

Strong close relationships key in coping with pandemic, twin study shows

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A new study of twins and triplets shows how our close social relationships are vital in how we cope with the upheaval of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The study involved over 3,500 adult twins and triplets from across

Australia at the height of initial social lockdown measures.

Called [TRACKERR](#), the Twins Research Australia COVID-19 Knowledge, Experience, Reaction and Resilience study investigates the physical, social and psychological impacts of the pandemic on Australians and their families.

"The findings have revealed great differences in experiences," said Professor John Hopper, Director of Twins Research Australia at the University of Melbourne. "Although based on twins and triplets, this research provides us with insights into the pandemic's impact that are directly applicable to the population as a whole."

Conducted between 15 April and 12 May, the study is the first in a series by Twins Research Australia across the coming 12 months to measure the impact of the pandemic in the short, medium and long-term.

Key findings from the [full report](#) released today include:

- Those with closer relationships, such as being married or with strong bonds with their co-twins or triplets, had higher resilience scores and reported less impact on mental health during the pandemic. They also indicated a more optimistic outlook for the future
- The biggest causes for concern were the health of elderly relatives (especially among 45-60-year-olds) and losing jobs (especially among the 30-45-year-olds)
- One in four adult participants reported a change in income, regardless of gender, although this was more likely for those who were younger (41 percent of those under 30)
- About one in three reported a decline in mental health and almost half reported a decline in their social health
- Women's mental health was more severely impacted than men's

(female twins' anxiety levels were 17 percent higher than their twin brothers, and depression levels were 19 percent higher)

- Females aged 30-45 appeared to be the least optimistic about their own future
- Physical health improved for nearly 18 percent.

Some participants reported substantial disruptions and increased stresses in their lives. Others reported positive consequences of the restrictions in terms of the impact on their close relationships and physical and [mental health](#), related to not having to deal with the usual day to day stressors.

For instance, while 14 percent reported a decline in the quality of close relationships, 13 percent reported that their [close relationships](#) had improved since the beginning of restrictions.

There were also reports (more so for women) of feeling threatened and experiencing abuse or assault, even at this early stage of the restrictions.

"This research shows how quickly the pandemic affected every aspect of people's lives," Professor Hopper said. "Of particular concern is the higher levels of stress being experienced by women. Also, close social relationships—whether family, friends or house mates—are having a big impact on people's positive or negative experiences. We've been required to bunker down into smaller social groups than we're used to, and to rely on them like never before. This research focuses attention on the need to help families under pressure and to pay close attention to and value and strengthen our closest relationships because they can help us through these tough times."

Professor Hopper said he hoped the findings would help guide decision-making related to public [health](#) services, support and outcomes.

"We know coronavirus has had a massive impact in the short-term but

what will be the effects in the medium and longer-term on families?" he said. "To better understand this, we will continue to monitor changing experiences and ways of coping."

Twins Research Australia will soon release findings into the specific challenges faced by parents of twins and triplets, including those relating to remote learning and home environments during the pandemic. Further phases of research into the experiences of twin adults and multiple-birth families will continue over the coming 12 months.

More information: Adult twins and parents of twins aged 1-17 years are welcome to join this ongoing research project at www.twins.org.au

Provided by University of Melbourne

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