

MASKING OUR COMMUNICATION: EFFECTS OF CLEAR AND SURGICAL FACE COVERINGS ON COMMUNICATION

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INTRODUCTION


Societal wearing of facemasks became commonplace during COVID-19. Verbal communication requires both auditory and visual cues for successful communication exchange. However, the use of facemasks obscures the mouth removing access to essential visual information which can negatively impact communication.

OBJECTIVES

1. To investigate if communication interactions have changed since the introduction of face masks
2. To compare clear and surgical face masks in understanding verbal communication.
3. To investigate the perceived benefits, barriers, and preferences of the general population.

PARTICIPANTS

193: 52 Male, 140 female and 1 non-binary persons ranging from 18-80 years



METHOD

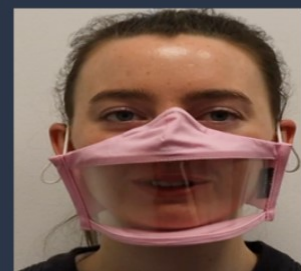
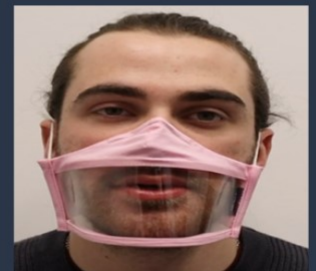
- Via an online survey, participants watched four videos of male and female speakers, with either a clear or surgical mask.
- Participants gave opinions regarding each mask type.
- Potential associations with gender, age, occupation, and experience of mask type were analysed using **Chi-square**.
- Participant comments were analysed using **Thematic Analysis**.

FINDINGS

- Most participants (**78%**) reported a negative change in their communication exchanges since the requirement for wearing face masks was introduced.
- **64% favoured clear over surgical masks.**
- Participants noted that **Comfort (55%), Protection (52%), Availability (51%), Cost (44%) and Fashion (41%)** influenced mask choice.
- Theme 1: **Communication benefits and challenges**- Participants noted various changes to interpersonal communication in the presence of different mask types
- Theme 2: **Attitudes towards mask design**- Participants commented on the perceived visual and acoustic elements of mask types, noting some reservations around safety and aesthetic elements of clear mask options
- Theme 3: **Potential benefits of clear masks**- Participants observed that wearing of clear masks may be advantageous to either themselves or others in different settings, with some seeing it as an altruistic option

CONCLUSION

SURGICAL FACE COVERINGS CAN NEGATIVELY AFFECT VERBAL COMMUNICATION DUE TO THE MOUTH BEING COVERED. CLEAR FACEMASKS HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO CIRCUMVENT THIS CHALLENGE, ALTHOUGH PARTICIPANTS REPORTED A HESITANCY IN ADOPTING THESE FACEMASKS DUE TO AN UNAPPEALING MASK DESIGN.



REFERENCES



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