

Ties didn't worsen for most families amid Covid-19

41% in study say pandemic improved how family members got along, 71% spent more time together

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The protracted Covid-19 pandemic did not worsen family ties as feared, despite anecdotal reports of rising tensions among people who had to work and study from home.

In fact, family relations improved or at least stayed the same for most of the more than 3,000 families interviewed in a nationally representative study on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on families with young children here.

The Singapore Longitudinal Early Development Study found that:

- 41 per cent of families said the pandemic improved how their family members got along, while 46 per cent said there was no change. The remaining 13 per cent said the pandemic made ties worse.
- 47 per cent of households said the quality of communication between family members during the pandemic improved, while 43 per cent said it stayed the same. The remainder said it became worse.
- 71 per cent of households said they spent more time together as a family, versus 23 per cent

who reported no change. The rest spent less time together.

Professor Jean Yeung, principal investigator of the study, said the finding that family relations remained the same or improved for most of the families interviewed was surprising.

There have been media reports, albeit citing anecdotal examples, of how more families are facing increased friction at home during the pandemic, she said. Family violence cases have also risen.

She said: "Of course, we have some families who said things got worse, but the proportion who reported that Covid-19 made things better is significantly larger than those who said things got worse, across all housing types.

"It is valuable that we have a national empirical picture to look at what is really happening with Singaporean families with young children."

The study involved 4,355 children, aged between two and nine, in 3,018 families.

Their primary caregivers were interviewed between February and November for the study on the pandemic's impact.

The researchers have been following these families since 2018 as part of the longitudinal study, interviewing them on a range of issues relating to early childhood development.

The study's first wave involved about 5,000 children up to age six, and their primary caregivers were interviewed between November 2018 and September 2019.

The study is supported by the Social Science Research Council, which was set up by the Government in January 2016 to provide concerted direction for social science and humanities research.

Prof Yeung, who is founding director of the Centre for Family and Population Research at the National University of Singapore, noted that the pandemic has reduced commuting time and provided an opportunity for the redistribution of housework and child-care responsibilities, even as it blurred the boundaries between work, school and family.

"This is a good opportunity for fathers to be more involved in their children's development and share in housework."

The study found that slightly more than a third of the primary caregivers said the pandemic had

made them more anxious. Some 95 per cent of the primary caregivers are mothers.

Prof Yeung cautioned: "We need

to be very careful to avoid having all the responsibilities fall on the mothers, of whom more than 70 per cent are also working, which

may increase anxiety and conflicts in the family."

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SURPRISING OUTCOME

Of course, we have some families who said things got worse, but the proportion who reported that Covid-19 made things better is significantly larger than those who said things got worse, across all housing types.

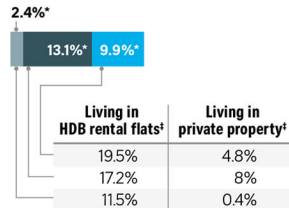


PROFESSOR JEAN YEUNG,
principal investigator of the study.

Impact of pandemic on families with young children

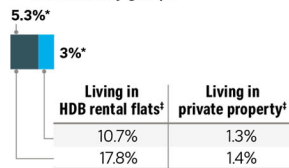
IMPACT ON EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME

- Lost job
- Severe decrease in salary
- Moderate decrease in salary



ASKED FOR FINANCIAL HELP

- Asked family or friends for financial help
- Asked government agencies or community groups



NOTES:

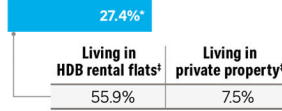
[†] Condominium or landed property that is rented or owned

[‡] HDB rental flats refer to highly subsidised flats rented from the HDB

*Refers to all families

SAVINGS

Don't have savings of at least one month in family income



CHILDREN'S LEARNING

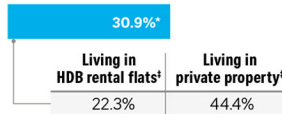
Owns a computer or tablet that child can use for home-based learning or homework



Child has quiet place to study

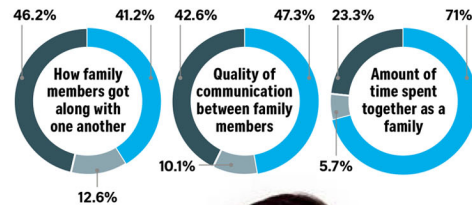


Child participated in extra online tutoring class during circuit breaker



FAMILY DYNAMICS DURING THE PANDEMIC

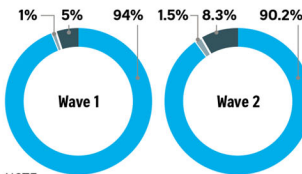
- Better
- No change
- Worse



FOOD INSECURITY

Worry about current food supplies and no money to buy more food

- Never
- Sometimes
- Often



NOTE:

Wave 1 refers to interviews done from November 2018 to September 2019, while Wave 2 refers to interviews done between February and November 2021



Source: SINGAPORE LONGITUDINAL EARLY DEVELOPMENT STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN IN SINGAPORE PHOTO: ISTOCKPHOTO SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS