

Relationships Australia Monthly Website Survey

October/November Survey 2020: Self-care

Introduction

Self-care is a term used to describe the deliberate actions people take to look after their physical, emotional and mental health. Self-care is a very individual concept, as people find respite with different activities (Every Mind 2020). Given the challenges that 2020 has brought, self-care has become an important way for people to look after themselves, however it can be challenging when many of our usual activities are subject to restrictions.

The term self-care has recently been popularised through social media and the more transparent discussions around mental health occurring as a result of the pandemic. However, self-care is not as straightforward as it appears. In order for an activity or action to be truly considered self-care, it requires attention and thoughtfulness to ensure it is truly beneficial. Additionally, taking time out to practise self-care should not be understood as selfish, as practising self-care can put you in a better place mentally, physically and emotionally to care for others (Beyond Blue 2020). Practised mindfully, self-care has the capacity to help people better manage stress, increase resilience and reduce the symptoms of mental health problems (Every Mind 2020).

This month's survey sought to investigate the relationship between the pandemic, self-care, positivity and people's hope for the future.

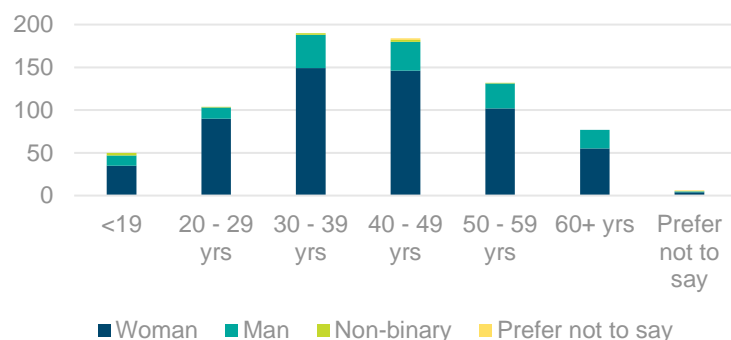
Key Findings

- 1** Self-care is a popular form of caring for our physical, emotional and mental health
 - 71% of participants practise self-care (figure 3)
 - The more people practise self-care, the more likely they were to report its positive effects (figure 6)
- 2** Feelings of hopefulness about the future remain high
 - 79% of respondents rated their level of hope for the future at 5/10 or above (figure 8)
 - Respondents' hopefulness about the future is not significantly affected by either self-care routines or state-based experiences of the pandemic (figures 9 and 10)
- 3** Despite hardships, the pandemic has brought about many positive outcomes for many people
 - 70% of respondents reported positive outcomes arising out of the pandemic (figure 11)
 - The most common positive outcomes included the ability to work from home, spending more time with children and family and an increased 'appreciation for the smaller things' (figures 12)

Results

Figure 1. Respondent Demographics

Monthly website survey, Self-care October 2020, Survey Results



Relationships Australia's survey on self-care ran from October through to November 2020, receiving 755 responses. As in past months, most respondents identified as women (77%). It should be noted that, compared with previous months, respondents were younger, with 39% aged between 20 and 39 years, rather than the majority being aged between 40-49 years (as typically the case in prior surveys). As in previous months, there were respondents from across Australia, representing the presence Relationships Australia has in these locations (figure 2).

This month's survey addressed people's knowledge of self-care, especially in relation to COVID-19 and its effect on people's physical, emotional and mental health. Before the pandemic, 60% of respondents had been practising self-care and a further 11% had started practising self-care since the beginning of the pandemic (figure 3). Thirteen percent said that they did not have time and 2% said they were not interested. Finally, 10% of people were unfamiliar with the concept and so were unsure if they had been practising or not.

Figure 2. Respondent Location

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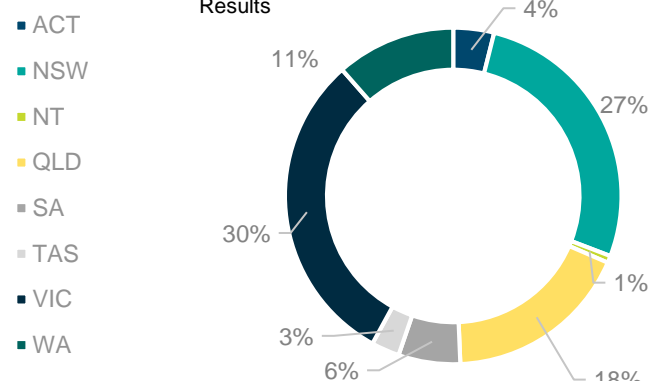


Figure 3. Have you tried self-care before?

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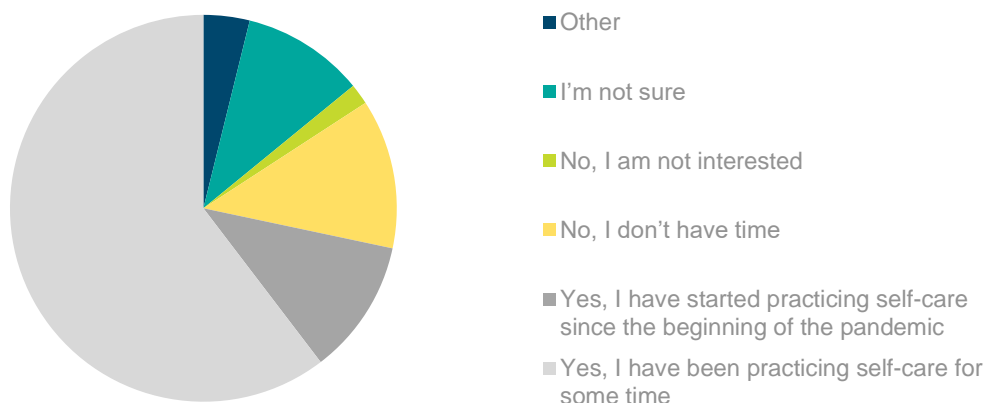
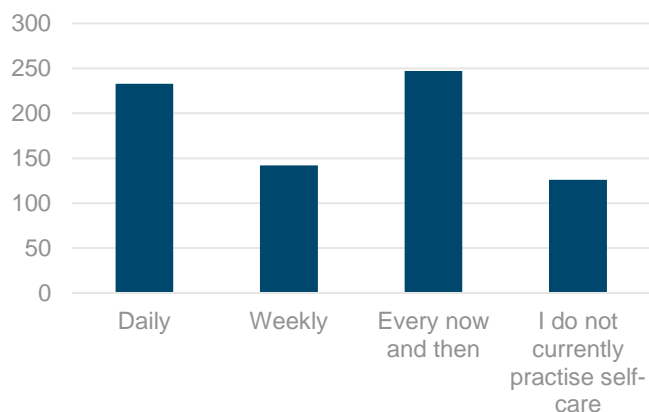
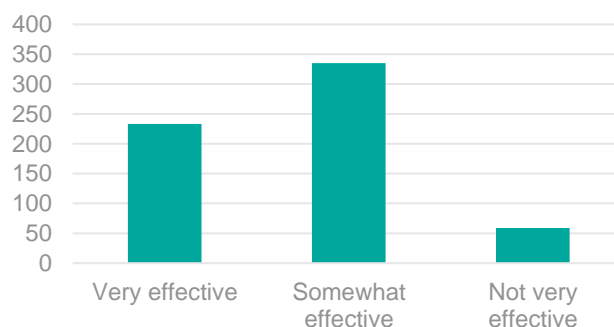


Figure 4. How often do you practise self-care?

Monthly website survey, Self-care October 2020, Survey Results

**Figure 5. What effect has self-care had on your mental, emotional and physical health?**

Monthly website survey, Self-care October 2020, Survey Results



Figures 4 and 5 explore the regularity of practice and effect self-care has had on respondents. Although 31% of respondents practise self-care every day, a further 33% said they only dabble in self-care every now and then. Nineteen percent said they practise weekly, while 17% said they do not practise self-care at all. This suggests that, like many habits, it is more common for people to engage in self-care practices every day, as opposed to sometimes during the week. Figure 5 illustrates that a majority (44%) find self-care to be somewhat effective in supporting their health. A further 31% felt it was very effective and only 8% felt that it was not very effective.

Figure 6. Effectiveness of self-care versus regularity of practice

Monthly website survey, Self-care October 2020, Survey Results

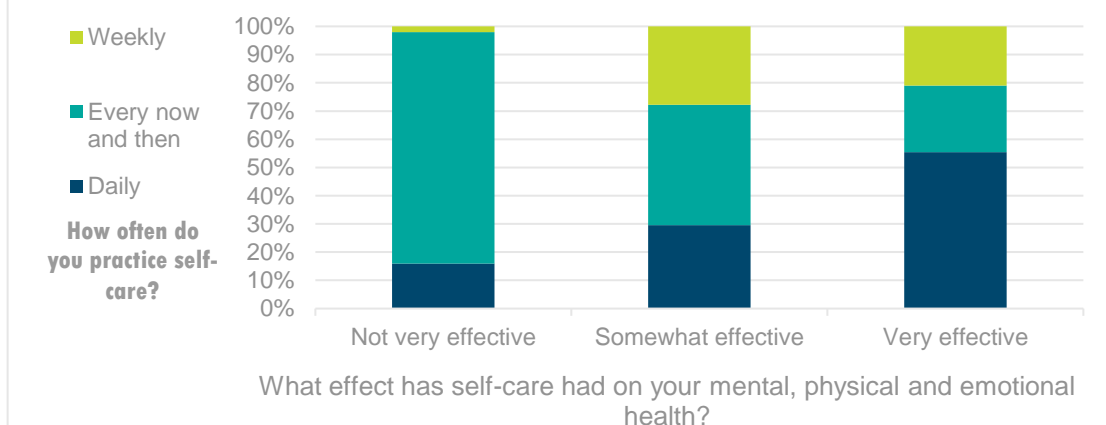


Figure 6 illustrates the relationship between how often people practise self-care and their perception of its effectiveness in supporting their physical, emotional and mental health. As expected, there is a positive relationship between the perceived effectiveness of self-care in

supporting health, and the amount of time spent practising self-care. Interestingly, of those who felt that self-care was not very effective in supporting their health, 82% still engaged with self-care every now and then. This could be for several reasons. Although self-care has been shown to support health, its broad definition makes self-care unique to each individual. As such, many people may engage in activities that they find enjoyable, and could be considered self-care, but the individuals themselves may not observe the benefits of these activities.

Figure 7 illustrates the changes that have occurred to people's self-care routines since the beginning of the pandemic. Thirty-nine percent of people reported changes due to COVID-19 restrictions. A further 30% said their self-care changed due to their motivation levels. Twenty-one percent said they changed their self-care routine due to time limitations and a final 5% of respondents said that they had started practising self-care since the pandemic began.

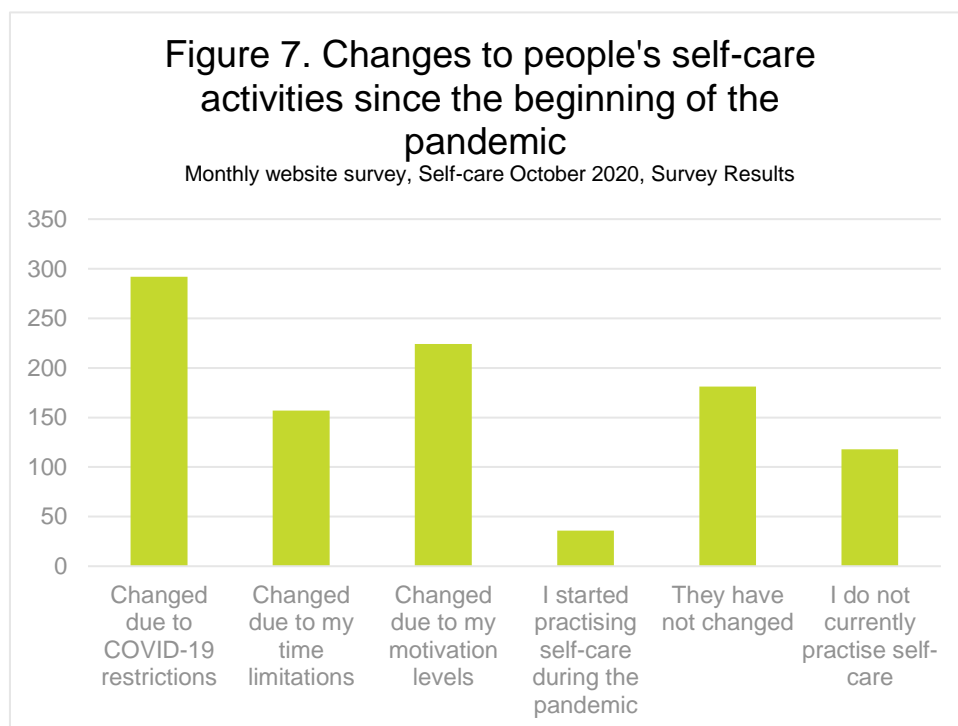


Figure 8. How hopeful do you feel about the coming months?

Monthly website survey, Self-care October 2020, Survey Results

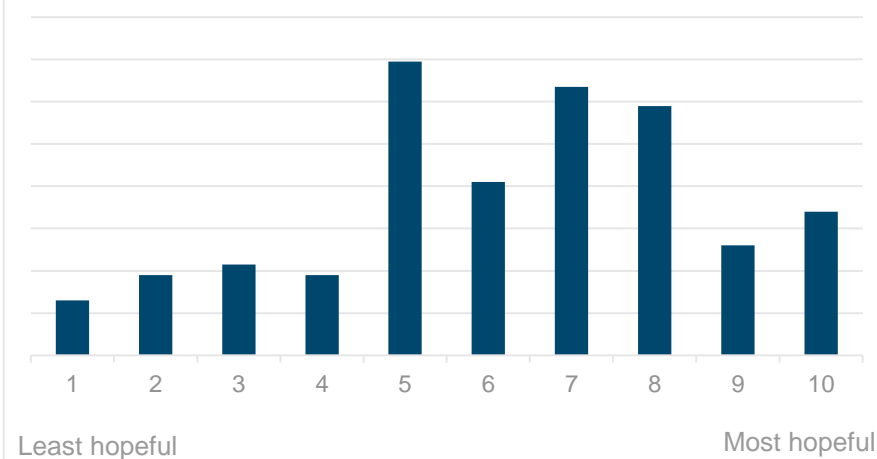
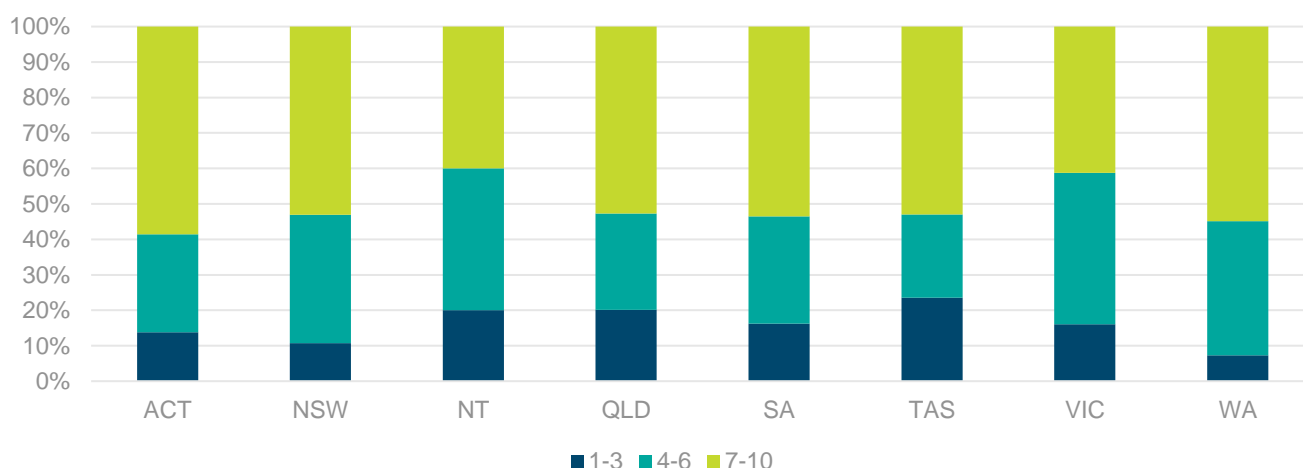


Figure 8 depicts the hope people feel for the coming months. The question asked respondents to rate their hopefulness on a scale of 1 to 10, one being not at all hopeful and ten being very hopeful. Promisingly, 79% of respondents rated their level of hope at 5 or above. While a significant portion of respondents rated their hopefulness at 5 (18%), suggesting a balance of pessimism and hope, a further 33% rated themselves as 7 or 8.

While one might assume that people's location could have an effect on their hopefulness, given the vastly different experiences different states have had during the pandemic, figure 9 illustrates that there is little difference between states and territories. Similarly, figure 10 shows that while there is a weak correlation between regularity of people's engagement with self-care and hopefulness, self-care does not lead to a significant increase in hopefulness.

**Figure 9. How hopeful do you feel about the coming months?
(State comparison)**

Monthly website survey, Self-care October 2020, Survey Results



**Figure 10. How hopeful do you feel about the coming months?
(Self-care comparison)**

Monthly website survey, Self-care October 2020, Survey Results

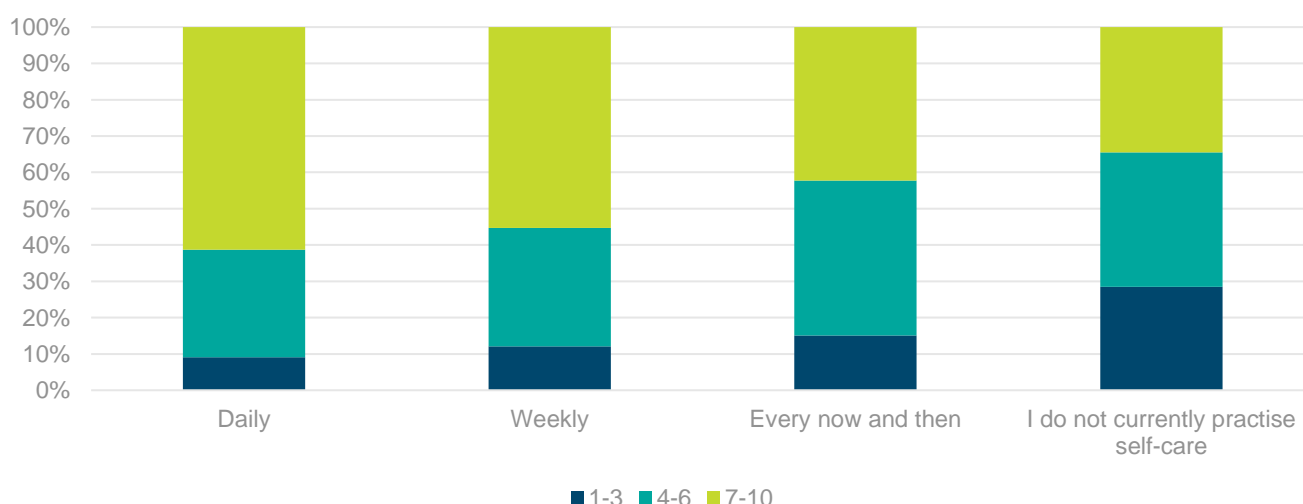
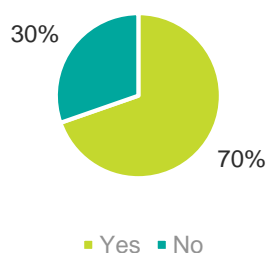


Figure 11. Can you think of anything positive that has come out of the pandemic?

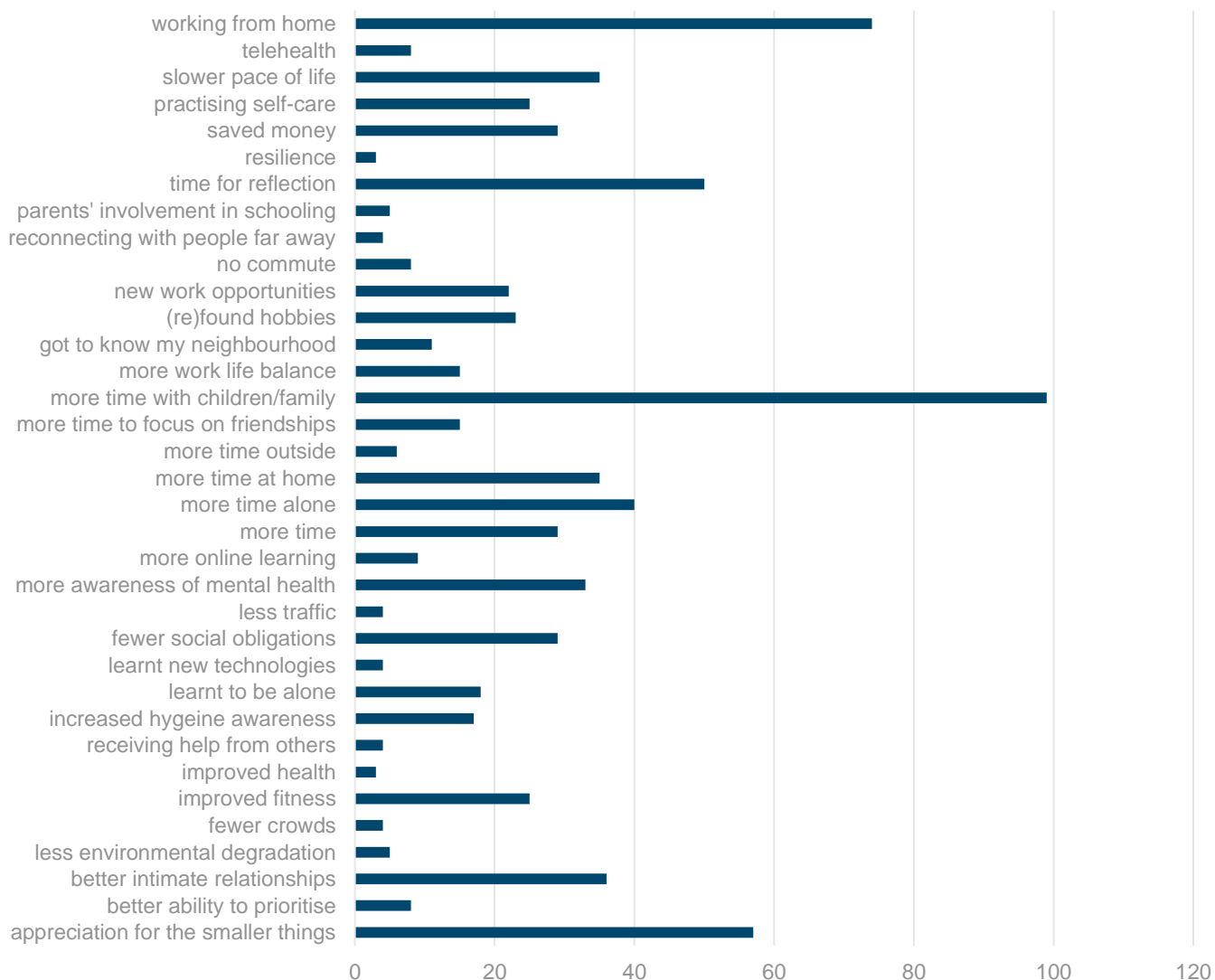
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Lastly, we asked people if they had any positive experiences come about as a result of the pandemic. Seventy percent of respondents were able to provide an example (figure 11). Figure 12 illustrates common themes that could be gleaned from these responses. 'More time with children and family', 'working from home' and an 'appreciation for smaller things' were stand-out benefits from a challenging year.

Figure 12. Positive outcomes from 2020

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Extra time at home with family gave some parents an opportunity to connect with their children in new ways. One respondent said:

“I got to teach my kids old school past times”

Another said:

**“I have more of an understanding of my
daughter's schoolwork and
how she processes information and learns”**

Many respondents enjoyed spending time at home with their children, partner or alone, working on new hobbies without the stressors of travelling to work. Others found that *attending* work was their positive benefit.

One respondent shared that:

**“As a barista, I have been able to connect with
and provide relief to my customers”**

Another felt that:

**“My job, that used to be considered average,
became essential”**

Others found employment, or felt more supported, despite the economic hardships:

**“I was out of work last year, but this year I have been working because
I found work for an essential service, so I don't have
any financial stress this year”**

Similarly, people said that:

**“People seem more able to accept others who have been out
of work for extended periods of time”**

and

**“the increase in Job Seeker payments helped me feel
less stressed about money”**

In conclusion, many respondents seem to practise self-care, and have had more time, energy or motivation to do so since the beginning of the pandemic. Additionally, while self-care has a perceptible benefit towards physical, emotional and mental health, for our participants, self-care does not seem to be a strong indicator of hopefulness. Lastly, irrespective of the year that has been, most people were able to find something beneficial that had come out of the pandemic. Additionally, a significant proportion of respondents felt very hopeful about what the future might hold.

References:

Beyond Blue. 2020. *Why You Should Do Something For Yourself Every Day*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/personal-best/pillar/supporting-yourself/why-you-should-do-something-for-yourself-every-day>> [Accessed 26 November 2020].

Everymind. 2020. *Self-Care*. [online] Available at: <<https://everymind.org.au/need-help/self-care>> [Accessed 26 November 2020].