

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.

Livelihood Resilience

Livelihood resilience concerns people's capacity to cope with and recover from environmental, economic, or social stresses and shocks while sustaining or enhancing their livelihood opportunities and well-being. Inequality and poverty are real issues in New Zealand and not everyone has the capacity or resources to cope easily with pandemic stay-at-home orders. Consequently, this has societal well-being implications beyond those it directly affects. Key themes arising from our interviews that helped with the construction of livelihood resilience included having secure employment with stable and meaningful income, financial reserves, strong social capital/connections, and secure and spacious housing, and having access to green spaces/nature, education, and mental health services. Policies and interventions aimed at building livelihood resilience will result in people being better prepared to cope, adapt, and navigate stresses and shocks – including future pandemic responses. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected people unevenly:

I think it's one of those things where we're all experiencing the same thing but we're in different boats while we do it, and ... [for some] ... it will probably be a blip, but for other people it will be much more of a roadblock (MWB47).

The initial lockdown was a scary or anxious time, but how well the research participants weathered the response varied considerably:

There were moments where it was very challenging, and the uncertainty at first was a bit scary, but in terms of – we got through it, wow, we worked out new coping mechanisms. We had some really nice moments with our children and with each other. There was a lot of unforeseen positives (MWB71).

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

Like the participant quoted above, other participants also noted that overall, the lockdown had been a positive experience:

So, my experience has been generally positive. I liked being able to spend more time with my children. I liked being able to spend more time at home doing quiet things, as normally I live quite a busy life and I have a job that demands I'm out and about quite a lot. So, I liked it....I have a garden and my children – it's a big enough house that all of us could find our own space if we wanted....And it was also within walking distance of...parks....I liked it, yeah (MWB2).

A key theme from participants reporting a positive lockdown experience was the security and stability of their circumstances. They had the resources to cope with the uncertainty. For example, they had capital reserves, they had jobs that allowed them to work from home, they largely owned their own homes, and they had access to green spaces to unwind:

I think we've coped really well, and I think that's due to the fact that our jobs haven't changed, that we've got secure work, secure income, we live in our own home – so we have a lot of stability anyway (MWB31).

However, this was not the case for all. Not everyone was in a position to navigate the difficulties brought by the pandemic response without their overall situation deteriorating:

...you've got some really important challenges to that idea from young South Aucklanders who are saying, "Hang on a minute. A whole lot of us have missed out on our schooling, have actually left school in order to get shit work to help our families stay afloat." So, people who were already in insecure work or who lived in households which were reliant on insecure work, they maybe – will be having a very – really, really different experience of actually things falling apart and then having to desperately shore up the family finances, yeah, and put their dreams on hold or just let go of their personal dreams for whatever they were planning to do next (MWB7).

As you can probably imagine working in housekeeping most of the guys I work with are what you would call on the lower end of the income scale, and I know even with the wage subsidy which we were paid, they're still trying to recover from the loss of income, the debt that they've gone into just to survive over that period. Not bad enough to go to a foodbank, but not comfortable either. In that bracket that gets caught in the middle all the time (MWB39)

I...was talking to the woman who was helping me..., she said the foodbank where they are is overrun, the people are in real poverty,...she said she has not been so busy ever where she is (MWB47).

The stress and the emotional...circumstances actually led to my partner and I parting (MWB48)

I've got a niece, she and her husband were put off work, both of them. The husband's managed to get employment again now, but they had to put their mortgage on holiday, which is going to be difficult for them in the future to pay that off. So, yeah, there are family members that have not had it so easy (MWB4).

Strengthening adaptive capacity at the individual, household, community, and national level will lead to better livelihood resilience outcomes and improved well-being post COVID-19.