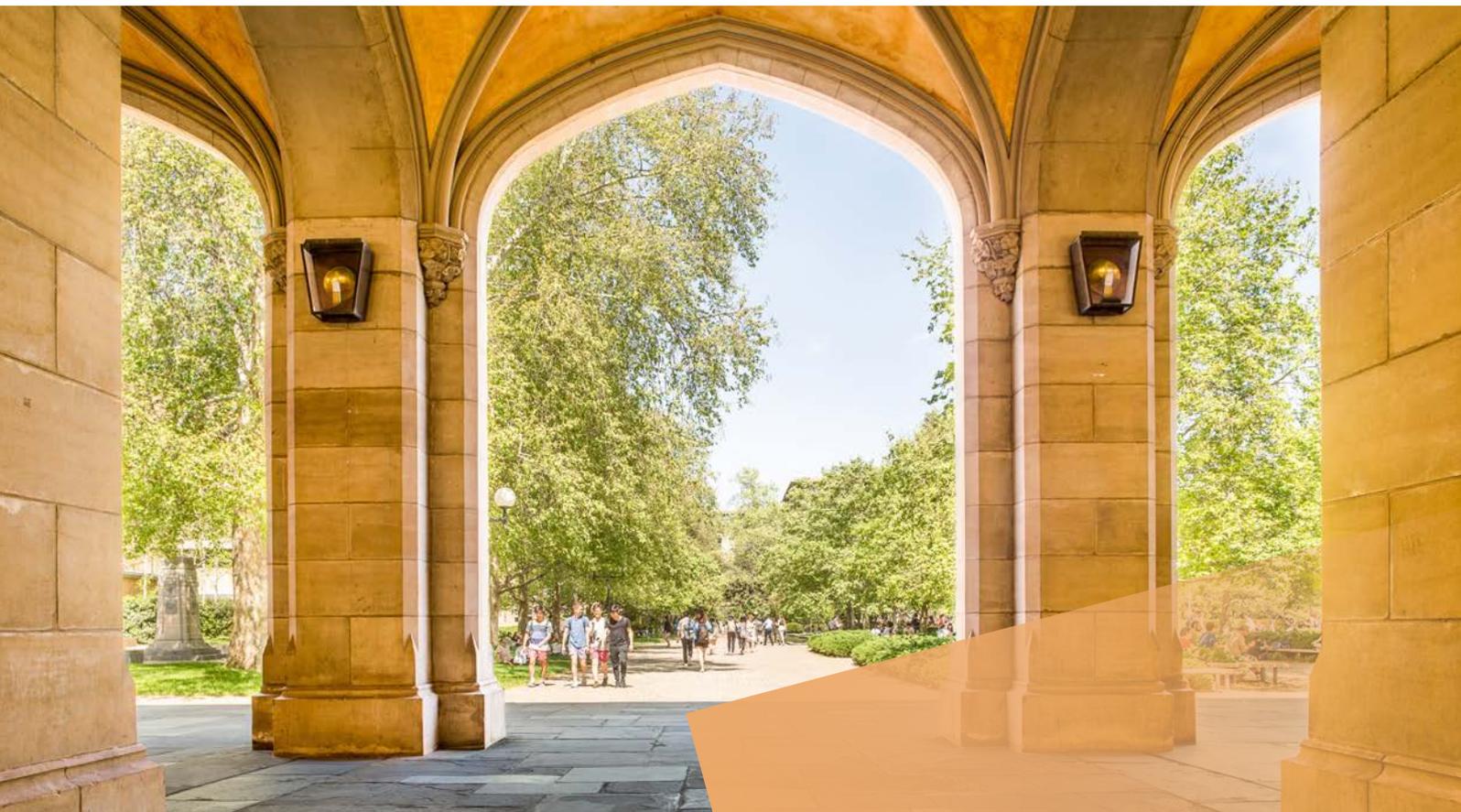




Melbourne Graduate  
School of Education

# Life Patterns Project

## PATHWAYS IN ADULT LIFE: SUMMARY REPORT ON THE 2021 SURVEY



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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*

# INTRODUCTION

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In this report, we provide you with an overview of our latest findings from the Life Patterns research project. The Pathways in Adult Life survey is part of on-going research by the Youth Research Collective at the University of Melbourne that has been researching the lives of young people as they move into adult life for over 30 years. The study explores different areas of adult life, including education, work, family and personal relationships as well as satisfaction with life and health and well-being.

Your contribution as a participant provides valuable insights about the lives of young Australians. The findings can be used to inform policymakers and governments about the experiences of your generation.

The report presents the results from a survey you completed in 2021, during the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic. This period was characterised by significant difficulties for some, including prolonged lockdowns.

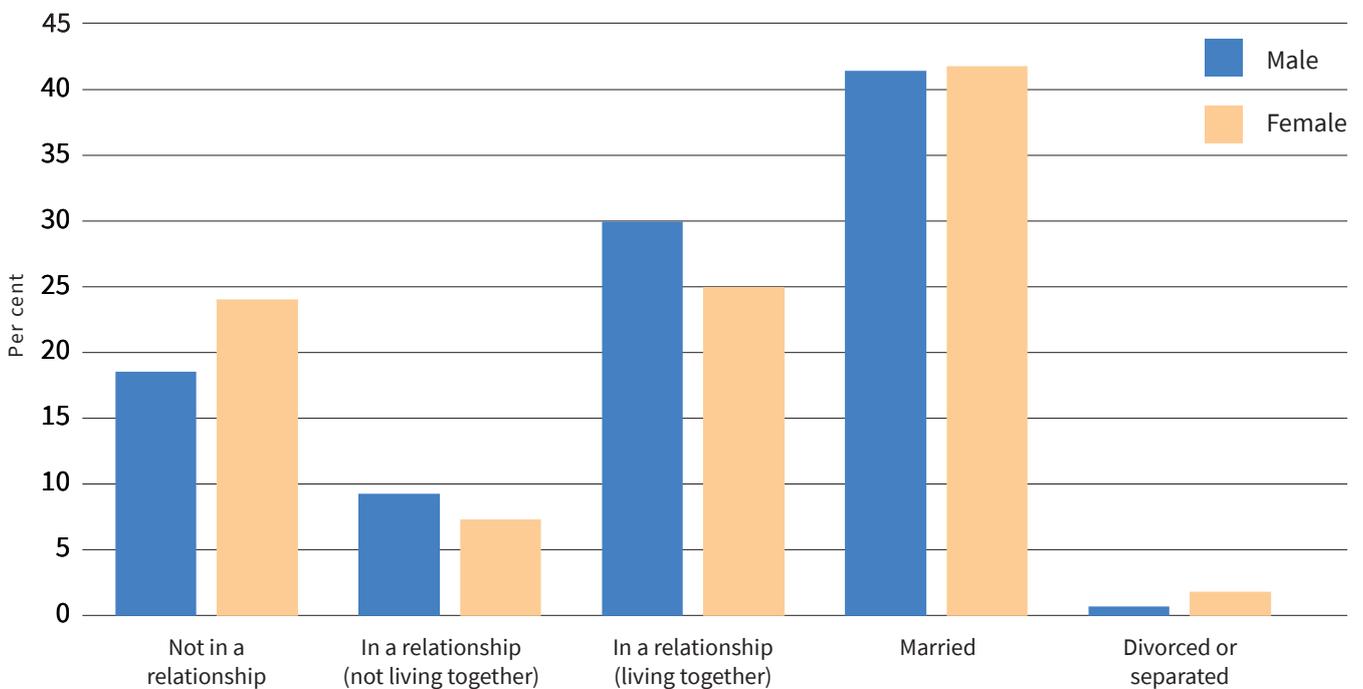


# SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Findings in this report are based on a survey of 470 participants from Cohort 2 who were aged between 32 and 33 years from the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Tasmania, and Victoria. Some of the key aspects of the sample are: 70% of participants identified as female; 59% lived in a capital city; 41% were married and a further 23% were living with their partner.

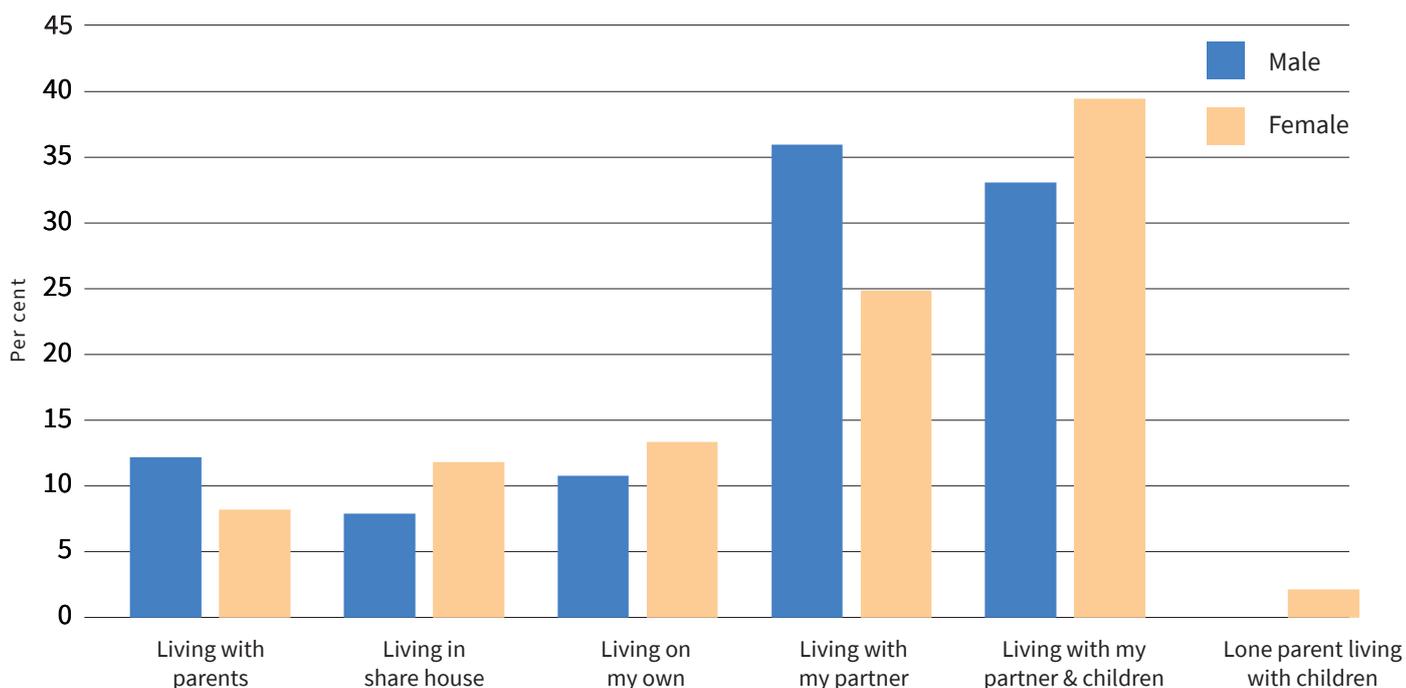
The graph in Figure 1 shows that similar percentages of male and female participants were married, women were more likely than men to be single and men were more likely than women to be in a relationship and living with their partner.

**Figure 1. Relationship status by gender (%)**



In 2021, 12.5% of participants lived on their own; 10.5% of participants lived in a share house and 9% lived with their parents. The graph in Figure 2, illustrates the differences between men and women in terms of living arrangements. Women were more likely than men to be living with their partner and child/children. Men were more likely than women to be living with their partner (without children). Women were more likely than men to be living in a share house whereas men were more likely than women to be living with their parents.

**Figure 2. Living arrangements by gender (%)**



# SPENDING TIME DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

During the pandemic, how people spent time with their family and special ones was of critical importance to their wellbeing. We asked participants the following question: “Due to COVID-19, do you spend more time or less time with members of your family and with your friends?” The percentages of men and women who reported spending more time or less time with family and friends due to COVID-19 is shown below in Table 1.

Both men and women reported spending more time with their partner due to COVID-19, which is not surprising given the stay-at-home orders and lockdowns during the pandemic. Working from home became the norm, schools and childcare centres were closed and recreational activities, apart from walking, running and bicycle riding (for limited time periods), were suspended. A higher percentage of men than women reported spending more time with their partner and a higher percentage of fathers than mothers reported spending more time with children. In fact, just over half of all fathers reported they spent more time with their child/children than previously. In contrast, both men and women spent less time with siblings, other relatives and friends due to COVID-19.

**Table 1. Change in time spent with family and friends due to COVID-19 (%)**

	Male			Female		
	Less time	Same	More time	Less time	Same	More time
	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Partner</b>	11	31	58	12	41	47
<b>Mother</b>	58	31	10	51	35	13
<b>Father</b>	59	32	9	54	35	11
<b>Children</b>	6	43	51	3	68	27
<b>Siblings</b>	67	26	7	66	25	8
<b>Other relatives</b>	69	28	3	76	21	3
<b>Friends</b>	66	27	7	79	16	5

We also asked participants to comment on how COVID-19 affected their relationships. Below are some typical comments, which reflect the difficulties some encountered during 2021 as the pandemic prevented participants from seeing family members and friends:

*It was difficult especially at the start of COVID. Family holidays were cancelled. We avoided visiting people due to the risk of infection (Female working as a teacher living in a capital city)*

*Working from home meant my wife and I were juggling both the kids in between online classes. Our kids saw a lot less of their cousins and aunts and uncles. The 5km radius was the worst part as majority of my friends live well outside that radius (Male working as a teacher living in a capital city)*

Some were able stay in touch with family members and friends in different ways:

*I was lucky during COVID-19. I couldn't see my family, but we were able to facetime a lot, which was great (Female working as a teacher living in a capital city)*

*I don't think there has been a significant negative impact on relationships, but they've definitely become more reliant on tech, e.g., Zoom calls, more online games as a way to catch up. Distant friendships probably suffered as more effort was required to maintain contact but [for] close friends more effort was put into the relationship (Male working as a podiatrist living in a regional city)*

Overall, lockdowns may have a lasting impact:

*During lockdown, my relationships were significantly impacted. I have found post-lockdown, I prioritise time with my family and friends even more than before (Female working as a speech pathologist living in a capital city)*

*It has made me appreciate them more, before COVID I was exhausted having to catch up with so many people so often I was starting to hate it, but when covid locked us down, as I live alone, it made me appreciate the friendships/family relationships much more (Female working as a family worker living in a regional city)*

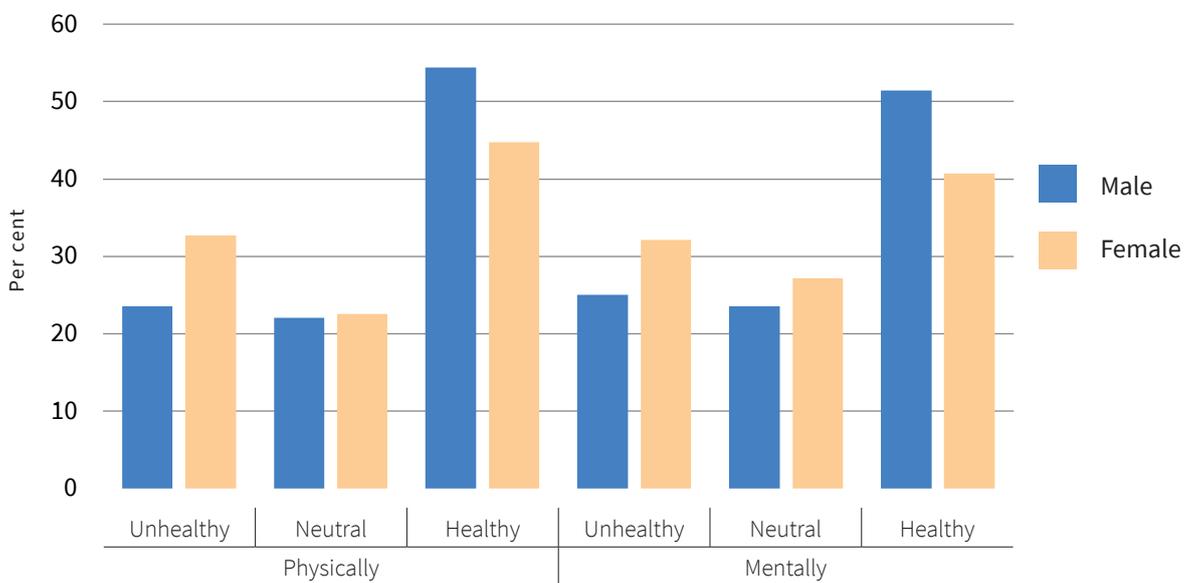
*Big family gatherings such as Easter and Christmas, engagements means that celebrations and family gatherings are organised differently [...] not a large group, sometimes a smaller group, so you see less people in the group than usual (Female working as a marketing professional living in a capital city)*



# HEALTH

Participants were asked to report on their physical and mental health. As Figure 4 illustrates, men were more likely than women to report being healthy. The majority of men (54.5%) reported their physical health as 'healthy' or 'very healthy' compared to 45% of women. Men were also less likely to say that their health was 'very unhealthy' or 'unhealthy' (23.5%) than women (33%). In terms of mental health, again most men reported their mental health as either 'healthy' or 'very healthy' (51.5%) compared to around 41% of women.

**Figure 4. Physical and mental health status by gender (%)**



When participants were asked to reflect on their health, the toll of the pandemic on their mental and physical health was evident:

*Stress has definitely taken its toll over the past year and like many I have struggled keeping to a self-care routine due to COVID (Female working as a lawyer living in a capital city)*

*I have gained weight. I don't eat healthy meals all the time and I don't exercise as much [as I should]. I need to change those behaviours soon (Female working as an assistant store manager living in a capital city)*

*Working from home has also caused my mental health to deteriorate, due to the isolating environment it puts you in. You lose all human contact when previously you were surrounded by your team all day. In my profession team collaboration is very important and hard to get when working from home (Female working as a senior HR advisor living in a regional city)*

*Lots of stress and anxiety. I try to stay physically fit/healthy but time sometimes becomes an issue and [so does] motivation when feeling emotionally/mentally drained (Female working as an optometrist living in a capital city)*

# WORK AND STUDY PLANS

We were also interested in asking participants about how COVID-19 impacted on their study and work plans. In Table 2, we present the percentages of those who reported that COVID-19 had impacted their plans. We show these results according to gender and levels of education. With regards to study plans, 9% of men and 7% of women reported that the pandemic had impacted on their plans. Across education levels, those with other tertiary qualifications like a diploma (19%) were the most impacted followed by those with a trade certificate (11%). Moving to work plans in the next column, we can see that again men were more impacted by COVID-19 than women. Across educational levels, the impact was greatest for those who had completed Year 12 but had not completed a post-secondary qualification.

**Table 2. COVID-19 impact on study and work plans by gender and education (% agree, strongly agree)**

	Study plans % agree/strongly agree	Work plans % agree/strongly agree
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	9	25
Female	7	22
<b>Education</b>		
Postgraduate qual.	4	23
University degree	8	22
Other tertiary qual.	19	24
Trade certificate	11	24
Year 12	6	39
Less than year 12	0	0

Some participants commented on how their work and/ or study plans had changed due to the pandemic, especially in relation to overseas study and work options:

*I had to reconsider job opportunities. I had access to overseas which [is] now not an option (Female working as a researcher living in a capital city)*

*I want to work and study overseas for 1-2 years and that has been postponed. However, if I want to start a family, I need to do that soon too. Something will have to be compromised (Female working as a media manager living in a capital city)*

For some, this change of plans has some positives:

*I had planned to move overseas for work, but with the border closures in place I have had to postpone. On the upside, Australia's excellent handling of the covid situation has meant jobs in my industry are much more numerous than they were pre pandemic and has led to me having better job security (Male working as a VFX artist living in a capital city)*

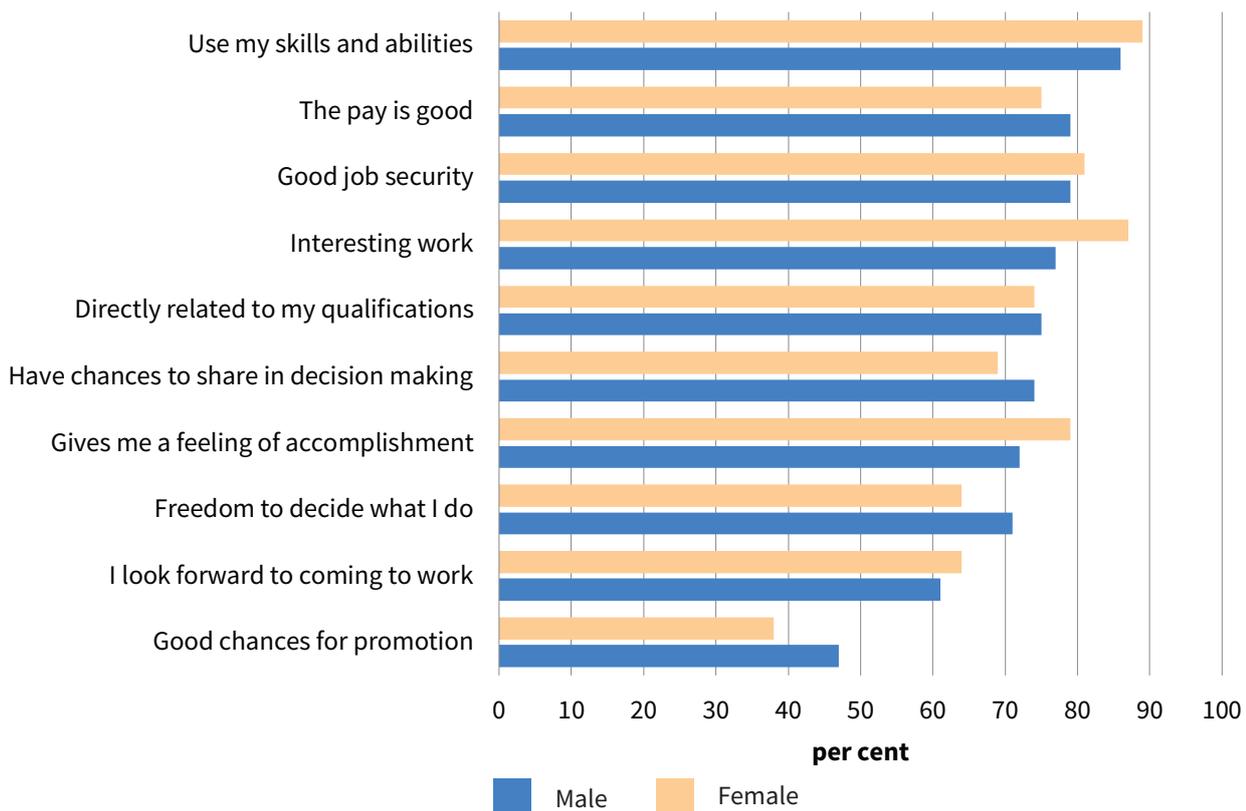
*My work involved considerable overseas travel. COVID-19 has helped me to consider alternative career options in a domestic setting (Female working as a research program manager living in a capital city)*

# ASPECTS OF WORK

Work is an important part of many participants' life. In Figure 5, we present the proportion of men and women who agree with descriptions for each of the aspects of their current work. Overall, the results suggest that most of the participants are in good jobs, however, there were some differences between men and women on a number of key aspects.

More women than men reported being in work 'that is interesting' and 'lets them use their skills and abilities'. However, more men than women report that 'their pay is good'; that they 'have many chances to share in the decision making'; and that they 'have the freedom to decide what work they do'. The biggest difference between men and women is in the chances for promotion. There is a 10-percentage point gap between men and women with more men than women believing their chances of promotion were high. In short, the findings suggest that compared to men, women tend to find jobs that interest them and match their skills but are not as rewarding in terms of pay and opportunities for promotion.

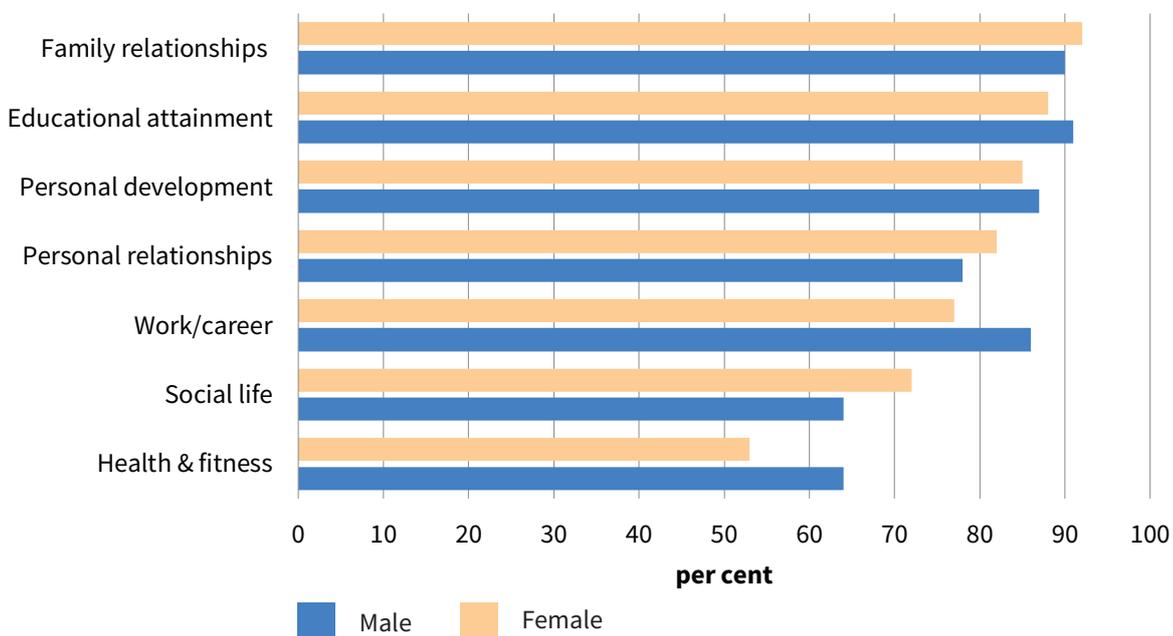
**Figure 5. Perceptions of current job (% agree, strongly agree)**



# SATISFACTION WITH ASPECTS OF LIFE

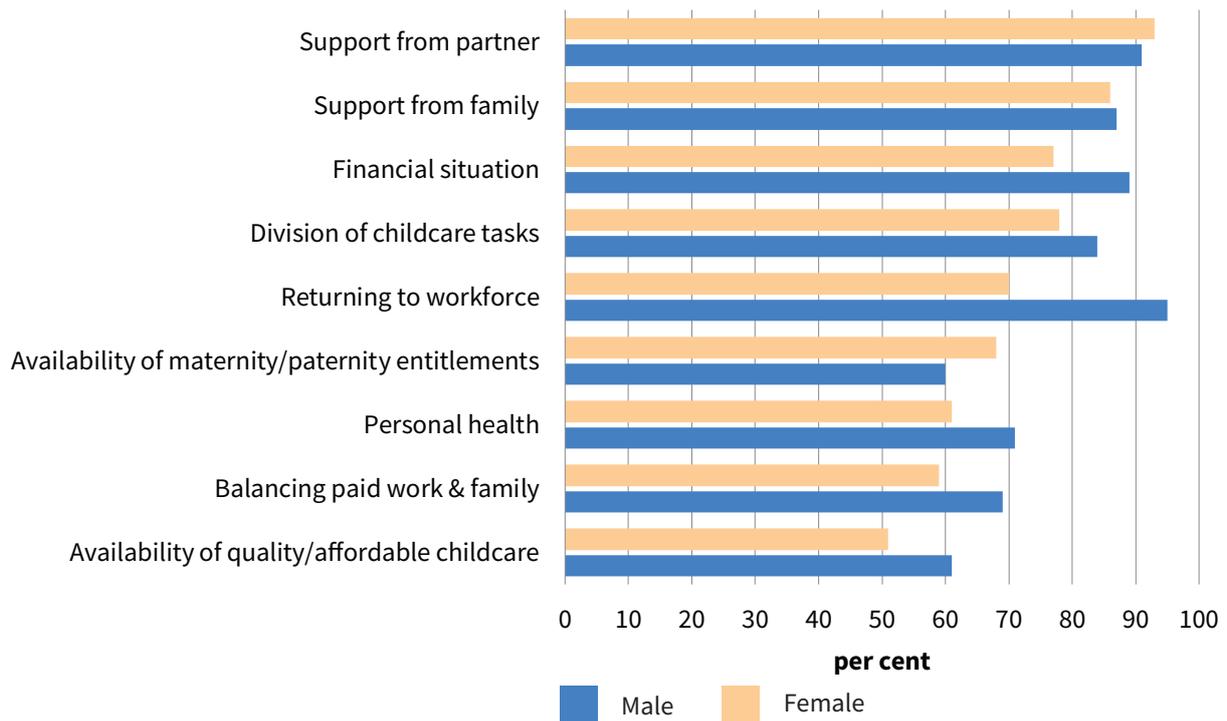
We asked respondents to reflect on hopes they had five years ago and to assess how satisfied they were with the way things have turned out across several life domains. In Figure 6, we report the percentage of men and women who were satisfied or very satisfied. As the results show, around 90% of respondents were very satisfied/ satisfied with their family relationships and their educational attainments. A higher percentage of men than women reported being very satisfied/ satisfied with their work/ career whereas a higher percentage of women than men were very satisfied/ satisfied with their personal relationships and social life.

**Figure 6. Levels of satisfaction (% satisfied, very satisfied)**



In 2021, 187 participants were in a parenting role. Of those, 144 had at least one child under five years. We asked participants in a parenting role about their levels of satisfaction with various aspects of their lives since becoming a parent. The graph in Figure 7, illustrates the similarities and differences in levels of satisfaction between men and women. Overall, men and women reported similar levels of satisfaction with support from their partner and their family. A higher percentage of men than women were satisfied with the way childcare tasks were divided between them and their partner; the balance between work and family commitments; and the availability of quality/affordable childcare.

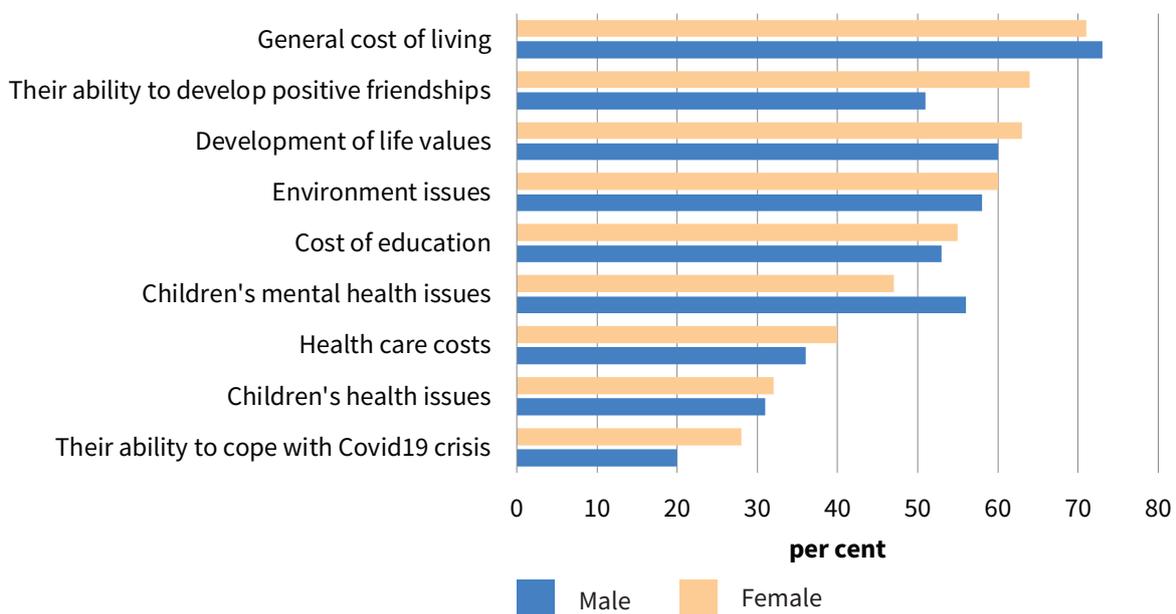
**Figure 7. Levels of parental satisfaction (% satisfied, very satisfied)**



# CONCERN WITH ASPECTS OF CHILD'S FUTURE

Participants with children were also asked about their levels of concern with regards to several aspects of their children's future. In Figure 8, we report the percentage of men and women with children who were highly or very highly concerned across a number of domains. Overall, the most concerning area was the general cost of living. However, a higher percentage of women than men were concerned with the costs of specific things like education and health care. More women than men held concerns about their children's ability to develop positive friendships. More men than women were concerned about their children's mental health.

**Figure 8. Parental concerns (% high or very high)**



These comments from parents illustrate their concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on their child/children's futures.

*Working in education myself, I am aware of the direct impacts covid-19 has had on my children's education (e.g. missing 3/4 or pre-kinder year in 2020). [Helping them with] building social skills after missing out on social interaction with others for so long is something I will be focusing on for my children (Female working as a teacher living in a regional city)*

*I worry that my son who was born in 2020 will somehow be affected by all the lockdowns and the lack of socializing. His language skills are nowhere near what his older brother's were at this age but it's hard to know how much of that is because of the pandemic (not seeing people's mouths for speech development) or whether it's just down to individual differences in our two children (Female working as a radiographer living in a capital city)*

Others were thankful their children were too young to be aware of COVID-19:

*Luckily my children were young and were not aware of the impact of COVID* (Female working as a nurse living in a regional city)

*My children are quite lucky that they are too young for COVID-19 to have affected them too much. However, getting into a good school that is also close to my and my husband's work has been quite a long and stressful process. Harnessing my children's mental health is something that is really important to me, and I am keen to ensure that we can teach them strategies for them to become quite resilient* (Female working as a spatial analyst living in a capital city)

For others, there were other future concerns:

*Climate change and environmental degradation is my biggest concern. I am concerned that there will be a lot of struggles to face in terms of resource security, employment, housing and medical care as the world becomes a less hospitable place to live* (Female working as a librarian living in a capital city)

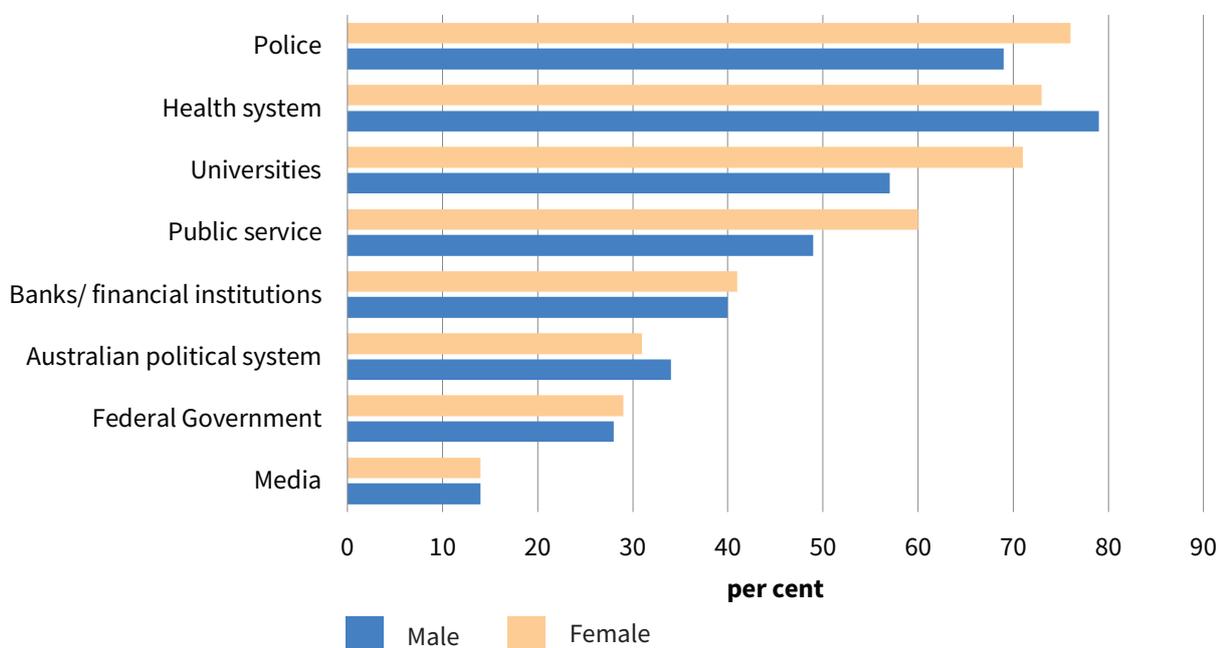
*I'm concerned that my child will spend a portion of his life trying to pay back the debt accrued during the covid-19 crisis* (Female working as a psychiatrist living in a capital city)



# CONFIDENCE IN INSTITUTIONS

Institutions such as government and the media have been central points of reference for many people during the pandemic. We asked participants to indicate how much confidence they have in a number of institutions like the health system or police. The graph in Figure 9 illustrates the similarities and differences between men and women with regards to their levels of confidence in a number of institutions. Three-quarters of women had a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the police compared to 69% of men. Men were more likely than women to report having a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the health system: 79% compared to 73%. Less than one-third of men (28%) and women (29%) reported having high levels of confidence in the Federal Government and just 14% of men and women reported having high levels of confidence in the media.

**Figure 9. Confidence in institutions (% quite a lot or a great deal)**



We appreciate and thank you  
for your contribution.

We look forward to seeing how future years  
go for you and your generation.

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

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