

Sydney Women's Fund

Portrait of Sydney Women in 2021

Media Fact Sheet and Case Studies

1 December 2021

1. Sydney life is tough for too many Sydney Women and getting harder

“People work longer hours to make more money to live a certain way and everyone does their own thing in their corner. It means we are mentally isolated.”

Woman Inner West

“One of the worst aspects of Sydney is that the cost of living is insane. I feel very lucky that we got into the housing market when we did. I just can't believe the prices. I find that stressful and think my kids will be living with us for a long time.”

“Woman from the Hills District.”

- The Portrait of Sydney Women 2021 again shows a divided and challenging city to live in for women in terms of health, opportunity and security.
- Many Sydney women say they struggle with daily life (41%)
 - 41% are struggling or just getting by financially.
 - 54% of women in Sydney are satisfied with their finances.
 - 64% Almost three-quarters of women in Sydney said they are more financially stable than they were 10 years ago.
- Cost of living is a keen concern for the women of Sydney as 67% said they were concerned about maintaining an adequate income.
- The fears and worries of Sydney women are financial security (67%) Housing affordability (61%) and cost of living (63%)
- A significant proportion of Sydney women do not believe they will have enough retirement earnings to live comfortably in retirement.
- Many older women want to retire at 65 but see themselves as having to work for longer.

- Despite financial comfort many Sydney Women say they are overwhelmed by responsibilities (41%)
- Almost three quarters of Sydney women are satisfied with life overall though in the last three years satisfaction with life has dropped by 10 % from 82% in 2018 to 72% in 2021.

2. Sydney women are worried about their health and mental wellbeing, more than COVID

“I’ve had some health issues and that’s also why I work part time and I haven’t been able to earn the income enabling me to buy a house.”

- More Sydney women hold fears for their health, mental wellbeing (over half at 53%) and financial security (44 %) than three years ago.
- More Sydney women worry more about stress and overwhelm than Covid. (53%)
- Women are all concerned about family violence and women’s safety and recognised more public focus on these issues had not necessarily meant and improvement in service delivery.

3. Sydney Women remain optimistic and want to live in a city where there is more to do, more expenses, more decisions, more to worry about and yet, more to love.

“I feel so lucky to live where I live. I am very lucky my husband earns a good wage as I could never live on what I earn as a part time teacher's aid. “

Cath, Eastern suburbs, 50

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Woman from the Hills District.

- Sydney women show strength, capacity and optimism (67%) despite only small improvement in financial wellbeing (5%)
- Sydney women have a big job as active carers (33%) and most are in the busy 36 – 55 age group.

- Women are equal earners in the family (67%) earn as much or more as husbands and partners.
- Women are making the decisions around spending. Only 7% of women rely on spouses and partners to make key decisions and run the family budget.
- Sydney is becoming harder to live in, especially for women with dependent children. (87%) of women with children said it was harder compared to 78% of women without.
- Women want to live close to family, parks and good health infrastructure.

4. The working life of Sydney women is critical to women staying in their special corner and contributing to Sydney life.

“There are so many benefits working from home. it’s a much better quality of life.”

Kirra , southern suburbs,30’s.

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Woman from the Hills District.

- Only 45% of Sydney Women are satisfied with their work life.
- More Sydney Women want more work (33%) especially women with dependent children and more are working from home (23% up from 8%) since covid.
- Working from home is still for more advantaged Sydney women. Only 7% of those who call themselves the struggling poor can work from home compared to 19% of women who say they are getting along and 27% of women who describe themselves as comfortable.
- More Women want to have flexibility to work part time to work longer and to maintain their health and wellbeing and caring responsibilities.
- Of women in Work - 33 % earn \$31,000 or less showing an improvement.

- More women are saving super.
- Super is up from 39% three years ago to 48% Younger Sydney women are aiming to have their own retirement savings with 54% of women under 36 saving.
- It's hard to live securely in Sydney as a single woman. (33%) say they would be at financial risk if their relationship broke down.
- There is a need for income with a decent amount of flexibility to care for children and themselves.

5. Women are opting for part time work as one third between ages 35 – 55 are caring for someone important in their life and this lifestyle choice sets them back financially.

“There is a need for income with a decent amount of flexibility to care for children and themselves.”

- One in three women care for someone else.
- A third of Sydney women say caring has an impact on their career.
- I took this job that's not well paid so I can walk in at 10 and leave at 3.00pm and manage school drop offs and pickups.
- More Women want to have flexibility to work part time to work longer and to maintain their health and wellbeing and caring responsibilities.

6. For about half of Sydney Women the pandemic has impacted, work, finances, and mental and Physical health.

“I have been in a default state of distress with the uncertainty of people losing jobs.”

About half Sydney women experienced the pandemic with a negative impact (56%) while 22% said the impact was positive and some reported no impact (14%)

Perceived benefits were:

- More time with and a closer connection to family
- Working from home
- More time at home to focus on the things they care about (hobbies, renovating, physical and mental health)
- Saving money

Negative impacts however were:

- Financial impacts (lost jobs, reduced hours or being forced onto Job Keeper)
- Social isolation
- Mental health impacts

7. Sydney women who have feelings of security about a comfortable retirement are relying on remaining in a partnership.

“I have started plan for retirement and that plan requires, well is 100% predicated in leaving Sydney. And is also 100% dependent on downsizing and living a simpler, simpler life.”

- Only about half of Sydney Women have employment but those who do want to retire by 65 but may not have enough super to stay.
- More women are saving super and younger women are planning to fund their own retirement.
- Super is up from 39% three years ago to 48%
- Younger Sydney women are aiming to have their own retirement savings with 54% of women under 36 saving.
- The majority say a comfortable retirement is dependent on retiring with their husband or partner or on leaving Sydney to live with a lower cost of living.

Common themes in the voice of Sydney Women

Retirement

"I have started plan for retirement and that plan requires, well is 100% predicated in leaving Sydney. And is also 100% dependent on me downsizing and living a simpler, simpler life."

"I'm so lucky because the landlord keeps the rent down and I'm nervous cause if I moved out of here, I couldn't afford to live on the North Shore."

"We should have planned retirement better, but things just happen "

"My preference would be to retire sooner than 65 because I am quite tired "

"If I can keep the part time work, I am thinking 67 "

"It's laughable to think that you would get a job as an older person. Judy 70, Eastern Suburbs

"Work can be hard for older people because of the technology."

Cost of living

"One of the worst aspects of Sydney is that the cost of living is insane. I feel very lucky that we got into the housing market when we did. I just can't believe the prices. I find that stressful and think my kids will be living with us for a long time." Isabella in her late teens and from the Northwest. "Woman from the Hills District."

I think the image of Sydney, and the people that reside here- the main focus is placed on the better half. "Isabella in her late teens and from the Northwest."

"You can just smell the privilege. Isabella in her late teens and from the Northwest."

"I can't see my daughter being able to move out of a two-bedroom unit unless she gets a big lump of money from me."

I think we are 100 % blessed where we live and that we are both working (Woman from the Shires)

“Even a simple life in Sydney is an expensive life.” Woman from the Inner western

I feel so lucky to live where I live – Cath, Eastern suburbs ,50.I am very lucky my husband earns a good wage as I could never live on what I earn as a part time teachers aid.

Household and Care Responsibilities

“I have been in a default state of distress with the uncertainty of people losing jobs.

“There is a need for income with a decent amount of flexibility to care for children and themselves.”

“Work part time to maintain my health and so that I can care for those I need to.”

Health and Well-being

“I’ve had some health issues and that’s also why I work part time and I haven’t been able to earn the income enabling me to buy a house.”

“I’ve never really felt at home in Sydney so when people ask me where I am from, I say from Adelaide.”

“There are very few middle-aged black women in Sydney – the black sisterhood is very much missing “

“People work longer hours to make more money to live a certain way and everyone does their own thing in their corner. It means we are mentally isolated.”

“I feel so lucky to live where I live – Cath eastern suburbs ,50 I am very lucky my husband earns a good wage as I could never live on what I earn as a part time teacher’s aid”

About Sydney Women's Fund

Established in 2006 as part of Sydney Community Foundation, Sydney Women's Fund (SWF) is a leading charity changing lives for women and girls, growing financial independence and opportunity to determine their own future. SWF has a 10-year history of applying a gender lens to grant making in the Greater Sydney area. Its 'Portrait' research forms an evidence base to inform Government; Private Ancillary Funds; Corporates; and Individuals; on resource gaps in social investment in women and girls and guide their granting to greater equality and impact.

With Sydney Women's Fund support, one social enterprise has become five, providing employment to people in need; a business skills class a retail shop; at-risk youth the first in three generations to finish school; young girls saved from prostitution and empowered to make better life choices; long-term unemployed re-skilled and job ready; domestic violence survivors counselled and supported; refugee women, tortured and traumatised, are gently supported to recovery and a new life with their families in Sydney.

Led and supported by a community of Sydney's leading professional and business women in philanthropy, SWF invests, inspires and supports opportunities for local women and girls to thrive.

About Sydney Community Foundation

Sydney Community Foundation, established in 2004, has over a decade's experience connecting philanthropy with Sydney communities in most need. As small grant specialists, SCF has overseen the distribution of almost \$10 million to innovative, grassroots charities who design and run projects that support people at greatest risk in the Greater Sydney area. Grants ranging between \$5,000 to \$100,000 have supported projects that create belonging; education and employment pathways; build safety and independence; and transform place. As Sydney's only independent community foundation with a local geographic focus, SCF has the granting expertise to guide giving from Private Ancillary Funds; Corporates; and Individuals; to local high-impact projects that are community led, sustainable social investments.

SCF projects recognise the barriers faced by those struggling in our city, alleviating poverty and suffering by encouraging the strengths of the individual in their journey to independence. Supporting people one-by-one, we build stronger communities. SCF is growing its funds under management to create stronger Sydney communities for today and future generations.

Research Background & methodology

- In 2021 Sydney Community Foundation's Sydney Women's Fund (SWF) commissioned Dr. Rebecca Huntley to undertake a baseline survey Portrait of Sydney Women 2018 that would research the hopes fears and dreams of Sydney Women aged 18 – 75 .
- Three years on this research commissioned again by SWF on the status, behaviours, attitudes, and aspirations of women in the greater Sydney area co – incided with the toughest Sydney lockdown caused by the Pandemic.
- The research provides a contemporary public record of how Sydney women felt about changes to their lives caused by living through a global pandemic.
- The research continues to be a key aspect of SWF's advocacy work, informing the whole Sydney community of the current needs of women in Australia's largest and most expensive city.
- SWF intends the benefits of this research is to define and shape their work and have policy impact beyond the organization.

Methodology

- Initial research was an online survey hosted by ORU. The survey fieldwork was conducted by ORU. Data tables were prepared by ORU. The survey was in the field in July 2021.
- The survey fieldwork coincided with the beginning of a COVID-19 lockdown in the Greater Sydney area.
- The target population for this research was the women of Sydney.
- The survey was completed by n=1030 respondents. The effective sample size after weighting is n=1022.
- This data was weighted to ABS for women in Sydney.
- The survey was designed by Rebecca Huntley and Kate Whelan in conjunction with the client. The analysis of this data was conducted by Rebecca Huntley and Kate Whelan.
- SPSS and Excel were used to analyse the results. Open-ended questions were analysed manually.

- This project repeats a survey conducted in June 2018 using the same questionnaire and project design. The sample for the 2018 project was n=1043.
- The second part was 10 depth interviews with Sydney women from across the south (2), north (2), east (2), west (3) and inner city (1). These women ranged in age from late teens to mid-70s, with a mix of employment status.