



Exploring Peer Pressure and Behavior during the COVID-19 Pandemic



Jasmine Enriquez, Psychology
Mentor: Dr. Claudia Garcia-Des Lauriers
Kellogg Honors College Capstone Project 2022

Introduction

With the COVID-19 pandemic, communities have been faced with situations they have never experienced before. This has provided us with the opportunity to understand new behaviors, and reactions to new occurrences. Due to this changing time, it is important to understand why humans have reacted to the pandemic in these ways, and what causes majority of pandemic related behavior. With the pandemic still going on, there is little research to the effects the pandemic has had, especially regarding interactions with others. With this, it is relevant to understand how forms of peer pressure have navigated the reactions of others in the pandemic. Research states that positive pressure can work for adolescents in the pandemic, following the positive behaviors of respected peers (Andrews et. al, 2020). Understanding adolescent behavior is important, but young adults have faced majority of the peer pressure during the pandemic. With some being used to attending college in person, as well as social gatherings, being forced to stay home may have been a major shift in their lives. This study aims to explore how the peer pressure of others affected their perception and behaviors toward the pandemic, as they faced an experience like no other. Research supports the idea that college students did continue to attend bars and events during the pandemic, and felt anxiety from staying home and lack of social interaction. These similar students also stated they were obeying pandemic safety measures, despite recollection of attending bars and outings (Cohen et al., 2021). With students in research stating they were being safe while performing negative pandemic behaviors, this study hopes to examine why they did. Peer pressure is a major possibility as to why students who want to be safe, succumbed to performing harmful behaviors during the pandemic. Actions such as going to bars and restaurants during the heights of the pandemic provided a major spike in cases and detriment for various families. The main research question is "Which forms of pressure did participants feel more reluctant or prone to follow?". In examining peer pressure during the pandemic, this study hopes to understand the meaning behind these actions that have prolonged the COVID-19 pandemic

Materials and Methods

Participants: 56 anonymous participants (25 women, 12 men, 2 non-binary, and 1 other) were recruited through social media sites, such as Instagram and Twitter. Participants ages ranged from 18-25 to help gain a view for emerging adults, with a mean age of 23.275 years old.

Materials: Social media sites, Twitter, Instagram, and Discord, were utilized to share the anonymous survey link. A Qualtrics Survey was utilized to conduct the data collection of this study. Among the survey, participants were asked multiple-choice, multiple-selection, free-response, and "yes or no" questions. These questions revolved around occurrences of peer pressure, activities associated with peer pressure, and COVID-19 awareness. To examine likeliness of behaviors, Likert Scales were used, ranging from "Extremely Unlikely" to "Extremely Likely". Demographic questions were conducted as well, such as age and ethnicity.

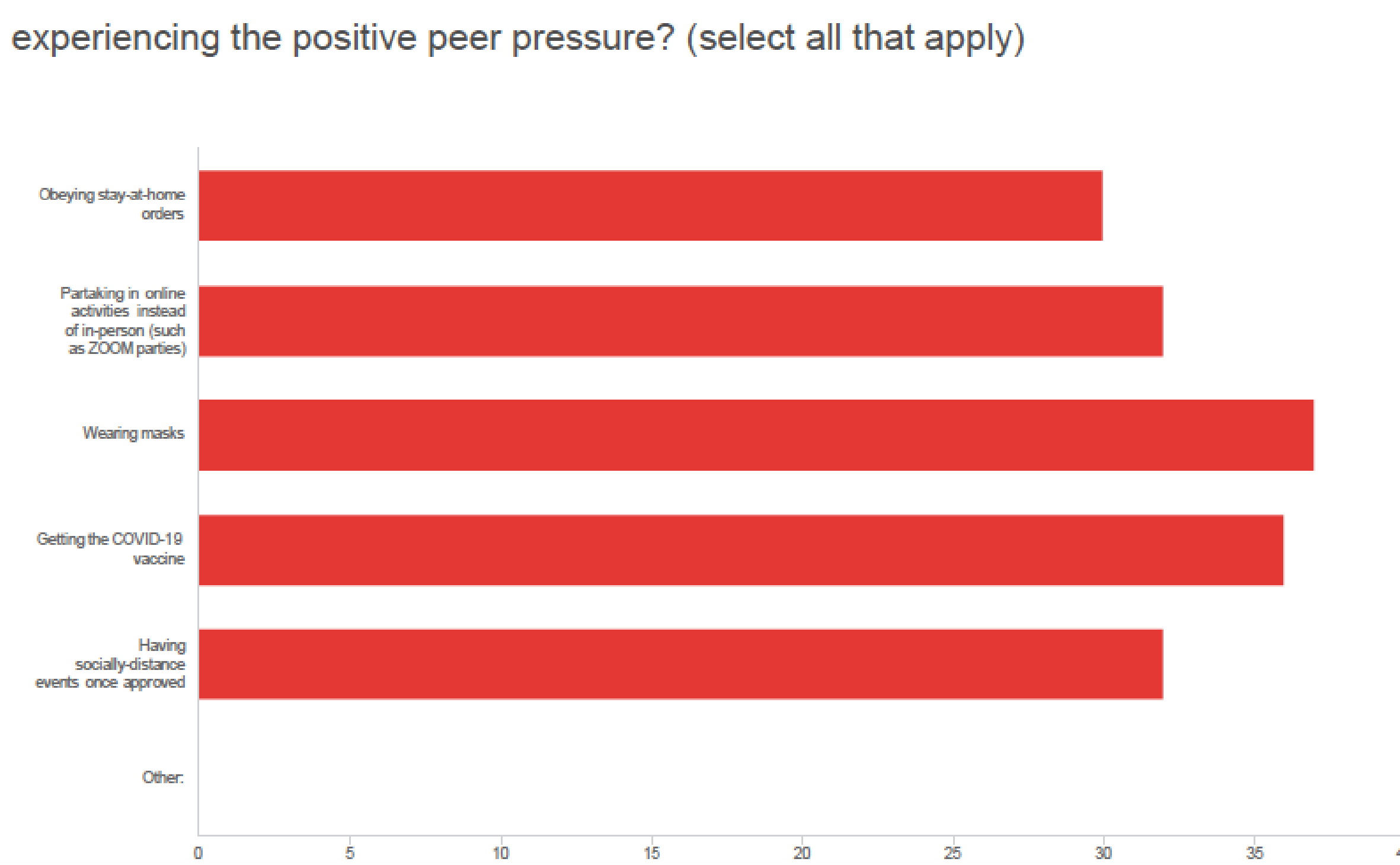
Procedure: A Qualtrics survey was shared via social media platforms Twitter, Instagram, and Discord. Potential participants who selected the link were routed to the Qualtrics survey. Participants were provided with a consent form, selecting "Yes or No" to continue or end the survey. Participants who selected "Yes" were routed to the survey. Participants were presented with multiple-choice, multiple selection, Likert Scale questions, and "Yes" or "No" questions. These questions revolved around negative and positive peer pressure, as well as likability to performing pandemic-related actions, such as wearing masks. The survey provided questions such as "During the COVID-19 pandemic, did you feel any forms of peer pressure in regard to performing pandemic-related behavior? (Pandemic-related behavior can be defined as disobeying stay-at-home orders, getting vaccinated, or wearing masks)." Following the survey, participants were also asked demographic questions, such as age and annual household income. Once completed, participants were provided with a debriefing statement, discussing the purpose of the study. Participants then exited the survey once their answers were confirmed, and the debriefing statement had been provided. Following the end of the data collection portion, data was then downloaded through Qualtrics to begin the analysis process.

Results

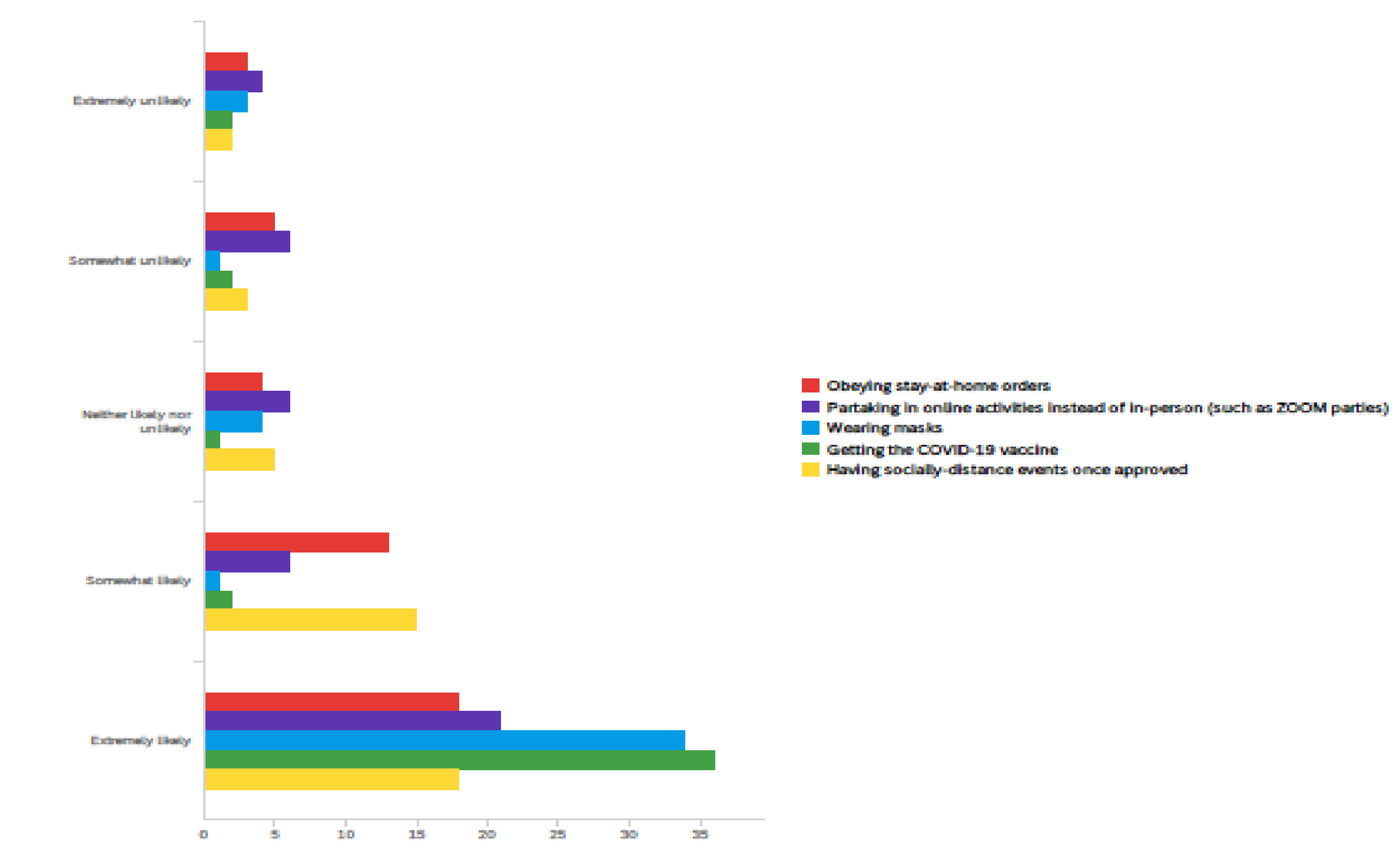
In analyzing the recorded data, it was supported that participants did experience overall forms of positive peer pressure regarding pandemic-related behaviors (i.e. mask-wearing, and social distancing). Among the 44 recorded responses, 41 (93.18%) participants stated they did feel some form of positive peer pressure. Among these behaviors, participant's data (93.18%) supported "Wearing Masks" as the behavior they experienced the most peer pressure to perform (See Q11 Chart). Following this, the second behavior with the most peer pressure was "Getting the COVID-19 Vaccine" (86.36%). In comparison to this, out of 46 recorded responses, only 27 (58.70%) participants experienced negative peer pressure, such as disobeying stay-at-home orders (See Q4 Chart). Regarding these behaviors, the action with the most experienced negative peer pressure was "Attending get-togethers that disobeyed COVID-19 guidelines at the time" (54.35%). However, this data was lower than the participant's experiences of positive peer pressure throughout the pandemic.

Participants were also asked how likely they were to perform these behaviors without the presence of negative and positive peer pressure. Among the sample, majority of the recorded data supports that participants may have preconceived beliefs about safety precautions, and positive pandemic-related behaviors. In asking about the likeability of wearing masks without any form of peer pressure, 36 (81.82%) out of 44 participants stated "Extremely Likely". With a minimum of 1 (Extremely Unlikely) and a maximum of 5 (Extremely Likely), this data presented a mean of 4.57. This information can be tied into the limitations of this study, as the sample may not be fully representative of the target population. These obtained results do answer the overall research question, examining which forms of peer pressure participants were more likely to experience, as well as more likely to act upon.

Q11 - Out of these pandemic-related behaviors, which ones did you perform after experiencing the positive peer pressure? (select all that apply)



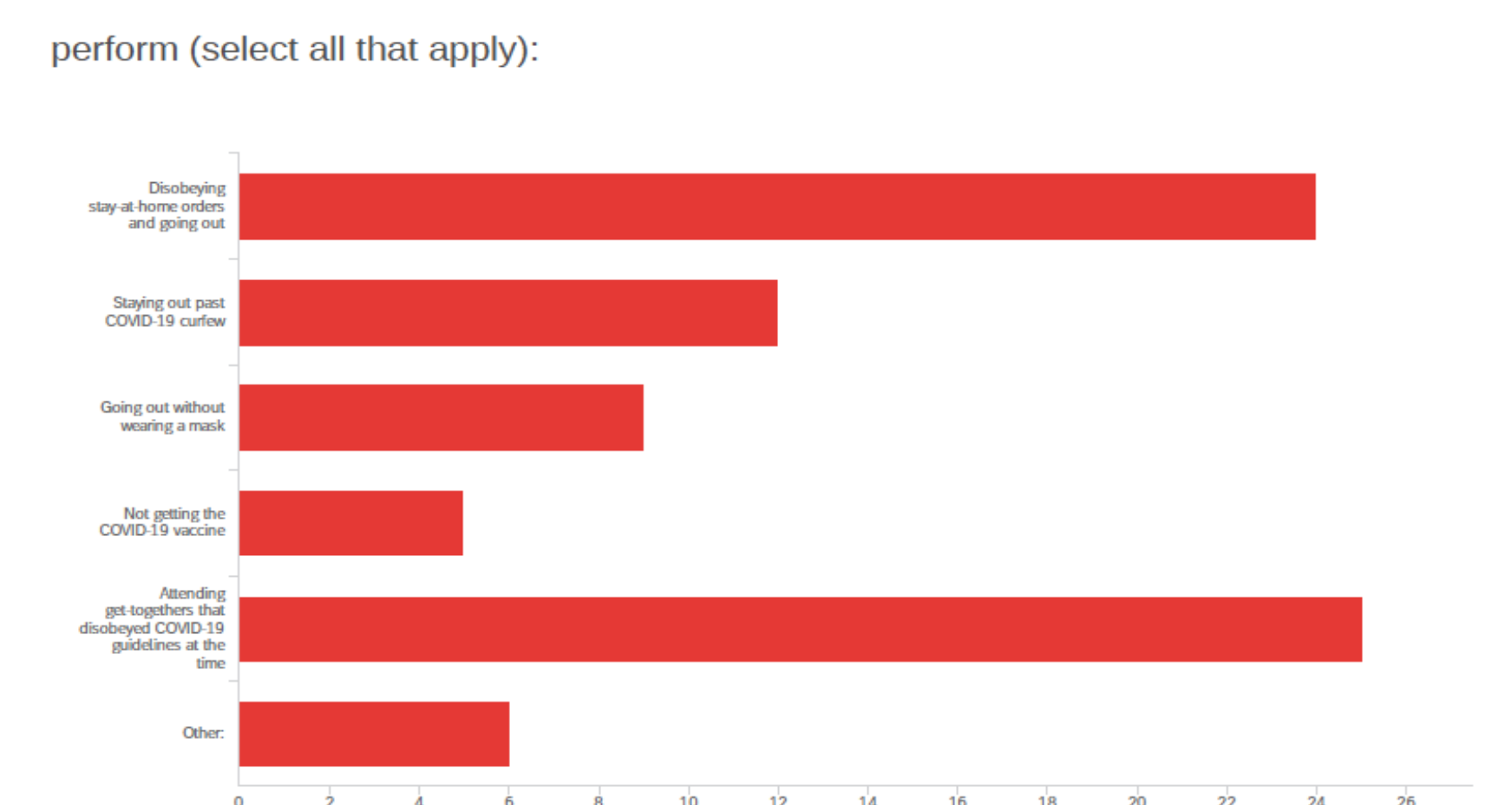
Q19 - Without the influence of positive peer pressure, how likely were you to perform these actions during the pandemic?



Discussion

The COVID-19 Pandemic has caused major changes among our society, as well as changes for the individual as well. Throughout the pandemic, many individuals had to fight with new aspects of morality, facing peer pressure to make unfamiliar decisions. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a major variable in the navigation and possible decline of personal relationships among emerging adults. The results of this study support the fact that emerging adults have experienced a new realm of social pressure, from disobeying stay-at-home orders to getting vaccinated. The meaning of this data provides support that positive peer pressure can play a major part in pandemic-related behavior, and can be used to stop the spread of the virus. Beyond this, positive peer pressure can play a major role in preventative care, such as getting the COVID-19 vaccine. However, there are limitations to this study, and the entire study of the recent pandemic. Throughout this study, the sample size was limited due to materials and accessibility. Beyond this, data showed participants had previous cautious behaviors of the pandemic, adjusting to the new lifestyle (See Q19 chart). With this, results could be biased, as positive peer pressure may have come from family and friends with similar beliefs and values. In connection to this study, little research has been done about peer pressure throughout the pandemic, and continues to grow. Future research must aim to further examine the effects the COVID-19 pandemic has had on interpersonal relationships, behavior, and standards among society.

Q4 - Please select the pandemic-related behaviors that you were negatively pressured to perform (select all that apply):



References

Andrews, J. L., Foulkes, L., & Blakemore, S.-J. (2020). Peer influence in adolescence: Public-health implications for COVID-19. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 24(8), 585–587. <https://doi-org.proxy.library.cpp.edu/10.1016/j.tics.2020.05.001>

Cohen, A. K., Hoyt, L. T., Nichols, C. R., Yazdani, N., & Dotson, M. P. (2021). Opportunities to reduce young adult college students' COVID-19-related risk behaviors: Insights from a national, longitudinal cohort. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 69(3), 383–389. <https://doi-org.proxy.library.cpp.edu/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2021.06.004>