INTRODUCTION

- Human behavior (e.g., social distancing) is critical to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, but not everyone adheres to behavioral recommendations. Thus, identifying factors that are associated with such behaviors is important.
- When assessing potential health harms, people often use subjective norms to guide their behavior.
- The purpose of this research is to investigate associations between subjective norms and social distancing, perceptions of the efficacy of protective behaviors, and returning to pre-pandemic social behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Participant demographics of age, race/ethnicity, and gender were also investigated as potential moderators to these associations.

METHODS

- Data was collected in April 2020 (Time 1) and July 2020 (Time 2) from adults (N=507) using a national U.S. internet panel (from 48 states and the District of Columbia)
  - 50.9 % female (N=258), 48.3% male (N=245), 0.8% non-binary (N=4)
  - 71.6% White (N=363), 12.8% African American (N=65), 6.7% Asian American (N=34), Hispanic/Latinx 6.3% (N=32), 2.2% Mixed/Other (N=11), American Indian/Alaskan Native, 0.2% (N=1), 0.2% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (N=1)
  - Age m = 50.39 years (SD=15.32; range: 18-80)
- Participants rated their subjective norms of social distancing (Time 1 and Time 2), perceptions of the efficacy of protective behaviors, social distancing behaviors, and returning to pre-pandemic social behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESULTS

- Figure 1 shows a comparison of means by race and ethnicity
- Subjective norms decreased from Time 1 (M=5.92) to Time 2 (M=5.56), p <.001, d=.35. This change was not moderated by gender, race/ethnicity, or age.
- A series of General Linear Models tested Time 1 subjective norms, the demographic moderator, and their interaction on Time 2 outcomes.
  - Higher subjective norms at Time 1 predicted more frequent social distancing, stronger perceptions of the efficacy of protective behaviors, and less engagement in pre-pandemic behaviors at Time 2.
  - Older age predicted more frequent social distancing at Time 2.
  - Being female predicted more social distancing and stronger perceptions of the efficacy of protective behaviors.
- No other main effects occurred and associations between subjective norms and outcome variables were not moderated by age, race/ethnicity, or gender (all ps > .05). See Table 2.

![Figure 1. Means by race/ethnic group.](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Example Item</th>
<th>k</th>
<th>α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subjective norms (1=strongly disagree; 7=strongly agree)</td>
<td>Most of my friends engage in social distancing.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Distancing Behavior (1=never; 7=very often)</td>
<td>In the past two weeks, how often did you maintain social distance (6ft) when you went out.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Efficacy of Protective Behaviors (1=strongly disagree; 7=strongly agree)</td>
<td>Practicing social distancing curbs the spread of COVID-19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Pandemic Social Behaviors (1=none or very few; 5=most or all of them)</td>
<td>Think back to activities that you could not do during stay-at-home orders (e.g., eating at restaurants; visiting friends). How many of these have you started doing again?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
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CONCLUSIONS

- These outcomes demonstrate that subjective norms are predictors for COVID-19 perceptions and behaviors.
- Differences in age, race, and gender had no significant effect on the relationships tested.
- This work emphasizes the importance of social norms about COVID-19 protective behaviors and beliefs. Normative beliefs could be targeted to enhance protective behaviors, such as staying socially distanced from others, to curb the impact of viral outbreaks such as COVID-19.