Submitted to ABC AU -ID by HCDI

7/31/2022

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Executive Summary

This research aimed to contribute to understanding digital engagement of youth in Vanuatu and how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected young people in Vanuatu. [1]

The research was carried out in June of 2022, immediately following the February 2022 community outbreak of Covid-19 in Vanuatu and the resulting lockdowns. The study reached 147 survey respondents between the ages of 18 and 29. Follow-up phone interviews and focus group meetings, designed to collect in-depth, qualitative date, included an additional 70 respondents.

The study concluded that COVID-19 clearly impacted digital engagement among young women and men, especially in the wake of the 2022 community outbreak in Vanuatu, and recommends that support for the education and mental health of young people in Vanuatu is prioritized in policy, funding and research.

Specific findings related to the 4 main research questions were:

1. "*How do young people engage online?*
   - 80% of young people connect to the internet using their mobile phones
   - Facebook was the most frequently used site, regularly accessed by 96%
   - 41% said they spend 2 to 3 hours daily on line but 45 % said they spent much more than that, ranging from 4 to more than 7 hours a day
   - They go online most often for social reasons, followed by news and media updates
2. *Has COVID-19 Pandemic directly changed youth digital behaviours, attitudes, and experiences?*
   - Direct and mostly negative changes reported were spending more time on line, online distractions disrupting work and study, addiction to social media, overall stress, and stress related to finances
   - 65 % felt affected by the Covid-19 community outbreak, and 95% of students were negatively impacted by school closures
   - 90% reported increased financial stress and reduced face-to-face with family and friends
   - 76% said they did <u>not</u> experience social peer pressure and only 11.5 % reported online bullying
   - Almost 2/3rds said their online experience during the Covid-19 outbreak was stressful
3. "*Has the COVID-19 Pandemic indirectly changed youth digital behaviours and attitudes?*"
   - Almost half reported that the Covid -19 lockdown impacted their mental health
   - Key stressors included home schooling, online learning, and finances, along with feelings of isolation, loneliness, fear, worry, and confusion
   - Online engagement was a good way to receive accurate, reliable information about Covid-19, if gathered from official reliable sources. Social media often caused confusion
   - High amounts of money spent on phone and data credit caused added finance stress
4. "*What has been the exposure and learning from Go! Cyber campaign on young people's awareness regarding safety while being online?"*
   - Most understood the importance of cyber safety, could identify standards strategies for staying safe on line, and applied those strategies regularly.

1. Background

1.1 Background to the study

This research was commissioned by ABC AU International Development, and carried out by Human Capacity Development International (HCDI), a Vanuatu-based NGO.

The research aimed to bridge the knowledge gap in understanding digital engagement of youth in Vanuatu and how the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences has affected young people in Vanuatu. This kind of research is being undertaken in western countries. However, the contextual differences (digital infrastructure, COVID-19 situation, culture, and social norms etc.) are expected to drastically impact the findings of the research in the Pacific. To accurately diagnose the issues that young people face, we must understand the context in which they live.

A literature review was completed in 2021[2], that concluded that COVID-19 had not radically impacted the level of digital engagement among young women in the Pacific countries studied. Even though at the time of reporting, most Pacific Islands had still been sheltered from major COVID-19 infection rates, the study indicated that the Pandemic had impacted cyber-safety adjacent areas of young people's lives. These interrelated areas included mental health, education, and employment opportunities which can increase vulnerability to cyber harms and aggravate risky cyber behaviour.

The review recommended that "the impacts of COVID-19 on young women and girls/ youth is further investigated. Further research should focus on changes (if any) young women have adopted in their cyber engagement as a direct result of the Pandemic, and on adjacent impacts, such as those on: education, employment, family relations, psychological well-being/ mental health, young people with disability, (and)digital engagement across any or all of these areas"[3].

In 2021 and early 2022, a Go! Cyber online campaign was carried out by CARE International Vanuatu and Sista, a Vanuatu-based, feminist NGO. The campaign aimed to "improve cyber resilience", caried out cyber safety training workshops and produced 3 cyber safety videos, launched via an online campaign. The Go! Cyber campaign coincided with the passing of the Vanuatu Cyber Crime Act No 22 of 2021.

1.2 Vanuatu

Vanuatu comprises 83 islands in the South Pacific Ocean, with a total land area of 12,190 km^2 [4] It has an estimated 2022 population of approximately 322,000 people[5], and its population density is 25 people per km^2. Annual population growth is 2.4 %. Life expectancy is 71, and the median age of 21.1. Infant death rate is high at 19.1 per 1000 live births[6].

The country is divided into 6 provinces and it has two major towns. The capital, Port Vila, which is located on Efate, and has a population of 36,000 and Luganville, which is located on Santo and has a population of 16,000.

The majority of the population – 75% – is rural and many of those live in remote, hard to reach locations. The main sources of livelihood include subsistence farming, fishing and the production of cash crops including coconut, coffee, peanuts, cocoa and kava. Prior to Covid-19, tourism was a significant source of income, accounting for around 40% of GDP. Major exports include copra,

kava, coconut oil, timber and beef.

Vanuatu has 3 official languages - Bislama, French and English - and over 100 indigenous languages, making it one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world.

In December 2020, Vanuatu became one of only 6 countries in the world to graduate from the least developed country (LDC) list. Graduation from LDC status was based on Vanuatu consistently meeting or exceeding the Gross National Income per capita of over USD 1,230 – USD 2,460 in the case of Vanuatu- and mostly meeting the human assets index (HAI) score over 66 measured through health and education indicators[7].

Vanuatu has never met or come close to meeting the third LDC indicator requirement, which is an economic vulnerability index (EVI) score of less than 32. The EVI measures exposure to and impact of economic (particularly trade) and environmental shocks.

This indicator is highly relevant for Vanuatu, given its location on both the Ring of Fire and the tropical cyclone belt. It ranks #1 on the World Risk Index, reflecting both its exposure to natural disasters and its vulnerability to impact. Regularly occurring hazards include frequent and severe cyclones -most recently category 5 Tropical Cyclone (TC) Harold in 2020-, volcanic eruptions such as those resulting in the 2018 and 2019 full-scale evacuations of Ambae, excessive ash fall on Ambae and Tanna, and frequent earthquakes, droughts and floods. These natural hazards cause significant external shocks to the country's society and economy and present a critical challenge to development.

Vanuatu 2030: The Peoples Plan is the National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP) for the period 2016 to 2030, and it serves as the country's highest-level development policy framework[8]. The People's Plan is "founded on culture, traditional knowledge and Christian principles, and builds on Vanuatu's development journey since independence"[9]. The People's Plan consists of 3 pillars: Society, Environment, and Economy, 15 national sustainable development goals (SDGs) and 96 policy objectives, which together seek to realise the national vision of a 'stable, sustainable and prosperous Vanuatu' by 2030.

As is the case with many developing countries, social equality is an ongoing challenge in Vanuatu, especially when it comes to inclusion and equality for women and other marginalized populations.

In terms of economy, the average gross national income for women in Vanuatu is around $1,200 lower than for men. Women also occupy a smaller share of most types of formal employment, filling fewer than 40% of jobs across the private and public sectors and more women than men (49% vs 41%) are engaged in subsistence livelihoods meaning their sources of income are less secure[10].

With regard to health, maternal mortality in Vanuatu is slightly higher than the average for Pacific Island small states at 72 per 100,00016 and although teenage pregnancy rates have fallen significantly in the past 20 years, they remain higher than the global average at 49 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19.

In education, the expected years of schooling are slightly lower for girls than boys and a greater proportion of women than men have never been to school. This gap is closing in younger

generations, but overall, the rates of secondary and tertiary education remain lower for women than for men at 25.3% vs 27.4% and 3.3 vs 4.5%, respectively[11]

Gender-based violence is endemic in Vanuatu. A report in 2011 by the Vanuatu Women's Centre surveying 3,750 women across Vanuatu found that 60% of women who had ever been in a relationship had experienced either physical or sexual abuse by a partner, and more than 2 in 3 had experienced emotional abuse[12]

1.3 Covid-19 in Vanuatu

With regard to COVID-19 in Vanuatu, the country declared a State of Emergency on March 26, 2020. Nationally, measures included awareness campaigns, an initial period of school closure from March through June 2020, and the closing of its borders to international travel. An extensive vaccination campaign began in mid-2021, resulting in 76% of the population being fully vaccinated, with higher percentages in key urban areas.

From a public health perspective, Vanuatu's actions to prevent COVID-19 from coming into the country succeeded for almost 2 years. As of January 2022, the country had 7 confirmed cases, all of which were effectively contained.

HCDI Health Alert System training – Tanna

Community outbreak started in February of 2022, followed by lockdowns and curfews. As of the date of this report writing, 11,723 COVID-19 cases were reported, with 37 remaining active cases, 11,672 recoveries, and 14 deaths. Vanuatu partially opened its borders in July with a full opening scheduled for August 2022.

For young people, the two major tangible impacts were educational and economic. In terms of education, schools were closed at various points between March 2020 and February 2022, with a full final lockdown on Efate from February through May 2022. Schools were asked to develop and utilize home school packages, which often relied on parents and on computer access for successful use. There was little to no preparation or support for teachers or students in this area, financial or pedagogical.

The *Partnerships for Recovery: Australia's COVID-19 Development Response* report observed that COVID-19 significantly disrupted education systems throughout the Pacific, citing instances of students dropping out of school/tertiary education due to limited connectivity to access online learning, or as a cost saving measure[13]. In Tuvalu for instance, widespread school closures led to mass outer-island migration, which in turn led to dropouts from the centrally located high schools[14] While Vanuatu uses a similar system of main island boarding high schools, similar data have not yet been reported.

As noted in several early studies, school closures and the resultant reliance on internet and remote learning tools have disproportionately impacted already disadvantaged and underprivileged children and youth, in terms of access to learning opportunities, loss of social protection, access to healthy nutrition, and mental health [15] who have fewer educational opportunities outside of school, lack access to the Internet and remote learning tools, rely on school for social protection and a sense of belonging and self-exploration, and who depend on free or discounted school meals for healthy nutrition."

Reporting on a community-based study on the effectiveness of home schooling, carried out by KOBLE, a Vanuatu-based NGO, it was noted that:

> In Vanuatu, different schools used very different approaches in providing remote learning during school lockdowns. (KOBLE's) research taught them that online teaching is insufficient in Vanuatu, that parents and teachers need more guidance, and it gave them unique insights into the general situation of education in remote communities of the island-state.
>
> "One of the core issues we discovered was the digital infrastructure. The government focused a lot on using online teaching platforms during the lockdowns. But in some of the remote areas we visited during our research, there is poor or no internet connection and in some cases no electricity" explains Shirley Abraham, National Coordinator of KOBLE.
>
> The lack of sufficient digital infrastructure made learning difficult for students in remote areas. KOBLE also realized that illiteracy rates amongst parents were high in some areas which made it difficult for parents to support their children in learning. In addition, some of the main recommendations in the report include providing better guidance for parents, making sure that teachers are more directly involved with students, and ensuring that even those without access to internet are provided with necessary hard-copy learning materials.

In terms of economics, the long-term border closure completely shut down the international tourist industry in Vanuatu, a key source of income for the country, and a major source of employment for young people, especially those with low education and skill levels. According to Terauds (2022[16]), "international tourism generated an average of US$ 282 million per year from 2011 to 2018, equivalent to an average of 72.8 per cent of total exports and 35.6 per cent of GDP over the period, underlining the economy's dependence on tourism". According to the Vanuatu National Statistics Office 2021 report, tourism directly employed approximately 10,000 people, or 11 per cent of the total workforce[17]). More recently, the World Travel and Tourism Council estimated that tourism supported a total of 29,000 direct and indirect jobs in Vanuatu in 2019[18].

On the eve of the COVID-19 pandemic, Vanuatu's 2019 gross domestic product (GDP) was approximately 907 million United States dollars (US$). GDP growth in Vanuatu averaged 4.2 per cent from 2010 to 2019, which was slightly higher than the world average of 3.8 per cent. The loss of tourism revenues during the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a drop of 7% Vanuatu's GDP, from US$ 907 million in 2019 to US$ 844 million in 2020, with losses expected to continue

through 2024. The suspension of tourism also affected trade with total exports crashing "by 48 per cent, from US$ 382 million in 2019 to US$ 201 million in 2020. Exports of goods actually increased over the period, meaning that the contraction was due to the US$ 205 million, or 61 per cent, reduction in service exports, mainly from the tourism sector".[19]

Government economic measures during the period included 2 stimulus packages, mostly aimed at small businesses and wage subsidies, a Hardship Loans program, allowing people to withdraw funds from their retirement accounts, along with school tuition support programs. In addition, government campaigns were rolled out to stimulate agriculture and local tourism.

As noted in the ABC AU literature review:

> "The effects of periods of unemployment in youth have disproportionate and long-lasting effects on income and health beyond the period of economic recession as well as risks of concurrent and future insecure employment (Power et al 2020). Unemployment, and lack of involvement in education or training, "increases risks of suicidal thoughts and behaviours in young people beyond the effects of prior mental health vulnerability" (Power et al. 2015). This may further contribute to existing mental health impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic.
>
> Conversely, women may experience increased domestic labour demands, particularly when partners/other family members have lost or reduced incomes. The burden of unpaid domestic labour, already disproportionately undertaken by women, necessarily increases when school and childcare services close. This means that women will not only absorb more unpaid domestic labour but lose opportunities to pursue education or income-generating labour. Furthermore, in the Pacific, women make up most healthcare workers and home-based community/family caregivers which means that the onset of the Pandemic increases their paid and unpaid work. (Gurney 2020, Pacific Women 2020)"[20]

Finally, the Vanuatu section of the 2020 Youth-Led Action Research on the Impact of Covid-19 on Marginalized Youth found that:

- Several youths reported that their parents had lost their jobs during the lockdown period. This left them with little money to pay their school fees and continue their education. Moreover, with most technical colleges run privately, they said that it was becoming increasingly difficult to pay the exorbitant fees and pursue their studies.
- There was a reported increase in poverty levels with several youth struggling to make both ends meet. The respondents also said that there was a rise in homelessness.
- Persons with disabilities said that they felt further excluded during this period
- The loss of livelihoods coupled with increased economic stress has led to a rise in criminal activities in the region. The youth respondents pointed at the rise of thefts, drug peddling and fights during this period.

- The lockdown has brought to a standstill access to basic services and utilities. The strict social distancing along with limited infrastructure has increased the burden on healthcare infrastructure. During this period, even costs of accessing healthcare have increased manifold. The respondents indicated that it was too expensive to book transportation services to hospitals even, which was leading to panic among people[21].

1.4 Online Engagement in Vanuatu

In Vanuatu, cyber engagement is regulated through the Bill for the Cybercrime Act No..22, which was passed in July of 2021[22]. . Among other things, the Bill prohibits cyber crime offences, such as child pornography and solicitation, identity-related crimes, cyber-stalking, and computer-related forgery and fraud. The first arrests under the new law, and under the new 2021 regulations on criminal libel and slander, were made in May 2022[23]. The passing of the law was supported by Vanuatu Police Force educational materials[24]

As of February 2021, there were reportedly 104.1 thousand internet users in Vanuatu. The number of internet users in Vanuatu increased by 26 thousand (+33%) between 2020 and 2021, and overall internet penetration reached 33.5%[25]. This is around half of the 2021 global average of 65.6% and the Oceania average of 67.4%[26].

There were 110.0 thousand social media users in Vanuatu, representing 35.4% of the population – this was an increase of 15 thousand (+16%) between 2020 and 2021. Much of internet access in Vanuatu occurs through mobile phones. In 2021, there were 320.5 thousand mobile connections in Vanuatu, equivalent to 103 % of the population. The number of mobile connections increased by 7,557 (+2.4%) between January 2020 and January 2021[27].

Internet access in Vanuatu is often *costly* and *slow*.

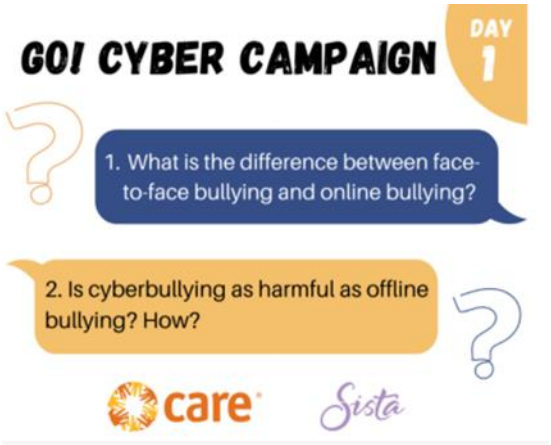
- Vanuatu is lagging behind in the expansion of broadband Internet connections. Around 26% of all residents have access to the Internet. Around 1% have their own fast Internet connection, which is at least faster than the former ISDN (more than 256 kbit/s). All fixed connections via DSL, cable or satellite were counted here, but not those connected to the Internet via mobile communications. With an average download speed of 10.64 Mbit/second for fixed-network broadband internet, Vanuatu ranked 140th in an international comparison. The upload rate was only 6.4 Mbit/second (141st place)[28].
- The cost of a basic home internet package is around 12,5000 vatu a month[29], roughly 4 times the cost of a similar package in Fiji, and more than double the cost of Australia[30]
- A 30-day mobile data package for 15 GB averages around 3000 vatu.
- In most rural access, internet access is only possible by mobile phone, if at all.
- Access to electricity in Vanuatu is estimated at 67%, but is much lower in rural areas[31]

1.5 Go! Cyber Campaign

The *Girls Online Cyber Safety! Online Campaign* was carried out by Sista, a Vanuatu-based feminist organization and CARE International in Vanuatu, with the support of ABC AU ID in early 2022. The project aimed "to improve cyber resilience and contribute to the achievement of United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which recognizes the vital role of digital technologies in sustainable development"[32].

The project resulted in the production of 3 short videos - 'No Spolem Naraman Onlaen' (cyberbullying), 'Tingting Gud Bifo Yu Post' (image-based abuse), and 'Ino Blong Yu '(lack on online protection) - and an educational booklet. The videos were accessed and shared widely, resulting in close to 60,000 link clicks.

A set of 13 interactive questions was released prior, during and after the campaign through Care & Sista's social media accounts to assess people's understanding of the issues, with 25 resulting responses. These showed a good understanding of cyber safety but the sample was too small to make any generalizations.



2. Methodology

The *purpose* of this research project was to understand digital engagement of young people in Vanuatu and the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on this engagement. The research focused on assessing cyber behaviours within the ecosystem of psychosocial, health, education, and vocational COVID-19 impacts. The study was carried out in June and July of 2022, immediately following the February 2022 community outbreak and resulting lockdowns.

The 4 *main research questions* specified were:

1. How do young people engage online?
    a. what platform/s are used?
    b. what is the frequency and duration of usage
    c. what is the purpose of engagement
    d. what is the usage environment and presiding parental supervision (if any)

2. Has the COVID-19 Pandemic directly changed youth digital behaviours, attitudes, experiences?

3. Has the COVID-19 Pandemic indirectly (e.g., through the impact of school closures, mental health strain, family financial stress) changed youth digital behaviours and attitudes?

4. What has been the exposure and learning from Go! Cyber campaign on young people's awareness regarding safety while being online?

For this research, we collected qualitative and quantitative data, using the following methodology:

1. *Background research*, including the ABC AU preliminary literature review, the Sista Go! Cyber study, and relevant materials related to the Vanuatu Covid-19 experience, and general studies related to youth cyber engagement.
2. *E-surveys* – an initial e-survey was developed and distributed through the various Facebook and other social media sites popular with young people in Vanuatu, using this link https://sprw.io/stt-082f3f (see Appendix 1).
3. *Face-to-face interviews* - because very few people typically respond to e-surveys in Vanuatu, we put together and trained a team of 5 young Ni-Van interviewers who went out and interviewed 25 young people each, using the same e-survey questions.
4. *Follow-up phone interviews* were carried out, selected randomly from people who completed the e-survey and using additional questions (see Appendix 2).
5. *Focus group interviews* were carried out with a total of at 4 tertiary education institutions: National University of Vanuatu, Malapoa College, University of the South Pacific, and Vanuatu Institute of Technology. When and where possible, focus group participants also completed the e-survey. The focus group discussions followed the same questions used in the phone interview.

6. *Language:* The e-survey and all interviews and discussions were carried out in Bislama. The e-survey, phone questions, and responses were all translated from Bislama into English for the purpose of this report.
7. *Incentives:* To ensure a sufficient response level, a 2,500 vatu phone credit incentive was awarded to 4 people, randomly selected from the total number of respondents from 1 and 2 above. In addition, all phone interviewees were awarded a 1000 vatu phone credit incentive upon successful completion of the interview. Focus group participants were given refreshments at the session.

The data collection resulted in a total of 147 e-survey respondents, 125 collected from the interviews and 22 collected from directed responses. This exceeded the original goal of 100 respondents. All responses were entered into the Survey Sparrow data collection site.

For the follow-up, there were 30 follow-up phone interviews completed. The focus group interviews resulted in an additional 40 interview participants: 8 from the National University of Vanuatu, 6 from Vanuatu Institute of Technology, 6 from University of the Pacific and 20 from Malapoa College. This exceeded the original goal of 30 interviews.

All respondent groups were gender balanced and and included 3 different age groups, ranging from a minimum age of 18 to a maximum age of 29.

2.1 Limitations of the study

The study was well-timed to capture responses from young people, immediately following the community outbreak of Covid-19 in Vanuatu. Combining the e-survey with face-to-face interviews was a useful approach, because in spite of extensive postings on social media, there were relatively few direct e-survey responses.

Translating all survey and interview questions and responses into Bislama was very useful in terms of communicating with the respondents. It is possible though that there are still errors and confusions that crept into this process.

The interview and focus group approach biased the sample. The respondent group was considerably more educated that the general population, and it also did not appear to have included people of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity and expression (SOGIE). Due to time limitations, the study also did not include a specific outreach to young people with disabilities, as originally intended.

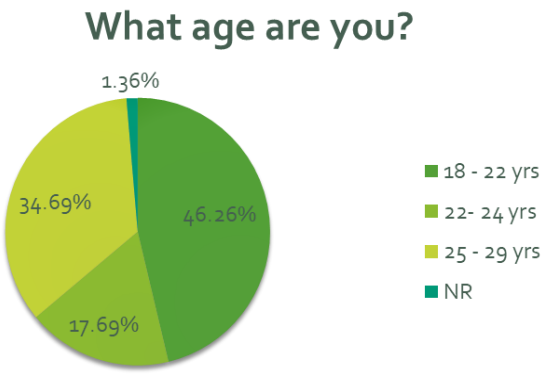
3. Results

3.1 E-Survey Results

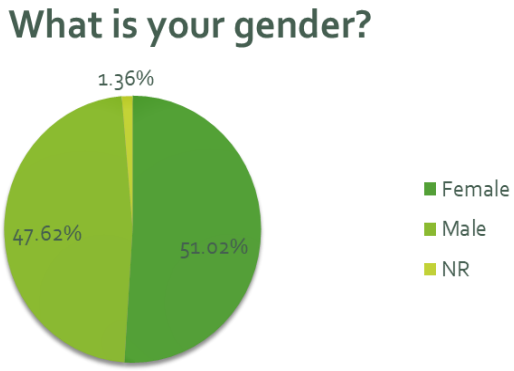
The survey results are divided into 4 main categories: demographics, online engagement, and the impact of Covid-19 on online engagement, direct and indirect.

3.1.1 Demographics

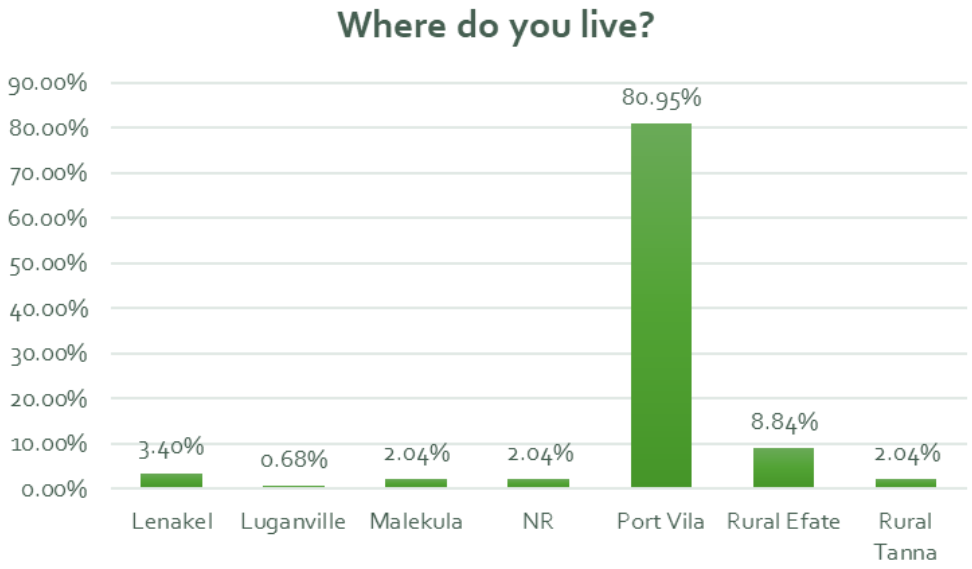
In terms of *age*, the study only included young people between the ages of 18 and 29. Of the 147 respondents, 68 (46.26 %) were 18 to 22 years old, 26 (17.69 %) were between 22 and 24 years, and 51 (34.69 %) were between 25 to 29 years old.



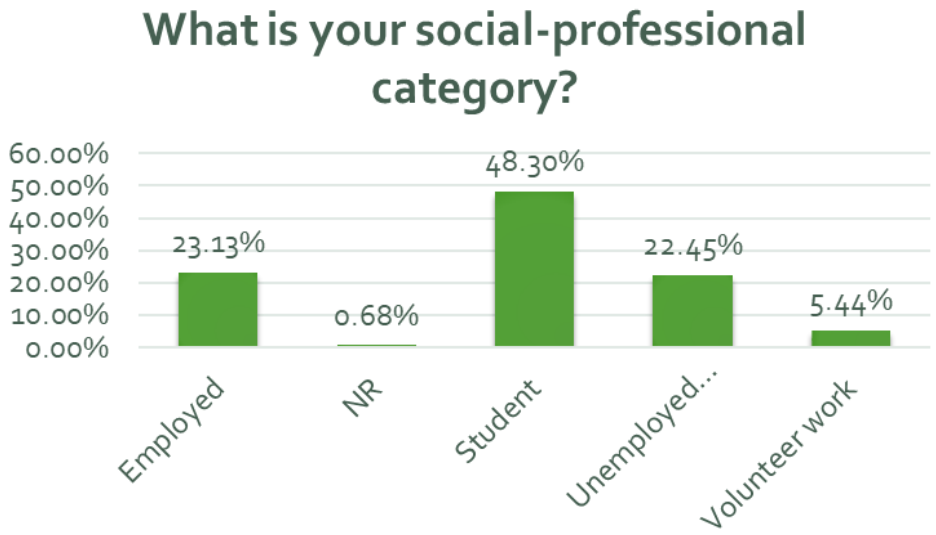
With regard to *gender*, 51 % were female and 48% were male. There were no respondents that indicated being gender diverse.



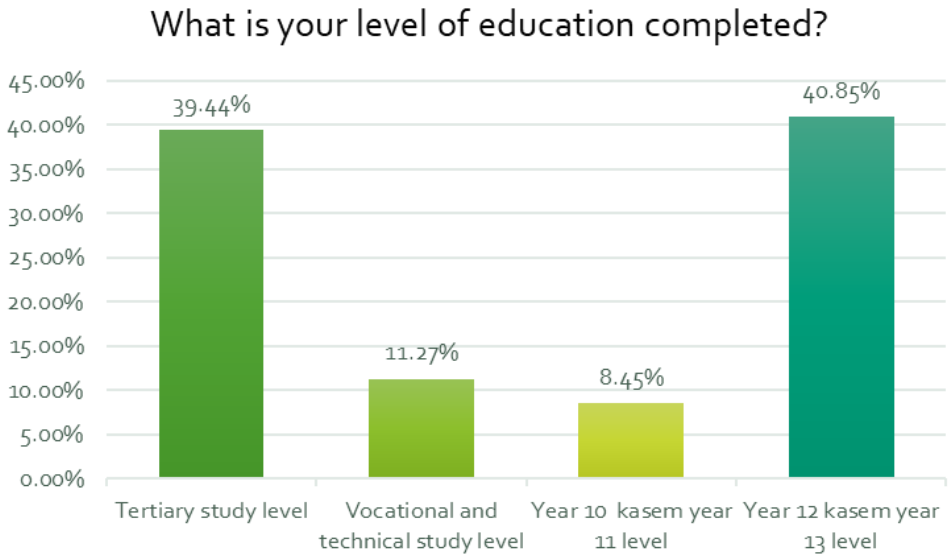
Geographically, we targeted Port Vila, the capital of Vanuatu, and surrounding areas on the island of Efate, for the face-to-face survey result collection. Responses from other areas were collected through direct e-survey responses online. The resulting geographic distribution of respondents included 81% from Port Vila, 8.9% from rural Efate, 3.4% from Lenakel on Tanna, 2% from rural Tanna, 2% from Malekula and .68% from Luganville.



Looking at their social-professional category, 48.3% were students, 23.1 % were employed, 22.45 % were unemployed and 5.44% were engaged in volunteer work. The percentage of unemployed respondents is substantially higher than the generally assumed average youth unemployment rate in Vanuatu of 5.4 % [33] but it should be noted that unemployment is often periodic, seasonal, or part-time, especially for young people.

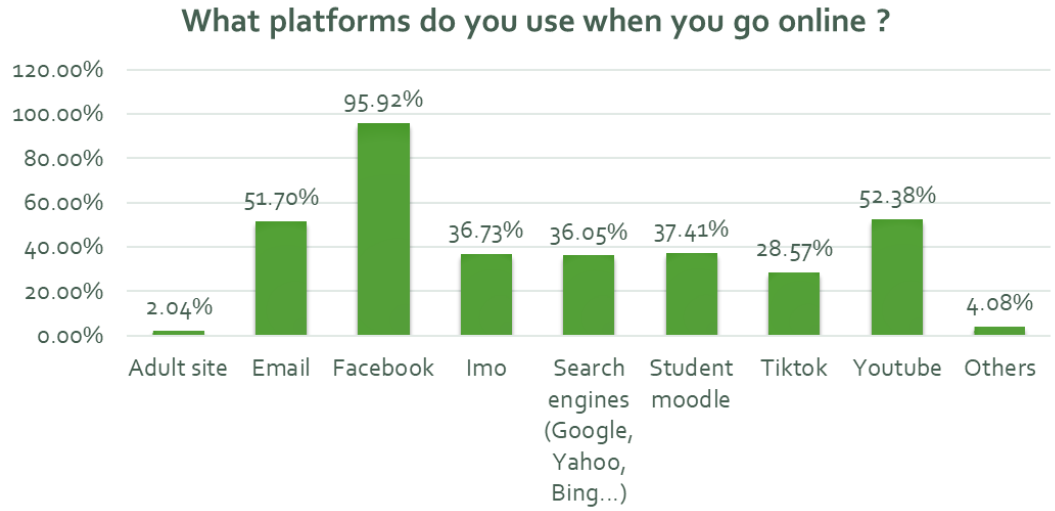


With regard to *education,* close to 41% of the respondents completed year 12 or 13, almost 40% were engaged in or completed tertiary education, 11 % completed vocational or technical study and 8.45 % completed year 10 or 11. It should be noted that the distribution in this sample is not representative of Vanuatu as a whole where only 4% of the overall population completed tertiary education. The skewing in the sample was most likely caused by the fact that the interviews took place in Port Vila and that our interviewers were university students or graduates.



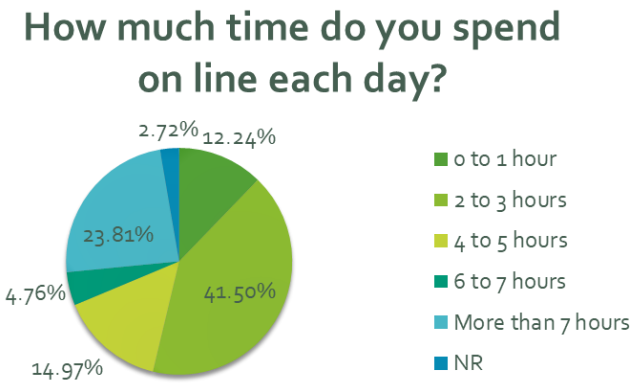
3.1.2 Online engagement

In the area of online engagement, respondents were first asked *what platforms or sites* they used when going online, checking all that applied. The results showed that Facebook was used most often (95.9%). It should be noted that the two main mobile phone providers in Vanuatu – Digicel and Vodaphone- provide data-free access to Facebook which in all likelihood stimulates its popular use among youth and other people in the country. Facebook was followed by YouTube (52.4%), email access sites (51.7%), Moodle (school site) (37.4%), Imo (36.7%), search engines (36%) and TikTok (28.6%). Adult sites were only listed by 2 % of respondents.



There were a few significant differences in this area by age. While all age groups frequently used Facebook and search engines, the 18–22-year-olds more often used student Moodle sites, while the 25–29-year-olds more often used email sites. Women used Facebook, TikTok and Imo more often than men (99% vs. 94% FB; 32 vs. 26% TT; 41% vs. 33%), and men accessed YouTube more often than women (61% vs. 44%).

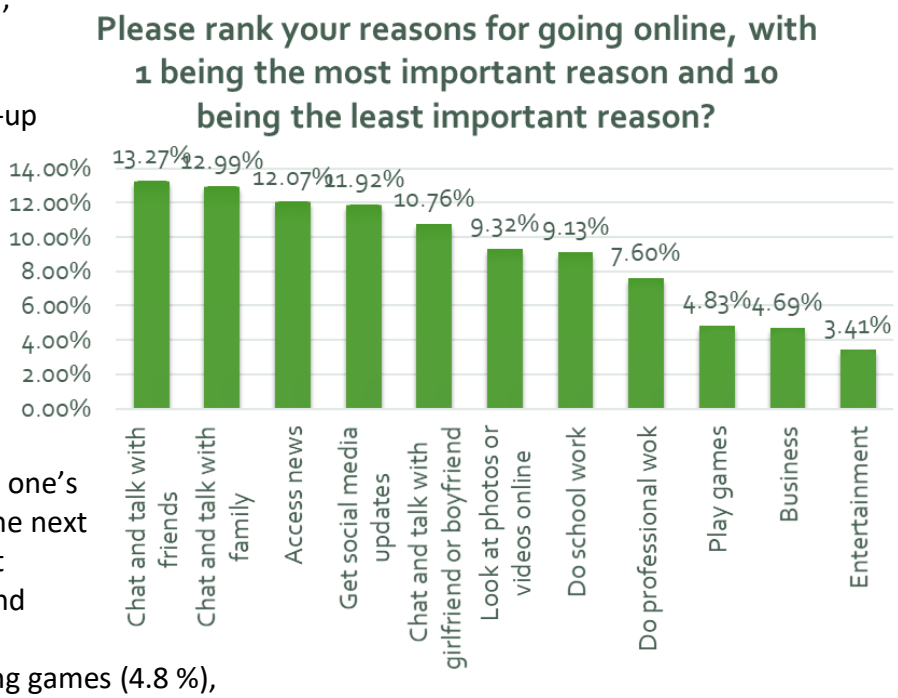
Next, respondents were asked *how many hours* they think they spent online on a daily basis. The most frequent response given was 2 to 3 hours (41.5%). However, a substantial portion of respondents said they spend quite a bit more time. Around 15 % said 4 to 5 hours, almost 5 % said 6 to 7 hours, and close to 24 % said they were online for more than 7 hours a day. Only 12 % said they were online 1 hour or less daily.



Comparing the responses based on age, almost half of the 18–22-year-olds were online most often between 2 to 3 hours, compared to around a third of the other 2 groups. Twenty percent of the youngest group was online more than 7 hours a day, versus 31 percent of the 22–24-year-olds, and 27 % of the 25–29-year-olds.

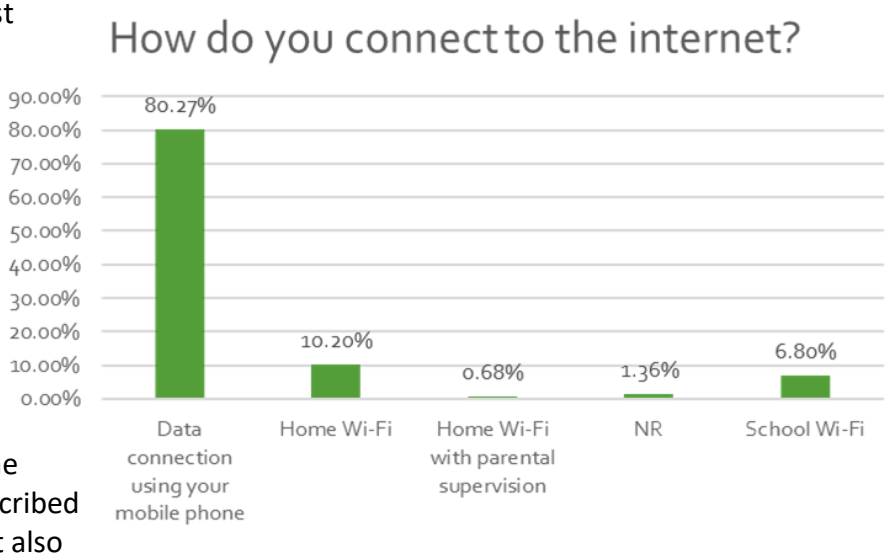
Comparing online time by gender, there were some significant differences in patterns. Among men, most (53%) spent between 2 to 3 hours. Seventeen percent spent more than 7 hours, 13 % spent less than 1 hour, 10% spent 4 to 5 hours and 4% spent between 6 to 7 hours a day online. For women, 31 % spent 2 to 3 hours, 29% spent more than 7 hours, 20% spent between 4 and 5 hours, 12% spent less than 1 hour and 5% spent between 6 to 7 hours online a day.

When asked *why they go online*, social communication was predominant overall. This was further confirmed in the follow-up interviews, to be discussed later.



The two most highly ranked reasons were to talk with friends or family (13.3% and 13% respectively). This was followed closely by accessing news (12%) or social media updates (12%), and talking with one's girlfriend or boyfriend (11%). The next three in ranking were looking at photos or videos online (9%), and doing school work (9%) or professional work (7.6%). Playing games (4.8 %), doing business (4.7%), or engaging in entertainment (3.4%) were ranked lowest.

Next, we asked *how people connected to the internet*. Mobile phones were by far the most frequently used means. A full 117 respondents (80%) indicated they used mobile data connections. This was followed by home Wi-Fi used by 15 respondents (10%), and school Wi-Fi, used by 10 respondents (6.8%). Only 1 respondent said they used home Wi-Fi with parental supervision.



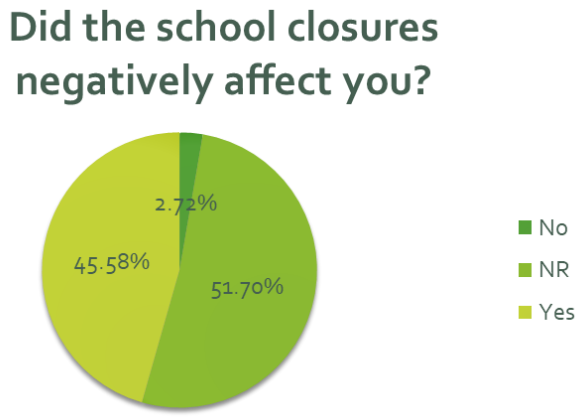
These results are consistent with the frequency of mobile phone use described earlier in the background section. It also fits with the frequent and free access to Facebook using mobile phones, also mentioned earlier.

Women were somewhat more likely to use home Wi-Fi than men (16% vs. 4,3%), and men were more likely to use school wi-fi (10 % vs. 4%) and mobile phones (84% vs. 74.7%). Not surprisingly, use of school Wi-Fi was the lowest among the older age group (2% vs. 8.9% and 11.5%).

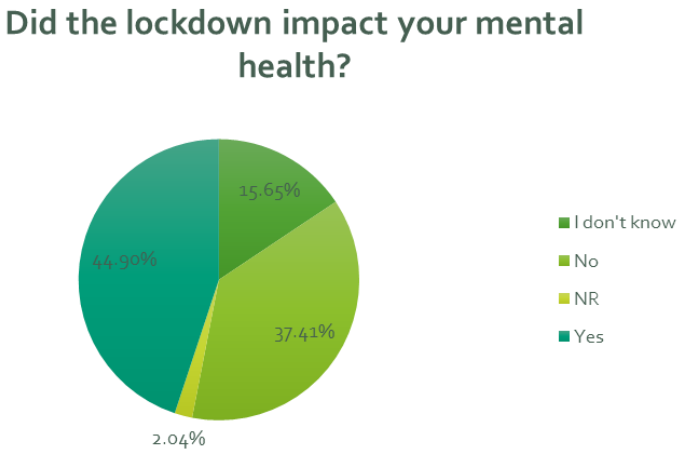
3.1.3 Impact of Covid-19 on digital behavior, attitude and experience.

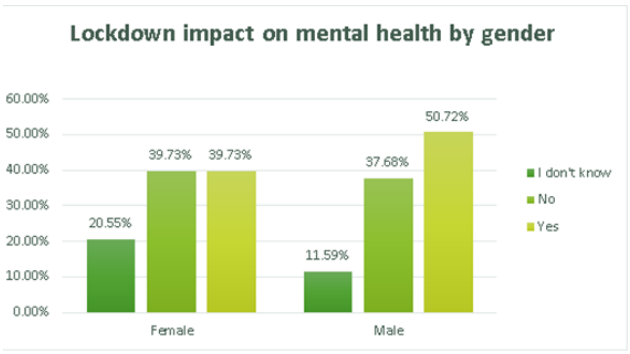
In terms of impact, the survey asked about the impact of Covid-19 in relation to school closures, mental health, and financial stress. It also explored if digital engagement, face-to-face interaction, online bullying, and the overall experience of online engagement were affected.

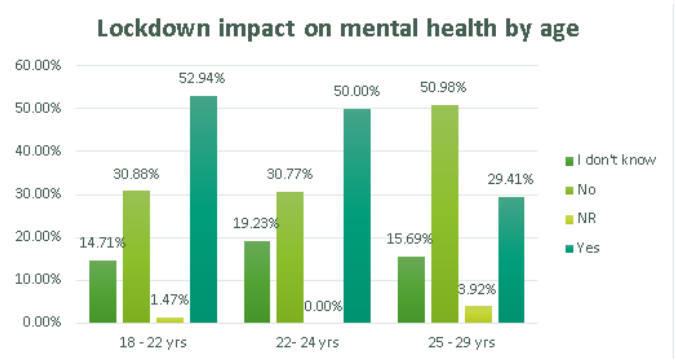
As noted earlier, schools in Vanuatu were closed for about 4 months in 2020 when the State of Emergency was first declared, and social distancing, hygiene, and other protection measures were put into place. They were closed again for 5 months – beginning in Efate- following the first community outbreak in February 2022. During these times, home school packages were distributed in primary and secondary schools, and tertiary education moved online. We asked respondents *if the school closures negatively affected them*. Overall, 45.6 % said that there was a negative impact and 51.7% said there was not. Looking only at the 71 respondents who were students, however, a full 67 (94.4%) said that they experienced a negative impact.



Respondents were also asked if specifically, the lockdown following the Covid-19 community outbreak, affected their mental health. Sixty-six of them (45.83%) said that the lockdown had impacted their mental health, 55 (38.2%) said it did not, and 23 (16%) said they did not know. Men were more likely to be impacted than women (50.7% vs. 39.7%), and younger people were more likely to be impacted than older people. In the 18–22-year-old group, 53% said their mental health was impacted, in the 22–24-year-old group 50% said they were impacted, and in the 25–29-year-old group, 29.4% said they were impacted.







Home schooling, learning, and financial stresses, along with feelings of fear, worry, and confusion were the *main reasons given for being impacted*

- "Tumas stress long maen blong mi, from wok blong skul" (too much mental stress, due to school work)
- "Stap lo haos nomo, no go lukim ol fren i mekem se mi bored tumas". (being stuck in the house and not being able to see friends made me feel very bored)
- "I bin slowem daon sam long ol plans long wok mo skul" (it slowed down my plans for work and school)
- "From mi ting ting tumas abaot sik ia, mo wari from famle blong mi, wori from se lockdown i mekem se mi fil no gud mo mi no go long work mo mi fraet se nogud bae mi lusum job blong mi". (because I thought too much about being sick and worrying about my family, which meant I did not feel good enough to work which made me afraid of losing my job).

Some frontline workers had been separated from their families for a long time and this impacted their health: "Mi wan nurse long taem blong covid mi stap lo quarantine blong 2 manis we mi no go bak long haos blong mitim famle blong mi , hemi rili afektem mi bigwan from mi missim kompani blong famle blong mi" (I am a nurse and during the Covid times, I was in quarantine for two months during which I was not able to go back home to meet my family – this really affected me a lot because I missed their company).

Financial stress added to the impact: "From mi stap long haos mo pem rifil blong everiwan (because I was at home and had to pay the phone top-up for everyone)". Confusing information about Covid and the outbreak made the situation worse. Some also mentioned domestic arguments and violence caused by stress and shortage of resources. Additional mental health impacts were explored in the follow-up interviews to be discussed later.

Those respondents who said *they were not impacted mentally* by Covid-19 explained:

- "From hemi givim mi oportuniti blong mi gat taem blong spendem wetem famle blong mi, mo taem blong tingting long wanem ol important samting we mi sud mekem. Iven blong lanem sam samting mo storian long kastom mo kalja blong mi, from taem yu stap tumas wetem ol frens yu save end ap long ol problem or aksident. So hemi help bigwan" (because it gave me to opportunity and I had time to spend with my family, and time to think about what important things I should do. Even to learn something and talk about

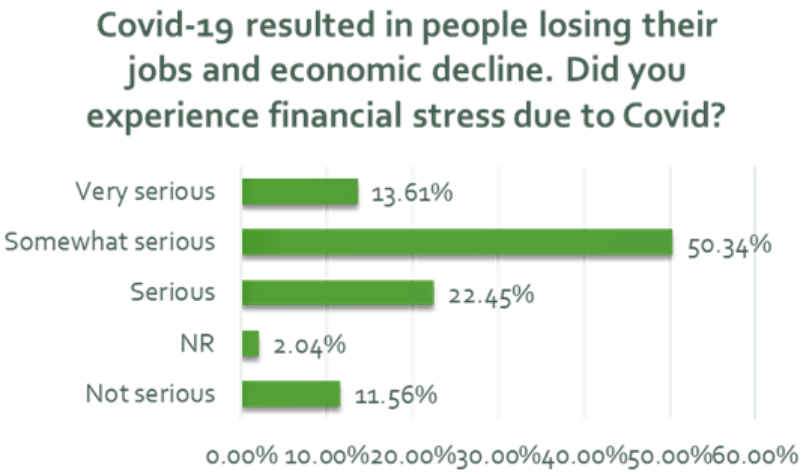
our traditions and culture, because when you are with your friends too often, you end up with problems or accidents. So, it helped me a lot).

- "Long taem blong lockdown mi bin stap kwaet long haos nomo mo i mekem i no afektem mental helt blong mi" (during the lockdown, I spent quiet time at home which meant that my mental health was not affected).
- "From mi stap helti mo mekem eksasaes oltaem" (because I stayed healthy and exercised all the time)
- "Mi bin spendem plente taem blong mekem ol smol smol wok long haos olsem gadening blong kining mo meiteinans. I fun tumas!!!" (I spent a lot of time doing small things around the house, like gardening, cleaning and maintenance. Fun!)

Learning about Covid-19 and being prepared and informed was also mentioned as important:

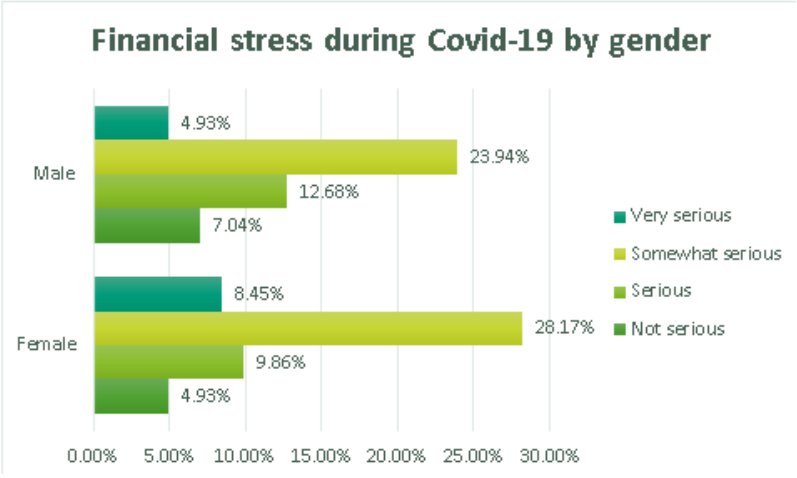
- "From mi tekem advaes long olgeta blong helt mo mi stap sef oltaem" (because I took the advice from the health (department), I stayed safe the whole time).
- " From mi stap wetem famle long haos mo mi apdeit long wok onlaen mo wetem ol frens tu mo nius aotsaed long kaontri" (because I stayed with my family at home and I kept updated on work, friends and news outside the country).

As described in the background section of this report, Covid-19 impacted the overall economy, especially with regard to jobs. When asked about how serious *the financial stress* was that they experienced, about half of them (50.3%) said that it was somewhat serious. Twenty three percent said it was serious and almost fourteen percent said it was very serious. Only 11.6% said it was not serious.

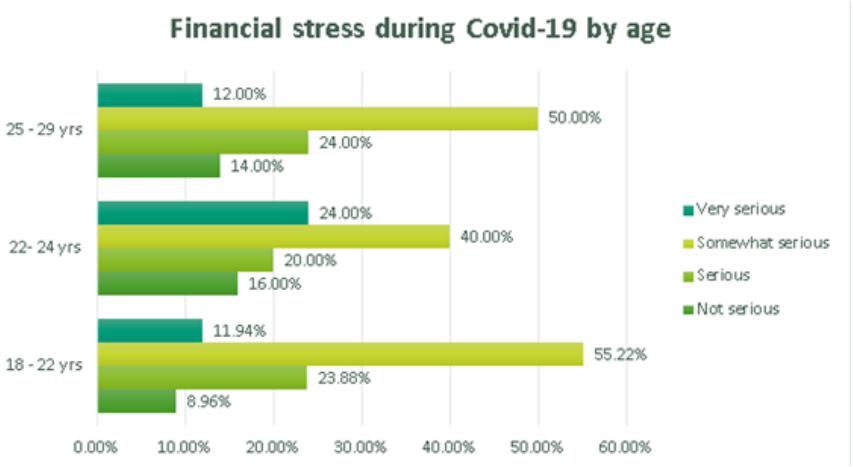


More women than men indicated that the financial stress was very serious (8.5% vs. 5%), or somewhat serious (28.2% vs. 23.9%).

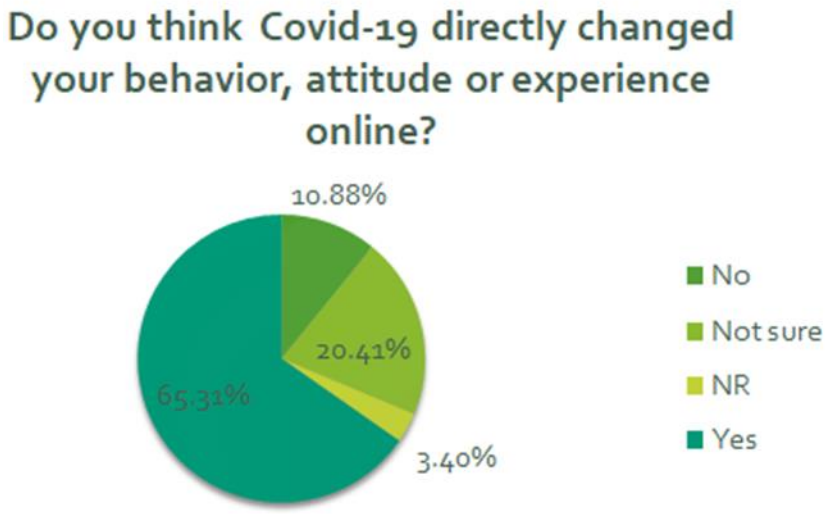
Looking at age differences, there were almost twice as many respondents in the 22–24-year-old group that said the financial stress was very serious. Close of one fourth of all groups said it was serious and close half of all age groups said it was somewhat serious.



As we will discuss in the interview section, the financial cost of online engagement was a major factor in the increase in financial stress experienced by young people during this time.



Focusing specifically on *the impact of Covid-19 on online engagement*, we asked first if respondents thought that Covid-19 directly changed their behavior, attitude, or experience online. A full 65% said it did, 20.41 said they were not sure, and 10.9 % said it did not. The proportion of respondents that said it did affect their behavior was somewhat higher, based on age with 72% saying it did in the 18–22-year group, 61 % in the 22–24-year group, and 57% in the 25-to-29-year group. There were no major differences by gender.



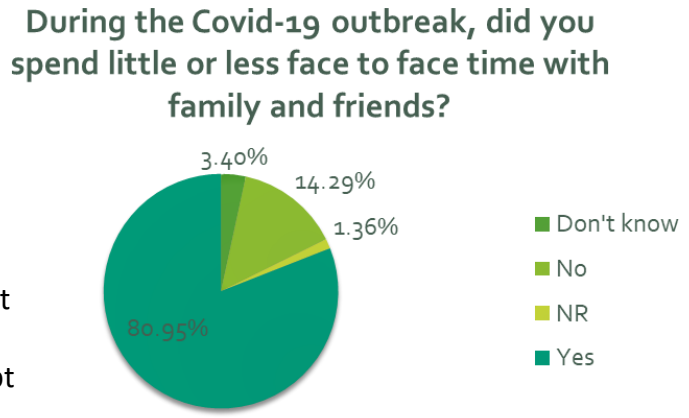
Overall, it was felt that *the time spent on the internet during Covid-19 was much more* than at other times. Some of the resulting changes were negative and some were positive.

Some negative changes included:

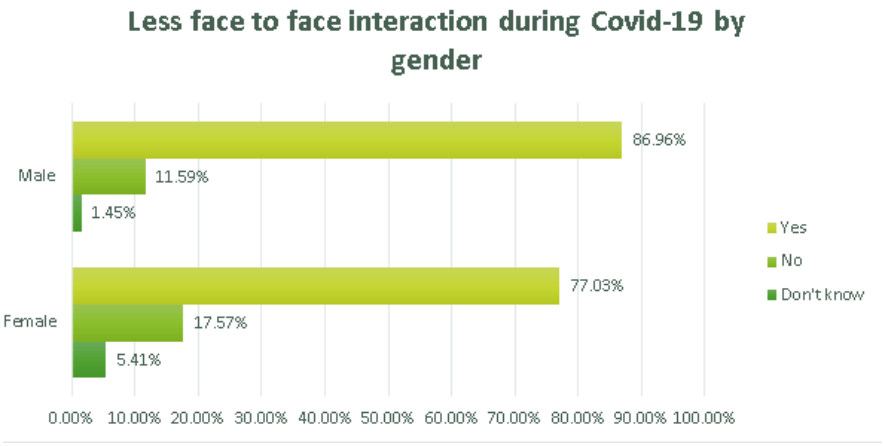
- Stress because of work, school work, finances, family and health
- Loneliness and boredom
- Loss of jobs
- Waste of money to access internet on a daily basis
- More time spent with the families at home
- Addiction to social media such as Facebook, TikTok and others
- Disturbance to the normal course of learning, because social media takes up more time than school work or job
- Some young people did not have money to go online because of the financial situation
- Online bullying
- Experiencing social peer pressure through online engagement (Joss Culture).

Neutral or positive changes mentioned included:

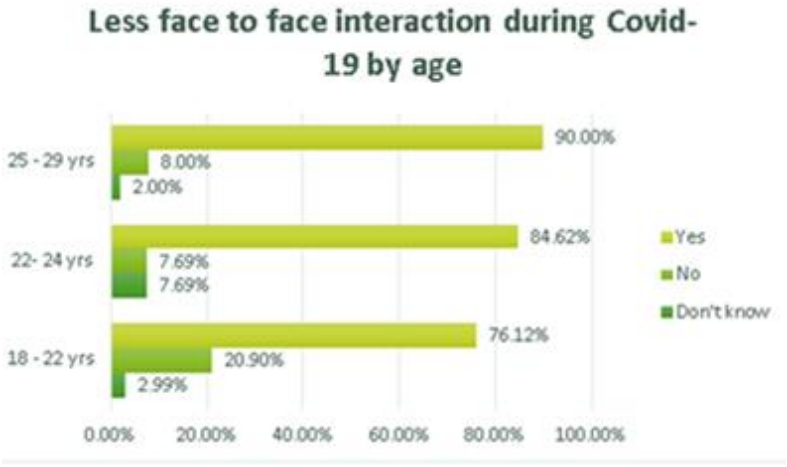
- Social distancing, face to face interaction, and lockdowns changed how we socialize with others
- Covid-19 gives the lesson of how to pass more time at home
- Online interaction and communication with peers, friends and families became more important
- Sharing important information to the families back in the island
- Getting daily updates and information about Covid-19
- Covid-19 enabled youth to change and adapt on new ways to connect online more
- New discovery and usage of new ICT tools such as Moodle



Because face-to-face interaction with family and friends is often seen as quality relations and family life, respondents were also asked if they spent *less face-to-face time with family or friends* during the Covid-19 outbreak. One hundred and nineteen respondents (81%) said they did spend less time, 21 (14.3 %) said they did not, and 5 (3.4%) said they did not know.



Men were more likely to indicate reduced face to face time than women ((87% vs. 77 %). Older respondents were also more likely to indicate reduced face-to-face time than younger respondents (90% vs. 84.6 %. vs. 76.1%).

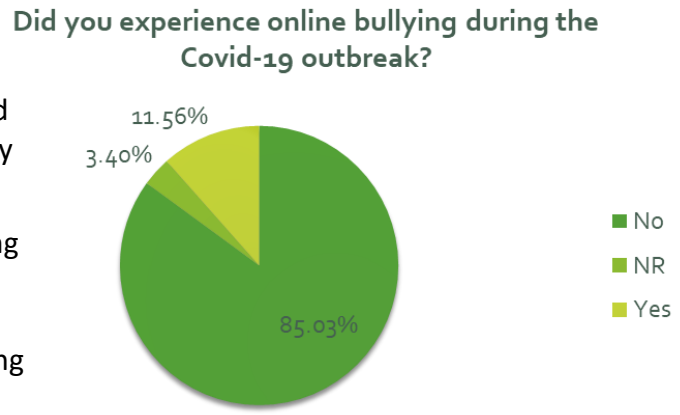


Some of the main explanations given for the reduced face-to-face interaction included:

- People go online to avoid being bored

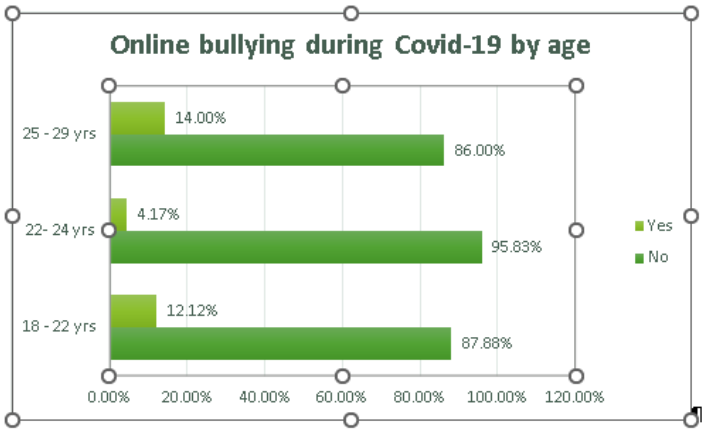
- Being have more time to go online and less time to talk
- Internet access is available that is why people are always and easily going online.
- It is a way of apply social distancing at home, respecting protocols required by the Health Authorities.
- Fear of spreading the Virus to other members of the family
- Protecting family members through less face-to-face interaction
- For health protections and avoiding friends and family who have come in contact with positive cases, face to face conversation is limited at my house with friends and family.
- The frontline office such as nurses cannot go home and are engaged online to reach their families and friends. They also use online platforms to educate people and make awareness.
- Business due to work from home and school work limits the time for face-to-face interaction.
- Online discussion avoids stress, mental health issues, loneliness and boredom
- It is a way to share information by discussing openly and in face to face about Covid-19

When asked if they experienced *online bullying* during Covid-19, a full 125 (85%) reported they did not, and only 17 (11.56 %) said they did. Of all women, 11% said they did experience bullying and 13 % of men said they did as well.



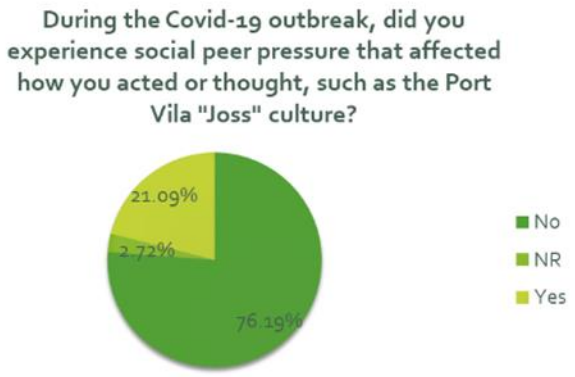
There were some differences in online bullying experience based on age, with 14 % of the youngest group and 12.1 of the oldest group indicating they had experienced online bullying vs. only 4.2 % of the middle group.

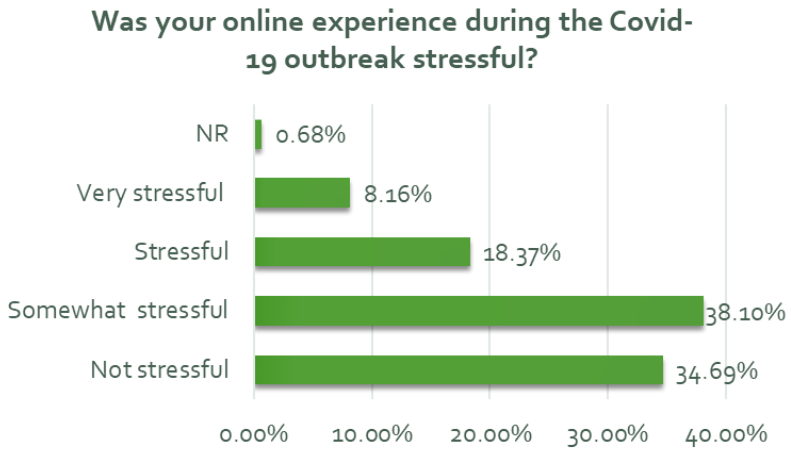
When asked if they experienced *social peer pressure* that affected how they acted or thought, such as the Port Vila "Joss" culture[34], a very high 76% of respondents said they did not, and 21 % said they did experience peer pressure. There were no major differences by age or gender.

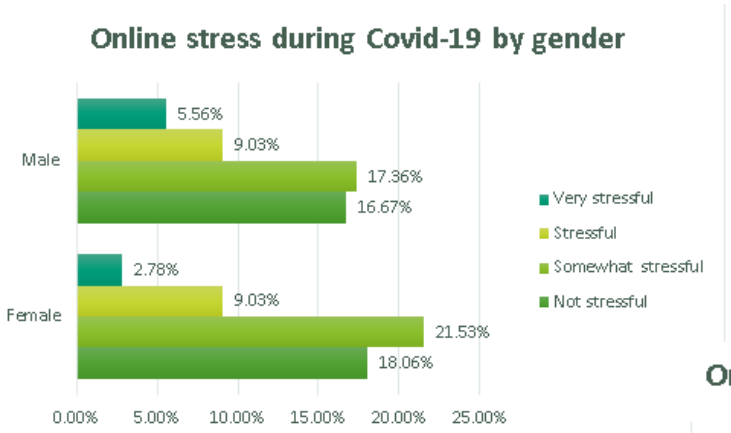


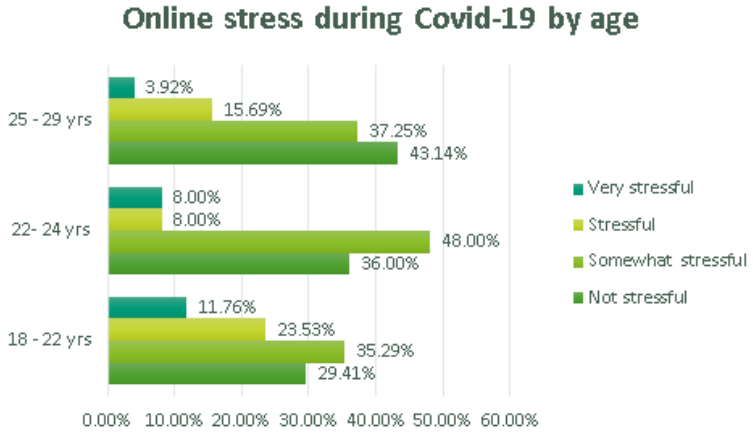
The last question was *if online experience during the Covid-19 outbreak was stressful*. Two third of respondents said it was, with ratings ranging from somewhat stressful (38%), to stressful (18.4%) to very stressful (8%). Thirty five percent said it was not.

There were some small differences in the stress experience based on gender and age, as shown in the charts below.









3.2 Results from Follow-up Interviews and Focus Groups

There were 30 follow-up phone interviews conducted among people, randomly selected from the 147 e-survey respondents. All phone interviewees were awarded a 1000 vatu phone credit incentive, upon completing all 14 interview questions (see Appendix 2). The same questions were asked in the focus group interviews, covering an additional 40 respondents from 4 different tertiary education institutions, 8 from the National University of Vanuatu, 6 from Vanuatu Institute of Technology, 6 from University of the Pacific and 20 from Malapoa College.

The follow-up sample was gender-balanced with 35 male and 35 female participants. Of the 30 phone interviewees, 16 were male and 14 were female. Of the 40 focus group participants, 19 were male and 21 were female. All participants were between the ages of 18 and 29.

The first question asked if the respondent's online engagement changed during Covid, and what they saw as positive and negative changes. More than half of the phone interviewees and most of the focus group participants said their online engagement had increased significantly, with many indicating they were online daily.

The three most frequently indicated positive effects of this included being able to connect with friends, accessing news, especially about the Covid 19 pandemic, and doing work and school assignments on line. Negative changes listed most often included the high financial cost of online engagement, the high amount of unproductive time spent online, and too much fake news:

- *We get information but we do not know if this is the right information or where it comes from. Most confusing information come from social media and fake news on Facebook. Is the vaccine really effective to fight Covid? Are the death are really caused by Covid or other factors. Some ordinary people only share fake news online*.

As discussed earlier, schools in Vanuatu were closed due to Covid for extended periods of time, initially as part of the preparation for Covid and later on during the actual lockdown. When asked if online engagement helped them with school, work or socially, most of the respondents stated that online engagement helped them to access Moodle (the school platform used in Vanuatu) and to complete assignments.

- *Yes, it helped me a lot in my school works. It allowed to access the school Moodle pages and home school package and made it easy to search for information or answers to my school assignments.*
- *Yes, it helped by communicating with friends in discussing assessments*

A few of the respondents who were employed noted that it helped them to do their work online and communicate with their employers. Almost all of the respondents said that the online engagement helped them to stay connected socially, with friends and family, both locally and in other islands and countries.

Two thirds of all respondents also acknowledged that online engagement was distracting:

- *Sometimes it really disturbed me from my school work. When doing my studies online using my student Moodle, notifications from Facebook appear on the screen. sometimes*

I check out what the notification is about and that's when I lose my focus and it takes up my study time.

- *Online engagement distracts me - every moment when i am free I feel like I must online instead of helping parents at home.*
- *Sometimes I concentrate more on social engagement online and fail to do my home duties or my private study.*

When asked about how much money they spent on phone and data credit a week, many respondents indicated that their data spending had doubled or tripled during Covid, and that it took up a very large part of their budget. Most spending ranged from 1000 to 6000 vatu a month, with an approximate average of 3500 to 4000 vatu, not counting a few who indicated data spending as high as 8,000 to 30,000 vatu per month.

When asked if online engagement a good way to receive accurate and reliable information about Covid, Covid-symptoms, Covid vaccinations, government reports on the spread of Covid, all but 2 agreed that it was. A number of respondents mentioned the importance of only using trusted sources like the Ministry of Health, VBTC, and WHO. Most also said that social media postings were often confusing, noting a lot of fake news:

- *You must get information from the trusted sources like WHO, VBTC, News,*
- *Some information – especially on social media- is fake and can mislead people.*
- *Some of the government MPs post about COVID vaccination are really confusing- some of them encourage people to get vaccinated and some of them discourage people from getting the vaccine… The leaders of the country should take one decision.*
- *One thing I find most confusing is about Covid vaccination, such as the spoon magnet example - some of the videos online show the shoulder of a person getting vaccinated was attracted to a spoon and the quote stated on the video says no to vaccine There is a lot of fake information about covid 19 going around in the different sources of information but I only trust information that comes from WHO, VBTC, RADIO, and newspapers*

These results are similar to what was noted in the ABC ID review: "Our consultations also found that fake news about Covid-19 is prevalent and spreads quickly. According to the young women, reports of the first positive case in Vanuatu broke on social media, and many considered it to be an unsubstantiated rumour as government sources were slow to report the case. This issue is widespread in the Pacific - in PNG social media is being used to espouse conspiracy theories about the Pandemic, including that "COVID-19 is an invention of the West to control population, that Papua New Guineans are guinea pigs for vaccines and that God is protecting Melanesians from catching the disease". (Ahearn 2021)"[35].

When asked if they know *how to stay safe during online engagement*, all but three respondents said they did. Frequently cited strategies included avoiding fake Facebook accounts and request, not clicking on spam links, using strong passwords, protecting passwords, logging out of accounts after use, and not engaging in or with cyberbullying. Most learned about staying safe strategies from school, INGO workshops such as those offered by CARE, and from friends and families.

Online bullying, false information, fake accounts, pornography, cybercrime, getting addicted to social media, exposing private information, and wasting time and money were mentioned as the biggest dangers for young people online, along with negative impact from other countries and cultures.

The last question asked if Covid impacted their mental health. All but three respondents said it did. The most frequent mental health issues mentioned were feeling lonely, sad, depressed, angry, worried, bored, unhappy, or useless:

- It made me feel bored because I was growing up with friends and families but in times of covid I felt lonely and sad.
- It made me spent more times lonely, I felt homeless like no friends and families
- I felt useless, no friends to play with like in the past.
- Covid impacted my mental health, because I always felt lonely.
- I felt unhappy because I can't have access to sport and other activities.
- I felt stressed all the time and lonely - normally people work together but during lock down people are lonely because of the sickness.
- I feel lonely because our culture is based on community and social interaction. Covid 19 had caused loneliness, stress and financial stress. Lockdown has caused a lot of issues in the level of community.

When asked how they dealt with those feelings, there were only a few responses, such as:

- Covid has made me feel depressed and lonely, but engaging with online activities and communicating with families and friends makes me feel happier and not feeling depressed and lonely anymore.
- I spend my time to work in the garden, swim in the river
- Talk with friends, make fun with my siblings, and laugh with my parents which helps me a lot to reduce wariness. making phone calls to my families and friends and also chatting with them on Facebook and making video calls.

The few respondents who felt they were not impacted mentally explained:

- (I felt) free from stress of work. This is because I spend few hours to interact with students online, then the rest is my free time. For example; I teach online and I can have my brake anytime.
- Mentally impacted by covid, I think I'm fine. Nothing happened with me mentally. This is because I spent my time with my family, practice hygiene and apply covid protocols. For example, talk to each other, make fun and laugh with my family members.
- Covid 19 makes me happy because it gathered all the family to settle down and tell stories, do things together rather than normal days when everyone is busy with their school works and their jobs and there is no time for family reunion

4. Discussion

The central purpose of this research was to contribute to our understanding of digital engagement of youth in Vanuatu and how the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences has affected young people in Vanuatu.

Contrary to the 2021[36] literature review cited earlier, this research found that COVID-19 did impact digital engagement among young women and men, especially in the wake of the 2022 community outbreak in Vanuatu.

With regard to the first main question asked in this study "*How do young people engage online?",* we found that 80% of young people connect to the internet using their mobile phones. This is consistent with the internet and mobile phone data reported for Vanuatu.

Facebook was the most frequently used site, regularly accessed by a full 96% of the respondents, followed by YouTube (52%), email access sites (51%), Imo (7), student Moodle (37 %), and search engine sites (36%).

When asked how much time they spend online on a daily basis, most (41.5%) said 2 to 3 hours, but 45 % said they spent much more than that, ranging from 4 to more than 7 hours a day. The reported *global* average time spent by young people online is 7 hours[37]. Only 12 % of respondents said they were online 1 hour or less daily.

Young people in Vanuatu access the internet most often for social reasons: to talk with friends, family, or partners. News and social media updates were the next most important reasons, while doing school or professional work was ranked as the third reason.

With regard to the second main question asked by the study, *Has the COVID-19 Pandemic directly changed youth digital behaviours, attitudes, experiences?,* the results show that it definitely has, and the changes have mostly been negative.

Sixty five percent of respondents said they felt affected by the Covid-19 community outbreak, and ninety five percent of students said they were impacted by school closures that interrupted their studies and access to learning opportunities.

Ninety percent of respondents also reported increases in financial stress, ranging from somewhat serious to serious. Eighty one percent also said they spent less time face-to-face with family and friends.

Specific changes in digital behavior mentioned included spending considerably more time online – two to three times as much as before-, disruptions in work and study caused by online distraction, confusion caused by fake news, addiction to social media, overall stress, and wasting money, because internet access is expensive. These changes are very similar to those reported worldwide.

Positive changes were also mentioned, though, such as prioritizing online communication with friends and family, getting news and updates about Covid-19, and learning how to more effectively use online learning and communication tools.

Somewhat surprisingly, when asked if they experienced social peer pressure that affected how they acted or thought, a very high 76% of respondents said they did not. Also, only 13% of men and 11% of women 11.5 % said they experienced online bullying

However, when asked if their online experience during the Covid-19 outbreak was stressful, almost two thirds of respondents said it was, with ratings ranging from somewhat stressful (38%), to stressful (18.4%) to very stressful (8%). Thirty five percent said it was not stressful.

With regard to the third main question "*Has the COVID-19 Pandemic indirectly changed youth digital behaviours and attitudes?*", we found that there were significant impacts of the pandemic on the mental health of young people.

Almost half of the survey respondents said the Covid -19 lockdown had impacted their mental health, with higher rates among men and among the younger respondents. Key stressors included home schooling, online learning, and finances, along with feelings of isolation, loneliness, fear, worry, and confusion. Staying connected, staying healthy, and contributing through home chores and studies were mentioned as good coping strategies.

Interview participants did indicate that online engagement a good way to receive accurate and reliable information about Covid, Covid-symptoms, Covid vaccinations, government reports on the spread of Covid, especially if they used official rather than social media sources of information.

In terms of financial stress, the amount of money spent on phone and data credit was a particular source of concern, with many indicating that their data spending had doubled or tripled during Covid, and that it took up a very large part of their budget. Most spending ranged from 1000 to 6000 vatu a month, with an approximate average of 3500 to 4000 vatu, not counting a few who indicated data spending as high as 8,000 to 30,000 vatu per month.

To put this into perspective, almost half (49%) of the survey respondents were students, 23 %were employed, 23% were unemployed, and 5% were engaged in volunteer work. The minimum wage in Vanuatu is 220 vatu (2.7 AUD) per hour (or 38,000 vatu (467 AUD) per month. Data spending of 4000 vatu a month would mean that it would take up 10.5 % of all income, if the person was employed at minimum wage. For students without income, the cost is much more burdensome of course. No special allowances or discounts were provided to students for accessing school sites.

Finally, regarding the last question "*What has been the exposure and learning from Go! Cyber campaign on young people's awareness regarding safety while being online?",* the phone and focus group interviews showed that most participants understood the importance of cyber safety, could identify standards strategies for staying safe on line, and indicated that they applied those strategies regularly. While it was not possible to determine how much of this understanding came from the Go! Cyber campaign, several respondents specifically mentioned participating in workshops that were part of the campaign.

5. Conclusion

This purpose of this research was to bridge the knowledge gap in understanding digital engagement of youth in Vanuatu and how the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences affected young people in Vanuatu. While this kind of research is being undertaken in Western countries, the contextual differences between the West and the Pacific in digital infrastructure, COVID-19 situation, cultures, social norms, and other factors are considerable, as are the resulting issues faced by young people in the Pacific in general and Vanuatu in particular.

The study used a combination of background research, and quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis, reaching 147 survey respondents and an additional 70 interviewees of both genders between the ages of 18 and 29.

Based on the research, it was found that the Covid-19 pandemic had a considerable impact on young people in Vanuatu, significantly increasing the extent to which they engaged online and the overall stress experienced during online engagement.

The Covid-19 lockdown negatively affected their ability to engage effectively in their studies, increased financial stress, and decreased their mental health and their face-to-face connections with friends and family. On the positive side, young people reported learning new skills, finding new ways to connect, and were able to identify ways of staying safe on line.

Looking to the future, young people in Vanuatu face the same uncertainties as young people worldwide. The Covid-19 pandemic has not shown signs of subsiding and it is unclear what the long-term impact of this is on the economy, health, education, communication and community.

For Vanuatu in particular though it means that the issues faced by young people -educational challenges, mental health issues, and lack of affordable internet access – must be addressed urgently. The educational system is ill-prepared for home or online education. The health system has little to no provisions for mental health support, and internet access remains limited, slow and expensive. These issues must be addressed through government policy priorities, through targeted funding support, and through future research.

Appendix 1: E-Survey Questions

1. Demographic data

a. What is your age?
   a. 18-21 b. 22-24 c. 25-29

b. What is your gender?
   a. Male b. female c. gender diverse

c. Where do you live:
   a. Port Vila b. rural Efate c. Luganville d. Rural Santo e. Lenakel f. Rural Tanna g. Other (please specify)

d. What is your social-professional status?
   a. Student b. Employed c. Unemployed d. Volunteer worker

e. If working, what is your position title?

f. What is your education level completed?
   a. Year 10/11 b. Year 12/13 c. Vocational/technical training d. Tertiary education

g. What is your phone number?

2. Online engagement

a. What platform do you use when you go online (check all that apply)?
   Options: Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, Student Moodle, search engines, email, adult sites, Imo, Other

b. How much time do you think you spend online per day?
   a. 0-1 b. 2-3 c. 4-5 d. 6-7 e. More than 7

c. Please rank order your reasons for going online, with 1 being the most important and 10 being the least important, using the options provided below:
   a. Talk with friends; b. Talk with family members; c. Talk with boyfriend or girlfriend; d. Get social media updates; e. Access the news; f. Watch photos or videos online; g. Do school work; h. Do professional work; i. Play games; j. Do business; k. Entertainment.

d. How do you access the internet?
   a. School Wi-Fi b. Personal Mobile data c. Home Wi-Fi d. Home Wi-Fi online environment with parental supervision e. Public Wi-Fi online environment f. Other

3. Covid-19 Impact

a. Have school closures impacted you? If yes, how? If no, why not?

b. Has the lockdown affected your mental health? If yes, why or how? If no, why or how not?

c. Have you or your family been affected economically or financially by Covid-19?

d. Did Covid-19 directly impact your online behavior or attitude?
   a. if yes, please explain and give an example
   b. if no, please explain and give an example

e. During the Covid lockdown, did you spend less time face to face with your friends or family? Explain why or why not?

g. Did you experience online bullying during Covid-19
Yes/No/Not sure

h. Did you experience stress when online, during Covid 19?
a. No stress; b. a little stress; c. stress; d. a lot of stress

i. Did you experience peer pressure that affecting how you thought or acted during Covid-19? Can you give examples of why/why not?

Follow-up

a. Are you willing to participate in a follow-up phone interview?
b. If yes, what is your name?

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

1. Online Engagement

a) How has your online engagement changed during Covid? Can you give some examples of positive change? negative change?
b) Did online engagement help with your school work? Ask for example
c) Did online engagement help with your job or volunteer work? Ask for example
d) Did online engagement help you to stay socially connected? Ask for example
e) Does online engagement distract you from your school or job work? Ask for example
f) How much money do you spend on phone and data credit a month (estimate?) Has this gone up during Covid? Is this a big part of your budget?

2. Staying safe

a) Do you know how to stay safe during online engagement?
b) Tell me about your strategies? How did you learn about these strategies? Do they work for you?
c) What do you feel are the biggest dangers for young people on line? Any examples or experiences?

3. Covid-19 Information

a) With regard to Covid, was online engagement a good way to receive accurate and reliable information about Covid, covid-symptoms, covid vaccinations, government reports on the spread of covid?
b) What did you find most confusing about online reports or postings on Covid?

4. Mental Health

a) How has Covid impacted your mental health? Has it made you feel e.g., depressed, lonely, anxious?
b) Could you some examples of how you dealt with those feelings?

Endnotes

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