

Trusting Others Matters in Public Health: Exploring the Role of Interpersonal Trust on complying with COVID-19-Related orders in Australia

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Interpersonal Trust as a Key Predictor of Compliance to COVID-19 compliance

This study suggests that interpersonal trust significantly predicts compliance with public health measures. This trust not only directly influences behaviour but also mediates and moderates the impact of other factors, highlighting its critical role in public health response strategies.

BACKGROUND

During the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, governments worldwide implemented public health measures to mitigate the virus's spread, however there was marked variation within and between countries in hospitalisations and mortality.

One of the factors explaining this variation has been trust. A relationship between institutional trust and COVID-19 preventive behaviours and outcomes has been shown in numerous studies. However, research on interpersonal trust, the belief that most other people can be trusted, has shown varied findings regarding its mechanisms and impacts.

The objectives of this study were to examine the relationship between pre pandemic interpersonal trust and complying with COVID-19 public health orders in Australia.

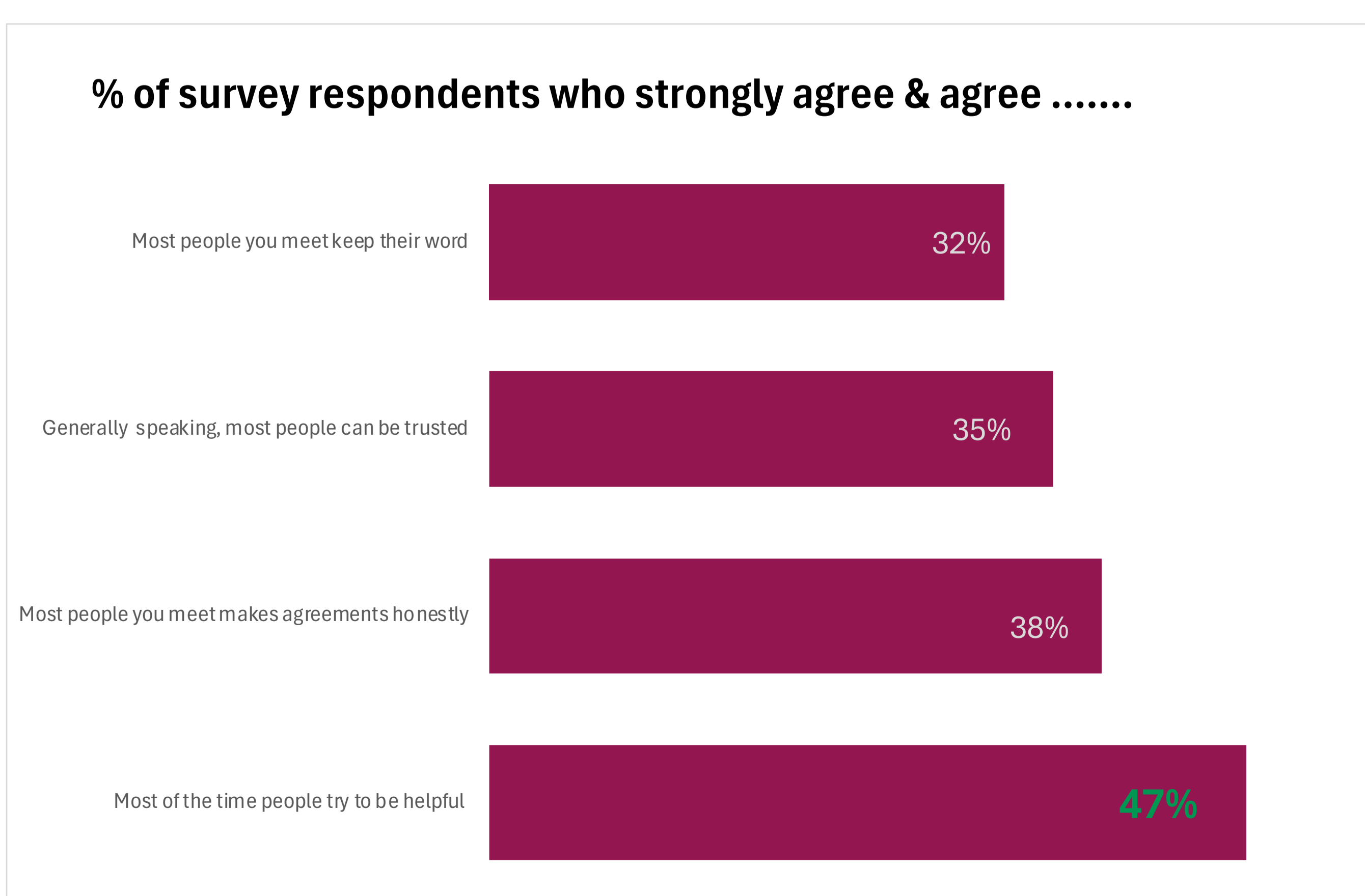
METHODS

This study conducted secondary analysis of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, an annual household-based panel study. The analysis used three waves of data (pre pandemic, year 1 and year 2 of the pandemic) with 16,549 adult respondents. The data were analysed using structural equation modelling (SEM).

RESULTS

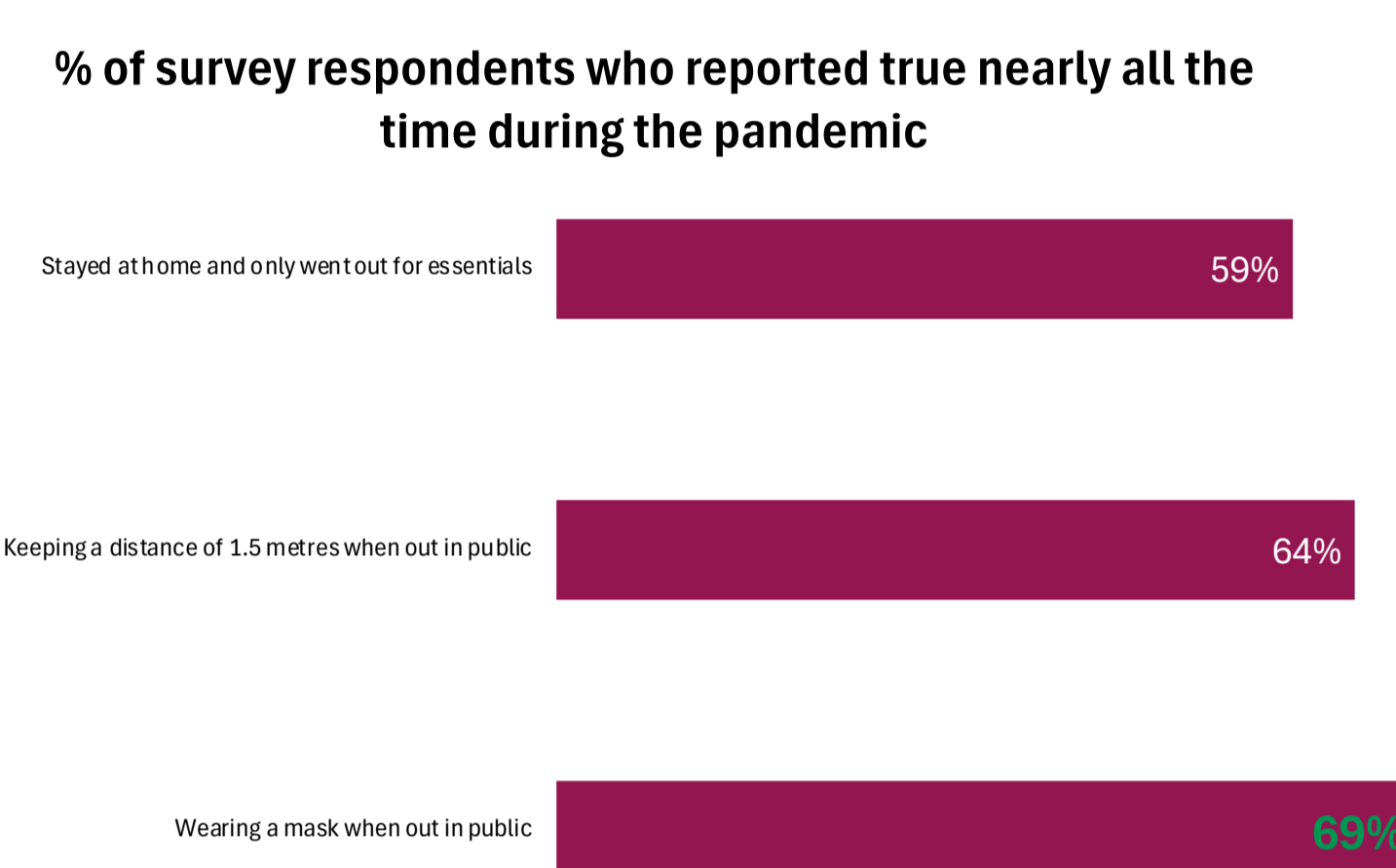
Overall, the survey respondents reported both high levels of interpersonal trust, adoption of preventive behaviours and vaccination status compared to studies in other countries. Higher interpersonal trust was significantly associated with some COVID-19 behaviours (vaccination and wearing a facemask) but not others (staying at home and social distancing when outside).

Australians report high levels of interpersonal trust in other citizens pre pandemic, 2018/19



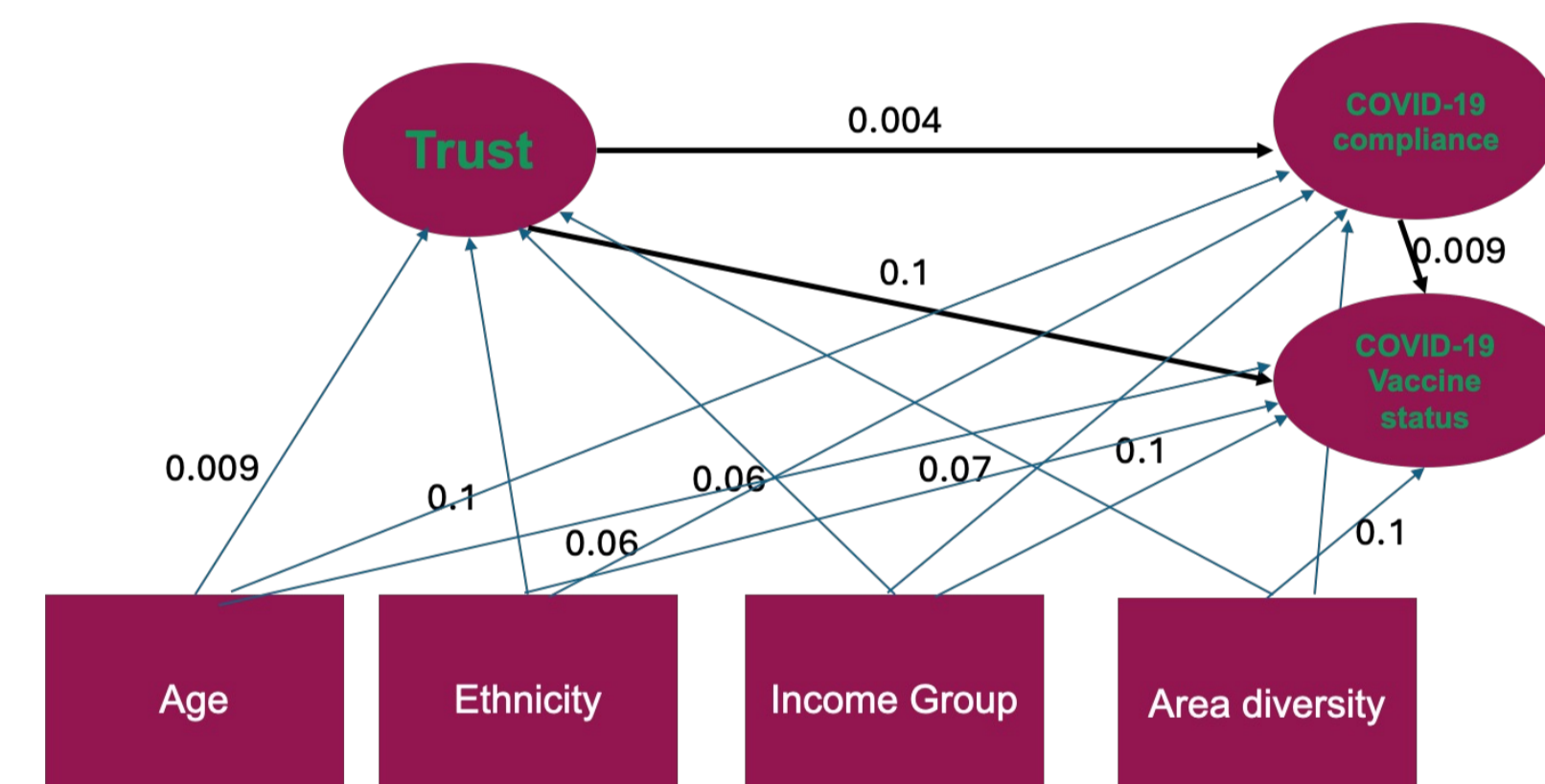
RESULTS CONTINUED

Australians report high levels of compliance during the COVID19 pandemic, 2021



The SEM model suggests that interpersonal trust, age, ethnicity, area diversity and income are all significant predictors of COVID-19 preventive behaviours. Together they explain 21% of the variance of this variable.

Structural equation model with significant standardised coefficients



What this study adds?

- **Trust Dynamics in Australia During COVID-19** Even in Australia, with high institutional and interpersonal trust and high vaccination rates, trust dynamics during public health crises are complex.
- **Exploring Trust and Compliance via SEM:** Our Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) approach uncovered the relationships between interpersonal trust and compliance, highlighting trust's role as both a mediator and moderator in compliance behaviours.
- **Advantages of SEM over Traditional Regression:** Using SEM provided a more comprehensive analysis compared to traditional regression modelling, allowing us to simultaneously examine multiple relationships, account for latent variables, and better capture the complexity of trust and compliance dynamics

ADDITIONAL KEY INFORMATION

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This paper uses unit record data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey. The HILDA Project was initiated and is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) and is managed by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (Melbourne Institute). The findings and views reported in this paper, however, are those of the author and should not be attributed to either DSS or the Melbourne Institute

