
How long do we continue to follow the covid-19 prevention measures?

Belgian citizens' current motivation scores are promising!



How do we deal with the current covid-19 crisis? And how long can we continue to follow the governmental measures? The university of Ghent is currently examining the role of **Belgian citizens' motivation** in following these measures over time.

Today we are confronted with the covid-19 crisis, which presents a challenge and potential threat to everyone in our society. The Belgian government took important measures to limit the spread of the virus. But **to what extent are Belgian citizens motivated** to stick these measures?

Motivation Barometer

To achieve great performances, top athletes need to train on a daily basis and take good care of themselves. Their motivation plays a key role herein. Without a large dose of healthy motivation, they are not able to stick to their demanding training schedule. During the current covid-19 times, it is of critical importance that the population is well-motivated to adhere to the imposed measures. **A study by researchers of Ghent university shows that we do display sustainable motivation to follow these measures today, although there are differences between people.** This is good news because our motivation is a key predictor of the extent to which we follow the measures and thus help to limit spreading the covid-19 virus. If the daily motivation measurement - **the motivation barometer** - indicates that our motivation starts to decrease, the government can adjust their policy by communicating in more motivating ways.

Adherence to Covid-19 Measures

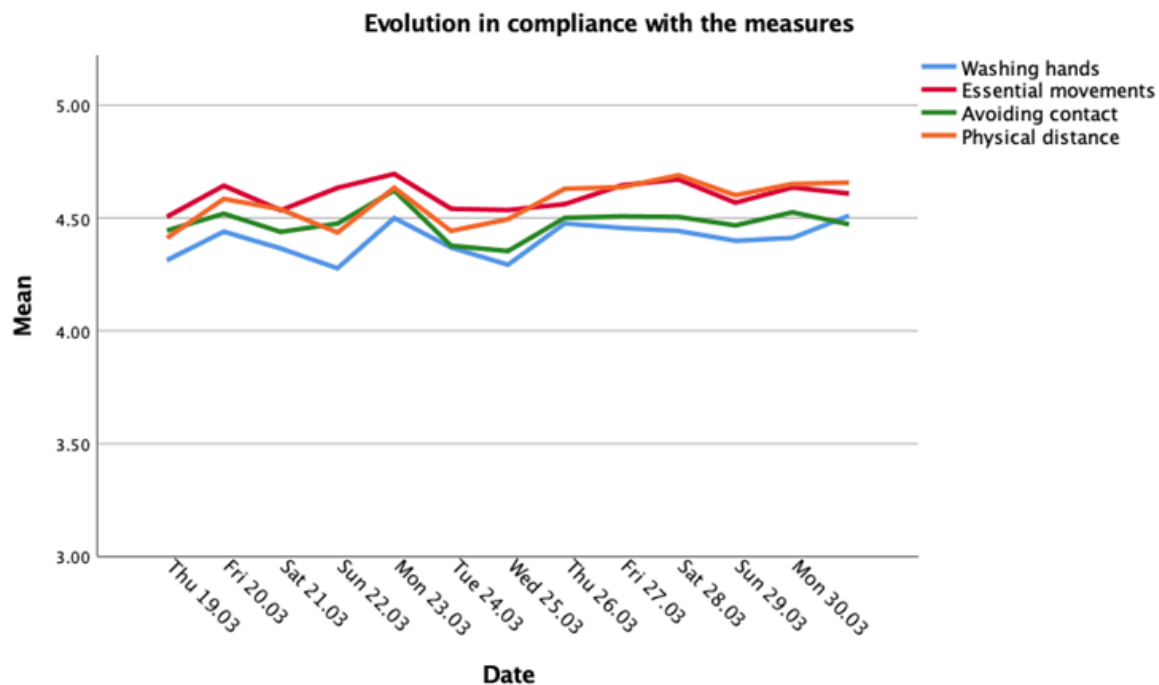
Since the launch of the study on Thursday, March 19, 4,480 participants completed the survey. The sample mainly consists of females (77.1%), with an average age of 42 years. Participants indicate the extent to which they follow four measures imposed by the government: washing one's hands as much as possible, keeping social distance, limiting oneself to essential movements, and avoiding contact with external persons. **Almost 80% of participants reports that they (almost) always adhere to all measures.** Thus, only a fifth of the participants is not sufficiently conscientious in following all measures. Also, only a minority does not follow the measures at all. **Older participants** appear to be more rigorous and significantly more compliant in sticking to the measures, especially when it comes to keeping sufficient social distance.

In general, participants indicate that it is easiest to limit themselves to essential movements. Surprisingly, hand washing, perhaps the simplest and most obvious measure, is a little less adhered to. Women wash their hands somewhat more than men do. Although the advice to wash hands is well adhered to in absolute terms (see Figure 1), it may be less clear what it means to wash hands 'as much as possible'? Does it mean that that we need to wash our hand three, five, or ten times a day? Should we do so at fixed moments throughout the day or every time we have been outdoors? Do you also have to wash your hands if you did not enter public space but spent time in your garden? While a measure such as 'keeping social distance' really involves a rupture in our daily routines and is very clearly formulated (i.e., maximum 1.5 meters), this is less the case for a measure like 'washing hands'. Also, as washing hands was something we already did before the covid-19 crisis began we may have the mistaken impression that no change is needed in this case.

Citizens' compliance with the measures has been monitored daily since Thursday 19 March. As the figure shows, these measures are well adhered to, showing a slightly fluctuating pattern over the different days. Yet, the longitudinal trend is slightly positive since the start of the study. **Participants become increasingly more conscientious and careful in following the measures.** This is excellent news because, with the prolongation of the measures in Belgium for another two weeks, we all will have to keep it up for quite some time.

Figure 1

Evolution in compliance with the measures since Thursday March 19



Imposed Yet Voluntarily Followed

What can explain why we follow these imposed measures given that these measures yield a strong rupture in our daily routines and violate our personal decision-making space? In the study different types of motivation for following the measures are assessed. Participants' **voluntary or autonomous motives for comply with the measures was highest**. Imposed measures and yet voluntarily motivated? While this may seem like a **paradox**, it is not. Participants autonomously adhere to the measures because they are convinced of their necessity and meaningfulness. For example, they realize that compliance with these measures helps limiting spreading the virus, which may especially affect at-risk groups (e.g., the elderly) in our society. Since both our own health is involved and we can help others with these measures, people can easily see the relevance and personal importance of the measures. The drastic measures taken by the government are therefore perceived as **legitimate** by most people. In light of this insight, the imposed measures are not experienced as a threat to our freedom, but as a choice that fits well with core values that are of great importance to almost all people: **health and altruism**.

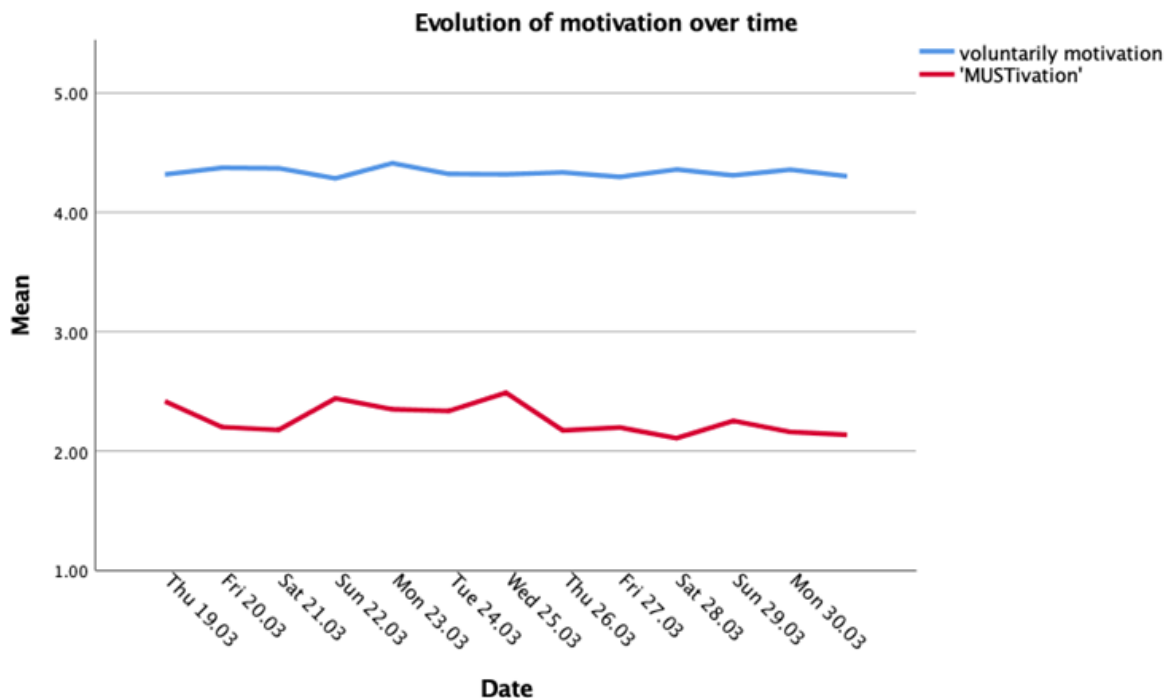
However, some participants additionally report external pressure to adhere to the measures. They fear the criticism of others or getting a ticket. Following the measures then feels like an obligation. In particular single people, more than those co-habiting, exhibit more '**mustivation**'. Limiting one's social contact is probably more difficult for those living by themselves compared to those who live with a partner or family.

However, it is important to point out that even singles do follow the measures in absolute terms and report in general more voluntary motivation than 'mustivation'.

The fact that the population, and in particular the older generation, is strongly voluntarily motivated is a finding of great importance. This more voluntary form of motivation positively predicts long-term compliance with the measures. Dozens of studies in the field of motivation psychology and self-determination theory in particular show that students, employees, and athletes are more likely to sustain their efforts when they are voluntarily motivated. They persist even when facing difficulty. In light of their more prevalent voluntary motivation, **the older generation may serve as a model for the younger generation**. In fact, it is exactly their enhanced voluntary motivation which helps explain why older generations report adhering more to the measures.

Figure 2

Evolution in voluntary motivation and 'mustivation' for following the measures since Thursday 19 March



Since the start of the study, a **positive evolution in our motivation** is observed. As shown in the figure, citizens' voluntary motivation to follow these measures is the most pronounced type of motivation. This type of motivation hardly fluctuates over the different days and stabilizes at a high level. 'Mustivation' is significantly less prevalent compared to voluntary motivation and even shows a slight declining trend as the coronacrisis lasts longer. This is a favorable evolution, because – in contrary to the laymen beliefs of many of us - external pressure is not the best motivator to encourage citizens to engage in long-term change.

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