

Two-thirds of Kiwis surveyed saw lockdown's silver linings

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Credit: Alix Campbell via Upper Hutt City Library

Two-thirds of New Zealanders believed there were 'silver linings' to the country's Alert Level 4 COVID-19 lockdown imposed in March last year, a University of Otago survey has found.

The researchers were able to question New Zealanders while they were at home, giving a unique insight into their lives during the nationwide [lockdown](#) between 25 March and 23 April, widely regarded as one of the strictest imposed anywhere in the world.

One year on from lockdown, the results of their study have been published in the international scientific journal, *PLOS ONE*.

Participants were asked "Have you experienced any [silver](#) linings, or positive aspects during the COVID-19 Level 4 lockdown?" and were able to answer 'yes, for me personally,' and/or 'yes for wider society,' or no. Of the 2,010 participants who completed the [online survey](#), 64 percent said they could see a silver lining to lockdown.

Lead researcher Dr. Matthew Jenkins says New Zealanders talked about a wide range of positive experiences during lockdown, from pride in the country's response, to having more free time to exercise, take up hobbies, or build relationships with their neighbors.

"Lockdown represented a major flashpoint in people's lives and created an opportunity to stop, take stock and to reflect and connect with others.

"Many people reported that kindness and helping behaviors became more common over this period. They described an 'old fashioned sense of community and caring ... that was not apparent before lockdown.'"

Increased flexibility in working from home and reduced time spent commuting was frequently mentioned as one of the silver linings of lockdown, enabling people to spend more time with their families.

"Because of the social distancing measures in place, technology became a major way for people to connect socially and for work via online services such as videoconferencing. One participant reported they 'got to

speak with my Dad, who lives overseas, daily' while another joined a global online knitting group to maintain social interactions."

Others reported the pride they felt in the country's response to the pandemic, with one commenting, 'we may be a small country, but we are doing an amazing job.'

"There was an increased sense of national unity, expressed by one participant as '... it's brought New Zealanders together, united in our shared COVID experience.'"

Participants also talked about the respite that lockdown offered for the environment, with one observing there was, 'less air pollution and nature (was) having a break from humans destroying it' and another enjoying 'hearing birds sing.'

Dr. Jenkins says the research offers a valuable insight into what kinds of support could help people survive and thrive under adverse circumstances.

"Our findings show that in a time of turmoil, unrest and [psychological distress](#), many people nonetheless found silver linings. We also speculate that, despite the impact of the lockdown, many people had their psychological needs for social connectedness and autonomy met, and these were likely to have influenced compliance with lockdown measures.

"Identifying these silver linings will help Governments and mental health practitioners identify the support required to help people survive and thrive during prolonged and stressful events, such as pandemics and lockdowns."

More information: Jenkins, Matthew (2020): Silver linings raw data.

figshare. Dataset. doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.13023065.v1

Provided by University of Otago

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