

'Delayed as a QANTAS flight': the impact of COVID-19 on the pregnancy plans of people living in Australia

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Background:

The first case of COVID-19 was recorded in Australia in late January 2020. By late March the entire country was placed under 'stay at home' orders to slow the spread of the virus, restrictions that continued into May. We investigated the impact of these restrictions and COVID-19 more broadly on the reproductive health of people living in Australia.

Methods:

We conducted an online survey that was open from 23 April to 11 May 2020. People living in Australia and aged 18+ were eligible to participate. Participants responded to several questions about their reproductive health, including a free-text question that asked about the impact of COVID-19 on plans for pregnancy. Descriptive thematic analysis was used to examine the qualitative free-text data.

Results:

A total of 613 participants aged 18-49 years completed the reproductive questions and of these, 70.5% indicated that they were trying to avoid pregnancy while 12.8% wouldn't mind getting pregnant. Of these, 252 provided a free-text comment about the impact of COVID-19 on their plans for pregnancy. Participant responses fell into one of four key themes. Many reported that COVID-19 would have no impact, as their plans for pregnancy are in a distant (hopefully COVID-free) future. Others reported questioning or reconsidering desires to have children given the current 'state of the world' or noted that the pandemic had solidified their decision not to reproduce. A third group reported indefinitely delaying immediate plans for pregnancy due to circumstances imposed by the pandemic, including loss of financial stability, delayed travel or weddings, and concern about pregnancy care. A small number reported that COVID-19 had positively impacted their plans for pregnancy.

Conclusion:

What impact COVID-19 might have on the Australian fertility rate in the future is unclear although, at least for the participants in our study, a COVID-19 baby-boom seems unlikely.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.