

Social & Food Security Impacts of COVID-19 in Solomon Islands

Results from Round Three (July 2021) of the Solomon Islands High-Frequency Phone Survey

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Introduction and Highlights



This brief presents analysis of the social and food security impacts of COVID-19 in Solomon Islands.

While widespread transmission of COVID-19 did not occur in 2021, COVID-19 preparedness measures such as border closures and precautionary public health measures, as well as weak external demand may have had an impact on the welfare of households. The findings in this brief come from the third round of the World Bank's High Frequency Phone Surveys (HFPS),² as well as UNICEF's Social-Economic Impact Assessment Survey (SIAS).³

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Households used a range of coping strategies to fulfill basic needs, such as selling assets and keeping children (aged 6-14) home from school, which will have negative long term impacts.**
- **There was widespread concern and worry regarding COVID-19, among adults in households with children aged 0-14.**
- **Food insecurity was very high in July 2021, affecting about 90 percent of households.**
- **Most people reported that social relations stayed the same or improved over the six months to July 2021, indicating that while economic stresses have increased, social cohesion has not deteriorated substantially.**
- **Half of urban households reported that domestic violence had "gotten worse" over the preceding six months.**

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY

- **The protection of vulnerable groups, such as children, women, people with disabilities, and the elderly, should be a priority. Possible policy actions include expanding outreach and welfare services to address domestic violence (including violence against children). Additionally, services that support the mental health of adults and children could be considered.**
- **Given the coping strategies used by households, and the prevalence of food insecurity, social protection programs could be considered which are likely to have both economic and social benefits.**

¹ The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in this note are entirely those of the authors. They do not necessarily represent the views of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the World Bank, UNICEF, and its affiliated organizations, nor those of the Executive Directors of the World Bank or the governments they represent. The team gratefully acknowledges the Korea Trust Fund for Economic and Peace-Building Transitions for financing the data collection and analysis for the World Bank survey and the UNICEF Pacific Multi Country Office for financing the data collection and analysis of the UNICEF SIAS. The authors thank UNICEF colleague Ronesh Prasad, as well as World Bank colleagues Lodewijk Smets, Annette Leith, Shohei Nakamura, Kristen Himelein, Utz Pape, and Dung Doan for their comments on earlier drafts.

² Data collection occurred from June 2021 to August 2021, though some statistics from this survey are quoted as representing the month of July 2021, which accounted for over 80 percent of households interviewed.

³ Data collection occurred from August 2021 to September 2021, though some statistics from this survey are quoted as representing the month of August 2021, which accounted for over 95 percent of households interviewed.

Household coping strategies



Most of the strategies used by households to make ends meet became more common between December 2020 and July 2021. The most common strategies were finding ways to earn extra money, by reducing non-food consumption, as well as reducing food consumption (Table 1). This trend is consistent with a further deterioration of economic conditions over this period.

Households increasingly used the sale of assets as a coping strategy and over half spent from savings, which may increase vulnerability in the long term. While the sale of assets and purchases on credit can help to smooth consumption, these actions can reduce the resilience of households to potential future economic shocks: for example from higher food prices or a health crises induced by COVID-19. Another coping strategy that may have negative long term consequences is taking children out of school, which could reduce productivity in the future. Across coping strategies, there were minimal differences between households with or without children, with the exception of the sale of assets, which was roughly twice as common for households with children compared to households without children.

Table 1. Top Ten Most Common Coping Strategies, December 2020 and July 2021.

	December 2020	July 2021
Find ways to earn extra money	71.7%	78.5%
Reduce food consumption	58.5%	65.4%
Reduce non-food consumption	54.9%	63.2%
Receive other assistance from friends or family	47.5%	63.1%
Spend from savings	60.3%	57.7%
Receive cash or borrow from friends or family	47.5%	50.6%
Purchase items on credit	49.6%	49.3%
Sell assets	26.9%	42.5%
Delay making re-payments	35.9%	40.1%
Reduce the number of children attending school	17.0%	26.8%

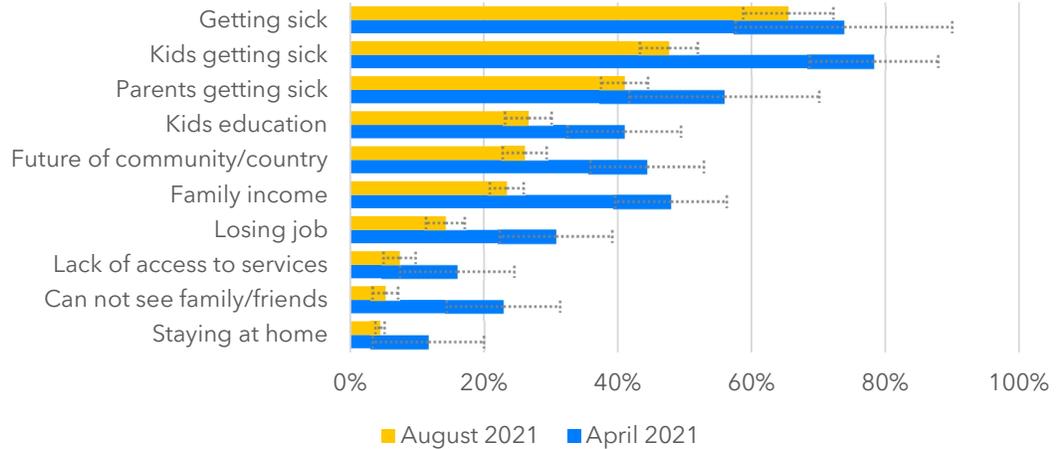
Source: December 2020 and July 2021 HFPS household level data.

COVID-19 related concerns



Worry about COVID-19 was widespread, but households were less concerned in July 2021 than they were in December 2020. All COVID-19 related worries were less common in July 2021 than in December 2020 (Figure 1), in households with children aged 0-14 years of age. The most common COVID-19 related worries were: people getting sick themselves; parents getting sick; and children getting sick. There were only minor differences between the responses of male and female household heads.

Figure 1: COVID-19 Related Concerns, for Households with Children

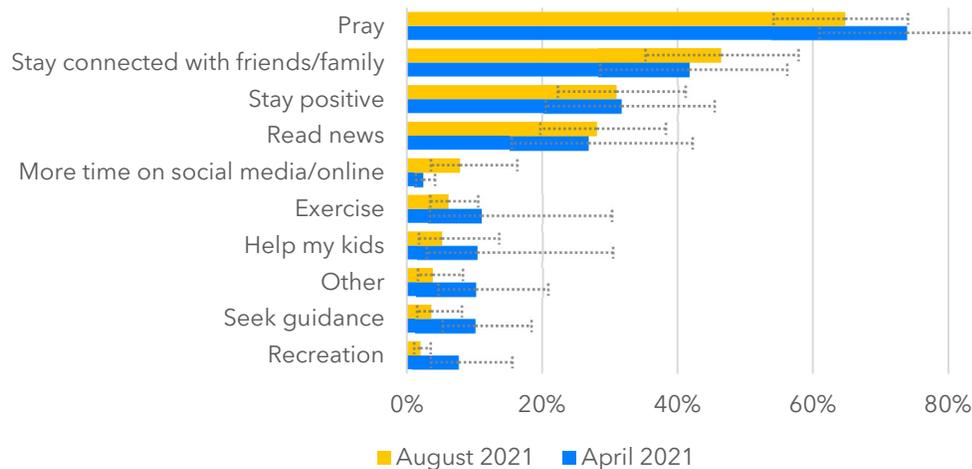


Source: April 2021 and August 2021 UNICEF SIAS.

Note: Dotted lines represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

About two thirds of households used prayer to help deal with the stress caused by COVID-19, this was the most common coping strategy (Figure 2). Another common strategy was staying connected with family and friends. One in twenty people reported using tobacco or betel nut to cope with the stress, while around two percent reported using alcohol or kava.⁴ The pattern of coping strategies was broadly similar in the August 2021 SIAS to the April 2021 SIAS. The use of tobacco, betel nut, alcohol and kava was concentrated in men.

Figure 2: Coping Strategies for Dealing with COVID-19 Related Stress, for Households with Children⁵



Source: April 2021 and August 2021 UNICEF SIAS.

Note: Dotted lines represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

⁴ Kava is an intoxicating drink made with the crushed root of the Kava plant

⁵ In Figure 2, "Other" includes tobacco or betel nut, as well as alcohol or kava.

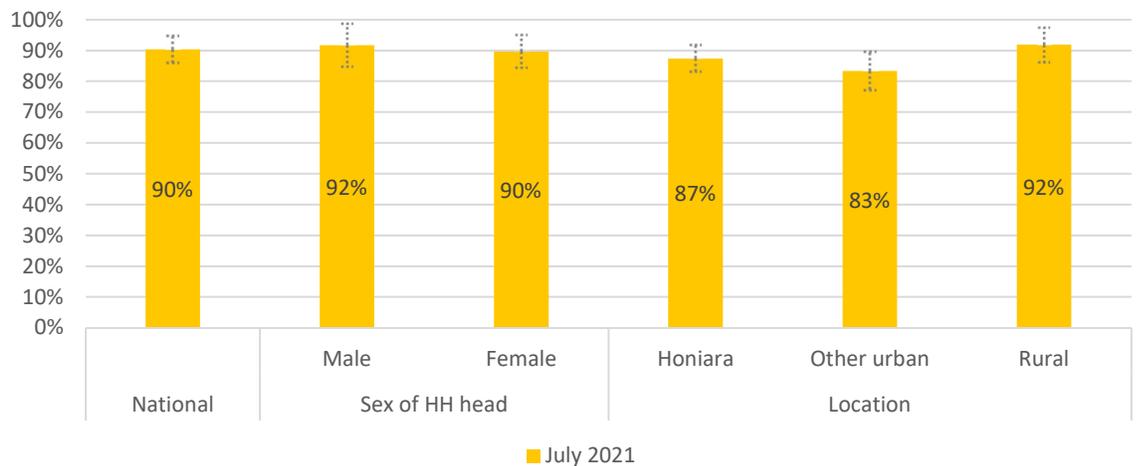
As was the case with adults, it was commonly reported that children used prayer to cope with stresses caused by COVID-19,⁶ in households with children aged 0-14. However, urban children were less likely to pray than rural children. Also, children in male headed households were less likely to pray than children in female headed households. Keeping in touch with relatives or friends was the next most common way of children coping with COVID-19 induced stress.

Food Security



Food insecurity was prevalent across Solomon Islands in July 2021. About 90 percent of households reported at least one indicator of food insecurity in the month leading up to the survey (Figure 3). There was no measured variation between male and female headed households or across geographic areas. Food insecurity is measured here as a household experiencing any of the full set of eight indicators derived from questions recommended by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to measure food insecurity.⁷

Figure 3: Reporting at Least One Indicator of Food Insecurity, by Sex of Household Head and Location



Source: July 2021 HFPS household level data.

Note: Dotted lines represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

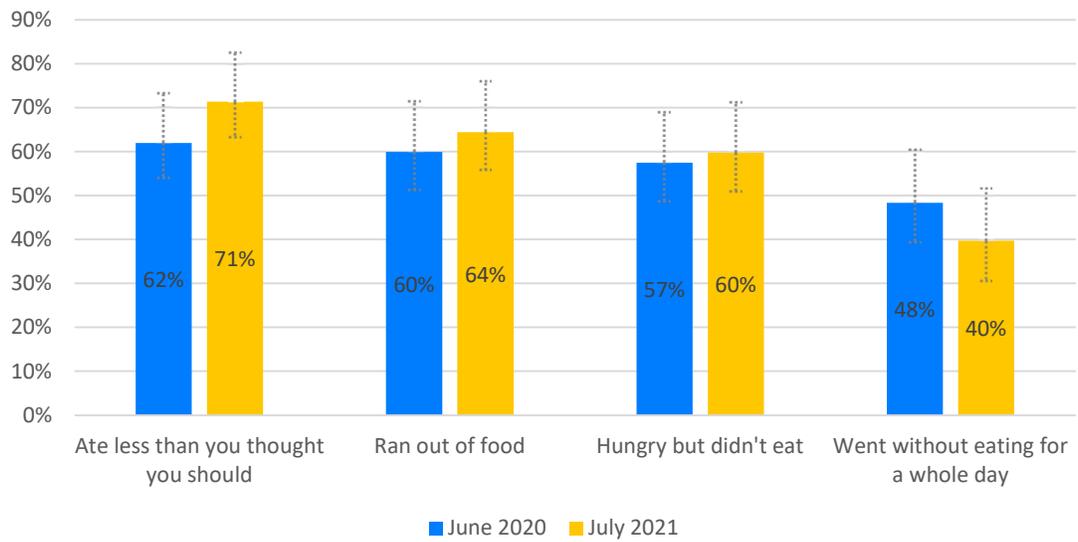
Food insecurity in Solomon Islands remains acute for about four out of ten households. Acute food insecurity is indicated by a household going without eating for a whole day because of a lack of money or resources, which occurred in 40 percent of households in July 2021.⁸ This form of food insecurity seems persistent in Solomon Islands as there was no significant change between June 2020 and July 2021 (though food insecurity may have changed at times between the survey rounds). A less acute (or moderate) level of food insecurity is indicated by households eating less than usual. More than two thirds of households reported eating less than usual in the month before the survey (Figure 4).

⁶ Note that these results reflect the view of the adult respondent and not the views of the children.

⁷ More information is available at https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/ess/voh/FIES_Technical_Paper_v1.1.pdf.

⁸ In the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES), "Ate less than usual" and "Went without eating for a whole day" are two thresholds of severity levels. The first indicator separates the class of "food secure or mildly food insecure" from the class of "moderately food insecure". The second indicator separates the class of "moderately food insecure" from that of the "severely food insecure". For comparable measures across rounds, the full FIES module is needed. Estimating the moderate and severe FIES rates for round 1 (June 2020) is not possible as round 1 only collected data for four indicators. Round 2 (December 2020) did not collect data on food security.

Figure 4: Proportion of Households Experiencing Food Insecurity Over Time



Source: June 2020 and July 2021 HFPS household level data.

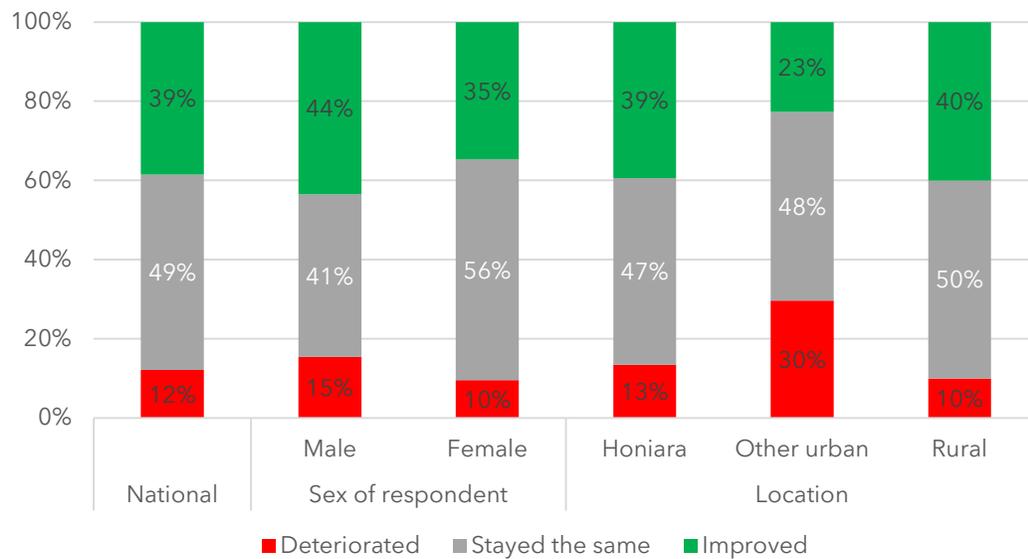
Note: Dotted lines represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

Public trust and Community security



Despite economic challenges, on average there was no deterioration in levels of trust and social relations in local communities over the six months to July 2021 (Figure 5). Indeed, four in ten people thought that trust and social relations had improved over the past six months, while half reported that trust and social relations stayed the same.

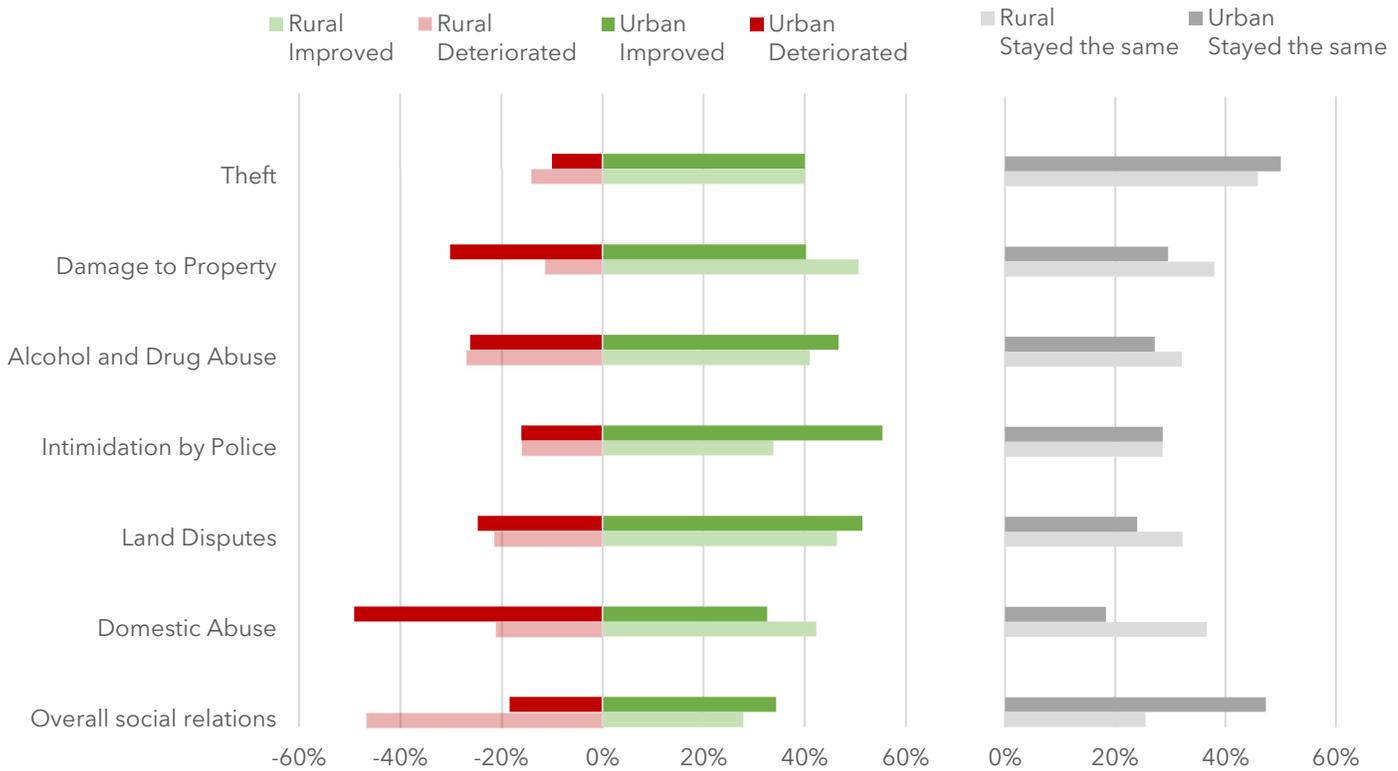
Figure 5: Change in Trust and Social Relations Between January and July 2021, Nationally and by Sex and by Geography



Source: July 2021 of HFPS household level data.

No widespread deterioration was reported in community security between December 2020 and July 2021, except for domestic abuse, which was reported to deteriorate in half of urban households. More than half of households thought that theft, damage to property, alcohol and drug use, intimidation by police, and land disputes had improved or stayed the same in their community in the six months leading up to the survey (Figure 6). However, half of urban households thought that domestic abuse had gotten worse. While not reported in the Figure 6, gender differences were not significant in the reporting of domestic violence. The same questions were asked in the previous round of the HFPS, and as there is no reference baseline level for each of the security issues, changes across surveys are difficult to interpret.

Figure 6: How Community Security Changed Between December 2020 and July 2021



Source: July 2021 of HFPS household level data.

ANNEX: SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Round Three of the World Bank HFPS interviewed 2,503 households on topics including employment and income, coping strategies, public services, public trust, and security. It follows rounds of the HFPS in June 2020 and in December 2020 through January 2021. The dates of implementation for HFPS Round Three were between June 29, 2021 and August 11, 2021. Telephone interviews were conducted through a Solomon Islands call center run by Tebbutt Research.

As the objective of the HFPS was to measure changes as the pandemic progresses, Round Three data collection sought to re-contact the 2,882 households in Round Two. Of the Round Two households, 1182 were successfully re-contacted and completed interviews. In addition, 693 households from Round One were recontacted and completed interviews. To reach the target sample size of at least 2500 households 980 new replacement households were added to the World Bank survey. The total final sample of completed interviews was 2503. The employment questions were asked for both the respondent and the household head by proxy (if different from the respondent), yielding a total sample size for the individual-level employment analysis of 3188.

The third round of the HFPS was complemented by the second UNICEF Social-Economic Impact Assessment Survey (SIAS) This survey was designed to provide more detailed information of a subsample of households from the HFPS. The SIAS collected data on children, access to health care, family arrangements, education, and water and sanitation. For the SIAS survey, recontact was attempted with all 2503 households from the HFPS Round Three sample, between August 16, 2021 and September 5, 2021. In total, 1770 households were successfully recontacted and completed interviews.

Table A

	UNICEF	World Bank	2019 Census
Province	% of sample	% of sample	% of population
Choiseul	3.2	3.0	4.2
Western	14.6	14.8	13.1
Isabel	3.2	3.2	4.2
Central	2.8	2.7	4.2
Rennell-Bell	0.2	0.2	0.6
Guadalcanal	20.2	20.9	21.4
Malaita	12.8	13.2	24
Makira-Ulawa	3.3	3.4	7.2
Temotu	1.9	1.7	3.1
Honiara	37.6	36.9	18

Despite geographic quota targets, re-weighting was necessary to compensate for areas where targets were not reached. Honiara was over-represented in the sample (see table A). Compensating factors for these differences were developed and included in the re-weighting calculations. Further information regarding weighting can be found in the HFPS Round One and HFPS Round Two reports, which followed the same weighting methodology. Because of considerable attrition between rounds, most statistics showing changes through time reflect data from repeated cross sections rather than panels.

References:

World Bank. 2020. Solomon Islands High Frequency Phone Survey on COVID-19: Results from Round 1. World Bank, Washington, DC. © World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/34908> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.
World Bank. 2020. Solomon Islands High Frequency Phone Survey on COVID-19: Results from Round Two. World Bank, Washington, DC.