

Gender differences in travel risk perceptions within the COVID-19 pandemic context

CARLA MARIA SILVA¹, CLÁUDIA SEABRA², MANUEL REIS¹

¹ Instituto Politécnico de Viseu, ²Universidade de Coimbra

Contacting author: csilva@estv.ipv.pt

Keywords | Risk perception, COVID-19 pandemic, Gender

Objectives | Tourism literature recognizes the importance of studying gender differences in the perceptions of risk due to the impacts on travel decisions (Yang et al., 2017). The purpose of the present study is to identify the main differences in safety perceptions to travel domestically and internationally between males and females during the COVID-19 pandemic context. Based in previous studies, the present work was built on the hypothesis that women are more sensitive than men to health risks with concerns travel behavior (Boksberger et al., 2007; Byrnes et al., 1999; Elsrud, 2001).

Methodology | The present work is based on a quantitative research approach using an online questionnaire shared on social media between February.2020 and February.2021. The scales used to study the "Impacts of the COVID19 threat on Safety Perceptions" were adapted from the works of Huddy, Feldman, Capelo's and Provost (2002), Jeuring and Becken (2013) and Seabra, Kastenholz, Abrantes and Reis (2018). The original scales were translated to Arabic, Bulgarian, Chinese, Croatian, Czech, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Portuguese Romanian, Russian, Slovak, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish by native speakers. In order to avoid translation errors, the questionnaires were back translated into English. Using snowball sampling, it was possible to collect 1536 answers from respondents in 63 countries. To analyse the differences in risk perceptions travelling in domestic and international destinations between men and women, Mann-Whiney and "Sign test" tests have been conducted.

Main Results and Contributions | The findings indicate that, compared to men, women have a higher degree of risk perception when it comes to travel, whether on business, leisure or visiting friends and family. They feel even more nervous than men in traveling today, either within the country or on international trips. Also, women give greater importance to the safety factor in travel and when choosing tourist destinations. Despite the fact that these results are in line with previous studies (cf. Carr, 2001; Cui et al., 2016; Gustafson, 1998; Lepp & Gibson, 2008; Weaver, 2012; Williams & Baláz, 2013; Yang et al., 2017), they bring important contributions to understand gender

differences in risk perception in the context of Covid-19 and not only generally but also in the context of domestic and international trips.

Limitations | The present study has some limitations that should be considered. The study, using structured techniques, might not consider other specific and relevant existing dimensions of travel risk perceptions within the pandemic context.

Conclusions | Tourism has been the worst affected of all major economic sectors by the present COVID-19 pandemic (Iaquinto, 2020) and its recovery depend on tourists' perceptions of safety in travel. Previous research suggests that women and men perceive risk differently, especially in what concerns health risks. In fact, the findings of this research, applied to the COVID-19 context, are in line with previous research: compared to men, women have a higher degree of risk perception when it comes to travel even when considering travel motivations.

Further research should explore gender studies in consumer behaviour in tourism due to the importance that women have in influencing household buying decisions. Gender differences should be explored in studying other variables such as, involvement and tourism experience.

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