

The impact of COVID-19 on the Australian Visual Arts and Craft Sector

Discussion Paper
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Visual Arts Work

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Introduction

This paper assesses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Australian visual arts sector. We base our analysis on the responses by over 1,500 visual artists and arts workers to a survey conducted by the National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA). We employ this survey to discover how the pandemic influenced both the incomes and mental health of artists and arts workers and the correlation between incomes and mental health.

Key findings include:

- (i) There has been a significant negative impact on both incomes and the mental health of artists and arts workers.
- (ii) Reduced hours of work and loss of contracted work due to the pandemic were both related to declines in income and mental health outcomes for all artists and arts workers.
- (iii) Half of the artist respondents to the NAVA survey reported a significant or extreme change in income in 2020-21 compared to pre-COVID times. However, only a small percentage (3.6%) applied for and received JobSeeker payments and 14.2% of the sample worked for an employer who applied for and received JobKeeper payments.
- (iv) The severity of the impacts vary by gender, age and the availability of Australian Government support programs.
- (v) In terms of mental health impacts, younger artists (<30), female artists and arts workers, artists living in Victoria and those that applied for and received JobSeeker were more likely to experience a significant or extreme impact, compared to no or little impact.
- (vi) Artists and artswokers reported much higher levels of housing stress (at approximately 30%) than the general population pre-COVID.
- (vii) Younger artists as well as those who identified their careers as combining arts practice and arts work, were affected more significantly in terms of both housing stress and mental health issues.
- (viii) Some artists were able to shift to increasing their on-line profiles. Further, those artists able to take advantage of visual arts teaching and learning opportunities experienced a positive influence on both their incomes and mental health.

The precarious nature of work as an artist in the visual arts and craft sector was well known prior to the pandemic. Those who work in the sector tend to hold multiple jobs and/or be self-employed with few to no employees in their arts practice. Thus, access to paid time off work or continuing income in case of illness is minimal. Earnings for many self-employed Australians across the workforce are also known to be low and unstable. For example, median earnings for part-time self-employed individuals with no employees were around

60% lower than for full-time paid employees in 2017 (Carney & Stanford, 2018). Further, working conditions and the nature of precarious work itself are also connected to potentially detrimental health and wellbeing outcomes in general (Tuisku et al., 2016). The visual arts and craft industries are supported by artists and arts workers who undertake several different roles within the sector. However, there is little focused research on the economic conditions these workers face (Throsby and Petetskaya 2017).

Government public health measures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted the visual arts and craft sector. During lockdowns, art galleries and museums across the country were forced to close and on re-opening were severely restricted by social distancing and capacity restrictions. Art exhibitions, programs and events, and festivals were cancelled, postponed or re-designed. In this paper we empirically investigate the impact of COVID-19 on the visual arts and craft sector using data collected from artists and arts workers through an online survey undertaken by the National Association of the Visual Arts (NAVA) in August – September 2021. The survey was designed to collect information about the unique pressures that visual artists and art workers experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Results of similar surveys in other countries show lockdowns also had profound effects on arts professionals (Spiro et al. 2021).

For context, Australia was one of the few countries that was able to bring community acquired COVID-19 cases down to zero by using testing, contact tracing, border closures and lockdowns early on in the pandemic. However, this resulted in borders closing with international travel being almost impossible and domestic travel being severely limited. In March 2020, state governments began to close “non-essential” services and all Australians could only leave their homes for a limited number of reasons (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021). In April 2020, cases across Australia began to fall and at this time, states and territories began adopting their own approaches to the pandemic, with some easing restrictions faster than others and endorsing future localised responses to any outbreaks. Additional waves of COVID-19 led to some states experiencing harsher restrictions than others. In May 2020, breaches in hotel quarantine led to a second strict lockdown in Victoria from July to November 2020. The emergence of the Delta variant also saw long lockdowns in the second half of 2021 in New South Wales, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory, whereas in other states and territories only short lockdowns were required. Throughout 2020-2021, while maintaining strict border entries, Western Australia had some of the most relaxed restrictions in the country. At the time of writing this paper in August 2022, new COVID-19 strains and waves have arrived across the country. Further, artists and arts workers continue to be affected by cancellations for public events and workshops, putting additional economic and mental health strains on them.

Main Federal Government Policy Measures

Due to large scale business closures towards the end of March 2020, Australia saw a considerable spike in unemployment and underemployment. This was particularly the case for the arts, and food and retail sectors (Raynor and Panza 2021). The Australian Government responded by rolling out a succession of economic response packages that were intended to support households and business viability. In this section we describe two

major policies: changes to the *JobSeeker* payments to support social welfare recipients, and the introduction of *JobKeeper* payments that aimed to help employers keep their staff on payroll. Many people began to experience housing insecurity during this time, so we also discuss policy interventions that were designed to alleviate housing stress.

i. *JobSeeker*

The *JobSeeker* Payment is the primary income support payment paid to working-age Australians who are looking for work or are earning under the income threshold¹. Receipt of this payment is typically subject to asset tests and mutual obligation requirements². In response to COVID-19, the government made several temporary changes to these settings. The partner income threshold and taper rate were raised, and the liquid assets waiting period was suspended. Further, the government introduced a Coronavirus Supplement of \$550 per fortnight in April 2020, which was paid to all *JobSeeker* recipients, regardless of how they had come to be receiving the payments. The Coronavirus Supplement was cut to \$250 per fortnight at the end of September, and to \$150 from January 2021. At the end of March 2021, the supplement and other temporary changes ceased altogether. However, a permanent increase of \$50 per fortnight was introduced.

ii. *JobKeeper*

The *JobKeeper* payment was introduced by the Australian Government in 2020 and paid to eligible businesses and not-for-profit organisations to support their employees so that they may continue to trade and keep their employees during the pandemic. Businesses were eligible for *JobKeeper* if their turnover was less than \$1 billion and, due to the pandemic, had an estimated decline of at least 30% or above \$1 billion with an estimated decline of at least 50%. Initially, the payment amount was set at \$1,500/fortnight. Eligible organisations had to pay their employees the full amount regardless of what their usual salary would have been. For some employees, particularly those working part time, this meant a sudden increase in their take-home wage. Changes to the payment amount were made in September 2020 and January 2021, and eligibility criteria changed from 'estimated decline' to 'showing an actual decline' in turnover. The program ended in March 2021. In response to further strict lockdowns in some states, the government introduced COVID-19 disaster payments for those who lost work due to stay-at-home restrictions from June – mid October 2021.

iii. Housing assistance

In response to the significant increase in tenants who were at risk of or unable to pay their rent, the Australian Government announced a six-month moratorium on evictions on 29 March 2020. Some states, such as Victoria, also introduced some financial assistance for tenants in the form of one-off grants. Additionally, some banks in Australia put in place

¹ Pre-COVID-19 the amount of income a person could earn before their payment rate was reduced was \$106 per fortnight

² Mutual obligations include looking for work or engaging in activities that that will assist with finding work in the future.

short-term measures to assist customers who were having trouble making their mortgage payments.

The Survey and Data

This 2021 NAVA survey, focusing on COVID-19 impacts, was open to artists³, arts workers⁴ and arts managers working in the visual arts and craft sector. In this paper we concentrate on the responses from artists and arts workers. At the time the data was collected, New South Wales, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory were under severe lockdown conditions. Other jurisdictions had closed their borders to these states and territories, making domestic travel virtually impossible for most Australians. International borders were also effectively closed. The Oxford Stringency Index is a composite measure of the relative strictness of government lockdowns based on indicators including school closures, workplace closures, and travel bans, ranging in value from 0 to 100 (strictest)⁵. Using this rating we find that Australia was much more affected by COVID-19 restrictions than either the UK or US. Between 26 August – 5 September 2021, Australia had a rating of 71.76 compared to 43.98 for the UK and 56.02-52.30 for the US.

NAVA's survey was designed to collect information about the unique pressures that artists and arts workers in the visual arts sector faced during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia. The survey asked respondents in each group about economic impacts, including changes to income, impacts on income, and government supports and health impacts including mental health and housing stress experience. Artists were also asked about the impact on their arts practice. 1,047 responses were collected from visual artists and 499 responses from arts workers in the visual arts sector. 417 (40%) of those who responded as visual artists also responded as arts workers, reflecting the often hybrid and expanded nature of artists' practices and careers.

i. Impacts on artists

Summary statistics for artists are reported in Table 1. 75% of respondents for artists were female with an average age of 52. Over 65% of the sample lived in the two most populous states, New South Wales and Victoria. The mean income as a visual artist in 2020-21 was \$16,066 and the median income was \$7,414 with only around 30% earning more than 50% of their income as a visual artist during 2020-21. The main sources of income as a visual artist were sales (around 44%), commissions (17%), workshop fees, talks and other appearances (10%), salary (7%) and grant income (7%).

Australian economist David Throsby and his colleagues have conducted a survey of professional artists in all art forms six times since 1989. In the most recent survey (Throsby and Petetskaya 2017), 54% of visual artists and 58% of craft practitioners identified as female. The average age was 52. The mean income from creative sources (i.e. from their

³ Types of visual artists included painting/drawing/printmaking; sculpture/installation; craft/object; photography/video/sound/media; performance; socially engaged/community and street art/public art

⁴ Types of visual arts workers included administration/management; marketing; production/installation; curatorial/producer/exhibition design; writing/publishing; educator/academic/teacher/public programming; cultural advisor; community worker; conservator/registrar; front of house/invigilation/visitor services

⁵ See <https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/research/research-projects/COVID-19-19-government-response-tracker>

principal artistic occupation⁶) in 2014-2015 financial year in 2021 dollars was \$19,784 for visual artists and \$20,112 for craft practitioners. The corresponding median incomes in 2021 dollars were \$5,684 and \$7,651. Thus, while the average age and mean income across the two surveys are similar, the NAVA respondents reported lower mean incomes and the percentage of the sample that identified as women is higher in the NAVA survey. To participate in the Throsby and Petetskaya (2017) survey, respondents were required to be “working at a level and with a degree of commitment appropriate to the norms for professional recognition in their particular artform” (Throsby and Petetskaya 2017, p. 18), whereas the online survey distributed by NAVA was based on respondents self-selecting as a visual artist. Further, there is evidence that women are more likely to self-select to participate in online surveys (Smith 2008), which may explain the higher percentage of the sample that identified as women in the NAVA survey.

Half of the artist respondents to the NAVA survey reported a significant or extreme change in income in 2020-21 compared to pre-COVID times. A small percentage (3.6%) applied for and received *JobSeeker* payments and 14.2% of the sample worked for an employer who applied for and received *JobKeeper* payments. As outlined previously in this paper, there were specific eligibility criteria associated with these payments, so not all artists and arts workers were eligible to apply for them. The main impacts on artist income included reduced ability to sell (62%) and cancellation or postponement of contracted or commissioned work (52.8%). The main impacts on the arts practices were reduced ability to sell (77.7%), COVID-19 travel restrictions (71.3%), and reduced opportunities for professional development (51.9%). Over one third (34%) of the sample developed online methods to present work, which suggests artists were active in developing new ways to connect with audiences and sell their work.

Questions in the survey about health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic included impacts on mental health and housing stress⁷. Almost half of the artist respondents (48.3%) experienced either a significant or extreme impact on their mental health compared to pre-COVID times, with around 10% experiencing an extreme impact. This is a similar finding to a survey of Australians aged over 18 conducted in August 2021 by Biddle and Gray (2021) who found 10.1% had levels of psychological distress that would identify them as being at risk of a serious mental health issue (measured using the Kessler Psychological Distress scale)⁸. It is also similar to the recent finding in the Australian Census of Population and Housing (2021) conducted in August 2021 where 10.3% aged 15 and over responded to having been told by a doctor or nurse that they have a mental health condition (depression or anxiety)⁹. Further, in the NAVA survey almost one third (31.5%) of the artist sample experienced housing stress. This is much higher than the percentage found by Biddle and Gray (2020) in an earlier survey

⁶ Principal artistic occupations are grouped into eight occupational classifications: writers; visual artists; craft practitioners; actors and directors; dancers and choreographers; musicians and singers; composers, songwriters and arrangers; community cultural development artists see Throsby and Petetskaya (2017, p. 6).

⁷ Housing stress is defined as more than 30% of income dedicated to housing costs.

⁸ The Kessler Psychological Distress scale is a 10-item questionnaire and is based on questions about anxiety and depressive symptoms that a person has experienced in the most recent 4-week period.

⁹ How the Covid-19 pandemic specifically affected the mental health of many working in the arts has been discussed by Flore, Gaylor and Hendry (2021).

of Australians aged over 18 between April and May 2020, where the proportion of Australians reporting that they had not been able to pay their mortgage or rent on time increased from 6.9% in April to 15.1% in May.

ii. Impacts on arts workers

Table 2 reports the summary statistics for arts workers in the visual arts and craft sector. Over 74% of the respondents were female with an average age of 49. Over 64% of the respondents lived in the two most populous states, New South Wales and Victoria. The mean income as an arts worker in 2020-21 was \$32,344 and the median income was \$19,406. Over 60% earned more than 50% of their income as an arts worker during 2020-21. The most common type of arts work selected for those who were arts workers only was administration/management, whereas for those who were also visual artists it was educator/academic/teacher/public programming.

There is very little other research on arts workers in the visual arts and craft sector to compare this data with. However, MacNeill et al (2022) define this group by nominating occupational categories from the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO) at the six-digit level code. Using this classification and data from the 2018-19 Australian Tax Office (ATO), 58% are female and in 2021 dollars the mean and median salary or wages incomes are \$55,971 and \$52,000 respectively. The data from the NAVA survey has a higher female representation and markedly lower mean and median incomes from arts work in the visual arts and craft sector. These differences may partly be explained by how arts workers are defined, since the determination of occupational category in the 2018-19 ATO data is based on the occupation in which the taxpayer receives the greatest income, whereas the NAVA survey allows respondents to self-select their main occupation. Another contributing factor maybe that the ATO data reports on income from all sources whereas the NAVA survey reported on income in their capacity as a visual artist.

Over 40% (41.1%) of arts worker respondents reported a significant or extreme change in income in 2020-21 compared to pre-COVID-19 times. Almost 40% of respondents experienced a loss of contracted work and 46% experienced a reduction in work hours. A small percentage (3.4%) applied for and received *JobSeeker* payments and 17.2% of the sample worked for an employer who applied for and received *JobKeeper* payments. As was found for visual artists, over 50% of respondents (50.9%) experienced either a significant or extreme impact on their mental health with 10% experiencing an extreme impact, similar to Biddle and Gray's (2021) survey of the general Australian population and the Australian Census of Population and Housing (2021). Further, around one third (31.8%) also experienced housing stress – again, a much higher rate than Biddle and Gray (2020) found in the general Australian population pre-COVID-19.

Of note, Biddle and Gray (2021) found that those who lived in Sydney and Melbourne tended to experience a worsening in mental health outcomes in August 2021 compared to the rest of Australia, and that psychological distress in August 2021 was higher for those aged 18-44 when compared to February 2017 but had improved for those aged 55 years and over. The recent Australian Census of Population and Housing (2021) also found that those aged 15-49 were more likely to have reported having a mental health condition (10.9%) than

those who were aged over 50 (9.4%). Similar findings were found for both visual artists and arts workers in the NAVA survey, with those under 40 in both groups having both higher extreme and significant impacts, compared to no or little impact. Artists and arts workers in Victoria reported the highest extreme impact. When the visual arts workers were separated into two groups, that is those who were also artists and those who were not, we found that those who were both artists and arts workers were most affected.

Table 1: Summary Statistics Artists

Variables		% or \$
Significant/extreme change in income in 2020-21		50.0
Significant/extreme mental health impact		48.3
Gender	Non-binary	3.1
	Female	74.9
	Male	22.0
Age	< 30	7.6
	30-50 years	34.0
	50-70 years	50.1
	70+	8.3
Residential location	Victoria	33.4
	New South Wales	34.9
	Western Australia	5.9
	Queensland	11.0
	South Australia	5.6
	Rest of Australia	9.2
Mean income		\$16,066
Median income		\$7,416
>50% income derived from work as artist		30.7
Sources of artist income	Sales	51
	Commissions	19.5
	Workshop fees	12.0
	Salary	8.6
	Grant income	8.1
Visual arts worker		39.8
JobSeeker	Applied & received	3.6

	Applied & ineligible	20.6
	Did not apply	28.7
	Not applicable	47.1
<i>JobKeeper</i>	Employer applied & received	14.2
	Employer applied & ineligible	3.0
	Employer did not apply	23.1
	Not applicable	59.7
Reduced hours for arts practice		35.3
Reduced ability to sell		62.0
Delayed artist payments		13.3
Cancellation or postponement contracted or commissioned work		52.8
Reduced ability to exhibit		77.7
Reduced professional development		51.9
Loss of supports from arts organisations		26.2
COVID-19 travel restrictions		71.3
Developed online methods to present work		34.0
Created digital artwork		17.8
Undertook visual arts learning opportunities		23.7
Undertook visual arts teaching opportunities		12.6
Experienced housing stress		31.5
Number of observations		1,047

Table 2: Summary Statistics Arts Worker

Variables		% or \$
Significant/extreme change in income in 2021		41.1
Significant/extreme mental health impact		50.9
Gender	Non-binary	3.2
	Female	74.3
	Male	22.4
Age	< 30	8.8
	30-50 years	41.9
	50-70 years	46.3
	70+	7.6
Residential location	Victoria	26.1
	New South Wales	38.3
	Western Australia	7.8
	Queensland	12.2
	South Australia	7.4
	Rest of Australia	8.2
Mean income		\$32,344
Median income		\$19,406
>50% income derived from work as arts worker		61.1
JobSeeker	Applied & received	3.4
	Applied & ineligible	21.4
	Did not apply	26.1
	Not applicable	49.1
JobKeeper	Employer applied & received	17.2
	Employer applied & ineligible	3.0
	Employer did not apply	27.7
	Not applicable	52.1
Loss of contracted work		39.3
Reduction in work hours		46.3
Experienced housing stress		31.9
Number of Observations		499

Regression Results

We use a logistic regression analysis to empirically investigate the characteristics and circumstances of individual visual artists and visual arts workers associated with two outcome variables:¹⁰

(i) experiencing a significant or extreme change in their income compared to pre-COVID-19 times; and

(ii) experiencing a significant or extreme change in their mental health compared to pre-COVID-19 times.

We estimate four logit regressions. Thus, for each outcome variable we estimate a regression for visual artists and for visual arts workers. The explanatory variables used in the regressions for visual artists for outcome variable (i) include indicator variables to account for demographic information including: gender (non-binary/female/male), age (<30/30-50/50-70/70+), residential location (Victoria/New South Wales/Western Australia/ Queensland /South Australia/rest of Australia). Many artists hold multiple jobs for a variety of reasons (Throsby and Petetskaya 2017). To account for heterogeneity among artists and their art practice, we include an indicator that takes a value 1 when more than 50% of their income is derived from work as an artist and 0 otherwise. We also include an indicator variable that takes the value 1 if they are also a visual arts worker and 0 otherwise. To measure access to government support we included indicator variables for *JobSeeker* and *JobKeeper* payments (applied and received, applied and ineligible, did not apply and not applicable). Also included are indicator variables to allow for the potential impacts on their arts practice during 2020-21 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. These took the value 1 if the impact occurred and 0 otherwise. Potential negative impacts included reduced hours for arts practice due to increase income generation through non-arts employment; reduced ability to sell work; delayed artist payments; cancellation or postponement of contracted or commissioned work; reduced ability to exhibit; reduced professional development; loss of supports from arts organisations (such as studio space) and COVID-19 travel restrictions. Potential positive or unexpected impacts included developed online methods to present work; created digital art work; undertook visual arts learning opportunities and undertook visual arts teaching opportunities. The same explanatory variables were included for outcome variable (ii) and also included whether they experienced housing stress during 2020-21.

The explanatory variables used in the regressions for visual arts workers for outcome variable (i) include the demographic variables gender, age and residential location as described above. Also included was an indicator variable that took the value 1 if more than 50% income was derived from work as an arts worker and 0 otherwise. As above, indicator variables were included for *JobSeeker* and *JobKeeper* payments. Indicator variables are included to account for potential impacts on their arts work during 2020-21 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. These included: loss of contracted work supports and reduction in work

¹⁰ A logistic or logit regression allows the estimation of a regression with a binary dependent variable. One aspect of this method is the need to apply a transformation of the estimated coefficients to obtain the marginal effects. (e.g., Chapter 14, in Wooldridge et al 2020).

hours. The same explanatory variables were included for outcome variable (ii) and in addition also included whether they experienced housing stress during 2020-21. All regressions estimated used the logit specification.

The average marginal effects are reported in Tables 3 and 4. Figures 1 and 2 plot the estimated coefficients of the logit regressions for both outcome variables for visual artists and arts workers respectively, indicating those characteristics and circumstances of individuals that are associated with each outcome variable.

For visual artists, Figure 1 and Table 3 highlight that those aged 30-70+ and those that applied and received JobSeeker payments were more likely to have experienced a significant or extreme fall in income in 2020-2021 compared to pre-COVID-19. In addition, those artists who received greater than 50% of their income derived from work as an artist were also more likely to experience a significant or extreme fall in income in 2020-2021 compared to pre-COVID-19, which suggests that those artists who were more reliant on income as a visual artist were worse affected. The impacts on arts practice that were associated with a significant or extreme fall in income in 2020-2021 compared to pre COVID-19 included reduced hours for arts practice, reduced ability to sell, cancellation or postponement of contacted or commissioned work and COVID-19 travel restrictions. However, those living in Western Australia and those able to undertake visual arts teaching opportunities were less likely to experience a significant or extreme fall in income. This can perhaps be explained by the far lighter restrictions in that state throughout most of the pandemic. For the mental health impacts outcome variable, those visual artists who identified as female, working as a visual arts worker, and those who applied for and received *JobSeeker* payments were more likely to experience a significant or extreme impact. Women with childcare obligations saw a substantial and unequal increase in unpaid work because of the restrictions in place due to COVID-19 and this may account for impacts on mental health (Johnston et al. 2020). Impacts on arts practice that were associated with a significant or extreme mental health impact included reduced ability to sell, delayed payments and loss of supports from arts organisations such as studio space.

As discussed earlier in this paper, one third of visual artists were found to have experienced housing stress. The results here indicate that this is associated with a higher likelihood of a significant or extreme mental health impact. Those in the younger age group (<30) were also more likely to experience a significant or extreme impact on their mental health. However, those living in Western Australia or South Australia were less likely to experience a significant or extreme impact on their mental health. However, developing online methods to present work and undertaking visual arts teaching opportunities seemed to offer some protection against a significant or extreme impact on mental health.

Table 3: Average Marginal Effects for Visual Artists (positive indicates a decline)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Decline in Income</i>	<i>Decline in Mental Health</i>
Non-binary	0.0229	0.139

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Decline in Income</i>	<i>Decline in Mental Health</i>
Female	0.0167	0.0919^{***}
30-50 years	0.130^{**}	-0.142^{**}
50-70 years	0.233^{***}	-0.276^{***}
70+	0.239^{***}	-0.377^{***}
Victoria	-0.00545	0.0815
New South Wales	0.00782	-0.0755
Western Australia	-0.195^{***}	-0.163^{**}
Queensland	-0.0496	-0.0813
South Australia	-0.115	-0.132[*]
>50% income is derived from work as an artist	0.113^{***}	0.0245
Visual arts worker	0.0453	0.0644^{**}
Applied & received <i>JobSeeker</i>	0.247^{***}	0.233^{***}
Applied & ineligible <i>JobSeeker</i>	0.0607	0.0143
Did not apply <i>JobSeeker</i>	-0.0381	0.00586
Employer Applied & received <i>JobKeeper</i>	0.0155	-0.00380
Employer Applied & ineligible <i>JobKeeper</i>	0.0374	-0.0673
Employer did not apply <i>JobKeeper</i>	-0.00154	0.0472
Reduced hours for arts practice	0.104^{***}	0.0305
Reduced ability to sell	0.158^{***}	0.0809^{**}
Delayed artist payments	0.0750[*]	0.0758 [*]
Cancellation or postponement contracted or commissioned work	0.175^{***}	0.00787
Reduced ability to exhibit	0.0609	0.0174
Reduced professional development	0.0448	0.0463
Loss of supports from arts organisations	0.0401	0.0915^{**}
COVID-19 travel restrictions	0.0791^{**}	0.0560
Developed online methods to present work	-0.0473	-0.0555 [*]

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Decline in Income</i>	<i>Decline in Mental Health</i>
Created digital artwork	-0.0582	0.00152
Undertook visual arts learning opportunities	0.0213	-0.0523
Undertook visual arts teaching opportunities	-0.0706*	-0.0956**
Experienced housing stress		0.132***
N	1,047	1,047

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Average marginal effects reported. For factor levels this is the discrete change from the base level.

Figure 1. Estimated Coefficients for Visual Artists

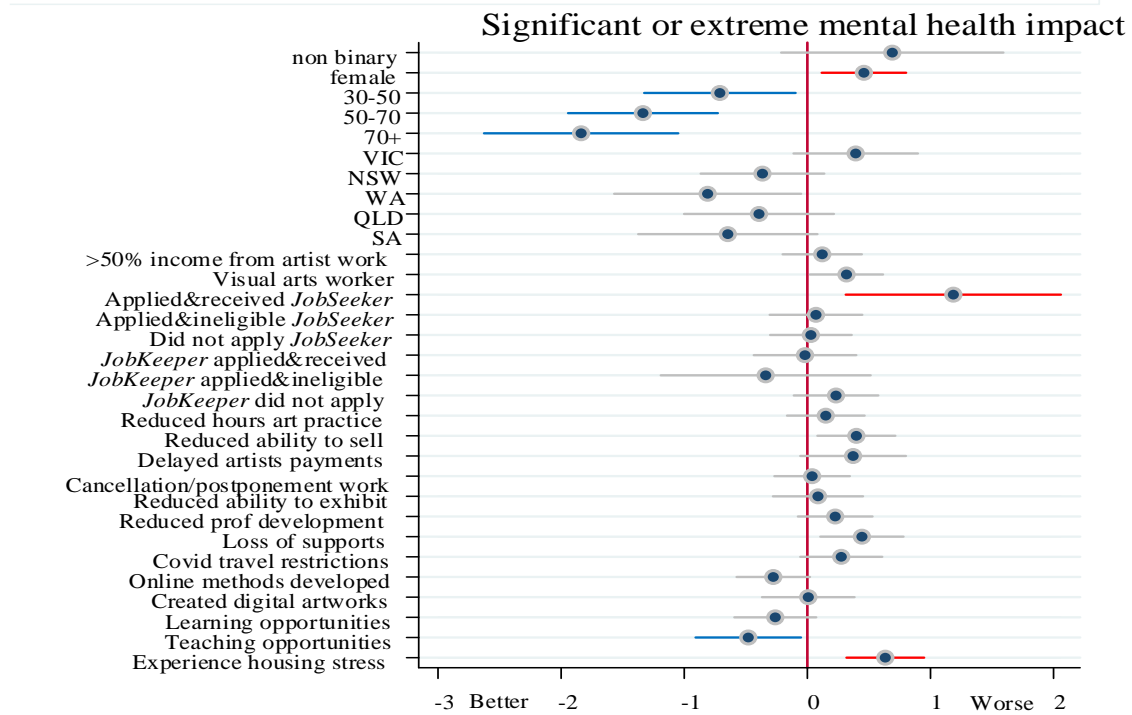
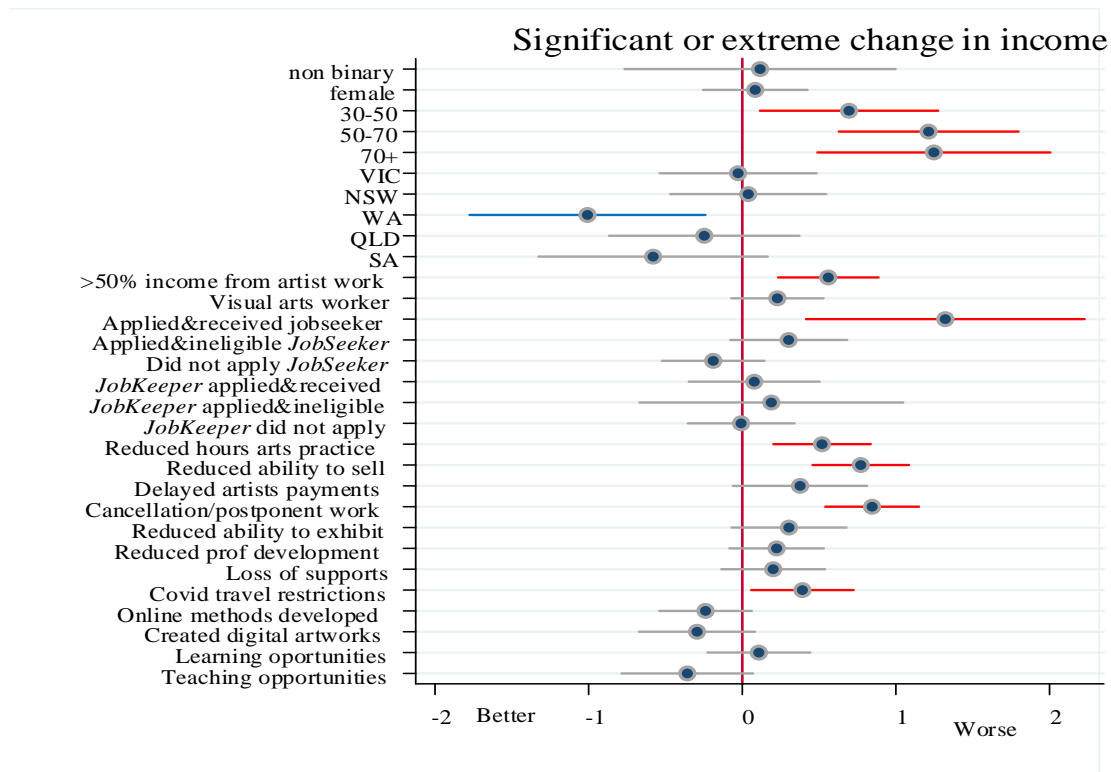


Figure 2 and Table 4 highlight that for those working as an arts worker, those that applied and received JobSeeker payments or applied but were ineligible for JobSeeker payments were more likely to experience a significant or extreme fall in income in 2020-2021. This was also the case for those that experienced reduced work hours and loss of contracted work.

Those aged over 50 however, were less likely to experience a significant or extreme fall in income in 2020-2021.

Those that worked as visual arts workers were more likely to experience significant or extreme impacts on their mental health if they experienced reduced work hours, loss of contracted work, applied for and received JobKeeper and experienced housing stress. However, those aged over 50 were less likely to experience significant or extreme mental health impacts.

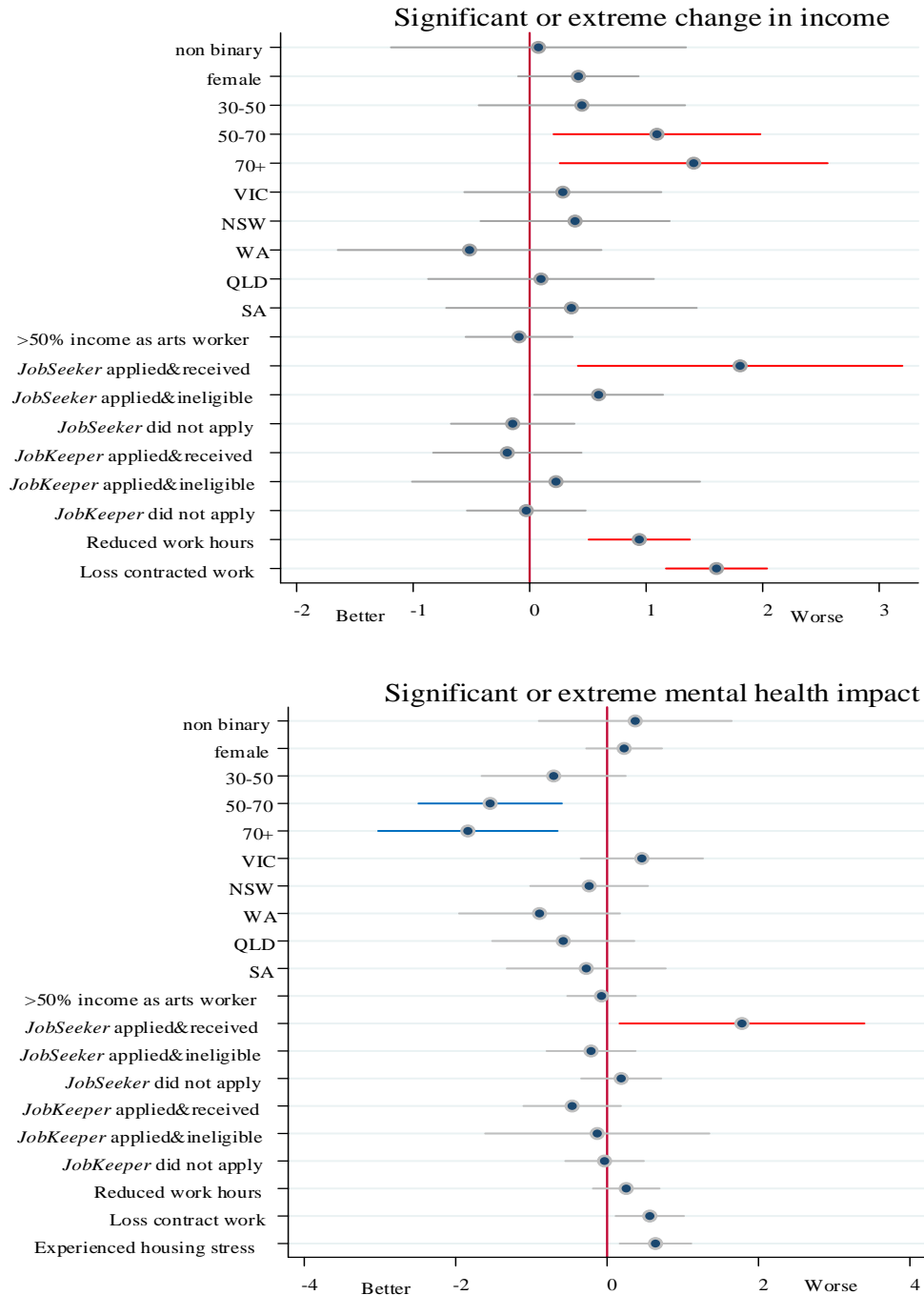
Table 4: Average Marginal Effects for Visual Arts Workers (positive indicates a decline)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Decline in Income</i>	<i>Decline in Mental Health</i>
Non-binary	0.0130	0.0784
Female	0.0737	0.0475
30-50 years	0.0734	-0.135
50-70 years	0.190^{***}	-0.321^{***}
70+	0.249^{**}	-0.384^{***}
Victoria	0.0507	0.0967
New South Wales	0.0699	-0.0514
Western Australia	-0.0854	-0.190 [*]
Queensland	0.0171	-0.125
South Australia	0.0642	-0.0596
Reduction in work hours	0.178^{***}	0.0536
Loss of contracted work	0.330^{***}	0.120^{**}
Applied & received <i>JobSeeker</i>	0.336^{***}	0.322^{***}
Applied & ineligible <i>JobSeeker</i>	0.112^{**}	-0.0451
Did not apply <i>JobSeeker</i>	-0.0265	0.0397
Employer Applied & received <i>JobKeeper</i>	-0.0340	-0.0962
Employer Applied & ineligible <i>JobKeeper</i>	0.0411	-0.0272
Employer did not apply <i>JobKeeper</i>	-0.00513	-0.00700
>50% income is derived from work as arts worker	-0.0163	-0.0155
Experienced housing stress		0.138^{***}

N	499	417
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* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Average marginal effects reported. For factor levels this is the discrete change from the base level.

Figure 2. Estimated Coefficients for Visual Arts Workers



Discussion

In this paper we assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the visual arts sector based on the responses by over 1,500 visual artists and arts workers to a survey conducted by

NAVA in August-September 2021. We do this by estimating a set of four logit regressions to determine the impact on income and mental health for both artists and arts workers and the factors associated with these impacts.

The survey clearly demonstrates a significant and negative impact on both incomes and the mental health of artists and arts workers. Reduced hours of work and loss of contracted work due to the pandemic were both related to declines in income and mental health outcomes for all artists and arts workers. One significant finding of this paper is that younger artists who experienced housing stress were most likely to report a significant or extreme decline in mental health. This was also the case for younger artists who combined their practice with arts work. Younger people are more likely to be reliant on a stream of income for their housing expenses, which may explain both the housing stress and subsequent decline in mental health.

We also find that given other factors accounted for, a greater decline in mental health outcomes was observed for artists that identify as female. Unfortunately, since the childcare obligations of the respondents was not included in the questionnaire, further investigation is warranted to determine the degree to which this may be a contributing factor to decline in mental health.

The COVID-19 pandemic created severe travel and transport restrictions that reduced the ability for artists to sell their work. These restrictions and the loss in income from potential art purchasers resulted in limiting current sales, future sales and contract work. However, not all impacts were universally negative for artists. Some shifted to more online presence to present and sell their work. Those able to take advantage of visual arts teaching and learning opportunities experienced a positive influence on both their incomes and mental health.

For arts workers, reduced hours and loss of contracted work were both related to declines in income and mental health outcomes. These workers were also potentially the recipients of income supplements under the federally funded *JobKeeper* payments to their employers. However, we found no significant impact for the *JobKeeper* payment for either outcome variables for both artists and arts workers. This may be due to the timing of the survey since the *JobKeeper* program had finished by August 2021. However, a large proportion of artists selected “not applicable” in response to the question as to whether they had received *JobKeeper* (60%). This may be because many artists are self-employed and may not have been able to have satisfied the eligibility requirements by being able to show an estimated or actual decline in their turnover. As noted by Australia Council for the Arts (2020) the *JobKeeper* program was unlikely to support a large proportion of the creative workforce given the high levels of casualisation and freelancing that characterise this industry. A similarly large proportion of arts workers selected that their employer did not apply for *JobKeeper*, or it was not applicable to them (70%). Arts workers who were also artists were most likely to be engaged in educator/academic/teacher/public programming in their arts work. Thus, they are most likely to be working in the education sector and if at a

most university were not eligible for the *JobKeeper* program.¹¹ As government entities, some local, state and national galleries also weren't eligible for *JobKeeper*. As such, a number of artists who were also arts workers engaged in public programming or other professional roles with these galleries were also unable to access the support provided by the *JobKeeper* program.

A small proportion of both artists and arts workers applied and received *JobSeeker* payments. However, they also experienced significant or extreme impacts on both income and mental health. The Coronavirus supplement to the *JobSeeker* payment had effectively doubled the rate of *JobSeeker* although at the time of the survey it had ceased. There was a permanent increase of \$50 per fortnight however, the payment remains well below the poverty line.

In summary, our findings demonstrate multiple negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on livelihoods and wellbeing of artists and artswokers in Australia, which accords with the findings reported by Biddle and Gray (2020, 2021) for the general population. We find that artists and arts workers were strongly affected by the COVID-19 restrictions as were those in other professions dominated by the self-employed and those individuals with scarce resources to rely on. Some artists were able to invest in their digital capacity and skills to enable the promotion of their work when other traditional methods were not available and travel was restricted. This provided potential opportunities to sell their work and stay engaged with the sector, which may have had a positive impact on their mental health.

¹¹ Universities were typically not eligible due to the complexity of their status as they are partly government entities, partly for-profit businesses, partly not-for-profit businesses and partly charities (Hare 2021).

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