Social Activity Measure June 28th June
(Period Covered: June 28th – July 6th)

The Social Activity Measure (SAM) is a behavioural study that records the public response to the risk of Covid-19 infection and Covid-19 guidelines over time. Designed by the Economic and Social Research Institute's Behavioural Research Unit (BRU), SAM is an anonymous, interactive, online study that surveys people about their recent activity. The study offers insight into where and how risks of Covid-19 transmission arise. SAM aims to inform policy regarding the opening of parts of the economy and society, while keeping Covid-19 under control. The research is funded by the Department of the Taoiseach.

Method

SAM is a "prompted recall" study that uses methods from behavioural science to help people to recall their activities. It asks about times when people left their homes, via factual, neutral questions. Questions cover locations people visited and visitors to their home during the previous week. Follow-up questions gather greater detail about the previous two days: how many people participants met, for how long, ease of keeping a 2m distance, use of hand sanitiser and face masks, and so on. The study concludes with questions about the pandemic more generally.

This report presents data from the twelfth round, carried out in the week beginning June 28th. Data have been collected fortnightly since the week of January 25th, from nationally representative samples of 1,000 adults. Recruitment is from existing online survey panels to match the socio-demographic profile of the adult population. A discussion of the accuracy of this method can be found in previous ESRI-BRU publications.[1] The survey is completely anonymous.

Main Findings

Where differences are highlighted, they are statistically significant unless otherwise stated. Further detail is provided in accompanying slides, which are referenced here for ease of use. Prior to data collection, indoor dining, which had been anticipated to open on 5th July was delayed. There was some media coverage about travel and the EU vaccine passport, alongside coverage of the Delta variant. Vaccine registration in pharmacies was announced for all in the 18-34 year age group on July 2nd.

1. *Cafés, pubs, restaurants and exercise facilities saw increases in activity while transport, workplaces and hospitality were listed as the busiest locations.*

Social activity in most locations has stabilised over June and July (Slide 3-5). This month saw increases in visits to exercise facilities, hotels and cafés, pubs and restaurants compared to June, and decreases in visits to schools and colleges, while other locations remained unchanged (Slide 5). Nearly half of respondents had visited a café, pub or restaurant in the previous week. For each of these locations, respondents were asked how easy or difficult it was to maintain a 2-metre distance from others while there (Slide 6). The location with the highest rate of reporting difficulties with social distancing was transport, bearing in mind that half of responses related to private cars containing people from different households. The second busiest location was the workplace. Over 1

[1] See Timmons et al. (2020), Public understanding and perceptions of the COVID-19 Test-and-Trace system, ESRI Survey and Statistical Report Series 96 (www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/SUSTAT96.pdf), pp.3-4.

in 4 of those who went to their workplace in the past 24 hours found it difficult to socially distance from others while there. The third, fourth and fifth highest were cafés, pubs and restaurants. Just under 1 in 5 of those who went to a restaurant found it difficult to socially distance from others who were not in their party.

2. *There have been increases in close contacts, but mostly with people who have received at least one dose of vaccine.*

People are meeting the same number of other people on average as in the last wave of SAM (Slide 7) but, since June, there has been an increase in close contacts and in the number of close contacts occurring without masks (Slide 8). For reference, close contact interactions are defined as those that lasted for longer than 15 minutes, without a 2m distance being maintained at all times, or that took place indoors for longer than 2 hours in a space that was not well ventilated. Most close contacts still take place during household visits and in workplaces. Most close contacts without masks take place during household visits and an increasing number occur in hospitality venues (Slide 8). Since the last wave of SAM, an increased number of social visits to other people's homes involve risk factors such as meeting indoors, with no social distancing and with poor ventilation (Slide 9). There have been some increases in these risk factors during social visits by both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals (Slide 10). However, as vaccinations have increased, so have the number of close contacts where at least one person has received at least one dose of the vaccine. For the first time, close contacts with someone who was fully vaccinated were more common than close contacts with someone who was unvaccinated (Slide 11). More social visits to homes are accounted for by those who are fully vaccinated than by those who have only had one dose or who are unvaccinated (Slide 12).

3. *Vaccine uptake and intention to take it remains high. There has been a large increase in registrations in the 18-39 age bracket in July.*

As of the beginning of July, 71% of the SAM sample had received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, consistent with figures for the total population (Slide 13). The majority of those not yet vaccinated intend to take the vaccine. Previously, we observed an increase in the minority who intend to refuse the vaccine, but this fell back to only 4% of the population this wave (Slide 13). This is mainly due to a reduction in the under 40 age group, of whom only 5% do not intend to take the vaccine (Slide 14).

Vaccination uptake rose in all age categories. The biggest increase for those aged under 40 was in first doses and the biggest increase for those aged over 40 was in second doses (Slide 14). Over 97% of the oldest cohort and 84% of those aged 50-59 have been fully vaccinated (Slide 15). Just over half of 60-69 year olds and just under half of 40-49 year olds have been fully vaccinated, but a large percentage of both age groups continued to wait for their second dose. Nearly half of those aged under 30 and two-thirds of those aged 30-39 have either registered or received at least one dose of the vaccine.

There was a substantial increase in the percentage of 18-39 year olds who registered for a vaccine this wave (Slide 16). The official registration for vaccines for the 35-39 age group opened before data collection began and registration in pharmacies for the 18-34 age group was announced midway through data collection for this wave.

Almost two thirds of those not yet vaccinated are happy to take whichever vaccine is offered to them, although half of these say they have a preference. The most commonly preferred vaccine is Pfizer. There is no significant change in this variable from the last wave (Slide 17).

Satisfaction with the vaccine rollout has not changed significantly from the previous wave. Younger adults are less satisfied than older age groups. (Slide 18).

4. *The majority of people, even of those fully vaccinated, do not plan to travel in 2021. The proportion expecting further easing of restrictions in August is declining.*

Regardless of their vaccination status, around 70% of people do not plan to travel abroad in 2021 (Slide 19).[2] More fully vaccinated people who intend to travel in 2021 have booked compared to unvaccinated people who intend to travel. There has been no change in travel off the island of Ireland or into Northern Ireland, but there was a slight (albeit not significant) increase in the number of people travelling between counties in the Republic of Ireland (Slide 20).

There has been an increase in the percentage of people who expect restrictions to be tightened next month (from 8.5% at the end of June to 22.6% at the start of July) and a sharp decline in those who expect further easing (Slide 21). Note that data for this wave was collected after the announcement of the delay in allowing indoor dining.

5. *People find the restrictions less coherent and easy to understand this month, and remain worried about the virus.*

Since the end of June, the extent to which people find the restrictions coherent and easy to understand has decreased (Slide 22). The decrease is seen in both vaccinated and unvaccinated people. Both variables are associated with individual behaviour. The less coherent people find the restrictions, the more likely they are to have had a close contact, to have had a social visit, to have met more people. The less easy people find the restrictions to understand, the more likely they are to have had a close contact and a social visit (Slide 23). They are also less likely to be cautious about COVID-19 in their day-to-day behaviour.

We asked people how committed they were to following specific guidelines, and how difficult they find them to follow. Commitment remains high with an average of over 5 on a 7-point scale and perceived difficulty remains low with an average of less than 4 on a 7-point scale. However, there has been a decrease in commitment to following guidelines about risk mitigation measures, about the numbers of people one can meet and about meeting outdoors (Slide 24). There has also been a slight increase in how difficult people find it to follow these guidelines (Slide 25). Unvaccinated people report finding it more difficult to follow these guidelines than vaccinated people. There has been no change to commitment to or difficulty of following advice to avoid non-essential international travel.

Worry about the virus has not changed since last month, it remains at 6 out of 10, and continues to be associated with more cautious behaviour (Slide 26). Wellbeing has remained stable since early June at an average score of 5 out of 7 (Slide 27). There has been a slight increase in the extent to which people find the restrictions tiresome and a slight decrease in self-reported compliance to the guidelines and in perceived compliance of others (Slide 28).

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[2] Note, it is not known what proportion of those in this sample would normally travel abroad. A CSO survey in February 2021 found that 73.3% of respondents reported that in typical years before the COVID-19 pandemic they would take a holiday overseas. https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-sic19vahe/socialimpactofcovid-19surveyfebruary2021vaccinationattitudesandholidayexpectations/internationaltravelandholidayintentionsfor2021/