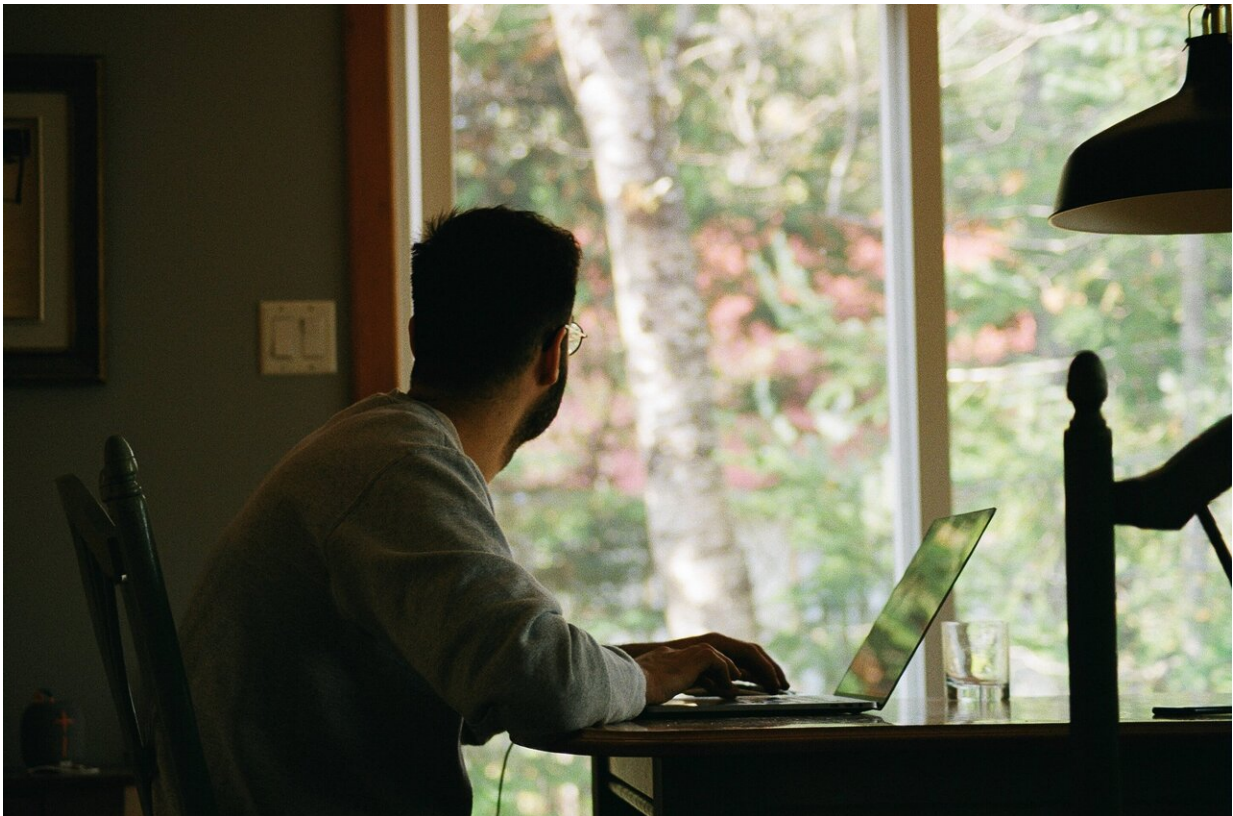


Mental health costs of lockdown compliance still being felt, research shows

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An analysis by researchers from Bangor University looked at the behavior of around 1,700 people during the COVID restrictions in relation to their personality traits and their post-pandemic recovery. The

study aimed to answer three broad questions: who follows health advice, what can be done to improve compliance; and what are the costs for those who comply?

The team found that those who were more sensitive to the needs of others were more likely to have complied with lockdown rules and health advice, compared to those who were more focused on their own needs and priorities.

However, they also found that those who reported high levels of compliance with COVID restrictions and were most worried about infection during the pandemic are least likely to have resumed normal behavior and more likely to be experiencing stress, anxiety and depression now.

Dr. Marley Willegers, from the Institute for the Psychology of Elite Performance (IPEP) at Bangor University, said, "There was naturally a lot of focus on getting [public health](#) messages out when COVID first emerged, to change people's behavior. Similarly, throughout the pandemic, messaging campaigns were designed to ensure people continued to follow the rules."

"But there was no messaging campaign as we came out of the pandemic to help everyone safely transition back to normality. Without this, certain personality types have retained infection prevention behavior and anxiety that undermines their mental well-being."

The study involved over 1,700 people, recruited through Healthwise Wales, who were asked earlier this year to answer questions about their [personality traits](#) and their attitudes to COVID and behavior during the first lockdown (March–September 2020). The researchers also questioned 230 people who were friends or family of those involved in the study, to cross check respondents' recollections of their behavior

with others who knew them well.

The team followed up with 850 of those who'd taken part, asking them to report their levels of well-being, stress, anxiety, depression and infection prevention every two weeks over a three-month period between February and May 2023.

They categorized each person in relation to two types of personality trait—those who are more focused on what affects them (agentic personalities) and those who are more focused on what affects others (communal personalities). In general, the former were less likely to have complied with COVID rules, except where they felt under personal threat of infection.

Conversely, communal personalities were less likely to improve their compliance with health advice as the threat of infection increased, possibly due to them taking personal risks to help others.

The researchers found, regardless of personality, higher levels of compliance with COVID rules during the pandemic (March-September 2020) predicted lower current levels of well-being (Feb–March 2023). In other words, the more people complied with COVID rules during the pandemic, the worse their well-being emerged in the aftermath.

Dr. Willegers said, "It's clear from our research that if government advertising campaigns want to change the public's behavior, they need to take both [personality](#) types into account. Campaigns need to highlight the personal costs and benefits involved not just people's responsibility to others."

One example the researchers point to is the introduction of the 20mph limit in Wales. The existing campaign to inform the public of the speed limit change, which focuses primarily on the lives potentially saved by

driving slower is unlikely to encourage compliance from more agentic personalities. A broader campaign, which also focuses on personal costs and benefits of compliance with the change would target a wider range of [personality types](#) more effectively, the researchers say.

The full report "The effect of agency and communion on pandemic response and post-lockdown recovery" is [published](#) by Bangor University.

Provided by Bangor University

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