



Independent COVID-19 Evaluation Public Consultation Analysis Overview

March 2026

Background Information

The independent COVID-19 Evaluation's public consultation included a **long and short survey**. These incorporated themed multiple-choice questions and an open question for people to reflect on their pandemic experience.

The surveys covered numerous quality-of-life aspects to better understand how the pandemic impacted different dimensions or aspects of people's lives.

In addition to the survey, the public also had the opportunity to provide **individual submissions** to the Evaluation, outlining their personal experiences and the impacts of the pandemic and its management.

As a public consultation, it was open to all people aged 18 and over living in Ireland during the pandemic, and therefore is not akin to pure research methods where sampling mechanisms are an inherent part of the data collecting approach.

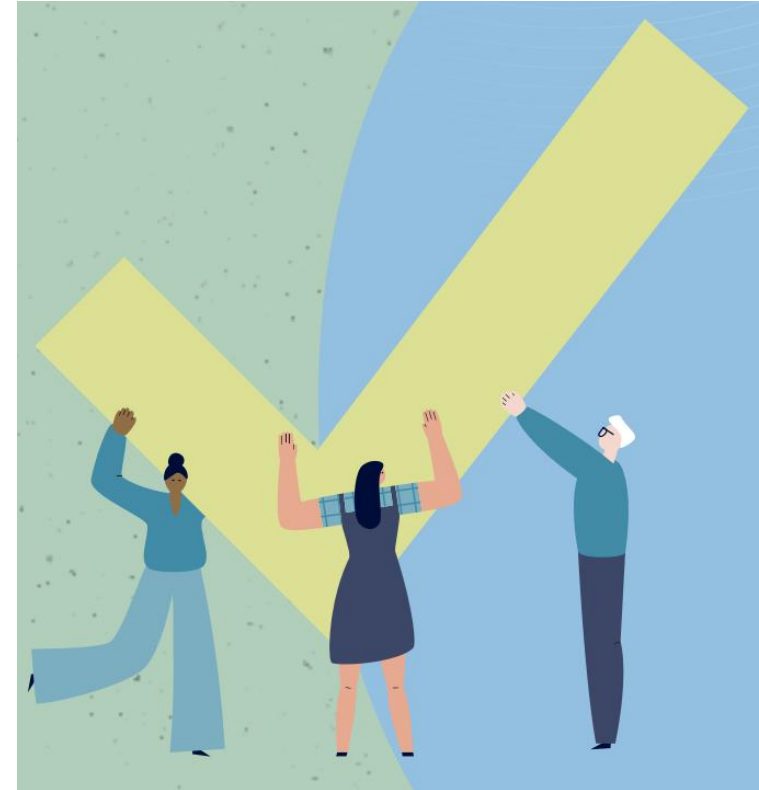


This Overview Analysis Includes:

- Analysis of closed survey questions (*quantitative analysis*)
- Overview of open survey responses & individual submissions (*qualitative findings*)

The general survey and individual submissions are also complemented by initial [stakeholder submissions](#), which provide further perspectives from the viewpoints of specific sectors or groups.

*Analysis of the bespoke **survey for young people**, and the dedicated consultation on **long-term residential care facilities for older persons**, will be analysed and published separately.*



Overall analysis dimensions are:

1. Relationships, social connections and community (*includes bereavement and life events and milestones*)
2. Mental health and wellbeing
3. Physical health (*includes experiences of health and care services*)
4. Local environment (*includes housing and digital engagement*)
5. Education and development (*parent/guardian and student view*)
6. Work and time use
7. Financial situation
8. Civil liberties, human rights and trust (*includes aspects such as information/communications, restrictions and risk appetite*)
9. Overall key issues of concern
10. Comparisons of overall impacts across different life area dimensions

Overview of survey findings – quantitative

The top 3 **issues** that were **of most concern** to respondents during the pandemic were

1. Mental health & wellbeing (47%)
2. Relationships, social connections & community (45%)
3. Physical health (35%)

Areas with the highest proportion of reported **negative impacts**:

- Education and development (*from students' and parents/guardians' perspectives only - 65%;61%;*)
- Civil liberties, human rights and trust (46%)
- Mental health and wellbeing (44%)
- Work and time use (41%)
- Relationships and connections (40%)

Dimension with the highest reported **positive impacts**:

- Local area (26%).



Overview of survey findings – quantitative

When impacts are considered in the round, across numerous quality-of-life aspects, it appears that **life stage and circumstances clearly matter:**

- A person's financial situation (or level of difficulty in making ends meet) has considerable bearing across dimensions
- Having very young children is also very impactful overall, especially for single parents
- Age is also very relevant, with younger people feeling considerably impacted across many dimensions
- Other cohorts, such as carers and people with a disability, had strong negative impacts across some dimensions
- For certain dimensions, such as civil liberties, human rights and trust, there were differing perspectives, such as across gender.

Overview of open text - qualitative survey and individual submission findings

Respondents' direct inputs were **divided on many issues, largely influenced by their personal situation and their personal perspectives.**

Issues raised include:

- The importance of protecting mental health and wellbeing, not just physical health
- The impacts of school closures on education and development (and the protective role schools play)
- Lost time and milestones
- Societal change and division
- Risks and challenges for frontline workers
- Burden of care
- Communications, information, digital engagement and media
- The extent, design and nuances of restrictions
- Vaccination & healthcare
- Visiting restrictions in nursing homes, acute hospitals and maternity hospitals
 - Related isolation, grief of losing loved ones, and how restrictions significantly negatively affected bereavement and grieving practices.

Overview of open text - qualitative survey and individual submission findings

Insights included:

- insufficient supports and services
- issues around cocooning and isolation
- issues around the 2km and 5km restrictions
- the value and delay in introducing 'bubbles'
- challenges for 'non-nuclear' families
- the role of fear in communications
- how different risk appetites created division among family, friends and society.

Respondents also shared harrowing accounts of losing loved ones in nursing homes and hospitals during the pandemic. Many residents and patients died alone and respondents described how they were not facilitated to be with their loved ones in their final stage.

Cautions and caveats



The total number of responses received was over 7,000:

Applicable Responses	Number
Surveys	Just under 6,800
Open textbox	Over 3,500
Individual submissions	Over 100

- Given the overall response size, caution is required in interpreting findings and extrapolating experiences to the population, in particular for cohorts or groups where response levels are low or proportionately different to that of the overall population.
- Where subcategories are being explored, it is important to be aware that this is focusing on an often-small subset of the overall response level. For open text, it is important to bear in mind that this relates to just over half of all respondents.

Cautions and caveats



When considering this data, it is important to note:

- biases inherent in public consultations (those who choose to participate)
- differences in demographics of respondents compared to general population (key demographic comparisons are provided in the next slide)
- risks of hindsight biases (in particular, as the consultation took place 5 years after the onset of the pandemic)

Given these caveats and cautions, in the Final Evaluation Report, this analysis will be considered and compared to related data collected in real-time during the pandemic.

Survey demographics – comparison to overall population

When key demographics of survey respondents are compared to CSO data we see some differences, with both over and under representations across different characteristics.

These differences should be borne in mind when considering survey findings.

Demographic	Comment
Age*	Overrepresents middle-aged people (52% aged 40-59) and underrepresents younger and older cohorts (10% aged under 29, 4% aged over 70)
Gender	Overrepresents females (69%) compared to males (28%) and 'Other' (1%)
Ethnicity	More 'White Irish' (86% compared to CSO's 77%) and lower representation of all other ethnic groups
Disability	Underrepresents people with a disability (8.6% compared to the CSO's 23.6%) driven by people aged over 65 while younger groups are overrepresented
Principal economic status	Underrepresents all categories except 'Employed' (overrepresented at 70%)
Household level of making ends meet (MEM)	Skewed to those with ease at making ends meet (65% compared to CSO's 54%)
Urban/ rural	Slight overrepresentation of rural areas (38% compared to CSO's 31%)
Household composition or parental status	Underrepresents parents (two parents and single parents) (51% compared to CSO's 66%)

**At the onset of the pandemic*



Overview of each dimension

1. Relationships, social connections and community

Overall pandemic impact

40% reported a **negative impact** on their relationships and connections with others (12% positive impact, 37% positive and negative, 10% no impact).

Of the different demographic groups, those who reported the highest proportion of negative impacts were:

- those whose level of difficulty MEM* was **‘great difficulty’** (74%) and **‘difficulty’** (62%)
- those who reported their **gender as ‘Other’** (62%)
- **single parents or guardians of very young children** (56%)

All groups reported higher proportions of negative than positive impacts, but the groups who reported the highest proportion of positive impacts were:

- those whose reported difficulty in MEM was **‘very easily’** (22%) or **‘easily’** (14%)
- those whose reported ethnicity/ background was **‘Other White background’** (14%)
- those in the **age group 60-69** (14%)
- those who were **retired** (13%).

* Household’s level of difficulty in ‘Making Ends Meet’

Relationships, social connections and community

Overview of specific questions

Question	Agree*	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree*
Pandemic restrictions were stressful for relationships within my household	53%	17%	30%
Pandemic restrictions provided an opportunity to strengthen relationships within my household	40%	29%	31%
Being kept apart put a strain on connections with family and friends from outside of my household	73%	11%	15%
Meeting online or meeting outdoors had a positive impact on my connections with friends and family from outside my household	49%	21%	31%

*Strongly agreed or agreed and strongly disagreed or disagreed

Relationships, social connections and community

Overview of specific questions

Question	Agree*	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree*
I felt isolated from my community during the pandemic	60%	15%	26%
I experienced strong neighbourly or community spirit during the pandemic	41%	23%	36%
Either myself or people I know benefitted from community based supports, such as the Community Call initiative	16%	31%	53%

**Strongly agreed or agreed and strongly disagreed or disagreed*

Relationships, social connections and community

Overview of specific questions

Differences between people who experienced difficulties and ease in MEM:

- People who reported 'great difficulty' and 'difficulty' in MEM were more likely to find restrictions stressful for relationships (68% and 53%, respectively) and being kept apart put a strain on connections with family and friends outside of their household (90% and 84%, respectively)
- People who reported that they could 'very easily' or 'easily' MEM were more likely to feel that restrictions provided an opportunity to strengthen relationships within their household (53% and 48%, respectively) and were more likely to disagree with the statement that they felt isolated from their community during the pandemic (43% and 34%, respectively).

Single parents or guardians of very young children also experienced difficulties. They were more likely to feel that restrictions did not give them the opportunity to strengthen relationships within their household (44%) and being kept apart put a strain on relationships outside of their household (85%).

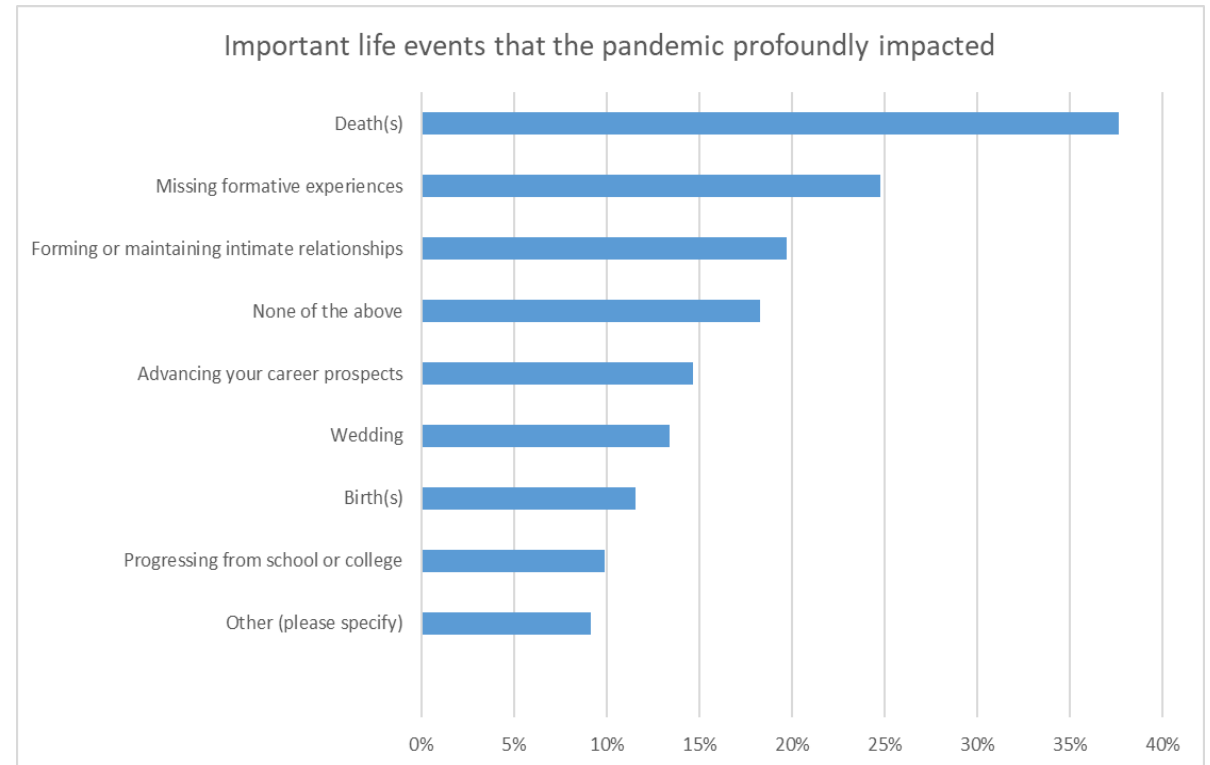
Relationships, social connections and community

Overview of specific questions

55% of respondents to the survey reported that they experienced **bereavement** during the pandemic.

The most common **life events** that were profoundly impacted by the pandemic were:

- death(s) (38%)
- missing formative experiences (25%)
- forming or maintaining intimate relationships (20%).



Relationships, social connections and community

Overview of open text

Respondents had very mixed experiences across relationships, social connections and their community:

- Circumstances and perspectives mattered, for example, people's level of busyness, their care duties, age, whether they experienced loss, whether they were a new parent, a separated parent, grandparent or living alone, and their risk appetite.
- Respondents raised issues around lost life opportunities, regret with adhering to restrictions (particularly where people experienced a bereavement), isolation, social development impacts, feeling restrictions were conceived for nuclear families, the value of 'bubbles' and the delays with their introduction, and issues regarding legal access for high-conflict or separated families, and domestic violence issues.

Relationships, social connections and community

Overview of open text

Respondents missed out on **key life milestones**:

- Young people missed out on teen discos, graduations and Leaving Certificate celebrations.
- Weddings were smaller or postponed.
- With restrictions to funerals, respondents felt their loved ones did not receive the send off they felt they deserved and described how they felt more isolated and alone in their grief.

While some appreciated the sense of community and national solidarity that emerged during the pandemic, others observed a shift in attitudes as the pandemic progressed, with increasing tensions between cohorts.

- They raised concerns around socially enforced compliance resulting in a more polarised and changed society.

2. Mental health and wellbeing

Overall pandemic impact

44% of **all responses** reported a negative impact of pandemic response on mental health or wellbeing, followed by positive and negative impacts (33%), no impact (12%), positive impact (9%) and can't say / don't know (3%).

Of the different demographic groups, those who reported the **highest proportion of negative impact** on their mental health:

- household level of difficulty in MEM as '**great difficulty**' (76%)
- **single parents or guardians of very young children** (74%)
- those in the **age group 13-19** (67%)

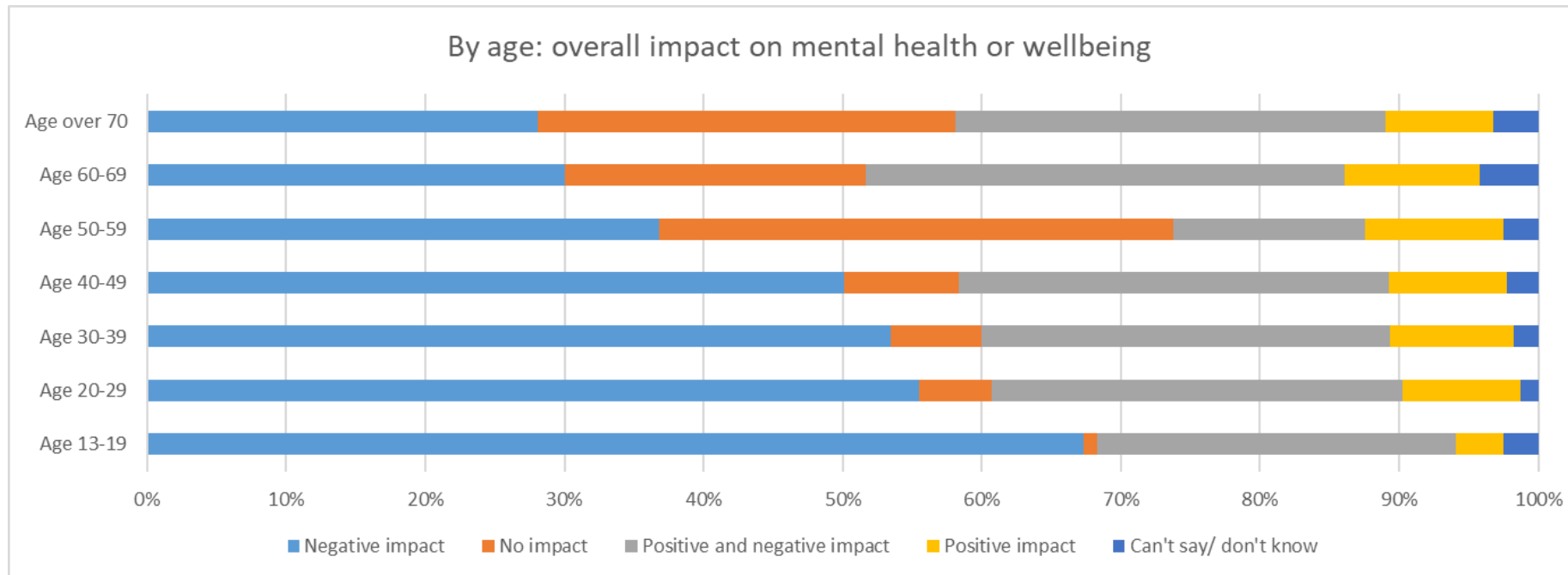
Groups reporting the lowest proportion of negative impact on mental health:

- those aged **60-69** (30%) and **over 70** (28%)
- household level of difficulty in MEM as '**very easily**' (26%).

Mental health and wellbeing

Differences across demographic groups

Age – clear pattern with highest negative impacts amongst the youngest age group 13-19 (67%), decreasing with each age group to the lowest proportion reporting negative impacts, those aged over 70 (28%).



Mental health and wellbeing

Differences across demographic groups

Gender - male respondents had a higher proportion reporting negative impacts on mental health and wellbeing (51%) than those who identified their gender as 'Other' (48%) and female respondents (40%)

Ethnicity - respondents who identified their ethnic group or background as 'All other backgrounds' had the highest proportion reporting negative impacts on their mental health and wellbeing (52%), followed by those who identified as 'White Irish' (43%)

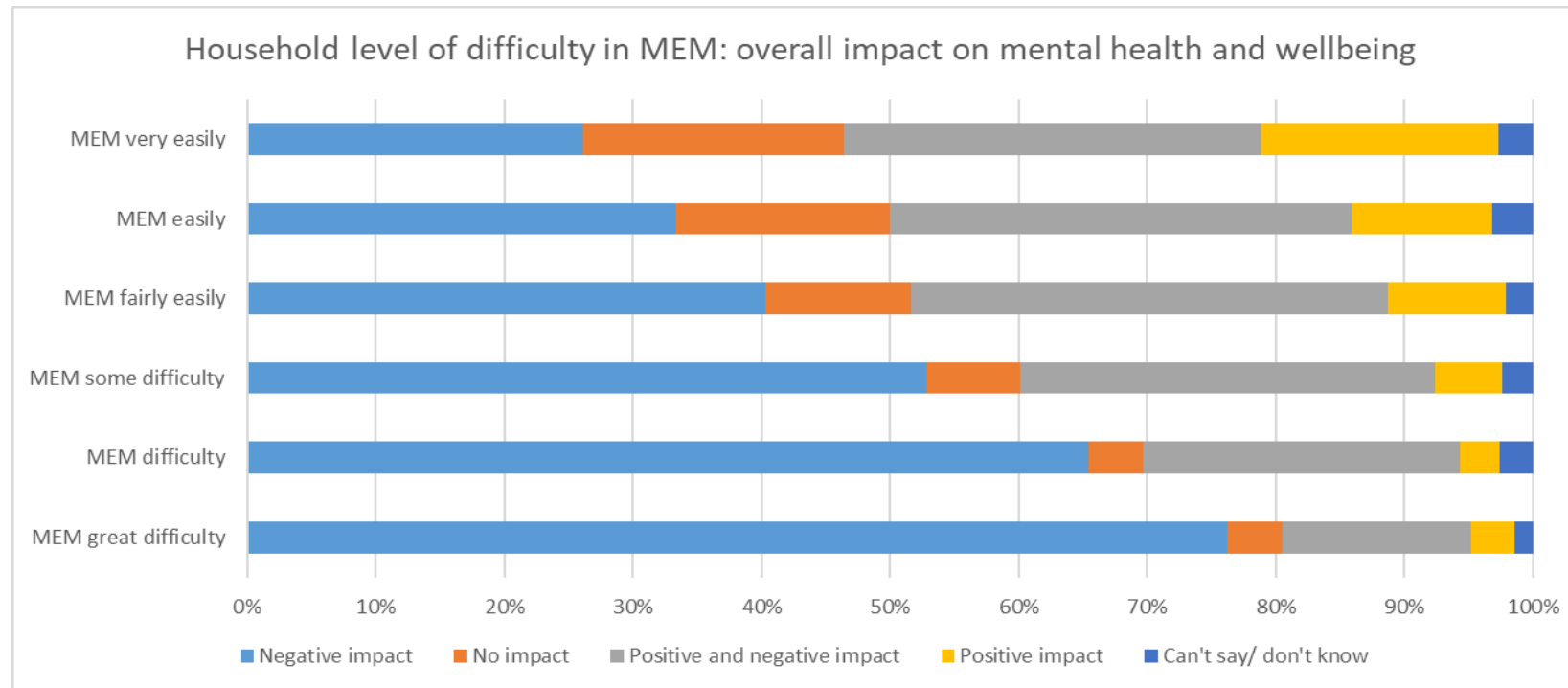
Disability - higher proportion of respondents with a disability (48%) reported negative impacts on their mental health and wellbeing than those with no disability (43%)

Principal economic status - highest proportion reporting negative impacts on their mental health or wellbeing were students (63%) and carers (54%), while retired people (32%) reported the lowest proportion.

Mental health and wellbeing

Differences across demographic groups

Household level of difficulty in MEM - clear pattern with the highest negative impacts to mental health and wellbeing amongst those reporting 'great difficulty' in MEM (76%) and the lowest amongst those reporting MEM 'very easily' (26%)



Mental health and wellbeing

Differences across demographic groups



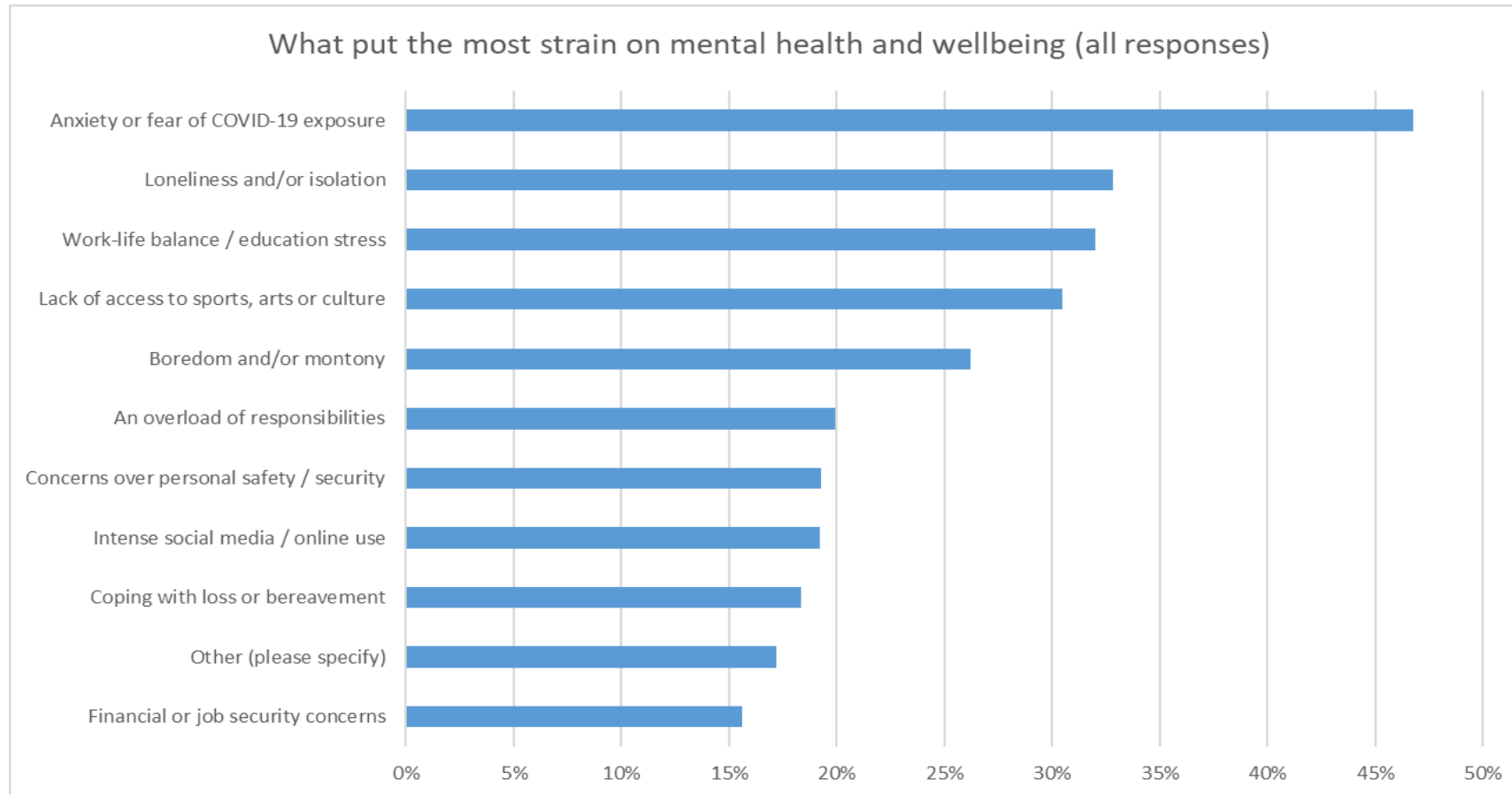
Urban/Rural - negative impacts on mental health or wellbeing were similar between those living in urban (44%) and rural locations (43%)

Household composition/ parental status - highest proportion reporting negative impacts were single parents or guardians of very young children (74%), followed by parents or guardians of very young children (57%), and lowest amongst those living alone (44%) and those who were not parents or guardians (41%).

Mental health and wellbeing

Overview of specific questions

Strains on mental health



Mental health and wellbeing

Comparisons across groups

47% identified anxiety or fear of COVID-19 exposure as a strain

- Most common among single parents of very young children (67%) and people living with an underlying health condition (63%)

33% identified loneliness and/or isolation as a strain

- Most common among people aged 13-19 (69%), students (65%) and single parents of very young children (56%)

32% identified work-life balance or education stress as a strain

- Most common among students (57%), single parents or guardians of very young children (56%), single parent or guardian of young children (53%), those aged 13-19 (53%)

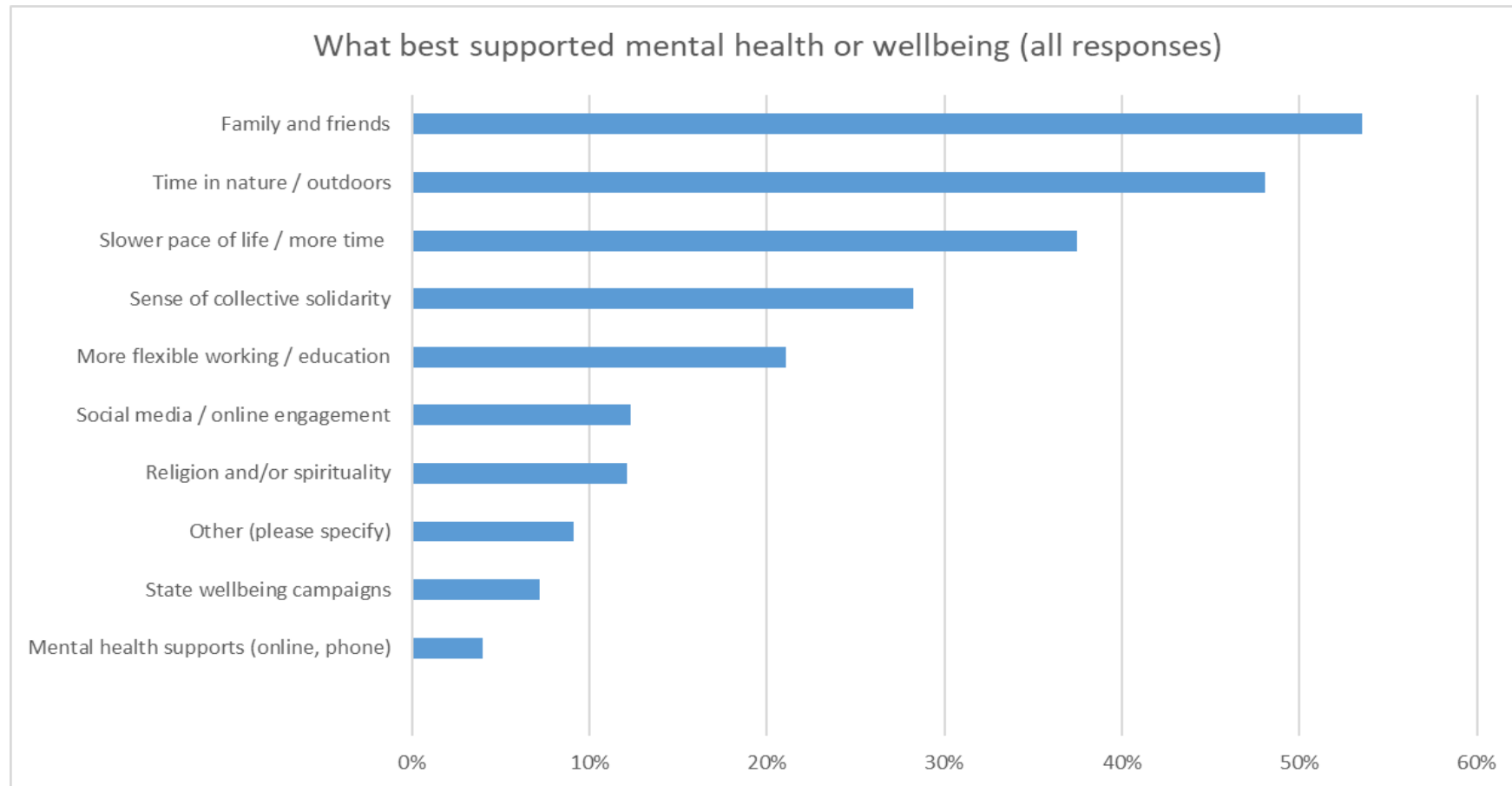
30% identified lack of access to sports, arts or culture as a strain

- Most common among students (45%), male respondents (40%), people aged 13-19 (40%) and 20-29 (38%), and people who reported 'great difficulty' in MEM (38%)

Mental health and wellbeing

Overview of specific questions

Supports for mental health



Mental health and wellbeing

Comparisons across groups

54% identified family and friends as supporting their mental health

- Lowest among people who identified their gender as 'Other' (29%), who reported their ethnicity as 'All other ethnic backgrounds' (39%) and *carers* (40%)

48% identified time in nature or outdoors as most supporting their mental health.

- Most common among single parents or guardians of young children (58%), people who reported they could 'very easily' (57%) or 'easily' (57%) MEM, people from 'Other white background' (57%) and people living in rural areas (57%).

28% identified a sense of collective solidarity as supporting their mental health

- Most common among people who could 'very easily' (47%) or 'easily' (39%) MEM, people who were retired (40%) and aged over 70 (37%)
- Lowest among people who reported they MEM with 'great difficulty' (10%) and 'difficulty' (17%) and single parents or guardians of young children (16%)

Mental health and wellbeing

Overview of open text

Respondents highlighted that **public health is not just about infection numbers, but also about people's mental health and wider wellbeing.**

- Respondents shared their wide-ranging experiences, exploring factors which negatively impacted their mental health. These included fears around getting or spreading COVID-19 and increased workload and burnout, particularly among frontline workers.
- Visiting restrictions in hospitals, maternity hospitals and nursing homes were also emphasised, as was cocooning, and its detrimental impact on older people.
- More broadly, missing family and major milestones, including graduations, weddings and funerals, impacted people. People across all age groups felt a general sense of lost time, from people entering their first year of college through to older people living their final years of life.
- Young people, parents and teachers discussed the impacts of school closures on students' mental health, particularly for students sitting State examinations.

Mental health and wellbeing

Overview of open text

- With school and childcare closures and the introduction of cocooning, respondents experienced greater stress as they took on additional care duties, particularly women.
- Respondents outlined the impact of the withdrawal of supports and services for people with disabilities, family carers and new or expectant mothers.
- Communications during the pandemic, including daily case numbers and messaging targeted at children, was highlighted as negatively impacting people's mental health.
- Respondents also described how the pandemic impacted their existing mental health conditions, such as anxiety, OCD and depression.
- For others, the slower pace of life and better work-life balance improved their mental health.
- **Respondents largely felt that mental health and wellbeing supports and services were insufficient throughout the pandemic.**

3. Physical health

Overall pandemic impact

38% of **all responses** reported a negative impact, followed by positive and negative (24%), no impact (22%) and a positive impact (13%).

Of the different demographic groups, **highest proportions reporting a negative impact** on their physical health:

- household level of difficulty in MEM as '**great difficulty**' (71%) or '**difficulty**' (60%)
- **single parents or guardians of very young children** (56%)
- people with a **disability** (53%)
- people who were **unemployed or unable/unavailable for work** (50%)

Groups who reported the **lowest proportion of negative impact** on their physical health:

- people aged **over 70** (29%) and **60-69** (28%)
- people who were **retired** (28%)
- people who reported their household level of difficulty in MEM as '**very easily**' (24%).

Physical health

Differences across demographic groups

Age - groups with the highest proportions reporting negative impacts on their physical health in the age group 30-39 (48%), followed by 13-19 (46%) and 20-29 (43%).

Gender - those who identified gender as 'Other' (42%) and male respondents (42%) had a larger reported negative impact, compared to female respondents (36%).

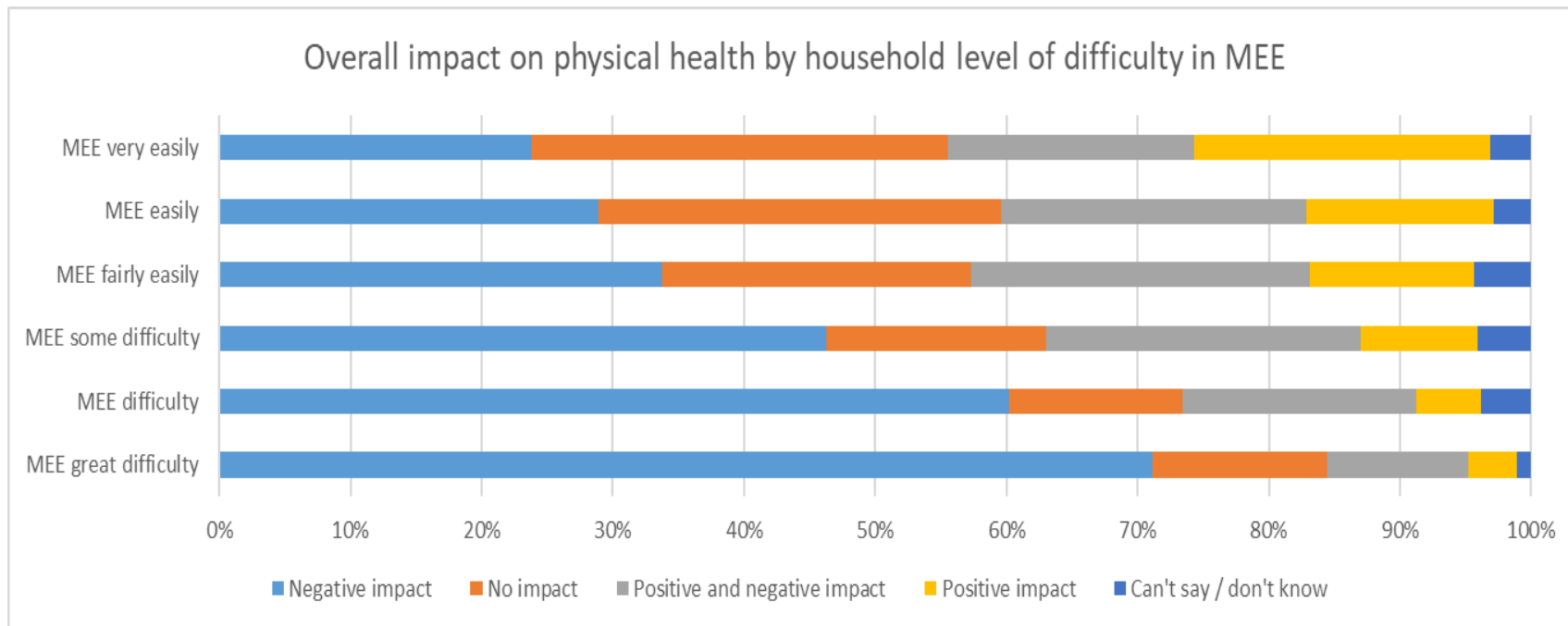
Ethnicity - respondents who identified their ethnic group or background as 'All other backgrounds' had the highest proportion reporting negative impacts (46%), followed by those who identified as 'Other white background' (40%).

Disability - notably higher proportion of respondents with a disability (53%) reported negative impacts on their physical health, compared to people with no disability (36%).

Physical health

Differences across demographic groups

Household level of difficulty in MEM - clear pattern in the proportion of respondents reporting negative impacts by household level of difficulty in MEM, with the highest amongst those reporting 'great difficulty' in MEM (71%) and the lowest amongst those reporting MEM 'very easily' (24%).



Physical health

Differences across demographic groups

Principal economic status - groups with the highest proportion reporting negative impacts were those unemployed or unable or unavailable for work (50%), carers (49%), and students (48%).

Urban/rural - slightly higher negative impacts among those living in urban areas (39%) compared to rural areas (36%).

Household composition - group with the highest proportion reporting negative impacts were single parents or guardians of very young children (56%), followed by single parents or guardians of young children (49%), and was lowest amongst those who were not parents or guardians (37%) and those living alone (39%).

Physical health

Overview of specific questions

23% reported having an underlying health condition or chronic illness at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

43% responded that they or an immediate family member accessed health or care facilities for a substantial issue or illness during the pandemic (*majority related to hospitals, followed by community care and GP services*).

- 40% reported a 'mixed experience' of care received, over one third reported a positive experience and just under a quarter reported a negative experience.

On physical health impacts:

- 42% identified changes to **lifestyle** (such as diet & exercise)
- 15% identified **delays to either treatment/intervention** and 12% identified **delays to screening/diagnosis of a non-COVID 19 related illness**
- 10% of all respondents identified **long or medium-term health issues due to contracting COVID-19**

Physical health

Overview of open text

Respondents' experiences on general physical health were mixed.

- The slower pace of life presented some respondents with the opportunity to get fitter and eat healthier. However, for others, they struggled with the closure of sport facilities, ate more unhealthily and drank more.
- Cocooning impacted older people's physical activity and, in turn, their mobility.
- Immunocompromised or high-risk individuals largely welcomed restrictions and the Government's approach. They felt safer and experienced less illness. However, some had to adjust their lives to protect themselves or their loved ones: some respondents felt forced to retire and others faced difficult decisions between living or isolating separately from their families or all cocooning together, which created difficulties for families caught between different generations.

Wider Healthcare - Nursing Homes

Overview of open text

Staff:

- They outlined how they struggled to keep up with changing guidelines and HIQA inspections.
- They described an initial lack of PPE and a lack of support around testing, particularly for people who were transferred into homes from hospitals.
- Staff reported chronic understaffing due to COVID-19 outbreaks, as they worked in tough conditions and experienced trauma.

Wider Healthcare - Nursing Homes

Overview of open text

Family members:

- They described the heartbreak they experienced due to visiting restrictions on nursing homes throughout the pandemic.
- Respondents described their loved ones' distress as they could not understand the COVID-19 pandemic and why their loved ones were not visiting them.
- They remarked on how the extended isolation, loneliness and lack of social interaction caused many residents' health to significantly deteriorate.
- Respondents who lost a loved one in a nursing home during the pandemic described how their loved one died alone, how they were not informed of their deterioration or how they could only visit them when they were very near the end and in some cases unresponsive.

Wider Healthcare - Nursing Homes

Overview of open text

Many criticised the approach in nursing homes, including around protecting residents from COVID-19 and access, they pointed to:

- transfers from hospitals to nursing homes
- a failure to adequately test residents for COVID-19
- staff shortages
- a failure to prioritise nursing homes with PPE, testing and staffing; and
- visiting restrictions

as reasons as to why so many residents died or had negative experiences in these residential facilities.

Wider Healthcare

Overview of open text

Respondents experienced **delays accessing healthcare** during the pandemic.

- Some people stated that they could not access critical care, which caused their conditions to deteriorate or, in some cases, become terminal.

Many respondents criticised the visiting restrictions in hospitals and hospitals' failures to properly communicate with patients' loved ones. Family members felt they could not advocate for their loved one's care, offer them support when they received diagnoses or treatment or be by their bedside during their final days.

Most criticism levelled at hospital staff centred on their upholding of visiting restrictions. However, some detailed inadequate levels of care received by their loved ones due to staff shortages and increased workloads.

Wider Healthcare

Overview of open text

For **new and expectant mothers**:

- Respondents opposed the visiting restrictions in maternity hospitals and the lack of support given to expectant and new mothers.
- Mothers described attending appointments and largely labouring on their own, with additional difficulties if they were miscarrying alone, experienced complications at birth or had a child in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU).
- Mothers detailed how they received little or no support post-birth and could not access usual support from family or friends.

For **people with disabilities**:

- They and their loved ones outlined the impacts of the suspension of disability day services, and how some supports failed to resume after restrictions lifted.

COVID-19 healthcare

Overview of open text

Testing: Respondents criticised the initial delays in getting test results and subsequently the slow adoption of antigen testing.

Contact tracing: While some believed it worked well, others felt that it and/or the contact tracing app, largely failed.

COVID-19 treatment/outcomes:

- Patients described how staff feared them, while loved ones fought for regular updates on their sick loved ones.
- Respondents expressed their hurt and frustration that their loved one contracted COVID-19 in hospital or were not prioritised for treatment. They described their loved ones' final days spent alone on ventilators and buried in body bags without a final goodbye or the funeral they felt they deserved.

COVID-19 Healthcare

Overview of open text

Vaccines:

- While many praised the vaccine roll-out, others criticised which groups were or were not prioritised for vaccines.
- Respondents largely did not agree with vaccine certificates - By restricting peoples entry into certain facilities or places, people felt forced into getting a vaccine.

Long COVID:

- Respondents described a lack of support from their employers, doctors and the State.

4. Local environment

Overall pandemic impact

26% reported that the COVID-19 pandemic response had a positive impact on their local area, the highest proportion of positive impacts across the different life areas considered in the survey (*28% no impact, 20% both positive and negative impacts, 18% negative impact*).

Of the different demographics, groups with the **highest proportions reporting a positive impact**:

- people who rated their household level of difficulty in MEM as ‘very easily’ (42%) or ‘easily’ (31%)
- people aged 60-69 (32%)
- people who were retired (32%)
- people from urban areas (30%)

Groups who reported the **lowest proportion of positive impact** on their local area:

- household level of difficulty in MEM as ‘great difficulty’ (7%) or ‘difficulty’ (18%)
- carers (15%)
- People who identified their gender as ‘Other’ (11%)

Local environment

Patterns across demographic groups

Household level of difficulty MEM - clear pattern in the proportion of respondents reporting positive impacts on their local area by household level of difficulty in MEM, with the highest amongst those reporting MEM 'very easily' (42%) and the lowest amongst those reporting 'great difficulty' in MEM (7%)

Urban/rural - 30% of respondents from urban localities reported positive impact on their local area, compared to only 21% of respondents from rural areas

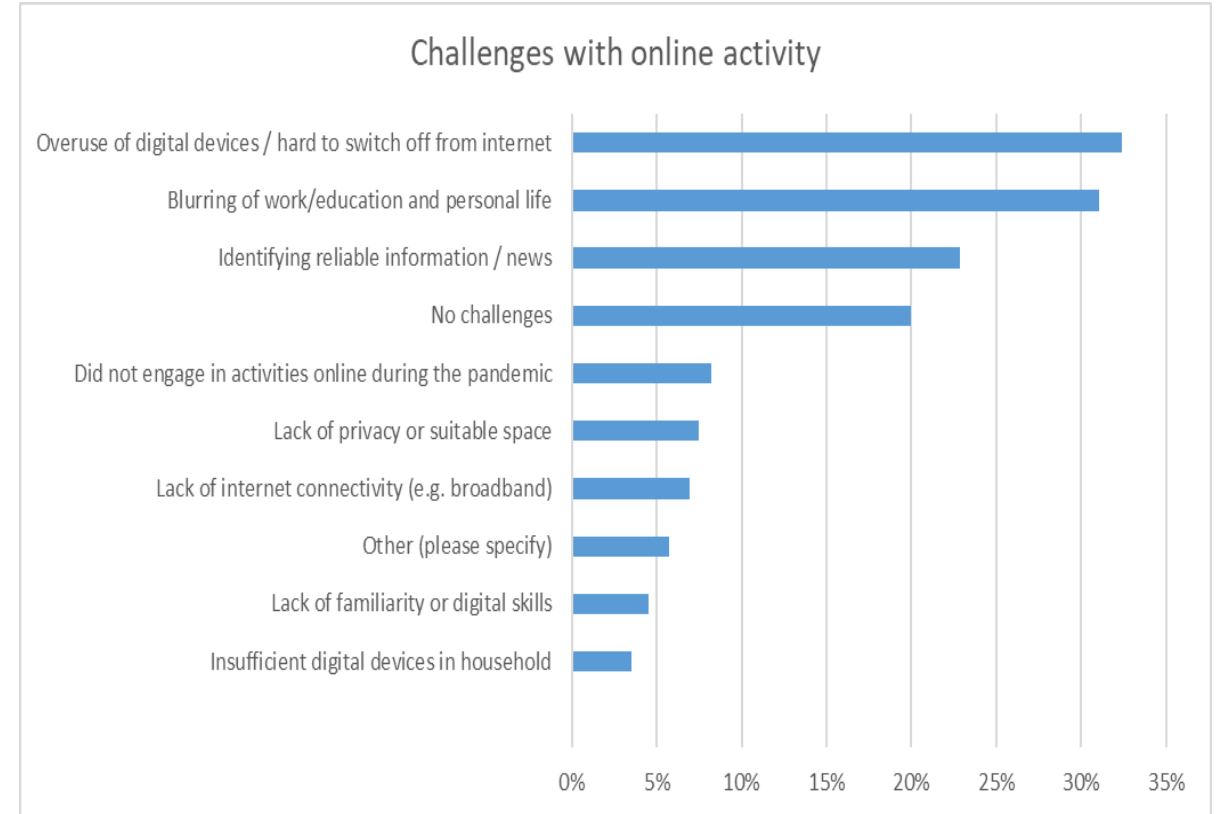
Household composition - group with the highest proportion reporting negative impacts were single parents or guardians of very young children (41%), followed by single parents or guardians of young children (29%), and parent or guardian of very young children (26%), lowest amongst those who indicated that they were not parents or guardians (15%) and those living alone (17%).

Local environment

Overview of specific questions

Housing - 82% agreed that their housing or accommodation provided adequate functionality during the pandemic period

Digital engagement – challenges included overuse (32%), the blurring of work/life balance (31%) and identifying reliable information.



Local environment

Overview of open text

Housing experiences depended on people's circumstances.

- While some enjoyed doing up their homes and spending time in their garden, others described difficult living situations, most often caused by a lack of space or adult children moving home.
- People were widely impacted by their access to green spaces and public facilities. Urban and rural dwellers experienced contrasting issues. In urban areas, people did not always have access to green spaces and city parks were often busy. In rural areas, while social distancing was easier, some struggled to access safe spaces to exercise due to prevailing kilometre restrictions.
- Respondents also highlighted the impacts of playground and recreational closures on children.

Local environment

Overview of open text

Digital engagement:

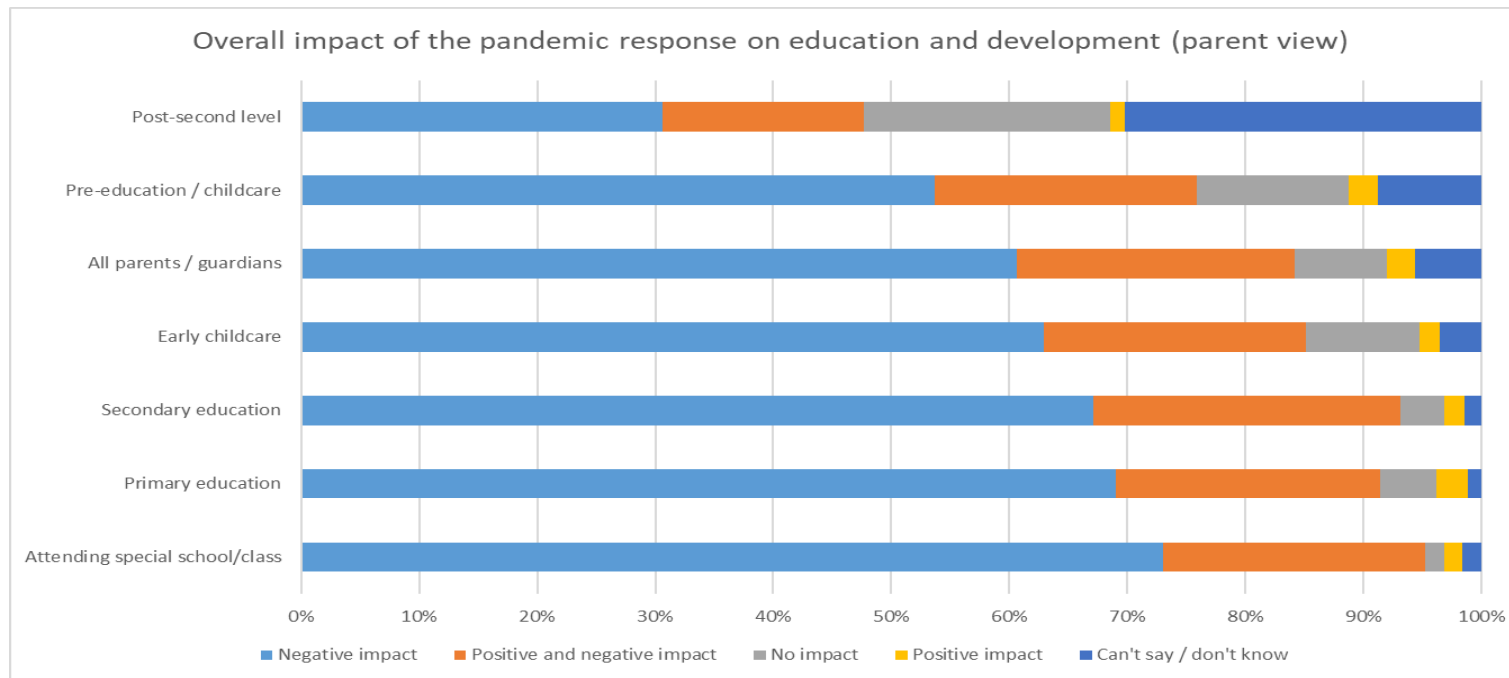
- Many people appreciated the use of digital devices to stay in touch with their loved ones during the pandemic.
- Workers upskilled for remote working and some people entered the digital world for the first time. Children's screen time increased.
- Older people had mixed experiences with technology – some embraced the shift online, while others struggled to adapt. Respondents highlighted the value of digital upskilling for future events.

5. Education and Development

Parents / guardians' view

61% of all parents or guardians reported that the pandemic response had a **negative impact** on their child or children's education and development.

Groups with the highest proportion of respondents reporting negative impact were parents/guardians of children attending special school or class (73%), primary education (69%) and secondary education (67%)



Education and development

Overview of specific questions

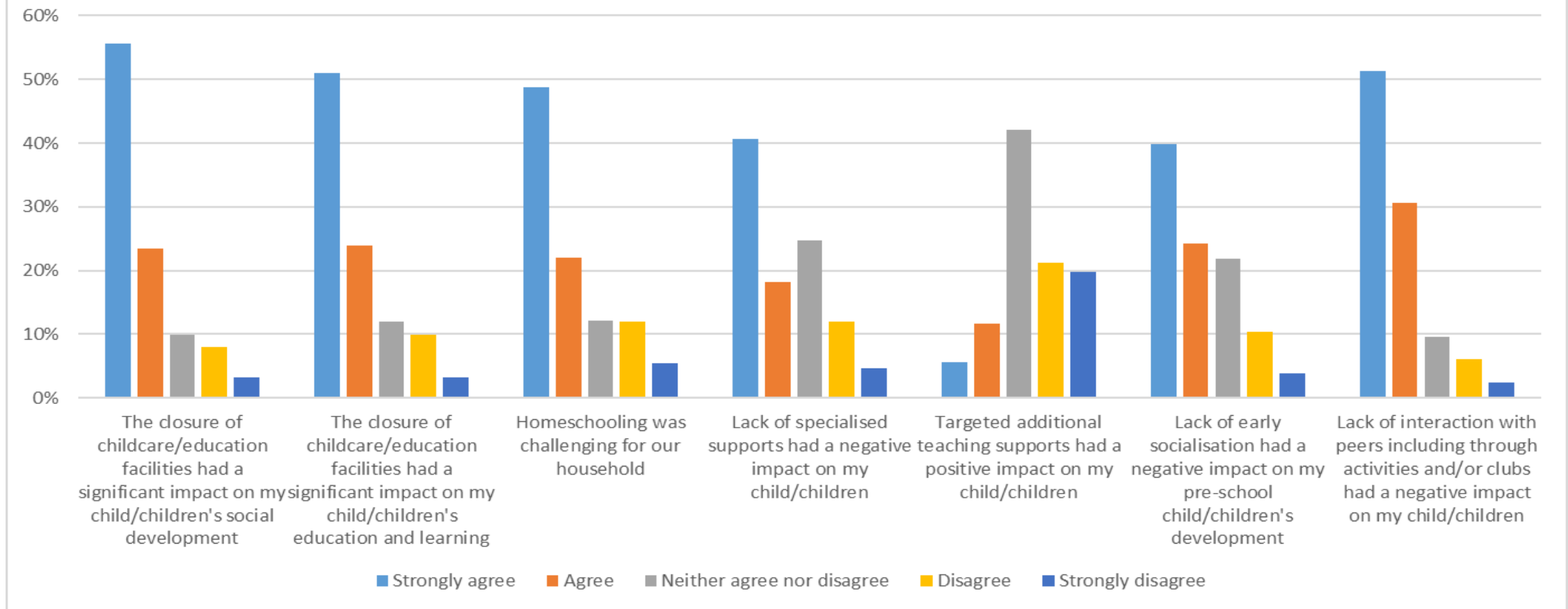
Closure of childcare and education facilities:

- 79% of parents/guardians agreed* that it had a significant impact on their child or children's **social development**
- 75% agreed* that it significantly impacted their **education and learning**

- 82% agreed* that the **lack of interaction** with peers, including through activities or clubs, had a negative impact on their child or children.
- 64% agreed* that the **lack of early socialisation** had a negative impact on their pre-school child or children's development.
- 71% agreed* that **homeschooling was challenging** for their household.

*Either selected 'Agree' or 'Strongly agree'

Impacts on education and development (all responses)



Education and development

Overview of specific questions

On targeted supports:

- 41% strongly agreed and 18% agreed that a lack of specialised supports had a **negative impact** on their child or children.
- 41% **disagreed** that targeted additional supports had a positive impact on their child or children.

Many impacts were reported as most acute by parents or guardians of children attending a special school or class:

- 71% of parents or guardians with a child or children attending special school or classes strongly agreed that a **lack of specialised supports had a negative impact** on their child
- 71% of parents or guardians of children attending special school or class strongly agreed that the closure of childcare or education facilities had a significant impact on their child or children's **social development**.

Education and development

Overview of specific questions

Students' views

65% of all students reported that the pandemic response had a **negative impact** on their education and development.

- 40% reported that **exam disruption and/ or calculated grades** had a **negative impact** on their education and development. Groups reporting the **highest proportion** of negative impacts were those who indicated their household level of MEM as '**great difficulty**' (71%) and '**difficulty**' (56%).

Note, separate forthcoming analysis of bespoke survey for young people will contain more detailed analysis

Education and development

Overview of specific questions

Question	Agree*	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree*
I had the resources I needed (e.g. access to a computer, a quiet space to study, guidance) for online learning throughout the pandemic restrictions	68%	9%	22%
Homeschooling was adequately supported and guided	20%	51%	28%
Lack of meaningful engagement with peers during pandemic restrictions negatively impacted me	83%	6%	11%
Lack of structured extracurricular activities (e.g. clubs or team sports) during pandemic restrictions negatively impacted me	67%	18%	15%

*Strongly agreed or agreed and strongly disagreed or disagreed

Education and development

Overview of open text

Respondents were divided over whether schools should have closed and the length of time they were closed for:

- While some acknowledged that schools had to close initially given the level of uncertainty, others argued that schools should have remained open.
- Many felt that schools were closed for too long, and not enough weight was given to the impact of closures on children's education, social development and mental health.

Education and development

Overview of open text

Online learning or teaching:

- Parents, in particular mothers, described a lack of support and guidance from schools, and their difficulties balancing home schooling with work and other care duties.
- Teachers expressed frustration about a lack of preparation and inadequate communication.

Return to school:

- Principals and teachers described the immense workload involved to get schools ready to reopen and to apply restrictions at schools.
- Teachers described a feeling of betrayal as they were told schools were safe to return, which they felt was in stark contrast to advice given to other settings.

Education and Development

Overview of open text

Many respondents highlighted the **social and developmental impacts** of COVID-19 on children and young people.

- Parents criticised the lack of developmental checks, delaying referrals and early interventions, and highlighted the transition from primary to secondary school as particularly difficult.
- Teachers noted a rise in absenteeism among students.

Exam years:

- Respondents described the stress they or their child experienced as a Leaving Certificate student during the pandemic and how indecision caused much anxiety.
- Some also noted difficulties for students who missed their Junior Cycle exams, resulting in their first State exam being their Leaving Certificate.
- Respondents called for clear plans for education and state exams during times of crisis.

6. Work and time use

Overall pandemic impact

41% identified that the pandemic had a **negative impact** on work and time use (*32% no impact, 10% both positive and negative impacts, 13% positive impact*).

Groups with the **highest proportion** of respondents reporting **negative impacts** on their work and time use:

- households MEM with **'great difficulty'** (71%) and **'difficulty'** (62%)
- **single parents or guardians of very young children** (63%)

Groups with the **lowest proportion** of respondents reporting **negative impacts** on their work and time use:

- people who were **retired** (24%)
- people aged **over 70** (25%)
- **homemakers** (26%).

Work and time use

Overview of specific questions

- 33% reported that they started to **work from home** during the pandemic
- Groups with the highest proportion **increasing their working hours** during the pandemic:
 - frontline workers (27%)
 - single parents or guardians of very young children (26%).
- 18% reported taking on **additional caring duties** within their household and 16% reported taking on additional caring duties outside their household (*19% reported no change*).....

Work and time use

Overview of specific questions

Groups with the highest proportion taking on **additional caring duties within their households:**

- Carers (59%)
- Single parent or guardian of very young children (48%) and young children (42%)
- Parent or guardian of young children (38%) and very young children (37%)

Groups with the highest proportion taking on **additional caring duties outside their household:**

- Carers (31%)
- Homemakers (25%)
- People who experienced bereavement of their spouse or an immediate family member (24%)

Work and time use

Differences across demographic groups

Age - proportion identifying negative impacts highest amongst younger age groups - highest at age 13-19 (55%) and 20-29 (51%), decreasing through the age groups to the lowest level at age over 70 (25%)

Gender - groups with the highest proportion reporting negative impacts were male respondents (47%) and those identifying their gender as 'Other' (46%), compared to females at 39%

Ethnicity - group with the highest proportion reporting negative impacts was 'All other ethnic backgrounds' (48%), compared to 41% for 'White Irish'

Disability - proportion reporting negative impacts was higher among people who do not have a disability (42%) than for those who identified as having a disability (38%)

Household level of difficulty in MEM – clear pattern based on proportion of respondents identifying negative impacts, highest amongst people reporting 'great difficulty' in MEM (71%) through to being lowest for those reporting MEM as 'very easily' (27%)

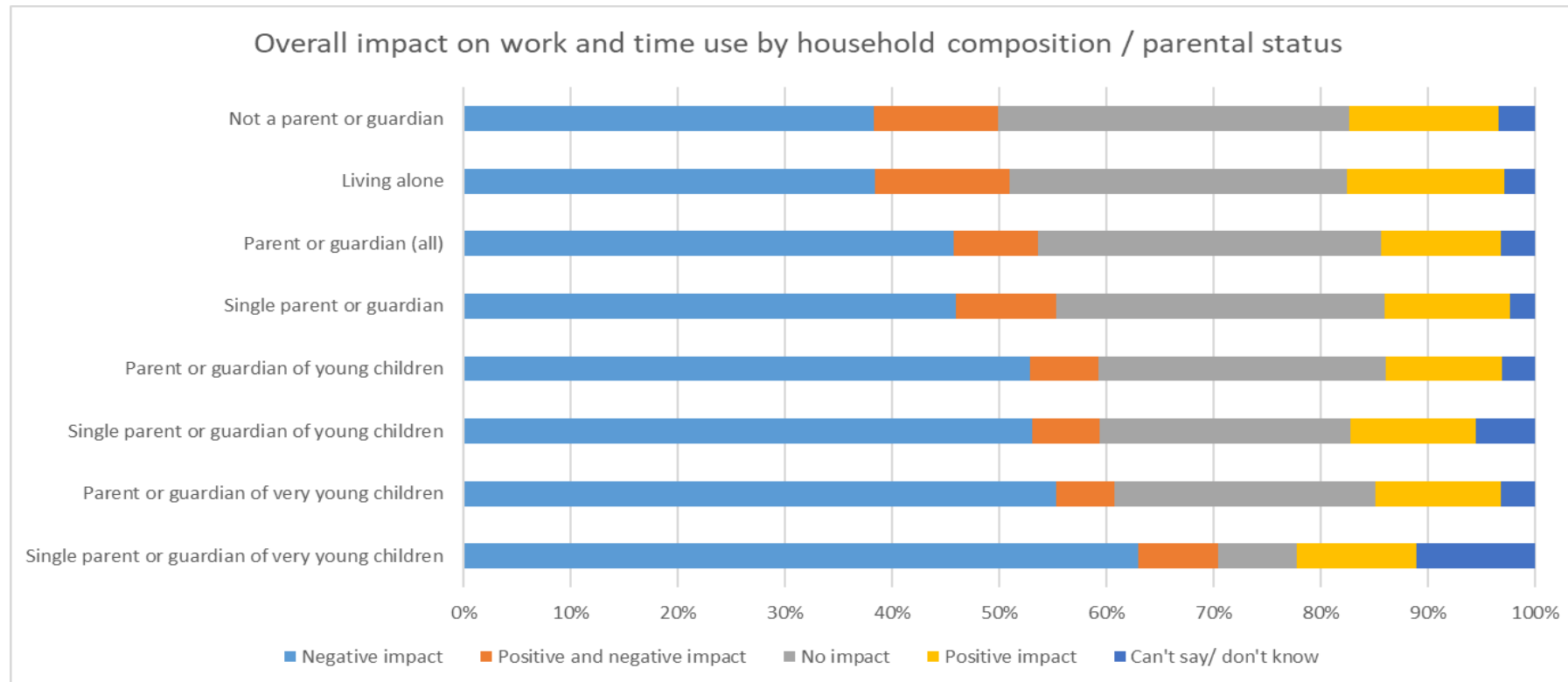
Urban/ rural - 41% of respondents from urban areas and 42% of respondents from rural areas reported negative impacts

Principal economic status- proportion of people reporting negative impacts was highest for students (52%) and frontline workers (52%), followed by those in employment (all) (45%) and carers (41%).

Work and time use

Differences across demographic groups

Household composition or parental status - Highest proportion of negative impacts among single parents or guardians of very young children (63%), parents or guardians of very young children (55%), parents or guardians of young children (53% for both single parents or parents), through to the lowest proportion of negative impacts reported by those living alone or not a parent or guardian (both at 38%).



Work and time use

Overview of open text

Business owners:

- Highlighted how their businesses were forced to close or have struggled to remain open since the pandemic.
- While business supports helped some through the pandemic, many experienced knock-on effects as other businesses they relied on shut their doors.
- Some expressed their frustration with the delays in reopenings, as changing guidelines and restrictions impacted people's bottom line.

Work and time use

Overview of open text

Essential workers:

- Detailed their increased stress and workload during the pandemic.
- While some enjoyed continuing to work in-person, others felt unsafe in their workplaces. They believed that employers were given too much discretion around categorising their work as 'essential' and lacked a suitable mechanism to report breaches of COVID-19 restrictions.
- Some healthcare workers reported poor working conditions, noting they were exposed to COVID-19 and expected to return to work before they fully recovered. The significant personal sacrifices to continue working made by staff was highlighted, often limiting or stopping all contact with their families. They detailed the trauma and mental health issues they have suffered post-pandemic.
- Both non-healthcare and healthcare workers felt they did not receive sufficient recognition for their contributions during the pandemic.

Work and time use

Overview of open text

Relevant workers largely welcomed the introduction of **remote working**.

- While some described an increased workload and toxic surveillance cultures, most respondents reported that remote working improved their work-life balance and disagreed with the move back to the office post-pandemic. They called for a stronger official stance on the issue, given its positive social, economic and environmental impacts.

More generally, many people enjoyed the **slower pace of life** offered during COVID-19.

- People had time to take stock of their lives - they spent more time with their families, took up new sports and hobbies, and turned to their faith. However, many reflect now on a sense of lost time.

7. Financial situation

Overall pandemic impact

40% reported that the pandemic had **both positive and negative impacts** on their financial situation (23% negative impact, 17% positive impact, 16% no impact).

Groups with the highest proportions reporting a negative impact on their finances:

- people who reported a household difficulty in MEM as ‘great difficulty’ (83%) or ‘difficulty’ (69%)
- people who received pandemic-related payment (46%)
- single parents or guardians of young children or very young children (42% and 41% respectively)

Groups with the lowest proportions reporting a negative impact:

- People who reported their level of household difficulty in MEM as ‘very easily’ (5%), ‘easily’ (7%) or ‘fairly easily’ (11%)
- people who were retired (8%)
- People aged 60-69 (13%) and over 70 (13%)

Financial situation

Differences across demographic groups

Age - proportion of respondents identifying negative impacts was highest amongst the age group 40-49 (30%), 13-19 (28%) and 30-39 (27%). One quarter (25%) of people aged 20-29 reported a positive impact on their financial situation, followed by people aged 30-39.

Gender - groups with the highest proportion reporting negative impacts were those identifying their gender as 'Other' (38%), compared to male respondents (29%) and female respondents (20%).

Ethnicity - group with highest proportion of respondents reporting negative impact on their financial situation was 'All other ethnic backgrounds' (41%), which was notably higher than the proportion for 'Other white background' (25%) and 'White Irish' (23%)

Disability - proportion of respondents reporting negative impacts was higher among people who have a disability (30%) than for those who indicated that they do not have a disability (22%)

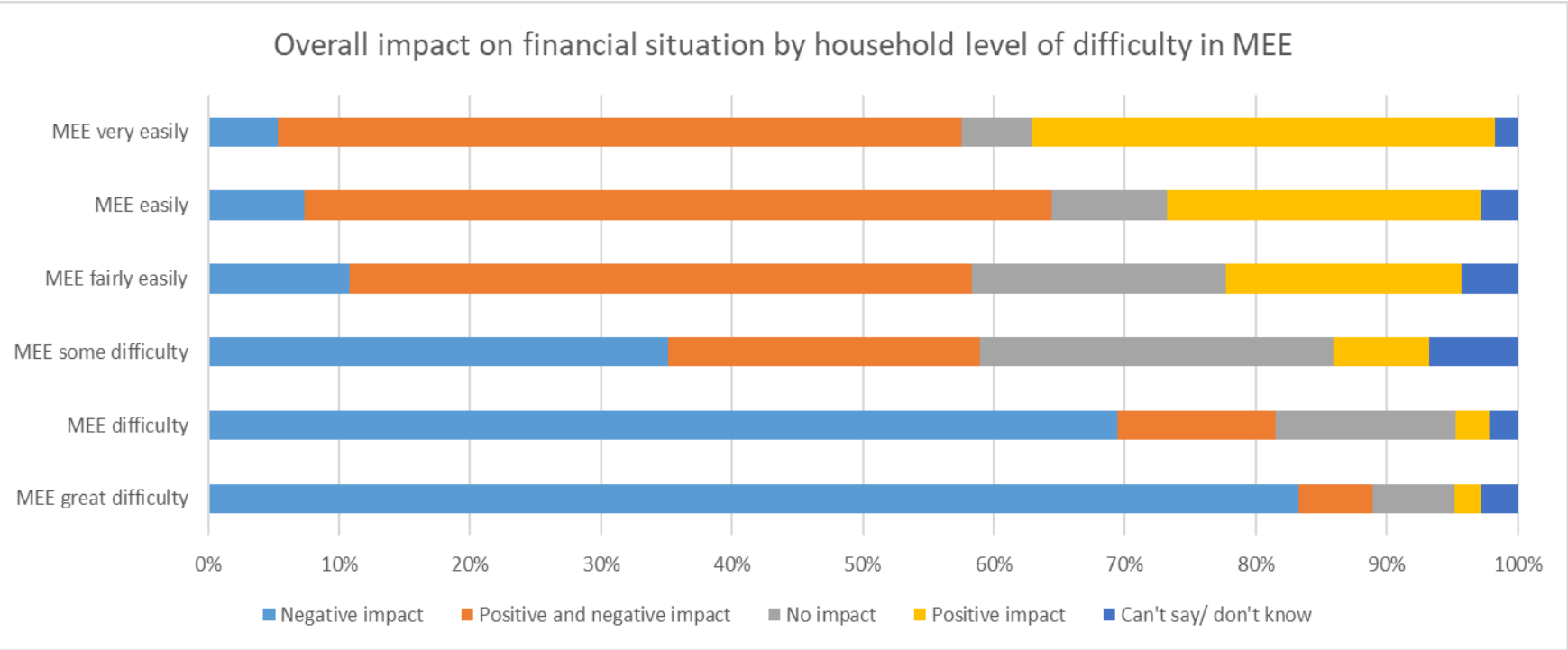
Principal economic status - proportion of people reporting negative impacts was highest for carers (36%), those who were unemployed or unable or unavailable for work (33%) and homemakers (31%). A fifth (20%) of those who were employed reported a positive impact on their financial situation.

Urban/ rural - respondents reporting negative impacts on their financial situation was slightly higher amongst those living in rural areas (25%) compared to those living in urban areas (22%).

Financial situation

Differences across demographic groups

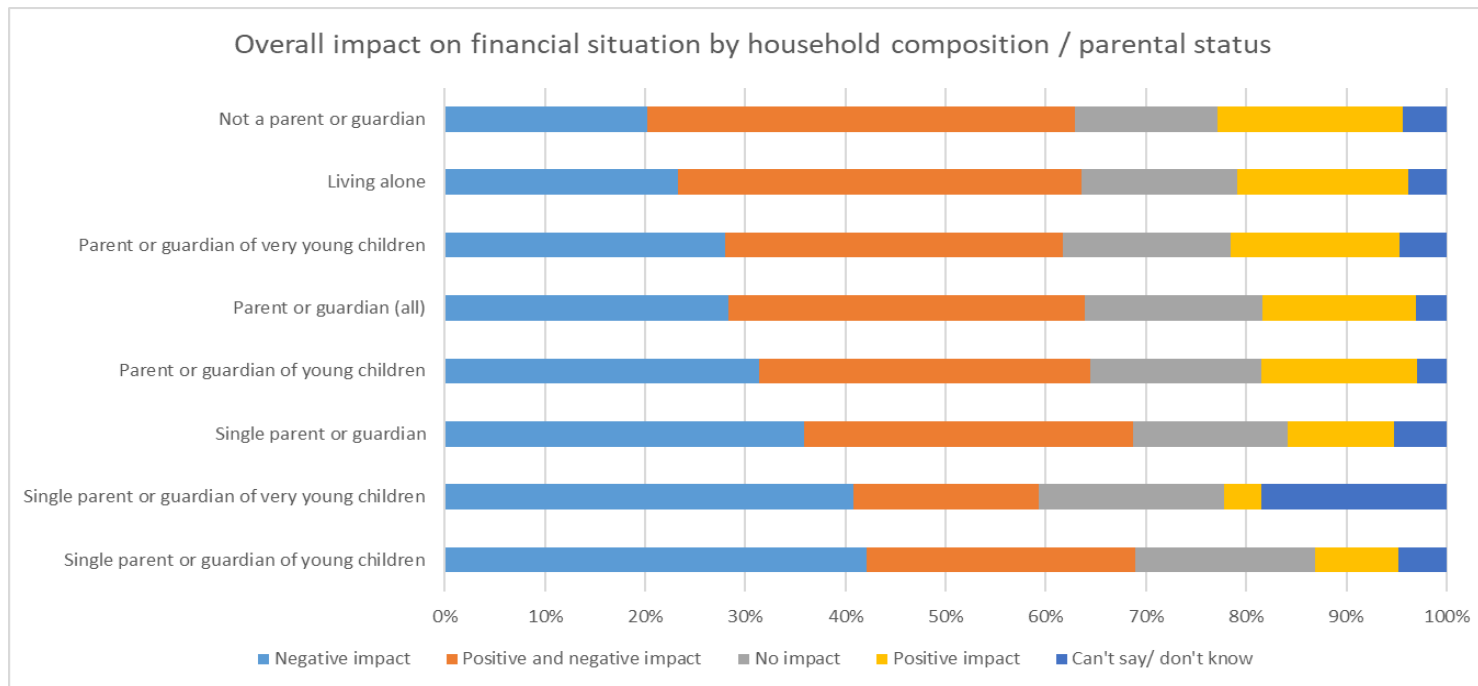
Household level of difficulty in MEM - The differences in the proportion of respondents reporting negative impacts on their financial situation is particularly striking across the household level of difficulty in MEM. 83% of those who reported 'great difficulty' reported negative impact on their financial situation, compared to 5% of those who reported their level of difficulty in MEM as 'very easily' (35% of this group reported positive impacts on their financial situation)



Financial situation

Differences across demographic groups

Household composition or parental status - groups reporting greatest proportion of negative impacts on their financial situation were single parents or guardians of young children at 42%, single parents or guardians of very young children at 41% and single parents or guardians of any age child (36%). The lowest proportion of negative impacts were among those living alone (23%) or those who indicated they were not a parent or guardian (20%).



Financial situation

Overview of open text

Some respondents reported that they **saved** more money during the pandemic:

- They no longer had social events to attend, could move outside of cities due to remote working and did not have to commute to work.

However, others experienced **financial hardship**:

- They struggled to find work, impacting their future job prospects, pension and retirement age.
- Respondents reported that the cost-of-living increases during and immediately after the pandemic remains high.

The Pandemic Unemployment Payment and business supports helped to insulate some respondents from this financial hardship. However, some reported being overburdened by subsequent tax bills.

8. Civil liberties, human rights and trust

Overall pandemic impact

46% identified a **negative impact** on civil liberties, human rights and trust, followed by 'no impact' (24%), 'positive and negative impact' (23%), and 'positive impact' (4%).

Groups with the **highest proportion** of respondents reporting **negative impacts**:

- people who rated their household level of difficulty in MEM as 'great difficulty' (78%) or 'difficulty' (71%)
- single parents or guardians of very young children (70%)
- carers (61%)
- male respondents (60%)

Groups with the **lowest proportion** of respondents reporting **negative impacts**:

- people who rated their household level of MEM as 'very easily' (26%) or 'easily' (35%)
- people who were retired (33%)
- people age 60-69 (33%)
- people with an underlying health condition (36%)

Civil liberties, human rights and trust

Overview of specific questions

Question	Agree*	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree*
Pandemic restrictions provided personal relief by reducing my individual responsibility for decision making	31%	21%	48%
Pandemic restrictions undermined my personal decision making in a negative way	47%	21%	32%
Pandemic restrictions impacted my /my loved one's ability to live independently	49%	24%	28%

**Strongly agreed or agreed and strongly disagreed or disagreed*

Civil liberties, human rights and trust

Overview of specific questions

Question	Agree*	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree*
Returning to social norms, once restrictions were removed, such as meeting with peers or colleagues, was challenging for me	44%	14%	41%
I broadly trusted how democracy worked in Ireland during the pandemic	56%	11%	33%
Information on the Government's response was clearly communicated during the pandemic	64%	11%	25%

*Strongly agreed or agreed and strongly disagreed or disagreed

Civil liberties, human rights and trust

Overview of specific questions continued

There were strong differences based on **household difficulty in MEM:**

- People who MEM with ‘great difficulty’ and ‘difficulty’ felt that restrictions negatively undermined their personal decision making (69% and 46%, respectively) and most strongly disagreed that they broadly trusted how democracy worked in Ireland (57% and 38%, respectively)
- People who MEM ‘very easily’ most strongly agreed that restrictions provided personal relief by reducing individual responsibility for decision-making (18%) and most strongly disagreed that restrictions undermined personal decision making (23%)

Civil liberties, human rights and trust

Overview of specific questions continued

There were also differences based on **gender**:

- Men more strongly disagreed that restrictions provided personal relief by reducing individual responsibility (44%) than women (23%). Men and people who identified their gender as 'Other' also more strongly agreed that restrictions undermined personal decision making (42% and 45%, respectively) than women (23%)

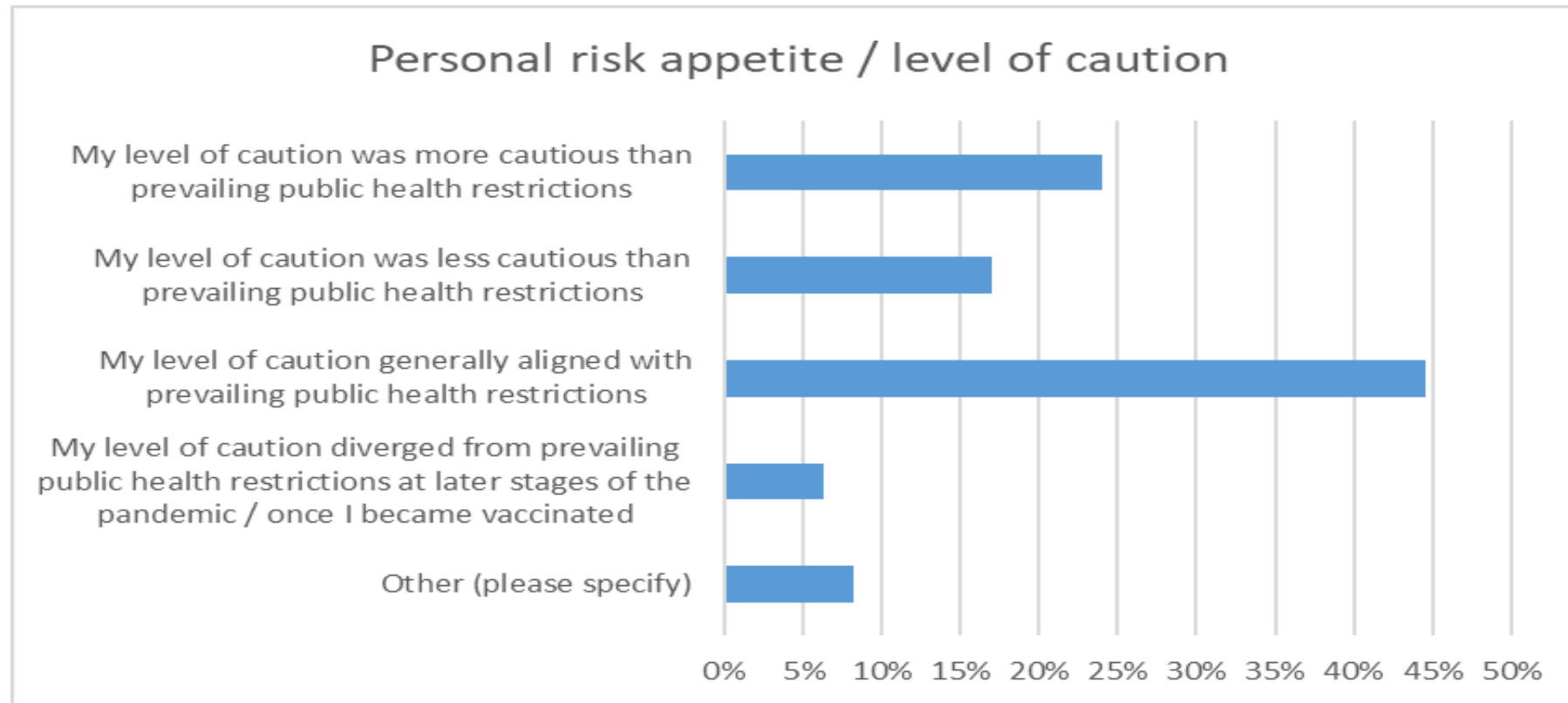
Age was also a key factor:

- People aged over 60 more broadly trust how democracy worked in Ireland (33% aged over 70, 32% aged 60-69) and believed that information on the Government's response was clearly communicated (32% aged over 70, 36% aged 60-69)
- People aged 13-19 found it more challenging returning to social norms following the pandemic (37%)

Civil liberties, human rights and trust

Overview of specific questions

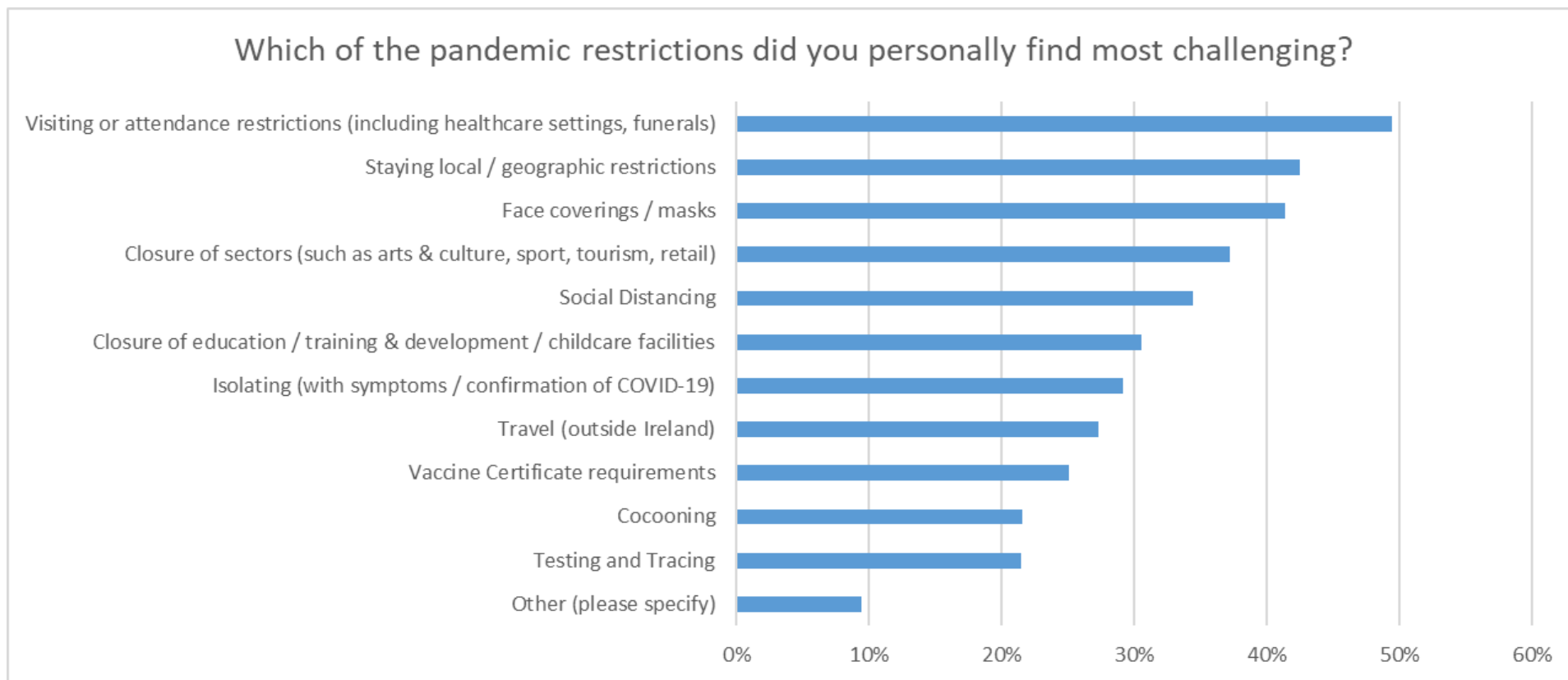
Overall, 44% of respondents' level of caution generally aligned with prevailing public health restrictions:



Civil liberties, human rights and trust

Overview of specific questions

The pandemic restrictions which people found most challenging were visiting or attendance restrictions, followed by staying local/ geographic restrictions, and face coverings/ masks.



Civil liberties, human rights and trust

Overview of open text

Respondents were largely divided on COVID-19 restrictions.

- Some agreed with restrictions and the Government's approach, believing they were necessary to save lives and the Government acted on the best available information.
- Others felt that they were disproportionate. Some respondents felt that their constitutional rights and fundamental freedoms were taken away, as people were “coerced” into getting vaccines and were “silenced” if they questioned the Government or NPHET.
- Many spoke about how their trust in the Government and democracy was lost, eroded by officials breaching restrictions or NPHET's power – or simply doubted whether the pandemic was real.
- Many maintained that they would not comply with restrictions if a pandemic were to take place again.

Civil liberties, human rights and trust

Overview of open text

Respondents were particularly critical of certain restrictions, including:

- 2km/5km restrictions
- lifting of restrictions during Christmas 2020
- cocooning, which they believed caused older people to become more isolated, fearful and less active

Media:

- While some people thought that mainstream media provided an invaluable service during the pandemic, offering reliable information, others believed that they were a “mouthpiece” for the Government and failed to hold them accountable for their decision making.
 - They believed that the media refused to voice or share dissenting opinions, stoked fear and stirred up hatred towards people who did not want to get vaccinated.

Civil liberties, human rights and trust

Overview of open text

Misinformation and disinformation:

- Many complained about the rise of misinformation, and the risk that people were now revising their pandemic experiences as a result.
- Some felt that the lack of transparency around COVID-19 data and studies created the conditions for misinformation and disinformation.
 - They called for a proactive strategy to combat misinformation.



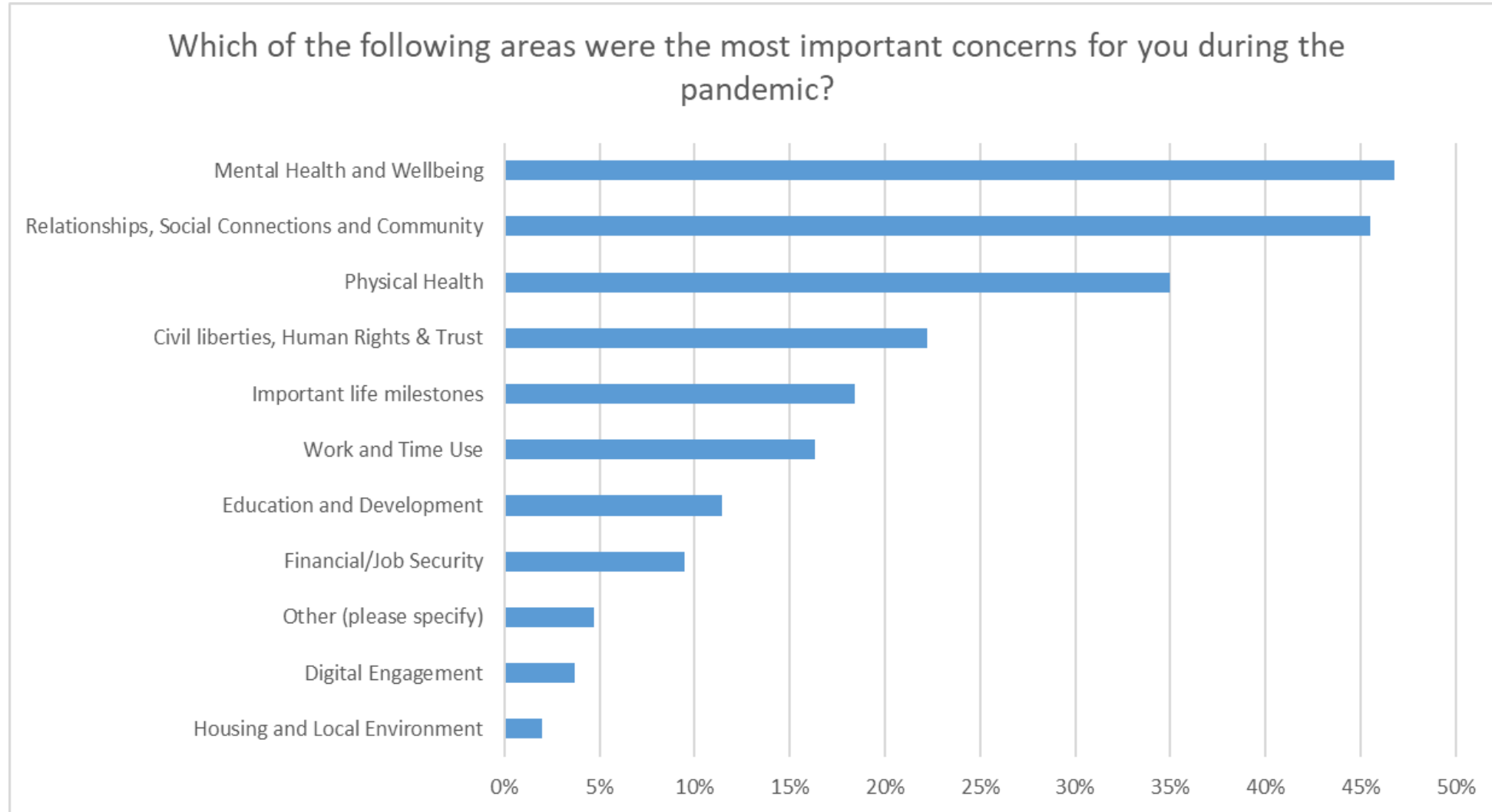
9. Key concerns across all dimensions

Overall, the top three issues that were of most concern to people during the pandemic were:

1. Mental health and wellbeing (47%)
2. Relationships, social connections and community (45%)
3. Physical health (35%)



Key concerns across all dimensions



Key concerns across all dimensions

Differences across demographics

Mental health was the most important concern for those in the **younger age groups** while **relationships, social connections and community** were the most important concerns for those **aged over sixty**.

Mental health was also the most important concern for those with **more difficulty making ends meet**, with **relationships, social connections and community** being more important for those who found it **easier to make ends meet**.

Mental health was also a more significant concern for those who were **parents or guardians (especially those with very young children)** compared to **those without**, who placed a higher weighting on **relationships, social connections and community**.

Physical health was a greater concern for **older age groups** compared to younger age groups; and was a concern for **people with a disability**.

For the **youngest age group**, the most frequently identified important concern was **education and development**.

The issue of **civil liberties, human rights and trust** was notably **lower for female** respondents (compared to males and gender 'Other').

10. Comparison of overall impacts

For the dimensions that all respondents reported on, the area with the highest proportion of reported **negative impacts** were:

- **Civil liberties, human rights and trust** (46%)
- **Mental health and wellbeing** (44%)
- **Work and time use** (41%)
- **Relationships and connections with others** (40%)

The aspects with the highest reported **positive impacts** were **local area** (such as green space and nature, outdoor dining), with 26% of respondents reporting a positive impact, followed by **financial situation** (17%)

Looking at the impacts across the different life dimensions for parents and students only, the area with the highest proportion of reported **negative impacts was:**

- **education and development (student only view)** at 65%
- **education and development (parent only view)** at 61%

Comparison of overall impacts

Highest reported negative impacts by different dimensions

Age - negative impacts to mental health were mostly reported by younger cohorts aged 13-19 (67%) and 20-29 (56%), while other cohorts reported the greatest negative impacts to their civil liberties, human rights and trust (aged 40-49 (52%) and 50-59 (41%)).

Gender – women reported the greatest negative impact was to their mental health (40%), while men reported the greatest negative impact was on their civil liberties, human rights and trust (60%). People who reported their gender as 'Other' found their relationships and connections with others were most negatively impacted (62%).

Ethnicity – 'White Irish' (44%), 'Other white background' (47%) and 'All other ethnic groups' (54%) all reported the greatest negative impacts to their civil liberties, human rights and trust.

Comparison of overall impacts

Highest reported negative impacts by different dimensions

Disability- people with a disability felt that the greatest negative impact of the pandemic was to their physical health (53%), while people with no disability felt their civil liberties, human rights and trust (45%) were most negatively impacted.

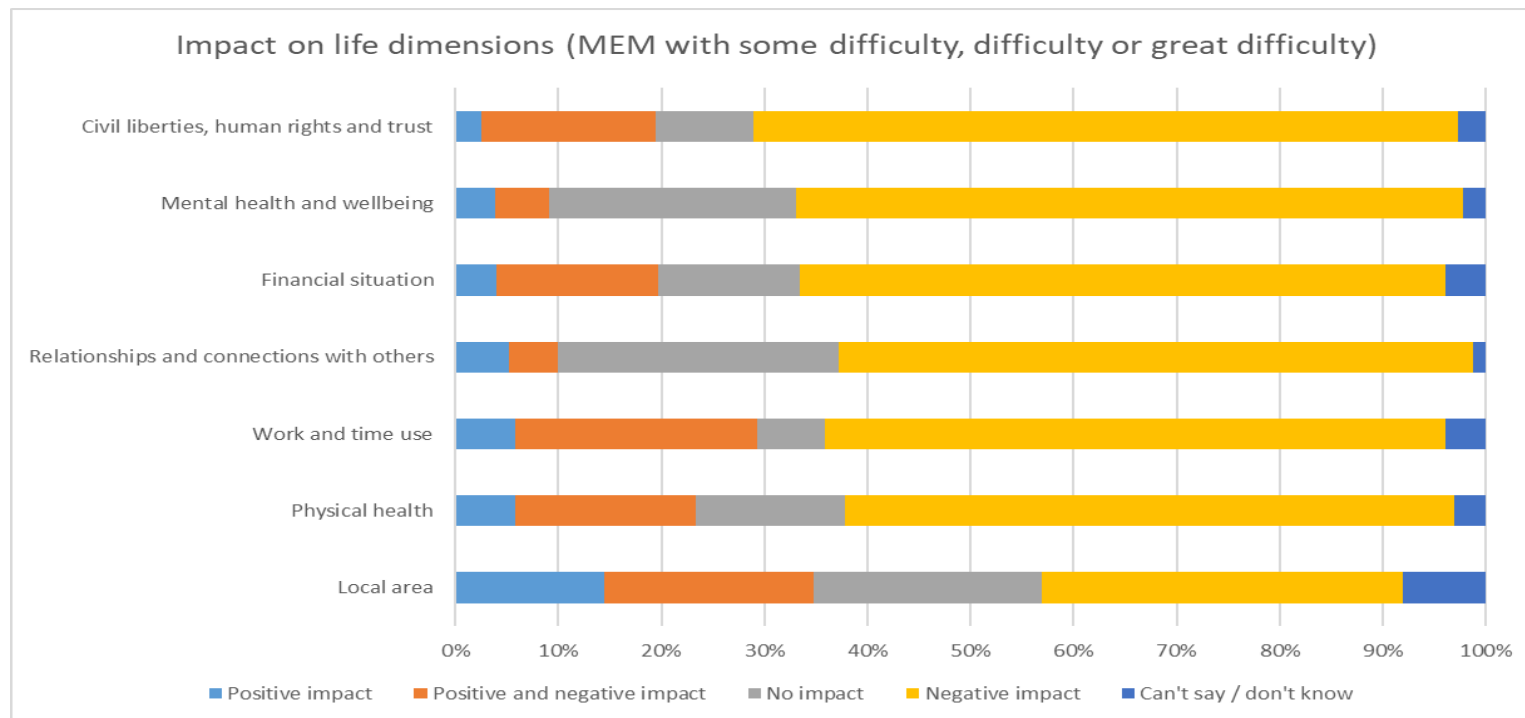
Urban and rural – both were similar on negative impacts; and while both had local area as their greatest positive impact, it was higher for urban (30%) than for rural dwellers (21%).

Principal economic status – people who were employed (47%), homemakers (50%) and carers (61%) felt that their civil liberties, human rights and trust were most negatively impacted. Frontline workers felt that their work and time use (52%) was most negatively impacted, while unemployed or people unable or unavailable for work (50%) and students (63%) felt that their mental health was most negatively impacted (*people unemployed or unable or unavailable for work also felt their physical health was equally negatively impacted at 50%*).

Comparison of overall impacts

Highest reported negative impacts by different dimensions

Household level of difficulty in MEM – for those with any level of difficulty in MEM, the highest reported negative impacts were civil liberties, human rights and trust (68%), followed by mental health and wellbeing (65%) and financial situation (63%). For people who MEM with ease, negative impacts included civil liberties, human rights and trust (34%), while positive impacts included their local area (34%) and financial situation (26%).

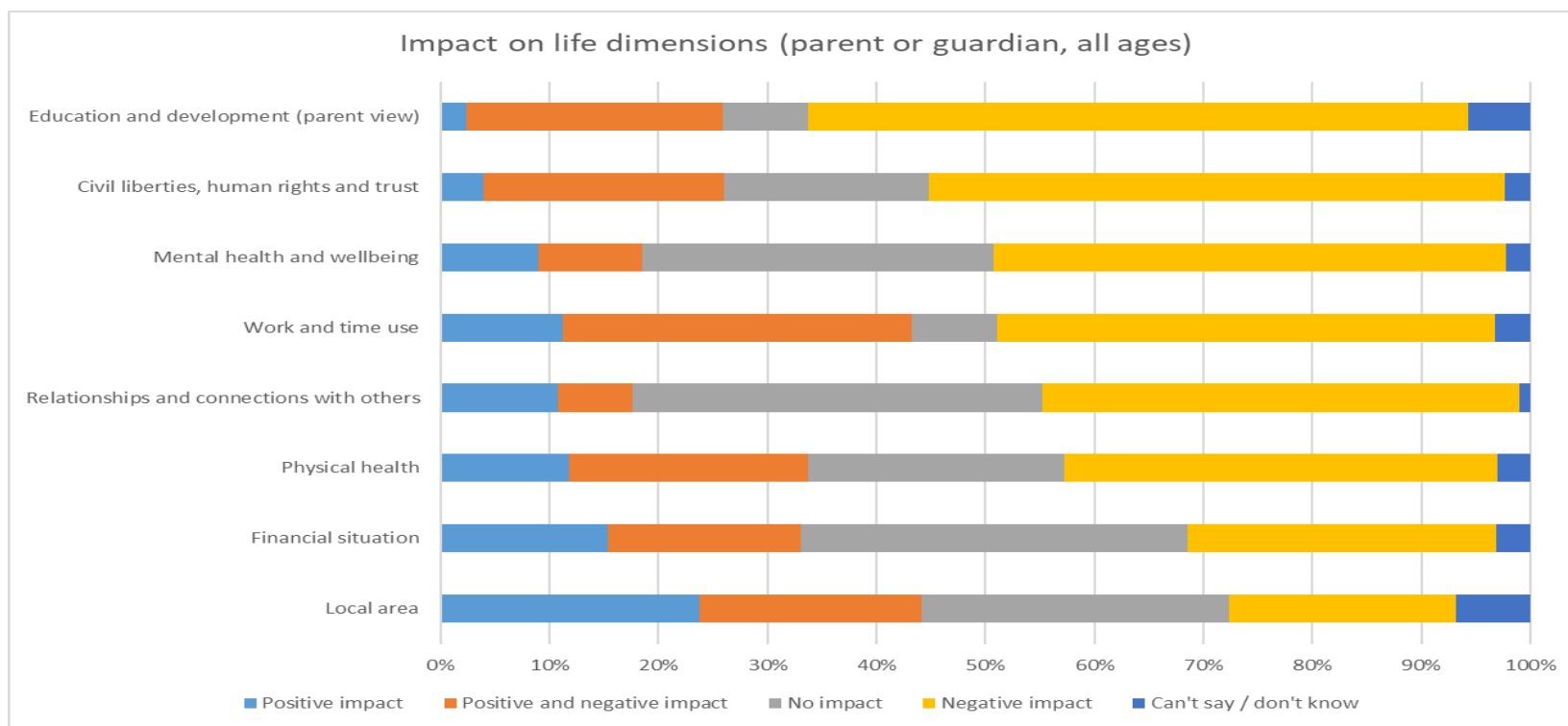


Comparison of overall impacts

Highest reported negative impacts by different dimensions

Household composition – for people living alone and who were not parents or guardians, mental health and wellbeing (44% and 41% respectively) and civil liberties, human rights and trust (42% and 41% respectively) had the most negative impacts.

For all parents, education and development was most negatively impacted:



Detailed overview of open text - qualitative survey and individual submission findings

In addition to this presentation, the COVID-19 Evaluation is shortly publishing a detailed overview report on the analysis of the general survey open text responses and individual submissions.

This detailed overview paper covers the below dimensions and aspects:

- 1. Relationships, social connections and community**, including family, partners and spouses, separated parents, older people, friends and social life, people living alone and single people, domestic violence, society and community and milestone events
- 2. Mental health and wellbeing**, including the impacts of cocooning, living alone, caring duties, work, the news and communications, the rural and urban divide, visiting restrictions in hospitals, nursing homes and maternity hospitals
- 3. Physical health**, including weight and exercise, the impacts on mobility and the experience of 'high risk' individuals
- 4. Nursing homes**, including guidance, infection control, visiting restrictions, level of care, staff, the transfer between hospitals and nursing homes, and deaths
- 5. Healthcare**, including visiting, staff, non-COVID care, level of care, infection control, improvements, maternity care, supports and services for people with disabilities and family carers
- 6. Local environment**, including housing, local area and digital engagement

Detailed overview of open text - qualitative survey and individual submission findings

7. **Education and development**, including home and online-schooling, balancing duties, the return to school and the impact on social and educational development and exams
8. **Work and time use**, including remote working, the impact on essential workers, businesses, people's sports and hobbies and faith
9. **Financial situation**, including people's finances, the cost of living and inflation and the impact of welfare payments
10. **Civil liberties, human rights and trust**, including restrictions, democracy, trust and the Government, Government Departments and agencies
11. **Other countries**, including responses in the United Kingdom, Sweden and the USA.

Note, this paper provides an overview of people's personal experiences and perspective without questioning or verifying information provided.

