

COVID-19 and young Italians: results of a cross-sectional study

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Background:

At the end of 2019, a novel pneumonia-causing Coronavirus called Sars-CoV-2 was first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. It subsequently spread throughout China and elsewhere, becoming a global health emergency. In February 2020, WHO designated the disease COVID-19, which stands for Coronavirus disease 2019. The aim of this study was to evaluate the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on the perception of young Italians and to assess their knowledge and attitudes about the disease.

Methods:

An online survey was conducted on 3rd-4th-5th February 2020 with the collaboration of “Skuola.net”, an important Italian Website for students. Young people had the opportunity to participate in the survey by answering an ad hoc questionnaire created to investigate knowledge and attitudes about the new Coronavirus, using a link published on the homepage.

Results:

5234 responses were received of which 3262 were females and 1972 were males, aged from 11 to 30. 82,4% were students (50,4% high school students) while 17,6% did not attend school or university. Regarding knowledge, 80% of the participants knew that the infection occurs through droplets from infected people; 63% knew that symptoms can appear up to 14 days after exposure; 80% knew that a vaccine has not yet been discovered. Regarding attitudes, 36% admitted that their attitude towards Chinese tourists has significantly worsened; 26% did not buy from Chinese run stores and 24% avoided Chinese restaurants.

Conclusions:

Although most of the participants seem correctly informed about COVID-19, young Italians are at risk of assuming irrational behavior due to psychosis.

Key messages:

- The global emergency of COVID-19 needs adequate information to avoid the spread of dangerous psychoses.
- Young people, usual users of social networks as a means of information, are more at risk of being influenced by fake news and adopting wrong behaviors.