

# Long COVID and the (in)ability to work

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**IMPACTS OF COVID-19 IN AOTEAROA**  
NGĀ KAWEKAWE O MATE KORONA

# Why would long COVID affect work?



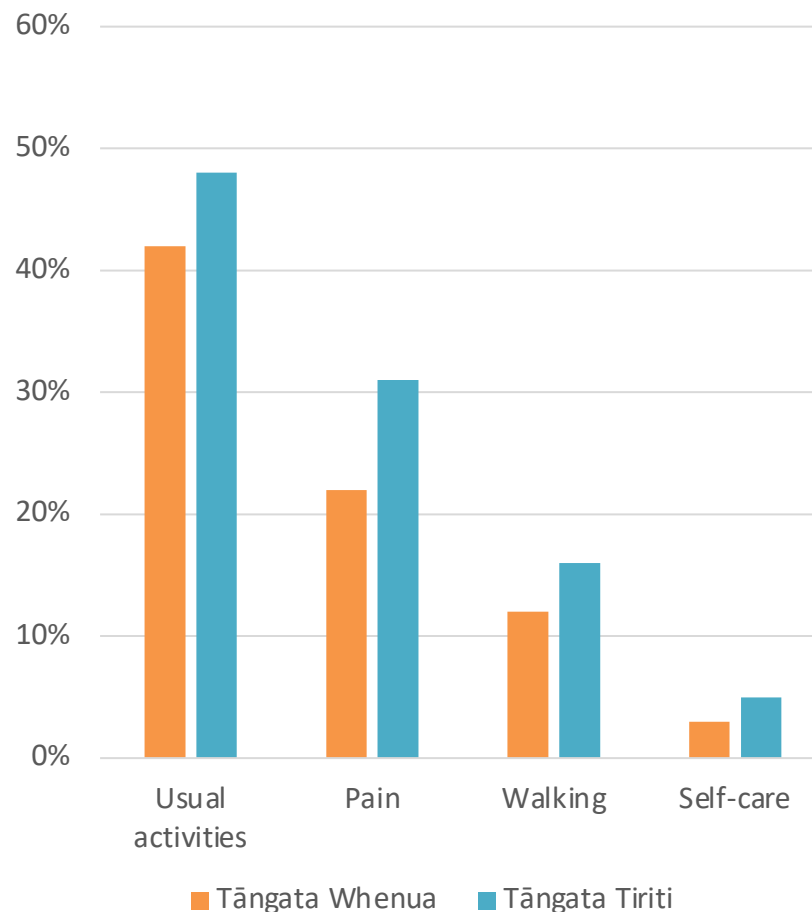
# International literature



- About one quarter (22%) were not working, and half (45%) working reduced hours
  - International study of 3,505 people (Davis, 2021)
- Between a third (29%) and half (47%) were not able to return to work
  - Review of five studies (in Ceban, 2022)
- About 3.7% of workforce not in employment due to long COVID
  - Two UK surveys (Reuschke, 2022)

# In Aotearoa

- About 20% of people who had COVID-19 have symptoms that last over 3 months
  - Most conservative estimate: 2.5%
- Nearly half of these people have their usual activities moderately to severely affected
- 1.5m reported cases of COVID-19 in Aotearoa age 20-69
  - 150,000 working age people moderately to severely affected
  - Most conservative estimate: 20,000 people



# Among people with long COVID



- About half (47%) have had time off work
- Two thirds (65%) had more than 10 days off work
  - Paid sick leave increased to 10 days in July 2021
- One in five people (23%) had more than three months off work

I now have breathing problems, heart problems, fatigue, muscle and joint pains. These are bad enough that I have had to give up my job as a *[health professional]*. I haven't worked since August 2020.

I had to stop going into the office due to pain, I also felt it difficult to think and remember things. I started working from home full-time and would fall asleep during the day sometimes.

Covid has caused me to give up my job and move out of my home and in with my parents.

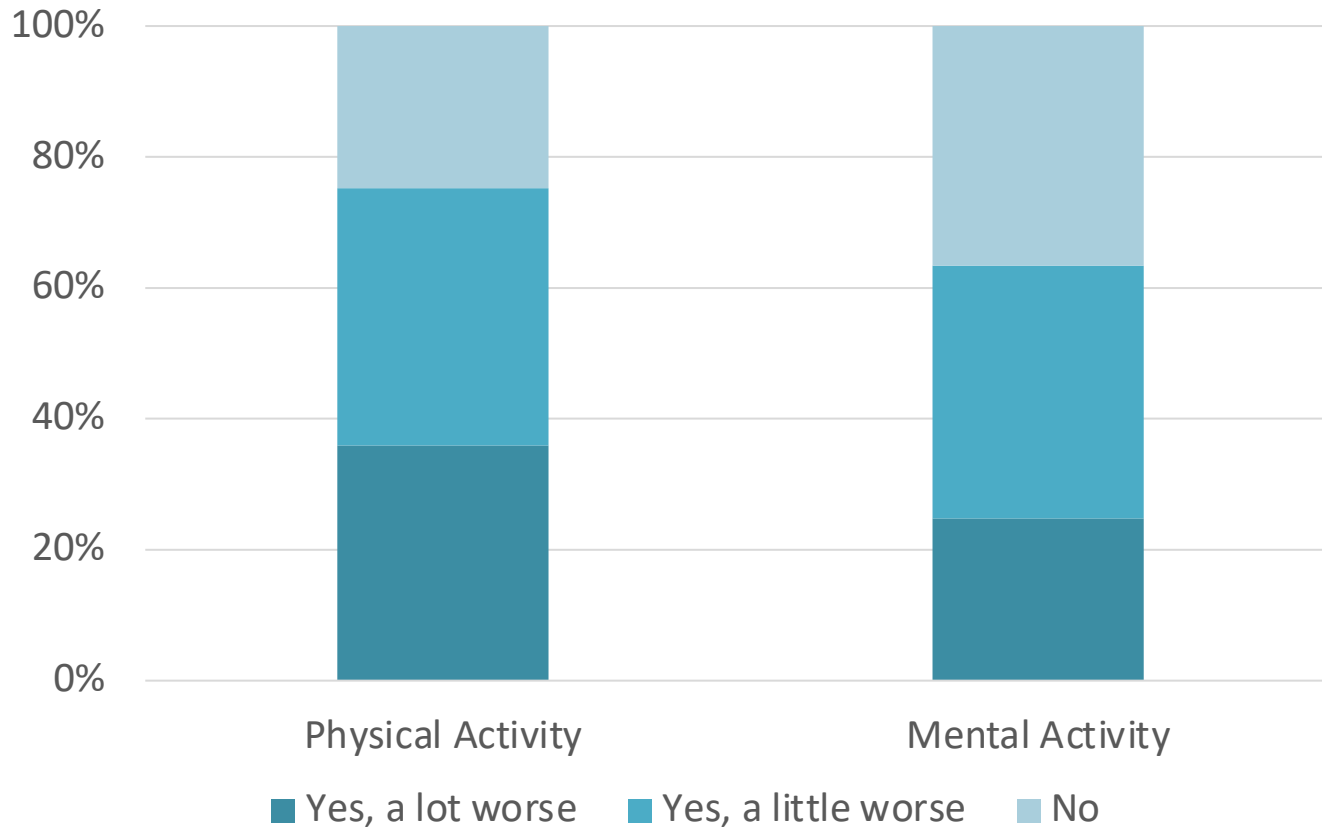
Now I struggle to get out of bed in the morning, exercise destroys me, and my overall energy levels are so low. I cannot get through a full day at work, and I'm afraid my manager will notice and I will lose my job.

It has left me very debilitated... I had to resign from my part time job in retail and haven't been able to work since and I was unable to complete my final year of high school due to the severe fluctuation of my symptoms and pain.

# Post-exertional malaise



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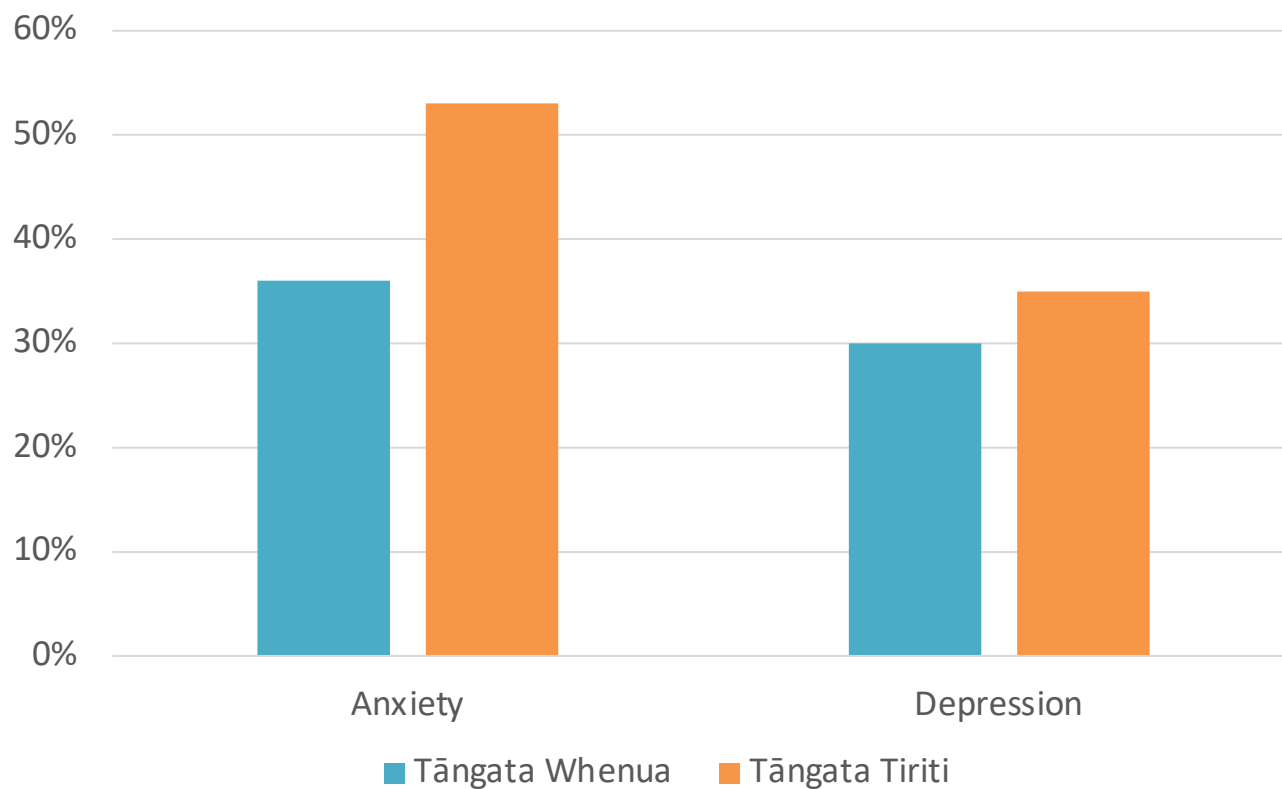


# Mental distress





# Mental distress



# Unknowns



- Prevalence: little evidence on duration
- Impact of different strains
  - Are Omicron variants less likely to cause LC?
- Impact of re-infection
  - Increased risk?
- What works best to keep people in work?

# Summary



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- Long COVID is common and debilitating
- Employers need to understand how this is affecting their staff
  - “What can I do to help?”
- Call for long COVID to be recognised as a disability
  - Reasonable accommodation measures

# Acknowledgements



- Dr Lynne Russell
- Rōpū Kaitiaki | Advisory Board
- Rōpū Rangahau | Research Team
- All those who took part
- Manatū Hauora | Ministry of Health

# References



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