

Maximising well-being post COVID-19

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RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Rationale

Much has changed in New Zealand since the Government imposed a nation-wide lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic on 26 March 2020. Discussions in September 2020 between Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research (MWLR) social researchers and Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment (MBIE) staff, highlighted that COVID-19 has impacted on people to varying degrees through a wide range of interconnected issues, such as economic security, mental health, social connections, housing, food security and employment, just to name a few.

Quantitative economic data from MBIE indicated that people responded to the COVID-19 response in different ways and with varying levels of success, i.e. the impacts were not universal or consistent across the country, demographics, or sectors – and nor were people’s responses (see [COVID-19 economic data | Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment \(mbie.govt.nz\)](#)). Our research sought to further understand these impacts through qualitative investigations. It was agreed that a well-being lens would provide a holistic framing to investigate the diversity of impacts and responses being identified. A well-being approach provides a framework to examine in more detail the complex realities of the impacts of the COVID-19 response, and if or how people coped and adapted to the significant societal changes that have unfolded due to the pandemic.

This project aimed to explore how people navigated their COVID-19 response and what that meant for their continued well-being. It sought to identify important intervention points that can contribute to improving well-being and how that influenced ongoing public acceptance of the approaches and tools used to manage the COVID-19 response; thereby contributing to the Government’s Social Licence to Operate. Furthermore, we aimed to identify post-COVID shifts in what is important to people, i.e., what activities people would like to keep and be developed, and what activities people would like to leave behind.

While it is important that a good breadth of stories about how people navigated their COVID-19 response are documented and used to inform future planning for New Zealand, it is equally important from a well-being perspective for people to have opportunities to share their stories and reflect on their experiences. This project provided that opportunity.

Ethics

This research project was approved by MWLRs Social Research Ethics process (Application number 2021/13) on 5 October 2020. All interview participants received an information sheet outlining the

purpose of the research and information on the interview process (Appendix 1). All the participants gave informed consent to participate in the research.

Methods

Participants for this study were recruited from a MWLR database of people who had previously registered an interest in social research about 'Connecting with Nature' during the Level 4 & 3 lockdowns of March–May 2020 (see [Slowing down enabled connection with nature » Manaaki Whenua \(landcareresearch.co.nz\)](https://landcareresearch.co.nz)). The 'Connecting with Nature' database was constructed by sending an invitation to participate in the research via MWLR social media pathways. Invitees were also free to snowball the invitation through their own networks. Those people who registered an interest in participating in the research formed the database.

For this study, everyone on the 'Connecting with Nature' database ($n=113$) were recontacted via email and invited to participate in this research. An information sheet describing the research aims and process was provided with the email (Appendix 1). Fifty people were interviewed. Participants were drawn from regions across the country (Table 1) and despite prioritising invitations to the upper and lower age groups to ensure an even age-spread of interviewees, participants heavily favoured the 31–69 age bracket (Table 2).

Table 1: Regional location of participants

Region	No. of participants
Northland	3
Auckland	11
Bay of Plenty	3
Canterbury	11
Dunedin	1
Hawke's Bay	1
Wellington	7
Nelson/Marlborough	2
Taupo	2
Waikato	4
Wairarapa	1
Manawatu/Whanganui	4
Total	50

Table 2: Age distribution of participants

Age	No. of participants
18–30 years	4
31–69 years	44
70+ years	2
Total	50

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants using either video conferencing platforms (such as ZOOM), or phone. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants. Interviews took an inductive/deductive approach which enabled participants to tell their story of how COVID-19 impacted them and how they navigated that process (see Appendix 2 for interview schedule). Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed by a professional transcription company. Researchers analysed the transcripts using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12. The data were analysed using thematic coding to identify key insights.

Appendix 1: Information Sheet

9 October 2020

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Information for interview participants.

Thank you for your interest in talking to us about your COVID 19 experiences. Please read this information before deciding whether to take part in this research.

Who is doing these interviews?

The research team comprises Dr Dean Stronge, Dr Alison Greenaway, and Robyn Kannemeyer (from Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research) and Dr Chris Howard (Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment).

Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research is one of seven Crown Research Institutes (CRIs) formed in 1992. CRIs function as independent companies but are owned by, and accountable to, the New Zealand Government. The Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment is the New Zealand ministry charged with delivering policy, services, advice, and regulation that contribute to New Zealand's economic productivity and business growth.

What is the aim of the project?

A lot 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.

This project aims to explore how people navigate their COVID-19 response, what that means for their continued well-being and how that may influence ongoing public acceptance of the approaches and tools used to manage the COVID-19 response. Furthermore, we aim to help identify post-COVID shifts in what is important to people, i.e. what changes people would like to keep and be developed, and what changes people would like to leave behind.

It is important that a good breadth of stories about how people navigate their COVID-19 response are documented and used to inform future planning for New Zealand. It is also important for people to have opportunities to share their stories and reflect on their experiences. This project provides you with that opportunity.

Please note that funding for this project is not fully secured so the project may change over time. We will endeavour to keep participants informed of any significant changes because of this.

Interested?

If you are interested, we will arrange a suitable time for an interview. Interviews will be confidential. No names or personal identifiers will be connected to the reported data. The interview can be via phone, skype or zoom – whatever suits you best. If you are agreeable, we would like to record the interview so that it can be transcribed/written up accurately by a professional transcription company. The research team will not share your recording with anybody else. The interviewer will ask you if you agree to being recorded before the recorder is turned on. If you agree, your verbal consent will then be recorded. If you don't want the interview to be recorded your continued participation will be deemed as consent and written notes will be taken.

How will the stories be used?

Insights from across the interviews will be collated and shared with relevant government agencies and made public via our website. No personal identifiers will be used but we might share some quotes to show how people express their experiences of navigating the COVID-19 response. Any quotes used will be treated with great sensitivity, the research team will follow up with you to check it is okay to

use your quote if they think the quote could reveal your identity. The research team may also discuss insights from this research, including quotes from people's stories, at conferences or in publications.

The information provided in your interview may also be shared with collaborating agencies and researchers (i.e., Government agencies, other Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research researchers, other research institutions). Any data shared with collaborators will not contain personal identifiers or information that could compromise your confidentiality.

Where any information provided (which may include personal information) constitutes public records, it will be retained to the extent required by the Public Records Act 2005 and may be discoverable under the Official Information Act.

Next steps?

If you do decide to participate, we will assume that you have read this information sheet and agree to be part of the research. The interviewer will also check if you have any questions before the interview starts. You can withdraw from the research at any time up to 2 weeks following the interview. You can also add to or revise your comments by emailing Dean within 2 weeks of your interview.

More questions?

You can email or phone Dean Stronge, Researcher Environmental Social Science, Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research at StrongeD@landcareresearch.co.nz or phone: (07) 859 3716 or 027 578 6216.

Concerns?

This research has been developed in accordance with Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research's social ethics approval process. If you have any concerns about this research or the conduct of the researchers, you may contact either: Dr Nick Kirk, Ethics Convener, Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research, kirkn@landcareresearch.co.nz, or the leader for this research portfolio, Dr Suzie Greenhalgh, by email at GreenhalghS@landcareresearch.co.nz or by phone on 095744132.

Appendix 2: Interview Schedule

Discuss information sheet – answer queries, discuss consent.

Announce turning recorder on.

Please confirm that you understand this interview is being recorded.

The purpose of this interview is to explore how you are navigating COVID-19 and specifically what this means for your wellbeing and the wellbeing of NZ. So, to get started...

- 1) Please tell me about yourself and your COVID-19 experiences?
[Feel free not to use your name since the recorder is on]
- 2) Can you give me some (more) examples of what has changed for you since March and what has stayed the same?
Prompts
 - a. At home and at work
 - b. In your community or neighbourhood
 - c. Your income and what you spend money on
 - d. The places you go to and how you travel
 - e. How you prioritise your time these days

- 3) If we think about your well-being since March going in and out of lockdowns, is there anything we haven't discussed yet – the good and the bad?
[Depending how they answer, probe on why it's been going ok/not ok]
- 4) How do you think you have coped with COVID-19 compared to others?
a. your friends/family/ support group etc
- 5) Looking back since March, tell me about the things you've been most worried about? Most confident about?

Prompts

- a. Work
b. Finances
c. Health
d. Government
e. What's happening overseas?
f. Family
g. COVID 19
h. Science
i. Education
j. Holidays! Or Leisure activities/Time out
k. The future
- 6) Where do you get support from and how has this been going over the last few months?
Prompts
a. Family and friends
b. Work
c. Iwi and hapū
d. Local and central government
e. Community and religious organisations
f. Health provider, e.g. GP
g. Media – access to information
h. How do you connect?
- 7) Thinking about NZ's COVID-19 response, what might this mean for the well-being of all New Zealand?
Prompts
a. Environment
b. Culture
c. Economy
d. Society
- 8) What hopes do you have for NZ's well-being post COVID-19?
Prompts
a. what changes/activities would you like to keep and be developed?
b. what changes/activities would you like to leave behind?
- 10) Is there anything else you think is important to share?
Thank you for your time.