

INDIVIDUALS' RESPONSE TO COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS IN EUROPE: A SNAPSHOT OF TODAY AND HOPES FOR TOMORROW

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Abstract This study presents the individuals' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Considering that many institutions and working places were closed due to the pandemic, the possible impact of COVID-19 restrictions on individuals was assessed. The study examined the number and frequencies of respondents in the survey including demographic variables (gender, income), and future expectation on economic situation and psychological conditions. There were 218 individuals from 24 European countries participating in the survey. The percentage of respondents, discovering personal strength (previously unaware of) during restrictions was 40%. This is a high percentage showing that isolation may contribute to self-discovery. Despite annoying restrictions, many individuals expressed their economic optimism for the future. Also, most of the participants stated that they had not enough money during these restrictions. Also, this study shows that trust in governments, the European Union (EU) and the World Health Organization (WHO) was low during the pandemic restrictions. The results of this study might be useful and taken into account for potential future waves of this pandemic and possible new pandemics that may occur in the future.

Keywords:
coronavirus,
COVID-19,
restrictions,
pandemic,
european
individuals

1 Introduction

In January 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) announced the outbreak of a new Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). In March 2020, WHO assessed that COVID-19 can be characterized as a pandemic [WHO(1), 2021]. After the announcement of the pandemic, countries started to take strong measures, in particular from March 2020. Here are the facts about COVID-19 as of the end of March 2021: There have been 123,902,242 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 2.7272.838 deaths in the world. There have been 43,171,541 total confirmed cases in European region including 940.513 deaths [WHO(2), 2021].

Having essential information about the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on individuals' social and psychological conditions is considerably important for protecting them from the challenges of the pandemic restrictions (Yang and Ma, 2020). In particular, the individuals' being faced with less socialization than before may have some health problems. Identifying these difficulties and determining the possible negative effects of the pandemic restrictions can be effective in reducing the negative consequences of the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused social isolation that has some negative effects on individuals. WHO (2020) has given some messages to people in isolation about staying connected and maintaining social networks. These messages indicate the importance of social participation through social integration because the social participation of individuals in their communities is vital for the development of both themselves and society (Cicognani, Pirini, Keyes C., Joshanloo, Rostamiand Nosratabadi, 2008). Sense of community is also very important for especially young people because active participation in school communities is essential for building social identity (Capone, Donizzetti and Petrillo, 2018). Besides, the school environment is important for young individuals' overall well-being. School environment and learning quality are essential factors influencing students' positive psychological condition (Gashi and Mojsoska-Blazevski, 2016). Wang, Pan, Wan, Tan, Xu, Ho C.S. and Ho R.C. (2020) conducted a study during the epidemic of COVID-19 in China and found an association between female, student status and specific physical symptoms, and the greater psychological influence of the outbreak and higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. González-Sanguino, Ausín, Castellanos, Saiz, López-Gómez, Ugidos and Muñoz (2020) investigated the

psychological impact of COVID-19 on Spanish people and found that women showed greater depressive symptoms than men.

Pandemics increase morbidity and mortality over a wide geographic area and cause significant economic, social, and political problems. Pandemics have occurred throughout history and appear to be increasing in frequency, particularly because of the increasing emergence of viral disease from animals (Madhav, Oppenheim, Gallivan, Mulembakani, Rubin and Wolfe, 2017). This study aims to explore the individuals' responses to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions in Europe. Understanding the individuals' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic can contribute to the literature in terms of initiating more specific studies on the pandemic. Besides, It can also be useful in developing new measures against future pandemics.

The study consists of four sections. The second section of this research has short explanation of including collecting data, variables and the analyses of the data. Third section includes results of the study. Conclusions is the last section including findings of the research and suggestions for this study.

2 Methodology

This study is based on an online survey questionnaire. It was conducted in European countries. The questionnaire was designed in a simple style and was made to reflect that the COVID-19 pandemic conditions may have caused a negative situation in individuals' life. It was used the Google online hosting platform to gather data. University students are target group of this study. The age of the participants of this research was between 18-25 years old. The collect data, the survey questionnaire was disseminated in social media such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. It was tried to reach as many participants as possible. SPSS statistical programme was used to analyze data. The online survey conducted between January and February 2021.

3 Results

Totally 218 participants from 24 European countries were included in this study. There was only one participant from Croatia, and 2 participants from North Macedonia. There were more than 10 participants from Czechia, Germany, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, and Spain and. Most of the participants were from Ukraine with 8.6% comparing with the other countries.

Table 1: Participants from European Countries

Participant's country	Frequency	Percentage
Austria	7	3.21
Belgium	4	1.83
Bulgaria	13	5.96
Croatia	1	0.46
Czechia	11	5.05
France	8	3.67
Germany	10	4.59
Greece	8	3.67
Hungary	11	5.05
Italy	6	2.75
Kosova	4	1.83
Latvia	5	2.29
Moldova	12	5.50
Netherlands	8	3.67
North Macedonia	2	0.92
Poland	15	6.88
Portugal	9	4.13
Romania	16	7.34
The Russian Federation	16	7.34
Slovakia	4	1.83
Slovenia	6	2.75
Spain	15	6.88
Turkey	9	4.13
Ukraine	18	8.26
Total	218	100.00

Source: Prepared by the author.

Most of the participants were female (62.8%). Percentage of the male participants was 32.7. It was asked 6 questions dealing with the personal condition during restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 2: Descriptive Analyses

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	81	37.2
Female	137	62.8
How many months do you have enough money if these restrictions remain in place for some time?		
Up to two months	129	59.2
Three months	51	23.4
Five months or above	38	17.4
Which of the following seems to give you more confidence in the present emergency situation?		
Government of my country	29	13.3
European Union	24	11.0
World Health Organization	13	6.0
I care more about having enough money than trusting those above	152	69.7
Do you think that you will be economically secure after this pandemic?		
Yes	139	63.8
No	79	36.2
Are you struggling emotionally during these restrictions?		
Yes	73	33.5
No	145	66.5
Even though face-to-face communication is less than before, do you feel happy?		
Yes	109	50
No	109	50
Do you think that you have discovered your personal strength you were previously unaware of?		
Yes	86	39.4
No	132	60.6
Do you think you can cope with the challenges of the pandemic?		
Yes	168	77.1
No	50	22.9

Source: prepared by the author.

Question 1: How many months do you have enough money if these restrictions remain in place for some time?

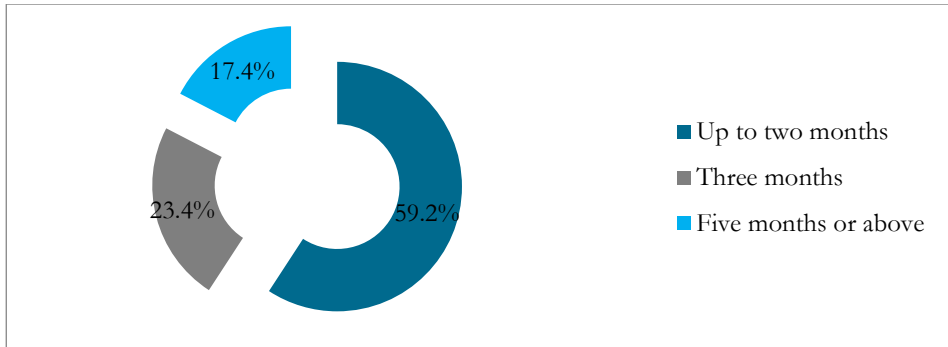


Figure 1: Percentage of participants' personal income situation.

Source: Prepared by the author.

It was first inspected the financial situation of the survey respondent by asking them "How many months do you have enough money if these restrictions remain in place for some time?" The results are presented in Figure 1. In particular, this question was asked to measure the level of the participants' savings for emergencies. The result shows that the savings level is not enough because only 17.7% of the participants have enough savings for 5 months or more. 59% of respondents responded that their savings would last for a maximum of two months.

Question 2: Which of the following seems to give you more confidence in the present situation?

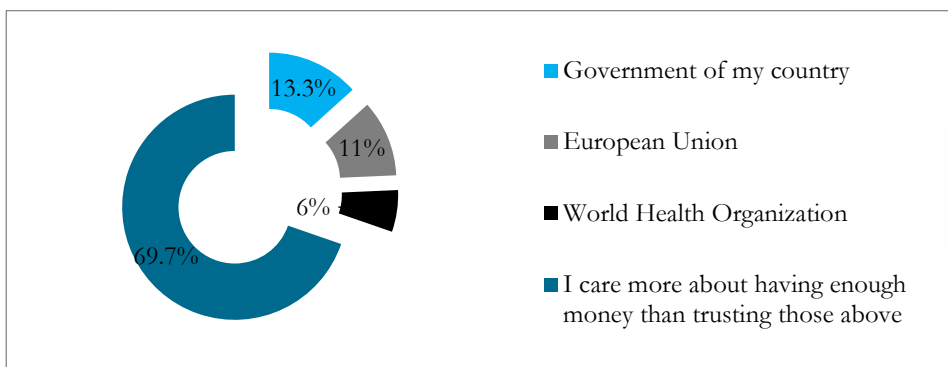


Figure 2: Percentage of participants' trust in institutions.

Source: Prepared by the author.

This question was asked in order to find out what is the most trusted thing for individuals during the restrictions of the pandemic. Trust in country governments was 13.3%, European Union 11% and World Health Organization 6%. Most of the participants stated that the most reliable thing in this process was the money owned.

It was first inspected the financial situation of the survey respondent

Question 3: Do you think that you will be economically secure after this pandemic?

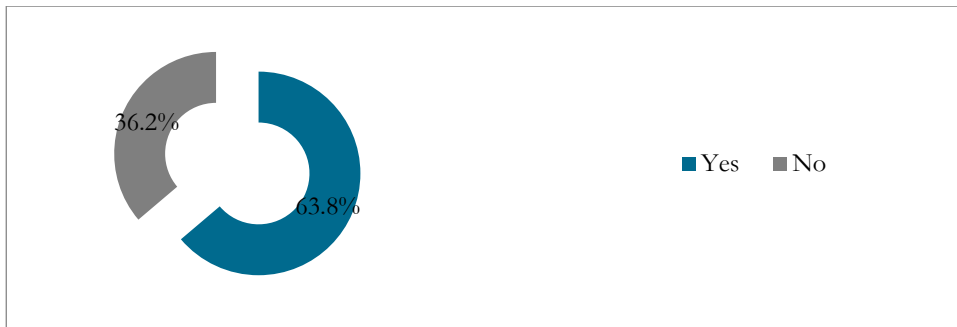


Figure 3: Percentage of participants' future expectation on personal finance.

Source: Prepared by the author.

This question was asked to determine whether the current pandemic restrictions is causing a pessimism for the financial future. The results showed that 63.8% of the participants feel that they will be economically secure after the pandemic.

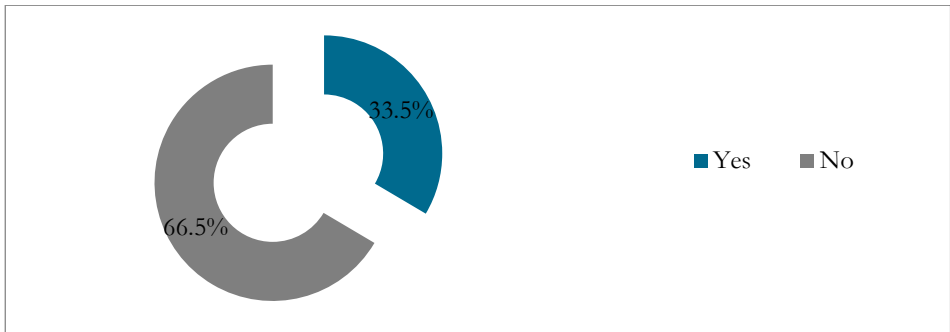
Question 4: Are you struggling emotionally during these restrictions?

Figure 4: Percentage of participants' stress condition.

Source: Prepared by the author.

This question was asked to measure the participants' perceived stress condition during the pandemic restrictions. 60% of the participants stated that they are struggling emotionally during restrictions.

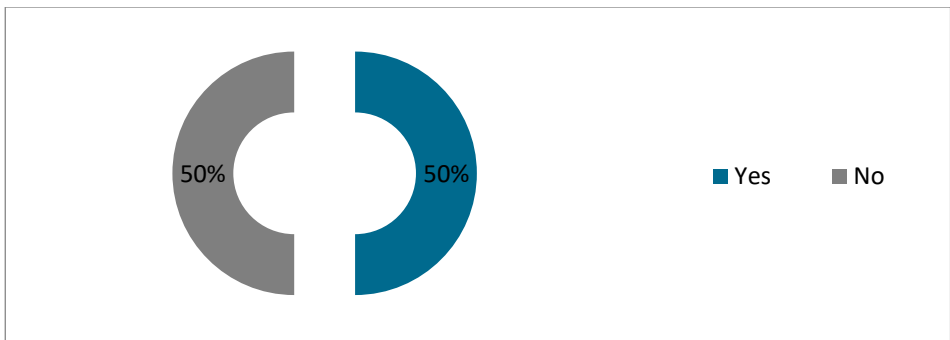
Question 5: Even though face-to-face communication is less than before, do you feel happy?

Figure 5: Percentage of participants' feelings on less communication.

Source: Prepared by the author.

This question was asked to determine the importance of face-to-face communication for the participants and the effect on their happiness. Only half of the students stated that they felt happy in this situation.

Question 6: Do you think that you have discovered your personal strength you were previously unaware of?

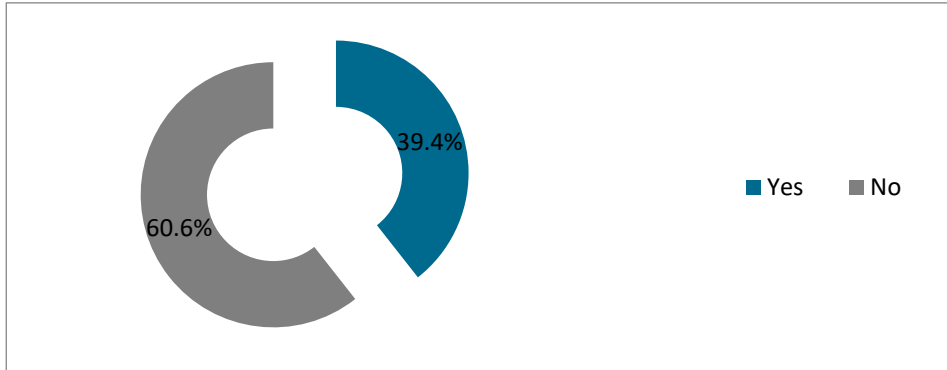


Figure 6: Percentage of participants' perceived personal strength.

Source: Prepared by the author.

This question was asked to measure whether individuals discovered their personal strengths as they were previously unaware of. 39.4 % of the participants stated that they discovered their individual strength.

Question 7: Do you think you can cope with the challenges of the pandemic?

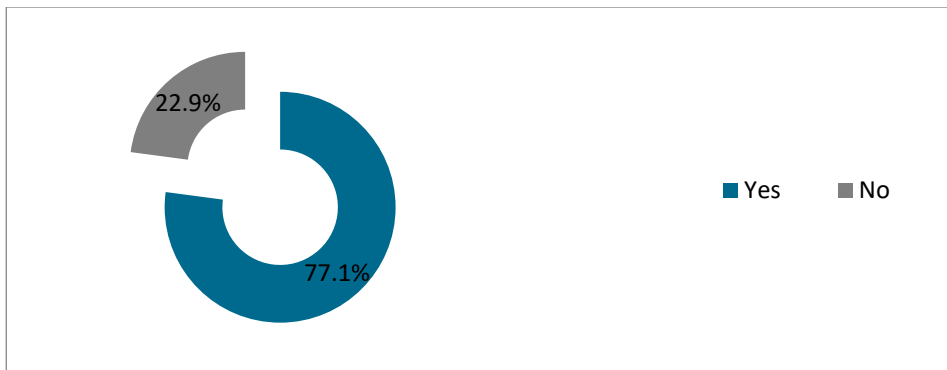


Figure 7: Percentage of participants' perceived ability to cope with challenges of the pandemic.

Source: Prepared by the author.

This question was asked to explore the strength of the participants in fighting the pandemic. 77.1% of the participants stated that they can cope with the challenges of the pandemic.

4 Conclusion

Finding indicated very low confidence to governments, EU and WHO. Most of the students think that having enough money is more important than trusting in such institutions. Also result shows us that individuals don't have enough saving for unexpected situations, indicating low level of financial behavior.

Findings indicated that half of the participants during COVID-19 pandemic restrictions was happy in spite of less communication level. Pandemic social restrictions may negatively affect happiness. Lang and Stein (2005) found that youth had serious mental health problems during the initial days of COVID-19 pandemic.

Respondents had the highest positive response to the item dealing with coping with the challenges of the pandemic (77.1%). Acute stress may lead an individual to be overconfident in their situation awareness understanding (Price, Tenan, Head, Maslin and LaFiandra, 2016). This percentage is rather high for such a stressful condition caused the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, it may show overconfidence caused by stressful situations during pandemic social restrictions. On the other hand, this stress and overconfidence may cause low grades for the students. Academic stress at the start of the year is inversely related to end of year grades (Wang et al, 2020).

The result also showed that individuals have positive economic expectations on their future financial situations. Positive expectations for future economic life is a very important hope for future. The percentage of discovering personal strengths (previously unaware of) during COVID-19 social restrictions were found to be 39.4%, indicating very positive behavior. Discovering personal strength in emergencies can lead to beneficial results for individuals' life.

The Coronavirus pandemic has revealed that governments and other institutions should take more responsibility in healthcare systems and economic affairs. This results might use to enhance better healthcare and economic life.

Although this study has some useful results, it cannot be generalized to all individuals in Europe. The results should be supported by new studies in the future.

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