

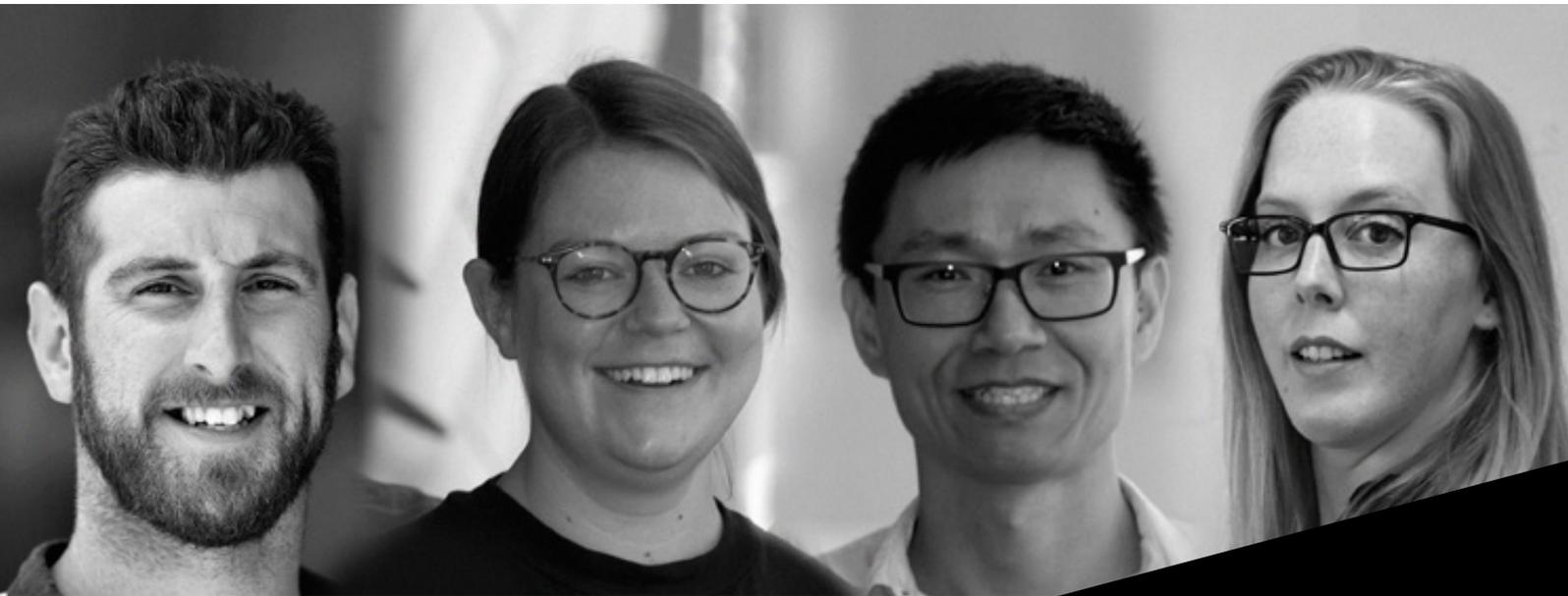


Melbourne Graduate
School of Education

Life Patterns Project

PATHWAYS IN ADULT LIFE: SUMMARY REPORT ON THE 2020 SURVEY

CAN YOU HEAR ME... WHAT ABOUT NOW... IS THIS BETTER...



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At the Youth Research Centre, 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.

PATHWAYS IN ADULT LIFE: SUMMARY REPORT ON THE 2020 SURVEY OF PARTICIPANTS IN COHORT 2

INTRODUCTION

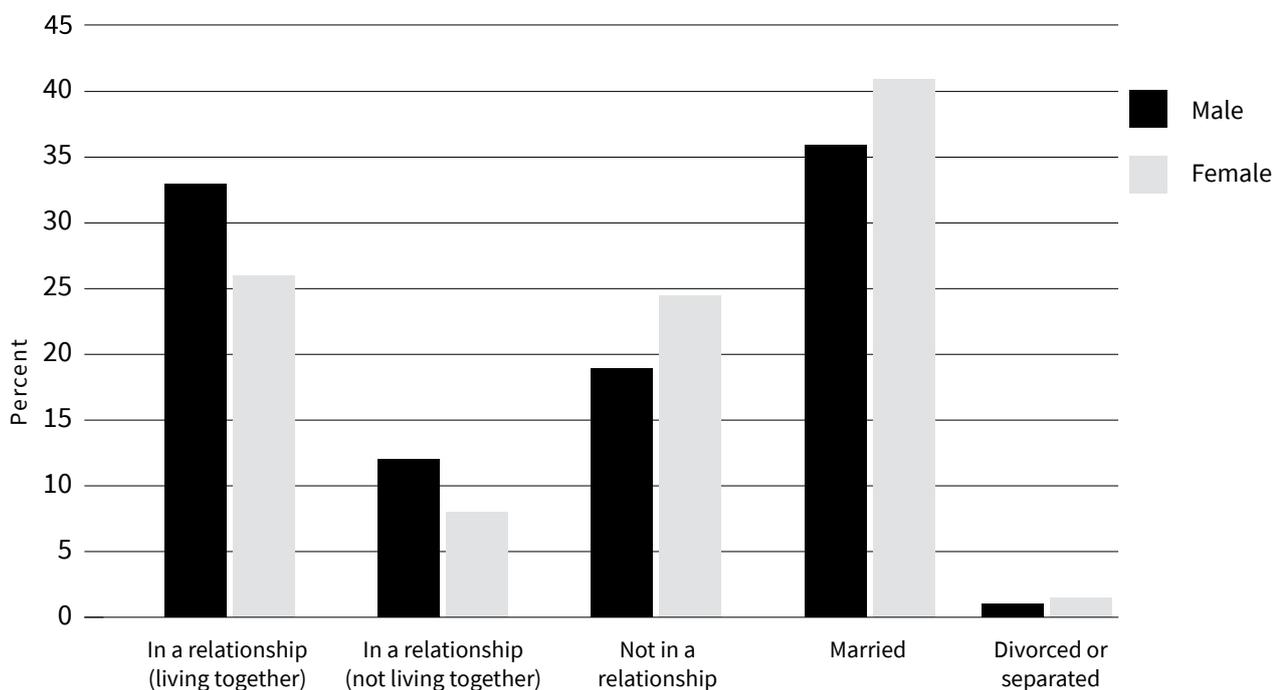
We are pleased to provide you with this latest update on the Life Patterns research project in which you are a highly valued participant. The survey is part of an ongoing research project by the Youth Research Centre, at The University of Melbourne. It explores different areas of adult life, including your experiences in education, the workplace, your family and personal relationships, attitudes to life, and health and wellbeing. With your contribution, we are able to provide valuable insights that can inform governments and social institutions about your generation. This report presents the results of the survey you completed in 2020 during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was a period characterised by unprecedented social and economic upheaval due to the rapid spread of the highly contagious respiratory disease. Although the initial lockdowns were relatively uniform across Australia, Victorians experienced a prolonged period of isolation due to the emergence of a second wave in July 2020.



SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

This report is based on the responses of 485 Cohort 2 participants aged 31-32 years from Victoria, Tasmania, the ACT and NSW. In 2020, 336 (69%) participants were women and 149 (31%) were men. The majority of participants were living in metropolitan centres (60%), 24% were living in regional cities, 15.5% were living in rural areas. In terms of relationship status, 76% were either married or in a relationship, 22% were not in a relationship. Women were more likely to be married or not in a relationship than men, while men were more likely than women to be in a relationship-see Figure 1.

Figure 1 Relationship status by gender



As for participants' living arrangements, 64% were living with their partner, 12% were living on their own and 22% were living in a shared household or with their parents. Men were more likely than women to be living with a partner or with their parents. Women were more likely to be living with their partner and child/children or living in a shared household- see table 1.

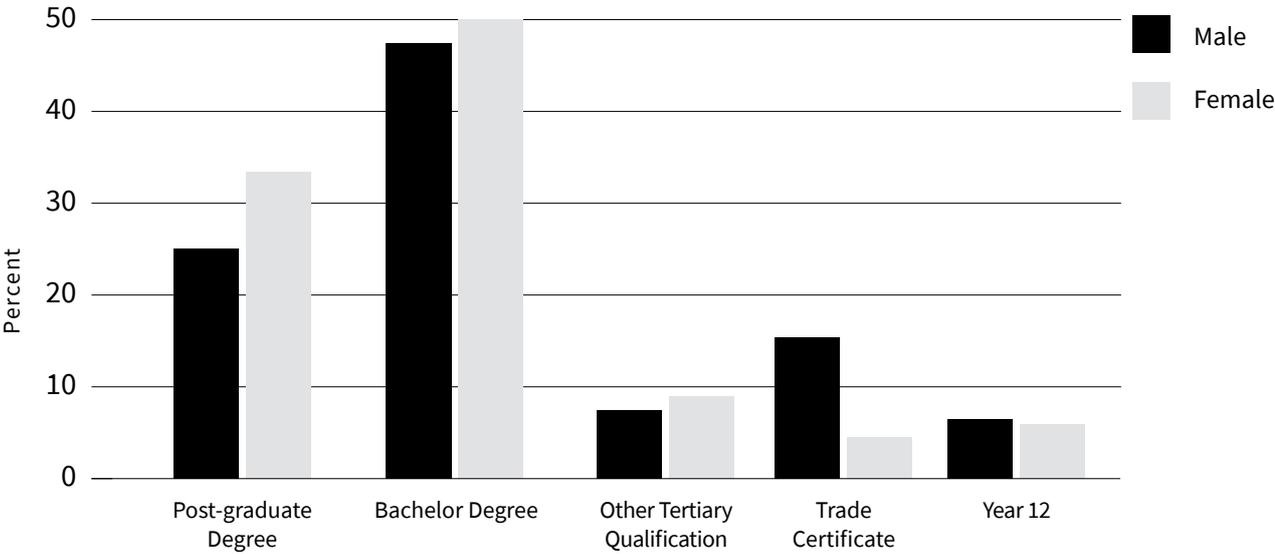
Table 1 Living arrangements by gender

| Living arrangements | Male | Female |
|--|------|--------|
| Living with parents | 11.4 | 7.5 |
| Living in a shared household | 10.1 | 14.4 |
| Living on my own | 10.7 | 13.2 |
| Living with my partner | 42.3 | 26.7 |
| Living with my partner and child/children | 24.2 | 35.9 |
| Living with my child/children as a single parent | 0 | 0.6 |

EDUCATION

By 2020, 94% of participants had completed at least one post-school qualification. Seventy-eight percent had completed at least one university-level qualification and 16% had completed at least one vocational education and training (VET) qualification. In 2020, 77 (16%) participants were undertaking further study. There were some differences in highest level of education according to gender: women were more likely than men to have completed a post-graduate qualification (32% compared to 24%) - see Figure 2.

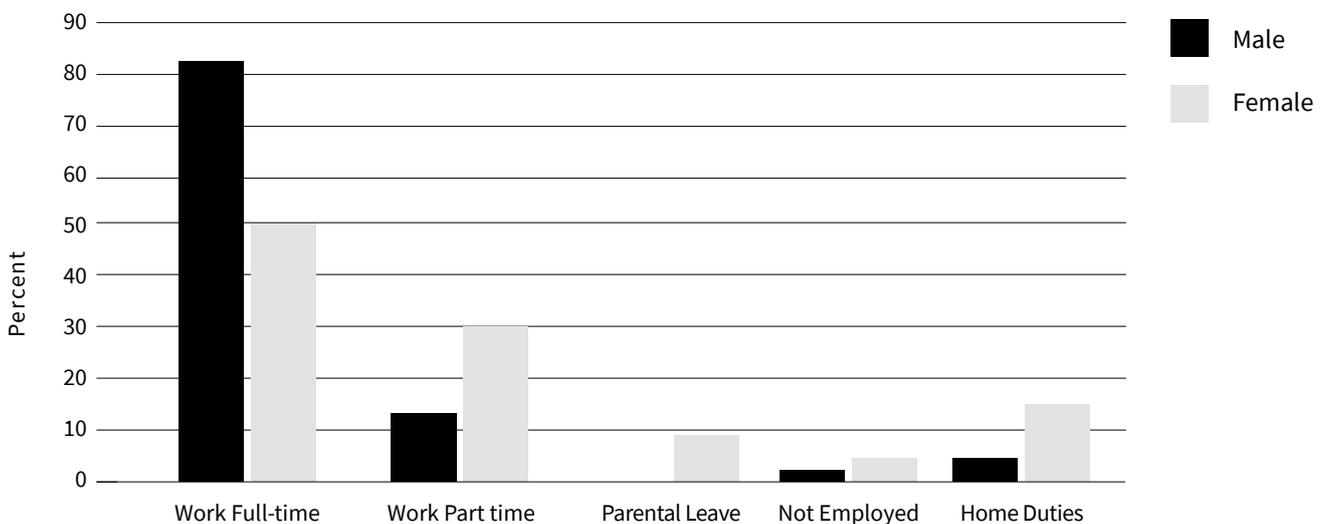
Figure 2 Education by gender



EMPLOYMENT

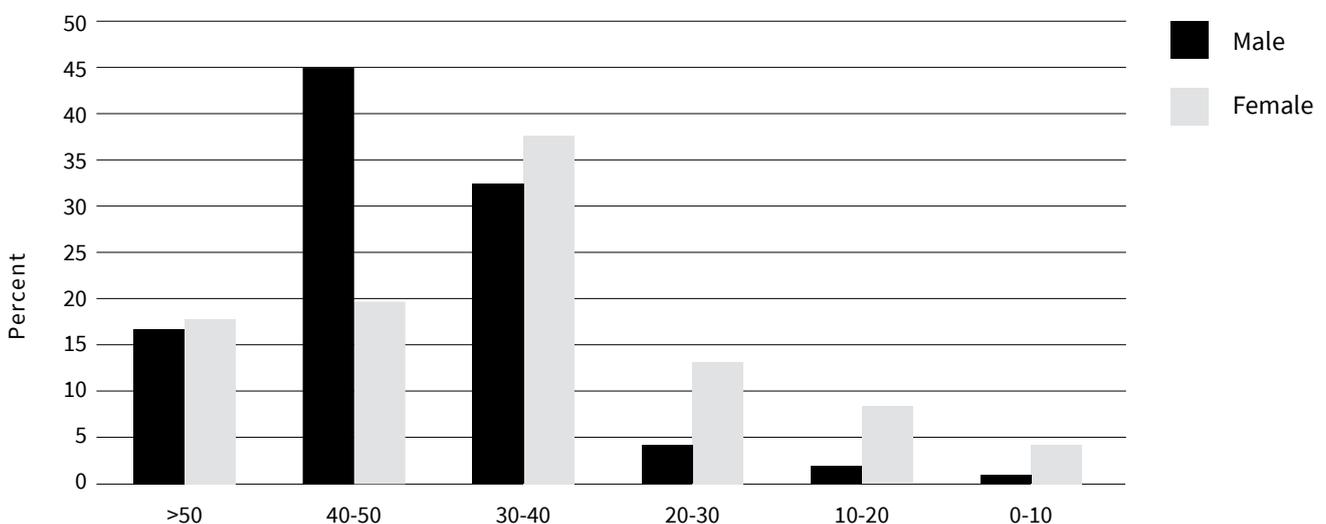
Each year, we ask you about your current employment status and if you are employed, the type of employment contract you have. In 2020, 60% of you were working full time, 24% part-time, with the rest of you were on parental leave, not employed or doing home duties. Thirteen per cent of you were self-employed; and 18% were working more than one job. Men were more likely to be working full-time, while women were more likely to be employed to work part-time – see Figure 3. Given that this survey was completed in April/ May 2020, the full effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the employment status may not be reflected in these figures.

Figure 3 Employment status by gender



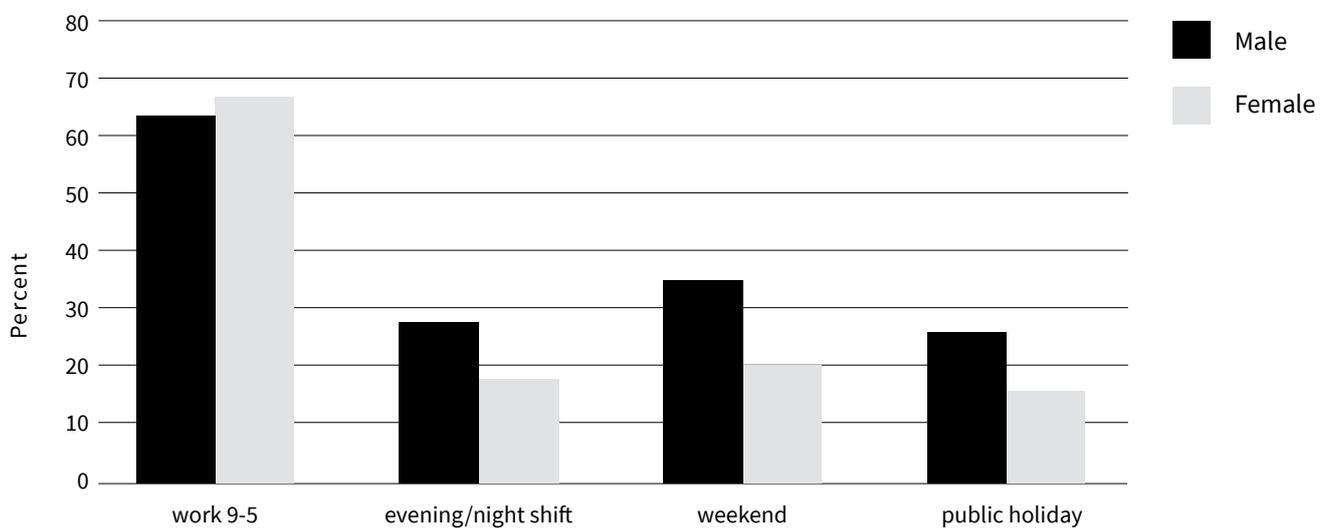
Over the past five years, 40% of women and 33% of men have experienced job insecurity. There were also distinct gender differences in hours of paid employment. Men were more likely than women to be working 40-50 hours - see Figure 4. This difference resonates with the employment status of men and women shown in Figure 3, where women were more likely than men to be employed on part-time basis or doing home duties.

Figure 4 Weekly paid work hours by gender



With regard to the type of employment contract participants had, 68% were employed on a permanent contract, others were employed on casual, limited term or renewable contract. The percentages of men and women employed in different types of contracts were similar except for limited term contracts, where women had a higher rate than men (7.3% compared to 4.4%). The weekly paid work hours vary for 35% of participants. Furthermore, 23% work evening/night shifts, 27% work weekend shifts, and 23% work other non-standard hours. Men were more likely to work non-standard hours than women – see Figure 5. Given these long hours of paid work and the prevalence of working non-standard hours, it is not surprising that almost 37% of you were not able to spend as much time as you would like with your family.

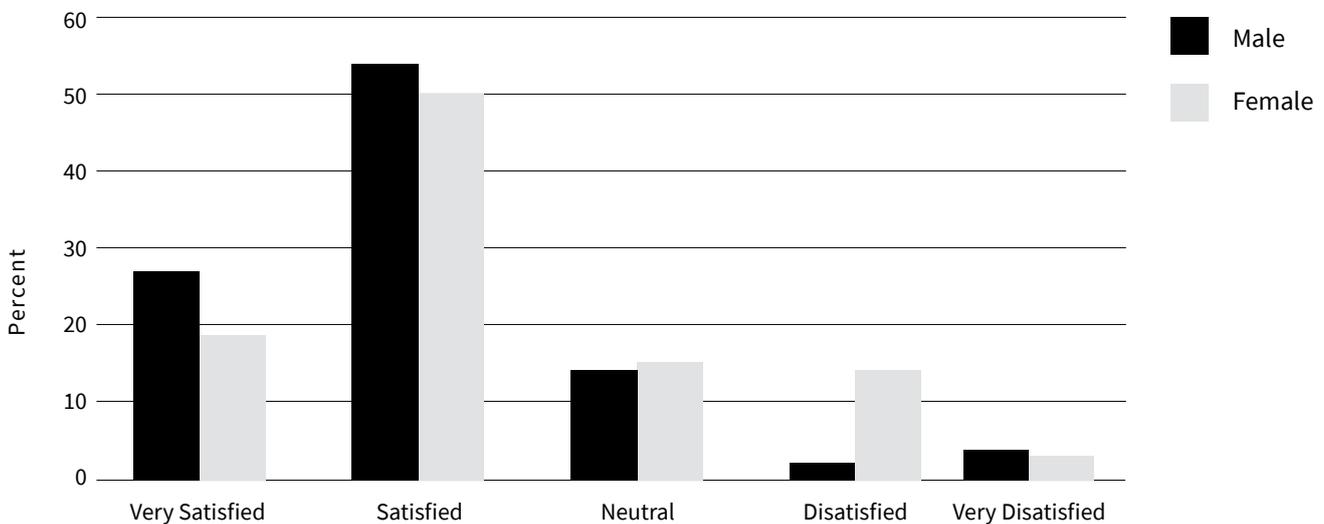
Figure 5 Non-standard working hours across gender



LEVELS OF SATISFACTION

Levels of overall life satisfaction varied according to gender with 68% of men and 60% of women reporting that they were very satisfied/satisfied with their lives. Over half of you (52%) were either satisfied or very satisfied in general with the way household tasks were divided between you and your partner; 58% of you were satisfied or very satisfied with the way paid work arrangements were divided between you and your partner. There is a gender difference in the level of satisfaction in terms of how household tasks are divided: men were more likely to be satisfied or very satisfied than women – see Figure 6.

Figure 6 Satisfaction with the share of household work according to gender



In 2020, 167 (35%) participants were parents. Of those, 60% had one child, 33% had 2 children and 7% had more than 2 children. The chart below shows levels of satisfaction with different aspects of life since becoming a parent. In general, parents are very satisfied/ satisfied with the support from their partner and family, 78% were satisfied with their financial situation. Maintaining personal health and balancing paid work with family commitments appeared to be more challenging (with a rate of satisfaction of 66% and 63% respectively). The availability of quality/affordable childcare is the factor that parents were the least satisfied with (48%) – see Table 2.

Table 2 Parents’ level of satisfaction with different aspects of life

| | Very satisfied/ Satisfied |
|--|---------------------------|
| Support from your partner | 92.2% |
| Support from your family | 91.0% |
| Personal health | 66.3% |
| Financial situation | 77.8% |
| The available maternity/paternity entitlements | 69.9% |
| Balancing paid work with family commitments | 62.7% |
| Availability of quality/affordable childcare | 48.2% |

PARENTAL CONCERNS



When we asked parents about their levels of concern for their children's future, parents were most concerned about the general cost of living (66%), environmental issues (64%) and their children's ability to develop positive friendships (62%). Children's development of values in life (58%) and their mental health (49%) were also significant concerns– see Table 3.

Table 3 Level of parents' concern about children's future

| | very high/ high |
|---|------------------------|
| General cost of living | 66.1 |
| Environment issues | 64.1 |
| Their ability to develop positive friendships | 62.1 |
| Development of values in life | 58.4 |
| Your child/children's mental health issues | 49.1 |
| Political climate | 47.9 |
| Cost of education | 45.5 |
| Availability of quality education | 43.7 |
| Physical safety | 41.0 |
| Your child/children's health issues | 35.3 |
| Health care costs | 32.9 |

Commenting on concerns about their children's future, participants were mainly focused on environmental issues, physical and mental health (especially their social and emotional learning), and education (quality, accessibility and affordability). Other concerns often mentioned included digital media, cost of living and the general social environment. Below are some typical comments:

The main worry for me is climate change and the effect that will have on his life as an adult (female accountant living in a regional city).

Such an unknown due to the changing generations. The use of social media probably scares me the most and the increasing mental health issues in young people (female midwife living in a capital city).

Concerned about her ability to improve her social skills while we are in isolation. I have pulled her out of childcare to reduce the risk & she speaks to other family members on facetime but other than that, only has socialisation with myself & her dad (female teacher in a capital city).

Access to good healthcare and education especially in light of the Morrison government's recent changes (in COVID19 times) to cut funding to universities, along with the ABC etc. I hope my child can grow up in an era where decision makers are held accountable and access to education/health isn't just for the privileged (male physician living in a capital city).

HEALTH

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and government restrictions on people's outdoor, social and recreational activities, health issues have become a big concern. In this year's survey, only 53% of you felt very healthy/ healthy physically, and 50.4% felt very healthy/ healthy mentally (see Table 4).

Table 4 Physical and mental health in the past few months

| | Physical | Mental |
|----------------|----------|--------|
| Very unhealthy | 3.8% | 3.6% |
| Unhealthy | 20.0% | 20.5% |
| Neutral | 23.2% | 25.5% |
| Healthy | 42.3% | 42.2% |
| Very healthy | 10.7% | 8.2% |

In your comments on health related issues, it is apparent that COVID-19 has taken a heavy toll on your physical and mental health both as a threat to physical health and an extra source of stress which cuts across different spheres of life.

The comments below show how COVID19 affected participants' physical and mental health.

Currently the Covid-19 pandemic is a major issue. It's certainly causing a lot of stress in my role as a teacher and in my personal life as my social life has been severely curtailed. It also means I cannot currently visit my family who live interstate (female teacher living in a country town).

I have lost my full-time job due to coronavirus and I'm getting by on 6 hours work teaching at university per week. Fortunately, this covers my rent but not much else. The situation has made me feel quite depressed and unmotivated to exercise much. I'm not eligible for job seeker, my previous employer doesn't seem bothered to hire me again for me to be eligible for job keeper due to the paperwork which is involved, and it's never an ideal situation to be out of work for an extended and indefinite period of time (female academic living in a capital city).

Working in primary healthcare as a nurse during this COVID19 Pandemic has stressed me a lot, including a lot of personal losses I am contemplating going to see my GP to get back on medication. I do not enjoy my work anymore and I find minimal to no interest in things I enjoyed 6 months ago. (female nurse living in a regional city).

It goes without saying that Covid-19 had had a detrimental effect on my mental health, this is due to work stress which has resulted in a high level of anxiety (female manager living in a capital city).

The situation with COVID-19 is creating additional stresses and testing my resilience, including job security and financial concerns, feelings of frustration associated with isolation and lockdowns, and worry about the future and possible long term impacts (female consultant living in a capital city).

Being pregnant during this pandemic has impacted my mental health. It is a stressful time especially when self-isolation has impacted physically seeing friends and family and also impacted how I have been receiving maternity care (female midwife living in a capital city)

As more participants of your cohort become parents, pressures of parenting start to become a significant impactor on physical and mental health.

A difficult pregnancy and emergency caesarean, combined with the challenges of parenting a newborn, bushfires and COVID-19 isolation has had a huge impact on my physical and mental health. I don't know how or when these will improve (female teacher living in a capital city).

Post pregnancy weight gain, lack of support in opportunity to spend time on "myself", exercise, self care, independence (female on maternity leave living in a capital city).

I have recently given birth (last week), I find it difficult to feel physically healthy in the end stages of pregnancy. After my first child was born I suffered PND/anxiety. It is a concern this time with the added anxiety of constant negativity/life changes due to COVID-19 (female nurse living in a regional city).

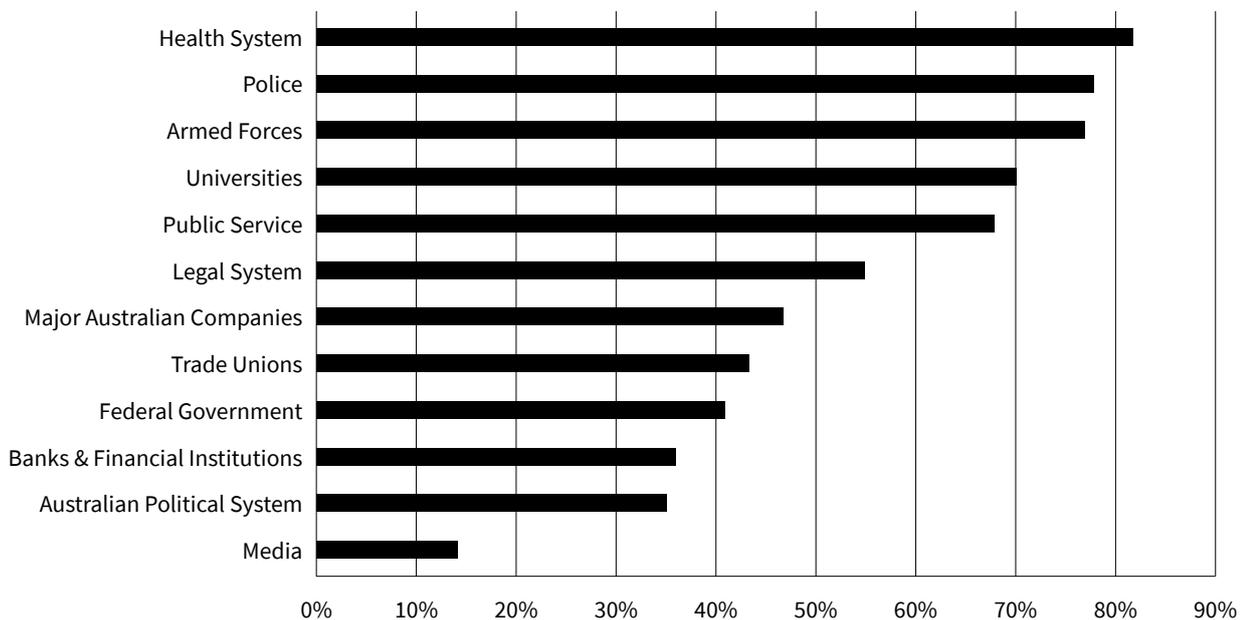
Mental health. 2 months of full-time work and full-time child minding of a 1 year old at home leaves zero space for time out (female manager living in a capital city).



CONFIDENCE IN INSTITUTIONS

When we asked you about your confidence in both public and private institutions, your responses indicated that the overwhelming majority had a high level of confidence in the health system, the police and the armed forces. On the other hand only one-third had a high level of confidence in the Australian political system. Figure 7 shows the percentage of those who have either a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in each institution.

Figure 7 Percentage with a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in different institutions



Similar to last year, only 13% had a high level of confidence in the media. Many participants reflected on their lack of trust with comments like: “mainstream media is dramatised, negative and one-sided”, and they “always have an agenda and use manipulative techniques, so cannot be trusted”. Public funded media were regarded as being somewhat more reliable than private media corporations, for example:

The media I am disgusted by the Murdoch Media empire. ABC and SBS and some independent news mediums are the only news sources I will rely on at this stage (male dentist living in a capital city).

The ABC just had major funding cuts, so the other avenues of media (Fairfax and channel 7, 9 & 10) will have disproportionate funding from the private sector which can skew their journalistic integrity (male physician living in a capital city)

As for the Australian political system, many of you think Australian politicians are failing to show leadership and are not well connected with people.

Leadership is something lacking in aspects of Australia especially our political system. Especially given recent events - bushfires and COVID-19 currently impacting our society now. I am counting down until the current government is voted out...time and inaction will tell (female midwife living in a capital city).

I don't agree with politicians and often feel like they are more interested in lining their own pockets than actually helping the Australian people, especially in these trying times when we need to help one another and help the economy recover - but safely and slowly (female consultant living in a capital city).

I believe the Federal Government are not connected with the needs of all Australians - even as a white middle class family we don't feel represented let alone our friends from diverse backgrounds (female community service leader living in a country town).

As a public servant, I have confidence in what we do, but the politicians don't give much confidence (female program delivery officer living in a capital city).

Confidence in banks and big business companies was also low. Typical comments were:

Banks and big business seem more concerned with profits than morals (male public servant living in a regional city).

I do believe a lot of big companies in Australia as well as the people leading them are very much only concerned with their own well-being and not necessarily the well-being of Australian citizens (female teacher living in a country town).

Although levels of confidence in the health system, police and armed forces are high, some of you also expressed concerns about the funding of these public institutions.

I really value the police & health systems but they are under-funded (female social worker living in a country town)

Our health system and defense are fantastic and I am proud to support these with my tax money (male public servant living in a regional city).

I have confidence that the health system is doing a really great job with what they have, but they need to be better funded so they can look after everyone promptly and competently (female solicitor living in a capital city).

Health care has been stripped back significantly and I feel we are being pushed into a U.S model of health care. Since the current situation I now believe health care is back on the national agenda (male learning design engineer living in a capital city).

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES

In the survey, we asked you to nominate the three most important issues facing Australia today. Our analysis shows that the top three nominated issues were: environmental issues (climate change, natural disasters, and sustainable development), the Coronavirus pandemic (management and response to the pandemic, and its short and long term effects), and health related issues (mental and physical health, and issues related to access, funding and sustainability of the public health system).

We also asked if you would like to make any further comments and many of you did. Here are a few examples that are representative of your comments:

Environment:

The debate (about climate change) was at its highest during the bush fires, but once the COVID-19 pandemic ramped into full gear the public attention and focus drifted away from the impact our current lifestyle is affecting the planet. I fear this lack of focus will push us back even further and prevent real change occurring for the time being (male teacher living in a capital city).

Climate change is always going to be a number 1 priority, because if we don't put in the effort to prepare for the future impacts (through policy, investments etc), then we are going to suffer consequences in future (male administrative support worker living in a country town).

Climate change is an existential threat that doesn't take a holiday during lockdown (male software developer living in a capital city).

COVID-19:

Whilst climate change remains a big issue, it has been dwarfed by the COVID-19 pandemic. As someone who works in the arts and entertainment industry me and many of my friends and colleagues have become unemployed with little support from the Australian government. I am concerned about the long term unemployment that could be caused as this pandemic stretches on and the mental toll that will take on many Australians. I am also concerned about the amount of debt we are taking on to prop up the economy during this time, I agree it is necessary but I am worried about the long term tax and economic implications over the next decade as we recover. I worry that the burden of recovery will fall on the shoulders of the Millennials and members of Gen Z who have been hit hardest by this crisis. (unemployed male living in a capital city)

COVID-19- being pregnant and birthing during the pandemic, impending unemployment for the country and impending deaths of victims of COVID-19 frighten me (female midwife living in a capital city).

Heath and health care system:

After spending 2 weeks in hospital with my daughter whilst she had open-heart surgery I have an understanding of just how much extra funding our healthcare system requires and whilst our hospital stay was a positive experience the entire system is generally under-funded (female teacher living in a regional city).

Mental health is a huge issue in Australia - it remains misunderstood, stigmatised and largely unrecognised amongst work places. Our hospital systems cannot manage mental health appropriately as often the resources are simply not there. I would say mental health makes up almost 50% of ambulance work - it's a big issue (female paramedic living in a capital city).

Maintaining a good quality, accessible & fair system of health, welfare and other social services. also developing policies that will benefit the whole country (male public servant living 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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