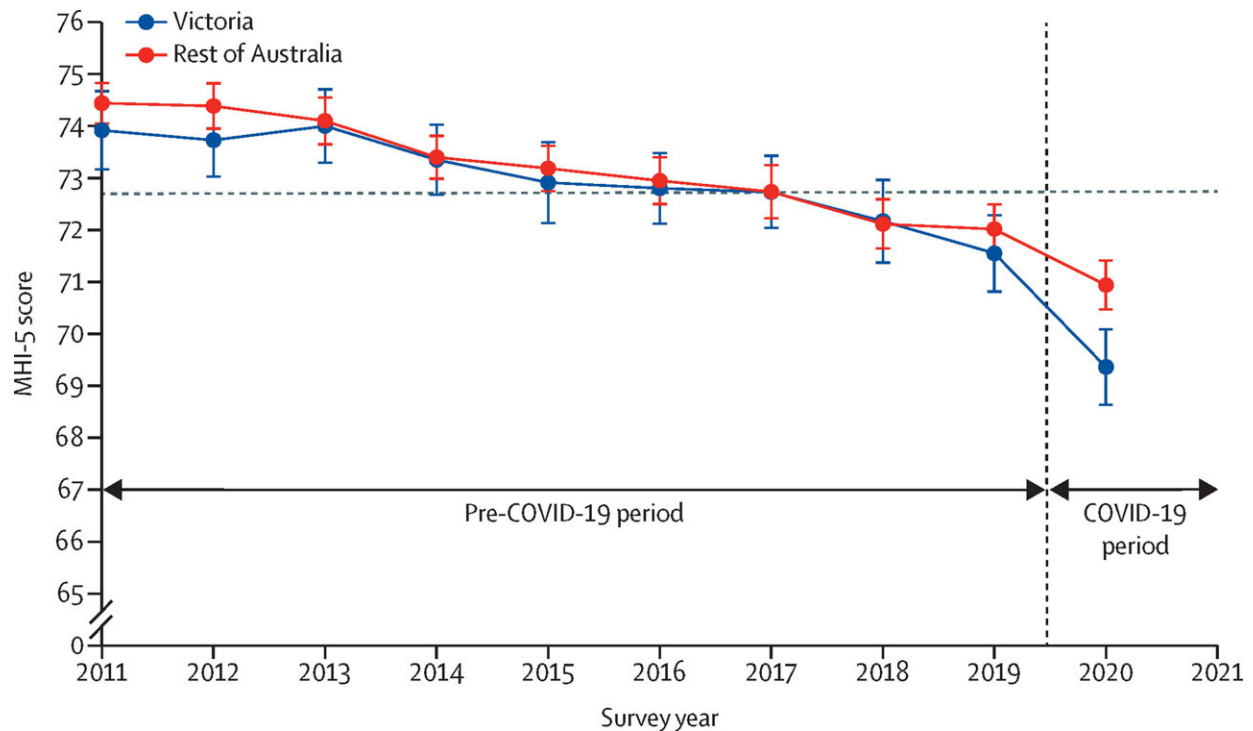


Effect of lockdown on mental health in Australia

April 28 2022



Mean MHI-5 scores by wave of data collection in Victoria and other Australian states and territories MHI-5 scores range between 0 and 100. Error bars represent 95% CIs. MHI-5=five-item Mental Health Inventory. The horizontal dashed line is the MHI-5 sample mean over the period 2011 to 2020. Credit: *The Lancet Public Health* (2022). DOI: 10.1016/S2468-2667(22)00082-2

Victorian women experienced greater mental health decline compared to the rest of Australia during 2020 COVID-19 lockdowns, new University

of Melbourne research has found.

The negative impacts of [lockdown](#) were more severe for women in couples, with children under 15, and for women who lived in flats or apartments, data taken from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey showed.

The study, published in *The Lancet Public Health*, analyzed 151,583 observations from 20,839 Australians from 2011 to the first period of 2020. It compared two groups—people who were exposed to lockdowns during 2020 and those who were relatively free of restrictions.

University of Melbourne Professor Mark Wooden, co-author of the article said the study showed lockdowns can exaggerate existing inequalities in the responsibility for household and caring duties.

"If lockdowns and other policies intended to restrict population movement are to remain part of the policy toolkit for responding to pandemics, more attention needs to be given to providing support to alleviate the potential negative side-effects, including for example, focusing on equitably delivering childcare services and schooling," Professor Wooden said.

"Further research is also needed into the potential modifying role that [environmental factors](#), such as housing and access to outdoor space, might have on the psychological effects of lockdowns."

Mental [health](#) was assessed in this report using the Mental Health Inventory (MHI-5), assessing overall mood and frequency of anxiety symptoms over four weeks. Scores ranged from 0 to 100, with low values indicative of poor mental health.

The analysis showed that while, on average, the effect of the Victorian

2020 lockdown on mental health overall was very small (from 71.6 in 2019 to 69.4 in 2020) and on par with other states (from 72.0 in 2019 to 70.9 in 2020), coupled women with children experienced a 4.4 point decline during lockdown, compared with only 1.2 point decline for coupled men with dependent children.

Other key insights:

- No negative effect of lockdown was found for single mothers
- No evidence that lockdown effect was different for males in couples with or without dependent children
- Effects of lockdown on mental health were not driven by the most vulnerable populations ([older adults](#) living on their own, those with chronic physical or [mental health conditions](#) or those in the most disadvantaged socioeconomic circumstances)
- Mental health effects were greater among those with higher income
- No evidence of a lockdown effect on the mental health of adolescents aged 15 to 19 years (important to note that HILDA has previously shown a significant decline in the mental health of adolescents, but this study shows the decline is not attributable to lockdowns)

"While this study doesn't speak to the prolonged effects of lockdowns, nor what the impact would be in the absence of lockdowns in relation to greater illness and death caused by COVID-19, it does provide evidence of mental health effects that should be accounted for when evaluating the merits and costs of the Australian COVID-19 policy approach," Professor Wooden said.

"It's also important to note that although our findings are very specific to the Australian context, these policy responses (stay-at-home orders, school and business closures, cancelation of public events, and

restrictions on movement) and their [mental health](#) effects might be widespread around the world."

In its 20th year, this is the first release of HILDA data taken from during the COVID-19 pandemic. The full release is expected later in 2022.

More information: Peter Butterworth et al, Effect of lockdown on mental health in Australia: evidence from a natural experiment analysing a longitudinal probability sample survey, *The Lancet Public Health* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/S2468-2667\(22\)00082-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(22)00082-2)

Provided by University of Melbourne

Citation: Effect of lockdown on mental health in Australia (2022, April 28) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-04-effect-lockdown-mental-health-australia.html>

<p>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.</p>
--