

Disadvantaged mothers report high rates of job loss and stress during COVID-19 pandemic

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A third of Australian mothers experiencing disadvantage have suffered job or income loss as well as high rates of stress during the COVID-19

pandemic, a new study has found.

The research, led by the Centre for Community Child Health at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI) and published in *PLOS ONE*, found mothers who had to self-quarantine, faced [financial hardship](#), or were under stress from their children's at-home learning reported poorer [mental health](#).

The researchers stated unless the financial and social consequences of lockdown were addressed, the inequities arising from adversity would be exacerbated.

The study involved 319 mothers living in adversity recruited across Victoria and Tasmania from the right@home trial who undertook a survey during the first 10 months of the pandemic. It found 20 percent of mothers had to self-quarantine, 27 percent experienced job or income loss and 40 percent faced [family](#) stress.

A third of mothers reported being moderately to extremely worried about themselves or [family members](#) becoming infected and that changes in contact with family and friends had been moderately to extremely stressful for their child. Half felt their child's at-home learning often or almost always made their usual duties more difficult.

But the report noted many also experienced resilience with 49 percent finding good ways of coping with the stress and 29 percent providing support to fellow families in their community.

MCRI researcher Dr. Hannah Bryson said the financial and social impacts of Australia's public health restrictions have substantially affected families experiencing adversity and their mental health.

"Financial hardship impacts parents' ability to pay for essentials and to

care for and invest in resources for their children. Additionally, it puts families at greater risk of poor mental health, family violence and child maltreatment," she said.

"Subsequently, poor parent mental health can negatively impact parents' own health, as well as their children's behavioral and emotional outcomes. "Closure of schools and transitioning to at-home learning also appears to be a key contributor to this."

MCRI Professor Sharon Goldfeld said to recover from the pandemic, the economic and healthcare needs of women and children living in adversity must be prioritized with investment in income support and universal and equitable access to family [health](#) services.

"As Australia emerges from lockdown and the pandemic, the disproportionate burden on women and children already living in [adversity](#) will need to be addressed with similarly disproportionate service system and economic policy responses," she said.

More information: Hannah Bryson et al, Clinical, financial and social impacts of COVID-19 and their associations with mental health for mothers and children experiencing adversity in Australia, *PLOS ONE* (2021). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0257357](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0257357)

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