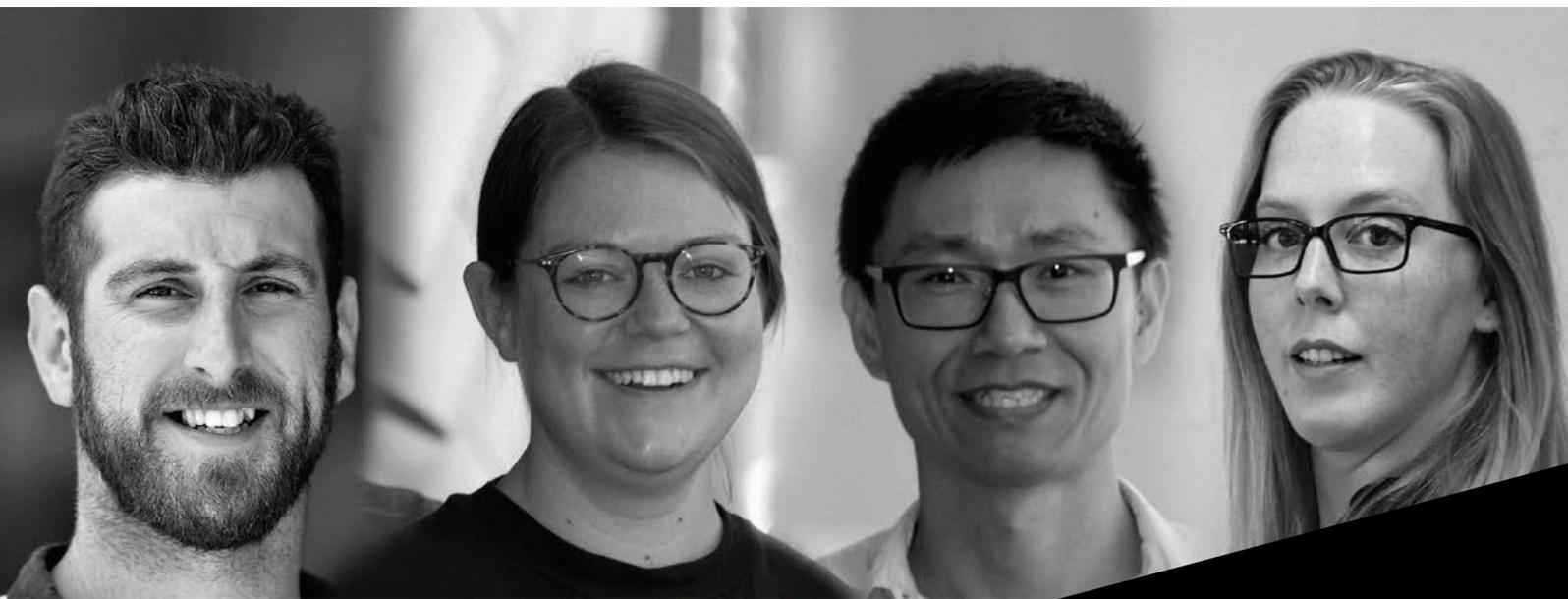




Melbourne Graduate
School of Education

Life Patterns Project

PATHWAYS IN ADULT LIFE: Summary Report on the 2020 Survey



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At the Youth Research Collective we acknowledge the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which our centre is located and where we conduct our research and teaching. We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past, present and future.

ADULT LIFE: SUMMARY REPORT ON THE 2020 SURVEY OF PARTICIPANTS IN COHORT 1

INTRODUCTION

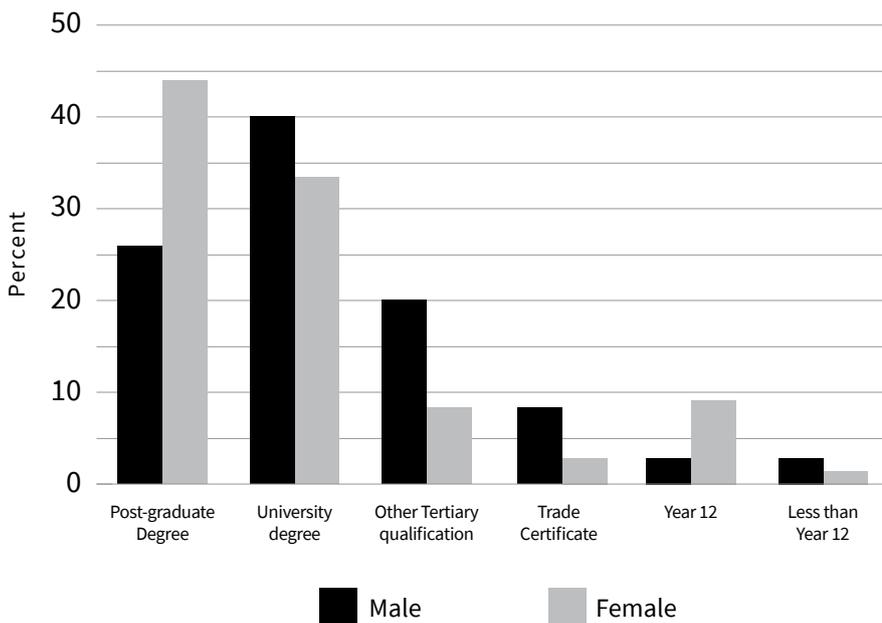
We are pleased to provide you with this latest update on the Life Patterns research project in which you are a highly valued participant. This report presents the results of the survey you completed in 2020. The survey is part of an ongoing research project by the Youth Research Collective (formerly Youth Research Centre), at The University of Melbourne. It explores different areas of adult life, including your experiences in the workplace, your family and personal relationships, and health and wellbeing. With your contribution, we are able to provide valuable insights that can inform governments and social institutions about your generation.



SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

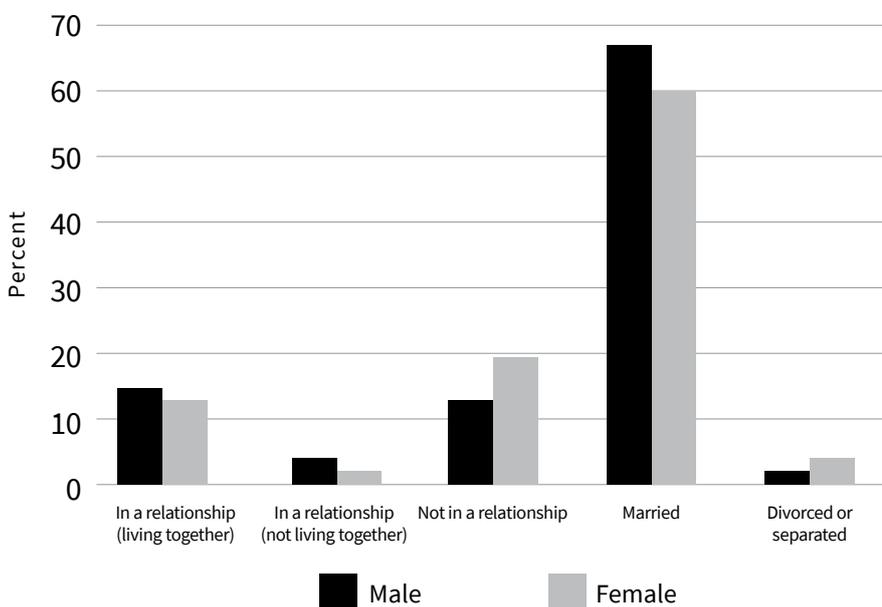
This report is based on the responses of 250 Cohort 1 participants aged 46-47 years. Two-thirds of the surveys were completed by women. The majority of you were living in metropolitan centres (68%), with 15% living in regional cities and 17% living in a country town or rural area.

Figure 1 Education by gender



Over 70% of you have a university or post-graduate degree. Women are more likely to have a post-graduate degree than men (43% vs 26%), while men are more likely to have other tertiary qualification or trade certificate than women (See figure 1)

Figure 2 Marital status by gender



In terms of relationship status, men are more likely to be married or in a relationship than women (See figure 2).

FAMILY

Sixty-eight per cent of you reported being in a parenting role. Men were more likely than women to be in a parenting role: 74% compared to 65%. Over half of parents had two children (54%), 10% had one child, 32% had three children, and 4% had more than three children.

Life since becoming a parent

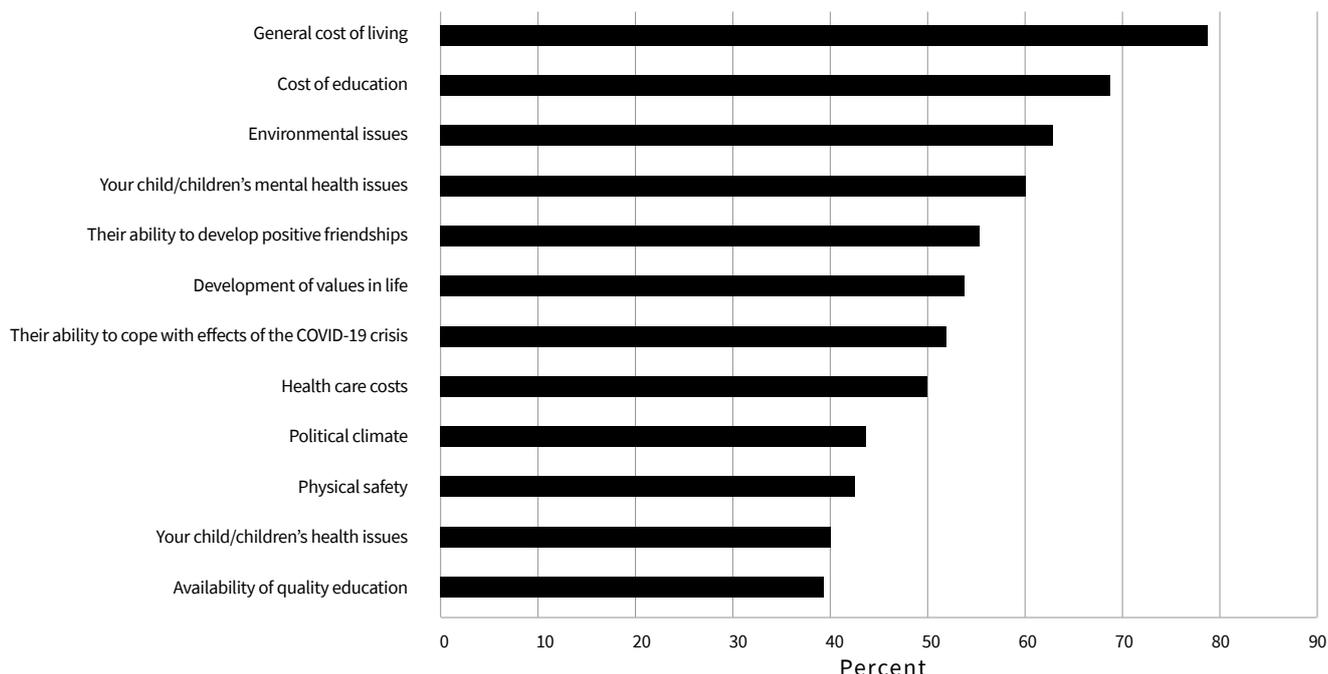
Of the 168 participants who responded to the question about life since becoming a parent, over 80% were happy (either very satisfied or satisfied) with the support from their partners and family, 73% were happy with their personal health. Male parents' level of satisfaction is quite different from female parents in two aspects: support from their partners, and the way childcare tasks are divided between you and your partner (See table 1).

Table 1 Level of satisfaction since becoming a parent by gender

	Satisfied and very satisfied		
	%Men	%Women	%All
Support from your partner	91.83	78.18	82.74
Support from your family	81.03	83.63	82.74
Personal health	75.86	71.82	73.21
Financial situation	82.76	79.09	80.36
Balancing paid work with family commitments	74.14	67.28	69.64
The way childcare tasks are divided between you and your partner	87.93	61.82	70.83

For those of you in a parenting role, the top three concerns for your child/children's future were general cost of living, cost of education, and environmental issues. Mental health issues and development of positive friendships were also significant concerns held by over half of the participants who are in a parenting role (see figure 3).

Figure 3 Parents' concern for their child/children's future

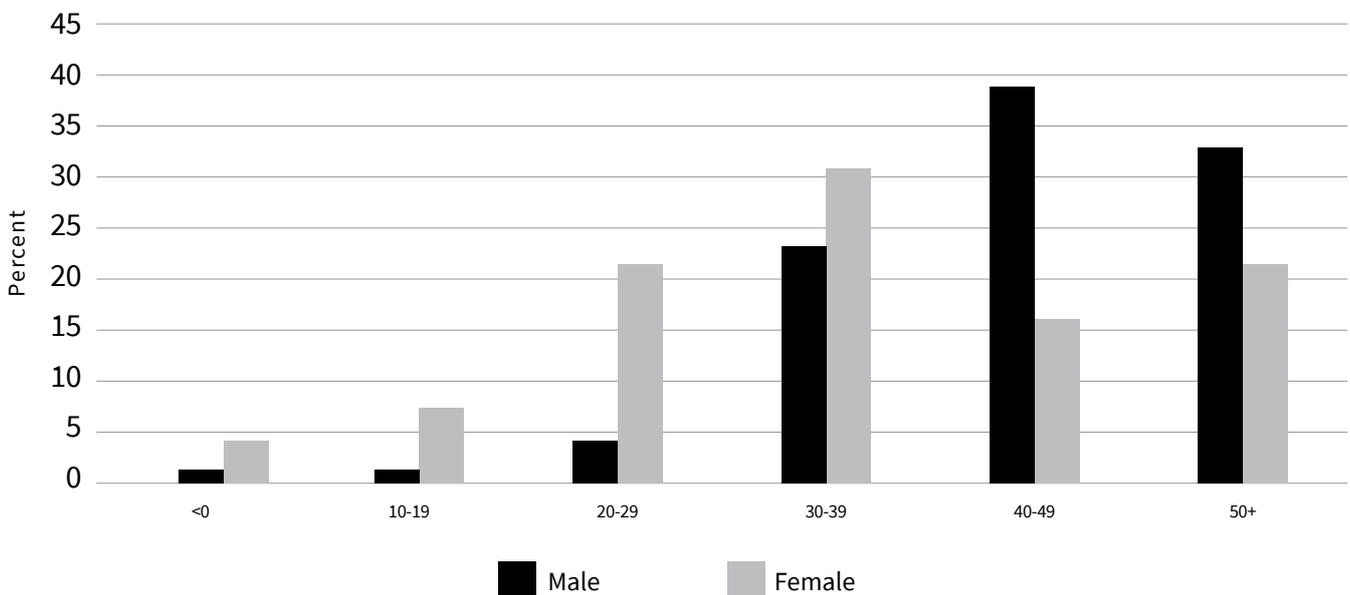


EMPLOYMENT

In 2020, 56% of you were employed full time, 35% were employed part time. Men were much more likely to be employed full time than women (86% compared to 42%), while women were more likely to be working in part-time jobs than men (46% compared to 10%). Fifteen percent of you were working more than one job. Men were more likely than women to have a permanent contract for their main job (81% compared to 75%), while women were more likely than men to work on a casual basis (11% compared to 4%).

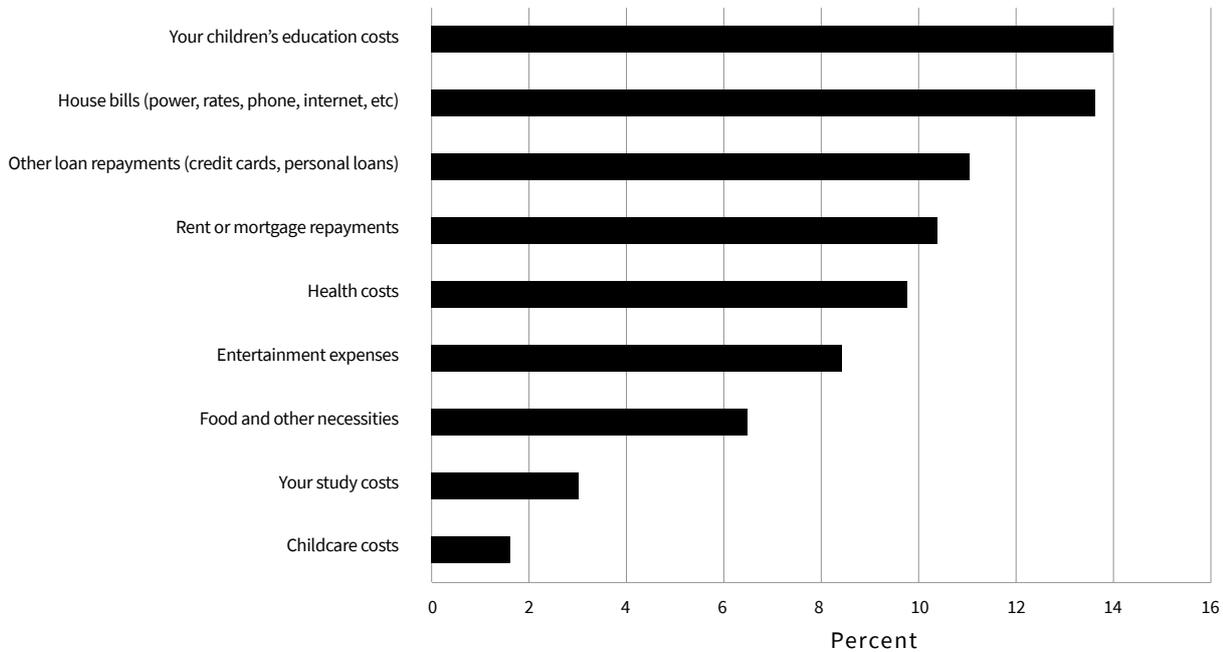
With regards to your paid work hours, 29% of you indicated that the hours of your paid work varied from week to week. There were also distinct gender differences in hours of paid employment - see Figure 4. Women were more likely than men to be employed for less than 40 hours per week.

Figure 4 Paid work hours by gender



In terms of job security, 37% of you have experienced job insecurity in the past five years. This insecurity and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your paid work were implicated in your capacity to meet different kinds of costs in your life. Figure 5 shows that over ten percent of you have had difficulty meeting the costs of children's education, household bills, rent or mortgage payments, and other loan repayments over the year prior to the survey.

Figure 5 Difficulties in meeting life expenses over the past year



About one third of you indicated that COVID had affected your work plans for the next five years (38% of men and 30% of women). Many of you commented that COVID has led to you postponing your study and work plans:

I was looking at doing a Cert IV in training & assessment but have not due to face-to-face restrictions. Also, not the best time to change careers. (Male, animal technician in a capital city)

I was keen to add to my post graduate qualifications this or next year, but now with being cut to part time hours at work it's not financially possible. (Female, accountant in a country town)

I was about to start my own business which I've decided against because I couldn't cope with the uncertainty and pressure of home schooling at the same time. (Female, social worker in a capital city)

I was thinking of looking for new work. Won't be much around when it gets back to normal. If it ever does. (Female, delivery driver in a regional city)

I will now be owed long service leave in a few months, my job is mostly secure and the job market pretty dead so there is no way I would be job searching unless I had to. As all work is currently remote and budgets are under extreme pressure, I will not be requesting my employer to pay for any study, I'm keeping my head low as it were. (Female, IT specialist in a capital city)

It was also obvious from your comments that the pandemic has increased your job insecurity and work pressure. For some, the impact is very strong.

Scary at work with poor leadership at the beginning of COVID. Most of operating cancelled but had to learn telehealth which took time and energy. I do lots of pain medicine, and everyone's pain is worse this year - so usual consulting more stressful. Income has dropped by 30%. Less running around on weekends as no kids sport so at least downtime better, plenty of sleep. (Female, doctor in a regional city)

My company made my current role redundant, which I lost my company car, mobile phone, credit card and salary reduction. I get reinstated back in the company on less money and hours. (Male, sales in a capital city)

Own real estate business. office closed. Staff had to be put off. No money coming in. Don't think I will survive. renting. two children to support. not good. (Male, business owner in a capital city)

Own a travel agency. Major impact on business, so far 6 months of 98% downturn in revenue. Could be another 18 months, am looking at applying for work or changing business model. (Female, travel agent)



HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The year of 2020 has put tremendous pressure on the health and wellbeing of many Australians. In the survey, we asked questions about your physical and mental health, life satisfaction, and civic experiences, which are all closely related to your wellbeing.

Health

Almost half of you (45%) felt physically healthy in the months prior to your completion of the survey, 30% felt unhealthy or very unhealthy physically, and the rest of you felt neutral. When it comes to mental health, only 37% of you indicated that you felt mentally (very) healthy in the few months prior to the survey, while 34% of you felt unhealthy or very unhealthy mentally. For many of you, COVID has obviously taken a toll on your physical and mental health:

With lockdown restrictions and working from home I have found it difficult to remain motivated and positive. I have experienced a lot of work and family life pressure and this has impacted my emotional wellbeing. (Female, social worker in a capital city)

Unemployment has had some effect on my ability to focus and even achieve tasks around the house. I'm monitoring it, aware but not alarmed! (Male, living in a country town)

Stress, mental health, burnout, exhaustion. (Female, accountant in a capital city)

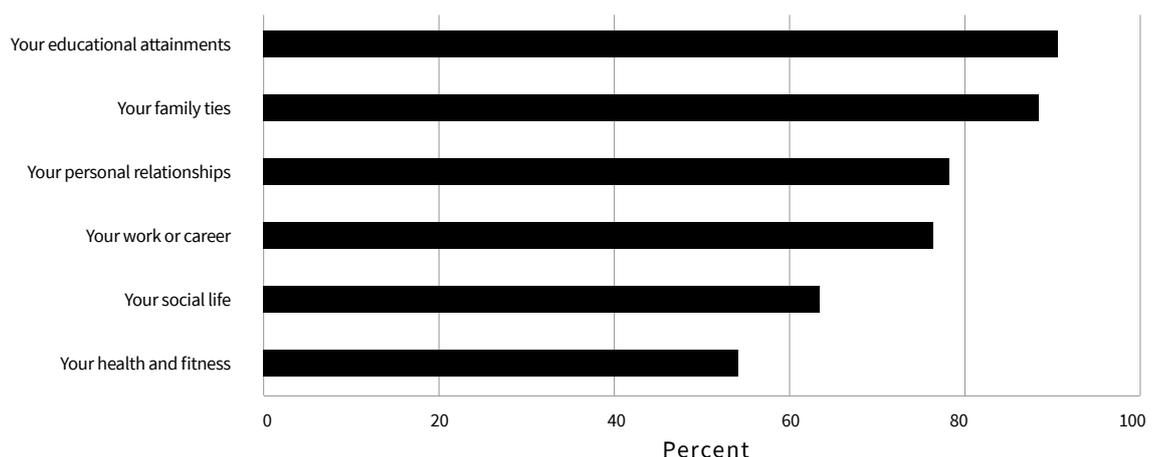
No time for exercise. Increase workload & work - stress with double COVID-19 including teaching/work & home schooling (only 4 weeks). Increase binge eating, insomnia, some increase in alcohol but 1-2 drinks, 3-5 days/week (used to be once/week). (Female, veterinarian in a country town)

COVID-19 has affected my mental health in ways I never imagined could be possible. trying to manage the juggle of life/kids/work/remote schooling is taking its toll. (Female, operations manager in a capital city)

Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction is a strong predictor of wellbeing. In the survey, 86% of you were very satisfied or satisfied with your life overall. There were discrepancies in your level of satisfaction with different aspects of life. The majority were satisfied with your educational attainments (90%), family life (88%), and personal relationships (80%). Unlike previous surveys which indicated a high level of satisfaction with social life, you were less satisfied with your social life in 2020. This might be associated with the restrictions to social activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Consistent with previous surveys, health/fitness was still the area you felt least satisfied with in 2020 (see Figure 6).

Figure 6 Satisfaction with life



Civic Experiences

Community participation is closely associated with mental and even physical wellbeing. While your level of participation in civic activities is low in general, the three areas of contributing to charitable organizations within the community, staying informed of events in the community, and helping members of the community have higher levels of participation (see Figure 7). Below are some typical examples of these community engagement activities:

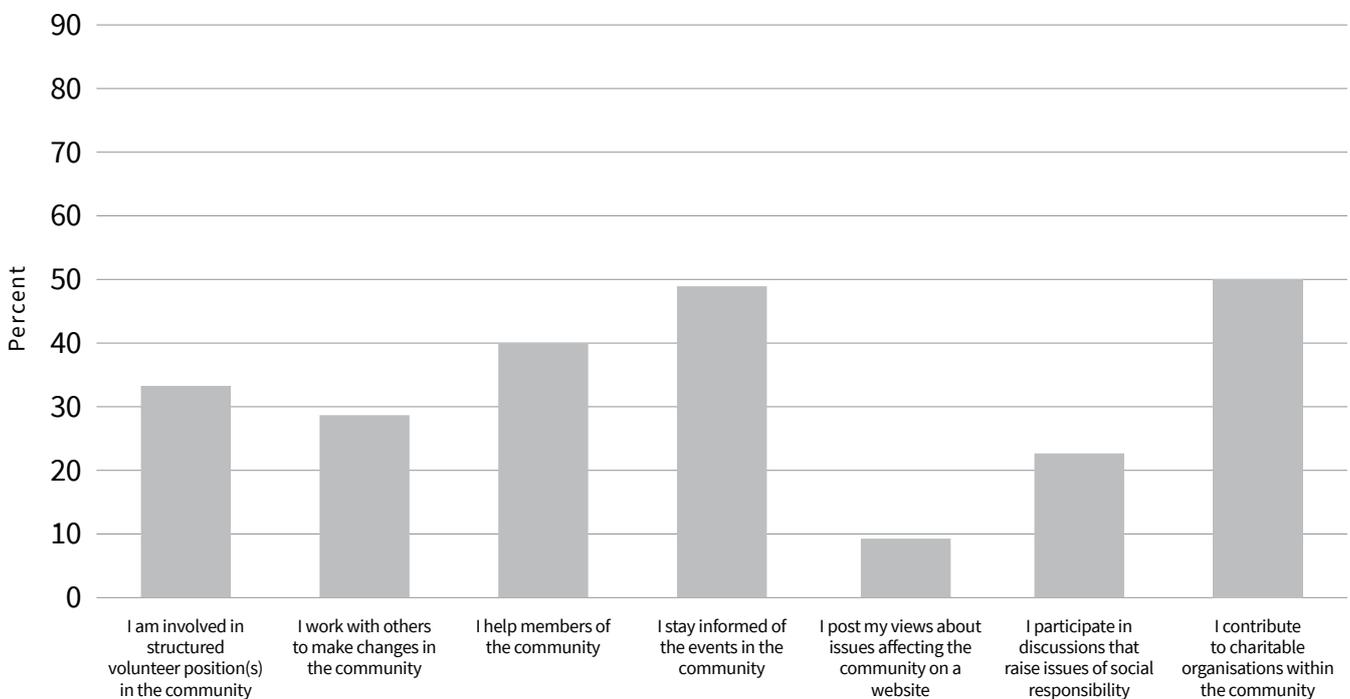
Youth group leader. Volunteer at church. volunteer at children's school. Provide food for charity food pantry. Donate money to charitable organisations. (Female, nurse educator in a capital city)

Taekwondo trainer. (Female, croupier in a capital city)

Secretary of the neighbourhood house. working on a steering committee to develop public land into a bushfire place of last resort/community centre/CFA station/climate change education centre. (Female, education consultant in rural area)

Tried to lobby for roundabout safety for two years - talking to local MP, VicRoads, community. Not successful - needs someone to die before VicRoads will do anything. (Female, radiologist in a capital city)

Figure 7 Level of participation in activities in local community



High (level of participation 6–10)

Your capacity to participation in community activities is often restricted by physical conditions and work and family commitments, as well as the COVID pandemic in 2020. However, the comments below show how some of you tried to overcome restrictions and participate where possible:

With COVID and a young child not much at the moment but do post views and complete social survey from local members of parliament. (Female, teacher in a capital city)

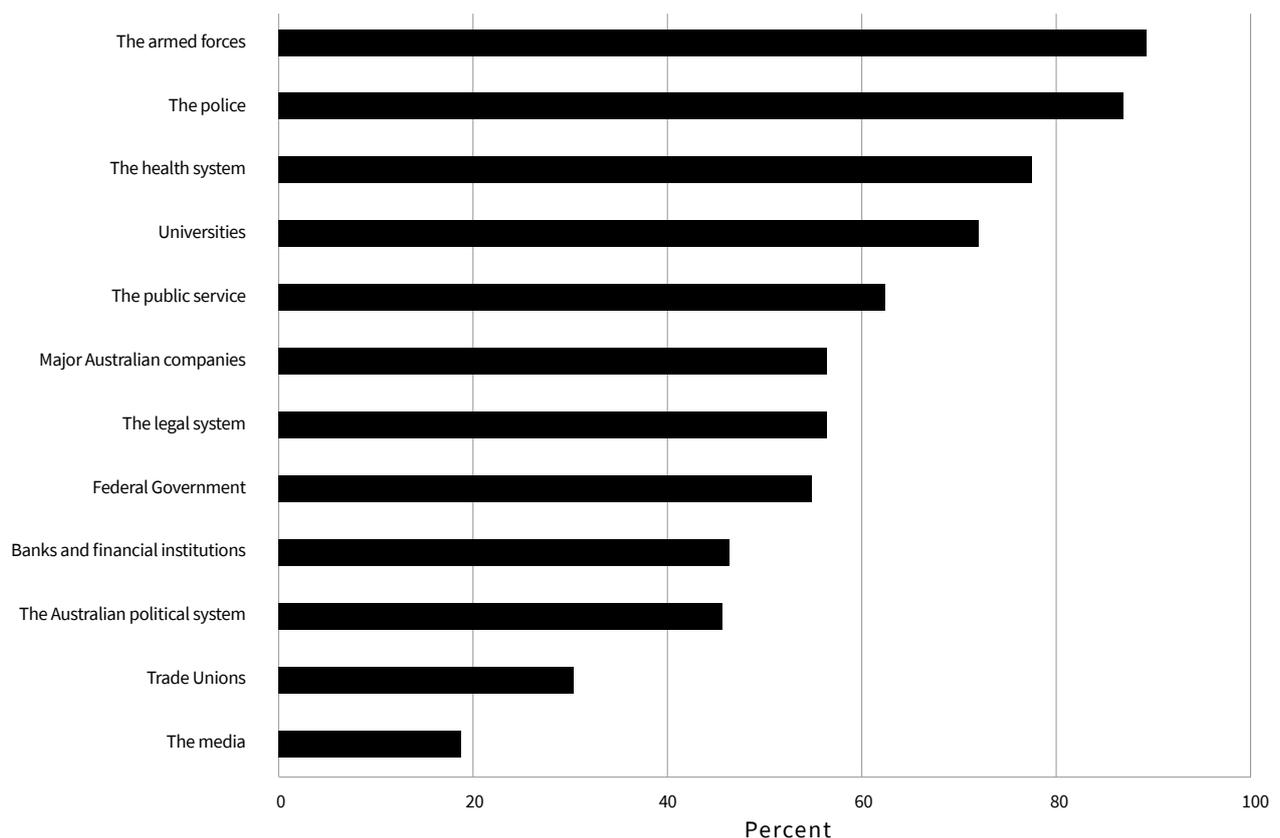
While physically I can't participate as I would like due to ill health, I do still try to stay in contact with those groups I support - such as animal and environmental groups. we always check on our neighbours too. (Female, accountant in a country town)

Volunteering in my local community to assist with food drops, shopping assistance and accommodation for those affected by COVID. (Female, clinical nurse consultant in a capital city)

With the COVID-19 crisis, participation in community activities has dropped off a lot. I usually go to church, but have not been going due to COVID. My children are involved in girl guides and scouts organisations. (Female, teacher in a country town)

Over 80% of you had a high level of confidence (either a great deal or quite a lot) in the armed forces and the police. Your levels of confidence in the health system and universities were also high (over 70%). About half of you either had a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the Australian political system, and banks and financial institutions. However, only 30% of you had confidence in trade unions, and the media was the least trusted organisation with only 19% of you reporting either a great deal or quite a lot of confidence (see Figure 8).

Figure 8 Confidence in organisations



Here are some comments that further illustrate your level of confidence in organisations:

We have no energy policy in Australia - it's disgraceful - and we've lost a decade watching politicians fight over the environment and energy. We have gone from world leaders to an unsavoury colonial outpost. No innovation. re the media - I only watch SBS. I get all my news from international sites as the standard of journalism in Australia is awful. (Female, manager in a capital city)

Unions have destroyed too many industries due to their agendas. Media skew their reports depending on their own agendas. Governments need more accountability on spending. (Male, technical support in a capital city)

The undermining of the ABC by the LNP and concentration of media ownership in a few hands (Murdoch etc.) means media in Australia do a bad job of holding our leaders to account, and our leaders are appalling. (Male, editor in rural area)

Political system lacks substance. decisions made are motivated around being reelected as opposed to what is best for the country. (Male, financial analyst in a capital city)

Public service (including health and police) are doing an amazing job. Federal politicians on the other hand are behaving poorly in their bickering and side sniping and the way they undermine each other. Australia needs stability in its political system to move forward after a shocking period of fire, flood and COVID-19. The media has resorted to ambulance chasing behaviours and sensationalising every little nuance when they should be reporting more responsibly and accurately. (Female, scientist in a regional city)

Like most I am exasperated by our political and legal systems. I work in the public service and can see the good that they do, but my husband is with Victoria Police and I see how under-resourced they are, and I find it concerning, yet I have faith in those left behind to do the job. I cannot fault our health system for my own health, and as a parent of children that have required care in the health system. (Female, operations manager in a capital city)



MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES IN AUSTRALIA TODAY

The three most important issues you nominated in the survey were health issues and the maintenance of health system (nominated by 79 participants), economy (nominated by 47 participants), and environment (nominated by 42 participants). The issues of politics and international relations, unemployment and job security, social inequality and cohesion were also nominated, though less frequently.

Health

Health was nominated as the top issue in 2020. Although usual concerns about physical and mental health were mentioned in your nominations as before, COVID-19 took the foreground in your comments on health.

The pandemic has changed our focus on everything. Right now, we need to consider people's physical health but also their mental health as we deal with this situation. (Female, human resource manager in a capital city)

The impact of mental health on people due to fear and uncertainties around COVID-19 are going to need a great deal of work over the next few years. (Male, in a country town)

Once in a hundred year pandemic is such a horror for our world/country. It is so very sad. Mental health is a huge issue but now with COVID it is even more important. (Female, accountant in a country town)

Against the background of COVID, in which the health system was under tremendous pressure, some of you expressed concerns about the sustainability of the health system.

The health system is a disaster, Medicare is at risk, privatization is wrong and depletes services and caring in exchange for profit of the few. The government's decision to move to a multi-user pays system has resulting in longer wait times and more expensive care. (Female, IT specialist in a capital city)

Public health/Medicare needs to be improved and protected. Less privately run care agencies. (Female, academic in a country town)



Economy

Concerns about the economy mainly revolved around the recovery of the economy and job opportunities from the impact of the pandemic.

The economy must take priority to ensure the country can recover from the pandemic. (Female, office administrator in a regional city)

I think it will see a lot of small/medium business close, a lot of people out of work, the federal govt, had done their best with the help and support but some will just not survive. this will put greater stress on all aspects of the economy. (Male, electrician in a regional city)

Getting the economy back on track after COVID-19. Ensuring people can get jobs and small business can continue and not collapse. (Female, corporate services director in a capital city)

A few of you expressed concerns about financial security (due to significantly increased expenses for public funding and the impact of COVID on people's paid employment) and economic independence in respect to foreign ownership and diversification of trading partners and relationships.

Strong, independent, diversified, multi-layer economy, which does not mean the same things as protectionism or withdrawal from international trade, but does mean maintaining multiple trading relationships. (Male, IT consultant in a capital city)

Political interference & foreign interference - Australia needs to distance itself further from China. (Female, nurse manager in a capital city)

Our governments are looking for profit and are selling off all assets and infrastructure to foreign ownership. (Female, authorised officer in a country town)



Environment

Although some attention was diverted to the impact of the pandemic on health and economy, environmental issues were still nominated by you as one of the three most important issues in Australia.

The government needs to stop making climate change a political topic. (Female, admin officer in a capital city)

The environment and caring for it should be one of our biggest concerns, proper care of our bush and rivers needs to be a priority. (Female, IT specialist in a capital city)

Pollution and climate change need urgent attention, the longer we leave it, the harder it is to stop. (Female, business owner in a capital city)

I was tempted to write climate change three times. While COVID-19 is the issue of the moment, climate change will cost 10x more lives and have vastly bigger effects. (Male, editor in rural area)

Efficient and sustainable use of our resources (financial, physical, intellectual, human etc.), which does not mean the same things as rampant environmentalism buttt does mean minimising waste. (Male, IT consultant in a capital city)

Other visible issues that emerged from your nominations - though less frequently - include politics and international relations, employment and job security, social equality and cohesion. They are epitomised by the comments below:

Increasingly right-wing government, politicians playing politics not implementing scientifically valid policy. Old white blokes with lots of money controlling assets - media, resources, politics. (Female, doctor in a regional city)

Since the Howard government we've had a revolving door of PMs/political parties. Hopefully, this may have stopped but a bit more respect in parliament (both ways) wouldn't go astray. I have many immigrant friends who came here for a better life and cherish Australian values, but it seems, every day to them and myself, this is slowly being watered down until you can't even speak openly and honestly with one another. (Male, musician in a regional city)

Providing secure/stable jobs for people, reducing inequality and unemployment. (Female, social worker in a capital city)

Society is poorly integrated though - have/have nots, educated/uneducated. Diversity is good but a common ground is needed to allow exchange/tolerance/discourse. Geo-politics & Australia's position related to the US & China will become more important in the short term. (Male, urban designer in a capital city)

Democracy is seriously under threat - news media monopolies, social media and tech companies have too much control and not enough regulation, politicians acting in their own self-interests and prioritising corporations over citizens, big corporations that pay no tax, etc. (Female, advisor in a capital city)



We appreciate and thank you for your contribution and we look forward to seeing how future years go for you and the group.

For more information on the Life Patterns Project visit our website:
<https://education.unimelb.edu.au/ycr/research/life-patterns>

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