

Drowning in information? Covid-19 information seeking behaviour and socioeconomic status during the first lockdown in Austria

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Background: The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in major challenges for healthcare systems, also due to the raging so-called Infodemic, with misinformation and fake news eroding trust in health authorities and compliance with imposed measures. Literature suggests that Covid-19 information seeking behaviour is associated with individuals' socioeconomic/-demographic status. However, this has not yet been researched in Austria but is crucial to policy-makers for choosing communication channels and fighting misinformation.

Methods: We assess this association in regression analyses, using data referring to behaviour during the first Austrian lockdown (15/03/2020-15/04/2020) (n=559). Status variables include education, migration background, gender, age. Variables characterizing Covid-19 information seeking behaviour include i) main information source (TV, newspaper, social media, news, government/WHO websites); ii) respective use frequency; iii) and ability to switch off social/traditional media.

Results: Young people, women, those with migration background and lower education level were more likely to be exposed to potentially less reliable information sources such as social media. For example, women (OR: 1.79, 95%CI 1.24-2.57) were found to use social media more frequently to obtain Covid-19 information and respondents with migration background (RRR: 2.94, 95%CI 1.14-7.60) were more likely to use it as their preferred information source. Tertiary education increased the odds of a higher frequency of use of TV for Covid-19 information more than fourfold compared to primary/lower secondary education (OR: 4.81, 95%CI 1.34-17.21).

Discussion: Generalization of our findings is limited given the not fully representative sample, but may nonetheless inform more targeted and effective information initiatives to vulnerable groups in future health crises.