

RAPID ASSESSMENT OF COVID-19 IN INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN SOLOMON ISLANDS

Insights into socio-economic
impacts on residents in
5 communities across Honiara

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Rapid Assessment of COVID-19 in Informal Settlements in Solomon Islands
Insights on socio-economic impacts on residents in 5 communities across Honiara
UN-Habitat

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SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

LIVELIHOOD SECURITY & HOUSEHOLD INCOME

59% of respondents reported **loss in household income** due to COVID-19

Women experienced a much larger **income drop** than men

Over half of surveyed households have increased **subsistence farming and/or fishing** to manage the impact of COVID-19

FOOD SECURITY

Over half of respondents were worried about **running out of food** at home

65% of those respondents who received financial support used the **money to buy food**

54% of respondents **skipped meals** due to a lack of funds to buy food during the COVID-19 pandemic

ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

Lack of transport was the most commonly cited barrier preventing access to healthcare

Over half of respondents consider **access to healthcare easy**

71% of respondents would choose the **national referral hospital** for treatment of COVID-19

KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES & PRACTICES RELATED TO COVID-19

3% of respondents could name the 3 most common **COVID-19 symptoms**

6% of households follow the recommended **handwashing** measures

Radio was the most commonly used source of information on COVID-19

CLIMATE-HAZARDS & COVID-19

Informal settlements experience a multitude of **severe climate events**

Women report more often to be **affected by extreme climate** events than men

Almost 2/3 of respondents were affected by **strong winds in the past 60 days**

LAND TENURE

Almost all respondents felt safe from eviction

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1 INTRODUCTION



BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit at a time when sustainable urbanization is seen as an accelerator of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Pacific (Fifth Pacific Urban Forum, July 2019 (https://www.fukuoka.unhabitat.org/info/news/pdf/PUF_5_Final_Report_reduced_web_version.pdf)). With unequal coping capacities and existing structural inequalities, not all citizens are equally affected by COVID-19.

The pandemic has further highlighted many of the underlying flaws in the prevailing socio-economic model, bringing into stark relief the fragile nature of life in underserved informal settlements and slums. From this vantage point, the most vulnerable individuals are those most exposed to the ongoing effects of COVID-19, who possess the most limited capacity to cope, and ultimately suffer the most from the impact of the crisis. Indeed, the outbreak has the potential to push many into poverty and increase the vulnerability of those already there.

In Honiara, informal settlements account for almost 15% of the city's total land area and around 35-40 percent of the city's population. These have significantly higher population densities than the rest of the city with 5,270 people per square kilometre compared to 2,680 people per square kilometre city wide, with certain settlements such as Ontong Java settlement in Mataniko Ward having extremely high densities of 21,800 residents per square kilometre.

These settlements have inadequate household-level water and sanitation facilities, little or no waste management, overcrowded public transport, and oftentimes limited access to essential services and information. This makes recommended measures to prevent COVID-19 transmission difficult to implement. Very often, households in informal settlements rely on unstable income sources for daily subsistence and maintain minimal or no savings. As such, these households are frequently unable to afford soap, food, or medical treatment when disruptions, such as movement restrictions or lockdowns, are in place.

While there have been no cases of COVID-19 community transmission in Solomon Islands, and the border quarantine cases have been managed effectively by the government (as of October 2020), it remains important to have a strong understanding of underlying community vulnerabilities in order to help prevent a future spread of COVID-19 in informal settlements, should the pandemic emerge.

UN-Habitat's rapid impact assessment study aims to provide insights into the conditions present in informal settlements collected through household surveys.

The study examines 6 key areas:

- Livelihood security and household income
- Food security
- Access to health care
- Knowledge, attitudes and practices related to COVID-19
- Climate related hazards and COVID-19
- Tenure security

METHODOLOGY

Over a period of 2 weeks (17th – 31st August 2020), the UN-Habitat team conducted face-to-face surveys with 100 households in 5 informal settlements across four wards in Honiara. The respondents were randomly selected from informal settlements that are participating in the ongoing 'Climate Resilient Honiara' project, with 20 households coming from each of the settlements: Wind Valley, Ontong Java, Kukum Fishing Village, Akafo-Feraladoa (Jericho), and Gilbert Camp/ Jabros. The 100 households represent roughly 5,5 percent of the overall number of households in the 5 target areas (in total the CRH project estimates around 1813 households across the 5 settlements).

Figure 1: Honiara map of informal settlements



The survey team consisted of two UN-Habitat staff members, employed under the CRH project and based in Honiara. These staff members are both experienced surveyors and have well-maintained relationships within the target communities due to their ongoing engagement in the CRH project.

In total, the questionnaire consisted of 41 questions with each interview lasting approximately 20 minutes. The study used the following definition for household: a group of persons who normally live together and take their meals from a common kitchen. Prior to the start of the interviews, the surveyors assured the respondents that their participation in the study would have no negative consequences for them or their families and that their privacy and confidentiality would be maintained.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

The purpose of this study is to provide an entry point for dialogue amongst relevant stakeholders on the strengths and vulnerabilities of informal settlements in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, enabling a more informed response.

The settlements covered in this study were selected based on UN-Habitat's ongoing engagement with them, not because they necessarily represent the wider diversity of Solomon Island informal settlements in general.

This rapid assessment study is by no means exhaustive and does not represent a comprehensive view of the current situation across all Solomon Island informal settlements.

2 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE



2 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Household respondents were 40 percent female and 60 percent male. No respondents selected “other” under gender. 85 percent were between 25 and 65 years of age. The overwhelming majority of the heads of household were male (87 percent).

Figure 2 Age of respondents

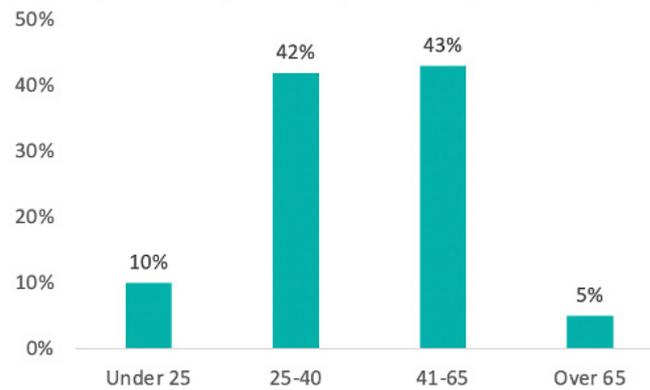


Figure 3 Household breakdown across settlements

Ward	Settlement Name	#HH
Panatina Ward 12	Jabros	20
Kolaa Ward 8	Jericho	20
Vura Ward 11	Kukum Fishing Village	20
Mataniko Ward 7	Ontong Java	20
Ngossi Ward 1	Wind Valley	20
Total	5	100

Regarding marital status, 94 percent of respondents were married, 3 percent were single, 2 percent were widowed, and 1 percent were separated.

The average size of households surveyed was 6.8 individuals. 18 percent of households surveyed reported one or more household members to have a disability.

3 KEY FINDINGS



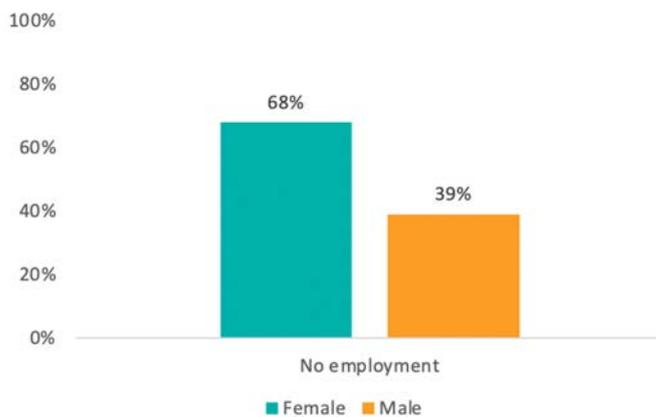
3.1 LIVELIHOOD SECURITY & HOUSEHOLD INCOME



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A quarter of households reported no one as currently working; with women disproportionately affected. Out of the 100 respondents surveyed, 68 percent reported that no women in their household were working versus 39 percent who reported that no men were working. The main income earner was reported to be female by 28 percent of households.

Figure 4: Respondents who reported no women and/or no men in employment in their household



59%
of respondents
reported **loss in
household income**
due to COVID-19

Over Half
of surveyed households have increased **subsistence
farming and/or fishing** to manage the impact of
COVID-19

Women experienced
a much larger **income
drop** than men

Only 13 percent of respondents reported that one or more members of their household had lost their jobs due to the introduction of COVID-19 governmental restrictions.

Conversely, looking at differences in household income from before and after COVID-19 restrictions shows a more drastic economic impact. For example, while only 5 percent of respondents in Kukum Fishing Village reported loss of jobs due to COVID-19, the average household income fell by 67 percent.

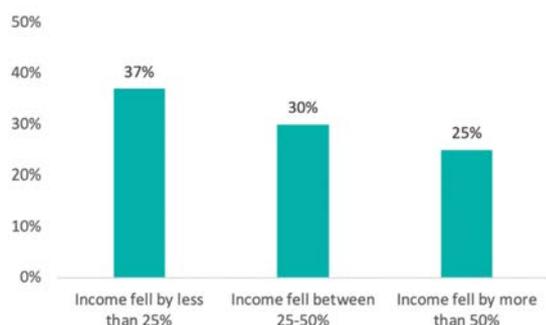
Figure 5: Have you or a member of your household lost your job in the past 60 days?



The average household income in the 30 days prior to COVID-19 restrictions across all households surveyed, excluding Kukum Fishing Village was 2961 SBD (approximately 355 USD). In the 30 days prior to the survey, the average income reported by respondents was 2136 SBD (approximately 256 USD), which is a 28 percent drop. Overall (including Kukum Fishing Village), 59 percent of respondents reported a decrease in household income.

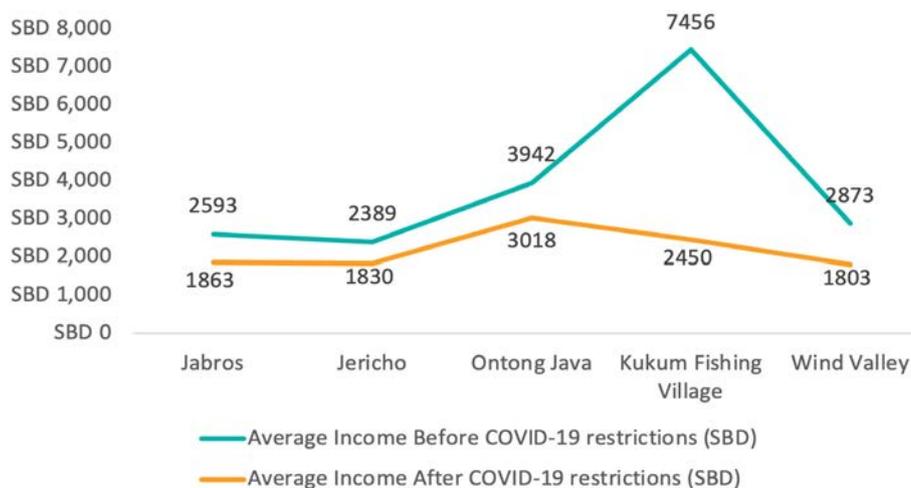
The more established, inner-city settlements (OJ and KJV) report significantly higher incomes than the other settlements.

Figure 6: Magnitude of income loss



Respondents from Ontong Java, Wind Valley and Kukum Fishing Village had the largest drops in income to 1000 SBD or less per month. Looking at the magnitude of overall income loss it shows that 25 percent of households experienced an income drop of 50 percent or greater.

Figure 7: Average income before and after COVID-19 restrictions by settlement



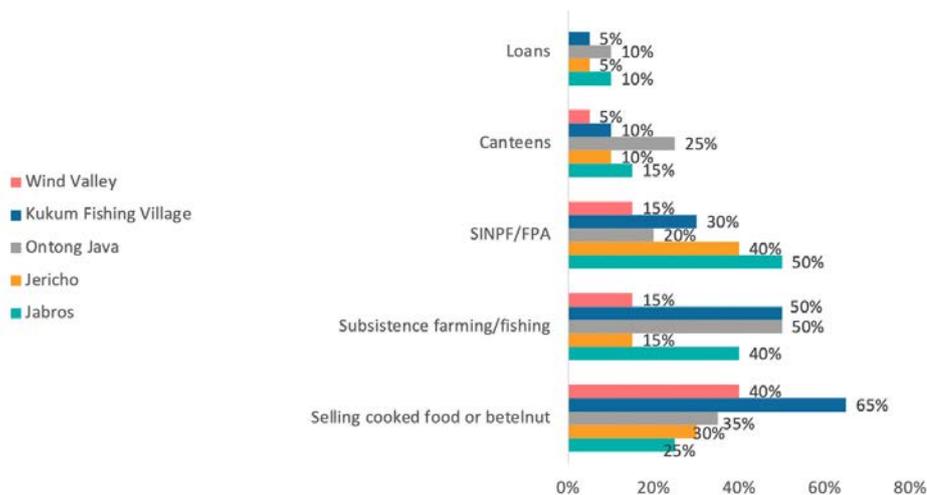
*The average income reported in Kukum Fishing Village before COVID-19 represents a strong outlier and could be due to overreporting. The average income was calculated based on just four settlements, excluding Kukum Fishing Village.

Figure 8: Percentage difference in average monthly household income before and after COVID-19



When looking at data disaggregated by the gender of the main income earner, Figure 8 shows that those households in which the main income earner is female, on average experienced a 52 percent drop in monthly income compared to a 39% drop of male income earners.

Figure 9: Which other sources of income does your household have access to? (only top 5 answered are shown on chart)



Although 73 percent of respondents reported having access to alternative sources of income, 69 percent of respondents reported receiving no form of government financial relief (Solomon Islands National Provident Fund – SINPF, and Frontline Protection Allowance – FPA) to support losses in incomes as a result of COVID-19. Of those households who did report accessing SINPF or FPA, 65 percent reported utilizing these funds to purchase food. There was significant variation by settlement in the number of respondents who accessed government financial support.

The survey found that overall, respondents largely rely on selling cooked food or betelnut, as well as on subsistence farming and/or fishing to supplement income loss due to COVID-19. However, these figures also vary by settlement. In terms of selling cooked food and betelnut, this was most commonly cited in Kukum Fishing Village, by 65 percent of respondents.

Alternatively, Jabros had the lowest number of respondents reporting this as a source of income at 25 percent. Interestingly, while Jabros respondents were less likely to report having received income from a) selling cooked food or betelnut, or b) from subsistence farming and/or fishing, they were more likely to report government COVID-19 financial assistance than all other settlements.

Figure 10: Did you or a member of your household access SINPF or FPA in the past 60 days?

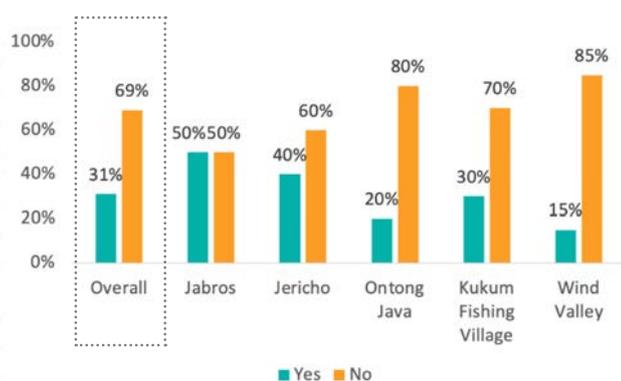
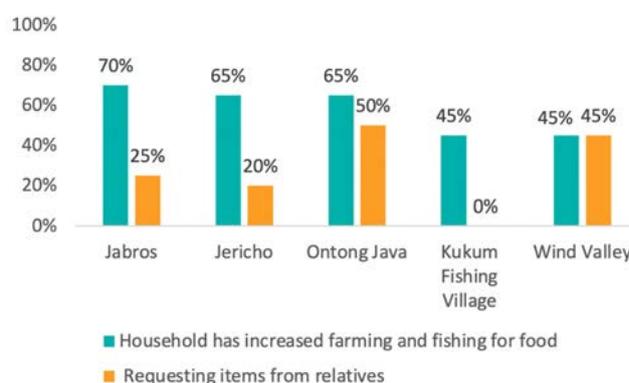


Figure 11: Traditional forms of social protection by settlement (only top 2 included).



When looking at traditional forms of social protection, 58 percent of respondents reported their households had increased subsistence farming and/or fishing to manage the impact of COVID-19, which also illustrates the importance of these activities to families. Farming and/or fishing was most common in Jabros (where 70 percent of respondents reported scaling up these practices) as well as Ontong Java and Jericho (with 65 percent of respondents reported the same). Meanwhile in Wind Valley and Kukum Fishing Village 45 percent of respondents reported the same respectively.

The reliance on traditional wantok systems varies significantly by settlement: whilst in some settlements up to half of the respondents rely on receiving items from relatives, in other communities this is not practiced at all.

An increase in farming and fishing activities was reported by a slightly higher percentage of female respondents (63 percent) than male respondents (55 percent) when asked in the context of traditional forms of social protection.

Regarding access to government financial support, male head of households had slightly greater access at 32 percent compared with 23 percent of female headed households. Overall, women were disproportionately impacted, with less access to official support channels, and fewer alternatives to usual income generation. 35 of female respondents reported no other sources of income versus 22 percent of male respondents.

Figure 12: Access to government financial support disaggregated by gender of the Head of Household.



3.2 FOOD SECURITY



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When asked 'In the past 30 days, did you or other household members ever skip a meal because there was not enough money to buy food?': 54 percent of respondents across the settlements reported having skipped meals over the 30 days prior to taking the survey. This was most pronounced in Kukum Fishing Village, where 80 percent of respondents answered affirmatively. This was the only settlement in which the majority of respondents reported skipping meals, perhaps due to the sharp fall in income reported earlier. 50 percent of Jabros respondents reported the same, followed by 47 percent in both Jericho and Ontong Java, and 45 percent in Windy Valley.

More females reported skipping meals than males, with 62 percent of the former responding positively, compared with 48 percent of the latter.

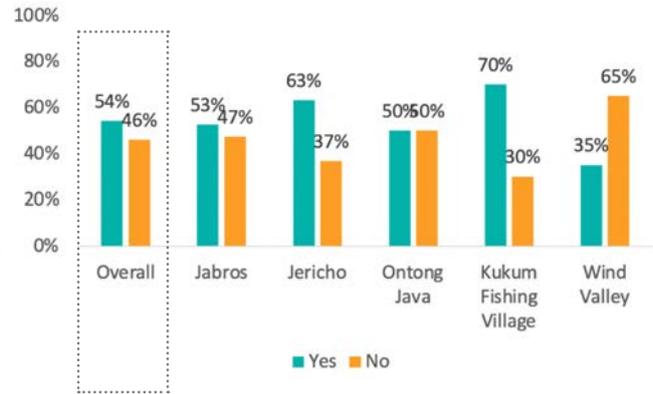
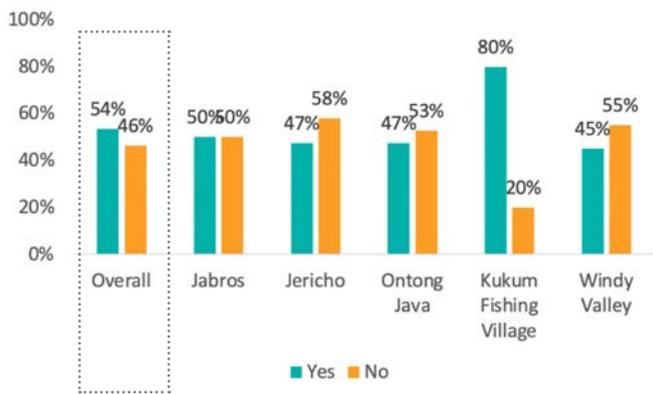
54% of respondents had skipped meals due to a lack of funds

65% of those respondents who received financial support used the money to buy food

Over half of respondents were worried about food running out at home

Figure 13: 'In the past 30 days, did you or other household members every skip a meal because there was not enough money to buy food?'

Figure 14: 'In the past 30 days, have you thought of this scenario: "I am worried that our food will run out before I can get money to buy more"?''



Similarly, 54 percent of respondents reported that they are worried food will run out before they can afford to buy more, and more females than males reported feeling worried over household food supplies running out (65% compared to 47% respectively). This may reflect the role of women in many families in relation to obtaining and preparing food.

Again, this was most evident in Kukum Fishing Village where 70 percent of respondents reported feeling worried about food running out. In Wind Valley, this was the least pronounced, with 35 percent of respondents reporting the same.

There is little variance between communities in worries over food running out, with 63 percent of respondents in Jericho, 53 percent in Jabros and 50 percent in Ontong Java.

3.3 ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE



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Accessing healthcare services is generally perceived to be relatively easy to moderate. However, there is great variation between municipalities in terms of distance to the nearest healthcare facility.

Those respondents that identified barriers to accessing healthcare mentioned a lack of transportation and concerns with overcrowded facilities as major issues.

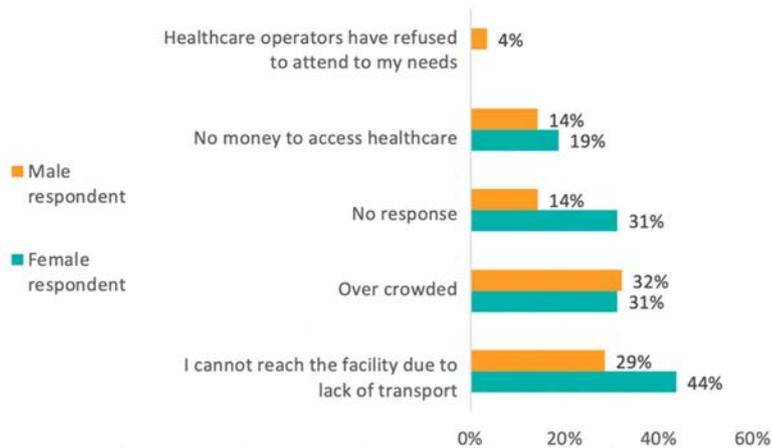
Over two-thirds of the respondents reported they would choose a national referral hospital for treatment of COVID-19 symptoms.

Over half of respondents consider **access to healthcare easy**

71% of respondents would choose the **national referral hospital** for treatment of COVID-19

A lack of transport was the most commonly cited barrier preventing access to healthcare

Figure 15: Barriers to accessing healthcare services disaggregated by gender of respondent

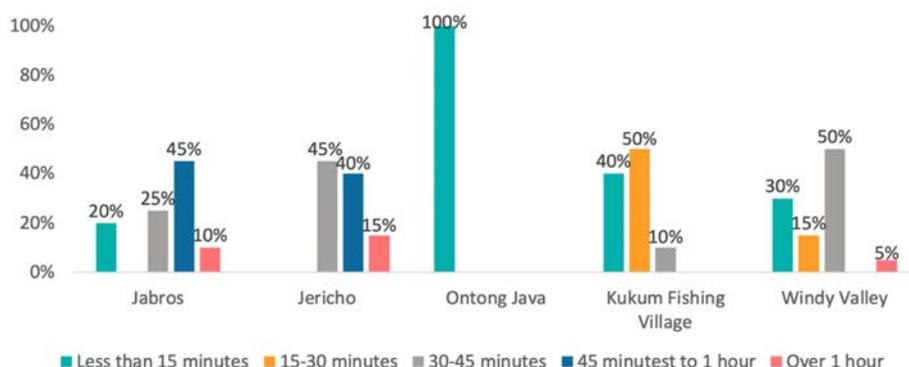


Ease of access to healthcare services was reported as moderate by 43 percent of respondents, while 55 consider access easy and only 1 percent stated access is difficult.

Of the factors affecting ease of access to healthcare services, overcrowded and understaffed facilities and lack of transport were the two most commonly cited factors, cited by 32 and 34 percent of respondents respectively.

There was a fairly even number of women and men reporting issues with overcrowding at facilities preventing access to healthcare. However, a much higher number of women cited a lack of transport. 44 percent of female respondents cited this as a barrier to access healthcare facilities, compared with 29 percent of males. Furthermore, 16 percent of respondents reported being unable to afford healthcare services with a slightly higher proportion of whom were women (19 percent), compared to men (14 percent).

Figure 16 How long does it take to reach the nearest healthcare facility?



For 78 percent of respondents, their nearest healthcare facility was a public clinic. For the remaining 22 percent, it was the national referral hospital.

Ontong Java respondents reported the shortest travel time to reach the nearest healthcare facility with 100 percent of respondents reporting that they were able to reach a healthcare facility within 15 minutes. Kukum Fishing Village had the second highest proportion of respondents able to reach a healthcare facility within 15 minutes (40 percent of respondents). In Wind Valley 30 percent of respondents reported this. In Jabros, which is located outside of the municipal boundary, only 20 percent of respondents reported the same. In Jericho, 0 respondents were able to reach a healthcare facility within 15 minutes.

When asked where they would first seek treatment upon developing symptoms of COVID-19, 71 percent of respondents chose the national referral hospital, 28 percent cited a public clinic and 1 percent cited a private clinic. However, at the time of the survey the National Referral Hospital was the only facility able to treat COVID-19 patients, potentially highlighting the need for further awareness raising on testing and treatment procedures.

3.4 KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES & PRACTICES RELATED TO COVID-19



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The survey showed a rather limited awareness of the variety of clinical symptoms of COVID-19. When asked what knowledge of the COVID-19 symptoms respondents had, the top three cited symptoms were dry cough (68 percent); fever (59 percent); and headache (41 percent).

Across all settlements only 3 percent of respondents were able to name all three of most common COVID-19 symptoms as confirmed by the WHO at the time of data collection (fever, dry cough and fatigue/tiredness).

only **6%** of households follow the recommended **handwashing measures**

Radio is the most commonly used source of information on COVID-19 across all age groups and settlements

only **3%** of respondents named all three most common symptoms

Figure 17: What are the main clinical symptoms of COVID-19?

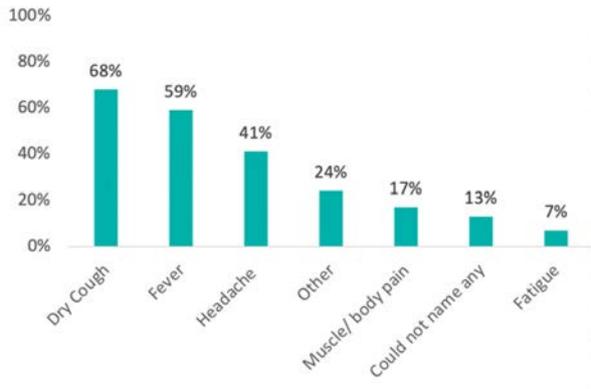
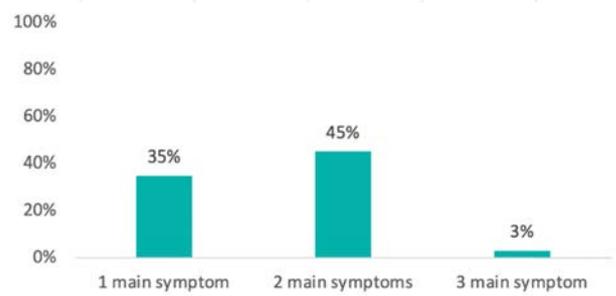


Figure 18: Percentage of respondents who can name the main symptoms of COVID-19



Overall this hints at a rather limited awareness of the variety of clinical symptoms of COVID-19.

In terms of complying with prevention measures, respondents from all settlements reported low levels of compliance with all WHO recommended measures. Most alarming was the lack of handwashing practice by households. Across all settlements, only 6 households reported always following handwashing recommendations, all of which came from two settlements (Kukum Fishing Village and Wind Valley). Furthermore, only 7 percent of respondents reported that a lack of access to clean water was a barrier to adhering to handwashing recommendations.

Figure 19: Percentage of respondents who practice regular handwashing

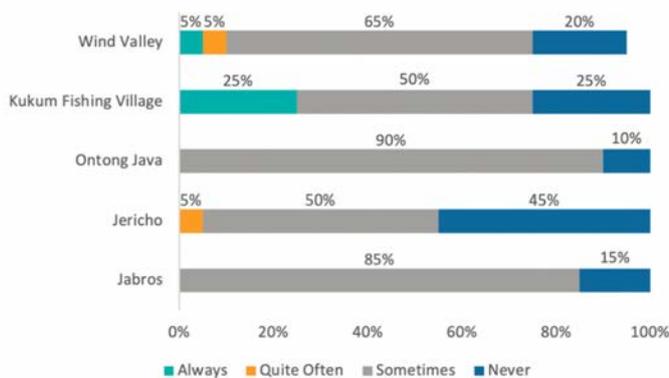
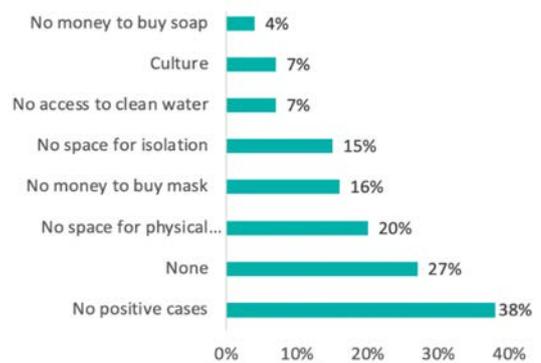


Figure 20: What are the main barriers that prevent you to take actions against the contagion of COVID-19?



Looking at data disaggregated by settlement provides additional insight. 15 percent of respondents in both Jabros and Jericho cited access to clean water as a barrier, whereas this figure was only 5 percent in Ontong Java. Interestingly no respondents in Kukum Fishing Village or Wind Valley reported lack of access to water as a barrier. These are also the only two settlements with respondents who reported always following handwashing recommendations.

There is little variation in responses of male and female respondents in relation to following the recommended COVID-19 prevention measures. Women are slightly more likely to follow physical distancing recommendations with 81 percent of male respondents reported never following physical distancing recommendations compared with 63 percent of female respondents.

Figure 21: How often do you follow COVID-19 physical distancing measures?

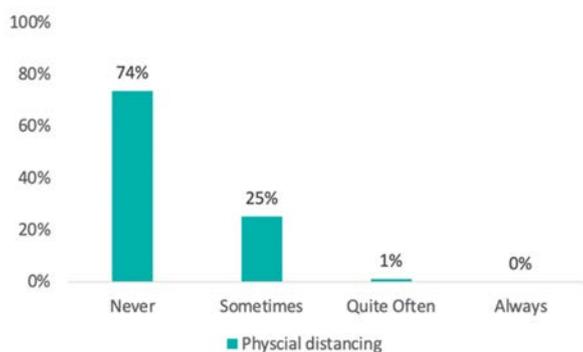
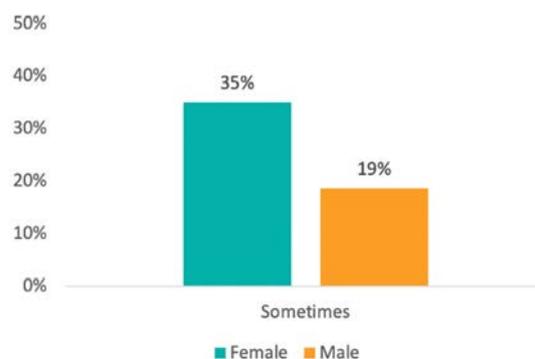


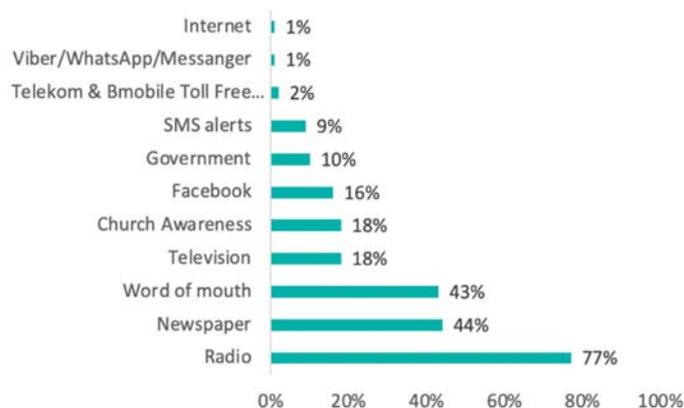
Figure 22: Female and male respondents who reported 'sometimes' following physical distancing recommendations



The most notable reason for respondents not following COVID-19 prevention measures was the lack of COVID-19 cases in the country. In Kukum Fishing Village, the highest proportion of respondents (60 percent) reported that a lack of positive cases was the most common reason for not complying with prevention guidance. In other settlements, the proportion of respondents reporting this was between 25 percent (in Ontong Java) and 40 percent (in Wind Valley).

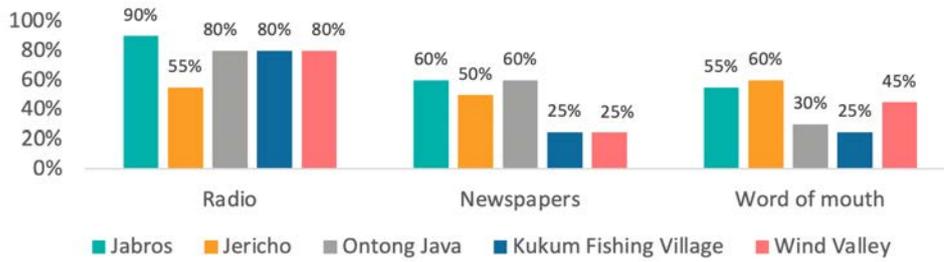
This is probably the main reason why such a high number of respondents reported never to have followed the prevention measures (23 percent of respondents report never following handwashing recommendations and 74 percent never follow physical distancing measures).

Figure 23: What are your main sources of information on COVID-19?



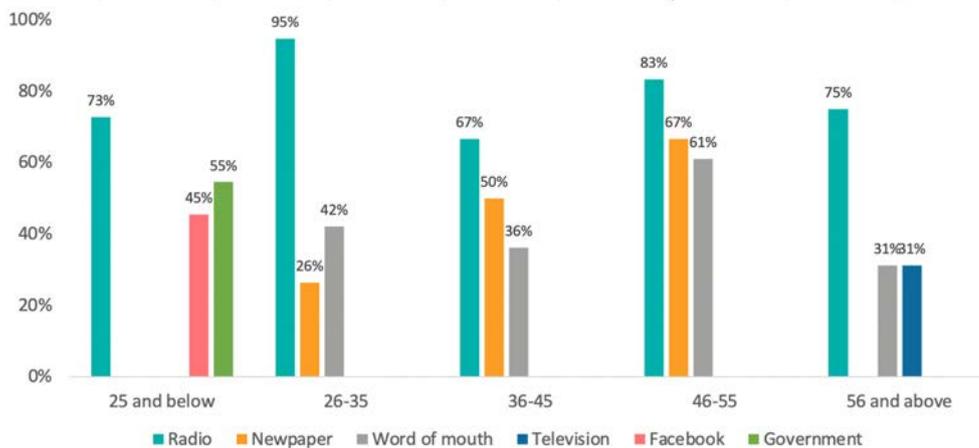
Across all settlements and age groups, radio was the most commonly reported information source (77 percent of total respondents). This was followed by newspapers (44 percent) and word of mouth (43 percent).

Figure 24: What is your main source of information about Covid-19 (only the top 3 most common sources shown)?



As Figure 24 shows, radio is the most used information source by all age groups. However, the next leading source for information, newspaper, was not used at all by respondents aged 25 and under, rather this age group reported getting their information on COVID-19 from government announcements, Facebook and church awareness programs.

Figure 25: Three most common sources of information for COVID-19 by age group



The least commonly cited sources of information were Telecom and BT Mobile toll-free numbers (2 percent), instant messaging applications such as Viber, WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger (1 percent), and the internet in general (1 percent). Only Wind Valley respondents reported using either the internet in general or instant messaging applications as an information source, with 5 percent of local respondents citing each method.

While radio was consistently cited as the most common source of information. There was great variance across all settlements regarding other sources, suggesting the need for a mixed-media approach.



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Many communities regularly experience a range of climate-related hazards, further intensifying the economic pressure put on informal settlements during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As informal settlements are frequently located in fragile sites such as unprotected coastal areas, river floodplains, or steep mountainous terrain they are often impacted by a multitude of climate related hazards, which add to existing underlying vulnerabilities. On April 27th and 28th 2020, the Solomon Islands experienced a category 3 Tropical Cyclone (TC Harold), bringing additional challenges to the already difficult environment, with damages to crops, homes, buildings and roads.

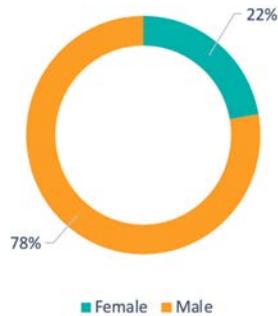
Almost **2/3** of respondents were affected by **strong winds** in the past 60 days

Women report more often to be affected by **extreme climate events** than men

The multitude and severity of extreme climate events **add to the existing vulnerabilities** of informal settlements

The impact however varied greatly between settlements depending on location and reprographic characteristics. Whereas Kukum Fishing Village and Jericho for example was heavily affected by strong winds (eg. TC Harold), Wind Valley is located further inland in mountainous terrain with steep slopes and is hence more impacted by heavy rainfall and resulting landslides.

Figure 26: Percentage of female and male respondents who reported no impact from climate-related hazards in the past 60 days

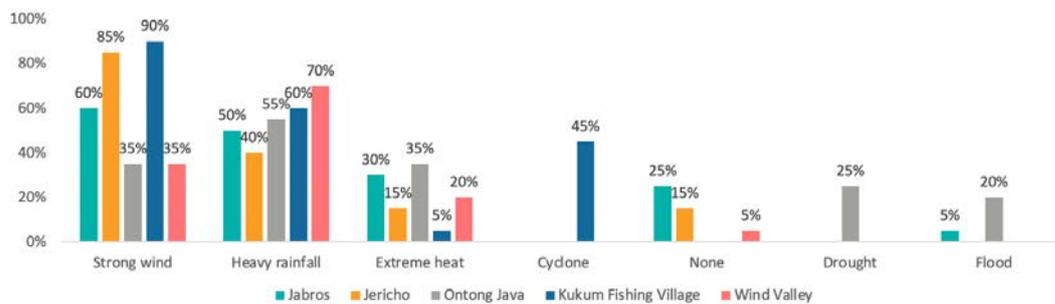


When asked about perceived climate related hazards, respondents most commonly reported storms and heavy rainfall. (61 percent of respondents cited strong wind as a concern and 55 percent cited heavy rainfall).

As reported in section 3.1, the increase in farming by many respondents may be adversely impacted by heavy rainfall. In both Ontong Java and Wind Valley heavy rainfall was more commonly reported as a hazard with 55 percent and 70 percent respectively reporting this.

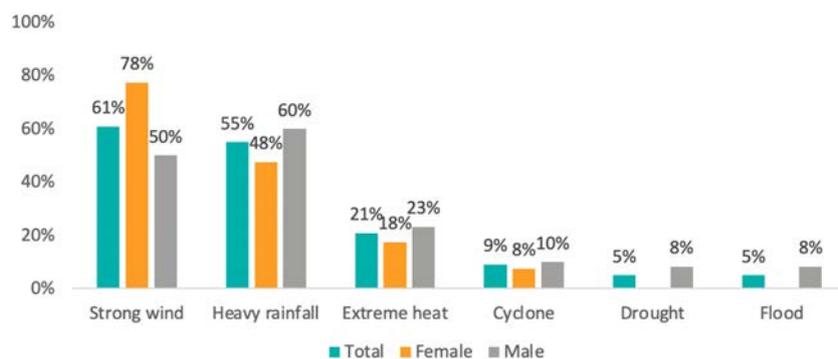
Disaggregated by gender, men more often reported to not be affected by recent weather events than women.

Figure 27: What climate-related hazard were you impacted by in the past 2 months?



On the other end of the scale only 5 percent reported drought and flood respectively as of a high concern. Both hazards were most commonly cited in Ontong Java. 25 percent of local respondents reported drought as a hazard and 20 percent reported flooding. Ontong Java’s coastal geography may account for this.

Figure 28: What climate-related hazards were you impacted by in the past 2 months - disaggregated by gender



3.6 LAND TENURE



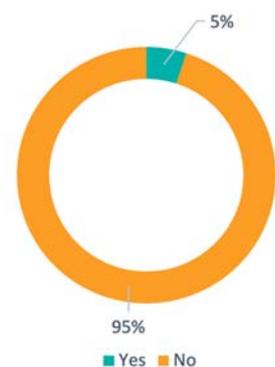
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Figure 29: In the past 30 days, has your household been threatened with eviction due to COVID-19?

Within Honiara, most land is state owned, with those on the fringes of the urban boundary being under customary ownership, where security of tenure is usually represented by the length of occupation rather than registration.

Many residents located on state lands were issued with Temporary Occupation Licences (TOLs) from the 1960s, with a gradual transition towards offering 75-year leases (Fixed Term Estates) ongoing, providing a good degree of tenure security. Much of these licences have now expired but evictions are extremely rare, with tensions related to ethnicity, land and economic benefits largely avoided in Honiara.

It is therefore unsurprising to note that the vast majority (99 percent) of respondents feel safe from eviction, with 95 percent answering no to the question on whether they had been threatened with eviction due to COVID-19 in the 30 days prior to the survey.



**Almost all
respondents felt
safe from
eviction**

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