

# Volunteering and keeping in touch with others helps people cope with lockdown

*People who volunteered and maintained their social connections coped better with lockdown finds research in Lithuania by Paulius Yamin (University of Pennsylvania/ LSE), Egle Zeime, Dalia Bagdziunaite (Behavioural Lab LT) and Giulia Magnani.*

Abruptly confronted by strict restrictions on what they could do, some people decided to take advantage of lockdowns to embark on self-improvement regimes. But a survey we conducted in Lithuania during the spring 2020 restrictions suggests that this may not be the best way to deal with prolonged isolation.

We surveyed 381 people, 78 percent of whom lived in Vilnius, and of whom 62 percent were female. A quarter had children and two-thirds had some level of undergraduate or postgraduate education. We wanted to assess the psychological impact and coping measures associated with lockdown. Using multiple regression analyses, we identified the relationships between stress levels and different activities.

The majority of respondents were living under highly unusual conditions, which manifested themselves in high stress and anxiety (reported by 75 percent), depression (33 percent), and low motivation and concentration (22 percent). Young people (18-38 year-olds), those on lower incomes, people without a university degree, the unmarried and those who had no children suffered more.

We observed that people worried about the health and safety of their loved ones more than they worried about their own. Money was also a secondary concern. On the other hand, they were concerned about taking public transport and accessing media, both online and offline.

Half of those surveyed cooked more than before the pandemic (57 percent of women and 38 percent of men), 30 percent did more cleaning or learning, and a quarter exercised, ate healthy food or gardened more. In general, women were more likely to do cleaning or engage in learning than men.

Family members, friends and colleagues were the main sources of support and advice: few found the police, government or celebrities of help during the crisis. We found that people who took part in activities oriented towards others (such as socialising and volunteering) suffered less stress. This suggests it is important to try to maintain them during lockdown, however difficult. People who made an effort to eat healthier food or learn more actually reported more stress than those who did not.



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How can policymakers help people to handle any future pandemics better? We believe that in the extraordinary experience of a lockdown, private, public and social institutions could do a lot more to support people and promote healthy coping mechanisms. A 'business as usual' attitude is at best a missed opportunity for innovation and at worst dangerous.

Forced to stay at home and limit social contact, it may be tempting for people to embark on journeys of self-improvement, such as diets, rigorous exercise regimes, or efforts to learn something completely new. But trying to be more productive than usual may only increase levels of stress, or at least not reduce them. We would do better to try to maintain familiar routines from before the crisis.

*This post represents the views of the authors and not those of the COVID-19 blog, nor LSE. It is based on their presentation to the World Pandemic Research Network conference in December 2021, [Crisis, coping and sustainability \(CCS\) Lithuania study](#).*