

Lockdowns, exclusion and resilience: Our first pandemic related studies

Editorial

It's hard to believe that the COVID-19 pandemic has been with us for more than a year. While vaccine rollouts and the impacts of emerging strains of the virus vary markedly around the world, in Australia our borders remain closed (for most of us), keeping loved ones and family members apart. Even returning Olympians are in extended quarantine as they pass through the Covid 'red zones' to their home-towns around Australia (2021, ABC news). Concerns about double standards arise as famous actors and other celebrities enter and leave Australia, while family members are denied permission to cross borders to see dying loved ones. 'Fortress Australia' is riven with inequalities and vulnerabilities that have always existed in our society, but are experienced during the pandemic in ways never before realised or imagined.

Australia's early success in suppressing (almost eliminating) COVID-19 through harsh lockdowns and sudden border closures bought crucial time in preparing medical resources, but this was not matched by efforts to immunise or safeguard the population. Vaccine supply issues, as well as vaccine hesitancy, have meant that our vaccine rates are some of the lowest in the world with even greater disparities evident for first nations and rural and remote communities (Allam & Evershed, 2021). As the rest of the world seems to be opening up again, escalating cases of the Delta variant in Sydney are necessitating a new wave of extended lock-downs, as Australia struggles to manage its largest outbreak, to date.

It is in this context that JOSI's first pandemic related study has been published. The Australian study examined the support provided by youth to their communities in the 2020 tower lockdowns in Melbourne. The other pandemic related paper included in this edition is a heartfelt commentary from the US, calling for change to the entrenched inequalities that have been exposed by the pandemic from personal immigrant and Black perspectives.

In '*We were already strong: Young Refugees, Challenges and Resilience during COVID-19*, Couch writes about the snap lockdown of nine tower blocks in Melbourne in July 2020 after some occupants tested positive to COVID-19. Many occupants were refugees and their families, who were given no notice before a police guard enforced some of the harshest lock down orders in Australia, leaving many people without food or medicine. This important paper tells the story of the experience of these lockdowns from the perspective of young people. It tells of the stress and uncertainty caused, but also of resilience; "I've crossed so many rivers, I no longer get wet". It shows the vital role played by young people as interpreters, messengers and errand runners, emergence food and medicine providers, emotional support providers and cultural ambassadors, especially for older community members living in the towers who were at most risk from the virus.

Taborda and Johnson provide a clarion call for change in the US in their commentary about their experiences of the pandemic from immigrant and Black perspectives. Their paper *Economic Diversity and Social Exclusion: A commentary on the Uneven Effect of COVID-19 on Historically Marginalized Populations in the United States*, provides an account of the inequalities in access to health and employment during the pandemic, showing that as resources have become stretched it is the usual groups that miss out; the "inequities in health expressed by Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and immigrants were real and pervasive." They argue that this is against the idea of what the US should be, but reflects long term structural inequalities.

The other three papers in this edition of JOSI deal with social exclusion outside the pandemic. Each of these papers remind us that social, cultural and economic exclusion are not new, but are experienced contextually. The first of these papers is an ethnographic account of the experience of disability in Ghana by Grischow and Mfoafo-M'Carthy. Based on the results of interviews with sixteen adults and children (and their parents) exploring people's lived experiences of disability, the researchers also examined how the traditional notion of Ubuntu – 'a person is a person through other people', can be used to overcome the social exclusion experienced by people with disabilities. Based on the findings, it is argued the traditional bonds and the notion of *Ubuntu* provide meaningful opportunities to help achieve disability rights in Ghana.

The importance of social bonds, and moreover, the harm that arises from the labelling and problematisation of some groups in society is also examined in the article by Allen. In focusing on the experience of young Muslims in Birmingham, Allen provides a contextual understanding of the issues before exploring the identity of 'Brummies' or young Muslims from Birmingham. The paper examines the complex and at times contrasting impacts of problematising the identity of both place (Birmingham) and people (young Muslims). Its findings provide important insights for further research to explore other contexts in which identity is perceived to be problematic or not, and how this can be used to build both bonding and bridging social capital in communities like Birmingham and more broadly.

The final paper, a commentary, by Enari presents a personal account of cultural pride in Pacific Island heritage in a student cultural group. Indeed, the benefits from engaging in this culturally-based student association, not only in terms of navigating university education, but also providing support and a source of cultural pride to challenge the continuing colonial legacies and practices which are replicated in tertiary education systems. Having to forsake Pacific Islander ways of knowing and being in order to assimilate into university education creates a clash of values and beliefs and significant dissonance or distress for students which can lead to an 'educational disconnect'. In this context, sharing the story of the Griffith Pasifika Association is indeed noteworthy in demonstrating its utility in helping to decolonize knowledge formation and maintain connections and pride in culture.

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