

VALUES IN CRISIS

VALUES UNDER THE IMPRINT OF
COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE MALDIVES



*Values in Crisis Survey (Wave 1)
Summary Report*



This project is co-funded by
the European Union



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The Coronavirus Disease-19 (COVID-19) pandemic is the most significant health crisis the world has collectively witnessed in recent decades. From the onset of the pandemic, many governments - including the Government of the Maldives - enforced limitations on citizen's mobility and essentially shut down public life. These became known as periods of 'lockdown'. Restrictive measures such as these or declarations of 'states of emergency' had in the past been limited to times of war and unrest. Pandemic containment measures, while necessary to impede the spread of the virus, were highly disruptive to societies. In anticipation of an economic recession as a byproduct of these restrictions, governments provided stimulus mechanisms and aid packages at an unprecedented scale.

Nevertheless, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has also opened up rare opportunities. One such opportunity is in the study of how citizens' moral values may change during times of crises.

The Values in Crisis Survey (VICS) was first initiated in Germany and the UK with the onset of the pandemic in March 2020. The survey questionnaire is originally an instrument developed in English by Prof. Christian Welzel, Prof. Klaus Boehnke, Prof. Jan Delhey, Dr. Franziska Deutsch, Dr. Jan Eichhorn, & Prof. Ulrich Kühnen.¹ The purpose of this survey was to gauge the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on an individual's moral values and social orientations. VICS provides a mechanism through which social cohesion, solidarity within communities, and trust in public institutions can be analyzed. If a shift is identified, then the survey also measures the scale and direction of these changes. A survey of this nature was commissioned in the Maldives by UNDP and the Maldives National University, with the support of the European Union. The VICS is designed as a panel study that surveys the same people at different stages of the COVID-19 pandemic:

Wave 1: Amidst the Crisis (in the middle of the pandemic)

Wave 2: End at Sight (shortly after the pandemic ceases)

Wave 3: After Recovery (when things return to normal)

Wave 1 of the survey was carried out as an online questionnaire from 25 May to 3 June 2020. This time frame corresponded with the sixth week of lockdown in the Greater Male' area and the restriction of movement between islands across the country. The sample used for the VICS is a multi-clustered **representative random sample** from **urban** and **rural** communities of the Maldives, stratified into gender and age groups. A total of 1179 prospective participants were contacted and invited to participate. A **response rate of 87%** was achieved with **1026** completed usable questionnaires collected (433 from urban clusters and 593 from the rural clusters).

This report summarizes the key findings from Wave 1 of VICS in the Maldives. The descriptive statistics of all survey questions can be found at the project [web-page](#) of The Maldives National University.

¹More information here: <https://wapor.org/values-in-crisis-a-crisis-of-values-moral-values-under-the-imprint-of-the-corona-pandemic/>

COVID-19 IN THE MALDIVES

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted societies all over the world, including in the Maldives. At the time of the development of this report, the number of COVID-19 cases in the Maldives continues to rise. Since the first reported case in early March 2020, the virus has consistently threatened the health of the country's population of approximately 507,660 citizens, including 100,000 migrant workers (World Bank, 2020).

The government of the Maldives introduced early preventative interventions (Suzana et al., 2020) and enforced measures to control the spread of the virus including closing the country's borders, restricting island to island travel, and closing schools and offices (MED 2020; Moosa & Usman, 2020). However, lockdown measures have been gradually eased since July 2020. The government continues to lessen restrictive measures through ensuring contact tracing and mandating face masks to be worn by all in public places, while continuing to uphold restrictions on large gatherings and partial curfews in the Greater Male' area.

The closure of the country's borders crippled the Maldivian tourism sector and continues to adversely impact employment throughout the country (MED 2020). With a significant proportion of the population depending on the tourism sector for their livelihoods, about 8000 of the local population were left without a job at the onset of the pandemic (World Bank 2020). The fear of the spread of COVID-19, coupled with financial uncertainties, is also believed to be responsible for higher levels of mental distress across the country.

Against this background, this Values in Crisis Survey explores the socioeconomic experiences, social value orientations, and various attitudes of Maldivian society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

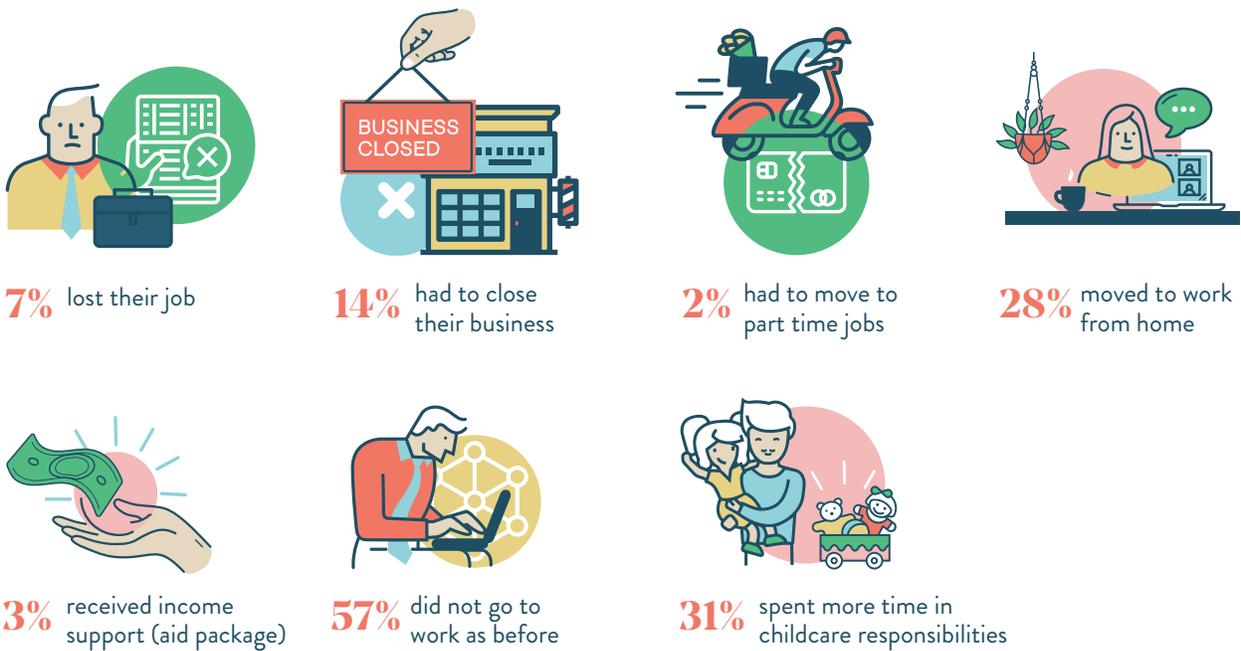
SOCIOECONOMIC EXPERIENCES DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE MALDIVES

The pandemic profoundly impacted the way people work in the Maldives, with potential implications for employees' health, well-being, and social perceptions.

HEALTH AND ECONOMIC EXPERIENCE

At the early stages of the pandemic in May 2020, the findings of VICS show that the fear of the pandemic - and how this would potentially create adverse economic and health impacts - were felt more significantly than its actual impact. As per the findings, many people were psychologically affected by the crisis. There also was a significant association with psychological well-being and importance given to religion such that more importance given to religion corresponded to a higher well-being score.

VALUES IN CRISIS SURVEY (WAVE 1)



Participants were given a set of economic experiences and asked whether they were affected by these scenarios during the crisis to date.

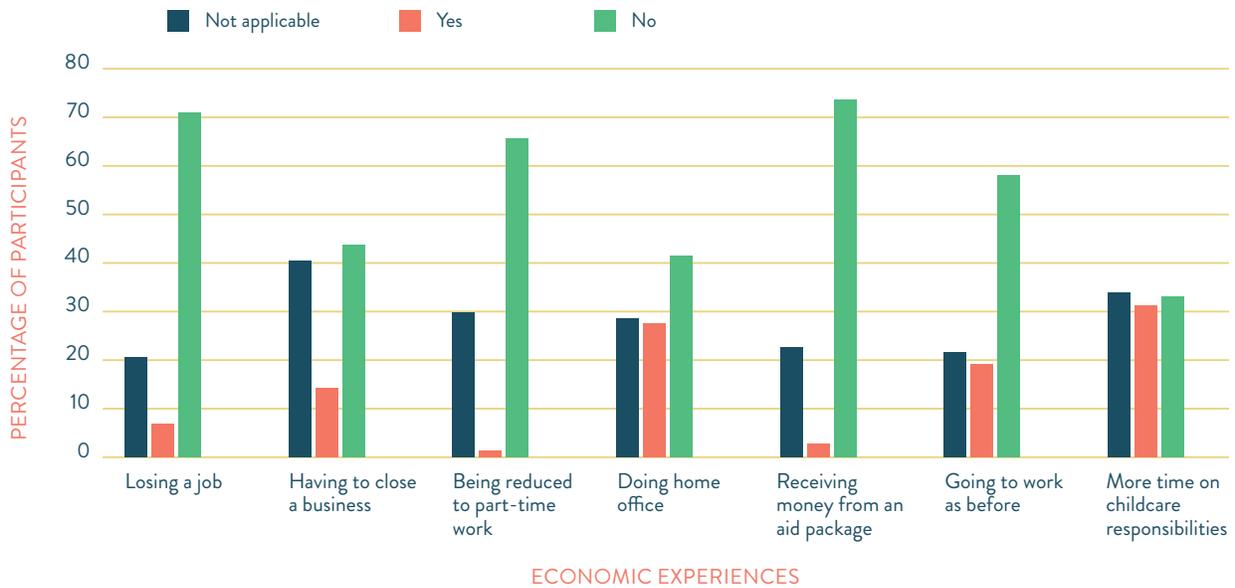


Figure 1. Economic experience in the time of the pandemic

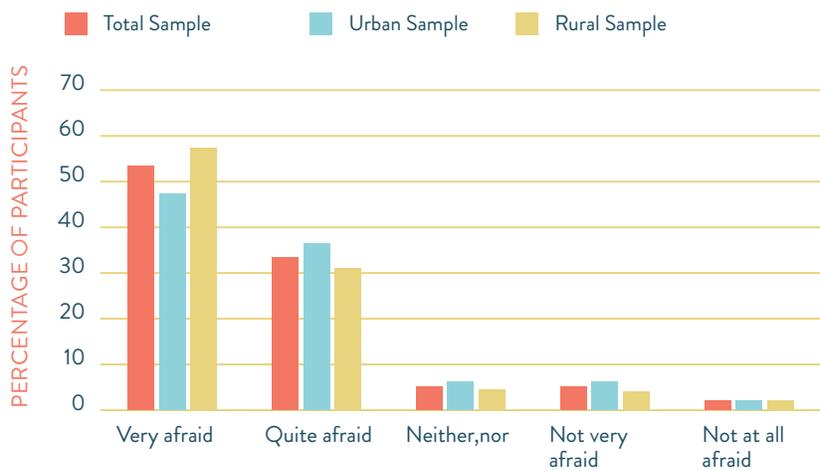
87% reported fear of suffering from an economic recession



54% reported as being very afraid

33% reported as being quite afraid

Participants were asked how afraid they were for themselves or their loved ones due to an economic recession following the coronavirus crisis.



LEVEL OF FEAR FOR OWN OR LOVED ONES SUFFERING FROM AN ECONOMIC RECESSION FOLLOWING THE CORONA CRISIS

Figure 2. Fear of suffering from an economic recession following the corona crisis

PERCEPTION ON THE REALITY OF THE PANDEMIC

While the majority of participants (88%) believed the pandemic to be a lived reality, it is also significant that 1 in 11 people believed that the various information on social media about the pandemic to be a hoax. Those who believed in hoaxes that challenged how real the pandemic was were more often from rural communities. This discrepancy between the urban and rural communities could be due to the fact that the spread of the virus was largely in the urban capital and not in any of the rural islands at the time of questioning (WHO 2020; Moosa et al 2020). These findings highlight the importance of information dissemination relating to the pandemic.

PERCEPTION ON SOLIDARITY DURING THE PANDEMIC

The majority of the participants relayed that they felt that most people in the country were exercising quite improper (43%) or very improper (18%) behavior under the imprint of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, upon reflecting on their own experiences and encounters, most participants reported a greater sense of solidarity than hostility. Solidarity in times of emergency involves forming a social identity in a common crisis (Drury, 2018). Therefore, it is inevitable that people may construct a common social identity during a crisis (Norris & Alegria, 2008).

VALUES IN CRISIS SURVEY (WAVE 1)

61% perceived most people as having improper behavior

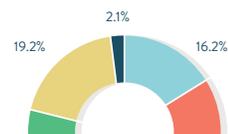
Participants were asked how properly they thought most people in the country behaved under the imprint of the crisis.



HOW PROPERLY DO YOU THINK MOST PEOPLE IN OUR COUNTRY ARE BEHAVING UNDER THE IMPRINT OF THE CORONA CRISIS?

- Very Improper
- Quite Improper
- Quite Proper
- Very Proper

URBAN



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