

The Impact of Lockdown

Snap Survey Results

A report from Women on Boards Australia
August 2021



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” WOB recognises and extends sympathy to all those experiencing the emotional and physical impacts of lockdown.

Women on Boards' Founders (L-R)
 Claire Braund (Executive Director)
 Ruth Medd (Executive Chair)

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Executive Summary

The Women on Boards snap survey of its members and wider network has shown that the effects of COVID related lockdowns are starting to take their toll on professional women. This is impacting leadership capability, productivity, morale, staff management, health and wellbeing. To a lesser extent, state lockdowns are also impacting the work of Non-Executive Directors, with at least one-quarter of the 342 respondents agreeing that remote board meetings were negatively impacting decision making and relationships.

While respondents on the whole are currently coping with extended lockdowns and managing the impact on their leadership and board responsibilities, it is clear that cracks are beginning to appear and people are very tired of only being able to work remotely.

There is a very clear preference for professional human contact, with 79% reporting they dislike not being able to meet face-to-face, 68% saying they have Zoom fatigue and 63% feeling professionally isolated.

Issues relating to business uncertainty, lack of access to family support structures for child supervision and concern for friends and older parents were expressed.

On the plus side, comments from respondents suggested that meetings are shorter, relationships between executives and board members have deepened and hybrid working could enable better diversity on boards. Respondents are also enjoying more time with immediate family, increased flexibility, ability to focus away from busy workspaces and not commuting.



342
respondents

”
Diversity, inclusion, Arts, culture and communities in regional and lower socio economic are the most impacted

Respondent comment

About this Survey

Women on Boards undertook a survey of its members and wider network to assess the impact of lockdown on their board and leadership responsibilities.

The survey was sent on Friday 6 August 2021 and closed midnight Sunday 8 August 2021. During this time, NSW went into a full state lockdown. ACT, Melbourne and parts of Victoria were also in lockdown.

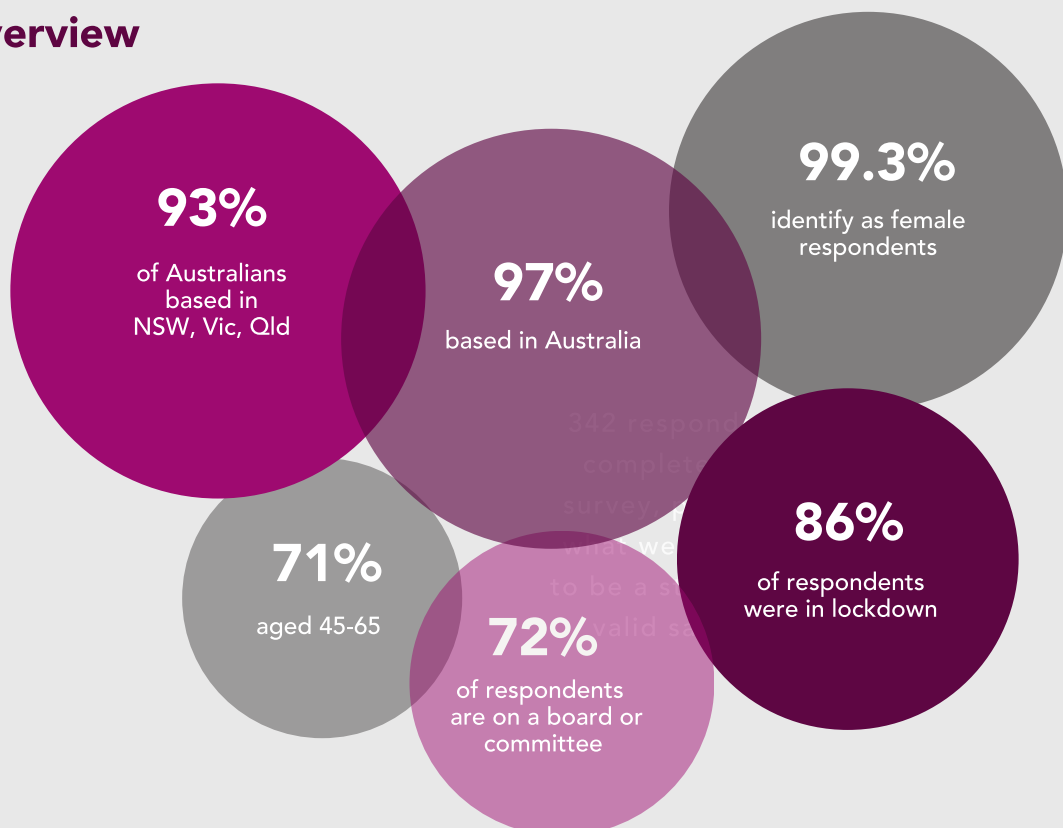
The survey was distributed via direct email link and posted to the Women on Board social media platforms (LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter and Facebook).

Survey responses were encouraged with a random draw of three x \$75 Charley's Chocolate vouchers.

There were 342 respondents to the survey:

- 86% were in lockdown at the time of taking the survey
- 97% were based in Australia & 3% overseas
- 93% were from NSW, Victoria and Queensland
- 99.3% were women
- 71% were aged 45-65 years
- 72% are currently serving on a board or committee

Sample Overview



Key Findings



*“We are
Zoomed out*”

Overall respondents are just coping, with a mean coping rating of 6.5/10, where 10 is coping well. The main issues that respondents are finding difficult are:

- lack of face-to-face meetings
- Zoom fatigue
- lower staff morale
- feeling professionally lonely

Health and wellbeing is an issue for many respondents:

- 45% percent said they lack motivation and zest
- 24% are finding it difficult to balance work and home life
- 23% are not exercising daily
- 27% are not eating healthily
- 31% don't feel like they are looking after their health in general

The findings show that those who are looking after their health and exercising most days correlated to a higher coping rating.

Working remotely provides challenges, with 79% saying they dislike no face-to-face contact and 63% saying that they feel professionally lonely.

We're Zoomed out, with 68% saying that they have Zoom fatigue.

Of the 72% of respondents currently on a board or committee, 26% said that remote board meetings are negatively impacting decision making and 31% said that remote board meetings are impacting their relationships.

Key Findings cont...

Personal productivity appears relatively unaffected for the majority, however 36% reported a drop in their productivity.

Staff management has been impacted, with 59% saying that they feel staff morale is lower and 47% finding staff management more difficult.

85% of those in lockdown reported some positives, including:

- lack of commute time
- more time with family
- increased flexibility

Of the 14% not in lockdown, 87% said they are impacted by lockdown, with key impacts including:

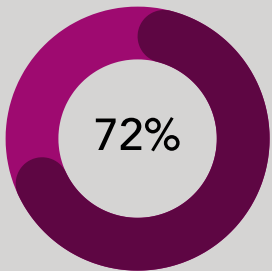
- inability to visit family and friends
- lack of travel opportunities
- business downturn
- mental health of children

The results show that lockdowns are negatively impacting professional women with leadership and board responsibilities. There are undoubtedly others in far worse circumstances that are not the subject of this survey.

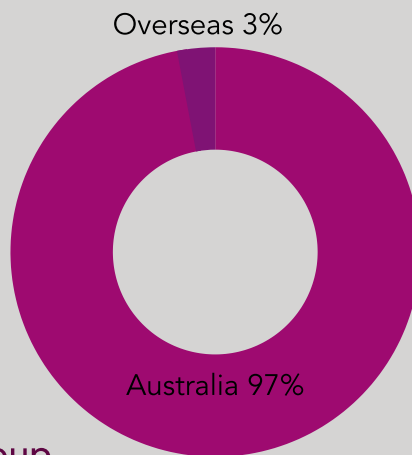
WOB recognises and extends sympathy to all those experiencing the emotional and physical impacts of lockdown.

The Sample at a Glance

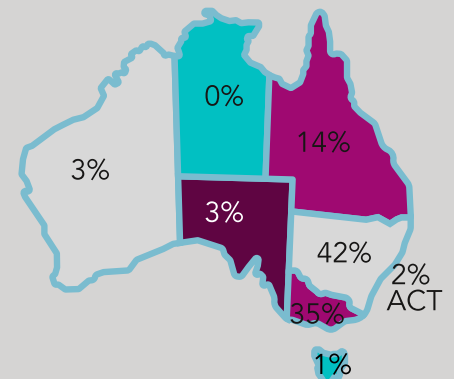
Currently on a Board or Committee



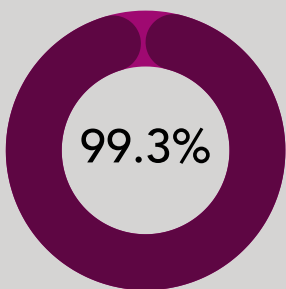
County of Residence



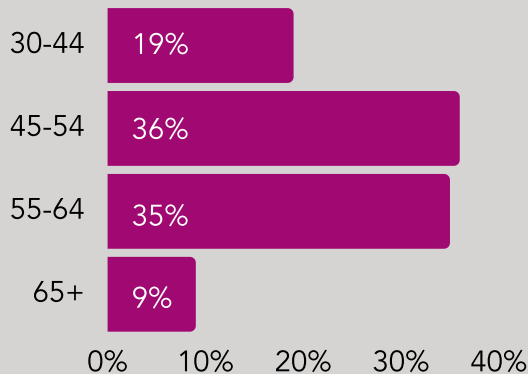
Australian respondents by State



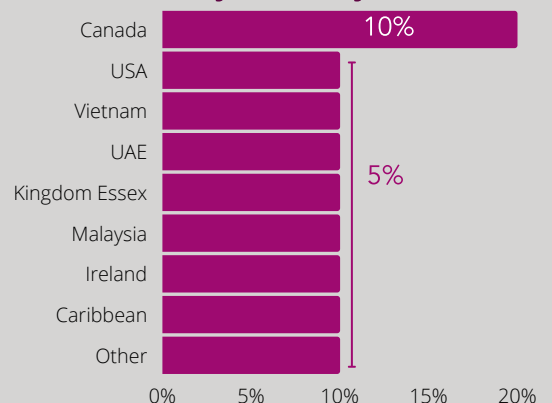
Identify as Female



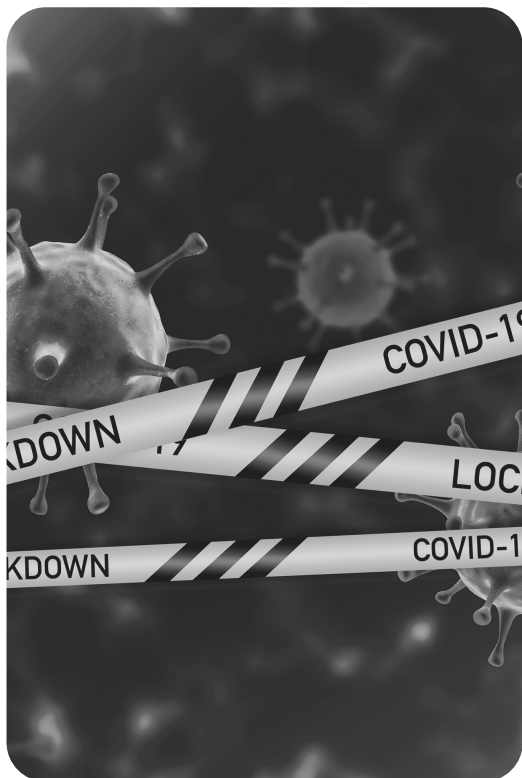
Age Group



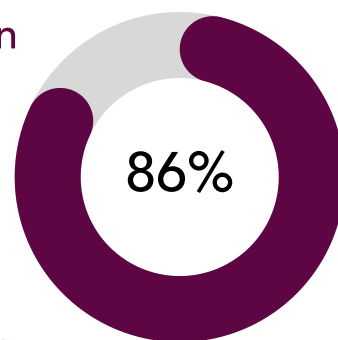
Overseas respondents by country



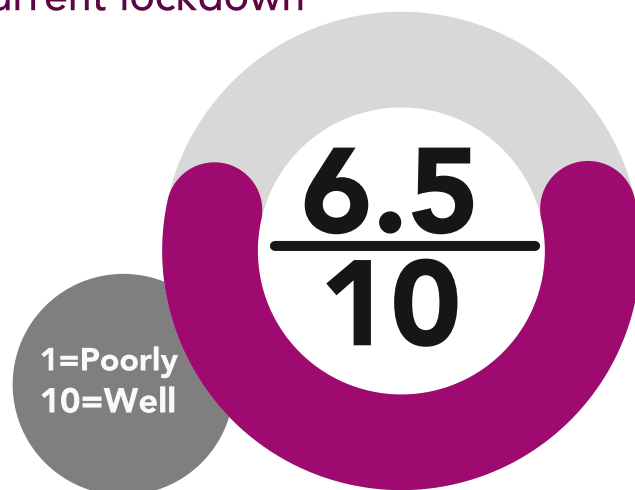
Coping with lockdown



Respondents in lockdown



Coping with the current lockdown



Overall respondents in lockdown rated their coping level as 6.5/10 (where 10 is coping well).

Comment Snapshot

”Working more, feeling very little down time. Work days dragging into the weekend.

”CEO oversight has been difficult.

”Home schooling
Home schooling
Home schooling
Home schooling

”Being stuck at home with family leaves no time for escape, or some peace and quiet without feeling guilty, or resentful of my partner and kids.

”Increased alcohol intake.

”Feel that there is less time for me (which is crazy since we are locked down so would think all I have is time)!

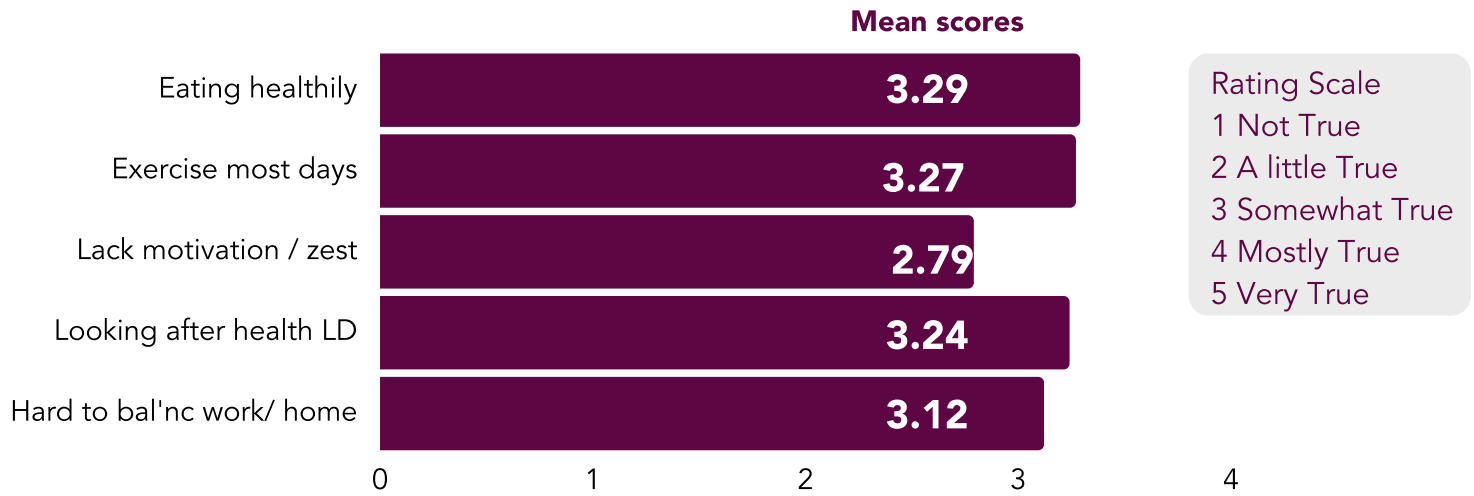
”I just feel tired and lack lustre most of the time.

”Feeling mentally fatigued.

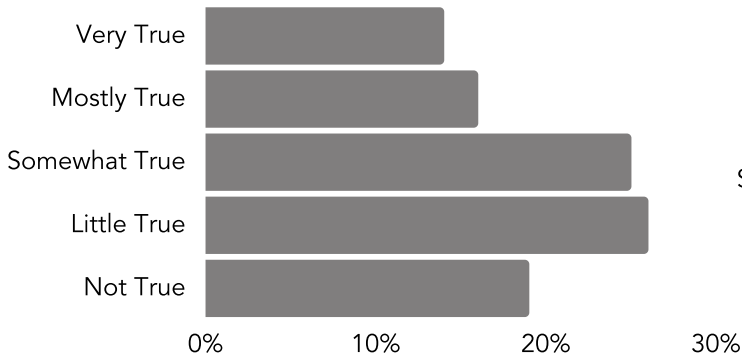
”The constant tension between home-schooling and work is the most draining aspect of lockdown for me. I feel like I am failing on both fronts because I'm constantly being pulled in two different directions.

”Lack of family interaction has been difficult.

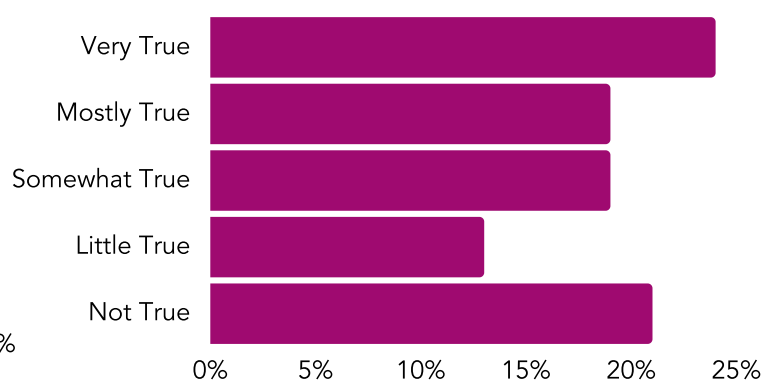
Health and Wellbeing



Lacking motivation and zest



Difficulty managing work and home



“Less exercise, can't get to gym which is a big stress reliever for me.

45%

are lacking motivation / zest

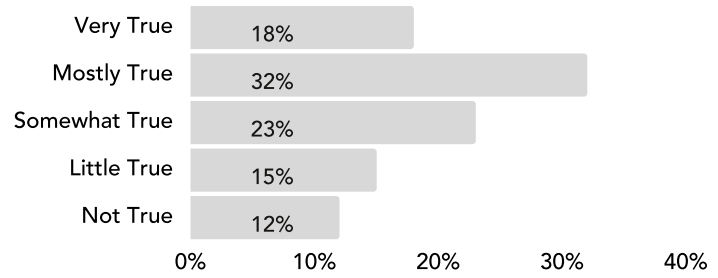
24%

are finding it difficult to balance work and home life

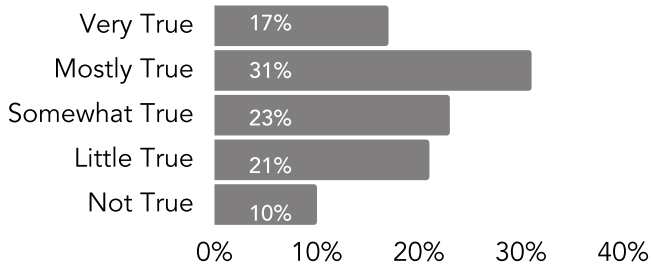
Health and Wellbeing cont...



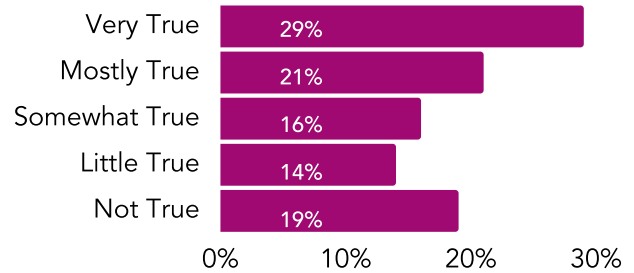
Eating healthily



Looking after my health



Managing to exercise most days



Correlation between health and coping rate

Coping Rating	Looking after health	Exercising most days	Eating healthily
0 - 4	2.4	2.5	2.4
5 - 6	3.0	3.2	3.1
6 - 7	3.5	3.4	3.3
8 - 10	3.7	3.7	3.9

Mean score out of 5 (1 = not true, 5 = very true)

”

Lockdowns have affected my mental health and feeling very lonely.

- Rating Scale
- 1 Not True
 - 2 A little True
 - 3 Somewhat True
 - 4 Mostly True
 - 5 Very True

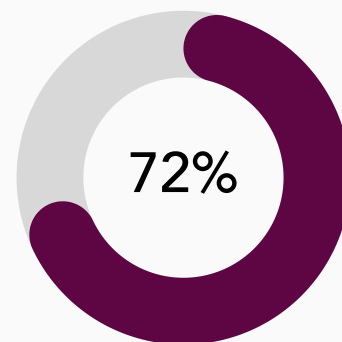
There is a direct correlation between how well respondents are coping and their exercise and eating habits



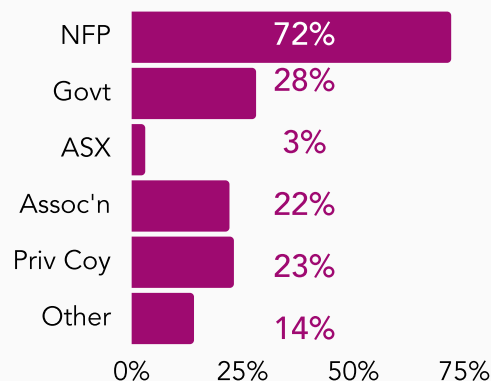
The Board Impact



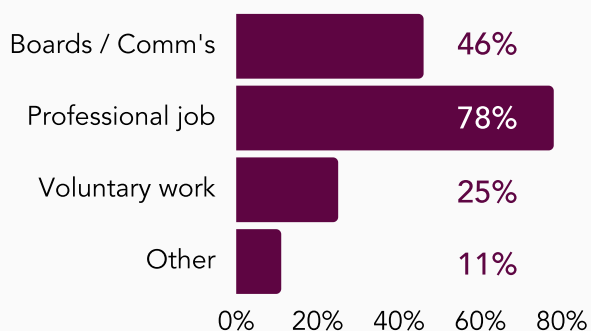
Currently on a Board or Committee



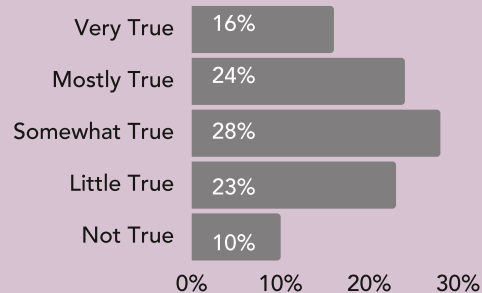
Current Boards



Professional time spent...

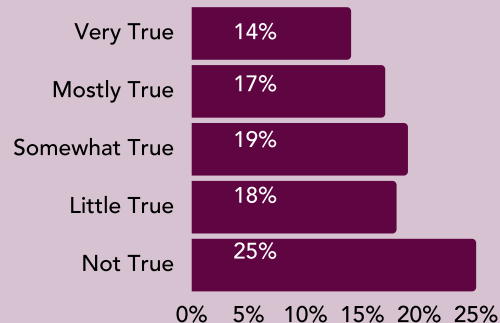


Making an effort to maintain networks



50%
said they have lost focus on their board journey

I have lost focus on my board journey

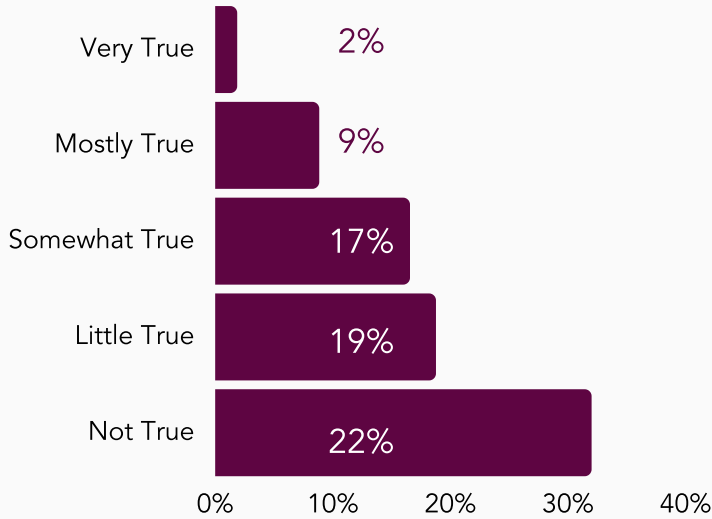


67%
making an effort to maintain networks

72%
on a Not for Profit Board

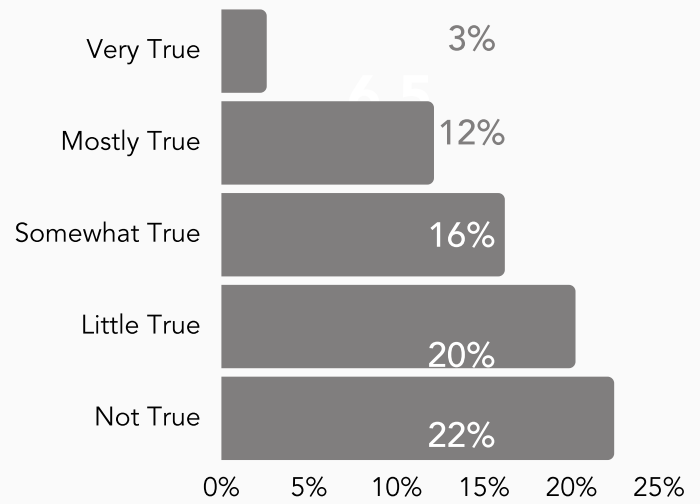
The Board Impact cont...

Remote board meetings are negatively impacting decision making



Mean 2.1/5

Remote board meetings are impacting my relationships



Mean 2.35/5

More than 25% of respondents agree that remote board meetings are having a somewhat negative impact on decision making and relationships.

Rating Scale
 1 Not True
 2 A little True
 3 Somewhat True
 4 Mostly True
 5 Very True

Comment Snapshot

“We have developed more effective systems.

“Hybrid working will enable more diversity on Boards (if the old fashion chairs allow it).

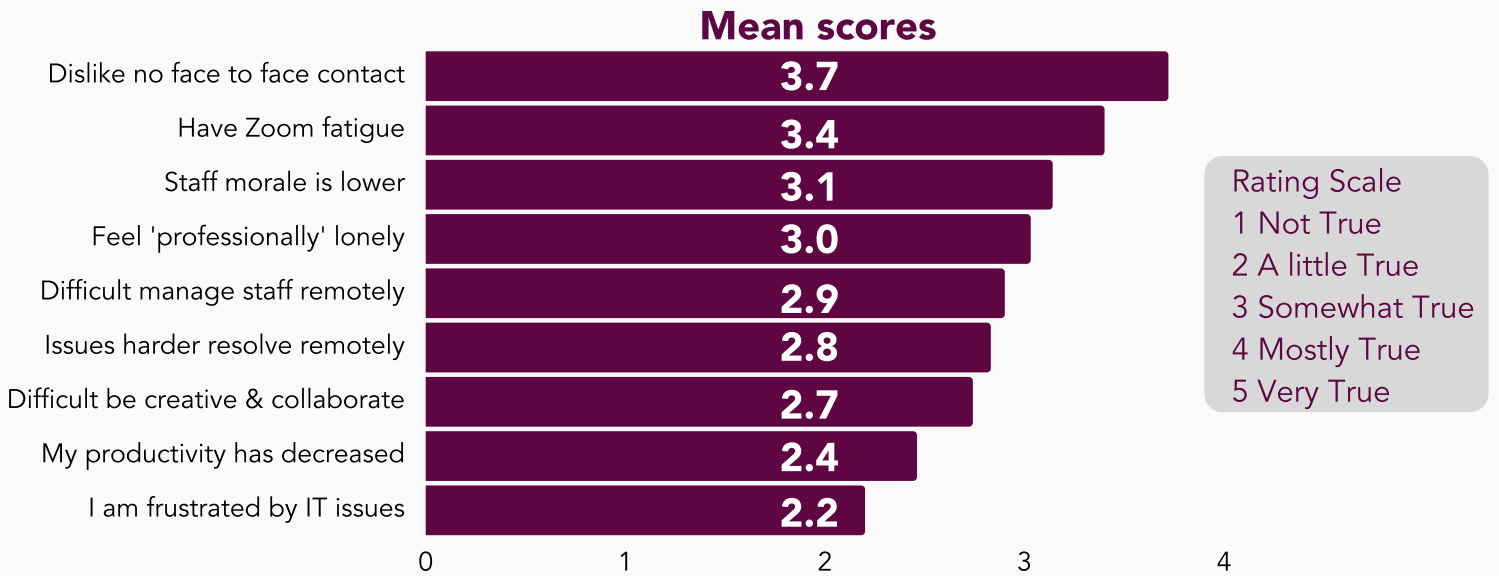
“Shorter meetings and more decisive action.

“Have lost focus on my board journey.

“Relationships between Board and Executives have deepened - Covid gives a licence to ask more personal questions and ensure execs are coping, ask about their families, and see a little of their life outside the office.

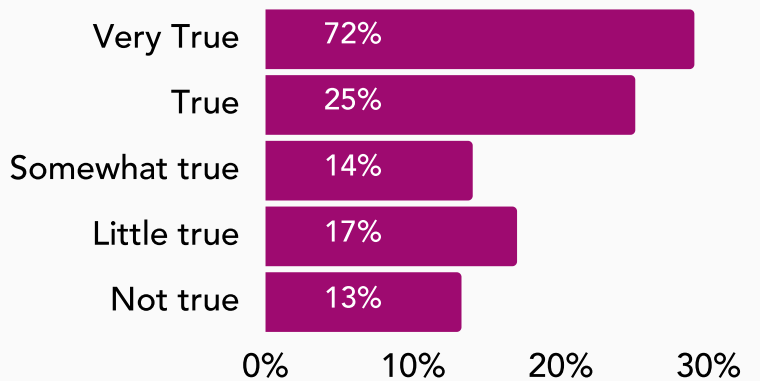
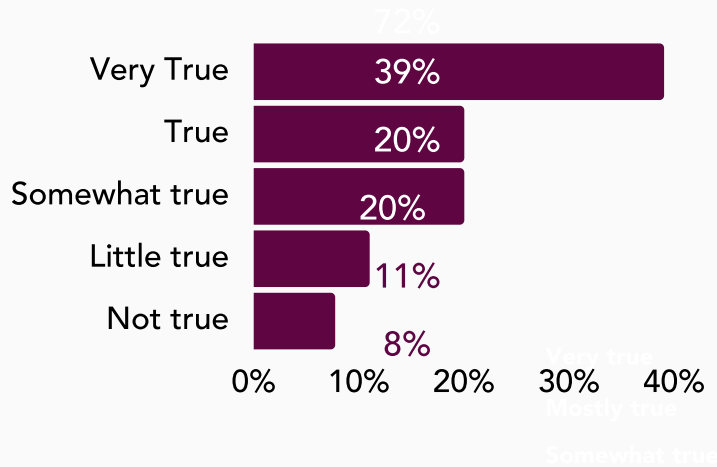
“As Chair, I have found it more challenging to plan and run meetings remotely and recruiting/on boarding two new Directors during this period has also been more challenging. Whilst we have made it work, it is not my preferred approach to engage and maintain professional relationships.

Working Remotely



Dislike no face to face contact

Have Zoom fatigue



“I am trying to build my networks and find it difficult to network over Zoom so less motivated.

“The leadership role is very hard to enact without presence in a Zoom meeting where you are just one tile. There is no easy way to bring empathy and cohesion without the breaks and informal part of the working relationships.

79%
dislike no face to face contact

68%
have Zoom fatigue

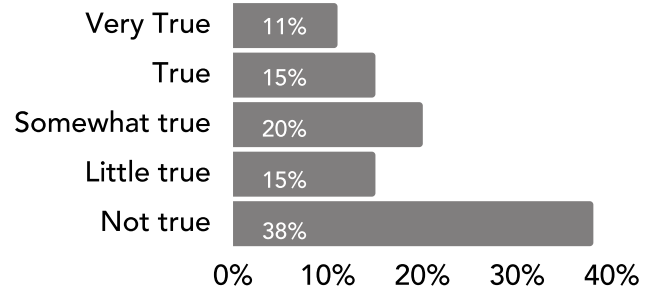
“Appears to be an expectation that all meetings need to be Zoom when a phone call or email would do.

“Difficult to 'build' relationships in lockdown - Zoom is helpful and better than nothing.

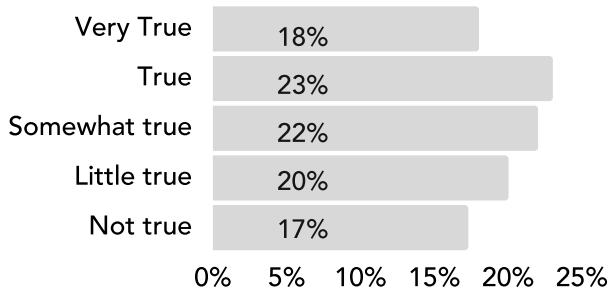
Working Remotely cont...

“Social isolation is the hardest thing. Phone calls, texts and emails do not compensate for real face to face interactions

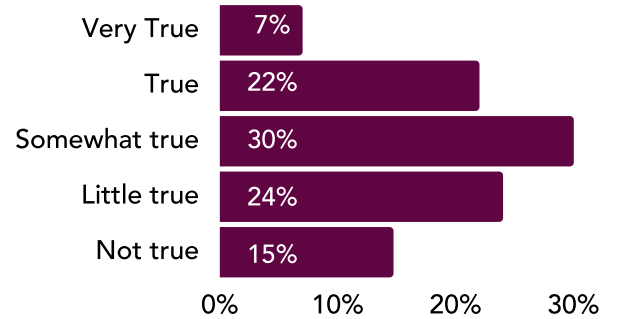
Personal productivity has decreased



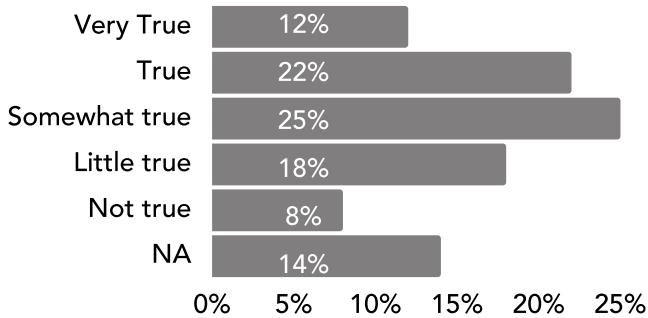
Feel professionally isolated



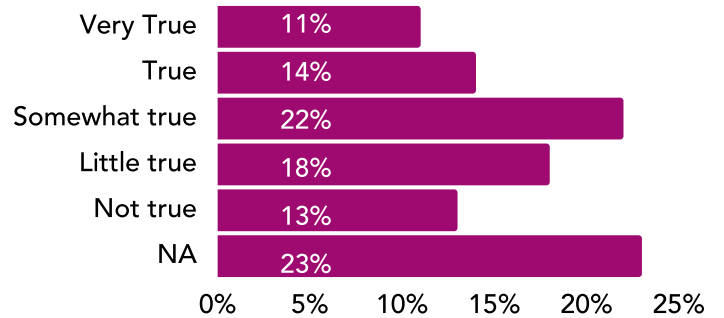
Issues harder to resolve remotely



Staff morale is lower



More difficult to manage staff



36%
report
decreased
productivity

47%
find staff
management
more difficult

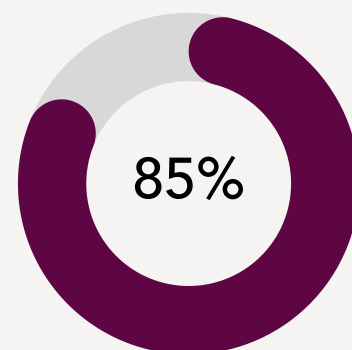
59%
feel staff
morale
is lower

59%
find issues
harder
to resolve

63%
feel professionally
isolated

+ The Positive Impacts of Lockdown

Experienced 'positives' from lockdown



Key positives:

- Lack of commute time
- More time with family
- Increased flexibility

Comment Snapshot

- ” As a disabled person I usually work from home with some face to face meetings and travel. Although I miss the face to face contact, the lack of travel is easier.
- ” My team have upskilled in the use of technology in client support, education and other ways - this has made services more accessible and increased productivity.
- ” Huge amounts of additional business opportunity, dramatically lesser operating costs (particularly travel, entertainment etc), ability to compete with bigger players on a much more level playing field.
- ” Hybrid working will now become the norm.
- ” I have learned new influencing skills, I cannot rely on face-to-face persuasion to solve issues.
- ” Lockdown has provided a good opportunity for self reflection and a slowing down to think about the important things in life.
- ” I love having the opportunity to spend extra time with my children.
- ” Meetings which are online can allow many more people to participate - people who would not have attended previously because of travel constraints - so more inclusive.
- ” I'm working on a difficult project with difficult people - so being away from the office is perfect for me. Give me my dog any day!
- ” I have learned new influencing skills, I cannot rely on face-to-face persuasion to solve issues.
- ” Maybe we have learned some things about the future of work we would not otherwise have known, including that human interaction IS actually important!
- ” Remote board meetings have made it easier with a small family.

Impact of those not in lockdown



Not in
Lockdown

16%

6.5

Impacted by
Lockdown

87%

How they've been impacted:

- Inability to visit family / friends interstate
- Lack of travel opportunities
- No client meetings
- Business downturn
- Mental health

Comment Snapshot

” I am a solo mum of an infant and my family have been unable to visit. It’s exhausting managing work and home without family assistance.

” I have not been able to see my family or attend my mother’s funeral.

” Lost my job due to economic downturn caused by lockdowns, marriage broke down and ended in divorce, had mental health issues.

” We rely heavily on mainland travellers in our industry of hospitality and tourism.

” My family business has been severely affected with 90% drop in revenue. All of the Boards I sit on have had to go virtual so I’m chairing 8hr meetings by Zoom; trying to recruit and induct new CEOs and Board members remotely and look after the staff at the organisations I govern as they try to steer our organisations through very difficult times.

” Project delays (caused by lockdowns, uncertainty in the markets and because of state border restrictions) has severely impacted my line of work.

” We rely heavily on mainland travellers in our industry of hospitality and tourism.

” Referral work out of Sydney Melbourne and all global clients non existent.

”Family stress from children remote learning. Mental health of children.

About Women on Boards



Women on Boards' Founders
Claire Braund, Executive Director, and Ruth Medd, Executive Chair

Women on Boards has been working since 2006 to address gender inequity in the boardroom and across leadership roles.

We are a recognised leader in the ecosystem of organisations and networks promoting and supporting women; dedicated to breaking down barriers to entry into leadership and onto boards. We have a track-record of success and are known for our strategic and practical events and programs. Our aim is to have 40 per cent of these roles occupied by women by 2025.

The Women on Boards network is full of extraordinary women who operate under the principles of reciprocity, transparency and equity. This rich, varied and supportive network ensures WOB is unparalleled in its success in moving women into the boardroom.

As strong advocates for women, WOB works across organisations and sectors and with Government on a meaningful and strategic policy and cultural change agenda for gender equity.

Women on Boards has worked hard during COVID to maintain connection within and between its membership as its contribution towards supporting women's health and wellbeing. We have many workshops and programs that are offered virtually and are always available to discuss member's board aspirations and challenges. Please get in touch if you need our support.

womenonboards.net