

Maximising well-being post COVID-19

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KEY INSIGHTS

Much has changed in New Zealand since the New Zealand Government imposed a nation-wide lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic on 26 March 2020. Research³ undertaken by social researchers from Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research and the Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment provides insights into how people navigated their COVID-19 response and what that means for their, and New Zealand's, continued well-being.

Gender Impacts

Pandemics make existing gender inequalities worse. Women, for example, have been disproportionately affected by job losses resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic response:

...it's really interesting, for example, that a large proportion of the jobs that have been lost and industries that have been most impacted are staffed by women, so that economic impact has fallen very unequally in a gender sense (MWB7).

I work in a travel agency,...and unfortunately on the first day of lockdown I was made redundant (MWB27).

I was working full-time and because of COVID-19 my job position was made redundant...it was stressful...because at one stage everything was all hunky dory....and then that lockdown happened, yeah, jobs were lost, and you were having to go look for another job which is tricky considering I just came back from maternity leave (MWB37).

Furthermore, as outlined in the key insight on rethinking the economy, participants felt that the proposed shovel-ready recovery interventions were not geared towards women, or prioritised sectors that employ significant numbers of women.

Women have also been affected in other ways by the pandemic response. Participants spoke to the difficulties of having to juggle childcare, and household and work commitments during lockdown:

³ A background and methodology report is available from StrongeD@landcareresearch.co.nz

...even people who have got money and have got jobs, it's still affecting them in different ways, whether that be just the impact on women, for example, having to hold down their jobs while they're providing childcare and teaching them (MWB31).

This was particularly challenging for solo mothers or those who were effectively solo parenting due to their partners being away as essential workers. Participants in this situation spoke of the impacts on their well-being, and even of sacrificing their well-being to prioritise their children:

I'm a single mum...lockdown, so that was challenging for me. It was interesting for me the working from home I think, and very, very hard with the single parenting. It was lovely having my daughter at home with me and it was also the hardest thing ever because I was trying to work full time, I was trying to parent and run a household and manage her schooling and juggling all of that....it was really, really hard, and when you're trying to do it all and you're run pretty ragged and you're exhausted and it's stressful....So, it definitely drags you down and exhausts you... (MWB41).

I was aware of quite a few people with kids at home who have really struggled. It was just I guess really intense, and they were all in each other's pockets, and who found it really stressful, and who couldn't access the same support that they would normally do, especially those single parents... (MWB76).

So, during COVID, the lockdown I guess, I was employed...full-time as well as being a mother to three children, one on the autism spectrum and my partner...he was essential service, so he wasn't available to help support the household during the time. So, I guess it's fair to say that it was a really busy and stressful time...I definitely didn't prioritise my work as much as what I should have...[and making time for myself]...that's something that was massively sacrificed. I often like going for a nice lunchtime walk and a short jog each day, but I couldn't do those with no-one to look after the children. I think mums are always providing the support for everyone in the house and they often don't think about the support that they need really (MWB91).

While some struggled to develop coping strategies, others were able to implement measures to counteract the negatives:

I've got pretty good coping strategies. I know what to do to keep yourself well and that's all about physical exercise, connection with nature, making sure you're getting – like with my daughter the physical hugs were a great way to feel good, and connection with other people that are meaningful to you, so even if it was online just trying to maintain those friendships and those connections. Yoga, I did lots of yoga and meditation over lockdown (MWB41).

Moving forward post COVID-19, participants hoped that the gendered nature of economic, social, and political processes would receive more attention. They hoped that for the future well-being of New Zealand, pandemic response and investment decisions would include a gender analysis:

we need to have social systems that don't continue to perpetuate injustice or bias because of...gender (MWB90).