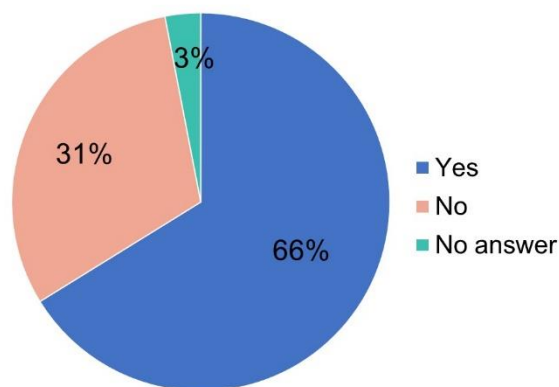
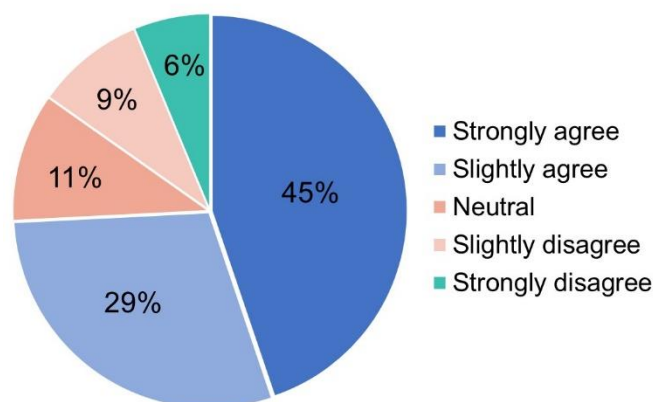


Fig 2. The lockdown measures during the Covid-19 outbreak were necessary to limit the spread of the outbreak



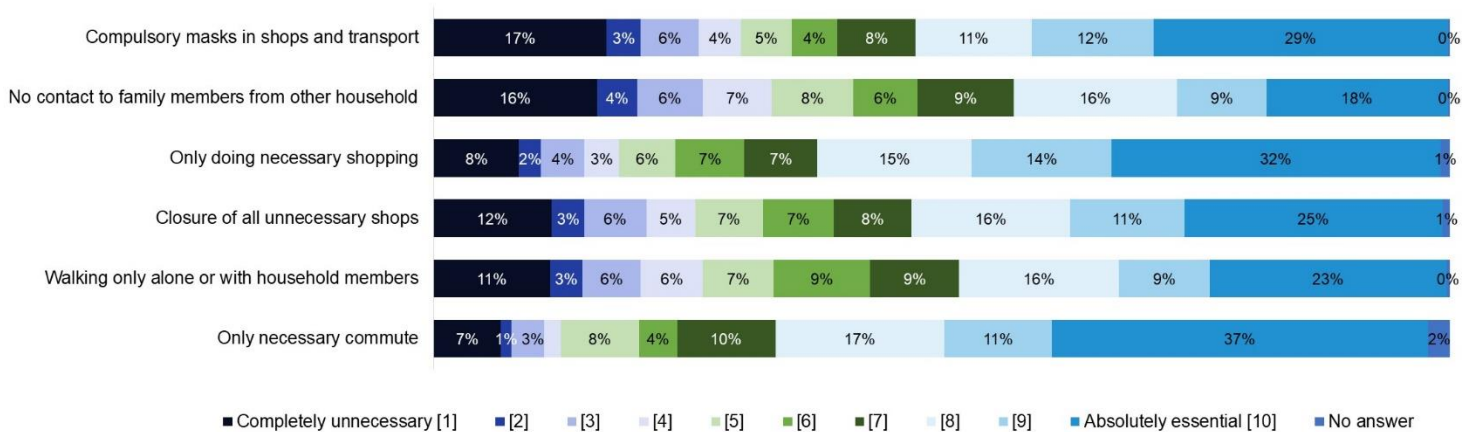
Source: Study *Auswirkungen von COVID-19 auf die psychische Gesundheit und das Wohlbefinden in Österreich*, n=560
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With respect to the specific restrictions, respondents were asked to mark on a scale from 0 (completely unnecessary) to 10 (absolutely essential) how necessary in their opinion different public health measures were to limit the spread of the coronavirus.

Respondents most strongly agreed with the commuting to and from work only if absolutely necessary (37% indicated that this measure was absolutely essential) and shopping only for necessary goods and items (groceries, pharmacy, etc.), with 32% seeing this restriction as absolutely essential.

The less “popular” restrictions were wearing masks in shops and public transport, and not being able to have a personal contact with family members living in different households. In these cases, 17% and 16% of respondents saw these restrictions as absolutely unnecessary, respectively (**Fig 3**).

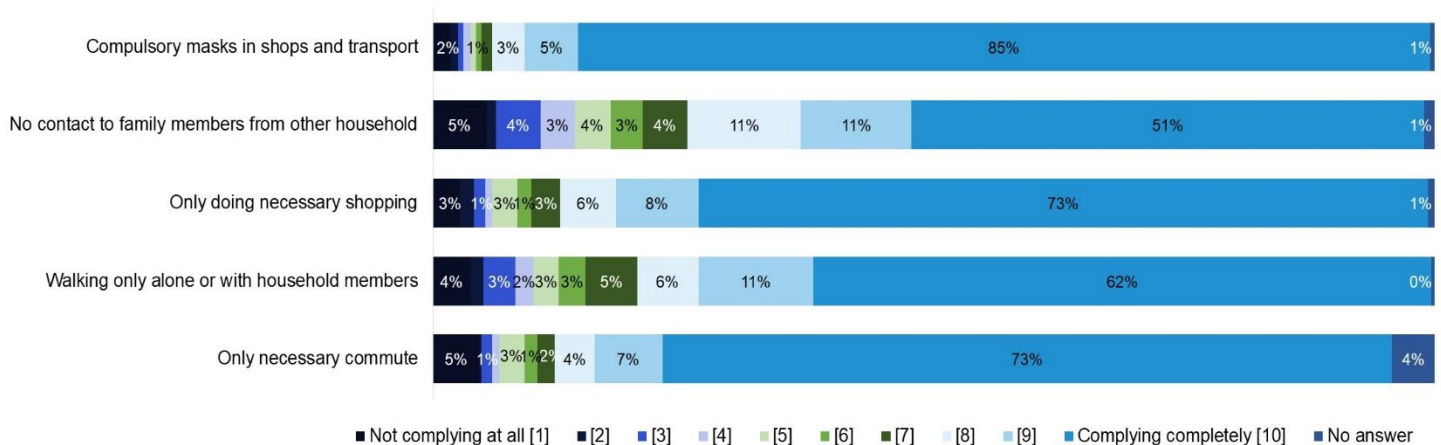
Fig 3. On a scale of 1 to 10 (ranging from ‘completely unnecessary’ to ‘absolutely essential’) please indicate how necessary you think the following lockdown restrictions were to contain the Covid-19?



Source: Study *Auswirkungen von COVID-19 auf die psychische Gesundheit und das Wohlbefinden in Österreich*, n=560
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Respondents were also asked to indicate if they complied with the quarantine measures at the time of lockdown. Respondents reported highest compliance (85%) for using masks in public closed spaces. People were less likely to adhere to the restriction regarding meeting family members living in different households; 5% reported they did not comply at all, and only 50% reported that they fully complied with this regulation (**Fig 4**).

Fig 4. On a scale of 1 to 10 (ranging from ‘Not complying at all’ to ‘Complying completely’) please indicate how much were you complying with the following ‘lock-down’ restrictions?



Source: Study *Auswirkungen von COVID-19 auf die psychische Gesundheit und das Wohlbefinden in Österreich*, n=560
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The survey showed that Austrian residents felt more isolated than usual during lockdown. Female respondents were more likely to report feeling more isolated, with almost two-thirds (63%) strongly or slightly agreeing with the statement regarding isolation, compared to 53% of men (Fig 5). Respondents of both genders were equally concerned with becoming infected with Covid-19. The level of concern regarding infection was reported to be relatively low. Nearly half of the respondents (47% of men and 46% of women) were only slightly concerned, whilst one-third of participants were not at all concerned about becoming infected with Covid-19 (Fig 6).

Fig 6. Since the period of lockdown commenced, I have felt more isolated than I usually do.

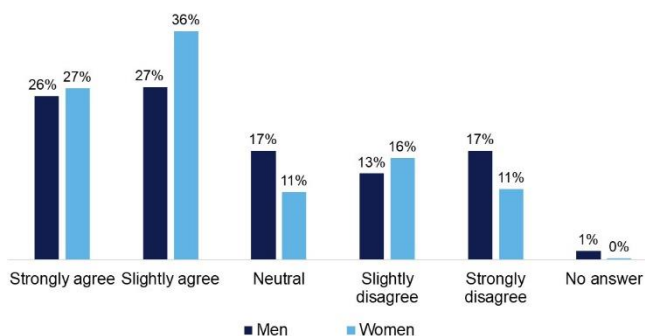
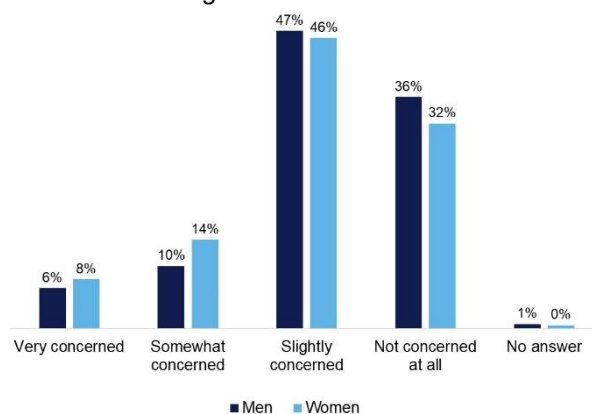


Fig 5. How concerned are you personally about becoming infected with Covid-19?



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Note: The above findings represent the circumstances and opinions of the participants of the survey and they should not be presented as representative of the entire general population in Austria. In this study cohort, some groups, including females, younger and more educated people, were over-represented compared to the general population of Austria.

Description of the study and contact details: <https://healtheconomics.meduniwien.ac.at/science-research/projects/exploring-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing-in-austria-an-exploratory-study/>