

PEER REVIEW HISTORY

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ARTICLE DETAILS

TITLE (PROVISIONAL)	Public perceptions and experiences of social distancing and social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic: A UK-based focus group study.
AUTHORS	Williams, Simon; Armitage, Chris; Tampe, Tova; Dienes, Kimberly

VERSION 1 - REVIEW

REVIEWER	Joanne Brooke Birmingham City University
REVIEW RETURNED	07-May-2020

GENERAL COMMENTS	<p>Public perceptions and experiences of social distancing and social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic: A UK-based focus group study.</p> <p>Thank you for submitting your paper to BMJ Open, and providing me with the opportunity to review your work. I hope you find my comments both helpful and constructive as this is my aim.</p> <p>Abstract My first question is 'lockdown' the appropriate term to use within this research, as the UK did not lockdown completely when compared to Spain and Italy (for example). Results – the first sentence has a grammatical error, so I am unsure how this should read, the results are unclear, this may be due to the omission of how your data was analysed, this needs to be added in the design section, or a methods section.</p> <p>Introduction Some of the language in this section is very emotive, which feels inappropriate in an academic paper, and you state the negative impact on social distancing and isolation without evidence, within the introduction, which feels biased (first sentence of your second paragraph) The application of social distancing and isolation in the UK, could be more clearly stated with the removal of brackets, this is important information for readers outside of the UK.</p> <p>Participants and methods Your results state UK, but you do not present the geographical data of participants, were all four countries included as the experiences of people from Scotland and Wales will be different from those in England The diversity of your study is rather White biased.</p>
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	<p>Analysis and results The analysis you completed states grounded theory, but not actual process of analysing the data, the themes you have identified appear to address your research questions explicitly and appears at this stage to be more of a content analysis. I am unclear if you applied grounded theory to develop your themes how they mapped so clearly onto your research questions.</p> <p>Ethics How was participant consent obtained, it would be clearer to have a section on ethical approval within the paper.</p> <p>Results The inclusion of the quotes within the text would support the readability of this paper.</p> <p>Discussion The first statement is not supported by your research, and has over generalised your results, this needs to be addressed.</p> <p>Conclusion Again, within the conclusion your statements are not supported by your research, as you have over generalised your results.</p>
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REVIEWER	Katie Robinson University of Limerick, Ireland.
REVIEW RETURNED	15-May-2020

GENERAL COMMENTS	<p>This paper makes a useful contribution in advancing understanding of community dwelling adults experiences of social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>I recommend the following revisions before publication.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach to data analysis could be specified in the abstract. • More detail on participants age could be included in the abstract. • In the methods it would be useful to contextualize the study further by specifying the 'lockdown' guidelines in the UK applicable to the participant group during the period of data collection. • The data analysis could be more clearly presented in order of steps completed. Some further description of the thematic coding framework would be useful. It is not fully clear to what extent GT guided the analytic approach. • Although loss and psychological consequences of social distancing were a pattern identified in your data I think opening the discussion with the statement that the 'findings suggest a large proportion of the UK population may be suffering from feelings of depression and anxiety' is perhaps overstating the findings. I recommend opening the discussion with a statement of your main findings without extrapolating to the entire UK population. • I think early in the discussion you should frame the results in the context of the participant group – half of the participants were under 35 years and most were under 45 years. This needs greater consideration early on and could also be mentioned in the study abstract. • The basis for your conclusions that adherence is 'likely to wane' from the study findings is not fully clear – you could make this more explicit in the findings or re-phrase this conclusion (this is also stated in the abstract). Your conclusion that some will seek immediate re-
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	<p>integration links really well with the findings. The following are suggestions the authors might consider when revising their manuscript:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theme 1 has 'loss' as a central concept cross cutting all subthemes. The theme title is broad and does not capture this central idea. Refining the theme title to include this concept might be useful for communicating the study findings more effectively. • Again theme 3 has a similar broad and not v descriptive title and doesn't really communicate the fact that people reported self-adherence but instances of non-adherence by others. • Try to avoid repeating quotes in the main text of the findings and the additional boxes. I think integrating quotes into the main body of the findings is more effective than including boxes with a list of quotes.
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REVIEWER	Lynne McCormack University of Newcastle, Australia.
REVIEW RETURNED	26-May-2020

GENERAL COMMENTS	<p>Thank you for the opportunity to review this well constructed research article where participants are currently immersed in the restrictions of Covid-19. Obviously it is early days and it presents a lens of in-the-moment lockdown.</p> <p>Abstract: Aims, design and outcomes clear. However, Objective, Design, Setting, Participants each are not stated as a complete sentence e.g. 'Explore the perceptions ...' should read 'This study explored the perceptions ...' etc. Response and Conclusions are correct.</p> <p>Introduction: Very fluid argument and presentation of the literature. 5 para 1 parentheses after handwashing - delete one.</p> <p>Methodology: Need to explain why grounded theory is the appropriate method for the research question. I presume that consent was implied but this is not mentioned.</p> <p>Results: Well explored, thematically validated by relevant quotes.</p> <p>Discussion: Very succinct and raises important issues for future research consideration and limitations of this study. Given the limited amount of participants and qualitative approach, writing occasionally slips into generalising findings rather than being unique to these participants e.g. '..that these participants are experiencing' rather than '...people are experiencing.'</p> <p>Thank you.</p>
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VERSION 1 – AUTHOR RESPONSE

Reviewer(s)' Comments to Author:

Reviewer: 1

Reviewer Name

Joanne Brooke

Institution and Country

Birmingham City University

Please state any competing interests or state 'None declared':

None declared

Please leave your comments for the authors below

Public perceptions and experiences of social distancing and social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic: A UK-based focus group study.

Thank you for submitting your paper to BMJ Open, and providing me with the opportunity to review your work. I hope you find my comments both helpful and constructive as this is my aim.

[Many thanks indeed – we found your comments extremely helpful and constructive]

Abstract

My first question is 'lockdown' the appropriate term to use within this research, as the UK did not lockdown completely when compared to Spain and Italy (for example). [this has been removed from the abstract and has been amended to 'the UK government's 'stay at home' announcement]

Results – the first sentence has a grammatical error, so I am unsure how this should read, the results are unclear, this may be due to the omission of how your data was analysed, this needs to be added in the design section, or a methods section. [this section of the abstract has been re-written and errors removed to aid clarity and emphasise thematic findings]

Introduction

Some of the language in this section is very emotive, which feels inappropriate in an academic paper, and you state the negative impact on social distancing and isolation without evidence, within the introduction, which feels biased (first sentence of your second paragraph) [this section has been edited and the emotive language changed or removed]

The application of social distancing and isolation in the UK, could be more clearly stated with the removal of brackets, this is important information for readers outside of the UK. [these have been actioned; language is less emotive and definitions expanded and parentheses removed]

Participants and methods

Your results state UK, but you do not present the geographical data of participants, were all four countries included as the experiences of people from Scotland and Wales will be different from those in England [all four countries were represented – a note about this is included in this section, but specific locations of specific participants were not added to quotations upon request by the editorial team]

The diversity of your study is rather White biased. [a note about the ethnic bias and difficulties in recruitment have been noted in the limitations section]

Analysis and results

The analysis you completed states grounded theory, but not actual process of analysing the data, the themes you have identified appear to address your research questions explicitly and appears at this stage to be more of a content analysis. I am unclear if you applied grounded theory to develop your

themes how they mapped so clearly onto your research questions. [this section has been re-written to give a fuller account of the qualitative approach taken – we have more precisely linked this to one of the main texts used (Coffey and Atkinson 1996) (which includes discussion of Grounded Theory, at least the ‘abductive’ version of it) – we agree that the previous draft was unclear so have removed explicit link to GT, and more detail has been added to explain the steps through which coding was performed and themes generated]

Ethics

How was participant consent obtained, it would be clearer to have a section on ethical approval within the paper. [we have added details into the methods, as also per editorial request]

Results

The inclusion of the quotes within the text would support the readability of this paper. [this has been actioned – thanks]

Discussion

The first statement is not supported by your research, and has over generalised your results, this needs to be addressed. [these have been addressed; language rephrased to avoid over-generalising]

Conclusion

Again, within the conclusion your statements are not supported by your research, as you have over generalised you results. [these have been addressed; language rephrased to avoid over-generalising]

Reviewer: 2

Reviewer Name

Katie Robinson

Institution and Country

University of Limerick, Ireland.

Please state any competing interests or state ‘None declared’:

None declared.

Please leave your comments for the authors below

This paper makes a useful contribution in advancing understanding of community dwelling adults experiences of social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic.[Many thanks for these positive remarks]

I recommend the following revisions before publication.

- Approach to data analysis could be specified in the abstract. [this has been done]
- More detail on participants age could be included in the abstract. [due to word constraints we have not included specific ages in the abstract but have emphasised the limitations of age within the methods and limitations section]
- In the methods it would be useful to contextualize the study further by specifying the 'lockdown' guidelines in the UK applicable to the participant group during the period of data collection. [this has been added]
- The data analysis could be more clearly presented in order of steps completed. Some further description of the thematic coding framework would be useful. It is not fully clear to what extent GT

guided the analytic approach. [this section has been re-written to give a fuller account of the qualitative approach taken – we have more precisely linked this to one of the main texts used (Coffey and Atkinson 1996) (which includes discussion of Grounded Theory, at least the ‘abductive’ version of it) – we agree that the previous draft was unclear so have removed explicit link to GT, and more detail has been added to explain the steps through which coding was performed and themes generated]

- Although loss and psychological consequences of social distancing were a pattern identified in your data I think opening the discussion with the statement that the ‘findings suggest a large proportion of the UK population may be suffering from feelings of depression and anxiety’ is perhaps overstating the findings. I recommend opening the discussion with a statement of your main findings without extrapolating to the entire UK population. [this has been done- language and arguments reframed and rephrased to avoid overgeneralising]

- I think early in the discussion you should frame the results in the context of the participant group – half of the participants were under 35 years and most were under 45 years. This needs greater consideration early on and could also be mentioned in the study abstract. [due to word constraints we have not included specific ages in the abstract but have emphasised the limitations of age within the methods and limitations section]

- The basis for your conclusions that adherence is ‘likely to wane’ from the study findings is not fully clear – you could make this more explicit in the findings or re-phrase this conclusion (this is also stated in the abstract). Your conclusion that some will seek immediate re-integration links really well with the findings. [the point about waning has been removed]

The following are suggestions the authors might consider when revising their manuscript:

- Theme 1 has ‘loss’ as a central concept cross cutting all subthemes. The theme title is broad and does not capture this central idea. Refining the theme title to include this concept might be useful for communicating the study findings more effectively. [this has been retitled – we agree that the central theme was loss and title should reflect this]

- Again theme 3 has a similar broad and not v descriptive title and doesn’t really communicate the fact that people reported self-adherence but instances of non-adherence by others. [also we agree – thanks – and have rephrased the title to reflect more precisely the substantive content of the theme]

- Try to avoid repeating quotes in the main text of the findings and the additional boxes. I think integrating quotes into the main body of the findings is more effective than including boxes with a list of quotes. [this has been actioned – thanks so much]

Reviewer: 3

Reviewer Name

Lynne McCormack

Institution and Country

University of Newcastle, Australia.

Please state any competing interests or state ‘None declared’:

None declared

Please leave your comments for the authors below

Thank you for the opportunity to review this well constructed research article where participants are currently immersed in the restrictions of Covid-19. Obviously it is early days and it presents a lens of in-the-moment lockdown.

[thanks so much for your positive comments]

Abstract: Aims, design and outcomes clear. However, Objective, Design, Setting, Participants each are not stated as a complete sentence e.g. 'Explore the perceptions ...' should read 'This study explored the perceptions ...' etc. Response and Conclusions are correct. [amendments made to abstract - with fuller sentences now included]

Introduction:

Very fluid argument and presentation of the literature. 5 para 1 parentheses after handwashing - delete one. [actioned – thanks]

Methodology:

Need to explain why grounded theory is the appropriate method for the research question. I presume that consent was implied but this is not mentioned. [more details as to the specific methods used have been included – as per also reviewer 1 and 2's suggestion]

Results:

Well explored, thematically validated by relevant quotes. [many thanks]

Discussion:

Very succinct and raises important issues for future research consideration and limitations of this study. Given the limited amount of participants and qualitative approach, writing occasionally slips into generalising findings rather than being unique to these participants e.g. '..that these participants are experiencing' rather than '...people are experiencing.' [these have been addressed, and language changed, to avoid over-generalising]

Thank you.

VERSION 2 – REVIEW

REVIEWER	Joanne Brooke Birmingham City Univeristy
REVIEW RETURNED	11-Jun-2020

GENERAL COMMENTS	Public perceptions and experiences of social distancing and social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic: A UK-based focus group study. Thank you for resubmitting your article to BMJ Open,
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REVIEWER	katie robinson University of Limerick
REVIEW RETURNED	30-Jun-2020

GENERAL COMMENTS	The changes I requested have been addressed. Many thanks.
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REVIEWER	Lynne McCormack University of Newcastle, Australia
REVIEW RETURNED	17-Jun-2020

GENERAL COMMENTS	Abstract: Objective and Design are still not full sentences. Should read: 'This study explored (not to explore) public perceptions and experiences of social distancing and social isolation related to the
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	COVID-19 pandemic'. Similarly: 'This qualitative study comprised (not comprising) five focus groups....." I note there is now no mention of Grounded Theory. It would seem that the authors have changed the analysis to simply thematic analysis?
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VERSION 2 – AUTHOR RESPONSE

Regarding reviewer 3, Dr McCormack's comments:

- we have amended the first two sections of the abstract as requested to include full sentences.
- Yes that is correct (we had amended the methods section to reflect the fact that thematic analysis more appropriately captures the approach taken (specifically drawing on the approach to analysing qualitative data as outlined by Coffey and Atkinson 1996))