

Corresponding Author:

Robin Chark
University of Macau Macao
robinchark@gmail.com

Author(s):

The current COVID-19 pandemic presents a global public health crisis. Policymakers are finding ways to encourage individuals to take preventive measures. Perceived risk of the pandemic was found a good predictor of the intention of taking preventive measures (Park et al. 2021). In the risk perception literature, a gender difference is often found (Siegrist and Árvai 2020). Females tend to perceive lower risk than males in different domains such as health risk. This difference is especially pronounced between white males and females and is thus known as the “white male effect” (Finucane et al. 2000). One possibility of such difference is that females and ethnic minorities are often disadvantaged. This inequality drives the difference in risk perception (Olofsson and Rashid 2011). To support this hypothesis, Olofsson and Rashid find that the gender difference disappears in Sweden, which is a more gender-equal country.

Another factor that drives risk perception is the degree to which an individual underestimate one's own risk relative to similar other's predicted (Park et al. 2021). In particular, more optimistic individuals perceived their own risk of COVID-19 to be lower. This underestimation of one's own risk is known as “optimistic bias.” In the current study, we study gender difference in the optimistic bias of the COVID-19 risk. We find that the gender difference in risk perception of self is small. More interestingly, the optimistic bias is larger among females. This gender difference is not driven by the females' underestimation of their own risk but a more pessimistic perception of other's risk.

References

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