

## PEER REVIEW HISTORY

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### ARTICLE DETAILS

<b>TITLE (PROVISIONAL)</b>	Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on ongoing health research: an ad hoc survey among investigators in Germany
<b>AUTHORS</b>	Bratan, Tanja; Aichinger, Heike; Brkic, Nicole; Rueter, Jana; Apfelbacher, Christian; Boyer, Lisa; Loss, Julika

### VERSION 1 – REVIEW

<b>REVIEWER</b>	Martínez-García, Mireya National Institute of Cardiology
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	10-Apr-2021

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	<p>The study title, "Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on ongoing health research: an ad hoc survey among investigators in Germany", is very interesting and I found it well conducted. However, I have some questions and observations that I expose below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. In the methods section, the authors mentioned an online workshop open to all interested investigators from the 'Healthy - for a lifetime' funding programme was held on 28 May 2020. The objective of the online workshop was specifically present the results from the survey and discuss them?</li><li>2. In the results section, the authors mentioned: some projects (18%) did not employ mitigation strategies, sometimes because no suitable measures were available. The authors could mention some of these measures?</li><li>3. Some information about the validation through an online workshop should be mentioned in the abstract.</li><li>4. The authors said that it would be helpful to repeat the survey at certain intervals. In their experience, and at the light of the pandemic course, what intervals could you propose, could you recommend distinguish by the type of the study area?</li></ol>
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<b>REVIEWER</b>	Alajlani, Mohannad University of Warwick, WMG
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	20-Aug-2021

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	- I am confident that the authors have followed the appropriate approach to reach the participants, however, it is highly recommended to provide further specific details on this approach to avoid any ethical considerations from the readers. For example,
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	<p>have the authors had access to the email list from “Healthy – for a lifetime”?</p> <p>- Discussion Section: I would recommend including further evidence from the literature to support the discussion.</p>
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### VERSION 1 – AUTHOR RESPONSE

Reviewer comments	Authors’ response
<b>Reviewer 1</b>	
<p>In the methods section, the authors mentioned an online workshop open to all interested investigators from the ‘Healthy - for a lifetime’ funding programme was held on 28 May 2020. The objective of the online workshop was specifically present the results from the survey and discuss them?</p>	<p>We would like to thank the reviewer for her helpful comments. The purpose of the workshop was indeed to present, discuss and confirm the survey findings. We have added this validation purpose to the section “The online survey” (p. 5).</p>
<p>In the results section, the authors mentioned: some projects (18%) did not employ mitigation strategies, sometimes because no suitable measures were available. The authors could mention some of these measures?</p>	<p>The “suitable measures” refer to the mitigation strategies listed in the previous paragraph (“[...] researchers [...] modified their data collection methods [...] or made adjustments in project implementation”). To make the link to this paragraph clearer, we slightly modified the sentence: “However, some investigators (18%) had not employed mitigation strategies in their projects yet, sometimes because those measures mentioned above were not feasible for their projects.” (p. 7)</p>
<p>Some information about the validation through an online workshop should be mentioned in the abstract.</p>	<p>We have added this aspect to the design and participants sections of the abstract: “Design: Online survey and validation workshop. [...] Participants Survey: 120 investigators of health research projects across Germany, performed between 15 and 25 May 2020; workshop: 32 investigators, performed on 28 May 2020.” (p. 1)</p>
<p>The authors said that it would be helpful to repeat the survey at certain intervals. In their experience, and at the light of the pandemic course, what intervals could you propose, could you recommend distinguish by the type of the study area?</p>	<p>In general, it is difficult to make such recommendation in the dynamic situation of a pandemic and we do not have data to support specific intervals, or different intervals for different study types. Deciding on an interval after which a renewed survey would make sense, should consider and counterbalance a) the overall duration of projects (which is about 3 years), b) relevant changes in epidemic situation and political mitigation strategies, and c) possible willingness of investigators to participate in a voluntary survey again. In fact, we have repeated the survey in June 2021 (while this article was still in the review process), which was one year after the first survey. We have now inserted the following cautious recommendation:</p>

	As the pandemic has been imposing ongoing challenges on health research, with mitigation strategies and social distancing regulations being in place for months, further surveys, e.g. after six or twelve months, may reflect impact on projects even better and capture lessons learnt over time by project investigators. (p. 11)
<b>Reviewer 2</b>	
I am confident that the authors have followed the appropriate approach to reach the participants, however, it is highly recommended to provide further specific details on this approach to avoid any ethical considerations from the readers. For example, have the authors had access to the email list from “Healthy – for a lifetime”?	We would like to thank the reviewer for his helpful comments. We have added that the project team gathered names and contact details from publicly available sources. In addition, as mentioned in the section “Ethical considerations”, we only sent the survey to those 120/144 principal investigators who had given written informed consent for participating in the accompanying research project, including the consent to be sent an online questionnaire.
Discussion Section: I would recommend including further evidence from the literature to support the discussion.	We have added several references to support the discussion, and we have included a new subsection on other surveys on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on research (p. 9). The latter studies had not yet been available when the paper was originally written.