

Emergency cash payments found to have positive impact on vulnerable young Australians

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A University of Sydney study has found that Australian government emergency cash payments, like JobKeeper, significantly helped young adults with pre-existing mental health disorders during the pandemic. Its findings can be built on to inform future crisis support plans about the

importance of financial aid.

[This study](#), published in *Scientific Reports*, investigated the impact of cash transfer payments (specifically JobKeeper and JobSeeker Supplement) provided during the COVID-19 pandemic and found young Australians with neurodiversity and/or mental health conditions who received JobKeeper coped better through the pandemic than those who did not receive JobKeeper.

JobKeeper was an emergency cash transfer payment from the Australian Government, paid to businesses, not-for-profit organizations, and sole traders to give employers [financial support](#) to retain the employment of their workforce and to maintain connection with their employees through the "lockdown" phases of the pandemic to prevent job losses.

Co-authors, Dr. Md Irteja Islam, Sydney School of Public Health, University of Sydney and Professor Alexandra Martiniuk, Faculty of Medicine and Health, University of Sydney, examined [mental health outcomes](#) in Australian adolescents and young adults.

"This [research](#) is important as we grow our understanding of national (and indeed international) policy strategies to support mental health and well-being during crises. Particularly given how many people globally are suffering with poor mental health, and global destabilization, conflicts and inflation continue to require development and evaluation of mechanisms for social protection," Professor Martiniuk said.

The researchers used data collected by Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, to examine how well the participants felt they were managing during the stress of the pandemic.

Of the 902 participants in the study, 18.9% self-reported being neurodiverse and/or having a mental health disorder either in the form of

anxiety, ADHD, depression or autism.

Results showed that those who received JobKeeper had higher levels of adaptive coping than those who did not receive JobKeeper. Coping can be described as using mental and practical strategies to successfully manage a challenging situation.

The study also found that for individuals without prior mental health issues, being male and having strong family support were both linked to better coping during the pandemic. Those with strong family bonds were 88% more likely to cope well compared to those with weak family bonds.

"Targeted [support programs](#) need to be rolled out to those most greatly impacted during crises. This could be in the form of increased funding, such as JobKeeper or funding directly to [mental health services](#), particularly for young adults and those with pre-existing mental health conditions," Dr. Islam said.

"The study underscores the critical role of timely financial interventions during crises in safeguarding the mental well-being of [young adults](#) with pre-existing neurodiversity and/or mental health conditions."

According to the Australian Institute, during the first period of lockdown, youths aged between 15 to 24 made up 39% of job losses. The Institute also reported the figure rose even higher between June and September 2021, when young people represented 55% of job losses.

To reinforce how important job security was in relation to mental well-being, researchers cited results from a COVID-19 Impact Survey conducted in the United States which found economic uncertainty and unemployment were associated with substantially increased mental distress.

"Future research should focus on further longitudinal and randomized studies to better understand the effects of financial support on mental health. Using a variety of methods and tools can help provide more knowledge about how various solutions help individuals cope with stress and adversity," Dr. Islam said.

More information: Md Irteja Islam et al, A longitudinal study on impact of emergency cash transfer payments during the COVID pandemic on coping among Australian young adults, *Scientific Reports* (2024). [DOI: 10.1038/s41598-024-68027-0](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-68027-0)

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