SURVEY FUTURES

SURVEY DATA COLLECTION METHODS COLLABORATION

Working Paper 16:

Video interviewing in the European Social Survey: A post-pandemic view

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Survey Futures is an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)-funded initiative (grant grant ES/X014150/1) aimed at bringing about a step change in survey research to ensure that high quality social survey research can continue in the UK. The initiative brings together social survey researchers, methodologists, commissioners and other stakeholders from across academia, government, private and not-for-profit sectors. Activities include an extensive programme of research, a training and capacity-building (TCB) stream, and dissemination and promotion of good practice. The research programme aims to assess the quality implications of the most important design choices relevant to future UK surveys, with a focus on inclusivity and representativeness, while the TCB stream aims to provide understanding of capacity and skills needs in the survey sector (both interviewers and research professionals), to identify promising ways to improve both, and to take steps towards making those improvements. Survey Futures is directed by Professor Peter Lynn, University of Essex, and is a collaboration of twelve organisations, benefitting from additional support from the Office for National Statistics and the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods. Further information can be found at www.surveyfutures.net.

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Abstract

Live video interviewing emerged as an alternative survey mode during the COVID-19 pandemic, yet little evidence exists on its performance once in-person fieldwork resumed. This study provides a cross-national, post-pandemic assessment of live video interviewing within the European Social Survey (ESS) using data from Rounds 10 (2020–22) and 11 (2023–24). We examine (1) prevalence of video interviewing, (2) characteristics associated with mode choice, and (3) comparability of data quality between video and in-person interviews. Uptake varied substantially across countries and telephone-first contact and clearly communicating the video option increased uptake. Video respondents were younger, more highly educated, more likely to be in paid work, and lived in larger households, with education differences intensifying in ESS-11. Interview duration, item nonresponse, straightlining, and interviewer assessments showed minimal and inconsistent differences. Overall, video interviewing produced data quality comparable to in-person interviewing, with important implications for its use in mixed-mode survey designs.

Keywords

Live Video Interviewing, Cross-National Survey, European Social Survey

Contents

Introduction

The European Social Survey (ESS), one of the world's leading cross-national surveys, has traditionally relied on in-person interviewing to ensure high data quality and comparability across countries. In Round 10 (2020–2022), however, the ESS introduced live video interviewing for the first time, allowing participating countries to offer video interviews alongside in-person interviews in response to the constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic (Hanson et al., 2024). While the adoption of video interviewing in Round 10 was driven by exceptional circumstances, Round-11 (2023–24) is the first ESS round conducted after pandemic-related restrictions were fully lifted. This creates a unique opportunity to assess how video interviewing operates in a more typical survey environment.

Video interviewing for Surveys

For decades, in-person interviewing has been widely regarded as the "gold standard" in survey research (Endres et al., 2022; Schober, 2018). This status reflects its association with higher participation and completion rates as well as greater respondent engagement through direct personal interaction (Anderson, 2008; Holbrook et al., 2003). However, even before the global events of 2020, survey methodologists were exploring feasible alternatives. Video interviewing emerged as a promising alternative, though initially limited to small-scale applications (Centeno et al., 2024).

The COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 led to rapid methodological adjustments in survey data collection. Public health measures and social distancing requirements forced many survey organisations to pause in-person data collection, leading to a rapid shift towards remote methods (Centeno et al., 2024). In this new landscape, video interviewing was widely explored as the "closest substitute for in-person interviewing because it preserved visual

communication between interviewer and respondent" (Centeno et al., 2024). This led to the integration of video interviewing into a range of major national and international surveys. The ESS introduced live video interviewing as a complementary mode alongside in-person interviewing to accommodate respondent preferences or circumstances (Hanson et al., 2024). This large-scale implementation provided valuable real-world evidence on the feasibility of video interviewing and its implications for survey practice.

Existing evidence

Research conducted during the pandemic-driven adoption of video interviewing has concentrated on three inter-related areas of interest: prevalence, sample composition, and the comparability of data quality with traditional in-person interviews.

Prevalence

A central focus of pandemic-era studies was the extent to which respondents opted for video interviewing when given the choice. Across a range of studies, uptake was generally limited. Video-first designs–where respondents are initially invited to complete a live video interview before being offered other modes–tended to result in lower participation rates, and within mixed-mode designs respondents rarely selected video interviewing voluntarily (Centeno et al., 2024; Durrenat et al., 2024; Silber et al., 2025). These findings underscore that merely offering video interviewing does not guarantee substantial uptake. Evidence from ESS Round 10 reinforces this point. Although sixteen countries introduced live video interviewing as a complementary mode to in-person interviewing, often investing considerable effort in its implementation, video interviewing generally remained a minority mode (Hanson et al., 2024). Uptake varied markedly across national contexts. In some countries, more than one-third of completed interviews were conducted by video, while in others only a very small number of video interviews were achieved. This substantial cross-

national variation suggests that the use of video interviewing is highly sensitive to country-specific institutional, cultural, and fieldwork conditions.

ESS-11 provides a valuable opportunity to revisit these patterns in a post-pandemic environment and to assess which contextual and procedural factors continue to shape cross-national variation in video uptake when in-person interviewing is feasible again.

Sample composition and representativeness

A consistent finding across studies is that video interviewing tends to attract systematically different groups of respondents compared with other modes. Respondents who completed interviews via video tended to be younger, have higher levels of educational attainment, and were more likely to be in paid work than those who participated in-person or by telephone (Hanson et al., 2024; Centeno et al., 2024; Durrant et al., 2024; Carr et al., 2023). This pattern has been observed across different national contexts and survey types, including cross-sectional and longitudinal studies in the US and Europe.

Evidence regarding other demographic characteristics has been less consistent. Some studies report an overrepresentation of women among video respondents (Durrant et al., 2024), some found no gender difference (Endres et al., 2022), and others found an overrepresentation of men (Martin & Fradier, 2023). Furthermore, a U.S. study observed that video respondents were more likely to be White or non-Hispanic (Carr et al., 2023).

In ESS Round 10, similar patterns were observed: across the six countries which achieved the largest number of video interviews, video respondents were consistently younger, more highly educated, more likely to be in paid work, and more often lived in larger households than those interviewed in-person. The sample composition by sex, partnership status, and migration background were generally similar across the two modes (Hanson et al., 2024). This body of research highlights a critical challenge: a survey design that heavily relies on video interviewing risks significant representation bias by under-representing older,

less educated, and potentially less technologically adept populations (Silber et al., 2025). Whether these compositional differences persist in a post-pandemic context remains an open empirical question.

Data quality

In contrast to findings on uptake and sample composition, evidence on data quality and measurement is generally reassuring. Results from ESS Round 10 show that in countries where video interviewing was used at scale, data quality indicators—including item non-response, straightlining, and interviewer effects—were closely comparable between video and in-person modes, with only small and inconsistent differences observed across countries (Hanson et al., 2024). These findings align with results from controlled studies. A randomised experiment carried out in the US found no significant differences between video and in-person interviews across multiple measures, including satisficing, social desirability bias, and respondent satisfaction (Endres et al., 2022). Recent experimental evidence from the UK further shows that differences in item non-response and response distributions between video and in-person modes are minimal, with video interviews in some cases even yielding slightly lower levels of item non-response (Asensio et al., 2025). Complementary quasi-experimental evidence similarly indicates that, after adjusting for selection effects, measurement differences between video and in-person interviewing are small and largely attributable to residual compositional differences rather than the mode itself (Kocar et al., 2025). Research exploring interviewer effects has shown that interviewer-related variance in live video interviewing is generally low (West et al., 2021).

Taken together, these findings indicate that video interviewing can deliver data quality broadly comparable to in-person interviewing. However, much of the evidence was generated during the exceptional conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, when video communication had become normalised and in-person interaction was more difficult.

It remains an important question whether the results on data quality can be replicated in a post-pandemic context.

Contribution to existing evidence

Although the rapid uptake of video interviewing during the COVID-19 pandemic generated valuable insights into uptake, sample composition differences and data quality, most of this research was conducted under highly unusual conditions. Public health restrictions, heightened reliance on video communication, and shifts in daily routines likely influenced both respondents' willingness to participate via video and the characteristics of those who chose this mode (Carr et al., 2023; Rowen et al., 2022). As a result, it remains unclear whether the patterns identified during the pandemic reflect stable properties of video interviewing or are specific to the circumstances of that period.

This gap highlights the need for systematic post-pandemic assessment of video interviewing. Understanding how the mode performs once fieldwork has returned to typical conditions is essential for evaluating its long-term role in mixed-mode survey designs. The present study addresses this gap by examining video interviewing in the European Social Survey Round 11–the first ESS round conducted fully after pandemic-related restrictions were lifted.

By using repeat cross-sectional data from ESS Rounds 10 and 11, this paper provides the first cross-national, post-pandemic assessment of video interviewing in a large-scale probability survey. This study directly extends prior ESS-10 evidence on prevalence, sample composition and data quality, allowing us to evaluate whether patterns observed under pandemic conditions persist in a more typical survey environment.

Approach and Research questions

Using data from ESS Round 11, we examine (1) the prevalence of video interviewing across participating countries, (2) whether video interviewing continues to attract a systematically distinct group of respondents compared with in-person interviewing, and (3) whether data quality indicators remain comparable across modes. By comparing data from Rounds 10 and 11 of the ESS, we assess whether pandemic-era results reflect stable features of video interviewing or temporary conditions specific to 2020–22.

Through this analysis, our paper seeks to answer the following research questions with accompanying hypotheses:

RQ1: How prevalent is video interviewing across ESS-11 countries, and to what extent do country-specific factors (such as population internet use, mention of video interviews in advance letters, and mode of contact attempts) help explain differences in uptake?

H1: Countries with higher levels of internet use, clear communication of the video option, and the ability to make first contact by telephone will show significantly higher video interviewing uptake than countries without these features.

RQ2: How does the sample composition of video interview respondents in ESS-11 compare to those interviewed in-person?

H2: Consistent with ESS-10, video respondents in ESS-11 will be younger, more highly educated, and more likely to be in paid work than in-person respondents.

RQ3: How does the sample composition of video interview respondents in ESS-11 (post-pandemic) compare to ESS-10 (pandemic)?

H3: The socio-demographic selectivity of video respondents will be more pronounced in ESS-11 than in ESS-10, reflecting a shift from necessity-driven uptake to preference-driven mode choice (e.g., even higher levels of education and employment among video respondents).

RQ4: How comparable are video and in-person interviews in ESS-11 with respect to data quality indicators, including interviewers' perceptions of respondent behaviour, interview duration, and satisficing behaviours?

H4: Video interviewing in ESS-11 will yield data quality comparable to in-person interviewing, with no significant differences in interview duration, interviewer-reported respondent behaviour, or satisficing indicators, replicating ESS-10 findings of strong mode comparability.

Methods

Data

We use data from the European Social Survey (ESS) Round 10 and 11. The ESS is a cross-national survey that has been fielded biennially since 2002 and traditionally relied on computer-assisted personal interviewing using in-person interviews. During COVID-19, ESS Round 10 (2020–2022) introduced video interviewing for the first time as a complementary mode to in-person interviewing in response to public health restrictions (Hanson et al., 2024). In ESS Round 11 (2023–2024), several countries continued to implement video interviewing as a complementary mode to in-person interviewing, now within a post-pandemic fieldwork environment (ESS ERIC, 2024). Overall, 16 countries offered video interviews in ESS-10, and 10 countries offered it in ESS-11. While the main analyses are done looking at the post-pandemic sample (ESS-11), ESS-10 is used for a comparison of the sample characteristics and a reference point for uptake of video interviews.

Video interviews in the ESS

The ESS data collection model is based on decentralised fieldwork contracting and data collection. National teams ("National Coordinators") in each country either manage fieldwork in-house (where they have an interviewer field-force) or contract a survey agency.

The main process for contacting target respondents remained largely identical to the previous round (ESS-10), where video interviewing was trialled for the first time. In most countries the interviewers attempted in-person contact (sometimes following an advance letter). At that point, a video interview could be offered as an alternative to an in-person interview. In countries with a named person sample containing telephone numbers, first contact could be made by telephone. In these cases, video interviews could be offered immediately meaning that video interviews could be conducted without any in-person contact. National teams could choose between three different approaches for carrying out video interviews:

- Option A: Establish a specialist team of video interviewers, separate from those carrying out in-person interviews.
- Option B: Allow all in-person interviewers to also carry out video interviews.
- Option C: Allow a subset of in-person interviewers to carry out video interviews.

Interviewers used licensed versions of standard video platforms (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams), and respondents were not required to create an account or install software. Interviewers were advised to use two screens or devices—one for the CAPI questionnaire and one for the video call and showcard display. Respondents could participate using any internet-enabled device, including smartphones, although the use of a larger screen (tablet or laptop) was recommended for clearer viewing of showcards. Countries that had used video interviewing in Round 10 were not required to pre-test it again for Round 11, whereas countries introducing it for the first time or changing their approach were required to conduct at least five pre-test video interviews. Interviewers received video-interviewing training as part of the Round 11 briefing.

Variables

For analyses of prevalence (RQ1), we include all ten ESS-11 countries that offered video interviewing. For analyses of sample composition and data quality (RQ2–RQ4), we restrict the sample to the countries with the highest uptake of video interviews.

Prevalence (RQ1)

Following (Hanson et al., 2024), we assess prevalence by calculating the proportion of completed interviews conducted via video in each ESS-11 country and compare these with ESS-10. We also examine cross-national differences in implementation, including contact mode, sampling approach, and communication of the video option. In countries permitting telephone contact, we assess whether telephone-first approaches show higher video uptake.

Sample composition (RQs 2 and 3)

To assess the potential of video interviewing in the post-pandemic context, it is essential to examine whether this mode attracts a systematically different respondent profile compared with in-person interviewing. For the four countries with the highest uptake of video interviews in ESS-11 (Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden), where case numbers are sufficient for meaningful comparisons, we compare the socio-demographic composition of respondents completing the survey via video and in-person. The following variables are examined, using standard ESS classifications:

- Age (in years)
- Gender (male/female, as provided)
- Legal partnership status (in a registered or cohabiting partnership vs. not)
- Education (university degree vs. lower)
- Employment status (in paid work vs. not)

- Migrant background (born in the country vs. abroad)
- Household size (number of persons in the household)

Additionally, to contextualise post-pandemic patterns, we compare the sample composition of video-interview respondents in ESS-11 with those in ESS-10. For comparability across rounds we focus on the three countries with the highest uptake in each round: Finland, Iceland and Norway. [1]

Comparability of quality indicators (RQ4)

To evaluate whether video interviews yield data of comparable quality to in-person interviews in the post-pandemic context, we examine three sets of interview quality indicators. As in the sample composition analyses, we restrict these comparisons to the four ESS-11 countries with the highest uptake of video interviewing–Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden–where sufficient case numbers exist to meaningfully compare modes. Because quality indicators may vary systematically with respondent characteristics, we restrict the sample to respondents with comparable profiles across modes. Specifically, we focus on individuals who (a) live with a partner, (b) have at least secondary education, and (c) are younger than 60 years old. This results in country-specific in-person sample sizes ranging from 161 to 393, and video-interview sample sizes ranging from 76 to 229.

1. ***Participant behaviour***

   The first set of indicators capture interviewer assessed respondent behaviour during the interview. These measures reflect interaction quality, respondent engagement, and potential differences in interviewer–respondent rapport across modes.

   We use four items from the interviewer questionnaire:

   - Understanding of questions
   - Willingness to answer

- Frequency of asking for clarification
- Presence of others who interfered with the interview

The first three items were measured on a five-point scale (never, almost never, now and then, often, very often). Presence of others was recorded as a binary (yes/no) indicator.

2. ***Interview duration***

Interview duration serves as a second quality indicator, as it may reflect interviewer effects, technical issues, respondent engagement, or differences in the pace of administration across modes (Hanson et al., 2024). We first analyse overall interview duration for the main ESS questionnaire separately by mode and country. Outlier interview lengths of more than 180 minutes were excluded from the analysis (n=7).

We examine the duration of the first five questionnaire sections (A–E) to assess potential mode differences. Later sections are excluded because they vary by respondent, are too short to permit meaningful comparison, or occur after the main interview. For section-level analyses, durations exceeding 90 minutes are treated as outliers and removed. See Table 1 for descriptions of Sections A–E.

Table 1

Description of sections of the ESS questionnaire

Section	Number of questions	Description
A	6	Media use, internet use, social trust
B	45	Politics, including political interest, trust, electoral and other forms of participation, party allegiance, socio-political orientations, authoritarianism, immigration

C	36	Subjective wellbeing, social exclusion, crime, religion, perceived discrimination, national and ethnic identity, climate change, test questions, vote intention in EU referendum
D	30	Social inequalities in health and their determinants
E	28	Gender in contemporary Europe: rethinking inequality and backlash

3. Satisficing behaviour

Finally, we assess two indicators of satisficing–item non-response and straightlining–which tend to increase when respondents are fatigued or disengaged. Following Hanson et al. (2024), both measures are derived from the 21-item Schwartz Human Values Scale located near the end of the ESS questionnaire, where satisficing is most likely. Item non-response is examined within the values scale and for the household income variable, which typically shows higher non-response rates (Jabkowski & Piejut, 2023). Straightlining is defined as providing the same answer to at least 15 of the 21 items (Hanson et al.; Ainsaar et al. 2013). Given the diversity and sometimes contradictory nature of the values in the scale, consistently selecting the same responses across items are unlikely to reflect true preferences.

Chi-squared tests are used to assess whether the prevalence of these satisficing indicators differs between video and in-person interviews. See Table 2 for an overview of which countries were used in which part of the analysis.

Table 2

Countries Included in Each Part of the Analysis

Analysis Section	Rationale	Countries Included

Feasibility (ESS-11)	All countries that offered video interviewing	Finland, France, Iceland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Slovakia, Switzerland, Sweden, United Kingdom
Feasibility–contact mode	Countries that allowed first contact by telephone	Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden
ESS-11 sample composition	Countries with highest video interview uptake	Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden
ESS-10 vs ESS-11 sample composition comparison	Countries with sufficient video cases in both rounds	Finland, Iceland, Norway
Quality indicators (ESS-11)	Countries with highest video interview uptake	Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden

Results

Prevalence

Country uptake and characteristics

To address Research Question 1, we examine cross-national variation in the prevalence of video interviewing in ESS-11 and explore whether country-level and procedural factors help explain observed differences. As shown in Table 3, the prevalence of video interviewing varied substantially across countries, with the highest proportions observed in the Nordic region. Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden reported the largest shares of video interviews, ranging from 11.9% in Sweden to 48.4% in Norway. In contrast, all other participating countries conducted fewer than 5% of their interviews via video, showing fewer than 100 cases in each country. Comparing ESS-11 with ESS-10 indicates that while overall uptake declined in many countries, those with substantial use of video interviewing in ESS-10–particularly Finland, Iceland, and Norway–further increased their uptake in ESS-11.

Examining the characteristics of countries with the highest uptake reveals several noteworthy patterns. In ESS-10, overall internet use was correlated with higher video uptake;

however, contradictory to Hypothesis 1, this relationship is not evident in ESS-11. Although the two countries with the lowest uptake–Italy and Slovakia–also reported the lowest levels of regular internet use, other countries with high internet use, such as Switzerland and the Netherlands, still showed limited adoption. This suggests that general internet access alone does not explain cross-national variation in the uptake of video interviewing.

When looking at the type of sample that was being used, ESS-10 found that all countries that carried out a relatively large share of video interviews used individual samples instead of address-based samples (Hanson et al., 2024). This meant that they could contact respondents by name in advance of an interviewer visit. In ESS-11, almost all countries that offered video interviewing used individual samples (the only exceptions being the UK and Slovakia). This partly reflects that some address-sample countries that offered video interviewing at ESS-10 found take-up to be low, and so did not offer video again at ESS-11.

A closer review of country fieldwork documentation suggests that procedural differences may have played a role in the prevalence of video interviews. First, all countries with the highest video uptake permitted interviewers to make the first contact attempt by telephone. Telephone contact may provide a more conducive setting for introducing video interviewing as a viable option, compared with offering it on the doorstep where an in-person interview can be more easily arranged. Second, differences in how video interviewing was communicated to potential respondents also appear relevant. In high-uptake countries, advance letters commonly presented video interviewing as a standard alternative available according to respondent preference. By contrast, in countries with lower uptake, video interviewing was often mentioned only as an option in cases where in-person interviewing was not possible, and in some instances (e.g., France, Switzerland, Slovakia) it was not mentioned at all.

Taken together, the results indicate that Hypothesis 1 is partially supported. The descriptive patterns suggest that observed cross-national differences in video interview prevalence might reflect contextual and implementation-related factors rather than inherent differences in the feasibility of the mode. As such, caution is advised when interpreting country-level uptake as evidence that video interviewing is naturally more suitable in some countries than in others.

Table 3

Uptake of video interviews by country and country characteristics for ESS round 11

Country	**Number of video interviews in ESS-11**	**Proportion of all interviews done by video in ESS-11**	**Proportion of all interviews done by video in ESS-10**	**Use internet at least most days**	**Who carried out video interviews?**	**Type of sample**	**Whether country could make first contact with respondents by telephone**	**How VI was mentioned in the letter**
Finland	419	26.9%	15.2%	88.2%	Subset of face-to-face interviewers	Individual	yes	Interview can take place in person or via video according to *preference*
France	72	4.1%	2.3%	82%	Subset of face-to-face interviewers	Individual	no	Letter does not mention video interview
Iceland	352	41.8%	37%	96.2%	Most interviewers did both video and in-person, a small subset did only video	Individual	yes	Interview can take place in person or via video according to *preference*
Italy	15	0.5%	17.3%	71.7%	Subset of face-to-face interviewers	Individual	no	Video interview is mentioned as an option *if in-person interview isn't possible*
Netherlands	78	4.6%	16.9%	93.8%	Subset of face-to-face interviewers	Individual	No	Video interview is mentioned as an option *if in-person interview isn't possible*
Norway	647	48.4%	34.8%	95.4%	Subset of face-to-face interviewers	Individual	Yes	Interview can take place in person or via video according to *preference*
Slovakia	8	0.6%	0%	56.9%	Subset of face-to-face interviewers	Address	no	Letter does not mention video interview
Switzerland	57	4.1%	3.3%	87.8%	Small specialist team	Individual	no	Letter does not mention video interview
Sweden	147	11.9%	NA	92.8%	Subset of face-to-face interviewers	Individual	yes	Interview can take place in person or via video according to *preference*
UK	44	2.6%	4.8%	84.3%	Subset of face-to-face interviewers	Address	no	Video interview is mentioned as an option *if in-person interview isn't possible*

Note. While ESS-10 video interview proportions are outlined in this table, the table only includes countries that used video interviews in ESS-11. In total, 16 countries used video interviews in ESS-10.

Mode of contact attempt

As mentioned before, countries that could make first contact via phone had the highest uptake of video interviews. Table 4 examines this further by cross tabulating the mode of successful first contact and the mode in which the interview was conducted. Combining cases for Norway, Iceland, Finland and Sweden, the majority of first successful contacts were made by telephone. When contact was initiated in person, most respondents also agreed to complete their interview in person (80.6%), whereas only 19.4% opted for a video interview. In contrast, among respondents first contacted by telephone, nearly one-third (31%) chose to complete their interview via video, while 69% agreed to an in-person interview. Thus, telephone contact showed a higher proportion of video interviews compared to in-person contact.

These descriptive patterns are consistent with Hypothesis 1, which posited that the ability to make first contact by telephone would be associated with higher video interview uptake. Being contacted by telephone could make the option of a video interview more salient or convenient, thereby increasing uptake. However, these patterns are descriptive, and the relationship may partly reflect interviewer practices or national implementation strategies specific to countries that emphasised telephone contact in their fieldwork design. Moreover, telephone numbers are not available for all sample members, and individuals with and without available contact numbers may differ systematically in ways that are correlated with their propensity to participate via video.

Table 4

Mode of first contact attempt and participants agreed mode for the interview

Mode of first contact attempt	Agreed mode for interview	
	In-person	**Video**
In-person	108 (80.6%)	26 (19.4%)
Telephone	990 (69%)	444 (31%)

Note. Percentages refer only to respondents who agreed to an interview at the first contact attempt. The table includes pooled data from the countries with the highest uptake of video interviews (Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden), all of which permitted first contact attempts to be made by telephone.

Sample composition

ESS-11

To address Research Question 2, Table 5 compares the sociodemographic composition of respondents interviewed via video and in-person across the four countries with the highest video interview uptake–Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. Several statistically significant differences were evident. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, video respondents were substantially younger on average than in-person respondents (44.3 vs. 54.9 years, $p < .001$) and were significantly more likely to hold a university degree (57.5% vs. 33.6%, $p < .001$) and to be in paid work (78.6% vs. 51.9%, $p < .001$). Video respondents also lived in slightly larger households (2.9 vs. 2.4 persons, $p < .001$). By contrast, the proportions of men, individuals in a legal partnership, and those born outside of the country did not differ significantly between modes. See Appendix 1 for a full breakdown of sample characteristics between countries.

Overall, consistent with Hypothesis 2, these findings indicate that video interviewing tended to attract a younger and more socioeconomically advantaged segment of the population compared with in-person interviewing.

Table 5

Sample composition by mode for ESS round 11 for pooled countries

Mode of data collection	Age	% men	% legal partnership	% university educated	% at work	% not born in country	Household size
In-person	54.9***	50.9%	47.3%	33.6%***	51.9%***	10.4%	2.4***
Video	44.3***	49.2%	48.2%	57.5%***	78.6%***	10%	2.9***
Total	51.6	50.3%	47.6%	41.5%	60.3%	10.3%	2.6

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001. The pooled countries include Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, which were the countries with the highest uptake of video interviewing for the best comparability. The results were broadly consistent across the pooled countries.

ESS-11 and ESS-10

To address Research Question 3, we compared the composition of video interview respondents during the pandemic (ESS-10) with the post-pandemic sample in ESS-11. Table 6 compares the video interview sample composition for ESS-10 and ESS-11, restricted to Finland, Iceland, and Norway, the only countries with sufficient uptake in both rounds for valid comparison. While the overall profiles of video respondents remained broadly similar, several statistically significant differences emerged between rounds. In ESS-11 video respondents were slightly older on average (44.3 years) than those in ESS-10 (41.7 years; $p <$ .05) and were more likely to report being in a legal partnership (48.6% vs. 44.3%; $p < .05$). The proportion of video respondents in paid work remained stable at around 78%, and no significant differences were observed in gender composition, migration background, or household size. The most pronounced change, however, was in education level: the share of university-educated respondents rose from 50.4% in ESS-10 to 57.5% in ESS-11 ($p < .001$). Taken together, these findings provide support for Hypothesis 3, which anticipated increased socio-demographic selectivity among video interview respondents in the post-pandemic round.

Table 6

Sample composition of video interviews by mode for ESS round 10 and 11

ESS round	Age	% men	% legal partnership	% university education	% at work	Not born in country	Household size
ESS-10	41.7*	47.4%	44.3%*	50.4%***	77.9%	7.6%	3
ESS-11	44.3*	49.2%	48.2%*	57.5%***	78.6%	10%	2.9

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001. The pooled countries of interest are Finland, Iceland, and Norway. These countries were chosen as they had the highest uptake of video interviews in both ESS-10 and ESS-11 to allow for comparability of modes and between modes. The results are broadly consistent across the pooled countries.

Comparability across quality indicators

Respondent behaviour

To address Research Question 4, we first examined interviewer-reported respondent behaviour to assess whether video and in-person interviews differed in observable respondent engagement, comprehension and cooperation during the interview. Table 7 presents interviewer assessments across the four countries with the highest uptake of video interviewing. Within each country, the vast majority of respondents were judged to "often or very often" try to answer to the best of their ability and to understand the questions, with only minor fluctuations by mode. Across the four countries, 98.9% of video respondents and 98.7% of in-person respondents were perceived as trying to answer to the best of their ability, and understanding levels were similarly high (97.6% video vs. 97.8% in-person). Small and non-significant differences were observed in the proportion of respondents who were reluctant to answer (3% video vs. 3.5% in-person) or who asked clarification questions (3.7% video vs. 3.8% in-person). The only statistically significant difference concerned the presence of others who interfered with the interview, which was less common in video interviews (2.6%) than in in-person interviews (4.4%). Although this effect was modest, it suggests that video interviews may offer somewhat more privacy or reduce the likelihood of third-party interruptions compared to in-person visits.

Taken together, these findings support Hypothesis 4, with interviewers perceiving similar levels of respondent understanding, effort, and willingness to participate across modes, providing no evidence that video interviews compromised the quality of the interaction from the interviewer's perspective.

Table 7

Interviewer questionnaire regarding respondent behaviour by mode and country

Country	Mode of data collection	Respondent asked clarification questions (often or very often)	Respondent reluctant to answer (often or very often)	Respondent answered to best of ability (often or very often)	Respondent understood questions (often or very often)	Anyone present who interfered with the interview
Finland	In-person	2.7%	3.2%	99%	99%	.7%
	Video	.9%	2.6%	99.6%	99.6%	.9%
Iceland	In-person	6.8%	1.9%	98.8%	96.3%	9.9%**
	Video	3.2%	4.3%	99.5%	97.9%	2.2**
Norway	In-person	4.9%	1.8%	99.6%	96.9%	9%*
	Video	4.8%	1.8%	98.8%	97%	4.2%*
Sweden	In-person	2.8%	5.4%	98%	98%	2.3%
	Video	7.9%	6.6%	96.1%	93.4%	1.3%
All 4 countries	In-person	3.8%	3.5%	98.7%	97.7%	4.4%*
	Video	3.7%	3%	98.9%	97.6%	2.6%*

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001. The countries Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden were those with the highest uptake of video interviewing, ensuring comparability across modes. To control for sociodemographic differences between modes, the sample was restricted to respondents under age 60, living with a partner, and with at least secondary education.

Interview duration

To further address Research Question 4, we examined interview duration across modes. Table 8 presents the average duration of in-person and video interviews for each of the four countries with the highest video interview uptake, as well as the pooled average across these countries.

The country-level results show a mixed pattern. In Finland and Norway, video interviews were longer on average than in-person interviews, whereas in Iceland and Sweden they were shorter. The differences reached statistical significance in Finland, Iceland, and Norway. When pooling all four countries, the average duration was nearly identical across modes: 65.3 minutes for in-person interviews and 64.8 minutes for video interviews. This pooled difference was small and not statistically significant.

Taken together, these results provide support for Hypothesis 4, suggesting no systematic or consistent mode effect on interview duration. Although individual countries showed meaningful differences, these differences varied in direction and largely cancelled out when aggregated. Overall, video interviews did not appear to lengthen or shorten interviews in a meaningful or uniform way across countries.

Table 8

Interview duration for the main questionnaire by mode and country

Country	In-person	Video
Finland	59.65**	62.91**
Iceland	68.23**	61.66**
Norway	62.45***	67.32***
Sweden	70.02	66.41
All four countries	65.28	64.75

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001. The countries Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden were those with the highest uptake of video interviewing, ensuring comparability across modes. Outliers were removed if their interview time exceeded 3 hours.

Table 9 presents the average interview duration for each questionnaire section across in-person and video interviews in the four countries with the highest uptake of video interviewing. At the country level, patterns are mixed: in some countries and sections, video interviews took slightly longer (e.g., Finland and Norway in Sections A and C), whereas in others they were shorter (e.g., Iceland and Sweden in Sections B and D), with several of these differences reaching statistical significance.

When pooling across all four countries, however, a clearer pattern emerges. For every section (A–E), video interviews were slightly shorter on average than in-person interviews, with differences ranging from about 0.1 to 0.3 minutes. These pooled differences were statistically significant for Section B (7.8 vs. 7.6 minutes; $p < .05$) and Section D (9.4 vs. 9.1 minutes; $p < .05$), while remaining small and non-significant in the other sections. Taken together with the overall duration of the main questionnaire, these findings suggest a modest tendency for video interviews to progress slightly more quickly at the section level, even though country-specific patterns vary and the absolute differences are small. The fact that overall interview length does not differ between modes despite these shorter section durations may reflect additional time spent at the start or end of video interviews–such as establishing the connection, confirming audio/video functionality, explaining the process, or closing the interview–which could offset small efficiencies during the questionnaire itself.

Table 9

Average interview time per section per country by mode

Section	Description	Country	In-person	Video
A	Media use; internet use; social trust	Finland	11.2**	12**
		Iceland	13	11.9
		Norway	11.6*	12.2*
		Sweden	13.2	12.7
		All 4 countries	12.3	12.1
B	Politics	Finland	7.6	7.9
		Iceland	8.2***	7.2***
		Norway	7.5	7.7
		Sweden	7.9*	7.3*
		All 4 countries	7.8*	7.6*
C	Sociocultural	Finland	10.3*	11.2*
		Iceland	10.9***	9.5***
		Norway	10.1**	10.8**
		Sweden	11.9	11.8
		All 4 countries	10.9	10.7
D	Social inequalities in health and their determinants	Finland	9*	9.5*
		Iceland	9.6**	8.7**
		Norway	8.8*	9.2*
		Sweden	10.1*	9.1*
		All 4 countries	9.4*	9.1*

E	Gender in contemporary Europe	Finland	15.3	15.4
		Iceland	18.9***	16.8***
		Norway	17.8**	18.9**
		Sweden	18.9	18.2
		All 4 countries	17.7	17.4

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001. for each section, outliers were removed if their interviewer time exceeded 90 minutes

Satisficing

To further address Research Question 4, we examined satisficing behaviour, focusing on two indicators: item nonresponse and straightlining. Item nonresponse was assessed for both the Human Values items and the household income question, while straightlining was measured using responses to the Human Values scale.

Item non-response

Table 11 compares the average proportion of missing responses in the Human Values items for in-person and video interviews across the four countries with the highest uptake of video interviewing. The results show no consistent or statistically significant differences between modes. At the country level, video respondents had fewer missing responses than in-person respondents in Finland and Iceland, but the pattern reversed in Norway and Sweden. When pooling across all four countries, the average proportion of missing responses remained low in both modes (1% for in-person vs. 0.7% for video), and this difference was not statistically significant.

Overall, these findings support Hypothesis 4, showing no evidence that video interviewing leads to higher item nonresponse on the Human Values scale. Missingness was minimal in both modes, suggesting that respondents were similarly willing and able to provide complete answers regardless of whether the interview took place in-person or via video. This slightly differs from the ESS Round 10 findings, where significant mode

differences were observed, with video interviews showing fewer missing responses. See Appendix 3 for a comparison between ESS-10 and ESS-11.

Table 11

Average proportion of missing responses in human values item per mode per country

Country	In-person	Video	Total
Finland	1.1%	.3%	.8%
Iceland	2.3%	.6%	1.4%
Norway	.6%	.8%	.8%
Sweden	.6%	1.6%	.8%
All 4 countries	1%	.7%	.9%

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

Table 12 presents the proportion of missing responses to the household income question, which typically shows higher nonresponse rates due to its sensitivity. As with the Human Values items, the results reveal no consistent or statistically significant differences between in-person and video interviews. The direction of the mode difference varied across countries: video respondents had higher missingness in Finland and Sweden, but lower missingness in Iceland and Norway. The only country that showed a significant difference between the modes was Finland with .3% missingness for in-person and 2.2% missingness for video ($p < .05$). In line with Hypothesis 4, when pooled across all four countries, the average proportion of missing income responses showed no significant difference across the interview modes (2% vs. 2.2%).

Table 12

Average proportion of missing responses for household income by country

Country	In-person	Video	Total
Finland	.3%*	2.2%*	1.1
Iceland	3.7	2.7%	3.2%
Norway	4%	1.5%	2.5%
Sweden	1.3%	4%	1.7%
All 4 countries	2%	2.2%	2.1%

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Straightlining

Table 13 presents the number and proportion of respondents identified as straight-liners in the Human Values Scale–those selecting the same response option across at least 15 of the 21 items. When pooling across the four countries, the prevalence of straightlining remained very low across both modes and the difference was not statistically significant (both around 1%).

Overall, the straightlining results are in line with Hypothesis 4, showing no indication that video interviewing increases satisficing behaviour. Combined with the findings on item nonresponse, the results suggest that respondents in video interviews were no more likely than in-person respondents to exhibit low-effort response patterns. Consistent with earlier analyses, data quality in video interviewing appears broadly comparable to that achieved in in-person interviewing. The results mirror the findings of ESS Round 10, where no significant differences between the modes were found. See Appendix 4 for a comparison between ESS-10 and ESS-11.

Table 13

Participants identified as straighliners by mode per country

Country	In-person	Video
Finland	0%*	1.3%*
Iceland	1.2%	1.1%
Norway	1.8%	0.9%
Sweden	1.3%	0%
All 4 countries	1.02%	1%

*Note. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.* Straightliners are identified if the same answer is selected for >= 15 questions.

Discussion

This study set out to reassess the role of live video interviewing within the European Social Survey in a post-pandemic fieldwork environment. By revisiting the core analytical dimensions previously examined in ESS-10–prevalence, sample composition, and data quality–we aimed to determine whether patterns observed under pandemic conditions reflect structural features of video interviewing or were shaped primarily by the unique health, behavioural, and operational constraints present in 2020–2022. The results show both continuity and meaningful shifts. We discuss these findings and outline emerging implications for mixed-mode survey designs.

ESS-11 shows substantial cross-national variation in video interviewing uptake, broadly replicating but also diverging from ESS-10 patterns. As before, the Nordic countries carried out most video interviews, but fewer countries achieved sizeable samples in ESS-11, suggesting that pandemic conditions had temporarily boosted demand for remote interviewing. In typical fieldwork contexts, video interviewing appears to compete with in-person interviewing on less favourable terms.

However, in the countries that did achieve substantial uptake–most notably Finland, Iceland, and Norway–video shares were higher than those observed in ESS-10. This suggests that when strong fieldwork infrastructure and established operational practices are in place, video interviewing remains a robust and attractive complementary mode even in post-pandemic conditions. Clear communication of the video option and the ability to make first contact by telephone emerged as key contextual factors shaping uptake.

In ESS-11, the profile of video respondents closely replicated ESS-10 and prior research: video participants were younger, more highly educated, and more likely to be in paid work, again indicating a more socioeconomically advantaged group. ESS-11 additionally showed that video respondents lived in slightly larger households on average.

Comparisons across rounds suggest that some differences have intensified post-pandemic. The share of university-educated respondents choosing video increased further in ESS-11, indicating an even stronger concentration of highly educated participants. This likely reflects a shift from necessity-driven mode choice during ESS-10 to preference-driven selection in ESS-11, with highly educated respondents being more comfortable opting for video. Video respondents were also slightly older and more often in a legal partnership than in ESS-10. Overall, ESS-11 reinforces that video interviewing systematically attracts a selective subgroup–and that this selectivity is not pandemic-specific but a structural characteristic of the mode that becomes more pronounced when respondents are free to choose.

Interview durations in ESS-11 were highly comparable to ESS-10, with video and in-person interviews taking similar amounts of time. This reinforces earlier evidence that video interviewing does not lengthen the survey process (Hanson et al., 2024). Section-level patterns showed that video interviews were occasionally slightly shorter, possibly reflecting more efficient pacing or a more task-focused interaction when interviewer and respondent are not co-present.

Interviewer assessments of respondent behaviour were also broadly equivalent across modes. Consistent with ESS-10, there were no significant differences emerged in item nonresponse or straightlining (Hanson et al., 2024). These results add to the growing body of evidence that interviewer-administered video interviewing delivers data quality similar to in-person interviews (Asensio et al., 2025; Kocar et al., 2025). That these patterns persist in a post-pandemic context is particularly important: it demonstrates that the high data quality observed in ESS-10 was not merely a product of pandemic-specific circumstances or temporary normalisation of video-communication.

Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations. Most importantly, the analysis is based on observational data rather than an experimental design, meaning the findings should be interpreted descriptively. Additionally, it compares only two cross-sectional rounds (ESS-10 and ESS-11). While these provide a useful pandemic vs post-pandemic contrast, two data points limit the extent to which observed differences can be interpreted as stable longer-term trends rather than round-specific fieldwork effects. A further limitation is that video interviewing remains a minority mode in most countries, restricting meaningful comparisons in low-uptake contexts and limiting generalisability beyond countries where video interviewing was used at scale. Cross-national differences in how video interviewing was implemented also complicate interpretation, as observed patterns may reflect operational choices rather than mode effects. Given that the ESS is transitioning to web surveys, future research should use other survey infrastructures to evaluate the longer-term role of video interviewing and its implications for respondent selectivity and data quality in mixed-mode designs.

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Appendix

Appendix 1

Sample composition by country

Country	Mode of data collection	Age	% men	% legal partnership	% university educated	% at work	% not born in country	Household size
Finland	In-person	56.3***	49.3%	45.4%	30.8%***	44.6%***	.7%	2.1***
	Video	43.5***	49.4%	47%	57.8%***	75.4%***	.9%	2.6***
Iceland	In-person	54.7***	52.6%*	51.22%	35.2%***	62.86%***	9.9%**	2.7***
	Video	44.3***	45.5%*	49.2%	59.7%***	84.94%***	2.2**	3.3***
Norway	In-person	52.1***	50.7%	42.1%*	34.4%***	52.4%***	9%*	2.5***
	Video	44.6***	48.7%	48.8%*	58.8%***	78.7%***	4.2%*	2.9***
Sweden	In-person	55.3***	47.3%	51%	35.4%**	54.3%***	2.3%	2.4***
	Video	44.9***	51.7%	46.9%	46.3%**	72.1%***	1.3%	2.9***
All 4 countries	In-person	54.9***	49.1%	47.34%	33.6%***	51.9%***	4.4%*	2.4***
	Video	44.3***	50.8%	48.24%	57.5%***	78.6***	2.6%*	2.9***

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Appendix 2

Average proportion of missing responses in human values item per mode per country per ESS round

ESS round	Country	In-person	Video
11	**Finland**	1.1%	.3%
	Iceland	2.3%	.6%
	Norway	.6%	.8%
10	**Finland**	0.12%	0.01%
	Iceland	0.36%	0.15%
	Norway	0.08%	0.04%

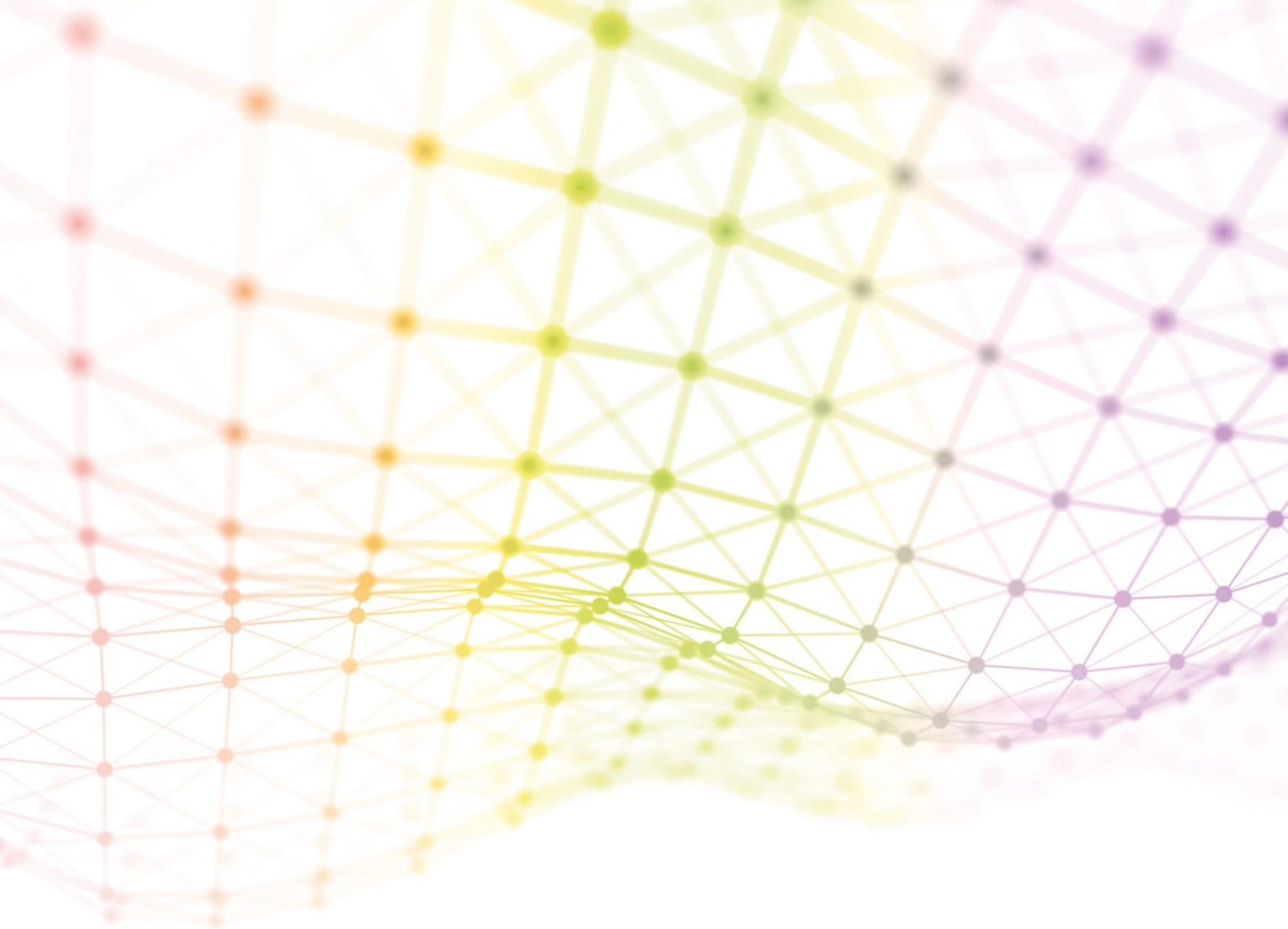
Note. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Appendix 3

Percentage of respondents straightlining for the Schwartz basic human value question by country and ESS-round

ESS round	Country	In-person	Video
11	**Finland**	0%*	1.3%*
	Iceland	1.2%	1.1%
	Norway	1.8%	0.9%
10	**Finland**	1.4%	0%
	Iceland	1.4%	0.6%
	Norway	1%	0.6%

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001



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