

severe anxiety health conditions feeling a loneliness  
work social distancing new baby social interaction  
increased anxiety week uncertain  
social isolation future  
kids day

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# NCCWN NATIONAL IMPACT SURVEY- WOMEN DURING COVID 19

## SUMMARY REPORT



OCTOBER 2020

NCCWN – (NATIONAL COLLECTIVE OF COMMUNITY BASED WOMEN'S NETWORKS)





## Introduction

Established in 2002, the National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks (NCCWN) is a national organisation that works directly with and represents the interests of women from communities in rural and urban settings throughout Ireland. Funded through Department of Children, Disability, Equality, Integration & Youth (DCDEIY) to advance equality for women experiencing disadvantage and marginalisation, NCCWN works nationally and locally through our 17 Women's Community Development Projects based around the country, with 46 members of staff. As the only national organisation working specifically and directly with women from disadvantaged communities, NCCWN are an experienced and essential part of the infrastructure to support and advance disadvantaged women's equality both locally and nationally.

Our mission is to support the empowerment of and advocate for women who experience disadvantage and marginalisation, and to promote social justice, women's human rights and equality bringing about positive and sustainable changes to women's lives and society and our vision is a just and equal society for all women.

The NCCWN works from two core approaches – a feminist approach and a community development approach both of which are intrinsically linked. These approaches underpin all aspects of NCCWNs work and organisational structure.

## Background

The National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks (NCCWN) Impact Survey – Women During Covid 19 - was undertaken to gauge the impact COVID-19 has had on women in Ireland. Disadvantaged women are the target group for NCCWN nationally and locally. In the main, NCCWN recognise disadvantage in relation to women's socio-economic circumstances. NCCWN Projects, particularly our rural Projects, also work with women who are often further disadvantaged through social isolation and lack of access to supports and services. At local level, supports and services provided by NCCWN Projects include targeted outreach strategies, accredited and non-accredited needs-based community education, training, health and well-being, childcare centres, drop-in/information centres, referrals, and counselling supports.

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## Rationale

In these Covid-19 times where access to communities and the women we work with is limited due to restrictive measures, NCCWN Projects have had to look at alternative ways of engaging with women and have worked with other existing community structures to reach out and remain connected to women in these evolving times. NCCWN staff, for whom the normal way of working is meeting with women as individuals and more often in groups, were presented with the challenge of how to keep engaged with the women in their communities when normal circumstances no longer applied. Technology has played a major part in reaching out and remaining engaged with women. NCCWN staff had to assess not only what technologies were available to themselves at home, to the women in their communities but also what technologies women were comfortable with. The telephone was a vital tool of engagement, both landline and mobile. Staff working from home and using their own phones, reached out and called women individually, giving them the space to listen to concerns, feedback, myths and rumours about Covid-19 as well as communicating information about the virus and supports available locally. Social media was used to share and promote public health information and advice, positive mental health awareness and supports/services available locally and remotely.

In light of the significant anecdotal evidence from women we work with, NCCWN compiled a survey aimed at gathering information on women's experiences of the impact Covid-19 on their lives. The findings of this survey will help support NCCWN's collective voice; identifying the needs, issues and challenges now experienced by women; feed into work planning; and help NCCWN to influence new strategies being developed in response to COVID 19 both locally and nationally.

## Methodology

The national survey was carried out between 1<sup>st</sup> September and 15<sup>th</sup> September and was circulated nationally and locally. A number of our local NCCWN Women's Projects had begun conducting the survey in their local areas in June before the opening of Phase 3. At national level, the survey was circulated as an online electronic questionnaire through the NCCWN Website, Facebook and through email. Locally, our 17 NCCWN Women's Community Development Projects utilised an online electronic survey questionnaire, hard copies of the survey questionnaire and telephone interviewing to produce responses from **3,369** women. This data provides a valuable insight into the impact of COVID-19 on the lives of many women

in Ireland. The survey covers topics including age breakdown, family and household breakdown, lifestyle impacts of COVID 19, personal challenges, supports and personal benefits to reflect how COVID-19 has impacted women in different ways.

Section 1 of summary results outline the age breakdown, status and household description of the 3,369 respondents. Section 2 provides information on the impact on women's care responsibilities and relationships. In Section 3, the concerns respondents have in relation to the impact of COVID-19 on their health and wellbeing are quantified and presented. Section 4 outlines COVID 19 impact on staying connected and supports needed for women during and after this pandemic.

# NCCWN Impact Survey Data Collected

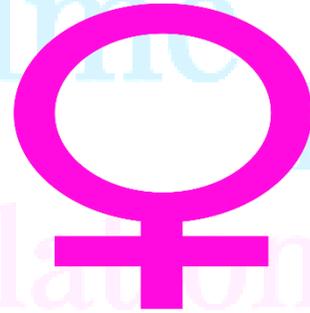
**3,369** Women throughout Ireland completed NCCWN COVID 19 Impact Survey.

## Age Breakdown

18 to 25	171
26 to 40	958
41 to 64	2,162
65+	78

## Status Description

Single	13.90%
Married	36.65%
Living with Partner	8.45%
Widowed	3.15%
Separated/Divorced	7.32%
Other	30.45%



## Household Description

I live with my partner (married, civil partner or cohabiting)	24.05%
I live in a house share	2.20%
I live with my parent/s	7.66%
I live alone	12.95%
I live with my partner and child/children	46.69%
I am a one parent family living with my child/children	6.45%

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## Key Areas Impacting Women's Lives during COVID 19 Pandemic

### Impact on Care Responsibilities & Relationships

- Increase in Adult care responsibilities 31.20%
- Increase in Childcare responsibilities 41.89%
- Having Older Parents to Worry about 61.08%
- Living with someone who has underlying health problems 44.46%
- Increase in physical Household work (cooking, cleaning etc.) 66.90%
- Increase in household admin workload (managing bills, appointments etc.) 39.03%
- Home Schooling Children 40.06%
- Increase in family arguments 30.78%
- Increase in partner relationship arguments 22.88%
- Working from home 39.36%
- Job loss due to Covid-19 37.00%

**41.89%** of Women have experienced an Increase in Child Care responsibilities

With school and childcare closures women had been juggling working from home as well as taking on the role of teacher while caring for their children full time. With COVID 19 restrictions, there has been no help outside the home from family or grandparents.

***“Challenges of working from home and trying to juggle that along with minding the kids and schoolwork has left zero time for myself”***

**66.90%** of Women have experienced an Increase in physical household work

Through survey findings Women expressed how physical housework has significantly increased for them. With family members home for longer periods of time the burden of extra cleaning and cooking duties seem to fall to the women within households.

***“Adjusting to being at home all the time. Trying to incorporate Working from home, helping kids with school work, cooking, washing, ironing & cleaning into daily routine.”***

**61.08%** of Women are concerned for elderly parent’s health

During the COVID 19 pandemic elderly people are in the at risk category, particularly those with underlying health conditions. The caring role women have assumed for their elderly parents have left them feeling worried and anxious about their high risk parents.

***“Working fulltime and taking full responsibility for the care of cocooning parents, one with dementia and both with numerous physical issues. Being the only one to support them as no other family help is so overwhelming”***

## Impact on Health and Wellbeing

- **Mental Health affected** 62.27%
- **Less time to look after own Mental Health** 35.36%
- **Postponed Medical Appointments** 37.37%
- **Feeling Isolated** 62.17%
- **Feeling disconnected from family** 60.01%
- **Feeling disconnected from friends** 75.16%
- **Feelings of Loneliness** 59.44%
- **Concerns of contracting COVID 19** 82.16%
- **Concerns of spreading the disease** 75.77%
- **Concerns of living with someone who has underlying health problems** 44.46%



**62.27%** of Women felt their Mental Health has been affected by COVID 19

Women are experiencing strain on their Mental Health and Wellbeing as well as feeling Isolated and disconnected from Friends and Family. Women cited an increase in psychological issues for them, including anxiety and depression, due to COVID 19 and the restrictions imposed.

*"Not a day goes by that I don't feel like running away, just disappearing, constantly putting a brave face while screaming on the inside. An overpowering feeling of fear, anxiety and guilt for thinking this is not the life I signed up for"*

**37.37%** of Women were affected by cancellation of Medical Appointments.

Due to COVID 19 restrictions medical appointments in all services were either cancelled or postponed. Smear tests and Breast Screening were put on hold leaving women vulnerable and at risk.

*"My health is failing and I am suffering with additional health issues developing because surgery I needed has been postponed"*

**75.16%** Feelings of Disconnect from Friends, **60.01%** Feelings of Disconnect from Family

An overwhelming number of women have expressed deep feelings of Disconnect from Family & Friends due to COVID 19 restrictions. Predominantly among older women who have had to cocoon. Women dealing with life changing situations with no supports to help them through.

*"I am a front-line worker and a lone parent with no childcare, therefore I did not see my kids for 6 weeks. I was trying to protect them from contracting COVID as I was working in such close proximity to people with the disease."*

**82.16%** Are  
Worried about  
Contracting the  
Disease

A staggering 82.16% of women are worried about contracting the disease. The constant fear and worry of this has affected women's mental health and well-being. Many are struggling to engage in everyday situations.

***"I have a genuine fear of going to the shops and going about everyday tasks because I am so afraid of getting the virus and spreading it my loved ones"***

**75.77%** Are  
Worried about  
Spreading the  
Disease

An overwhelming number have expressed their fears of passing on the virus to their loved ones or elderly parents. For frontline workers this fear is exasperated with the added stress and pressure of being in such close proximity with the general public, leaving them more susceptible to contracting the virus.

***"I struggle with worry and uncertainty. Especially worry about keeping all family safe and well - in particular my parents as they are older and most vulnerable".***

## Impact on Staying Connected and Supports Needed

- **Limited or No Access to adequate Internet Services** 35.20%
- **Supporting a family/community member who had to cocoon** 44.79%
- **Now classified as a Frontline Worker** 21.15%
- **Reduced Working hours due to COVID 19** 16.54%
- **Job loss due to COVID 19** 19.91%
- **Missing connecting face to face in Women's group** 43.33%
- **Being supported to remain in contact online or phone with Women's Group** 36.07%

**35.20%** of Women had Limited or No access to an adequate Internet Service.

Without adequate internet Women are further limited to connections outside of the home. This is especially relevant in rural communities where women are already living in isolated areas and cut off from physical contact.

**"The Isolation!! Missing physical contact with loved ones. I live in a rural area and my internet is not great, I found it difficult to stay in touch with my family due to poor service"**

**43.33%** of Women are planning to return to their Women's Groups when safe to resume

NCCWN continue to work with local women remotely. We understand the importance of face to face contact and a need for our services. NCCWN 17 Local Projects are continuing to work, in line with the changing government restrictions, in order to be ready to open when safe to do so.

**"I will definitely returns to my Women's Group. I am a strong believer in getting out in the community and belonging to a group. It gives you a purpose. I have heard of a lot of our members struggling with the loss of physical contact."**

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## SUMMARY & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report has highlighted some of the most important and prevalent findings within our survey. 39.36% of respondents working from home commented that balancing home and work life has been a challenge. Lack of adequate internet access has also proved challenging and has further isolated women. Respondents also commented on the negative impacts that the pandemic has had on lack of supports and services, particularly access to childcare and health services. 82.16 % of the women who participated in the survey have a fear of contracting the disease and a figure just below that at 75.77 % are concerned that they will pass the disease to a member of their families. The findings of the survey have shown that the COVID19 Pandemic has had a huge impact on women in many areas of their lives including:

- Isolation & Loneliness
- Strain on Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Medical Issues
- Disconnected from support systems
- Lack of access to the adequate Internet services
- Fear & Concern

We would like to thank and acknowledge each woman who has taken the time to complete NCCWN National COVID 19 Impact Survey. Their time and input are very much appreciated and NCCWN will continue to support women throughout and beyond this pandemic. We recognize that consulting with women through a survey format is a useful tool for gathering information that will help us to target supports for women and NCCWN will continue to carry out research on issues affecting women's lives.