

The Other Pandemic:

The Impact Of Covid-19 On Britain's Mental Health

With a foreword by

Simon Blake OBE, Chief Executive of Mental Health First Aid

About Public First

Public First is a consultancy specialising in complex public policy through opinion research, policy analysis and design, and policy communications. We are regularly hired for high-profile, high-stakes work where policy issues are in the public eye. Formed in 2016, Public First has run policy projects for national and local governments in Britain and abroad, and for some of the world's leading businesses in more than two dozen international markets. Public First is led by a politically diverse group of policy experts, who have worked in government departments, the UK Parliament, the media and leading think tanks. For more information, please see: www.publicfirst.co.uk

Foreword

2020 will be remembered as the year the Coronavirus pandemic changed our lives in ways it would have been hard to imagine just 12 short months ago.

As of the beginning of March the death toll from Coronavirus stands at well over 120,000.

We have been locked down in our homes, unable to see family and friends, unable to visit bars and restaurants. Hairdressers, barbers and non-essential shops have been shut. People have been furloughed or made redundant, while others were undertaking work remotely, many of whom were trying to home school their children at the same time. We have lived on our own. We have rearranged weddings and been to funerals online.

As a country we have adapted to these changed ways of life with extraordinary stoicism, determination and sacrifice. We have supported our neighbours, shown appreciation for the NHS staff and other key workers, we have fundraised for charities working hard to provide support to those who need it most from food banks, to shopping or providing social contact to people who need it.

But the evidence from this, other research and our training is clear: despite the adaptiveness and resilience people have shown it has had a significant impact on the mental health of the nation and needs serious attention as we start to rebuild. There is a lot that people are concerned about, including their own or someone else's physical health, job/financial security and mental wellbeing. This is reflected in people's reported experience, and time and again research shows that people are more anxious or stressed and tired than they were before lockdown.

It is important too to remember that those impacts are not felt evenly across the population. The pandemic has laid bare pre-existing inequalities - gender, race and economic - and in turn it has exacerbated them.

The Centre for Mental Health estimates that about 8.5 million adults and 1.5 million children in England will need support for depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorders and other mental health difficulties in the coming months and years. That is approximately 20% of all adults and 15% of all children.

The Coronavirus vaccine rollout gives us hope that we will soon be able to move more freely again, but we cannot and must not rely on hope to address the mental health crisis. This Report is an important call to

legislators and policy makers to invest in mental health and make sure mental health is at the heart of our national recovery plan.

And all action for mental health needs to be built on a strong partnership between national and local government, social enterprises, charities and community groups, the NHS and the general public.

There is no other credible or viable alternative.

Simon Blake OBE

Chief Executive, Mental Health First Aid England

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

British people say they are more stressed, less happy, more tired and less physically healthy than they were before the pandemic and lockdown.

While there are reasons to hope that the immediate emergency is slowly coming to an end, it appears that the mental health crisis that has evolved as a result will last longer. For this is what it is: a national crisis. While the death toll has previously been the immediate focus of the NHS, the Government and the media, the drastically declining mental health of much of the population is only just coming into the spotlight.

A relaxation of the rules around lockdown should have a positive impact on the nation's mental health. But, given we are some way from returning to normal life, we should expect significant mental health challenges to remain and potentially even grow. Just like a war, it is when the fighting stops that the impact on the survivors starts to become most visible, and the full impact may not reveal itself for some time.

While we have all had to adapt to living lives in very different ways, this does not mean that people have got used to lockdown life, let alone come to enjoy it. For large numbers of people across the country, the long series of lockdowns has ripped their lives apart: isolation; lack of a clear end-state; not being able to see extended family; not being able to see friends; not having the certainty of office life; not being able to visit shops, museums and all the rest - all the everyday routines that defined a person and their place in the world that, until now, many people had taken for granted. Many people are likely to have had their mental health damaged for the long-term.

Because this report concentrates on the polling evidence, we have emphasised the evidence we have taken from larger groups, rather than smaller sections of society such as frontline key-workers in the NHS or those who spent days or weeks in hospitals as patients, often fighting for their lives or learning that the person in the bed next to them had unfortunately died. But the focus groups we did with these groups showed that many of them - though not all - were extremely likely to have been negatively affected by the experience. Nothing could have prepared one care worker we talked to for the experience of losing over 30 residents in her home in just a few weeks.

While our participants talked primarily about the negative impact of Covid on their mental wellbeing, the story is not wholly pessimistic. For

one, people in the UK being able to talk openly about mental health is a relatively new phenomenon, and the pandemic seems to have accelerated that trend to openness. Even recently, there was a strong stigma around the topic, and mental ill-health was dismissed or ignored. This research shows that the UK is ready for a discussion on mental health; we have little reason to believe that the candidness with which people discussed these topics will disappear once the immediate threat of the virus dissipates. We can hope then, that one enduring impact of the pandemic might be an elevated understanding of mental health, a greater policy focus on societal well-being, and radical changes in how easy it is to seek help and how available that help is.

Public First, the opinion research agency that specialises in understanding the impact policy has on the public, has run a major opinion research project, to look at the impact that the long Covid emergency has had on the British people. This research includes a lengthy 60-question opinion poll of 4,012 people and a dozen focus groups, including key groups such as critical workers and Covid survivors as well as ordinary members of the general public

In this research, we looked in great depth at how the mental health of the British people has been affected by the medical emergency of Covid, as well as the lockdowns designed to mitigate the worst of the effects. We asked people about their general feelings over the last year, before looking in detail at some of the specific effects they have had to contend with - from feelings of fear and loneliness to losing sleep and struggling with concentration. We asked people about their relationships with their partners and how they have coped looking after children. We also asked them about their hopes and fears for the future.

In this report, we look at the results of that work. We set out the most important findings here in a summary.

- **There is a genuine, wide and profound mental health crisis.** Covid has been a truly national crisis; in our nationally representative polling sample, 15% of the public had lost a close friend or relative to the virus. These are levels of grief that society only usually experiences during wartime. But the impact has been far, far wider than just those who have lost someone directly to the disease. Nearly 40% say their mental health has been negatively affected. While 14% of the public say their physical health is poor, 18% say their mental health is poor. When we ask how people think they would have said their mental health was before Covid, 11% say poor,

and over a quarter of people (28%) rate it higher than they would place their mental health currently.

- **Women have carried a particularly heavy burden.** There are usually gender gaps in opinion research, and in particular in self-reporting of mental ill-health. In line with this, we find women are much, much more likely to say they have struggled with mental health problems than men, and are also more likely to say that their mental health has been particularly impacted by the last year. They are more likely to say they have struggled generally, but also more likely to name specific ways they have struggled - for example, with concentration and sleep. 42% of women say they have been more worried about their own mental health because of Covid, compared to 32% of men. 49% of women say they have been worried about their mental health in the last year, compared to 34% of men. While we still see gaps in how willing men and women are to talk about these issues, we note that 38% of men are finding it easier to talk about poor mental health since the start of the pandemic, a potential sign that stigma is being broken down.
- **Those with children have worried terribly about a “lost year” of childhood.** Across the research project, it is clear that those with children have found the healthcare emergency and the long series of lockdowns to be particularly stressful. Yes, parents have on the surface-level had company and purpose - those living on their own or without a partner have struggled with loneliness - but, for many parents, it has been heartbreaking to see their children go without time spent with close friends and families, and missing important milestones in their young lives. 32% of those with children under 18 say they have been worried about their children’s mental health.
- **While young people are mostly protected physically, they have suffered extremely badly with their mental health.** In the early days of the pandemic, it was not clear who Covid was really going to affect. It took time to understand that it was a virus that was going to attack the old and the physically vulnerable much more seriously than the young. As such, young people have largely been spared the burden of worrying that they might die from Covid or suffer severe illness. But our research demonstrates that they have suffered dramatically in other ways. In short, our research showed that young people have endured much worse mental health than older people. 50% of 18-24-year-olds say their mental health has been negatively impacted by the pandemic - compared to just 25% of those aged over 65 who say the same. For some young people that has translated into mental ill health, 34% of 18-24-year-olds rate their mental health as very or quite poor, up from 21% who say they would have said the same before the pandemic.

- As the economy has suffered, fears have shot up.** Up until mid-way through 2020, the public almost always named the NHS / health service as their primary national concern. In the early days of Covid, this was particularly true: not surprisingly, the public became obsessed with the state of the NHS. But from the summer of 2020, people began to worry more and more about the state of the economy - and the economy is now usually people's primary concern. People are worried that, post-lockdown, when "furlough morphine" is removed, the economy will tank and jobs will be lost and household finances destroyed. These fears are very widespread, but they are felt particularly by those who are either furloughed or who are unemployed. 40% of those who have been furloughed at some point during the pandemic put it among the most difficult parts of lockdown to cope with, rising to 49% among those who are currently furloughed. 27% of furloughed workers expect it to take longer than a year for their job security to recover, compared to 37% of those who are currently unemployed but seeking work.
- The poorest have suffered most with their mental health.** In the early days of the crisis, it was said that Covid was a "great leveller", in the sense that everyone across the country was affected - or at least potentially affected - in the same way (age and existing health aside). Quite soon into the pandemic, it was clear that it did not affect everyone physically in the same way: some groups were more prone to serious illness and death than others. And in this research it is also clear that the mental health crisis has not affected everyone in the same way either. As we have seen, women have been more adversely affected than men, and young people have been more adversely affected than the old. But wealth - or "class" if you like - also plays a role in mental well-being. We do not mean that less well-off people are somehow less "tough" than the better-off. They simply have fewer resources to fall back. The poorest have struggled far more than the wealthiest because they often have more precarious employment, a more precarious income and fewer savings. However, there are other factors that are likely in play: more cramped housing; less access to outside space; (usually) less access to parks and the sort of nice open spaces which confer higher house prices or rents on a particular area; and so on. A useful illustration of this is how richer and poorer groups have been affected financially. In our poll, by 31% to 23% those in the highest socio-economic groups (the "AB" groups) said their personal financial situation had got better as a result of Covid, if it has changed at all; in the lowest social groups (the DE groups), by 27% to 15% people said their financial situation had got worse.

- **Life for those living alone has been particularly tough.** In recent times, there has been increasing political interest in the problem of loneliness in Britain. Such a preoccupation from politicians is in some ways easy to parody: what can the state really do? Can a government force people to be friends with those that have none? But this research threw up some interesting questions on issues related to loneliness. There are notable gaps in the mental health status of those living with and without partners, in particular on loneliness. While 61% of the sample who live with their partner say they have felt lonely rarely or none of the time, only 38% of those who live without their partner do so.

Public First would like to thank Tim Boughton for reviewing this report

Methodology

Methodology

Public First is a company partner of the Market Research Society and a member of the British Polling Council. We follow their respective codes of conduct strictly.

This was a socially important project; we strongly believe the mental health crisis needs to be understood and taken seriously by policymakers. However, this was inevitably a sensitive project to research; we had to ensure that everyone - in the poll and particularly the focus groups - was fully aware of the aims of the study and how their data and commentary would be used. This was especially important given the findings were being shared with the media. We ensured that everyone was aware that they could withdraw from the research at any point and in the poll we gave people the option to skip sensitive questions. All questions on mental health were accompanied by instructions on how to get help if the participant felt they needed it, with a phone number for reaching the Samaritans included and the line “if you’re struggling, it’s best to speak to someone”. In the focus groups, everyone was asked to opt-in to allowing their comments to be used via a comprehensive waiver form. We checked back with participants several days after they had joined one of our groups.

Public First ran a nationally representative poll of 4012 UK adults. Results were weighted to be representative of national proportions by interlocked age and gender, region and social grade. Fieldwork ran between the 8th and 11th of February 2021.

The poll included a range of questions on lifestyle and mental health, and a variety of demographic questions. The poll also included the 10-item version of the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CESD-10), which is a short measure to determine the prevalence and severity of depression symptoms in a population. This question was presented optionally to participants, who could choose not to answer specific items in the inventory, or to skip the questions in their entirety.

The full polling tables are available: http://www.publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/MWB_Pandemic_Final.pdf

Focus groups were run online through video conferencing software between the 15th and 23rd of February. Across the groups, we ensured

as broad a mix of people as possible; for example, we ensured that the groups had a broad mix of people from different ethnic and social backgrounds. Each of the groups had a particular theme, however, which are detailed below.

- Mothers of primary school children
- Mothers of secondary school children
- Fathers of school-age children
- University students
- Single people between the ages of 20 and 30
- People with children under 30 and parents over 75
- People who have been furloughed or have lost a job due to the pandemic
- Key workers (frontline)
- People who have had a serious case of Covid
- Male teenagers doing A levels
- Female teenagers doing A levels
- People over 70 years old

Note on ethnicity

In this research, we ensured a broad representation of ethnic minority participants both in the poll and focus groups. There is ample evidence to show that people from ethnic minority backgrounds suffered disproportionately - in the form of higher rates of hospitalisation and deaths and economically. There is also a growing research body demonstrating a range of different impacts of the pandemic on mental wellbeing among those from ethnic minority backgrounds. We are reluctant to draw any conclusions on the different impacts of the pandemic on ethnic minority groups from our own research; within the nationally representative sample, 90% of respondents were white, and the 10% who were not were from a hugely diverse range of backgrounds such that meaningful analysis of ethnic background would be impossible. There is an urgent need for more research in this area, with larger samples and (we expect) a specific focus on how the pandemic has damaged minority communities.

Britain's Mental Health Crisis: An Overview

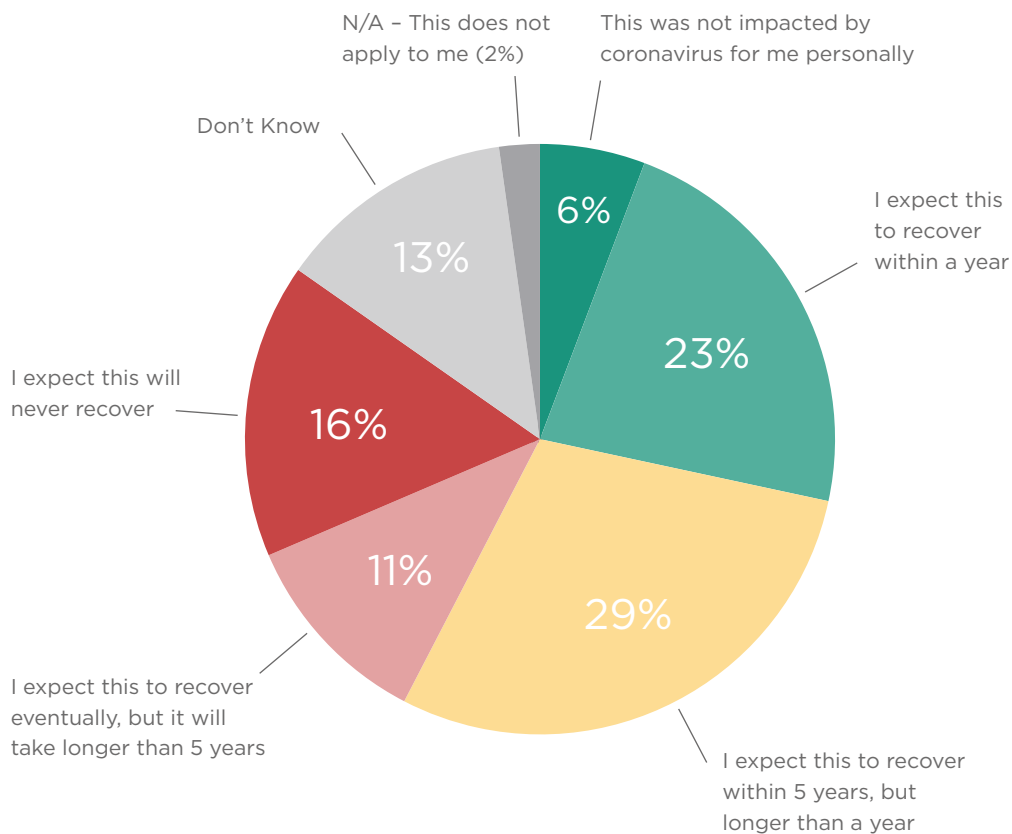
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1. Britain's Mental Health Crisis: An Overview

Public First's opinion research was carried out after almost a year of Covid measures and lockdowns. At the time of our research in early 2021, cases were coming down, and vaccinations were proceeding at a rapid pace: 21% of our polling sample had personally received a vaccine for the virus, and 54% had a close relative who had been vaccinated.

At this point, over 110,000 people in the UK had died with Covid, and 15% of the respondents said someone close to them had died. But it was also clear that people were starting to look to the future, although not always in a positive way. On our standard issues tracker in the poll, concern for the NHS had taken a firm second place to concerns for the economy. 56% expected their local high street or town centre to take over a year to recover from the impact of the pandemic, with 16% even saying they expect it will never recover (Figure 1).

Figure 1: How long do you expect the following to take to recover from the impact of Coronavirus, if they were impacted at all?: Your local high street or town centre



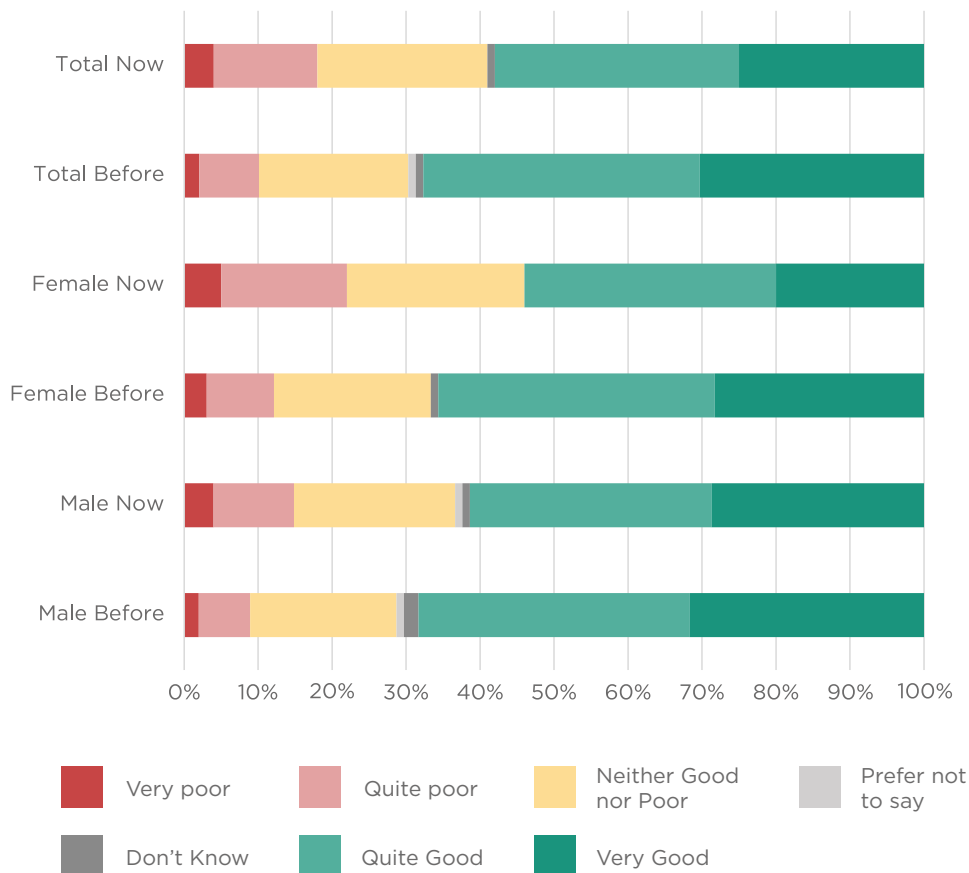
Mental health

In this context, where the country is grieving for mass casualties, and where fears for the economy are beginning to take centre-stage, it would be easy to overlook the damage which has been done to people's mental health. But our research reveals the terrible toll that the virus - and, equally as importantly, the long series of lockdowns - have had on people's mental health.

In short, the British people say they are more stressed, less happy, more tired, listless and less physically healthy than they were a year ago.

In our sample, 18% of respondents regarded their mental health as poor or very poor, and when we asked respondents to guess how they would have rated their mental health prior to the impacts of Covid, this dropped to 11%. 40% of our sample said that their mental health had been negatively impacted by the impacts of lockdown and Covid. This was higher than the proportion who said their physical health had been impacted, which was 32%. 42% now also say they have been worried about their mental health including stress and anxiety in the last year, while only 28% say they worried about their mental health before Covid (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Self Reported Mental Health now versus recollected Mental Health prior to the impacts of the pandemic



The breadth of mental health issues

Through the course of this research, we investigated a wide variety of mental health issues. We also relied on people's self reporting of mental health - which could include, for example, stress, anxiety, or depression.

- We used the CESD-10 to examine the severity and prevalence of symptoms of depression.
- We asked questions about other forms of poor mental health including stress; anxiety and loneliness.
- We also asked about other symptoms of poor mental health including sleep, alcohol consumption, and a social behaviours.
- And we asked about some causes of mental health problems including financial concerns and social activity.

We found wide disparities between groups on all of these measures. For example, younger groups tend to score higher on the CESD-10, those who live with partners are less likely to experience loneliness, and those who have young children tend to be sleeping less. We explore these trends in detail below.

These are abstract measures, and mental health can be affected in a huge variety of ways. Someone who rates their mental health as poor gives us no indication as to whether they are stressed, or depressed, both of the above, or something else entirely. We do not attempt here to provide diagnostic information on the respondents. Instead we are interested in how people have perceived the last year to have impacted their mental health.

Self-reported measures like this are highly subjective. We know, for example, that men are less likely to report poor mental health than women. As we explore in more detail, there were clear demographic trends within this research. Younger people, women, and those in less secure financial positions were all likely to report worse current mental health, and worse impacts on their mental health, over the last year. These should certainly be interpreted partly as trends in self-reporting. However, other research that takes a longitudinal approach has given some evidence that the decline of mental well-being and the prevalence of mental health problems

during the pandemic has been larger among women and young people.^{12 34} This was certainly our experience in this research project.

The knock-on effects of poor mental health are wide-ranging including the impact on sleep. 31% of the sample report that they are sleeping badly as a result of perceived mental health symptoms, 24% are speaking to fewer people, while 17% are taking less interest in their hobbies. Again, we emphasise that these symptoms are not clinically diagnosed, but it is indicative of how people feel their behaviour has been affected over the last year. When we ask how many hours of sleep people are getting on an average night and how much they used to get (to the best of their recollection), we find that 35% are now sleeping fewer hours than they believe they were before Covid. On average the amount that people in the UK are sleeping has decreased by about 21 minutes over the last year. 44% currently rate the quality of their sleep as fairly or very bad.

The pandemic has taken a heavy toll on people's personal relationships. 22% say that their sex life is worse now than it was a year ago. 20% agree with the statement "I worry that I have lost some friendships forever as a result of Covid". 73% put being able to see family and friends again among the things they are most looking forward to when the pandemic ends, with 53% listing "not seeing family" and 48% "not seeing friends" among the most difficult parts of lockdown to cope with (Figure 3).

Other research has identified a trend in increased loneliness since the start of the pandemic, particularly among women and young people, with having a job or living with a partner going some way to protecting against this.⁵

1 Etheridge, B., & Spantig, L. (2020). The gender gap in mental well-being during the Covid-19 outbreak: Evidence from the UK (No. 2020-08). ISER Working Paper Series.

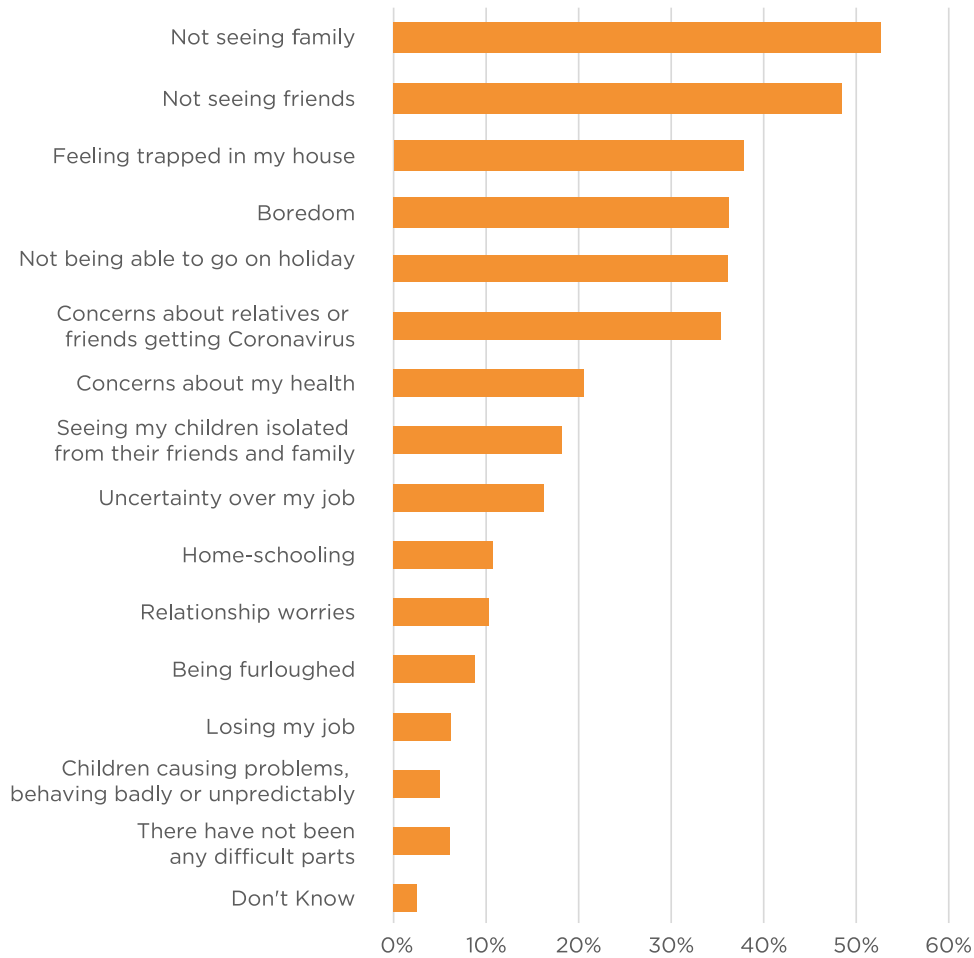
2 Daly, M., Sutin, A. R., & Robinson, E. (2020). Longitudinal changes in mental health and the Covid-19 pandemic: Evidence from the UK Household Longitudinal Study. *Psychological medicine*, 1-10.

3 Pierce, M., Hope, H., Ford, T., Hatch, S., Hotopf, M., John, A., et al. (2020). Mental health before and during the Covid-19 pandemic: a longitudinal probability sample survey of the UK population. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 7(10), 883-892.

4 O'Connor, R. C., Wetherall, K., Cleare, S., McClelland, H., Melson, A. J., Niedzwiedz, C. L., et al. (2020). Mental health and well-being during the Covid-19 pandemic: longitudinal analyses of adults in the UK Covid-19 Mental Health & Wellbeing study. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 1-8.

5 Li, L. Z., & Wang, S. (2020). Prevalence and predictors of general psychiatric disorders and loneliness during Covid-19 in the United Kingdom. *Psychiatry research*, 291, 113267.

Figure 3: The most difficult parts of lockdown

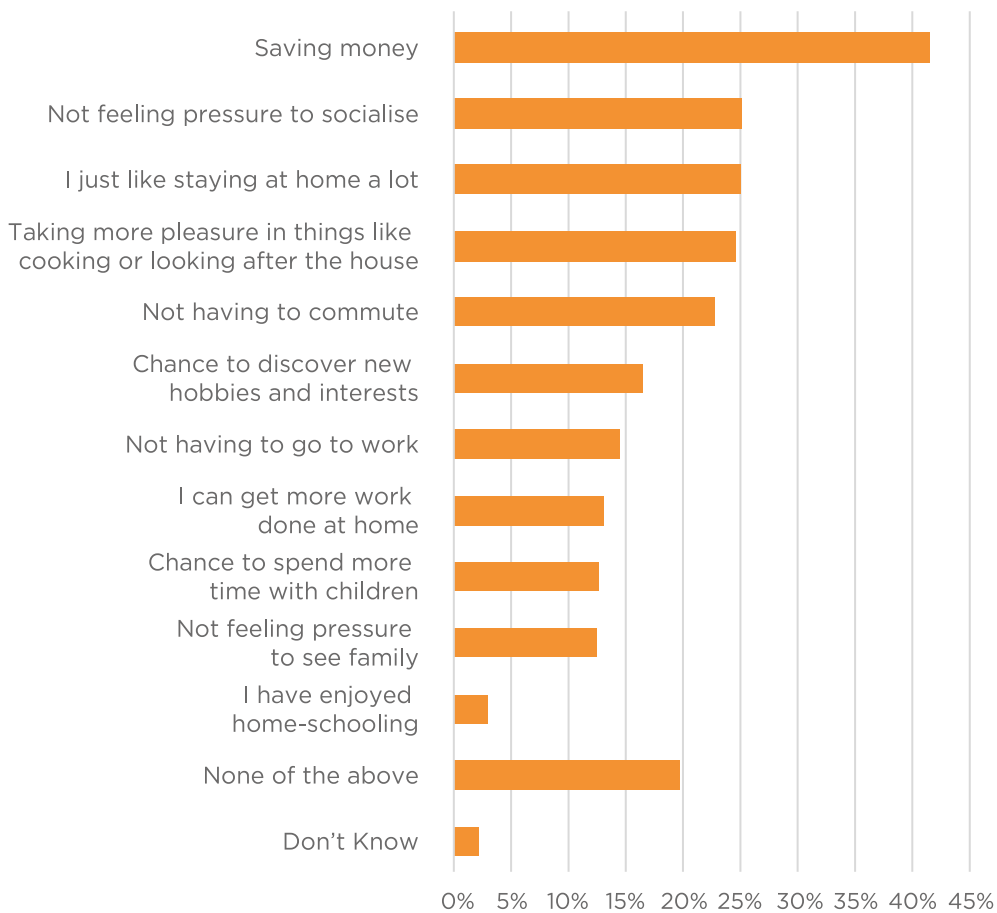


It is easy to be casual about these issues; when hospitals have been full to bursting point and when huge numbers of people have gone untreated for serious illnesses, worrying about things like a lack of sleep can seem unimportant. But issues like loneliness, isolation and long-term tiredness can be extremely debilitating for people. They are serious in themselves - and can have serious long-term effects. Again, while it is right the Government has worried primarily on keeping physical casualties as low as possible, it is also right that the Government now takes stock of the mental health of the nation.

As we explore later in this document, these effects on mental health come hand-in-hand with a mixed impact on personal finances and economic stability. While few say they have liked lockdown on balance (16% of the sample), when we provide a list of things which people may have liked about the lockdown experience, we find 41% select “saving money” as something they have liked about it (Figure 4), with 35% of respondents saying that the amount they have saved has increased. However, this

varies by income, with 34% of those with incomes below £20,000 a year mentioning it compared to 54% of those with household incomes over £50,000. As such, despite there being a relatively large group who feel they have been able to save during the pandemic, 25% of respondents say their personal financial situation has got worse as a result of Covid, and 23% say that they expect their personal financial situation will take longer than a year to recover from the impact of Covid.

Figure 4: Aspects of lockdown which people have liked, if any



The severity and longevity of these impacts will become clearer over the next few years, but while the majority holds out hope, a substantial portion of the UK is anything but hopeful for the future. 19% of the respondents agree that they have lost all hope for the future as a result of Covid, and 18% expect their personal mental health to take more than a year to recover.

The Gender Mental Health Gap

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2. The Gender Mental Health Gap

“You get up in the morning and there’s that nanosecond where you forget and then you remember and you go ‘Oh God! Another day of this!’” Mother of one son (14) and one daughter (15), 50s, London.

“I cry at least once a week. I feel like I soak everyone’s emotions like a sponge. So if someone’s unhappy or raging, I just soak it in.” Mother of three (twins aged 9, son aged 12), 40s, London.

Looking at the data and talking to people across Britain, it is clear that one of the biggest divides during the Covid emergency has been between men and women. Gender divides are common in opinion research, and in particular when we talk about mental health, men are less likely to discuss the difficulties they are suffering. In line with this we find women more likely to rate their mental health lower on a range of measures..

- 42% of women say they have been more worried about their own mental health because of Covid, compared to 32% of men.
- 49% of women say they have been worried about their mental health in the last year, compared to 34% of men.
- 48% of women say they have worried more about friends’ and family’s health as a result of Covid, compared to 41% of men.

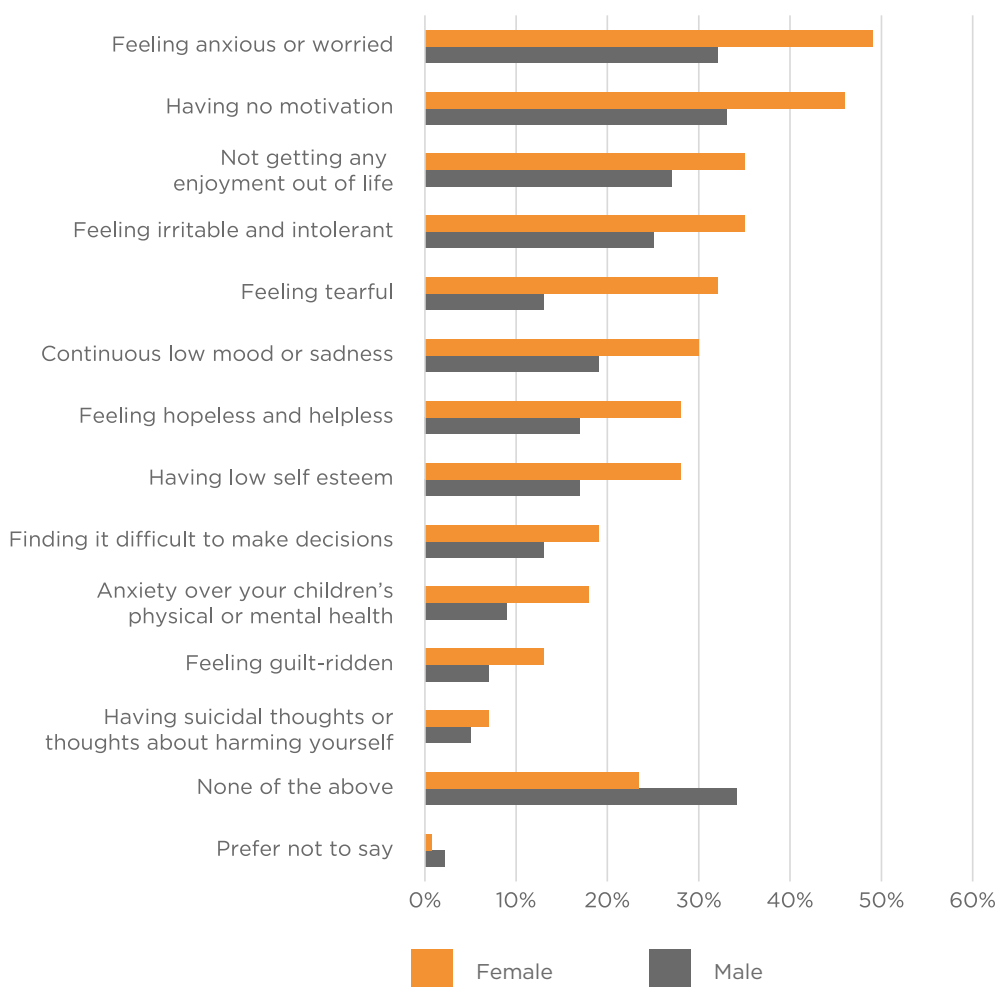
Whether these differences are of self-report would likely require longitudinal data to understand, but early research (largely focused on the first lockdown) has indicated that the decline in mental wellbeing was twice as large for women as it was for men, probably as a result of both the gender differences in caring responsibilities, and social factors, with women more likely to report more close friends before the pandemic and increased loneliness after it.⁶ As we explore later, women’s role as carers and their role in the household has been reinforced by the pandemic. The amount of emotional labour demanded of women by the pandemic has been huge.

We found in this research women are more likely to name very specific challenges to their mental health than men - not just to complain of, as it were, a general malaise. So, for example: women are more likely to say they had experienced a wide range of negative feelings since March 2020, compared to men: feeling anxious (49% compared to 32% of men); feeling

⁶ Etheridge, B., & Spantig, L. (2020). The gender gap in mental well-being during the Covid-19 outbreak: Evidence from the UK (No. 2020-08). ISER Working Paper Series.

tearful (32% to 13%); feeling anxious about their children (18% to 9%); having no motivation (46% to 33%) (Figure 5). Our research therefore corroborates other longitudinal research examining the impacts of the first lockdown on mental health, which has found increased anxiety and lower wellbeing among women,⁷ increased levels of depressive symptoms and entrapment,⁸ as well as increased levels of stress.⁹ Much of this longitudinal research was conducted after the first lockdown, and our results provide an early indication that the pattern may be similar for the latest lockdown.

Figure 5: Since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic in March last year, would you say you have experienced any of the following things more than you did before? Please select ALL which apply



7 Kwong, A. S., Pearson, R. M., Adams, M. J., Northstone, K., Tilling, K., Smith, D., et al. (2020). Mental health during the Covid-19 pandemic in two longitudinal UK population cohorts. *medRxiv*.

8 O'Connor, R. C., Wetherall, K., Cleare, S., McClelland, H., Melson, A. J., Niedzwiedz, C. L. et al. (2020). Mental health and well-being during the Covid-19 pandemic: longitudinal analyses of adults in the UK Covid-19 Mental Health & Wellbeing study. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 1-8.

9 Jia, R., Ayling, K., Chalder, T., Massey, A., Broadbent, E., Coupland, C., & Vedhara, K. (2020). Mental health in the UK during the Covid-19 pandemic: cross-sectional analyses from a community cohort study. *BMJ open*, 10(9), e040620.

Looking in detail at the data, we ran a regression analysis, making use of a range of demographic data (age, gender, income, parental status, ethnicity, tenure) on the results from the CESD-10. We explored how these factors impacted scores on the CESD-10, which is a brief but robust indicator of symptoms of depression. We note that the CESD-10 is not a diagnostic tool; this is unlikely to be directly associated with the rates of diagnosed clinical depression, but will provide a good indication of the severity of depressive symptoms.

We found that, controlling for other key demographics such as age and income, women are significantly more likely to score higher on the CESD-10 scale, indicating a greater self-reported experience of depressive symptoms (Regression 1). If we also control for recollected mental health rating on 1-5 prior to Covid, we still find a significant impact of gender on CESD-10 score (Regression 2). While 22% of women now regard their mental health as poor, 12% say they would have done so prior to Covid (only slightly more than men at 9%). This could show that women are looking back on their pre-Covid mental health in a more positive light now, particularly given 46% say their mental health has been negatively impacted, compared to 34% of men.

The self-reported decline in mental health was strongly reflected in our conversations with women, particularly those with school-aged children at home and those who had lost their jobs or been furloughed. The relentlessness of the chores (which mostly fell to women), the lack of a sense of purpose, the monotony and not getting out as well as not having anything for themselves, like the jobs they used to have, was having the greatest impact on them.

“It’s like you’re on a wheel and you can’t get off.” Mother of two girls (9 and 12), 40s, London.

“It’s just relentless. I lost the plot last week and just shouted at everybody. I just said ‘Covid Cafe is shut! If anybody wants lunch they can make their own!’ All I was saying everyday was: What do you want for breakfast? What do you want for lunch? Who needs a sandwich? Do you want a toastie or a panini?” Mother of one son (14) and one daughter (15), 50s, London.

“I get to the end of the day and I just want to cry every night.” Mother of three (twins aged 9, son aged 12), 40s, London.

“I was literally just starting to get over my marriage breakdown and then this all hit. Some days I’d like to come home and have my own meltdown but I’m a single mum and I can’t because I’ve got to be there for my kids.” Single mum living alone with teenage children, 40s, West Midlands.

“You just feel every day is the same. You just go to work, go to sleep, wake up. And it’s the same again the next day.” Part-time teacher, two children (9 and 11), 40s, Manchester.

“I’m a single parent so it’s been hard. My son has been home all the time and it’s made me realise that I do need time to myself... I need routine and there’s been no routine.” Mother of 7 year-old, 40s, furloughed, Manchester.

When we asked mothers what the triggers were that led them to feel stressed or anxious, people mentioned being in the house too much (but lacking the motivation to go out) but also the effect that the news was having on them. Many people reported ‘fleeing’ the news, trying to get away from it, with consequences if they failed:

“It’s when I do get sucked into the news or read some fact about how we’re all going to die - that will set me off into a spiral until I get myself back on track. You get sucked down a rabbit hole so it’s switching off social media, not looking at the news.” Mother of a 5 year-old, 30s, Manchester

Asked about what they had worried about in the last week, women were more likely than men to name: weight (46% to 25%); financial problems (34% to 24%); health (32% to 27%). This was reflected in the qualitative groups with mothers of school-aged children and in particular those who had lost their jobs and had, in some cases, been self-employed and were therefore not eligible for furlough. Their financial concerns were great and growing but people were still trying to convince themselves and each other that everything will work out.

“I lost my job but then when my husband lost his, it was panic, like rabbits in the headlights feeling. We’re just trying to reassure each other that it’ll all be ok.” Mother of one son (14) and one daughter (15), 50s, London.

Where too much alcohol was more of a problem in the first lockdown, the mothers we spoke to reported serious weight gain and a lack of exercise leading to potential health problems.

“Anyone who says they haven’t put on weight they’re just lying.” Mother of one son (16) and one daughter (11), 40s, London.

“In the first lockdown we were all healthy doing Joe Wicks and circuits in the garden and no-one drank so much. By the summer we were all drunk. By Christmas I’ve piled the weight on.” Mother of two girls (9 and 12), 40s, London.

When it came to sleeping, 49% of women rate their sleep as bad, compared to 38% of men. If we look at women's estimates both of how many hours a night they sleep now, and how many they would sleep before Covid, we find the estimates to have dropped by an average of 27 minutes, compared to 15 minutes among men. When we control for other factors which impact sleep, we find that if you take two people who are demographically identical besides gender identity, and report sleeping the same amount before Covid, we can still expect the woman to report getting about 12 minutes less sleep now (Regression 5). This replicates other research which has identified greater self-reported sleep loss among women since the pandemic.¹⁰

This is further emphasised when we look at those who have children under 18 living with them; this group, controlling for other demographics and pre-pandemic sleep estimates, tended to report sleeping around 15 minutes less now (Regression 5). Mothers in particular in our sample tend to report sleep reductions of an average 40 minutes, compared to 20 minutes among fathers, 22 minutes among women without young children, and 13 minutes among men without young children. This was particularly evident in the groups of mothers of school-aged children who reported sleeping badly but also staying up much later than usual - often to get some time to themselves.

“It takes me two hours to get everyone to bed and by 10pm my husband has already fallen asleep so that’s my me-time. I sit on the sofa, watch Netflix and eat. I’ve piled the weight on but it’s my way of coping.” Mother of three (twins aged 9, son aged 12), 40s, London.

“I struggle to sleep through. I wake up at 3 o’clock in the morning and sleep would just disappear from my eyes. Then I’m cranky and tired all day and stressed out.” Mother of 6 year old, working from home, 30s, Manchester.

“I’m finding I can’t really focus or concentrate very well. I’m looking at Netflix, at the news, going down rabbit holes, reading things I don’t want to be reading often until one or two in the morning.” Mother of one son (14) and one daughter (15), 50s, London.

“My sleeping is all over the place. Because I don’t have to get up I’m relaxed about going to sleep later and that can have a knock-on effect the next day.” Single mother of 7 year old, 40s, furloughed, Manchester.

¹⁰ Falkingham, J., Evandrou, M., Qin, M., & Vlachantoni, A. (2020). ‘Sleepless in Lockdown’: Unpacking Differences in Sleep Loss During the Coronavirus Pandemic in the UK.

Women are more likely to say they have been bothered by things that wouldn't normally bother them. 30% of women experienced this a moderate amount of the time or all of the time, compared to 19% of men. Women are also more likely to say they have been feeling depressed (29% to 22%); and more likely to say they have been feeling fearful (25% to 16%); or feeling lonely (30% to 22%).

Feelings of sadness and loneliness were particularly prevalent among mothers of school-aged children with many saying that they cried regularly.

“I feel depressed a lot - not clinically depressed but low level, constantly a bit depressed, a bit low, a bit flat.” Mother of one son (14) and one daughter (15), 50s, London.

When they said that they were depressed (at a non-clinical level), they were quick to caveat it saying that they knew that they were luckier than most and saying that they felt guilty about complaining when others had to deal with far worse.

“But I can't moan about it because in comparison with everyone else's problems it's nothing.” Mother of daughter doing university from home (19), two boys (9 and 13), 40s, London.

“We've been really really struggling but after hearing all the other stories, I feel so blessed.” Mother of three (twins aged 9, son aged 12), 40s, London.

While women are still finding it easier than men to talk about their mental wellbeing, our research gives some indication that stigma around talking about mental health may be receding. Just as in ordinary, pre-Covid times, women have been more likely to seek help than men. 41% of women say they have taken active steps to protect their mental health in the last year, compared to 31% of men. This is a well-studied phenomenon, which is not unique to the pandemic.¹¹ However, there have been promising investigations into methods for reaching men on the topic of mental health,^{12 13} When we ask whether people believe it has become easier or harder to talk about mental health since the onset of the pandemic, we

11 Galdas, P. M., Cheater, F., & Marshall, P. (2005). Men and health help-seeking behaviour: literature review. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 49(6), 616-623.

12 Robertson, S., Gough, B., Hanna, E., Raine, G., Robinson, M., Seims, A., & White, A. (2018). Successful mental health promotion with men: the evidence from 'tacit knowledge'. *Health Promotion International*, 33(2), 334-344.

13 Lynch, L., Long, M., & Moorhead, A. (2018). Young men, help-seeking, and mental health services: exploring barriers and solutions. *American journal of men's health*, 12(1), 138-149.

find men are more likely to say it has stayed the same (44% compared to 36% of women), while women are more likely to feel it has got easier (45% to 38% of men). While lower than the proportion of women, 38% of men saying getting easier may well provide some indication of the impact of the pandemic in terms of breaking down the stigma around mental health. There remains an urgent need for improving methods of reaching men on the subject of mental health.

Put simply, women have generally carried a much greater burden in the home than men have. The data is clear that women are doing the lion's share of the housework and other chores, and they are doing most of the childcare. Crucially, they are also carrying the burden of homeschooling. Women are finding this particularly tough, because in many cases they are also having to combine it with work.

Looking at women's work patterns during the pandemic first:

- In our sample, many women were working in some form. 49% of women in the sample are currently working full or part time, compared to 59% of men.
- Women were slightly more likely to be in a critical worker category with 39% of women currently in full or part-time work in critical worker categories compared to 30% of working men.
- Women were more likely to say they worked in a frontline healthcare role: 27% of those identifying themselves as critical workers, compared to 14% of men.
- Women were more likely to say they worked in an education or childcare role (27% of female critical workers, 12% of male critical workers).

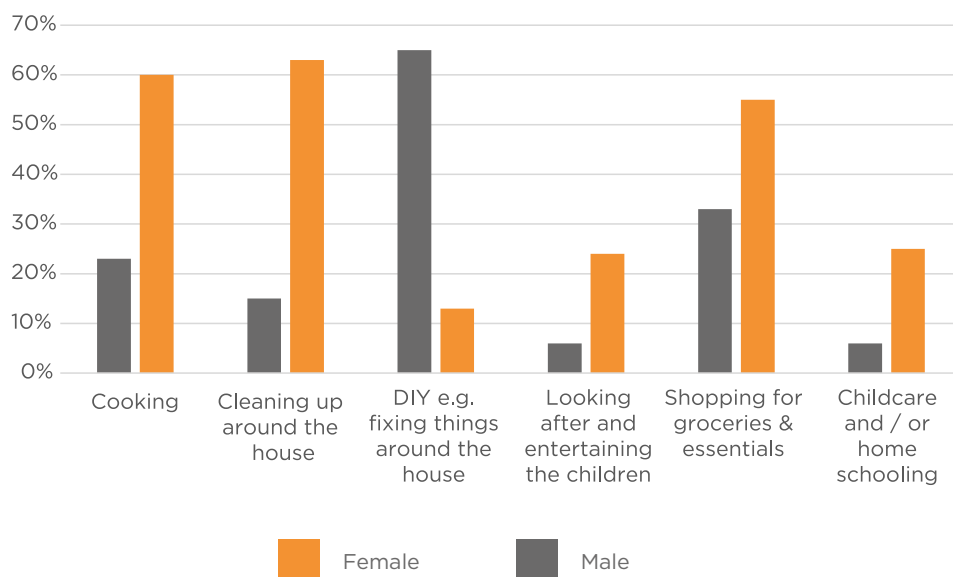
In spite of this, women are shouldering the lion's share of the domestic burden (Figure 6):

- 60% of women say that they do the cooking more than their partner, and among men with female partners 41% say their partner does the cooking more, while only 22% say they do it more.
- 63% of women say they clean up around the house more than their partner, and among men with female partners 47% say they split the cleaning equally between them, 37% says their partner does more, 14% say they do more.
- 55% of women say they shop for groceries more than their partner, compared to just 33% of men with female partners, who are more likely to say they split this equally (46%).
- On homeschooling, 65% of women do homeschooling and

childcare more than their partners, while 54% of men with female partners say they split it equally, and 33% say their partner does it more. This balance remains even when we look only at men and women who are working full time. Here 54% of women say they do homeschooling more, 39% say they split it equally, and only 7% say their partners do it more, compared to 13% of men who say they homeschool more. 52% of men say they split it equally and 32% say they do it more.

- There were also clear differences in how men and women had found homeschooling. Men were more likely to find it:
 - » Interesting (36% of men, 24% of women).
 - » Rewarding (25% of men, 19% of women).
 - » Enjoyable (27% of men, 18% of women).
 - » Distracting from their job (21% of men, 16% of women), although this is because men are more likely to be working.
- Women were more likely to find it:
 - » Stressful (62% of women, 41% of men).
 - » Hard (46% of women, 31% of men).
- Women are also more likely to spend longer homeschooling - 35% of women spend 4 hours or more on homeschooling each day, compared to 29% of men, but more revealingly, while only 20% of men say their partner spends an hour or less on homeschooling each day, 43% of women say so, or 47% of women with male partners.

Figure 6: Proportion of Male/Female respondents who do the following more than their partner.



This was certainly borne out in our focus groups where mothers of primary and secondary-school aged children reported a return to a more traditional split in the gender roles. Even where both men and women had been furloughed or lost their jobs, it fell to the women to ensure the homeschooling happened and that all the domestic chores were done while the husbands retreated to their studies for up to 13 hours a day either working or trying to drum up work.

“I know they’re busier than me and my husband is drumming up business and the kids are homeschooling so I understand why it’s fallen to me but I still fecking resent it.” Mother of one son (14) and one daughter (15), 50s, London.

One of the group, a nurse, told the story of her friend, an intensive care consultant whose university-aged children were all at home. While she was at work, at the height of the pandemic, her children texted her asking what was for their lunch. This story was told about an hour into the focus group and almost all the other women taking part in the group reported their children all having texted asking where they were and when they were finishing.

“I can’t bear being this available to everyone.” Mother of one son (14) and one daughter (15), 50s, London.

“It’s not normal to be hovering around in case someone needs you.” Mother of two girls (9 and 12), 40s, London.

The nurse herself had changed from working occasionally “to working more than full time to support my colleagues” reported coming home and having to do all the cooking and housework but felt guilty about complaining as her husband was trying to keep his business up and running.

As we discussed above, our qualitative research highlights how women (of course not exclusively, but the trend across the research is undeniable) are worrying about their children’s mental health, their physical wellbeing and homeschooling while men are, from evidence in our qualitative research, restricting their childcare obligations to playing with the children. This was highlighted in the responses that mothers gave to the question “are fathers pulling their weight?”

“Not at our end but that’s because it’s not a strength of his. He’s more practical, more ‘let’s go in the garden - let’s do something together’ whereas I’m on the learning side.” Mum of 5 year-old, 30s, working full time from home, Manchester.

“When the first lockdown happened my husband had to change

jobs. For him it was getting to know his new colleagues so it was impossible for him to do any homeschooling so it all fell on me. But I have total sympathy for him." Mum of 6 year old, working full-time from home, 30s, Manchester.

"Women seem to have taken on the teaching role. It's just fallen naturally to them. It's just how it is." Part-time teacher, mother of two children (9 and 11), 40s, Manchester.

Without a doubt this was causing stresses and tensions in relationships - particularly as lockdowns continued into an uncertain future. There was a marked difference between the first lockdown and the last, both because the novelty of not working had now morphed into severe financial concerns, but also because of the change in weather. One of the mothers had an autistic child who was more violent in the second lockdown because he was unable to burn off his excess energy. Other parents with children with an ASD diagnosis reported them 'cocooning' in their rooms - switching off from the outside world entirely. The strain on relationships, being in the same house with one's family, was palpable:

"In the first lockdown with my husband we felt really close but in this one he's really getting on my nerves. He's just always there!" Mother of three, 40s, London.

"I'm having to make an effort to be nice. I'm quite resentful of everybody having stuff to do. He has this amazing job. He's loving his job. He's busy. He's got his spark and I kind of hate him for that. I haven't got that. It's not his fault but I haven't got that." Mother of two girls (9 and 12), 40s, London.

"You're trying to keep everyone happy and entertained but inside you're just ticking off the days until they go back to school." Mother of two girls (9 and 12), 40s, London.

"I had to take my husband to get his car serviced today and driving to the garage it felt like we were on a date because we were on our own in the car!" Mother of one son (16) and one daughter (11), 40s, London.

Most mothers were optimistic that 'unhealthy' behaviour and strained relations would all go back to normal once lockdown ended - that a lot of it was just getting through. Although this was not true of everyone. For some people the conditioned fear of the virus was going to be a huge hurdle to overcome before life could go back to normal.

"To be honest, I'm just looking forward to hugging someone who hasn't got my surname." Mother of one son (16) and one daughter (11), 40s, London.

“I want to be out of the house by 8 again going to work, not sitting in the kitchen clearing up and eating bits of toast that people haven’t eaten.” Mother of one son (16) and one daughter (11), 40s, London.

“Just the thought of lots of people in a room makes me nervous. I think we’ll need deprogramming.” Mother of two girls (9 and 12), 40s, London.

“I look back at how things were before, concerts and stuff, and I can’t ever imagine life getting back to that. And I worry about how everything’s going to change and the restrictions that may stay in place for years.” Mother of 5 year-old, 30s, Manchester.

“That’s my main worry as well: if we’re ever going to get back to what we class as normal. Are the masks going to be a thing we always have now? I don’t tend to worry about my son or myself, but about our world and what it’s going to be like.” Single mother, one 7 year-old son, furloughed, 40s, Manchester.

As we found with some of the other groups, with the days lacking definition and grinding into one another, people had adopted a trance-like state that allowed them to float through until like went back to normal, or at least until lockdown was lifted. In one very telling comment about what the future might look like, one mother said:

“You’re more likely to forget you’ve made plans. You’re so used to not having anything happening that you forget you’ve got something on.” Mother of two children (9 and 11), 40s, Manchester.

We have concentrated here on the mental health impact on mothers of school-aged children, but it would be a mistake to say that it has had no impact on fathers. Some sub-groups had found it especially hard, for example those fathers whose children do not live with them full time.

What was especially striking, though is that fathers were reluctant to talk about their own struggles first. When talking about the damage that Covid has done to mental health, or just in terms of the sheer grimness of lockdown and what worried them about it, almost universally fathers talked about others first - whether that be about their children, an ageing parent or their partners.

The Lost Year: Parents' Great Fear For Their Children

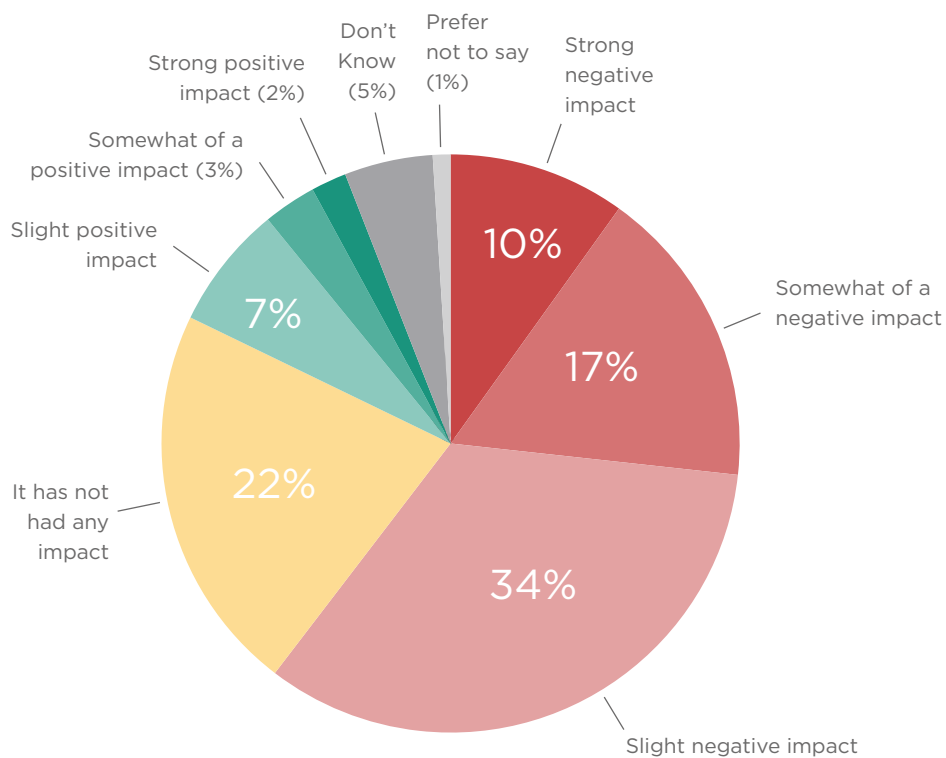
3. The Lost Year: Parents' Great Fear For Their Children

Another clear theme to come through from the research - which we touch on above - is the great stress parents feel on behalf of their children. Parents worry about how their children have coped - and the long-term effects this will have - with what amounts to a “lost year”.

In summary:

- 32% of those with children under 18 say they have been worried about their children’s mental health, and 61% say that lockdown has had a negative impact on their children’s mental health (Figure 7).
- The most damaging thing to children’s mental health during Covid according to their parents is “not seeing friends” with 60% of parents selecting this; this rises to 68% among mothers compared to 52% among fathers.
- While parents generally anticipate the pandemic will not affect their children’s attitude to education and their future (40%), a quarter (25%) still expect it to change it for the worse while only 16% expect it to change for the better.

Figure 7: From what you can tell, do you think Coronavirus and lockdown has had a negative or positive impact on your children’s (aged 18 and under) mental health?



The concern for children's mental health, the impact of not seeing their friends and socialising, the lack of routine and the heartbreak of seeing children miss important milestones was what was causing the greatest concern for parents - for mothers in particular. Not knowing, and not being able to influence the longer-term impact was frustrating and a real cause of worry. In this chapter, we again dwell on the mothers' perspective. This is not to diminish the worry of fathers - and we cover fathers' concerns below - but it reflects both the differences in how mothers and fathers talked about their children, and also the straight reality of women doing more of the childcare and homeschooling (as we saw above).

“In the first lockdown my little girl was asking me every day, why am I not going to school? And then these constant outbursts of emotion. A child that age [6], you don't know what's going on in their minds or how they are feeling.” Mum of 6 year-old, working full-time from home, 30s, Manchester.

“Getting him [her son] to sit down and focus on work has been the most difficult. It's been much harder than I expected. It's been him not seeing his friends and not getting that support from them.” Single mum, 40s, one son (7), Manchester

“I'm not so worried about the home learning. It's the social skills and confidence that I'm worried about.” Mum of 5 year-old, 30s, working full time from home, Manchester.

“Keeping their [the children's] mental health I've found the hardest. My eldest was all right to start with and then she plummeted... Now my youngest who was really good, she's gone right down hill; like her spark has gone, like she's switched off.” Mother of two girls (9 and 12), 40s, London.

“It's balancing their mental health and it breaks my heart every day watching them not being able to socialise. That kills me more than the academic side.” Mother of one son (16) and one daughter (11), 40s, London.

“I've made an effort to get up every day for my kids because I don't want them worrying about me. I've definitely got lazier. I've set myself a ten o'clock target to be up by.” Mother of two late teenage children, 40s, Leeds.

Our poll indicated that fathers are generally slightly less worried about their children's mental health, although still worried. 55% of fathers say that lockdown has had a negative impact on their children's mental health, compared to 66% of mothers. For 66% of mothers, seeing their children return to a normal life is among the top things they are looking forward to

at the end of lockdown, compared to 52% of fathers.

In part we expect that this reflects the increased stigma which is felt by men about reporting mental ill-health. In the focus groups, all of the fathers we spoke to were deeply concerned about their children, and put that above their partners, or indeed other family members. They were worried about them losing out on schoolwork or falling behind, or just the general sense that they were losing out on key experiences. But acute mental health issues among children were at or close to the surface

“My number one concern is the children. It’s that every time.” Father of one (daughter in late teens), 60s, South Coast.

“I agree with what a couple of the other guys have said. It’s the worry about children. My two eldest have flown the nest but they’re still your children. They’re both at uni, they’re not getting that experience. My younger ones - the 16-year-old and the 10-year-old - they’re not getting the social interaction. That’s what’s gone.” Father of four, 40s, South Coast.

Most of the fathers were also convinced that they were making a fair contribution at home, both in terms of home schooling and everything else associated with running a home. Although most were willing to concede that the old distribution of domestic labour had persisted in some ways.

“So much has changed since last March and people are finding the new norm and the new routine and I hope everyone has tried to do what they can. I think it also depends on the job roles within the family to start off with whether one person has been furloughed or made redundant, whether the man was always the breadwinner which is still the case in some families.” Father of four, 40s, South Coast.

Meanwhile other men have enjoyed the opportunity to spend more time with their children. But they were also convinced that men were finding it easier to talk about mental health than they had in the past - and society and their local communities had become more aware of the deep problems that some people faced.

“Because we live near the coast, there have been quite a few incidents of cars going over the cliff. Before all this lockdown started, you never used to hear about it or see [that happening]. People are becoming more aware, or hopefully they are, of mental health and some people just can’t cope.” Father of two, 30s, Isle of Wight.

There is a vicious cycle of parental worry. Having children during the pandemic has of course on the surface level given parents both purpose and, to use a trite phrase, “company”. But seeing their children “locked up”

away from friends and family has been very traumatic.

It is clear from this research too that parents - and particularly mothers, who have done the lion's share of it - have found homeschooling extremely difficult, as we saw above. Homeschooling would be hard at the best of times, but at a time when parents are also working, often looking after elderly relatives, and generally worrying about life in the pandemic, it has been very stressful. As such caring for children in some cases became an inescapable source of stress.

This stress and anxiety constantly bubbled to the surface in our focus groups with mothers, but what was perhaps more surprising was the cycle of guilt which they reported. This was shared by almost every mother we spoke to - including a nurse who felt that she was letting down her daughter who was at school but not getting much of an education. If she were at home rather than nursing, she would be able to help her with her school work, she said.

For the rest of the group it was guilt about not homeschooling well enough, or being bad tempered - or just not being as good as other mothers.

“I snap at the kids and then I feel guilty about snapping at them and then I feel self-indulgent for crying about it.” Mother of one son (16) and one daughter (11), 40s, London.

“I just want to get out of the house to go to the Co-op to buy things and then I feel guilty for leaving the house because I shouldn't go unless it's something we really need.” Mother of one son (16) and one daughter (11), 40s, London.

“And then you see these people and they'll tell you how their child has learned an instrument and I'm just getting through the day.” Mother of two girls (9 and 12), 40s, London.

“I felt like such a terrible mum when they were all talking about all their cooking and sourdough.” Mother of three (19, 13 and 9) 40s, London.

One woman said that she wasn't too worried about her son being on his Xbox for over seven hours a day because he's talking to his friends which means that other mums are also letting their kids be on Xbox for seven hours a day.

How much mothers were missing seeing their families was a recurring theme in our focus groups. In the two groups with mothers (more so in the group of primary school aged children than secondary school aged children), not seeing family was having an impact on the mothers

themselves but was also a concern about how this was affecting their children. This far outstripped anything that mothers were missing and it was this that was putting a huge strain on them - the feeling of isolation and not having help when it was needed.

“Not being able to see my family, that’s putting stress on.” Single mum of 6-year old, 20s, Manchester.

“Not getting out and homeschooling that’s been difficult but the biggest impact by far is not seeing my family.” Mum of 5 year-old, 30s, Manchester.

“It’s been not seeing my family. I’ve not seen my parents for a year and they only live down the road.” Mum of 6 year-old, 30s, Manchester.

While financial strains and the overwhelming sense of uncertainty was having a seriously detrimental impact on how people feel and how anxious they are, there was a strong sense that all this could be coped with better if people could be with their families to support each other.

This partly explained why the women in the focus groups we conducted said how much just talking to each other, being part of a group of women who were all in the same boat, really helped.

Young People: Online But Disconnected

4. Young People: Online But Disconnected

According to young people themselves, **their mental health has been particularly badly affected by Covid**. 50% of 18-24-year-olds say their mental health has been negatively impacted by the pandemic – compared to just 25% of those aged over 65 who say the same. For some young people that has translated into mental ill health; 34% of 18-24-year-olds rate their mental health as very or quite poor, up from 21% who say they would have said the same before the pandemic. As with the findings on gender, longitudinal data would be needed to test whether self-reported mental wellbeing had been impacted more heavily among younger people. Preliminary research does indicate that this is the case, with one report indicating an 8.6% increase in mental health difficulties among 18-34s than 50-64 years olds,¹⁴ and the youngest cohort often displaying much more dramatic changes than the rest of the population.¹⁵

These poll findings were borne out in our focus groups with young men and women (16-18-year olds) who told us that among their peer groups, nearly everyone had, to one degree or another, experienced some kind of mental ill-health over the past year. For some, it was a feeling of loneliness or heightened insecurities, whereas for others the pandemic had led to serious depression.

“I think everyone’s had some kind of mental issue whether it’s tiny or someone’s got depression.” Young man, 17, Birmingham.

“I used to be able to cope... and now in this lockdown it has been the smallest thing and I’ll be in tears...everything that happens seems to have like 10 times more of an effect, but if it was normal times, it’d be irrelevant to me.” Young woman, 17, Yorkshire and the Humber.

“You just have too much time in your own head... you overthink everything.” Young woman, 17, London.

¹⁴ Daly, M., Sutin, A. R., & Robinson, E. (2020). Longitudinal changes in mental health and the Covid-19 pandemic: Evidence from the UK Household Longitudinal Study. *Psychological medicine*, 1-10.

¹⁵ Banks, J., & Xu, X. (2020). The mental health effects of the first two months of lockdown and social distancing during the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK (No. W20/16). IFS Working Papers.

The toll the pandemic has taken on the mental health of young people may last well beyond lockdown, with 32% of 18-24-year-olds expecting their mental health to take longer than a year to recover and both the young men and women in the focus groups telling us they were pessimistic about the future.

Sources of anxiety

A few clear themes emerged when the young people in our focus groups told us what they had found most difficult over the past year:

1. **Social disconnection and drift.** Young people have found schools and colleges being closed and being away from their friends to be a lonely and isolating experience. Among 18-24-year-old students, 58% list “not seeing friends” among the hardest parts of coronavirus (compared to 48% of all adults). This has been compounded by the lack of structure to their lockdown days, they have felt demotivated by the lack of a proper routine. Other research has clearly identified that risk of loneliness was higher for younger adults, who were already at greater risk pre-pandemic, and indeed that being a student has become a higher risk factor than usual.¹⁶
2. **Family members catching Covid.** A number of the young people had experienced close family members getting sick and, in some cases, even dying from Covid-19. They worried about their family’s health, and especially the possibility that they themselves might infect their vulnerable family members, such as grandparents.
3. **Missing out on formative experiences.** There was a real sense that as a result of lockdown they were missing out on the important experiences that mark the transition to adulthood, such as celebrating their 18th birthdays, celebrating completing exams, and school leaving parties and farewells.
4. **Stress and uncertainty around school.** Young women in particular said that one of the most difficult parts of lockdown was keeping on top of schoolwork. Both young men and women found it difficult to motivate themselves with online learning, and the workload felt overwhelming. Both groups also talked about how they were particularly stressed by the uncertainty around exams, how their grades would be determined, and what impact that could have on their futures.

¹⁶ Bu, F., Steptoe, A., & Fancourt, D. (2020). Who is lonely in lockdown? Cross-cohort analyses of predictors of loneliness before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Public Health*, 186, 31-34.

While regression analysis of sleep did not reveal a significant relationship of sleep duration with age (Regression 5), the pandemic has seemingly affected the quality of young people's sleep. 44% of 18-24-year-olds reported struggling to get to sleep within 30 minutes three or more times a week, and 48% of 18-24-year-olds say they are currently waking up feeling unrested more than usual. Their younger peers in the focus groups reported oversleeping and falling back to sleep throughout the day. Some young people said it was normal for them to wake up at 3 or 4pm and others said that they fell back asleep after their parents left the house for work.

“Once [my mum] leaves the house there’s a 90% chance I’m gonna fall back asleep.” Young man, 17, Manchester.

“My sleep pattern had literally shifted to where I was going to bed at 5 in the morning and waking up at 4 in the afternoon.” Young woman, 18, North West.

“My sleep pattern just kind of went out the window.” Young woman, 17, London.

But the disruption to young people's daily routines extends beyond sleep. Without a structure to their day, the 16-18-year-olds said it became more difficult to motivate themselves and easier to procrastinate rather than doing things like school work or exercise. Some mentioned in the first lockdown they were able to set schedules for themselves and give their days structure, but as time has gone by, they have become demotivated and exhausted, unable to create or stick to routines.

“Today I got up at 4pm and watched a couple of lessons. That’s my schedule.” Young man, 17, London.

“When you’re doing online learning in your bedroom... it’s just so much easier to put the laptop down and just get back into bed. Whereas when you go into college you’re like ‘right I have to get the bus at this time, I have to be there for this time.’ It’s harder to give yourself a reason not to go.” Young man, 17, Yorkshire and the Humber.

“We told ourselves ‘oh, we’re gonna go get big and strong off the lockdown’ but personally, I gave up like halfway through because I just have no motivation to do any of that... it all just gets very boring and you just procrastinate it a lot.” Young man, 17, London.

Young people have become fed up with the “endless cycle” of being in and out of school. They felt that decisions to close schools/isolate bubbles were done at the last minute with little warning, leaving them feeling confused and uninformed. They were fed up with getting their hopes up to be back in school/college only to have them pulled away at the last

minute. They all agreed that they would have preferred a longer, stricter lockdown rather than coming in and out of lockdown over the past year.

Online learning was not popular among the young people we spoke to and they all agreed that it was difficult to get motivated to do online learning, which for many was pre-recorded and didn't require their full attention. They noted that the lack of a structured timetable and the fact that they work in their bedrooms means it's easy to get distracted or just get back into bed. They also often found online learning overwhelming and found it easy to fall behind, compounding feelings of stress.

"[online learning] goes through one ear and out the other." Young man, 17, Manchester.

"I would always attend my lessons but I used to just watch them later or just figure out a way to teach myself afterwards. If I don't have any lessons I just... do nothing really, I just mess around." Young man, 17, London.

"They give us more work because they want us to know everything, but at the same time it's really demotivating because it's like you get one thing done and then three new pieces of work come through." Young woman, 17, Yorkshire and the Humber.

Despite the inadequacy of online learning, going back to school or college on March 8th was not universally popular. A few young people told us that while online teaching wasn't perfect, it was too early and too dangerous to go back to school. The young men told us that some students didn't pay attention to social distancing rules, which would inevitably lead to higher transmission of the virus leading to worries about catching Covid themselves or giving it to a vulnerable family member.

In terms of exams, the young people told us that the system was stressful and unfair. For this year's exams they didn't understand how their grades would be determined, which made them feel unprepared and unsure about where to focus their attention. There was confusion over whether their grades would be solely based on mock exams, on class work (this research took place before the Government's announcements on this), or if they would be taking mini exams which further increased anxiety. Students who were supposed to take exams last year, talked about the unfairness of having grades based on their mocks and the fact they hadn't been able to prove what they were capable of. All of these worries became wrapped up in fears about the future and the possibility of being blocked from moving on to their preferred next step, whether that be college, university, or a job.

"I need two As and a B and right now that's a reach that's looking so

far out it's frightening.” Young man, 17, Manchester.

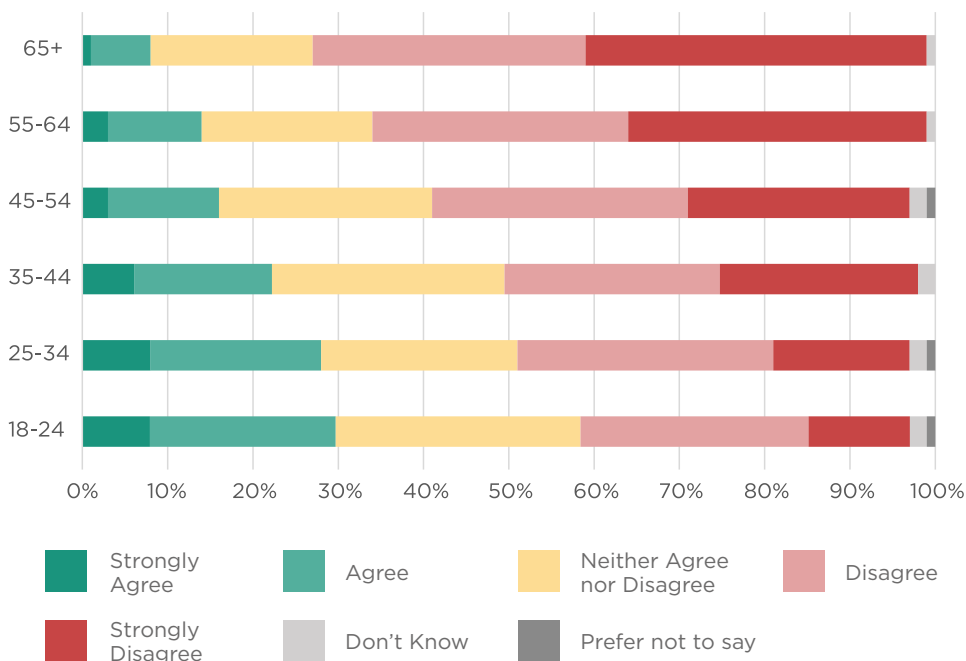
“[Exams] are my biggest worry as of right now. Like how are exams, mini exams, whatever it is - how's it all gonna play out? How are we going to get our grades? If we don't like our grades how's the appeal system gonna work?” Young woman, 17, London.

“My one main worry currently is what's happening with exams. In January they were like 'no exams' and then a couple of weeks later they were like, 'possibly mini exams'. It's like, what does 'mini exam' mean?... what's actually going to happen? How likely am I to get the grades I need to go to the university I want to go to?” Young woman, 18, East of England.

Young people report feeling “helpless” about their future.

Beyond school and college, worries about the future were common across both the 16-18-year-olds in our focus groups and the young adults we polled. Young people were clearly much more concerned about the future than the elderly - 30% of the 18-24 group agree with the statement 'I have lost all hope for the future as a result of Covid', which compares to just 8% of those aged 65 and over (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Looking ahead to the future, after Covid, do you tend to agree or disagree with the following?: I have lost all hope for the future as a result of Covid



For the young people in the focus groups, one source of anxiety was that employers might look at their grades differently than other years because they did not sit exams. The young men, for example, said they thought an employer with two candidates with the same grades, one from a 'Covid-year' and one from a normal year, would choose the 'non-Covid-year' candidate because they could be confident that their awarded grades were deserved. The young people feared that these 'Covid-year' grades would always be with them, with a long lasting impact on their lives.

“It’s going to be a long-term impact because GCSEs and A levels stay on your record forever.” Young man, 16, North West.

Even beyond qualifications the young people also worried that their career plans and dreams would be hampered by Covid, whether that be having to resit some years of school, not getting into their top choice university, or not getting the job they want. This was particularly true for one young woman in our group who was pursuing a career in musical theatre. She worried that Covid could damage the industry in the long-term and make it difficult to build a successful future career in theatre.

Young people’s experience of spending more time with their immediate families over the past year has been mixed. Several talked about how it had made them closer to their parents/carers and particularly siblings. However, inevitably, being in such close proximity also led to arguments. The young people told us that a lack of personal space and time alone led to family members taking out their stress and frustrations on each other. One young man summed it up as feeling confined with no escape to the freedom of seeing friends and getting away from the pressures at home.

“I feel confined in the house, I don’t like it at all... I normally just try to stay in my room and zone out, but my parents don’t like me to stay in my room so it’s conflicting. I would say I have gotten closer to my brothers but there have been quite a few arguments.” Young man, 17, London.

“There’s times it does bring you closer together...but at the same time it brings about arguments because at a certain point, everyone wants their own space and time to just be on their own.” Young man, 17, Yorkshire and the Humber.

“There have been arguments over essentially nothing just because we’re all sick of each other.” Young man, 16, North West.

“We’re either great or screaming, there’s no medium anymore.” Young woman, 17, Yorkshire and the Humber.

Outside of their immediate families, many of the young people missed their extended families, including aunts, uncles, and grandparents. One young woman, however, said that her extended family had become closer as a result of the pandemic - although they were not seeing each other

in person, they were speaking over the phone much more than they had ever spoken before. Others, however, said that although they kept in touch through video calls, it wasn't a replacement for seeing them in person.

“Me and my nan are really close... it's my 18th [soon] and the only thing I want to do is go and see her...but it's just going to be a FaceTime call to say happy birthday and that sort of upsets me.”

Young man, 17, Manchester.

“There's been an increase in the amount of phone calls... before the pandemic I would talk to my family quite a bit, but now it's like every other day. It's great but it wasn't like this before.” Young woman, 17, London.

Many of the young people were worried about their loved ones getting seriously ill or dying from Covid and were anxious that they could inadvertently give them the virus. A few of the young women spoke about how they still help the elderly people in their lives with groceries and cooking meals, but constantly panicked about transmitting the virus - cleaning the food multiple times and repeatedly washing their hands before handing anything over. Another young man told us that for him the lowest moment of the pandemic came when his brother got ill with Covid and the family feared that he could give it to his elderly grandfather who also lived with them.

Some of the young people had lost relatives to Covid. One young man in particular shared how several of his aunts and uncles had died throughout the year but he wasn't able to say goodbye or attend their funerals because of lockdown measures, all of which compounded his grief.

As with being in and out of school, there was also a sense of pessimism about reopening and returning to normal. The young people felt like they had been disappointed so many times with previous announcements - which promised one thing but turned out to be untrue. They told us they no longer trusted the Government's reopening announcements, and weren't convinced that cases would remain low enough to allow reopening to happen as planned. They don't want lockdown to be eased just to end up back in it again because cases aren't low enough.

“Last time Boris said we'd be out by June we did not get out by June, we were still in Lockdown. Why should I believe him this time?” Young man, 17, Yorkshire and the Humber.

“We've been out what, 3 or 4 times? If we stayed in for long enough we could actually come out, like New Zealand who went into a proper proper lockdown and they've been able to come out with no restrictions. If we were smart we'd stay in, we'd have a proper draconian style lockdown, and get rid of it.” Young man, 17, London.

“You keep getting your hopes up that this is the last time, we're

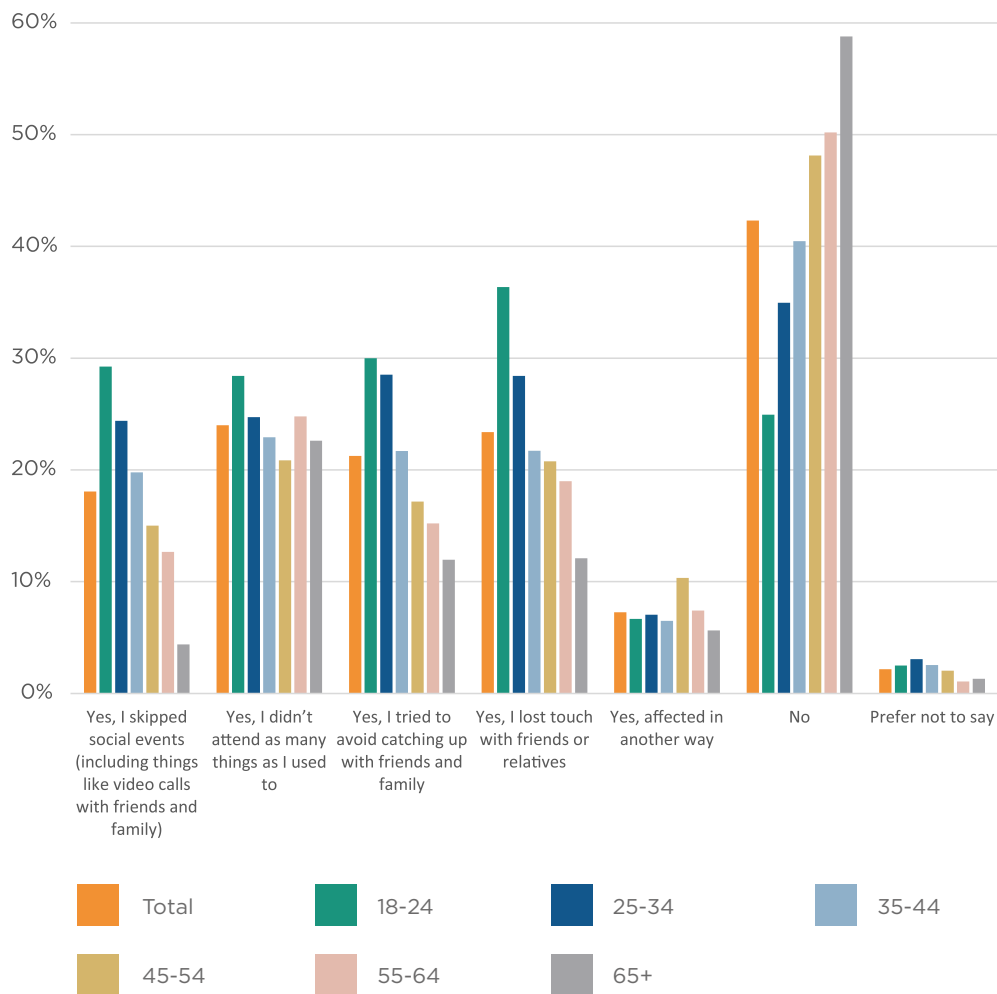
definitely coming out now, and then it's back in lockdown. It just feels like a never-ending cycle." Young man, 17, Yorkshire and the Humber.

The young people's worries about the future were also rooted in the fact that they thought Covid-19 would be something that we deal with forever.

They seemed convinced that some elements of Covid would be the new normal and that we might always be dealing with new strands and having to take new vaccines, just like the flu.

More than any other age group, young people worry the most about losing friendships as a result of Covid. 36% of 18-24-year-olds agree (30% disagree) with the statement 'I worry that I have lost some friendships forever as a result of Covid', making them the only age cohort with net agreement on this question (among those 25 years old or above, 57% disagreed with this and only 18% agreed). Young people are seeing and talking to other people less than they were before Covid, and this in turn they often report this being linked to mental health, with 37% of the youngest group saying they are talking less to people as a result of mental health symptoms (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Were people's social lives impacted by any of the negative experiences we listed (of those who selected any negative experiences) by age



Many young people have replaced that physical engagement and socialising with screen time. 45% of 18-24s are now using a screen for more than 10 hours a day, more than double the 22% who estimated this level of usage before the pandemic. 72% of this group say their use of phones or tablets has increased since last year, and 38% say they have been playing more video games than usual.

“At the end of the day, you’ve got a headache from all the screen time.” - Young woman, 17, London.

This was also reflected in the focus groups, where nearly all of the young people said that their screen time was higher during lockdown than before Covid because they are spending more time playing video games and on social media. For the young men gaming was, in part, a lockdown coping mechanism - they told us that online gaming with friends helped them get through the past year when they were feeling low. This was reflected in the poll, with 44% of young people saying they were spending more time on screens (e.g. online, watching TV) as a result of the mental health symptoms they experienced, and 46% of 18-24 men reporting playing more video games than usual.

Interestingly, the young men felt that they were better off than most of the young women they knew in their age group because playing video games was a social activity they could do together. In contrast they said many young women spent more time on social media which they said was less sociable and worse for mental health.

This was confirmed by the young women we spoke to, who reported spending several hours per day scrolling through social media, such as Instagram and Tik Tok. They argued that social media had been more of a negative than a positive in their lives throughout lockdown, often fuelling their demotivation and procrastination. They scrolled through social media because they were bored, but after that scrolling they felt worse - saying it made them feel more lonely and like they had wasted their day.

“I’m on Tik Tok for about 4 hours and then I get off it and I feel so rubbish... like I just wasted so much of my day... it’s a bit of a drain more than it is a coping mechanism.” Young woman, 17, Yorkshire and the Humber.

“I’m on Instagram, Snapchat and Tik Tok practically all the time. You open the app and the sun’s up, and then you come off it and the sun’s down.” Young woman, 17, London.

Both the young men and women agreed that no amount of gaming or social media was the same as hanging out with friends. Despite gaming together, the young men said they still felt lonely. Again this reflected the

experiences of 18-24 year olds in the poll with 49% of the youngest group reported feeling lonely 3 or more days a week, whereas 69% of those aged 65+ said they rarely or never felt lonely.

“[with social media and gaming] even though you’re talking to your friends it’s not really the same at all. At the end of the day you’re still in your room, you’re still up by yourself.” Young man, 17, London.

Both the young men and women in the groups felt it was easier to talk about mental health today than it had been before the pandemic (in large part because everyone was in the same boat). Young men however expressed more reticence (as we found more generally in this poll, where men were less likely to look for support). They worried that by sharing their problems with their friends they could become an extra burden on them. One young man said he worried about opening up and being vulnerable because he feared others might use it against him down the line.

The young women, on the other hand, did not feel the same stigma around talking about mental health. In fact, for the young women in our focus groups, the most common coping mechanism to help with their mental health during lockdown was ‘talking to friends’. They said almost all of their friends were experiencing similar feelings, making it feel safe and normal to talk to each other about their mental health struggles. In the poll, 58% of 18-24 women reported actively taking steps to protect their mental health in the last year, compared to 51% of men.

There was a sense among the young people that they had missed out on important formative teenage experiences, such as celebrating their 18th birthday, school-leaving parties and going to clubs. They were clearly looking forward to the opportunity to have ‘normal’ teenage experiences again.

“I feel like we’re wasting our teenage years... we should be out partying and having fun but we’re locked up inside.” Young woman, 17, London.

In the 18-24-year-old cohort, 25% cite ‘being able to go to nightclubs’ among the top things they are looking forward to after the pandemic ends. Similarly, among 16-18-year-olds in the focus groups, normality meant seeing friends again, and going on holiday.

However, some young people, particularly young women, told us about their worries about life going back to normal. They were nervous about having to juggle work, school and sport again because they already felt so overwhelmed at the moment without those extra things going on.

There was also a worry that there would be massive pressure for young

people to go out all the time, which would come as a shock having done so little socialising over the past year.

“I’m a bit scared for everything to go back to normal...when everything comes back I’ll have school, [sport], I work like three jobs, I’ll have all that... And I’m not the same person I was when I was doing all that. I’m gonna get pushed to the deep end and have 100,000 things to do.” Young woman, 17, Yorkshire and the Humber.

“There’s gonna be a lot of pressure to go out. Before Coronavirus I would go out quite a lot, but then, being home all this time - and then suddenly being able to go out again, I feel like everyone’s going to want to go out all the time. I think it could be really overwhelming.” Young woman, 18, North West.

However for the most part young people, while sceptical about promises of reopening, were looking forward to it. Perhaps as a result, the young people in our focus groups were deeply unsupportive of the idea of vaccine passports, to allow the already vaccinated to go to cinemas and festivals etc. While, throughout our discussions it was clear they appreciated the need for the sacrifices of the past year, they thought a reopening which allowed older generations to resume a normal life while they remained under restrictions would be deeply unfair.

The Physical And Mental Generational Divide

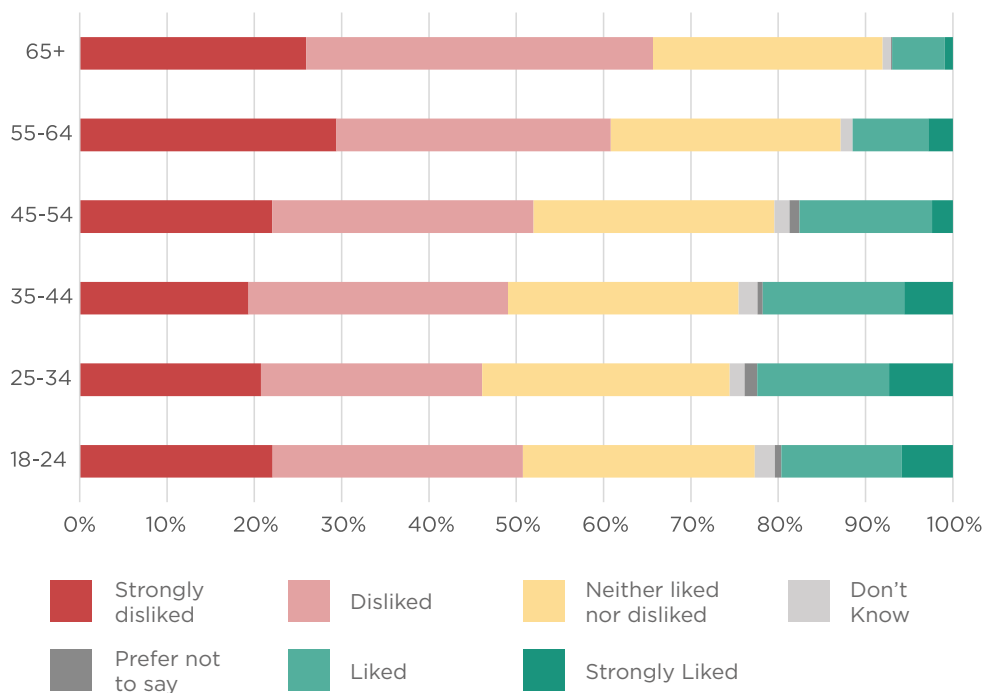
5. The Physical And Mental Generational Divide

Elderly people have been at far greater risk of serious illness and death in the last year. They represent the vast majority of excess deaths due to Covid. They have been under serious physical threat for a year.

What is interesting from our research, though, is that while the older generation clearly miss their families, worry for their health, and are concerned about their children and grandchildren, they have presented with fewer mental health effects from the pandemic than younger people.

There is no question that older people dislike lockdown - and to a greater degree than younger people (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Would you say that, on balance, you have liked or disliked “lockdown”?

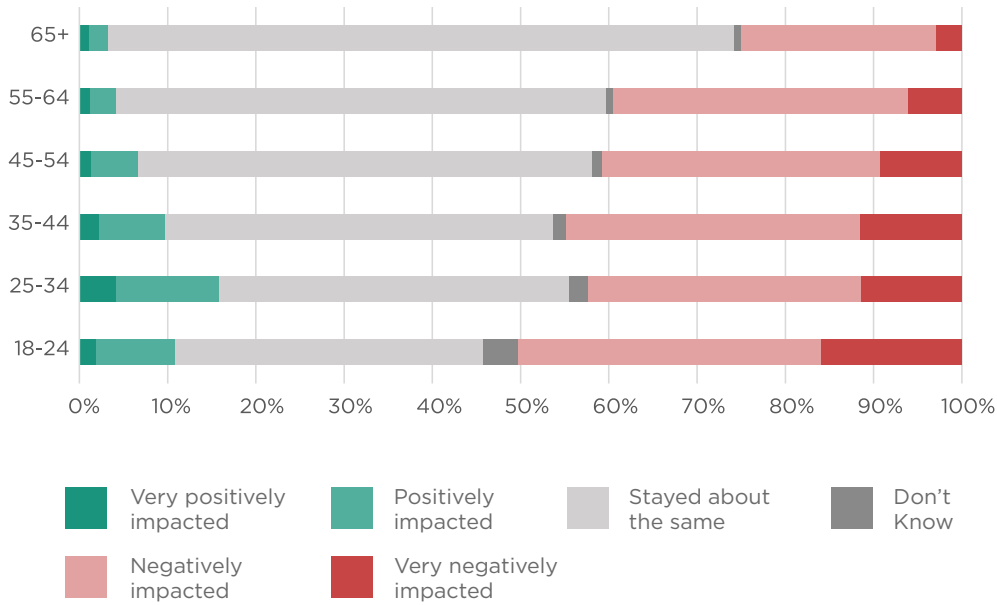


But the mental health burden is notably lower, both in terms of self-reporting, and scores on the CESD10 scale:

- Double the percentage of 18-24 year olds (50%) said their mental health had been negatively affected in the last year as people aged 65+ (25%) (Figure 11).

- Older people were also much more likely to say there had been no effect either way – their mental health had stayed the same.

Figure 11: Thinking about the impacts of lockdown, and not just whether you have had Coronavirus or not, do you think your mental health has been positively or negatively impacted by Coronavirus, or stayed around the same?



Looking to the future, a similar pattern emerges. 7% of those aged over 65 agree that they expect their mental health to suffer for a long time after the end of the pandemic, compared to 27% of under 65s.

Of course, part of this may be language, stoicism, and generational differences in what people think of as a ‘mental health’ issue, and their comfort in reporting it. But we did find three sets of indicators to suggest something else may be at play.

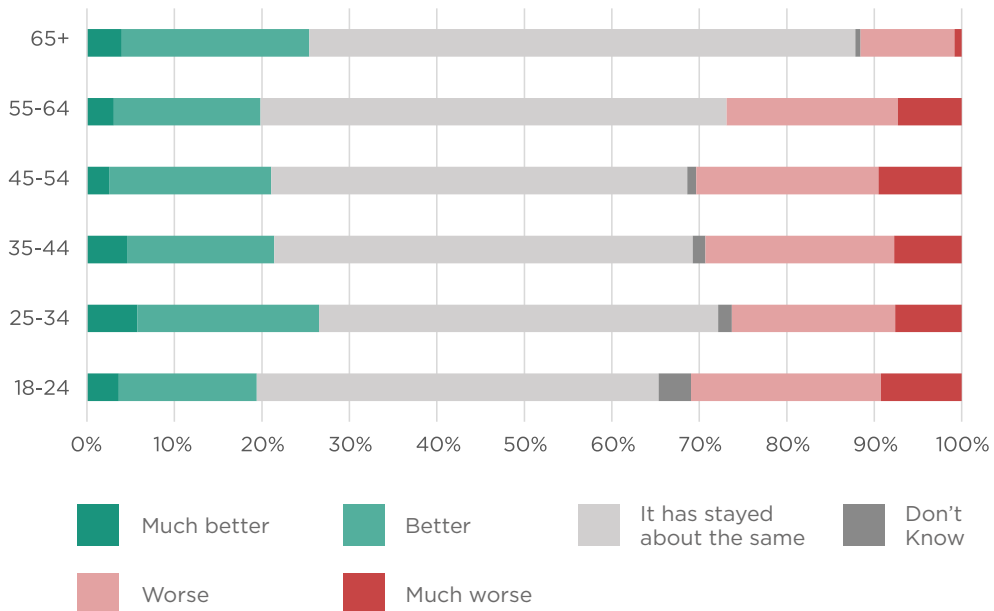
First, on the CESD10 scale, we also found that younger people scored much more highly (an average of 14.9 score) than people over 65 (an average of 7.07, or just under half).

Second, a number of the underlying drivers of poorer mental health are less prevalent in older people.

Most obviously, older people are less vulnerable to financial difficulties from the pandemic – a high percentage will get the majority or all their income from pensions, which have been less affected. Just 12% of over 65s say their financial situation has worsened, compared with 31% of 18-24s (Figure 12). They also aren’t finding their costs are increasing – 84% of 65+ say the amount they are spending has decreased or stayed the same, compared to 71% of those under 65.

This is carrying through to worries and anxiety - Only 8% of 65+ say they have worried about financial problems in the last week, compared to 35% of those under 65.

Figure 12: Would you say that your personal financial situation has got better or worse as a result of Coronavirus?



Job instability, too, is (unsurprisingly) less prevalent. The oldest group is more likely to say that not seeing friends (59%) and family (64%) have been the hardest parts about lockdown - younger groups are much more likely to choose uncertainty about jobs (20% compared to 1% of 65s).

Instead, it is experiences that older people are likely to pick as a greater hardships. 46% of 65+s say that not being able to go on holiday has been one of the hardest parts of lockdown, compared to 34% of under 65s.

And, finally, living arrangements are often easier for the older people in the sample. 89% of 65+s have a garden compared to 77% of those under 65 - only 9% live in urban areas compared to 24% of the under 65 groups.

Third, our focus groups did support the findings that, on average, older people were less likely to say they have been affected mentally (as opposed to physically) by the pandemic.

Many of the older people in our focus groups said their experience of Covid-19, while not pleasant, had not taken a major toll - their lifestyle had changed less, and the consequences of Covid-19 physically (and therefore the benefits of lockdown) were very clear.

“I haven’t really suffered that much, to be honest. I’ve been in touch

with my family quite a lot; I've been in touch with my friends quite a lot. The biggest loss is that our age we can ill-afford to lose a year of our life.” (Male, 70+, Newcastle)

“We've been fortunate because there's two of us. My wife and I can talk to each other. Whereas we have friends who live on their own and this lockdown has been terrible. They feel as if they've been in prison for 12 months.” (Male, 70+, Newcastle)

“I feel very lucky that I have a husband when others don't. We have an allotment and a garden. I consider myself very lucky in that respect.” (Female, 70+, Newcastle)

Of course, there were many personal stories of loss – missing grandchildren, but also losing other, elderly relatives and friends. In the polling we find that gender still plays a key role among the older group on much of this, with 72% of women 65+ years old saying that not seeing family has been the most difficult part of lockdown compared to 57% of men, and 63% of women saying not seeing friends compared to 54% of men.

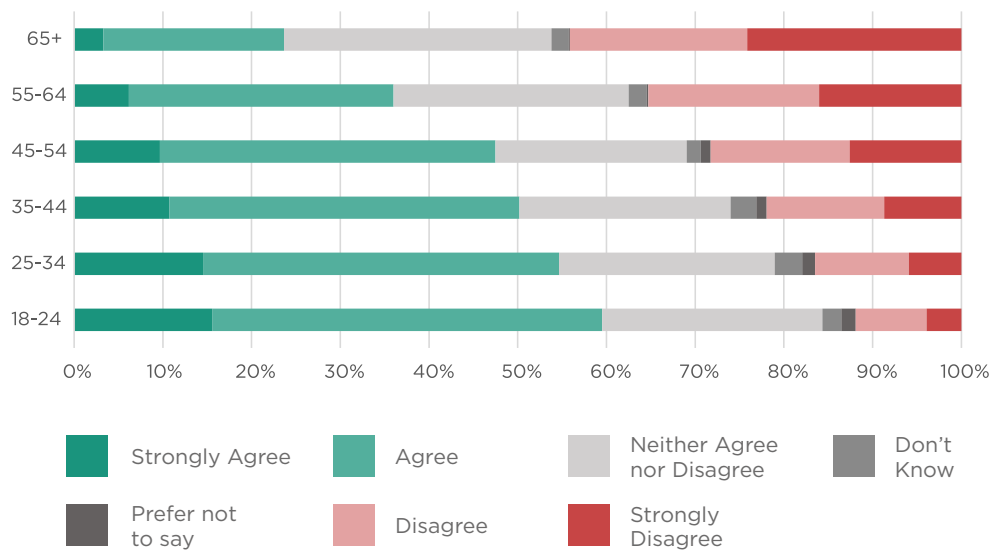
“Of course, we see [our grandchildren] on Zoom and that but it's not the same. And if you do meet them outside and they run to you, you have to tell them to keep back. It's like being in prison.” (Female, 70+, Newcastle)

“The only unlucky thing for me is that I lost my mum during lockdown. She did have Covid. She was in a care home and I couldn't see her. Then she was in hospital and she died on her own, without me and that was the hardest thing really for me. A funeral for four people. She was 97 and you could never imagine that that would be the end for her.” (Female, 70+, Newcastle)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given all of this, but more troubling for future intergenerational policy, older people not only reported that the impact on their own mental health was lower, but were less empathetic towards others when it came to mental health.

Among the 65+ group, 24% agree that they have been more worried about their friends and family's mental health as a result of Covid, and 44% disagree. Among those under 65, the proportions are 50% to 23% (Figure 13).

Figure 13: I have been more worried about my friends' and family's mental health as a result of Covid



We also found in our focus groups, a number of participants while being concerned for their own grandchildren, were more critical of younger people as a whole – either in terms of their mental resilience, or following of the rules.

“I generally sympathise with the young people: I’ve got a grandson trying to do his GCSEs and a granddaughter who is at university and has hardly been there this year and has been paying for accommodation all the time. She hasn’t been able to go out and have her freedom like most students. But at the same time there are lots and lots of students who just do not care. They don’t care if they get it or pass it on.” (Female, 70+, Newcastle)

“We didn’t have the lifestyle that the young ones have got now, the freedom. We had families and we didn’t go anywhere. We brought our families up, did the shopping and put our husband’s dinner in the oven... it probably has had an effect on their mental health... they just don’t know how to handle it... Now you’ve got Zoom, your internet, your iPad, your telephone. We didn’t have anything like that.” (Female, 70+, Newcastle)

“I think the younger generation it is just too easy. They should just grow some balls. You go back to our parents , what they had to put up with during the war... They should just accept it is a pandemic, that we’ve never dealt with before... We’ve got the vaccine now and if we behave ourselves then after summer maybe we can get back to normal.” (Male, 70+, Newcastle)

“I feel very sorry for students who were at their last year at school before going to university and suddenly all this has cropped up and

their education's been disrupted. They must be very worried about what's going to happen to their future but getting away from that group my message to the younger ones in general would be toughen up, you know, you hear of the snowflake generation and I think there are too many of them who are wanting to go under too quickly and they should just toughen up a bit.” (Male, 70+, Newcastle)

“I'm a little bit worried about the younger people in jobs because there's going to be a lot of people paid off. One of my grandsons has just graduated and he hasn't got a job. There isn't any jobs for him to apply for. He's suffering a little bit with mental health because he feels there's no point. I think there'll be a lot more like him. There will be a lot of mental health about when this is all finished.” (Female, 70+, Newcastle)

None of this should take away from the fact that the absolute mental health burden (as opposed to the relative one) remains high across age groups, and particularly bad for many individuals.

While less severe – both in the quantitative and qualitative work – we did hear many of the issues with exercise and sleep affecting older people too.

“I'm quite a busy person but there's only so much you can do – clean the house, bake, cook, do the garden... so I'm not doing as much and I'm not running around after my family – which I like doing. And because I'm not as busy I'm not sleeping as good” (Female, 70+, Newcastle)

“I'm used to playing golf, which is 3.5-4 hours of walking so I'm missing that. I do my 45 minute walk but that's nothing to what I'm used to” (Female, 70+, Newcastle)

“I go to bed later because otherwise I wake up in the middle of the night. And 4am's no fun when it's so dark at the moment” (Female, 70+, Newcastle)

There was also, as with younger people, a massive difference between older people who had partners, and those who were alone. 83% of those 65 or over who live with their partners say they have felt lonely 'rarely or none of the time' on the CESD-10 loneliness item, compared to just 47% of those who do not live with partners.

While the combination of these findings indicate a very different story of mental wellbeing among the older and younger groups in the UK, it is important not to discount the potential impact of generational differences in attitudes towards these topics. Particularly as we look towards how societal well-being is handled post-pandemic. Rather than concluding that elderly people would not benefit from these efforts, consideration should instead be given to the different approaches that will need to be taken to reach these groups.

The Terror Of Uncertainty: Life Without Work

6. The Terror Of Uncertainty: Life Without Work

It is often said that work brings an element of purpose to people's lives and a useful structure - as well as, hopefully, the means to live without financial worry. This does not mean that work defines people's identity - it only does that for a minority - but working has often been viewed as being positive for people's mental health, - even if that is defined narrowly by keeping one's family fed and clothed. In our research, we found some indications that not working - either through furlough or unemployment - has brought great stress to many people.

On a brief consideration of their situation, it is easy to envy the furloughed: they receive most of their salary but do not have to work; they ought to be able to return to work properly when lockdown is lifted. The furloughed, it appears, are being paid to just stay at home; they have little to worry about, assuming their lower outgoings on things like travel, bought lunches and so on, make up for their lower wages.

This is not reality, though. As we found in this research, many of those on furlough have suffered huge stress over the last year. This is partly down to their relative isolation - being away from their workplace and colleagues - but also because of the great uncertainty that being on furlough actually implies. After all being furloughed, could be taken as meaning you're not needed in a business; this is not a great feeling.

- In our poll we found 40% of those who have been furloughed at some point during the pandemic put it among the most difficult parts of lockdown to cope with, rising to 49% among those who are currently furloughed.
- 39% of those who have been furloughed put 'uncertainty over my job' among the top things they have been worried about during lockdown, rising to 44% among those currently furloughed. This compares to 11% of those who have not experienced furlough, 35% who have been made redundant. Those who have had their hours reduced mention job uncertainty at the same rate as those furloughed (39%).
- Despite the support from the Government, 46% of those who have experienced furlough say that their personal financial situation has got worse as a result of the pandemic, compared to 21% of those not furloughed.

- 34% of those who have experienced furlough expect their personal finances to take longer than a year to recover, and 20% say their finances have not been impacted. Among those in work, 20% say it will take this long to recover, while 41% say they have not been impacted.
- 45% of those who have been furloughed say they have worried about financial problems or worries in the last week, compared to 26% of those who have not been furloughed.

The data therefore indicates clearly that furlough has not entirely shielded people from the financial impacts of the pandemic. A large portion of those who have experienced furlough would list it as one of the hardest parts of the last year, and the impact on people's financial situations is pretty clear in the heightened concern about finances among those who have gone through it.

Having said that, while furlough has been difficult and taken its toll on people's mental health, it is still better than having hours reduced or being made redundant - both of which had a more serious impact on mental well-being.

Furlough does seem to have mitigated some of the worst mental health impacts of pandemic employment instability, at least for now. 58% of those currently in work rate their mental health as good, compared to 46% among those who have been furloughed, and 39% among those who are unemployed but seeking work. When we analyse the impacts of various Covid life-changes (Regression 3), we find that redundancy and hours-reduction are associated with significantly higher scores on the CESD-10, but experiencing furlough was not. Importantly, this was true when controlling for age, which is key when it is more common for young people to have experienced redundancy.¹⁷

Equally, on the social level, when we examine whether there is any relationship between changes to work status, and agreement with the statement that 'I worry that I have lost some friendships forever as a result of Covid', we find 34% of those who have been made redundant during the pandemic to agree, 30% of those whose hours have been reduced, and only 25% of those who have been furloughed, compared to 20% across the general population.

There is further evidence for how much harder lockdowns have been for people without work as opposed to those who have had their hours cut or

¹⁷ Major, L. E., Eyles, A., & Machin, S. (2020). *Generation Covid: Emerging work and education inequalities*. Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics and Political Science.

who are on furlough when we look at people's feelings about their future in work:

- 27% of currently furloughed workers expect it to take longer than a year for their job security to recover, compared to 37% of those who are currently unemployed but seeking work.
- Among those who are currently furloughed, 53% say their job security has not been impacted or expect it to recover within a year, up from 40% among those who have experienced redundancy as a result of the pandemic.
- Meanwhile, 41% of those currently working (full time) say that their job security has not been impacted.

This demonstrates that while furlough has been clearly felt to have an impact on job security, the impact of redundancy is more damaging. Regardless, there is clear pessimism among those furloughed about the future of their work, and with a third expecting the recovery of their job security to take longer than a year, it is clear that not everyone is expecting furlough to fully serve its purpose of job retention.

This sense of pessimism came across strongly in the qualitative research when we spoke to workers who had been furloughed as well as those who had lost their jobs. What was particularly striking was an unwillingness to think too hard about the future as this in itself caused real anxiety. One woman who had been furloughed, then been made redundant and was now looking for temporary work had found something only to be told the week before that it had been called off. This had caused her to fall into a profound depression from which she was finding it hard to recover. It was the sense of not having a purpose and not being needed anymore that was the cause rather than any necessity to bring in money (her husband was still working full time and was a high-wage earner).

This pessimism was universal among the group, even if it was expressed differently by people in different circumstances.

“It’s a downward spiral. You wake up knowing you’ve done nothing the day before so you’re already starting your day on a down.” Head chef, 20s, York.

“I look forward to less. A little change of scenery - I look forward to going to the shops.” Man, 50s, Bradford.

“It’s the uncertainty and not knowing if I’ll have a job at the end of this or if my industry will collapse. I wake up every morning worried about

if I'll have a job. It's with me all the time." Beautician, 30s, Wakefield.

"I can't even look for work because I'm shielding so I'll probably have to retrain or something, do a course. But that's only when I get my mojo back." Woman living on her own, 40s, Leeds.

"I just don't know if there'll be an industry when we come out. I think I'll keep my job but will there even be a hospitality industry?" Head chef, 20s, York.

The head chef was also worried more widely about the impact of the extension of furlough of the business:

"This second one [lockdown] has just gone on so long. We just don't know how long we can last. We're paying rent on the business and bills and everything. It's quite scary now." Head chef, 20s, York.

The knock-on impacts of income loss are wide-ranging:

- 72% of those currently furloughed say that the amount of money they are earning has decreased during the pandemic (unsurprisingly);
- But this then means that 42% say the amount of money they are saving has decreased; while those who remain in work have seen the amount they are saving increase in 39% of cases (only 21% of those furloughed have seen savings increase);
- No wonder then, that 58% of those who are currently furloughed say their personal financial situation has got worse as a result of Covid, compared to just 22% of those currently still in work;
- Further, 34% of those currently furloughed expect their personal finances to take longer than a year to recover from the impacts of the pandemic, compared to 23% of those in work.

The acute financial anxiety was probably the hardest thing for people to talk about in the group of people who had either lost their jobs or who had been furloughed. It was difficult for them to think about the financial impact and the longer-term economic consequences on them and this made them reluctant to talk about it. But when they did, it was a source of terrible anxiety and caused them to sleep badly and wake up at night.

"My sleep isn't normal. It takes ages to go to sleep. I'm worrying about work. Will I have a job to go back to because some of my colleagues were made redundant in the summer. It's knocked my confidence."
Man, 50s, Bradford.

As well as money worries, those on furlough or who had lost their jobs

talked about a total lack of motivation. In our qualitative research, people who had been furloughed or who had lost their jobs spoke freely about the poor state of their mental health - with the low level but constant anxiety at one end and bouts of depression at the other. The main problem was listlessness and even unwillingness to get out of bed.

“Motivation is the biggest problem. I’ve got so much time to do things but I don’t feel like doing it. I’m spending most of my time procrastinating.” Head chef, 20s, York.

“I’ve just moved into my new flat. It needs doing up. I’ve got paint. I’ve got paper. Zero motivation. Plenty of time, obviously, but no motivation to do anything. The less you do, the less likely you are to do anything. It’s a nightmare.” Woman living on her own, 40s, Leeds.

“All I want to do is lie on my bed or lie in front of the television but because he [her husband who is working from home full time] is working downstairs, I’m cleaning out all the cupboards and tidying up which I don’t want to do at all but I feel obliged to do it.” Mother of two late teenage children, 40s, Leeds.

Furlough and unemployment was markedly different for women with children than it was for furloughed or unemployed men in the same household. This came out particularly strongly in our focus groups with furloughed women or those who had lost their jobs - women who had previously worked and had, in effect, a life outside as well as inside the home, but who now found that their function had been reduced to domestic chores, childcare and homeschooling as well as just looking after everyone. What was so interesting here was that in many cases both parents were furloughed or unemployed but it was the women picking up all the domestic slack while men retreated to ‘drum up work’.

“I feel like I’m the catering maid. Everyone has lunch at different times. It’s like lunch lasts for three hours and I’m just cleaning, making food, buying food, cleaning up after people and it’s sending me bananas! I’m cleaning, cooking, moaning, nagging, schoolworking, nagging, cleaning.” Mother of two girls (9 and 12) who had been working full-time but was now furloughed, 40s, London.

In our groups, mothers felt that they were having a completely different furlough experience than their partners. As we saw above, women on furlough who had been used to working full-time, craved time on their own and in some instances reported going to bed much later than usual in order to have some me-time.

Poor sleep patterns were, again, common and an unhealthy lifestyle was something that furloughed and unemployed participants were very

concerned about. While seen as a legitimate means to ‘get through’, the consequences of eating and drinking too much - and particularly of the massive increase in screen-time - was something everyone was putting off thinking about.

“Sleeping? I stay up until about 4 or 5 in the morning and not getting up until the early afternoon. In the first lockdown I was drinking more and binge eating - just stuff I wouldn’t normally do. This time, from the moment I wake up until I go to sleep it’s staring at a screen most of the time. Massive increase in screen time.” Head chef, 20s, York.

“I’m definitely eating more. I’ve put tonnes of weight on. Drinking? I’m in recovery so I know a lot of people who have relapsed. Fully relapsed. It’s that ‘when’s it going to end?’” Woman living on her own, 40s, Leeds.

“When it comes to sex we’ve just really not been in the mood. I’ve been completely miserable so I haven’t really endeared myself to him. It’s been such a rough few months that I couldn’t think of anything worse really.” Mother of two late teenage children, 40s, Leeds.

However, when we explore the impacts of work-changes on sleep through regression (Regression 5), we find the only significant correlation to be among furloughed workers, who tend to sleep 13 minutes more than demographically similar individuals who are not furloughed. It is worth noting though that, along with other groups, the furloughed group still on average reports sleep reduction since last year.

When discussing screen time increase in particular in the groups, people had significantly increased the amount they were watching but often not in a concentrated way: ‘just flicking through Facebook and Instagram, not reading anything in particular’. Among the quantitative sample, 62% of those who were currently furloughed reported watching more TV than usual in the last year, compared to 47% of those currently working. Interestingly, the whole group agreed when a beautician from Wakefield said:

“Screen time definitely. I’ve never watched so many series. I dread that time every week on your phone when it tells you your screen time and what percentage you’re up. It goes up and up and up.”

The mother of two teenagers from Leeds responded: ‘You need to turn that off! I’ve turned that off on my phone!’ which everyone agreed with. There was a very real sense that people would just rather be in denial about the amount they are watching or the ‘unhealthy’ habits they were developing because they just had to get through this.

“In the first lockdown I started drinking more and earlier. I’d start at 5 o’clock every day - ‘I’ve got through another day!’” Beautician, 30s, Wakefield.

“Sometimes I’d have a couple of beers and then some wine. And there were a couple of times when my partner said to me ‘You were in a real state when you came to bed last night.’ So this lockdown I’ve dialled that down a bit.” Man, 50s, Bradford.

But it was the lack of routine and not having a sense of purpose (and the feeling that lockdown would never end) that was most undermining of people’s mental health.

“There’s no routine to get into. There’s so much uncertainty about when this is going to end so it seems a bit silly to make plans.” Head chef, 20s, York.

“Because I don’t have that commute in the morning I might have more of a drink during the week because I don’t have to get up.” Man, 50s, Bradford.

And furlough has impacted some groups more than others. The ONS estimated a much higher frequency of furlough in the first stages of the pandemic among those who tend to be in sectors such as Accommodation and Food Service activities (82%); Arts, Entertainment and Recreation (75%); Construction (39%).¹⁸ More recent ONS research indicates that younger people and those with the lowest household incomes were more likely to be furloughed than the general population.¹⁹ This impact on those earning less came across in our quantitative work.

- 56% of those currently furloughed are C2D, in typically less well-paid manual jobs, and 61% of those still in work are ABC1, in largely office jobs. While 17% of ABC1 people have experienced furlough, 24% of those in C2D households have.
- 25% of those who privately rent have been furloughed at some point, 22% of those who have a mortgage or loan to pay off, only 12% of those who own their home outright.
- Obviously, this is in part because of the fact those who are not in the workforce (e.g. retired) are less likely to be renting or paying off their mortgage, but it still highlights that those who are in more

¹⁸ Comparison of furloughed jobs data: May to July 2020 - Retrieved from: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/business/businessservices/articles/comparisonoffurloughedjobsdata/maytojuly2020>

¹⁹ Personal and economic well-being in Great Britain: January 2021 - Retrieved from: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/bulletins/personalandeconomicwellbeingintheuk/january2021>

fragile financial situations already have been impacted more heavily by this. Indeed the IPPR estimated early on in the pandemic, that up to 45% of furlough payments would ultimately be returned to landlords and lenders.²⁰

While we do not find a clear age-trend with furlough within our sample, we do find that 12% of 18-24s have experienced redundancy as a result of Covid, compared to 6% of 25-64s. We also find that 21% have experienced a reduction in their hours compared to 14% of 25-64s. This supports other research which finds 1 in 10 16-24 year olds have suffered job loss in the pandemic.²¹

One aspect of lockdown and its impact on mental health that should concern policy makers is the gulf of difference in experience between furloughed workers or those without employment and those who continued to work and key workers. This was particularly evident when talking to furloughed mothers who were trying to keep on top of their own and their families mental health while trying (and feeling like they were failing) to homeschool and keep on top of domestic chores. This group looked with envy (bordering on resentment) at mothers who could, like nurses, for example, carry on working and continue to live a ‘normal’ life (even where they expressed gratitude that they did not have to live such hard lives). In our focus groups, while some key workers spoke of undergoing enormous stress, for example a community psychiatric nurse in Wolverhampton and a care home worker in Manchester, others said that they had found having work outside the home - especially useful work - had meant they considered themselves to be in a better state than their friends. An example of this was a former City worker in London who was about to start studying for a Master’s Degree so had used a gap in employment to become a vaccinator. Compared to her 20-something friends still working in areas like finance and law, stuck working from home in small - often shared - flats, she felt that she was having a much easier time.

Furloughed or unemployed mothers and those working in key roles simply could not understand what the others were complaining about. Where the first group were going ‘stir crazy’ at home, other mothers were doing admired and meaningful work saving lives. In one group, a nurse talked about mental health, but what she was concerned about was the frontline health workers who had seen such huge numbers of dying and dead people as a result of the pandemic.

In another group, a nurse could barely disguise her bemusement at the

²⁰ Berry C., Macfarlane L., Nanda S. (2020) - Who wins and who pays? Rentier power and the Covid Crisis - Retrieved from <https://www.ippr.org/research/publications/who-wins-and-who-pays>

²¹ Major, L. E., Eyles, A., & Machin, S. (2020). *Generation Covid: Emerging work and education inequalities*. Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics and Political Science.

women who were stuck at home, talking about how difficult things were for them. She said that she thought that they really could not understand one another.

“I’ve had a really different experience. I think those of us who have been on the frontline feel really left out.” Frontline worker, mother of three at school.

For the frontline workers, when they talked about the beginning of the pandemic and how little was known about it, they did not know whether going to work would kill them and bring the virus back into their homes to their families. This had a huge impact on their own mental health:

“What was challenging was walking into a hospital full of Covid patients and not knowing what I was letting myself in for.” Single mother, hospital worker, 20s, Manchester

This mother also said that many of her colleagues during the first lockdown had schools refuse to take their children on the basis that they might have been exposed to Covid and endanger the school. This was something that she found very hard to deal with.

This ‘two worlds’ of experiences throughout lockdown is something that urgently needs addressing once the restrictions are lifted. On the one hand, key workers feel the stress of the virus and staring death in the face but largely feel highly valued. People who have been forced into their homes, mothers who feel pressured into domestic and child-caring duties that they do not want to take on, who have lost their sense of purpose and meaning in life - both are mental health issues but experienced in diametrically opposed ways with one having no experience of the other.

The Myth Of Covid “The Great Leveller”

7. The Myth Of Covid “The Great Leveller”

In the early days of the pandemic, a myth which evaporated nearly as quickly as it appeared, was that Coronavirus was some form of ‘great leveller’. As early as April, it was evident that the impacts of Coronavirus were not being felt equally by rich and poor. Now, almost a year later, our polling data shines light on the disproportionate burden which people in less financially secure positions have been faced with.

The picture from the poll could not be clearer:

- The financial situation of those in the lowest social grades has got worse, but in the highest it has got better.
- By 31% to 23% those in the richest AB social groups say their personal financial situation has got better as a result of Covid, if it has changed at all. In the DE group, by 27% to 15% people say their financial situation has got worse.
- Meanwhile, lower middle class C1s say the same by a smaller margin of 25% to 21%; the C2 group, by 31% to 17%, say their financial situation has got worse.
- Looking only at those who have not experienced furlough, redundancy or hour-reduction as a result of Covid, ABs by 33% to 11% say their financial situation has got better if it has changed at all, while among C2s this is 20% to 16%, and DEs 16% to 17%.
- In other words, even when accounting for changes in employment, the financial situation of those in the AB group is more likely to have improved than lower social grades.
- This seems to be because the upper social grades have been able to save: 48% of this AB group who have experienced no job changes say they have increased the amount they are saving (more than say it has stayed the same at 37%); for DEs only 26% managed to save more (while 46% stayed the same).

While not all renters are poor and not all homeowners are rich, it is nonetheless a rudimentary mark of financial stability (certainly outside London). The cross breaks in the poll between the two groups also tells an interesting story:

- While the majority of renters have seen no change in the amount of

rent they are paying, 12% of renters have seen the amount they are spending on rent increase during the pandemic, while only 6% have seen it decrease.

- 9% of those who own with a mortgage or loan have seen the amount they are spending on their mortgage increase, compared to 6% who have seen it decrease.
- 28% of those who are renting have seen the amount of money they are saving decrease, and 25% have seen it increase; among homeowners (without mortgages) this was 14% and 43%, and those with mortgages 21% and 39%.
- While only 17% of those who own houses without a mortgage expect their personal financial situation to take longer than a year to recover, 27% of renters think this, and 24% of those with a mortgage.
- When we asked about what people had been worrying about in the last week, we found 45% of renters say 'financial problems or worries'; 31% of those with a mortgage say this; only 13% of those who own their home outright do so.

When we ran a regression analysis to determine what is driving differing perceptions of changes to financial situations (Regression 4), we found that women are more likely to feel that their financial situation has got worse, as well as parents of children under 18 years old. We also found a considerable impact of income, with those whose household earnings are in higher bands being less likely to feel their personal financial situation has worsened. Naturally, directionality will have an impact here; those whose personal financial situation has deteriorated as a result of employment impacts of Covid will move to lower income bands. However, this relationship is found even when controlling for the three major job impacts (reduced hours, furlough and redundancy).

Further to this, we find those in less stable living situations are more likely to feel that their personal financial situation has got worse. Even when controlling for income, and impacts on employment as above, we found that those who have mortgages, privately rent or rent from a housing association are significantly more likely to say that their personal financial situation has got worse as a result of the pandemic.

The knock-on effects of this are also evident. Among renters, 28% have seen the amount they are saving decrease, and 25% have seen it increase. The comparative proportions for those who own homes are 14% and 43%, and for those with mortgages 21% and 39% (Figure 14). Among renters, 45% say they have been worrying about financial problems in the last week, compared to just 13% of those who own their home outright (Figure 15).

Figure 14: During the pandemic (over the last year) have the following increased or decreased for you, or stayed the same: The amount of money you are saving

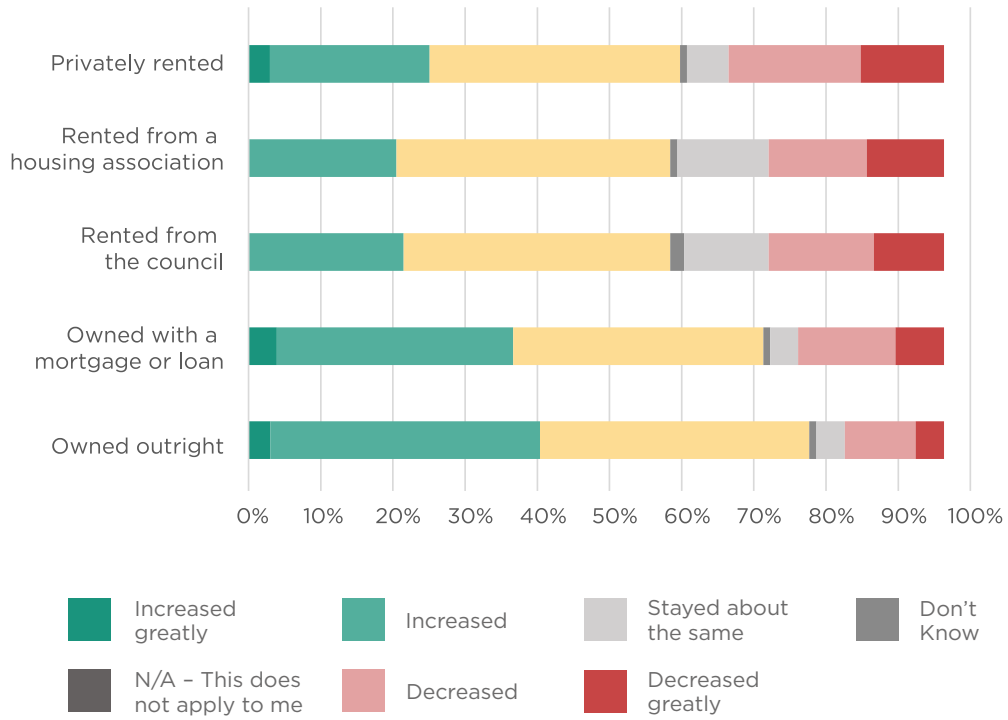
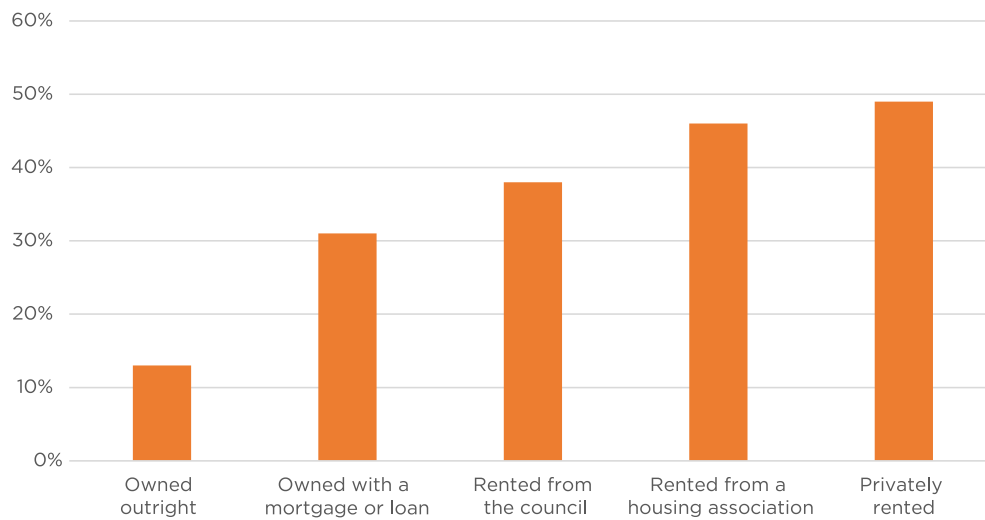


Figure 15: Have you been worrying about any of the following in the last week: Financial problems or worries



The Freedom To Be Lonely: Living Without Partners

8. The Freedom To Be Lonely: Living Without Partners

For people living alone, the pandemic has been tough. And while to some this may come as no surprise - the lack of social contact for someone who does not share a house with anyone else is naturally the fall-out of the lockdown - the situation is worse than many may have imagined.

People living alone were more likely to report that their mental health was poor (22% said quite poor or very poor compared to 15% of people living with a partner) - with this increasing from how they would rate their own mental health prior to the coronavirus pandemic (15% of people living alone said they would rate their mental health as quite poor or very poor before the pandemic). And on almost every indicator of the mental health questionnaire, people living alone were significantly more likely to select indicators of depression than those living with partners.

On specific feelings, people living alone feel anxious or worried (44% compared to 38% of people living with partners), no motivation (45% compared to 36% of people living with partners) and not getting any enjoyment out of life (35% compared to 28% of people living with partners).

Our regression analysis shows that those who do not live with a partner tend to score lower on the CESD10 when we control for key demographics such as age and gender (Regression 2). In particular, this is driven by the item on loneliness; 61% of those who live with a partner say they feel lonely rarely or none of the time, compared to 38% of those who do not live with a partner. Other research has identified that, while being younger is a clear risk factor for loneliness during Covid, higher levels of social support and cohabitation are protective factors against this.^{22 23}

The reasons for this are multiple, but our research in both the poll and focus groups go some way to explaining this.

For one, our poll identifies other trends which are somewhat associated with single living. People living alone were much less likely to have access

22 Groarke, J. M., Berry, E., Graham-Wisener, L., McKenna-Plumley, P. E., McGlinchey, E., & Armour, C. (2020). Loneliness in the UK during the Covid-19 pandemic: Cross-sectional results from the Covid-19 Psychological Wellbeing Study. *PLoS one*, 15(9), e0239698.

23 Bu, F., Steptoe, A., & Fancourt, D. (2020). Who is lonely in lockdown? Cross-cohort analyses of predictors of loneliness before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Public Health*, 186, 31-34.

to a garden (72% of people living alone compared to 85% of people who live with a partner) or a television (90% of people living alone compared to 95% of people who live with a partner). This has made the continued lockdowns incredibly difficult to cope with.

“The first lockdown was springtime, so while it was strange at the start I got into a really good routine with it - walks, exercise and stuff. And then I feel like this lockdown has hit with it being winter, so I’m just stuck in and I’m so bored of going for walks. Like, that’s the last thing you want to hear isn’t it - ‘do you want to go for a walk?’”
Female living alone, 20s, Birmingham.

“It’s just been soul destroying, particularly the dark evenings. It’s pure boredom. I feel like once I get home from work it’s like, what do you do? There’s only so many zoom calls with friends or walks you can go on. It’s really difficult at times. It’s really lonely.” Female living alone, 30s, Birmingham.

“It all just feels so restless. there’s been so many things I’d like to do that I just can’t, and instead I just find myself pacing round my flat quite often instead.” Male living alone, 30s, Birmingham.

This is a theme that continued strongly within our focus groups. The repeated lockdowns have had an enormous toll on people who live alone - and there is an increasing awareness of the impact it is having on both physical and mental health.

“In the summer, I was getting out of the house doing healthy stuff. I don’t think I’d ever been in better shape from cycling and running. But when winter came and the cold weather set in, that’s just not really as appealing anymore. I’m finding that I’m in my flat more than I’ve ever been, and indoors by myself more than I’ve ever been. So winter has definitely been totally different.” Male living alone, 30s, Birmingham.

“For me, it’s more that I’ve gone from seeing people every day to working from home full time, just sat in front of my laptop, like it’s just been ridiculously boring. I kind of feel like I’m okay. But I’ve definitely found myself more frustrated, more irritable, less focused at work. I try and tell myself it’s all ok, but I have definitely noticed a change in my personality.” Female living alone, 20s, Birmingham.

“I miss the communal side of playing football in a group and that sort of thing. I quite enjoyed the exercise, but probably I miss the communal side of playing team sports more. I feel shorter, more irritable, and less focused. It’s pretty difficult at times, isn’t it?” Male living alone, 30s, Birmingham.

Living alone has also given people time to think about their own mental health for the first time. Participants in our groups who lived alone talked about usually being able to deal with issues well, and not really considering their own mental health before. But we got a strong sense that the time alone has given them time to reflect on how they're feeling - in many cases for the first time in their lives.

“I usually just go with the flow. I’m pretty happy to do things and I’m pretty okay with things. But I think just the frustration of not having anything to do at all other than go outside and walk my dog every day has really made me a lot more conscious of how I’m feeling and my emotions, I guess.” Female living alone, 20s, Birmingham.

“I think I’m comfortable in most situations, at least in terms of my mental health. So I’ve never really given it that much consideration before. But I guess I’ve also been quite lucky that I’ve had a really good support network, to spend time with which, if I didn’t have that, maybe I’d be saying something totally different. But I have definitely noticed a lot of other people struggling way more.” Male living alone, 30s, Birmingham.

“It kind of sneaks up on me because generally it’s not something that I ever think about. But last night I sat around thinking ‘I just can’t sit in the house anymore’ so I walked to Tesco Express. I get annoyed more often and I just think I need to do something. It’s just pent up energy or whatever but it’s an odd one for me - for someone that’s never experienced anything like that before. It’s quite a strange feeling.” Male living alone, 30s, Birmingham.

Many participants in our groups told us how the lack of social and physical contact contributed to difficulty sleeping. They could go days without having a real life conversation with people, and would often find themselves not leaving the house all day given they were working all day from home.

“It’s absolutely terrible. I can’t tire myself out enough to then be tired. And so I find that I’m staying up late. And then as a result, I’m finding it hard to get up in the morning, or I’m not getting up in the morning.” Male living alone, 30s, Birmingham

“Sometimes it’s three o’clock in the morning and I’m wide awake. So by half past one in the afternoon, I could honestly just fall to sleep. And it’s terrible to think that but yeah, it’s definitely been affected in the last couple of months or so.” Female living alone, 30s, Birmingham.

Naturally, people living alone have also found relationships difficult to

either manage or create during the pandemic. With a lack of access to traditional forms of dating - whether it's first dates at a pub or restaurant or the ability to host people legally at their houses - they have found it difficult. We find pretty much identical self-report changes to sex-life among those who live with partners and those who do not, with 21% of the latter reporting their sex life has got worse compared to 23% of the former.

But many in our focus groups reported using dating apps for the first time in the last few years - with mixed success.

"I found at first dating was difficult. But then I downloaded all the dating apps and all these sorts of things. And it's actually worked. So I've actually found someone on it and she's now my support bubble. So actually it's one of the positives that come from this whole thing that I've actually found someone I quite like!" Male living alone, 30s, Birmingham.

"I never really took dating apps quite so seriously before. It was usually that I would go to the pub and have a few swipes with my friends - kind of collectively choosing people. But in the last year or so I've taken them a lot more seriously. It does mean that you end up speaking to people a lot more, you know, without actually seeing them physically. And you get to know someone in a different way which has been quite good." Male, 20s, Birmingham.

"I'd never tried Tinder or anything like that before, but one of my friends recommended to just go for it. And yeah, I was talking to a few people, but then because of lockdown, you couldn't meet anybody. It all just gets a bit boring after a while. There's only so many things you can talk about to try and get to know somebody but then they won't reply or you don't want to reply to them." Female living alone, 30s, Birmingham.

Appendix 1

Appendix 1 - The CESD-10

What is the CESD-10?

The CESD-10 is a standardised, 10-item inventory, for measuring the prevalence of depression symptoms. It is scored out of 30, and higher scores indicate a greater severity of depression symptoms. The questions are assessments of how regularly certain experiences have occurred for someone within the last week. We gave participants the option to withdraw from this portion of the poll if they desired, and each item was individually made optional with a “prefer not to say” option. For the purposes of the following regression analyses in Appendix 2, those with incomplete CESD scores are not included (624 individuals are excluded, 523 of whom elected not to take the questionnaire, and the others responded to at least one item with “Prefer not to say”).

While the CESD is a good indicator of the severity of depression symptoms, it is not a clinical diagnostic tool. As such, results should be treated as indicative of trends in experience of depression symptoms, and not diagnostic of the prevalence of clinical depression.

The Items in the scale

- I was bothered by things that usually don't bother me.
- I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing.
- I felt depressed.
- I felt that everything I did was an effort.
- I felt hopeful about the future.
- I felt fearful.
- My sleep was restless.
- I was happy.
- I felt lonely.
- I could not “get going”.

Scoring the scale

- Rarely or none of the time (less than 1 day) - Score: 0.
- Some or a little of the time (1 - 2 days) - Score: 1.
- Occasionally or a moderate amount of time (3 - 4 days) - Score: 2.
- All of the time (5 - 7 days) - Score: 3.
- Prefer not to say - Exclude.

Each item is responded to with the above options, and scored accordingly. Two items are reverse-scored (“I was happy” and “I felt hopeful about the future”). From this a score out of 30 is provided.

Appendix 2

Appendix 2 - Results of regression analysis

Regression 1: Demographic impacts on current scores on the CESD10

Independent variables

Age (continuous; single year)

Gender Identity (Binary: Male/Female, non-binary responses removed)

Children Under 18 (Binary: Yes/No)

Income (continuous; income bands coded as numbers from 0-16)

Living With a Partner (Binary: Yes/No)

Simplified Ethnicity (Binary: White Identity / Non-White Identity)

Tenure (Base: Own a home outright)

Dependent variable

CESD Score (continuous; range 0-30)

Results

Variable	Level	Coefficient	Error	t-value	p-value	Significance
Intercept	Intercept	16.758577	0.656524	25.526	< 2e-16	***
Age	Continuous	-0.128757	0.008941	-14.401	< 2e-16	***
Gender Identity	Female	2.013757	0.239884	8.395	< 2e-16	***
Children Under 18	Yes	0.255034	0.302228	0.844	0.398819	
Income	Continuous	-0.188361	0.037013	-5.089	3.81E-07	***
Live with partner	Yes	-0.942675	0.27022	-3.489	0.000492	***
Ethnicity	Non White (Grouped)	-0.885248	0.463983	-1.908	0.056491	
Tenure	Owned with a mortgage or loan	0.814552	0.332478	2.45	0.014342	*
	Privately rented	0.65684	0.387343	1.696	0.090031	
	Rented from a housing association	1.428343	0.50369	2.836	0.004601	**
	Rented from the council	1.001974	0.497387	2.014	0.044045	*
	Shared ownership	-0.322185	1.469588	-0.219	0.826481	
	Rent free	1.897086	0.777438	2.44	0.014735	*
*** <0.001 ; ** <0.01 ; * <0.05 ; else n.significant 706 responses excluded						

Key Points

- Age has a very significant correlation with CESDScore - for every 8 years older someone is, we can expect their score on the CESD to decrease by about 1 point.
- Gender is also significantly correlated - even when we take into account everything else, we can expect women to score about 2 points higher on the CESD.
- Income is significantly correlated - for every 5 income bands higher someone's earnings are, we can expect their score on the CESD to decrease by around 1 point.
- Those who live with their partners can be expected to score about 0.94 points lower on the CESD than those who do not.
- Looking at housing tenure, even controlling for income and age, we can find that those renting from a housing association can be expected to score around 1.43 points higher, those who rent from the council about 1 point higher, those with a mortgage about 0.81 points higher, and those currently living rent-free about 1.9 points higher (although this is a small subgroup) than those who own their houses outright.

Regression 2: Demographic impacts on current scores on the CESD10, controlling for recollected assessment of mental health pre-Covid

Independent variables

Self-Reported Mental Health a year ago (continuous; 1-5)
 Age (continuous; single year)
 Gender Identity (Binary: Male/Female, non-binary responses removed)
 Children Under 18 (Binary: Yes/No)
 Income (continuous; income bands coded as numbers from 0-16)
 Living With a Partner (Binary: Yes/No)
 Simplified Ethnicity (Binary: White Identity / Non-White Identity)
 Tenure (Base: Own a home outright)

Dependent variable

CESD Score (continuous; range 0-30)

Variable	Level	Coefficient	Error	t-value	p-value	Significance
Intercept	Intercept	26.273369	0.687022	38.242	< 2e-16	***
Mental Health Pre-Covid (recollected)	Continuous	-3.064337	0.111885	-27.388	< 2e-16	***
Age	Continuous	-0.082308	0.008257	-9.968	< 2e-16	***
Gender Identity	Female	1.787497	0.216476	8.257	< 2e-16	***
Children Under 18	Yes	0.229687	0.272542	0.843	0.39943	
Income	Continuous	-0.105697	0.033487	-3.156	0.00161	**
Live with partner	Yes	-0.699259	0.24389	-2.867	0.00417	**
Ethnicity	Non White (Grouped)	-0.403397	0.420592	-0.959	0.33757	
Tenure	Owned with a mortgage or loan	0.279227	0.300528	0.929	0.3529	
	Privately rented	-0.101749	0.351086	-0.29	0.77198	
	Rented from a housing association	0.375795	0.455927	0.824	0.40986	
	Rented from the council	0.093872	0.450527	0.208	0.83496	
	Shared ownership	-1.113466	1.320925	-0.843	0.39932	
	Rent free	0.345025	0.704473	0.49	0.62434	

*** <0.001 ; ** <0.01 ; * <0.05 ; else n.significant
 728 responses excluded

Key points

- As we would expect, how people say they would have rated their mental health a year ago is significantly correlated with current score on the CESD. The scales are different, but for every point higher someone says they would have rated their mental health before Covid (on a scale of 5), their CESD score drops by about 3.06 points.
- Age and gender maintain their importance despite this, as do income and living with a partner. This means, e.g., that if you take two people who say that their mental health was poor a year ago, if one identifies as female we can expect them to score higher on the CESD regardless.
- Tenure no longer displays the relationships with CESD-10 which it did in Regression 1.

Regression 3: Covid life changes impacts on current scores on the CESD10, controlling for key demographics

Independent variables

Self-Reported Mental Health a year ago (continuous; 1-5)
 Age (continuous; single year)
 Gender Identity (Binary: Male/Female, non-binary responses removed)
 Income (continuous; income bands coded as numbers from 0-16)
 Living With a Partner (Binary: Yes/No)
 Changes to work (Binary for: Furloughed / Redundancy / Working hours reduced)
 Loss of a relative or close friend to Covid (Base: No)
 Personally suffered from Covid - confirmed or suspected (Base: No)
 Vaccine received (Binary for: Personally received / relative received)

Dependent variable

CESD Score (continuous; range 0-30)

Variable	Level	Coefficient	Error	t-value	p-value	Significance
Intercept	(Intercept)	25.410908	0.593271	42.832	< 2e-16	***
Mental Health Pre-Covid (recollected)	Continuous	-3.04251	0.11083	-27.452	< 2e-16	***
Age	Continuous	-0.079349	0.007776	-10.204	< 2e-16	***
Gender Identity	Female	1.773982	0.21696	8.177	4.22E-16	***
Income	Continuous	-0.091145	0.031676	-2.877	0.004038	**
Live with partner	Yes	-0.68996	0.232816	-2.964	0.003064	**
Work changes	Been "furloughed"	0.251876	0.285676	0.882	0.378016	
	Been made redundant / lost your job	1.513105	0.462497	3.272	0.001081	**
	Had your working hours reduced / move	1.220129	0.324951	3.755	0.000177	***
Lost a relative	Yes	1.007611	0.302514	3.331	0.000876	***
Personally suffered from Covid	Yes	0.751745	0.321051	2.342	0.019269	*
Vaccine Received	Personally	0.392514	0.283868	1.383	0.166847	
	A close relative	0.045724	0.216163	0.212	0.832489	
*** <0.001 ; ** <0.01 ; * <0.05 ; else n.significant 788 responses excluded						

Key Points

- The relationships between the demographic factors and CESD Score remain significant, indicating that those are not better explained by Covid-specific lifestyle changes - i.e. younger people aren't scoring higher on the CESD because they are more likely to have suffered from Covid.
- Those who have been made redundant as a result of Covid tend to be scoring about 1.51 points higher on the CESD, and those who have had working hours reduced about 1.22 points higher.
- Being furloughed displays no significant relationship with CESD score - this is not to say that furlough has had no effect on mental health or lockdown experience, but that there is no relationship with this specific measure of depression symptom severity.
- Those who have lost someone close to them as a result of Covid, are scoring about 1 point higher on the scale, and those who have personally suffered from Covid about 0.75 points higher.
- There is no evidence as it stands for an impact of vaccination on CESD-10 score.

Regression 4: Factors relationship with changes in personal financial situation

Independent variables

Gender Identity (Binary: Male/Female, non-binary responses removed)

Children Under 18 (Binary: Yes/No)

Income (continuous; income bands coded as numbers from 0-16)

Tenure (Base: Own a home outright)

Changes to work (Binary for: Furloughed / Redundancy / Working hours reduced)

Dependent variable

Has your personal financial situation got better or worse as a result of Covid (continuous; 1-5)

Variable	Level	Coefficient	Error	t-value	p-value	Significance
Intercept	(Intercept)	3.083752	0.076004	40.573	< 2e-16	***
Age	Continuous	-0.001979	0.001006	-1.966	0.049335	*
Gender Identity	Female	-0.129271	0.027777	-4.654	3.37E-06	***
Income	Continuous	0.044924	0.004129	10.88	< 2e-16	***
Children Under 18	Yes	-0.116216	0.03344	-3.475	0.000516	***
Tenure	Owned with a mortgage or loan	-0.113422	0.038213	-2.968	0.003015	**
	Privately rented	-0.24165	0.044678	-5.409	6.75E-08	***
	Rented from a housing association	-0.225549	0.05898	-3.824	0.000133	***
	Rented from the council	-0.080729	0.056909	-1.419	0.156108	
	Shared ownership	0.310702	0.159802	1.944	0.051937	.
	Rent free	-0.384092	0.085147	-4.511	6.66E-06	***
Work changes	Been "furloughed"	-0.332118	0.036332	-9.141	< 2e-16	***
	Been made redundant / lost your job	-0.580058	0.05853	-9.91	< 2e-16	***
	Had your working hours reduced / move	-0.094731	0.066236	-1.43	0.152748	

*** <0.001 ; ** <0.01 ; * <0.05 ; else n.significant
320 responses excluded

Key points

- The relationship between income and the perception that one's personal financial situation has improved is key, although directionality cannot be assumed here (e.g. someone who has moved to a lower income band as a result of Covid is likely to say their financial situation has got worse). As for many people in the sample, personal finances have broadly not been affected, we are looking at relatively small but significant coefficients here.
- When we control for income, and specific Covid impacts on finances (furlough / redundancy / working hour reduction), we find that housing tenure has significant relationships with the perception that personal finances have got worse. This means that, if you compare two people who are identical in terms of age and income, but one rents privately and one owns their home outright, the renter is going to be scoring almost a quarter of a point less on our 1-5 scale of whether personal financial situation has improved or got worse.
- Notably we see a relationship with having school-age children here - again small because of the tendency towards middle response, and particularly when compared to something like being made redundant (for obvious reasons), but nonetheless significant.

Regression 5: Current sleep levels, and the change since pre-pandemic sleep

Independent variables

Recollected sleep prior to Covid (Continuous 3 hours - 11 hours a night)
 Age (continuous; single year)
 Gender Identity (Binary: Male/Female, non-binary responses removed)
 Children Under 18 (Binary: Yes/No)
 Income (continuous; income bands coded as numbers from 0-16)
 Living With a Partner (Binary: Yes/No)
 Changes to work (Binary for: Furloughed / Redundancy / Working hours reduced)

Dependent variable

Current hours of sleep each night - “less than 4 hours” was coded as 3 hours, and “over 10 hours” as 11 hours

Variable	Level	Coefficient	Error	t-value	p-value	Significance
Intercept	(Intercept)	2.026275	0.165238	12.263	< 2e-16	***
Sleep before Covid	Continuous	0.670633	0.01727	38.833	< 2e-16	***
Age	Continuous	-0.001601	0.0015	-1.067	0.28588	
Gender Identity	Female	-0.203044	0.044505	-4.562	5.23E-06	***
Income	Continuous	0.02016	0.006436	3.132	0.001748	**
Children Under 18	Yes	-0.257119	0.054782	-4.694	2.79E-06	***
Live with partner	Yes	0.057306	0.050027	1.146	0.252075	
Work changes	Been “furloughed”	0.2148	0.058304	3.684	0.000233	***
	Been made redundant / lost your job	0.179697	0.094626	1.899	0.057641	
	Had your working hours reduced / move	-0.094731	0.066236	-1.43	0.152748	

*** <0.001 ; ** <0.01 ; * <0.05 ; else n.significant
 320 responses excluded

Key Points

- If you take two people, both of whom say they slept the same amount before Covid.
- Regardless of other details, if one is a woman then we would

expect them to be sleeping around 12 minutes less each night.

- If one has children under 18, then we would expect them to be sleeping around 15 minutes less.
- If one has been furloughed, then we expect them to be sleeping around 13 minutes more than the other, although we would still expect them to be sleeping less than last year.

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