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# Generating research impact during a pandemic: Timing matters

submitted for the

Open Research Prize 2021

## **SUMMARY**

The 2020 Coronavirus pandemic is a major international public health challenge. Governments have taken public health protection measures to reduce the spread of the virus through non-pharmacological measures. At the time of the described analysis, the impact of the pandemic and the public health response on individual and population mental health was totally unknown.

We used Google Trends data to investigate the impact of the pandemic and government measures to curb it on people's concerns. Our work indicated promise for the use of Google Trends as a surveillance tool and was picked up by Public Health England.

### **What did you do and why did you do it?**

Early on in the COVID-19 pandemic there were real concerns of the mental wellbeing of populations as a consequence of both the virus and its associated public health measures. There was an absence of surveillance data for this purpose and so to help public health efforts we looked for open access data to provide timely insights to policy makers. In the interest of disseminating the findings quickly to lead to real life impact at a time of crisis we decided to publish the article as a pre-print whilst the article was being peer-reviewed. I was also keen to be transparent and ensure replicability of findings, so we also published our datasets. Whilst we formulated a plan prior to publication I did not have time to register this and publish it.

### **How did you do it?**

I was keen to have the article formally reviewed and ideally to have an open peer review process, as this would mean that any changes we made to our analysis could be tracked. I had previous experience of publishing on the Wellcome Open Research platform and decided that this would be where we would publish this rapid analysis.

### **What barriers / challenges did you have to overcome?**

Open research is still a fairly new concept in the field of suicide research. The senior academics I worked with were unfamiliar with the platform I was referring to and did not fully understand how the peer review process would work. There was initial reluctance to publish before peer review, but given the urgent need for knowledge in this area and the Wellcome branding of the platform I was suggesting, I was able to convince them to publish in this way.

### **What does it mean for you and your research?**

Given the timely nature of the publication and the desperate need at the time for data to help with public health surveillance, this work led to a collaboration with Public Health England. On a weekly basis from the start of May 2020 (5 days after publication) for a period of 5 months I send updates to Public Health England for their mental health tracker. The work was also presented at Welsh Parliament.

## How might your findings / approach help other researchers?

Publishing in this way meant I was able to achieve impact from the findings and provide evidence when it was most needed – something which would not have been possible using traditional publishing methods. I'll be using this as an example when I speak to other suicide researchers and in my teaching to promote more open practices in research.

## Additional Information

Paper <https://wellcomeopenresearch.org/articles/5-82>

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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### REVISED Mapping population mental health concerns related to COVID-19 and the consequences of physical distancing: a Google trends analysis [version 2; peer review: 2 approved]

 [Duleeka Knipe](#) <sup>1</sup>, [Hannah Evans](#)<sup>2</sup>, [Amanda Marchant](#)<sup>2</sup>, [David Gunnell](#)<sup>1,3\*</sup>, [Ann John](#) <sup>2\*</sup>

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This article is included in the [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) collection](#).

## Abstract

**Background:** The 2020 Coronavirus pandemic is a major international public health challenge. Governments have taken public health protection measures to reduce the spread of the virus through non-pharmalogical measures. The impact of the pandemic and the public health response on individual and population mental health is unknown.

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	1	2
<b>Version 2</b> (revision) 10 Jun 20	 read	 read
<b>Version 1</b> 30 Apr 20	 read	 read

- John Gunn** , Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Newark, USA
- Olivia J. Kirtley**, KU Leuven, Leuven, Belgium