



***Worsening of Australian Women's
Experiences under COVID-19:
A Crisis for Victoria's Future***

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Overview

Scope of the Problem: The COVID-19 Pandemic is Disproportionately Impacting Women

COVID-19 has placed unparalleled challenges on individuals, families, employers and governments. As global cases have climbed, governments have responded by closing economies and restricting the movement of individuals to stop the spread of the deadly pathogen. The implications of these closures are uniquely gendered at both home and work.

Australia is no exception. Australian women's larger care burdens – to children, spouses, and relatives – have resulted in increasing demands for their labour under lockdown, yet much of this work is unrecognized and unpaid. In terms of paid employment, a divergent pattern emerges. Women are underemployed in some sectors that are hardest hit by the lockdowns such as hospitality and retail, but demand for women's labor on the frontline-response sectors such as nursing and aged care have increased. Many of the service industries – food service, tourism and accommodation – may suffer long term structural declines due to the economic shocks of the virus, even after economies re-open.

This has led to the impending economic crisis coined as a “she-cession” because women are acutely disadvantaged. Importantly, women are responding to changing employment on top of unstable childcare arrangements as schools and daycares close, and remote learning moves online.

To better understand how Australians are coping under the pandemic, we conducted two surveys during heightened periods of social movement restrictions. The first was a sample of 1,005 Australians under the first lockdown (May 2020) to understand their work, family and health experiences during these unprecedented times. The second was a sample of 1,375 Australians during the height of the Stage four lockdowns in Victoria (September 2020). Our survey design allowed us to follow many Australians over these two time periods to document changes in their work, family and health experiences.

As Victoria was the only state to experience a second lockdown characterized by stage four restrictions, our second survey over-samples Victorians so that we can meaningfully compare their experiences to the rest of Australia. We focus on the gender divisions between Victorians and the rest of Australia.

These patterns show a stark reality: Victorian women are particularly disadvantaged in their work, family and health experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Executive Summary

Our key results benchmark women's experience from May to September highlighting the distinct patterns for Victorians and Victorian women:

Australian women experienced higher economic vulnerability in May 2020 which has compounded for Victorian women in September 2020:

- During the first lockdown, women experienced a job loss at higher rates than men (16 per cent vs 11 per cent).
- During the second lockdown (September 2020), Victorian women reported the *highest* rates of job loss of any other group (17 per cent for Victorian women compared to 10 per cent for women in other states).
- During the first lockdown, men were more vulnerable to having their own business disrupted.
- During the second lockdown, Victorian women who own their own businesses are increasingly disadvantaged, effectively closing the gender gaps in business disruption identified in the first shutdown.
- During the second lockdown, Victorians experienced higher rates of economic disruptions than Australians in other states (38 per cent vs 29 per cent for lost a job, pay or hours reduced, business disrupted, or took a voluntary redundancy)
- Notwithstanding that many Victorian women work in industries ineligible for JobKeeper (almost 40 per cent are ineligible), Victorian women are more reliant on the JobKeeper federal scheme than Victorian men (29 per cent vs 22 per cent).
- Victorian women were much more likely than men (12 per cent vs 7 per cent) to seek financial assistance from family and friends.
- Australian women are worried their jobs will disappear, they won't have the right skills for the future work or enough money for superannuation.

Women continue to carry a larger housework and childcare load with the greatest disadvantage amongst Victorian women.

- Women are doing much more housework under the COVID-19 crisis in May and September.
- Victorian women are doing more childcare in September than in May with Victorian men also increasing their contributions.

Women's health has been severely impacted by the pandemic with Victorian women particularly vulnerable to poor health, anxiety and restless sleep.

- As the lockdowns have continued, Victorian women who report their health has been affected has increased by 50 per cent.
- Victorian women report higher rates of their friends' health being affected (7 per cent in May versus 12 per cent in September).
- Victorian women report higher anxiety from May to September with women in other states and men in Victoria also reporting anxiety increasing during this time period.
- Australian women are reporting more restless sleep and feeling less calm than Australian men.
- Victorian women are reporting more restless sleep and less calm than any other group in Australia.

The key points listed above show a clear picture that under the pandemic, Australian women's work, family and health lives have suffered. Moreover, Victorian women are particularly

vulnerable to compounding disadvantage – job loss, business disruption, higher childcare and housework burdens, and more adverse health effects such as sleeplessness and anxiety. Victorian women who own their own businesses weathered the first wave but are particularly disadvantaged in the second lockdown. Victorians are drawing down savings more than any other surveyed group in the country with women particularly worried about their retirement savings and future work lives. The health consequences are clear: women are more anxious, less calm and sleeping poorly. Victorian women are particularly vulnerable to poor mental and physical health as the lockdowns have dragged on. The emerging evidence over time shows that women, especially those in Victoria, are facing unparalleled disadvantage. This means government approaches should be tailored to support women, especially those in Victoria.





Methodology

Life Under Lockdown Survey: Data Description

This project is an interdisciplinary collaboration of experts in gender, employment and data science. The team comprises Associate Professor Andrea Carson from La Trobe University (gender and politics) and Dr Shaun Ratcliff from the U.S. Studies Centre at the University of Sydney (data science) and Associate Professor Leah Ruppanner from The Policy Lab at the University of Melbourne (sociologist and expert on women's domestic and paid work).

Our survey was collected from a representative sample of Australians by YouGov, the global leaders in survey research, with a strong presence in Australia and other countries. We drew a combined sample of Australians against key demographics within the Australian population to ensure representation by age, political orientation and region across the two surveys in May and September 2020.

Our first survey of 1005 Australians was fielded on May 2 and 3, 2020. The timing was strategic – to capture Australians' experiences during the height of the lockdown.¹

The second wave of our sample consisted of 1365 respondents: a resurvey of 677 respondents from the first wave and 698 new respondents (including a 300-respondent oversample in Victoria). This fielded from 31 August to the 9 September 2020. During this second wave, we over-sampled Victorians to ensure adequate representation from the state that experienced the toughest restrictions (Stage 4 at time of survey), which impacted local economic and social activity.

In the next section, we provide more detailed findings that compare time, gender and state differences. We identify the impacts of COVID-19 on Australians over two different time points (May and September); we map the impacts on men compared to women across Australia and more specifically on Victorian women compared to the rest of Australia. We also identify the impacts on Victorian women compared to Victorian men.

¹ We also drew equivalent data from a sample of over 1,000 Americans during the same time frame to provide a strategic country-comparison.



Key Findings



Key Finding 1

Australian women experienced higher economic vulnerability in May which has compounded for Victorian women in September

Australians were under a strict lockdown to reduce the spread of the novel coronavirus in April and May 2020. At this time, we documented that Australian women were reporting job losses at higher rates compared to men. These reports were confirmed by other major reporting at the time. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) collection of weekly payroll data reported that between March and July 2020, there was a 7.1 per cent decline in the number of Victorian women in jobs.² By July, the rate of female job loss was almost five times the rate for men, according to the ABS.³

This reporting came before Melbourne's stage four lockdowns. A resurgence of COVID-19 cases within Victoria forced the government to declare a second lockdown, beginning on 9 July 2020 for six weeks. This was elevated to stage four restrictions and a state of disaster declared by Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews on 2 August 2020. Other states did not experience an equivalent second wave of the disease spread. ABS monthly labour force data shows that Victoria has the highest number of women who are unemployed, since records were first recorded.⁴

The disproportionate spread of the infectious disease across Australia makes Victoria an important case study into how Victorian women are faring during COVID-19 pandemic against the rest of Australia. Media reportage of a “she-cession” due to COVID-19's greater economic impact on women accord with our data findings.

² Batchelor, Ryan. (2020). *The impact of COVID-19 on women and work in Victoria. The McKell Institute Discussion Paper, August, p. 2.*

³ *Ibid*

⁴ *Ibid, p. 3.*

For example, in figure 1b, we find that Australian women reported higher job loss in May compared to men with little variation across the other states. Over the following four months, strong state-level differences emerged. Women in Victoria continued to report high rates of job loss with little change over these months; approximately 16 per cent lost jobs in May and September. The patterns look starkly different for the rest of Australia whereby one third of the women unemployed in May had returned to work in September. This means many women who had lost their jobs in May continued to be unemployed in September. This means Victorian women did not benefit from an economic bounce-back that appears to have occurred in the rest of Australia where the health crisis of COVID-19 had abated.

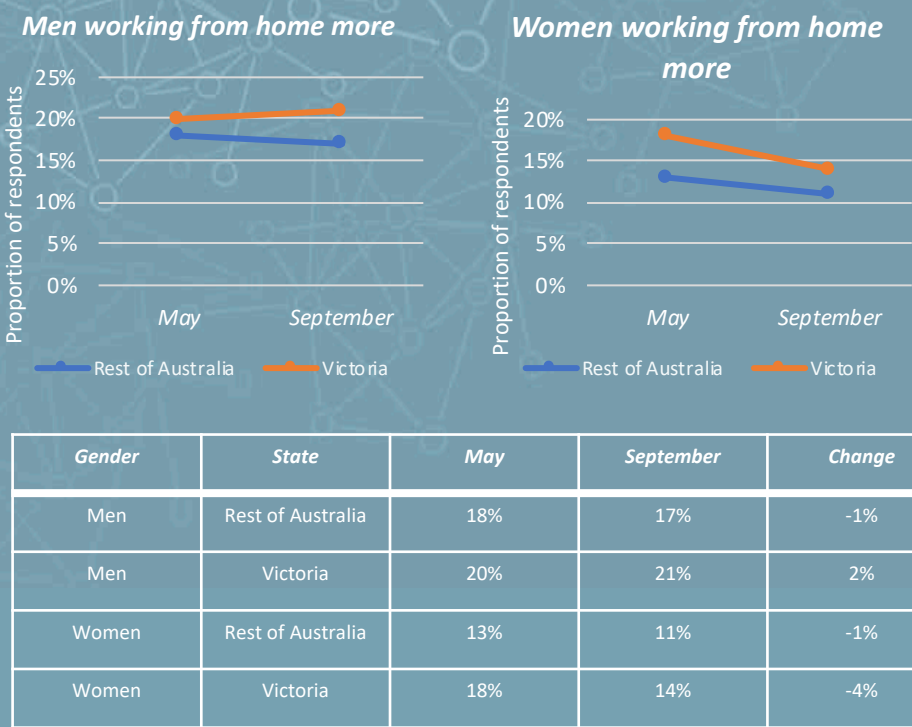


Figure 1a. Proportion of men and women whose working from home situation have changed since social distancing measures began, in Victoria and the rest of Australia.

Overall, men reported less job loss than women during the first lockdown (16 per cent versus 10 per cent in May). Men in non-Victorian states reported stronger economic recovery than those in Victoria. Again, this means the second lockdown suppressed a job rebound that is exhibited across the rest of Australia in Figure 1b.

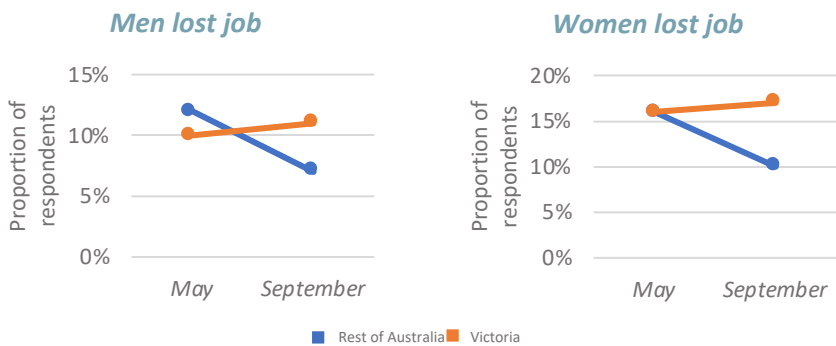
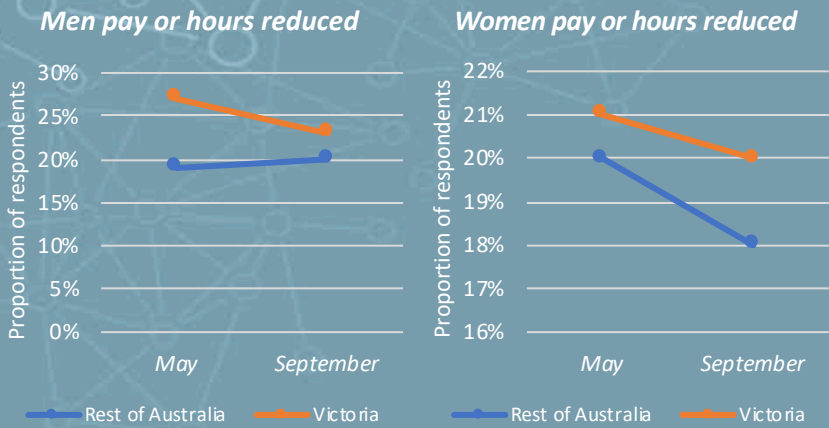


Figure 1b. Proportion of men and women whose employment situation have changed since social distancing measures began, in Victoria and the rest of Australia.

Whether these patterns translate into long-term economic job loss is yet to be seen, but the preliminary results indicate Victorian women are particularly hard hit by the prolonged lockdown through higher rates of continuous job loss.

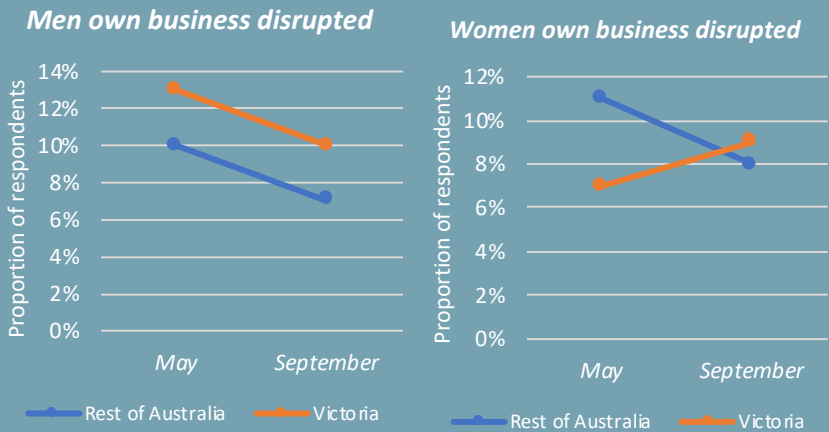
Turning to small business owners and sole traders (see Figure 1d), Victorian women who own their own businesses also appear increasingly vulnerable to economic fallout. For men in Victoria and other states, the impact of COVID-19 on their business has declined from May to September. Victorian men remain more disadvantaged than those from the rest of Australia but, at least preliminarily, it appears that the impact of the pandemic has waned for them over time.

For women, a divergent pattern emerges. Women business owners in Victoria were less impacted at the first wave of lockdowns (May) but, four months later, are increasingly reporting their businesses have been negatively impacted. This increasing trend is divergent from women business owners in other states who are experiencing a recovering. This means that, at the time of writing, Victorian women businessowners are uniquely disadvantaged by the lockdowns under the second wave of COVID-19 infections. Given that government intervention to support sole traders has been minimal preceding the second lockdown, this points to an area of key concern of economic disadvantage for Victorian women.



Gender	State	May	September	Change
Men	Rest of Australia	19%	20%	1%
Men	Victoria	27%	23%	-4%
Women	Rest of Australia	20%	18%	-2%
Women	Victoria	21%	20%	-2%

Figure 1c. Proportion of men and women whose pay or hours have changed since social distancing measures began, in Victoria and the rest of Australia.



Gender	State	May	September	Change
Men	Rest of Australia	10%	7%	-3%
Men	Victoria	13%	10%	-3%
Women	Rest of Australia	11%	8%	-3%
Women	Victoria	7%	9%	2%

Figure 1d. Proportion of men and women whose businesses have changed since social distancing measures began, in Victoria and the rest of Australia.

Overall, Victorians are experiencing worse economic outcomes than the rest of the country with about 10 per cent more Victorians reporting they have been negatively impacted by the lockdowns (i.e. lost their job, pay or hours cut, had business disrupted or took a redundancy; see Figure 2). Both in Victoria and the rest of Australia women appear to have been slightly more impacted than men, but the difference is too small for us to be statistically certain.

Figure 3 shows JobKeeper is supplementing 29 per cent of Victorian women's salaries which is 7 per cent higher than that of Victorian men. Women in other states report the highest rate of ineligibility at 20 per cent compared to 13% of those men across Australia and women in Victoria.

Given the findings, it is perhaps no surprise that the data reveals Victorians are drawing more heavily upon their savings than residents in other states. Roughly one in three Victorian men have drawn upon their personal savings compared to one in four Victorian women (see Figure 4). More men drew down their superannuation as well, which may capture men's higher contributions to superannuation. Concerningly, almost 10 per cent of Australians accessed their superannuation during this time despite not reporting any economic disadvantage because of the global health crisis. By contrast, Victorian women are more likely to access JobSeeker or borrow from friends and family for economic support under the second lockdown.

These indicate that men and women are drawing upon different economic supports to survive the economic consequences of the pandemic. This has implications for women when the JobKeeper scheme is reduced in September 2020 and set to end in March 2021. Current patterns show that women will be disproportionately worse off financially than men without this scheme, notwithstanding that more women than men were ineligible to participate due to the industries that they work in.

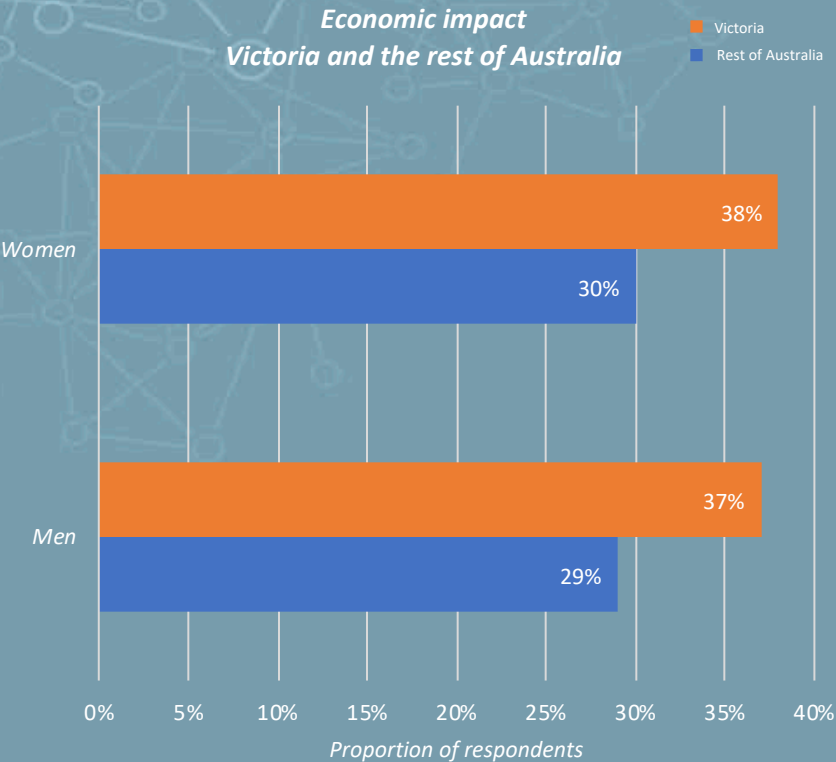


Figure 2. Proportion of men and women who have been impacted economically by the COVID-19 recession in Victoria and the rest of Australia. Here economic impact is classified as those who have lost their job, had pay or hours reduced, had their own business disrupted, or taken a voluntary redundancy.

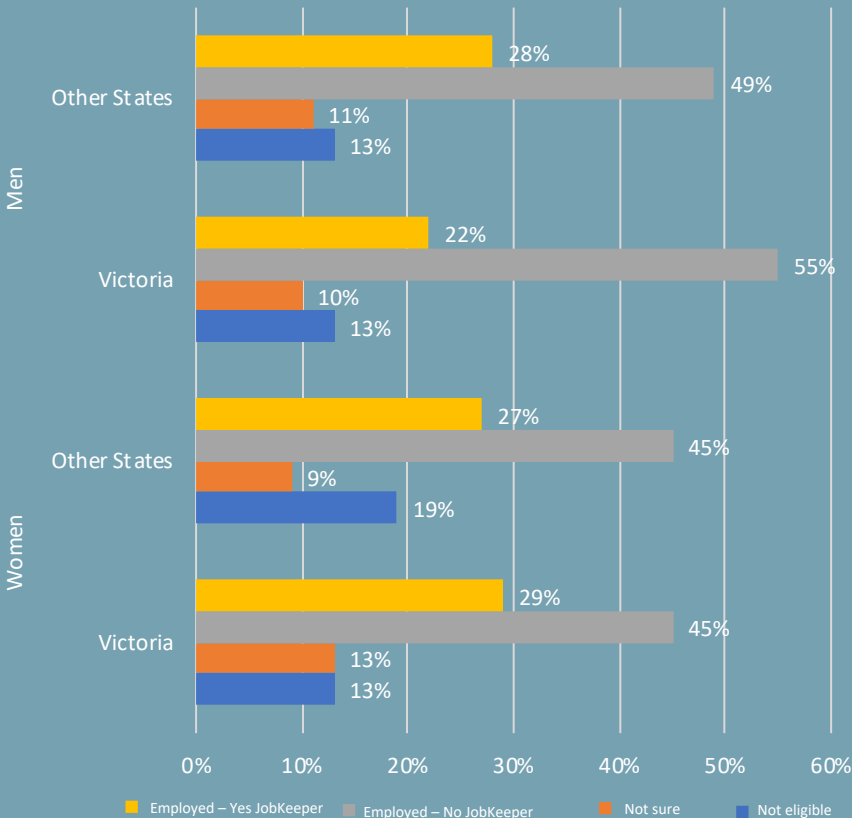
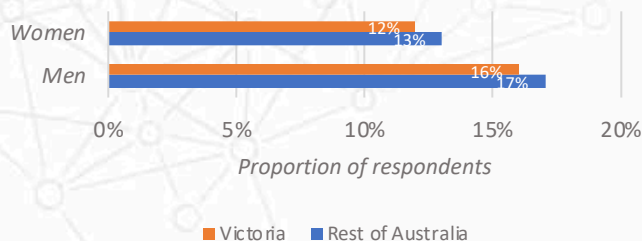
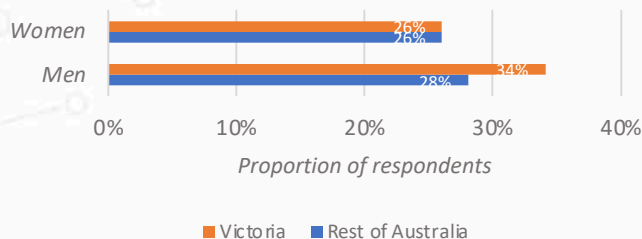


Figure 3. Portion of Employed Workers Reporting Accessing Job Keeper (September 2020)

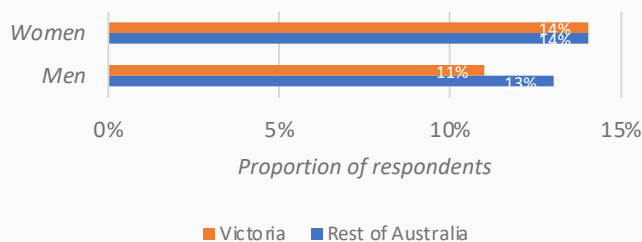
Withdrawing money from superannuation



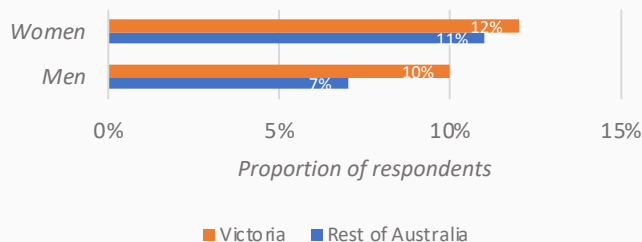
Withdrawing money from savings



Accessing jobseeker



Financial assistance from family and friends



Accessing rent relief

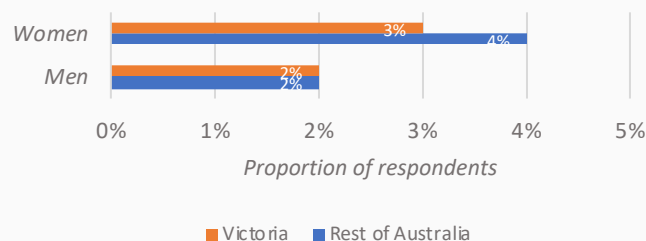


Figure 4. Proportion of men and women who have accessed different types of financial assistance since COVID-19 restrictions have been in place, in Victoria and the rest of Australia.

Amongst the people who drew upon economic resources during the lockdowns, most allocated this money to necessities – rent, and food. Women were more likely to draw upon financial support to pay for food and few allocated this extra money to childcare costs (see Figure 5). These patterns are important as the data shows most women were using these resources to survive – to pay for daily needs. That the government provisions were insufficient to support Australians to pay their day-to-day costs shows additional economic fallout may emerge when JobKeeper and other provisions are phased out. Figure 5 shows how Victorians spent emergency funds compared to the rest of Australia that did not experience the same degree of economic disruption owing to COVID-19.

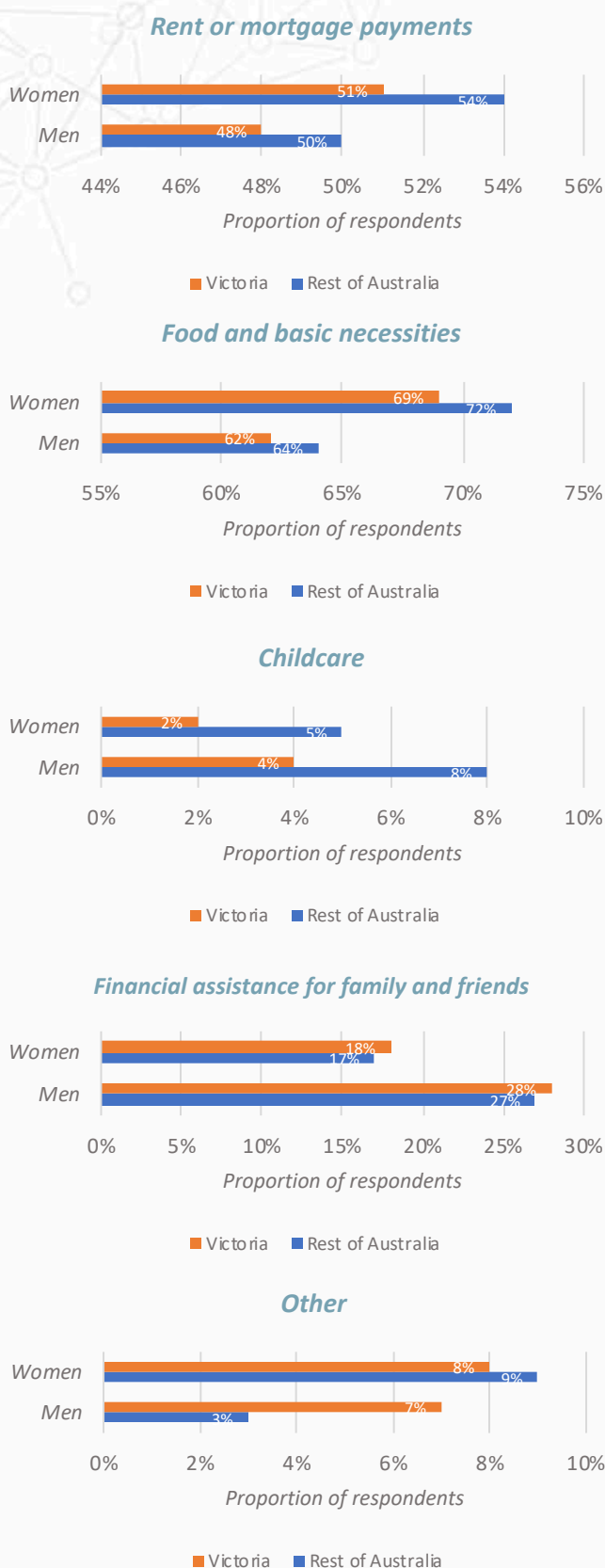


Figure 5: How Victorians spent their emergency funds during COVID-19 compared to other Australians.





Key Finding 2

Australian women are worried their jobs will disappear, they won't have the right skills for future work or enough money for superannuation

The pandemic has clear gendered economic consequences and we have shown these impacts are compounding disadvantage for women, especially those in Victoria. Australian women are also particularly worried about their economic futures.

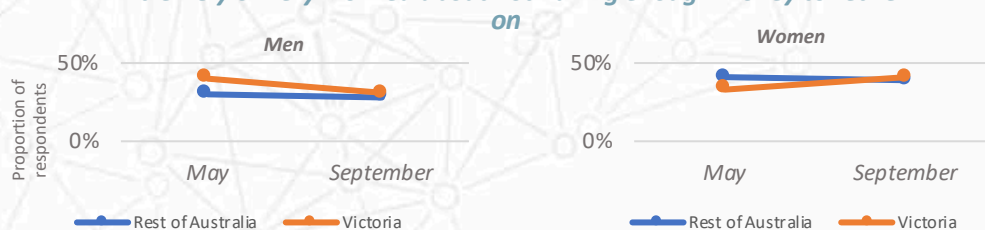
Australian women are more worried that their job will disappear and not come back (see Table 1).

When looking to their futures, Australian women are more worried than Australian men that they won't have enough superannuation for retirement (describing figure 6). Importantly, Victorian women are increasingly worried about having enough money for retirement, increasing by 8% from May to September. These patterns are interesting given that men have pulled more heavily upon their superannuation savings to mitigate the damage of COVID (see figure 4 above). But women are shown to hold less superannuation on average with an average balance for women approaching

retirement of \$121,300 in 2018 compared to \$168,500 for men.⁵ According to the ABS, 23 per cent of women have no superannuation savings compared to 20 per cent of men. Further, as of 2020, the gender pay gap was 14 per cent emphasizing women's incapacity to contribute to superannuation at the same level as men. Thus, women are more economically precarious regarding retirement savings which appears to be exacerbated by the global pandemic.

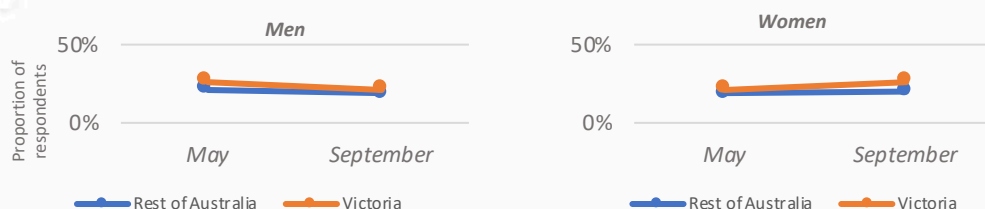
⁵ ABS [Australian Bureau of Statistics]. (2019). *Household Income and Wealth, Australia, 2017-18*. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017-18.

Extremely or very worried about not having enough money to retire



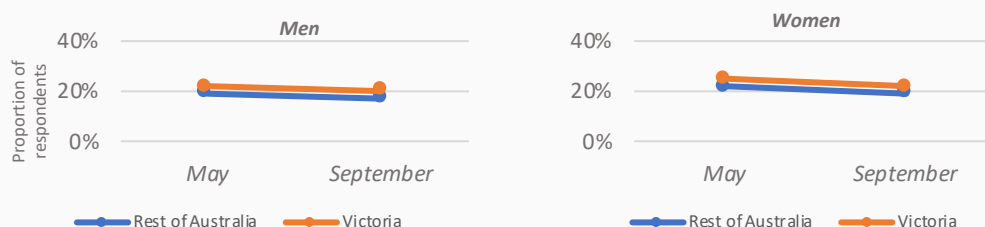
Gender	State	May	Sept	Change
Men	Rest of Australia	30%	28%	-3%
Men	Victoria	40%	31%	-9%
Women	Rest of Australia	41%	39%	-2%
Women	Victoria	33%	41%	8%

Extremely or very worried about losing job in the next 12 months



Gender	State	May	Sept	Change
Men	Rest of Australia	21%	19%	-2%
Men	Victoria	26%	21%	-5%
Women	Rest of Australia	19%	20%	0%
Women	Victoria	21%	26%	5%

Extremely or very worried about not having enough money to pay rent or mortgage



Gender	State	May	Sept	Change
Men	Rest of Australia	19%	17%	-2%
Men	Victoria	22%	20%	-2%
Women	Rest of Australia	22%	19%	-2%
Women	Victoria	25%	22%	-2%

Figure 6. Proportion of men and women very or extremely worried about losing their jobs, not having enough money to pay for housing, or retire on, in Victoria and the rest of Australia (5-point scale from extremely worried to not at all worried)

A unique characteristic of this pandemic is its impact on female-dominated jobs like tourism, service and retail. These industries are likely to be slow to recover with many jobs disappearing altogether. Work futures that rely more heavily on automation and artificial intelligence may be accelerated as companies look for new ways to work under COVID-safe regulations. This means that many women may need to reskill for their work futures.

Women are generally more worried than men that they will not have enough money to retire on, that they will lose their job in the next 12 months and that they will not have enough to pay their rent and mortgage, and Victorians are more worried than Australians in other states (figure 6).

Table 1 reveals that Australians are worried that if they lose their jobs they may not come back (36 per cent of women and 34 per cent of men). But we find that Australian women are particularly concerned about these futures with 33 per cent reporting that they worry that they lack the necessary skills for the future of work compared to 28 per cent men. Australian women are more likely than men to report they are much more worried they lack these skills (14 per cent of women vs 10 per cent of men). This finding provides policymakers with some directions about targeting funding to future training and skill acquisition.

The data shows about one in four Australian men and women are worried their caregiving responsibilities will make employment difficult (see Table 1). Again, women are more likely to say they are much more worried than men. Governments will need to be increasingly attuned to matching skills to future work for Australian women taking in to account flexibility to enable caregiving responsibilities to fit alongside viable employment.

Compared to a year ago, how much more worried about the following...				
	Somewhat and much more worried		Much more worried	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
If I lose my job, it will not come back	36%	34%	14%	15%
I do not have the right skills to pursue the job I want	28%	33%	10%	14%
Caregiving responsibilities to children, partners, friends and family make it difficult for me to work	27%	26%	7%	9%
*Note significant gender differences in bold				

Table 1: Concern about employment during the COVID-19 pandemic





Key Finding 3

Women continue to carry larger housework and childcare loads with the greatest disadvantage amongst Victorian women

Women's larger housework and childcare loads remain crucial barriers to their ability to engage in paid employment (see Figure 7). The lockdowns of schools, childcare and early learning facilities and workplaces brought all housework and childcare into a single location – the home – with detrimental consequences for parents, especially women.

During the first lockdown in May, we show women and men picked up more housework. In Victoria, men and women continue to do more and at

largely equal rates. But these patterns look much different than those in other states whereby most Australians outside Victoria (60 per cent) are reporting their housework load had gone back to pre-pandemic levels. The second lockdown means Victorians continue to carry a larger than normal housework burden. Given that women do more housework overall, this suggests women in Victoria remain at a disadvantage even though more Victorian men have increased their time on household chores.

Increased home duties is a problem for women that is compounded by the fact that a large number of working women are also juggling working from home (see Figure 1).

We see similar evidence of Victorian women's compounding disadvantage in their larger than normal childcare loads. Under the second lockdown in September, Victorian parents have increased their childcare relative to the rest of the nation with Victorian women particularly disadvantaged. While only 40 per cent of women in states outside of Victoria continue to spend more time in childcare than pre-pandemic, we see more than half of Victorian women (approximately 58 per cent) report higher childcare shares than non-COVID times. More Victorian fathers report spending greater time on childcare in September compared to May, but overall, their levels are lower than those of mothers. In the rest of the country, parents are returning to pre-pandemic levels of childcare demonstrating that the second lockdown is particularly challenging for Victorian parents, especially mothers.

Again, these trends **must** be contextualized against time trends documented in supplemental research pre-pandemic studies. The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA)⁶ consistently shows that mothers spend more time in housework and childcare than fathers. That mothers picked up *even more* of this work under the lockdowns –and that these experiences were exacerbated for Victorians – highlights the compounding disadvantage that mothers are experiencing during these unprecedented times.

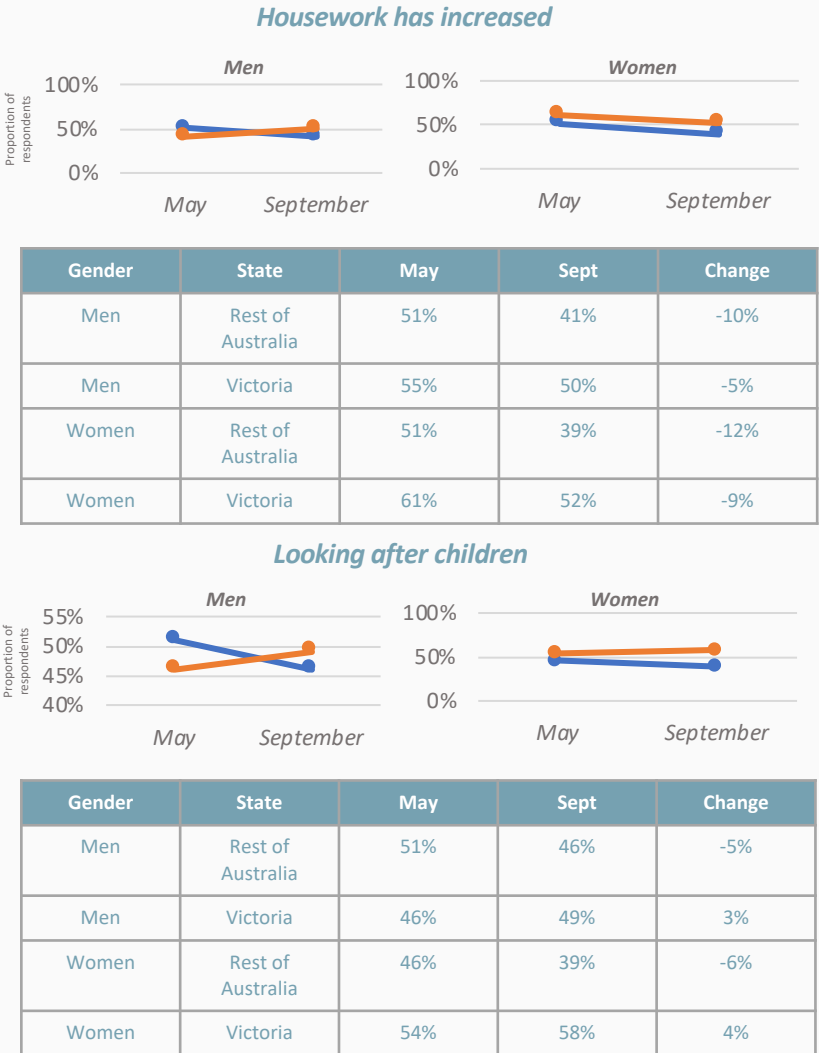


Figure 7. Proportion of men and women who have seen an increase in household responsibilities since social distancing measures began, in Victoria and the rest of Australia.

⁶ See <https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/hilda>



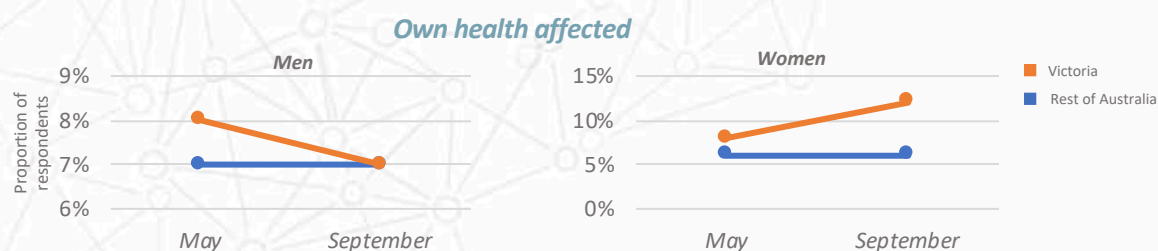


Key Finding 4

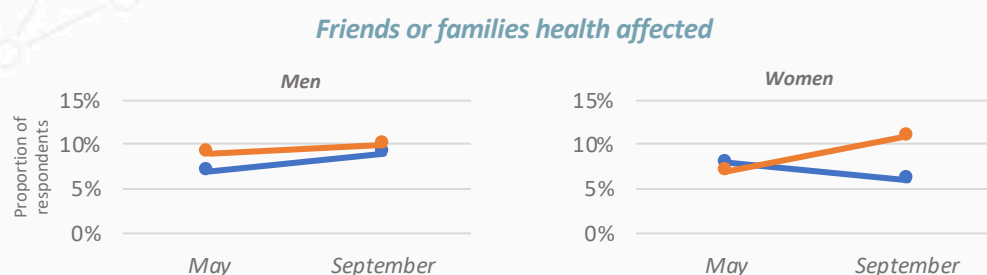
Women's health has been adversely impacted by the pandemic with Victorian women particularly vulnerable to poor health, anxiety and restless sleep

Thus far, our findings document compounding disadvantage for Victorian women as the COVID-19 pandemic endures – higher job loss, greater disadvantage for female business owners, and larger housework and childcare shares. It is perhaps no surprise that this added burden is taking a major toll on women's physical and mental health.

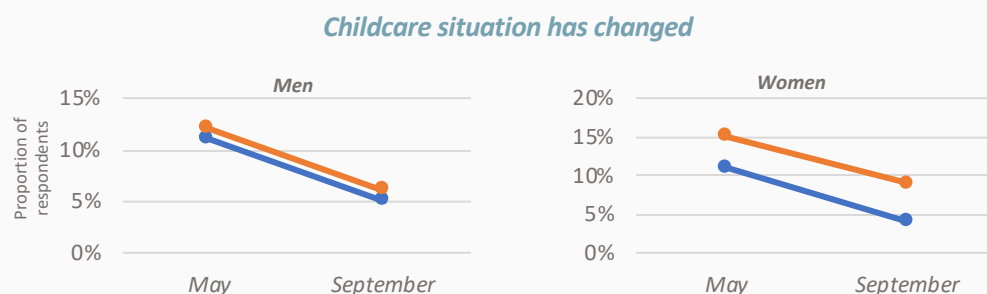
In May, we find that roughly 6 to 9 per cent of Australians are reporting that their own health has been impacted by the pandemic. By September, a stark gender pattern emerges with approximately 12 per cent of women in Victoria reporting their own health has been affected. By contrast, Victorian men are less likely to say their health is affected with equal numbers of Victorian men and those in other states reporting an impact. Women in other states are also flat in their reporting of an impact on their health. Victorian women are carrying a health consequence from the pandemic unparalleled to men and women in other states.



Gender	State	May	Sept	Change
Men	Rest of Australia	7%	7%	0%
Men	Victoria	9%	7%	-1%
Women	Rest of Australia	6%	6%	0%
Women	Victoria	8%	12%	4%



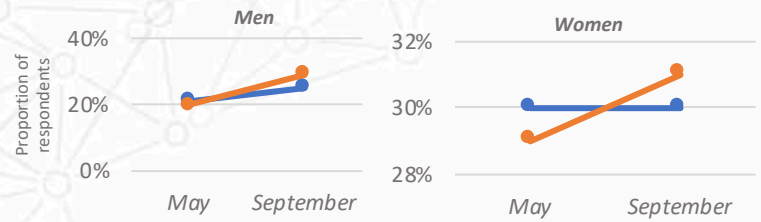
Gender	State	May	Sept	Change
Men	Rest of Australia	7%	9%	2%
Men	Victoria	9%	10%	0%
Women	Rest of Australia	8%	6%	-2%
Women	Victoria	7%	11%	4%



Gender	State	May	Sept	Change
Men	Rest of Australia	11%	5%	-6%
Men	Victoria	12%	6%	-6%
Women	Rest of Australia	11%	4%	-7%
Women	Victoria	15%	9%	-6%

Figure 8. Proportion of men and women (the most affected group) whose health and home situations have changed since social distancing measures began, in Victoria and the rest of Australia.

Felt anxious most, almost all, or all of the time



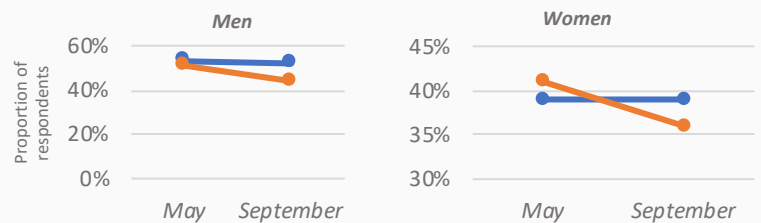
Gender	State	May	Sept	Change
Men	Rest of Australia	21%	25%	4%
Men	Victoria	20%	29%	9%
Women	Rest of Australia	30%	30%	0%
Women	Victoria	29%	31%	1%

Victorian women also report that their friends' and families' health has been impacted by the pandemic at higher rates than all others. In May, 7 per cent of Victorian women reported that their friends' or families' health had been affected by the pandemic. By September, that rate had increased to approximately 11 per cent.

To understand the ways in which Victorian women's health may be adversely impacted, we chart their rates of anxiety, calm and restless sleep during May and September. Figure 9 shows rates of anxiety, calm and restless sleep amongst those who report feeling these ways most, almost or all of the time. We see one in three women report feeling anxious, which is 10% higher than men's reports. Feelings of anxiety have remained largely stable for women since May, but men across the country are increasingly anxious. One in two men reported feeling calm most, almost or all of the time in May compared to 40% of women. By September, the percentage of men reporting feeling calm declined as did the percentage of Victorian women. Women are also reporting restless sleep at higher rates than men with these rates increasing from May to September.

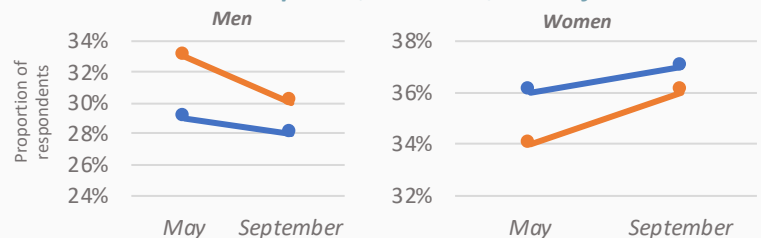
Figure 10 plots those who are feeling anxious, calm and restless sleep at the highest rates – almost all or all of the time. Here, we can see that Victorian women are the most vulnerable to the greatest anxiety at twice the rate of Victorian men and higher than any other group. We also see that women are experiencing restless sleep almost all or all of the time at twice the rates of men. Collectively, we show Australian's mental health and sleep are suffering under the pandemic with women, especially those in Victoria, particularly vulnerable.

Felt calm and peaceful most, almost all, or all of the time



Gender	State	May	Sept	Change
Men	Rest of Australia	53%	52%	-1%
Men	Victoria	51%	44%	-7%
Women	Rest of Australia	39%	39%	1%
Women	Victoria	41%	36%	-4%

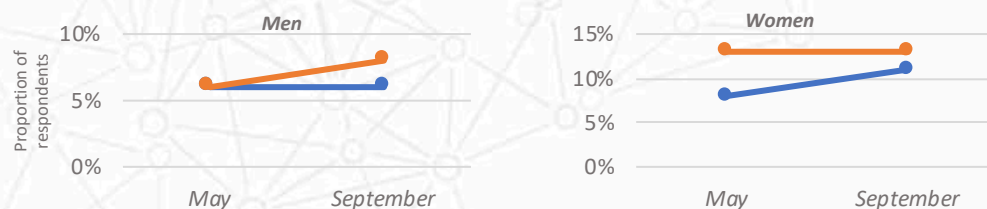
Had restless sleep most, almost all, or all of the time



Gender	State	May	Sept	Change
Men	Rest of Australia	29%	28%	0%
Men	Victoria	33%	30%	-3%
Women	Rest of Australia	36%	37%	1%
Women	Victoria	34%	36%	2%

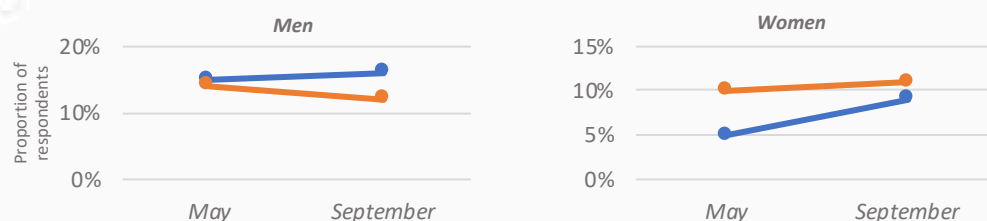
Figure 9. Men and women's levels of anxiety, feelings of calm and restless sleep over the past week (4-point scale ranging from all or almost all of the time to none or almost none of the time)

Felt very anxious all or almost all of the time



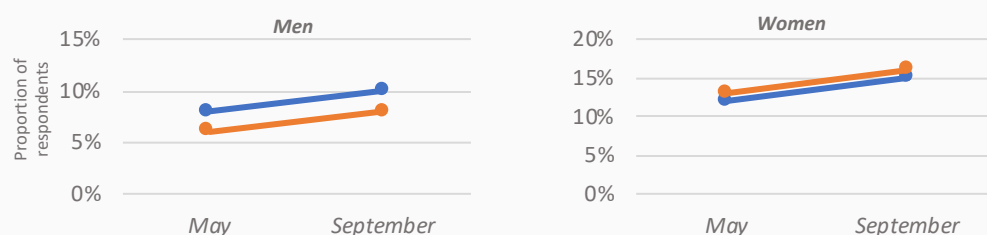
Gender	State	May	Sept	Change
Men	Rest of Australia	6%	6%	0%
Men	Victoria	6%	8%	2%
Women	Rest of Australia	8%	11%	4%
Women	Victoria	13%	13%	0%

Always felt calm and peaceful all or almost all of the time



Gender	State	May	Sept	Change
Men	Rest of Australia	15%	16%	1%
Men	Victoria	14%	12%	-2%
Women	Rest of Australia	5%	9%	4%
Women	Victoria	10%	11%	1%

Always had restless sleep all or almost all of the time



Gender	State	May	Sept	Change
Men	Rest of Australia	8%	10%	3%
Men	Victoria	6%	8%	2%
Women	Rest of Australia	12%	15%	3%
Women	Victoria	13%	16%	3%

Figure 10. Highest levels of anxiety, feelings of calm and restless sleep over the past week (4-point scale ranging from all or almost all of the time to none or almost none of the time)



Summary

Updating Life Under Lockdown: Victorian Women are Vulnerable to Long-Term Disadvantage

Our results show the power of our data that captured Australians during the first lockdown and followed them over time as the pandemic continued to impact on Australians. While the rest of Australia re-opened its businesses quickly and remained open, Victoria experienced a second, more severe lockdown. The consequences of this second lockdown for Victorian women has been dire. Victorian women report high and consistent job loss. While the percentage of women in other states who lost their jobs has declined, job loss for our Victorian sample remains constant after four months. What is more, we see women businessowners in Victoria, who performed relatively well at the start of the recovery, experience greater economic precarity as the pandemic endured. Further, close to 40 per cent of Victorians in our sample have experienced an economic loss – a job loss, pay reduction, business disruption or redundancy – due to COVID. This rate is 10 per cent higher than the rest of Australia.

Victorians are drawing upon their savings at higher rates than the rest of the country. However, the types of resources being drawn vary by gender. Victorian men are pulling from their savings and retirement accounts at higher rates than the rest of Australians. By contrast, Victorian women are utilizing JobSeeker, JobKeeper and financial support from friends and family at higher rates than Victorian men. But Victorians are not alone. Australians are drawing upon economic resources to mitigate economic damage from the COVID-driven recession. Again, this highlights the unprecedented economic consequences of COVID on the economy and the importance of government intervention; especially for vulnerable groups including women.

Looking towards their economic futures, Australian women are particularly vulnerable. Women are more worried about holding enough retirement savings, employability and skills that match to the future of work.

Women's work lives are always complicated by housework and caregiving demands. Our results show the pandemic has exacerbated existing trends. When the entire country was in lockdown in May, women picked up a larger share of the housework and childcare than men. As other states re-opened, women's shares of this work largely returned to baseline. For Victorian women, for whom a stage four lockdown closed schools, workplaces and early learning centres, their larger housework shares remained high. Time educating and caring for children also increased. It is important to think of these as additive pressures faced by Victorian women – job losses, women-owned businesses disrupted, housework levels increased, and childcare and child education demands intensified – because of the pandemic.

It is perhaps no wonder that Victorian women are reporting increasingly worse health than the rest of the nation. These patterns mirror those for women around the country who are feeling anxious, never calm and sleepless. But Victorian women are particularly vulnerable to these experiences.

The recommendations from our results are threefold:

1. Federal government economic, health and well-being responses should give primacy to Victoria as it is facing a disproportionate economic fall-out from the second lockdown.

2. Government responses should recognize that women are vulnerable to long-term poor economic, domestic and health consequences of this pandemic.
3. Federal and State governments should recognize that Victorian women are among the hardest hit groups in Australia due to the COVID-19 crisis.

The results from the rest of the nation show a relative bounce-back to pre-pandemic levels. But Victorian women's patterns are starkly different. These patterns only exacerbate a gender unequal world whereby Australian women earned less money, did more housework and were more likely to reduce work time or drop out altogether to care for children. Our results show worsening disadvantage meaning a strong and effective government and industry approach is essential for progress towards gender equality.



Further reading

Read more about our work here:

1. This is laying the groundwork for some pretty serious poverty for women; <https://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/gender/this-is-laying-the-groundwork-for-some-pretty-serious-poverty-for-women-20200522-p54vp0.html>
2. Forget flowers and chocolates for Mother's Day: Keep Free Childcare Going Instead; <https://theconversation.com/forget-flowers-and-chocolates-for-mothers-day-keep-free-childcare-going-instead-137992>
3. Why Coronavirus may forever change how we care within families; <https://theconversation.com/why-coronavirus-may-forever-change-the-way-we-care-within-families-134527>
4. Moms are Working dramatically fewer hours than dads during coronavirus: it's a red flag for what's ahead; <https://www.thelily.com/moms-are-working-dramatically-fewer-hours-than-dads-during-coronavirus-its-a-red-flag-for-whats-ahead/>
5. Coronavirus is widening the gender gap for working moms; <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alisonescalante/2020/07/14/coronavirus-is-widening-the-gender-gap-for-working-mothers/#1b591e335368>
6. "They Go to Mommy First"; <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/15/parenting/working-moms-coronavirus.html>
7. Why parents need paid leave during the coronavirus pandemic; <https://www.vogue.com/article/why-parents-need-paid-leave-during-coronavirus-pandemic>

