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Healthful Behaviour During the Pandemic: Physical Distancing

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Abstract

The purpose of this naturalistic observation study was to observe, in a natural setting, the actions of shoppers at retail outlets. In doing so it was hoped that numerous behaviors could be observed that would indicate a level or extent of observance of physical distancing guidelines. It was found that the observed sample was often in compliance with physical distancing guidelines and avoiding contact with others while shopping in retail contexts. The wearing of masks was noted and the cleaning of hands upon entry and exiting was commonplace. Overall, the sample demonstrated an informed and obedient behavioural mode observing the advice from various levels of government.

Keywords: Naturalistic observation, COVID-19, physical distancing, shopping behaviour

1. Introduction

In North America people awoke to the news on January 30, 2020, that the World Health Organization had declared an outbreak of COVID-19. In Canada, the BC Centre for Disease Control (2020), a program of the Provincial Health Services Authority, providing provincial and national leadership in disease surveillance, detection, treatment, prevention and consultation stated that the,

coronaviruses are a large family of viruses found mostly in animals. In humans, they can cause diseases ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). The disease caused by the new coronavirus has been named COVID-19. (p.1)

The word pandemic was not commonplace in Canada, nor was the term COVID-19, yet in early 2020 the words were introduced to all, when the Government of Canada (2020) announced that COVID-19 is a public health event of international concern. On January 25, Canada confirmed its first case of COVID-19 related to travel in Wuhan, China (Government of Canada, 2020). The next day the government delivered a position in the media reporting that, Canada has implemented screening requirements of COVID-19 for travelers returning from China to major airports in Montréal, Toronto and Vancouver (Government of Canada, 2020). As the virus spread in other countries, and deaths occurred, governments around the world were alerted, and here in Canada on February 9, Canada expanded the “COVID-19 screening requirements for travelers returning

from affected areas to 10 airports across 6 provinces” (Government of Canada, 2020, p.1). This was necessary since the “worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, and efforts to contain it, represent a unique threat” (Galea, Merchant & Lurie, 2020, p. 1), to our health and well-being.

It was almost full month since the first COVID-19 was identified in Wuhan, China, that Canada confirms its first case related to travel outside mainland China on February 20, 2020 (Government of Canada, 2020). It was February 22 that this author travelled to Las Vegas to present at a conference in the United States and noted no safeguards in place at the Toronto, Ontario or Las Vegas, Nevada airports. Even upon return no precautions were seen at these same airports on February 27th, 2020. The provincial governments observed numbers of cases grow and then began to act yet it wasn't until March 30, 2020, that the Chief Medical Officer of Health, for all Ontario public health units strongly encouraged Ontarians to stay home, limit essential trips and obey physical distancing.

Over two months since the first reported case in Canada, the Government of Ontario announced on April 3rd, 2020 that they are issuing a new emergency order under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, effective immediately, to provide public health units the authority and flexibility they need to make staffing decisions that support their ongoing fight against the outbreak of COVID-19, despite any collective agreements. As a result, public health units will be able to significantly expand their capacity to implement critical public health functions, such as case and contact management, through the use of volunteers, including the thousands of retired nurses and medical students who have signed up through the province's website.

The month of April saw all levels of Canadian government move quickly to flatten the curve of COVID-19 cases. Indeed, it was the provincial government action that allowed the Ministry of Health to move quicker and assertively to respond to the growing pandemic. Health Units would now be able to “significantly expand their capacity to implement critical public health functions, such as case and contact management, through the use of volunteers, including the thousands of retired nurses and medical students who have signed up through the province's website” (Government of Ontario, 2020, p.1). The pandemic which began in China swept into all parts of Canada, and as of April 6, 2020, “280 deaths were reported in Canada with 16 probable cases and over 15,496 confirmed cases out of 324,791 people tested” (Government of Canada, 2020, p.1).

During this time of uncertainty, Canadians began showing more concern in how they shopped, dressed (wearing masks) and some remained in self-isolation. Terms such as lockdown, isolation and physical distancing became well known as all types of media sent cautionary messages to all Canadians. Physical Distancing (PD) means “limiting close contact with others. When outside of your home, practicing social distancing by keeping two meters (six feet) away from one another is something we can all do to help stop the spread of COVID-19” (British Columbia Centre for Disease Control, 2020, p.1). PD then became something that needed to be practiced and obeyed while out of doors and one enforcement team reported a decrease in the number of gatherings spotted in 20 high-use public parks during this weekend's enforcement blitz. After focusing on educating the public about physical distancing rules – any two people who don't live together and fail to stay two metres apart in a park or public square will be fined up to \$1,000. (Now Staff, 2020, p.1)

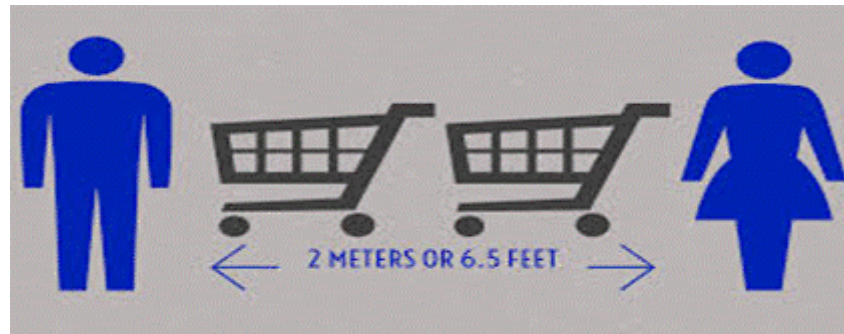


Figure 1. Physical Distancing (PD) – Essential shopping guidelines (Okotoks Online, 2020, p.1).

This enforcement it is believed heightened concern and the directive impacted Canadians, some of whom seemed to move online to shop, socialize and work, if possible, yet others enacted PD and a small minority were ticketed (fined) for not observing PD.

In addition to its impact on individuals and communities, “Coronavirus (COVID-19) has notably impacted retailers, 85% of Canadian consumers say their shopping behaviour has been impacted by Coronavirus” (Government of Canada, 2020, p.1). More than half (62%) experienced product shortages in the past week and Canadian consumers are most worried about job losses, product shortages, ability to go about normal routines (North Bay Parry Sound Health Unit, 2020, p.1). This is because the Ontario provincial government, following advice from Ontario’s Chief Medical Officer of Health, on April 3, 2020, “Ontario updated the list of essential businesses that can remain open. The restrictions are aimed at further reducing contact between people and stopping the spread of COVID-19” (Government of Ontario, 2020b).

The Government of Canada (2020) claimed that Canadian consumers “cited impacts not previously listed, and the majority of these were related to “shopping less,” “making fewer trips overall,” or “only shopping for groceries” (p.1). This was a welcome reality since only essential businesses would be able to stay open and if people did not change shopping habits the remaining businesses would be overwhelmed by face-to-face consumers. Indeed, the provincial Government of Ontario (2020b) explained:

For the purposes of this order, businesses include any for-profit, non-profit or other entity providing the goods and services described herein. This does not preclude the provision of work and services by entities not on this list either online, by telephone or by mail/delivery. This also does not preclude the operation or delivery of services of any publicly funded agency or organization that delivers or supports government operations and services, including operations and services of the health care sector. (p.1)

As well, in light of “Coronavirus, 29% of Canadian consumers say they are making online purchases when they normally would have shopped in-store” (Government of Canada, 2020, p.1). Of interest is that shoppers went online becoming digital as “nearly 1 in 10 Canadian consumers (9%) who made an online purchase in March said it was their first time ever or first time in the past six months shopping online” (Government of Canada, 2020, p.1). Yet, there was a continued need to shop for essential goods and services face-to-face, and this is where this study focused.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this investigation was to observe and decode consumers obedience, interpretation, and shopping behaviour while in the midst of a pandemic; who were directed by various levels of

government to only shop for essential items while observing physical distancing guidelines as well as other safety protocols.

2.1. Questions

The principal research question asked: What is the impact of PD directives on the behavior of consumers? As well sub-questions asked: Would consumers obey and observe PD directives? Would consumers move to function in this pandemic as directed to PD?

2.2. Context

Context is linked to the purpose and perspective; the analyst “cannot avoid relying on inherited background assumptions, and these provide the context for what is observed” (Hammersley, 2008, p. 122). The current Naturalistic Observation (NO) qualitative study unfolded over four weeks and was situated within a small urban centre in Northern Ontario. The city and surrounding area tops 100,000 people and have a regional airport as well as a Trans-Canada highway running through the middle of the city. The city is home to a University, College and a military base while serving as a social service and health centre for the region.

Community-based studies often consider only do short-term effects of interventions (PD) however, being a qualitative NO there is a need to remind oneself and others that,

the knowledge generated from a specific setting appears to be context specific and unique, it is often dismissed as too subjective and not useful for other settings; however, the specificity of the setting and the results that emerge from within can be informative rather than detracting. (Hammersley, 2008, p. 123)

Within this NO study and observing recent statistics put forward from regional health authorities in Ontario conclusions emerge wherein the tracking curve is flattening and eventually diminishing indicating policy measures such as physical distancing is have an impact on this pandemic. Physical distancing measures,

are being put in place throughout Canada to help prevent and slow the spread of COVID-19 from person-to-person. This is important so a large number of people do not get sick at the same time. We all share in the responsibility to keep one another healthy. Physical distancing involves taking steps to limit the number of people you come into close contact with. This will help to limit the spread of COVID-19 in the community. The earlier these social actions start the better protected we will all be. Physical distancing does not mean you must stay in your home. You can still go outside to take a walk or walk your dog. If you need groceries, go to the store. We simply recommend that while outside you make sure to avoid crowds and maintain a distance of 2 meters (6 feet) from those around you. (North Bay Parry Sound Health Unit, 2020, p.1)

Again, physical distancing (PD) was observed in this study in a naturalistic mode.

2.3. Methodology

Historically, naturalistic observation (NO) has been described as the recording of behavior in natural settings by trained observers who describe what is observed and recorded (Jones, Reid, & Patterson, 1979). NO, may not interfere with the people observed (Angrosino 2005), and is often used as a pilot study leading to future investigation. Many famous researchers such as “Piaget showed the importance of naturalistic observation. . . he took detailed notes and filled journals, . . . continuing with the naturalistic approach with thousands of other children throughout his career “(Johnson, 2017, p.1). Piaget was demonstrating that observational research is actually a,

type of correlational (i.e., non-experimental) research in which a researcher observes ongoing behavior. . . . It is a social research technique that involves the direct observation of phenomena in their natural setting. . . . Naturalistic (or nonparticipant) observation has no intervention by a researcher. It is simply studying behaviors that occur naturally in natural contexts Importantly, in naturalistic observation, there is no attempt to manipulate variables. It permits measuring what behavior is really like. However, its typical limitations consist in its incapability exploring the actual causes of behaviors, and the impossibility to determine if a given observation is truly representative of what normally occurs. (Atlas.ti, 2018, p. 1)

This explanation by Atlas.ti (2018) is echoed by the Government of Canada (2017a) who believe NO is “does not include collecting personal information that will be disseminated with visual materials; and . . . there is no reasonable expectation of privacy among those being observed” (Government of Canada, 2017a, p. 1). This NO was completed over a four-week period (March 25th to April 25th, 2020) and did not require ethics approval.

One of the most popular modes of recording what is observed is to construct an anecdotal record of what is observed (Russell et al., 2011). Observers can impact what is observed if the sample population is aware, they are being observed (Creswell, 2007; Patton 2002). Although this can be a limitation, NO has a place in the development of both theory and praxis (Hintze, Volpe, Shapiro, 2008, p.993). NO excludes researcher impact and participant inaccuracy that may affect certain variables, since NO has social validity and “by noting the frequency of their occurrence in the natural setting, their relationship to important environmental antecedents and consequences can be examined systematically (Hintze, Volpe, Shapiro, 2008, p.996). NO has limited generalizability, doesn’t seek to control variables and does not attempt to introduce cause-effect outcomes (McLeod, 2015). Data were recorded using a chart as displayed in Table one.

Table 1: Data Recording Chart – Two days (A-D & E-H)

Distancing Behavior	Frequency Person A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	Total
Obeys 2 metre rule									
Touching face									
Cleaning Hands									
Mask (safety clothing)									
Touching others									
Stands with others									
Invades bubble of other									
Leaves line									
Sits–slow to move as line does									

The NO required the observer to record behaviors and events in a written fashion chronologically as they appeared in real time (Ryan, 2019). The interpretation was “limited to a descriptive account of the types of behaviors and events observed and their temporal ordering in time” (Hintze, Volpe, Shapiro, 2008, p.995). Because of the past experiences of the observer the notion of expertise was assigned to the observer (Ryan, 2019). The direct observation “does not suffer from selective recall and is considered the “gold standard” for assessment in medical and psychological research studying behavior in natural settings” (Intille et al., 2003 p.157). NO and its inherent direct observation provided a means to collect both qualitative and quantitative data (Intille et al., 2003).

2.4. Method

Within this community-based NO study I visually selected customers who were waiting in line outside four different essential businesses since all other non-essential businesses were ordered closed by our provincial government. I observed from my vehicle while parked in a parking lot approximately 50 meters from each participant. I chose to observe during peak times (9a.m. & 2 p.m.) when lines would be longest and observed the last four people in each line to ensure I could observe each person for the full five minutes; and each observed line moved in a measured and deliberate fashion.

The selection of participants aligns with the criterion-based purposeful sampling mode wherein the selection of cases satisfies an important criterion (Gall et al., 2007). Each of the observed waited in line and the measured and deliberate entry was ensured by door-people who controlled entry of each person. Essential businesses indicated PD on sidewalk line-up areas (chalk, tape, stickers), so it was easy to observe PD behaviour in relation to the sidewalk markings. Observations propose a firsthand account of the context investigated and the actions of participants (Merriam, 2009).

From the onset of this qualitative study my coding emerged from previous observations, which is common in NO studies, and these became a classification system (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which were eventually used in each Table and Figure. Each consumer was observed during five-minute intervals and all four consumers at each site were observed over a four-day period for a total of 20 minutes of observation. I observed on a Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday which proved to be busy shopping days. All data were complete and resulted in over 20 minutes daily at each of the four locations; equaling 80 minutes per day over four days for a total of 320 minutes of naturalistic observation with 32 people being observed (N=32). The research structure focused my attention while providing objectives, as I purposefully observed in a passive yet goal-oriented manner (Jones & Somekh, 2006).

As well as Tables, the first two days of observation were combined and in doing so allowed me to compare and contrast over time the PD behaviour of those observed on the first two days with data from the second two days, creating two Figures that highlight change.

2.5. Limitations

One of the limitations posed by naturalistic observation is the inclination to “over interpret” the data or make inferences (Hintze, Volpe, Shapiro, 2008, p.995). NO is often conducted on a small scale and may be biased (age, gender or ethnicity); this limits generalizability as variables cannot be controlled. This makes replication improbable as cause and effect relationships cannot be established (Creswell, 2007; McLeod, 2015). Given the purposeful sample size, the small scale of the sample may produce either an over or under representation of specific observations (Patton, 2002; McLeod, 2015).

3. Results

Overall, this research determined that NO of behaviors and interactions between individuals (N=32) was able to realize highly accurate data (Katz-Buonincontro & Anderson, 2018; McLeod, 2015). The naturalistic observation mode has played a significant role in the study of PD social behaviors, as this means of inquiry has generated important data (Beins, 1999), as was the case in this examination of PD. Observing from my vehicle approximately 50 meters from the line-up to enter an essential business, the sample (n=4) was observed and recorded as shown in Table two.

Table 2: Wal Mart Observation Day One and Two

Distancing Behavior	Frequency Person A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	Total
Obeys 2 metre rule – 6.5'	yes	y	y	y	y	y/n	y	y	8y1n
Touching face	Yes 3x	1x	6x	no	1x	2x	1x	no	14y2n
Cleaning hands	no	yes	n	n	n	n	yes	no	2y6n
Mask (safety clothing)	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	yes	yes	4y4n
Touching others	Yes (partner)	no	no	no	no	no	Yes child	Yes child	3y5n
Stands with others	yes	no	no	no	no	no	Yes child	Yes child	3y5n
Invades bubble of other	no	no	no	no	no	no	Yes child	Yes child	2y6n
Leaves line	no	no	no	no	no	no	No	Yes Trade	1y7n
Sits–slow to move as line does	Yes 1x	no	no	no	no	no	no	Yes Child	2y6n

Examining Table two it is apparent that at the first NO site, eight of the observed seemed to obey the PD protocol (8y1n) with the six- and one-half foot perimeter in place as marked on the sidewalk of the essential business. Over-time most people observed did touch their face (14y2n) and only a few cleaned their hands while being observed (2y6n). Of the eight observed over the first two days mask wearing was 50/50 with half wearing a mask and half not wearing a mask (4y4n). Physical contact with others via touch was limited (3y5n) even though a few stood with others (3y5n) while in line. Of the observed some moved into the bubble of others (2y6n) while very few left the line during observation (1y7n). On occasion it was noted during the observation that people failed to move as the line moved forward (2y6n) however in each instance people moved quickly to establish PD once they were aware of the line movement.

Table 3: Canadian Tire Store Observation Day One and Two

Distancing Behavior	Frequency Person A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	Total
Obeys 2 metre rule	yes	no	y	no	y	y/n	y	y	5y3n
Touching face	no	1x	no	no	1x	no	1x	no	3y5n
Cleaning Hands	yes	n	n	n	n	n	Y	no	2y6n
Mask (safety clothing)	no	no	no	yes	no	no	no	yes	2y6n
Touching others	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes	1y7n
Stands with others	Yes child	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	1y7n
Invades bubble of other	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes	1y7n
Leaves line	no	no	no	no	no	no	No	Yes Trade	1y7n
Sits–slow to move as line does	Yes 1x	no	no	no	no	no	no	Yes	2y6n

Examining Table three site two, eight of the observed maintained the PD protocol (5y3n) as marked on the sidewalk of the essential business. Over-time most did not touch their face (3y5n) and only a few cleaned their hands while being observed (2y6n). Of the eight observed over the first two days mask wearing few chose to wear a mask (2y6n). Physical contact with others via touch was limited (1y7n) even though a few stood with others (1y7n) while in line. Of the

observed some moved into the bubble of others (1y7n) while very few left the line during observation (1y7n). On occasion it was noted during the observation that people failed to move as the line moved forward (2y6n) however in each instance people moved quickly to establish PD once they were aware of the line movement.

Table 4: No Frills (Grocer) Day One and Two

Distancing Behavior	Frequency Person A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	Total
Obeys 2 metre rule	yes	y	y	y	y	y/n	y	y	8y0n
Touching face	Yes 2x	1x	1x	no	no	2x	1x	no	7y3n
Cleaning Hands	no	yes	n	n	n	n	yes	no	2y6n
Mask (safety clothing)	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	yes	yes	4y4n
Touching others	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes	1y7n
Stands with others	yes	no	no	no	no	no	Yes child	Yes child	3y5n
Invades bubble of other	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes	1y7n
Leaves line	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	Yes Trade	1y7n
Sits–slow to move as line does	Yes 1x	no	Y1	no	no	no	no	Yes Child	3y5n

Examining Table two it is apparent that at the first NO site, eight of the observed seemed to obey the PD protocol (8y0n) with the six- and one-half foot perimeter in place as marked on the sidewalk of the essential business. Over-time most people observed did touch their face (7y3n) and only a few cleaned their hands while being observed (2y6n). Of the eight observed over the first two days mask wearing was 50/50 with half wearing a mask and half not wearing a mask (4y4n). Physical contact with others via touch was limited (1y7n) even though a few stood with others (3y5n) while in line. Of the observed some moved into the bubble of others (1y7n) while very few left the line during observation (1y7n). On occasion it was noted during the observation that people failed to move as the line moved forward (3y5n) however in each instance people moved quickly to establish PD once they were aware of the line movement.

Table 5: Food Basics (Grocer) Day One and Two

Distancing Behavior	Frequency Person A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	Total
Obeys 2 metre rule	yes	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	8y0n
Touching face	Yes 1x	1x	1x	no	1x	3x	1x	no	8y2n
Cleaning Hands	no	no	n	n	n	n	yes	no	1y7n
Mask (safety clothing)	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	no	yes	3y5n
Touching others	Yes 1x	no	no	no	no	no	Y1 child	no	2y6n
Stands with others	no	no	no	no	no	no	Yes	Yes	2y6n
Invades bubble of other	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes	1y7n
Leaves line	no	no	no	no	no	no	No	No	8n
Sits – slow to move as line does	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	Yes	1y7n

Examining Table two it is apparent that at the first NO site, eight of the observed seemed to obey the PD protocol (8y0n) with the six- and one-half foot perimeter in place as marked on the sidewalk of the essential business. Over-time most people observed did touch their face (8y2n) and only a few cleaned their hands while being observed (1y7n). Of the eight observed over the first two days mask wearing was 50/50 with half wearing a mask and half not wearing a mask (3y5n). Physical contact with others via touch was limited (2y6n) even though a few stood with others (2y6n) while in line. Of the observed some moved into the bubble of others (1y7n) while none left the line during observation (8n). On occasion it was noted during the observation that people failed to move as the line moved forward (1y7n) however in each instance people moved quickly to establish PD once they were aware of the line movement.

The following figures illustrate summed PD observations. Figure two suggests most observed obeyed the PD protocol (29y4n). Most observed touched their face (32y12n) and few cleaned their hands (7y25n) while being observed in line. Mask wearing was frequent while over half did not wear a mask (13y19n). Physical touch of others was limited (9y23n) even though a few stood with others (11y21n) while in line. Some moved into the bubble of others (6y26n) while very few left the line (3y29n). Some failed to move as the line moved forward (7y25n) however people eventually moved to establish PD once they were aware of line movement.

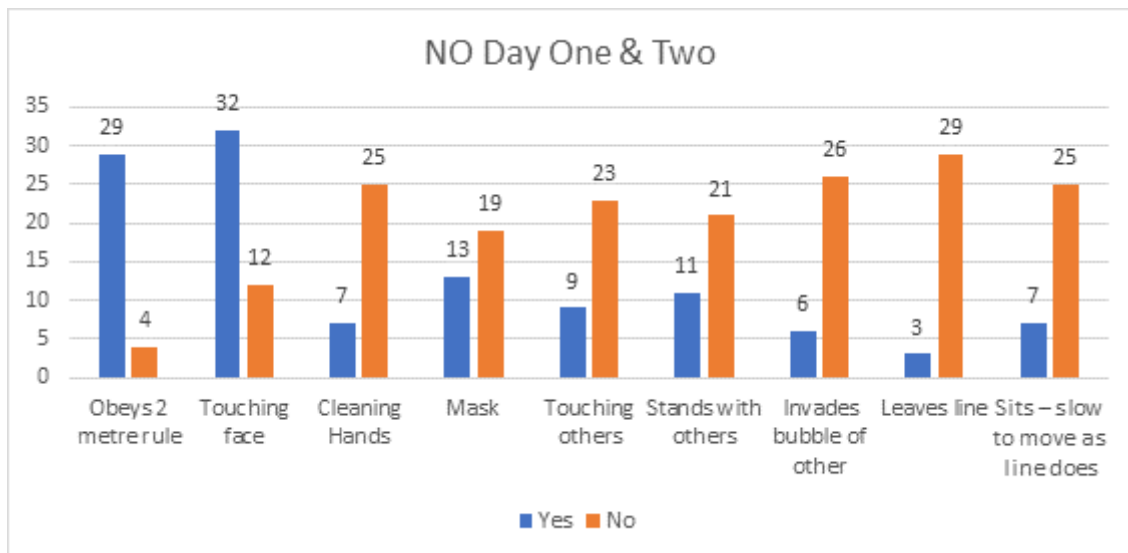


Figure 2. Summed Data (4 sites) First two days of observation

Figure three displays day three and four and indicates most obeyed the PD protocol (21y6n). Most observed touched their face (6y2n) and few cleaned their hands (3y28n). Mask wearing was frequent while over half did not wear a mask (7y15n). Physical touch of others was limited (5y29n) even though a few stood with others (3y25n) while in line. Some moved into the bubble of others (2y26n) while very few left the line (2y31n). Some failed to move as the line moved forward (3y28n) however people eventually moved to establish PD once they were aware of line movement.

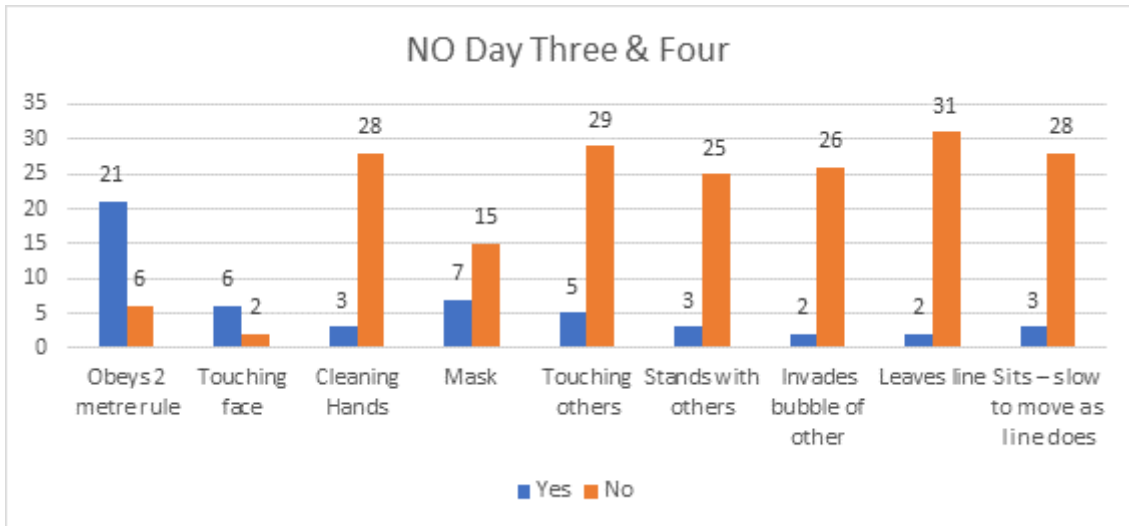


Figure 3. Day three and four Summed Data Note. Four sites - last two days of NO.

Figure four displays all four days of NO data. Most obeyed the PD protocol (50y10n). Most observed touched their face (38y14n) and few cleaned their hands (10y53n). Mask wearing was infrequent while over half did not wear a mask (20y34n). Physical touch of others was limited (14y52n) even though a few stood with others (14y46n) while in line. Some moved into the bubble of others (8y52n) while very few left the line (5y60n). Some of those observed failed to move as the line moved forward (10y53n) however, people eventually moved to establish PD once they were aware of line movement.

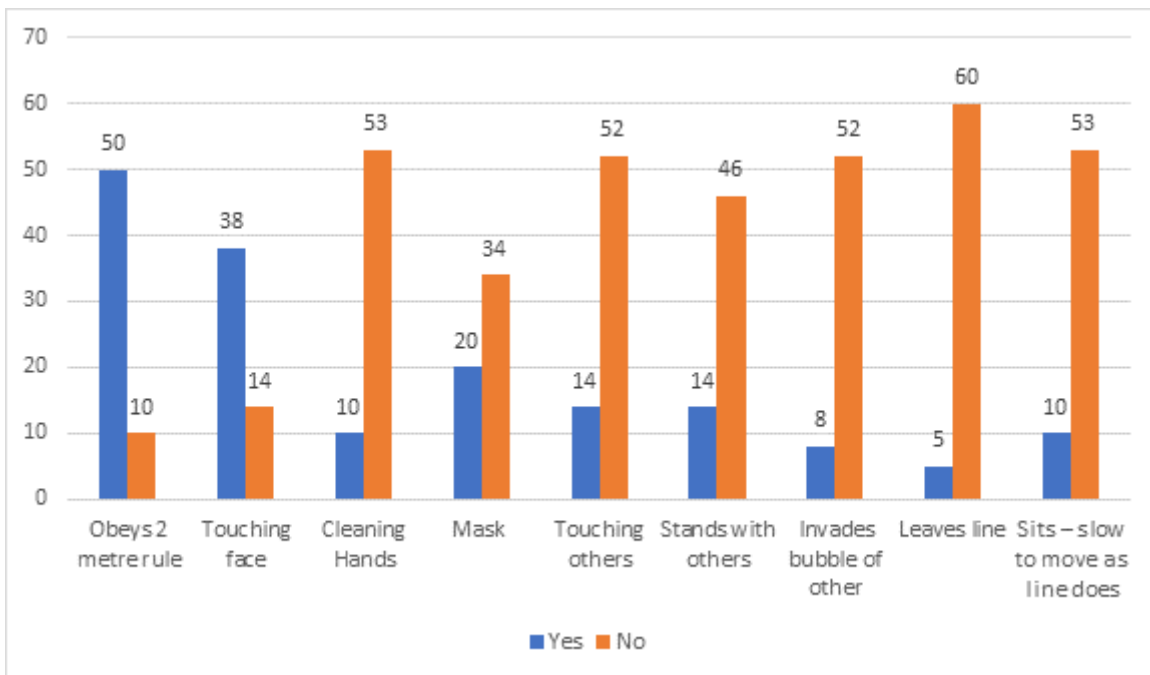


Figure 4. Summed NO Data of all Four Days - Note. All four sites and All four days of NO.

4. Discussion

This NO revolved around three questions. The first question asked: What is the impact of PD directives on the behavior of consumers? The second question asked: Would consumers comply and observe PD directives? Third, question asked: Would consumers grow to function in this pandemic as directed to PD? In order to address each of these questions NO data were collected in order to better understand this pandemic which “has brought unprecedented efforts to institute the practice of physical distancing (called in most cases “social distancing”) in countries all over the world, resulting in changes in national behavioral patterns and shutdowns of usual day-to-day functioning” (Galea, Merchant & Lurie, 2020, p. 1).

Herein the purpose of this NO research was to observe consumers (N=32) interpreting and observing PD while in the midst of a pandemic. People were directed by various levels of government to only shop only for essential items while observing PD guidelines as well as observing other safety protocols mentioned in all modes of media. For instance, the Government of Canada (2020) requested that people “avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands” (p.1), and people were reminded regularly: physical (social) distancing is a “provincial public health order — not a suggestion . . . People ignoring the order, . . . could each be handed the \$1,000 fine” (MacPherson, 2020, p.1).

The accumulated NO data led to the creation of Tables and Figures used herein, and these data were laid out (labelled) and organized according to what was observed. In particular Figure four indicates most people obeyed the PD protocol (50y10n) which addresses the third question looking at people functioning in the era of COVID19. This is a key finding since distancing and handwashing are critical behaviours (Cheng, Lam, Leung, 2020). As well, most did not heed the advice to avoid touched their face (38y14n) during this pandemic as COVID19 moved into the body via face touching, if the virus was on the hands. Due to the need to keep hands clean and virus free a few people in this NO were observed inline cleaning their hands (10y53n) before entry to the essential business.

Globally, countries, such as Canada, South Korea, and the Czech Republic, require and advise all to wear masks in public places. Research supports mass masking in this pandemic (Cheng, Lam, & Leung, 2020). Within this NO mask wearing was infrequent and over half did not wear a mask (20y34n) which addresses the first question within this study. Physical touching of others was limited (14y52n) even though a few stood with others (14y46n) while in line. These behaviours indicate that people are observing directives and responding as necessary. Some people, as observed, moved into the bubble of others (8y52n) while very few left the line (5y60n): Again, this evidence provides answers to the NO research questions leaving the impression that people are responding appropriately while PD. Some of the observed seemed to hesitate to move as the line moved forward (10y53n) however, people eventually moved to establish PD once again as they became aware of line movement. As the COVID-19 pandemic progresses, numerous debates emerge concerning human behaviour and the growing pandemic as it seems the health policy is evolving.

Human behaviour can be slow to change and implementation of PD demands abrupt change in behaviour which has been difficult for some, for instance: “This weekend, Municipal Licensing & Standards (MLS) officers issued 48 tickets to people using closed park amenities and not practising physical distancing – or 32 per cent of the total number of tickets issued since enforcement began on April 3” (Now Staff, 2020, p.1). While this study only looks at a select number of people, it can be suggested that most people were learning and becoming more observant of PD. For example, “officers spoke with 286 people regarding . . . social distancing, an 83 percent decrease from Friday [and] complaints. . . about people not following the rules. . . went down. . . by almost 39 percent from the previous day” (Now Staff, 2020, p.1). This is a trend

that seems to be evidenced in both Figure one and Two as behaviour is shifting toward PD obedience and other healthful behaviour.

Moving forward it is important to recall the response to the pandemic. Factually, on January 25, Canada confirmed “its first case of COVID-19 related to travel in Wuhan, China” (Government of Canada, 2020, p.1). The next steps for future research would be to explore and examine what was done and what could have been done to impacts outcomes. Our country did react quickly following the first case noted, in fact, the next day the government delivered a position in the media reporting that, “Canada implements screening requirements related to COVID-19 for travellers returning from China to major airports in Montréal, Toronto and Vancouver” (Government of Canada, 2020, p.1). Future research could observe what these next steps actually looked like in airports, and elsewhere to realize if early directives were being acted upon to the extent necessary. This is not the first serious virus to spread and take lives globally as history details past outbreaks, actions taken and outcomes.

5. Conclusion

Within the Northern Ontario context our region population is low and spread out with smaller urban areas. As well no area was not declared a COVID19 hotspot, yet people were careful in response to Health directives offered by three levels of government in the province of Ontario. Seeing people cover up with masks, businesses close and only essential services continue to operate over the past few months prompted this research. The objective was to observe in a natural setting the actions of consumers while shopping at essential businesses. The NO which unfolded over a period of days seems to indicate that consumers in this small (N=32) purposeful sample were observing directives and enacting PD protocols. Specifically, PD (social distancing) was observed by most people possibly due to the fact that it was widely reported that PD was having a positive impact on the region, Dr. Jim Chirico, medical officer of health with the health unit, claimed (Wilson, 2020). Moving forward, people should be confident that as long as others are behaving as required by law, the pandemic will further diminish in size in this region.

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