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Published online by Understanding Animal Research, London, April 2020.

Introduction

This report presents the findings of a March 2020 public opinion survey undertaken by Understanding Animal Research during the UK national lockdown due to the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) virus. The survey sought to capture feelings and attitudes towards the use of animals in medical research, and the organisations undertaking this research, at a time of national emergency when people are focussed on their health. The research was designed and carried out by Understanding Animal Research, using the online survey participation tool Prolific.co to source participants. It is a stand-alone survey.

The survey was carried out on 26 March 2020. It was posted online in the morning and was complete by the afternoon. The survey was completed by 1,027 respondents from the UK, aged over 16. The participants were drawn from a pool of 31,462 potential participants and the sample was weighted according to age, ethnicity and gender to represent the UK population. Research was carried out according to the ethical standards of the British Sociological Association. While some questions asked during this survey are similar to those used in other surveys, the methods used here are different to those used elsewhere so direct comparisons cannot be made to other datasets. It is, however, interesting to note where the answers provided by this survey are similar and where they differ from similar questions asked in other surveys.

Key findings

The UK public is highly aware that animals are used for research for biomedical purposes such as finding treatments for disease. Over 90% of the UK public say they understand that animal research of this kind takes place.

Almost three quarters of people in the UK (73%) think that it is acceptable for scientists to develop tests, treatments or vaccines for COVID-19 using animals such as mice, dogs or monkeys if it is the only way this can be done. However, many people feel conflicted and remain uncomfortable with the idea of animal research: “Because I can accept it, doesn’t mean that I like it,” sums up the position for many.

A large proportion of the UK public accept the use of animals for research as long as there is no unnecessary suffering and there is no alternative. A similar proportion accept the use of animals when they are used only for medical research. (75% and 74% respectively).

Awareness that animals are used in medical research, and the perception that this work is important, seems to have increased, however the public remain concerned about animal welfare and want to see more alternatives to using animals in research.

A tenth (11%) of people feel that their views on animal research and testing have changed since the COVID-19 outbreak. In all cases, these people are more accepting of using animals in research.

Overwhelmingly the public trust and support the efforts of scientists and those who work with them to find a solution to ending the pandemic, and they are more aware than before that this is likely to mean using animals in research.

Methodology

A sample of 1,027 adults aged 16+ from across the UK responded to an online survey on 26 March 2020, three days into the UK lockdown in response to COVID-19. The respondents were registered on the survey website, Prolific.co, which provides participants for academic survey research. Prolific.co gathers a large amount of data on each participant and is able to provide a demographically representative sample of the UK population by restricting access to the online survey to participants from particular groups.

The survey was offered to a pool of 31,462 potential respondents who were given a description of the broad structure and theme (medical research). Those who elected to take part were compensated for their time, but they did not know the subject matter of the survey before choosing to participate, and were in no way selected or influenced by Understanding Animal Research. Where multiple choices were required to a question, for example attitudes in a matrix grid, the choice order was randomised. Responses were typically thorough and considered.

Data presented here are weighted by gender, age and ethnicity to represent the profile of the UK population.

Data was gathered using Smart Survey online survey software, and the anonymised participant data is stored on Smart Survey databases. Responses were analysed using Smart Survey software. Quantitative responses were verified and expanded on through qualitative, open responses. Wordclouds were generated using Smart Survey's text analysis software and Wowed wordclouds.

Publication of data

The dataset from this research has been released alongside this report and may be used for secondary analysis. It can also be requested in other file formats from Understanding Animal Research. However, we require that the findings are accurately reflected in any publications that make use of this dataset. The publication of findings from this report is, therefore, subject to the approval of Understanding Animal Research. This approval will only be refused on the grounds of inaccuracy or misrepresentation.

An error

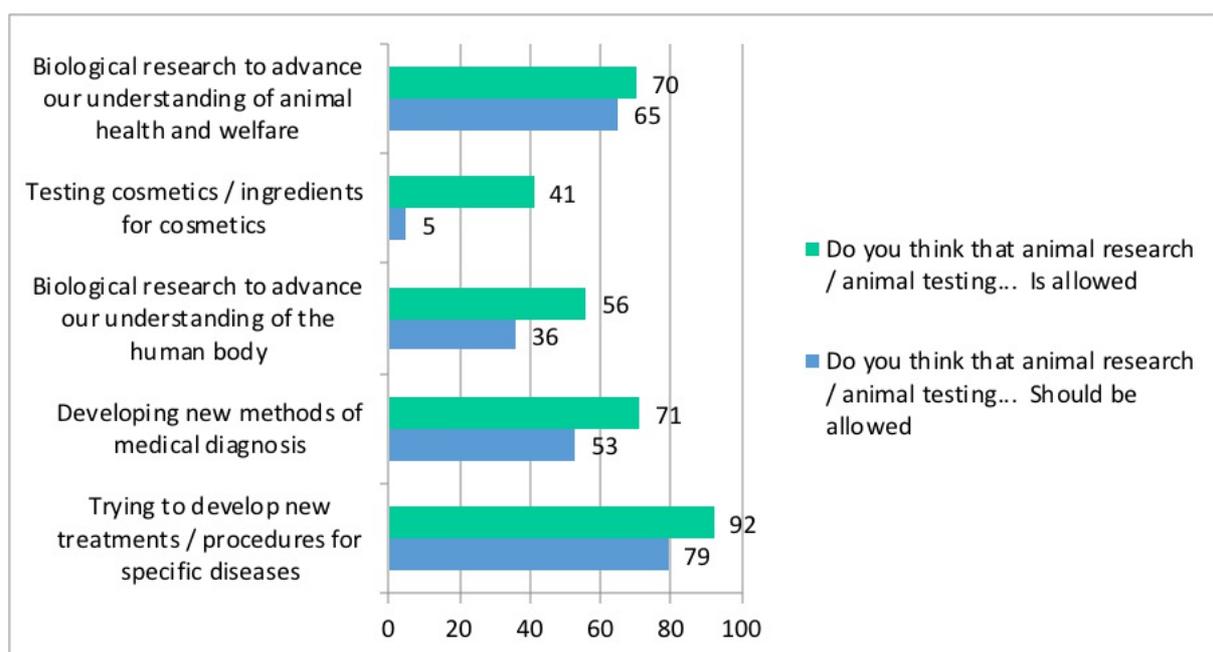
The final and distributed version of the survey question 2b, asking which uses of animals in research in the UK should be allowed, gave no option to say “**none of the above**”. This error means that the results for this section may not be representative of the true opinions of the respondents, or of the UK public. Twenty-four participants commented that they did not feel any form of animal testing should be allowed, and that opinion may be more widely shared. The question has been retained for completeness of the data, but the figures presented should not be used for further analysis and the data bias should be considered in reading this section.

Findings part 1: attitudes to the use of animals in medical research

- 1.1 **Over 90%** of the UK public believe that animal research and animal testing take place in the UK to develop new medical treatments for specific diseases. This figure is much higher than expected as the association between animal research and the development of medicines is generally low.
- 1.2 Four-fifths (**79%**) believe that **animal research or testing to develop new medical treatments should be allowed in the UK**. This figure is supported by qualitative responses where 73% of respondents said it was acceptable to use animals, including dogs to test treatments or vaccines specifically for COVID-19 (see part 3).
- 1.3 **40%** of people believe that **animals are used for cosmetic testing in the UK**, although cosmetic testing has been banned in the UK since the 1990s. A very small proportion (**5%**) believe that **cosmetic testing on animals should be permitted**.
- 1.4 Generally, the UK public believe that more animal research takes place in the UK than should be permitted.

Figure 1: Ideas about permitted animal research

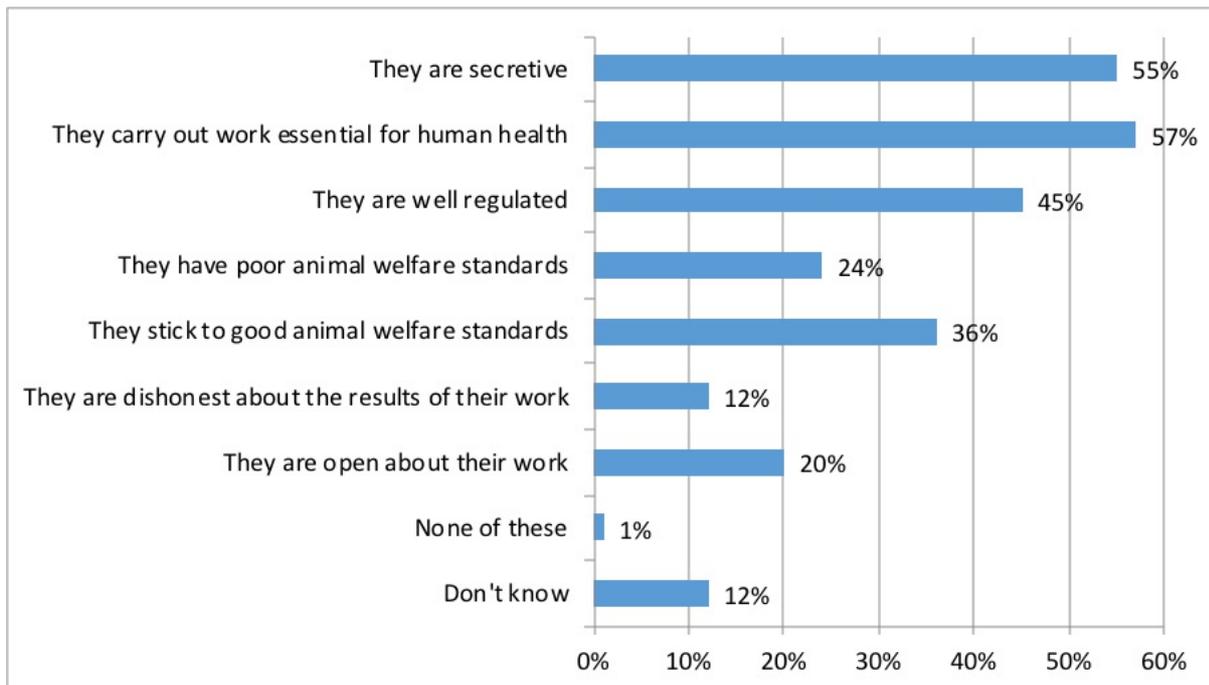
Responses to, **do you think that animal research or animal testing in the UK is allowed for the following**, compared to where it **should** be allowed?



- 1.5 The UK public are more likely to believe that animals should be used in research to advance animal health and welfare than for human health, unless that research can be directly applied (such as to test medicines).
- 1.6 The UK public feel that organisations that carry out research on animals are **a) carrying out work essential to human health (57%)**, **b) secretive (55%)**, **c) well regulated (45%)**, **d) sticking to good animal welfare standards (36%)**. The modal response (a) indicates that in the current climate people associate scientific research on animals with human health and medicine.

Figure 2: perceptions of organisations that carry out animal research

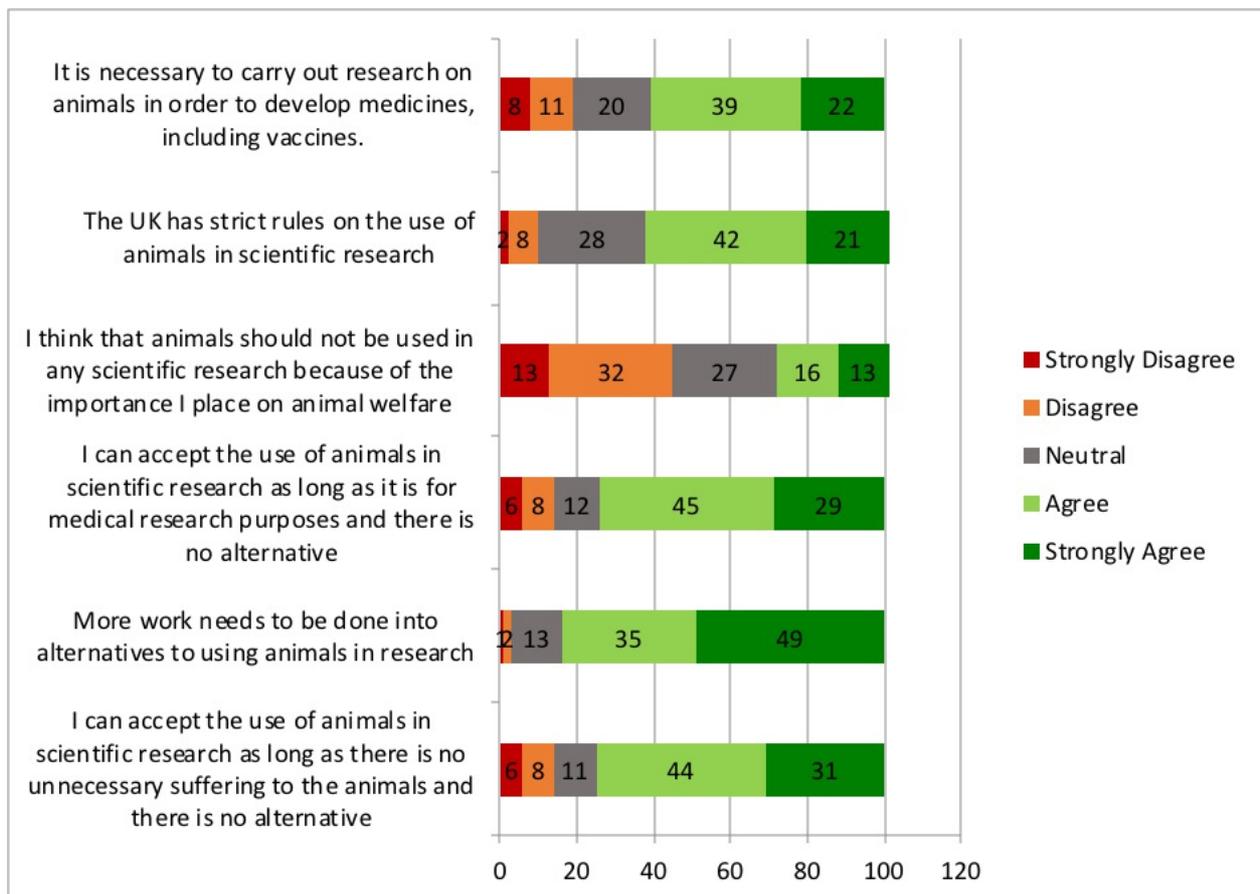
Responses to the question, **do you think any of the following are true of organisations that carry out research on animals?**



Findings part 2: acceptability of animal research

- 2.1 Three quarters of the UK public (75%) say that they can accept the use of animals in research where there is no unnecessary suffering to the animals and there is no alternative. Only 14% of people disagree with this statement.
- 2.2 A similar proportion of the public (74%) say they can accept the use of animals for medical research purposes.
- 2.3 However, 29% of people say that they could not accept the use of animals in any scientific research on animal welfare grounds, indicating that a large proportion of people have mixed and conflicting views on this issue.

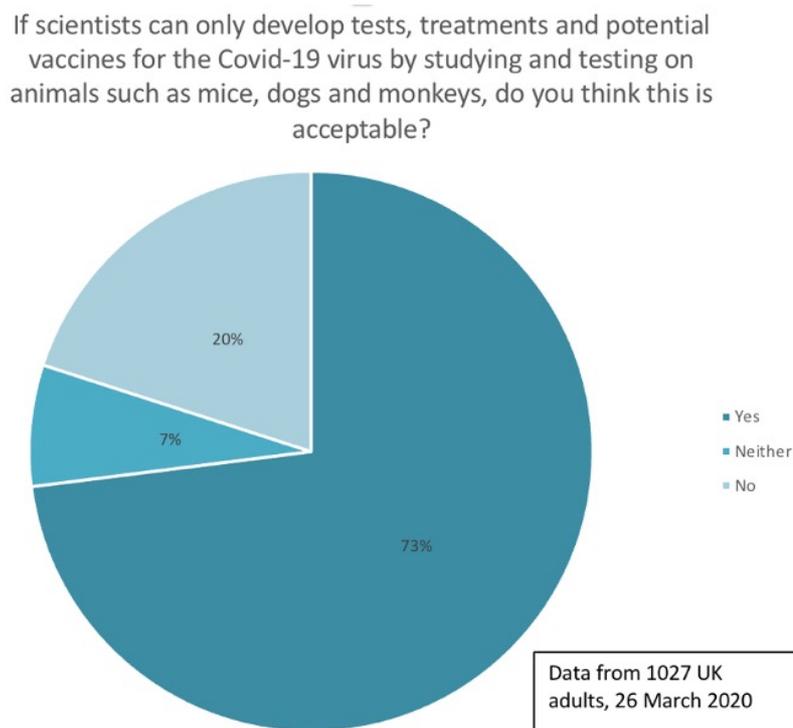
Figure 3: acceptability of animals in scientific research



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- 2.4 A majority of the UK public (**84%**) agree that **more work needs to be done into alternatives to using animals in research**. This view is supported by qualitative responses, which emphasise concern about animal welfare and express conflicted feelings about the perceived need to use animals in medical research.
- 2.5 **62%** of the UK public think **the UK has strict rules governing the use of animals in research**, but **28%** gave a neutral response, most likely because they are unsure about the rules and welfare standards.
- 2.6 **60%** of the UK public think that research on animals is necessary when specifically applied to the development of new medicines and vaccines.
- 2.7 Almost three quarters of people in the UK (**73%**) think that it is **acceptable for scientists to develop tests, treatments or vaccines for COVID-19 using animals such as mice, dogs or monkeys** if that is the only way this can be done.

Survey respondents were asked to provide a brief comment to the question, **if scientists can only develop, tests, treatments and potential vaccines for the COVID-19 virus by studying and testing on animals such as mice, dogs and monkeys, do you think this is acceptable?** Responses were coded manually, and show that the majority of the UK public (**73%**) consider that, under the circumstances, animal research and testing is acceptable.

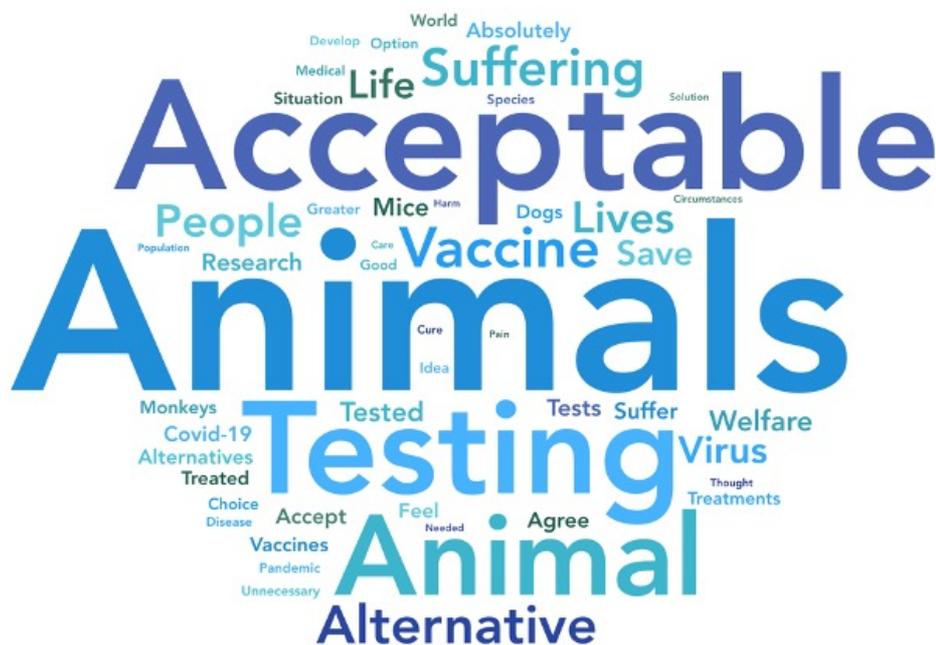
Figure 4: acceptability of animals to research COVID-19 treatments



Responses to this question indicate that many participants feel morally conflicted about their answer, but they think this type of research is essential. A small number of participants who responded 'no' commented that they would accept the use of mice for such research, but not dogs or monkeys (0.02%).

An overview of common ideas and themes given in the responses can be seen in the wordcloud below.

Figure 5: if scientists can only develop, tests, treatments and potential vaccines for the COVID-19 virus by studying and testing on animals such as mice, dogs and monkeys, do you think this is acceptable? (Wordcloud)

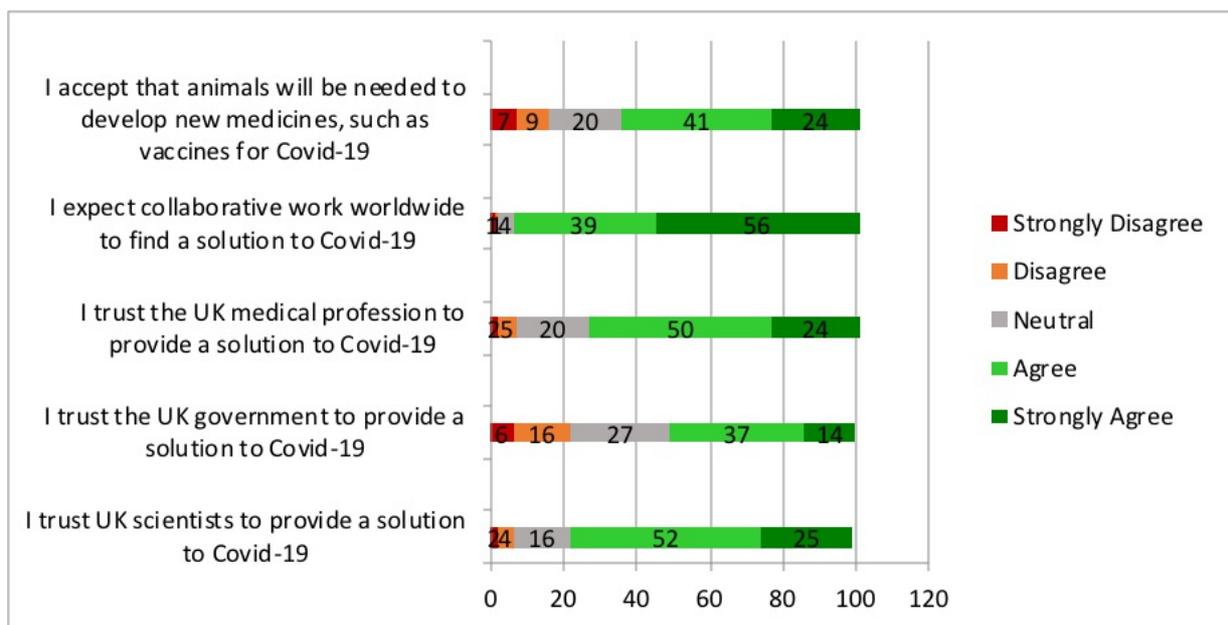


Findings part 3: solutions to the COVID-19 outbreak

Survey respondents were asked about their trust and expectations in finding a solution to the COVID-19 outbreak.

- 3.1 Trust in science and scientists to provide a solution to COVID-19 is high (77%).
- 3.2 Trust in medical solutions such as public health measures and practices around containment and isolation is also high (74%) and confirmed through qualitative answers which indicated a large degree of support for containment and social distancing measures.
- 3.3 Trust in the government was lower, but half (51%) of the UK public said that they trusted the government to find a solution to the outbreak.
- 3.4 Two-thirds of people (65%) now accept that animals will be needed to develop medicines to treat COVID-19, and that this will include vaccine development. However, qualitative responses showed that, while they accept this, many of the UK public are conflicted over welfare concerns and the potential harms to the animals.
- 3.5 95% of people felt a solution to COVID-19 would come through international collaboration.

Figure 6: solutions and necessities for COVID-19



The majority of participants think that science and research will eventually provide a solution, either through treatments or a vaccine. Half of the respondents (50%) discussed the pressing need for a vaccine, often in combination with or following the use of other measures. The repurposing of existing medication to provide treatments was discussed by 9%, while 14% refer to the importance of the work done by science or scientists. A small number of respondents feel that despite scientific endeavour there will be no vaccine to COVID-19.

Containment

“It will disappear with social distancing and self isolation.”

“Initially isolation, and then through use of a vaccine once it has been developed.”

A quarter of respondents (25%) feel the solution will be provided by social distancing measures or lockdowns. Many of these responses refer to “following the rules”. A large number see containment and quarantine as a temporary solution to buy time until a scientific solution such as a vaccine can be developed, but others feel the containment strategy will, in itself, provide a resolution.

Global

“The governments and health organisations of the world work together to develop a vaccine.”

“It will take worldwide collaboration with extra help from countries like China that have been working towards a solution for longer.”

A key theme, found in 14% of comments, noted the importance or otherwise of international efforts. These responses sometimes support the scientific work, stating that researchers need to collaborate to solve this problem, or that the solution will come from beyond the UK. Others feel that any scientific or medical solution will be monopolised or only available to wealthy nations. A small minority connect the pandemic to globalisation and feel that international borders should be tightly controlled.

Time

“In time the spread of the virus will slow and eventually a vaccine will be created.”

“It might take up to 2-3 years to have a cure for this virus.”

More than a quarter of comments (29%) refer to time or the passage of time. Some speculate on how long the pandemic will last, and others discuss the time needed to develop a vaccine. Expectations of time-courses vary greatly from a few months to many years.

Run its course

“Basically, the virus will wear itself out.”

“Hopefully we can all restrict movements until the virus has run its course.”

Almost one tenth of people (9%) think that the virus will eventually run its course and the pandemic will end without intervention. Many of these expect the virus to remain in some form, and think that it will need measures to manage it on an ongoing basis as ‘flu does. A small minority feel that we should not interfere with a natural process or with God’s creation, while a larger number believe that containing the virus will provide an opportunity for it to “burn itself out” or for the population to develop immunity to it.

Frightened

“I’m at a loss and feeling overwhelmed. I don’t think it can be [solved].”

“It is very scary and has turned the world upside down. I cannot see a solution for a year.”

Around 8% of respondents feel concerned, worried or frightened by the pandemic. Most of these gave no explanation as to how they expected the situation to be resolved.

Other themes

“The government is behind the curve and there will be unnecessary deaths. They needed to be transparent and are not.”

“Anxious for the future of family and my job / economy.”

Other emergent themes with less prevalence focus around: public health measures (protecting healthcare services and staff, hand-washing, equipment); political solutions; concern over the economy; distrust of government and authorities; distrust of corporations (pharmaceuticals and 5G); the role of vitamin C in immunity; unconcerned.

Findings part 4: changes to views about animal research

Respondents were asked **do you feel that your views around animal testing and animal research have changed in light of the COVID-19 outbreak?**

The responses were provided as short comments and manually coded to indicate a subjective change of views. Allowing that survey respondents tend to under-report changes in attitudes, a substantial change in views can be observed, with **11%** of respondents indicating that their views around animal research have changed. In all cases their views have become more favourable, and many cite the severity of the situation. Some reported that they had not given the matter much thought until now.

“Yes I do [feel my views have changed]. Before I was very against animal testing. But after how many people have been infected and are predicted to be infected we’ve got to do something.”

The majority of respondents, whether in agreement or not with the use of animals in scientific research, did not feel that their views had changed.

Figure 8: changes to respondent views on animal research following the Covid-19 outbreak

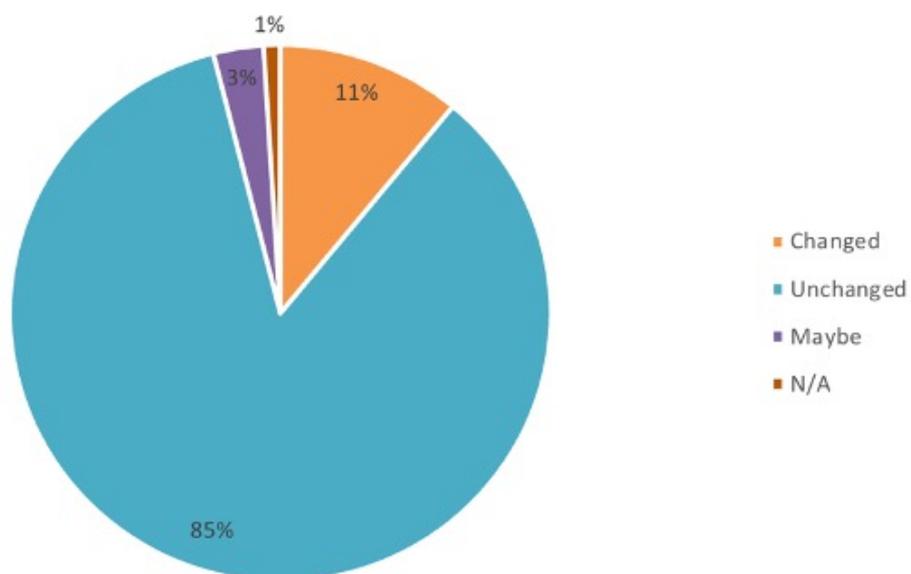


Figure 9: do you feel that you views around animal testing and animal research have changed in light of the Covid-19 outbreak? (Wordcloud)

