

# How has the experience of COVID-19 shaped perceptions of pandemic risk?

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## Background

Most studies of pandemic risk perception focus on specific disease outbreaks, using surveys to gather quantitative data for statistical analysis. Several are multi-country, including some assessing risk perception in relation to COVID-19.

There are relatively few qualitative studies of pandemic risk perception and even fewer mixed-methods studies. Little is known about public perceptions of the ongoing (and possibly existential) threat posed by infectious diseases with pandemic potential. Consequently, the ways in which different people interpret and make sense of pandemic risk – and related public health communications – are not well understood. This has important implications for global health policy and practice, particularly with respect to future pandemic preparedness.

## Objective

The aim of this research project is to explore **public perceptions of pandemic risk** in the wake of COVID-19 through a **comparative study**.

**Research questions** include:

- Are people continuing to use COVID-related health protection measures or engaging in new health-seeking behaviours?
- How do they rate the likelihood of another major infectious disease pandemic in the near term, or over the longer term?
- What, if anything, do they believe should be done to reduce this risk?

Data will be collected from **three country contexts** with contrasting experiences of COVID-19 (data from the WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard 19/4/23):



### New Zealand

- 2,240,441 confirmed COVID-19 cases
- 2,716 related deaths

### South Africa

- 4,072,533 confirmed COVID-19 cases
- 102,595 related deaths

### United Kingdom

- 24,555,629 confirmed COVID-19 cases
- 221,943 related deaths

## Methodology

This study will deploy an **interdisciplinary mixed-methods** approach and a **sequential explanatory** design.

### Quantitative data collection

- Via a **survey** run simultaneously in the three focus countries
- Adult participants recruited through an online survey platform
- Sample size 300-400 respondents per country

### Qualitative data collection

1. Collected via **free text fields** in the survey, inductively coded, analysed thematically:

- To aid interpretation of quantitative results through qualitative insight
- To inform development of focus group topic guide
- To generate initial coding frame for use in subsequent qualitative analysis

2. Followed by **focus groups** in all three countries:

- Participants drawn from population groups of interest
- Potential focus on young people, given evidence that exposure to epidemics during “impressionable years” (ages 18 to 25) has negative and lasting effects on confidence in political leadership, institutions, public health systems

### Quantitative data

Survey run simultaneously across three countries  
Statistical analysis to compare population groups within and across countries

### Qualitative data 1

Data gathered from free text fields within survey  
Inductive coding and thematic analysis  
Informs development of focus group topic guide

### Qualitative data 2

Focus group discussions  
Two or more per country  
Participants from population groups of interest – e.g. youth or Generation Z



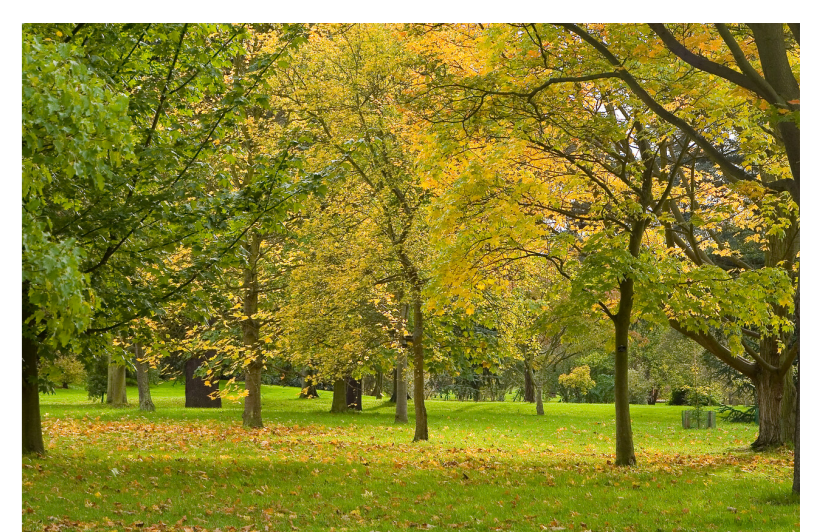
## Data analysis and interpretation

- Data analysis will **identify similarities and differences in pandemic risk perception within and between the three focus countries**, with reference to demographic variables and socio-economic factors.
- Outputs from all data analysis will be interpreted with reference to existing theoretical frameworks and literature, with the goal of **generating new theory** related to pandemic risk perception.

## Contribution

This research relates to an ongoing pandemic scenario, with potential for both instrumental and conceptual impact. It will:

- Provide insights into how different approaches to COVID-19 risk communication and management have influenced perceptions of pandemic risk over the longer term, which may **inform future pandemic preparedness and response**
- Shed light on how people in different countries perceive various drivers of pandemic risk, which may have broader **implications for global health and environmental policy and practice**.



## References

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