

Life during a pandemic in Australia: wellbeing and social determinants of health

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Background:

The COVID-19 pandemic has had effects on populations worldwide. The social determinants of health affect an individual's capacity to cope during a crisis which could potentially impact on their wellbeing. The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between wellbeing and the social determinants of health among Australian adults during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods:

A cross-sectional study of adults residing in Australia was conducted using SurveyMonkey (an online survey) between August - October 2020. Participants were recruited via social media. Wellbeing was measured using the 10-item Multicultural Quality of Life Index and social determinants of health were measured using validated tools and investigator developed questions. Data were analysed using SPSS version 25. Inferential statistics, including independent t-test and one-way ANOVA were undertaken. Multiple regression analysis was used to investigate the predictors of wellbeing.

Results:

In total, 1211 responses were received. Females accounted for 80.7% of the responses, men 16.7% and transgender/non-binary 2.6%. The mean age of the respondents was 43 years (SD 14.5). The mean score for total wellbeing was 62.58 (SD 21.22). Housing insecurity ($p=0.000$), food insecurity ($p=0.000$), social support ($p=0.000$) and access to health care ($p=0.000$) were all predictors of poor total wellbeing. Being a male ($p = .0380$) was the only predictor of higher wellbeing.

Conclusions:

This study demonstrates that adults in Australia who had poor social support, had difficulty accessing health care, had insecure housing and food insecurity had significantly poorer wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study exposes the social determinants of health that are responsible for health and social inequalities. It shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the social vulnerabilities and highlights the need to take action on the social determinants of health and inequalities.

Key messages:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed the long-standing health and social inequalities that exist in Australia.
- Action on social determinants of health is required in a post COVID-19 world to rebuild social protection and safeguard populations from any future public health emergencies.