

Border closures creating potential long-term mental health crisis

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Australia's extended international COVID-19 border closures have led to high levels of psychological distress across the community, with experts suggesting future pandemic policy settings consider the toll on people's mental health and wellbeing.

A recent study of almost 4000 people living in (63 percent) and outside (34 percent) Australia found that the Australian international border

restrictions had a negative impact on the mental [health](#) of respondents.

The study published in *Globalization and Health* was led by researchers from Flinders University Órama Institute and the SAHMRI Wellbeing and Resilience Centre.

"The vast majority of participants reported being negatively affected by the restrictions and showed high or very high levels of psychological distress," says Flinders University researcher Dr. Kathina Ali, with colleagues from the SAHMRI Wellbeing and Resilience Centre.

"Our findings indicate that respondents are similarly affected, whether they were in Australia or overseas."

Participants reported a variety of reasons why their mental health had been negatively affected: wanting to be with partners, family and friends (81.1 percent), economic / employment reasons (4.9 percent), study (4.1 percent), [personal safety](#) / health (2.6 percent) or holiday (1.4 percent). Being separated from partners and those with interrupted study pathways expressed the highest distress.

"A fifth of respondents believed they needed help for [mental health problems](#). Health and mental health care providers should be aware of this crisis and provide appropriate support options and practical strategies to mitigate the risk of further deterioration," Dr. Ali says.

Researchers caution that [policy decisions](#) need to consider significant mental health cost of these border restrictions into developing future strategies and plans.

"It is important to track the mental health of these groups," adds co-author Dr. Dan Fassnacht. "We continue to measure the impact of [border](#) policies on people's [mental health](#) and wellbeing."

"Qualitative data which is currently prepared for publication demonstrates the significant impact with respondents reporting that they intend to leave or have left Australia due to the ongoing stress of not being able to see families."

More information: Kathina Ali et al, A cross-sectional investigation of the mental health and wellbeing among individuals who have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 international border closure in Australia, *Globalization and Health* (2022). [DOI: 10.1186/s12992-022-00807-7](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-022-00807-7)

Provided by Flinders University

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