

# COVID-19 pandemic is widening economic inequalities

November 8 2021



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

People who were struggling financially before the pandemic are more

than twice as likely, compared to people who were already living comfortably, to say they are now even worse off, find UCL researchers as part of the COVID-19 Social Study.

Among people who were finding it difficult before the pandemic, 55 percent said in October 2021 they were worse off than before the pandemic, compared to 19 percent of people who were living comfortably before the pandemic.

The study found that people who were living comfortably before the pandemic were also most likely to say they were now much better off.

Launched in the week before the first lockdown started, the ongoing UCL COVID-19 Social Study is funded by the Nuffield Foundation with additional support from Wellcome and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). It is the UK's largest study into how adults are feeling about the lockdown, government advice and overall wellbeing and mental health with over 70,000 participants who have been followed across the last 84 weeks.

Lead author Dr. Elise Paul (UCL Institute of Epidemiology & Health Care) said: "These widening disparities are cause for concern, as we have been finding throughout the pandemic that people with low household incomes report higher levels of depression and anxiety symptoms, and loneliness, and lower levels of life satisfaction and happiness. People on lower incomes have also reported worries about being able to access sufficient food. This may not have always been due to the pandemic, as Brexit and petrol problems have also been contributing factors this year.

"Many people on lower incomes have been hit hard by economic impacts of lockdowns, particularly those whose employment may have already been precarious, while many people on higher incomes have been less

affected and may have been more likely to work remotely. In many ways, the impacts of the pandemic have not been shared equally, so [recovery plans](#) need to prioritize lifting up all groups of people who have been struggling over the last year and a half."

The study has also found that the proportion of people concerned about catching or becoming seriously ill from COVID-19 has been increasing somewhat over the past several months and is now similar to what it was in February 2021, at 34 percent. Women and people with a physical or mental health diagnosis continue to be more worried about the disease.

Confidence in the government's ability to handle the pandemic has been decreasing in England over the past six months and is now similar to autumn 2020 levels and is lower in England than in Scotland or Wales.

The researchers also found that compliance with COVID-19 guidelines is at an all-time low; while majority compliance was reported by 84 percent of respondents, only 32 percent reported complete compliance.

Cheryl Lloyd, Education Programme Head at the Nuffield Foundation said: "The latest release from the COVID-19 Social Study is further evidence of the profound, ongoing and disproportionate effects of the pandemic on people on low incomes. Increasing numbers of people who were on lower incomes prior to the [pandemic](#) are finding it more difficult to manage financially, and that has knock-on effects on their [mental health](#) and wellbeing. This suggests that recovery plans have been insufficient in terms of helping those most in need and that action is required to prevent further deterioration in people's ability to cope financially, and to address the social and psychological impacts that we continue to see."

**More information:** COVID-19 Social Study: Understanding the psychological and social impact of the pandemic.

[www.covidsocialstudy.org/](http://www.covidsocialstudy.org/)

Provided by University College London

Citation: COVID-19 pandemic is widening economic inequalities (2021, November 8) retrieved 6 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-11-covid-pandemic-widening-economic-inequalities.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.