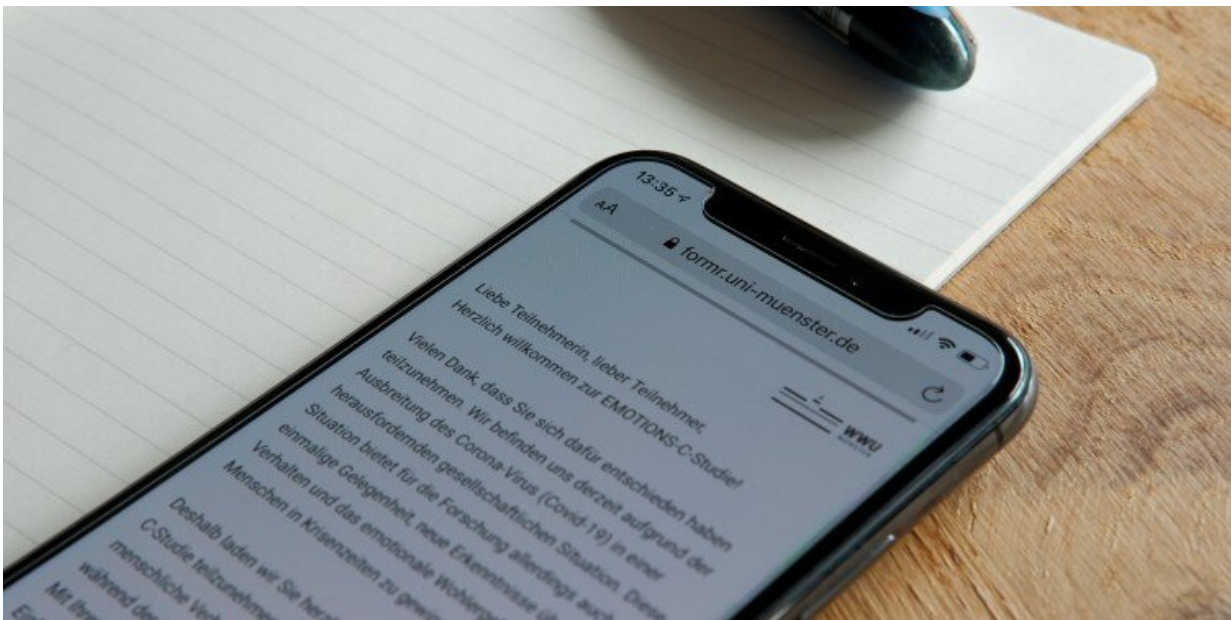# Neurotic people feel worse emotionally during the corona crisis

December 17 2020

Study participants were able to answer the questions using their smartphones. Credit: WWU - Sophie Pieper

When the corona pandemic began in March, it fundamentally changed many people's everyday lives. A normal working day, vibrant public life, carefree social contacts—all these things now seem like a memory from another age. In order to find out what effects these restrictions are having on people's emotional well-being, the researchers carried out a survey on how people dealt with the pandemic. "Our analyses showed

that most people have been doing relatively well during these times," explains Lara Kröncke from Münster University's Institute of Psychology. Kröncke is a Ph.D. student and she headed the study. "These results match other studies showing that most people are coping with the restrictions better than expected," she adds.

The study consisted of two parts and began shortly before the start of the first lockdown in Germany on March 18. In a wide-ranging online questionnaire, those taking part first supplied personal details, as well as information relating to their personal attitudes and behaviors in dealing with the coronavirus. This was followed by a two-week phase, lasting till April 3, of further short questions which the participants—over 1,600 in number—received on their smartphones several times a day. The questions related, for example, to their current emotional state and to social interactions.

"There were some people who frequently experienced emotions such as fear and uncertainty and who were emotionally more unstable—in other words, who reported stronger emotional mood swings," says Kröncke. In order to find out which groups of people were affected the most, the team of researchers compared the impact of demographic features and personality traits on emotional well-being in everyday life. Here, the personality trait of neuroticism—the tendency to be insecure and nervous and to have a negative view on oneself, the world and the future—turned out to be the greatest risk factor for emotional problems. Over the entire period of the study, neurotic people reported experiencing more negative feelings and greater affective variability. They also paid more attention to coronavirus and worried more about their health. This in turn reinforced negative feelings such as fear, uncertainty and tension in neurotic people in particular. The impact of neuroticism on people's emotional state was actually higher than the influence of demographic factors such as gender, age and health status. "These findings show that our personality exerts a decisive influence on

how we deal with the crisis," is how co-author Prof. Mitja Back from the Institute of Psychology summarizes the results.

These results can be used to identify people who have a particularly high risk of suffering emotional problems during the corona crisis. "This is important if we specifically want to address risk groups," explains Lara Kröncke. Future studies should examine which measures are especially effective in the case of these people, and how their emotional well-being develops over a longer period of time.

More information: L. Kroencke et al, Neuroticism and emotional risk during the COVID-19 pandemic, *Journal of Research in Personality* (2020). DOI: 10.1016/j.jrp.2020.104038

Provided by University of Münster