

Impacts of COVID-19 in 2020 for families and Study Youth

Findings from Footprints in Time: The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC)

Footprints in Time: The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC) began in 2008 with a sample of nearly 1,700 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0.5-5 years and their families from 11 sites, including major cities and very remote areas across Australia. This factsheet presents key findings from the LSIC Wave 13 survey about impacts of COVID-19. Wave 13 interviews were conducted entirely by telephone during the COVID-19 pandemic (June to December 2020). A total of 755 families were surveyed in Wave 13, accounting for 49% of the in-scope population for the wave. The Wave 13 sample was more clustered around non-remote areas, with 40% of families from major cities, 44% from regional areas and 16% from remote and very remote areas, compared with 30%, 41% and 29%, respectively, in Wave 12..

Main findings from the analysis of the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 on Footprints families and youth:

- COVID-19 had minimal direct health effects (in terms of infection and death) on Footprints in Time families in 2020.
- Many parents and carers enjoyed increased family time and experienced overall improvements in employment, income and finance compared with pre-pandemic levels.
- For Study Youth, COVID-19 had both positive and negative impacts on education. For some (37%), remote learning led to less distraction from peers, increased focus on learning activities and less exposure to bullying behaviours. For others (36%), COVID-19 increased isolation from peers and social networks and limited access to learning resources.
- COVID-19 disrupted communities' access to food and other essential items, especially in regional (57%) and remote areas (58%).

Of 755 Footprints families interviewed in 2020:

- 21 reported that someone in the family contracted COVID-19.
- No families reported that someone in the family passed away due to COVID-19 infections.
- 112 reported that someone in the family was quarantined for being suspected having COVID-19.

Parents/carers were asked if any good things happened because of the Coronavirus pandemic:

- Yes=461
- No=290
- Most prevalent good things that happened were more family time (48%); improved financial conditions (16%) and improved employment condition (10%)

Parents/carers were asked how the Coronavirus and restrictions affected community. They responded:

More family time	56%
Cost of food went up	56%
Community stressed	53%
Couldn't get essentials	52%
Couldn't see elders	42%
Good for country	19%
Overcrowding	8%

Examples of good things that occurred due to COVID-19, in parents/carers' own words:

- "More family time, making people realise more to life."
- "Yes, I get extra money, I am now debt free because of the virus."
- "Working from home has been wonderful, we spend more time together, more cooked meals."
- "Getting employment, I started work just as covid-19 came out. woollies were hiring more people. Indigenous recruitment."
- "It's been good for the country - some respect - environment less carbon footprint, cleaner jobs, people have settled into this new way living."

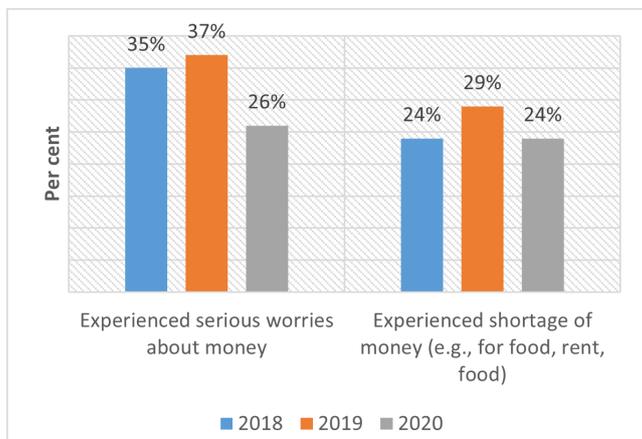
Examples of bad things that occurred due to COVID-19, in parents/carers' own words:

- "Can't go on Country."
- "Haven't been able to see family. Family events postponed".
- "Less food in the supermarket."
- "People unsure about everything including kids' education and stressed."
- "A lot of people stopped coming into the medical clinic, so they weren't getting their medication."

Some Footprints parents/carers reported COVID-19-induced changes to their employment:

- 97 of the 755 parents/carers either lost a job or knew someone caring for the Study Youth who lost a job due to COVID-19.
- Among 379 parents/carers who were still employed at the time of the survey:
 - ✓ 28% worked from home.
 - ✓ 19% worked less than their usual hours.
 - ✓ 8% worked more than their usual hours.
 - ✓ 5% were stood down (still employed but not being paid).
 - ✓ less than 5% applied/received JobKeeper & JobSeeker payments.
- Overall, the rate of employment among Footprints parents/carers slightly increased from 57% in 2019 to 59% in 2020.

For families interviewed in 2020, financial stress decreased between 2019 and 2020 despite increasing between 2018 and 2019:



Possible reasons for improved financial conditions:

- Gaining employment/working more hours.
- Savings from reduced travel costs and holiday expenses.
- Temporary increase in government payments.

Potential sources of financial improvement, in parents/carers' own words:

- "Hours at work have increased so getting more money."
- "Extra money for support, bit more money in my purse."
- "Super release was a good thing".
- "Received extra money which was very handy with paying bills."
- "We saved money because less travelling to [holiday destination]. More quality time with family."

Study Youth were asked about the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on their education. Of 642 youth interviewed:

- 37% had positive experiences (e.g., less distraction from peers and increased focus on learning activities, flexible learning programs, and less exposure to bullying behaviours).
- 36% had negative experiences (e.g., isolation from friends, lack of sufficient learning resources and support in the home, and difficulty navigating digital technologies and online contents).
- 27% reported both positive and negative experiences, such as more focus on education but less socialisation with friends.
- 23% could not do certain subjects they were interested in, including physical education, arts, and cooking.

Examples of positive experiences, in Study Youth's own words:

- "Did home-schooling via online. It was nice because I could sleep."
- "Good because more time to focus on my education."
- "Online schooling was good but bad when I went back due to bullying."
- "Been ok, was given work to do at home, had support from mum and we could phone the school if we needed to."

Examples of negative experiences, in Study Youth's own words:

- "A little harder trying to work out how to use the computer."
- "Couldn't do the subjects due to not have computer since back at school have caught up with assignments."
- "I missed seeing my friends."
- "I didn't like doing work from home, it was hard, could not concentrate, there was no help from the school."

Overall, the findings highlight:

- Footprints families and youth showed high level of adaptability in navigating the COVID-19 crisis.
- The impacts of COVID-19 were non-uniform and post-COVID-19 recovery efforts should consider the unique experiences of communities, families and individuals.
- The importance of ensuring accessibility of digital learning resources in the home for remote learning.

Please see the full report for detail on the study findings: Cooms, V., Dinku, Y., Howard-Wagner, D., Edwards, B., & Biddle, N. (2024). Footprints in Time: Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC)-Wave 13 Summary Report, Australian National University, Canberra.

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