

The New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study

NZAVS 2020 Newsletter



[Professor Chris Sibley](#)

Dear NZAVS Participant,

My name is Chris Sibley, and I am the Lead Investigator for the *New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study* (or NZAVS). On behalf of the NZAVS research team and myself, I would like to thank you for your continued participation in the study. Your responses are very important, and have already helped to answer a number of research questions about significant issues facing New Zealand. We would also like to send our congratulations to the winners of our most recent prize draw.

This newsletter summarises some of the latest findings from the NZAVS. As a participant in the study, you have directly helped in making this research possible. This newsletter provides a snapshot of some of the great work that comes out of the NZAVS each year.

Thanks again for taking part in the study,



Sincerely,
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THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF LOCKDOWN

COVID-19 has brought about unprecedented change in the ways we live, work, and socialise. Early on in the Level 4 lockdown beginning in March 2020, NZAVS researchers worked to assess whether and how lockdown impacted our wellbeing and attitudes towards one another. Here is a summary of our results written and published during that first lockdown.

How can we measure the impact?

Thanks to participants filling in their questionnaires throughout lockdown, we have information on how people are doing during these unusual times. In the first 18 days of Level 4 lockdown, 1,003 participants completed their questionnaires. For comparison, we selected another 1,003 participants who completed their questionnaires before COVID-19 emerged. The participants in this 'pre-lockdown' group were carefully selected to match the 'lockdown group' by gender, age, ethnicity, health, parental status, religiosity, and so on. This means that when we compare these two groups, we can be sure that any differences we find are solely because of the effects of lockdown.

How do we feel about New Zealand?

We looked at two main areas: societal attitudes, and health and wellbeing. One concern about lockdown is

that it would allow fear and misinformation to flourish. Instead, our results suggest that people are banding together. Our research found that people in lockdown felt more patriotic and were more satisfied with the government's performance than people pre-lockdown. Trust in politicians, the police, and science were also higher during lockdown. People in lockdown did not feel any less satisfied with the economy, healthcare, or social conditions. Finally, people in lockdown were more supportive of investing in reducing domestic violence. This suggests that New Zealanders are largely confident in the country's response to COVID-19 and are pulling together (rather than apart) while in lockdown.

How are Kiwis doing?

Another concern about lockdown is that mental health will be significantly impacted. However, our results suggest that not much has changed, at least in the short-term.

No changes were detected in rumination (repeated negative thoughts), belongingness (feeling connected to others), or social support (having people you can depend on). There was no change in how satisfied people were with their life, standard of living, future security, personal relationships, or health. In fact, participants who were in lockdown actually reported they felt less fatigued than participants pre-lockdown. People also felt a greater sense of community in their neighbourhoods while in lockdown. These feelings of community, patriotism, and trust in the government may be helping to maintain wellbeing despite the great restrictions New Zealanders are facing.

While most indicators of wellbeing stayed the same or improved, there was some evidence of poorer mental health. Psychological distress measures how often people report feeling signs and symptoms of poor mental health. The amount of people who reported feeling some anxious or depressive symptoms increased from 16% pre-lockdown to 21% during lockdown.

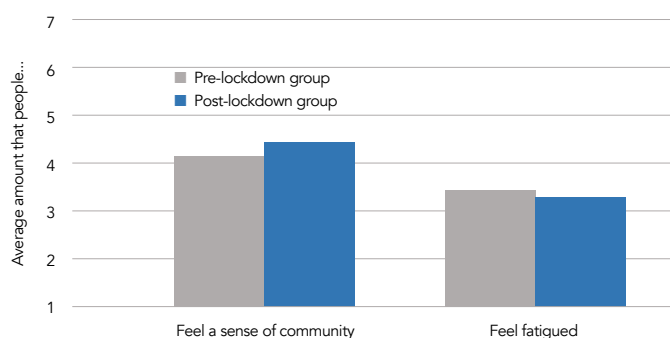
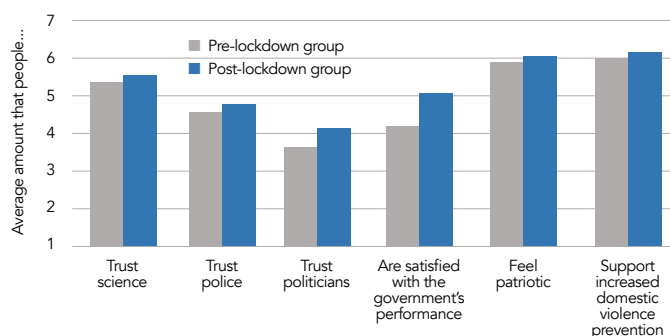
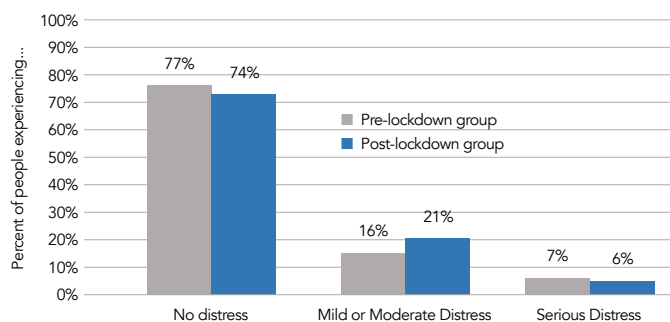
Where to from here?

In sum, the general picture was one of resilience. New Zealanders feel close to their communities and trust their politicians, scientists, and country. Health and wellbeing remain largely the same in the first weeks of lockdown, although mental distress has risen a little.

It remains to be seen whether this resilience will continue on through the weeks to come. Some things may change long-term rather than short-term, such as dissatisfaction with the economy. The NZAVS will continue to track the changing psychological impact of the lockdown measures, with the aim of detecting early warning signs of declining wellbeing so that appropriate measures can be taken.

This research was led by Professor Chris Sibley and was published in [American Psychologist](#).

These graphs represent what has changed during lockdown. We measured many other types of satisfaction with New Zealand society that did not change.



Social connectedness and mental health

While people with poor mental health generally feel less connected than others, one difficult-to-answer question about mental health is which comes first. Is it that people who feel disconnected from others then see their mental health suffer? Or does having poor mental health make it harder to maintain relationships?

Recent research used four waves of NZAVS data to track the direction of this association. Social connectedness was measured by asking whether participants felt accepted and valued by those around them. Results showed that

feeling connected to others more strongly predicted better mental health than the reverse. These results show the importance of social relationships for psychological health, and support policy that facilitates engaging and connecting with others.

This research was led by Research Fellow Alexander Saeri and was published in the [Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry](#).

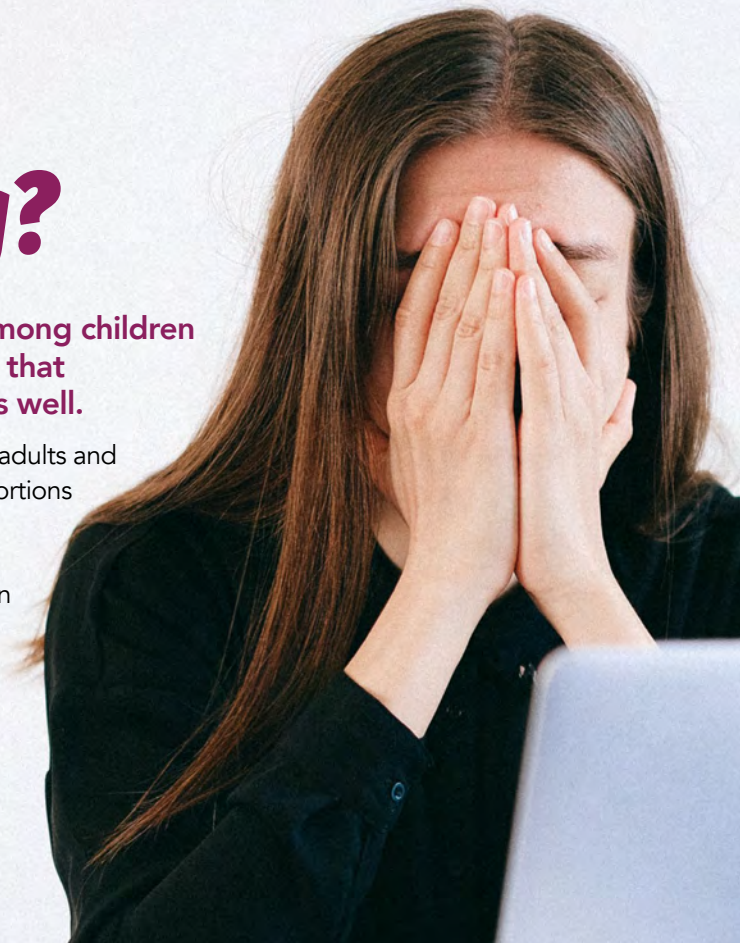
Read our piece in the [Conversation](#) for more.

Who is affected by cyberbullying?

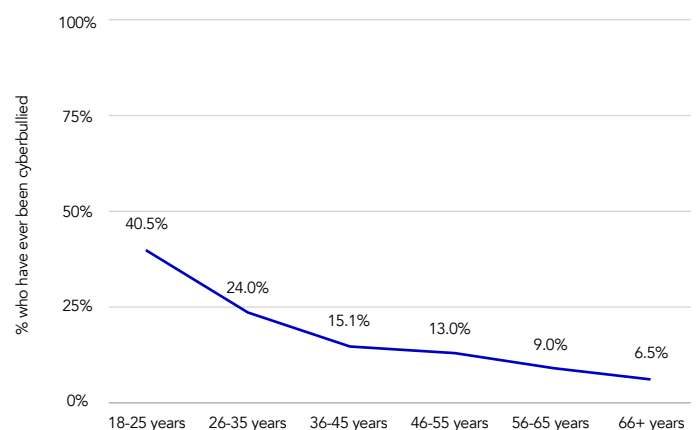
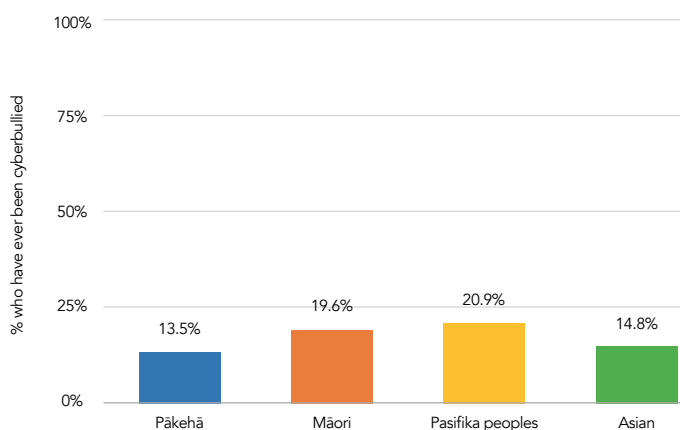
Cyberbullying is well-known to be a growing issue among children and teens. However, new NZAVS research has found that cyberbullying affects a significant portion of adults as well.

Participants were asked if they had ever been cyberbullied. Young adults and teens reported the highest rates of cyberbullying, but significant portions of older adults also reported they had been cyberbullied. Women were more likely to report cyberbullying than men, and Māori and Pasifika peoples were more likely to report cyberbullying than Asian peoples or Pākehā. Similar patterns were found when participants were asked whether they had been cyberbullied within the last month, although rates were much lower. These results highlight the spreading problem of cyberbullying across all ages in an increasingly connected society.

This research was led by PhD student Meng-Jie Wang and was published in [Cyberpsychology, Behaviour, and Social Networking](#).



Who is affected by cyberbullying?





Money, happiness, and the 1%

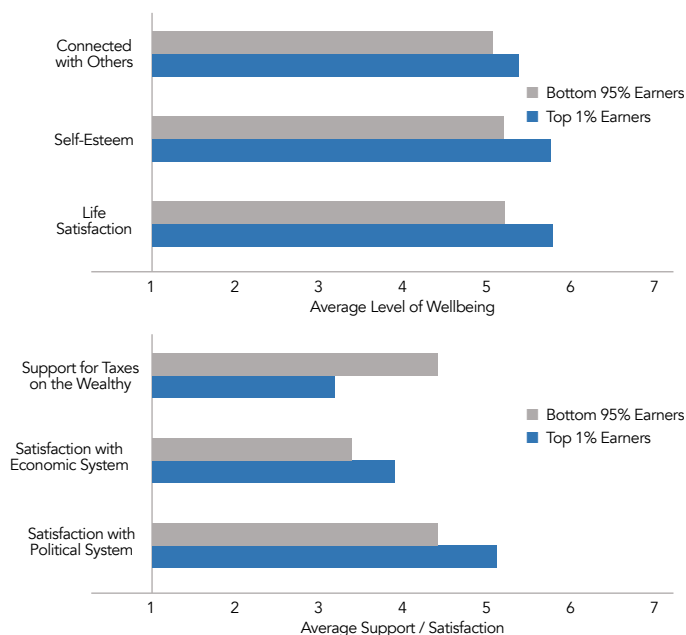
Does money buy happiness? Or does more money only bring more problems?

While the debate is ongoing, recent research from Lecturer Nikhil Sengupta suggests that people with lots of money are not too worried!

This research examined the 1% – those in the top percentage of annual earnings – and found that they were more satisfied with their lives, had better self-esteem, and felt more socially connected than others. High incomes ‘bought’ the 1% roughly half a point more happiness on the 7-point scales used in the NZAVS. The 1% were also more satisfied with the political and economic systems in New Zealand compared to lower earners, and were more opposed to higher taxation on the rich.

This research was published in the [Journal of Happiness Studies](#).

Money, happiness, and the 1%



Teaching te reo in our schools

There is ongoing discussion about teaching te reo Māori in New Zealand primary schools, but what do everyday New Zealanders think?

Research led by PhD student Correna Matika showed that people feel mostly positive about the idea. Māori and Pasifika peoples were more supportive of the idea than Asian peoples or Pākehā, younger people were more supportive than older people, and women were

more supportive than men. The strongest predictors of support for teaching te reo in schools were having higher levels of education, and spending time with Māori friends, whānau, and colleagues. This research also found that support for teaching te reo has been slowly but steadily increasing since 2009 and is expected to continue to increase over the coming years.

This research was published in [MAI Journal](#).



Social support in relationships for men and women

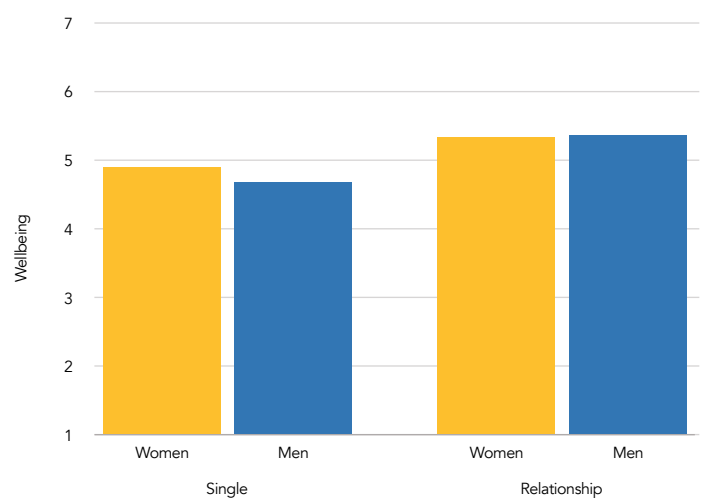
Previous research has found that men tend to be happier and healthier when they are in a relationship than when they are single. For women, whether or not they are in a relationship doesn't matter as much for their wellbeing.

One theory about why this happens is that women are more likely to get social support from their friends, whereas men may get most of their social support from a romantic partner. This theory was tested for the first time in recent NZAVS research.

Social support was measured by asking participants whether they have someone they can depend on when they need it, and who they can turn to in times of stress. For men, compared to women, social support was more strongly tied to whether or not they were in a relationship.

This difference in social support then had knock-on effects to men's self-esteem and life satisfaction. Among single people, men had lower wellbeing than women, but among people in a relationship, men had the same or higher wellbeing than women. These differences were small, indicating there may be more explanations to research in

Wellbeing in relationships



the future. However, they highlight the importance of a supportive social network outside of a romantic partner.

This research was led by Research Fellow Samantha Stronge and was published in the [Journal of Family Psychology](#).

Changing belief in climate change

As climate change is more and more a topic of conversation, how have New Zealanders' beliefs changed?

Recent research used six years of NZAVS data from 2009 to 2015 to measure how much more (or less) our participants agreed that 'climate change is real' and 'climate change is caused by humans'.

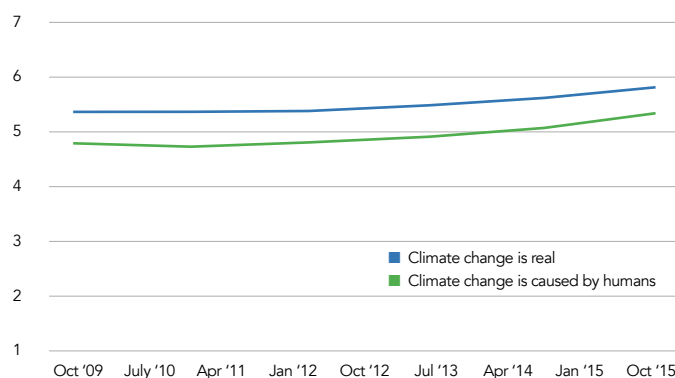
Results showed that across 2009 to 2012, there was little change, but in more recent years, people are more and more likely to believe in climate change and believe it is caused by humans. The two beliefs were also correlated; the more people increased their belief in climate change over time, the more their belief that climate change is caused by humans also increased over time (and vice-versa).

This research, led by Associate Professor Taciano Milfont, is the first study that tracks the same people and shows their beliefs changing. While a small percentage of people (2%) disagree that climate change is real, with a further

6% doubtful, most people increasingly believe in climate change. These findings show that the national (and global) conversation about climate change is having a real impact on New Zealanders' attitudes.

This research was published in [PloS ONE](#).

Changing belief in climate change



OUR PETS AND US

What difference do pets make to our lives?

New research led by PhD student Gloria Fraser found very few differences between pet owners and non-owners in terms of health and wellbeing. Pet owners had personalities that were more tolerant of mess and more open to new experiences than non-owners. Pet owners also felt a greater sense of community than non-owners.

However, pet owners were also more likely to report they had been diagnosed with anxiety and depression than

people who did not have pets, with cat owners in particular more likely to report an anxiety diagnosis.

Does this mean pets are bad for us? Not necessarily! It may be that people who have anxiety and depression are more likely to get an animal companion to help them cope. To test this question thoroughly, the NZAVS is currently collecting more longitudinal data so that we can explore the mental health of pet owners and non-owners over time.

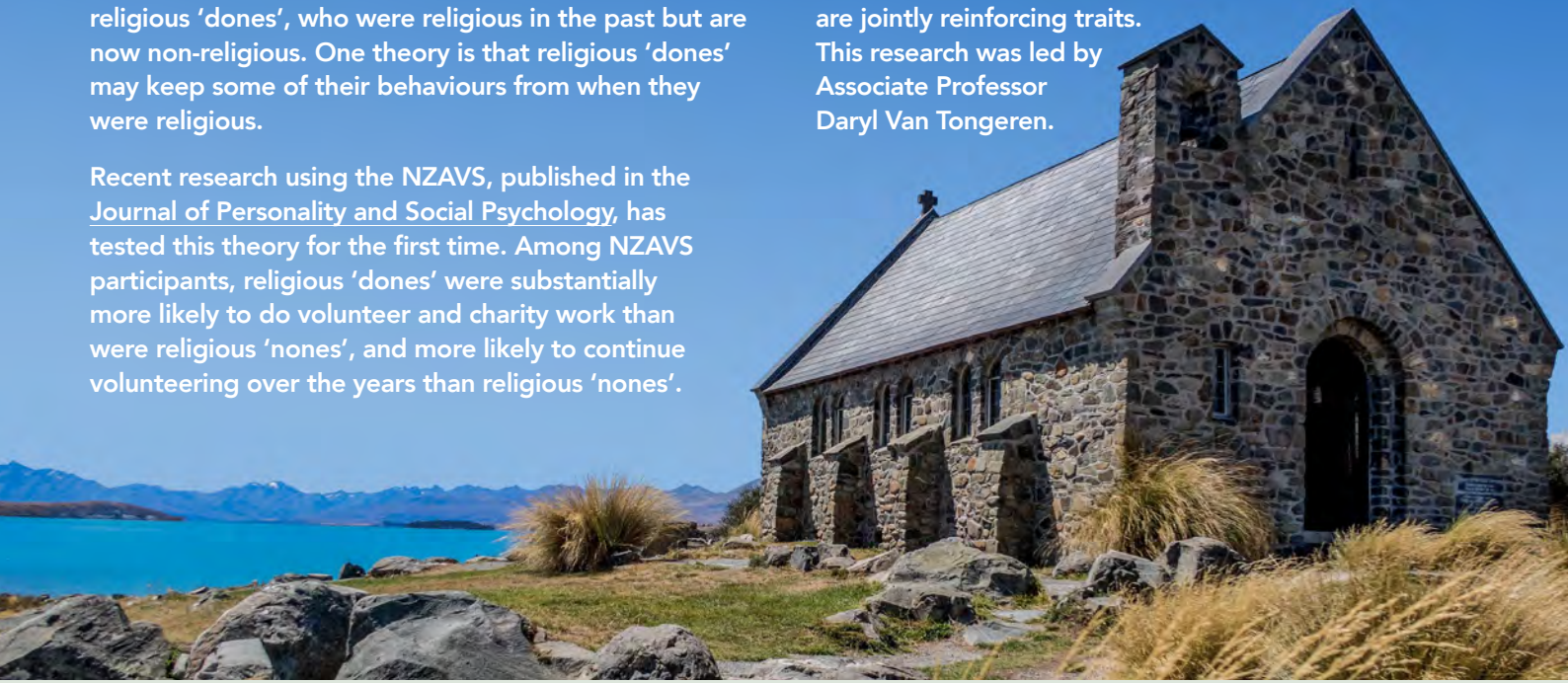
This research will be published in *Anthrozoös*.

Religious ‘residue’

There are many different ways to be religious, but are there different ways to be non-religious? Researchers have previously distinguished between religious ‘nones’, who have never identified as religious, and religious ‘dones’, who were religious in the past but are now non-religious. One theory is that religious ‘dones’ may keep some of their behaviours from when they were religious.

Recent research using the NZAVS, published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, has tested this theory for the first time. Among NZAVS participants, religious ‘dones’ were substantially more likely to do volunteer and charity work than were religious ‘nones’, and more likely to continue volunteering over the years than religious ‘nones’.

This finding supports cross-sectional research from participants in Hong Kong and the Netherlands that relied on participants’ memories. This research suggests that religious affiliation and volunteering behaviours are jointly reinforcing traits. This research was led by Associate Professor Daryl Van Tongeren.

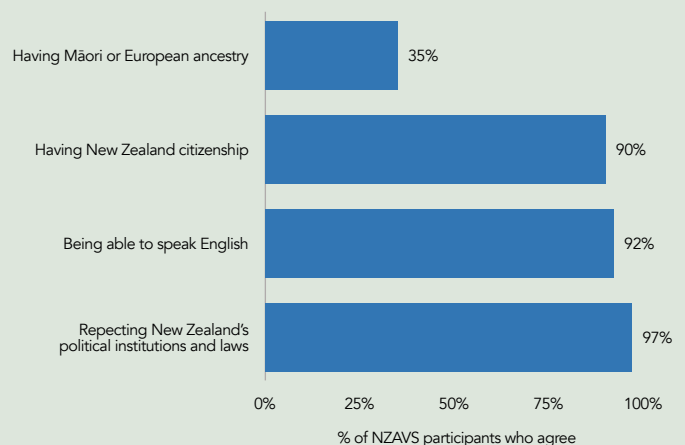


What makes someone a ‘true’ New Zealander?

In the wake of the horrific attacks against Muslims at the Al Noor and Linwood Mosques in Christchurch last year, NZAVS researchers sought to understand some of the factors that lead to negative attitudes towards Muslims and towards diversity. One possible factor is national identity, or the way in which people define who counts as a ‘true’ New Zealander.

Recent research led by Associate Professor Kumar Yogeeswaran found that most people thought a true New Zealander was someone who had New Zealand citizenship, could speak English, and respected New Zealand’s political institutions and laws. Fewer people thought a true New Zealander should have Māori or European ancestry. Importantly, the research found that defining a New Zealander as someone with Māori or European ancestry or as someone who can speak English – things that are difficult or impossible to change – predicted greater prejudice towards Muslims and less support for diversity. However, defining a New Zealander as someone who respects New Zealand’s political institutions and laws predicted less prejudice towards Muslims and greater support for diversity.

What makes someone a ‘true’ New Zealander?



This research shows that one step towards positive relations in a diverse country is defining national identity in less exclusive ways by not limiting who is considered a ‘true’ New Zealander to only people of specific ethnic heritage.

This research was published in the [New Zealand Journal of Psychology](#).



An ongoing concern about social media is that it might be making mental health worse.

Recent NZAVS research investigated whether spending more hours using social media is associated with psychological distress – signs and symptoms of poor mental health. This research also compared how much of an impact time spent on social media has on mental health compared to time spent sleeping, exercising, playing video games, doing housework, working, and so on.

The results showed that while social media use was associated with psychological distress, the effect was very small. On average, accounting for demographic factors such as gender, age, and ethnicity, someone would have to use social media literally 24/7 to see large changes in their mental health. Of course, some individuals may still find their social media use makes them unhappy.

What this research suggests is that social media is unlikely to be driving a societal wide mental health crisis. This research was led by Research Fellow Samantha Stronge and is published in Cyberpsychology, Behaviour, and Social Networking.



What difference do siblings make?

We've all heard of "Only Child Syndrome" – the popular idea that only-children are more selfish and narcissistic than people who grew up with siblings. But is there any truth to this?

Recent research led by Research Fellow Samantha Stronge tested for personality differences between adults who had siblings and adults who didn't. Very few differences in personality were found. Only children were found to be slightly less humble, less hardworking, and more emotional, and slightly more open to new experiences. However, the size of these personality differences was very, very small. While these differences can be detected statistically, they suggest that in real life only children behave no differently to others. As more and more people choose to have one-child families, these results suggest the "only child" persona is mostly a myth.

This research was published in the [Journal of Research in Personality](#).

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