

Early impact of COVID-19 on scientists revealed in global survey of 25,000

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The initial impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the scientific community has been revealed in one of the largest academic surveys ever conducted. Open access academic publisher *Frontiers* surveyed

more than 25,000 members of its scientific research community from 152 countries between May and June this year to assess the initial impact of the virus on them and their work.

Highlights from The Academic Response to COVID-19, released by Frontiers this week, include researchers views on:

- The political response
- Mitigating future disasters
- The impact to funding
- Keeping the science going

Commenting on the report Kamila Markram, Frontiers' CEO and co-founder, said: "A pulse check of how COVID-19 has manifested itself across the [research community](#) is crucial if we are to ensure that scientific discovery continues unabated. Scientists are under extraordinary pressure to deliver answers and a lack of precedent and preparation, combined with severe political and social pressures, has made this an incredibly challenging time for them. Along with the disruption faced by most of the world's population—lockdown, remote working, isolation and anxiety—many researchers have felt an added pressure to understand, cure and mitigate the virus."

Survey respondents come from *Frontiers'* academic community of authors, editors and reviewers, representing diverse countries, roles, and areas of research.

Perceptions of the political response

Researchers are divided over their perceptions of the political response. Countries that showed a significantly higher level of dissatisfaction with policy makers' use of [scientific advice](#) during the [pandemic](#) include the US, Brazil, Chile and the UK, while those in New Zealand, China, and

Greece were the most satisfied.

"While we do not know what advice was given and if it was used, this data suggests more comfort in those countries that are coping well—those who took early lockdown decisions, have had similar previous experience, for example with SARS, and who recognized science as key to pandemic management decision making," said Prof. Sir Peter Gluckman—chair, International Network for Government Science Advice.

Preparing for future disasters

The [coronavirus](#) pandemic is the biggest global emergency of recent times. But what about the months, years, and decades ahead? Concerns about future pandemics (28%) and [climate change](#) (21%), topped the list of future disasters that can be mitigated with the help of science, according to the respondents.

Kamila Markram said: "We were not prepared for COVID-19, despite the warnings of a pandemic, and are only now beginning to fully grasp the cost of our complacency. The consequences of continuing to fail to respond to future threats, particularly the climate emergency, will be far worse and potentially irreversible if we do not act now. Researchers have warned policymakers for 30 years that we are damaging the natural environment at an unsustainable rate. Yet, deforestation, air and water pollution, intensive agriculture, and general environmental degradation continue to get worse. We must think about how we can fundamentally change our relationship with the natural world. The one positive that we can take from this pandemic is that it might be the catalyst for such change and instill a greater sense of urgency and responsibility."

Future of Funding Unclear

Findings reveal that COVID-19 has created a sense of uncertainty in the research community around funding. Almost half (47%) of those surveyed believe less funding will be available in the future as a result of COVID-19, signaling a potentially lasting impact to the scientific research landscape.

Kamila Markram said: "The impact of COVID-19 is manifesting itself across the funding landscape. While it is critical that collectively, we do everything we can right now to combat the virus, we must also recognize that diverting or the 'covidization' of funding away from other fields is not a sustainable solution. The environment, for example, is an area we simply cannot afford to neglect. Doing so will have potentially irreversible consequences. We have to adopt a more holistic, interdisciplinary approach to problem solving."

The science must go on

Findings also reveal scientific research itself has been able to continue for the large part, despite the disruption of COVID-19. When asked what they had been working on during the pandemic, 74% of respondents said they had been writing papers, 57% continuing with their research, and 42% virtual teaching.

Kamila Markram said: "It is encouraging that despite the massive disruption the first wave of coronavirus caused that the vast majority researchers said were able to continue to work. It gives us hope that the academic community will remain resilient to new waves of COVID-19, like those currently sweeping through Europe, and come together to find the solutions we urgently need to live healthy lives on a healthy planet."

More information: Chantelle Rijs et al, The Academic Response to COVID-19, *Frontiers in Public Health* (2020). [DOI: 10.3389/fpubh.2020.621563](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2020.621563)

Provided by Frontiers

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