

# COVID-19 Phone Survey Headlines Report

## Listening to Young Lives at Work in Vietnam: Third Call

### Introduction

At the time of writing, Vietnam has continued to succeed in containing the spread of COVID-19. Early proactive measures, including the closure of schools and nonessential businesses, a ban on large gatherings, a 15-day national lockdown in April 2020, and extensive contact tracing proved highly effective. There have been virtually no recorded cases of community transmission since the start of September 2020. Three cases of local transmission were detected in Ho Chi Minh City at the end of November 2020, but the city quickly enacted strong measures against the spread of the virus. In contrast to previous outbreaks, the government only imposed restrictions on the homes of patients and the places they had visited, rather than reinstating provincial or large-scale lockdowns. In recent months, the main focus has shifted towards monitoring unauthorised land and sea border crossings. Overall, the government remains committed to pursuing the 'dual goal' of containing the COVID-19 pandemic and reviving the economy. The recovery of employment since the third quarter of 2020 has contributed to a GDP growth rate of 2.9% for the year (GSO 2020).

The [Young Lives phone survey](#) investigates the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health, well-being, employment and education of Young Lives respondents, tracked since 2001 and now aged 19 and 26.<sup>1</sup> This report presents key findings from the third call in this phone survey, based on a preliminary version of the data collected in Vietnam between November and December 2020. These results build on findings from the first two calls: [call 1](#), conducted between June and July of 2020, and [call 2](#), conducted between August and October 2020.

<sup>1</sup> More information on the Young Lives phone survey, the fieldwork manual and the third call questionnaire can be found here: [www.younglives.org.uk/content/young-lives-work-ylaw?tab=3](http://www.younglives.org.uk/content/young-lives-work-ylaw?tab=3). Data for call 3 will soon be available on the UK Data Service website. Background on the Young Lives survey overall (sampling strategy and previous rounds) is available at [www.younglives.org.uk](http://www.younglives.org.uk).

<sup>2</sup> The other Young Lives study countries are Ethiopia, India (Andhra Pradesh and Telangana) and Peru.

### HEADLINES: THIRD CALL

- Of those previously engaged in education, **88% of 19-year-olds were regularly attending classes by call 3**. Among the 118 respondents who were not enrolled and not planning to enrol, most had completed their courses. **Only 13 individuals cited reasons related to the pandemic or subsequent economic impacts as a reason for leaving education**.
- Of those previously engaged in education, **those from rural areas were much less likely to be in school or higher education** (63%), compared to those in urban areas (95%).
- **Overall, employment rates have fully recovered to previous levels in both rural and urban areas**. The exception is young women in the Older Cohort (26-year-olds), for whom employment levels remain **5 percentage points below pre-pandemic levels**.
- Among those in employment, 7% were not working at the time of the interview. The most common reason was that they wanted more time to study (primarily for the Younger Cohort); **COVID-19 and related restrictions were not among the top reasons cited**.
- **Overall, 4% of households reported running out of food in the past 12 months** and figures for the Younger Cohort remain broadly the same as levels observed in 2016, indicating that the **pandemic has had relatively little impact on overall food shortages**. However, **11% of those living in dwellings giving limited protection from COVID-19 ran out of food during this period**.
- Based on figures for the Younger Cohort, **there is evidence of a narrowing of the gap in experience of food shortages between the poorest and wealthiest households since 2016**. Despite the pandemic, the prevalence of food shortages for the poorest households dropped by 3 percentage points, while wealthier households experienced an increase of nearly 2 percentage points.
- **Vietnam continues to show the lowest rates of mental health issues of all Young Lives countries**.<sup>2</sup> Our call 3 results show a significant reduction in both reported symptoms of anxiety (5%, compared to 9% in call 2) and reported symptoms of depression (6%, compared to 9% in call 2).

The third call of the Young Lives phone survey took place between 1 November and 9 December 2020, reaching a total of 2,496 individuals (1,677 Younger Cohort respondents, aged 19, and 819 Older Cohort respondents, aged 26). This corresponds to 99% of the sample located in the second survey call and 88% of the sample located during the most recent tracking (May and July 2020).

In the analysis below, the Younger Cohort and the Older Cohort are merged into one sample, unless otherwise stated. Our analysis is informed by comprehensive information collected over five in-person surveys (between 2002-2016) and three phone calls (2020). This information is used to assess how the impact of COVID-19 is affecting individuals with different socio-economic backgrounds and histories.

## Results

### 1. The impact of COVID-19 on education

Our results on the impact on education focus on respondents from the Younger Cohort (aged 19) who were enrolled in education during 2020, representing 57% of the Younger Cohort. The vast majority (98%) were attending higher education. The remaining 2% were enrolled at secondary or primary school level. Unlike previous survey calls, the call 3 interview was conducted during the academic year.

**Of those previously engaged in education, 88% of 19-year-olds were regularly attending classes by call 3.** Compared to those enrolled (or planning to enrol) at call 2, 4% fewer 19-year-olds were in education by call 3. This is likely to be a result of the age of the Younger Cohort (school-leaving age), as opposed to reasons

related to COVID-19.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the most common reason for leaving education was the completion of the course (likely to be the final year of high school, Grade 12); **only 13 individuals cited reasons related to the pandemic, such as being unable to pay school fees or a school cancelling classes.**

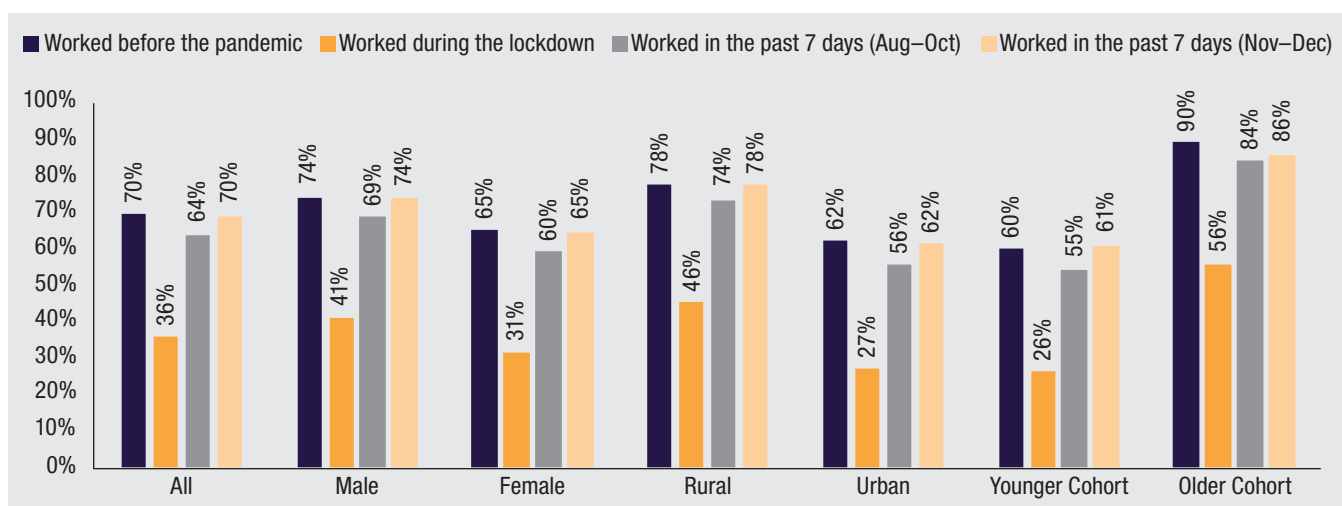
**Those from rural areas were much less likely to have resumed classes by call 3 (63%) compared to their urban counterparts (95%).** Notably, the 4% reduction in those engaged in education at the time of call 3, compared to call 2, was primarily related to those living in rural areas and those whose parents had not completed primary education (there was no significant reduction for urban students or those whose parents had higher education). In line with the findings from call 2, **parental education and household wealth<sup>4</sup> remain important determinants of the likelihood of being in education at age 19.**

### 2. The impact of COVID-19 on employment

To monitor the impact on employment, we compared the employment levels of both Young Lives cohorts at four points in time (Figure 1): (1) before the national lockdown (December 2019 – February 2020); (2) during the national lockdown (April 2020); (3) in the seven days before the second call (August–October 2020); and (4) in the seven days before the third call (November–December 2020). The first two periods were measured retrospectively.

Following a substantial reduction in employment levels during the national lockdown (from 70% before the pandemic to 36% in April 2020), **there has subsequently been a full recovery of overall employment levels.** Call 3 results show that pre-pandemic levels of employment have been achieved for both male and female respondents,

**Figure 1: Employment levels before, during and after national lockdown**



Note: Estimates use sampling weights.

<sup>3</sup> The change in enrolment may be *indirectly* linked to the pandemic, however, as the national exam was postponed for a number of months (longer in COVID-19-affected districts). Students who were either in quarantine or living in areas where social distancing measures were in place at the national high school examination between 3 and 5 September 2020. Thus, during call 2, some young people who would normally have been recorded as having completed their final school year were still considered enrolled.

<sup>4</sup> Relative household wealth is determined using wealth status measured during the Young Lives Round 5 survey, undertaken in 2015/16.

and for those living in both rural and urban areas. **The exception is for the Older Cohort (aged 26) where employment levels remain 4 percentage points below original levels** (86%, compared to 90% before the pandemic). This incomplete employment recovery is primarily related to 26-year-old women (5 percentage points below the pre-pandemic level), as opposed to 26-year-old men (2 percentage points below the pre-pandemic level).

**Among those in employment, 7% were not actually working at the time of interview** (3% of the Older Cohort and 9% of the Younger Cohort). The most common reason for not currently working was that respondents wanted more time to study (particularly for the Younger Cohort). Notably, COVID-19 and the previous restrictions were not among the top reasons cited, with only two respondents reporting being temporarily laid off because there was less business or because of staff reductions (as a result of the virus).

**Our call 3 results confirm a continuing trend of fewer people working in the agricultural sector** (GSO 2019). Overall, 13% of our sample reported working in this sector in call 3, compared to 17% in call 2 and 15% before the pandemic. This trend was observed for both men and women, and in both cohorts. **There was also evidence that some of the switch to self-employment, found in call 2 (24%, relative to 21% before the pandemic), has been reversed** (20% in call 3).

### 3. The impact of COVID-19 on food security

**Overall, 4% of households reported running out of food in the previous year.** Food shortages were most likely to impact the poorest households (5%, compared to 3%

among wealthier households). Of some concern was the finding that **11% of those living in dwellings with limited protection from COVID-19**, as measured by the YL Home Environment for Protection (HEP) index,<sup>5</sup> **had run out of food in the previous 12 months.**

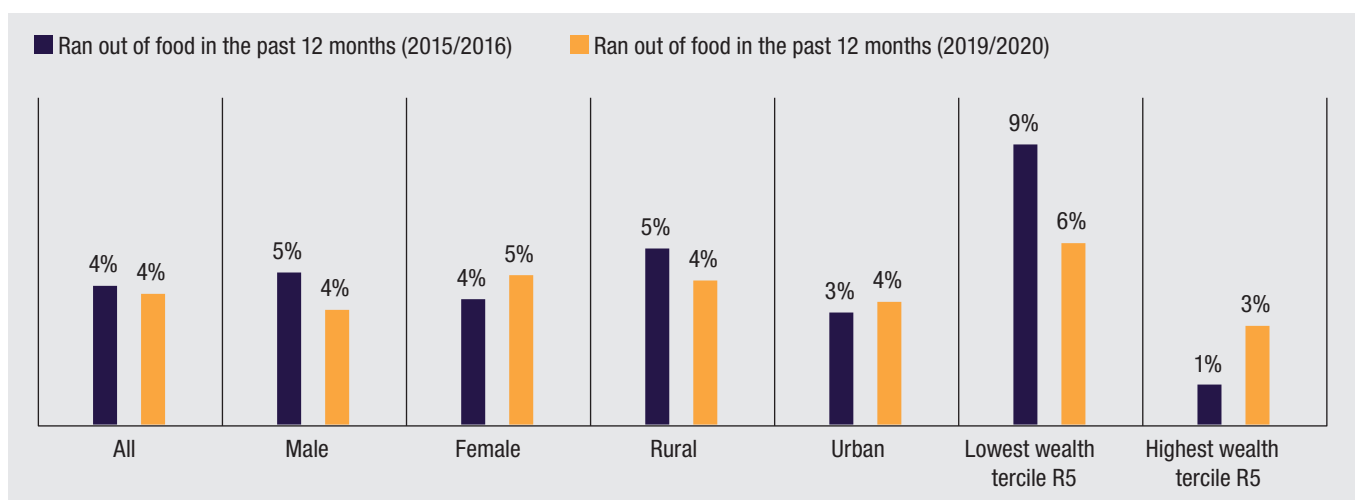
Young Lives data collected in 2016 for the Younger Cohort (only) provide a comparative pre-pandemic measure of food shortages for this group. Figure 2 shows that the proportion of Younger Cohort households that ran out of food in the past 12 months (in 2020) remains broadly the same as that observed in 2016. **However, there is evidence of a narrowing of the gap between the poorest and wealthiest households.** Despite the pandemic, food shortages for the poorest households dropped significantly by more than 3 percentage points. By contrast, wealthier households experienced an increase in food shortages, by nearly 2 percentage points.

### 4. The impact of COVID-19 on mental health

We have measured anxiety using the Generalised Anxiety Disorder Assessment (GAD-7) and depression using the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-8).<sup>6</sup>

**Vietnam continues to show the lowest rates of mental health issues among the four Young Lives countries (Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam).** Our call 3 results show a significant reduction in both reported symptoms of anxiety (5%, compared to 9% in call 2) and reported symptoms of depression (6%, compared to 9% in call 2). This may be explained by the further easing of COVID-19 restrictions since November, the recovery of the labour market and the country's continuing success in containing the virus.

**Figure 2: Proportion of Younger Cohort households that ran out of food in the past 12 months (compared to 2016)**



Note: Only Younger Cohort sample is shown. Estimates use sampling weights.

5 More information on how the HEP index has been computed using the Young Lives data is available here: [www.younglives.org.uk/sites/www.younglives.org.uk/files/YL-HEP-Index-Nov20.pdf](http://www.younglives.org.uk/sites/www.younglives.org.uk/files/YL-HEP-Index-Nov20.pdf)

6 GAD-7 and PHQ-8 consist of seven and eight statements, respectively, reporting if the respondents experienced any of the anxiety and depression symptoms listed and how often. To calculate the GAD-7 and PHQ-8 score, values of 0, 1, 2, and 3 are assigned to the frequency of symptoms reported ('not at all', 'several days', 'more than half the days', and 'nearly every day', respectively) and summed together. Mild, moderate and severe anxiety are defined using 5, 10, 15-point cut-offs (Spitzer et al. 2006) and 5, 10, 15 and 20 cut-off points are used to define mild, moderate, moderately severe and severe depression (Kroenke et al. 2009).

## Concluding remarks

This report provides further insights into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people, following the easing of the restrictions in Vietnam. We observe some decrease in education enrolment rates, although this may reflect the transition of our 19-year-old cohort out of secondary education. Our evidence suggests a full recovery of overall employment rates since the national lockdown, though employment levels for young women in the Older Cohort are still 5 percentage points below pre-pandemic levels. Initial findings suggest that COVID-19 did not generate greater inequality in experience of food shortages, with the impact of the pandemic appearing relatively modest across all groups. We have also seen a positive change in mental health, through reduced reported rates of anxiety and depression. Further analysis of the impact of mental health, food insecurity and other issues is ongoing.

Young Lives is planning to get back to the field for the next regular round of data collection (Round 6) in late 2021, depending on the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic across our four study countries.

## References

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