

Peer Review

Review of: "Evolution of Perceived Vulnerability to Infection in Japan During the COVID-19 Pandemic"

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The research article “**Evolution of Perceived Vulnerability to Infection in Japan During the COVID-19 Pandemic**” addresses a highly relevant public health psychology topic and demonstrates strength through its large multi-year dataset, integration of pre-pandemic baseline data, and appropriate statistical analysis using ANOVA with post-hoc comparisons, which provides valuable insight into behavioral immune system dynamics and long-term psychological responses to pandemics. The study is particularly novel in tracking perceived infectability and germ aversion across pre-, intra-, and post-pandemic periods, enhancing its epidemiological and behavioral science relevance. However, several weaknesses limit its scientific robustness, including reliance on repeated cross-sectional datasets rather than true longitudinal follow-up of the same participants, potential demographic variability between yearly samples that may introduce confounding bias, limited inclusion of socioeconomic, educational, or health status variables, and dependence on self-reported psychological scales without behavioral or clinical validation measures. Additionally, causal interpretation remains limited due to the observational design, and cultural generalizability beyond Japan is not sufficiently explored. The article would benefit from applying mixed-effects longitudinal modeling, integrating behavioral outcome indicators (e.g., compliance behaviors or infection rates), improving demographic stratification analyses, and incorporating cross-cultural comparative datasets to strengthen external validity.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.