



Public consultation findings overview

Children and young people

Background



- The independent COVID-19 Evaluation ran a public consultation for children and young people in October 2025
- The focused survey was open to all children and young people aged 16-25 living in Ireland during the COVID-19 pandemic, and serves as a complement to the general public consultation
- The consultation survey included themed multiple-choice questions and an open question for people to share their pandemic experience
- The survey covered different quality-of-life aspects to better understand how the pandemic impacted different areas of people's lives

Background



- To inform the survey, the COVID-19 Evaluation worked with Spunout.ie to design and run a focus group with children and young people.
- Insights from this session informed the survey, which resulted in a strong focus on:
 - Education
 - Development
 - Milestone events

The survey was also tested by the COVID-19 Evaluation with a group of young people from Comhairle na nÓg. This was facilitated by the National Participation Office.

Cautions and caveats



Over 500 responses to the survey were received:

Input	Number of responses
Survey	563
Open text question	137

Given the response size, caution is required when interpreting findings and extrapolating experiences to the population

Where subcategories are being explored, it is important to remember that this is focusing on an often-small subset of the overall response.

Cautions and caveats

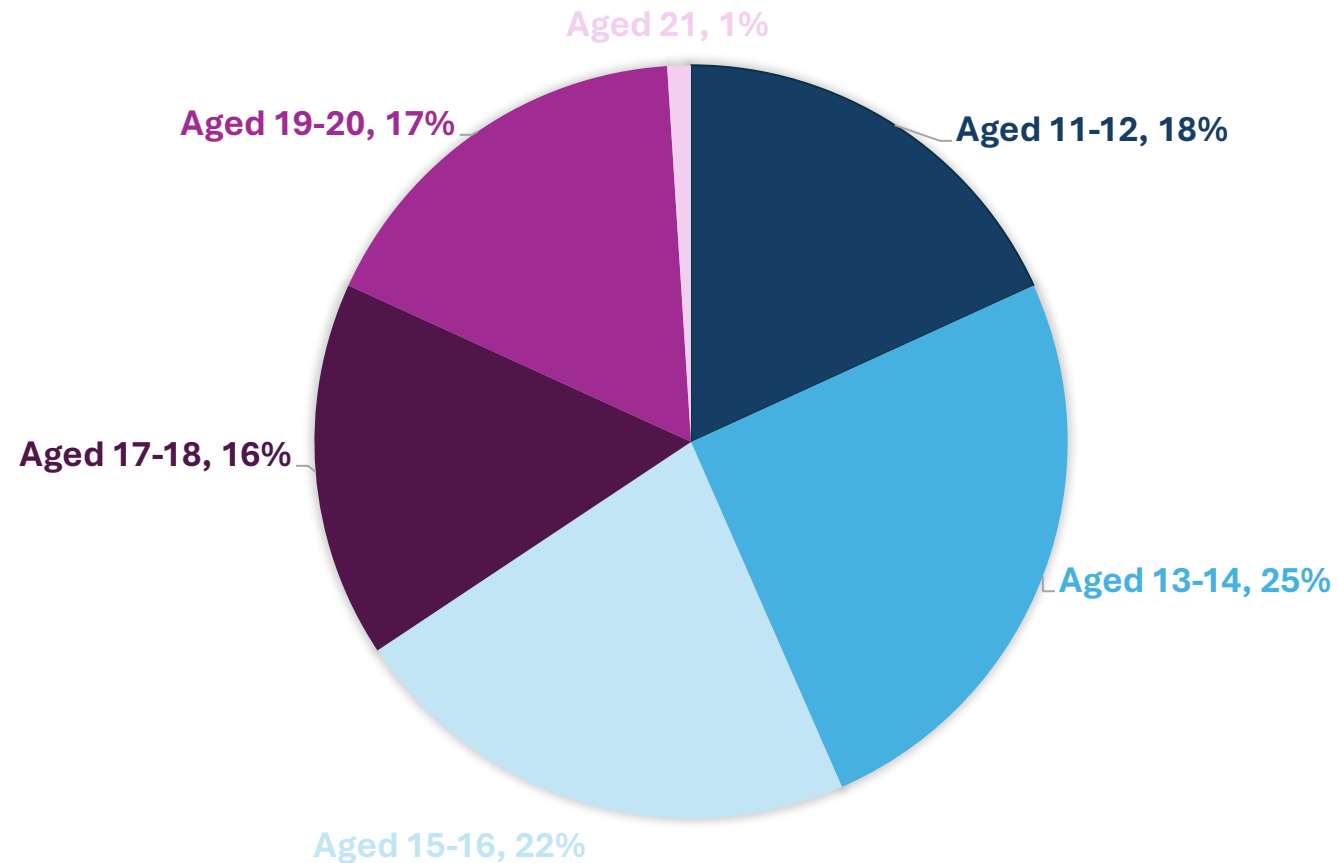


When considering this data, it is also important to note:

- Biases inherent in public consultations (those who choose to participate)
- Potential differences in demographics of respondents compared to wider population for this age group
- Risks of hindsight bias (for example, the consultation took place over five years after the onset of the population).

Demographics

Age of survey respondents in 2020



Demographics

Demographic	Comment
Age	Most (25%) respondents were aged 13-14 years old in 2020 (18-19 years old in 2025), compared to just 1% of respondents aged 21 in 2020
Gender	Female respondents were overrepresented compared to CSO overall population data (71% compared to 49%), and male respondents were underrepresented (22% compared to 51%)
Disability	27% reported having a disability, a larger shared than Census 2022 (11.6% for people aged under 25)
Difficulty in affording things	Higher proportion of people in 'some level of ease' categories and lower proportion in 'some level of difficulty'

Overall analysis dimensions

1. Relationships and social connections *(includes bereavement and life events and milestones)*
2. Mental health and wellbeing
3. Physical health
4. Housing and local environment *(includes digital engagement)*
5. Education
6. Development
7. Work and time use
8. Financial and job security
9. Civil liberties, human rights and trust

Overview of survey findings

The **top 3 concerns** for respondents were:

1. Mental health and wellbeing (26%)
2. Relationships and social connections (23%)
3. Education and development (21%)

Areas most **negatively impacted** were:

1. Mental health and wellbeing (71%)
2. Education and development (65%)
3. Relationships and connections with others (50%)
4. Physical health (50%)



Overview of survey findings

COVID-19 and the COVID-19 response had far-reaching impacts for children and young people, feedback included that:

- Non-essential healthcare was suspended leading to delays in diagnoses and treatment
- Children with disabilities and mental health issues faced a sudden withdrawal of supports and services
- School closures impacted children, young people and their families – their academic learning, mental health, social connections, access to sport and extracurricular activities
- Key formative moments were profoundly altered – children and young people missed out on sitting State exams, attending their graduation or Debs, or celebrating big birthdays
- This sense of lost time or missed opportunities profoundly impacted children and young people's mental health.



Overview of each dimension

1. Relationships and social connections

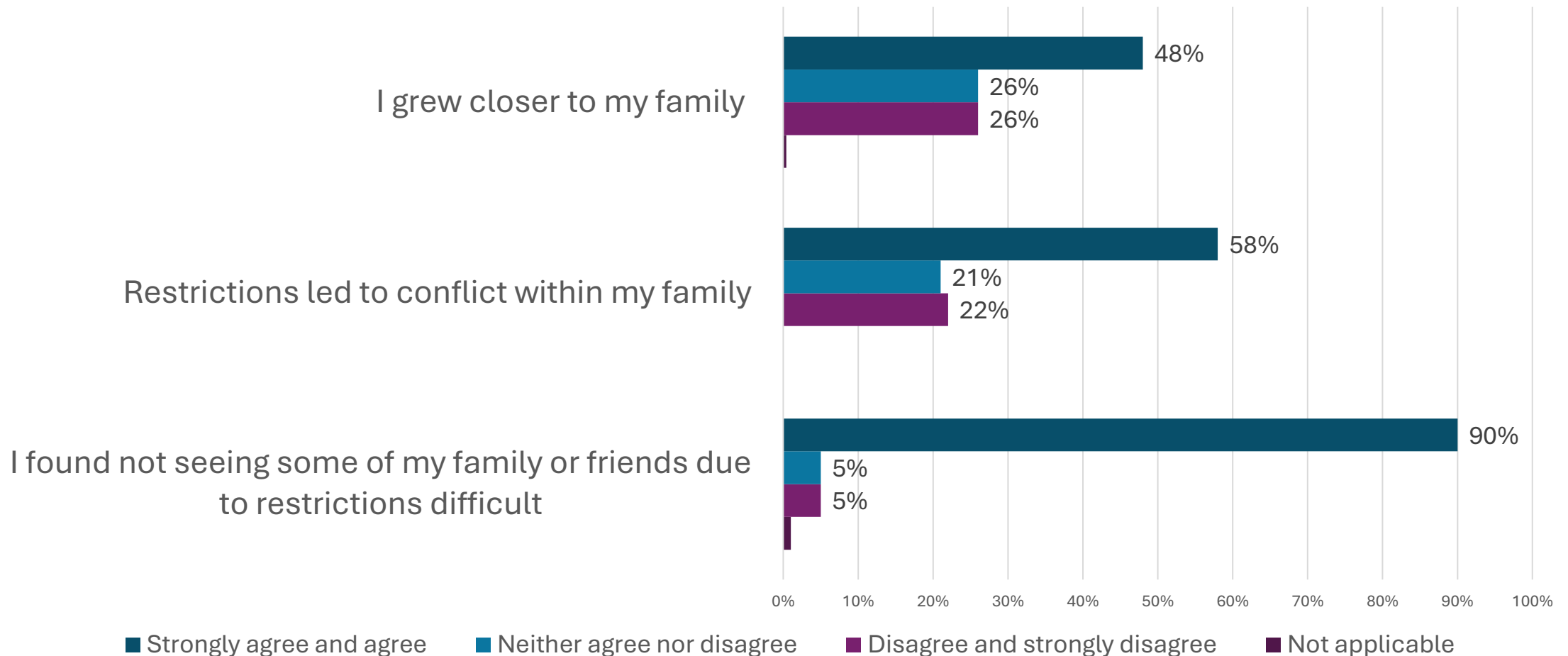
50% reported negative impacts on their relationships and connections with others

- The highest proportion of negative impacts were for carers (who all felt that their relationships and social connections were negatively impacted)
- This was followed by people who found it ‘very difficult’ to afford things (77%)

Impact Breakdown	Percentage
Positive impact	6%
Positive and negative impact	40%
Negative impact	50%
No impact	2%
Can't say/ don't know	2%

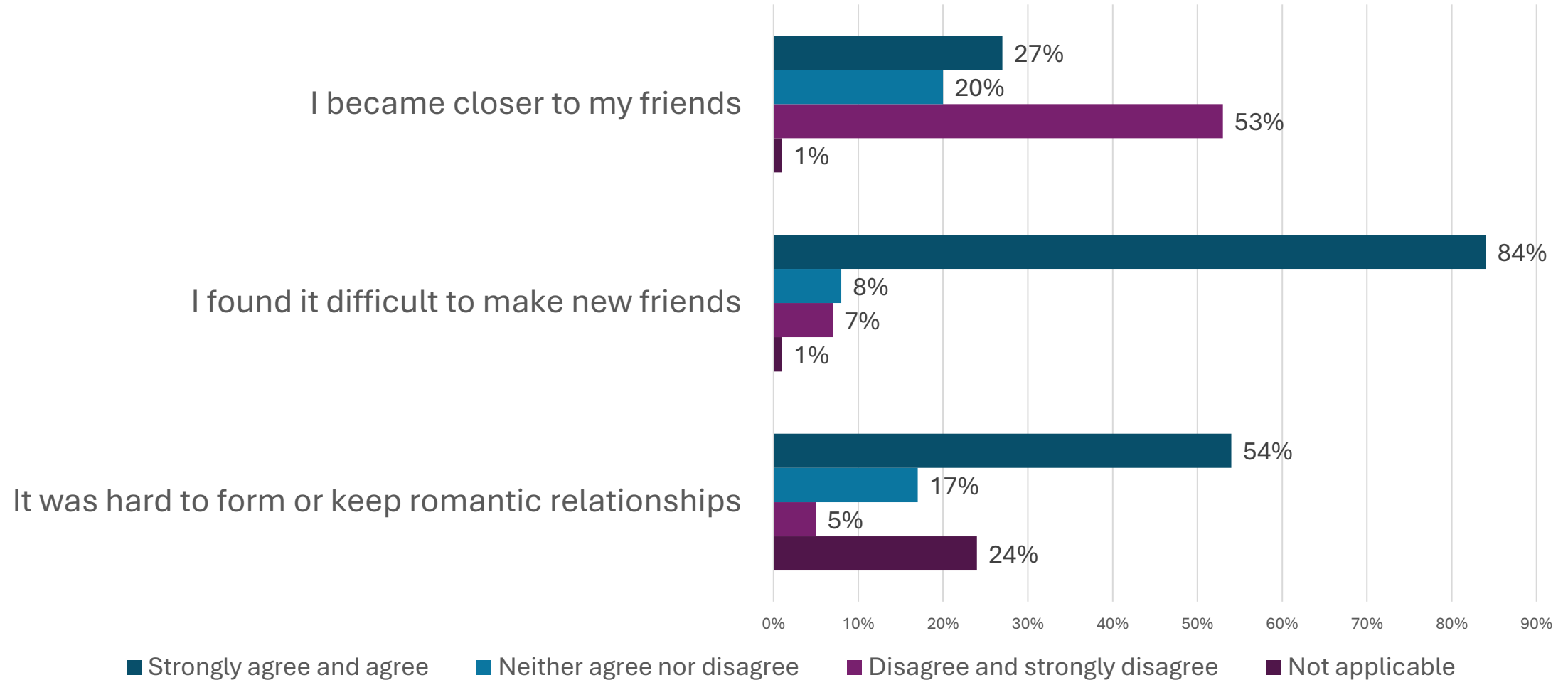
Relationships and social connections

Overview of specific questions



Relationships and social connections

Overview of specific questions



Relationships and social connections

Overview of specific questions

Clear divide by **difficulty in affording things**:

- People who found it 'easy' and 'very easy' grew closer to their families (59% and 57% respectively) and people who found it 'very easy' became closer to their friends (46%)
- People who found it 'very difficult' and 'difficult' disagreed, they did not grow closer to their families (both 48%)
- People who found it 'very difficult' experienced more conflict (81%) and felt they did not become closer to their friends (63%)

Children and young people who **lost a loved one** found it hard not to see friends or family due to restrictions:

- This was the case for 94% of people who lost a parent or a member of their wider family.

Relationships and social connections

Overview of specific questions

Life events missed by respondents	Percentage
School trip(s), holiday(s) or travelling	28%
Big family celebration or occasions	27%
Funeral(s)	13%
Starting secondary school	9%
Graduation or Debs	9%
Starting college	8%
Starting or advancing career	3%
Other	3%
It did not impact big life events	1%

42% of respondents lost someone close to them during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Relationships and social connections

Overview of open text

- Respondents who felt **unsafe** or experienced **challenges at home** detailed how COVID-19 was particularly difficult as they had “no escape, no support”
- Some described how they had lost faith in society due to people’s **selfishness** during the pandemic, as people refused to wear masks, get vaccinated or follow restrictions
- Many respondents described **missing key life events** from driving tests to holidays, Christmases with grandparents, to 18th birthday parties
- **School closures** particularly impacted transitions into secondary school and college – respondents could not sit exams, have graduations or attend discos or parties

2. Mental health and wellbeing

71% of respondents reported that pandemic response had a negative impact on their mental health

Groups most negatively impacted included:

- Carers (100%)
- People who found it 'very difficult' to afford things (92%)
- People whose employment status was 'Other' (92%)

Impact Breakdown	Percentage
Positive impact	5%
Positive and negative impact	20%
Negative impact	71%
No impact	2%
Can't say/ don't know	2%

Mental health and wellbeing

Overview of specific questions

Biggest **strains** on respondents' mental health included:

- Loneliness (13%)
- Boredom (11%)
- General anxiety (11%)
- Missing big life events (10%)

Most common **supportive factors** for respondents' mental health included:

- Time spent outdoors in nature (21%)
- Family and friends (21%)
- Technology, such as video games (14%)

Mental health and wellbeing

Overview of open text

Strains

School closures and a sense of lost time contributed to people's strained mental health:

- People felt they could not progress their lives – move outside the family home, form a relationship or get a job
- School closures impacted people's friendships and social skills, as respondents felt alone, depressed and/or struggled to make friends

Respondents criticised the lack and cost of support.

Supportive factors

Some respondents had more time to dedicate to their physical health which improved their mental health

Others enjoyed the shift to online learning, particularly for students with disabilities or people who were bullied.

3. Physical health

50% of respondents reported that the pandemic response had a negative impact on their physical health

Groups most negatively impacted included:

- People whose employment status was 'Other' (83%)
- People who lost their job (74%)

Impact Breakdown	Percentage
Positive impact	12%
Positive and negative impact	22%
Negative impact	50%
No impact	13%
Can't say/ don't know	4%

Physical health

Overview of open text

People who were 'high risk' largely welcomed restrictions:

- They described how they rarely got sick during the pandemic but this resumed once restrictions eased
- They emphasised the importance of restrictions, detailing how their illnesses worsened after contracting COVID-19

Respondents described the impact of living with high-risk family members:

- They felt pressure to help their family members and protect them from COVID-19
- They wished they had taken gap years so they could have fully experienced their college years due to the level of caution they had to follow.

Physical health

Healthcare – overview of open text

Delays in accessing healthcare:

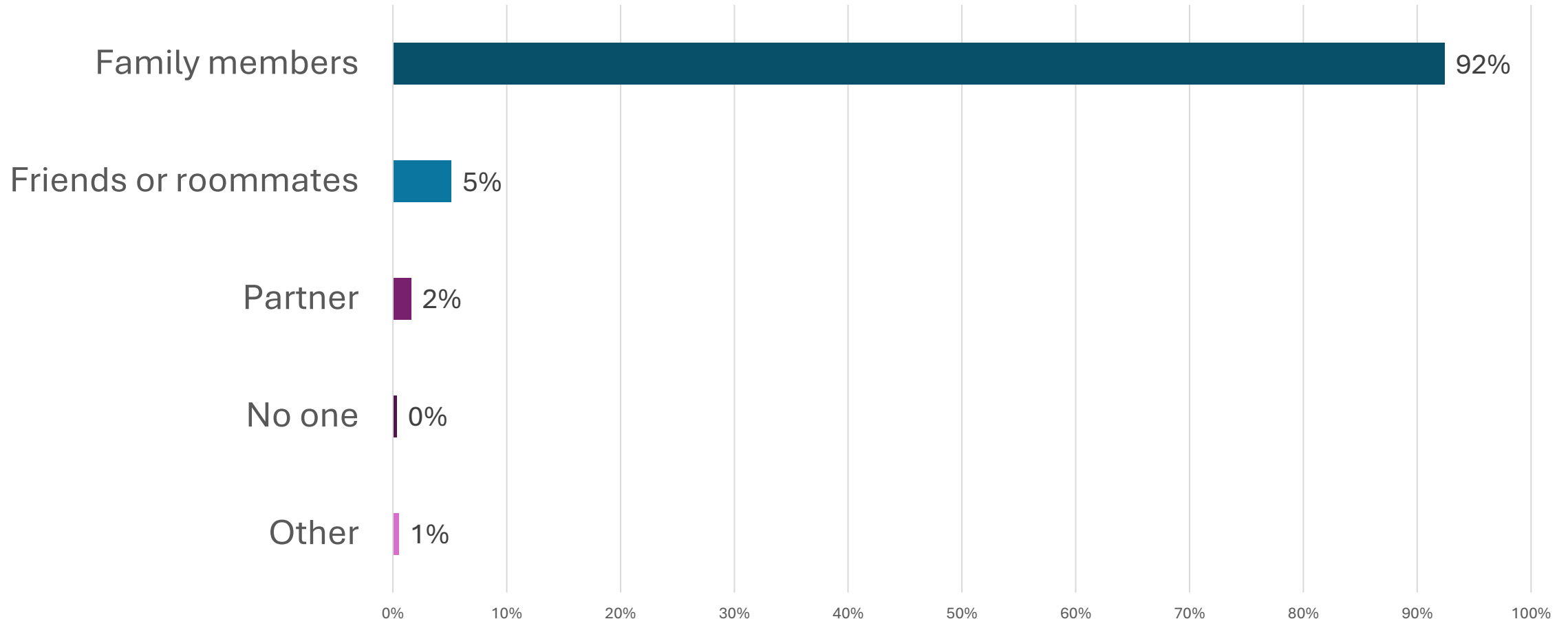
- Delayed diagnoses, including for autism, dyslexia and epilepsy
- Impacts on education, development, mental health and physical health
- Increased reliance on charities and agencies for support

Some felt that **visiting restrictions** should have been more lenient and prioritised when restrictions were easing

Some described how **long COVID** had “ruined” their or their friends lives.

4. Housing and local environment

Responses to 'Who did you live with during the COVID-19 pandemic?'



Housing and local environment

Overview of open text

Young people living in **rural areas** had mixed experiences:

- Some appreciated having more open spaces and the quiet country road for walks and cycles
- Others found it lonely and isolating, particularly among college students who had no way of meeting up with friends
- Some reported how young people in rural areas became more addicted to alcohol, vaping and drugs.

5. Education

65% of respondents reported that the pandemic response had a negative impact on their education and development

Groups most negatively impacted included:

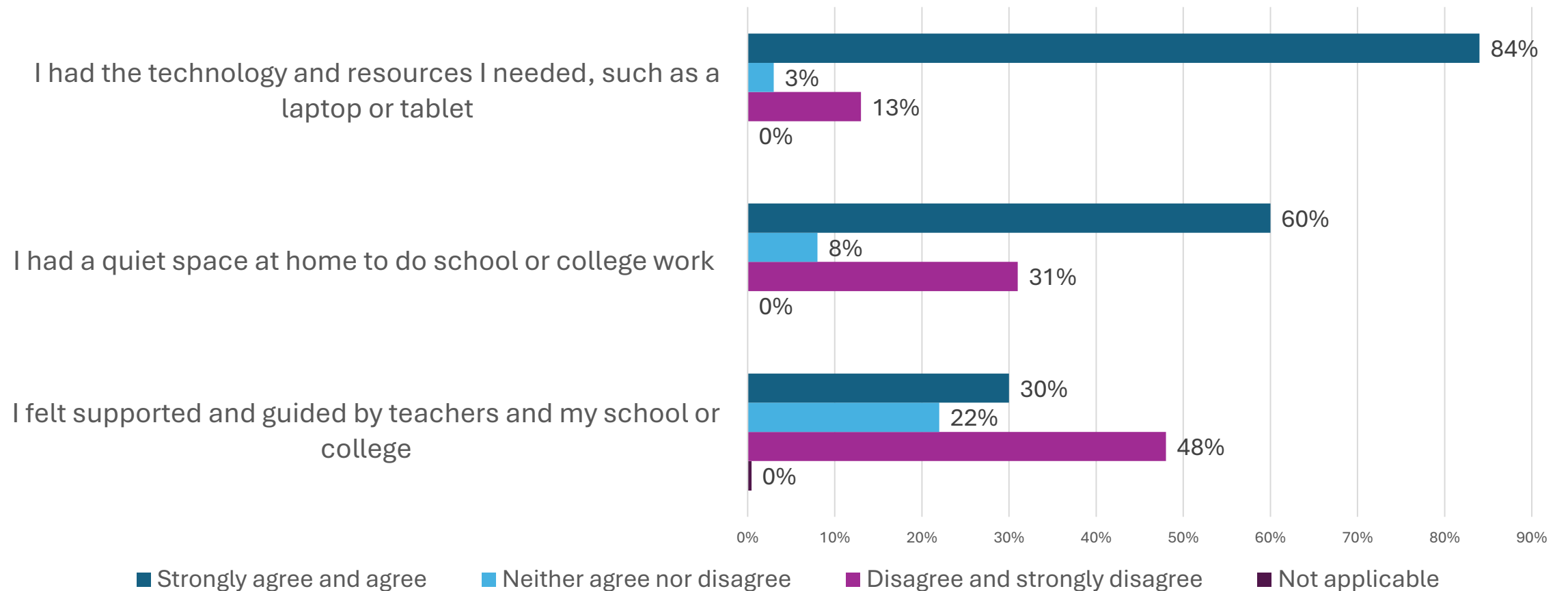
- People who lost their job (89%)
- People who lost a parent or preferred not to say (88%)
- People whose employment status was 'Other' (83%)
- People who found it 'very difficult' to afford things (81%)

Impact Breakdown	Percentage
Positive impact	5%
Positive and negative impact	23%
Negative impact	65%
No impact	5%
Can't say/ don't know	2%

Education

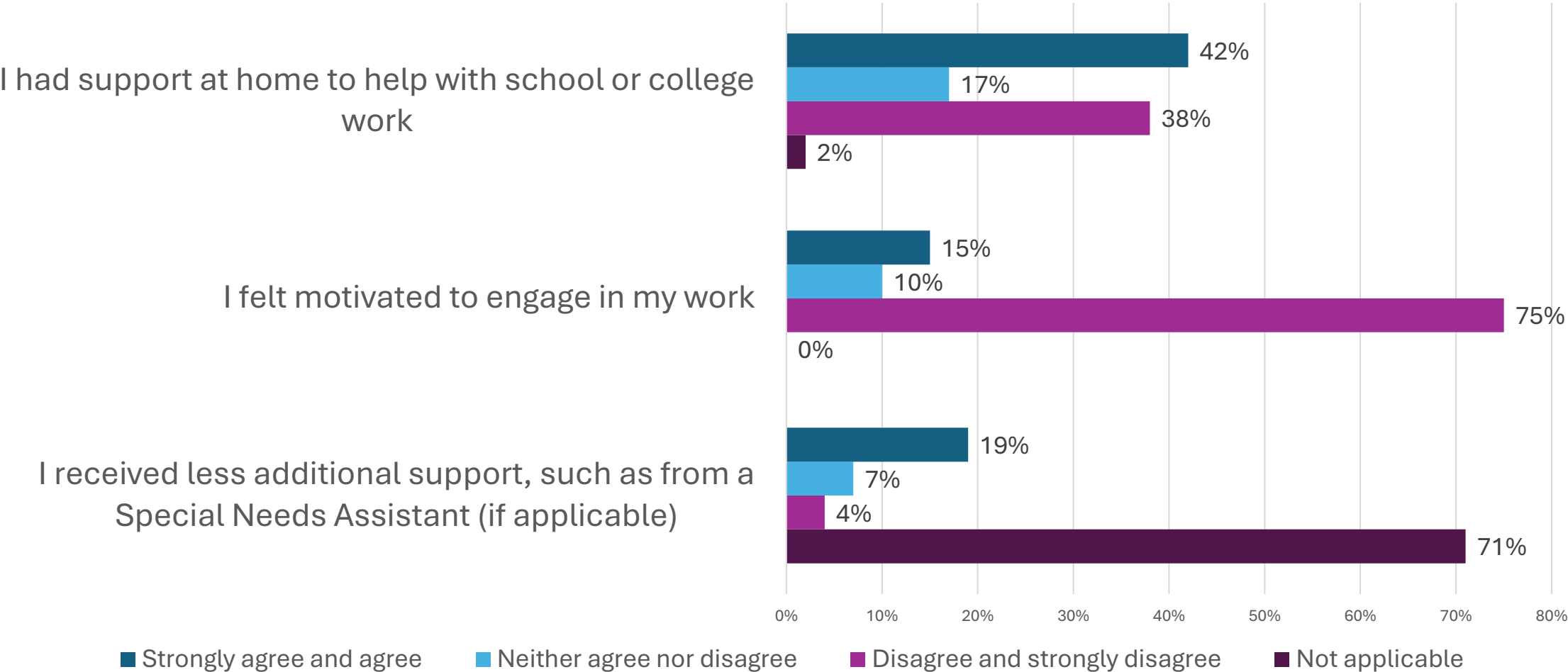
Overview of specific questions

Online schooling



Education

Overview of specific questions



Education

Overview of specific questions

A **digital divide** can be observed based on how easy or difficult it was for respondents to afford things:

- People who found it ‘very easy’ or ‘easy’ to afford things were most likely to have the technology and resources they needed (96% and 94%, respectively), a quiet place to study (81% and 74%, respectively) and were less likely to feel they had no support at home (18%)
- 49% of people who found it ‘very difficult’ to afford things did not have technology or resources for online schooling, and 74% did not have a quiet place to study and felt they did not have support at home to help with schoolwork

Education

Overview of specific questions

Older respondents were more likely to have a quiet place to study, while younger groups felt less motivated to engage in schoolwork

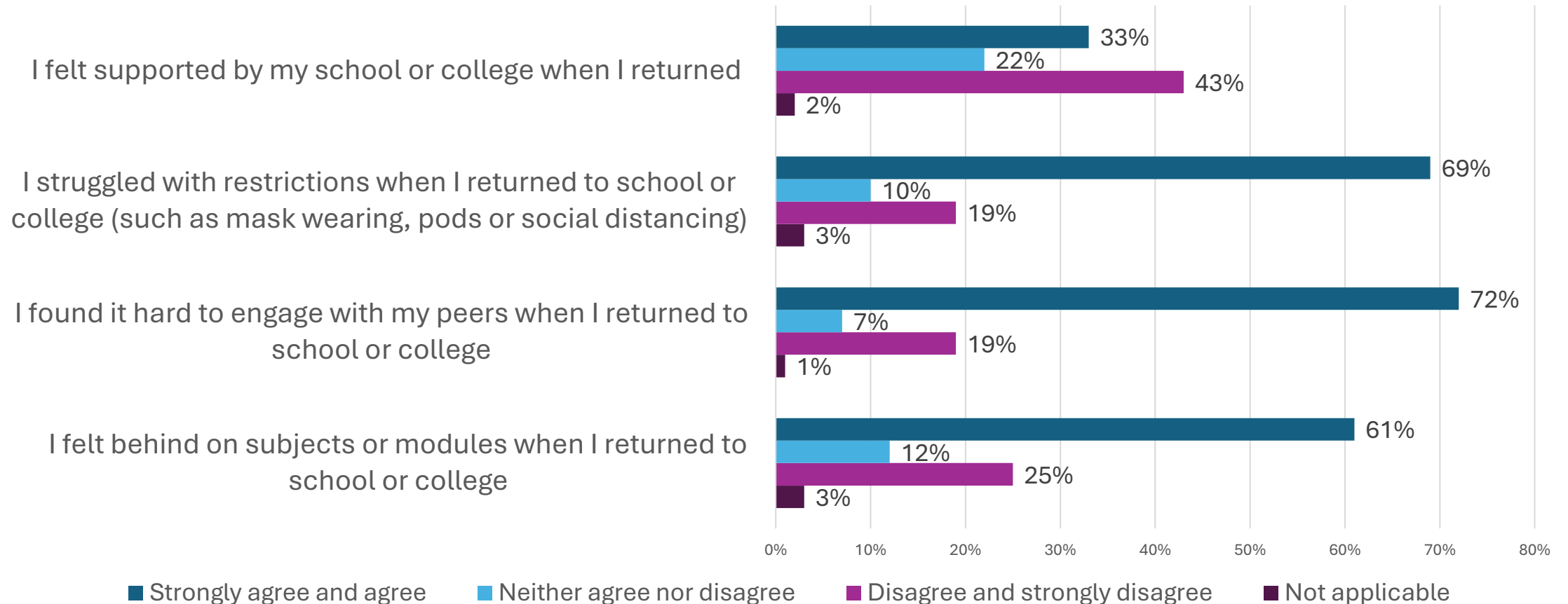
Responses to ‘I had a quiet space at home to do school or college work’ by age group

Age (in 2020)	Strongly agree and agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly disagree and disagree
11-12	54%	10%	37%
13-14	59%	9%	31%
15-16	56%	10%	33%
17-18	62%	8%	31%
19-20	71%	4%	25%
21	84%	0%	17%

Education

Overview of specific questions

Return to school



Education

Overview of specific questions

Similar divides based on how easy or hard to **afford things** for the return to school:

- Students who found it 'very easy' to afford things felt more supported by their school or college when they returned (52%)
- Students who found it 'very difficult' did not feel supported (63%), struggled more with restrictions (82%) and with engaging with their peers (82%) when they returned

Younger groups struggled more with restrictions when they returned to school (75%) and felt more behind on their subject or modules (65%, compared to 43% of 19-20 year olds).

Education

Overview of specific questions

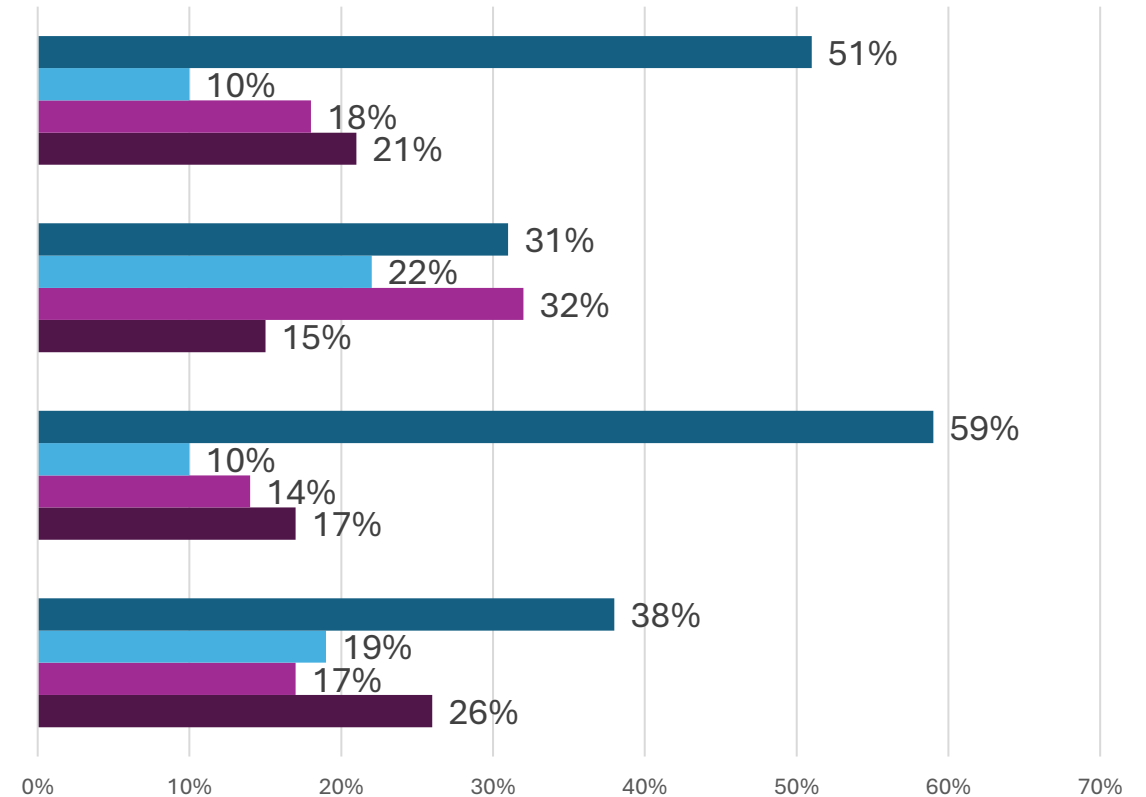
Impact on exams

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted my exams, such as my Leaving Certificate or Junior Certificate

I felt the approach to assessments or exams gave me a fair chance to prove myself

I was concerned by the lack of clear communication on exam changes

Overall, calculated grades and later related changes were a fair approach



■ Strongly agree and agree

■ Neither agree nor disagree

■ Disagree and strongly disagree

■ Not applicable

Education

Overview of specific questions

Greater negative impacts on people who found it **difficult to afford things**:

- People who found it 'very difficult' (78%) and 'difficult' (65%) to afford things believed changes to exams negatively impacted them
- Did not believe the approach to assessments or exams gave them a fair chance to prove themselves ('very difficult', 52%)
- More likely to be concerned by the lack of clear communication on exam changes ('very difficult', 81%)

Education

Overview of specific questions

Differences by **age**:

- Most negative impacts on exams were felt by 15-16 year-olds (72%)
- Older respondents more likely to feel that changes to exams and assessments gave them a fair chance to prove themselves – 41% of 19-20-year-olds and 30% of 15-16-year-olds
- 68% of 17-18-year-olds were concerned by the lack of communication on exam changes – the age group who were most impacted by changes to Leaving Certificate exams

Education

Overview of open text

Online schooling

- Some enjoyed online school as they no longer had to commute to college and they got better grades as they had “nothing else to do”
- Many described how online learning negatively impacted their education – people struggled to stay on top of their school work
- Respondents’ mental health suffered, particularly for college students who felt that the best years of their life were reduced to completing coursework from their bedroom in the family home

Education

Overview of open text

Return to school

- Difficult to make friends due to social distancing and hard to get back into a routine
- Frustration around length of school closures just for schools to reopen and young people to get COVID-19 anyway

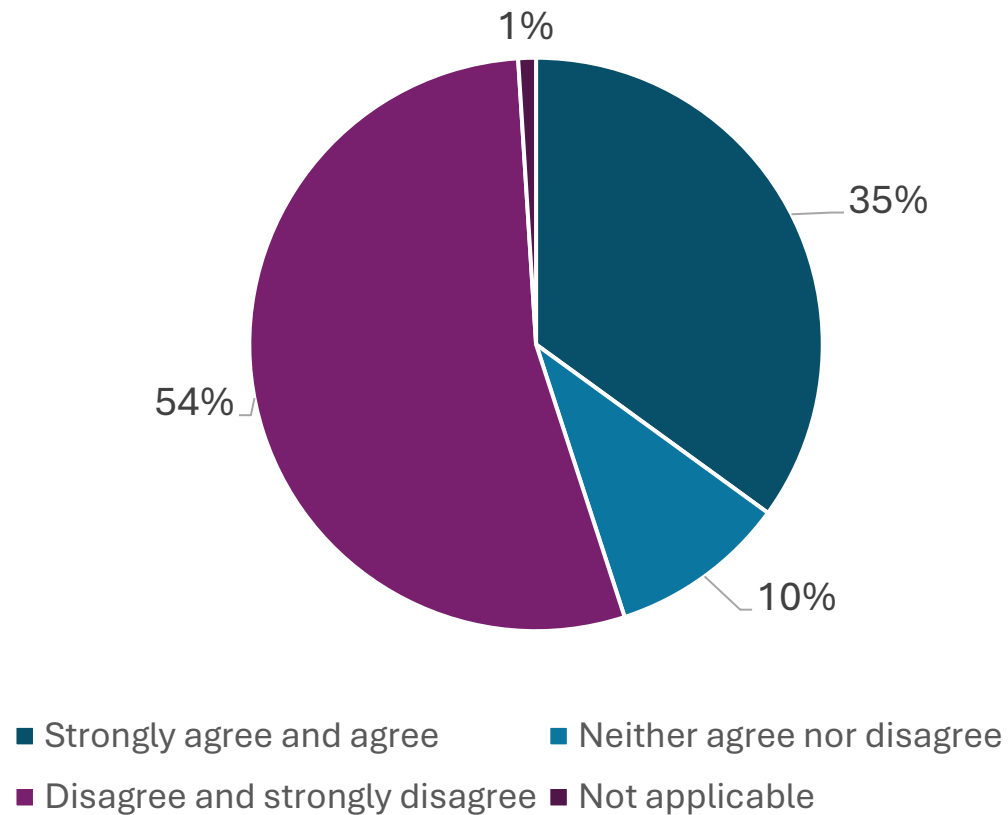
Exams and assessments

- Some felt Calculated Grades were “unfair”, others were disappointed that all their work “was for nothing”
- Junior Cycle students described learning first-year material a week before their exams
- Impact of delays in diagnoses for autism and dyslexia on students’ exams

6. Development

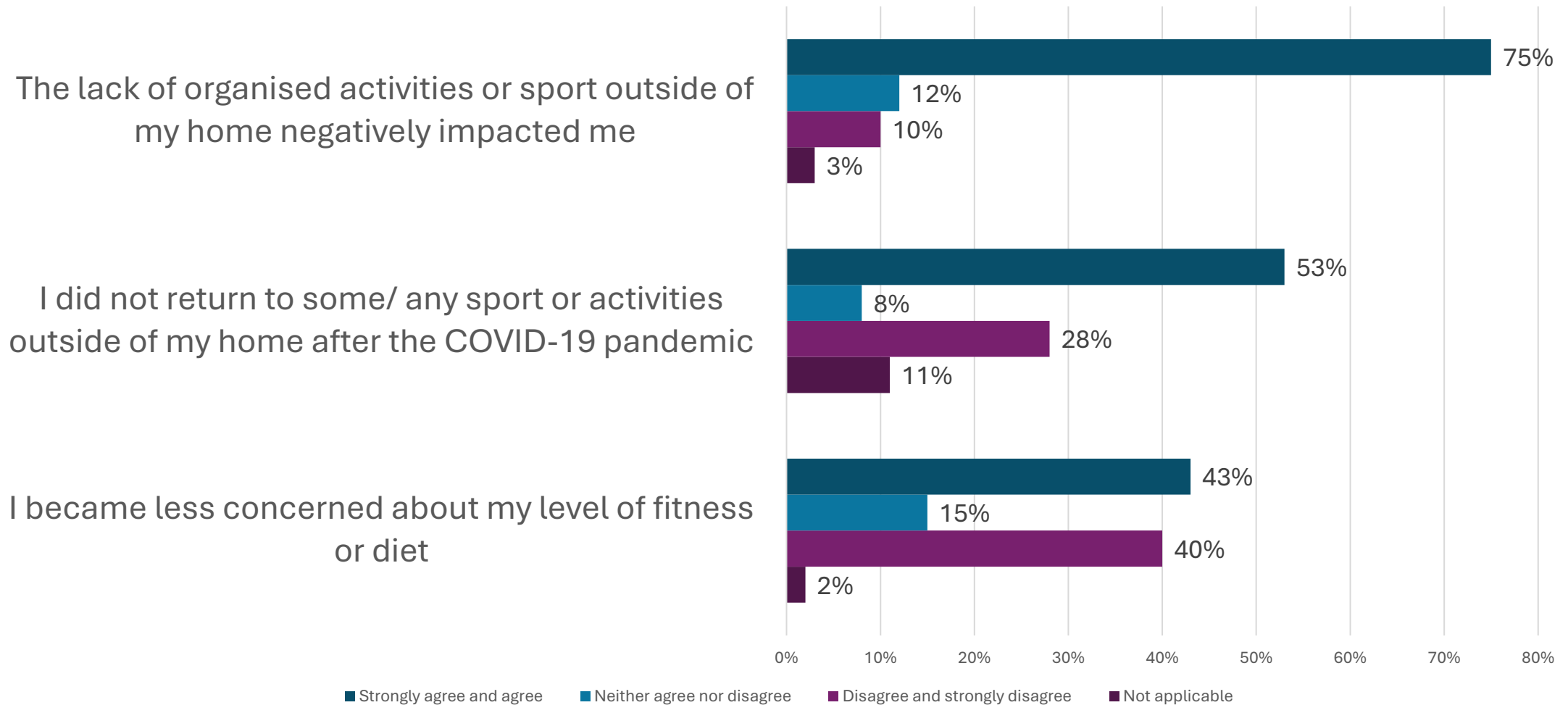
54% of respondents **did not feel** that their confidence in themselves and their social skills were positively impacted by the pandemic.

Responses to 'My confidence in myself and my social skills were positively impacted'



Development

Overview of specific questions



Development

Overview of specific questions

Limitations to sports and activities largely impacted **younger respondents**:

- 83% of 11-12-year-olds felt that the lack of organised sport or activities negatively impacted them
- 63% of 11-12-year-olds did not return to some or any sport or activities after the pandemic
- Older respondents were more likely to feel that questions on returning to sport did not apply to them (33% of 21-year-olds, 22% of 17-18-year-olds)

Development

Overview of open text

Negative impacts on **social development**:

- Remote learning impacted respondents' social lives, social skills and confidence
- Felt they missed social opportunities that were key to their development, such as going to junior discos or parties

Mixed experiences on **sport and their relationship with food**:

- Some began developing issues with food and dieting, their body image suffered and they developed eating disorders
- Others had more time to focus on their physical health and to cook meals

7. Work and time use

Respondents overwhelming felt they **lost a part of their childhood or teenager years** due to the pandemic

Responses	Percentage
Yes, definitely	74%
Yes, a little	21%
No, not really	4%
No, not at all	0%
Can't say/ don't know	1%

Work and time use

Overview of open text

Essential workers:

- Fear for their parents who were healthcare workers
- Abuse respondent workers experienced from the public
- Workers felt forgotten by the Government and resentment over others getting PUP

Lost time:

- Impact of missing formative moments - some respondents still longed to be a teenager again, while others felt that “mentally time froze”

Pace of life:

- Appreciated slower pace of life but regretted rush back to routines after restrictions lifted

8. Financial and job security

48% of respondents reported that the pandemic response had **no impact** on their financial situation

Groups reported most negative impacts included:

- People who lost their job (84%)
- People aged 21 (67%)

Impact Breakdown	Percentage
Positive impact	3%
Positive and negative impact	6%
Negative impact	21%
No impact	48%
Can't say/ don't know	22%

Financial and job security

Overview of specific questions

72% of all respondents did not work during the pandemic

The below table looks at the job status of respondents by age category

Job status	15-16	17-18	19-20	21
I did not work	75%	62%	28%	33%
I lost my job	2%	6%	10%	33%
Employed – public facing	16%	25%	47%	17%
Employed – not public facing	2%	5%	11%	17%
Self-employed	2%	1%	1%	0%
Other (including Carers)	3%	1%	4%	0%

9. Civil liberties, human rights and trust

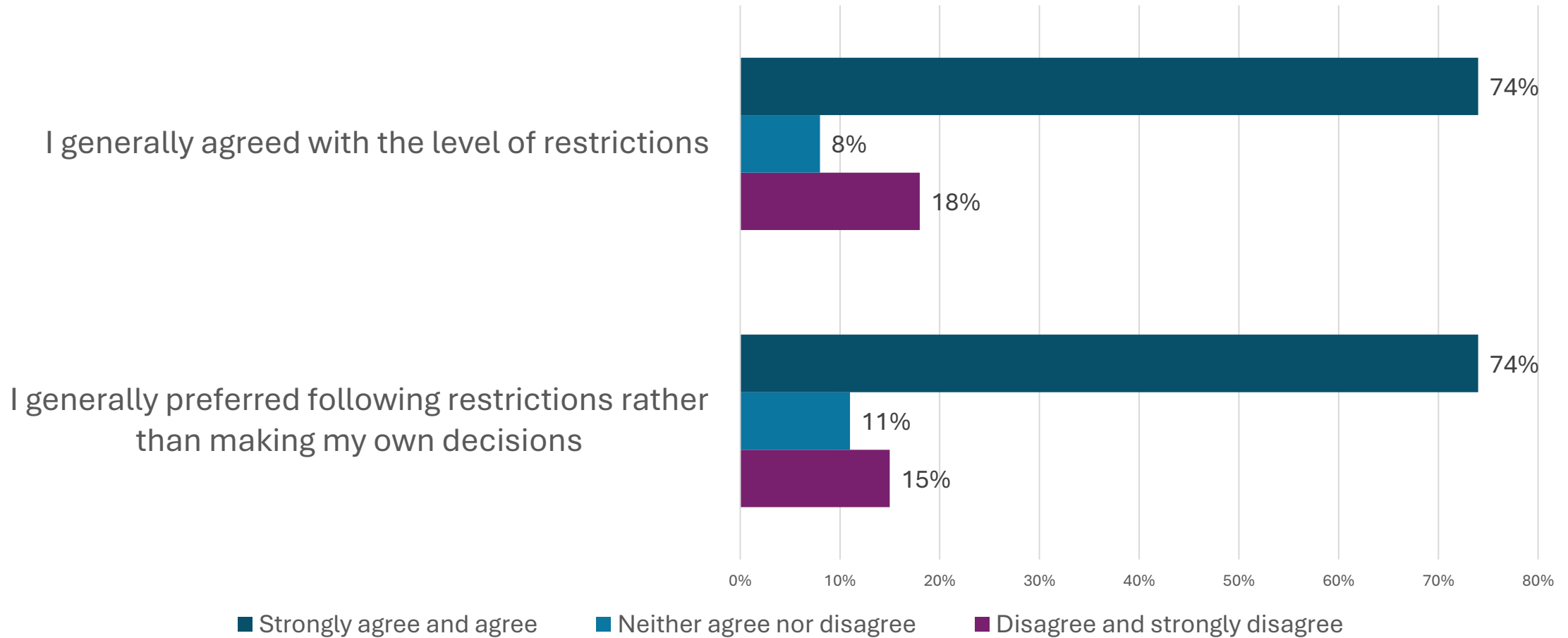
34% of respondents felt the pandemic response negatively impacted their civil liberties, human rights and trust.

Overall, respondents were largely divided.

Impacts Breakdown	Percentage
Positive impact	5%
Positive and negative impact	20%
Negative impact	34%
No impact	23%
Can't say/ don't know	18%

Civil liberties, human rights and trust

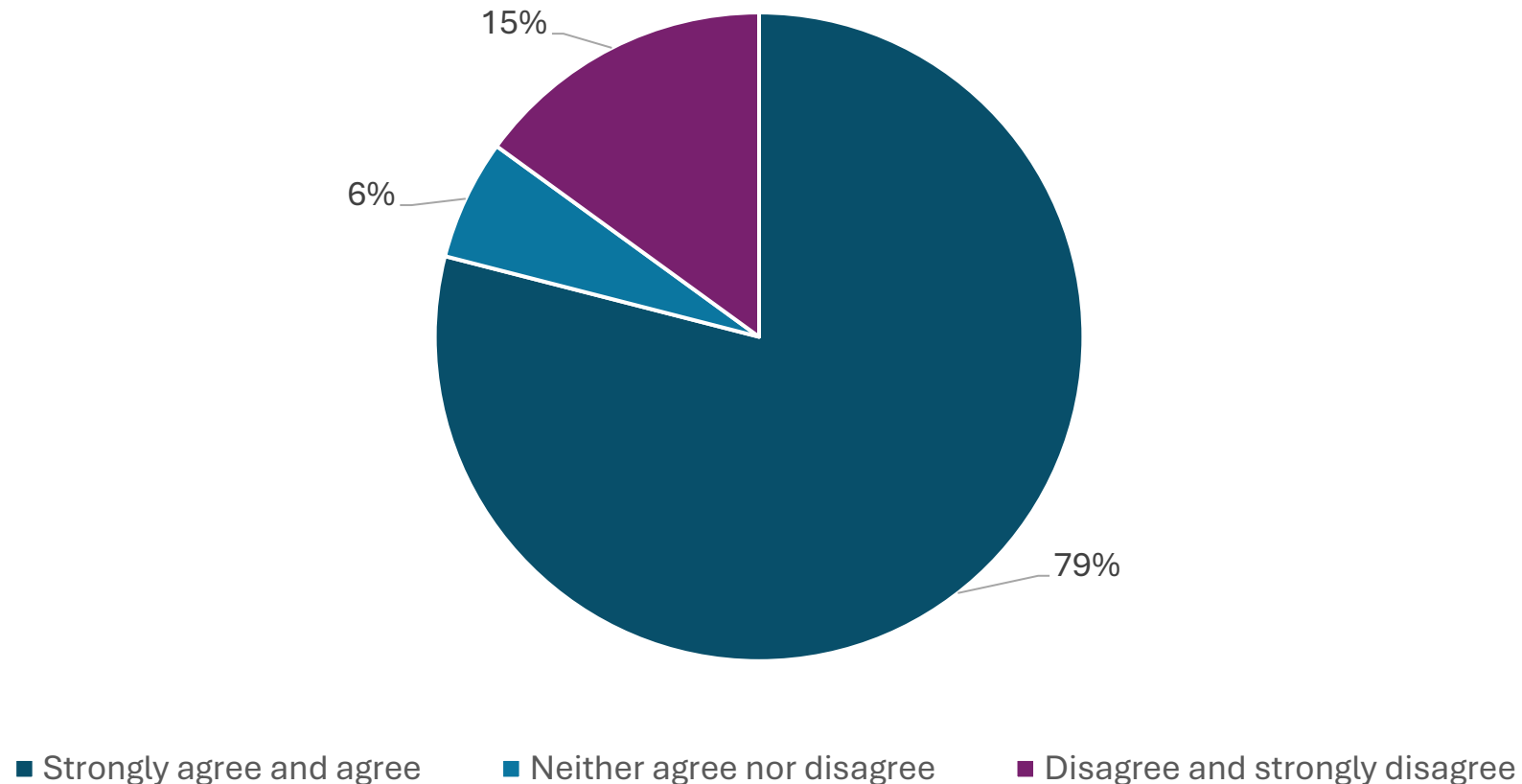
Overview of specific questions



Civil liberties, human rights and trust

Overview of specific questions

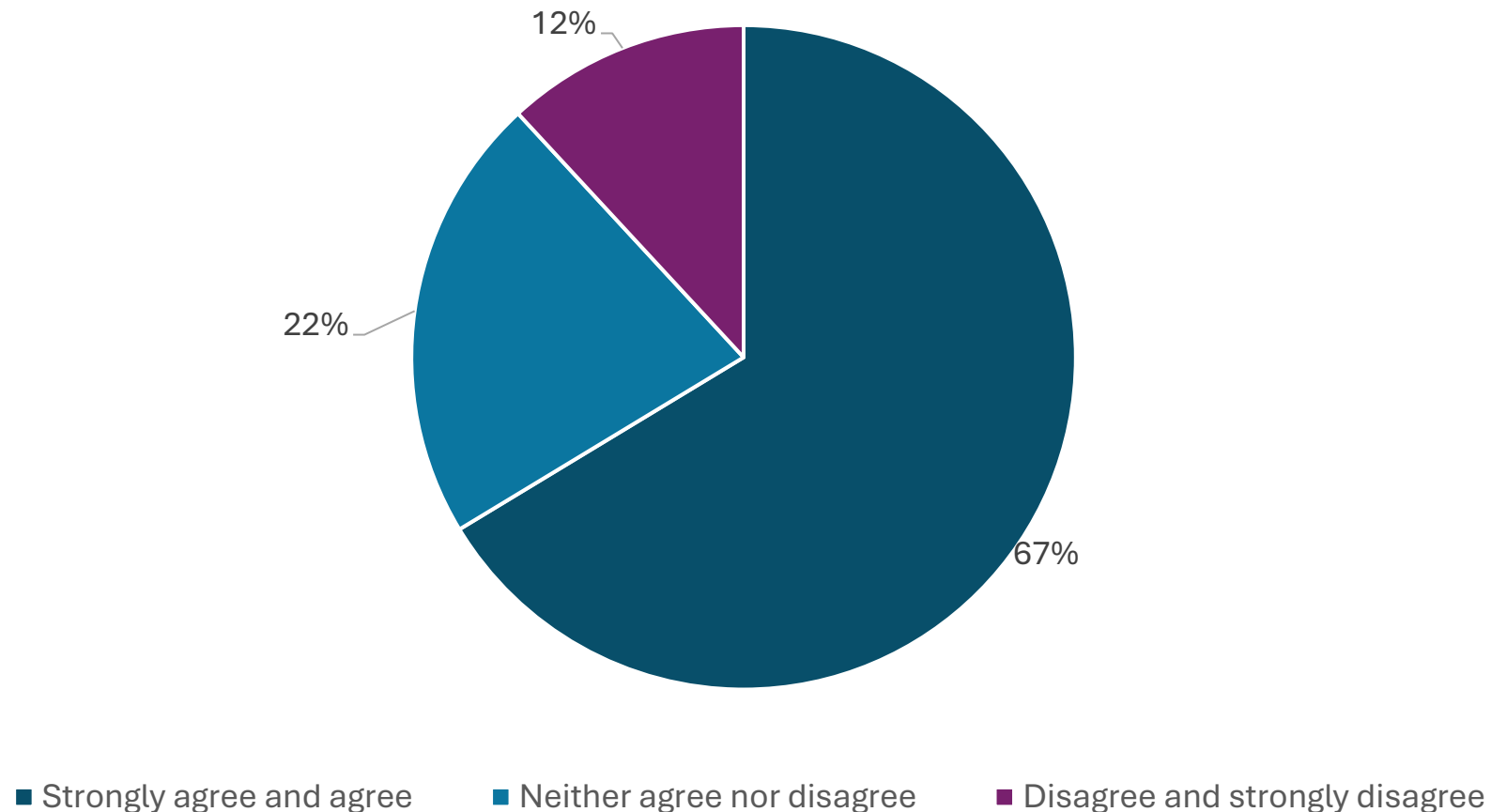
Response to 'It was hard to return to normal when restrictions lifted, such as meeting up with people'



Civil liberties, human rights and trust

Overview of specific questions

Responses to 'I felt that young people's rights and voices were not considered'



Civil liberties, human rights and trust

Overview of open text

Mixed responses on **restrictions**

- Some felt they were a “huge waste of time”, while others felt they were “very fit for the time”
- Respondents struggled more as lockdowns continued and questioned why restrictions continued months after people were vaccinated
- Felt the evidence that young people would not become very ill from COVID-19 was “completely disregarded”
- Some felt that restrictions on children and teenagers were “unfair”, and the Government should have taken a more targeted approach for high-risk people
- Some felt Ireland’s enforcement of restrictions was “incredibly authoritarian” while others thought restrictions should have been enforced “a little better”

Civil liberties, human rights and trust

Overview of open text

2km and 5km restrictions

- Respondents felt that these restrictions were disproportionate and negatively impacted “every aspect” of people’s lives

Masks, PPE and social distancing

- Responses were divided – some disagreed with their enforcement while others felt they should still be used when people are ill

Lifting of restrictions

- Respondents described their euphoria when restrictions lifted but some detailed how difficult it was to return to “regular life”.

Civil liberties, human rights and trust

Overview of open text

Democracy

- Some questioned Ireland's democracy at the time – they felt Ireland became “authoritarian” and power was deferred to NPHET

Trust

- Some respondents' trust in the Government was impacted by their “insane overreach” during the pandemic
- Some felt that people who questioned or spoke out against restrictions or vaccines were demonised.

