

**Title: Health & Safety – Survey results on
AUCKLAND-BASED PASIFIKA FAMILIES’ RESPONSES
TO THE INITIAL COVID-19 ALERT LEVELS 2020**

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| Author: | Tai Faalogo, Tauafu Fonua, Lorenzo Kaisara, Andrew Peteru, Rufo Pupuali’i, Malia Tua’i Manuleleua on behalf of the New Zealand Red Cross Pasifika Group |
| Signed Off: | Secretary General |
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Introduction

New Zealand Red Cross, in its Strategy 2030, sets out Disaster Risk Management (DRM) as one of three core priorities. For the Humanitarian Development Team in Auckland, this means working together with a range of diverse communities to strengthen readiness, resilience and promote skills and messaging in disaster preparedness. As the largest Polynesian city in the world, engagement with Pasifika communities is critical if we are to enhance and strengthen community resilience and preparedness across Auckland, Tāmaki Makaurau.

In 2017 an Auckland based Pasifika Reference Group (PRG) was set up by NZRC to provide guidance and support to the regional team to engage Pasifika communities across Auckland. The group is made up of Pasifika individuals with varying backgrounds who volunteer their time to support New Zealand Red Cross in its efforts to engage with Pasifika communities throughout Auckland on disaster preparedness and resilience.

To fill the dearth of literature pertaining to Pasifika peoples and their responses to natural disasters in Aotearoa, members of the PRG undertook a survey to find out how Pasifika peoples responded and coped with the COVID-19 alert levels at the beginning of 2020 (21 March – 08 June 2020). The aim of this survey was to provide potential insight for NZRC as the organisation continues to develop disaster awareness and preparedness strategies for this community.

The survey questions were developed by the PRG members to capture the following areas:

1. How Pasifika peoples protected, coped and sustained themselves during the alert levels.
2. What Pasifika people’s main concerns were during this period.
3. The type of support that was available to them during this period.
4. The key lessons that were learnt, and
5. What they would do differently in similar future situations.

The respondents were people who identified as Pasifika, who lived in Auckland and had email access. The survey questions were translated and sent out in English, Samoan, Tongan, Cook Islands Māori, Niuean and French. A total of 100 questionnaires were answered (85 via email and 15 manually administered). 12 questionnaires were translated into Samoan, 15 questionnaires were translated into Tongan, and 73 questionnaires in English were completed. Out of all these respondents, 70% of the responses came from the English survey. To achieve the total numbers within the time period set out, 15% of the questionnaires were carried out via face-to-face interviews. All questionnaires and face to face interviews were undertaken between the months of May and October 2020.

Clearly the survey did not reach Pasifika populations without email/internet access or a residential address.

The results of this survey provide a glimpse into the experiences of Auckland-based Pasifika families to the COVID-19 alert levels.

Survey summary

The survey showed that many Pasifika families in Auckland were able to cope during the various COVID-19 Alert Levels. The elderly people were cared for and looked after by family members within their bubbles that at times comprised of two or more homes. Many family members continued working during all alert levels as essential workers.

Pasifika peoples went to great lengths to keep themselves safe from COVID-19 infection. Homes were sanitised regularly, strict rules were put into place to keep family members safe, and roles and responsibilities were delegated to ensure family members could work collaboratively as one unit. Although Pasifika peoples tuned in to the daily press releases and frequent messaging on various media, the reasons for actually abiding with safety procedures were very personal and centred around the elderly and chronically ill family members.

Pasifika peoples took the rules put in place by government very seriously and often ‘pulled rank’ towards those who were non-compliant. Protecting the elderly and chronically ill family members appeared to be the key reason for keeping the virus out of their homes. A single person was often responsible to do the shopping which included purchasing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and cleaning products. Family members who were essential workers were isolated from the rest of the family and went through stringent infection control processes relating to bathing and personal items. Some families were well supported by their workplaces who also became key sources of updated information which in turn filtered down to their families.

The daily updates from the Prime Minister (PM) and Director General of the Ministry of Health (MoH) were the main source of information received either from the television, Facebook or the NZ Herald via internet. Radio programmes in Pasifika languages were also sourced.

Food was the main item sought by families during all COVID-19 alert levels. Some family members worked from home and re-organised their homes to cater for home schooling, online conferencing sessions with other family members, colleagues or friends, and setting up offices for those who ran small businesses.

The main challenge faced by Pasifika families was being isolated from loved ones. A common concern was whether their extended family or church members were receiving enough food and support. Two percent of the respondents reported that they had combined two homes to create a single bubble in order to care for elderly family members. Responses throughout the survey however allude to this percentage possibly being higher. Some respondents, mainly amongst those who led family initiatives against COVID-19,

mentioned anxiety and feeling lonely. Only a handful of families identified that they were struggling financially and had to dig into their savings to ensure they had enough essentials in case products and supplies ran out. Those who did apply for financial support (7%) felt happy with the response.

The elderly depended heavily on their children and family members. Some elders in fact did not keep up to date with what was going on but trusted their children who were caring for them.

Overall, the responses generally seem to indicate that Pasifika families feel they fared well during the Alert Levels.

In moving forward, respondents felt food security measures and developing safety plans were important in preparing for similar future crises.

Summary of Responses

Q1. How did you prepare to protect and sustain yourself and/or your family before moving into Alert Levels 4, 3, 2 and 1?

Five key themes emerged from the survey, representing how 100 Pasifika families coped with the various Alert Levels.

Shopping to stock up on food and essential items

- Moving into COVID-19 Alert Level 4 caused the most anxiety.
- Most families shopped to stock up on food items, essentials including sanitisers, masks and gloves. Only 3% of the respondents already had food storage as part of their church welfare programs or shopped normally.
- Frozen and non-perishable food were mostly mentioned. First aid kits, vegetable seedlings and filling up the cars were also mentioned.
- It was common for families to nominate one person to do the shopping while only a few opted for online shopping.
- Two percent of respondents had to tap into their savings to afford shopping in bulk. A few families ranging from regular households to families who ran small businesses had to carefully budget to cater for the new arrangements.

Staying home (Protect)

In general Pasifika families remained within their bubbles during the Alert levels and only left to do essential shopping or for medical reasons.

- Cleaning the homes and surroundings immediately before the first lockdown and throughout the various Alert Levels was a prominent practice.
- Family members worked online, were home schooled, and communicated with other family members via the internet and online church services and meetings.

Taking care of families (Protect / Sustain)

- It was not uncommon for respondents to take care of family members (especially the elderly) in more than one household. Homes were also set up to accommodate members who were required to work from home, and to isolate returning family members from overseas or from other parts of New Zealand and the essential workers.
- Family members would ensure that elderly family members were cared for ensuring they had enough necessities, some form of communication including mobile phones and helped to set up internet connections. The elderly also depended on their family members for support including the arrangement of their medicines. Precautions (safe distancing, sanitising) put in place for vulnerable family members with chronic illnesses or disabilities were generally observed.
- Holding family meetings to discuss plans and to update elderly members on the COVID-19 situation was common as was delegating family members to specific tasks such as teaching the young ones how to wash their hands and organising home activities. Some respondents had to mentally prepare themselves, with some having no time to ‘think’ or relax as they had to continue working and “keep it together.”

Kept themselves informed (Protect)

The daily press conference by the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Health was the main source of COVID-19 information for Pasifika families. Although, other sources of information were also accessed such as the radio programmes held in the various Pasifika languages as well as social media.

Abiding by the COVID-19 prevention rules (Protect)

Pasifika families largely abided by COVID-19 rules and stayed within their bubble as mandated by government. They would often allocate one member of the family to do the shopping for essentials. The only other reasons for leaving the home other than for medical reasons was to check on other homes (elderly family members and those with chronic illness) who they considered to be a part of their bubble, and it seems many still had to go to work as essential workers. Family members who breached the COVID-19 rules were quickly brought to task by other family members.

Prevention & Protection measures undertaken

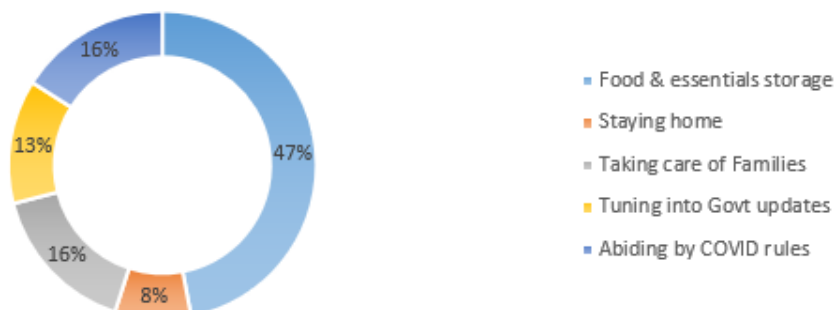


Figure 1: Prevention and Protection measures undertaken.

Q2: What was your main source of COVID-19 information?

The daily Government COVID-19 updates were the main source of information for Pasifika families by far, accessed via television and Facebook.

Other sources of information were:

- Television news (TV1 and Newshub)
- Information from the workplace whether by memo, emails or bulletin
- Radio (particularly the Pacific Media Network (PMN) Pasifika language updates)

The New Zealand Herald online, Facebook, and family members and friends who were essential workers within the health sector were also identified as trusted sources of information.

A small number of respondents tuned into church-based programmes, international programmes and the Ministry of Health website. Figure 2 shows the various sources of COVID-19 information received by the respondents.

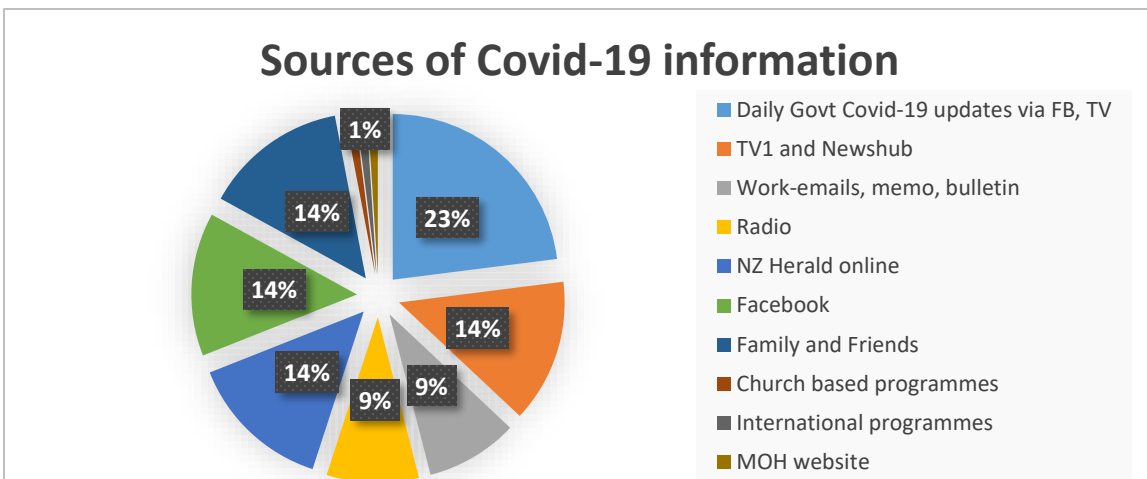


Figure 2: Sources of COVID-19 Information

Note: 1% Each includes information received from church-based programmes, international programmes and MOH website.

Q3: How have you and your family protected yourselves from exposure to COVID-19?

Whilst 37% of the respondents identified staying at home as a form of protection, responses in other parts of the survey point to the majority abiding by the ‘stay at home’ directive, and would only venture out to buy essential items, to visit the doctor, or to go to work as an essential worker. Respondents equally disallowed any visitors in their bubbles.

Noticeable was bubbles made up of two separate households so that elderly family members living alone could be supported and essential workers within respondent households. Isolating essential worker family members and sanitising their clothes and utensils were common responses.

Over 70% of the responses referred to washing hands regularly, wearing masks, keeping the 2-metre distance, and utilising the internet as a source of information and to socialise in place of meeting people face to face.

Only 3% of respondents viewed regular COVID-19 testing as a way of protecting the family such as ensuring the designated person doing the shopping would get tested regularly.

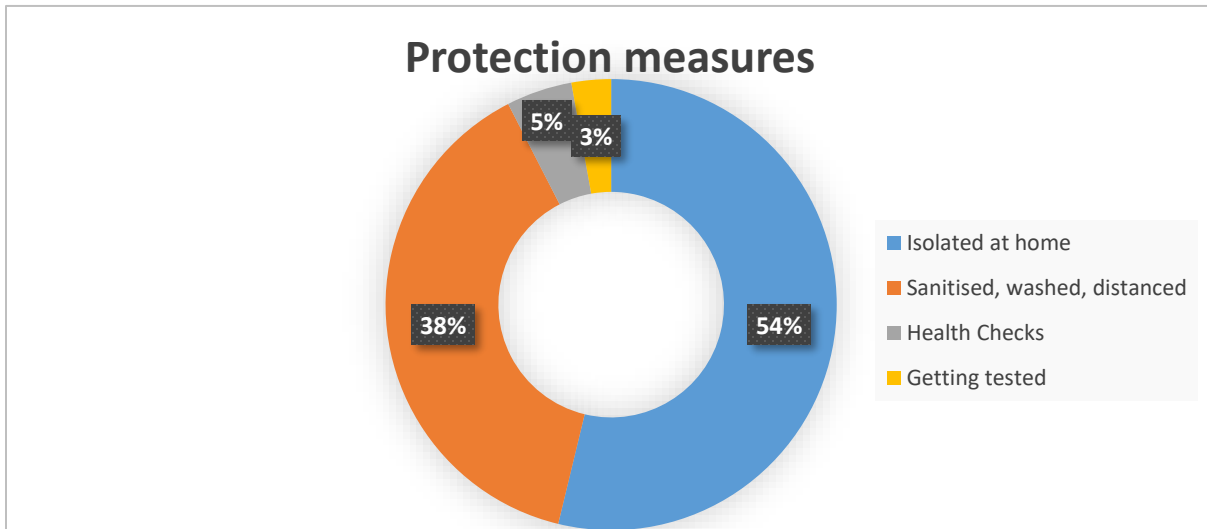


Figure 3: Specific protection measures against COVID-19

Q4. Did you or any family members get tested for COVID-19? If so WHY and if not Why not?

56% of respondents reported they got tested for COVID-19 during the initial Alert Levels. Out of the 35% who were tested 11% got tested because they had COVID-like symptoms and 24% tested as a precaution. These included 10% elderly and disabled, 7% essential workers and 7% with chronic illnesses. 36% of the respondents reported not getting tested of which 20% stated that it was because they did not have any COVID like symptoms.

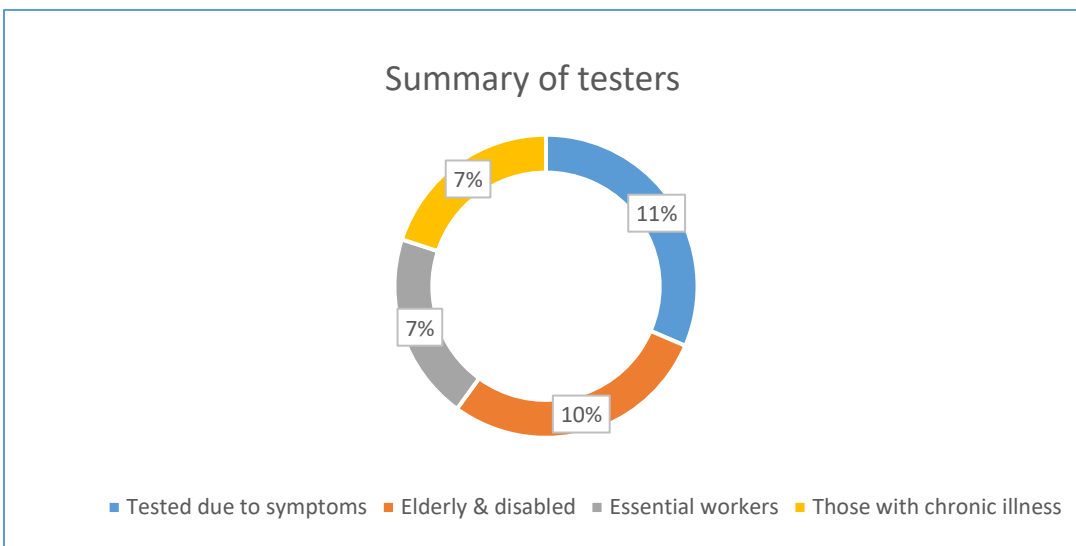


Figure 4: Summary of those who got tested for COVID-19.

Q5. What kind of support/assistance did you need most during the different Alert Levels?

30% of the responses indicated that they were fine and did not need extra support. Care-giving support within families continued (as part of a single multi-house bubble). Support for family also occurred online via Facebook chats etc.

14% of responses mentioned the need for food supplies and essential item support as people remained at home, especially growing children.

An interesting form of support needed mentioned (13%) was respondents referring not to their own needs but the needs of extended family members in different households and whether they had access to agencies to get support mainly for food and essentials. It appears that the normal ‘collective spirit of support’ shared by Pasifika families remained even during the COVID alert level movement restrictions.

7% of responses reported needing financial support and 7% reported needing support in understanding COVID Level information provided to the community. Only 1% of this group mentioned financial support to assist with petrol or transportation due to loss of income/ jobs. Five percent of the responses which came mainly from individuals who led the COVID efforts in their households reported needing mental health / emotional support as they felt lonely or isolated going through the experience.

Other needs raised (24%) included internet connectivity, access to emergency services (including dentists for situations like toothaches), and elderly living support.

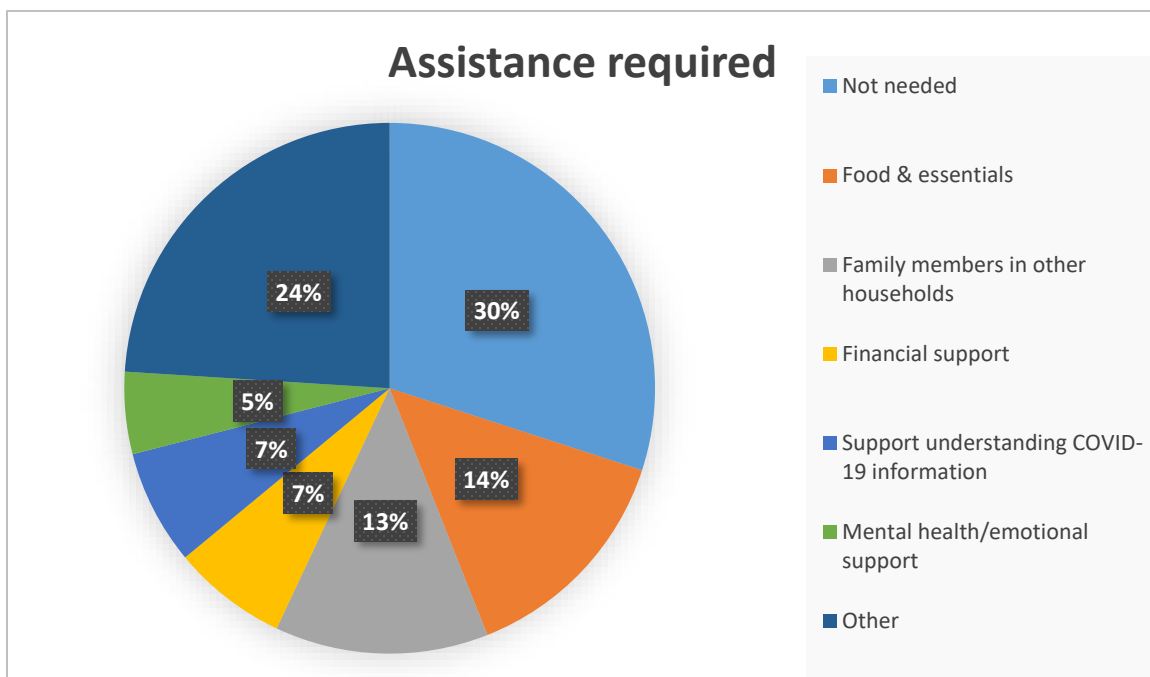


Figure 5: Types of assistance required during the initial COVID-19 Alert levels

Q6. Did you receive support or assistance from community/government organisations/ other/during the different Alert Levels? If so, were your needs met? If not why not?

46% of the responses reported receiving some form of support at least once while 48% of the responses reported not receiving support either because they had not requested it or they refused it.

Only 2% reported receiving support that they had asked for. 3% reported they received support from their church and 4% reported receiving a one-off support i.e. food parcel. 2% reported that they did not receive or were not able to access support but did not explain why.

The responses appear to portray a community that was fairly self-sufficient with those (up to 14%) receiving adequate food parcel support which was the key form of support needed.

Only 1% reported applying for business support or wage subsidies and were impressed with the efficiency of this process. 1% reported not being able to cope due to a drop in salary and 2% indicated that in hindsight they should have accessed support around childcare.

Some also reported receiving support or assistance from their church (3%), family, neighbours, friends (2%) and employers (2%).

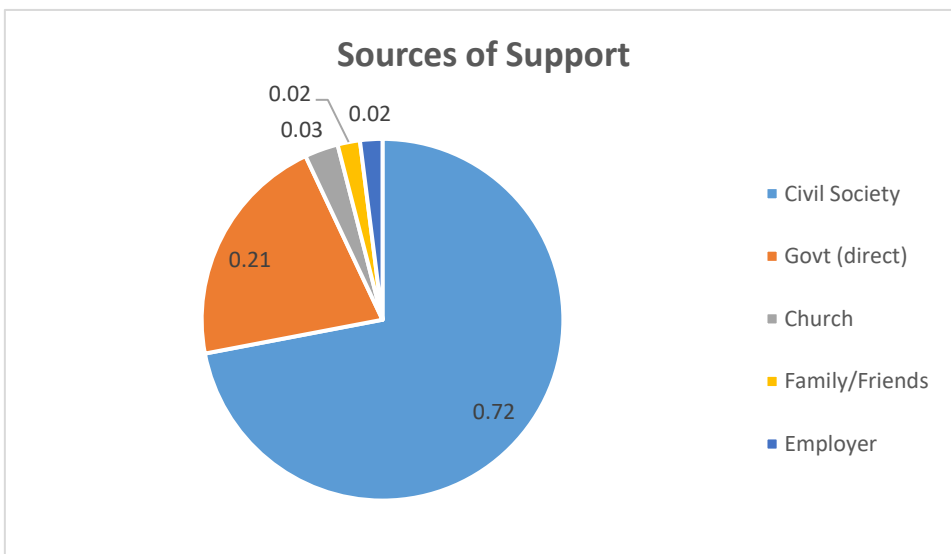


Figure 6a: Sources of COVID-19 support

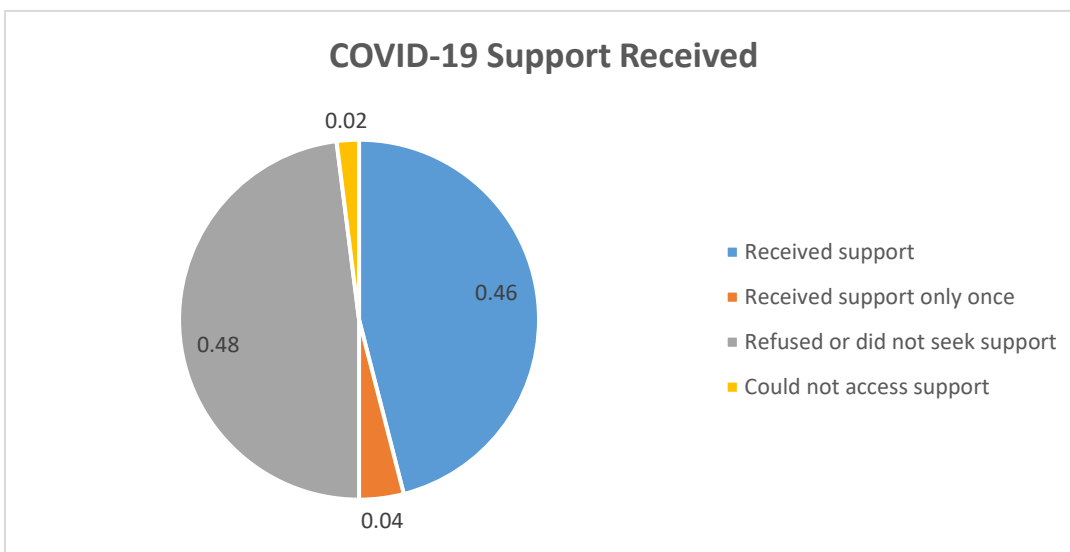


Figure 6b: COVID-19 Support received

Q7. What were the main challenges you faced during the different Alert Levels and how did you work through these?

Only 61% of the respondents answered this question. The main challenges expressed by 23% of the respondents were being isolated and feeling alone, missing children, and being separated from other family members outside of their bubble and not being able to visit them or being able to socialise as normal.

The responses also reflected that being creative and keeping family members busy and happy was an important task to ensure harmony whilst being confined to their homes.

8% of the respondents indicated that they did not have any or serious challenges.

Other challenges (4%) identified by several respondents included financial worries, concerns of becoming infected especially for the elderly and chronically ill family members, and dealing with medical emergencies.

The following figure summarises the key challenge areas identified by the respondents.

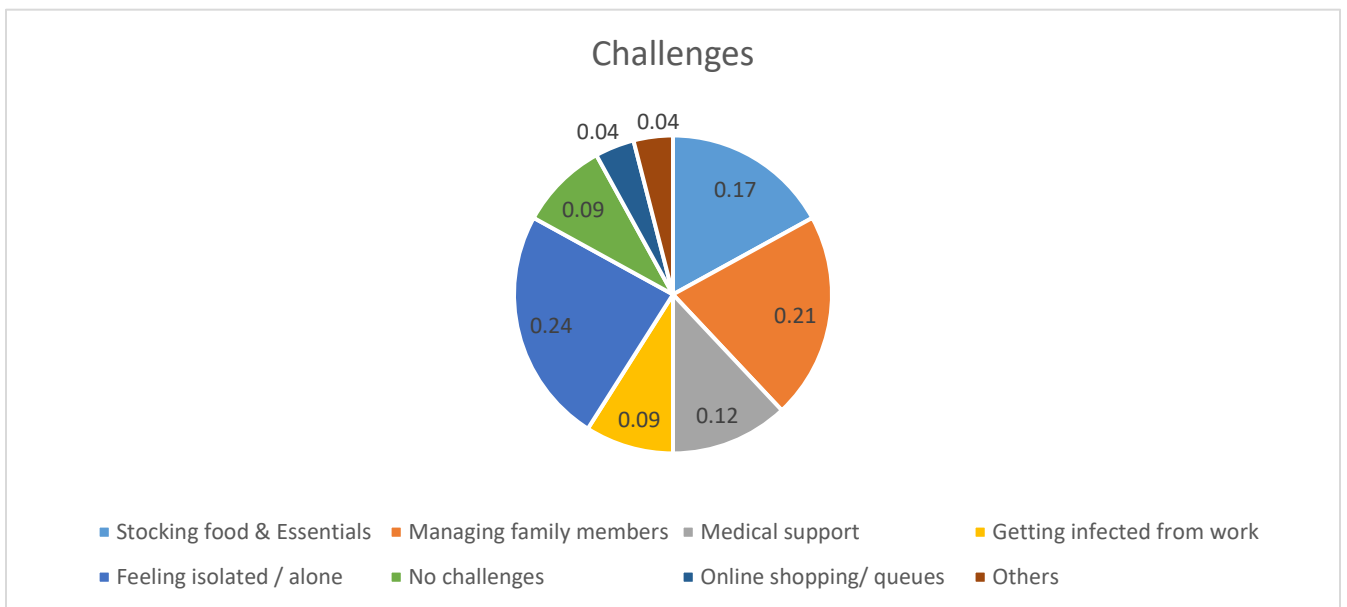


Figure 7: Main challenges experienced during the initial COVID-19 alert levels.

Q8. What would you do differently to prepare for a future pandemic?

The most frequent response was to ensure the home always had a good supply of food and essentials. Some mentioned the importance of having food storage and essentials cupboards.

Developing safety plans and safety kits was also a popular response.

A number of respondents felt that they had handled the various Alert Levels well and did not look at making too many changes. Other more personal areas identified were:

- Becoming more financially stable.

- Preparing to work from home.
- Becoming more physically fit (exercising, walking).
- Establishing an internet connection at home.

An interesting response included learning how to improve on caring for multiple homes within a single bubble. (e.g. looking after elderly family members in another household). Whilst only 2% of respondents indicated their bubble included more than one family, several responses also alluded to multiple homes in a single bubble via joint family activities and support. Despite this they largely felt they abided by the COVID-19 safety guidelines.

Conclusion and Survey Findings

Whilst writing the first draft of the survey findings in August 2020, it was hoped that by 2021, the end of the COVID-19 pandemic would be in sight. It is not clear that this is the case and communities around the world are adapting to new practices that are likely to stay with us for some time. These practices include everyday utilisation of personal protective equipment, working and learning remotely, lock down restrictions and border closures.

Developing and maintaining resilience, adapting to new ways of living and dealing with contemporary alert level restrictions are unprecedented challenges that our communities face in the current environment. New variants of COVID-19 also threaten to affect the great work and relatively safe environment that Aotearoa has been able to achieve over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

These survey findings are intended to provide insights into Pasifika communities and their preparedness experiences in Aotearoa. Additionally, it aims to provide the community sector with guidance around how to approach working with Pasifika communities in context of Aotearoa in 2021. The Pasifika Reference Group believes that the following guidance can be utilised to supplement national effort to strengthen Pasifika community preparedness against future large scale disasters as well as developing capacities to cope in the face of prolonged events analogous to what is currently being experienced. These findings are aimed at providing New Zealand Red Cross and the wider community sector with key reflections to incorporate into work moving forward.

1. The community sector could actively promote the inclusion of Pasifika peoples needs in emergency management plans.
2. Organisations who are involved in the emergency management space are encouraged to support the development of Family and Community Safety Plans for relevant emergencies that are culturally appropriate to Pasifika contexts. Developed plans should be visible, easily understood, practical for individuals, whanau and communities to implement and designed in collaboration with Pasifika communities. The following should be taken into consideration in the design process;
 - 2.1. For homes: To ensure that these plans are sufficiently generic. This allows for one plan to include more than one household (as a joint bubble) if necessary.

- 2.2. For communities: To ensure that any community centres such as halls, churches, and Pasifika focused service providers have these plans developed and accessible.
 - 2.3. Language used in plans must be taken into consideration and appropriate translations are made available. Plans should be provided in English and the relevant Pasifika languages. In addition, plans should be disseminated using the most effective, relevant communication channels to the communities in question.
3. It is recommended that plans should provide Pasifika communities with the following;
 - 3.1. Access to information on how to access support for food and essentials.
 - 3.2. Access to information on how to access support for elderly and childcare support

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Thank you, Fa'afetai tele, Malo 'aupito, Meitaki Ma'ata, Fakaau lahi, Merci Beaucoup.