

# “I promise it’s not COVID” - the change in societal attitudes towards COVID-like symptoms and the effect this has on COPD patients

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**Aims:** To explore the societal perception of coughing and the stigma experienced by people with COPD following COVID-19, and the potential impact of this.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional study was conducted among the general public and patients with COPD using mixed methods. Data from the general public was collected via an online survey, and both an online survey and qualitative interviews were conducted to obtain data from people with COPD. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics and qualitative data were thematically analysed.

**Results:** 198 members of the general public participated in the survey, with data showing a statistically significant increase in stigma towards coughing after COVID-19. 5 individuals with COPD participated in the COPD-specific survey, with results alluding to an increase in negative reactions and stigma towards their symptoms experienced by participants since COVID-19. Additionally, from the 3 individuals with COPD that were interviewed, themes of psychological impact, stigma from the public and overall impact on life were depicted.

**Conclusions:** Results show patterns in the data from the general public and participants with COPD indicate an increase in stigma experienced by patients with COPD ever since COVID-19 emerged. Despite this, low participant numbers limited the study, thus we recommend wider data outreach in subsequent work to underpin future research in this area, in which we believe there is scope for positive and impactful change through education.

