

COVID-19 Pandemic and Social Inequalities in Australia

Jenny Chesters, University of Melbourne, jenny.chesters@unimelb.edu.au

In March 2020, The Australian Government closed the national border and shutdown educational institutions and the majority of workplaces due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. To examine how the restrictions associated with the pandemic impacted on the working lives of young Australians during the 2020 lockdowns, I draw on data generated from semi-structured interviews conducted with 40 participants from the Life Patterns project [aged 32 years]. The interviews were conducted in September and October 2020, after the initial national lockdown but during the second lockdown in the state of Victoria. A thematic analysis of the interview data reveals how one's occupation determined the impact of the pandemic. During the lockdowns, some participants, such as those in the hospitality sector, were stood down whereas other participants either worked from home (eg. professionals and white collar workers) or continued working as usual after being classified as essential workers (eg. nurses and doctors). The lockdowns associated with the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities related to occupation and employment status and gave rise to a new form of inequality related to geographic location. After the lockdowns, some young people had depleted their savings whereas others had been able to build on their existing wealth.