

Concern for COVID: How Do Concertgoers Regard COVID-19 in the Era After Lockdown?

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Abstract..... | 4 |
| Introduction..... | 5 |
| Review of Literature | 6 |
| COVID Knowledgeability | 6 |
| Concert Attraction in the Era of COVID-19 | 6 |
| Symbolic Interactionism Theory and COVID-19..... | 7 |
| Methods..... | 8 |
| Sample..... | 8 |
| Variables..... | 8 |
| Scale | 9 |
| Results..... | 11 |
| Univariate Analysis..... | 11 |
| Bivariate Analysis | 11 |
| Descriptive Statistics..... | 11 |
| Inferential Statistics. | 12 |
| Qualitative Analysis | 12 |
| Social Engagement..... | 13 |
| Fear..... | 13 |
| Personal Responsibility..... | 13 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Mental Health..... | 14 |
| Discussion..... | 15 |
| Conclusion | 17 |
| References..... | 18 |
| Appendix A: Measuring Concern About COVID-19..... | 19 |
| Appendix B: Measuring Concern About COVID-19 Codebook | 24 |
| Appendix C: Interview Questions..... | 30 |

Abstract

Attending many concerts, being a woman, and being older are all good indicators of a higher level of concern for COVID-19. Concern regarding the virus has generally gone down in the years since the beginning of the pandemic, especially among frequent concertgoers. Previous research has found that health literacy is an important factor in how individuals regard COVID and younger people are the most likely group to attend concerts. This study uses the theory of symbolic interactionism to ascertain ascribed meanings associated with COVID-19 and other aspects related to the pandemic. To understand the population of modern concertgoers, I constructed a survey with a scale that measures the level of concern regarding the COVID-19 virus. There were 239 valid responses in total. I also interviewed five participants to learn about their personal experiences in relation to the virus and discover how that shapes their attitudes toward it. Common themes from the interviews include social engagement at concerts, fear, personal responsibility, and mental health. Future studies should go further into depth regarding the change in opinions of COVID-19 over time. This study is limited by time constraints and nonrepresentative sampling.

Introduction

This research paper seeks to characterize modern concertgoers and ascertain their level of concern for the COVID-19 virus. Understanding attitudes toward the virus is important for evaluating public health-consciousness and may be helpful in forming new methods of health education for future pandemics. I want to pursue this topic because of my past experiences with COVID-19 and my love of concerts. The human experience of live music is incredibly interesting to me. Even more interesting is the public's seeming acceptance of risk pertaining to possible infections of COVID-19. Concerts, gatherings where the virus is likely to spread, present an interesting dilemma to attendees who must balance the attraction of the event with the risk of potential infection. I want to find out how comfortable concert attendees are in the age of COVID, and how their view on the virus affects their attendance.

My research question: How concerned about COVID-19 are concertgoers in the era after lockdown, and what factors are good predictors of concern level?

Review of Literature

COVID Knowledgeability

Masoud et al. (2021) found that the more knowledge someone has on the effects of the COVID-19 disease, the more likely they are to have a reasonable attitude toward the virus. More knowledgeable people were also less likely to regard the virus with fear. In other words, someone educated on the effects of COVID-19 is more likely to be cautious of the virus rather than fearful. Females, people who lived in urban regions, people with higher education, and people who had or know someone who had COVID-19 were the most likely demographics to have a higher level of COVID-19 knowledge. An earlier study looking at COVID awareness found that general health literacy was a good predictor for COVID knowledgeability (O'Connor et al., 2020). Since Masoud et al. also concluded that attitudes are based mostly on knowledge, we can expect that those who show higher health literacy rates and those from demographics with higher levels of COVID-19 knowledge are more likely to display higher levels of concern for the virus.

Concert Attraction in the Era of COVID-19

A study that examined attendees of online and in-person concerts during the pandemic found that despite the option of attending online music festivals, the overwhelming majority of participants went to more live events than online ones. The social experience of a live music event was a strong motivator for most of the participants, something that was absent during lockdown. Younger people were more likely to state socialization as a reason to attend a concert. (Perez-Monteagudo & Curras-Perez, 2022). Another study by O'Neill and Egermann (2022) concurred and concluded that for most participants, the social experience of an event is the best indicator of enjoyment. The social aspect of concert-going, the main driver behind attendance

especially for younger people, is also the factor that risks exposure to COVID-19. People who decide to attend a concert must accept the risk of infection (Perez-Monteagudo & Curras-Perez, 2022). Earlier in the pandemic, Rothschild, Vowels, and Rothschild noted that given the option of receiving a refund for canceled music events, 80.7 percent of people reported being likely to purchase another ticket as soon as a future event opened. The virus did not impact their likelihood of attendance. Most people early in the pandemic only stopped attending concerts because venues were closed, and not out of caution (2020).

Symbolic Interactionism Theory and COVID-19

Symbolic interactionism is a sociological theory that focuses on how interactions create meaning within a society (Blackstone, 2019). COVID-19 has a variety of different meanings to different groups. Among most, the virus is regarded with caution (Masoud et al., 2020). In his study, Kurt (2022) examines tweets regarding COVID safety measures like vaccination in order to understand the different meanings that people have for the virus. This study found that people who support safety measures do so because they want others to be healthy, for life to go back to normal, and for the economy to bounce back. Those against safety measures protest because of concerns for liberty, belief in bodily freedom, distrust of politicians, and the fear of being controlled. The vaccine is another important yet divisive symbol. People with higher health literacy tend to support the vaccine (O'Connor et al. 2020), but vaccine hesitancy persists among groups that are more likely to not take the virus as seriously (Kurt, 2022).

Methods

I constructed a survey to characterize the modern concertgoer. The survey included general questions of identity as well as a question that quantified the number of times a participant attended a concert or other live music event in the last twelve months before survey completion. A scale determining participants' level of concern for the COVID-19 virus was also included.

Sample

The survey was published online to two different social media platforms. The first, Instagram, was open to a sample of 85 of my own followers, who are predominantly 17-20 year old southern California residents. The second platform is Reddit, an online forum made up of user-created communities. The social network is used worldwide, but the majority of users are young American males. I shared a link to my survey in seven different Reddit communities: three specific band focused communities, three indie music genre communities, and one popular general discussion community. Survey responses were collected over the course of four days, and 263 responses were collected in total. Twenty-eight responses were discarded because respondents failed to meet the age requirement to be included in this study.

In addition to the survey, I interviewed five participants that I knew personally. Each interview was an hour-long one-on-one session. Interviewees' ages ranged from 18 to 55 and their rates of concert attendance ranged from six to 16 times in the twelve months leading up to interviews. Three of the interviewees were men and two were nonbinary.

Variables

The independent variable in this study is participant concern level regarding COVID-19. This attribute is measured by a scale which considers the following aspects making up concern:

knowledge about COVID-19 infection, cautiousness for contracting the virus, and preoccupation with possible virus exposure. This study uses the variable rate of concert attendance to predict COVID-19 concern level, which is the dependent variable. For the purposes of this study, a concert is any live music gathering attended by a group of people. To put the effect of concert attendance in a greater context, I also used the characteristics age and gender to predict COVID-19 concern levels.

Scale

The COVID-19 Concern Scale is made up of nine questions measuring the three aspects of virus concern listed previously. Possible scores ranged from nine to 45. Recorded scores ranged from nine to 32, making the range 23. Among respondents, the mean level of concern was 23. When tested for Cronbach's Alpha, the scale yielded a score of .809 which indicates my results as acceptably reliable.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample, N=239

| | N | % |
|---|-----|------|
| Mean Age in Years | | 23.9 |
| Gender | | |
| Man | 162 | 67.8 |
| Woman | 49 | 20.5 |
| Nonbinary | 28 | 11.7 |
| Racial or Ethnic Identity | | |
| Asian or Pacific Islander | 16 | 6.7 |
| Black or African American | 3 | 1.3 |
| Hispanic ethnicity of any race | 35 | 14.6 |
| Native American/American Indigenous | 3 | 1.3 |
| White | 175 | 73.2 |
| Other | 7 | 2.9 |
| Median Concerts or Live Music Events Attended in Last 12 Months | | 4 |
| COVID-19 Diagnosis (Participant or someone close) | | |
| No | 21 | 8.8 |
| Yes | 218 | 91.2 |

Results

Univariate Analysis

The median rate of concert attendance was four times in twelve months. Participants overwhelmingly reported either being infected with COVID-19 in the past or knowing someone who had been infected with 91.2 percent of responses indicating as such. Men made up 67.8 percent of respondents, with women representing 20.5 percent and nonbinary folk making up 11.7 percent of the remaining minority. Recorded ages ranged from 17 to 67 years old with the mean at 23.87 years of age. 73.2 percent of respondents identified as White with the next biggest group being Hispanic, making up 14.6 percent of responses. Rates of concert attendance range from zero to 70 with the largest group being 19.2 percent of participants who reported attending zero concerts in the twelve months before completing the survey.

Bivariate Analysis

Descriptive Statistics. I ran multiple crosstabulations to further understand the sample. I found that 69.1 percent of White respondents and 51.4 percent of Hispanic respondents were men. Twenty percent of White respondents and 31.4 percent of Hispanic respondents were women. There were no Black/African American or racially non-specified women in the sample. Sixty-eight percent of the nonbinary respondents identified as White with the next biggest group of nonbinary folks being Hispanic at 21.4 percent.

To get an idea of who was attending concerts, I trichotomized rates of concert attendance into three groups. The first group did not attend any concerts. The second group attended one to four, and the third went to five or more concerts. When analyzing in terms of race and ethnicity, respondents who chose non-specified for race had the highest percentage of people who attended more than four concerts at 57.1 percent. White respondents were the second highest with 47.4

percent. Of White respondents, 19.4 percent did not go to any concerts and 33.1 percent attended between one and four. Seventeen percent of Hispanic respondents did not attend any concerts, 48.6 percent attended one to four, and 34.3 percent attended five or more. There were no Black/African American respondents who did not attend a concert. Men were the most likely to go to more concerts with a percentage of 48.8 who attended five or more. Twenty-eight-point-six percent of women did not go to any concerts, making them the least likely group to attend.

Inferential Statistics. H1: As age increases, the level of concern regarding COVID-19 will increase. I ran a correlation test with age and the COVID Concern Scale which yielded a significant weak positive correlation ($r=0.139$, $P=0.032$). I accept my hypothesis. As one ages, level of concern for COVID-19 increases.

H2: Women will have a higher level of concern regarding COVID-19 than men. I ran a correlation test and found a significant weak positive correlation ($r=.228$, $P=<.001$). My hypothesis is accepted. Women are more likely to have a higher level of concern for COVID-19 than men.

H3: As concert attendance increases, the level of concern regarding COVID-19 will decrease. I ran a correlation test with concert attendance and the COVID Concern Scale. The result was a significant weak negative correlation ($r=-1.75$, $p=.007$). I accept my hypothesis. The more concerts one attends, the less likely one is to have a high level of concern for COVID-19.

Qualitative Analysis

I asked five participants questions about concert attendance, the live music experience, social effects of lockdown, and their opinions on COVID-19. Analysis of their responses revealed common themes of social engagement, fear, personal responsibility, and mental health (fig. 1).

Social Engagement. When probing for motivation regarding frequent concert attendance, all participants indicated aspects related to the social experience of a concert as important factors of enjoyment. All participants said that crowd behavior significantly impacted their enjoyment of a live music event. Participants B and C enjoyed dancing and singing with surrounding attendees. Meeting new people was a motivator of attendance for Participants A, B, and C. All participants other than A and E indicated that they only attend concerts with close friends or family and never alone. Participant B expressed sadness for single attendees. All participants other than E assumed that at least one person in attendance at every concert could be infected with COVID-19. Every participant indicated that knowledge that a high percentage of people in attendance at a concert were infected with COVID-19 would severely negatively impact their experience and make it unlikely that they would attend themselves.

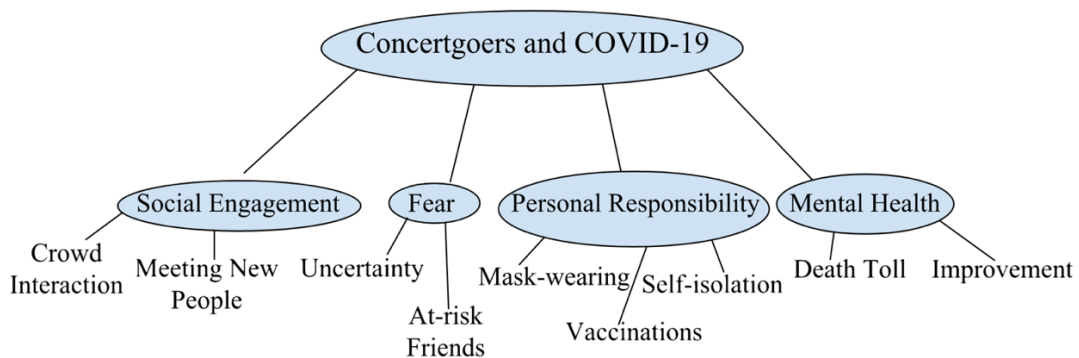
Fear. All participants used the word “scared” or “scary” in describing some aspect of their feelings toward COVID-19. Most participants indicated that they felt the most fearful after the lockdown was announced. Participants A and E indicated that uncertainty contributed to their fear early in the pandemic. As participants learned more about the virus, fear lessened. Fear, specifically the fear of infecting others, is a likely cause for participants’ concern for the virus. Participant B and C were close with at least one at-risk individual whose health could have been severely impacted by COVID-19. Both indicated worry for the at-risk individuals they knew personally.

Personal Responsibility. All participants indicated a level of personal responsibility to keep others from being exposed to COVID-19. Participants B, C, and E used expletives to refer to individuals who would not self-isolate if diagnosed with COVID-19. Every participant said that they would feel some form of negative emotion if they transmitted the disease to someone else,

ranging from “bad” to ”mortified.” Two of the five interviewees continue to wear face masks daily. These two are also the only participants to report mask wearing while attending concerts. All participants were fully vaccinated.

Mental Health. Participants B, C, and D indicated that their mental health has improved since the lockdown. Every interviewee except for participant A used the word “depressing” somewhere in their description of their lockdown experience. Two participants said that the growing death toll negatively impacted their mental health and outlook on the pandemic. All participants reported a drop in their level of concern for COVID-19 in the years after lockdown. Every participant said that they think about COVID-19 less now than they used too, and most say that social distancing is less important now than at the start of the pandemic. It is possible that thinking about COVID-19 less and the rise in social engagements after the end of lockdown contributed to the improvement of interviewees’ mental health.

Figure 1. Concertgoers and COVID-19 Concept Map, N=5



Discussion

I conducted this study to characterize modern concertgoers with a specific focus on discovering their attitudes regarding the COVID-19 virus. I sought to discover what COVID-19 means to people and how their personal experiences shape their view of the virus. My findings showed that, in general, people are less concerned about the virus now than they were at the beginning of the pandemic. The group of people who are least likely to have a high level of concern for the virus are young men who attend many concerts. Women, older individuals, and people who do not attend concerts all have more concern for COVID-19. This falls in line with the research of Masoud et. al who found that females have higher rates of health literacy than males. Gender was the strongest predictor of COVID-19 concern, but it was still weak with an r-value of 0.228. Qualitative analysis helped to explain the reasons behind my quantitative findings. Generally, people responded with fear at the beginning of the pandemic. This fear lessened over time as more information about the virus was disseminated. The drop in uncertainty regarding the virus was associated with a drop in fear. People maintained concern for the virus up until social distancing requirements and mask mandates ended. Many individuals today do not think about COVID-19 as often nor with as much as fear they did in the years prior. There are still some who continue to take measures against COVID-19 like mask-wearing, but even they admit that their belief in the importance of social distancing has lessened over time.

Concert attendance is uniquely impacted by feelings surrounding COVID-19 due to the virus' proclivity to be transmitted in densely crowded environments. Concerts and other live music events are one of the most crowded spaces that someone is likely to want to go to. It presents an interesting dilemma in the era of COVID-19 where attendees must weigh their desire to avoid the virus with their desire to engage in the event. I found that the main motivators for

concert attendance was the social environment of the concert which matches the findings of Perez-Montegudo & Curras-Perez. The social environment which attracts so many people is also the factor that makes concerts ripe for the spread of COVID-19 in the first place.

Concertgoers today accept the risk rather than ignore it. Some are likely to take protective measures while others choose to rely solely on their vaccination history to keep them safe.

Overall, frequent concertgoers have less concern for COVID-19, but only by a relatively slim margin. They are likely to be aware and accepting of the risk of infection.

Conclusion

Future research on this subject should go further in depth into how the opinions of subjects change over time. When asked directly, individuals are unlikely to recognize the extent to which their thoughts have changed. A more accurate depiction of changing opinions can be observed through a case study rather than qualitative interviews. Future researchers should also construct a scale to measure knowledge of COVID-19 alongside a scale for concern. I suspect that the level of knowledge plays an important role in one's development of concern and should be studied further.

This study has many limitations. Time was a major constraint on the researching process. I could only complete my work within the timeframe of a single 16-week class. My inexperience in conducting sociological research is another limitation of this study. I still have much to learn, so my analysis and interviewing abilities are limited to what skills I have been able to cultivate as of recently. Another limitation of this study is its sample. Due to time constraints, I had to rely on convenience sampling. Proper random sampling would yield more accurately representative data. Qualitative interviews should have a sample much bigger than five individuals for similar reasons.

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Appendix A: Measuring Concern About COVID-19

This is a survey to investigate levels of concern about the COVID-19 virus. By completing the survey, you give your consent to participate. The survey does not ask you for any personally identifying information. You may choose to discontinue your participation at any time. You must be 18 years old or older to complete this survey. Please fill in or select the answer that most closely applies to you.

First, let's collect some information about you.

What is your age? _____

What is your racial or ethnic identification?

- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Black or African American
- Hispanic ethnicity of any race
- Native American/ American Indigenous
- White
- Other not specified above

What is your gender identity? (For example: man, woman, nonbinary, etc.) _____

How many concerts or other live music event have you attended in the last twelve (12) months?

Have you or someone you are close to ever been diagnosed with COVID-19?

Yes

No

Now, let's look at some of your attitudes.

Rate how much you agree with each of the following statements:

COVID-19 is a serious disease.

STRONGLY AGREE

1

2

3

4

STONGLY DISAGREE

I am knowledgeable on the effects of the COVID-19 virus.

STRONGLY AGREE

1

2

3

4

STONGLY DISAGREE

I practiced social distancing to the best of my ability during the lockdown.

STRONGLY AGREE

1

2

3

4

STONGLY DISAGREE

I still practice social distancing whenever I can.

STRONGLY AGREE

1

2

3

4

STONGLY DISAGREE

Face masks are a safe and effective way to contain the spread of COVID-19.

STRONGLY AGREE

1

2

3

4

STONGLY DISAGREE

The COVID-19 vaccine is safe and effective.

STRONGLY AGREE

1

2

3

4

STONGLY DISAGREE

The possibility of contracting COVID-19 affects my decisions on a daily basis.

STRONGLY AGREE

1

2

3

4

STONGLY DISAGREE

I am worried about getting infected with COVID-19.

STRONGLY AGREE

1

2

3

4

STONGLY DISAGREE

If I was diagnosed with COVID-19, I would isolate myself so I would not spread the virus to others.

STRONGLY AGREE

1

2

3

4

STONGLY DISAGREE

Thank you for completing this survey.

Appendix B: Measuring Concern About COVID-19 Codebook

This is a survey to investigate levels of concern about the COVID-19 virus. By completing the survey, you give your consent to participate. The survey does not ask you for any personally identifying information. You may choose to discontinue your participation at any time. You must be 18 years old or older to complete this survey. Please fill in or select the answer that most closely applies to you.

First, let's collect some information about you.

AGE (Interval)

What is your age? _____

RACE (Nominal)

What is your racial or ethnic identification?

- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Black or African American
- Hispanic ethnicity of any race
- Native American/ American Indigenous
- White
- Other not specified above

GENDER (Nominal)

What is your gender identity? (For example: man, woman, nonbinary, etc.) _____

CONCERT QUO. (Ratio)

How many concerts or other live music event have you attended in the last twelve (12) months?

COVID (Nominal)

Have you or someone you are close to ever been diagnosed with COVID-19?

Yes

No

Now, let's look at some of your attitudes.

Rate how much you agree with each of the following statements:

SERIOUS (Ordinal)

COVID-19 is a serious disease.

STRONGLY AGREE

1

2

3

4

STONGLY DISAGREE

KNOWLEDGE (Ordinal)

I am knowledgeable on the effects of the COVID-19 virus.

STRONGLY AGREE

1

2

3

4

STONGLY DISAGREE

LOCKDOWN_SD (Ordinal)

I practiced social distancing to the best of my ability during the lockdown.

STRONGLY AGREE

1

2

3

4

STONGLY DISAGREE

RECENT_SD (Ordinal)

I still practice social distancing whenever I can.

STRONGLY AGREE

1

2

3

4

STONGLY DISAGREE

MASK_EFFICACY (Ordinal)

Face masks are a safe and effective way to contain the spread of COVID-19.

STRONGLY AGREE

1

2

3

4

STONGLY DISAGREE

VACCINE_EFFICACY (Ordinal)

The COVID-19 vaccine is safe and effective.

STRONGLY AGREE

1

2

3

4

STONGLY DISAGREE

DECISIONS (Ordinal)

The possibility of contracting COVID-19 affects my decisions on a daily basis.

STRONGLY AGREE

1

2

3

4

STONGLY DISAGREE

WORRY (Ordinal)

I am worried about getting infected with COVID-19.

STRONGLY AGREE

1

2

3

4

STONGLY DISAGREE

ISOLATE (Ordinal)

If I was diagnosed with COVID-19, I would isolate myself so I would not spread the virus to others.

STRONGLY AGREE

1

2

3

4

STONGLY DISAGREE

Thank you for completing this survey.

Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. How many concerts have you attended this year? Why so many/few?
 - a. How do you choose which events to go to?
2. What do you enjoy about attending concerts?
 - a. How do you typically feel when you are at a concert?
 - b. Could you describe the type of live music event that you like to go to?
 - c. How do the people in attendance affect your enjoyment?
3. If you knew that someone in the crowd at a concert was infected with COVID-19, how would that affect your experience?
 - a. Let's say 10% of the crowd was infected. How would that affect your experience?
 - b. 50%?
4. How has COVID-19 affected you personally?
 - a. What was lockdown like for you?
 - b. How did you feel when events were being canceled at the start of the pandemic?
 - c. How did getting infected change how you view the virus?
5. What is your opinion on social distancing to stop the spread of COVID-19?
 - a. How has this opinion changed over time?
 - b. Can you remember any piece of information that significantly changed your outlook on the pandemic? Death toll?
6. To what extent do you agree that the COVID vaccine is an effective tool to stop the spread of the virus?
 - a. How has your view on the vaccine changed over time?

7. To what extent does the possibility of becoming infected with COVID-19 affect your decisions today?
 - a. How important is social distancing today?
8. Let's say you test positive for COVID-19 tonight. How would that change your behavior for the days until you test negative again?
 - a. To what extent would you isolate yourself from others?
 - b. What factors might keep you from self-isolating?
9. If you were totally asymptomatic but still able to transmit the disease to others, how comfortable would you be attending a concert?
 - a. How would your view change if you knew that everyone in attendance was fully vaccinated against COVID-19?
10. How has your level of concern for the virus changed over time?
 - a. What did you think about COVID when it was first reported on in early 2020?
 - b. How did you feel about the virus during lockdown?
 - c. How do you feel about COVID-19 today?