

September 2020

Hidden Cost:

Young multicultural Victorians and COVID-19

Summary Report



Australian National University and
Centre for Multicultural Youth
joint report

cmj
Centre for
Multicultural Youth



Australian
National
University

Executive summary

The global Coronavirus (COVID-19) is having a significant impact upon all Australians across a range of social, economic, and health and wellbeing indicators. Victoria, one of the hardest hit states, has been in a 'State of Emergency' since mid-March, and has experienced varying degrees of physical distancing and isolation measures from this time.

Young Victorians have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 crisis, experiencing high rates of job losses, financial and housing stress and education disruption. This substantially increases the risk of mental ill health among this age group. In addition, many young people have expressed their concerns about increased racism and discrimination brought on by the COVID-19 crisis. Internationally, racism and racial discrimination have been dubbed the 'Second Pandemic' and racism declared a 'public health emergency'.

Based on the feedback and concerns of young people, communities and workers, the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) developed a rapid response survey to better understand young people's experiences throughout the COVID-19 crisis and Victoria's stage three lockdown in June 2020.

376 eligible participants participated in the survey, answering questions on their health and wellbeing, experiences of racism and racial discrimination, and changes to their everyday lives and feelings about their future since the COVID-19 crisis began.

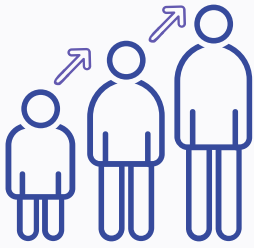
Key findings

Overall, the findings highlight the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people, particularly those from multicultural backgrounds, those who are first generation Australians, and who are female.

- High levels of racism and racial discrimination reported across direct and vicarious experiences, hypervigilance and worry about racism in public spaces, together with the low levels of reporting racism, are key issues to be addressed.
- High levels of COVID-19 related stressors reported by young people from multicultural backgrounds, those who are first generation Australians, and who are female, compared to their peers, also highlights the disproportionate burden of the pandemic on these groups of young people.
- High levels of negative social and emotional wellbeing symptoms, disrupted sleep, lack of physical activity and low levels of support for social and emotional wellbeing shown in this survey, are also priority action areas.

This study provides important data on young people's experiences of racism and discrimination and the impact of COVID-19 on their lives. The results show that most of the young Victorians who participated in this survey experienced many different impacts from the COVID-19 crisis. This demonstrates the need for differentiated, targeted responses in any recovery response. Further work is needed to investigate these issues across a larger sample of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and multicultural young people, as well as through qualitative data collection.

Who are the survey participants?



Age

Around a quarter (25%) of participants were under 18, and 35% were over 18 years of age – 150 or 40% of the participants did not provide their age.



Gender

Just under two thirds (65%) of the participants identified as females and just under a third (32%) identified as males. Around 2% reported their gender as 'Other'.



Ethnicity

Almost half (48%) of the young people who participated in the survey reported their ethnicity as Anglo, Southern European or Northern/Western/Eastern European; 31% identified as East Asian, Southeast Asian or South Asian; 13% as Middle Eastern, African or Pacific Islander; and 3% as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.¹



Languages spoken at home

87% of participants spoke English at home, with 55% of participants only speaking English and 32% speaking English and a second language; 13% of participants only spoke a language other than English at home. The most commonly spoken languages other than English include Arabic, Karen, Mandarin and Vietnamese.



Countries of birth

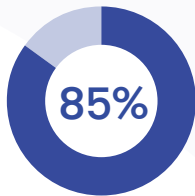
Two thirds (64%) of participants were born in Australia; 18% were 2nd generation Australians (born in Australia with at least one parent born overseas) and 46% of participants are 3rd generation Australians (born in Australia, both of their parents also born in Australia).

Of the 1st generation participants (born overseas), 15% were recent migrants moving to Australia in the last five years. Of those who were born overseas the most common countries of birth for participants were Thailand, China, Vietnam, India, New Zealand, the Philippines, Malaysia and Myanmar.

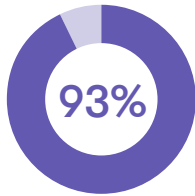
Racism and discrimination

The survey asked participants about direct (their own personal) experiences of racial discrimination, vicarious racism (second hand experiences), and hypervigilance (the impact that racism has on their social behaviours), as well as worry about racism when re-engaging with public life.

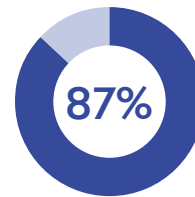
Most participants (89%), reported at least one experience of vicarious racism since the COVID-19 crisis began.



The majority (**85%**) of participants from multicultural backgrounds reported experiencing direct racism, with 32% reporting more than 6 out of a total of eleven experiences.



93% of participants from multicultural backgrounds reported consciously adjusting their behaviour in public to reduce their exposure to racism.



87% of participants from multicultural backgrounds reported being worried to return to their everyday lives and public spaces after lockdown, for fear of experiencing racial discrimination.

61% of participants experienced discrimination from their peers. More than half (55%) of the participants were worried about facing racism or discrimination in public spaces, 45% were worried about experiencing racism or discrimination at school.

More than half (59%) of the young people we surveyed said they ignored experiences of racism. Less than one in three (29%) talked with friends or family about it. Only 6% of participants reported their experiences. When asked about their decision to report racism, just over a quarter (26%) of participants stated they didn't feel confident that anything would be done or there was no point, and 19% of participants stated they didn't know who to go to or how to report it.

“When I’m at the shops, people have looked at me (visibly Asian) and stepped away or moved aside”

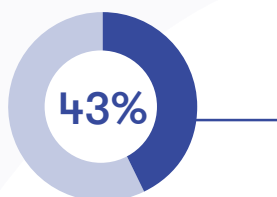
“I noticed on social media my Indigenous community were getting even worse racial remarks from others.”

“Seeing all the racism that is being highlighted at the moment is making me angry.”

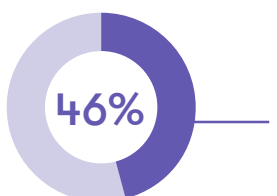
COVID-19 stressors

The survey explored a number of stressors related to COVID-19 by asking young people about things such as the impact of restrictions on leaving the house, changes to relationships with family and friends, financial concerns, as well as their capacity to meet basic needs such as food and bills, and access to supports and services.

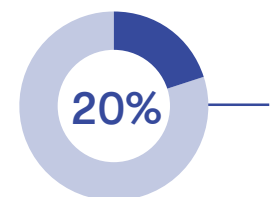
85% of participants reported having at least one stressor, with just over half (51%) having one to two stressors, and a third (34%) having three or more stressors.



A higher proportion of participants who identified as being from a multicultural background, had three or more stressors (**43%**) compared to participants from an Anglo/European background (26%).



When comparing generations in Australia, 1st generation had the highest proportion with three or more stressors (**46%**), then 2nd generation Australians (38%) and 3rd generation Australians (24%).



A higher proportion of male participants had none (male **20%** vs female 12%) or one stressor (male 59% vs female 47%), with a higher proportion of females having three or more stressors (female 41% vs male 21%).

“It feels more lonely with less social connections, sometimes it feels like I have no friends.”

“We don’t have the same freedom to do stuff, especially sport like we once did.”

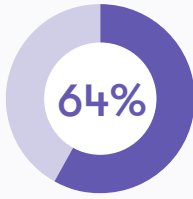
“Caring for relatives who are staying home”

“It made my family get angry at each other a lot”

“Missing my family and fearing for their safety because of COVID-19”

“I can’t leave Australia because if I do, I can’t come back next semester. It makes me very homesick.”

Education



64% of participants experienced one or more stressors related to education. Participants who identified as being from a multicultural background and those who are 1st generation are feeling more positive about their hopes for their education future compared to their Anglo/European and 2nd and 3rd generation peers.



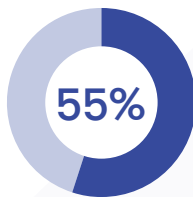
“Stress about failing university/preparing to get a job next year as this is my final year. Normally do well in terms of grades but have struggled with online learning.”

“My schooling is probably the thing that is most effected by the COVID-19.”

“Year 12 feels ruined”

“I can’t enrol in a tafe course because of the pandemic.”

Employment



55% of participants reported that their employment has been affected by COVID-19, 22% have had their hours reduced and 8% have lost their jobs. Reported experiences and hopes for the future related to employment were relatively similar for all generations and ethnicity groups.

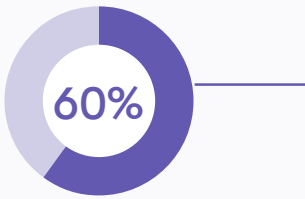


“The most important issue I am facing right now is financial insecurity. My family too is facing their own hardships around loss of work in my home country.”

Can I apply for my career job while the COVID-19 is still ‘around’?”

“Financial implications resulting from loss of employment.”

Positive impacts



60% of participants reported they had experienced at least a few positive changes in their lives since the start of the COVID-19 crisis. 84% of participants reported that the quality of their relationships with their family had either not changed or had improved, with 76% of participants stating their relationships with their friends had either stayed the same or improved.



“Made some more friends online, improved some too”

“School is less stressful, I have more time to chill”

“It has made my family closer”

“Inspiration to pick up more hobbies and increased exercising.”

“Now both my parents are working from home and it great because I can spend a lot more time with them both”

“Simpler lifestyle, less rushing around, more relaxed spending time at home”

“Working from home has reduced my commuting time and given me opportunity to develop a better self-care routine than I had before”

“More time (to) focus on myself and learn/try new things.”

“I’m spending more time being creative. During remote learning I had more time to go out because I wasn’t on buses.”

“I’ve improved with my school work”

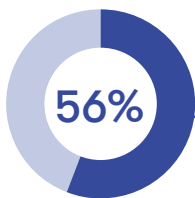
“I now have the flexibility to incorporate working from home. Enrolled back into Uni and now pursuing a masters degree.”

Health and Wellbeing

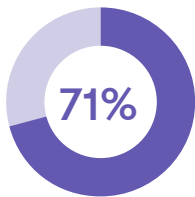
The survey explored social and emotional wellbeing through a series of questions about participants' emotions and worries in the two weeks prior to completing the survey, and the emotional support they sought out or accessed. The survey also asked participants about exercise, spending time outdoors and sleep during this period.

Almost all participants (97%) reported moderate/high/very high symptoms for at least one indicator of poor emotional wellbeing. 92% reported having these symptoms for two or more indicators. 86% of participants had at least one symptom rated as high/very high and 10% of participants had six or more high/very high symptoms.

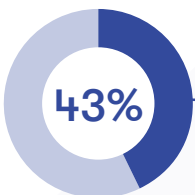
Participants from multicultural backgrounds and those who are 1st generation were more likely to report experiencing more COVID-19 stressors, compared to their Anglo/European and 2nd/3rd generation peers, however they were less likely to report poor emotional wellbeing symptoms rated as high/very high for two or more indicators.



More than half (**56%**) of the participants from multicultural backgrounds had symptoms rated as high/very high for two or more indicators, compared to 71% of participants from Anglo/European backgrounds.



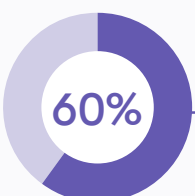
3rd generation participants (**71%**) were most likely to report symptoms rated as high/very high for two or more indicators, compared to 2nd generation (62%) and 1st generation (52%).



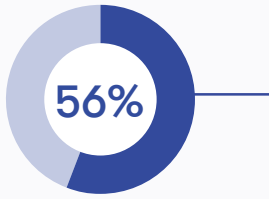
A higher proportion of participants who identified as being from a multicultural background, had three or more stressors (**43%**) compared to participants from an Anglo/European background (26%).

38% of participants received support from their friends and family. Only 12% of participants reported they reached out for support from a professional or service. 54% of participants said they didn't reach out for support, with 40% of participants thinking they didn't need any, and 15% said they didn't feel comfortable asking for support.

Two-thirds of participants (66%) reported they had average/poor/very poor sleep over the previous two weeks; 41% reported only spending time outside two or fewer days a week.



A lower proportion of participants from a multicultural background (**60%**) reported their sleep as average/poor/very poor when compared to participants who identified as from Anglo/European backgrounds (70%).



A lower proportion of participants from a multicultural background (**56%**) spent more than three days outside compared to participants who identified as from Anglo/European backgrounds (64%).

Two thirds (66%) of participants were not meeting national guidelines for required exercise, only exercising for at least thirty minutes on two or fewer days a week, for the previous two weeks.



“My mental health is a lot worse, I dont feel postive or excited anymore”

“Maintaining positive mental health while having to remain isolated from certain friends, family members and social activities”

“Sometimes i got really upset about stuff and sometimes I felt alone”

“The most important issues facing us right now is a major mental health crisis - I believe we need to educate teens on how to handle this.”

“corona has affected my mental health a bit and I have felt lonely”


“Mental health has been a big issue surrounding COVID-19 such as increased stress.”

“It’s played a huge part in my mental health deteriorating.”

What Next?

The COVID-19 crisis, and our responses to it, have compounded existing inequities in our society and laid bare potential social and generational fault-lines for a post-COVID world. These findings help us understand the many and varied ways the crisis has impacted upon young Victorians – almost half of whom are from refugee and migrant backgrounds, and whose lived experiences include intersecting complexities associated with race and racism, culture, identity and belonging. The findings give us an insight into where we should be looking to target interventions, and further research, for young Victorians during the recovery and beyond, as well as the need for policy solutions that are flexible and responsive to the diverse needs of this generation in the long term.

Future work should aim to further understand young people's experiences, with a particular focus on overlapping forms of disadvantage and identification of the structural, systemic and social forces that exclude or diminish young people's capacity to participate and engage fully in Australia's social, economic and civic life, now and post-COVID-19. It should also look to co-design strategies to address young people's concerns and promote their wellbeing, with a focus on bringing young Victorians closer to the policy making process. This is a major priority given this survey was collected in June 2020 under the stage three lockdown and that Melbourne, and some of regional Victoria, has been under a more severe stage four lockdown since July 9th 2020. Emerging data suggests the impacts of the stage four lockdown on young people and on mental health are even more profound than those associated with the first lockdown.



“there is lots of stress and hurt in the world currently and I feel completely helpless, there’s nothing that I can do to make things okay.”

“The world is in an interesting state and whilst many of the issues that we are experiencing are very important and influential for the future, they are putting a lot of pressure on young people.”

“Trying to work out how I see myself in the world.”

“A bit depressed and lost at the state the world is currently in...”

“Uncertainty about the future, in my personal life and the future of the world in general. Life seems depressing these days. I feel hopeless and a bit overwhelmed...”

“Not only the COVID-19 pandemic but other important events and crises in the world at the moment are going to impact on our future.”

Acknowledgements

We would like to sincerely thank both the young people who generously shared their experiences through the online survey, and the youth volunteers who provided valuable feedback on the survey tool.

Acknowledgment of Country

We respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we work. We pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging, and acknowledge their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We extend this respect to Traditional Owners throughout Victoria, and across Australia, where we live, work and play.

Copyright Statement

This work is protected under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercialNoDerivs 4.0 Australia licence: You may not reproduce or copy photographs. You may download, share, display, print and reproduce this material in unaltered form for non-commercial uses as long as you acknowledge CMY (and any other nominated parties) as the source. Full terms at: creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/au/ or www.cmy.net.au/copyright.

Suggested Citation: Doery, K., Guerra, G., Kenny, E., Harriott, L. & Priest, N. (2020). *Hidden Cost: Young multicultural Victorians and COVID-19*, Summary Report. Melbourne, Victoria: Centre for Multicultural Youth.

Endnote

1. Ethnicity was coded as 'Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander'; 'Anglo/European'; and 'Multicultural Backgrounds'. Following international guidelines (see full report for details), ethnicity was coded using a prioritisation method whereby the Anglo-European ethnicity coding does not include people who identified as also being from another ethnic/racial/cultural background. We recognise the considerable diversity among multicultural and ethnic minority groups, and that collapsing these groups into one larger category for statistical analysis has limitations. Additionally, due to the small number of participants from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds we were unable to include this group in the comparative analysis as a separate group.