

COVID noncompliers less open to new ideas, and more extroverted and driven by self-interests

July 30 2021



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People who purposefully breach COVID-19 regulations tend to share certain characteristics, finds a study of attitudes and behaviors in

Australia, the UK, the US and Canada.

When people protested the COVID-19 lockdown in Sydney last week, many were speculating about whether a certain type of person was more likely to be involved. Does science back that up?

A new University of Sydney study assessed people's behaviors and attitudes towards pandemic regulations in Australia, the UK, the US, and Canada. It found that roughly 10 percent of people were noncompliant.

Those individuals were mostly male, less agreeable (cooperative, considerate), less intellectual as a [personality trait](#) (less willing to try new experiences), and more extroverted.

Published in high-ranking journal *PLOS ONE*, the study also found that these people tended to prioritize freedom and their own self-interest. They also perceived their social culture as tolerant to variation in values and behavior, with greater tolerance for deviance. Contrary to the stereotype, most of them were not young.

They also tended to engage less with official sources, such as government announcements and news and engaged more in unhealthy coping strategies such as denial and substance abuse.

"Alarming, the non-compliant group were more likely than the compliant group to leave their home to meet friends or family, for religious reasons, because they are bored, and to exercise their right to freedom," said lead author, Associate Professor Sabina Kleitman from the University of Sydney School of Psychology. This behavior is a major concern in Australia, especially during the current Sydney lockdown."

She continued: "Our research reveals the need for targeted interventions to enhance COVID-19 regulation compliance, such as observing physical

distancing. More targeted approaches might utilize a variety of media outlets, provide education to help people identify misinformation, and target specific false beliefs."

The researchers gleaned their results from an online survey of 1,575 participants in March and April 2020. Participants reported their behaviors; attitudes; personality; cognitive/decision-making ability; resilience; adaptability; coping; political and cultural factors; and information consumption during the pandemic's first wave in 2020.

Compliant characteristics

Those more likely to comply with COVID-19 restrictions (90 percent of participants across four countries) were more likely to be young, educated and/or at-risk due to poorer health.

Compliant individuals were more likely to be female, worry more, and believe in government-mandated protective measures. They coped with stress and anxiety more productively, with strategies like distraction and planning.

Making non-compliers comply

Associate Professor Kleitman identified key strategies to shift non-complaint individuals' attitudes and behaviors:

1. Focus more attention/resources on regulating and monitoring misinformation. Non-compliers appear not to use official sources for COVID-19 information, nor do they tend to verify the legitimacy of information.
2. Frame some public health messages to appeal to [self-interest](#). This may be more effective in promoting positive behavior

change among non-compliant people than appealing to social obligations.

More information: Sabina Kleitman et al, To comply or not comply? A latent profile analysis of behaviours and attitudes during the COVID-19 pandemic, *PLOS ONE* (2021). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0255268](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0255268)

Provided by University of Sydney

Citation: COVID noncompliers less open to new ideas, and more extroverted and driven by self-interests (2021, July 30) retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-07-covid-noncompliers-ideas-extroverted-driven.html>

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