

Voices of Saint Lucian Women:

A study of the impact of COVID-19 on frontline workers, small entrepreneurs, pre-school teachers and hospitality workers



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United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

in Partnership with the UN SDG Fund Joint Programme,
**“Enhancing Resilience and Acceleration of the
Sustainable Development Goals in the Eastern Caribbean:
Universal Adaptive Social Protection”**

By Julie Xavier, PhD, Gender and Social Protection Consultant

August, 2021



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Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Acronyms	iii
Executive Summary	v
1. Introduction	1
2. Background and context	3
2.1 A brief look at Saint Lucia's COVID-19 history	3
2.2 An overview of the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic	5
2.3 Income support and assistance	6
2.3.1 The Economic Recovery Programme	6
2.3.2 The Income Support Programme	7
2.3.3 The Economic Recovery and Resilience Plan	9
2.4 Rationale for sector selection	10
3. Methodology	13
3.1 The rapid appraisal approach	13
3.2 Research questions	14
3.3 Research methods	14
3.3.1 In-depth interviews	14
3.3.2 Key informant interviews	17
3.4 Analytical approach	17
3.5 Risks associated with the research and mitigation strategies	18
4. Results	21
4.1 Profile of participants	22
4.2 Assistance received	25

4.3 Negative effects of COVID-19	26
4.4 Positive effects of COVID-19 on respondents	40
4.5 No impact of COVID-19 on respondents	47
4.6 The role of employer support and government assistance	47
4.7 The effects of COVID-19 on family members	51
4.8 What is needed to cope with COVID-19 and recommendations	57
5. Analysis of key informant interviews	65
5.1 The effects of COVID-19	68
5.2 COVID-19 assistance to members and clients of the organizations	73
5.3 The organizations' challenges in providing COVID-19 assistance	77
5.4 Government assistance	79
5.5 External aid/support for members	81
5.6 Most commonly expressed needs and demands of members and clients	81
5.7 Focus on women	83
6. Discussion	85
6.1 The unique features of the crisis and women's caregiving responsibilities	85
6.2 Financial planning	85
6.3 Challenges in accessing services and interventions	86
6.4 Social protection in the era of COVID-19	86
7. Conclusion	89
References	91
Appendices	93

Figures and Tables

Figures

Figure 1. Real GDP Growth	5
Figure 2. Map of Saint Lucia	15
Figure 3. Breakdown of respondents, by sector	22
Figure 4. Professional category participation, by region	24
Figure 5. Number of single mothers, by professional category	24
Figure 6. The percentage of workers who were unemployed during the pandemic, by sector	27
Figure 7. The trickle-down effects of unemployment due to COVID-19	27
Figure 8. The ripple effects of new safety protocols for pre-schools	34
Figure 9. No. of respondents who experienced positive effects of COVID-19	41

Tables

Table 1. Timeline of COVID-19 Protocols and Responses	4
Table 2. Paid and unpaid applicants for the Income Support Programme	8
Table 3. Distribution of payments by occupation	9
Table 4. Population distribution, by region	16
Table 5. Distribution of interviewees, by sector and region	16
Table 6. Age range of respondents	22
Table 7. Breakdown of frontline workers by occupation	23
Table 8. Breakdown in types of small-business activities	23
Table 9. Type of assistance received by sector	25



Dedication

This study is dedicated to all working mothers who, because of the coronavirus pandemic, have been facing increasing struggles in balancing their paid work responsibilities with additional caregiving duties in the home. May you be inspired by this acknowledgement of your sacrifice and please know that we are all in this together! You are not alone.

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Acronyms

CFLI	Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives
CHA	Community health aide
CHW	Community health worker
ERP	Economic Relief Programme
ESR	Economic and Social Review
GBV	Gender-based violence
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISP	Income Support Programme
KII	Key informant interview
NCPWD	National Council of and for Persons with Disabilities
NEMO	National Emergency Management Organisation
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NIC	National Insurance Corporation
PPE	Personal protective equipment
PWDs	Persons with disabilities
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SOE	State of Emergency
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

Executive Summary

Supermarket worker: *"Honestly, how I keep myself sane is looking forward to a smile from my grandchild in the morning when I wake up that is what keeps me going, my faith..."*

Senior customer representative: *"I started getting frustrated because no income is coming in. And you have to live, and then money keeps coming out and nothing is coming in."*

Marketing officer, hospitality sector: *"Before COVID-19, there were more than 70 staff on the island; now about 7 or 8 are employed. We all lost jobs: 95% of staff, and about 90% of the company staff are women. So about ten guys and 70 women."*

Spa manager: *"It has been a life-changing experience from full-time worker and then becoming a stay-at-home mum."*

Restaurateur: *"What I would have loved to be very honest in the face of this is if there could have been some small grant given to small business owners to allow them to expand and do whatever, that would have been good for me."*

Pre-school administrator 2: *"For me ... I was putting a lot of attention on school and getting everything ready as far as Government's demands. It has had me to sit down and take a serious look at myself, my school, and what else I can do apart from school that can help me, because I will definitely be a pauper if things continue like this."*

Teacher: *"I have greater appreciation for family. Life is so short things happen so fast and I would say it has given us a tighter bond."*

Administrative assistant: *"I don't need to work for anyone. If I was working for myself, paying myself, then I would not be in the situation I am in right now. Working on plans to make that change right away."*

Fire officer: *"Nobody has ever said let's hold sessions to debrief, like what you're doing now, to ask us how has this pandemic affected us? It's like you all are the frontliners, make sure you follow the protocols put in place. No one will say but I know this is an added stress, it is more than a fire call, a diabetic call, this is something that can affect you and your family, if you need some help ask us or come to us."*

Teacher: *"The long hours – I can tell you is hard. Working with a mask or a shield the entire day is hard. Not being able to comfort a crying child...."*

Cook: *"I am better rested and it has given me time to think, because you get up every day and you don't think, you get up to go to work, you rush in the morning ... so you don't really stop to think, and I have really gotten that chance to look at my life to see which direction to go."*

Nurse: *"...they should have allowed the nurses a counselling session... Because we went through a lot of distress, disrespect. A lot. So the trauma that was there, if you wasn't strong you would have broken down from all the disrespect, the vulgarity, all.... Everything that came with it."*

Pre-school administrator: *"I would have been happy if Government would have helped waive some of the costs of different things like thermometer, cleaning supplies to minimize the cost of getting these items. We had to bear all the financial cost."*

Supermarket worker: *"I see Government putting things in place for all other frontline workers they call first responders, we were there from the start and I never hear them call us out for any of the benefits they have extended to police, nurses and firemen, for instance. They did not even consider us, and we were in the COVID from start to finish. There were only 2 or 3 days that the supermarkets were closed, we were there restocking even when the supermarkets were closed during the lockdown. I heard [that the] Ministry of Health, received from Sandals [Hotel] 1,500 masks, no one ever came to give each merchandizer a mask, absolutely nothing for us."*

The above comments represent merely a glimpse into the thick descriptions and rich details emerging from interviews with 69 women from across Saint Lucia on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on various aspects of their lives. The qualitative study was conducted from July to October 2020 and included women who had been engaged in four different forms of economic activity when the pandemic struck Saint Lucia in March 2020, namely hospitality, pre-schools, frontline workers and small businesses. An additional 14 key informant interviews (KIIs) were also conducted among representatives of key agencies associated with the four sectors as well as organizations representing particularly vulnerable groups such as the elderly and persons with disabilities. Having captured some of the voices of the Saint Lucian women above, we now will focus on the key cross-cutting themes that emerged. These themes represent the specific conclusions drawn for each topic that emerged as relevant to at least three out of the four occupational groups.

The negative effects of COVID-19

- loss of employment, either temporarily or permanently. The group most drastically affected was workers in the hospitality industry;
- the loss of income, which prevented feeding family members as before, either in quantity or perceived quality of food;
- inability to maintain bill payment schedules;
- increases in food and utility bills due to higher consumption levels, particularly during the lockdown;
- difficulties with supervising or assisting their children or wards with home-schooling in the online environment;
- a sense of hopelessness, frustration, heightened stress levels, and worries about the future among most respondents in describing their struggles to cope, as well as a loss of independence lamented by many respondents, who had to depend on others (relatives, friends and neighbours) for their sustenance after having been independent in their previous income-earning status.

The positive effects of COVID-19 on respondents

- feeling gratitude for family members' support in the form of money, food or caregiving services;
- maximizing time at home to bond with family members;
- having a positive mindset to face the challenges that surfaced;
- readjusting lifestyles, priorities and spending habits in order to cope;
- gardening as a form of food source and stress relief;
- practising relaxation techniques and introspection;
- trusting in God to help them through the crisis.

The role of employer support and government assistance

- Few respondents had received any form of employer or other assistance since the beginning of the pandemic up to the end of October 2020.
- The most common form of economic action taken to combat the financial constraints was the use by individuals of their personal savings to cover basic needs and to ensure their family's survival.
- Entrepreneurial ventures were started during the pandemic as an alternative source of income. Similarly, entrepreneurs found ways to repurpose or scale down their businesses to more focused services and products.

The effects of COVID-19 on family members

1. Many young family members benefited from adult supervision and support in the online learning environment.
2. Several students struggled to cope with the online classes, and after the initial thrill of the unexpected holiday, many missed school and their friends and teachers. They also had difficulty in making the required adjustments to their regular school curricula or teaching modalities.
3. Several relatives lost their jobs and sources of income because of the pandemic, and became de facto dependent on other family members for their basic needs.
4. Families spent time bonding as a result of the lengthy period at home and as a form of coping with the uncertainties and negative impacts of the pandemic.

Needs and recommendations for coping with COVID-19

1. The women involved in small businesses called for more financial support to safeguard their businesses, and more effective strategies in information dissemination to ensure that they would receive the relevant information about existing opportunities in a timely manner.
2. The most urgent request among pre-school teachers and administrators was for financial and other support from the Government, particularly in the provision of materials and supplies needed to make the schools compliant with the new protocols.
3. All of the groups called for increased support to both parents and children in transitioning to the learning from home modality. There were specific calls for electronic devices. Several parents lamented the challenges they faced in teaching their children since they felt ill-equipped to perform this task.
4. Women from all of the four sectors made a strong plea for emotional and psychosocial support, which was particularly urgent for frontline workers. Children who experienced a form of trauma in adjusting to the new reality of learning from home and being away from friends and teachers also needed this type of support.

1. Introduction

The United Nations Sub-Regional Team for the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and Barbados is currently undertaking a project entitled, “Enhancing Resilience and Acceleration of the SDGs in the Eastern Caribbean: Universal adaptive social protection modelled at the community, national and sub-regional levels” (the “Joint Programme”). The Joint Programme is funded by the SDG Social Protection Fund and is being implemented in Saint Lucia by the United Nations’ Children’s Fund (UNICEF), World Food Programme, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Labour Organization (ILO). It is designed to help create an enabling environment for poor and vulnerable people to have predictable access to universal and adaptive social protection. The study described in this report is led by UN Women, as one of the participating agencies in the Joint Programme, in collaboration with the Ministry of Equity and Social Justice, Local Government and Empowerment.

In light of the effects of the current coronavirus pandemic and the need for physical distancing, some of the activities under this project have had to be postponed, while new initiatives have been designed to respond more directly to the current crisis facing Saint Lucia. Recognizing the possible gender and social protection implications of the pandemic, UN Women together with the Ministry of Equity, Social Justice, Local Government and Empowerment embarked on a study entitled, “**The Impact of COVID-19 on Women in Saint Lucia: A rapid appraisal of the situation of frontline workers, small entrepreneurs, pre-school teachers¹ and hospitality workers**”. The purpose of the study was to:

- assess the impact of the coronavirus on women in various sectors in Saint Lucia;
- understand the coping strategies employed by women in response to the crisis;
- provide evidence-based guidelines for the development of effective social protection support to women adversely affected by the crisis.

¹ Teachers and administrators from privately owned pre-schools.

Arguably, everyone has been affected in some way or another by the COVID-19 pandemic. On 19 August 2021, approximately 209,201,939 persons were infected by the coronavirus globally and 6,578 in Saint Lucia.² Men and women, and girls and boys across the globe have all been impacted by this crisis in various and distinct ways. While acknowledging the widespread and complex impact of the pandemic on all persons, the impact on women deserves special attention for various reasons:

- Due to pre-COVID-19 gender inequalities, women are particularly vulnerable to the new crisis.
- The need for social and physical distancing has resulted in the disruption of services in most service and care sectors. Saint Lucia's Survey of Living Conditions (SLC) Report (2016) clearly demonstrated that a much higher percentage of women than men performed the service sector jobs.
- The closure of schools and daycare centres has created new caregiving responsibilities, a role that is also predominantly and historically performed by women.
- The coronavirus pandemic is first and foremost a health-related crisis, which presents distinct and significant implications on the lives of women since they have historically dominated the health care sector, both globally and in Saint Lucia.

One of the goals of the Joint Programme is to strengthen gender-responsiveness of national social protection policy and legislation for Saint Lucia. The pursuit of this goal would necessarily involve extensive stakeholder consultations and social interaction, processes that would contravene the current physical distancing protocols. The COVID-19 crisis involves significant social and economic implications for women and others in society; it is therefore important to explore the new and emerging opportunities and challenges that the pandemic has presented for shock-responsive social protection systems in Saint Lucia. Notwithstanding the deferral of the reform of the social protection policy and legislation, the Rapid Appraisal is expected to provide critical and timely data to inform the policy and legislative review process.

The research for this study began in earnest in July 2020 and continued to the end of October 2020, just prior to the start of the country's second wave of coronavirus cases. This timeframe is important because it provides a very specific context to the study, which was conducted within a much broader and dynamic timeframe, replete with changes in COVID-19 numbers, protocols and policies. This document represents a report on the study, highlighting the research design and methods employed, the main findings, and analytical implications of the research and the key recommendations from the findings.

2 WHO. n.d.

2. Background and context

This section of the report involves a review of the background and context within which the study was conducted. It includes a summary of Saint Lucia's COVID-19 history from March 2020 to the end of October 2020. A summary of the socio-economic impact of the pandemic is then presented by focusing on the main findings of the Saint Lucia's Economic and Social Review (ESR) 2020, which was released in April 2021. This is followed by details on the Government's arrangements to provide support and assistance to persons adversely affected by the pandemic. The final section provides details on the rationale for selecting the four sectors for the study.

2.1 A brief look at Saint Lucia's COVID-19 history

On Friday, 13 March 2020, Saint Lucia recorded its first confirmed case of COVID-19, which was soon followed by a second confirmed case on 15 March 2020.³ The announcement of the second case resulted in the immediate closure of all educational institutions on the island, which would come into effect from 16 March. Subsequently, the Emergency Powers Act of March 24 was issued, a Statutory Instrument designed to provide official guidelines and protocols for the management and control of the coronavirus in the country. The Act made a distinction between essential and non-essential services: the former could operate under certain restrictions, while the latter were forced to close down temporarily. Essential services included supermarkets, grocery stores, utility companies, cleaning services and pharmacies, while non-essential services referred to all other businesses and services not classified as essential, which included hairdressing salons, barber shops, spas and clothing shops. These conditions were also accompanied by a curfew from 11:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. and came to be known as a lockdown. Since this initial lockdown, the country has gone back and forth into various forms and degrees of lockdowns depending on the fluctuation in the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases.

Table 1 captures the main changes in protocols in response to the pandemic. These details are presented here to understand precisely how the pandemic and the changing responses to it have affected the various sectors in society, particularly the four sectors covered in this study. For example, the curfew affected all non-essential businesses such as hairdressers and restaurants/bars, since it forces them to close much earlier than normal. The closure of all educational institutions led to a closure of all daycare centres and

³ The information presented here was primarily obtained from the Press Room of the Saint Lucia Government: www.govt.lc/news

pre-schools, and required parents to find alternative arrangements for the supervision and care of their children when they had to leave them to go to work. The closure of borders affects all persons involved in the hospitality sector. Similarly, since the work of all frontline workers was deemed essential services, they were directly affected by the changes instituted.

Table 1. Timeline of COVID-19 Protocols and Responses

Date	Key milestones or changes in protocols
23 March 2020	State of Emergency (SoE) instituted – Governor General by Proclamation
24 March 2020	Parliament approves Emergency Powers (Disasters) COVID; Parliament extends the SoE to 26 April 2020
31 March 2020	Amendment to Emergency Powers: Curfew 8 p.m. to 5 a.m.; suspension of the liquor licence
1 April 2020	24-hour curfew instituted from 1 to 8 April 2020
7 April 2020	Curfew amended to 7 p.m. to 5 a.m., 7 to 14 April 2020; restriction on social activities, without prior written permission; airports closed to incoming international flights; no face-to-face classes; restriction on liquor sales
15 April 2020	Curfew continues from 7 p.m. to 5 a.m., 15 to 26 April 2020; Restriction on social activities, without prior written permission; airports closed to incoming international flights; no face-to-face classes; restriction on liquor sales
23 April 2020	Parliament extends SoE from 27 April to 31 May 2020 and Emergency Powers; Parliament approves National Insurance Corporation (NIC) (Economic Relief Programme for COVID-19) Regulations
15 May 2020	Revised curfew from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m., 18 to 31 May; restriction on social activities, without prior written permission; airports closed to incoming international flights; no face-to-face classes; restriction on liquor sales
3 June 2020	Classes resume for Grade 6 and Form 5 only
15 June 2020	Curfew hours reduced (midnight to 5:00 a.m.), 15 June to 30 September 2020; schools remain closed; non-essential services open for full operation except during curfew; sale of alcohol resumed
30 June 2020	Parliament extends NIC regulations period up to 30 September 2020
10 July 2020	Complete lifting of curfew
18 August 2020	Extension of the first phase of reopening of the tourism sector: includes additional tourist activities and attractions such as diving, reopening of villas and Airbnbs
7 September 2020	Easing of restrictions; reopening of schools
30 September 2020	The SoE was lifted

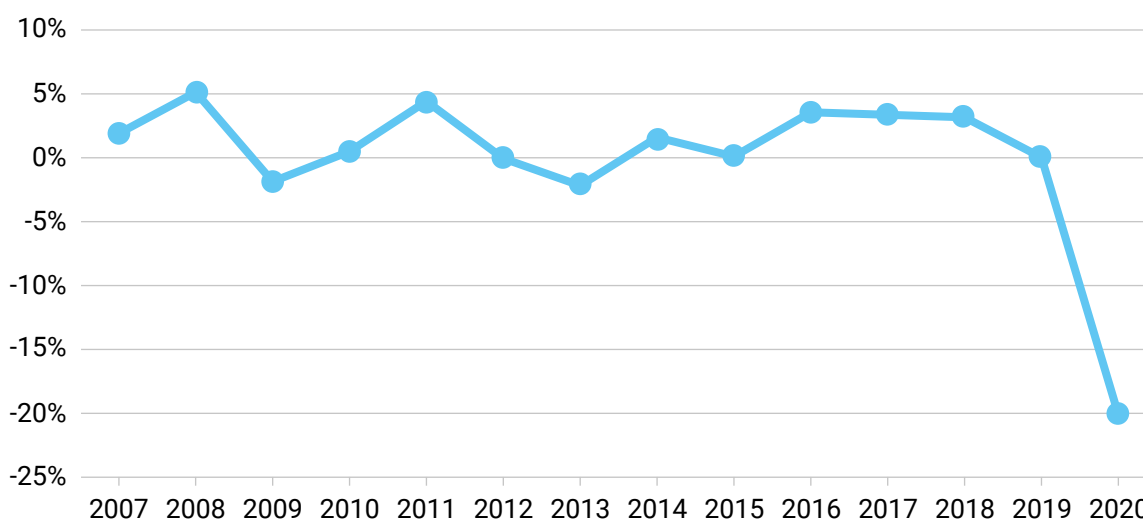
16 October 2020	Closure of schools
26 October 2020	Schools to remain closed: 26 October to 9 November
30 October 2020	Extended closure of school compounds; voluntarily limiting movement between 9:00 p.m. and 5:00 a.m.; minimal operations of select businesses until 9 p.m.

2.2 An overview of the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

This section provides a summary review of the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic on Saint Lucia, as outlined by the country’s Economic and Social Review (ESR), 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic brought a widespread cessation of or deceleration in social and economic activity across the globe. In light of Saint Lucia’s significant dependence on the global market and on international tourism, the effects of this extensive global lockdown were immediately and substantially felt on the island:

The sharp downturn in the key tourism sector, with substantially reduced activity at hotels, restaurants/bars, sites and attractions, car rentals and duty-free shops, had negative spillover effects on other sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, transport, retail and wholesale trade and utilities. In addition, ongoing remote work arrangements, temporary school closures, curfews and other COVID-19 restrictions limited business activity in 2020. These unfavourable developments resulted in an unprecedented and broad-based decline in domestic economic activity in 2020. (Economic and Social Review, 2020).

Figure 1. Real GDP Growth



Source: Central Statistical Office

As a result, the country reported significant declines in all sectors compared with 2019 figures. With regard to tourism, visitor arrivals fell by 65 percent, cruise ship arrivals by 63 percent and yacht arrivals by 60 percent. Revenue from the banana industry dropped by about 25 percent, and generally, the agriculture industry, which depends significantly on the demand from local hotels and restaurants, contracted by 9.5 percent. Similarly, the manufacturing industry and the construction sector experienced declines of 10.4 and 9.9 percent, respectively. As a result, the unemployment rate increased from 16.8 percent in 2019 to 21.7 percent in 2020, with youth employment reaching a high of 38.2 percent. Preliminary GDP estimates suggest that real economic output contracted by 20.4 percent.

In the area of early childhood education, the ESR reported a slight reduction in enrolment by 178 children, which represented an overall decline of 3.7 percent in the private and public facilities. This reflects a reduced enrolment in daycare centres and pre-schools of 1.2 percent and 4.6 percent, respectively. Undoubtedly, the reduction in this sector has significant gender implications:

- Given that almost all the teachers in the early childhood education sector are women, this reduction in enrolment affected the employment status of women who worked as pre-school teachers, administrators and other support staff.
- The reduction in enrolment is more likely to affect the employment situation and unpaid care burden for their mothers or female guardians.
- The reduction in the early childhood education sector may have created new employment opportunities for women who serve as babysitters and child-minders. However, in light of the pandemic, the demand for babysitters and domestics also declined.

With regard to the impact on children, had their withdrawal from the facilities not been immediately followed by regular and targeted early stimulation methods, they would have been robbed of the opportunity to benefit from the positive effects of early childhood education.

2.3 Income support and assistance

In light of the sudden and significant impact of the coronavirus pandemic on all sectors, the Government of Saint Lucia embarked upon various initiatives designed to bring relief to persons adversely affected. The data and information presented in this section were primarily drawn from the official webpage of the Government of Saint Lucia.⁴ This involved a review of press releases and videos; however, no documents were available with the relevant information.

2.3.1 The Economic Recovery Programme

The very first income support initiative to be announced and rolled out was the National Insurance Corporation's (NIC) Economic Relief Programme (ERP). This was designed to provide income support

⁴ Government of Saint Lucia. News Centre webpage, www.govt.lc/news

for a period of three months, from April to June, to NIC contributors who were directly affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

The amount payable under ERP was 50 percent of the monthly salary, i.e. between US\$375⁵ and US\$1,124. For salaries below US\$375, the amount payable was initially calculated at US\$187. For persons with salaries above US\$1,124, the amount payable was capped at US\$562. For individuals who were receiving financial assistance or income from their employers during the month or period of their claim, the amount payable by the NIC was reduced by the amount paid by the employer. The programme aimed to guarantee all NIC contributors a minimum payout of US\$187 per month for the three months.

The following eligibility criteria were established for the ERP:⁶

- The claimant was employed in February 2020 and is currently out of work due to COVID-19.
- The claimant must have contributed to the fund for at least one month prior to 29 February 2020, or in the case of self-employed persons, must have paid at least one contribution within the last 12 months prior to 29 February 2020.
- The claimant is not in receipt of any other benefit from the NIC other than the Funeral Grant. Where the claimant is in receipt of such a benefit, the higher amount – the ERP or the NIC Benefit already being received – will be paid.

One of the challenges with this programme is that it depended on the employers to submit requisite information about the applying employees. The NIC did not make payments to persons if this employer information had not been provided. By mid-October 2020, the Corporation announced that they were still awaiting details from about 256 (17 percent) of the employers. By that time, the NIC had made 68,904 payments to 18,853 applicants, amounting to US\$24,292,876.

2.3.2 The Income Support Programme

In July 2020, the Government of Saint Lucia initiated the Income Support Programme (ISP) with the aim of providing relief for citizens who had been adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This initiative formed part of the Government's broader Social Stabilization Plan, and was generally targeted at sole traders or self-employed persons who fit the following criteria: (i) they had lost their primary source of income; and (ii) they were non-contributors to the NIC, and therefore could not be eligible for the ERP. The Government of Saint Lucia made available US\$24 million to provide this financial relief. In order to be eligible for support, applicants were required to provide proof of trade.

Some of the main occupational groups who were encouraged to apply were taxi drivers, jet ski operators, vendors (beach, craft and provision market), farmers (agro-processors), tour guide operators, diving instructors, hairdressers, small bar/restaurant owners and artistes and others involved in the creative industry. Persons were required to apply electronically via the Government of Saint Lucia's webpage. Applications would be passed on to the NIC for processing and applicants were expected to sign on to

5 \$US1=EC\$2.67 as at May 2021.

6 National Insurance Corporation (2020).

the NIC as future contributors. The application process for this particular intervention ran from June to July 2020. Each successful applicant received a monthly payment of \$500 for three months, or because of the delays in processing of payments, many received a lump sum of \$1,500.

Table 2. Paid and unpaid applicants for the Income Support Programme

Paid applicants			
Category	Male	Female	Total
Auxiliary services in tourism	1,161	806	1,967
Construction workers	259	13	272
Microbusinesses	262	735	997
Other	692	887	1,579
Total paid	2,374	2,441	4,815
Unpaid applicants			
Category	Male	Female	Total
Auxiliary services in tourism	330	237	567
Construction workers	77	2	79
Microbusinesses	103	144	247
Other	536	492	1,028
Total unpaid	1,046	875	1,921
Total applications	3,420	3,316	6,736

Source: Government Information Technology Services

Table 2 shows the successful and unsuccessful applicants to the Government’s ISP in three key sectors. However, 54 percent of unsuccessful applicants fell out of the three main categories and were classified as “other”. It would be worth exploring the specific sectors and industries represented by the “other” category. This suggests that there is at least one other sector or occupational group that is believed to be in critical need of support, but the programme did not cater to these persons. Just over half of those who received financial support from the ISP (successful applicants) were women; women also made up about 46 percent of the unsuccessful applicants. According to the ESR, 2020, some of the reasons for which some applicants were unsuccessful in receiving support were as follows:

- They failed to submit all their required documentation.
- They submitted the applications after the deadline.
- The payments have been approved but not processed.

Table 3 provides some more detail on the specific types of jobs in which the successful applicants were engaged.

Table 3. Distribution of payments by occupation

Occupation	Percentage of beneficiaries (%)
Beach, craft, produce vendors	19.0
Other food vendors	10.7
Construction workers	5.6
Taxi drivers	14.5
Bar owners	5.4
Hairdressers and barbers	3.8
Tour guide operators	3.6
Boat operators	2.2
Others ⁷	35.2

Source: Economic and Social Review, 2020

One of the challenges with this initiative is that applications had to be made online, and for some persons who lacked Internet access and/or devices, these requirements were an immediate obstacle. Others complained that the system was not user-friendly, and many who did not fit into the expected occupational categories had difficulty advancing through the application.

2.3.3 The Economic Recovery and Resilience Plan

On 12 July, the Government of Saint Lucia launched the Economic Recovery and Resilience Plan, aimed at stimulating the economy, protecting the incomes and livelihoods of all Saint Lucians, as well as providing support and protection to the business sector from the threat of insolvency. The Plan is based on the following six pillars:

1. Mitigating the impact that both global and domestic economic contraction is having on the business sector by providing a set of tax-oriented policies to enable private sector business rejuvenation and continuity.
2. Allowing the Government of Saint Lucia to actively drive economic activity through the deliberate commencement and continuation of public sector capital investment projects.
3. Protecting the poor, the marginalized and the most vulnerable of the population from plunging further into poverty as a result of COVID-19.
4. Accelerating reforms that will build the resilience of the private and public sector by leveraging ICT, which will foster business continuity and catapult growth in the productive sectors.
5. Strengthening the health system to respond to viral outbreaks and to improve healthcare in general.
6. Continuing to build the resilience of Saint Lucia to natural disasters and hazards.

⁷ These include small restaurant owners, artistes, entertainers, travel agents, agro-processors and jet ski operators (ESR 2020).

In support of the business sector, nearly US\$ 1.2 million dollars were allocated to the provision of blended (loan/grant) support to micro, small- and medium-sized enterprises through the Saint Lucia Development Bank. This intervention is primarily focused on food security and the adoption of digital technologies.

The social protection pillar encompassed various interventions. As part of efforts to protect the poor and vulnerable, the Economic Recovery and Resilience Plan included an additional 1,000 households in the Public Assistance Programme, thus increasing the number to 3,600. Additionally, there is the increase in the Child Disability Grant from \$200 to \$300 for more than 280 households receiving child disability grants. Similarly, support was also provided to foster care households and persons living with HIV both received an increase of \$100 to \$200 monthly. Hygiene kits would also be provided to poor and vulnerable households. In addition, about US\$190, 000 would be made available in microloans to persons displaced by the pandemic and wishing to start small cottage industries and small infrastructural projects in the rural communities.

2.4 Rationale for sector selection

The continuous changes in the guidelines for the levels of operation of various types of business have undoubtedly affected all sectors of society. The current study has selected frontline workers, hospitality workers, pre-school teachers and small entrepreneurs. The selection was based on the recognition of some of the unique and important insights that they are likely to bring, including from a gender perspective. More importantly, as indicated above, the service sector is recognized as having the largest ratio of women to men. For example, in Saint Lucia, 42 percent of women in the labour force worked in services and sales, compared to only 18 percent of men (Government of Saint Lucia, 2018).

The focus on pre-school teachers is intentional. Whereas all teachers have been impacted by the closure of schools, which took effect on 16 March 2020 in Saint Lucia, most primary and secondary school teachers have not experienced a reduction in their income since most schools are public institutions; hence, the teachers continued to be paid while schools were closed. During an interview with Ruth Fevrier, Training Officer of the Early Childhood Services Unit of the Ministry of Education, it was confirmed that there were 130 pre-schools and daycare centres on the island, of which only 21 were government-operated. Hence, the vast majority of the pre-schools in Saint Lucia are privately owned. As a result, most of the teachers and administrators of these privately run schools experienced a sudden and immediate loss in income with the closure of schools since parents were not expected to pay for the service since their children were no longer attending school. Moreover, only one of the pre-schools on the island is known to be operated by a male administrator.

Similarly, it is important to understand how the suspension of commercial activities has impacted various types of small entrepreneurs, many of whom, perhaps due to the informality of their work, may not have the savings or other support systems to help cushion the impact of the economic lockdown. The types include: women farmers who would have previously supplied produce to hotels and restaurants; and vendors, spa operators, restaurateurs and hairdressers whose businesses were forced to close during the lockdown because they may not be deemed essential services. Moreover, these small businesses would continue to be affected by the physical distancing protocols and the general reduction in economic activity.

The focus on frontline and essential workers is complex: it reflects an understanding of the health and safety threats that these workers face on a daily basis and their implications for decent work standards. Additionally, recognizing the care responsibilities of women within the household, the sudden closure of schools and day-care facilities, and the irregular work hours expected of many frontline and essential workers, they had unique stories about their experiences, fears and coping strategies in this crisis. Of critical importance here is the impact on the mental wellbeing of these workers and the psychosocial support systems, if any, that were instituted to support them. It is also important to note that the terms 'essential' and 'frontline workers' refer to a broad category of workers. Within the context of this study, the terms refer to:

- healthcare workers such as nurses, pharmacists, doctors, community health aides, and other administrative and ancillary staff within the health sector;
- supermarket employees;
- fire and emergency personnel;
- police officers;
- other staff employed in homes for persons with special needs.

For several years, the tourist industry has been the most significant sector within the Saint Lucian economy in terms of its contribution to the country's gross domestic product (GDP). The Saint Lucia COVID-19 High Frequency Phone Survey (COVID-19 HFPS) reports that tourism accounted for half of the country's GDP and employment. Moreover, approximately 20,000 persons were directly employed by the tourist sector prior to the pandemic. With the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, this industry has suffered significant losses resulting from the closure of all ports, the subsequent cancellation of visitor arrivals, and the closure of major hotels. As a result, thousands of workers have had to be laid off, sent on involuntary vacation, or placed on rotation and having to accept pay cuts. Like other service industries, the tourist industry in Saint Lucia is predominantly occupied by women.

Given that this exercise was not designed to be a comprehensive or in-depth study, it was not possible to include all sectors. For this reason, the four sectors have been selected because they are likely to provide a useful overview of the immediate impact of the COVID-19 on the lives of women in Saint Lucia.

3. Methodology

This section presents the research framework employed for the Rapid Appraisal. It presents the rationale for the rapid appraisal approach adopted, the main methods utilized, the key research questions that guided the research, the analytical approach and the shortcomings involved.

3.1 The rapid appraisal approach

The rapid appraisal methods utilized offer several advantages, which are both necessary and pertinent in this context:

- They provide an in-depth understanding of complex socio-economic issues. The in-depth interviews (IDIs) yielded a wealth of information on the complex ways in which the crisis has affected the lives of different groups of women in Saint Lucia.
- They allow for flexibility: In light of the physical distancing protocols associated with the coronavirus pandemic, it is important to employ methods that allow for flexibility. In particular, the use of telephone and Skype calls ensures that the health and safety of the researcher and the participants are not compromised.
- They can be conducted in a relatively short timeframe.
- They are relatively low cost.

Notwithstanding these strengths, it is also important to acknowledge the shortcomings of this approach:

- It does not allow for generalizations due to the use of non-representative sampling approaches and qualitative as opposed to quantitative methods of investigation. As a result, the study provides details on the experiences of the selected groups, but it is not possible to determine the pervasiveness or extent of the issues that emerge.
- Limited reliability and validity due to the qualitative methods employed.
- It is possible that there is bias in the sample due to the convenience and purposive sampling approach taken in selecting participants.

3.2 Research questions

The research was guided by the following questions:

1. What has been the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic on women in Saint Lucia?
2. How have the COVID-19-related changes in society affected the mental health and personal well-being of women in Saint Lucia?
3. In what ways have the lockdown and other features of the pandemic affected family life, including the role of women in the family?
4. What are the coping strategies that have been employed by women, and how effective have they been in combating the effects of the COVID-19 situation?

3.3 Research methods

The study involved two primary methods of investigation, namely in-depth interviews (IDIs) and key informant interviews (KIIs). Both methods ensured compliance with current physical distancing protocols. The interviews were conducted from a distance through telephone calls, and Skype or Zoom, depending on the respondents' preference.

3.3.1 In-depth interviews

These interviews served as the main method for obtaining primary data on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on women in Saint Lucia. Using a combination of convenience, purposive and snowball sampling methods, about 20 women were targeted from each of four sectors as outlined below:

- Sector 1: Frontline and essential workers – nurses, first responders, supermarket workers.
- Sector 2: Hospitality workers – persons employed at hotels, restaurants and taxi companies, and tour guides
- Sector 3: Pre-school teachers and administrators
- Sector 4: Small-scale entrepreneurs – vendors, shopkeepers, hairdressers, farmers and other self-employed persons.

Every effort was made to ensure that the geographical distribution of participants reflected the population distribution of the country. To this end, the country was divided into three regions: North, Central and South, as indicated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Map of Saint Lucia



Source: www.shutterstock.com

Saint Vincent Passage

Table 4 presents the population distribution of the ten districts of Saint Lucia based on the 2010 Population and Housing Census.

Table 4. Population distribution, by region

District	Region	Population	Percentage (%)
Gros Islet	North	86,528	54
Castries			
Anse La Raye	Central	28,528	18
Canaries			
Soufriere			
Dennerly	South	44,529	28
Choiseul			
Laborie			
Vieux Fort			
Micoud			
Total		159,585	100%

Source: Saint Lucia Population and Housing Census, 2010

Based on this breakdown, interviewees were selected from the three regions of the island to ensure that for each sector, approximately 50 percent of respondents would be from the North, 20 percent from the Central and 30 percent from the South (Table 5). Additionally, every effort was made to ensure that at least two single parents were included in each sector in order to gain insight into the impact of the pandemic on unpaid care work responsibilities in these specific circumstances.

Table 5. Distribution of interviewees, by sector and region

Sector	Regions			Total (%)
	North (%)	Central (%)	South (%)	
Frontline workers	50	20	30	100
Hospitality workers	50	20	30	100
Pre-school teachers	50	20	30	100
Small entrepreneurs	50	20	30	100

3.3.2 Key informant interviews

These were conducted with persons in key positions in the four sectors of interest. They were expected to provide critical insights into the ways in which women and men in these sectors have been variously affected by the current crisis, what actions have and should be taken in response to these issues, and with what results to date. The KIIs were also conducted virtually or via the telephone, and included representatives of the following entities:

- Department of Gender Relations
- Early Childhood Services Unit
- Local Supermarket Representative
- National Association of Early Childhood Practitioners
- National Council of and for Elderly Persons
- National Council of and for Persons with Disabilities (North)
- National Council of and for Persons with Disabilities (South)
- Raise Your Voice Saint Lucia
- Royal Saint Lucia Police Force
- Saint Lucia Craft and Dry Goods Vendors Association
- Saint Lucia Medical and Dental Association
- Saint Lucia Nurses Association
- Saint Lucia Fire Service
- Saint Lucia Crisis Centre
- Small Enterprise Development Unit (SEDU)

Most of these interviews were conducted with the leaders or managers of the respective entities and interestingly, all but one of the KII was with a woman. The schedule of questions was shared with these respondents in advance to allow them the opportunity to gather the relevant data.

3.4 Analytical approach

For the analysis, edited transcripts were used to identify and categorize themes and patterns. This was a systematic approach to gaining insights from the data gathered. A multi-modal, structured coding system was used because the following coding methods were applied:

- a. Deductive coding: An initial set of codes was established from the questions asked. This method was the catalyst for the early analysis of the data, and created a springboard to delve deeper into searching for codes and trends.
- b. Inductive coding: This was possible since specific questions were asked to numerous participants, allowing for patterns to surface. Also, the initial codes established were updated as these new patterns became clearly identifiable.
- c. In-vivo coding: This approach was also utilized as participants' own words provided an opportunity to create sub-codes in some instances. This verbatim approach confirmed some of the previously established codes.

- d. Values coding: This became necessary as respondents' beliefs and concerns were captured during the interviews and these generated data for a later code.

In addition to the above techniques, the analysis of the data involves a gendered approach, which prioritizes women's voices. This approach seeks to explore and highlight the ways in which gender-based norms and practices might directly and indirectly disadvantage women in the context of the coronavirus pandemic. The analysis seeks to provide insights into the experiences of women in the following areas of focus:

- Economic impact
- Social impact including impact on family life and family relations
- Emotional and psychological implications
- Coping strategies
- Recommendations.

However, this analysis heavily drew from direct quotes from the women interviewees to allow them to tell their stories, express their feelings and share their experiences during the pandemic.

Notwithstanding the focus on four key sectors, efforts were also made to capture the experiences of specific vulnerable groups such as the elderly, persons with disabilities, and women and children who have been victims and/or survivors of gender-based violence (GBV). The inclusion of those groups allows for the production of a case study highlighting their unique experiences.

3.5 Risks associated with the research and mitigation strategies

At the design stage of the study, the lead researcher considered a number of possible risks and emergent issues from the research, which included the following:

- The expectation of financial and other support to individuals who have lost their livelihoods.
- The need to provide psychosocial support to individuals experiencing mental trauma.
- Adverse childhood experiences resulting from changing family dynamics, relationships and arrangements
- Gender-based violence
- Substance abuse
- Loss of homes
- Impact on children because of the sudden closure of schools
- Feelings of isolation and loneliness, and thoughts of suicide
- Lack of reliable day-care facilities and alternatives for children of frontline workers.
- Fear for the safety of children
- Fear for one's and one's family's health and life
- Feelings of insecurity and lack of safety in the workplace among frontline workers.

All of these are social protection issues that have a direct bearing on our efforts at accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Saint Lucia, since they pertain to poverty

and hunger (SDGs 1 and 2); good health and wellness (SDG 3); quality education (SDG 4); gender equality (SDG 5); and decent work (SDG 8). As indicated above, one of the goals of this appraisal is to provide real life experiences (evidence-based data) of women directly impacted by the coronavirus. On a broader level, it is also important to consider the current mechanisms and resources and those can be rapidly leveraged in Saint Lucia to respond to the above and other emerging issues from the research.

Some of the above issues can cause discomfort to the respondents; indeed, several of these issues emerged during the research. Where necessary, the researcher directed the interviewees to seek counselling support.

4. Results

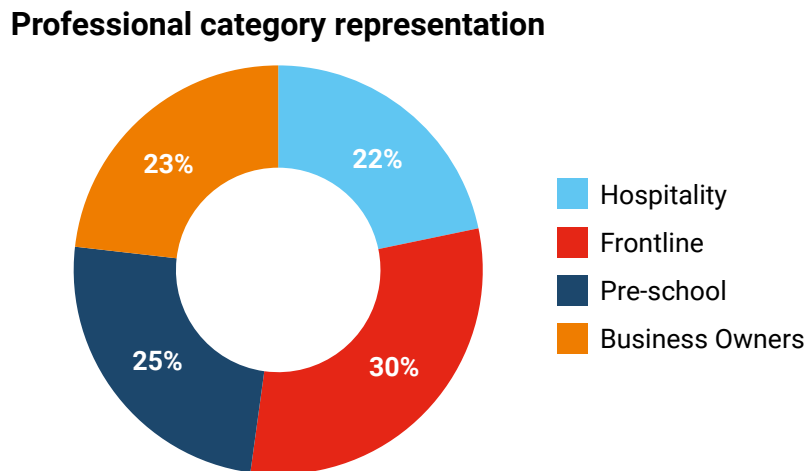
“Emotionally, women were masked. We just kept it moving and we [were] masked. We crying in the background, but we masked. We [were] crying in the bathroom but we [were] masked.”

This section presents the results of the research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women in Saint Lucia. The results will be presented in two parts: the first features the data obtained from interviews with women from the four sectors of interest; in the second part, the results from the KIIs will be shared. Admittedly, the presentation of the results from the women in the four sectors depends substantially and uniquely on the actual quotations from persons interviewed. This approach is intentional and is in keeping with the underlying theme of “Voices of Saint Lucian Women”. The quote above is from a pre-school administrator and teacher, and very accurately encapsulates the feelings and experiences of the women interviewed for this study. While they have had little choice but to comply with the various protocols including the wearing of a mask, this physical mask and the entire experience of the pandemic have led to an even deeper feeling of being masked, being stifled and unable to speak out, and feeling that even speaking out would be futile, since everyone was impacted by the crisis in one way or another. Several persons remarked that participation in the study was their first opportunity to speak out. In this regard, by featuring and valuing the verbatim comments of the women, this report seeks not only to give voice to the participants, but more importantly, to listen to their voices and to share their views with anyone who would listen, in the hope that this sharing would result in positive change for those affected.

4.1 Profile of participants

A total of 69 professionals from the four sectors of interest were interviewed. Figure 3 captures the proportion of interviewees by sector.

Figure 3. Breakdown of respondents, by sector



Interviewees ranged in age from their early 20s to just over 60 years old. Table 6 provides more details on the ages of the respondents.

Table 6. Age range of respondents

Age range	Small business	Hospitality	Pre-school	Frontline
21–30	3	5	2	3
31–40	5	5	3	10
41–50	7	3	4	2
51–60	1	2	6	4
60+	-	-	2	2
Total	16	15	17	21

It can be noted that respondents in the hospitality and frontline categories generally tended to be younger (concentrated in the 21–30 and 31–40 age groups), while generally persons involved in small business and pre-schools were slightly older. The pre-school sector accounted for almost half of the respondents in the 51–60 age group. This finding may be due to the tendency for retired teachers to become pre-school administrators. The category of frontline workers includes a total of five different occupations, as presented below:

Table 7. Breakdown of frontline workers by occupation

Occupation	No. of respondents
Nurses	4
Police officers	3
Fire officers/emergency medical technicians	5
Supermarket workers	5
Community health aides	4
Total	21

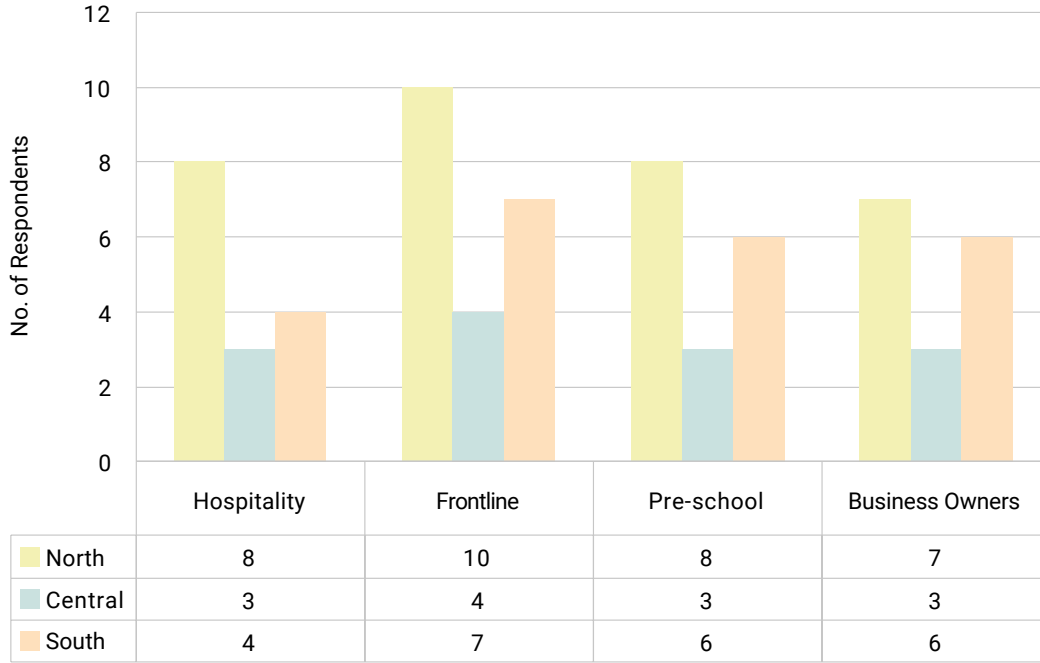
It must be noted that the supermarket workers involved in the study represented different supermarket companies/chains. Small business owners also comprised a mixed group, as indicated in Table 8.

Table 8. Breakdown in types of small-business activities

Occupation	No. of respondents
Caterers/restaurateurs	5
Beauty salons/spas	4
Farming	2
Vendors	2
Other	2
Total	15

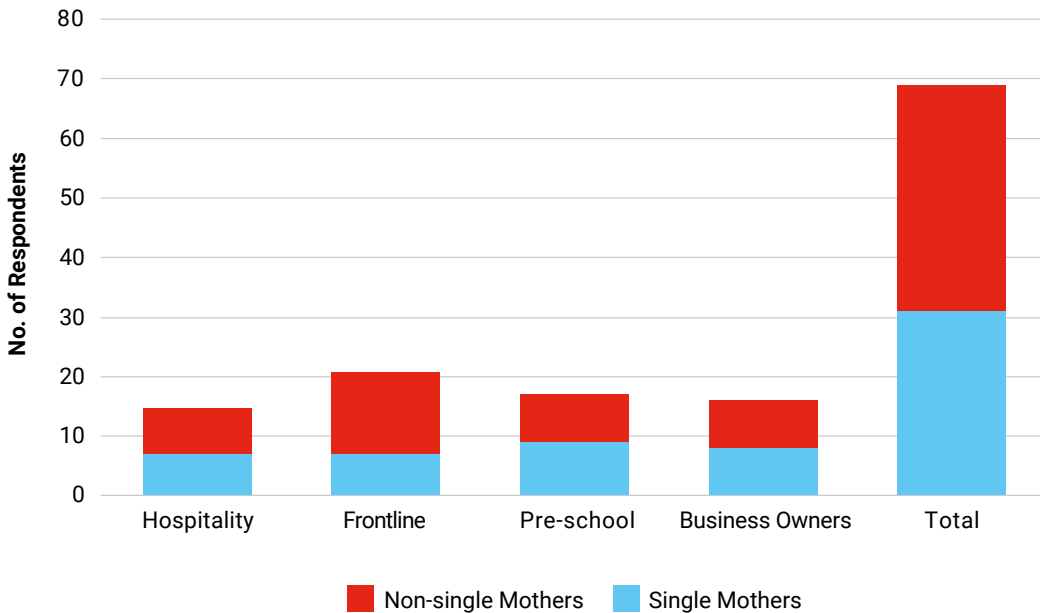
Interviewees from four occupational groups were selected from three regions across the island: North, Central and South. Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of interviewees and their sectors by districts.

Figure 4. Professional category participation, by region



In the selection of participants for the study, efforts were made to ensure that each occupational category included at least two single mothers. Figure 5 shows that this goal was actually surpassed, resulting in almost half of the respondents being single mothers.

Figure 5. Number of single mothers, by professional category



In addition to the individual interviews with persons from each sector, 15 KIIs were conducted to capture perceptions of the overall experiences of the members of various interest groups. These organizations represented the following categories of stakeholders:

- Medical professionals
- Market vendors
- Crisis victims
- The elderly
- Persons with disabilities
- Early childhood education practitioners
- Police officers
- Fire officers.

Efforts were made to conduct interviews with representatives of youth groups, the Ministry of Health and the hospitality industry, but they were not successful. However, for the hospitality sector, officers from the Ministry of Tourism provided some data for the study.

4.2 Assistance received

Respondents were specifically asked about the form of support they had received, if any. Of the 69 persons interviewed, 23 respondents received NIC support, which was the most common form of support identified by the respondents.

Table 9. Type of assistance received by sector

Sector	NIC-ERP	ISP	Other
Hospitality	12		7
Frontline			
Pre-school	9		
Business owners	2		1
Total	23	-	8

Note: NIC=National Insurance Corporation; ERP=Economic Relief Programme; ISP= Income Support Programme

None of the respondents had benefitted from the Government’s ISP. There were several patterns in the responses that emerged from the various discussions around the topic of assistance and support:

1. Eligibility: Some respondents complained about applying for but not receiving any funds.
2. Accessibility: Just under five respondents stated that they were not eligible for it so they did not apply for it.

3. Duration: Many respondents lamented that this form of subvention was for only three months, and they contrasted it with the uncertainty of the duration of the pandemic and its trickle-down economic damage.
4. Information dissemination: Some respondents said that they had not been aware of this type of support. In some cases, they may have only learned about it during the interviews, by which time it was too late to apply.
5. Inadequacy: After the complaint about not receiving the funds, the second most common complaint was the amount of funds received (EC\$500 per month), which did not enable them to meet their expenses with it.
6. There were significant delays in disbursing funds, and some of the respondents also complained about how long they had to wait. And yet they were grateful that, due to the delays, they would receive their one- to three-month allocations as a lump sum.
7. Other types of support discussed were food hampers and financial support for the retrofitting of pre-schools in compliance with the new safety protocols and in preparation for the opening of the new school term.
8. The frontline workers received no monetary forms of support; instead, they primarily received support in the form of training, transportation, PPEs, masks and food hampers.
9. While one nurse was grateful for receiving training, another indicated that she had not received any training. Similarly, there was no uniformity in the provision of transportation for the nurses and other frontline workers.

4.3 Negative effects of COVID-19

This section represents a collation of data related to the tangible ways that the COVID-19 pandemic had adversely affected respondents financially, physically, or with regard to work. All of the hospitality workers and pre-school teachers, and almost all of the frontline workers and small business owners experienced at least one negative effect of the pandemic. The pandemic has disrupted their livelihoods, their lifestyles, their families, their psychological state of mind, and their physical well-being.

Unemployment

The loss of employment was the main negative effect of the pandemic overall. Most of the hospitality workers became unemployed during the pandemic. Although all frontline workers remained employed, many were required to either work longer hours or on shifts; the former affected their family time; the latter, their salaries. The shift system was established either to accommodate new physical distancing protocols or as a response to a reduced clientele. While all re-school teachers and administrative staff were unemployed for a period of time during the pandemic, 76 percent of them returned to work temporarily when schools re-opened. Just over a third of small business owners remained unemployed during the time of the study, mostly due to the Government's new protocols for their business establishments to remain closed, or to having fewer clients and thus reduced profitability. Figure 6 shows the percentages of workers across the four sectors of interest who experienced some level of unemployment during the pandemic.

Figure 6. The percentage of workers who were unemployed during the pandemic, by sector

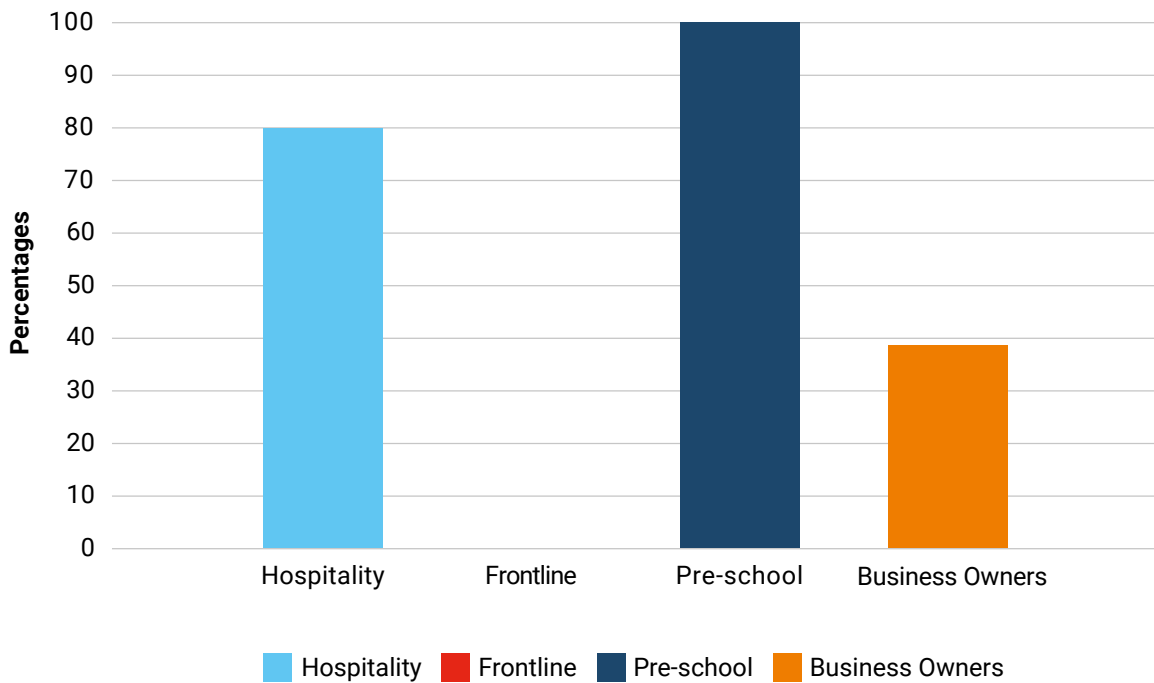
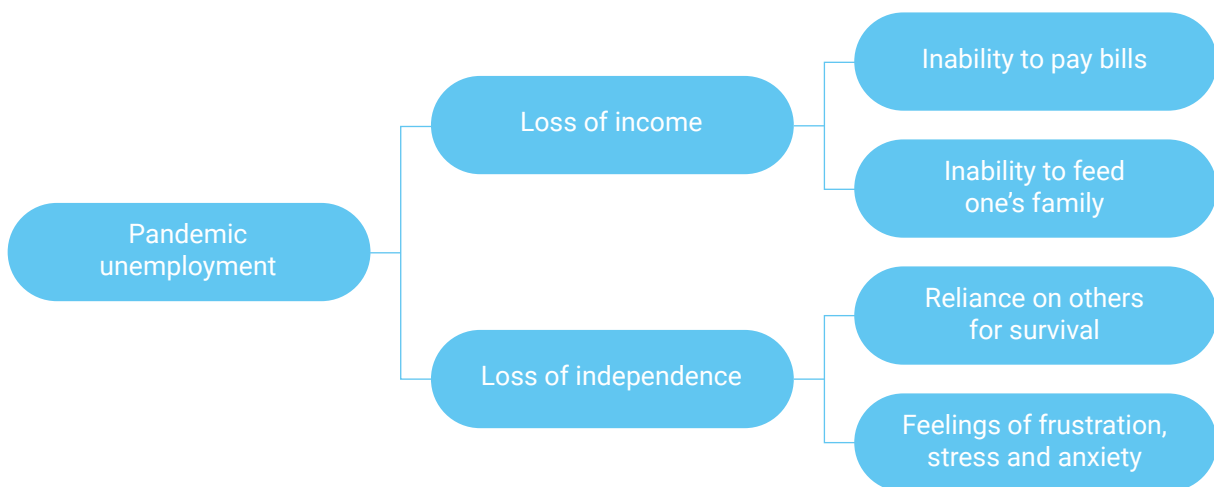


Figure 7 further captures the most commonly identified direct impacts and spillover effects of unemployment. This figure illustrates only a snapshot of the spillover effects, because each effect identified has other, additional effects, for example, persons who lost their jobs and had previously employed other individuals such as babysitters or domestics also had to lay off their workers. Importantly, given that these dependent workers provided some form of care or service, they were more likely to be women.

Figure 7. The trickle-down effects of unemployment due to COVID-19



Many respondents spoke of having to adjust their lifestyles to survive. This included eating two instead of their regular three meals per day, having to turn to relatives or friends for financial support or sustenance, and trying to decide on which bills to pay. The following excerpts are taken from the respondents regarding the general effect of losing jobs:

Senior customer representative: *“Not being employed and having the same bills and commitments to address every month can be mind-boggling. If it was only four months, you could pinch the savings but after the 4 months you have to start to restructure; you have to decide whether you will pay your health insurance and/or the car insurance...The challenges were great.”*

Marketing officer: *“Before COVID-19, there were more than 70 staff on the island; now about 7 or 8 are employed. We all lost jobs, 95% of staff, and about 90% of the company staff are women. So about ten guys and 70 women.”*

Beauty therapist: *“I had to decide on not paying bills or paying less on the rent in order to get what he [my son] needs. Thinking that, with everything going on, did we really have to get all these things [for school] for the children?”*

One hotel worker who was also a single mother had difficulty in coping with the financial constraints due to the loss of her job that she decided to return to her parents' home with her child. She now feels a great sense of relief: *“Knowing that you can get up, and your meal might be ready – it's soothing. It's a relief.”*

This issue relates directly to the difficulty faced by the women in coping with their new realities. It focuses on the sentiments of respondents throughout the interviews and their assessment of their ability to cope. Accordingly, the findings for each profession are presented so that the unique peculiarities as well as similarities across sectors may be observed. The following is a breakdown of findings for each professional category.

Hospitality workers: Most of the hospitality workers had lost their jobs and found no other source of income. Compared with the other professions, this category of workers suffered the longest without a reliable source of income, and most of the respondents were unemployed at the time of the interview. Their prolonged unemployment status affected their ability to pay their bills, loans, or rent, buy their regular food items, and/or assist dependent adult parents. Just over a quarter of respondents could not apply for another job due to a lack of caregiving support for either their children or elderly parents. Some of the respondents had to become de facto teachers to their children who were being schooled at home via the online platform.

Emotional and psychological impact

Nearly half of these workers used the following words to describe how they were coping with COVID-19 and its impact on their lives: “frustrated”, “depressed” and “stressed”. The financial difficulties experienced by the respondents were the main result of unemployment, which affected their ability to cope with the pandemic. This specific challenge was the main cause of the negative emotions expressed above:

Senior customer representative: *“Not only financial, but also mental and emotional stress. It was a low-level depression; for so long I have been working and now I am just home not doing anything...”*

Spa manager: *“My emotional state was a little bit messed up. The week before COVID-19 (lockdown), my husband travelled and is still unable to return. So I have not seen him since March. It is something unexpected, and it’s been an emotional wreck for me.”*

Events worker: *“There are days when I just want to shut my house and lie inside alone because I cannot afford do the things I am used to doing. It is depressing. Some days are better than others.”*

The respondents also reported having added responsibility within the household associated with the online learning arrangements for school-aged children. This created some measure of anxiety among some of the women. Additionally, the new childcare responsibilities precluded some women from seeking or taking up new job opportunities:

Senior customer representative: *“It was challenging because I had to become a teacher at home; the things that I probably learned ten years ago, I had to learn again... Two people have lost their jobs because I am not working – the babysitter and the house helper.”*

Spa manager: *“It has been a life-changing experience, from full-time worker and then becoming a stay-at-home mum.”*

Butler: *“I would say childcare. That’s one of the reasons that I’m not able to return to work. I’m still looking for something else, and childcare will still be an issue. I’m looking for somebody I trust to look after my home. Somebody that has good hygiene practices. With the pandemic you have to look at who you are hiring because not everyone takes the precautions.”*

Waitress: *This added more stress on me knowing I had to teach him those things on my own. I have no idea how to teach the way a teacher would teach. I felt that I needed to be paid a teacher’s salary for doing a teacher’s job.*

However, this same waitress also recognized some benefits in being a teacher for her son:

Waitress: *It built my confidence in helping my son improve. It built our relationship, and he does not just see me as mum, but as someone who taught him something he will find useful in life later.”*

In light of the struggles they faced with the pandemic, hospitality workers in particular were encouraged by the opportunity for support which first came through the NIC’s ERP. However, only a few of them succeeded in meeting the established criteria:

Events worker: *“No, I didn’t apply for NIC support. The nature of the work I do, it was sort of temporary with the hotels; they do not keep records of these things. The persons you would meet are restaurant managers, I never get to go to HR, they don’t ask for much documents, not even my ID card.”*

Chef: *“... under the Economic Relief Programme. The three of us applied for this financial programme and we were denied payment. I sought legal counsel.”*

Frontline workers: Nearly all of the respondents reported experiencing negative effects of the pandemic. The main concern of these respondents was the risk of contracting the virus due to their heightened levels of exposure to people, and the subsequent possibility of infecting their loved ones. About one-third of the respondents lamented the loss of family time because they either had to self-isolate for the safety of their family members, or they had to work longer hours and therefore spent less time at home. Some of these workers also had to self-isolate due to their exposure; about half of the respondents experienced increases in expenses without a corresponding increase in income; and a few of them now had to cover the expenses of two households because they had to meet the needs of relatives who lost their income as a result of the pandemic. In addition, just over half of the respondents described work-related challenges that weakened their ability to cope with the suddenness of the pandemic, which included insufficient PPE, longer work hours, fewer work hours resulting in a reduction in salary, and/or handling clients, customers or patients in a stressful environment.

The frontline workers were the only professional category where the topic of NIC or ISP payments did not arise because this type of form of support was only applicable to those who had lost their primary source of income. It should also be noted that one-third of frontline workers saw no positive effects of the pandemic on their lives. Because of the tremendous sacrifices they were making for the good of the country, they felt that they should have received some form of tangible support or compensation. They also complained about their employers’ failure to provide some of the most basic services or supplies that had been promised, such as transportation to limit their use of public buses, training, psychosocial support and groceries:

Supermarket worker: *“The Government has done nothing for supermarket workers. As far as I am concerned, they don’t even know if we exist. They put everything in place for every other sector except [for] the supermarket workers. My boyfriend dropped me at work because he didn’t want me using the public bus, for fear that I would contract the virus. I tried getting him a NEMO⁸ pass; I had no luck. I was told he was not a frontline worker. I was also told, once I am in the vehicle, I could present my work [supermarket] badge to the police, and my boyfriend would be allowed to pass. What if, when he is going back, I’m not in the vehicle?”*

Community health aide 1: *“The Ministry didn’t provide buses. They said a bus from each community would pick up staff to take them to work back and forth. That did not happen in my area ... I never got a bus; I hiked a ride to go to work and back. So that was the bad part of it because I didn’t have a bus to take me to work... The only thing that the Ministry provided was masks and gloves.”*

8 NEMO: National Emergency Management Office

Community health aide 2: *“Community health aids (CHAs) never stopped work during the pandemic. But no assistance [was] provided at all – not even counselling... CHAs are not referred to as frontline – it’s doctors and nurses, and no mention of them – the attendants, and there was nothing in place as an incentive... The country was closed. No transportation, so how do CHAs get to work?”*

They also complained about the tendency for some public buses to discriminate against them by failing to pick them up out of fear that they might be infected with the virus. Like other workers, frontline workers also faced additional financial burdens that they found difficult to bear on the same salaries:

Community health aide 1: *“I had to get a computer for him [her son] by Courts [appliance store] underneath⁹ that COVID so he could do his school online. So things were really rough at that time, and I had to get a computer, which I am still paying for.”*

Customer service representative: *“Now I am required to shop for both my mother’s home and mine.”*

Nurse: *“I am employed, and everyone at home was unemployed during the pandemic lockdown. My brother also worked in the hospitality sector and my mother worked at a school.”*

Emotional and psychological impact

Just over half of these respondents acknowledged that in various ways they experienced great difficulty in coping emotionally with COVID-19. Well over half of these respondents expressed feeling “stressed”, “frustrated”, “worried”, or “heightened levels of fear” about the above-mentioned pandemic realities (their finances, risk of exposure to the virus and subsequent infection of family members, and an inability to make regular bill payments).

Fire officer 1: *“It did affect us, besides the fact that my children had to be distanced from me. My daughter and niece got sick; they both suffered with a very high fever for a few days. I was literally beating myself up. I went through a very rough period; I didn’t sleep, I kept watch because I believed I had brought something home.”*

Nurse: *“At one time I actually broke down. Nobody knew about it but I would cry in the night, especially when thinking of my mother. I said, ‘Ok. I was here’ and I felt like drinking cocoa tea, and at the time I was at a particular place out there, and I thought, ‘Oh my goodness, I cannot get a glass of cocoa tea on a morning, I have to be away from my family. I have to be working and the hours and the time’ and I was like ‘wow’. The simple things that we take for granted.”*

⁹ The use of the term “underneath” is a direct translation from the Creole. While the individual spoke in English, the essence of the statement reflects a regular form of expression in Creole suggesting “under certain conditions” or “under the burden or weight of a particular condition”.

Merchandizer: *“Due to the sudden change in how we did things, the situation caused me to stress; my pressure went really high; it took a toll on me, especially with everyone at home no longer working due to the pandemic. I do not normally have pressure issues. As a result, I had to change my diet.”*

Fire officer 2: *“My great concern is that if I get infected, I can pass this on to my children.”*

Community health aide 1: *“I feel that I have been battered and bruised. Work is so stressful because people do not want to wear masks. I was exposed to the virus. Feeling that I am being exposed all the time – [verbally] abused, abused and abused.”*

Customer service representative: *“Having to work through the national lockdown and potentially becoming contaminated, and the likelihood of bringing the virus home to my son was and it still remains a concern to me.”*

Fire officer 3: *“Missed spending time with my loved ones. Every so often I have to self-isolate and I cannot be with my loved ones, especially my grandparents.”*

The following comment from a nurse reflects the idea that, although frontline workers had not lost their jobs, some of them may have experienced a relative or absolute decline in their incomes because of reduced shifts, increased costs, or a loss of second jobs as security guards during parties and other social events:

Nurse: *“Mental state – a little depression here and there with all the indoors and not able to do what you did before. A lot of frustration as well because some of your bills you cannot pay in full and you have to pay them half-way.”*

Fire officer 2: *“Pre-school would have you normally pay one month at a time (one term). Now you must pay all terms. The cost of groceries have changed, and trying to see how best we can sustain ourselves. The new normal and trying to meet the needs of myself and family.”*

In light of the types of shifts that they worked, frontline workers had the added concern of finding appropriate arrangements for the care of their children who were not only at home, but in need of adequate supervision for their online learning activities.

Fire officer: *“If you are at work, you need somewhere to place your children. It’s hard for persons who have dependents at home.”*

Police officer: *“It was very difficult for me to work with the kids because I had to be at the borders every day as the supervisor.”*

Pre-school teachers/administrators

“The Government is not seeing what we are going through. When statistics send questionnaires...they are not asking questions like what you are asking there. They are concerned about numbers, but not about our real life experiences.”

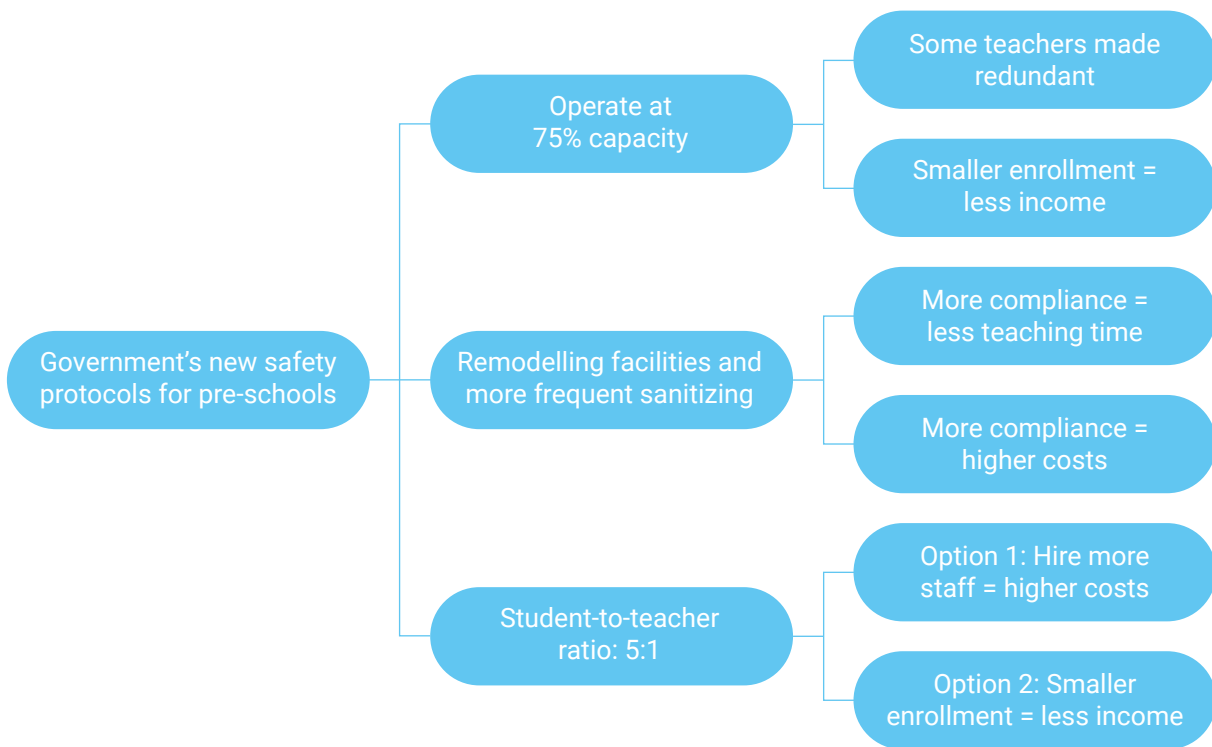
Pre-school administrator

All of the respondents complained of experiencing negative effects of COVID-19. Pre-schools closed in March in the early stages of the pandemic when all schools were forced to close, and they reopened a few months later in September. Several teachers expressed concern about the abrupt closure of school and their inability to prepare the pre-school children for primary school, as there was no third term. All the teachers interviewed complained about their unemployment status during these months and their difficulties in managing their finances to pay their bills and feed themselves and their families. One teacher confessed that she resorted to taking, that is, stealing produce from her neighbour's garden to feed her children. Her distress and embarrassment were visibly displayed as she described her situation.

During this period, all of the administrative staff explained that their greatest challenge was while they all saw the value of the new protocols, they all had to personally cover the cost to retrofit their schools with the proper safety protocols so that the Ministry of Health could grant approvals for re-opening. The financial burden took a toll on the savings of all of the administrative staff interviewed.

The establishment and enforcement of the new protocols caused a ripple effect in the pre-school system, which is primarily run by private individuals, under the supervision of the relevant Ministry of Education Department. All of the pre-school teachers interviewed represented private pre-schools and daycare centres. One new regulation was that pre-schools had to operate at 75 percent capacity. The Government also mandated a revision of supervision ratio (5 children to 1 adult). This further compounded the matter for the educational institutions, since it meant that some pre-schools had to hire more staff in some cases, and in other cases, it meant taking on fewer children. Both approaches ultimately resulted in revenue shortages. One other challenge that created added stress on the teaching staff was the time taken to repeatedly sanitize the facility, equipment, children and themselves. This lowered productivity levels because it limited the amount of work that could be done during the school day. The magnitude of these safety measures and their ripple effects can be seen in the following diagram (Figure 8).

Figure 8. The ripple effects of new safety protocols for pre-schools



The challenges described above were even further compounded by the fact that some parents kept their children away from the pre-schools for various reasons:

- They did not have the money to pay due to their own financial struggles and some pre-schools required payments for a full term.
- They were afraid for their children's safety. Teachers reported that some parents worried about their children contracting the virus even though stringent health and safety protocols were put in place.
- They were doubtful that the school term would last very long in a face-to-face format.

The reasons cited above resulted in even fewer pre-school children returning to school than the new capacity allowed, which exacerbated the financial instability of the schools and their capacity to function profitably. The teachers who returned to school also encountered the challenge of not being able to physically interact with the children while they made efforts to adhere to the self-distancing protocols. This proved particularly difficult for the teachers, because they were accustomed to displaying open affection to the children as part of the nurturing environment of the schools and now had to find other methods of consoling them during difficult moments.

It became evident that respondents experienced negative effects in three phases: Phase 1 was at the beginning of the lockdown, when schools were suddenly closed and there was a high level of uncertainty about their job security. Phase 2 was the period during the lockdown and curfew, when none of the teachers received a salary during their time at home, and they struggled to make ends meet. Phase

3 occurred as schools re-opened, when some teachers were not re-hired, while those who returned to work were forced to make major work adjustments to ensure that the class environment was safe for themselves and the children.

Teacher 1, herself a parent, speaking of the challenges faced by the administrator of the pre-school remarked: *"The daycare is now open but she does not have as many kids because of COVID-19 protocols; her numbers have been cut down considerably. Her expenses have skyrocketed due to the protocols she has to put in place... Teachers themselves do not have access to the resources they need to work with the children."*

Teacher 2: *"There isn't any income coming in, so what is saved I have to use, versus while I was working, I work, I save and purchase the groceries, pay the bills, do what I have to do; but with an income not coming in it is very strenuous."*

Teacher 3: *"I did not get the full salary, because we didn't work the entire month of March, and we haven't been paid ever since because we are not working, because I work at a community-based pre-school, so I am dependent on NIC. I got the payment twice already."*

Teacher 4: *"We go under the neighbour's bananas [farm] and look for bananas. The people farm. What fall down we take... They don't know. God is good. We keep the faith and hold the faith."*

Although the teachers were not being paid, some of them were still expected to provide teaching support to the children via WhatsApp and other social media platforms. Moreover, only a minority of parents took advantage of the opportunity. It was also difficult to work with toddlers through virtual means. This further exacerbated the teachers' frustrations with their conditions:

Teacher 1: *"It's not easy working with pre-school children online; you need that one-on-one interaction, they need to watch you and have eye contact."*

Teacher 2: *"I had a large group. One parent left the group. She said she was capable of teaching her own child ... I would get feedback from about ten of them and the others would just see the work and not regard it. I don't know if they did it or not."*

Teacher 3: *"I had to send work for the children. I worked with them via social media. I don't get paid for it but I do it. It was required by our administrator, so we had to follow her demand."*

Teacher 4: *"To go back to work and give them protection and give me protection, it's like a lot of stress. So I go to work and try my best, see how it comes."*

The pre-school teachers and administrators were the most vociferous in their calls for financial and other support and the recognition of the extent to which the pandemic had impacted their livelihoods. Moreover while just over half of the pre-school teachers who were interviewed received the ERP from NIC, generally they felt that it was insufficient and short-lived.

Pre-school administrator 1: *"I have to eat more vegetables, and now since COVID hit, the vegetable prices are sky high."*

Pre-school administrator 2: *"What about the business? The business closed for how many months? Some of the fees were not collected. You talk about concessions for the taxi drivers, hoteliers, don't you think we should get something? Isn't the taxi driver a private business? Aren't the vendors private, at least a little start, some gloves?"*

Teacher 1: *"I got through with my first payment just about 2 weeks ago. That's in July. If I was depending on NIC money, I would not have been able to eat or pay bills."*

Teacher2: *"NIC payments are being processed; we have not got them yet."*

Even when schools were re-opened, which is what the pre-school representatives awaited, they now had new complaints pertaining to the increased costs of adhering to the new protocols and the lack of financial support to meet the new demands. Moreover, the teachers felt an added burden in ensuring that they kept safe as a means of protecting the children:

Pre-school administrator 1: *"We had to get everything on our own. From the thermometer to hand sanitizers – everything, we had to get on our own. Not a dollar, a nickel or a dime. Nothing. Not even paper. No counselling."*

Teacher 1: *"Angry at first because I keep saying there is so much more [to do in a school] now. It became more expensive to do things. I could not take my bus and go to town. I had to be looking for a ride to go to the supermarket. I had to be paying taxi to drop me, wait for me and bring me back home. Was now more expensive because I am afraid to catch anything. ... So I have to pay taxi fare and pay groceries ... It was more expensive."*

Teacher 2: *"We are working over ten hours every single day. So every week now we are accumulating more than the 40 hours a week. We are working from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sometimes at 6:30 a.m. we are already at the school."*

Teacher 3: *"We have to screen. We have to clean so we have to come in and be in the school by 6:30 a.m. The latest a teacher will come in is 6:45 a.m. Every day. We screen ourselves. Take off our clothes, change into scrubs. We were already changing into scrubs, but the time is affecting us."*

Teacher 4: *"The long hours – I can tell you is hard. Working with a mask or a shield the entire day is hard. Not being able to comfort a crying child..."*

Pre-school administrator 2: *"No support from Ministry of Education. Nothing from the Association."*

Emotional and psychological impact

Like the other sectors, pre-school teachers experienced significant emotional distress as a result of the demands and impact of the pandemic:

Teacher 2: *"Emotionally women were masked. We just kept it moving and we masked." We crying in the background but we masked. We were crying in the bathroom but we masked."*

Teacher 1: *"It's overwhelming. It's a lot. Usually after work we clean but now we do so much cleaning, like every 30 minutes. We are on a cycle. We have to sanitize whatever that's used."*

Pre-school administrator: *"Emotionally, it took a toll on me. Around May, I felt I was at the end of my rope. I felt so depressed that I cried. I was not me. I was not the person I know myself to be."*

Pre-school administrator: *"I felt very alone and depressed. This has been the most challenging time of my life."*

Pre-school administrator: *"I tried to put on a face to support staff. Even if I was battling my own internal feelings, I needed to be there for staff."*

Small business owners

Mentally, it affected me for a little while because you have to figure out as a mom and business owner how you going to take care of your bills. A mother's job is to protect her cubs [children] and she [my daughter] is going to school, because that is more important to me than anything else. I don't make enough money to maintain the shop as I used to. No effects on my pressure, health. Pressure is great! I learned to cope. I pray, talk to God, that's my strength and I rely on my faith with God. That is how I am getting through this difficulty.

The above quotation from a single mother who is a small business owner is a good place to start in examining the experiences faced by small businesses. This woman who has a child in university was suddenly plunged into despair when her only source of income was cut off by the pandemic. The quote highlights a number of issues simultaneously:

- The emotional impact of the pandemic
- The economic impact of the pandemic
- Challenges of single mothers
- Business decision-making
- Coping strategies and spirituality.

Nearly all of respondents experienced on average two or more negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic; just over half experienced a drop in sales at their workplaces; and one-quarter experienced a total loss of income, directly resulting in their inability to feed their families and cover their expenses. A few respondents described having to adjust their lifestyles and eating habits in order to survive. Several respondents in this and the other groups observed that utilities and grocery bills increased due to increased levels of consumption of both food and utilities during the lockdown and curfew. The women in this category expressed strong feelings of anxiety about their domestic financial situation as well as about the future of their businesses. One respondent expressed feeling “suicidal”, while another described her situation as a “nightmare”.

Economic impact: Respondents reported their inability to pay their domestic and commercial bills, and the need to adjust their lifestyles as a result of the absence of an income. In several cases, they were forced to give up the business:

Nail technician: “Things you used to give your children to go to school, you cannot give to them no more. What you use to cook you cannot cook it like before.”

Printer: “I have been struggling financially – not able to pay bills. Could not pay rent so had to give up the business location.”

Massage therapist: “I can’t think anything good that has come through this pandemic.”

Vendor: “People don’t shop like they used to. People lost their jobs and they will buy what they need for the day and not for the week. There has been a decrease in sales.”

There were also reports of increased competition for limited markets and a general reduction in the demand for some of the services offered by these entrepreneurs. The reduction in demand was related to the closure of non-essential services, but even when these were re-opened, it took some time for people to access them because of the close contact involved and the need for physical distancing. Some individuals were now considering giving up their small business and seeking a job, at least to pay off their debts:

Hairdresser: “Personally, it has affected me. I am more at home than at work. Should I continue or should I give up? Right now I’m operating at a loss. I didn’t get any help from the Government... It’s a nightmare, but I love what I do.”

Farmer: “Hotels are hardly buying. So many people are vying for the same market and so it makes it difficult.”

Cook/vendor: *“Where I live, I used to do little ice lollies, and once the people around see it’s selling, everybody wants to be doing the same thing.”*

Massage therapist: *“Physical distancing with COVID means people (clients) are afraid to get massages and treatments done; they don’t want to take the risks because they don’t know who has it.”*

Nail technician: *“I don’t know where I will get a job. Don’t know where to start looking. So many places are closing and letting workers off.”*

Cook: *“Because of the physical distancing thing, it tremendously affected our flow of individuals. Not only that, with people losing their jobs, their disposable income got cut. And so the amount of money they had to buy food, they now had to redirect to something else more important at home. That cut our sales down from last year.”*

Emotional and psychological impact

These independent self-employed individuals were not spared the emotional and psychological pain brought on by the sudden closure of their businesses:

Farmer: *“The current situation makes me feel insecure, worried and anxious. There’s a sense of uncertainty about the future.”*

Caterer: *“I try to be positive. But there has been nothing positive from this pandemic! COVID-19 has been a nightmare for me.”*

Lack of awareness of support systems

It is interesting to note that even though the Government’s ERP was designed to support non-NIC contributors such as sole traders and self-employed individuals, most of the people in this group had not been aware of this opportunity. This suggests the need for improved strategies for disseminating information:

Hairdresser 1: *“I did not know about the non-NIC contributors’ programme of support, the Income Support Programme (ISP).”*

Caterer: *“I was not aware of the Economic Relief Programme that the Government was providing. That would have been awesome!”*

Hairdresser 2: *“First of all, I didn’t know about it... I think it could have been easier [to find out] and [have more on the] media about it. Some people keep to themselves and would not know. It should have been on the news. Say this is where you have to go, for people who don’t have access to internet. Some people’s business is not registered. Other ways*

that it could have been easier and some of us are not tech savvy. And of course, you need to send somebody to survey [verify] that's what we have been doing."

Others simply did not qualify because of the criteria or the documents they were required to present with their application.

Farm worker: *"... the farm daily paid by cash payments. Therefore, I was unable to have proof of employment or income and I received no assistance."*

Cross-cutting issues: Across the interest groups, each of the following themes prevailed among at least three of the four occupational groups:

- loss of employment, either temporarily or permanently. The group most drastically affected was workers in the hospitality industry;
- loss of income created an inability to feed family members as they usually would (either in quantity or perceived quality of food);
- inability to maintain bill payment schedules;
- increases in food and utility bills due to higher consumption levels particularly during the lockdown;
- difficulties with supervising or assisting their children or wards with home-schooling in the online environment.

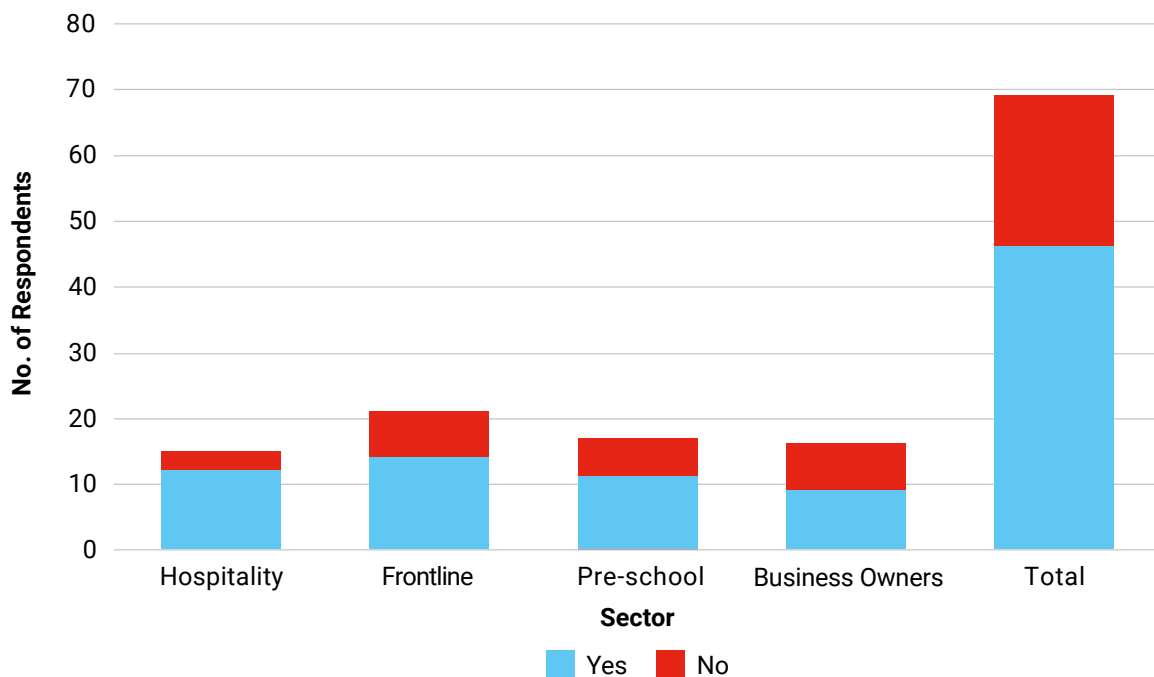
Moreover, in describing their struggles to cope, most respondents expressed a sense of hopelessness, frustration, heightened stress levels and worries about the future. And the themes of a loss of independence resonated as many respondents lamented having to depend on others (relatives, friends and neighbours) for their sustenance after having been independent in their previous income-earning status. This state of mind necessarily resulted in these small business owners questioning the viability of their business and exploring new means of income-generation.

4.4 Positive effects of COVID-19 on respondents

Nurse: *"I developed that kind of attitude to be grateful and not complain about life and stuff, and say thank you for everything – even the small things that I do, I would say thank you and I will always no matter how small, I will always give myself a gift every month. Every week I would [get] a pedicure, I would soak, I [light] my candles, I do my little self-talks, my affirmations, and I also did it on my WhatsApp chat. Throwing out these kinds of positive vibes so people can feel positive and look forward to another day."*

Of the 69 respondents across the four occupational groups, 46 persons experienced some type of positive effect from the pandemic. Importantly, this majority found at least one positive element in the midst of the trauma and crisis that they experienced from the start of the pandemic in March. Each sub-group will be presented individually. Figure 9 shows the number of respondents across the professional categories who experienced positive effects.

Figure 9. No. of respondents who experienced positive effects of COVID-19



Hospitality workers: Most of these respondents experienced at least one positive, tangible effect of the pandemic. The most frequent response was the increased time spent with family members; more than half of respondents spent the time available during the lockdown or after losing their jobs to bond with family members. Some of these respondents spent time tutoring their children who were undergoing online schooling from home, which became mandatory upon the closure of schools in the middle of March. Other positive effects of the pandemic for this category of workers were opportunities to start new projects such as kitchen gardens. One respondent started her own business, which was something she had hoped to accomplish in the past. She used her experiences as a chef in a hotel restaurant to leverage her own catering company. These responses also surfaced in other work categories. Most of these workers received three months of NIC benefits as a form of financial assistance during the pandemic, for which they were grateful.

Although most of the hospitality workers were unemployed during the pandemic, they were all still able to cope with the pandemic with a positive mindset. These reflections were common across the categories, as will be seen further on. About half of the respondents in this category expressed gratitude for the

support they received from their relatives, friends and even neighbours. They identified this as one of the factors that helped them to survive as funds diminished or disappeared:

Waitress: *“Presently, life is not that bad. I am coping because my boyfriend is working ... I have gotten help from my boyfriend’s mom who lives in the States. She has helped us a lot, and I thank her immensely. Even my friends support me; they would let me know where there is a vacancy. I also got the NIC support.”*

Chef: *“With school reopening, I have books and school material. By the grace of God I have good friends and family support systems; people will call and help.”*

Almost half of the respondents also stated that keeping a positive mindset improved their ability to cope with the adverse situations that emerged:

Housekeeper: *“I try to look at the pandemic in a positive way so that it does not affect me too much. There is not anything we could do. It showed me that we have no control of things to come. Showed who your friends are.”*

Hotel laundry worker: *“I’m keeping busy, always out there looking for something.”*

Administrative assistant: *“I have life and strength to wake up every other day and face my challenges. I thank God for that.”*

Waitress: *“I was depressed for one or two days. Gradually I got back up; I cannot be sad all the time, I couldn’t stay down for my children sake.”*

A few respondents also explained that focusing on the needs of others was one of the strategies that helped put their situation into perspective and allowed them to connect with others:

Chef: *“I became a teacher to neighbours’ children, too, because their parents are at work”.*

A very common response among hospitality workers as well as the other occupation groups was that the pandemic had forced them to start focusing on themselves, attending to their health needs, improving their nutritional habits and engaging in more self-care activities. Interestingly, at the same time that some of these women spoke about caring for themselves, they also reflected on how the pandemic had allowed them more quality time with their families.

Butler: *“The positives of the pandemic are that there was more time to do my studies, more family time. More relaxation time as my job did not allow for that.”*

Hospitality worker: *“Now I pay attention to what I eat. Time to focus on myself and on my health, having my medical checks done.”*

Waitress/cashier: *“Right now you can say you have a family because you get to know your family. Before that, everyone at work and everyone away from each other. Only one day a week to spend a little time together. Now you can say you know your family.”*

Frontline workers: Most of these workers experienced one or more positive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which ranged from having more time to bond with family, to having time for introspection, self-care and personal development. Although many frontline workers were familiar with persons who lost their jobs or were home indefinitely, only two respondents were able to identify their current job status of being employed as a positive element. They also acknowledged the Ministry’s efforts in easing the burden on the staff:

Fire officer: *“Due to the pandemic, transportation to and from work was made easier as transportation was provided to reduce possible spread from the public to fire officers and vice versa.”*

One possible explanation for the limited number of frontline workers who saw their employment situation as a benefit would be the negative work-related experiences described by these workers, including having to adjust to new protocols; the stress of fear of exposure to the virus and the ensuing fear of infecting family members; and longer work hours and time away from loved ones at home. Additionally, although a third of these workers received some form of government assistance, the main areas identified being PPE, hand sanitizers, and transport to work, many believed that they should have received financial and psychosocial support as well since they felt that they were putting their lives on the line and putting their families at risk for the good of the country.

As with the previous section, self-care and family time were identified together. An examination of some of the quotes might suggest that these women believed that spending quality family time was equally beneficial to their sense of well-being as are exercise and other personal forms of self-care:

Nurse: *“[I] started a backyard vegetable garden. Lots of diet changes. Also, I tried being a little more family-oriented. People I may not have had time to spend with them, I [now] had time for that.”*

Community health aide: *“Yes, the virus makes you get closer to your family, those who are overseas that you haven’t been in contact with; you make it your duty now to call your loved ones at least once a week.”*

As with the hospitality workers, frontline workers also found ways to evoke a positive attitude despite the stress they faced. However, in this case, there was much more direct reference to their spirituality and faith as a source of strength and encouragement:

Customer service representative: *“I carry my smile ... Accept the situation as it is and I’m trying to be as happy as I can be.”*

Supermarket manager: *“I get a little stressed – in life, money make the mare fly. I’m not giving up. I do as I may and how I can with the help of God.”*

Fire officer: *“By the grace of God my family will be fine. I cover them under the precious blood of Jesus. Protect yourself as best as you can.”*

Nurse: *“God was helping me. When I pray the road was smooth but if I didn’t pray then I experience a lot of frustration. I learn how to calm down, to relax, how to take it easy one day at a time, step by step.”*

Supermarket worker: *“Honestly, how I keep myself sane is looking forward to a smile from my grandchild in the morning when I wake up – that is what keeps me going, my faith...”*

Police officer: *“I’ve begun to feel a lot more relaxed. I feel better, rejuvenated. Like a load was taken off me.”*

As part of the positive attitude, persons also resorted to laughter and camaraderie despite the need to practise physical distancing. One fire-fighter reflected that among her colleagues they often laughed about the way that their family members treated them as outcasts when they got home from work, and insisted that they remove their clothes and have a bath outside of the house:

Fire officer: *“No one will let you in the house unless you remove all your clothes. We shared our experiences/stories of being sprayed down. Talking with each other about arriving at home, we all smelled like we came from a ‘cabaway’ [rum shop]; we smelled of alcohol. Making light of the situation sometimes just to keep us sane. Yes, we joked about certain situations we faced.”*

Pre-school teachers: About three-quarter of these respondents were able to identify one or more positive effects of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Of these respondents, nearly half listed bonding with family members as one of the main benefits of being home during the lockdown period of the pandemic. Additionally, about half of those who found positive elements in the pandemic, utilized their free time to see about their health and to rest, while a quarter of them took up gardening to produce their own food. Just under half of pre-school teachers and administration staff also received NIC funding.

In terms of their ability to cope positively with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the outlook of this category of interviewees was clearly the most positive because, although all of the women experienced several negative socio-economic and emotional effects of dealing with the pandemic, they also reported **on average three or more positive aspects or outcomes** of the pandemic. Most of them were generally positive in their attitudes and tried to maintain this positivity during the hardships they faced. They also described having to adjust their perspective of the whole situation and also their lifestyles in order to cope effectively. More than a quarter reported that spending time with their families helped them to cope more since they were home for five months of the pandemic. These interviewees in particular expressed gratitude for the support family gave to them either financially or with homeschooling. These supportive family members included spouses or their children’s fathers:

Teacher 1: *“Well, the bond with my family it got stronger; at least I got to see my son more often.”*

Teacher 2: *“I also talk to my parents a lot to relieve my stress.”*

Teacher 3: *“I would go and spend time with family – my daughter and I would spend weekends – she’d spend time with cousins. I would spend time with my mum. My sisters... we’d be there together. All of us would just be home, just talking. Having a glass of wine, cooking together. We’d just chill and have a laugh. You could have seen the joy on my mum’s face. It was a really nice feeling.”*

Pre-school administrator: *“The grandchildren are my company. I feel great with my grandchildren, it’s very joyful. They stay with me until their mum comes from work and they go with her.”*

A quarter of the pre-school staff lent support to their work colleagues who were also experiencing the same situations. These respondents admitted that this form of solidarity helped them to cope because they recognized that they were not alone in their distress. Some respondents also used gardening as a form of stress relief:

Teacher 4: *“Colleagues had to support each other, and I can tell you, sometimes nine hours out of the day, I’m on the phone. It was that bad. For one person, you are sometimes on a call for 3 to 4 hours. By the time that one hang up, that other one calls you, for another two hours. In a way it was draining, and it was also supporting.”*

Many persons were grateful for the opportunity to relax and enjoy the activities that they normally do not get the chance to do, and be more grateful for the important things in life. As with other groups, the importance of one’s spirituality also surfaced among the pre-school sector:

Pre-school administrator 1: *“Things I never got a chance to do I could now do. I have more time to find myself, relax, read more, crochet more.”*

Teacher 2: *“I don’t want to tell you it did me this, it did me that... I am in the frame of mind that I’m on summer vacation. Oh my God, I love it, a few months off. ... I watched movies so much on Netflix. It gave me time to go out with my friends. When you working you always rushing, rushing, you never have the time.”*

Pre-school administrator 2: *“I am looking at life differently. Not taking people and things for granted. Managing time and finances better. It’s not about wants but needs. Taking one day at a time.”*

Pre-school administrator 1: *“One of the women decided to start a garden, and she gave out seedlings and encouraged the women to start home gardens. It helped us to see our flowerpots not only for flowers but for food. COVID came with a lot of stress, but it allowed people to think outside the box, look and see what we can do and what we have around us.”*

Pre-school administrator 2: *“I pray a lot and fast. I believe in the higher power.”*

One person in this group considered the NIC support a positive. This might reflect the views by others that it was insufficient and short-lived:

Teacher 2: *“The only support I received was from the NIC. We received the last payment in August. The funding programme was from April to August.”*

Small business owners: It should be noted that three-quarters of the workers in this category were employed at some stage during the pandemic. However, due to the various challenges experienced on the job or at home, less than a third of the respondents saw their employment status as positive; only 19 percent received some form of government support, although many listed various ways in which the Government could have helped, which will be discussed below in the corresponding theme. Just over half of the respondents experienced positive effects of the pandemic, a significant proportion of whom grew closer to their family members, and 36 per cent expressed gratitude for the support from friends and relatives who provided food, money or caregiving for their children:

Printer: *“Faithful customers have continued to come from the village up to my home to give me support. By having me provide services. That’s why I’m not giving up.”*

Baker: *“We got groceries from different people.”*

Almost half of the respondents who experienced something positive from the pandemic attributed their ability to cope to their relationship with and trust in God. Some also spoke of turning to God more during their moments of uncertainty and/or despair:

Hairdresser: *“Emotionally and mentally it’s only God that is keeping me strong.”*

Nail technician: *“I’m doing very well ... I don’t worry much ‘cause I know there’s a God and he know why these things are happening. And I trust in Him that he will take care of me and my family.”*

One single mother treasured the vast array of free opportunities for learning during the lockdown. She has capitalized on these training opportunities, seeing them as a means of gaining skills for enhancing and pivoting her business to be one step ahead when the restrictions with the pandemic are relaxed. The appreciation of information dissemination is also confirmed by a vendor below:

Cake maker: *“As a small entrepreneur one of the things I have benefited from is access to information and knowledge. Without COVID, it may not have been so easily and freely available. A lot of organizations have been offering webinars that have been very informative and encouraged creativity. Yes, there is a pandemic, but we can still forge ahead and network.”*

Vendor: *“I keep myself updated with information. I pray more. I try to speak to my kids about what is happening and keep a positive frame of mind. Do more exercising like walking on mornings and afternoons.”*

As with previous sectors, the small businesswomen also enjoyed the opportunity that the lockdown allowed them to spend more time with their families and to care for themselves:.

Farmer: *“It enabled me to spend more time with my children and get to know them individually.”*

Vendor: *“I walk to the beach, I exercise by walking twice or three times a week. Sleep out the stress. There is no money for partying.”*

Cross-cutting themes: Across the interest groups, the following themes prevailed among at least three of the four occupational groups interviewed:

- Gratitude for family members’ support in the form of money, food or caregiving services
- Capitalization of time at home to bond with family members
- Having a positive mindset to face the challenges that surfaced
- Re-adjustment of lifestyles, priorities and spending habits in order to cope
- Gardening as a food source and stress relief
- Practising relaxation techniques and introspection
- Trust in God to help them through the crisis.

4.5 No impact of COVID-19 on respondents

This section briefly presents data on the respondents who believed that the pandemic had no effect on their lives, as well as those who identified one or more specific areas of their lives that were unaffected. While only three respondents stated that they had not experienced any significant adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on any aspect of their lives, almost a quarter of all respondents reported that one or more aspects of their lives remained unaffected. The most common among these areas was their domestic situation in terms of caregiving and household duties. A few frontline workers suggested that they were coping with the protocol regulations because those were already enforced at their places of work; these respondents were mainly fire service officers. Other respondents reported that their relationships with relatives were unaffected and that the lockdown had effected no changes, either positive or negative.

4.6 The role of employer support and government assistance

Throughout the discourse, it became clearer that the psychological and socio-economic circumstances of each interviewee was a direct result of whether or not, and for how many hours they were employed. The discussions flowed into the theme of the role of the employer in assisting the employee to cope with the suddenness and socio-economic impact of the pandemic. The interviews then delved deeper into analysing what other activities might have influenced the women’s abilities to cope. The theme of personal financial efforts then emerged as several respondents discussed ways in which they made attempts to find other sources of income to survive. Discussions also triggered negative emotions among some who lamented stymied efforts to make ends meet. These issues are presented together since

they helped to answer the overarching question of exactly how have these women been coping with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hospitality workers: Very few of these workers in the study received some form of assistance from their employers. One respondent received financial assistance for two months. Another respondent explained that she did not lose her job but had to go on leave. Almost half of these respondents indicated they had resorted to starting their own entrepreneurial venture or expressed interest in starting one. About one-fifth of the interviewees tapped into their savings in order to meet their needs:

Chef: *"I took the opportunity that COVID gave me to pursue my own business and I have already started. I used my personal funds to start off."*

Cook: *"I'm doing hustle by the road. I cook food and burgers, sell water and stuff. At the end of the day what is sold is mine and it helps me. It's OK for now."*

Administrator assistant: *"I realize [that] the pandemic taught me in essence that you don't need to depend on anyone to sustain you, to sustain your family. It showed me that I need to be an entrepreneur. I don't need to work for anyone..."*

Frontline workers: Fifty-seven percent of these workers received some form of support from their employers, which ranged from time-off and protective gear, to debriefing sessions/psychosocial support; each of these forms of assistance was received by less than one-fifth of the group. Other types of assistance received included transport to and from work, food and money vouchers. Some frontline staff who did not receive support from their employers highlighted the areas mentioned above as the types of assistance that they felt they should have received from their employers. A minority of these workers, although employed during the pandemic, still had to tap into their savings to make ends meet. It is worth recalling that the frontline workers comprises a mixed group of five different occupations; the responses given in this section demonstrates the futility in treating the group as a homogenous whole. It should be recalled that even the supermarket group does not represent a single company. Therefore, while one company seemed to have provided staff with numerous forms of support, others provided little support. Similarly, it was possible to see differences across branches:

Supermarket manager: *"The company instituted a leave donation scheme. Staff who have challenges could be assisted by fellow team members. Persons with leave who wanted to help a colleague can give approval for transfer of their leave to the colleague who would get time off to be with their child."*

Supermarket worker 2: *"I believe the employer did a lot for employees with children who needed the help. The company purchased laptops or tablets for the children and deducts monthly [interest-free] installment from the employee salaries. I was able to purchase two for my grandchildren. They allow us to pay them back within six months."*

Merchandizer: *"[The company] sent water and some soft drinks. That is the only thing we got, not even a little assistance, not even a little something on our salary to help us after we*

go through all that. But we still have work; we are not complaining. At least a little incentive could have gone a little way for us.”

Supermarket Worker 1: *“The company gave us a package with tissues, sanitizers, bathing soap, and a voucher for shopping just before the total lockdown. That was it, and we never got anything else. They gave each staff one mask and a shield. We are expected to wash the mask every day.”*

Generally, police officers seemed satisfied with the support they received:

Police officer: *“There was support from my place of work with the provision of vouchers and care packages to all staff members, which included toiletries.”*

Police officer: *“The police force did as much as it could have, as our supervisors kept us in the know.”*

It was also evident that even within a particular occupation grouping, there was no uniform policy or approach; the benefits and support varied according to one’s location on island:

Nurse 1: *“I received no kind of support, no training.”*

Nurse 2: *“We got a lot of training, online [webinars] and very often. I cannot complain. [It’s] very helpful, very informative. It doesn’t drag on. It’s no more than an hour. The professors explain everything to you. We started getting the lectures long before COVID was in Saint Lucia. Workshops, workshops, workshops, organized by the Ministry of Health.”*

Some of the feedback also suggests that there was insufficient consultation with individuals to determine their needs during the lockdown. As such, some of the assistance provided to one group would have been welcomed by others. Similarly the support given to certain groups was deemed irrelevant, and they were unable to enjoy these benefits because there was no consultation to ensure that this was in line with their needs:

Fire officer 1: *“Nothing received. The focus was more on the unemployed. With hampers and grocery bags. I would not qualify for that.”*

Fire officer 2: *“The only thing we got was the offer of duty free on vehicles. I am not able to take up that offer. We were given something that is not tangible. Others have welcomed it.”*

Pre-school teachers: Only one respondent received any type of assistance from her school, in the form of a food hamper and a donation of cash. No other teacher reported receiving any type of support. Just over one-third of teachers used their savings to survive during the period of the school closure. This was the most popular type of financial effort used to make ends meet. Other methods mentioned included selling food items; one teacher prepared binder packages for parents to do schoolwork with their children.

In addition, two teachers started gardening in the aim of selling their produce and providing food for their families. This activity was common across the occupational categories:

Teacher: *"I always believe in saving something for a rainy day."*

Pre-school administrator: *"No assistance received. Whatever I did, I did on my own. I am trying to sustain myself by continuing with my home gardening. Instead of having to spend x amount at the market, I grow what I need... I planted a lot of stuff. I did a lot of that to reduce on expenditures."*

Small business owners: Since these workers are their own bosses, the issue of employers' assistance does not apply to this professional category. In terms of personal financial efforts, this category of respondents focused on various ways to earn income. Nearly half of respondents made money either by continuing their regular business activities, or by starting new business ventures. Only two respondents used their savings to maintain their bill payments and feed their families.

Another two women entrepreneurs stopped working during the pandemic and made no report of efforts to generate income from other sources. Digging deeper into the data revealed that these individuals were dependent on male relatives to provide for their needs. This sub-theme also emerged among other professional categories. While none of these women reported having conflicts with the relatives they were dependent on, all respondents who relied on someone else for their basic needs to be met expressed varying degrees of frustration, anxiety or sadness about losing their independence and their regular sources of income:

Cook: *"I have started doing a Friday take-away so far and I think it might be a good idea to try to bring back the restaurant, though not every day, but a couple of days a week because people want to go out and sit down to eat. I have the facility there, but it is a challenge."*

Boat tour guide: *"In the absence of an income, I will ask my mum, and when I have the money, I will give it back to her."*

Farmer: *"I had a little something saved up."*

Hairdresser: *"After two weeks, no food for the children. The [SDA] church supplied us with food."*

Cake maker: *"This pandemic has forced me to have a closer relationship with God. During the lockdown I found myself engaging in more spiritual oriented reading, following programmes, and this calmed me a lot as the initial onset of COVID had me nervous."*

Cross-cutting themes: Across the interest groups, the following themes prevailed among at least three of the four occupational groups interviewed:

- Few respondents had received any form of employer or other assistance since the beginning of the pandemic.

- The most common form of economic action to combat the financial constraints was the use of personal savings to cover basic needs and to ensure one's family's survival.
- Entrepreneurial ventures were started during the pandemic as an alternative source of income. Similarly, entrepreneurs found ways to repurpose or scale down their businesses into more focused services and products.

4.7 The effects of COVID-19 on family members

While women discussed the effects of the pandemic, they also referred to the ways in which it affected home life and other family members. The ease with which these women shifted to discussing the effects on their broader family circle should be noted, since it reflects their familiarity with bearing the burden of caring for others and how they perceive the wellbeing of their family members as an extension of their own. This section also provides a deeper look at the ways in which the pandemic affected children and youth, and the concerns of the respondents in this regard.

Hospitality workers: About half of the respondents reported that at least one relative experienced negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Of this sub-group of respondents, more than half identified homeschooling and its related challenges with the online environment as the most negative impact of COVID-19 on their children. A third of respondents also explained that the border closure was a disruption in the lives of their relatives because they could not return home. About one-fifth of hospitality workers reported that their relatives experienced no negative effects of the pandemic. In this professional category, only one worker reported having immediate family members who lost their jobs due to the pandemic.

Conversely, almost half of the hospitality workers indicated ways in which their relatives were positively affected by the pandemic. Half of the respondents of this sub-group spoke of the benefits of being at home since they had the opportunity to bond more deeply with relatives through family activities and discussions, which were not often possible with the regular work schedules. One-third of respondents also highlighted the benefits of having support for their children while embarking on online homeschooling. This support was categorized in the survey as respondents' children having access to devices, adult supervision, and home guidance with schoolwork:

Housekeeper: *"Because of the time my youngest son spent with my sister and mother, he is now doing a lot more at home."*

Waitress: *"He's [her husband] also a frontline worker. First of all, I was a little scared that he was going out to work and coming back into the house. Since they were following protocols I adapted, we have to adjust because he has to work. Everything has been fine so far."*

Respondents stated that a key source of frustration was the difficulties that children had in sharing devices and their inability to cope with the new teaching format, the work required and the homework/project delivery methods:

Waitress: *“It was difficult to manage as we only have one laptop. Sometimes, due to their schedule, they both needed the laptop at the same time. On these occasions, one had to use the phone. It was also difficult for me as well because sometimes I could not help them. I could not understand some of the concepts.”*

Waitress/cashier: *“Due to the closure of school, my son missed out on the last term for preparation for kindergarten. This added more stress on me knowing I had to teach him those things on my own. I have no idea how to teach the way a teacher would teach.”*

The reflections of respondents also revealed the interdependence of family members and the ways in which one member’s loss of job affects many others:

Waitress/cashier: *“It has been a little stressful on my dad. He is the only one who has a job right now, so he is doing everything he can. Before COVID-19, we divided the responsibilities.”*

Administrator assistant: *“Single mum, single grandma with an elderly mother aged 72 who resides with me. I have to get her medication every week. She has bad knees; cartilage is worn. It gets a little frustrating sometimes.”*

Frontline workers: Approximately three-quarter of workers indicated that one or more immediate relatives were adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic; most of these respondents revealed that at least one close relative lost his or her job. Most of them also reported that their children or wards were struggling to cope with the online learning environment due to a lack of devices, the length of time required for classes, internet challenges, or the sheer inability to focus within the home-cum-digital classroom. Another critical area of concern was the challenges that relatives faced with having to isolate themselves from each other or from friends, especially the children who, like their parents, were totally unprepared for the abrupt closure of schools and general change in operations. Nearly half of the respondents described the emotional pain experienced by their loved ones by being separated or unable to visit each other. Finally, a quarter of those interviewed described the fear and anxiety experienced by relatives because either the respondent or the relative worked in a high-risk environment. This possible exposure at work was directly tied to the previous discussion on having to be quarantined away from loved ones.

Regarding whether respondents’ relatives experienced anything positive from the pandemic, more than a third of frontline workers were able to identify some aspects. Just over two-thirds of these respondents viewed their children’s homeschooling as a positive activity because the children had close relatives at home to assist them with the tasks or to navigate the devices and the online platforms. One respondent also explained that because her son enjoyed computers, his transition to online learning was seamless. Another quarter of respondents explained that having relatives at home to take care of the more vulnerable family members such as children and elderly parents was a source of comfort to them in the midst of all the other areas of anxiety that their families faced.

This group also reflected on the challenges faced by the children in coping with the demands of the pandemic, which included the difficulty in transitioning to online learning:

Nurse 1: *“The homeschooling was a challenge. My daughter did not want to do any online work. The school sent work, and there was no one to correct it. I just left her alone after sometime.”*

Community health aide: *“Well, it was a bit challenging for them because they have endless work to do online. But he [her son] got over it; he wrote his common entrance already and he is just waiting on his results.”*

Fire officer 1: *“I had to give him my laptop and checked on him every morning. I had to be printing everything; they used online learning, but you had to print everything, all the worksheets because he is just in grade two. He wears glasses because of the glare. I now have to protect his eyes because he is 7 years old; he is on the computer for prolonged periods. He missed his friends at school, but they were seeing each other online; that helped a bit.”*

Fire officer 2: *“For my son, it was a task to encourage him to study. The children thought it was a holiday, until work started to come in.... My daughter was left in the care of my sister when I was at work; it was difficult to get my daughter to do all the school assignments because my sister had her own responsibilities with her own children; my mom’s time for this [homework] had passed. I had to take a week off work to get her to catch up.”*

Supermarket worker: *“It is a difficult situation. Yes, he is safe at home, but he has no friends, nobody to play with. He has his school work, and it is very difficult for him, because when I come home, what time do I have to help him with his school work and to play around with him; it isn’t an easy task. When I get home, I have to go and get decontaminated before I can sit and talk to him, play with him.”*

Life did not get any easier for these women when schools reopened in September, often under a part-time mode, with most grades allowed to come in only two or three days a week. Parents now had to assume all of the expenses involved in making arrangements for school attendance while also arranging for the care and supervision for the children on the days when they were out of school. This arrangement seemed to be particularly challenging for the frontline workers because of their varied work shifts:

Nurse: *“The fact that my daughter has school two days a week is a burden because I have to find somebody to care for her on the days she’s home. I can’t work my schedule and care for her; it’s an additional expense for me. I now have to put my son in a daycare; the babysitter has a shop, and I wanted to minimize his exposure.”*

The children also had a hard time adjusting to the protocols, having to wear a mask constantly, not being allowed to see their friends and cousins, and not being able to play as they were accustomed to:

Community health aide: *“But saying about the mask, he has to be wearing the mask everywhere he goes. He is not used to that. You know, children are not used to these things... When he went to school he had his mask, his sanitizer.... I gave him two masks because*

school dismisses at one o'clock, so I told him to put one on for an hour and a half, then put it in a plastic bag, then put on the other one because you can never tell who coughs in the school, so he was doing just that."

Nurse: *"It was a challenge to help my daughter understand that she couldn't go outside to play with her friends. The kids hated corona."*

There was also evidence of changes in the family structure as frontline workers or their children moved in or out of a residence in order to safeguard others from contracting the disease. These disruptions to the family structure together with all the other complications posed by the pandemic are likely to affect both adults and children, and efforts should be made to provide the necessary psychosocial support to those affected:

Supermarket worker: *"My grandchildren used to stay at home with me: now that their mother is not working, they are back with her mostly for safety reasons. I fear I may bring the virus home to them."*

Fire officer 1: *"Our daughter spends 5 days a week away from us, and my son, we drop him off in the morning and take him in the evening. For me, it's not what I would like, but at the end of the day I have no choice. The impact on them, I cannot know 'cause they are young."*

Even for those who did not physically leave their regular residence, many frontline officers lamented the amount of time they had to stay away from their children:

Nurse 1: *"I have one son who is one year old and one daughter who is seven. The good thing was that my siblings were home so my children got to stay home with them."*

Fire officer, on special assignment to a different department: *"My son is used to the babysitter; he has been with her since he was a year old. The fact is that he knew I was on home soil and he could not see me, he once said that he wished I would go back to fire service because he used to see me more often. It also took a toll on him emotionally because he became afraid of me, as when I got home, I had to go for a shower immediately before interactions. I'm seeing the changes in him; he is trying to distance himself from me."*

Several respondents had relatives who lost their jobs or opportunities that were in the pipeline, and these situations exacerbated their families' economic hardship:

Fire officer 2: *"Imagine, I have a sister, she, her husband, and 2 of their children were working with a duty-free jewellery store. They are all unemployed now. I look at the situation with my sister-in-law; she had that situation where most persons at her workplace were laid off. She had to do 3 jobs with a salary cut and has to come home do the duties as a girlfriend and also do work and go to bed really late."*

Nurse 1: *"Everybody was home. My sister lost her job at Sandals, and brother lost scuba diving job at Anse Chastanet. I had to dig into my savings to accommodate others in my family."*

Nurse 2: *"I have a daughter. She not working and she was supposed to get a job, and she would have gotten a job at the Call Centre. She is complaining a lot and it is stressing me, her and everybody around."*

Pre-school teachers: About half of these respondents identified negative ways that the pandemic affected their family members. The majority of this sub-group determined that their relatives' greatest challenge was homeschooling: some children had to share devices, while others could not cope with the new demands on them to focus in an online environment. Half of the sub-group explained that their elderly relatives became more vulnerable because they were more dependent on the respondents for their basic needs to be sourced and provided. Caregiving services became a strain, with a few elderly relatives left alone due to the regulations for physical distancing to prevent the possibility of high-risk individuals from getting infected.

When these respondents looked at the impact of the pandemic from a positive perspective, only a quarter of them were able to pinpoint any positive effects on their family members. All of these respondents admitted that family bonds were fortified due to the time spent at home bonding, working together in the online forum and doing chores together. One respondent saw growth in her son's sense of responsibility as he performed more tasks at home. These respondents were the only ones who identified positive effects of the pandemic on their relatives. It should be highlighted that although this professional category was the second most optimistic one regarding the effects of the pandemic on their own lives – almost three-quarters of whom had found some aspect of positivity in the pandemic – they did not find more positive effects on their relatives' lives:

Teacher 1, speaking about her mother: *"Her needs would have been her food and nothing else. What affected me was that she could not go and get what she wants. When someone is dependent on you, they have their likes and dislikes."*

Teacher 2: *"I was very concerned about my 95-year-old aunt who has been bedridden for 7 years now. We had someone taking care of her, and with the COVID-19, the person no longer comes. It was a little strenuous on us to have to do it ourselves."*

Teacher 3: *"Speaking about her children and homeschooling: "Some of the things they are doing [at school] are not things I did, and I had to get the help they needed when I could not help them. My husband helped with whatever he could, especially with the one in primary school."*

Small business owners: *"Well over half of these workers identified at least one positive effect of the pandemic on their relatives. However, the feedback was generally mixed: while some children and young persons managed well, others struggled to adjust."*

Cake maker: *"My son missed socializing with his friends and age group. We should not only worry about ourselves, but also the psychological impact on children – the pre-teens and teenagers. It's been hard for them.... At first, my only challenge was to reorient my son's thinking. He is more apt for writing. When he learned that there was no paper 2 (for CXC exams), he was upset. He was visibly shaken. Hearing that his life depended on paper 1, I had to encourage him. A lot of past papers, so even the negative we were able to change."*

Cook/vendor: *“You know, the children can understand. My son [13 years old] understands, and he speaks to my daughter [6 years old] and she copes. We talk to one another. Today you cannot have that, you cannot have that.”*

Cook/vendor: *“School closure we did not have tablets. So I was teaching my daughter while my son was studying from the books he had already.”*

Boat tour guide: *“He is used to me, and when I speak, he pays me no mind, whereas if it is the teacher at the school, he would listen at once. The role of teachers is a hard role.”*

Caterer/cake maker: *“It is my daughter who feels she is seeing me too often. My daughter is 13. Ordinarily she would have been going to school, and now we are in the same space all the time.”*

Fifty percent of these interviewees also reported that relatives bonded more during the lockdown and engaged in more activities together such as having dinner. Only one respondent reported that her relatives' domestic situation had not changed because of the pandemic since their caregiving needs continued to be urgent.

Some women also lamented the economic impact on their relatives and their inability to assist them:

Cook/vendor: *“My mum has a little shop. It's not much; these days I hear her crying, saying 'no sale'.”*

Cake maker: *“Another negative is interruption in sales for my mom who is into farming. She sells through St. Lucia Marketing Board. We needed to pivot and become creative. She got a new buyer. What was a setback became positive.”*

There is also some evidence of children being left home alone because of the closure of schools. This small businesswoman attempted to put together multiple appointments on one day instead of having to go to her spa daily for one or two appointments. On these occasions, she would leave her son at home alone:

Nail technician/masseuse: *“Ten-year-old son at home. He stays home. On a weekday he stays home alone.”*

Depending on the age of the children, there is a clear concern about the safety of the children.

Cross-cutting themes: Across the interest groups, the following themes prevailed among at least three of the four occupational groups interviewed:

- Many young family members benefited from having adult supervision and support in the online learning environment.

- Several students struggled to cope with the online classes, and after the initial thrill of the unexpected holiday, many of them missed school and their friends and teachers. They also had difficulty in making the required adjustments to their regular school curricula or teaching modalities.
- Several relatives lost their jobs and sources of income because of the pandemic, and de facto became dependent on other family members for their basic needs.
- Families spent time bonding as a result of the lengthy period at home and as a form of coping with the uncertainties and negative impacts of the pandemic.

4.8 What is needed to cope with COVID-19 and recommendations

The research would be incomplete without capturing and sharing the needs expressed by the respondents as well as their recommendations since their experiences have made them hands-on experts. Their perspectives were influenced by these experiences, their reactions to the situations they encountered from the start of the pandemic, their emotional states, as well as their efforts to change their circumstances. Consequently, their recommendations provide insight into the perceived gaps in support systems and protocols, observations about the pandemic's impact on other individuals, and strategies for the way forward. As with the other themes, this topic will be discussed separately for each occupational category to capture the peculiarities, bearing in mind that there are also similarities across all categories. Most needs identified focused heavily on the role of the Government in improving the conditions of those suffering. It is important to recall the timeframe or temporal context of this study: all of the interviews were conducted between the July and October 2020. It is likely, therefore, that some of the measures recommended may have been instituted after the interviews were conducted.

Hospitality workers: Most respondents identified issues that needed to be addressed either in their own situations or generally within the country. About half of the respondents stated that greater financial assistance should have been provided for victims of the many negative effects of COVID-19. Related to this recommendation was another made by a quarter of the respondents, who said that food should be supplied to families affected financially. Respondents claimed that the provisions made by the various authorities were woefully inadequate given the changing nature of people's work conditions and the increase in consumption during the lockdown:

Laundry worker: *"I would like to see something more, more jobs, help from the Government. A lot of the people out there have kids, and school has started. Things are rough, it's really rough for a lot of people. Financial help. More financial help."*

Housekeeper: *"Make sure people have food to eat. Help out with school. Help out the single parents.... A little handout – that can help families."*

Cook: *"Our district representative should be out in the community looking to find who needs help. Would have been good to get some financial and grocery support."*

Waitress: *"I believe a job will help me. I would rather be gainfully employed."*

One-quarter of the women in this group also found that school-aged children were not fully equipped to begin the new school term due to two major missing elements:

- a. *A lack of school supplies and uniforms.* Respondents lamented the reality of many parents who experienced financial losses due to the pandemic. Accordingly, recommendations were made for parents to be granted funds for school supplies and uniforms. These requests were due to the fact that, notwithstanding the pandemic, all schools were reopened in September 2020. While there was some scepticism about this move, parents felt compelled to prepare their children for the reopening of schools under the protocols. However, this move seemed wasteful because schools had to be closed again about two weeks later once there was evidence of confirmed cases in some of the schools.
- b. *Assistance with online tuition.* One-fifth of hospitality workers expressed great difficulties in this area. Even more respondents – with and without school-aged children – pointed out the need for these children to function properly in the online environment, especially given that it was imposed on them without any formal training for them, teachers or parents. The needs identified were reliable internet access, devices and assistance with home tuition.

Senior customer representative: *“I believe that the Ministry could have helped with a small bursary towards books, printing of materials or ink.”*

Nurse: *“Government should step forward and provide children with ebooks or make arrangements to have the books available to parents. You have a population – maybe half of your working class unemployed with multiple children and [they] still have to buy books for these children to go to school.”*

Other needs identified were emotional support and psychosocial support or counselling for the respondent as well as for those struggling to cope with the unfavourable effects of the pandemic:

Senior customer representative: *“Or you might have a friend or neighbour who is in a worse situation than you and needs help as well. Some will call. They have 3 or 5 children. It’s difficult to say no to someone when they have children. People have pride as well, and may not want to call for help. Those who call will know that you have their back, that you will not go and talk and ‘blab’ about their situation. Having people you could count on and trust is also very important.”*

Spa manager: *“I also needed the psychological support myself as I was hurt, too. Like this conversation now, there should have been people reaching out...Other support would be emotional support. Just someone calling ...”*

Frontline workers: A significant proportion of these workers described a variety of needs that emerged as they discussed their challenges and those of their relatives, neighbours and co-workers:

- The most common need identified, which was highlighted by almost half of the group, was financial support for the many aspects of life during a pandemic.
- The second most common need highlighted by more than a third of respondents was emotional support and psychosocial support/counselling.

- The daycare services for the children of frontline workers who were required to work longer hours or more frequently was raised by nearly a third of the workers.
- A few respondents explained that there was an urgent need for support from the Ministry of Education for supplies, devices and online tuition.

Additionally, respondents outlined a few areas as critical for Government to lend its support: (i) safety protocol training; (ii) transport, as some healthcare workers were stationed outside of their regular work route or were given odd work hours; and (iii) food supplies.

More than one frontline worker also highlighted a gap in the governmental support systems that left their specific occupation unrecognized as being in need of any kind of assistance. Workers in the fields of nursing, community health aides and supermarket workers fell into this sub-category of workers who expressed dissatisfaction with being left out. They shared the view that although they were employed, their expenses had multiplied by having to support family members who lost their own sources of income, or by having to source devices for online tuition, or by having to support caregivers of their children. As discussed during an examination of the theme of governmental assistance, the author's findings revealed that nearly three-quarter of frontline workers received no government support of any kind from the start of the pandemic to the time of being interviewed:

Community health aide 1: *"It would be good even at this stage to have a debriefing retreat to talk about experiences – something like 'Return to Happiness', but for CHAs."*

Community health Aide 2: *"Let the Government know that people out there are suffering, and they need to extend help and cushion them with a monthly incentive to get them back on their feet."*

Supermarket merchandiser: *"Support from the Government should be available. It's hard sending children to school [at this time] as things are expensive."*

Customer service rep: *"I would have liked to have been allowed to work alternative Saturdays instead of every Saturday in order to provide greater help to my young son with his school work."*

Fire officer 1: *"Women with children should get support for school books."*

Fire officer 2: *"Jobs have been restructured and/or rescheduled, so some type of daycare system while parents are at work would be good... There should be something for those who lost their jobs, some type of package."*

Fire officer 3: *"I don't think any one group, not even at work have thought about how this virus affects us mentally. Nobody has ever said, 'let's hold sessions to debrief', like what you're doing now, to ask us how has this pandemic affected us. No one has done that, no one."*

Fire officer 2: *"Maybe more PPE – the fire services do have some PPEs because of donations. The cases in Saint Lucia are not as much. Supposing we had a high number of*

cases. Not sure for how long these PPEs would last us going on all these COVID calls. So more PPEs.”

Nurse: “One of the things we can take from that, during the time of the corona, after the second month, they should have allowed the nurses a counselling session. [It] could be anonymous or one-on-one sessions for persons to express how they feel. Because we went through a lot of distress, disrespect. A lot. So the trauma that was there, if you wasn’t strong you would have broken down from all the disrespect, the vulgarity, all.... Everything that came with it.”

Fire officer 1: “There is no counsellor assigned to the fire department on a regular basis or specifically for the pandemic, however, counselling/psychosocial support can be sought. We would have liked some extra money, if possible, but for how long can anyone support us financially? You may just need somebody to talk to. Sometimes you need money but the thought weighs so heavily that you just need to talk about it, and that helps. Whatever is in your pocket is also in your head.”

This last statement by the fire officer, “whatever is in your pocket is in your head” is extremely important as it reflects the state of mind of frontline workers when they face financial hardship. If fire officers or nurses are preoccupied with their own personal concerns, how can we be sure of the accuracy of their work performance? Perhaps this issue of the state of mind of workers may be overlooked in any other occupational group, but given the critical role performed by frontline officers of protecting the public and managing the spread of the virus, there is a need to address their psychosocial wellbeing with great urgency – our lives depend on it.

Pre-school teachers: The vast majority of respondents in this category (94 per cent) identified needs specific to the sector. Moreover, most of the needs itemized below are similar to those outlined in the previous professional categories:

- The findings revealed that the most popular need expressed came from the pre-school administrators. These respondents ascertained that the financial challenges in covering the administrative expenses (rent, retrofitting) were too great and depleted their personal savings, and undermined their business; therefore, the Government should support them financially.
- Almost one-third of respondents believed that since the pre-schools were operating at losses due to the many upheavals and changes, the Government should also cover the salaries of teachers until the schools become profitable again.
- One-third of respondents believed that the Government should provide assistance to parents in the form of food supplies and funds to cover school fees. They addressed the drop in enrolment numbers that was partly attributed to the aforementioned loss of earnings that many parents were experiencing, even at the time of schools re-opening.
- Approximately one-fifth of respondents saw a feeding programme as a critical need at this time for students returning to school, and felt that this was a significant area of support for parents.
- One-fifth of respondents recommended counselling and psychosocial support since this need was unanswered; many individuals were suffering and did not know where to access this free service.

It is clear that this category of workers saw the Government as the key to solving the problems that surfaced in their sector from the onslaught of the pandemic:

Pre-school administrator 1: *“We need people going out in schools doing sessions with students, teachers and groups to debrief.”*

Pre-school administrator 2: *“They should have at least given us a stipend. The private sector – we’ve been out of work for 6 months. That’s administrators and teachers not getting a salary, and we’re the foundation of it all – that’s where it starts; it starts with us.”*

Teacher: *“We were not important when you check it out [if you examine the issue], while teachers that work for the Government were getting their salaries. We were not important to them. We work so hard when it comes to the little ones – their safety, their care and everything; we work so hard. All of this happening, the Government should really acknowledge us.”*

Pre-school administrator 3: *“Provision of supplies – paper towel, hand soap, hand sanitizer. Help for securing another member of staff.... There was not enough help from the Early Childhood Unit.”*

Pre-school administrator 1: *“I thought the Ministry would make preparations for the children who cannot go to school, and there is nothing in place. Parents are very angry. This has affected us very much....Since most of the pre-schools the number has been cut like half, if the Government can give us a little incentive or pay at least one teacher to help us. That would be nice.”*

Teacher: *“It is more pressure on those who are single. For me, I have a husband. I wasn’t totally disabled. With the single parent, I could imagine how difficult it was for them. If the Government can find a way to help these single parents, it would be very good.”*

Pre-school administrator 1: *“The Government should realize the hardship and abruptness of the pandemic, assist in helping us in some way, rent, retrofitting, things to accommodate health and safety, subvention to assist the Early Childhood Development sector. NIC helped, but the Government should have come forward and, realizing the importance of that sector, assist through a subvention.”*

Small business owners: Almost all of the respondents described personal needs and areas that could be improved in the lives of others, with the help of the Government:

- Half of those who identified needs proposed that the Government could be more proactive in providing financial support for those in business, and for parents in general. Two respondents suggested grant funding as financial support that the Government could give to small business owners to help them stay afloat.
- One-fifth of respondents acknowledged that several people including themselves did not know where to go to access any form of government assistance.

- One-fifth of respondents suggested that they would have been grateful for assistance with reducing their food bills, and suggested that parents should be given greater support with this ongoing need.

Within this category of workers, there were two respondents who advocated for stronger support for the disabled who were affected by the pandemic. They described challenges faced by disabled family members in accessing assistance. One respondent was also physically challenged and reported receiving no form of government assistance. These two respondents represent a category of people who need specific resources and facilities. The effects of COVID-19 on persons with disabilities can therefore be an area for further research:

Nail technician: *"I have the ability, but I just need to find my feet, like take a starter loan to restart."*

Cook: *"Due to COVID, we can't pay the utility bills. I am paying commercial rates because of the business. Perhaps they can cut it a little for us that would really help."*

Cook/vendor: *"If they had given food, anything, I would accept it."*

Nail technician/masseuse, reflecting on the missed opportunity of ISP, which she did not know about in time: *"Would have been happy to have received financial assistance to help the business."*

Baker: *"I would have liked that they provide more for the babies and toddlers. To buy their needs – milk and Pampers."*

Boat tour guide: *"We have food but we don't have money."*

Hairdresser: *"I think that there should be a lot of advertisements put out telling women where to go for help, whether psychological or financial support, because some people just don't have any avenue to go through because they don't know."*

Nail technician: *"Emotionally women have not gotten enough support. Someone to call, someone to ask, 'How are you doing?' Some place to air views. One for married women and one for single women. And mothers."*

Cake maker: *"So probably, put more incentives for young people. Making funding more accessible to young entrepreneurs. Better rates – the banks are not going to help young entrepreneurs. Especially they have no collateral or anything to back them. Some form of funding or business support should be made available to them."*

Cross-cutting themes: Across the interest groups, the following themes prevailed among at least three of the four occupational groups interviewed:

- The women involved in small businesses recommended more opportunities for financial support to safeguard their businesses, and more effective strategies in information dissemination to ensure that they received the relevant information about existing opportunities in a timely manner.
- The most urgent need and recommendation among pre-school teachers and administrators was for financial and other support from the Government, particularly in the provision of materials and supplies to enable the schools to be able to comply with the new protocols.
- All of the groups called for increased support to both parents and children in transitioning to the learning from home modality. There were specific calls for devices, and several parents lamented the challenges they faced in teaching their children because they felt ill-equipped to do so.
- Women from all of the four sectors made a strong plea for emotional and psychosocial support. This was particularly urgent for frontline workers. This type of support was also needed for the children who experienced a form of trauma in adjusting to the new reality of learning from home and being away from friends and teachers.

5. Analysis of key informant interviews

Seventeen key informant interviews were held with spokespersons of organizations that represent some of the professional categories that were interviewed in the general discussion. These key informants provided an overall picture of the experiences of their members from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews captured the economic, social and psychological effects of the pandemic on the members, and in some instances, their clients and/or immediate family members. The data gathered in these specific interviews were in line with the information shared by respondents of the general professional category interviews since they focused on the following effects of the pandemic:

- a. Except in the cases of frontline workers, most of the other respondents experienced job loss, a reduction of work hours, and therefore pay, or a general uncertainty of whether their positions would be made redundant due to the length of the lockdown and the ensuing closure of work places. Frontline workers experienced a general increase in working hours, and while their hours were steady or even reduced in some cases, they were fraught with fear of contracting the virus due to heightened exposure to potential carriers.
- b. At the beginning of the pandemic, while there were no cases in Saint Lucia, as the Government began to take precautionary measures, many establishments were forced to close as a lockdown was enforced. Respondents, especially frontline workers, expressed increased levels of fear of contracting the virus, fear of infecting family members, and worry about their financial situations and their capacity to pay their bills, loans, and other general expenses. Many felt that there was an overall lack of information provided by the relevant government agencies or their places of work on the proper safety protocols and reasons for such measures.
- c. Most of the women with school-aged children described the challenges encountered with the abrupt closure of schools: (i) the resulting need to source immediate caregiving support from family members due to physical distancing that prevented contact with professional care providers; (ii) an increase in food and utility consumption; and (iii) little to no access to funds to purchase school supplies, including devices for online classes. Other issues arose: the need to enroll their children in online classes while still working; the need to become de facto home tutors, yet with limited knowledge of subject areas at both the primary and secondary school levels, despite wishing to help their children with schoolwork and monitoring their online activities; the irregular internet supply; and the challenges

that students faced in adjusting to the new style of teaching and learning while losing direct social contact with their peers and/or involvement in physical or social activities. An additional concern was raised by the representative of the Early Childhood Education Association, who spoke of the need to research and monitor the effects of the homeschooling on the students of different ages. This particularly concerns those who did not receive proper tutoring at home, and pre-school children who were entering primary school in September without having the benefits of the full academic year's preparation, or even a graduation, which symbolized a transition. The representative of the St. Lucia Crisis Centre added another major area of concern that should be highlighted: the need to discuss and monitor the children who were left at home in the care of adults who, due to the frustrations of the pandemic, might have abused the children physically, verbally and/or sexually. The representative stated that this was a fear among many of the Association's members who cannot work from home and must therefore leave their school-aged children in the care of relatives.

- d. The greatest outcry was the lack of government funding to support the disenfranchised respondents. Many spoke of receiving NIC or another grant, but most asserted that the amount was insufficient to pay their bills or to cover cost of food, which had increased since the closure of borders. Most respondents felt that the line ministries' efforts were insufficient with respect to the provision of funding, food hampers and safety apparatuses, as well as the timely dissemination of information on the pandemic, safety measures, and/or financial relief available to workers of different categories. This complaint was voiced across all professional categories, including frontline workers.
- e. The representative for the Early Childhood Education Association also highlighted and reconfirmed the complaints of members over not only the initial loss of income due to the sudden closure of all schools in March, but also the loss of jobs in some cases, since many pre-schools were unable to re-open with their full complement of staff due to the new protocols. All respondents in this category, as well as the Association representative, described the acute financial hardships experienced by its members who also felt angry and betrayed by the Government for not making greater provisions for them, while their colleagues at the primary and secondary school levels continued to receive their salaries during school closure. These pre-school teachers contrasted their situations with those of taxi drivers and other self-employed workers who received relief packages, and in many cases, food hampers, while some of them only received the NIC funding, which was for a period of 3–5 months only. Moreover, for the pre-school teachers who did not qualify for the NIC support, their applications to the Government's ISP were largely unsuccessful, and many were not informed of the reason for this.
- f. The digital divide was stark among workers with little to no computer skills. This limited their ability to assist their children with homeschooling, and/or to apply for government funding, much of which was accessible online. This was particularly evident among vendors. The Association had to repurpose to provide support and engage others to support their members in submitting online applications.
- g. One major exception to the trends identified in the interviews with the four occupational groups was the rise in GBV during the lockdown and curfew periods of the pandemic. The representative of Raise Your Voice Saint Lucia and of the Saint Lucia Crisis Centre, which provide support to victims of domestic violence, described observable increases in cases. These increases were calculated by the increase in phone calls received from victims or walk-ins when the lockdown was over. Both of the key

informants explained that there was an increase in requests for counselling, which was congruent with the increase in reported cases of GBV. It should be clarified that none of the respondents interviewed in the professional categories revealed that they had experienced problems of this nature before or during the lockdown or curfew, nor did they mention any relatives or colleagues experiencing this domestic problem during the pandemic. This may be due to the general trend of under-reporting GBV. Anecdotal reports of an increase in domestic violence came from the two key informants representing the St. Lucia Crisis Centre and Raise Your Voice St. Lucia. Both representatives discussed increases in domestic violence cases, consisting mostly of women victims. They spoke in general about their services being extended to men if they came forward requesting it, and that the most common form of support for men was counselling services. The sensitive nature of this topic requires a customized and confidential approach to research when gathering statistics to measure the extent to which domestic violence actually increased during the pandemic in St. Lucia.

- h. The plight of the elderly was discussed not only by the representative of the National Council of and for Older Persons, but also by several respondents during the professional category interviews. The following concerns were discussed:
- respondents' unanticipated dependence on elderly relatives for financial support due to their loss of income;
 - respondents' inability to provide for physically challenged elderly relatives who depended on them for logistical, financial, medical or physical support;
 - fears of infecting elderly relatives due to the movements and activities of other family members;
 - the loss of social activity and social interaction including church activities among the elderly;
 - the scarcity of geriatric caregivers during the lockdown.
- i. A small percentage of respondents expressed their concerns for their physically challenged relatives, who became more vulnerable during the pandemic with their various needs for assistance. The respondents could not address some of these needs due to their current financial position due to the closure of borders and workplaces. The respondents described the pandemic-related challenges of caring for these persons with disabilities (PWDs). In addition, the representative of the National Council of and for Persons with Disabilities highlighted the plights of PWDs who lived alone or who themselves were parents with dependents. The representative lamented the lack of financial and human resources required during a crisis to conduct proper outreach to PWDs to address their pandemic-induced needs or their regular challenges.
- j. The lack of transportation during the lockdown and curfew periods was a recurring discussion point among the frontline workers. They reported that public transport became scarce and that their employers provided few or no alternatives, and little flexibility of work hours, nor did they provide the opportunity to work from home. Respondents described the frustrations of waiting in vain for this mode of transport and having to resort to private transport arrangements while adhering to physical distancing and other safety protocols. The theme of transport was directly related to the discussion of workers' angst about contracting the virus due to heightened exposure and a lack of physical distancing. It also featured prominently in discussions about what they perceived to be the Government's lack of concern for their well-being as workers on the frontline.

Below are some of the excerpts from the interviews, presented by themes.

5.1 The effects of COVID-19

This section will highlight the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the members and clients of the various associations.

Saint Lucia Craft and Dry Goods Vendors Association

According to the President of the Saint Lucia Craft and Dry Goods Vendors Association, Peter Isaac, the economic impact of the crisis has been most severe for the vendors.

“The vendors in various areas have been suffering a lot, especially those who are primarily dependent on tourism, beaches, lay-bys, vendors’ arcades and the craft market, and those who sell on streets and pavements. They have been grossly affected by the emergence of the pandemic. This happened when the cruise ships were not allowed to berth in our ports, and this started bringing in problems financially, though we always had problems financially.”

As a man representing a predominantly female-based organization, Mr. Isaac is acutely aware that the impact on vendors has an impact on women, particularly single mothers whose families depend on them exclusively for the income they acquire from the sale of their goods:

“Ninety percent of the vendors are women; we are looking at almost 3,000 persons [vendors] affected, both registered and non-registered. They also depend on the local domestic market. Those in the craft market, vendors’ arcades and beaches were forced to stay home because the tourists who are coming in were not allowed to go out initially; now the ships do not come at all.”

After the lockdown, vendors were still not able to ply their trade like other self-employed workers:

“Right now, the virus has spread in the community. There are concerns about additional measures that the Government may take, a critical issue for us, especially the women who are in a single-parent situation. To be honest, I believe our situation is one of the worst on the island. Other self-employed [persons] like farmers and barbers have gone back to work. The stuff we have, they are dried goods; we can’t even use them ourselves or eat it.”

Raise Your Voice St. Lucia

Prior to the pandemic, this NGO, which provides counselling and other support to women, children and victims of abuse, had succeeded in training their clients and placing them in jobs in various industries. As in the case of the women interviewed from the four sectors, Catherine Sealys reported that the greatest impact of the pandemic on their clients was the economic impact resulting from the loss of jobs:

“All the people we had on employment were home-based, hospitality, and small business. All of 131 individuals have lost their jobs except for seven. We have to reinstate support such as rent, food, utilities, and now providing internet access for e-learning.”

Similarly, there are the emotional and psychological implications of the economic blow that has been dealt to them:

“Most of the 131 women are back to square one. Presently, we are unable to provide them with any type of hope. Many of them are not coping very well, but we continue to provide counselling services and any support available.”

While none of the women interviewed reported cases of domestic violence, this issue emerged as a significant concern by the Raise Your Voice Saint Lucia representative:

“On a daily basis, during the COVID-19 lockdown, we had about 20–30 calls on domestic violence [we would work with the police directly]; after the lockdown, the calls went down to 12–15 calls. Prior to COVID-19, the number of domestic violence calls were about 6 or 7 a day but not every day.”

National Council of and for Older Persons

According to the President of the Council, neglect was the most critical concern regarding the impact of the pandemic on the elderly. This was most evident during the 24-hour lockdown when persons were prohibited from moving freely. At that time, persons deemed to be part of the essential services could apply for special passes from the National Emergency Management Organization (NEMO). Accordingly, unless special arrangements were put in place to have a NEMO pass as an essential service provider, the individuals who normally provided care to the elderly, including family members who resided elsewhere, were unable to visit or attend to the older persons:

“Some are homebound. When the country shut down, some caregivers as first responders were able to continue the programme of caring for some elderly [persons]...”

Recognizing the impact of the lockdown on the poor and vulnerable in society, arrangements were made so that the National Emergency Management Office could provide hampers to those in need. However, some elderly persons were not prioritized in this process:

“During COVID-19, the older persons were marginalized as far as getting the service they need. I attended a meeting at NEMO the day before the lockdown. They told us there was nothing to worry about, that they had a list of the elderly to distribute food packages to them. Things took a turn for the worse; some older persons didn’t get any food. When volunteers went to the homes of the elderly and did not find them, they gave the food items to someone else.”

St. Lucia Crisis Centre

The St. Lucia Crisis Centre, which has been in existence for over 30 years, is commonly known for its provision of psychosocial support to women and children victims of GBV. However, with the onset of the pandemic, many women, children and even men turned to the Centre for basic needs:

“Most clients come requesting food, toiletries and even money. Lots of people have lost their jobs, and it has made it extremely difficult for families.”

“One of the problems they encounter is with child support, and the men find themselves unemployed. This has a domino effect on the family.”

There was also reference to increased family disputes and tension:

“Children become very problematic: many are at home; parents have to deal with behavioural problems, so that will pose a difficulty as well.”

“Domestic violence victims come in requesting support and counselling because now that the women spend a lot more time in the company of their partners, they feel trapped and having to deal with the fact that they can’t provide for the family. This creates a lot of family relationship difficulties. During the lockdown and curfew, there has been an increase in domestic violence.”

While noting the increases in cases of domestic violence, the Crisis Centre representative also noted that there was a distinction between the upper and lower classes. More prominent women in society often chose not to come forward, or if they did, they requested an extra layer of protection for their privacy: “They feel that they are on this level and would be belittled or seen on a lower level if it was known that they had been a victim of GBV. Many women therefore prefer to suffer in silence.”

Some women have also expressed their concerns about the safety of their children who, due to the closure of schools, are now left alone with males in the family:

“...mothers are worried about the fact that they are still employed; the father or stepfather may be unemployed and having to supervise the children, and the mother is out at work; they are worried as to what transpires at home with the children, whether they be boys or girls. Yes, mothers have expressed that they are fearful of leaving the children at home with these men.”

The St. Lucia Crisis Centre has also been re-purposed as clients have come forward requesting non-traditional forms of assistance:

“There are families who cannot afford the laptops to assist these children; they feel pressured because they cannot provide the children with what they need to get their work done. This issue contributes to troubling behaviour among students This could lead to major problems that, sometimes, those children would be referred to counselling or parenting sessions with mothers. The lockdown is already

a situation that they are not used to, so the children feel deprived, and this worsens their behavioural problems when the parents cannot provide them with their needs to pursue their education..."

Saint Lucia Medical and Dental Association

The representative of the medical and dental doctors also highlighted the concerns of the membership, but these pertained primarily to concerns for their health and that of their family members, as well as their separation from their family:

"Some are permanently at the hotel; they would spend two weeks of quarantine and two weeks' break. You can go home to your family, bearing in mind that there is some degree of risk. Most persons took the option of going to the hotel, especially those with young children and older parents, etc."

"People ostracized those who work at Victoria Hospital, and that has been unfortunate."

"Perhaps among the nurses there would have been issues with the closure of school and daycare; however, in the public sector, not really, because most of the physicians are younger and don't have children. The average physicians in the sector are not people with children. Those in the community tend to have children; in essence, they are not in the hospital on call."

"It was not a major concern at all at the hospitals, but there were concerns about caregivers not allowed on the bus to work in private homes."

"I think possible infection can be a concern, not knowing the end game; nobody knows when this will end. Frustration is setting in, although we have not had a major outbreak; not being able to go home to your family as you would like is an issue."

"Surgeries have not returned to where they need to be, and there is a backlog. There are delays of more than a year, and COVID-19 has exacerbated the issue, especially with the possibility of not having enough beds. We have great concerns that elective surgeries when delayed can become an emergency."

Saint Lucia Nurses Association

When asked about the effects of the pandemic on the nurses, the President of the Saint Lucia Nurses Association stated:

"Mainly more psychological, the fear that they are on the frontlines, [for] their families because some have elderly parents. They are having to make the decision to stay elsewhere because they want to protect their elderly parents and children. Also, a high number of nurses are single parents; with school being out it is difficult because they have to homeschool; hours are long, and when they get home, they have to school them. So it's causing a lot of stress. The discriminations, stigma and attitude of the public to nurses – they are viewed as carriers."

“Most of the nurses are women, and many are mothers and single mothers. There are issues of homeschooling and care for their young children especially. Imagine, as a nurse you’ve just paid for daycare for your child for the term, and suddenly, schools are shut down again. You now have to find extra money for someone to care for that child to be cared from at home. Or after a hard day’s work, you have to come home and rather than rest, you have to review homework or help the child to do the work.”

National Council of and for Persons with Disabilities

The representative of persons with disabilities also highlighted a range of issues when asked about the impact of the pandemic of the members:

“Most of them were complaining that the public assistance that they receive, which for some of them it’s all they rely on, that it was coming in extremely late.”

“So, our members on the ground are feeling it more than able-bodied persons. I am abled and I’m feeling it. I don’t want to imagine what they are going through. It has really affected them.”

“With this COVID thing, it basically has increased the cost of living. The price of gas has gone up, and because of the cost of all the sanitary items persons need to get, all of those masks to protect them from the virus. All of those costs means they are spending a lot more than they have or want to.”

“We have a client who is normally at the market selling arts and crafts, but also has a son who attends the special education centre. With the closure of school she has had to stay at home and care for him, because her other children were at work or going to SALCC [Sir Arthur Lewis Community College]. Even now they’ve gone back; she was still at home with her son. It is difficult for him to have to keep on this mask all the time, and he is a wheelchair user. She opted to forego her job and rely on her boyfriend and stay home with her son.”

“Others have contacted us for educational assistance saying that things are difficult. A child’s father is not working now, so he contacted us asking what can we do. How can we help, that kind of thing.”

“My concern is, how do you reach out to those persons who are more severely disabled than others? They don’t have the means or the resources to help themselves. And in some cases, all they receive is the \$200 from the Government.”

“This man only just got a prosthetic limb only to find out that his son – they amputated his son’s leg as well. So this man was frantic crying when he called. With both as amputees – how do you get them to the hospital? How can one help the other? If one has COVID, how do you cope? Who’s going to take care of who?”

National Association of Early Childhood Education Practitioners

Perhaps one of the most outspoken groups on the impact of the pandemic was the National Association of Early Childhood Education Practitioners:

“COVID affected every single one of our members emotionally, financially and socially. We have had to give a lot of support to our members because our members are very angry. They lost their income. At short notice they had to close down. They didn’t get any support from the policymaker. They felt betrayed. Although we are one of the most important groups in providing care for children who would form the nation, yet it’s like we were given a slap in the face.”

“And to make it worse, with the COVID guidelines now, we can only have a certain number of children. With no income since March and a lot of money spent in preparing our businesses, and to be slapped in the face and told we have to open with COVID guidelines. It’s hard. It affected everybody in different ways.”

“The administrators have had to carry the burden of having to cut salaries and or even having to dismiss people; that’s an emotional load that administrators have had to carry.”

“People are saying, what are the policymakers doing? They did things for the hotels, taxi associations, and why not pre-school?”

“It’s been very difficult to keep social distance from the children. It’s been very hard for the children.”

“COVID has brought back a [group] of children that have no structure. I telling you, unless something happens to help these children and parents, we will have some serious cases on our hands. Children are coming back to school; they had structure in their life, and that structure was taken away. ... The iPad was their teacher, they are very hyper, no form of communication. There’s a lot of fighting, a lot of communication-level problems, and that’s what we’re seeing.”

“Parents now have less income and are choosing a cheaper way of looking after their children, but these people do not necessarily have the experience to help the children cope with this trauma.”

“As far as I’m concerned, this is a trauma we all went through. My concern is, what if these children left us (the early childhood sector) and didn’t de-roll¹⁰ properly and entered primary school. There was no way of saying goodbye or no way of settling in. I think long term, that’s going to affect the children.”

“We are coming across women in our sector who have not got money to educate or send their children to school. It’s all around us. So women have been highly affected by what’s happening.”

5.2 COVID-19 assistance to members and clients of the organizations

This section will present details on the various forms of assistance that the organizations provided to their members and clients in coping with the challenges of the pandemic.

¹⁰ The respondent uses the term ‘de-roll’ to explain the transition process during which toddlers are prepared for the next phase (primary school) through a graduation activity and other educational processes.

Saint Lucia Craft and Dry Goods Vendors Association

"Yes, people are seeing the value and importance of the Association and the need to pay the dues."

"We were the ones who clamored for assistance and [on behalf of] the plight of the vendors. We also had some zoom discussions with the Ministry of Commerce. We highlighted the need to diversify our economy and vendors to prepare themselves and diversify their market, be less dependent on the tourist dollar. Great lessons learned."

"We provided administrative support to minimize errors on applications for the vendors. We stepped in to support hucksters [who were] not stationed; they had difficulty giving proof of business. We spoke to Government on the vendors' behalf. We also assisted some people who are not directly associated with us, such as the taxi drivers, to access applications for the ISP."

Raise Your Voice St. Lucia

"During curfew, we worked with the police because everywhere, including Family Court, and Department of Human Services were closed. It was only us and the police; we had to do direct intervention instead or rerouting persons to Family Court. None of the institutions were functioning, so we further automated our services."

"We added one component we did not do before, and that is collect non-perishable food items and redistribute once a month for the last six months."

"Every day we get approximately 15 or 16 messages on WhatsApp requesting support for basic supplies."

"Out of 100, we would receive one request from a man. I thought maybe they are less affected, but when we go into community to conduct outreach, when we speak to men one on one, they would indicate that they had lost their jobs, we realize they are equally affected. The assumption is that we provide support for women and children only and we don't care about men. We do support men. Once someone [men included] reaches out to us with reasonable complaints/issues, we assist as best we can. We narrowed our mandate because we did not think we had the capacity to deal with the entire population, so we chose women and children."

"When I informed the persons at NEMO, I was given some of the parcels to take to the individuals."

"We decided to have two soup kitchens. We had the communities help manage them. We allowed the community to take care of the elderly like the past-Koudmain culture."

"The situation was such that an elderly person did not pay her rent for two months and the landlord wanted to put her out. She called me; we had to speak to the landlord and give the assurance that as soon as the lady get the money, she would pay (\$300)."

St. Lucia Crisis Centre

"We provide counselling sessions to mothers and/with children to work out practical solutions to issues, highlighting the fact that this is a problem that we are not used to, and [we] are now trying to cope."

"We mostly deal with mothers and children; counselling with the fathers is not frequent. Sometimes they come as a couple and they would bring the children along."

"We assist by providing food packages, counselling, etc."

Saint Lucia Medical and Dental Association

"Staff had to be split between the two hospitals. A decision was taken that if you had a COVID-19 positive patient at Victoria Hospital, because of the mental health impact of the people, the rule was the junior physicians would do 14-day quarantine before going back to OKEU [hospital]."

"The mental health of the Victoria Hospital staff became very obvious, so much so there was a need to create a task force as such, just to cater to the mental health of physicians, particularly the ones working at the respiratory hospital, and that is ongoing. Very good use is being made of that service. We have a psychiatrist helping to talk to workers, provide counselling to the staff at Victoria Hospital."

"Provisions have been in place, especially with the continuing medical education seminars that we do. The Victoria Hospital staff was not left out because they could not interact with the other physicians in the general public. Provisions were made for Zoom so everybody can participate."

National Council of and For Persons with Disabilities

"Persons are contacting us and giving assistance, and we ourselves are trying to source assistance for our members."

National Association of Early Childhood Education Practitioners

"We've started a prayer session where a group prays every day and forward these prayers to the various clusters. And through that we see relief, and people are acknowledging the prayers and reading it. That has been some comfort to quite a few persons, and we've been doing that now since school reopened at beginning of September."

"We got some hand sanitizing machine and the thermometers – we paid for members who were unable to pay and they would reimburse us once school reopened and they get their money"

“As far as I’m concerned, this is a trauma we all went through. My concern is, if these children left us (early childhood) and didn’t de-roll¹¹ properly and entered primary school. “There was no way of saying goodbye or no way of settling in. I think long term that’s going to affect the children.”

Children’s Hospice

The staff of this institution became frontline workers because they never closed down during the lockdown. They also adopted a shift system where staff stayed at the facility for up to two weeks at a time, following which they had two weeks off to spend with their families, and then they had another shift at work.

“The staff saved money. They were fed, properly housed. All needs were met. They did not have to travel to and from home via the regular bus system.”

“Based on the initial plan we developed, we started educating/sensitizing the staff from the beginning of March, well before the first case in Saint Lucia. The plan provided information on how to prepare, what to do, and what COVID-19 is all about.”

“There were discussions. They resisted at first, but we encouraged them to make arrangements in advance. We asked, how can we support you to get yourself ready for those seven days? We had to offer transport to a child of a staff member to an out district [rural community] [Jacmel]. When staff were on compound, they were allowed time to support their children with schoolwork. For 2 days we had to arrange to feed a staff dog. We took people’s personal lives into consideration as much as possible. We wanted that when they were at work they were present in body and mind.”

“We conducted daily recreational activities for the children because they were cooped up inside. We had two birthday parties, which went very well. We also had formal dinners, fashion shows, talent shows, racing and obstacle courses, slumber parties. We did it because the children could not go out, and staff got creative.”

“There was also homeschooling. We had a routine from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 a. m. They participated in online school activities...”

Small Enterprise Development Unit

This department of the Ministry of Commerce is responsible for encouraging and supporting small business development in Saint Lucia. During the period of the study, the Unit provided the usual support to small businesses through entrepreneurial development training. In the months afterwards, the Unit began to collaborate with private sector companies and financial institutions to provide more direct technical support. One of these later initiatives was the Partial Guarantee Fund for Small Businesses with the Saint Lucia Development Bank.

¹¹ De-roll: the process of preparing the children for the transition from pre-school to primary school.

5.3 The organizations' challenges in providing COVID-19 assistance

The organizations also highlighted their challenges in supporting their members and staff in coping with the pandemic.

Saint Lucia Craft and Dry Goods Vendors Association

"We asked for more but that was not possible."

"The vendors have been requesting that I ask the Government to extend the programme. We are in a dire situation."

Raise Your Voice St. Lucia

"There is a medicine and medical supplies programme, but we have not received any as of March. There is an embargo on shipping medical supplies from United States of America. The public health system has not received any either because of COVID-19. The USA felt that they needed all their medical supplies. By extension our donor is unable to ship supplies to us."

"Let us talk about the other 10,000 who are out there contacting us, to say, 'I have five children, I have not eaten for three days, I have no money, I lost my job, I had to close my shop because things are not selling'. These people need funds for electricity, water and rent. This is not something we can do; we really do not have the resources to pay those bills. Some are also asking for diapers, etc."

National Council of and for Older Persons

"With COVID it has become even more difficult to source funding, as there is a reduction in support from corporate citizens."

St. Lucia Crisis Centre

"What has been done has been effective to an extent. Right after we resumed duties, there was an influx of people coming in and requesting food commodities. It was really a challenge because at some point the food commodities became so limited; we just had to ration the little we had left with the rest of clients who were visiting."

"We are not able to increase outreach and upgrade delivery system due to limited resources, but we continue to build strategic partnerships."

"When I discussed the initial proposal with the Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI), one of the requests we made was for daycare services for the women. We wanted to delve into that area; however, CFLI could not get the services paid for. We wanted to set up a daycare as part of the Crisis Centre programmes, to support the more deprived families."

Early Childhood Services Unit

"We are concerned about the loss of jobs of the practitioners and loss of income because most of the operators are functioning from rented facilities and most are having difficulty in meeting their monthly rent, especially with the reduced revenue. Due to the financial imbalance, they may be forced out or squeezed out."

"Parents who are not working and can't send their children to school. As a result, the children suffer from regression, domestic violence, child abuse, and even nutrition because some kids had their meals at the centre. We haven't heard anything of abuse but with our culture it doesn't mean that it isn't happening."

"To ensure the children's safety that they are still receiving quality instruction. Because of all the additional sanitizing, instructional time can be diminished. But we are seeing efforts in ensuring that the kids are still gainfully occupied, still utilizing play-based activities to make the learning fun. And that is a bit comforting for us."

National Council of and For Persons with Disabilities

"Because we are not even able to reach as many persons as we would like now. Our field visits are not as often as before....It's affected how we can go out there, how we meet people, how much we can do. It's a case of where we were able to do three visits to a community, we now have to limit it to two, in some cases one. So we cannot go to members as often as we'd like. We now use a lot of telephone calls, WhatsApp messages, and I have had to add persons on my phone to help them not only to keep calm but also to try to encourage them that we are trying on their behalf."

"We have to provide our own sanitizers and things like that. I had to get these things for my office and put them there because I realized nothing that was being said even when it was said [that] the items have not been made available to us."

"The President had indicated that counselling services would be made available through counsellors at the Crisis Centre. As far as I know, in the south, they have not started. I don't know if it has started in the north.... It was discussed, but is not in effect currently in the south."

"I know recently we were receiving some assistance from a Saint Lucian group overseas. They informed [us] that they were sending 100 backpacks for children with disabilities. Bags contain school supplies and sanitary items. We are grateful, but with 100 having to split it around the country. In the south, we get only 50, and how do I select from my children with disabilities who is most in need or who is most

fitting to receive these items? It makes it more difficult. I don't want to be biased but you have to look at persons' situations and ... it makes it a little difficult. I wish there was something more we could do."

"I believe that having one field officer for that area is not sufficient. ...But that is what the funds we receive allow us to do."

Supervisor: Frontline workers at Children's Hospice

"One of our challenges was that we had to feed more people. We did get some donations to help this situation."

5.4 Government assistance

Saint Lucia Craft and Dry Goods Vendors Association

"They were given the Income Support Programme (ISP), \$500.00 per month for 3 months... So far, many got it as a lump sum because it was given so late, that it was almost like dust in the wind when they received it, because it left their hands immediately. Now many are at home, and many are single parents. The Government is saying no further assistance because resources are depleted."

Raise Your Voice St. Lucia

"Our organization has not received anything, nor am I aware of any other organization receiving support from the Ministry."

National Council of and for Older Persons

"Ministry of Health is working with the elderly by having the community health aides and sometimes the nurses visit the elderly; for instance, in La Clery area, sometimes the nurses would take the doctors with them to visit the shut-ins."

"It took two months for persons to receive funds from the Public Assistance Programme."

Saint Lucia Nurses Association

"There's nothing in place. Nothing as far as psychosocial support. We have not asked because we believe the Ministry should know our needs. They should see that it's necessary. One of the things that

has been focused on in COVID is the mental aspect. Why aren't you as the Ministry of Health reaching out to these nurses, the doctors, the domestics?"

Saint Lucia Crisis Centre

"In an effort to be more self-sufficient, and given the number of unemployed persons at this time, we have 30 young women to start their own backyard gardens. We have embarked on this initiative in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture."

"The Ministry of Equity and Justice collaborated with us by providing packages to ten young women."

"We are collaborating with Gender Relations on some programmes to assist those unemployed mothers. We will provide virtual classes [skills training] through a website that is being developed. Will also use the website to lend support."

"... collaborating with [the department of] Gender Relations through Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to support 50 women who are survivors of domestic violence to conduct needs assessment in order to provide customized packages as COVID assistance.... awaiting funding."

Saint Lucia Medical and Dental Association

"One of the arrangements made for the physicians was that they were allowed to stay at one of the quarantine hotels... One of the important issues was mental health support. The Ministry saw the need, and it was a good initiative also, having the option to stay at the hotel. You know you had a place to go and didn't have to go and infect your family."

"The Cuban presence makes a huge difference, especially for nursing staff, but in general, the support is there if you are short-staffed."

Children's Hospice

"We invited the Ministry of Health to the workplace to conduct a lecture on what to do and how to handle the virus in the residential type setting and at staff private homes. Also, we shared a pandemic plan on how to cope; in essence, we developed a health and safety plan."

"The seven-day scheduled stay at the facility also helped during the zoning process. Our Government-assigned bus could have gone anywhere on the island. Half of our staff (direct care workers) are from the south. They were able to move freely because of our early planning. Logistics regarding passes from NEMO were also in place very early."

5.5 External aid/support for members

Saint Lucia Craft and Dry Goods Vendors Association

"We have received no specific support from these ministries. I understand that the Government paid \$75.00 on electricity for some persons, especially those who were not successful with the ISP programme."

"Kiwanis gave masks to vendors – that helped."

National Council of and for Older Persons

"All stakeholders in communities such as the various churches, St. Vincent de Paul, Police, Fire Service, they all tried to do a little at a time."

"Some other groups such as the Club 60 helped provide food for the elderly."

Saint Lucia Crisis Centre

"We have also collaborated with another NGO who provided food commodities to assist those who came to us."

National Association of Early Childhood Education Practitioners

"Yes, the banks gave leeway to some people but there should have been some financial help."

Children's Hospice

"When we received donations, we created grocery packages for our staff, especially as the supermarkets were closed. What the Government provided are for the children, but whatever excess we receive from organizations like Massy stores and NEMO were shared among the staff members."

5.6 Most commonly expressed needs and demands of members and clients

The representatives of the various agencies were also asked to identify the specific needs of their members and clients. Some of these are outlined below.

Saint Lucia Craft and Dry Goods Vendors Association

"They are now trying to arrest persons without the requisite support. There is a need for education and sensitization on protocols."

"The Income Support Programme was done on line. So those who couldn't do it and were not computer-savvy had difficulties. I had to go and beg somebody to help some of the vendors with the online application. This is a sector that really needs a lot of support."

Raise Your Voice St. Lucia

"Our organization's concern is that the Government of Saint Lucia has not addressed the issues of domestic violence with respect to the COVID-19."

"The Government has not had any conversation about how persons have been affected by domestic violence during this pandemic. They have not discussed marginalized and vulnerable populations and which communities have been affected. They have not addressed any issues pertaining to domestic violence."

The members need:

- public education and awareness;
- to make a policy decision to provide social safety nets for women and children who are victims;
- capacity building for Family Court and Department of Human Services.

National Council of and for Older Persons

"The only thing we are missing is funds. We have to be begging, begging and begging. We have to dig in the little core funds to create miracles. The Government helps with a subvention, which we are grateful for, but it is not sufficient. But we try with it."

"I would like to see more recognition given to the elderly. Do not wait until a disaster strikes to help them. We want the children to come on board, take care of their elderly parents. Some children believe [that the] Government should be taking care of the elderly."

Saint Lucia Crisis Centre

"An increase in support with special emphasis on rural communities and gender-based violence."

"As an NGO, our main concern is lack of financial and other resources."

Saint Lucia Medical and Dental Association

“Some members felt that we should keep those borders closed because we can’t handle COVID-19 if we have a real outbreak.”

National Council of and For Persons with Disabilities

“I do not think that enough has been done within our organization to ensure that we are protected against this thing.”

“Personally, I don’t think we are able to do as much as we want to right now. I don’t think we are in a position to do as much as we want to as an organization for our members.”

“If we had counsellors right when this thing started or right when we returned to work that would have been great and so helpful because persons were fearful and WhatsApping (me) at home. Persons were calling and asking for food because the public assistance was not there as yet, and you have to try and calm these persons. So if we had had the services of a counsellor or two then, that would have helped.”

“Need for our women or young ladies with disabilities to receive some form of counselling to help them through this.”

National Association of Early Childhood Education Practitioners

“They could have given a package to the schools – basic things like hand sanitizers, gloves, a hand sanitizing machine. Just basic things – that would have helped a lot.”

“There should have been counselling for our members; there should have been financial support for our members, even helping them with their rent. Some people still had to find rent money to pay. There should be some kind of financial help....Some of the countries in the Caribbean helped their early years sector using money acquired from the Citizenship Investment Programme (CIP). Where was our CIP money to help us?”

“The need to look at how we can accumulate a bit more funds so that if something happens to our members, we might be able to help them.”

5.7 Focus on women

One of the KIIs conducted for this study was with Janey Joseph, Director of the Department of Gender Relations. This interview provides a useful justification for the study’s focus on women and highlights the Department’s critical concerns for women in the context of the pandemic. Three key areas are highlighted in this regard:

- *“A lot of the frontline workers, including nurses, doctors and we have an increased presence of firewomen as well now. They [women] are in the frontline of the work for the pandemic. They are at greater risk of getting infected since they are persons working with persons who likely have the virus and are interfacing very much with people generally. So if those people do have the virus, the chance of infection is greater for women.”*
- *“In St. Lucia, the majority of persons who lost their jobs were women, and they are also more likely to lose their jobs because of the positions they hold in the agencies in which they work. And the fact is that most of the job losses affect the sectors where they tend to be the majority, for instance, in the service sector, including tourism and so on.”*
- *“Increase in unpaid care and domestic work. As a result of the pandemic shutdown and even now with a partial shutdown with children going to school only on some days during the week, the burden of care continues to be highly on women. And so [it] decreases their access to paid work. And even when they have paid work, it decreases their productivity because their minds are in two places.”*

In sum, Ms. Joseph lamented that women’s gains have regressed to some degree due to the pandemic:

“Today, women have gone back about ten years. That is what is being concluded. What it speaks to is the decreased economic autonomy of our women. A lot of the gains we’ve made in the past few years in terms of women’s economic empowerment, we are kind of losing those gains as a result of what we’re seeing now – women losing their jobs, women less likely to get employed because they are need to stay home and mind the children. That’s what it brings to the fore.”

6. Discussion

6.1 The unique features of the crisis and women's caregiving responsibilities

Whereas with most economic crises, the loss of jobs might simply result in a search for a new job or a new career path, this particular crisis brought on by the coronavirus pandemic has taken a slightly different meaning. The pandemic has not only affected the economy, but also all aspects of life. As a result, women have been adversely affected in numerous ways.

Due to the closure of schools, toddlers and school-aged children are now at home, and depending on their ages, there is now a need to dedicate additional time to care for them and support them in online educational programmes. However, this is not a simple matter of finding a tutor or help to come into one's home to provide the needed services. The pandemic demands a level of caution and care, such as physical distancing, which precludes one from bringing in other people to provide support with the added caregiving responsibilities. This undoubtedly affects the demand for domestic workers, a sector predominantly occupied by women.

One hospitality worker reflected on the fact that the loss of her job had automatically resulted in two other women losing theirs: her babysitter and her helper. Moreover, due to the health risks posed by the virus, combined with the fact that children are now at home and women are the ones who traditionally and/or primarily bear the responsibility for childcare, the women whose lives have been disrupted by the pandemic may find it more difficult to find another job with the flexibility they may need. Hence, while they are desperately in need of a new job and income, they are in a dilemma while they attempt to balance homeschooling, childcare and other domestic duties. Several participants in the study, particularly those previously employed in the hospitality industry, acknowledged that with the loss of their jobs, they now depended on their husbands or partners to support them. This suggests that the pandemic may have contributed to a reduction in women's sense of independence.

6.2 Financial planning

Most financial experts recommend that sound financial planning requires putting aside savings to cover at least 3 to 6 months of one's monthly expenses. However, this pandemic has undermined this theory, demonstrating the need for savings to cover at least one year of expenses. However, now that it is over a year

since the pandemic began, there is still no indication of if and when economic activity will return to its former level. The crisis has underscored the need for equipping the populace, rich and poor, manager and vendor, with the relevant skills and knowledge for effective financial planning. Many people who received financial assistance from the NIC ERP or the Government's ISP indicated that, because of the delays in processing these payments, by the time they received what was due to them, they had incurred additional debt from friends and family. The financial assistance therefore vanished as soon as it was received since they had to pay off these new debts. It is not surprising, then, that there was not an overwhelming number of individuals citing this financial assistance as one of the positive aspects of the pandemic. It may be useful to consider the provision of awareness sessions in financial management to accompany future financial assistance.

6.3 Challenges in accessing services and interventions

Several interviewees indicated that they had not been aware of the opportunities for accessing support through the Government's income support programme. This was a special arrangement made for non-NIC contributors, in particular, informal sector workers. Others may have known but did not think that it applied to them. Still others took the time to apply and were unsuccessful. The representative from the vendors' association lamented the tedious process involved in applying for this support. The application could only be completed online, and many of the vendors do not have Wi-Fi access or the know-how to manage the application process. The Vendors Association therefore had to reach out to the owner of an internet café to provide support to the vendors in the application process. This highlights the need for more user-friendly processes and more effective public messaging and information dissemination utilizing all relevant media and platforms.

Two of the reasons for the failure of some of the applicants to obtain support was that they did not meet the established criteria or lacked the relevant documentation, particularly proof of business. Some workers were denied support because of the informality of their work (their inability to produce the relevant documents and proof of business), which reflects a failure to understand the nature of the labour force in Saint Lucia: not only is a significant segment of the labour force involved in informal work, but this is also the sector that would have felt the full brunt of the pandemic with its accompanying forms of lockdowns since they would be considered 'non-essential workers'. Notwithstanding this classification, these individuals, particularly single mothers, were more likely to be the sole breadwinners of their households, and would in some cases be supporting other dependents such as elderly parents in other households. For their dependents, then, these women would be deemed 'essential workers'.

6.4 Social protection in the era of COVID-19

The coronavirus pandemic has created a crisis for most individuals, even though some have found innovative ways to create opportunities out of the crisis. Recognizing the predominantly negative effects of the pandemic, it becomes necessary to explore the implications for social protection in Saint Lucia and the wider Caribbean. Although the study did not specifically focus on poor women, much of the data generated would suggest that COVID-19 is the ultimate gap-widener of social inequalities, since the groups with pre-existing risks or those who were commonly known as the vulnerable groups were

more seriously affected by the pandemic. Several women lost their jobs, and hence, their independence. The women who still enjoy the benefits of a job are now forced to juggle additional tasks at home while balancing the new work demands, increasing prices and static wages. Youth have been displaced from their jobs, or robbed of opportunities that may have been on the horizon. For example, some of the parents of young adults lamented the loss of job opportunities that their adult children expected to have. Children were displaced from school and forced to learn in social isolation. The elderly were obligated to spend the latter years of their lives alone out of fear of being exposed to increased risks. PWDs may be further isolated and left to fend for themselves as a result of special concern for their health and safety.

The pandemic has likely worsened conditions for previously vulnerable women, such as those living in poverty, elderly women, women with disabilities, and those responsible for elderly parents and relatives with disabilities, as well as survivors of GBV. The crisis may have created a new class of vulnerable women – individuals who previously occupied middle-class positions; they may not have been very rich but they managed to hold their own. They were business owners, self-employed persons and those employed at various levels in the hospitality sector or some other industry. They were financially independent women who owned cars, paid mortgages on their houses, and even supported their elderly parents and other dependents. This crisis has clearly demanded a rethinking of social protection and its accompanying policies to respond to the changing faces of vulnerable persons in the Saint Lucian society.

It is also possible to consider the social protection implications of the pandemic by exploring the example of the non-COVID health issues that may have arisen as a result of the pandemic. Due to the pandemic, all free clinics at the hospitals and wellness centres were temporarily suspended, some of which (free dental clinics for adults and children, antenatal and prenatal clinics, and diabetic and hypertensive clinics) resumed at only select locations. All of these clinics would have contributed significantly to health and wellbeing, and overall quality of life of persons, and to their ability to manage pre-existing health conditions. It is generally acknowledged that women tend to use free health clinics; hence, the decision to limit these free community-based services has had a disproportionately negative effect on their health and wellbeing. Moreover, in several cases, the clinics addressed preventative approaches to health care. Given that they were free, it is mainly the poor and vulnerable, the majority of whom are women, who were more likely to make use of them. Without these clinics, it is doubtful that persons would go to private facilities; rather, they would likely choose to neglect their health care needs until they became critical. The lack of these preventative services is likely to result in increased incidence of diseases and health risks, including risk of COVID-19, and increased costs to the country. Some nurses noted the increased incidence of deaths associated with some chronic diseases as well as increased amputations among diabetics, and increased cases of dengue and dengue-related deaths among persons with pre-existing conditions. This situation highlights the need to set up systems to support other patients and address other health care needs while not losing sight of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the disease has a pervasive impact, it is important to avoid 'COVID-19 blindness', i.e. a tendency to see nothing but COVID-19. It must be noted, however, that this tendency is not exclusive to Saint Lucia, but has also affected the Americas in general. In a press statement on August 4, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Director, Dr. Carissa Etienne referred to a survey that showed that in 27 countries, half of the diabetes and hypertension programmes at the primary care level were halted, and pregnancy-related visits dropped by 40 per cent. She stated:

Without doctors and nurses available to offer other essential services at the first level of care, including pregnancy-related care, and management of chronic conditions like diabetes or infectious diseases such as HIV, TB and malaria, these services are severely disrupted or worse yet, halted entirely.¹²

In light of these issues, several questions emerge as part of the way forward for social protection in Saint Lucia:

- Who are the newly poor and vulnerable?
- How are the poor and vulnerable facing increased risks as a result of COVID-19? How are they coping?
- Are these new risks transitory? How long can they be expected to last?
- How are men and women differently affected?
- What is the impact on children?
- What coping strategies are adopted by youth?
- How are different categories of women affected?
- How does the new focus on technology and virtual communication further marginalize certain vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, the poor and unemployed? How does the use of digital platforms for education, and the dissemination of information about COVID-19 and other matters via virtual means contribute to a greater digital divide and the increased marginalization of persons who have no access to computers, the internet and data plans or smartphones?

¹² PAHO (2020).

7. Conclusion

The coronavirus pandemic has dealt a comprehensive blow on economies and societies across the globe. As a Small Island Developing State, Saint Lucia has suffered significant loss through the sudden halt in its economic activity. The pandemic, together with its demands for physical distancing and a relatively complete lockdown, has had a direct impact on social life and social activity. This study has explored the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on women involved in four sectors in Saint Lucia. It is anticipated that the results of the study will be useful in developing new social protection legislation and programming for Saint Lucia in a new post-COVID-19 era in which legislation and programming are in place for future occurrences of similar disasters.

I believe the Government could have helped businesses, especially those run by single mothers. We don't have the money like Massy, S&S. I don't ask for handouts. But more could have been done.....There was nowhere I could have turned to. If you are a government, you are supposed to help and take off some of the pressure... a few products, a means to make money; you don't have to give me money. But you can give me a way to make a way. Caring enough about your people. I find it was really hard for me, and I don't know what I was going to do as a mom.

Nobody caused COVID. It happened to all of us... there was a lack of compassion to help and truly help. Whatever little help that would have been offered to me, I would have been grateful for. Even if you can't solve the problem but you take steps to ask, then you give me hope.

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Appendices

Voices of Saint Lucian Women:

A study of the impact of COVID-19 on frontline workers, small entrepreneurs, pre-school teachers and hospitality workers

Interview Schedules

The following are the interview schedules, which guided the individual interviews with workers from the four sectors of interest as well as the key informant interviews (KIIs) with various representatives or leaders from those sectors. Given that the interviews were conducted over the phone or via Skype, the schedules were intentionally designed to be short with no more than ten main questions and a few probing questions.

Schedule A: Interview with Hospitality Workers

1. Tell me about your job just prior to the coronavirus pandemic. What type of work did you do? How long have you been employed? How did you feel about your job?
2. How has the coronavirus pandemic affected your life? Your work situation? Family life and relationships? Your emotional/mental state? Your economic well-being? Your ability to meet your needs?
3. Do you have any school-aged children? If so, how has the closure of school affected family life for you and your children? Are there any new roles that you now have to perform? Explain. How do you feel about this?

4. Do you currently have any babies or infants (children aged 0–3 years)? Do you have any dependents at home? How do you normally care for your infants/dependents? In what way(s) have these arrangements changed since the COVID-19 pandemic? How have these changes affected you/your work? How do you feel about this?
5. Are you a single parent? If so, do you have any help at home? What kind of help are you receiving in the home (e.g. help with domestic duties such as cooking, cleaning, etc.)? If you are not receiving any help, how are you coping?
6. How are you coping with the changes in your life that have been brought on by the pandemic? Have there been any positive impacts of the pandemic on your life?
7. Have you received any form of support to help you cope with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic? Explain. What additional support would you have liked to receive?

Schedule B: Interview with Frontline Workers

1. Tell me about your job situation just prior to the coronavirus pandemic. What type of work did you do? How long have you been employed? How did you feel about your job?
2. How has the coronavirus pandemic affected your work situation? Your feelings of safety? Your interaction with work colleagues? Are there any new roles that you now have to perform? Explain. How do you feel about this?
3. How has the pandemic affected other aspects of your life? Family life and relationships? Your emotional/mental state? Your economic well-being? Your ability to meet your needs?
4. Do you have any school-aged children? If so, how has the closure of school affected family life for you and your children? Are there any new roles that you now have to perform? Explain. How do you feel about this?
5. Do you currently have any babies or infants (children aged 0–3 years)? Do you have any dependents at home? How do you normally care for your infants/dependents? In what way(s) have these arrangements changed since the COVID-19 pandemic? How have these changes affected you/your work? How do you feel about this?
6. Are you a single parent? If so, do you have any help at home? What kind of help are you receiving within the home (e.g. help with domestic duties such as cooking, cleaning, etc.)? If you are not receiving any help, how are you coping?
7. How are you coping with the changes in your life that have been brought on by the pandemic? Have there been any positive impacts of the pandemic on your life?
8. Have you received any form of support to help you cope with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic? Explain. What additional support would you have liked to receive?

Schedule C: Interview with Pre-school teachers

1. Tell me about your job just prior to the coronavirus pandemic. What type of work did you do? How long have you been employed? How did you feel about your job?
2. How has the coronavirus pandemic affected your life? Your work situation? Family life and relationships? Your emotional/mental state? Your economic well-being? Your ability to meet your needs?
3. Do you have any school-aged children? If so, how has the closure of school affected family life for you and your children? Are there any new roles that you now have to perform? Explain. How do you feel about this?
4. Do you currently have any babies or infants (children aged 0–3 years)? Do you have any dependents at home? How do you normally care for your infants/dependents? In what way(s) have these arrangements changed since the COVID-19 pandemic? How have these changes affected you? How do you feel about this?
5. Are you a single parent? If so, do you have any help at home? What kind of help are you receiving within the home (e.g. help with domestic duties such as cooking, cleaning, etc.)? If you are not receiving any help, how are you coping?
6. How are you coping with the changes in your life that have been brought on by the pandemic? Have there been any positive impacts of the pandemic on your life?
7. Have you received any form of support to help you cope with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic? Explain. What additional support would you like to receive?

Schedule D: Interview with Small Entrepreneurs

1. Tell me about your job just prior to the coronavirus pandemic. What type of work did you do? How long have you been engaged in this type of work? How did you feel about your job?
2. How has the coronavirus pandemic affected your life? Your work situation? Your economic well-being? Your ability to meet your needs? How do you feel about your prospects as a small business owner? What are your current plans?
3. How has the coronavirus pandemic affected your family life and relationships? Your emotional/mental state?
4. Do you have any school-aged children? If so, how has the closure of school affected family life for you and your children? Are there any new roles that you now have to perform? Explain. How do you feel about this?

5. Do you currently have any babies or infants (children aged 0–3 years)? How do you normally care for your infants/dependents? How do you normally care for them? In what way(s) have these arrangements changed since the COVID-19 pandemic? How have these changes affected you? How do you feel about this?
6. Are you a single parent? If so, do you have any help at home? What kind of help are you receiving within the home (e.g. help with domestic duties such as cooking, cleaning, etc.)? If you are not receiving any help, how are you coping?
7. How are you coping with the changes in your life that have been brought on by the pandemic? Have there been any positive impacts of the pandemic on your life?
8. Have you received any form of support to help you cope with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic? Explain. What additional support would you like to receive?

Schedule E: Key Informant Interview: President, Saint Lucia Nurses Association

1. How has the current coronavirus pandemic affected the nurses? Their working conditions? Their interaction with each other? Their feelings of safety at work? The mental well-being of the nurses?
2. In what way(s) has the current situation has affected female workers differently than men? Please explain. How has the closure of schools and daycare centres affected persons with school-aged children and infants? What about those with dependents?
3. What measures has the Ministry of Health instituted to help the nurses to cope with demands posed by the coronavirus pandemic? Please explain. Have there been any specific measures geared towards supporting persons with school-aged children and infants? Any measures aimed at supporting those with dependents? How effective would you say these measures have been? Has the Ministry provided any specific support for transportation of staff who would ordinarily depend on the public transportation system?
4. What are the primary concerns of your association for the nurses in the current context of the coronavirus? What measures has the association taken to address these or other concerns? How effective have they been?

Schedule F: Representative, Small Enterprise Development Unit

1. Tell me a little about your association and its mandate. How has the current coronavirus pandemic affected small business owners in Saint Lucia? Explain.
2. Is there any way(s) in which the current situation has affected small business owners differently than men? Please explain.

3. What are the primary concerns of your unit in the current context of the coronavirus? What measures has the Small Enterprise Development Unit (SEDU) instituted to help the small business sector in coping with challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic? Have there been any specific measures for women entrepreneurs? Please explain. How effective would you say these measures have been?

Schedule G: President, Saint Lucia Craft and Dry Goods Vendors Association

1. Tell me a little about your association and its mandate. How has the current coronavirus pandemic affected the vendors? Explain.
2. Is there any way(s) in which the current situation has affected female workers differently than men? Please explain.
3. What measures has the Ministry of Tourism or Commerce instituted to help the vendors in coping with challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic? Have there been any specific measures for women? Please explain. How effective would you say these measures have been?
4. What are the primary concerns of your association in the current context of the coronavirus? What measures has the association taken to address these or other concerns? How effective have they been?

Schedule H: Key Informant Interview – Representative/Manager, Retail Supermarkets

1. How has the current coronavirus pandemic affected your staff? Their working conditions? Their interaction with each other? Their feelings of safety at work? The mental well-being of the staff?
2. In what way(s) has the current situation affected female workers differently than men? Please explain. How has the closure of schools and daycare centres affected persons with school-aged children and infants? How has the situation affected about persons with dependents?
3. What measures has your company instituted to help staff in coping with the demands posed by the coronavirus pandemic? Please explain. Have there been any specific measures geared towards supporting persons with school-aged children and infants? Any measures aimed at supporting those with dependents? How effective would you say these measures have been? Has the company provided any specific support for transportation of staff who would ordinarily depend on the public transportation system?

Schedule I: Representative, Other Vulnerable Groups (the Elderly, Youth, Persons with Disabilities, Women's Groups)

1. Tell me a little about your association and its mandate. How has the current coronavirus pandemic affected your members? Explain.
2. In what way(s) has the current situation affected females differently than men? Please explain.

3. What measures has the [Respective Ministry] instituted to help the vulnerable persons in your target group in coping with challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic? Have there been any specific measures for women? Please explain. How effective would you say these measures have been? What more would you like to see done for your interest group?
4. Are the primary concerns of your association in the current context of the coronavirus? What measures has the association taken to address these or other concerns? How effective have they been?

Schedule J: Key Informant Interview: President, Saint Lucia Medical and Dental Association

1. Tell me a little about your organization and its mandate.
2. How has the current coronavirus pandemic affected your members? Their working conditions? Their interaction with each other? Their feelings of safety at work? The mental well-being of the doctors? How have they been coping?
3. In what way(s) has the current situation affected female members differently than men? Please explain. How did the closure of schools and daycare centres (and the current blended approach) affect persons with school-aged children and infants? What about those with dependents?
4. What measures has the Ministry of Health instituted to help the doctors in coping with demands posed by the coronavirus pandemic? Please explain. Have there been any specific measures geared towards supporting persons with school-aged children and infants? Any measures aimed at supporting those with dependents? How effective would you say these measures have been?
5. What are the primary concerns of your association for the members in the current context of the coronavirus? What measures has the association taken to address these or other concerns? How effective have they been? What additional support/measures do you think should be in place to help your members cope with or adjust to the pandemic?



