

Daily Monitoring of Emotional Responses to the Coronavirus Pandemic in Serbia: A Citizen Science Approach

Website: <http://star.ff.uns.ac.rs/>

Country: Serbia

Geographical focus: Serbia

Scientific field/Thematic focus: Cross-thematic/Interdisciplinary, Medical and Health Sciences, Social Sciences

What is the good practice about?

This citizen science project by the Center for Behavioral Research in Psychology - STAR, Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad was conducted in order to understand the emotional reactions of the population to the ongoing pandemic. It was led by Dr Selka Sadiković and conducted in Serbia for 35 days in a state of emergency. Citizen scientists actively participated in all phases of the research (asking questions they are interested in, promoting the research, motivating the respondents etc). The results were regularly available on social networks and media, and the community was able to follow in real-time - changing the trends of the results. The group of researchers who conducted this project also provided advice on a daily bases on how to deal with the different psychological problems.

During the 5 weeks, a total of 18,478 participant responses were collected through the citizen science approach. The initiative engaged many institutions, NGOs and individuals to take part in creating the research questions, disseminating the results and making the platform to better understand our feelings and thoughts, and create better future interventions (for a list of the citizen scientist pls see <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.02133/full>).

This was the first citizen science project in the field of mental health. This project succeeded to connect many individuals, educate the broader public on how to perform basic research and how to understand research results, and also the media to report on the pandemic and mental health of the population during a state of emergency using scientifically based results in real-time.

Why is this initiative needed?

The project started in March 2020. It was during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and a state of emergency in the Republic of Serbia. Many people were frightened, confused and overloaded by the information through media or social networks and most of them were not based on scientific knowledge and results. The lockdown forced people to stay home and restricted their movement. Therefore, the main problems were: mental health, scientific fake news and the absence of routine.

A group of researchers decided to organize a study that can consider all three - understanding emotional reactions and giving tips on how to take care of the mental health during a crisis, educating the broader



public on how to conduct and understand research results and engaging them to take an active part in creating our project, so they use their time proactively.

What are the main objectives?

The objectives followed needs and problems:

1. to explore emotional reactions of the population through daily monitoring
2. to promote these results in the real-time and on the daily basis, along with the experts' tips on mental health
3. to conduct the research completely based on the citizen science approach.

What are the main activities?

1. an online personalized platform for data collection
2. social media campaign
3. coordination and education of citizen scientist in the different phases of the study

Who is involved?

Different individuals and organizations were involved; individuals were citizen scientists, organizations and institutions help promoting results and media take part in communicating results through mass media: Psychology students, generation 2018–2019; Marko Milošević, Ivona Jerković, and Jasmina Pajić, students at Department of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad; Edit Vereš, psychologist, Center for Social Development – Complexus; Prof. Dr. Silvana Andrić, Faculty of Science in Novi Sad; Milica Ševkušić, Institute of Technical Sciences, SANU; Prof. Dr. Sergej Ostojić, Faculty of Sport and Physical Education, University of Novi Sad; Prof. Dr. Staniša Perić, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, University of Niš; Prof. Dr. Kristina Randjelović, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš; Biljana Otasevic, psychologist, Human Resources Administration, General Staff of the Serbian Armed Forces; Jasmina Grubin, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology Development, Savina Smederevac, student at Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade; Uroš Mladenović, actor, Teleport Theater, Paraćin, and second year students at Department of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad. The team is are grateful for the great dissemination of research by the University in Novi Sad, Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad, Academy of Arts in Novi Sad, Center for Promotion of Science in Belgrade, Institute for Molecular Genetics in Belgrade, National Association of Youth Practitioners – NAPOR, Novi Sad Youth Forum (NOF), European Movement in Serbia and the media: Voice of America, TV Prva, ORadio, and RadioAparat.

Can this good practice be replicated?

Although the topic was specific, the main points of the project's methodology are transferable and easy replicated. The most important point is to choose a topic that is very important to people and very attractive to take part in. The best way to map the needs is to communicate directly to the community. In order to enroll in a citizen science project, it is vital to have continuous support and communication with



citizen scientists, to organize proper education for different phases (from articulating research questions to disseminating the research results). It was also a locally specific project, but every community has its own needs that are waiting to be addressed. The team put an effort to engage the public to take an active part in the scientific process as a way to democratize research results and make them available to anybody, no matter of their education, socioeconomic status, age etc.

This project was completely voluntary.

Further links:

- ⇒ The example of the research paper:
<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.02133/full>
- ⇒ http://star.ff.uns.ac.rs/volonterska_nauka.php#vol3
- ⇒ <http://star.ff.uns.ac.rs/vesti.php>

Relevant RRI keys: Science Education, Open Access, Open Science, Open Data

Type of practice: Promotional activities/events/campaigns, Peer learning/mentoring, engaging the public to take an active role in a research study - citizen science

Target groups: youth (children, pupils), students (up to Master level), the general public, people on the street

