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The response of low-income households to the cost-of-living crisis in Ireland

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AN INSTITIÚID UM THAIGHDE EACNAMAÍOCHTA AGUS SÓISIALTA
ESRI ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

THE RESPONSE OF LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS TO THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS IN IRELAND

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The rise in inflation in recent years triggered a cost-of-living crisis, in which households' ability to afford basic necessities declined. The cost-of-living crisis disproportionately affected lower income households, with the proportion in material deprivation (i.e. unable to afford basic necessities) rising by a fifth. This study examines how these households responded to this economic pressure and the challenges they faced in accessing government benefits and available support services during the cost-of-living crisis.

In the absence of detailed longitudinal data, the study employed a cross-sectional survey with techniques from behavioural science to improve recall and limit biases in responses. A nationally representative sample of 1,615 financial decision-makers from low- (i.e. below ~85 per cent of the median) income households undertook the study between May and June 2024. Most were recruited from the online panels of market research companies and completed the study online, but a subset was recruited in-person in low-income areas.

Participants reported on changes they made in their day-to-day spending, borrowing and saving due to the cost-of-living crisis, described as the period following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. They also reported on their use of government benefits and support services during the cost-of-living crisis, with a focus on administrative burdens (i.e. the time, effort, and frustration involved and their potential role as barriers to using supports).

The study produced the following findings:

- Almost nine-in-ten (87 per cent) reported cutting day-to-day spending as a result of the cost-of-living crisis. The most common cuts were to groceries (63 per cent), clothing and footwear (60 per cent) and electricity and heat (53 per cent).
- One-in-three households reduced savings, and a similar proportion took on more debt or entered arrears (on utility bills, rent, mortgage repayments, or other borrowing repayments). For half of those who entered arrears, this was their first time to do so.
- Some responses (e.g. entering arrears, increasing debt, cutting back on health spending) have higher risk of negative long-term consequences. Over half of households (54 per cent) undertook at least one such high-risk measure. These measures are associated with poorer mental health at the time of the survey, controlling for mental health prior to 2022.

- Entering arrears was the most stressful of all reported responses (an average of 6 on a 7-point scale, where 7 is 'very stressful'). Other forms of debt and reductions in savings were also rated as highly stressful (above 5), as were cutting back on electricity and heat, healthcare (17.1 per cent of the sample) and childcare (9.9 per cent of those with children under 18).
- Deprivation (measured using the Central Statistics Office definition) was a stronger determinant of both spending cuts and high-risk measures than income.
- Households with children under 18 were more likely to report at least one response (94 per cent vs 87 per cent of those without) and at least one high-risk measure (66 per cent vs 46 per cent). They also reported greater stress (4.4 vs 3.9).
- We found little evidence linking high-risk measures to individual psychological characteristics (e.g. financial knowledge or cognitive biases). Instead, we found strong links to situational factors (e.g. pre-existing financial stress).
- Although we cannot precisely estimate uptake of benefits (due to the complexity of eligibility criteria), there is evidence that some benefits are under-utilised. For example, only half (52 per cent) of those on very low incomes (i.e. household income below 60 per cent of the national median) reported availing of a Medical or GP Visit Card and less than half of renters reported availing of one of the Rent Tax Credit, Rent Supplement or Housing Assistance Payment.
- Just over one-third (37 per cent) availed of at least one support service (e.g. Citizens Information, St Vincent de Paul, MABS). Of these, one-third (33 per cent) did so for the first time.
- Despite the potential under-utilisation of benefits and services, many listed areas where they would like additional support. Energy bills were most commonly cited (50 per cent of the sample), followed by day-to-day expenses (32 per cent), health costs (22 per cent) and housing costs (22 per cent).
- When asked about experience accessing benefits availed of, those rated as most burdensome were the Additional Needs Payment, Carer's Benefit, the Energy Hardship Fund and the One Parent Family Benefit. The least burdensome benefits were ones that are not means tested (e.g. State Pension).
- Respondents were also asked about benefits they had not availed of but may have been eligible for based on basic socio-demographic information. Responses suggest that almost one-third of benefits were not taken up for reasons other than ineligibility, with information constraints most commonly cited.

TABLE 1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Topic	Finding	Implication
1. Protecting access to basic needs during crises	Responses with a risk of adverse effects, such as cutting day-to-day necessities and increasing debt, were common and stressful.	Interventions focusing on these areas could help protect households' financial security and access to basic necessities in times of crisis.
2. Minimising legacy effects of the cost-of-living crisis	Many households had to undertake responses with potential long-term negative effects (e.g. increased debt, reduced health and education spending).	Increased supports in important areas such as education, health and debt may be needed over the next decade to minimise the scarring effects of the cost-of-living crisis, particularly among low income households with children.
3. Targeting supports towards the most vulnerable households	Deprivation is a stronger indicator of vulnerability in a cost-of-living crisis than income.	Targeting based on deprivation would be highly beneficial but presents a practical challenge – more research is needed on how to overcome this challenge.
4. Addressing structural issues	Situational factors (e.g. pre-existing financial stress, experienced inflation), rather than individual psychological characteristics and biases, were associated with response behaviour during the cost-of-living crisis.	Interventions targeting structural issues affecting low-income households (e.g. administrative burdens) are more likely to be effective than individual-level interventions (e.g. financial education).
5. Tackling the under-utilisation of supports	Several benefits were under-utilised, with informational barriers playing a major role.	Automatic enrolment, signposting supports (e.g. benefits calculators) and implementing a single point of application could help increase take-up.
6. Identifying and removing administrative burdens	Many households experienced administrative burdens (learning, compliance, and psychological costs) when accessing supports.	Tracking administrative burdens by systematically reviewing the process people go through to access a specific benefit could help identify and remove burdens.
7. Addressing the most problematic policy areas	Housing, health, and energy were particularly problematic.	Interventions and supports prioritising these areas could be particularly impactful. Reducing administrative burdens associated with supports in these areas is likely to be fruitful (e.g. through signposting and sludge audits).
8. Future-proofing the welfare system	Households who needed supports during the cost-of-living crisis faced a complex benefits system that impeded access.	A simplified and more resilient welfare system may help tackle the long-run effects of the latest crisis and help to reduce damage in the event of future crises.

These findings have implications for policy, which are summarised in Table 1. Although inflation has stabilised, prices remain inflated relative to pre-2022, with household incomes yet to catch up. Many low income households (i.e. those with below median income) are therefore likely to persist with cuts to basic necessities, including groceries and heat. Widespread high-risk responses, including additional debt and reduced saving, imply that the cost-of-living crisis will have a lasting detrimental legacy, particularly among households with children. These households would benefit from assistance beyond temporary measures implemented in recent Budgets.

Welfare measures that are targeted at those most vulnerable allow for more efficient spending and reduce the potential for further price inflation. Our findings suggest that deprivation is a better indicator of need than income, but identifying objective and measurable indicators of deprivation is a challenge. The importance of targeted measures needs to be balanced against the administrative burden in accessing means-tested benefits experienced by those most vulnerable.

Potential under-utilisation of benefits and people's experience of administrative burdens suggest that the complexity of the welfare system may have blunted its effectiveness during the cost-of-living crisis, particularly with respect to housing, health and energy. Simplifying access and improving awareness of benefits (e.g. via a single point of application or through a centralised benefit calculator) could improve the system's efficiency. Additional monitoring of how low income households are coping with the cost-of-living and better administrative data on benefit uptake would be of further help.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

A combination of the COVID-19 pandemic, extreme climate events and Russia's invasion of Ukraine have disrupted global supply chains and energy production since 2020 (International Monetary Fund, 2023). The resulting rise in inflation hit low-income households hardest, with many unable to afford basic necessities, such as food, fuel and housing (Chafwehé et al., 2024; Collins, 2023; Lokshin et al., 2023; Meadows et al., 2024). In Ireland, this 'cost-of-living' crisis arrived on top of a pre-existing housing crisis. Annual inflation rose to 9 per cent, levels not experienced since the 1980s (Central Statistics Office, 2024a). Food and housing/utilities inflation rose to 13 per cent and 28 per cent respectively. Real incomes among those under 65 fell by 3 per cent (Roantree et al., 2024). The proportion of households suffering material deprivation (i.e. being unable to afford basic necessities) went up to 17 per cent, an increase of a fifth from 2021 (Central Statistics Office, 2024b; Roantree and Doorley, 2023), with material deprivation and income poverty particularly high among households with children (Roantree et al., 2024).

This study is motivated by the need to measure how households responded to the cost-of-living crisis, in order to inform policy. There are multiple ways in which households might respond to financial strain, broadly including reductions in spending and saving, increasing income where feasible, taking on additional debt, and foregoing activities that amount to investments in future wellbeing (e.g. spending money or time on education and health). Households can engage in one or more of these 'responses', with different long-term consequences. They may also increase their uptake of financial supports from a range of sources, including the welfare system, non-profit organisations or friends and family. Organisations offering support services to low-income households have reported large increases in demand for their services (Citizens Information Board, 2023; 2024; SVP, 2023; 2024; Threshold, 2023). Some households may be navigating these support systems for the first time.

Identifying how households have responded to the cost-of-living crisis can help to direct supportive resources and limit the risk of detrimental outcomes. As such, we sought to measure the prevalence of different responses among low income households and their experience of various benefits and services. We also sought to identify the psychological determinants of responses, such as financial knowledge and cognitive biases, and their associated outcomes, such as adverse mental health effects.

1.1 RELEVANT EVIDENCE

At the time of the survey in early 2024, we could locate no studies that attempted to measure how the public in Ireland had responded to the cost-of-living crisis. A pre-crisis qualitative study highlighted several strategies that low-income households use to cope with financial pressures, including cutting back on day-to-day spending, reducing education and housing costs, borrowing more, entering arrears and reducing savings (Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, 2018). Evidence from the UK shows that, during the cost-of-living crisis, people cut spending on things like food, home heating, travel costs and alcohol (Fountas et al., 2023; Hewlett et al., 2024; Huebner et al., 2023; Jackson et al., 2023; Meadows et al., 2024; Stone et al., 2024). Some also borrowed more, reduced savings and took on additional employment (Hewlett et al., 2024; Lawson et al., 2023; Schofield, 2024). People found these responses stressful, particularly when they had to take drastic measures such as skipping meals, borrowing for day-to-day expenses, working more or selling a car (Hewlett et al., 2024; Lawson et al., 2023).

There are a number of studies using *Growing Up in Ireland* data that examine the effects of the Great Recession among Irish families. Economic stress and vulnerability increased among Irish families after the recession (Watson et al., 2013b; 2016). A reduction in welfare benefits or working hours of parents was found to be negatively associated with child health and ability to afford basic necessities, while economic vulnerability post-recession was associated with child socio-emotional problems (Reinhard et al., 2018; Watson et al., 2013b).

We could find no study on the take-up of supports in Ireland during the cost-of-living crisis. Official figures show an increase in uptake of several welfare benefits between 2021 and 2022, when inflation peaked (Department of Social Protection, 2023). Applications for Disability and Carer's Allowances increased by 26 per cent and 16 per cent respectively. Those in receipt of the Additional Needs Payment increased by 73 per cent, with this increase coinciding with an increase in promotion of the benefit to the general public. As noted previously, organisations offering support services to low-income households also reported large increases in demand for their services.

Research from the UK shows that low-income households used a range of supports, from informal help within the community to formal support services and government benefits (Hewlett et al., 2024; Lawson et al., 2023). To understand engagement with these latter, more formal systems in Ireland, we draw on a growing body of research on 'administrative burdens.' This literature argues that the experience of accessing supports creates 'costs' for individuals, such as learning costs (e.g. researching whether one is eligible for a means-tested benefit), compliance costs (e.g. completing paperwork or attending an appointment to prove eligibility), and psychological costs (e.g. experiencing the stigma or loss of autonomy associated with some benefits) (Herd and Moynihan, 2019; Moynihan et al., 2015). International evidence shows that these can negatively impact people's experiences as well as reduce take-up of benefits (review in Halling and Baekgaard, 2024).

A related field of study in behavioural science argues that 'sludge', or behavioural frictions (such as overly complex, lengthy, or frustrating processes), can disproportionately discourage people from completing actions.[1] Importantly, this can happen even when the actions involved would significantly benefit them (Bearson and Sunstein, 2023; Madsen et al., 2022; Sunstein, 2018; 2022). In other words, even seemingly minor increases in learning, compliance, or psychological costs can have substantive detrimental effects. Furthermore, burdens and sludge can exacerbate inequality, as people with fewer resources (e.g. due to financial or health constraints) may be more impacted by burdens despite also being the individuals who most need to access supports (Bell et al., 2023; Christensen et al., 2020; Martin et al., 2024). For example, a recent *Irish Times* article (Bowers, 2024) highlighted the burdens involved in obtaining a Medical Card, with a cancer patient and single parent describing the process as arduous and invasive during a challenging time that already strained resources. Relatedly, Byrne and Murray (2017) noted that the complexity of the application process was a barrier to lone parents accessing higher education supports.

As noted, there is little available evidence on how low-income households in Ireland experience supportive benefits and services, though there is reason to suspect administrative burdens impede take-up. Micro-simulation models, which combine administrative and survey data, have estimated that the take-up of benefits, such as the Working Family Payment, Medical Card, and GP Visit Card, is below what would be expected given the socio-demographic profile of the population (Callan et al., 2018; Doorley and Kakoulidou, 2024; Keane et al., 2021). For Medical Cards, there is some evidence that information barriers and social stigma impede take-up (Keane et al., 2021). Sludge and administrative burdens have also been proposed to explain lower take-up of energy efficiency retrofitting grants (Lades et al., 2022; Tovar Reaños et al., 2023). However, we are unaware of any quantitative evidence on experience of support services.

1 Sunstein (2021) explains "If sludge is understood to consist of frictions that separate people from what they want to get, the concept is not entirely mysterious. Much sludge involves waiting time (in person, on the phone, even online). Much of it involves reporting burdens (as when people are required to fill out weekly reports, explaining what they have been doing with their lives). Much of it consists of dreary or duplicative application requirements, including time spent online, which might be required if people are seeking to obtain money, medical care, a job, a visa, a permit, or some kind of life-saving help. Much of it involves travel (as when people need to show up somewhere for an in-person interview)".

1.2 STUDY AIMS

Our aim was to provide the first quantitative analysis of how low-income households responded to the cost-of-living crisis in Ireland. Ideally, such an analysis would utilise longitudinal tracking data, comparing current financial behaviour and service use against pre-crisis behaviour and service use among the same representative sample. However, we could locate no sufficiently detailed administrative or survey data that would permit this approach. We therefore conducted a cross-sectional survey but employed multiple techniques from behavioural science to mitigate recall bias (i.e. misperceptions in memory) and to strengthen the reliability of findings. For example, we first anchored survey respondents to life events pre-crisis and used clearly defined timeframes for questions.

We focus on low-income households, given the disproportionate effect the cost-of-living increases have had on this group. Our sample frame is those with *equivalised* household income below ~85 per cent of the median (Central Statistics Office, 2023b). Equivalised income is a metric used by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) that equates to household income adjusted for household size (Central Statistics Office, 2023a). Within this low-income group, we differentiate between those on 'very low' income (below 60 per cent of the median equivalised income) and those on 'somewhat low' income (60 per cent of the median and ~85% of the median). The income threshold for the very low income category is the same as that for the at-risk-of-poverty measure used in poverty monitoring in Ireland and the EU (Central Statistics Office, 2023a; Eurostat, 2025a). We also differentiate between those in material deprivation (i.e. who report being unable to afford two or more basic necessities, such as sufficient home heating) and those not in material deprivation (Central Statistics Office, 2023a; Maître and Privalko, 2021). This approach allows us to compare the kinds of responses made and benefit uptake across groups, to identify possible methods for targeting policy solutions.

Our primary aim is to document the nature of the responses of low-income households to the cost-of-living crisis (e.g. how many cut back on spending and the nature of this spending, versus the proportion who took on additional employment), including how many people responded in a particular way for the first time, given that the cost-of-living crisis thrust many households newly into financial difficulty (Collins, 2023). A particular focus is on responses with potential negative long-term consequences (hereafter 'risky' responses), such as cutting back on health spending, taking on additional debt or entering arrears (Broadbent et al., 2023). In addition to monitoring the prevalence of risky responses, we investigate differences between household characteristics (e.g. gender differences in financial responsibility within the home, presence of children aged under 18 in the home) and psychological characteristics (e.g. perceptions, preferences and cognitive biases), and effects on potential outcomes, such as on mental health. We describe these measures in more detail in Chapter 2.

With respect to supports, we focus on two types: government benefits (including 28 benefits spanning general income benefits but also children, pension, housing, health, and energy-related benefits) and support services (we include nine, from local community groups to public or non-profit services providing support in areas such as money, housing, and mental health). Our aim is to document how low-income households used benefits and services, including how many did so for the first time. The data we collected do not to allow us to estimate deficits in take-up precisely for each family, as this would require very detailed socio-demographic data to ascertain eligibility. Rather, we describe the use of benefits across our low-income population sample. However, our approach does allow us to identify potential under-utilisation of benefits based on the sample's aggregate use. The survey also included questions on additional support needs that households may have.

We further aim to quantify experiences of benefit and service uptake, focusing on administrative burdens, and to identify potential reasons for not using benefits. We use a recently developed survey measure of administrative burdens to ask participants about the costs they experienced while accessing supports (Jilke et al., 2024). The study therefore generates insights into where reducing burdens to benefit or service access could be especially beneficial, including for the purpose of reducing inequality.

CHAPTER 2

Methods

2.1 PARTICIPANTS

This study received ethical approval from the ESRI ethics committee on 22 February 2024. In total, 1,615 participants completed the study between March and early June 2024. 6,754 people entered the survey but 2,567 were screened out because their household equivalised income was above ~85 per cent of the national median, or they reported having no financial responsibility within their households (Hitczenko, 2016). A further 1,810 were screened out due to socio-demographic quotas already being filled and 545 exited during the screening questions. Another 217 started the survey (after passing the screening and quota checks) but did not complete, giving an attrition rate of 11.8 per cent and a final sample of 1,615. The attrition rate is in line with previous studies using similar sampling methods and, importantly, the majority of attrition is distributed throughout the survey, implying that no individual task caused disproportionate difficulty for participants.

Of the final sample, 1,515 were recruited online from the online panels of two leading market research agencies.[2,3] Another 100 completed the survey in-person using computer-assisted personal interviewing. These individuals were recruited for the study by knocking on doors in low-income areas.[4] The in-person data collection was carried out to strengthen the representativeness of our sample by recruiting demographics that were slightly underrepresented in our online data collection (males, age 60+). Participants were paid a €5 participation fee. Table 2.1 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of our sample.

Despite efforts to ensure participant representativeness and to develop a plain language survey, limitations in this sampling method are worth noting. Individuals with unmet English language and/or digital literacy needs are likely underrepresented. As such, we are unlikely to capture the experience of certain groups of migrants (e.g. refugees) and those unable to afford or effectively use digital devices who may be particularly vulnerable to financial hardship and have additional difficulties accessing relevant benefits. The implication here is that our

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2 RedC Live (https://www.redclive.ie/), which is a panel of over 40,000 members with an additional 200-500 added per month via online and offline recruitment efforts (including probability sampling and advertisements). Data quality has been validated against real outcomes (e.g. https://redcresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Slide2-1024x576-1.jpg).

3 Pureprofile (https://www.pureprofile.com/), which is a panel of over 20,000 members in Ireland. They use a variety of recruitment methods, including member referral programmes, invitation-only panels, targeted acquisition, social media, PR campaigns, organic search and search engine marketing (https://business.pureprofile.com/global-panel-book/).

4 Carried out by Ipsos B&A.

findings may underestimate the full extent of the negative effects of the cost-of-living crisis on those households that are hardest to reach, though they nonetheless provide useful evidence for most low-income households.

TABLE 2.1 SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

Variable	%	Variable	%
Age		**Region of residence**	
- Under 40	33	- Dublin	29
- 40-59	35	- Rest of Leinster	30
- 60+	32	- Munster	24
Female	52	- Connacht/Ulster	18
Education		**No of adults in household**	
- Leaving Cert or less	34	- 1 adult	16
- Tertiary not degree	29	- 2 adults	53
- Degree or more	38	- 3 or more adults	31
Employment status		**Children in household**	36
- In employment	59	**Living situation**	
- Retired	21	- Private rental	19
- Other	20	- Local authority housing	11
Born Ireland	79	- Own home	60
Urban	62	- Parents'/family home	9
		- Other	1

Note: N=1,615. Unweighted estimates.

2.2 SURVEY DESIGN

The full survey instrumentation is included in the appendix.

2.2.1 Memory prompts

We took steps at the beginning of the survey to mitigate the risk of recall bias (i.e. that participants would misremember what changes they had made). We ran the survey around the two-year anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a significant event linked to cost-of-living increases in Europe in 2022. We first asked participants to recall the time of the invasion, giving them a salient anchor point to aid memory (Bradburn et al., 1987), before asking about their own experiences.

To further aid recall, participants were prompted to recall and write changes in their own lives over the previous two years, before answering questions about their financial behaviour. They first completed an open-ended question about significant personal events since 2022. They then completed a series of multiple choice questions (MCQs) about their socio-demographic characteristics at the beginning of 2022 (e.g. household composition, employment status, living situation). Their answers were used to generate a summary paragraph describing the participant's situation in early 2022, which was shown to them.

2.2.2 Responses to cost-of-living increases

After the memory prompts, participants were asked about cuts to day-to-day spending they had made since the beginning of 2022. They chose from a list of 11 different categories including groceries, clothing and footwear, and electricity and heating. We made it clear to participants that we were interested in areas of spending where they had 'cut back' since the beginning of 2022, rather than areas where their spending was constrained at the time of the survey but had not changed since 2022 (see the exact wording of the question in Appendix E). Next, they were asked about changes in four different categories of borrowing and saving since the beginning of 2022. They were then asked about four other domains in which they might have made changes to ease financial pressures since the beginning of 2022, including taking on employment and cutting back on education or training. After that, they were asked about nine different types of plans they may have abandoned since the start of 2022 because they could not afford them, including going on a holiday and starting a savings account or a pension. We noted that some households may change their financial behaviour for reasons other than external financial pressures (e.g. to increase savings) and so participants were asked if the changes they had made, and plans they had abandoned, were entirely, partly, or not at all due to cost-of-living increases. For changes that were at least partly due to cost-of-living increases, they were asked to rate how stressful each response was, on a scale from 1 'not stressful at all' to 7 'very stressful'. They were also asked how often they had made that kind of change before 2022 (the response options were 'never did this before 2022', 'did this once or twice before 2022', 'did this many times before 2022').

2.2.3 Government benefits and support services

Next, we surveyed participants about their experiences with government benefits and support services during the cost-of-living crisis. The benefits and services selected for the survey reflected those most relevant to and commonly used by low-income households. They were identified using sources such as the Citizens Information Service and finalised after feedback from stakeholders (including the study's Steering Committee) who work with low-income households to provide, signpost, or advocate on these benefits and services.

For government benefits, we focused on policy areas relevant to low-income households, such as income support (e.g. Jobseeker's Allowance), housing (e.g. Rent Tax Credit), health (e.g. Medical Card), energy (e.g. Fuel Allowance), pension (e.g. State Pension), and children (e.g. National Childcare Scheme). In total, we surveyed 28 benefits across six policy areas (full list in appendix).[5] The benefits are relevant but not necessarily exclusive to low-income households; for example, the Child Benefit is available to all parents and guardians of minors. Furthermore, not all low-income households are eligible for all the benefits examined. Some benefits are conditional on means tests, or on other eligibility criteria (e.g. pension, unemployment, children-related benefits). Most benefits involve either one-off or regular payments. Some involve tax credits (e.g. Home Carer Tax Credit) or the provision of free services (e.g. Warmer Homes Scheme).

For support services, we focused on nine services of potential relevance to low-income households: St Vincent de Paul (a charity that provides services to individuals facing poverty), the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (a free and independent money advice service), Citizens Information (information, advice, and advocacy on Irish public and social services), Threshold (a homeless prevention charity that advises tenants), the Residential Tenancies Board (a public body that regulates the rental housing market and resolves disputes), local churches and community groups, Men's and Women's Sheds (community-run centres providing social events and activities), credit unions (not-for-profit member-owned local financial institutions), and the Samaritans (emotional support services).

We surveyed participants about these benefits and services as follows:

Use of benefits and services: We asked participants to indicate which government benefits and support services they had used during the past two years, by selecting applicable items from lists of benefits (six policy areas totalling up to 28 items) and services (nine items). Participants were only shown the pension if they were over 65 and policies relevant to children if they had minor children living at home. Participants could also write in 'other' benefits and services not listed in the survey, but this did not yield recurrent or consistent new items, therefore the original list was maintained for analysis.

Reasons for not using benefits: We asked participants to indicate why they had not used certain benefits, selecting from a list of reasons ('I was not aware of this benefit', 'It was not relevant to me', 'I was not eligible', 'Too much hassle to apply', 'I don't know what this benefit is', 'Some other reason'). To limit burden on participants, up to three benefits were randomly selected by the survey software for this question.[6] We asked only about benefits that participants had not used but

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5 Some of these further include several benefits grouped together, when there was a risk participants might find it difficult to select the correct option (e.g. Medical and GP Visit Cards, Jobseeker's Benefit and Allowance, Carer's Benefit and Allowance, State Pensions regardless of contributory status). This allows us to reduce participant error, but it does limit the conclusions that can be drawn on specific benefits within these aggregated benefits.

6 This randomisation was programmed into the survey software using JavaScript. As for the questions about benefits used, only those over 65 could be asked about why they did not use pension benefits, and only those with minor children living at home could be asked about child-related benefits.

may have been eligible for based on their socio-demographic information over the past two years (age, children, marital status, homeowner or renter status, employment status).

Additional support needs: We asked participants what other supports they would want, out of an itemised list (help with energy bills, day-to-day expenses, health costs, education costs, housing costs, or childcare costs, help finding work, or finding and accessing benefits, emotional or psychological support, help managing money, and help with access to loans or credit).

Experiences of administrative burden: We asked participants about their experiences accessing benefits and services, adapting the three-item questionnaire proposed by Jilke et al. (2024). Again, to limit the burden on participants, we asked about up to three randomly selected benefits and up to three randomly selected services, among those that participants had used. For each benefit or service, we asked:

- Learning costs: 'How easy or difficult was it to find out about this benefit [service]?' (for benefits: '…such as how to apply or what you needed to do, or if you were eligible'; for services: '… such as how to use this service or what you needed to do'), rated on a numeric seven-point scale from 'Very easy' to 'Very difficult'.
- Compliance costs: For benefits, 'How easy or difficult was it to fill out the paperwork, provide proof of eligibility (such as payslips, proof of where you live, and so on), or attend appointments as needed?'; for services, 'How easy or difficult was it to use this service, for example gathering documentation, filling out paperwork, or attending appointments as needed?', both rated on a numeric seven-point scale from 'Very easy' to 'Very difficult'.
- Psychological costs: 'How frustrating was the experience of accessing this benefit [using this support service] for you?', rated on a numeric seven-point scale from 'Not frustrating at all' to 'Extremely frustrating'.

First-time use: When asking participants about their experiences with (up to) three benefits (services) that they had used, we also asked if they had ever used the benefit (service) before the start of 2022 ('Yes, I used this service before 2022' or 'No, it was my first time using it').

2.2.4 Other variables

We also measured several other variables that we analysed as potential determinants of responses to the cost-of-living crisis. These variables, along with the mental health measure we analyse as a possible outcome of responses to the cost-of-living crisis and the measures of equivalised income and deprivation we use to categorise participants are described in Table 2.2.

TABLE 2.2 PSYCHOLOGICAL AND OTHER VARIABLES

Variable	Description
Equivalised income	Equivalised income is a metric used by the Central Statistics Office (2023a) and is household income adjusted for household size. When measuring this, we took steps to help participants answer questions about their household size and income accurately. We defined a household as 'everyone who lives in your home who benefits from your household's shared income' and gave examples. For income, participants could answer as income per week, per month, or per year and were given instructions about what type of income to include (e.g. welfare benefits, pensions). They reported their income in two stages – first they chose one of six income brackets (e.g. €20,001-30,000), then they chose an exact amount on a slider scale within the chosen bracket.
Material deprivation	This was measured according to the method used by the Central Statistics Office (2023a). Participants who reported being unable to afford two or more basic necessities from a list of 11 are classified as deprived (e.g. unable to afford to heat their home enough, unable to afford to replace worn-out clothes).
Mental and Physical health	Participants rated both their mental and physical health in general on a scale from 1 'very bad' to 7 'very good', both currently (in line with Jylhä, 2009) and at the beginning of 2022.
Financial responsibility	Household members can differ with respect to the level of financial responsibility (Guiso and Zaccaria, 2023; Watson et al., 2013a). Participants rated their financial responsibility within their household in four different domains on a scale from 1 'none or almost none' to 5 'all or almost all' (Hitczenko, 2016). For analysis, we use the average of the four ratings.
Financial stress	Participants rated on a seven-point scale (1 'never' to 7 'very often') the extent to which they have had struggles paying bills over the last two years, and the extent to which they worried about having enough money to make ends meet (Carvalho et al., 2016). For analysis, we use the average rating as our measure of current financial stress. Additionally, because households may react differently to financial shocks if experiencing financial stress for the first time (Bufe et al., 2021), participants were also asked this for the beginning of 2022.
Experienced inflation	Differences in spending patterns may lead to differences in experienced inflation (Kaplan and Schulhofer-Wohl, 2017). Participants were asked 'Do you think your costs have increased by less than, more than, or the same as other people?'. They answered on a seven-point scale from 1 'much less than other people' to 7 'much more than other people'.
Inflation estimate	Participants were asked 'At the moment, do you feel prices of things in general are decreasing, staying the same, or increasing?'. If they answered 'increasing', they were then asked if prices were increasing faster, the same, or slower than they had in the previous two years. We generate a binary variable for analysis equal to one if answered correctly (increasing more slowly).
Financial knowledge	Participants rated on a seven-point scale (1 'not knowledgeable at all' to 7 'very knowledgeable') 'How knowledgeable do you think you are about general financial matters?' (McGowan et al., 2023; Savanta ComRes, 2020).
Confidence with skills	We asked participants to rate on a seven-point scale (1 'not confident at all' to 7 'very confident') their confidence with literacy, numeracy, and digital skills. We classify people as having 'high confidence' in these skills if their average rating for the three skills is above the median.

Contd.

TABLE 2.2 CONTD.

Variable	Description
Time preferences	Time preferences describe the extent to which an individual is willing to forego a short-term benefit in favour of a longer term gain (Ericson and Laibson, 2019). Participants answered on a seven-point scale (1 'completely unwilling' to 7 'very willing') 'How willing are you to give up something that is beneficial for you today in order to benefit more from that in the future?' (Falk et al., 2018; 2023).
Risk preferences	Risk preferences describe the extent to which an individual is comfortable with taking risks (Holt and Laury, 2014). Participants answered on a seven-point scale (1 'completely unwilling' to 7 'very willing') 'When it comes to financial matters, how willing or unwilling are you to take risks?' (Dohmen et al., 2011).
Money illusion	Money illusion is a cognitive bias which describes how people tend to think of money in nominal terms rather than its real value and therefore underestimate the effect of inflation on purchasing power (Shafir et al., 1997). We asked participants which of two hypothetical scenarios they would prefer: (1) annual income increases by €1,000 and inflation is 10 per cent or (2) annual income increases by €500 and inflation is 0 per cent. In real terms, option (2) should be preferred, and we classify a person as having money illusion if they chose option (1).
Pennies-a-day bias	Pennies-a-day bias is a cognitive bias which describes how people tend to underestimate the accumulation of small monetary amounts (Gourville, 1998). We asked participants to choose between two hypothetical price plans for a pay TV service: (1) Billed monthly, weekly cost of €1.75; (2) billed monthly, yearly cost of €85. Given that option (2) is cheaper, participants who answered (1) were classified as having pennies-a-day bias.

2.3 ANALYSIS METHODS

Our analysis plan was pre-registered at https://osf.io/y4f8h/.

We weight our sample for all descriptive analysis to strengthen representativeness. Weights are calculated using the raking method with statistics on age, gender and region of residence for the population below median equivalised income from the Survey on Income and Living Conditions 2022 (Central Statistics Office, 2023c; Deming and Stephan, 1940; Deville and Särndal, 1992). See Appendix Table A.1 for a comparison of the composition of our unweighted and weighted samples to population statistics.

Throughout the next section (Results), we refer to p-values derived from statistical tests of the differences between two estimates. Unless otherwise specified, the test used in each case is a Wald Test.

In our analysis, we categorise participants into groups, using methods from the CSO (Central Statistics Office, 2023a). Firstly, we categorise participants as either 'somewhat low income' or 'very low income' (64 per cent and 36 per cent of our sample, respectively) based on whether their income is between 60 per cent and ~85 per cent of national median equivalised income or below 60 per cent of the income. We also categorise participants as 'not deprived' or 'deprived' (51 per cent and 49 per cent of our sample, respectively) based on the material deprivation questions described previously.[7] This gives four subgroups: somewhat low income and not deprived (37 per cent of our sample); somewhat low income and deprived (28 per cent); very low income and not deprived (15 per cent); very low income and deprived (21 per cent). The socio-demographic characteristics by income level and by deprivation are shown in Appendix Table A.2. In our sample, those with very low income or in deprivation have less education, are more likely to be in single adult households, are less likely to own their own home, more likely to be in social housing, and have poorer mental and physical health. The mental health gap between those in deprivation and those not is significantly larger than the mental health gap between income levels (p=0.000). Those on very low income are also less likely to be in employment, while those in deprivation are younger, more likely to be female, more likely to be in private rented accommodation, and more likely to have children.

[7] Note that we do not use the standard CSO terminology for these categories (at-risk-of-poverty, in consistent poverty) for ease of exposition to those not already familiar with these terms, and to allow us to distinguish between those with "somewhat low income" who are deprived and those that are not.

CHAPTER 3

Results

3.1 RESPONSES TO COST-OF-LIVING INCREASES

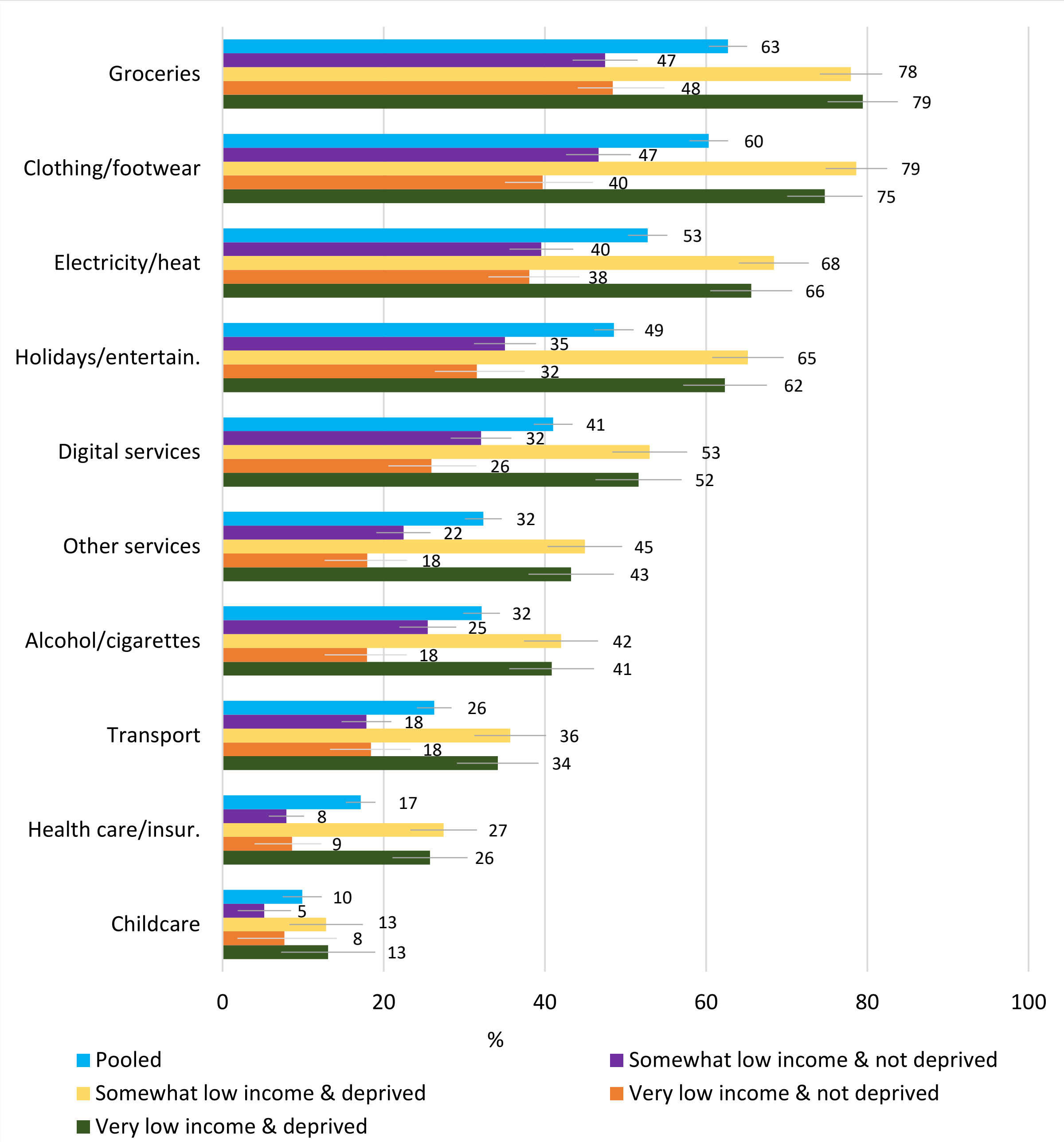
94 per cent of all changes people reported making since 2022 were at least partly due to cost-of-living increases. In what follows we focus on those changes. 87 per cent of participants reported cutting day-to-day spending due to cost-of-living increases. The most common cuts were: groceries (63 per cent), clothing and footwear (60 per cent), electricity and heat (53 per cent), holidays and entertainment (49 per cent) (Figure 3.1). A third of participants cut back on savings due to cost-of-living increases, while a similar proportion took on more debt or went into arrears (on utility bills, rent, mortgage repayments, or other borrowing repayments) (Figure 3.2). A fifth took on (additional) employment (Figure 3.3). 59 per cent of participants abandoned a plan due to cost-of-living pressures, the most common being holidays (one-third) (Figure 3.4).[8]

For many responses, a lot of participants reported that this period was their first time having to respond in this manner to financial constraints. Around three-fifths of those that cut back on childcare, health, utilities and education were doing so for the first time. Half of those who went into arrears had not previously done so.

Those in material deprivation were significantly more likely to have made changes due to cost-of-living increases – 98 per cent of those in deprivation undertook at least one response, compared to 81 per cent of those not in deprivation (p=0.000). There was no difference between income categories in the proportion who made changes (89 per cent vs 89 per cent, p=0.988).

[8] Note that in Figure 3.4, we restricted the sample to those aged under 45 in calculating the proportion abandoning a plan to have a child, and restricted the sample to those aged over 64 when calculating the proportion abandoning a plan to retire.

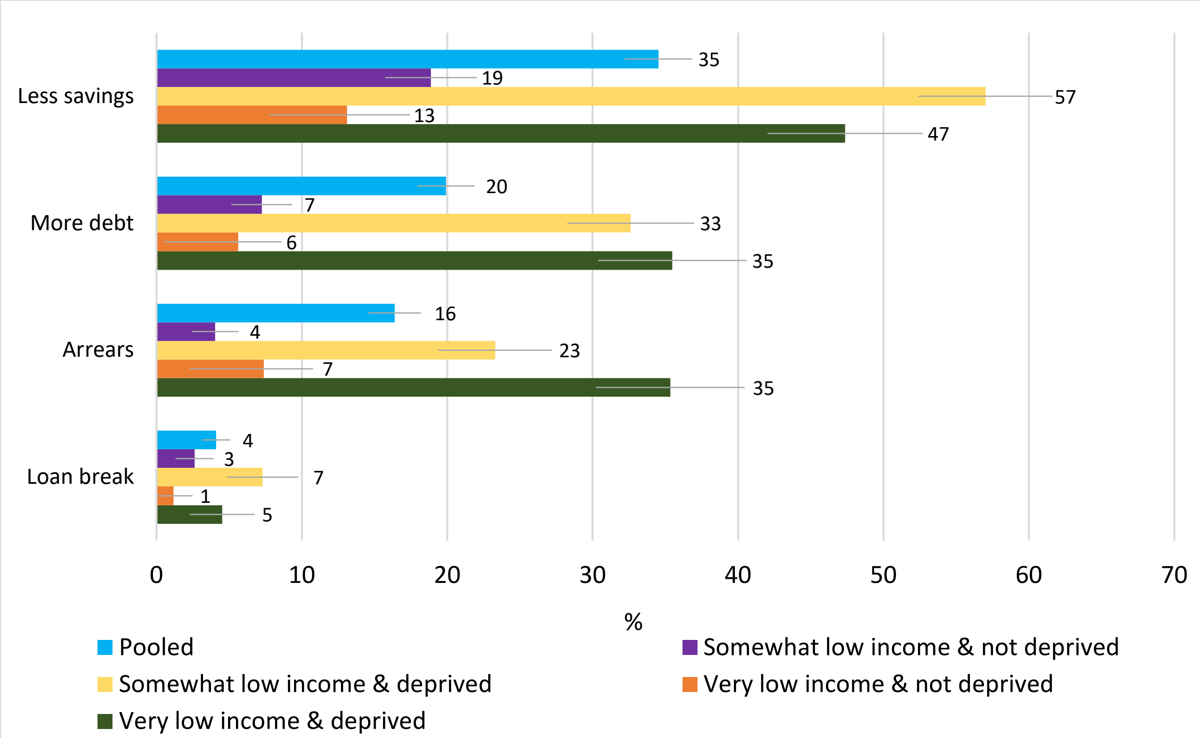
FIGURE 3.1 PROPORTION OF PARTICIPANTS WHO UNDERTOOK SPENDING RESPONSES DUE TO COST-OF-LIVING INCREASES



Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals. For childcare, the sample is restricted to participants who have at least one child under 18.

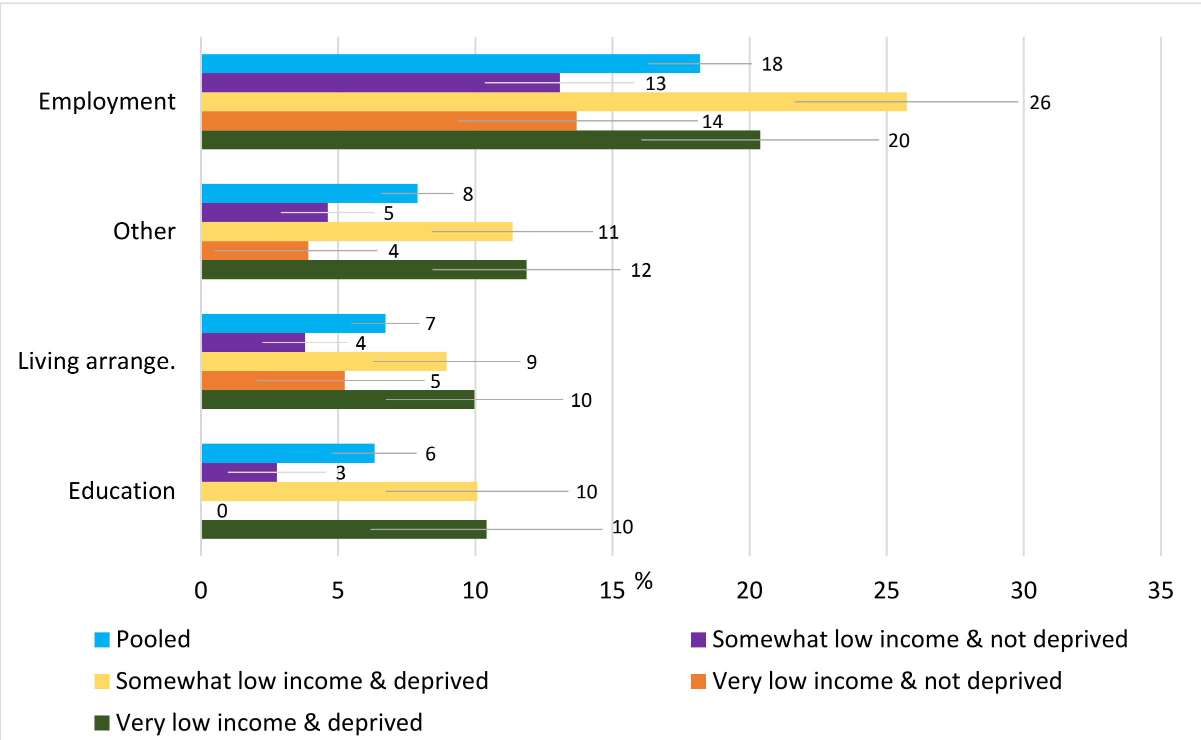
One potential limitation of this analysis is that there may be floor effects for some deprived households. Those households who were already spending the bare minimum on basic necessities in specific domains before the cost-of-living crisis may have had no room to make further cuts in those domains when the crisis hit. This may partly explain why cutbacks to holidays and entertainment are less prevalent than cutbacks to groceries, clothing/footwear and electricity/heat, while deprivation in the entertainment domain is usually more prevalent than deprivation in other domains (Central Statistics Office, 2024d).

FIGURE 3.2 PROPORTION OF PARTICIPANTS WHO UNDERTOOK BORROWING/SAVING RESPONSES DUE TO COST-OF-LIVING INCREASES



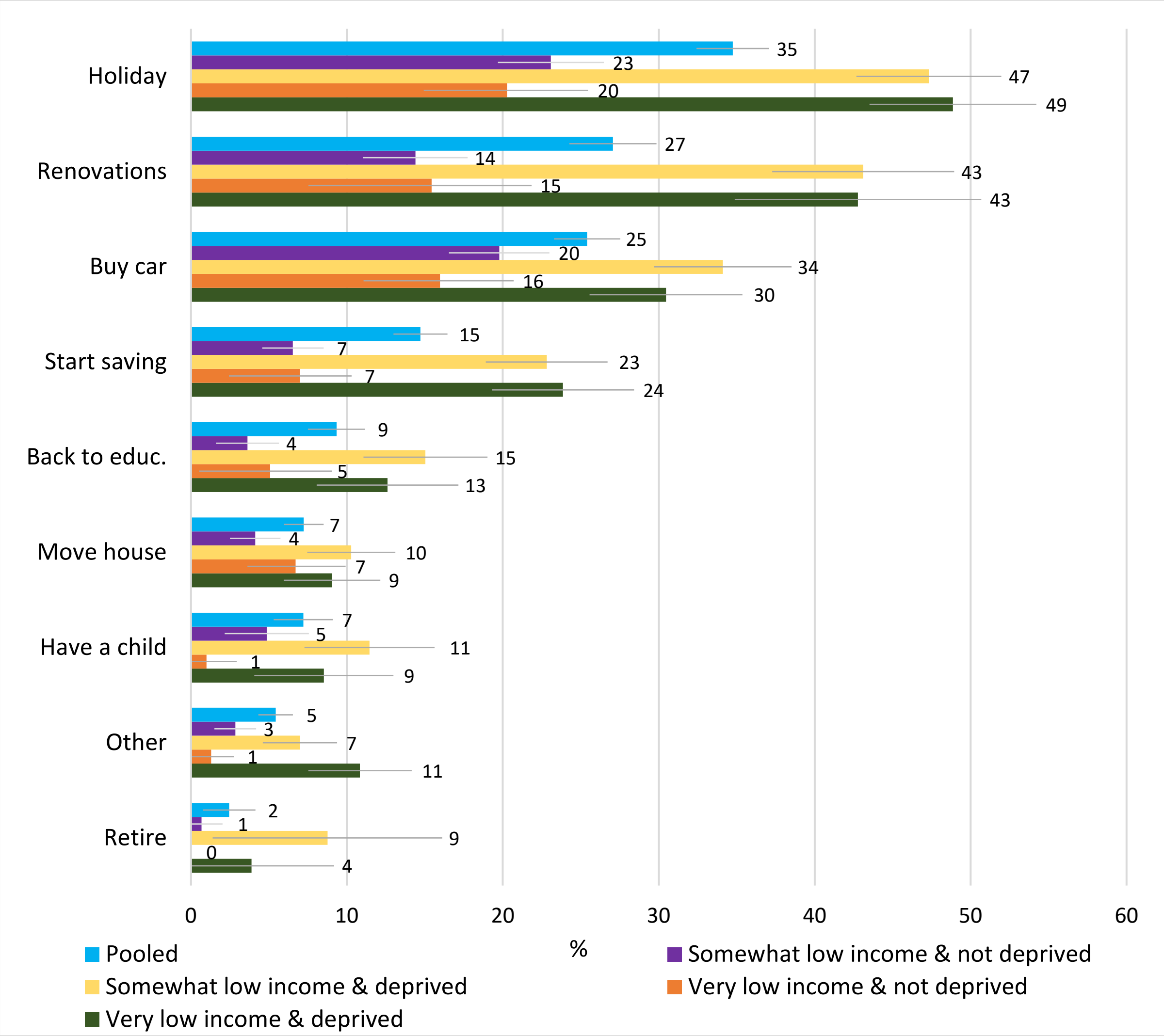
Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals.

FIGURE 3.3 PROPORTION OF PARTICIPANTS WHO UNDERTOOK OTHER RESPONSES DUE TO COST-OF-LIVING INCREASES



Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals. For education, the sample is restricted to those under 50 years of age and/or who had children under 18 at the time of the survey or at the beginning of 2022.

FIGURE 3.4 PROPORTION OF PARTICIPANTS ABANDONING PLANS DUE TO COST-OF-LIVING INCREASES



Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals. For renovations, the sample is restricted to those who own their own home. For education, the sample is restricted only to those under 50 years of age and/or who had children under 18 at the time of the survey or at the beginning of 2022. For having a child, the sample is restricted to those aged under 45. For retiring, the sample is restricted to those aged over 64.

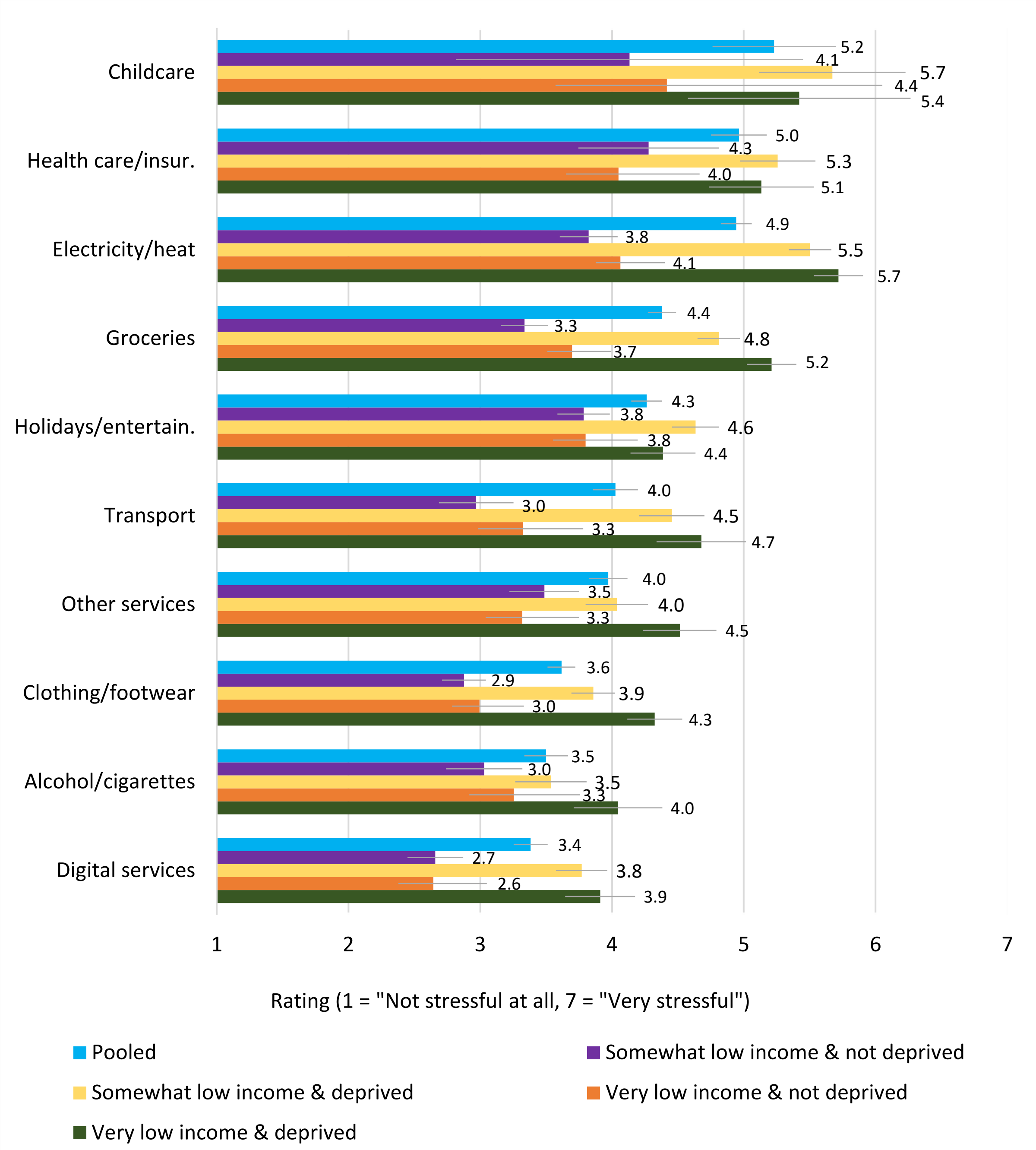
To gain further insight into this possibility, we analysed the spending cuts in particular domains made by those households who reported deprivation in the same domain at the time of the survey. While some of these households will have newly entered deprivation since the start of 2022, at least some will have been in deprivation at the beginning of 2022. 76 per cent of those that reported home heating deprivation at the time of the survey made cuts to electricity and heat. 80 per cent of those reporting food deprivation cut spending on groceries, 84 per cent of those reporting clothing deprivation made cuts to clothing/footwear, while 70 per cent reporting entertainment deprivation made cuts to entertainment. That leaves 16-30 per cent of those reporting deprivation in a given domain that did not make spending cuts in that domain. This 16-30 per cent is likely to be mostly made up of those who were in deprivation in that domain before 2022, as those newly in deprivation had to have made cuts in a given domain to enter deprivation in that domain.

It is possible that at least some of this group of 16-30 per cent of households may not have been able to make spending cuts in these domains due to floor effects, but it is also possible that some of these households still had room to make cuts but simply chose to make cuts in other domains instead. Even in the former case, the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on such households would have manifested itself in cuts in other spending domains, in increased borrowing etc, and so our estimation of the overall impact of the cost-of-living crisis would not be affected.

Something worth noting is that there is overlap between how deprivation is measured and some of the changes we asked about. Specifically, deprivation is measured by asking people if they cannot afford basic necessities in the domains of food, clothing, heating and entertainment, while we ask about cutbacks people have made in these domains. Making cutbacks in these domains increased the risk that a household that did not fit the definition of deprivation pre-crisis slipped into fitting the definition of deprivation during the cost-of-living crisis. This raises a concern that the relationship between deprivation and cutbacks we find is an artefact of how deprivation is measured, rather than reflecting a true relationship between cutbacks and the latent variable that the deprivation measure seeks to capture. However, we see the same relationship between deprivation and cutbacks in domains not directly measured in the deprivation index, as well as with other changes such as increases in debt (see below), allaying this concern.

Of the spending responses, cutting back on childcare, health insurance and care, and electricity and heat were rated the most stressful by participants, with an average rating of 5 on the 1-to-7 scale, (Figure 3.5). As childcare and health cuts were relatively rare in our sample (9.9 per cent of those that have children under 18; and 17.1 per cent, respectively), we ran some additional analysis to check that the high average stress rating of these cuts was not being driven by a selection effect (e.g. if those under most stress generally were more likely to make these cuts). Appendix Figure A.1 shows the average difference between the stress rating a participant gave to a particular cut and the average rating they gave for all responses they undertook, in contrast to Figure 3.5 which simply shows the average rating participants gave to each cut. This shows that people who made cuts to childcare, health spending and electricity/heating rated these cuts as relatively more stressful than other cuts they made ($p<0.01$ in all cases). Cuts to spending on alcohol/cigarettes and digital services were reported as relatively less stressful than other cuts people made ($p<0.01$ in both cases). Those living in social housing or private rented accommodation found electricity and heat cuts more stressful than others (average stress rating of 5.4 for those in social/rented housing compared to 4.8 for others, $p=0.000$).

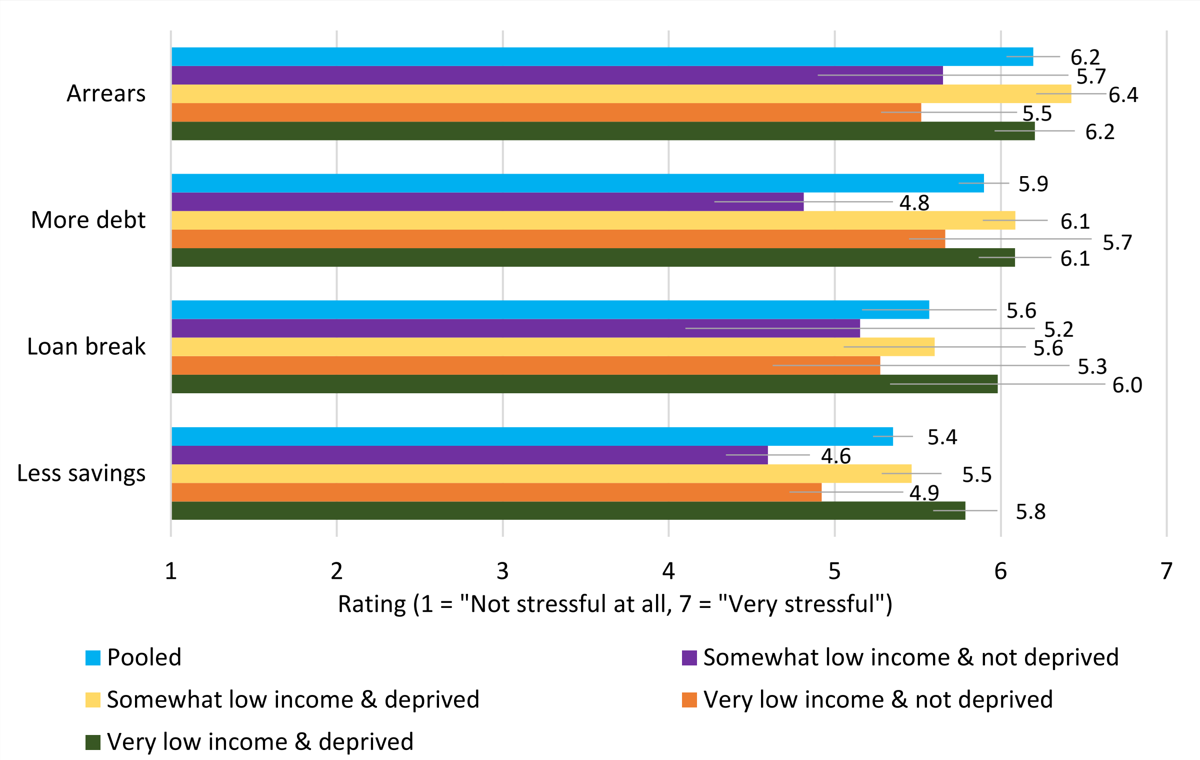
FIGURE 3.5 STRESS RATINGS REPORTED BY PARTICIPANTS FOR EACH SPENDING RESPONSE



Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals.

Entering arrears was reported as the most stressful of all responses, with an average rating above six on the seven-point scale (Figures 3.6 and Appendix Figure A.2). Indeed, all of the borrowing/saving responses were rated highly with average ratings all above five. Cutting back on education and making changes to living arrangements were also highly stressful, with average stress ratings above five (Figures 3.7 and Appendix Figure A.3). Those in deprivation rated the responses they made as more stressful on average (mean ratings 4.7 vs 3.4, p=0.000). Those on very low incomes also rated responses as more stressful (4.4 vs 3.9, p=000). The stress gap between those in deprivation and those not was significantly larger than the stress gap by income level (p=0.000). Those on somewhat low income and deprived found responses more stressful than those on very low income and not deprived (4.6 vs 3.5, p=0.000). Notably, the most stressful responses were also among those with the highest proportion of people making them for the first time (Appendix Figures A.4-A.6).

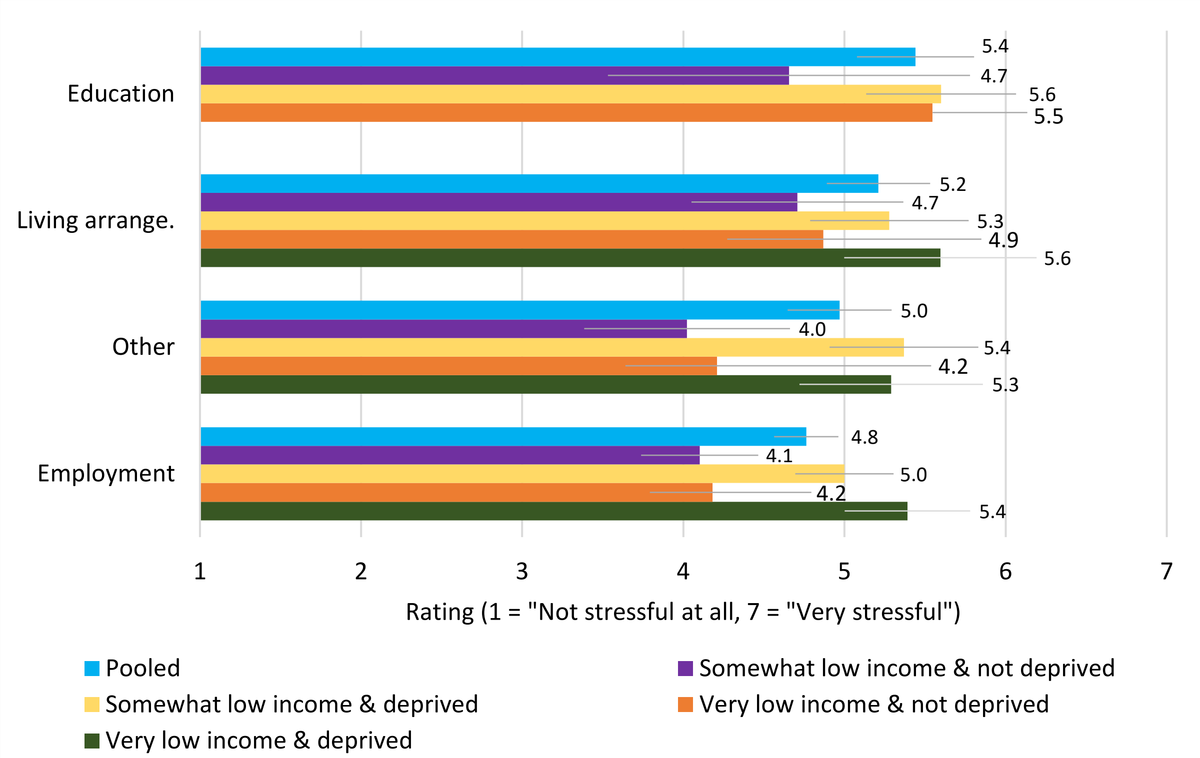
FIGURE 3.6 STRESS RATINGS REPORTED BY PARTICIPANTS FOR EACH BORROWING/SAVING RESPONSE



Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals.

We find no important differences in response behaviour between those who reported a higher degree of confidence in their numeracy, literacy and digital skill and those who were less confident (Appendix Figures A.7-A.9). 90 per cent of those with low confidence in these skills responded in some way to cost-of-living increases, compared to 89 per cent of this with higher confidence (p=0.549). However, we find significant differences between households with children and those without. A higher proportion of households with children undertook at least one response (94 per cent vs 87 per cent, p=0.000), and they found responses more stressful on average (average rating of 4.4 vs 3.9, p=0.000). See further details in Appendix Figures A.10-A.15. Those with children were also more likely to be in deprivation (43 per cent vs 31 per cent, p=0.000, Appendix Table A.2), which may at least partly explain the differences in response behaviour we find for this subgroup.

FIGURE 3.7 STRESS RATINGS REPORTED BY PARTICIPANTS FOR EACH OTHER RESPONSE



Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals.

3.2 'RISKY' RESPONSES

We classify the following responses as 'risky', due to their potential for long-term negative consequences: cutting health spending, going into arrears, increasing debt, taking a mortgage or loan payment break, cutting back on savings/pension, cutting back on education/training. Note that we consider increasing debt to be 'risky' in this context for two main reasons. Firstly, the increases in debt occurred at least partly to compensate for cost-of-living increases and so are likely to have been used to meet day-to-day expenses rather than investing in goods or services that will have long-term benefits. Secondly, low income households are at increased risk of not being able to afford to repay the debt in the future.

54 per cent of households undertook at least one risky response. This varied considerably by deprivation status. 79 per cent of those in deprivation undertook a risky response, significantly more than those not in deprivation (29 per cent, p=0.000). The difference by income level was also significant (57 per cent vs 51 per cent, p=0.03), but significantly smaller than the difference by deprivation (p=0.000). 51 per cent of those in deprivation took out debt or went into arrears, compared to 12 per cent of those not in deprivation (p=0.000). Households with children were significantly more likely to have undertaken a risky response (66 per cent vs 46 per cent, p=0.000).

Regression analysis shows that risky responses are significantly associated with poorer mental health, controlling for socio-demographic factors and mental health at the beginning of 2022 (Appendix Tables A.3 and A.4). Predictive margins derived from our regression analysis show that, on average, the mental health rating of someone who undertook no risky responses is 5 on the 1-to-7 scale, but for someone who undertook at least one risky response this rating is half a point lower (one-third of standard deviation). Looking at the number of risky responses made, analysis shows that each additional risky response was associated with a lowering of the mental health rating by 0.3 points, or 0.2 standard deviations. Interaction analysis shows that this effect is consistent across income levels – the difference in the relationship between risky responses and mental health for those on very low income and those on somewhat low income is not significant and close to zero (Appendix Table A.5). Further interaction analysis shows that the relationship is primarily driven by those in deprivation (Appendix Table A.6). The relationship between the number of risky responses and mental health is significant for those in deprivation, but not for those not in deprivation.

Note that these results are correlational and do not necessarily imply that risky responses *cause* poorer mental health. For instance, it might also be the case that having poorer mental health may cause someone to undertake riskier responses. A second point to note is that our control variable for mental health at the beginning of 2022 was measured retrospectively and at the same time as our current mental health variable. This means that there is a risk that a participant's response when asked about their mental health in 2022 was influenced by their current mental health. If this is the case, and the influence of current mental health on the 2022 measure is strong relative to the true signal from this measure, then mental health 2022 would be a 'bad control' and estimates from our analysis would be biased (Cinelli et al., 2024). We ran these analyses again without the mental health 2022 control variable. This made no substantive difference to the results, aside from our interaction analysis of deprivation – the interaction between deprivation and risky responses is no longer significant when the mental health 2022 control is omitted.

We also use regression analyses to identify factors associated with the number of risky responses made (Appendix Table A.7, columns 1 and 2). As hypothesised in our pre-registration, those who perceived that they had been more affected by the cost-of-living increases made a significantly greater number of risky responses. A one standard deviation increase in experienced inflation (equivalent to a one-point increase on the 1-to-7 rating scale) above its average value is associated with a 21 per cent increase in the number of risky responses. Note, however, the possibility of a bi-directional relationship here – having higher experienced inflation may cause people to undertake more responses, but having to undertake more responses may also lead people to perceive themselves as more affected by inflation.

We find no significant relationship between any of the following psychological factors and risky responses: correctly estimating the current inflation rate, time preferences, risk preferences, money illusion, financial knowledge. We find some evidence that pennies-a-day bias may be associated with risky adjustments, but the effect size is small – having this bias is only associated with a 19 per cent increase in the number of risky responses.

We find that the interaction term between financial responsibility level and gender is not significant, meaning that the effect of having more financial responsibility within the household on risky responses does not differ between men and women. This is still true even if we only include in our sample the 1,071 participants who are married or living with their partner.

We ran an additional regression to look at the association between risky responses and each of deprivation and income level (Table A.7 column 3). Introducing these variables into the regression carries a high risk of biasing estimates for other variables in the regression (e.g. due to collider variable issues), so the estimates from this regression need to be interpreted with caution. In this regression, we see that deprivation is associated with more risky responses, but income level is not, in line with what we see in our descriptive analysis. The effect size is large – controlling for income level, being deprived is associated with a more than doubling in the number of risky responses.

We also analysed if the relationship between financial stress and risky responses is different for those who were in financial stress before the cost-of-living crisis, compared to those who were not (Appendix Table A.8). We find evidence for this – the relationship between financial stress and risky responses is significantly stronger for those who were not under financial stress before the cost-of-living crisis. This may be important given that 53 per cent of people reported an increase in financial stress since the start of the cost-of-living crisis.

We ran robustness checks where we clustered standard errors at the region level, using both model-based and bootstrapped standard errors. Though the bootstrapped errors are larger than the model-based errors, the findings described above are robust, in terms of statistical significance, to all of these variations in standard error calculation.

3.3 BENEFITS AND SERVICES

3.3.1 Use of benefits and services

Use of benefits

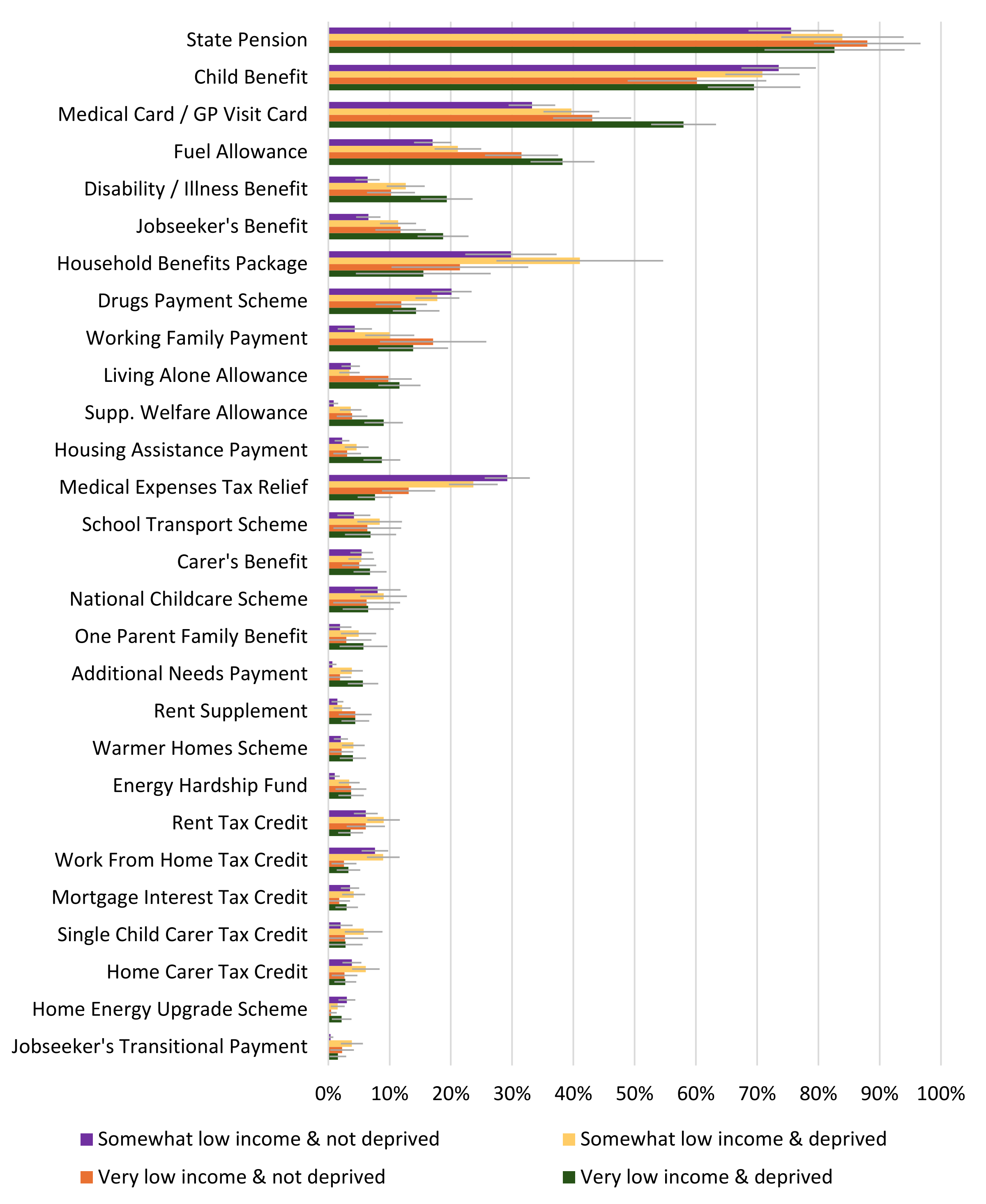
On average, people reported using 2.4 benefits. The ‘somewhat low income and not deprived’ group used 2.1 benefits, the ‘somewhat low income and deprived’ group used 2.6 benefits, the ‘very low income and not deprived’ group used 2.3 benefits, and the ‘very low income and deprived’ group used 2.9 benefits. The differences between deprived and non-deprived households (2.7 vs 2.2, p=0.000), and very low and somewhat low-income households (2.6 vs 2.3, p=0.007) are statistically significant.

Figure 3.8 shows the percentage of the (weighted) sample who reported using each government benefit since the start of the cost-of-living crisis by income and deprivation group (see Figure A.16 in the appendix for pooled results). For pension and children-related benefits,[9] the proportion of the sample who used these benefits is calculated out of participants who are older than 65 and who have children living at home, respectively (as these benefits are not relevant for other participants).

Figure 3.8 shows substantial variation in participants’ benefit use across different poverty classification groups. Some benefits are used widely. For example, 80 per cent of participants over 65 reported using the State Pension, and 70 per cent of participants with children under 18 in their household reported using Child Benefit. There are a number of potential reasons why not all households in the relevant samples analysed are using these universal benefits. For those eligible, there may be barriers to uptake due to lack of awareness or administrative burdens (discussed in detail in the next section). Some participants, such as migrants, may be ineligible. It might also be the case that the respondent was unaware that their household was claiming the relevant benefit, though this risk is mitigated somewhat by our exclusion from the study of people who had no financial decision-making responsibility in their household. It is worth reiterating that, due to these and other difficulties, we do not attempt to precisely measure take-up of benefits in this study. Rather, we describe the use of benefits across our low-income population sample.

[9] Pension benefits are State Pension and Household Benefits Package. Children benefits are Child Benefit, One Parent Family Benefit, Single Child Carer Tax Credit, Working Family Payment, National Childcare Scheme, and School Transport Scheme (Carer’s Benefit, Home Carer Tax Credit are excluded as include caring for older people).

FIGURE 3.8 PROPORTION OF PARTICIPANTS USING GOVERNMENT BENEFITS



Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals. For pension and children-related benefits, the proportion of the sample who used these benefits is calculated out of participants who are older than 65 and who have children living at home, respectively (as these benefits are not relevant for other participants). For the Household benefits package, the sample is restricted to only those 70 years of age or more, who are highly likely to be eligible for this non-means-tested benefit. Note that some people under 70 may be eligible for this benefit as well, but we restricted asking about this benefit to the 70+ age group to reduce the burden of the survey on participants.

Use of Medical Cards is relatively high, at 42 per cent of the full sample (all pooled percentages from Figure A.16 in appendix). By policy area, the highest usage rates occur in pension (84 per cent), children (76 per cent), and health (63 per cent) (when accounting for eligibility restrictions on pensions and child benefits, see Figure A.17 in appendix).

There were also some differences between poverty classification groups.[10] For example, very low income participants reported that Fuel Allowance is their next most frequently used benefit after the three listed above, and they were significantly more likely to use this benefit than somewhat low income participants (35 per cent vs 19 per cent, p=0.000); the ‘deprived’ group was also significantly more likely than the ‘non-deprived’ group to use this benefit (28 per cent vs 21 per cent, p=0.001). In contrast, the ‘somewhat low income’ group was significantly more likely use medical expenses tax relief than the ‘very low income’ group (27 per cent vs 10 per cent, p=0.000), and so was the ‘non-deprived’ group compared to the ‘deprived’ group (25 per cent vs 17 per cent, p=0.000), suggesting that these groups are more likely to pay for healthcare.

Overall, the pattern of benefits use by group among commonly used benefits suggests that households who are deprived or on a very low income are more likely to use means-tested benefits than those who are not deprived or on a somewhat low income, for example for the Fuel Allowance (as discussed above), Medical Cards (52 per cent of very low vs 36 per cent of somewhat low income households, p=0.000; 48 per cent of deprived vs 36 per cent of non-deprived households, p=0.000), and Housing Assistance Payment (6 per cent of very low vs 3 per cent of somewhat low income households, p=0.007; 6 per cent of deprived vs 2 per cent of non-deprived households, p=0.000). More generally, these groups are more likely to use income-related benefits (41 per cent of very low vs 24 per cent of somewhat low income households, p=0.000; 39 per cent of deprived vs 22 per cent of non-deprived households, p=0.000; see Figure A.17 in appendix).

However, participants who are on a very low income or deprived are *not* significantly more likely to use benefits that are not income-based, such as the State Pension[11] (86 per cent of very low vs 78 per cent of somewhat low income households, p=0.087; 83 per cent of deprived vs 79 per cent of non-deprived households, p=0.348), Child Benefit (66 per cent of very low vs 72 per cent of somewhat low income households, p=0.130; 70 per cent of both deprived and non-deprived households, p=0.918), or Household Benefits Package (19 per cent of very low vs 33 per cent of somewhat low income households, p=0.007; 29 per cent of

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10 Other socio-demographic characteristics may be relevant to supports use (and to experiences of burdens when using supports), such as: mental health; literacy, numeracy, and digital skills; and rural or urban location. Using Wald tests, we find some statistically significant relationships (except for urban/rural), but these results may simply reflect underlying relationships with deprivation (deprived participants use more supports and have poorer mental health, for example) and with other characteristics such as education or employment, which investigating in-depth is outside the scope of this study. Therefore, we do not present results on these characteristics here.

11 The Non-Contributory version of the State Pension is means-tested, but our survey pools both the Contributory and Non-Contributory pension (and Old Age Pension, and Widow/Widower’s Pension) together in a single question.

deprived vs 28 per cent of non-deprived households, p=0.749). These groups are also not more likely to claim benefits that involve tax refunds (e.g. tax relief for medical expenses, as discussed above).

Finally, some benefits are seldom used across groups, including some housing and energy-related benefits (though eligibility for these benefits may depend on homeowner status). For example, only 6 per cent of the sample used the Rent Tax Credit, even though 19 per cent of the sample lived in private rented accommodation (and less than 15 per cent of these private renters used the Rent Supplement or the Housing Assistance Payment, which would disqualify them from using the Rent Tax Credit).[12] More broadly, the use of most tax credits was low across policy areas. The benefits that fewest participants reported using were the Jobseeker's Transitional Payment (2 per cent), Home Energy Upgrade Scheme (2 per cent), and the Energy Hardship Fund[13] (3 per cent) (pooled figures from Figure A.16 in appendix).

Use of services

Most participants (63 per cent) did not use any services. Participants who did use services, used 1.5 services on average (1.3 for somewhat low income and not deprived participants, 1.5 for somewhat low income and deprived participants, 1.4 for very low income and not deprived participants, and 1.7 for very low income and deprived participants). Deprived households were significantly more likely to have used at least one service than non-deprived households (49 per cent vs 26 per cent, p=0.000), but we found no significant difference between very low and somewhat low income households (40 per cent vs 36 per cent, p=0.182).

Figure 3.9 shows the proportion of the sample who used each of the nine services included in the survey, by poverty classification group. The most used services were credit unions (23 per cent of pooled weighted sample), Citizens Information Service (14 per cent), and St Vincent de Paul (5 per cent of pooled sample).

Deprived participants were significantly more likely than non-deprived participants to use most services, including St Vincent de Paul (9 per cent vs 2 per cent, p=0.000), the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (4 per cent vs 1 per cent, p=0.000), Citizens Information Service (21 per cent vs 8 per cent, p=0.000),

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12 Doolan et al. (2022) find that about one-fifth of all renting households are using Rent Supplement (RS), Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) or Rent Accommodation scheme. Potential reasons why our figure is lower include: (1) some participants, such as migrants, may be ineligible; (2) some respondents may have been unaware that their household was claiming RS or HAP, especially given that HAP is paid directly to the landlord. This latter risk is mitigated somewhat by our exclusion from the study of people who had no financial decision-making responsibility in their household. Note that we do not attempt to precisely measure take-up of benefits in this study.

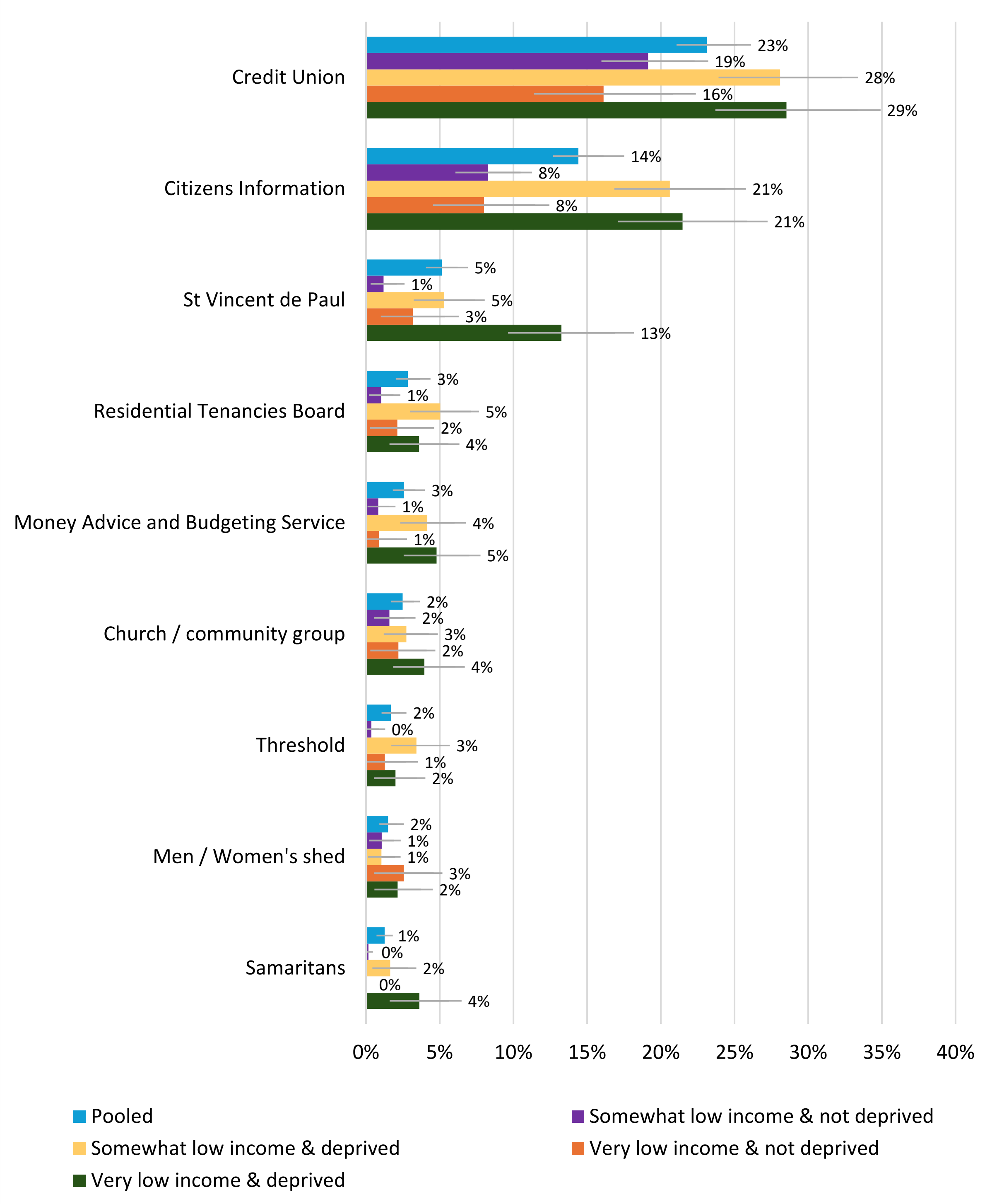
13 The low reported use of the Energy Hardship Fund may be partly due to the fact that there are several energy hardship funds (with different names) administered across different public and private organisations.

Threshold (3 per cent vs 1 per cent, p=0.001), the Residential Tenancies Board (4 per cent vs 1 per cent, p=0.000), Credit Unions (28 per cent vs 18 per cent, p=0.000), and the Samaritans (2 per cent vs <1 per cent, p=0.000). However, we found no significant differences based on deprivation for the use of churches and community groups (3 per cent vs 2 per cent, p=0.059) and Men's Sheds or Women's Sheds (2 per cent vs 1 per cent, p=0.958).

Participants on very low incomes were more likely than those on somewhat low incomes to use St Vincent de Paul (9 per cent vs 3 per cent, p=0.000) and the Samaritans (2 per cent vs 1 per cent, p=0.047), but we found no statistically significant differences between these groups for using the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (3 per cent vs 2 per cent, p=0.287), Citizens Information Service (16 per cent vs 14 per cent, p=0.212), Threshold (2 per cent of both groups, p=0.975), the Residential Tenancies Board (3 per cent of both groups, p=0.801), churches and community groups (3 per cent vs 2 per cent, p=0.187), Men's and Women's Sheds (2 per cent vs 1 per cent, p=0.077), or Credit Unions (23 per cent of both groups, p=0.856).

Overall, these findings suggest that the use of support services was low overall, that deprived participants were more likely to use services than non-deprived participants (except churches and Men's or Women's Sheds), that income groups did not significantly differ in their use of services (except for St Vincent de Paul and the Samaritans, which very low income households were more likely to use), and that service users most often focused on government support information (Citizens Information Service), financial support (Credit Union), and material support (St Vincent de Paul).

FIGURE 3.9 PROPORTION OF PARTICIPANTS USING SUPPORT SERVICES



Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals.

First-time use of supports

After asking participants about their use of benefits and support services, we also measured whether it was their first time using these supports (as opposed to having used them prior to the cost-of-living crisis).[14]

We found that in 29 per cent of instances where participants reported using a benefit, they were using it for the first time. Newer benefits were, as expected, most likely to have been used for the first time, such as the Rent Tax Credit (introduced in Budget 2023 to be claimed from the 2022 tax year), Home Energy Upgrade Scheme (launched in 2022), and National Childcare Scheme (launched in 2019) (83 per cent, 75 per cent, and 64 per cent of instances, respectively).[15] The next two benefits most often used for the first time were the Additional Needs Payment and the Supplementary Welfare Allowance (56 per cent and 52 per cent of instances, respectively; see Figure A.18 in appendix).

Regarding support services, in 33 per cent of instances where participants reported using a service, they were doing so for the first time. More than half of the participants who used Threshold (64 per cent), the Samaritans (61 per cent), the Residential Tenancies Board (59 per cent), St Vincent de Paul (54 per cent), and the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (51 per cent) reported that they were doing so for the first time (see Figure A.19 in appendix).

We do not compare results by poverty classification groups here because, in the case of many benefits and services, too few participants in each group both reported using the support and were selected for follow-up questions about it (for example, fewer than ten participants in the 'very low income and deprived' group were asked follow-up questions about 14 out of the 28 benefits, due to the low take-up of some benefits and because each participant was only asked follow-up questions about a maximum of three benefits and three services that they had reported using).

Additional support needs

Finally, participants were asked to indicate up to three areas where they would like additional support. Energy bills were most often chosen, with 50 per cent of the pooled sample and 68 per cent of the 'very low income and deprived' group choosing this need. This preference aligns with the finding that the Fuel Allowance

14 Due to a technical issue during data collection, we were not able to collect data about one of the 28 benefits (the Housing Assistance Payment) beyond whether each participant had used this benefit, therefore it is excluded from results on first-time use of benefits, barriers for not using benefits, and administrative burdens.

15 This means it should not have been possible for participants to have used the Rent Tax Credit or Home Energy Upgrade Scheme before 2022. The fact that a minority of participants still said that it was not their first time using these benefits likely reflects participant errors due to similar schemes (for example, participants may have ticked the Home Energy Upgrade Scheme thinking of the Better Energy Homes Scheme, introduced in 2008).

was the most-claimed benefit across the sample after the State Pension, Child Benefit, Medical Card, and Household Benefits Package. Other areas of common concern included day-to-day expenses (32 per cent of pooled sample, 51 per cent of 'very low income and deprived' group), health costs (22 per cent and 19 per cent, respectively), and rent or mortgage costs (22 per cent and 27 per cent, respectively) (see Figure A.20 in appendix).

Deprived participants had significantly more additional support needs than non-deprived participants (2.3 vs 1.3, p=0.000; participants could choose up to three needs). Likewise, participants on very low incomes identified more needs than those on somewhat low incomes (2.0 vs 1.7, p=0.000).

Examining group differences in specific needs, deprived participants were significantly more likely than non-deprived participants to report needing additional support with day-to-day expenses (45 per cent vs 19 per cent, p=0.000), energy bills (65 per cent vs 36 per cent, p=0.000), housing costs (30 per cent vs 15 per cent, p=0.000), health costs (25 per cent vs 20 per cent, p=0.014), education costs (9 per cent vs 5 per cent, p=0.003), access to credit (9 per cent vs 3 per cent, p=0.000), finding or applying for benefits or support services (8 per cent vs 4 per cent, p=0.000), finding work (8 per cent vs 4 per cent, p=0.000), and emotional support (17 per cent vs 9 per cent, p=0.000). However, they were not significantly more likely to need more support with childcare costs (4 per cent of both, p=0.939) or with help managing money (8 per cent vs 7 per cent, p=0.344).

Participants on very low incomes were significantly more likely than those on somewhat low incomes to report needing additional support with day-to-day expenses (42 per cent vs 26 per cent, p=0.000), energy bills (55 per cent vs 48 per cent, p=0.006), health costs (18 per cent vs 24 per cent, p=0.004), and finding work (9 per cent vs 4 per cent, p=0.000). However, we found no significant differences between the additional support needs of participants on very low and somewhat low incomes with regards to housing costs (21 per cent vs 23 per cent, p=0.626), education costs (9 per cent vs 6 per cent, p=0.109), childcare costs (3 per cent vs 4 per cent, p=0.138), access to loans or credit (7 per cent vs 5 per cent, p=0.189), help finding or applying for government benefits or support services (6 per cent of both, p=0.905), help managing money (9 per cent vs 7 per cent, p=0.285), and emotional support (14 per cent vs 13 per cent, p=0.633).

3.3.2 Perceived barriers to use of benefits

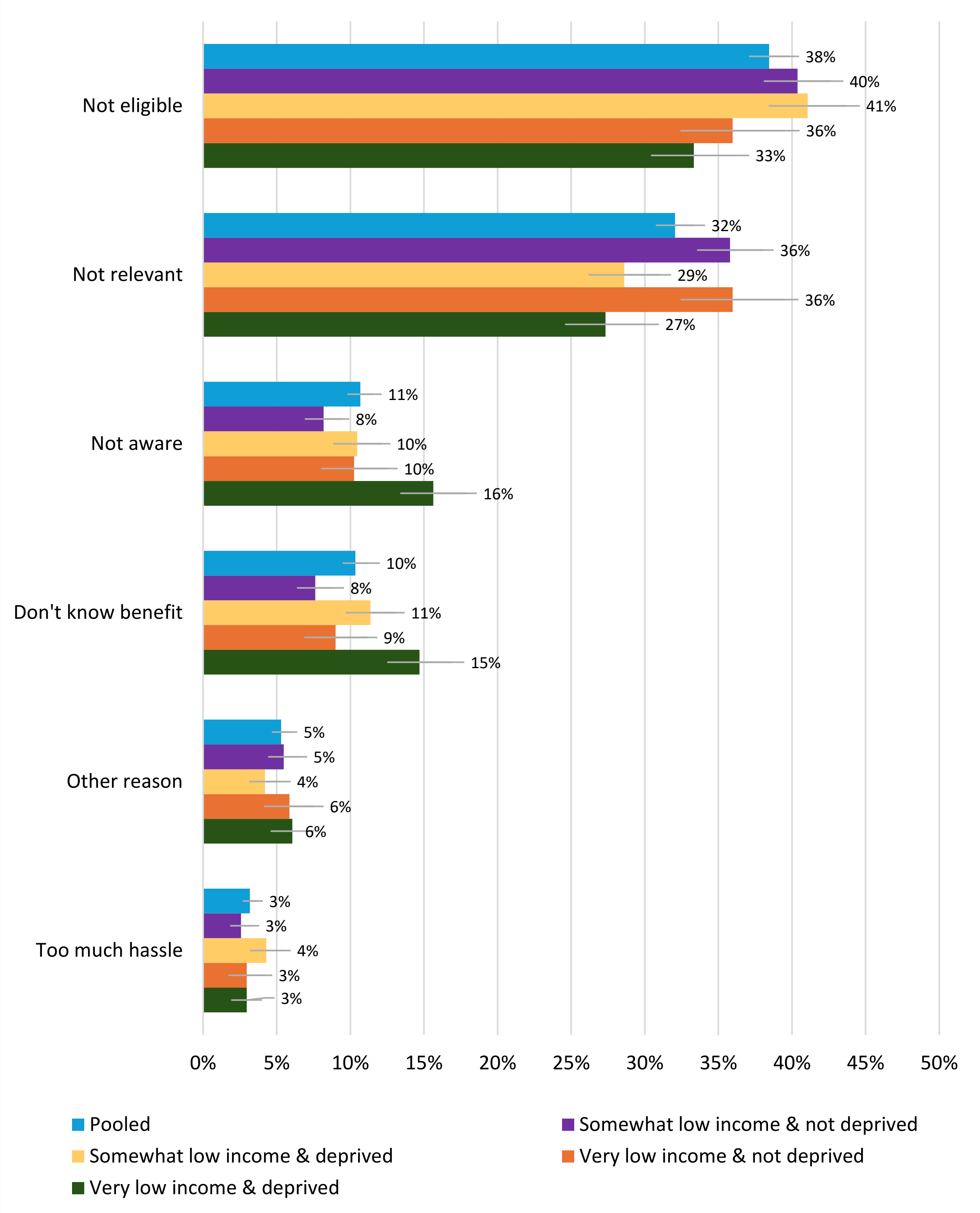
We next report on participants' stated reasons for not taking up government benefits that they may have been eligible for based on their socio-demographic information (see Chapter 2, Methods, for more details). Figure 3.10 shows the frequency of each stated reason by poverty classification group. The most common reasons were ineligibility (38 per cent of pooled sample), or that the benefit was not relevant to them (32 per cent of pooled sample). Given that eligibility criteria for many benefits are more complex than the data we could collect, it is not possible to confirm how many participants may in fact have been eligible. However, the data imply that in almost one-third of instances of unclaimed benefits, the reason for not using the benefit was not ineligibility or irrelevance (although it is possible that even if they reported another reason, participants were also not eligible for a benefit). This was primarily driven by a lack of awareness (21 per cent of the pooled sample, combining those who reported not being aware of the benefit and those who reported not knowing what the benefit is).

Deprived participants were significantly more likely than non-deprived participants to report information barriers such as lack of awareness (13 per cent vs 9 per cent, p=0.000) or knowledge (13 per cent vs 8 per cent, p=0.000). They did not significantly differ from non-deprived participants in their likelihood of reporting eligibility barriers (38 per cent vs 39 per cent, p=0.330), and they were significantly less likely than non-deprived participants to report that the benefit was not relevant to them (28 per cent vs 36 per cent, p=0.000). Deprived participants were also more likely to report hassle as a barrier (4 per cent vs 3 per cent, p=0.042), though the size of the difference was small.

Participants on very low incomes were also significantly more likely than those on somewhat low incomes to identify lack of awareness (13 per cent vs 9 per cent, p=0.000) and knowledge barriers (12 per cent vs 9 per cent, p=0.001). They were significantly less likely to report eligibility barriers compared to participants on somewhat low incomes (34 per cent vs 41 per cent, p=0.000), and did not significantly differ from them in terms of relevance (31 per cent vs 33 per cent, p=0.201) or hassle barriers (3 per cent of both, p=0.502).

Overall, deprived or very low income participants were more likely to report information barriers to benefits uptake, compared to non-deprived and somewhat low income participants (respectively). They also reported the same or fewer eligibility and relevance barriers. This is likely partly because the very low income group is, by definition, likely to be eligible for more means-tested benefits, while more needs-based benefits are likely to be relevant to participants who are deprived. Therefore, these groups' higher information barriers are partly driven by a substitution effect, since they have to select a reason for non-utilisation of the benefit, and eligibility or relevance barriers are less likely to apply.

FIGURE 3.10 STATED REASONS FOR NOT USING GOVERNMENT BENEFITS, POOLED



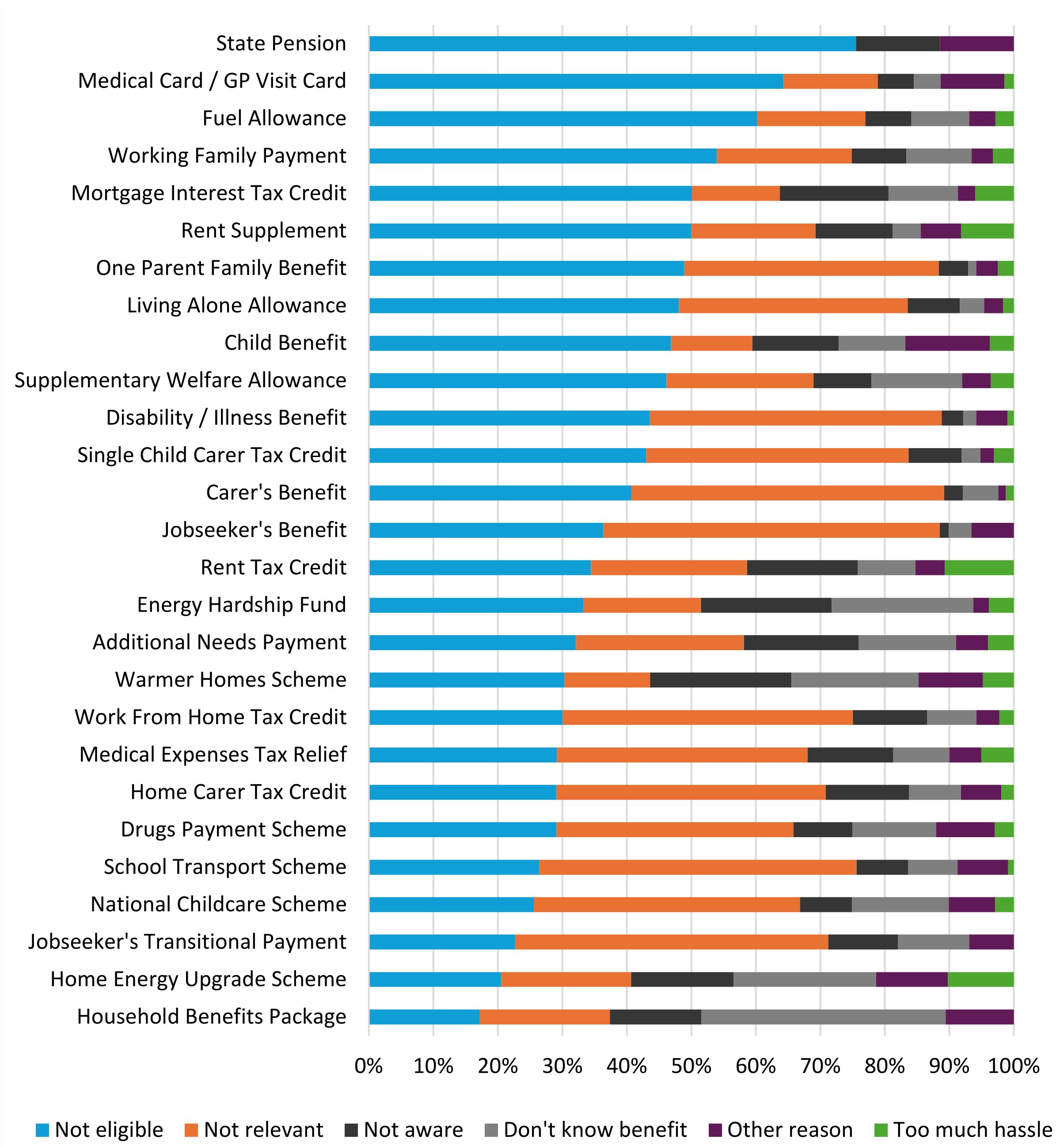
Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals.

When examining individual benefits, we find that patterns differ widely by benefit. We show this in Figure 3.11. For half of the benefits, the most common reason given for not using the benefit is ineligibility. When asking participants about their reasons, we did not have detailed enough socio-demographic data to determine with certainty which benefits they would be eligible for. Therefore, when participants state they did not use a benefit because they were not eligible for it, this may be correct in many cases. However, some benefits may be under-used. For example, 58 per cent of the sample did not use a Medical Card or GP Visit Card (see Figure A.16 in appendix), and the most common reason given for this was ineligibility, yet over three-quarters of the sample would likely be eligible based on their equivalised incomes (Health Service Executive, 2024). This finding supports the conclusions of Keane et al. (2021), who found that lack of eligibility information was a barrier to take-up.

Benefits not being relevant to the participant are another commonly cited reason. Next are knowledge barriers (not aware of or does not know what the benefit is). These are highest for the Household Benefits Package, with 52 per cent of participants asked why they did not claim this benefit answering with a knowledge barrier. This suggests scope for increasing take-up as we only asked about this benefit to participants who were highly likely to be eligible for this benefit – those aged 70 and older. For those aged 70+, this benefit is not means-tested (though there are some other criteria to satisfy, such as living in Ireland year-round) (Citizens Information, 2024).[16] In addition, knowledge barriers seem especially prevalent for energy-related benefits such as the Energy Hardship Fund (42 per cent of reasons), Warmer Homes Scheme (42 per cent), and Home Energy Upgrade Scheme (38 per cent). Finally, while few participants reported 'hassle' as their reason for not using a benefit, this reason is most often given for housing benefits and tax credits (Rent Tax Credit, Rent Supplement, and Mortgage Interest Tax Credit) as well as the Home Energy Upgrade Scheme.

16 People under 70 can qualify for this benefit if they are already in receipt of another qualifying social welfare payment (Citizens Information, 2024).

FIGURE 3.11 STATED REASONS FOR NOT USING GOVERNMENT BENEFITS, BY BENEFIT



Notes: Weighted sample. Due to a technical issue during data collection, we were not able to collect data about one of the 28 benefits (the Housing Assistance Payment) beyond whether each participant had used this benefit, therefore it is excluded from results on first-time use of benefits, barriers for not using benefits, and administrative burdens.

3.3.3 Experiences accessing benefits and services

Experiences accessing benefits

We now report on the experiences of low-income households when using supports. Figure 3.12 shows the level of overall 'administrative burden', the average of learning, compliance, and psychological costs reported by participants for each benefit (standard deviation = 1.8; each type of costs is rated from lowest 1 to highest 7, see Chapter 2 for details). Confidence intervals as shown in the figure vary significantly across benefits due to differences in the numbers of participants who used these benefits (e.g. 557 of the participants who used Medical Cards were asked burden questions about this benefit, while only eight of the participants who used the Single Child Carer Tax Credit were, because of the much lower pool of participants who used this benefit). Despite this, some patterns are visible across benefits.

First, regarding absolute levels of burden, only four benefits are at or above the midpoint of the burden scale. Having said that, all benefits involve some level of burden, with the average burden for each benefit being significantly greater than 1 (the first point, "Not at all", on the 7-point burden scale).[17]

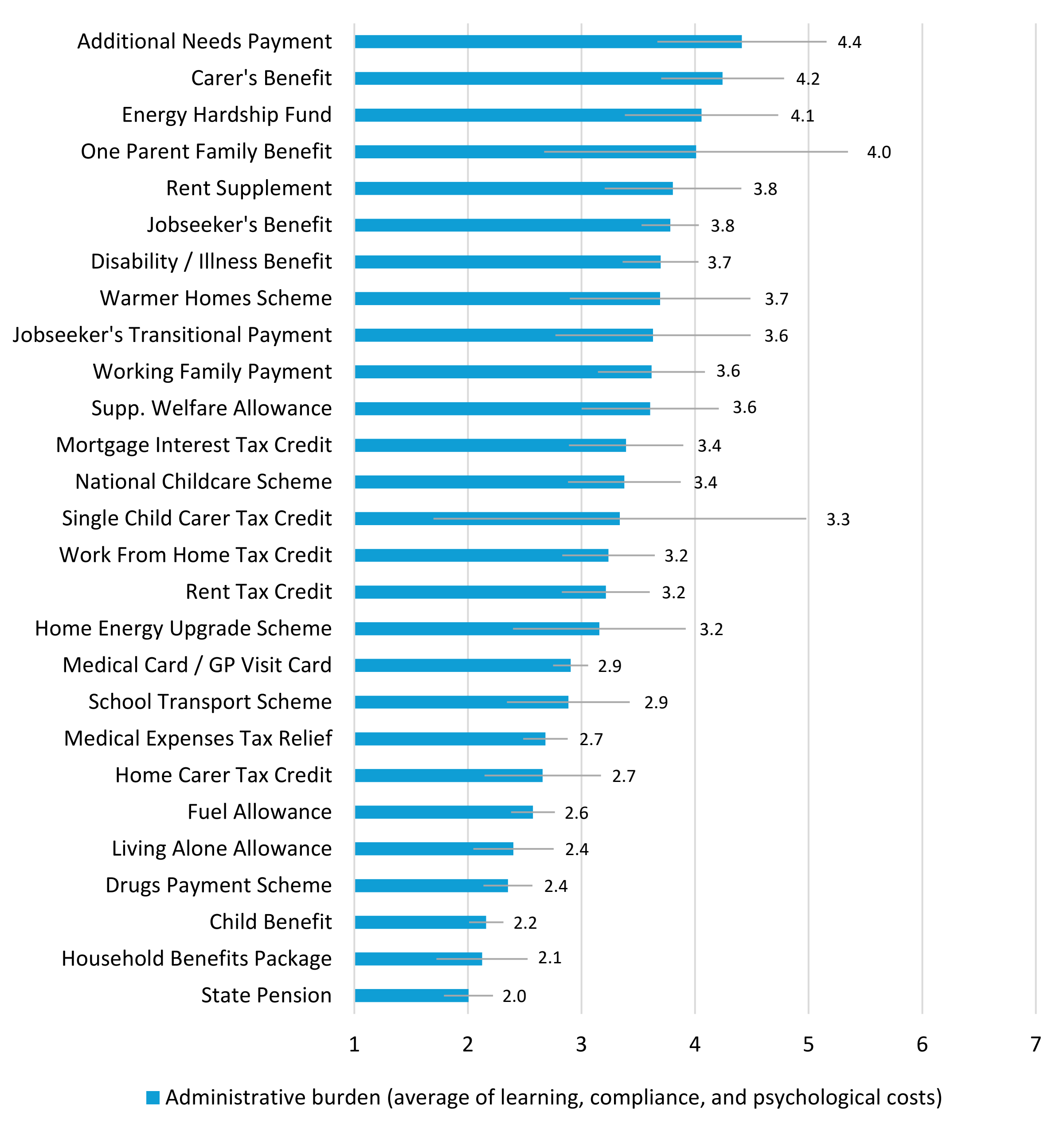
Second, regarding relative levels of burdens, the least burdensome benefits are not income-based, including the State Pension[18] and Household Benefits Package (age-based), and Child Benefit (paid to the parents or guardians of every child). These benefits are also the ones that are used most often. On the other hand, the most burdensome benefits in the list also share some characteristics. For example, the five most burdensome benefits involve a needs-based or means-tested payment (note Carer's Benefit is not means-tested but was shown jointly with Carer's Allowance in the survey, which is means-tested). The next two most burdensome benefits (unemployment and disability benefits) also involve seeking to replace income in a similar context. This means the most burdensome benefits are those likely to involve paperwork (to prove eligibility) and therefore compliance costs, and to become relevant to people at a potentially stressful or vulnerable time in their lives, which may exacerbate psychological costs.

Examining the individual components of the overall burden scale suggests that all three types of costs are relatively consistent within each benefit (Figure A.21 in appendix). For example, the Additional Needs Payment and Energy Hardship Fund (which may carry additional stigma due to the discretion involved in assessing claims), as well as Carer's Benefit or Allowance, have among the highest learning, compliance, and psychological costs overall (although the number of observations is limited so confidence intervals are large).

17 p=0.000 for all benefits except for the Single Child Carer Tax Credit (p=0.035) and One Parent Family Benefit (p=0.003). However, note small cell sizes for many benefits (especially the two cited above, which have the fewest observations on administrative burdens by a large margin – eight and nine observations, respectively).

18 The Non-Contributory version of the State Pension is means-tested, but our survey pools both the Contributory and Non-Contributory pension (and Old Age Pension, and Widow/Widower's Pension) together in a single question.

FIGURE 3.12 AVERAGE ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN BY BENEFIT

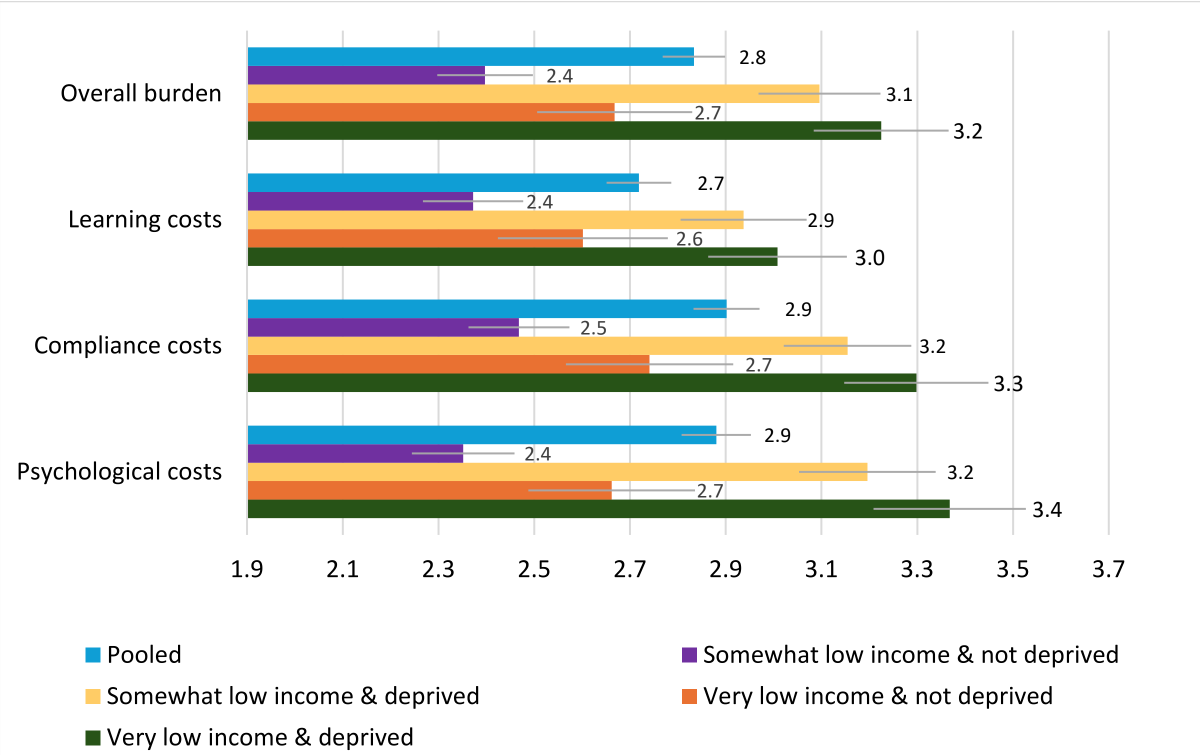


Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals. 1 to 7 rating scale.

We also find that different poverty classification groups experience different levels of burden. Figure 3.13 shows average administrative burden as well as average learning, compliance, and psychological costs for each group across all benefits (X-axis scaled to one standard deviation, using overall burden). Deprived participants report significantly higher levels of overall burden than non-deprived participants (3.2 vs 2.5, p=0.000), and this pattern is consistent in all three costs underlying burden (learning costs: 3.0 vs 2.4, p=0.000; compliance costs: 3.2 vs 2.5, p=0.000; psychological costs: 3.3 vs 2.4, p=0.000). Likewise, participants on very low incomes report significantly higher levels of overall burden than participants on somewhat low incomes (3.0 vs 2.7, p=0.000), and this pattern is consistent in all three costs underlying burden (learning costs: 2.9 vs 2.6, p=0.002; compliance costs: 3.1 vs 2.8, p=0.000; psychological costs: 3.1 vs 2.7, p=0.000).

Finally, examining administrative burden inequalities by individual benefit (see Figure A.22 in appendix) suggests that this pattern of deprived participants and very low income participants facing higher burdens is relatively consistent across benefits, although the small number of observations in each cell (due to the fact that these groups vary in the benefits they use, as discussed in Section 3.3.1) means that for most benefits, significance testing on inequalities between groups would be unlikely to yield meaningful results.

FIGURE 3.13 AVERAGE ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN ACROSS BENEFITS



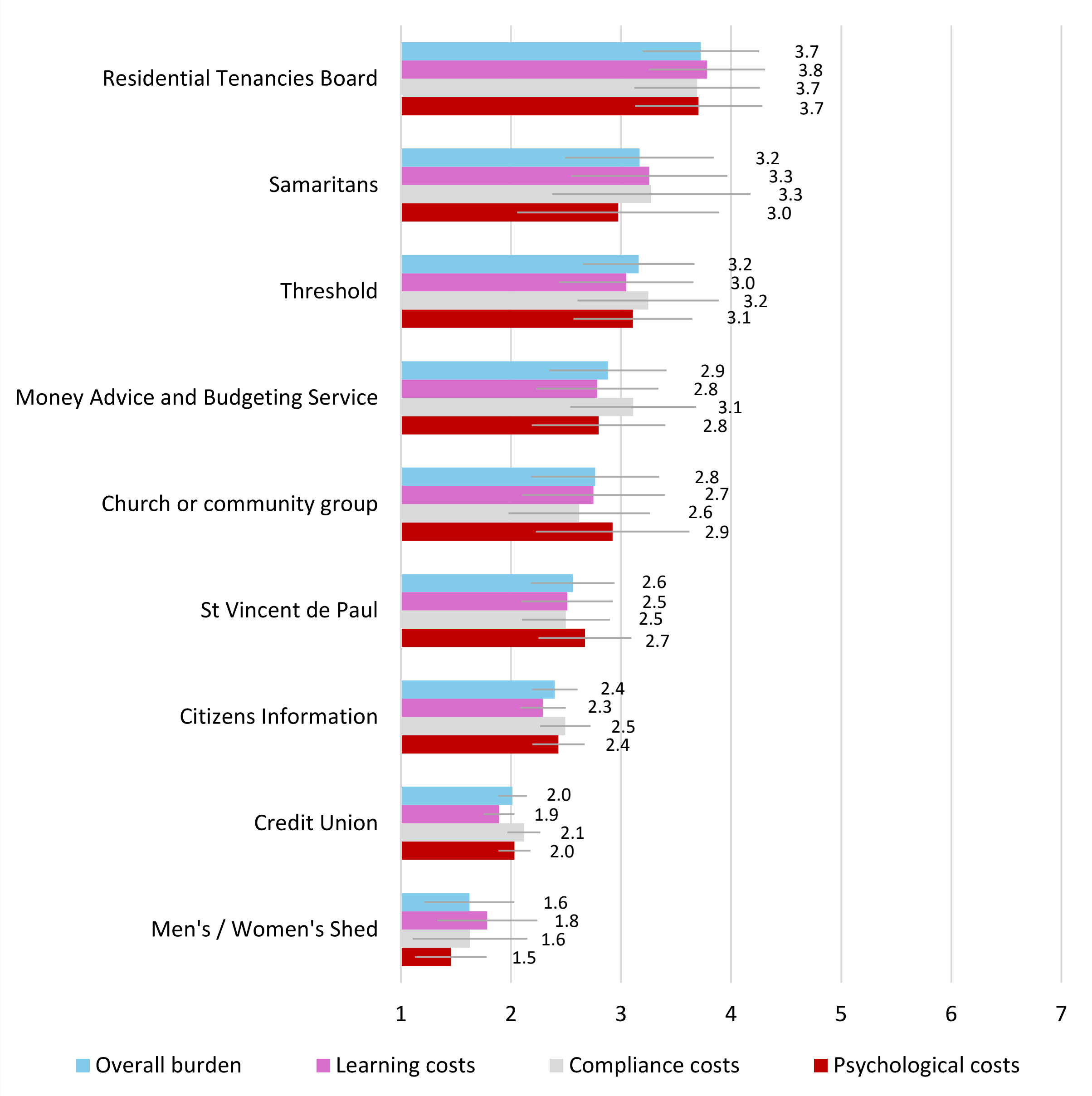
Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals. 1 to 7 rating scale.

Experiences accessing services

Figure 3.14 shows participants' average reported administrative burden by service, as well as the average costs (learning, compliance, and psychological costs) underlying this burden measure (standard deviation = 1.6). Participants report experiencing some amount of burden in all services, with the average level of burden for each service being significantly higher than 1 'Not at all' (p<0.01).

Comparing burdens across services, those that involve the lowest level of burden include services likely to rely on informal interactions (Men's/Women's Shed), a pre-existing relationship (Credit Union, which fewer than 20 per cent of participants were using for the first time), or services that do not necessarily require in-person engagement (Citizens Information); in other words, services likely to have a low barrier to engagement. On the other hand, some services specialise in helping people with complex or technical issues, such as housing issues for the Residential Tenancies Board or Threshold, or emotionally sensitive issues, such as Samaritans, and slightly higher levels of burdens are reported for these services. However, individual costs appear relatively consistent within each service (e.g. the highest learning, compliance, and psychological costs are found in the three services with the highest overall burden levels).

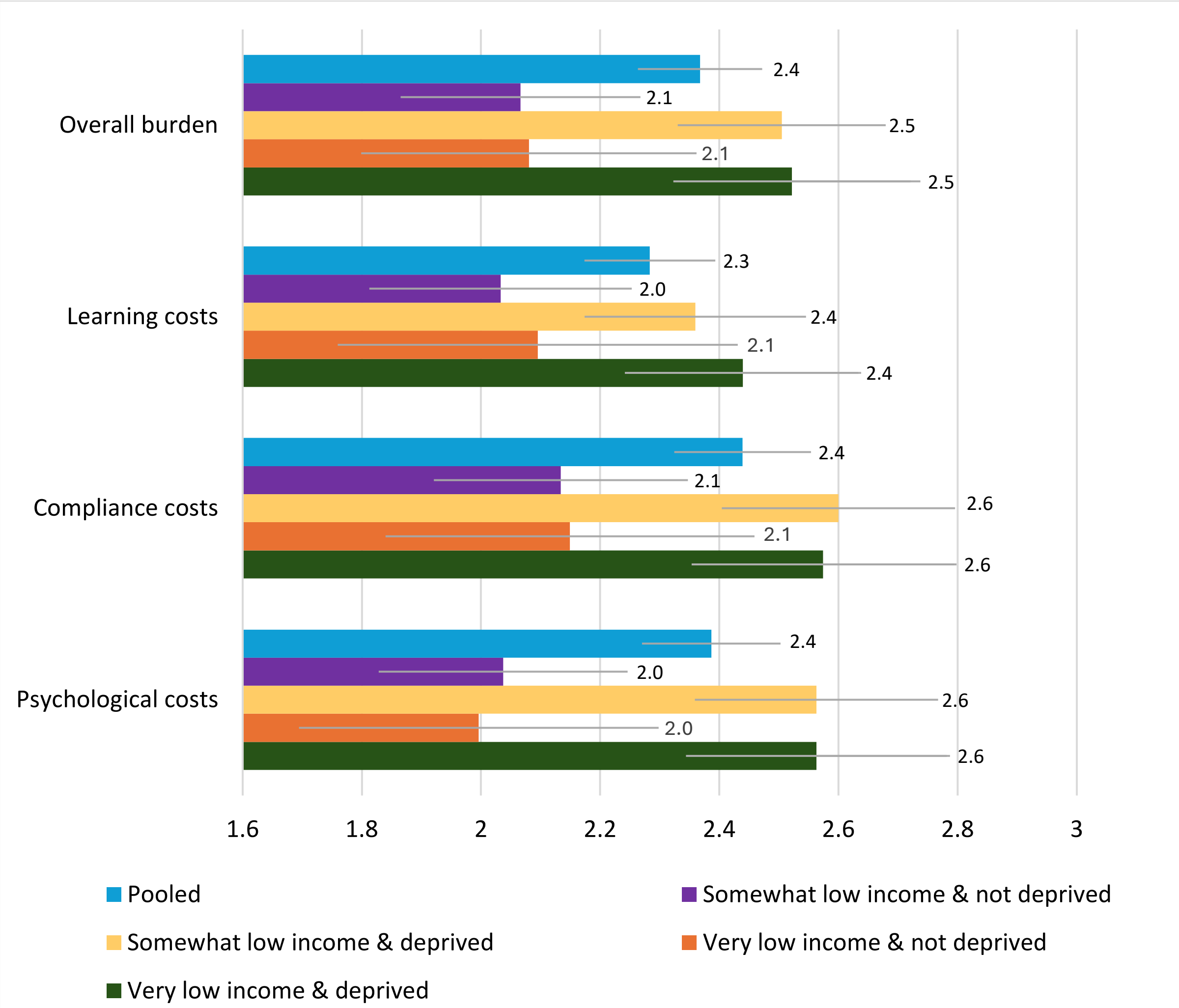
FIGURE 3.14 AVERAGE ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN BY SERVICE



Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals. 1 to 7 rating scale.

We also compare different poverty classification groups' experiences of administrative burdens in accessing services, as shown in Figure 3.15 (X-axis is scaled to one standard deviation), though due to small cell sizes it was not possible to examine differences in specific services (in six out of nine services, at least one group had five or fewer observations due to lower numbers of participants using services, and because participants were asked burden questions about maximum three services). Deprived participants report significantly higher levels of overall burden in accessing support services than non-deprived participants (2.5 vs 2.1, p=0.000), and this pattern is consistent in all three costs underlying burden (learning costs: 2.4 vs 2.1, p=0.003; compliance costs: 2.6 vs 2.1, p=0.000; psychological costs: 2.6 vs 2.0, p=0.000). However, we found no statistically significant differences between very low and somewhat low income participants both in overall burden (2.4 vs 2.3, p=0.461), and in all three underlying costs (learning costs: 2.4 vs 2.2, p=0.278; compliance costs: 2.5 vs 2.4, p=0.676; psychological costs: 2.4 for both, p=0.581).

FIGURE 3.15 AVERAGE ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN ACROSS SERVICES



Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals. 1 to 7 rating scale.

3.4 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUPPORT USE AND RISKY RESPONSES

We analysed the relationship between the number of risky responses made and use of benefits and support services using regression analysis (Appendix Table A.9). We used the number of policy areas a participant accesses benefits from (housing, children, pension, income, energy, health) as our explanatory variable for benefits. For our support services explanatory variable, we used the number of different services used. We hypothesised that greater support service/social welfare benefit use would be associated with fewer risky responses. What we find is the opposite; those that use more benefits and support services make significantly more risky responses. This is the case even when controlling for deprivation and income, though these controls do weaken the relationship. Each additional policy area from which benefits are accessed is associated with an average increase of 6-8 per cent in the number of risky responses, while each additional support service used is associated with a 19-31 per cent increase in the number of risky responses, on average.

This analysis is correlational and so these results do not necessarily imply that increased support use leads to more risky responses. There are a number of other possible, and perhaps more plausible, explanations. It may be that when people are in financial difficulty, they use risky responses as the first coping mechanism, and only after that do they turn to supports. It may also be the case that existing supports are simply not protective enough – those in need seek out supports but end up having to make risky responses anyway. However, our data are not sufficient to test any of these possible explanations.

CHAPTER 4

Policy implications and conclusion

4.1 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The next sections present the main implications of the study's findings. It is important to note that this study focuses on identifying how low-income households responded to the cost-of-living crisis, rather than evaluating specific tools or interventions to help address these challenges. Hence the findings do not provide direct evidence for specific interventions. However, they do provide support for potential solutions when the issues identified are considered alongside strategies found in other research or countries. Table 4.1 summarises the main implications of the study, alongside the study finding that they build on, ordered by topic. Each subsequent section explores one of these topics in more detail.

TABLE 4.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Topic	Finding	Implication
1. Protecting access to basic needs during crises	Responses with a risk of adverse effects, such as cutting day-to-day necessities and increasing debt, were common and stressful.	Interventions focusing on these areas could help protect households' financial security and access to basic necessities in times of crisis.
2. Minimising legacy effects of the cost-of-living crisis	Many households had to undertake responses with potential long-term negative effects (e.g. increased debt, reduced health and education spending).	Increased supports in important areas such as education, health and debt may be needed over the next decade to minimise the scarring effects of the cost-of-living crisis, particularly among households with children.
3. Targeting supports towards the most vulnerable households	Deprivation is a stronger indicator of vulnerability in a cost-of-living crisis than income.	Targeting based on deprivation would be highly beneficial but presents a practical challenge – more research is needed on how to overcome this challenge.
4. Addressing structural issues	Situational factors (e.g. pre-existing financial stress, experienced inflation), rather than individual psychological characteristics and biases, were associated with response behaviour during the cost-of-living crisis.	Interventions targeting structural issues affecting low-income households (e.g. administrative burdens) are more likely to be effective than individual-level interventions (e.g. financial education).
5. Tackling the under-utilisation of supports	Several benefits were under-utilised, with informational barriers playing a major role.	Automatic enrolment, signposting supports (e.g. benefits calculators) and implementing a single point of application could help increase take-up.
6. Identifying and removing administrative burdens	Many households experienced administrative burdens (learning, compliance, and psychological costs) when accessing supports.	'Sludge audits' that systematically review the process people go through to access a specific benefit could help identify and remove burdens.

Contd.

TABLE 4.1 CONTD.

Topic	Finding	Implication
7. Addressing the most problematic policy areas	Housing, health, and energy were particularly problematic.	Interventions and supports prioritising these areas could be particularly impactful. Reducing administrative burdens associated with supports in these areas is likely to be fruitful (e.g. through signposting and sludge audits).
8. Future-proofing the welfare system	Households who needed supports during the cost-of-living crisis faced a complex benefits system that impeded access.	A simplified and more resilient welfare system may help tackle the long-run effects of the latest crisis and help to reduce damage in the event of future crises.

4.1.1 Protecting households' access to basic needs in times of crisis

The results show widespread responses undertaken by low income households due to cost-of-living pressures since 2022. The vast majority of low income households – almost nine in ten – reported cutting back on day-to-day spending, particularly on essential items like groceries (two-thirds of households) and electricity and heat (half of households). For many households, this was the first time they needed to make such responses, particularly with respect to cuts to spending on childcare, health and electricity/heating. Among spending cuts, cuts in these areas were associated with the greatest level of stress, suggesting that individuals who had to compromise essential services experienced more intense psychological and practical strain. One-in-three low income households reported reducing savings and a similar proportion took on more debt or entered arrears. These responses were highly stressful, with arrears being the most stressful of all. Cuts to education and changes to living arrangements were also highly stressful.

These findings highlight pervasive financial strain affecting basic needs and have a number of implications. In times of crisis, interventions that focus on protecting access to groceries and essential services, particularly childcare, health and electricity/heating, are likely to reduce stress and bolster wellbeing. Support for debt management and arrears relief is also likely to be effective, given the high stress these entail. Housing is another high-stress area to target, given that it is likely to be intertwined with debt and arrears issues and its costs are a substantial burden for low-income households (Central Statistics Office, 2024b). Automatic stabilisers provided by the tax and welfare system (e.g. progressive taxes, unemployment benefit) can be important to cushion the effects of crises on low-income households (Doorley et al., 2021).

4.1.2 Minimising legacy effects of the cost-of-living crisis

Over half of households undertook a 'risky' response – a response with the potential for long-term negative consequences (e.g. increased debt, entering arrears, reduced savings). Taking on more debt or eating into savings leaves households in a more precarious financial situation and more vulnerable to future financial shocks, which is reflected in the associated high stress levels we find. This increased precarity may also constrain households' ability to make important investments over the next decade in areas like education and health, with many already cutting spending in these areas during the cost-of-living crisis.

These responses mean that the full extent of the adverse effects of the cost-of-living crisis on low-income households may not materialise for several years. The potential long-term impacts on children are particularly concerning, given that households with children found responses more stressful and were more likely to undertake a risky response. Relative to Northern Ireland, Ireland has had higher rates of childhood deprivation over the last two decades (Russell et al., 2025). Even transitory periods of deprivation in childhood have multiple detrimental long-term effects, including on educational attainment, socio-emotional development and health (Maître et al., 2021), and our evidence precludes analysis of some groups who may be particularly vulnerable, such as children in lone parent households, due to small sample sizes for specific subgroups (Russell and Maître, 2024). There are thus important medium- to long-term implications for policy. For example, although once-off welfare benefits in Budgets 2024 and 2025 shielded lower income households from some of the impact of the cost-of-living crisis, the temporary nature of these measures leaves these households exposed in future years (Doorley et al., 2023; Keane et al., 2024). Increased supports in important areas, such as education, employment, health and debt management, are likely to be needed over the next decade or so to help the worst-affected households return to financial security and to mitigate the risk of a further widening of existing economic, social and intergenerational inequalities.

4.1.3 Targeting supports towards the most vulnerable households

Results show substantial variation in responses to the cost-of-living crisis among lower income households. In particular, those experiencing material deprivation were more likely to have cut spending on essentials and to have undertaken a 'risky' response, such as increased debt. Notably, those on somewhat low income but deprived found these actions more stressful than those on very low income but not deprived, suggesting that deprivation exacerbates the burden of cost-of-living pressures even for those not on very low incomes.

These results also suggest that, more than income alone, deprivation is an important indicator of vulnerability during a cost-of-living crisis. This aligns with previous research showing a mismatch between income and deprivation when it comes to measuring poverty (Nolan and Whelan, 2009; Perry, 2002; Watson et al., 2017; Whelan et al., 2004; 2020). This distinction has important implications for future policy and intervention strategies. Targeted measures help efficiently allocate welfare to the most vulnerable households and reduce the added inflation risk from universal measures in recent Budgets (Doorley et al., 2024; Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, 2023). However, traditional approaches of identifying those most in need, such as proof of eligibility requirements, may exacerbate administrative burdens that deprived households already disproportionately experience (Christensen et al., 2020; Martin et al., 2024).

Using proxies for deprivation that are objective and easily measurable offers a potential solution, though identifying an appropriate proxy is challenging. Unlike other countries, in Ireland geographical location is a weaker indicator of deprivation than other socio-demographic factors, such as lone parenthood, disability, housing tenure and unemployment (Kneebone, 2014; Pobal, 2023; Watson et al., 2005). Almost half of lone parents and those with health-related unemployment, and over a third of those in private rental and social housing, experience deprivation (Central Statistics Office, 2024c).

International examples offer insights. For example, in the UK, vulnerability registers provide added protections for vulnerable groups dealing with utility and financial services companies (Ofgem, 2019; Priority Services Register, 2024; Vulnerability Registration Service, 2024). Criteria used to identify vulnerability include physical and mental health conditions, disabilities, old age, having young children, unmet literacy, language or digital needs, financial difficulty, and having recently experienced a major life event.

To target those in deprivation in Ireland effectively, multiple indicators will likely need to be combined. An important next step for research therefore is to identify a concise but broad set of variables to better target supports towards those most in need while limiting administrative burdens.

4.1.4 Focusing on issues at the structural level

We find little evidence to support the idea that individual psychological characteristics (e.g. financial knowledge or cognitive biases) explain risky responses, in line with recent international research (Ruggeri et al., 2023). Instead, situational factors – such as deprivation, pre-existing financial stress, and experienced inflation – are important determinants. This implies that effective interventions will need to address system-level or structural factors, such as administrative burdens, rather than focusing on individual-level factors such as cognitive biases or financial education (Chater and Loewenstein, 2023; Hewlett et al., 2024; Ruggeri et al., 2023). Tailoring interventions to the distinct needs of those newly in financial difficulty and those in long-term poverty may also be beneficial.

4.1.5 Tackling the under-utilisation of supports

Despite recruiting a large sample of households with lower incomes, reported uptake of most benefits (excluding the State Pension and Child Benefit) was low. Over half of the sample did not avail of a Medical or GP Visit Card and far more were not availing of other benefits (e.g. in areas such as housing and energy), despite participants indicating that they wanted more help with energy, health, and housing costs. In addition, most participants did not use any support services. Given the complexity of eligibility criteria for most benefits, available data do not allow precise estimates of under-utilisation, but self-reported data from our participants highlight a widespread lack of awareness of benefits. In particular, one-in-five participants were not aware of benefits that we asked them about, yet a meaningful proportion of these participants may have been eligible for these benefits (because the benefits we asked participants about were selected based on participants' socio-demographic information).[19, 20]

Interventions that tackle informational barriers (such as misperceptions about eligibility) may help increase benefit take-up and reduce administrative burdens. The most effective way to do so is to automatically enrol eligible individuals in benefits, for example using administrative data (Sunstein, 2018) such as the income and tax data collected by Revenue. When automatic enrolment is not feasible, directly (and, if needed, repeatedly) contacting eligible populations to inform them of benefits and explain how to apply is effective (e.g. Bhargava and Manoli, 2015; Finkelstein and Notowidigdo, 2019). For example, this could include contacting parents about children-related benefits (e.g. as is done under the National Childcare Scheme), or sending letters about the Rent Tax Credit to tenants registered with the Residential Tenancies Board. The Department of Social Protection engaged in a promotional campaign for the Additional Needs Payment in 2023, which plausibly played a role in the 73 per cent increase in uptake of that benefit (Department of Social Protection, 2023). International evidence emphasises the importance of accessible information, clear eligibility criteria, and simple instructions to reduce learning barriers (Bearson and Sunstein, 2023; Martin et al., n.d.).

Comprehensive interventions that signpost multiple benefits and services together may also reduce learning costs and increase take-up. For example, in the UK, online benefits calculators[21] allow residents to check their eligibility for a range of

19 As noted in Chapter 3, participants are less likely to be aware of benefits that are not relevant to them in the first place and that they would not have been eligible for anyway.

20 A caveat is that when comparing learning, compliance, and psychological costs across benefits, we did not find learning costs to be significantly higher. However, we only know learning costs for benefits that participants *did* use during the cost-of-living crisis. Therefore, our measure likely highly underestimates their importance in cases where they led participants not to hear, learn about, or use these benefits.

21 https://www.gov.uk/benefits-calculators.

supports by entering basic household details (such as their income). No equivalent tool exists in Ireland. Currently, online resources like Citizens Information and the Money Advice and Budgeting Service website list benefits with information on eligibility criteria, but these webpages lack customisation and therefore involve higher learning costs.[22] Developing a tailored benefits and services calculator, potentially integrated with application forms for benefits to provide a 'single point of application', might be a cost-efficient intervention to increase take-up, provided it is effectively promoted and avoids some important design and administrative pitfalls that have beset other single point of application systems such as the Universal Credit system in the UK (Bennett, 2024). Such a tool might be enhanced using AI, and behavioural testing of this kind of tool would help to determine and improve its impact. Such tools can also be designed to accommodate digitally excluded individuals, such as through phone-based support similar to Northern Ireland's 'Make The Call' service (NI Direct Government Services, n.d.).

Another type of intervention involves human 'navigators' (or intermediaries) who direct individuals towards supports they are eligible for and help them navigate burdensome processes to access these supports (Bettinger et al., 2012; DeLuca et al., 2023). This solution is more resource-intensive but could be effective in helping people identify and access multiple supports. One challenge would be to identify the best-placed actors to serve as intermediaries and ensure they have access to the right information to advise households, as supports are often fragmented between organisations, even within one policy area (e.g. several government bodies, charities, and energy providers provide energy supports).

Clearly, an increase in benefit take-up would require adequate resourcing to manage higher demand. Many organisations, such as Citizens Information and SVP, already report high demand, yet our results suggest that the people who could most benefit from supports face higher barriers in accessing them.

4.1.6 Identifying and removing administrative burdens

Households who used benefits, particularly means-tested ones, faced significant levels of administrative burden (learning, compliance, and psychological costs). These burdens were especially high for deprived participants and those living on very low incomes, who not only relied more on income-based benefits, but also reported higher levels of burden when accessing them. While a greater level and coverage of means-tested benefits may help reduce inequality in Ireland (Doorley et al., 2024), there is a trade-off in that means-tested benefits impose higher burdens than universal ones (Moynihan et al., 2015) and these burdens can be

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22 https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/ff767-social-welfare-schemes-and-services/; https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/social-welfare/; https://www.mabs.ie/en/managing-money/living-on-a-low-income/how-to-increase-your-income/.

exacerbated by, or even cause, poor mental health (Bell et al., 2023). Importantly, our findings probably underestimate the true level of burden, as we do not have data on individuals who faced burdens large enough to discourage them from accessing benefits.

Tackling administrative burdens in benefit access requires tailored approaches, as different benefits may present unique barriers to take-up. For example, stress or stigma associated with a benefit (e.g. to cope with unemployment) may generate high psychological costs, so interventions that reduce these may be effective to increase take-up. In two field experiments in the US, Lasky-Fink and Linos (2024) raised the take-up of a housing benefit by including de-stigmatising messages (i.e. that struggling with housing expenses is not the recipients' fault) in informational postcards about the benefit. Alternatively, long and complex forms may generate high compliance costs, which can be reduced by pre-filling forms with already known information (e.g. using administrative data) (Bettinger et al., 2012). Identifying the burdens specific to a benefit is key to effective intervention. However, doing so can be challenging for those who design and implement benefits, because they themselves are often highly familiar with required processes and therefore may not appreciate how challenging they are for others (Soman et al., 2019).

Behavioural or 'sludge' audits involve systematically identifying administrative burdens. Such audits map application steps and assess them against pre-set criteria, such as time or monetary costs, inclusion and equity, and user experience (for details, see Martin et al., n.d.; New South Wales Government, 2024; OECD, 2024; Shahab and Lades, 2024; Soman et al., 2019; Sunstein, 2022). For example, a webpage step might be rated as 'easy' if written in plain accessible language or 'very difficult' if it contains jargon and long sentences.

The OECD's 'Sludge Academy' (2024) used sludge audits to identify burdens in government programmes in multiple countries. In Ireland, similar audits could help increase take-up for targeted benefits. Audits are not only necessary to ensure that interventions target the real obstacles to take-up, but are also relatively low-cost, as they can be carried out by benefits administrators (ideally with a behavioural scientist) using existing data and systems to inform the audit ratings (e.g. drop-off rates from online application systems) as well as accessible ways to collect new data (e.g. a 'mystery shopping' approach where auditors go through the application steps themselves).

4.1.7 Addressing the most problematic policy areas

Housing, health, and energy supports may be fruitful areas for signposting interventions and behavioural audits. These areas were among the most stressful responses that low-income households undertook during the cost-of-living crisis and were commonly identified as areas where participants wanted additional support. Despite this demand, our findings suggest that supports in these areas may be under-utilised and involve administrative burdens. For example, families who do not take up health benefits to which they are entitled, such as Medical Cards, spend hundreds more per year on healthcare and insurance (Keane et al., 2021).

Rising housing costs are a persistent problem in Ireland and are considered a heavy burden by three-quarters of deprived households (Central Statistics Office, 2024b). Many low-income households live in poorly insulated homes, exacerbating problems caused by high energy prices (Laurence et al., 2024). This is particularly the case for those living in social or private rented accommodation, for whom cuts to energy spending during the cost-of-living crisis were particularly stressful. Solutions to this problem may include expediting the process of retrofitting Ireland's social housing stock, more effectively incentivising the retrofitting of private rental properties, and exploring other local solutions such as district heating (Climate Change Advisory Council, 2024).

4.1.8 Future-proofing the welfare system

Overall, we find that low-income households were strongly affected by the cost-of-living crisis, with many resorting to drastic responses such as cutting day-to-day necessities and increasing debt. These responses were often stressful and may have long-term negative effects on households' financial security and on both economic and social inequalities, particularly among households with children. Notably, 29 per cent of households seeking support did so for the first time, and faced a complex and burdensome benefits system. This complexity may have prevented many households from accessing the supports they needed, undermining the effectiveness of the welfare system in mitigating the cost-of-living crisis.

Simplifying the welfare system, such as by introducing a single point of application, could significantly improve access to vital supports. In the short term, this would extend assistance to vulnerable households who have been hardest hit by the cost-of-living crisis, while in the medium-to-long term, it would help to tackle the legacy effects of the cost-of-living crisis. A user-friendly design that considers accessibility constraints would ensure than even households newly experiencing financial difficulty can quickly and easily access the supports they need.

4.2 LIMITATIONS

While we link our findings to the above implications, some limitations of this study need to be acknowledged when evaluating the weight of evidence. We discuss five such limitations.

First, despite efforts to develop a plain language survey, people with unmet English language and/or digital literacy needs may have been less likely to sign up to the study and so may be underrepresented. This may also be the case for other groups, such as those with lower education levels, migrants, or those unable to afford digital devices. These groups may also have been more likely to drop out of the survey after starting it, and with a drop-out rate from the survey of about one-third, it is possible that this also contributed to underrepresentation. These populations may also experience higher levels of deprivation and greater difficulty in accessing benefits and services. For example, migrants, and particularly those born outside of the UK and EU, had significantly higher at-risk-of-poverty and deprivation rates than Irish-born people in 2022 (McGinnity et al., 2023). Non-EU (or UK) nationals also have fewer entitlements to benefits (McGinnity et al., 2023). Though approximately one-fifth of our sample were born outside of Ireland, heterogeneity within this group with respect to welfare entitlements and poverty indicators prevents any meaningful subgroup analysis. Consequently, our findings may underestimate the negative effects of the cost-of-living crisis on those low-income households that are hardest to reach.

Second, we rely on self-reports of current and past behaviours and experiences (including income and the use of supports), which may be subject to recall and social desirability bias. This is particularly the case when compared to a survey such as the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (Central Statistics Office, 2024b) that links to administrative data on income and benefit use. Social desirability could lead to underreporting of benefit and service use if there is associated social stigma, but may also depress estimates of, in particular, risky responses. We took several steps to mitigate recall bias, as outlined in Chapter 2, and addressed social desirability bias by assuring participants of the anonymous and confidential nature of the study. Additionally, most participants did the survey online, which enhances perceived anonymity and reduces social desirability bias (Krumpal, 2013; Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2023).

Third, to adjust household income for family size in order to calculate equivalised income, we use the equivalence scale of the Central Statistics Office. This differs slightly from the OECD's modified-equivalence scale that is used by Eurostat (Eurostat, 2025b).[23] This limits comparability of the study's findings to those of international studies using the OECD scale. However, the focus of our study was on informing policy in Ireland, and we judged it best to maximise comparability with

23 The CSO calculates equivalised household size as 1*first adult + 0.66*number of additional adults + 0.33*number of children. The OECD modified scale calculates equivalised household size as 1*first adult + 0.5*number of additional people aged ≥14 + 0.3*number of children aged <14.

official statistics and studies from Ireland, where the Central Statistics Office scale is predominantly used.

Fourth, the relationships we report between risky responses and various possible explanatory factors do not necessarily imply causal relationships. Unobserved factors may confound relationships. To mitigate this risk, we control for a number of possible socio-demographic and other confounding variables. Additionally, some relationships may be bi-directional. For instance, deprivation may be both a cause and effect of some responses to the cost-of-living crisis. Future research using longitudinal data could provide further clarity on these relationships.

Fifth, regarding the use of supports and associated burdens, we report the share of households who used each support, but these figures do not represent take-up rates, as we cannot determine each participant's eligibility for specific benefits. For example, there may be migrants in our sample who are ineligible for some of these benefits. For many benefits, far more detailed socio-demographic data would be required; to identify true take-up rates, studies would likely need to focus on a more limited set of benefits. Related limitations are that (1) some participants may not have recognised the official name of certain benefits, but only know them by their colloquial names (e.g. 'the dole'); (2) some participants may have been unaware that their household was claiming a certain benefit, especially household level benefits, though this risk is mitigated somewhat by our exclusion from the study of people who had no financial decision-making responsibility in their household. These limitations may have led to an underestimation of the proportion of our sample using certain benefits.

Finally, the survey likely underestimates administrative burdens as we only measure burdens for the supports that participants reported using, which by definition excludes burdens that led people to abandon pursuing the relevant support (as noted in footnote 20). As with benefit take-up rates, definitive conclusions on the level of administrative burdens associated with specific benefits and services would likely require benefit-specific research (e.g. in the form of behavioural audits).

4.3 CONCLUSION

Our findings show that low-income households adopted a wide range of response strategies to cope with the cost-of-living crisis, including cutting day-to-day necessities, increasing borrowing, and taking on extra employment. Households in deprivation were more likely to adopt these responses and found them more stressful, whereas differences by income level were much smaller (within a low-income sample). Deprivation measures may therefore be more important than income measures in determining the need for intervention, although identifying which households are deprived to target interventions is a significant challenge. More broadly, a large majority of deprived low-income households made risky responses, with potential adverse long-term consequences. This finding underscores the importance of interventions to mitigate these negative effects.

Our analysis found little evidence that psychological factors, such as financial knowledge and cognitive biases, drive risky responses. Instead, contextual factors — such as deprivation status, pre-existing financial stress, and recent inflation experiences — emerged as key influences. This implies that system-level interventions aimed at structural issues are likely to be more effective than individual-level interventions focused on, for example, financial education.

The study's results on benefits and services show that households used a broad range of supports during the cost-of-living crisis (varying by income and deprivation group), but also that households who needed supports during the cost-of-living crisis faced a complex benefits system that impeded access. This is likely to have blunted the system's effectiveness in counteracting the negative short- and long-term effects of the cost-of-living crisis on low-income households. A simplified and more resilient welfare system (e.g. index-linked core benefits) may help tackle the long-run effects of the latest crisis and help to reduce the damage done by future crises.

Importantly, these effects are observed on a sample of households that likely underrepresents households that are most financially vulnerable, such as certain migrant groups, members of the Traveller community and those with unmet digital literacy needs. Further targeted research is needed to measure potential scarring effects of the cost-of-living crisis on these groups.

Despite prices stabilising (McQuinn et al., 2024), they remain at inflated levels. While once-off measures implemented in Budgets during the cost-of-living crisis were likely welcomed by many lower income households, our findings underscore the importance of implementing structural changes to the welfare system; it is unlikely that the cuts in essential spending reported here have been reversed, nor that previous levels of debt and savings have been restored. Continuous monitoring of how vulnerable households are coping with changes in living standards and better administrative data on benefit uptake would help to improve the effectiveness of the welfare system.

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APPENDIX A

List of supports

Income and employment benefits:

- Jobseeker’s Benefit or Jobseeker’s Allowance
- Jobseeker’s Transitional Payment
- Carer’s Allowance or Carer’s Benefit
- Home Carer Tax Credit
- Supplementary Welfare Allowance
- Additional Needs / Exceptional Needs Payment
- Living Alone Allowance

Housing benefits:

- Housing Assistance Payment
- Rent Supplement
- Rent Tax Credit
- Work From Home Tax Credit
- Mortgage Interest Tax Credit

Health benefits:

- Disability Benefit or Illness Benefit
- Medical Card or GP Visit Card
- Drugs Payment Scheme
- Medical Expenses Tax Relief

Energy benefits:

- Fuel Allowance
- Energy Hardship Fund
- Warmer Homes Scheme
- Home Energy Upgrade Scheme

Pension benefits:

- State Pension, Old Age Pension, or Widower’s Pension
- Household Benefits Package

Children benefits:

- Child Benefit
- One Parent Family Benefit
- Single Child Carer Tax Credit
- Working Family Payment
- National Childcare Scheme
- School Transport Scheme

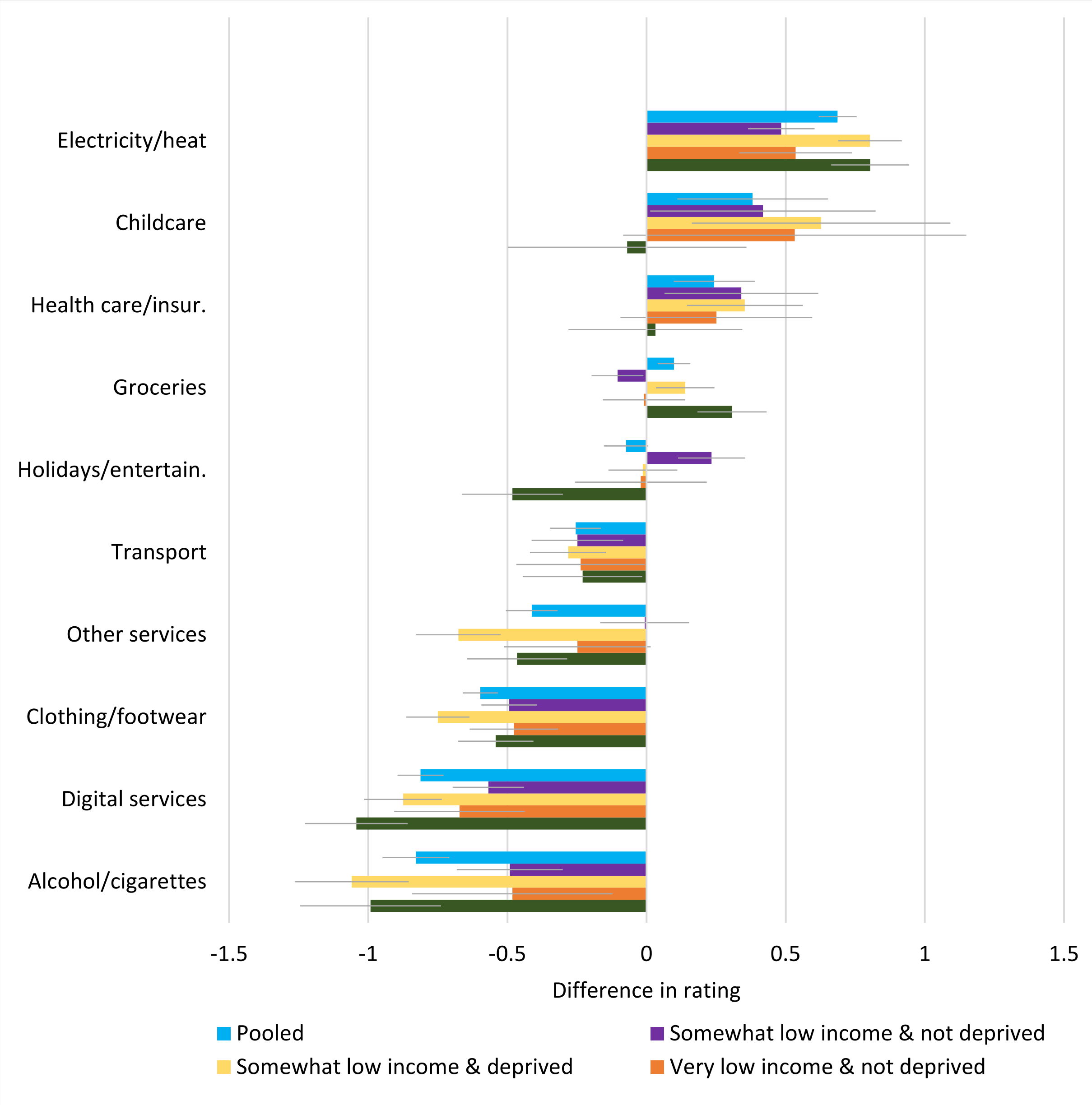
Support services:

- St Vincent de Paul (SVP)
- Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS)
- Citizens Information Service
- Threshold
- Residential Tenancies Board (RTB)
- Local church or community group
- Men’s Shed or Women’s Shed
- Credit Union
- Samaritans.

APPENDIX B

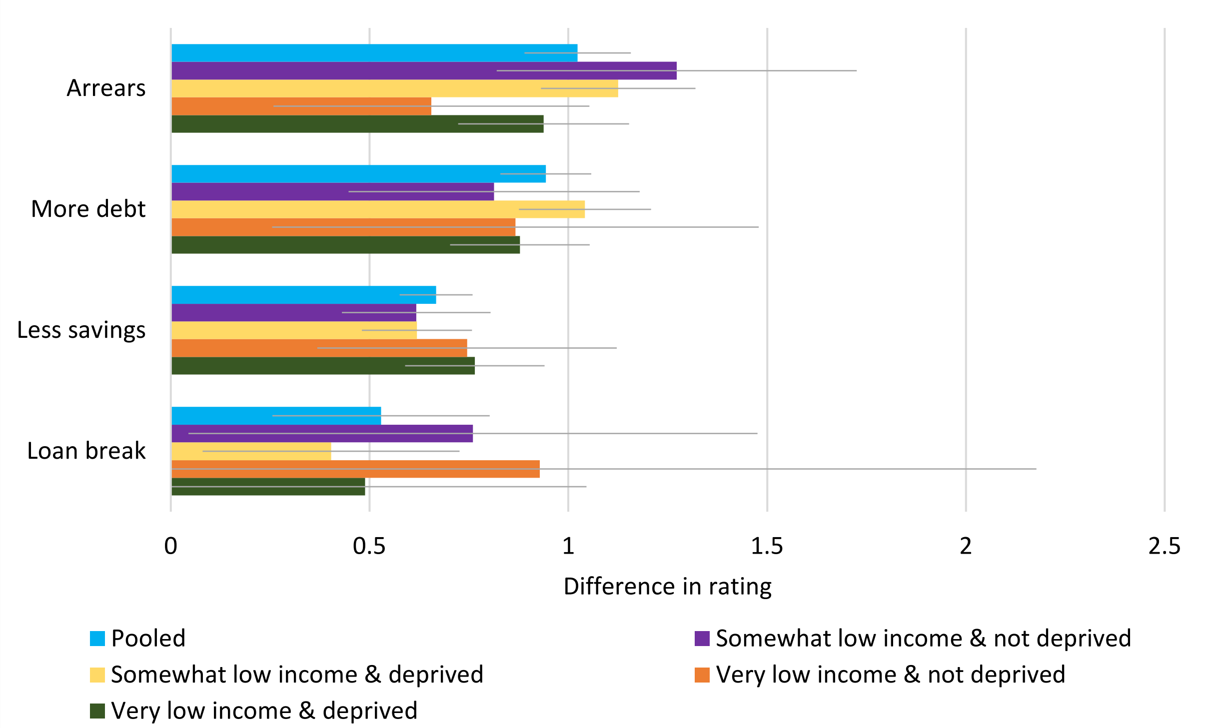
Supplementary figures

FIGURE A.1 AVERAGE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE STRESS RATING A PARTICIPANT GAVE TO A PARTICULAR CUT AND THE AVERAGE RATING THEY GAVE FOR ALL RESPONSES THEY UNDERTOOK



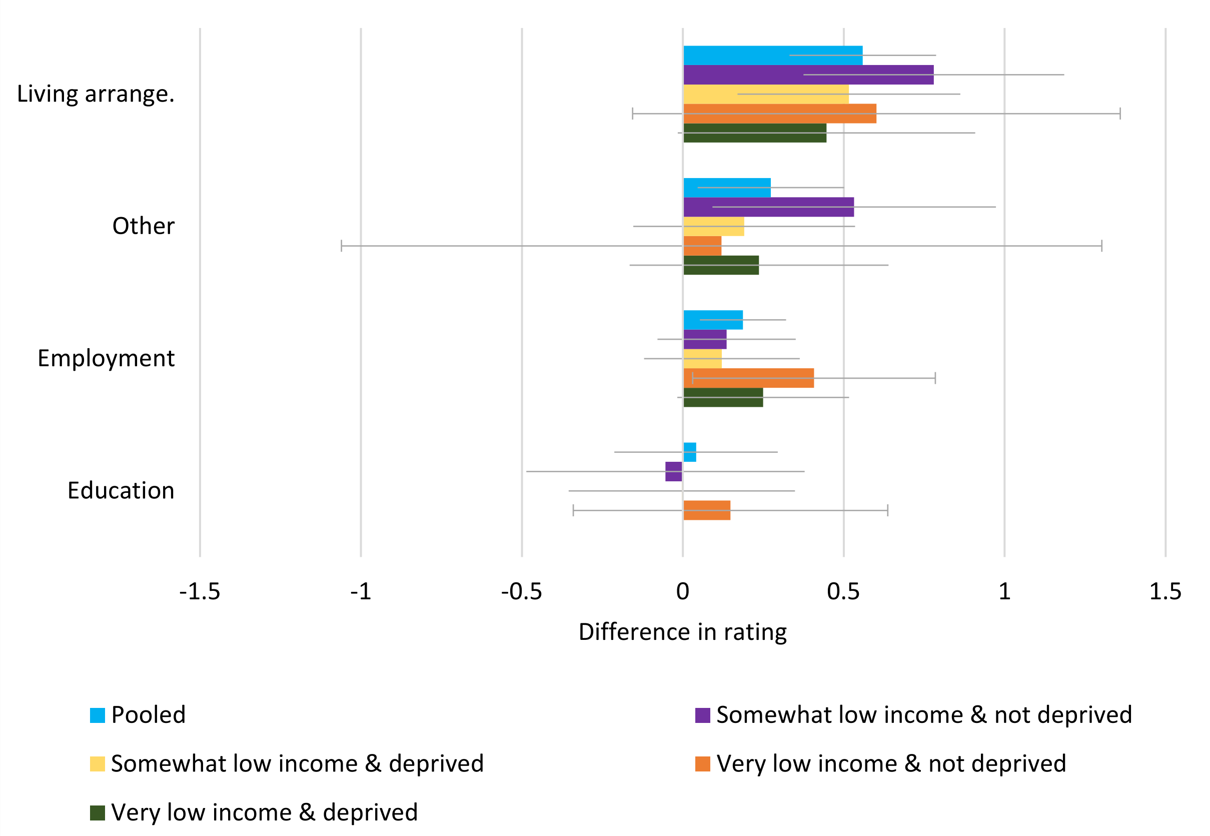
Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals. 1 to 7 rating scale.

FIGURE A.2 AVERAGE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE STRESS RATING A PARTICIPANT GAVE TO A PARTICULAR BORROWING/SAVING RESPONSE AND THE AVERAGE RATING THEY GAVE FOR ALL RESPONSES THEY UNDERTOOK



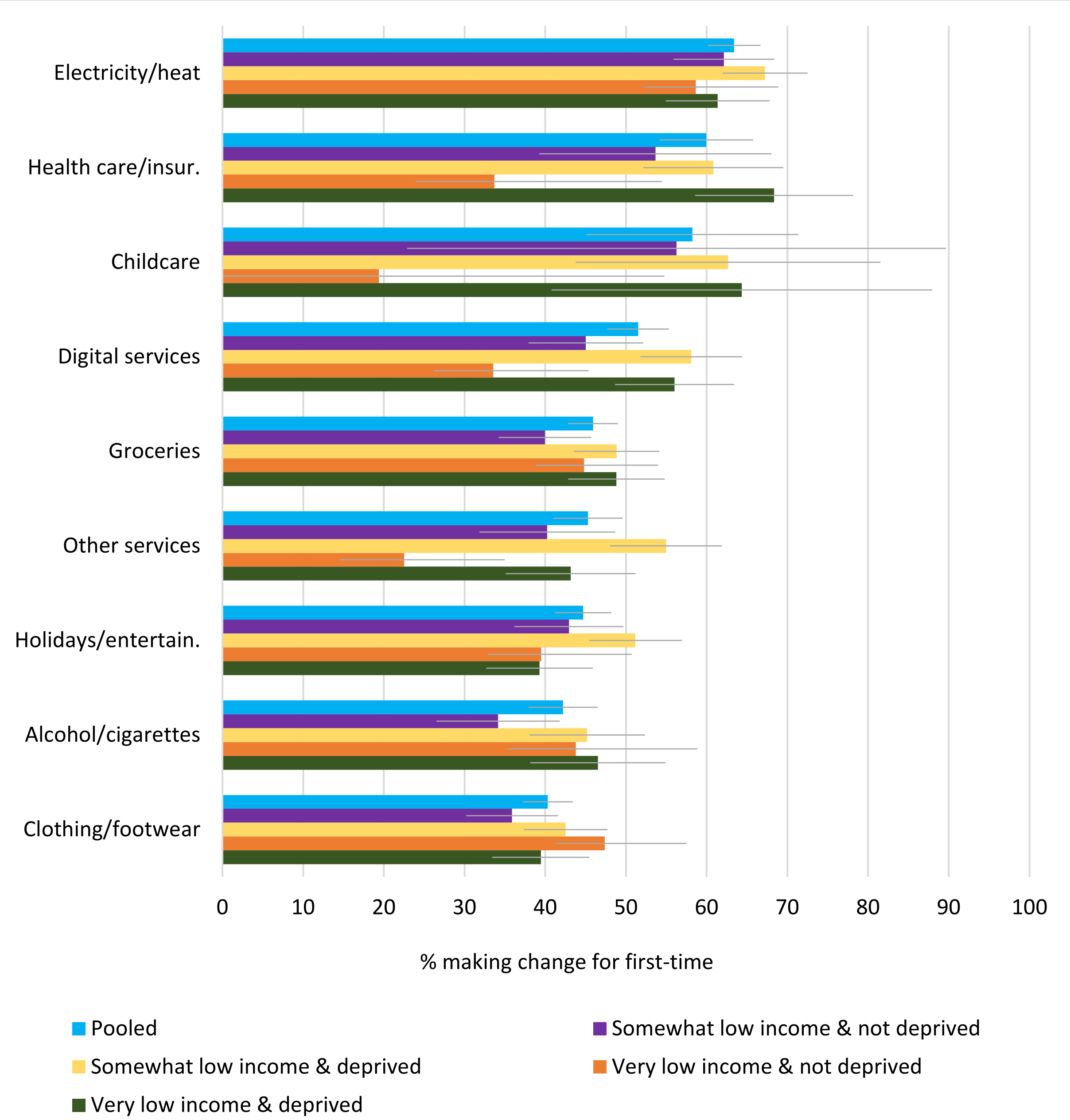
Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals. 1 to 7 rating scale.

FIGURE A.3 AVERAGE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE STRESS RATING A PARTICIPANT GAVE TO A PARTICULAR RESPONSE AND THE AVERAGE RATING THEY GAVE FOR ALL RESPONSES THEY UNDERTOOK



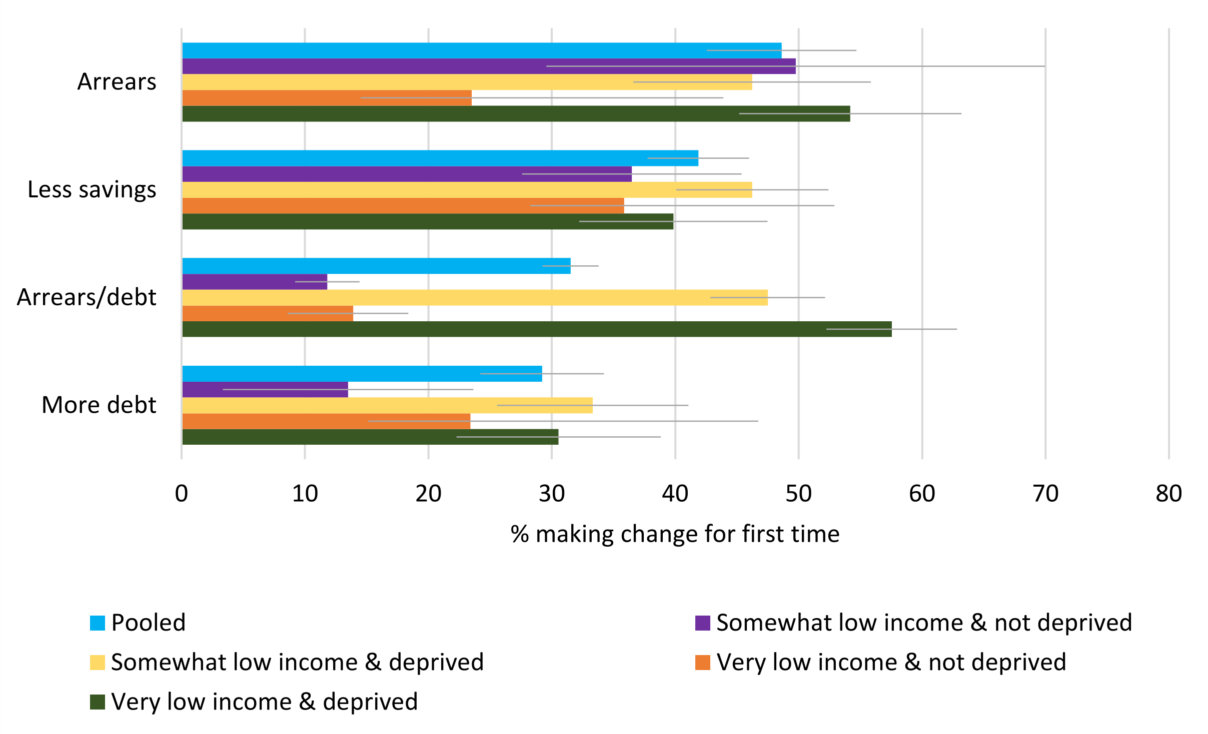
Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals. 1 to 7 rating scale.

FIGURE A.4 PROPORTION OF THOSE WHO UNDERTOOK EACH SPENDING RESPONSE FOR WHOM IT WAS THEIR FIRST TIME MAKING THAT CHANGE



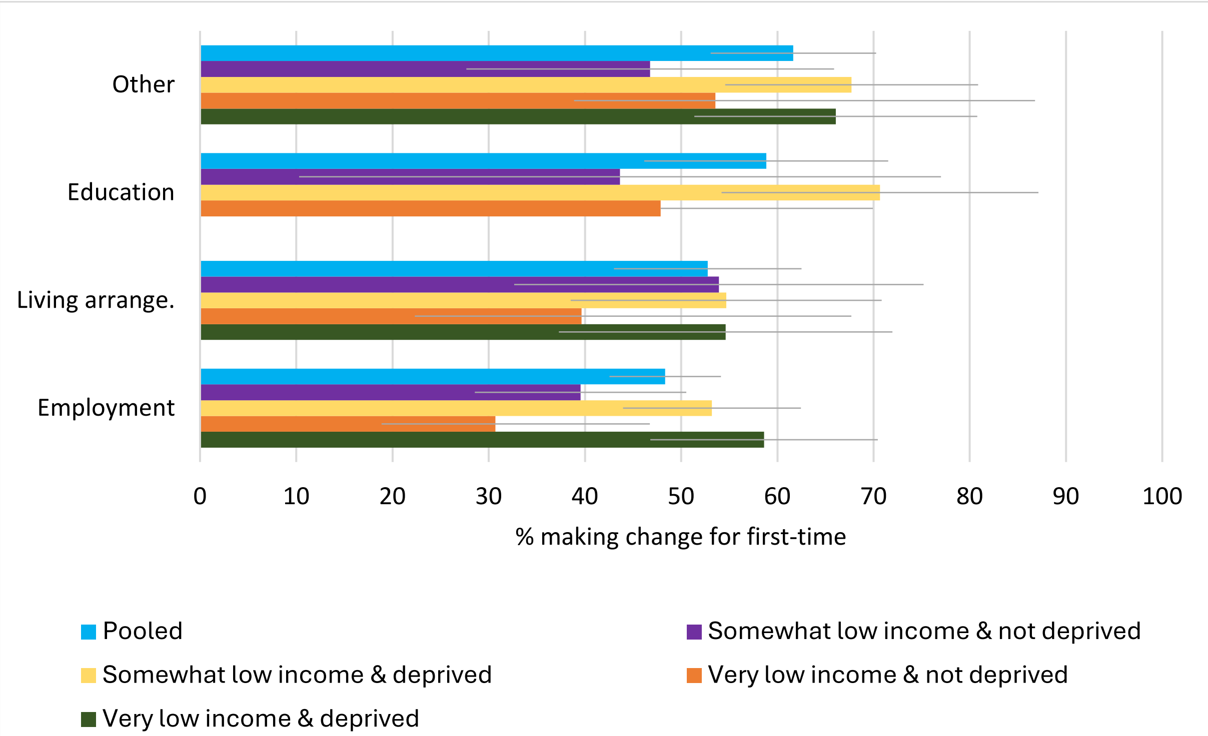
Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals.

FIGURE A.5 PROPORTION OF THOSE WHO UNDERTOOK EACH BORROWING/SAVING RESPONSE FOR WHOM IT WAS THEIR FIRST TIME MAKING THAT CHANGE



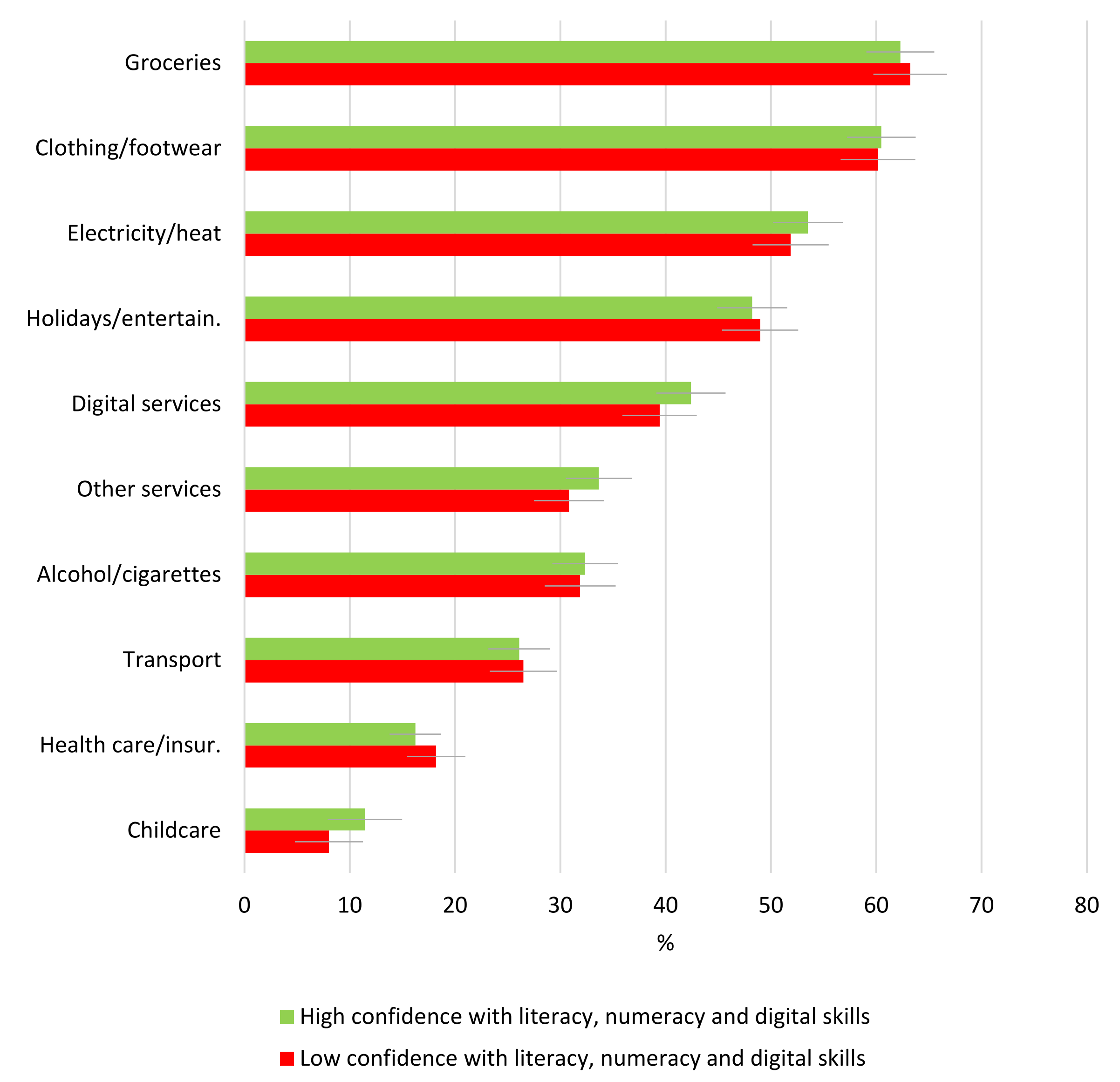
Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals.

FIGURE A.6 PROPORTION OF THOSE WHO UNDERTOOK EACH RESPONSE FOR WHOM IT WAS THEIR FIRST TIME MAKING THAT CHANGE



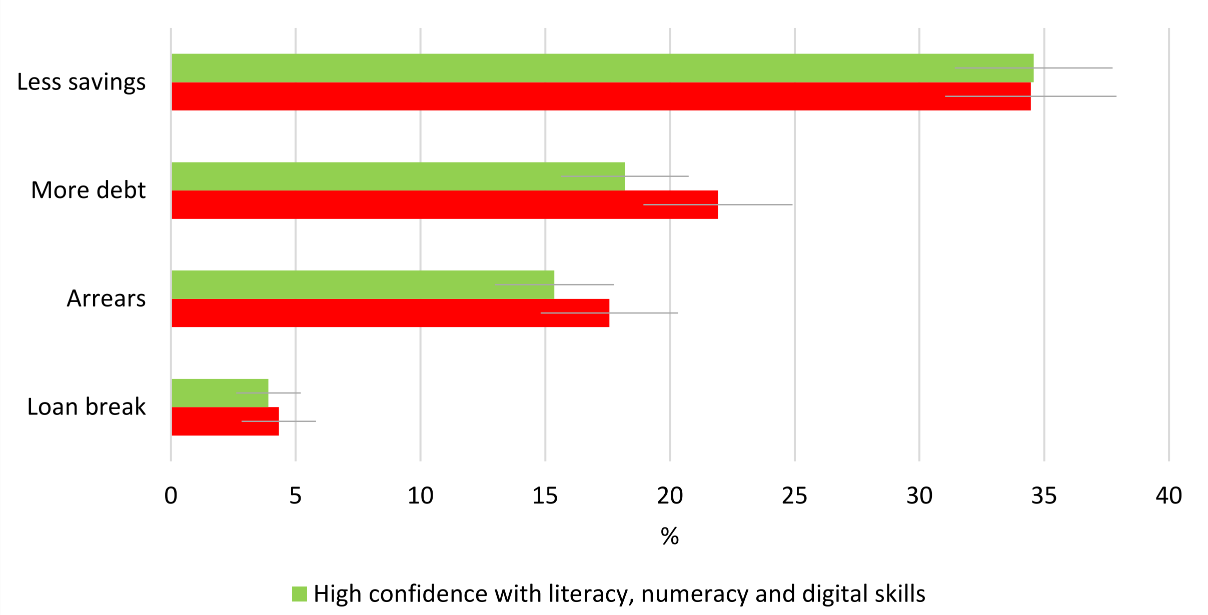
Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals.

FIGURE A.7 PROPORTION OF PARTICIPANTS WHO UNDERTOOK SPENDING RESPONSES DUE TO COST-OF-LIVING INCREASES, BY CONFIDENCE IN NUMERACY, LITERACY AND DIGITAL SKILLS



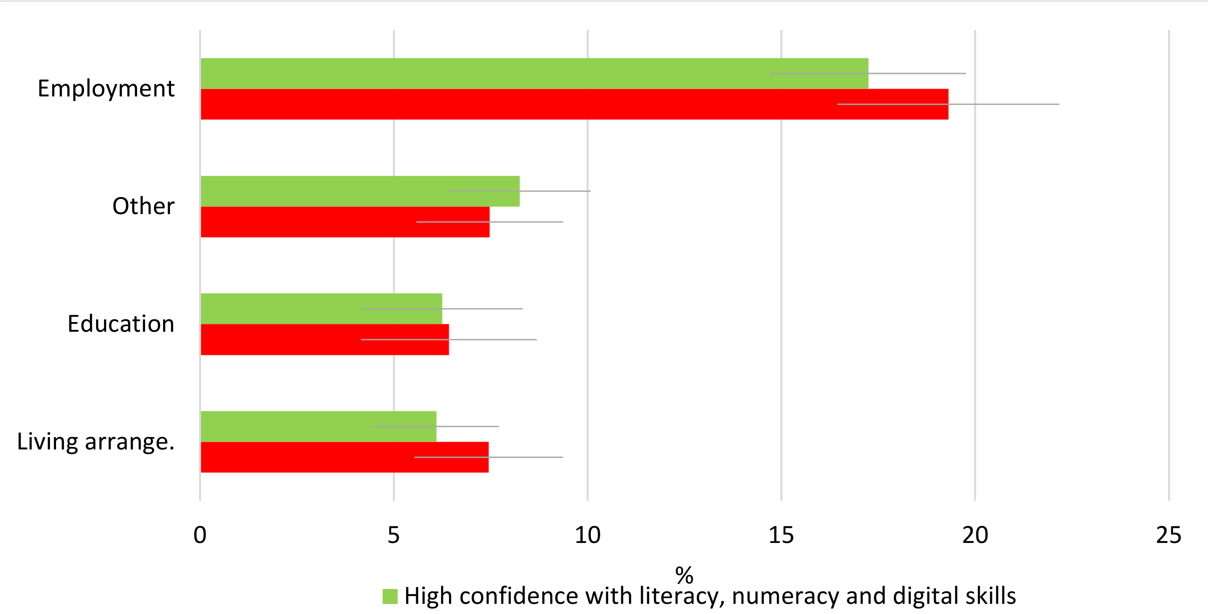
Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals.

FIGURE A.8 PROPORTION OF PARTICIPANTS WHO UNDERTOOK BORROWING/SAVING RESPONSES DUE TO COST-OF-LIVING INCREASES, BY CONFIDENCE IN NUMERACY, LITERACY AND DIGITAL SKILLS



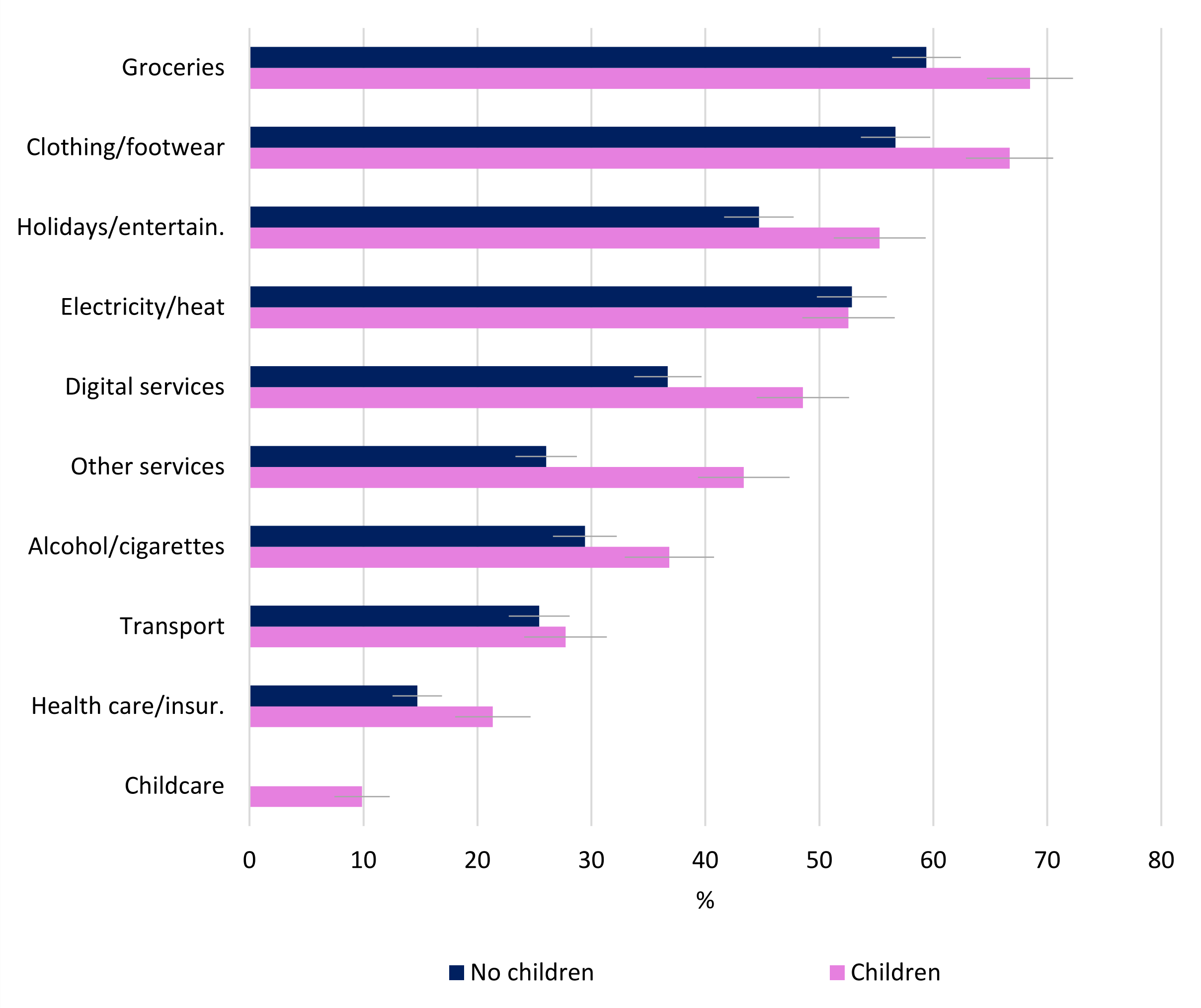
Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals.

FIGURE A.9 PROPORTION OF PARTICIPANTS WHO UNDERTOOK OTHER RESPONSES DUE TO COST-OF-LIVING INCREASES, BY CONFIDENCE IN NUMERACY, LITERACY AND DIGITAL SKILLS



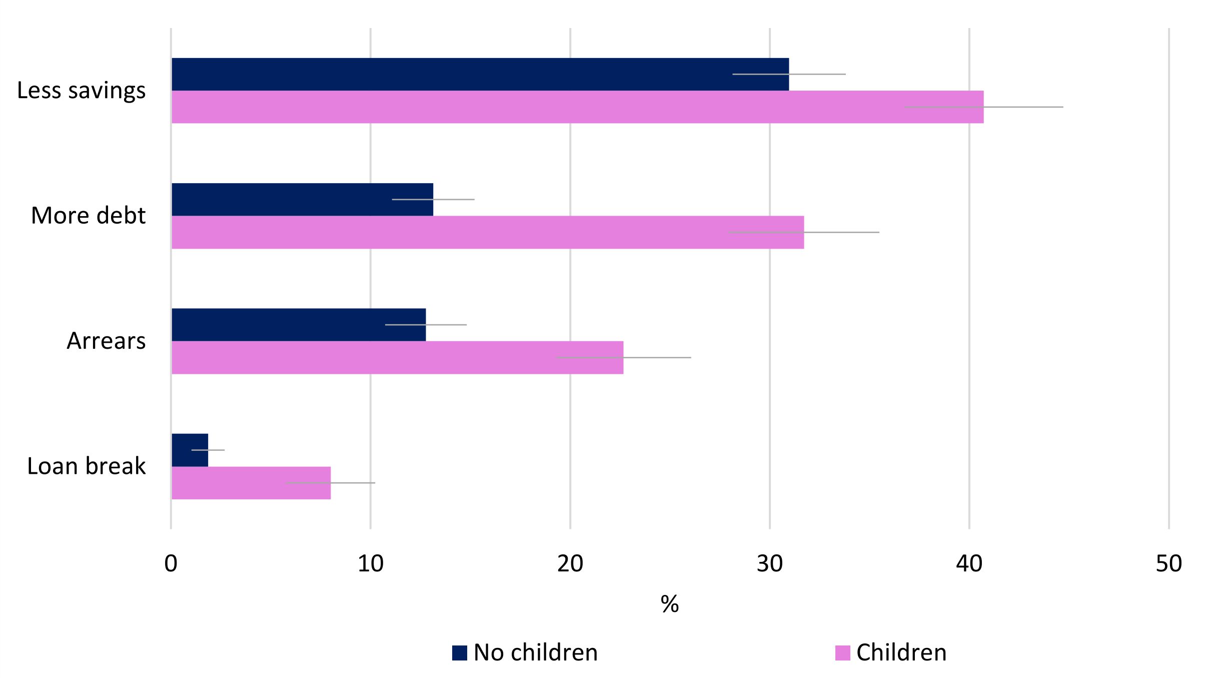
Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals.

FIGURE A.10 PROPORTION OF PARTICIPANTS WHO UNDERTOOK SPENDING RESPONSES DUE TO COST-OF-LIVING INCREASES, BY PRESENCE OF CHILDREN IN HOUSEHOLD



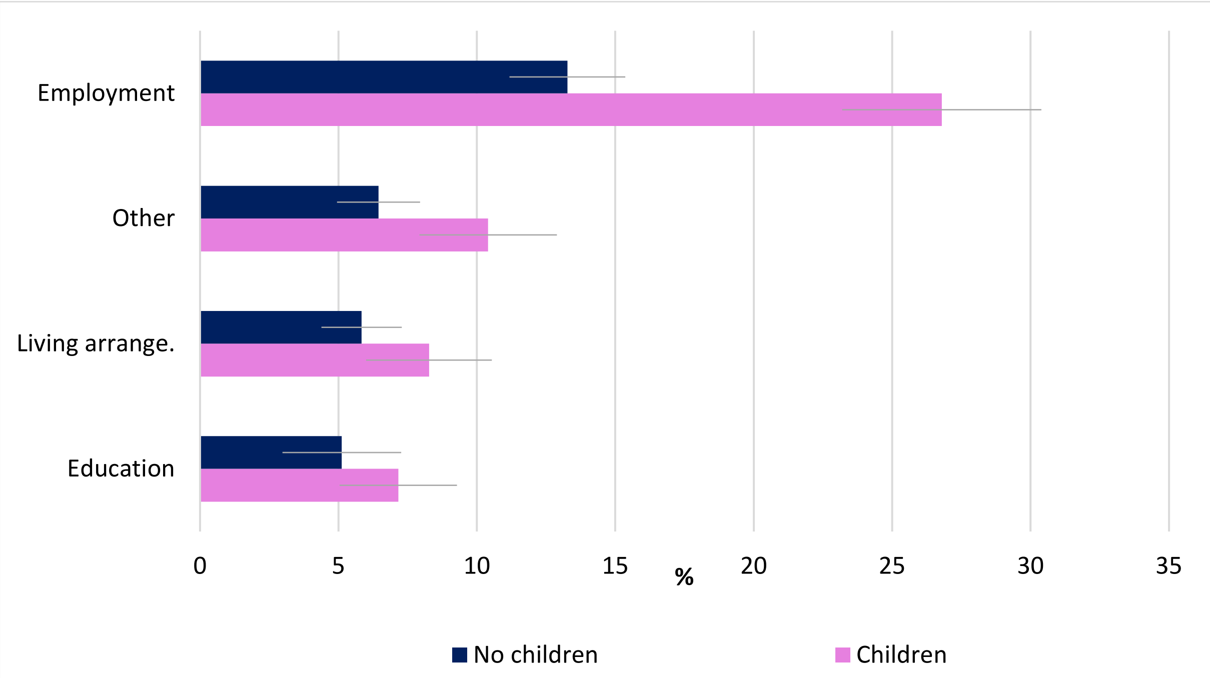
Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals.

FIGURE A.11 PROPORTION OF PARTICIPANTS WHO UNDERTOOK BORROWING/SAVING RESPONSES DUE TO COST-OF-LIVING INCREASES, BY PRESENCE OF CHILDREN IN HOUSEHOLD



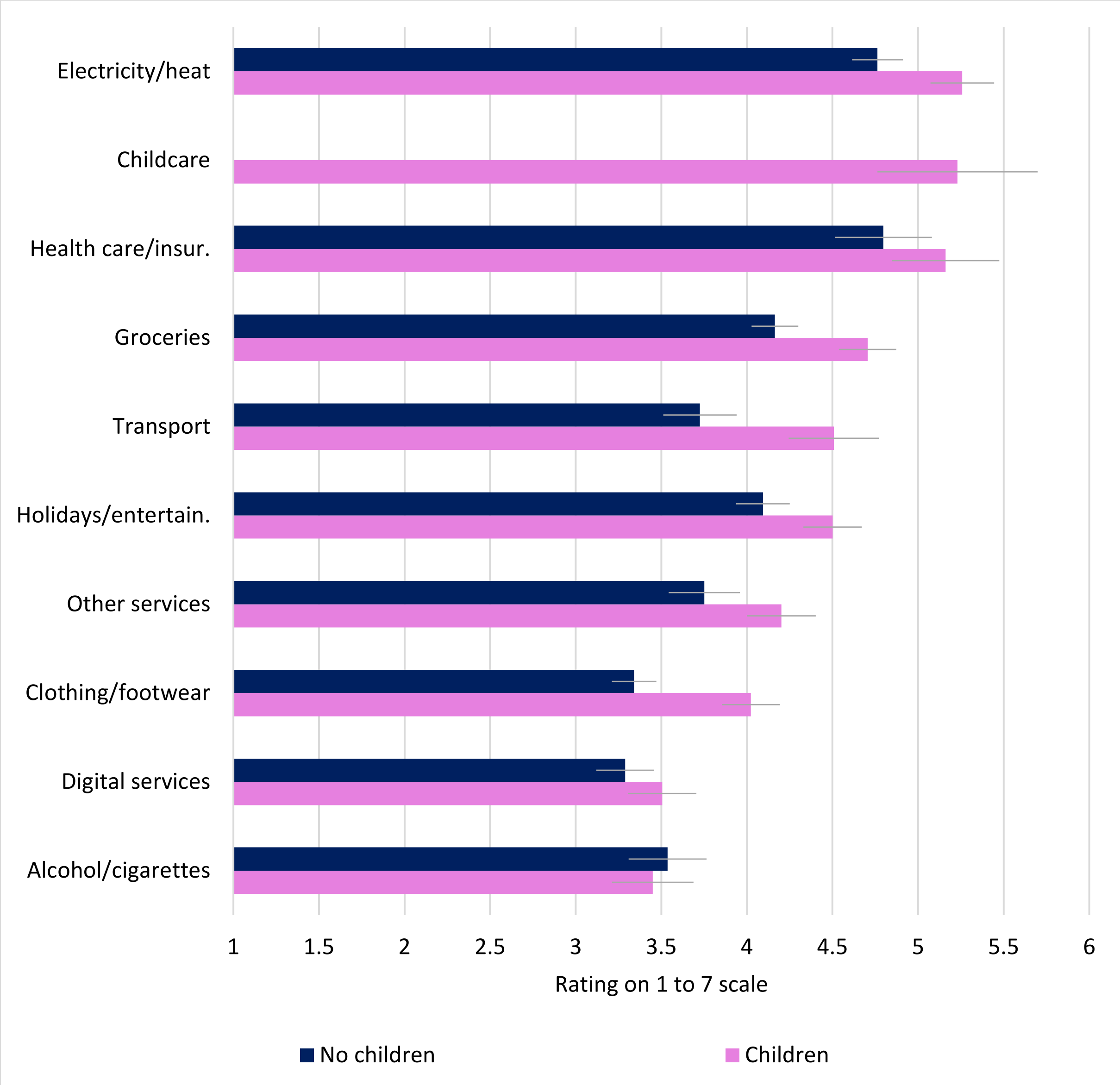
Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals.

FIGURE A.12 PROPORTION OF PARTICIPANTS WHO UNDERTOOK OTHER RESPONSES DUE TO COST-OF-LIVING INCREASES, BY PRESENCE OF CHILDREN IN HOUSEHOLD



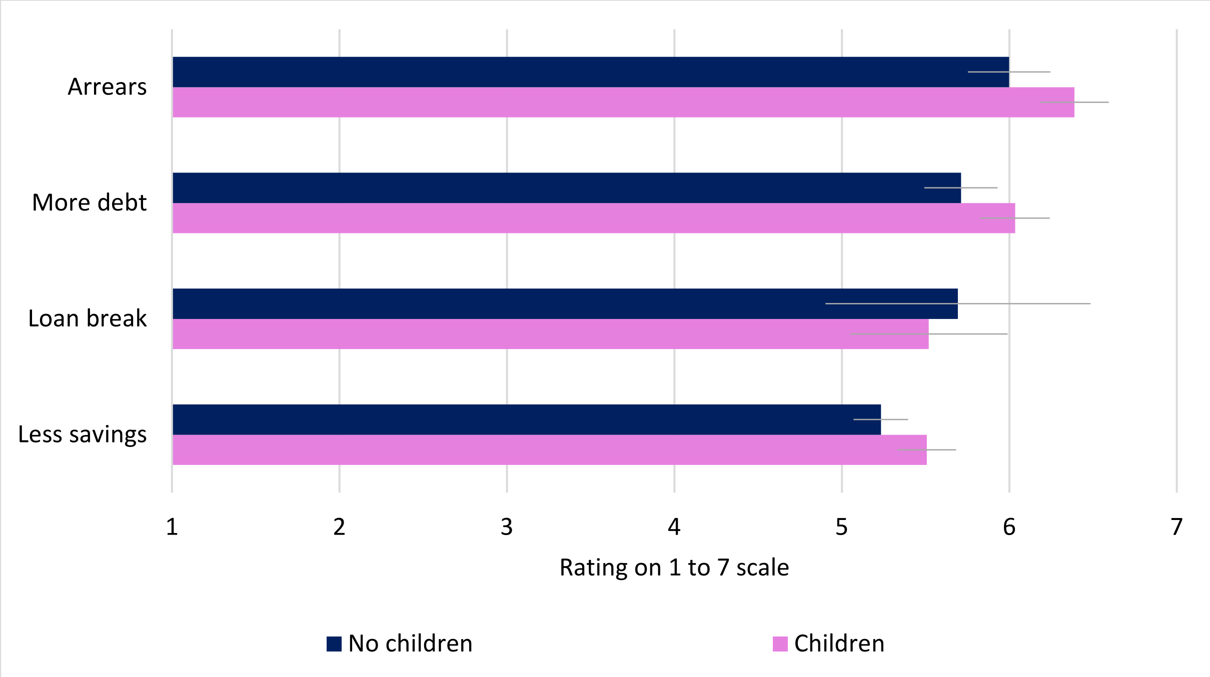
Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals.

FIGURE A.13 STRESS RATINGS REPORTED BY PARTICIPANTS FOR EACH SPENDING RESPONSE, BY PRESENCE OF CHILDREN IN HOUSEHOLD



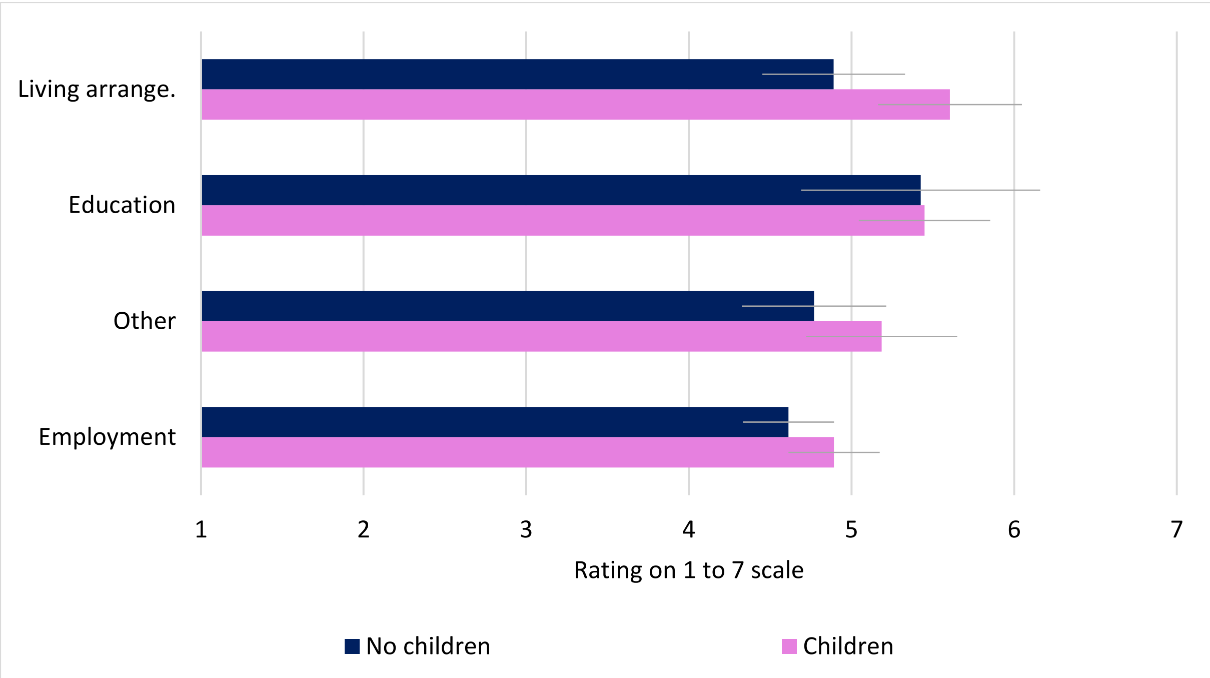
Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals.

FIGURE A.14 STRESS RATINGS REPORTED BY PARTICIPANTS FOR EACH BORROWING/SAVING RESPONSE, BY PRESENCE OF CHILDREN IN HOUSEHOLD



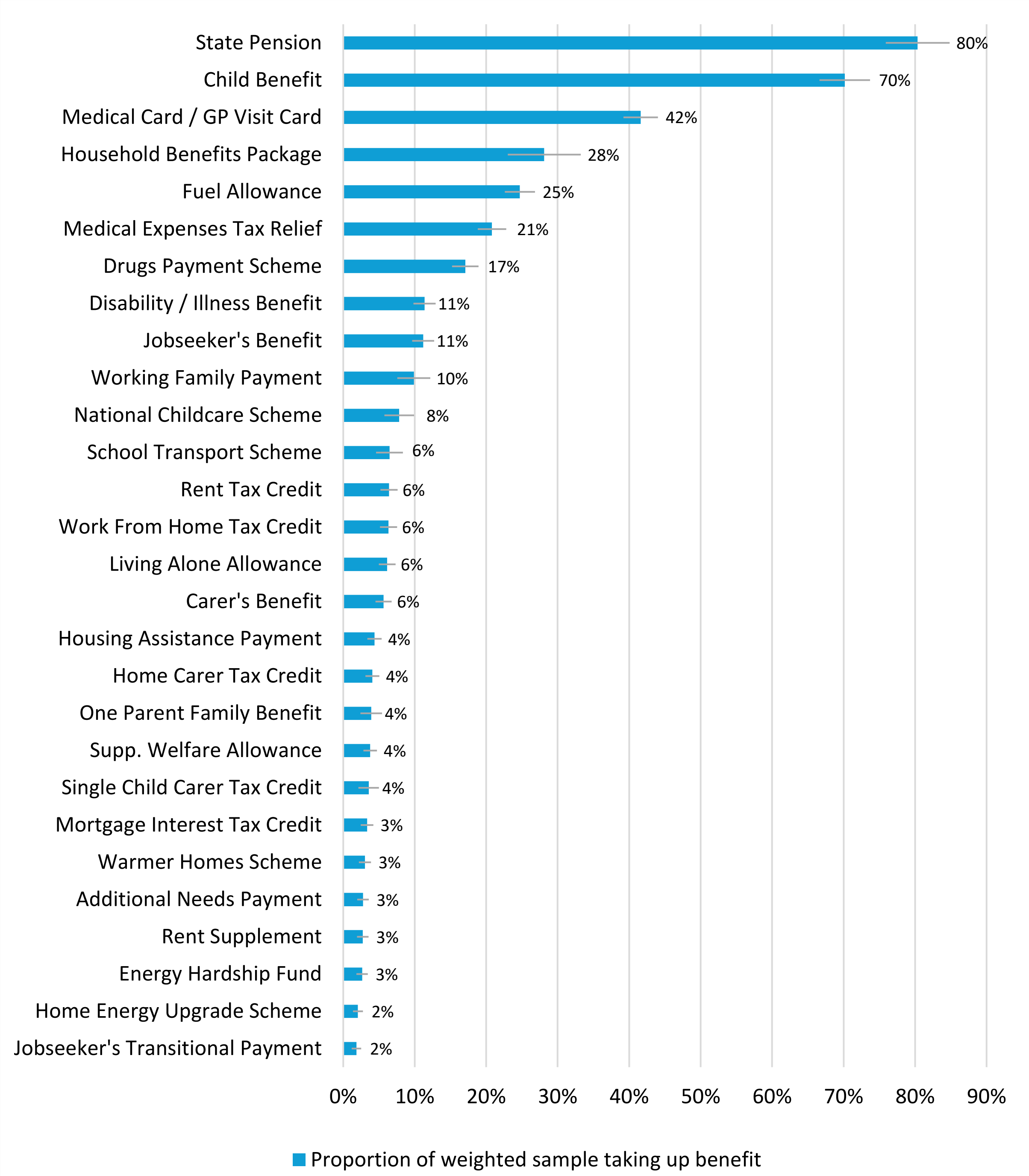
Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals.

FIGURE A.15 STRESS RATINGS REPORTED BY PARTICIPANTS FOR EACH OTHER RESPONSE, BY PRESENCE OF CHILDREN IN HOUSEHOLD



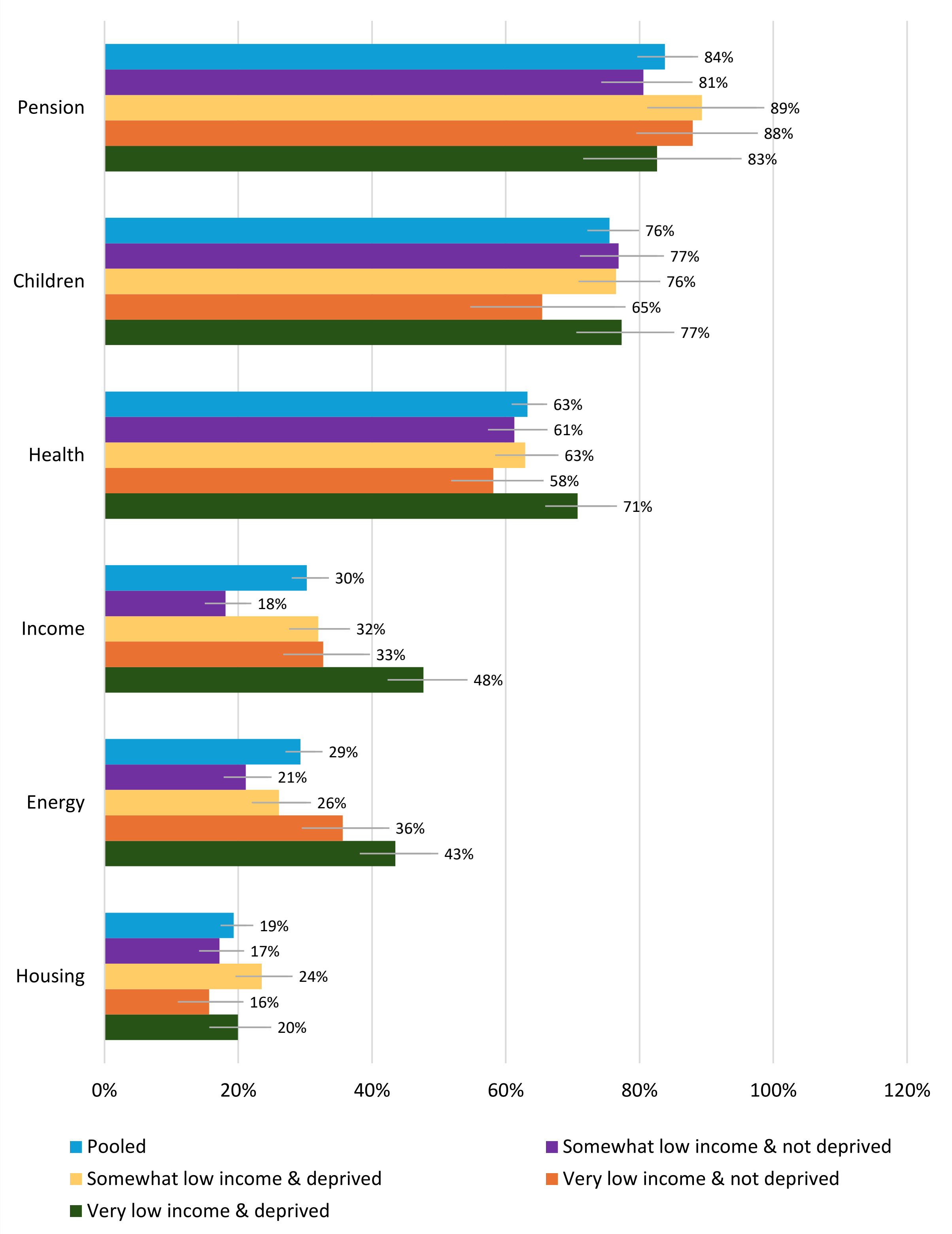
Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals.

FIGURE A.16 PROPORTION OF SAMPLE USING GOVERNMENT BENEFITS, POOLED



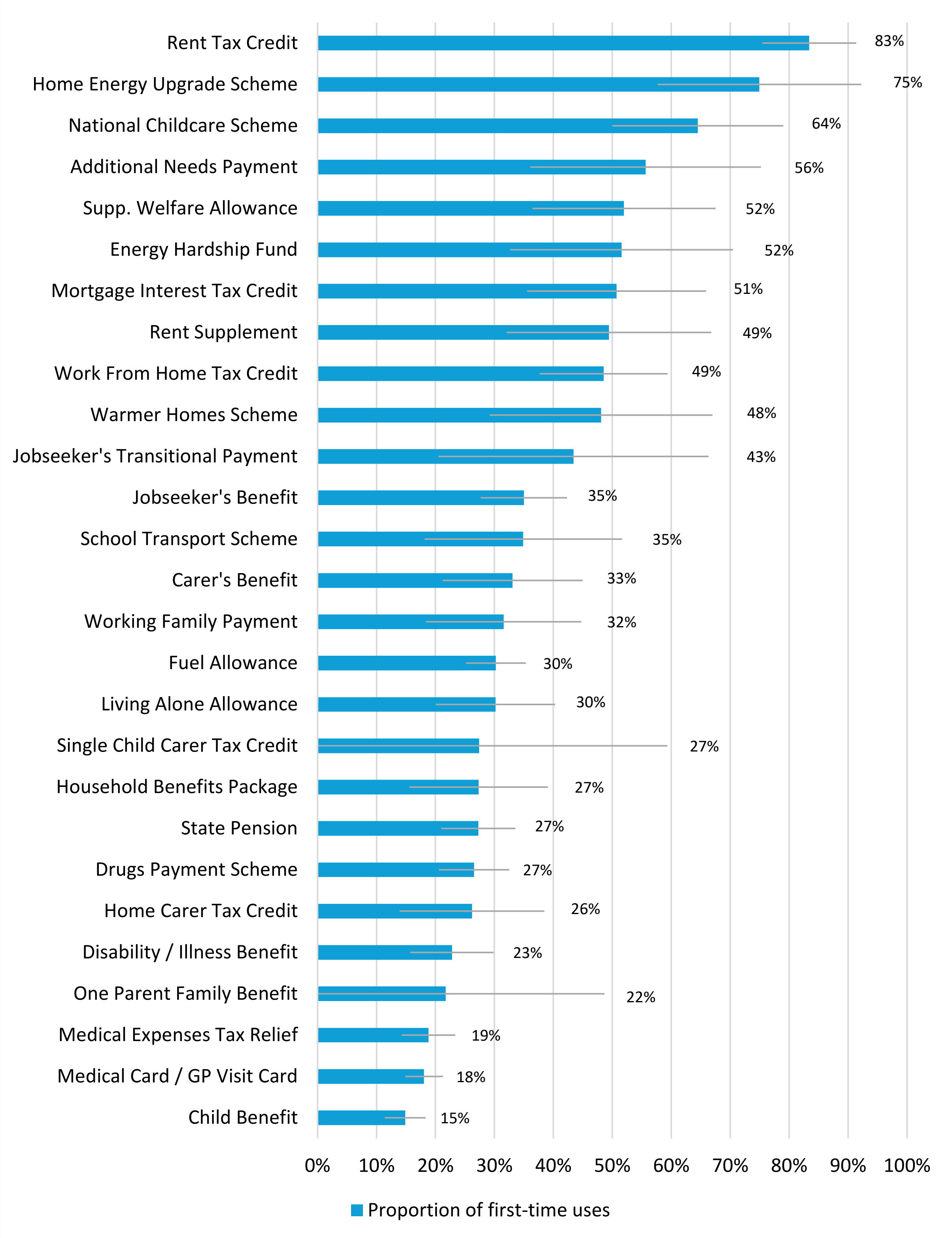
Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals.

FIGURE A.17 PROPORTION OF SAMPLE USING GOVERNMENT BENEFITS, BY BENEFIT CATEGORY



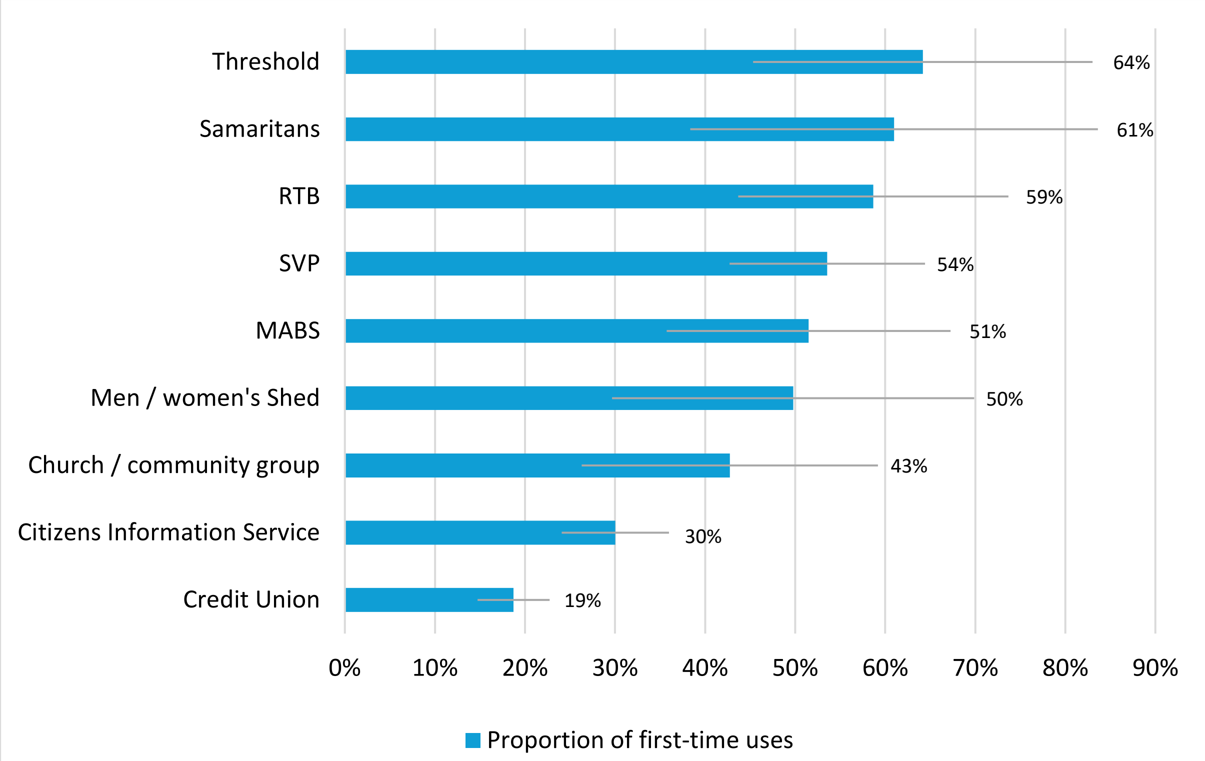
Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals.

FIGURE A.18 FIRST-TIME USE OF GOVERNMENT BENEFITS



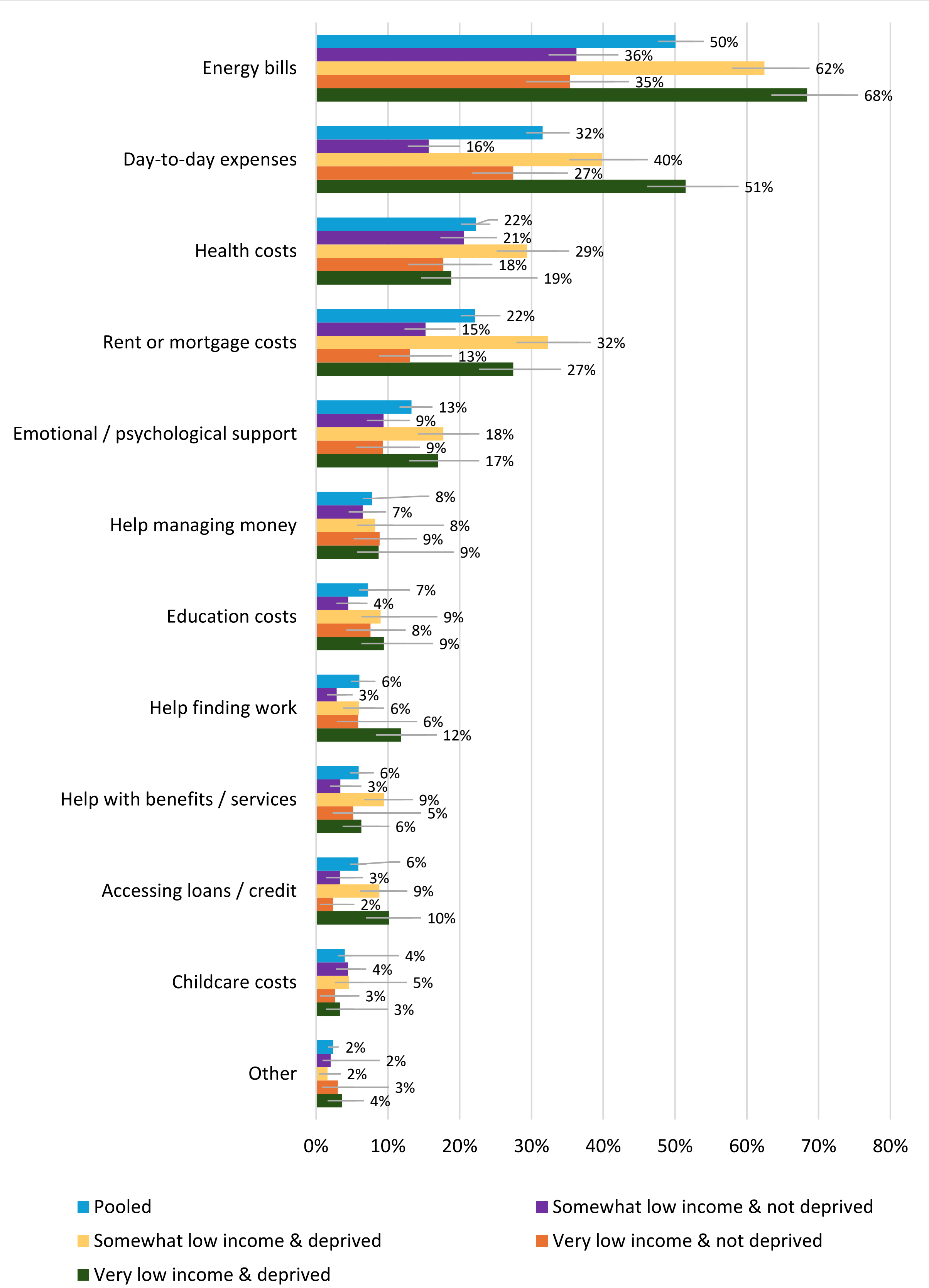
Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals.

FIGURE A.19 FIRST-TIME USE OF SUPPORT SERVICES



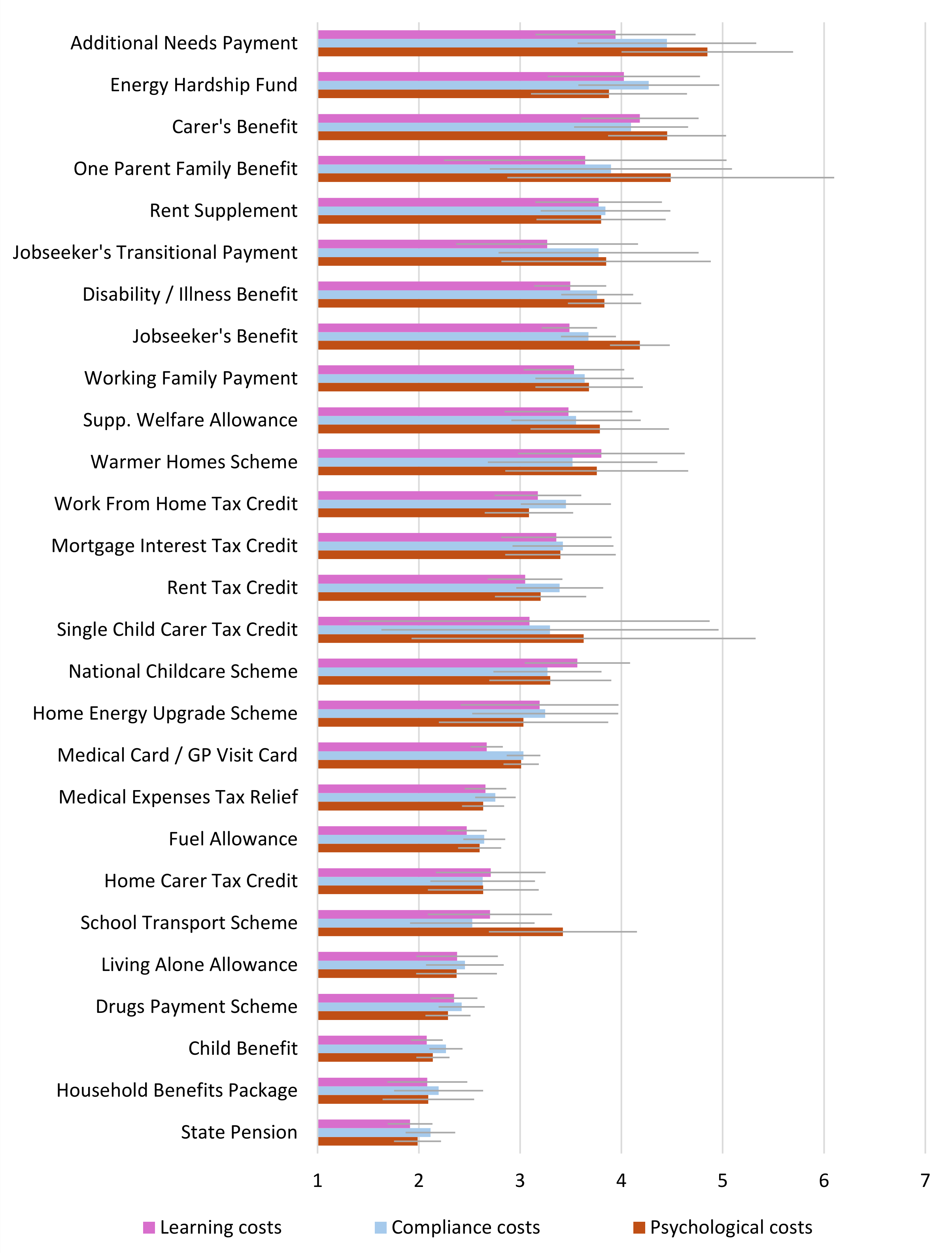
Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals.

FIGURE A.20 ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS (UP TO THREE NEEDS PER PARTICIPANT)



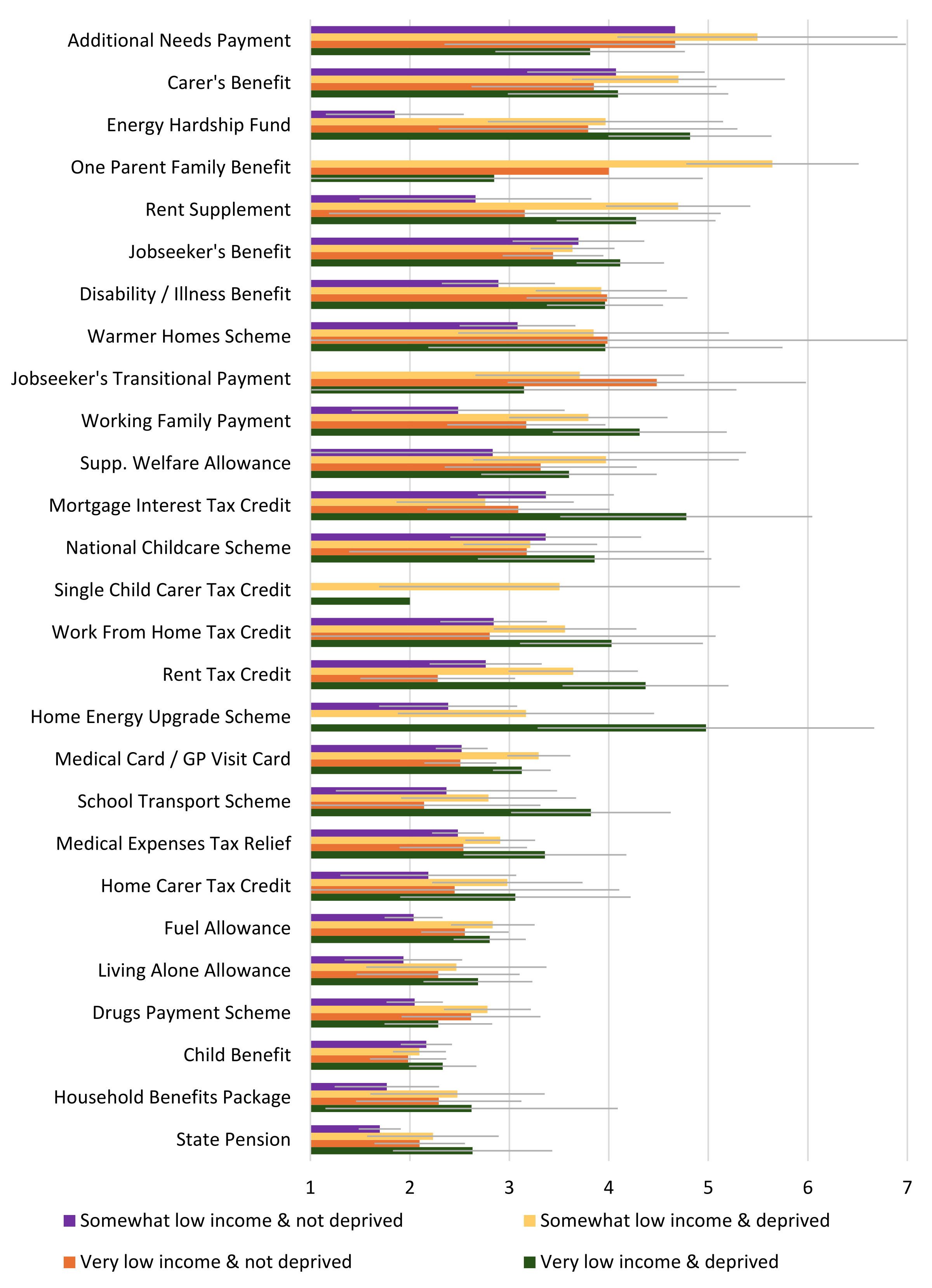
Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals.

FIGURE A.21 INDIVIDUAL COSTS FOR EACH GOVERNMENT BENEFIT, RATED ON SEVEN-POINT SCALES



Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals. 1 to 7 rating scale.

FIGURE A.22 ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN BY GROUP FOR EACH GOVERNMENT BENEFIT (AVERAGE OF LEARNING, COMPLIANCE, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL COSTS)



Notes: Weighted sample, error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals, benefits are ranked based on pooled figures. 1 to 7 rating scale.

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APPENDIX C

Supplementary tables

TABLE A.1 EFFECT OF WEIGHTING

	Sample (unweighted) %	Sample (weighted) %	SILC 2022 %
Female	53	53	52
Age			
Under 40	33	33	33
40-59	35	35	35
60+	32	22	32
Region			
Dublin	29	32	32
Rest of Leinster	30	30	30
Munster	24	22	22
Connacht/Ulster	18	16	16

Note: SILC 2022 figures are for the population in Ireland below median equivalised income.

TABLE A.2 SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHICS BY POVERTY CATEGORY

	Somewhat low income %	Very low income %	P-value for difference	Not deprived %	Deprived %	P-value for difference
Age						
- Under 40	34	31	0.128	32	35	0.207
- 40-59	34	38	0.092	30	41	0.000
- 60+	32	32	0.848	39	25	0.000
Female	52	52	0.744	45	59	0.000
Education						
- Leaving Cert or less	28	45	0.000	32	36	0.152
- Tertiary not degree	28	29	0.862	27	30	0.208
- Degree or more	44	27	0.000	41	34	0.010
Employment status						
- In employment	67	45	0.000	58	60	0.491
- Retired	20	23	0.222	27	15	0.000
- Other	13	32	0.000	15	25	0.000
Born Ireland	80	77	0.235	81	77	0.106
Urban	61	63	0.539	63	60	0.196
Region of residence						
- Dublin	29	29	0.852	31	27	0.139
- Rest of Leinster	31	27	0.133	29	30	0.690
- Munster	23	24	0.564	25	22	0.307
- Connacht/Ulster	17	20	0.171	16	20	0.016
No of adults in household						
- 1 adult	13	20	0.000	12	19	0.000
- 2 adults	61	39	0.000	55	52	0.212
- 3 or more adults	26	41	0.000	33	29	0.060
Children in household	38	34	0.220	31	43	0.000
Living situation						
- Private rental	18	21	0.167	15	23	0.000
- Local authority housing	7	20	0.000	7	16	0.000
- Own home	67	47	0.000	66	55	0.000
- Parents'/family home	8	11	0.014	12	6	0.000
- Other	1	1	0.259	1	1	0.917
Mental health (1-7 scale)	4.9	4.6	0.000	5.3	4.2	0.000
Physical health (1-7 scale)	5.0	4.8	0.001	5.1	4.7	0.000

Note: N=1,615. Unweighted estimates

TABLE A.3 ANALYSIS OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MENTAL HEALTH AND NUMBER OF RISKY RESPONSES

	Mental health score (standardised)	Mental health score (1 to 7 scale)
# of risky responses	-0.188*** [-0.226,-0.150]	-0.303*** [-0.364,-0.242]
N	1,615	1,615

Note: Results are from the following OLS regression: $y_i = \alpha + \beta x_i + Z_i'\gamma + \varepsilon_i$
The dependent variable, y_i, is the current mental health score for individual *i*. The independent variable, x_i, is the number of risky responses made by individual *i*. The control variables, contained in vector Z_i, are: age, gender, education, born in Ireland, born in Ukraine, ethnicity, urban, region, # of adults in household, # of children in household, marital status, mental health at start of 2022, physical health at start of 2022. Robust standard errors used. 95 per cent confidence intervals in brackets. This is a pre-registered regression. P-values adjusted for multiple testing using the False Discovery Rate method (Benjamini et al., 2006; Benjamini and Hochberg, 1995). * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

TABLE A.4 ANALYSIS OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MENTAL HEALTH AND HAVING MADE ANY RISKY RESPONSES

	Mental health score (standardised)	Mental health score (1 to 7 scale)
Made at least one risky response	-0.327*** [-0.401,-0.253]	-0.527*** [-0.647,-0.408]
N	1,615	1,615

Note: Results are from the following OLS regression: $y_i = \alpha + \beta x_i + Z_i'\gamma + \varepsilon_i$
The dependent variable, y_i, is the current mental health score for individual *i*. The independent variable, x_i, is a binary variable equal to one if individual *I* made at least one risky response, equal to zero otherwise. The control variables, contained in vector Z_i, are: age, gender, education, born in Ireland, born in Ukraine, ethnicity, urban, region, # of adults in household, # of children in household, marital status, mental health at start of 2022, physical health at start of 2022. Robust standard errors used. 95 per cent confidence intervals in brackets. This analysis was not pre-registered and so is exploratory. P-values adjusted for multiple testing using the False Discovery Rate method (Benjamini et al., 2006; Benjamini and Hochberg, 1995). * $p < 0.10$, ** $p< 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

TABLE A.5 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MENTAL HEALTH AND NUMBER OF RISKY RESPONSES – DIFFERENCES BY INCOME

	Mental health score (standardised)	Mental health score (1 to 7 scale)
# of risky responses	-0.190*** [-0.239,-0.142]	-0.307*** [-0.386,-0.228]
# of risky responses x Somewhat low income	0.008 [-0.064,0.080]	0.013 [-0.103,0.128]
N	1,615	1,615

Note: Results are from the following OLS regression: $y_i = \alpha + X_i'\beta + Z_i'\gamma + \varepsilon_i$
The dependent variable, y_i, is the current mental health score for individual *i*. The independent variables, contained in vector X_i, are: the number of risky responses made by individual *I*, the interaction between the number of risky responses and a binary variable equal to one if individual *I* was in the *somewhat low income category*, equal to zero if in the *very low income category.* The control variables, contained in vector Z_i, are: somewhat low income binary variable, age, gender, education, born in Ireland, born in Ukraine, ethnicity, urban, region, # of adults in household, # of children in household, marital status, mental health at start of 2022, physical health at start of 2022. Robust standard errors used. 95 per cent confidence intervals in brackets. This is a pre-registered regression. P-values adjusted for multiple testing using the False Discovery Rate method (Benjamini et al., 2006; Benjamini and Hochberg, 1995). * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

TABLE A.6 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MENTAL HEALTH AND NUMBER OF RISKY RESPONSES – DIFFERENCES BY DEPRIVATION

	Mental health score (standardised)	Mental health score (1 to 7 scale)
Not in deprivation as the reference value		
# of risky responses	-0.045 [-0.116,0.026]	-0.073 [-0.188,0.042]
# of risky responses x Deprived	-0.103** [-0.189,-0.018]	-0.167** [-0.305,-0.028]
In deprivation as the reference value		
# of risky responses	-0.149*** [-0.198,-0.099]	-0.240*** [-0.319,-0.160]
# of risky responses x Not Deprived	0.103** [0.018,0.189]	0.167** [0.028,0.305]
N	1,615	1,615

Note: Results are from the following OLS regression: $y_i = \alpha + X_i{}'\beta + Z_i'\gamma + \varepsilon_i$
The dependent variable, y_i, is the current mental health score for individual *i*. The independent variables, contained in vector X_i, are: the number of risky responses made by individual *i*. the interaction between the number of risky responses and a binary variable equal to one if individual *I* was in the *deprived category* (top panel only) or not in the deprived category (bottom panel). The control variables, contained in vector Z_i, are: age, gender, education, born in Ireland, born in Ukraine, ethnicity, urban, region, # of adults in household, # of children in household, marital status, mental health at start of 2022, physical health at start of 2022. Robust standard errors used. 95 per cent confidence intervals in brackets. This analysis was not pre-registered and so is exploratory. P-values adjusted for multiple testing using the False Discovery Rate method (Benjamini et al., 2006; Benjamini and Hochberg, 1995). * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

TABLE A.7 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NUMBER OF RISKY RESPONSES AND EXPERIENCED INFLATION, PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS, INTERACTION BETWEEN FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND GENDER, DEPRIVATION AND VERY LOW INCOME.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Experienced inflation	0.192*** [0.137,0.247] *21%*	0.192*** [0.137,0.247] *21%*	0.104*** [0.055,0.153] *11%*
Correct inflation estimate	-0.019 [-0.154,0.116] *-2%*	-0.017 [-0.152,0.118] *-2%*	-0.004 [-0.128,0.119] *-0.4%*
Time preference	0.024 [-0.032,0.080] *2%*	0.034 [-0.023,0.090] *4%*	0.025 [-0.023,0.074] *3%*
Risk preference	0.030 [-0.029,0.090] 3%	0.030 [-0.030,0.090] 3%	0.066** [0.013,0.118] 7%
Money illusion	0.012 [-0.130,0.153] 1%	0.004 [-0.137,0.146] 0.4%	0.080 [-0.057,0.216] 8%
Pennies-a-day bias	0.172*** [0.065,0.279] 19%	0.168*** [0.061,0.275] 19%	0.078 [-0.020,0.176] 8%
Financial knowledge	-0.023 [-0.079,0.033] -2%	-0.010 [-0.069,0.049] -1%	0.003 [-0.049,0.054] 0.3%
Financial responsibility x Female	0.041 [-0.072,0.155] 4%	0.042 [-0.071,0.155] 4%	0.039 [-0.065,0.143] 4%
Deprivation			1.002*** [0.901,1.104] 229%
Very low income			0.021 [-0.083,0.125] 2%
N	1,615	1,615	1,615

Note: Results are from the following Poisson regression: $\mathbb{E}(y_i|X_i, Z_i') = \exp(\alpha + X_i{}'\beta + Z_i'\gamma)$
The dependent variable, y_i, is the number of risky responses undertaken by individual *i*. The independent variables, contained in vector X_i, are: Experienced inflation (standardised), Correct inflation estimate (binary), Time preference (standardised), Risk preference (standardised), Money illusion (binary), Pennies-a-day bias (binary), Financial knowledge (standardised), the interaction of Financial responsibility (standardised) and Female (binary). In column 3, the binary independent variables Deprivation and somewhat low income are additionally included. The control variables, contained in vector Z_i, are: age, gender, education, employment status, born in Ireland, born in Ukraine, ethnicity, urban, region, # of adults in household, # of children in household, marital status, financial responsibility score, mental health at start of 2022, physical health at start of 2022. Regressions in columns (2) and (3) additionally control for self-reported confidence in own numeracy. Marginal effects shown (marginal effects for interaction (Dow et al., 2019)). Marginal effect as % of baseline value (i.e. the model's predictive margin of the dependent variable when the explanatory variable of interest is zero) shown in italics. Robust standard errors used. 95 per cent confidence intervals in brackets. The column (1) regression is the pre-registered analysis. Column (2) and (3) regressions added for additional insight. P-values adjusted for multiple testing using the False Discovery Rate method (Benjamini et al., 2006; Benjamini and Hochberg, 1995). * p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01.

TABLE A.8 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NUMBER OF RISKY RESPONSES AND FINANCIAL STRESS

	(1)
Current fin. stress x Low financial stress beginning 2022	0.239*** [-0.099,-0.379] 30%
N	1,615

Note: Results are from the following Poisson regression: $\mathbb{E}(y_i|x_i, Z_i') = \exp(\alpha + \beta x_i' + Z_i'\gamma)$
The dependent variable, y_i, is the number of risky responses undertaken by individual *i*. The independent variable, x_i, is the interaction between current financial stress (standardised) and low financial stress 2022. Low financial stress beginning 2022 is a binary indicator equal to one if the individual reported below-median financial stress in 2022. The control variables, contained in vector Z_i, are: Current financial stress, low financial stress beginning 2022, age, gender, education, employment status, born in Ireland, born in Ukraine, ethnicity, urban, region, # of adults in household, # of children in household, financial responsibility score, marital status, mental health at start of 2022, physical health at start of 2022. Marginal effect shown (marginal effects for interaction (Dow et al., 2019)). Marginal effect as % of baseline value (i.e. the model's predictive margin of the dependent variable when the explanatory variable of interest is zero). Robust standard errors used. 95 per cent confidence intervals in brackets. P-values adjusted for multiple testing using the False Discovery Rate method (Benjamini et al., 2006; Benjamini and Hochberg, 1995). * p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01.

TABLE A.9 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NUMBER OF RISKY RESPONSES AND SUPPORTS USE

	(1)	(2)
# of benefit categories	0.064*** [0.021,0.108] 8%	0.055** [0.015,0.095] 6%
# of support services	0.250*** [0.206,0.295] 31%	0.164*** [0.122,0.205] 19%
Deprivation		0.963*** [0.863,1.062] 215%
Very low income		0.017 [-0.087,0.121] 2%
N	1,615	1,615

Note: Results are from the following Poisson regression: $\mathbb{E}(y_i|X_i, Z_i') = \exp(\alpha + X_i'\beta + Z_i'\gamma)$
The dependent variable, y_i, is the number of risky responses undertaken by individual *i*. The independent variables, contained in vector X_i, are: number of different welfare benefit categories used, number of different support services used, and, in column 2 regression only, binary variables for deprivation and being in the very low income category. The control variables, contained in vector Z_i, are: age, gender, education, employment status, born in Ireland, born in Ukraine, ethnicity, urban, region, # of adults in household, # of children in household, financial responsibility score, marital status, mental health at start of 2022, physical health at start of 2022. Marginal effects shown. Robust standard errors used. 95 per cent confidence intervals in brackets. The column (1) regression is the pre-registered analysis. Column (2) regression added for additional insight. P-values adjusted for multiple testing using the False Discovery Rate method (Benjamini et al., 2006; Benjamini and Hochberg, 1995). * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

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APPENDIX D

Dividing households into subgroups with unique intervention needs

We use segmentation analysis to subdivide households into groups with unique intervention needs to give insight into how interventions could be tailored to meet the differing needs of low income households. We use K-medians clustering analysis, a machine learning technique that allows us to divide our sample into smaller groups based on shared characteristics. We specified the following six characteristics, or segmentation variables, by which to segment our sample: number of deprivation indicators, equivalised household income, number of risky responses made due to cost-of-living increases, number of other responses made, number of policy areas from which benefits are accessed, number of support services used. We ran the analysis ten times with ten different random starting points to allow us to identify the segment characteristics that were robust across multiple analysis. See detailed results in Appendix Table A.10 on the following page.

The four segments had a number of distinguishing features that are consistent across multiple analyses. We identified two 'lower need' segments and two 'higher need' segments. The lower need segments are low on deprivation, number of responses, and support service use. They are distinguished from each other by benefit use – one segment is older, is more likely to have children and uses more benefits. The higher need segments are high on deprivation, responses and the use of government benefits. They are also more likely to have children and have poorer mental health. The two higher need segments are distinguished from each other by their use of support services – one segment makes use of services, whereas the other does not. Indeed, 51 per cent of those in deprivation in our sample do not use any support services.

TABLE A.10 RESULTS OF SEGMENTATION ANALYSIS

Segment	N	# depriv-ation indicat-ors	Equival-ised income	# risky adjust-ments	# other adjust-ments	# benefits	# support services	Financial stress	Fem-ale	Age	# of children	Urban	Born in Ireland	Mental health (stand-ardised)	Physical health (stand-ardised)
Analysis 1															
1	549	0.63	18,400	2.36	0.25	0.79	0.19	2.83	50%	48.01	0.39	61%	80%	0.28	0.18
2	361	0.80	16,813	3.04	0.30	3.01	0.33	3.04	43%	55.77	0.73	67%	80%	0.31	-0.01
3	287	4.15	17,030	6.01	1.90	2.46	1.93	5.30	56%	46.39	0.87	59%	78%	-0.43	-0.14
4	418	5.12	15,202	5.36	1.84	1.93	0.27	5.49	60%	47.39	0.82	59%	77%	-0.34	-0.13
Analysis 2															
1	546	0.66	19,361	2.78	0.29	0.81	0.16	2.88	51%	48.37	0.4	64%	79%	0.28	0.16
2	246	0.73	13,770	1.47	0.17	2.67	0.16	2.74	40%	57.5	0.64	65%	81%	0.35	0.03
3	440	2.65	17,065	4.97	1.19	2.86	1.31	4.55	53%	48	0.88	60%	79%	-0.1	-0.13
4	383	5.91	15,524	5.98	2.19	1.77	0.49	5.81	61%	46.85	0.8	58%	77%	-0.52	-0.1
Analysis 3															
1	335	0.54	19,834	2.44	0.27	2.86	0.36	2.71	44%	56.86	0.59	64%	82%	0.39	0.03
2	366	0.67	19,947	2.34	0.31	0.49	0.18	2.87	50%	46.37	0.39	63%	79%	0.28	0.23
3	302	1.72	10,790	3.63	0.43	1.89	0.23	3.81	52%	49.72	0.66	65%	75%	0.03	0
4	612	4.94	16,682	5.86	2	2.17	1.04	5.49	58%	46.7	0.87	58%	79%	-0.4	-0.16
Analysis 4															
1	524	0.44	18,105	1.69	0.09	1.29	0.13	2.53	46%	51.56	0.47	63%	82%	0.39	0.15
2	224	1.54	18,003	5.06	0.91	0.54	0.21	4.03	53%	45.53	0.46	62%	76%	0.01	0.06
3	512	2.42	16,340	4.21	1	3.02	1.16	4.27	50%	49.94	0.83	62%	78%	-0.02	-0.1
4	355	6.06	15,569	6.14	2.24	1.95	0.52	5.81	64%	47.41	0.83	58%	78%	-0.54	-0.11
Analysis 5															
1	475	0.47	20,805	1.98	0.21	1.3	0.16	2.6	47%	51.55	0.45	62%	82%	0.39	0.2
2	229	0.81	11,403	2.66	0.21	1.1	0.17	3.14	48%	48.2	0.43	62%	78%	0.13	-0.01
3	594	3.68	18,623	5.89	1.69	2.05	1.1	5.03	58%	46.76	0.82	59%	80%	-0.29	-0.04
4	317	4.33	12,169	4.13	1.3	3	0.38	4.82	53%	51.46	0.85	65%	74%	-0.15	-0.22

Contd.

TABLE A.10 CONTD.

Segment	N	# depriv-ation indicat-ors	Equival-ised income	# risky adjust-ments	# other adjust-ments	# benefits	# support services	Financial stress	Fem-ale	Age	# of children	Urban	Born in Ireland	Mental health (stand-ardised)	Physical health (stand-ardised)
Analysis 6															
1	574	0.65	18,001	2.27	0.25	0.84	0.19	2.84	50%	48.19	0.41	61%	80%	0.25	0.15
2	407	1.21	16,959	3.51	0.39	3	0.33	3.34	45%	55.12	0.73	67%	79%	0.26	-0.01
3	282	4	16,176	5.33	1.88	2.5	1.95	5.22	53%	45.96	0.85	61%	80%	-0.35	-0.18
4	352	5.62	15,956	6.02	2.06	1.8	0.28	5.71	63%	47.05	0.84	57%	76%	-0.43	-0.09
Analysis 7															
1	431	0.33	19,682	2.1	0.18	0.85	0.19	2.6	50%	48.71	0.39	61%	83%	0.36	0.2
2	288	0.5	15,636	2.08	0.2	2.89	0.23	2.74	41%	57.3	0.68	66%	80%	0.42	0.04
3	401	3.89	16,442	5.45	1.49	0.97	0.21	4.98	60%	45.52	0.63	63%	78%	-0.23	0.06
4	495	4.29	15,825	5.38	1.66	2.93	1.32	5.18	55%	48.22	0.92	59%	77%	-0.36	-0.25
Analysis 8															
1	488	0.64	18,383	2.23	0.2	0.76	0.11	2.8	52%	48.13	0.4	62%	80%	0.27	0.16
2	289	0.86	14,390	2.22	0.26	3	0.25	2.93	40%	57.15	0.67	66%	78%	0.32	-0.02
3	409	2.08	20,130	5.03	1.05	2.11	0.85	4.33	54%	47.59	0.75	62%	80%	0.03	-0.01
4	429	5.96	14,103	5.98	2.24	2.18	0.98	5.8	59%	46.97	0.86	59%	77%	-0.55	-0.16
Analysis 9															
1	515	0.49	19,405	2.66	0.28	0.8	0.23	2.83	50%	47.8	0.39	63%	81%	0.32	0.19
2	318	0.56	15,949	2.04	0.22	2.95	0.32	2.76	41%	57.76	0.65	64%	81%	0.36	0.02
3	475	4.23	16,110	5.33	1.41	1.79	0.23	5.14	61%	47.79	0.76	61%	75%	-0.25	-0.08
4	307	4.98	15,294	5.87	2.21	2.73	1.83	5.52	54%	45.38	0.99	58%	79%	-0.53	-0.21
Analysis 10															
1	338	0.51	17,375	1.24	0.06	0.84	0.18	2.47	45%	48.77	0.37	62%	79%	0.31	0.17
2	354	0.94	15,943	2.88	0.29	3.1	0.36	3.11	44%	55.84	0.71	66%	79%	0.3	-0.01
3	377	1.57	19,964	4.47	0.85	1.02	0.25	3.96	56%	47.21	0.57	62%	80%	0.09	0.11
4	546	5.26	15,330	5.92	2.05	2.33	1.12	5.57	59%	46.83	0.87	58%	78%	-0.45	-0.17

Note: Mean values of a variable, or the % satisfying a given criterion, are shown.

APPENDIX E

Instrumentation

[Note that throughout the survey, all questions are mandatory (i.e. the participant cannot proceed to the next page without completing the questions on the current page]

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Thank you for your interest in this research. First we will explain what the study is about and what to expect during your participation. Please read this information carefully.

Who is conducting this research?

We are the Behavioural Research Unit at the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). We are funded by public and private bodies interested in helping to understand how people make decisions.

What is the research about?

This survey is about changes to your life and how you spent money over the last two years. You will be asked to think back over the last two years to help you answer the questions in the survey.

It will take 20 minutes to do the survey.

If you have difficulty loading any page, please refresh your browser. The answers you have already given will still be saved.

*********Page Break*********

How will my responses be recorded?

All of your answers will remain confidential and anonymous. They will not be stored with your name. The responses will initially be held on the Microsoft servers in Dublin owned by the online survey platform (Gorilla). Once all participants have completed the survey, the responses will be downloaded to secure files on the ESRI server and deleted from the online platform's server. Finally, they may be uploaded to online data repositories for other researchers to study, in line with best scientific practice.

Data protection

This study is carried out in accordance with Data Protection legislation. You can find detailed information about privacy and data protection for research conducted by the ESRI at this link:

https://www.esri.ie/esri-privacy-notice-for-research.

If you have any further queries in relation to this, please contact DataProtection@esri.ie

Are there any risks involved?

We will be asking you to think back over the past 2 years of your life. Some of the questions are about financial struggles you may have had to deal with. Some of the questions are about benefits and services you may have used. There is also a question about physical and mental health. These questions may be uncomfortable for some people. You can choose to stop at any time if you feel too uncomfortable answering the questions. Your data will not be saved if you do not complete the survey. If you wish to stop, you can just exit your browser.

*******Page Break*******

- I have read and understand the information about the survey
- I consent to taking part
- I am aged 18 or over.
- I understand that the aim of the research is to understand what changes people have made to how they spend money over the last two years.
- I agree with all of the above points

*******Page Break*******

- I understand that I will see questions on my screen and that my responses will be saved on the online survey platform’s Microsoft servers in Dublin. I understand that, once all data has been collected, my responses will be deleted from those servers and stored on ESRI computers only.
- I understand that the study data will be stored against a Private ID which is only used for this survey and cannot be used to identify me.

- I understand that the data will be available to researchers and will only be used for research purposes. I understand that my anonymous responses may be made available in online data repositories for research purposes.
- I agree with all of the above points

*******Page Break*******

- I understand that I may withdraw participation at any time by exiting the web browser, and that no data will be stored unless I finish the survey
- I understand that once the survey ends I will not be able to withdraw my data because this data will be completely anonymised and so cannot be linked to me.
- I agree with all of the above points
- I have read and understood the above and consent to taking part as a survey participant.

*******Page Break*******

We will now ask some questions about you and your household.

By 'household', we mean:

Everyone who lives in your home who benefits from your household's shared income

Your household's shared income is any money from:

- A job or a business
- Welfare benefits (for example, child benefit, jobseeker's allowance)
- Pensions.

Here are some examples of who might be in your household:

- Your family members who share the household income to pay for their food, clothing, electricity use.
- Any students who live away from home but depend on the household income for support.

These people are not in your household:

- Anyone who lives with you but does not share income. For example, a relative that you live with, a flatmate or someone who rents a room where you live but pays their own day-to-day expenses does not count.
- If you live alone, you are the only person in your household.

*******Page Break*******

How many adults (18+), including yourself, are in your household?

1 2 3 4 more than 4

How many children (under 18) are in your household?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 more than 8

*******Page Break*******

In your household, how much responsibility do you have for these tasks?

	None or almost none	Some	Shared equally with other household members	Most	All or almost all
Paying monthly bills (rent or mortgage, electricity and heating, phone, credit card repayments etc)					
Doing regular shopping for the household (groceries, household supplies, pharmacy, etc)					
Making decisions about saving and borrowing (whether to save, how much to save, whether to borrow, how much to borrow)					
Making decisions about other household financial matters (applying for welfare benefits, where to bank, what payment methods to use, setting up online bill payments)					

[If participant scores zero on this (i.e. select 'none or almost none' for all options) they are screened out of the survey.

*******Page Break*******

We will ask you what your household's total income is. This is income before paying any tax. Include all types of income including:

- Income from a job or business

- Social welfare benefits
- Pensions
- Any other income.

Your answers are anonymous and cannot be linked to you.

Firstly, what is easiest for you – to tell us your income per week, per month or per year?

- per week
- per month
- per year

*******Page Break*******

How much income does your household get per week/month/year ? Remember this is the total income of everyone in your household. We'll ask you for more detail on the next page.

[participant sees per week/month/year based on choice on previous page]

Your income per week is:

Less than €192 per week	€192-€385 per week	€386-577 per week
€578-769 per week	€770-€904 per week	More than €904 per week

Your income per month is:

Less than €833 per month	€833-1,667 per month	€1,668-2,500 per month
€2,501-3,333 per month	€3,334-€3,916 per month	
More than €3,916 per month		

Your income per year is:

Less than €10,000 per year	€10,000-20,000 per year
€20,001-30,000 per year	€30,001-40,000 per year
€40,001-47,000 per year	More than €47,000 per year

*******Page Break*******

Can you tell us how much your household income is using this scale? Remember this is the total income of everyone in your household. You can click and drag the slider scale (the grey line) below. It's ok if you're not sure, just give your best guess.

[slider appears like below with ends determined by income bracket selected on previous page]

[Participants will be screened out if their equivalised household income is above €26,257. Equivalised household income = Total household income/equivalised household size. Equivalised household size = 1 + 0.66(# of other adults in the household other than the respondent) + 0.33*(# of children in the household). See below the max household income a respondent can have for various household sizes:*

Adults in household	*Children in household*	*Max nominal household income*
1	*0*	*€ 26,257*
2	*0*	*€ 43,160*
2	*1*	*€ 51,740*
2	*2*	*€ 60,320*
2	*3*	*€ 68,900*

*******Page Break*******

What is your gender?

- Woman
- Man
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say

Which age group do you belong to?

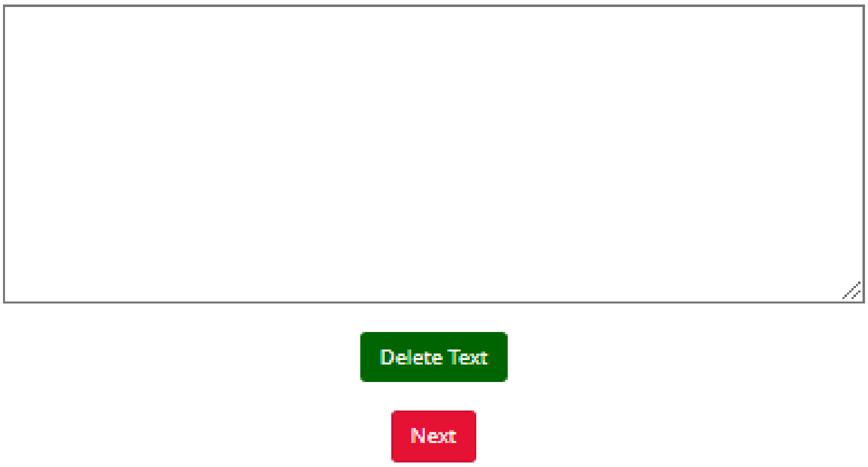
- Under 40 years old
- 40-59 years old
- 60 years old or above

*******Page Break*******

This survey is about changes in people's lives in the past 2 years. We are going to ask you about what has changed in your life and what has stayed the same, since early 2022. To help you remember, early 2022 was when Russia invaded Ukraine and prices started going up, especially energy prices. It is 2 years since then. This study has no questions about the war itself, we just want you to think about your own life over that time.

Think now about the big things that have happened in your life since the start of 2022. Take a moment to jot them down in the box below. This is only to help you remember the last two years. We will not be able to see or store what you write.

When you are done, click the green 'Delete Text' button to delete what you have written. Then click 'Next'.



*********Page Break*********

Thinking back to the start of 2022, how many adults (18+), including yourself, were in your household at the start of 2022?

1 2 3 4 more than 4

How many children (under 18) were in your household at the start of 2022?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 more than 8

*********Page Break*********

Are there any people living in your home who are **not** members of your household (for example, renters, flatmates or extended family)?

- Yes
- No

*********Page Break*********

How many? *[conditional on yes above]*

1 2 3 4 more than 4

*******Page Break*******

Thinking back to the start of 2022, were there any other people living with you in your home who were not members of your household?

- Yes
- No

*******Page Break*******

How many? *[conditional on yes above]*

1 2 3 4 more than 4

*******Page Break*******

What is your highest level of education?

- less than Junior Cert
- Junior Cert or equivalent,
- Leaving Cert
- technical or vocational certificate
- diploma
- degree
- master’s
- doctorate

*******Page Break*******

Are you...?

- full-time employed
- part-time employed
- self-employed
- a homemaker or carer
- retired

- a student
- seeking employment or unemployed
- unable to work

*******Page Break*******

Thinking back to the start of 2022, were you also {current employment status} then?

- Yes
- No

At the start of 2022, were you...? *[conditional on No above]*

- full-time employed
- part-time employed
- self-employed
- a homemaker or carer
- retired
- a student
- seeking employment or unemployed
- unable to work
- can’t remember

*******Page Break*******

Which of the following best describes your living situation?

- living in private rented accommodation
- living in council (local authority) provided accommodation
- living in your own home with a mortgage
- living in your own home without a mortgage
- living in your parents’/family home
- homeless (including in emergency accommodation)
- other

Was your living situation different at the start of 2022?

- Yes
- No

*******Page Break*******

Which of the following best describes your living situation at the start of 2022? *[if yes above]*

- living in private rented accommodation
- living in council (local authority) provided accommodation
- living in your own home with a mortgage
- living in your own home without a mortgage
- living in your parents'/family home
- homeless (including in emergency accommodation)
- other

*******Page Break*******

Has your household been evicted any time since the start of 2022?

- Yes
- No

*******Page Break*******

What was the reason for the eviction? *[if yes above]*

- the owner wanted to sell or wanted to move in a relative
- you fell behind on rental payments
- you fell behind on mortgage payments
- you had a disagreement with someone else living in the home
- other reason

*******Page Break*******

Are you...?

- single
- married or in a civil partnership
- living with your partner but not married or in a civil partnership
- separated
- divorced
- widowed

Thinking back to the start of 2022, were you also {current marital status} then?

- Yes
- No

*******Page Break*******

At the start of 2022, were you...? *[if yes above]*

- single
- married or in a civil partnership
- living with your partner but not married or in a civil partnership
- separated
- divorced
- widowed

*******Page Break*******

How old are you (in years)?

{Dropdown 18-100}

Do you have a long-lasting condition or difficulty that affects your ability to carry out day-to-day activities? (for example, a physical or sensory impairment, a mental health problem, an intellectual disability or a chronic illness)

Yes/No

Is English your first language?

Yes/No

*******Page Break*******

How would you rate your level of English? *[If No above]*

1: Very bad, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7: Very good

*******Page Break*******

Where were you born?

- Ireland
- Other (please specify)

What is your ethnicity? Please Select...

- White Irish
- White Irish Traveller
- Any other White background
- Black or Black Irish – African
- Black or Black Irish – Any other Black background
- Asian or Asian Irish – Chinese
- Asian or Asian Irish – Any other Asian background
- Other incl. mixed background

Which of the following best describes the area you live in?

- Urban
- Rural

*******Page Break*******

[Participant only sees this page if have 1 or more under 18s in household]

What age is your child?/ What are your children's ages? / You said that you have more than 8 children. Please tell us the ages of the nine youngest of them.

[Dropdown menu will appear for number of children they said they have]

Child 1:

less than 1 year old	1 year old	2 years old	3 years old	4 years old	5 years old
6 years old	7 years old	8 years old	9 years old	10 years old	11 years old
12 years old	13 years old	14 years old	15 years old	16 years old	17 years old

Child 2:

less than 1 year old	1 year old	2 years old	3 years old	4 years old	5 years old
6 years old	7 years old	8 years old	9 years old	10 years old	11 years old
12 years old	13 years old	14 years old	15 years old	16 years old	17 years old

Child 3:

less than 1 year old	1 year old	2 years old	3 years old	4 years old	5 years old
6 years old	7 years old	8 years old	9 years old	10 years old	11 years old
12 years old	13 years old	14 years old	15 years old	16 years old	17 years old

Child 4:

less than 1 year old	1 year old	2 years old	3 years old	4 years old	5 years old
6 years old	7 years old	8 years old	9 years old	10 years old	11 years old
12 years old	13 years old	14 years old	15 years old	16 years old	17 years old

Child 5:

less than 1 year old	1 year old	2 years old	3 years old	4 years old	5 years old
6 years old	7 years old	8 years old	9 years old	10 years old	11 years old
12 years old	13 years old	14 years old	15 years old	16 years old	17 years old

Child 6:

less than 1 year old	1 year old	2 years old	3 years old	4 years old	5 years old
6 years old	7 years old	8 years old	9 years old	10 years old	11 years old
12 years old	13 years old	14 years old	15 years old	16 years old	17 years old

Child 7:

less than 1 year old	1 year old	2 years old	3 years old	4 years old	5 years old
6 years old	7 years old	8 years old	9 years old	10 years old	11 years old
12 years old	13 years old	14 years old	15 years old	16 years old	17 years old

Child 8:

less than 1 year old	1 year old	2 years old	3 years old	4 years old	5 years old
6 years old	7 years old	8 years old	9 years old	10 years old	11 years old
12 years old	13 years old	14 years old	15 years old	16 years old	17 years old

Child 9:

less than 1 year old	1 year old	2 years old	3 years old	4 years old	5 years old
6 years old	7 years old	8 years old	9 years old	10 years old	11 years old
12 years old	13 years old	14 years old	15 years old	16 years old	17 years old

*********Page Break*********

Thank you for answering that section. Next, we are going to ask about changes to spending, saving, borrowing and so on that you have made since the start of 2022. So that you can answer those questions as best you can, we want you to spend a few moments thinking about the past 2 years.

- You said that at the start of 2022, your living situation was different than what it is now. OR
- You said that at the start of 2022, your living situation was the same as it is now.
- In 2022, your living situation was: *{living situation 2022}*
- You were evicted in the past 2 years.
- This was because *{reason given}*
- At the start of 2022, you were *{marital status}.*
- The number of adults in your household was {x} and the number of children was {y}.
- As well as your household, there was one other person living in the home you lived in that was not a member of your household OR
- As well as your household, there were {z} other people living in the home you lived in OR
- Apart from your household, there were no other people living in the home you lived in.
- You were {employment status} at the start of 2022.

*******Page Break*******

Have you tried to cut back on any of these things since the start of 2022?

Please tick all that apply.

My household cut back on...

- groceries (for example, started going to cheaper supermarkets, switched to cheaper brands)
- clothing and footwear (for example, bought less stuff, cheaper brands, second hand)
- digital services (for example, broadband, pay TV or streaming services, phone plan)
- alcohol or cigarettes

- holidays or other entertainment outside the home (for example, cinema, restaurants)
- health insurance or medical care (for example, GP visits, medications)
- transport (for example, travelled less, sold a car to reduce costs, changed mode of transport, walked more)
- electricity or heating, (for example, used less or switched to a cheaper fuel source)
- childcare
- other services (for example, gym membership, beautician, hairdressers, sports clubs for children)
- none of the above

*******Page Break*******

Have you done any of the things below since the start of 2022?

Please tick all that apply.

My household...

- fell behind on paying electricity bills, heating bills, rent, mortgage repayments, or other borrowing repayments
- borrowed more money (for example, loan, credit card, bank overdraft, buy now pay later, loan from friend or extended family)
- agreed a mortgage or loan payment break with mortgage or loan provider
- cut back savings or pension, or used up existing savings
- none of the above

*******Page Break*******

What kind of bills or repayments did you fall behind on? Tick all that apply *[appears conditional on answers chosen above]*

- Electricity bill
- Heating bill
- Rent
- Mortgage
- Other bank or credit union loan
- Bank overdraft
- Credit card
- Hire purchase
- Buy now pay later (for example, Klarna)
- Moneylender loan
- Loan from friends or extended family

How did you borrow more money? Tick all that apply *[appears conditional on answers chosen above]*

- Mortgage
- Other bank or credit union loan
- Bank overdraft
- Credit card
- Hire purchase
- Buy now pay later (for example, Klarna)
- Moneylender loan
- Loan from friends or extended family

*******Page Break*******

Have you done any of the things below since the start of 2022?

Please tick all that apply.

- someone in the household changed jobs or took on a new job because you needed extra money
- cut back on education and training
- moved house or rented a room out to save money

- any other big change since the start of 2022 to save money or make money
- none of the above

*********Page Break*********

Please briefly describe the other significant change you made in the box below. *[appears conditional on answers above]*

*********Page Break*********

Which of these did you do? Tick all that apply *[appears conditional on above]*

- Moved to a smaller or less expensive home
- Moved in with family or someone else
- Rented a room in your home to someone else
- Other

*********Page Break*********

Were there any big plans that your household had at the start of 2022 that had to be abandoned later because it turned out you couldn't afford them?

Please tick all that apply.

- buying a home or moving to a more expensive rental home
- expensive improvements or repair work to your existing home (for example, building work, new furniture, replacing the boiler)
- buying or upgrading a car
- going back to education or training
- having a child
- starting a savings account or a pension
- a household member retiring
- going on a holiday
- any other big plan that you had to abandon, not listed above
- none of the above

*******Page Break*******

Please briefly describe the other plan you had to abandon in the box below. *[appears conditional on answers above]*

*******Page Break*******

You said that your household has cut back on some things since the start of 2022. Lots of things became more expensive since the start of 2022. You may have cut back because things got more expensive or you may have cut back for a completely different reason.

Was everything becoming more expensive the reason you cut back on the things below?

[Of the items listed below, only those that the participant previously said that they had changed since the start of 2022 are shown to the participant]

Groceries

Not at all due to everything becoming more expensive; Partly due to everything becoming more expensive; Entirely due to everything becoming more expensive

Clothing and footwear

Not at all due to everything becoming more expensive; Partly due to everything becoming more expensive; Entirely due to everything becoming more expensive

Digital services

(for example, broadband, pay TV or streaming services, phone plan)

Not at all due to everything becoming more expensive; Partly due to everything becoming more expensive; Entirely due to everything becoming more expensive

Alcohol or cigarettes

Not at all due to everything becoming more expensive; Partly due to everything becoming more expensive; Entirely due to everything becoming more expensive

Holidays and entertainment outside the home

Not at all due to everything becoming more expensive; Partly due to everything becoming more expensive; Entirely due to everything becoming more expensive

Health insurance or medical care

Not at all due to everything becoming more expensive; Partly due to everything becoming more expensive; Entirely due to everything becoming more expensive

Transport

Not at all due to everything becoming more expensive; Partly due to everything becoming more expensive; Entirely due to everything becoming more expensive

Electricity and heat

Not at all due to everything becoming more expensive; Partly due to everything becoming more expensive; Entirely due to everything becoming more expensive

Childcare

Not at all due to everything becoming more expensive; Partly due to everything becoming more expensive; Entirely due to everything becoming more expensive

Other services

(for example, gym membership, beautician, hairdressers, sports clubs for children)

Not at all due to everything becoming more expensive; Partly due to everything becoming more expensive; Entirely due to everything becoming more expensive

*******Page Break*******

You said that your household has made some changes since the start of 2022. Lots of things became more expensive since the start of 2022. You may have made the changes because things got more expensive or you may have made the changes for a completely different reason.

Was everything becoming more expensive the reason you made the changes below?

[Of the items listed below, only those that the participant previously said that they had changed since the start of 2022 are shown to the participant]

Fell behind on paying rent, bills or borrowing repayments

Not at all due to everything becoming more expensive; Partly due to everything becoming more expensive; Entirely due to everything becoming more expensive

Borrowed more money

(for example, loan, credit card, bank overdraft, buy now pay later, loan from friend or extended family)

Not at all due to everything becoming more expensive; Partly due to everything becoming more expensive; Entirely due to everything becoming more expensive

Agreed a mortgage or loan payment break with your mortgage or loan provider

Not at all due to everything becoming more expensive; Partly due to everything becoming more expensive; Entirely due to everything becoming more expensive

Cut back amount put aside each month into savings or pension, or used up existing savings

Not at all due to everything becoming more expensive; Partly due to everything becoming more expensive; Entirely due to everything becoming more expensive

*******Page Break*******

You said that your household has made some changes since the start of 2022. Lots of things became more expensive since the start of 2022. You may have made the changes because things got more expensive or you may have made the changes for a completely different reason.

Was everything becoming more expensive the reason you made the changes below?

[Of the items listed below, only those that the participant previously said that they had changed since the start of 2022 are shown to the participant]

Household member changed jobs or took on a new job because of a need for extra money

Not at all due to everything becoming more expensive; Partly due to everything becoming more expensive; Entirely due to everything becoming more expensive

Cut back on education or training

Not at all due to everything becoming more expensive; Partly due to everything becoming more expensive; Entirely due to everything becoming more expensive

Made a change to living arrangements to reduce housing costs or to increase income

Not at all due to everything becoming more expensive; Partly due to everything becoming more expensive; Entirely due to everything becoming more expensive

Other big change:

Not at all due to everything becoming more expensive; Partly due to everything becoming more expensive; Entirely due to everything becoming more expensive

*******Page Break*******

You said that your household had planned to do the things listed below at the start of 2022, but that you had to abandon these plans later as you couldn't afford them. Lots of things became more expensive since the start of 2022. You may have not been able to afford to carry out your plans because everything got more expensive, or it might have been for a completely different reason.

Was everything becoming more expensive the reason you couldn't afford to carry out your plan?

[Of the items listed below, only those that the participant previously said that they had changed since the start of 2022 are shown to the participant]

Buying a home or moving to a more expensive rental home

Not at all due to everything becoming more expensive; Partly due to everything becoming more expensive; Entirely due to everything becoming more expensive

Expensive improvements or repair work to your existing home

Not at all due to everything becoming more expensive; Partly due to everything becoming more expensive; Entirely due to everything becoming more expensive

Buying or upgrading a car

Not at all due to everything becoming more expensive; Partly due to everything becoming more expensive; Entirely due to everything becoming more expensive

Going back to education or training

Not at all due to everything becoming more expensive; Partly due to everything becoming more expensive; Entirely due to everything becoming more expensive

Having a child

Not at all due to everything becoming more expensive; Partly due to everything becoming more expensive; Entirely due to everything becoming more expensive

Starting a savings account or a pension

Not at all due to everything becoming more expensive; Partly due to everything becoming more expensive; Entirely due to everything becoming more expensive

A household member retiring

Not at all due to everything becoming more expensive; Partly due to everything becoming more expensive; Entirely due to everything becoming more expensive

Going on a holiday

Not at all due to everything becoming more expensive; Partly due to everything becoming more expensive; Entirely due to everything becoming more expensive

Other plan:

Not at all due to everything becoming more expensive; Partly due to everything becoming more expensive; Entirely due to everything becoming more expensive

*********Page Break*********

How emotionally difficult or stressful were each of the following cutbacks?

[Of the items listed below, only those that the participant previously said that they had changed since the start of 2022 AND that they said that change was at least partly due to increases in prices are shown to the participant]

Cut back on groceries

1: Not stressful at all; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7: Very stressful

Cut back on clothing and footwear

1: Not stressful at all; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7: Very stressful

Cut back on digital services

(for example, broadband, pay TV or streaming services, phone plan)

1: Not stressful at all; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7: Very stressful

Cut back on alcohol or cigarettes

1: Not stressful at all; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7: Very stressful

Cut back on holidays and entertainment outside the home

1: Not stressful at all; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7: Very stressful

Cut back on health insurance or medical care

1: Not stressful at all; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7: Very stressful

Cut back on transport

1: Not stressful at all; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7: Very stressful

Cut back on electricity and heat

1: Not stressful at all; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7: Very stressful

Cut back on childcare

1: Not stressful at all; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7: Very stressful

Cut back on other services

(for example, gym membership, beautician, hairdressers, sports clubs for children)

1: Not stressful at all; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7: Very stressful

*********Page Break*********

How emotionally difficult or stressful was making the following changes?

[Of the items listed below, only those that the participant previously said that they had changed since the start of 2022 AND that they said that change was at least partly due to increases in prices are shown to the participant]

Fell behind on paying rent, bills or borrowing repayments

1: Not stressful at all; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7: Very stressful

Borrowed more money

(for example, loan, credit card, bank overdraft, buy now pay later, loan from friend or extended family)

1: Not stressful at all; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7: Very stressful

Agreed a mortgage or loan payment break with mortgage or loan provider

1: Not stressful at all; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7: Very stressful

Cut back amount put aside each month into savings or pension, or used up existing savings

1: Not stressful at all; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7: Very stressful

Household member changed jobs or took on a new job because of a need for extra money

1: Not stressful at all; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7: Very stressful

Cut back on education or training

1: Not stressful at all; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7: Very stressful

Made a change to living arrangements to reduce housing costs or to increase income

1: Not stressful at all; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7: Very stressful

Other significant change:

1: Not stressful at all; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7: Very stressful

*******Page Break*******

Below is a list of some things you have cut back on since 2022. Was making these kinds of cutbacks something you had experience of doing before 2022, or were they something you never did before 2022?

[Of the items listed below, only those that the participant previously said that they had changed since the start of 2022 AND that they said that change was at least partly due to increases in prices are shown to the participant]

Cut back on groceries

Never did this before 2022; Did this once or twice before 2022; Did this many times before 2022

Cut back on clothing and footwear

Never did this before 2022; Did this once or twice before 2022; Did this many times before 2022

Cut back on digital services

(for example, broadband, pay TV or streaming services, phone plan)

Never did this before 2022; Did this once or twice before 2022; Did this many times before 2022

Cut back on alcohol or cigarettes

Never did this before 2022; Did this once or twice before 2022; Did this many times before 2022

Cut back on holidays and entertainment outside the home

Never did this before 2022; Did this once or twice before 2022; Did this many times before 2022

Cut back on health insurance or medical care

Never did this before 2022; Did this once or twice before 2022; Did this many times before 2022

Cut back on transport

Never did this before 2022; Did this once or twice before 2022; Did this many times before 2022

Cut back on electricity and heat

Never did this before 2022; Did this once or twice before 2022; Did this many times before 2022

Cut back on childcare

Never did this before 2022; Did this once or twice before 2022; Did this many times before 2022

Cut back on other services

(for example, gym membership, beautician, hairdressers, sports clubs for children)

Never did this before 2022; Did this once or twice before 2022; Did this many times before 2022

*******Page Break*******

Below is a list of some things you have changed since 2022. Was making these kinds of changes something you had experience of doing before 2022, or were they something you never did before 2022?

[Of the items listed below, only those that the participant previously said that they had changed since the start of 2022 AND that they said that change was at least partly due to increases in prices are shown to the participant]

Fell behind on paying rent, bills or borrowing repayments

Never did this before 2022; Did this once or twice before 2022; Did this many times before 2022

Borrowed more money

(for example, loan, credit card, bank overdraft, buy now pay later, friends and extended family)

Never did this before 2022; Did this once or twice before 2022; Did this many times before 2022

Agreed a mortgage or loan payment break with your mortgage or loan provider

Never did this before 2022; Did this once or twice before 2022; Did this many times before 2022

Cut back amount put aside each month into savings or pension, or used up existing savings

Never did this before 2022; Did this once or twice before 2022; Did this many times before 2022

Household member changed jobs or took on a new job because of a need for extra money

Never did this before 2022; Did this once or twice before 2022; Did this many times before 2022

Cut back on education or training

Never did this before 2022; Did this once or twice before 2022; Did this many times before 2022

Made a change to living arrangements to reduce housing costs or to increase income

Never did this before 2022; Did this once or twice before 2022; Did this many times before 2022

Other significant change:

Never did this before 2022; Did this once or twice before 2022; Did this many times before 2022

*******Page Break*******

Over the past 2 years, how often…

Were you troubled about coping with ordinary bills?

1: Never, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7: Very often

Did you worry about having enough money to make ends meet?

1: Never, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7: Very often

Before 2022, how often…

Were you troubled about coping with ordinary bills?

1: Never, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7: Very often

Did you worry about having enough money to make ends meet?

1: Never, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7: Very often

*******Page Break*******

Now we will ask you some questions about your experiences using social welfare benefits and support services since the start of 2022. We will use responses to these questions to identify where people might not be using benefits they could be entitled to, so please answer these questions as best you can. Your answers are anonymous and cannot be linked to you.

*********Page Break*********

Social welfare benefits

Since the start of 2022...

Did you use any of these income benefits?

[Participants can 'tick' multiple relevant answers among the options below:]

- Jobseeker's Benefit or Jobseeker's Allowance
- Jobseeker's Transitional Payment
- Carer's Allowance or Carer's Benefit
- Home Carer Tax Credit
- Supplementary Welfare Allowance
- Additional Needs / Exceptional Needs Payment
- Living Alone Allowance
- No, I did not use any of these benefits

*********Page Break*********

Did you use any of these pension benefits? *[Only shown to participants who are 66+ years old]*

[Participants can 'tick' multiple relevant answers among the options below:]

- State Pension, Old Age Pension, or Widower's Pension
- Household Benefits Package
- No, I did not use any of these benefits

*********Page Break*********

Did you use any of these housing benefits?

[Participants can 'tick' multiple relevant answers among the options below:]

- Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)
- Rent Supplement
- Rent Tax Credit
- Work From Home Tax Credit
- Mortgage Interest Tax Credit
- No, I did not use any of these benefits

*******Page Break*******

Did you use any of these health benefits?

[Participants can 'tick' multiple relevant answers among the options below:]

- Disability or Illness Benefit
- Medical Card or GP Visit Card
- Drugs Payment Scheme
- Claiming tax relief on medical expenses
- No, I did not use any of these benefits

*******Page Break*******

Did you use any of these children benefits?

[Only shown to participants who have children]

[Participants can 'tick' multiple relevant answers among the options below:]

- Child Benefit
- One Parent Family Benefit
- Single Person Child Carer Tax Credit
- Working Family Payment
- National Childcare Scheme
- School Transport Scheme
- No, I did not use any of these benefits

*******Page Break*******

Did you use any of these energy benefits?

[Participants can 'tick' multiple relevant answers among the options below:]

- Fuel Allowance
- Energy Hardship Fund
- Warmer Homes Scheme
- Home Energy Upgrade Scheme (One stop shop)
- No, I did not use any of these benefits

*******Page Break*******

Did you use any other benefits, schemes, or government supports?

If so, please write the name of the benefit(s), scheme(s), or support(s) below. If you do not know the name of the benefit, you can describe it in your own words.

[Text box here.]

*******Page Break*******

Support services

Since the start of 2022, did you use any of these support services?

[Participants can 'tick' multiple relevant answers among the options below:]

- St Vincent de Paul (SVP)
- Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS)
- Citizens Information Service
- Threshold
- Residential Tenancies Board
- Local church or community group
- Men's Shed / Women's Shed
- Credit Union
- Samaritans
- No, I did not use any of these services

*******Page Break*******

Did you use any other support services?

If so, please write the name of the support service below. If you do not know the name of the service, you can describe it in your own words.

[Text box here.]

*******Page Break*******

What things do you need more support with? Tick a maximum of three that you most need support with.

- Day-to-day expenses (for example, groceries)
- Energy bills
- Rent or mortgage costs
- Health costs
- Education costs
- Childcare costs
- Access to loans and other types of credit
- Help finding or applying for welfare benefits or support services
- Help finding work
- Help managing money
- Emotional or psychological supports
- Other
- None of the above

*******Page Break*******

[For 3 randomly selected benefits that the participant <u>did not claim</u> but is likely eligible for based on their socio-demographics, we ask the following question:]

You told us that you did not use {benefit name}. Why did you not use this benefit?

- I was not aware of this benefit
- It was not relevant to me
- It was relevant to me but I was not eligible

- Too much hassle to apply
- I don't know what this benefit is
- Some other reason

*******Page Break*******

[For 3 randomly selected benefits that the participant claimed we ask the following:]

You told us that you used {benefit name}. We want to hear about your most recent experience applying for or renewing this benefit.

How easy or difficult was it to find out about this benefit, such as how to apply or what you needed to do, or if you were eligible?

[Likert scale from 1 to 7 with 1 being 'very easy' and 7 being 'very difficult']

How easy or difficult was it to fill out the paperwork, provide proof of eligibility (such as payslips, proof of where you live, and so on), or attend appointments?

[Likert scale from 1 to 7 with 1 being 'very easy' and 7 being 'very difficult']

How frustrating was the experience of accessing this benefit for you?

[Likert scale from 1 to 7 with 1 being 'Not frustrating at all' and 7 being 'very frustrating']

Did you ever use this benefit before the start of 2022?

- Yes, I used this benefit before 2022
- No, it was my first time using it

[Repeat up to 3 times on different pages depending on number of claimed benefits]

*******Page Break*******

[For 3 randomly selected support services that the participant used we ask the following:]

You told us that you used {service name}. We want to hear about your most recent experience with this service.

How easy or difficult was it to find out about this service, such as how to use this service or what you needed to do?

[Likert scale from 1 to 7 with 1 being 'very easy' and 7 being 'very difficult']

How easy or difficult was it to use this service, for example gathering documentation, filling out paperwork, or attending appointments as needed?

[Likert scale from 1 to 7 with 1 being 'very easy' and 7 being 'very difficult']

How pleasant or frustrating was the experience of using this support service for you?

[Likert scale from 1 to 7 with 1 being 'very pleasant' and 7 being 'very frustrating']

Did you ever use this service before the start of 2022?

- Yes, I used this service before 2022
- No, it was my first time using it

[Repeat up to 3 times on different pages depending on number of services used]

*******Page Break*******

Other questions

Thanks for completing that section. We're going to ask you a few more questions about you and your household.

*******Page Break*******

Have you ever had to go without heating during the last 12 months through lack of money?

- Yes
- No

Does your household replace any worn out furniture?

- Yes
- No, can't afford
- No, other reason

Do you have two pairs of properly fitting shoes in good condition that are suitable for daily activities?

- Yes
- No, can't afford
- No, other reason

Does your household have a roast dinner (e.g. chicken, beef) or its equivalent once a week?

- Yes
- No, can't afford
- No, other reason

Does your household eat meals with meat, chicken, fish or vegetarian equivalent at least every second day?

- Yes
- No, can't afford
- No, other reason

Can you replace worn-out clothes with some new (not second-hand) ones?

- Yes
- No, can't afford
- No, other reason

Do you get together with friends or relatives for a drink or meal at least once a month?

- Yes
- No, can't afford
- No, other reason

Does your household buy presents for family or friends at least once a year?

- Yes
- No, can't afford
- No, other reason

Do you own a warm waterproof coat?

- Yes
- No, can't afford
- No, other reason

Is your home kept warm enough?

- Yes
- No, can't afford
- No, other reason

Did you have a morning, afternoon or evening out in the last fortnight (i.e. two weeks), for your entertainment (something that cost money)?

- Yes
- No

[If no:] What was the main reason for this?

- Didn't want to
- Full social life in other ways
- Couldn't afford to
- Couldn't leave the children
- Other

*******Page Break*******

How is your **physical health** in general?

1: Very bad, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7: Very good

How was your **physical health** in general at the **start of 2022**?

1: Very bad, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7: Very good

How is your **mental health** in general?

1: Very bad, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7: Very good

How was your **mental health** in general at the **start of 2022**?

1: Very bad, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7: Very good

*******Page Break*******

In the past two years, have financial difficulties had a negative impact on your relationships with friends and family?

1: Not at all, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7: Very much so

*******Page Break*******

Since the start of 2022, the cost of lots of things like heating, electricity, groceries, rents, and so on have increased a lot. However, some people's costs have increased more than others'. Do you think your costs have increased by less than, more than, or the same as other people?

1: Much less than other people, 2, 3, 4: The same as other people, 5, 6, 7: Much more than other people

*******Page Break*******

At the moment, do you feel prices of things in general are decreasing, staying the same, or increasing?

- Decreasing
- Staying the same
- Increasing

[If answer 'increasing']

By how much do you feel prices are increasing, compared to how much they have been increasing over the last 2 years?

Increasing, but not by as much as over the last 2 years; Increasing by about the same as over the last 2 years; Increasing by more than the last 2 years

*******Page Break*******

How knowledgeable do you think you are about general financial matters?

1: Not knowledgeable at all, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7:Very knowledgeable

*******Page Break*******

How confident are you with these skills?

Literacy (reading, writing, spelling)

1: Not confident at all, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7: Very confident

Numbers and maths

1: Not confident at all, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7: Very confident

Digital (for example, using the internet to get information or apply for things)

1: Not confident at all, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7: Very confident

*******Page Break*******

How willing are you to give up something that is beneficial for you today in order to benefit more from that in the future?

1: Completely unwilling, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7: Very willing

When it comes to financial matters, how willing or unwilling are you to take risks?
1: Completely unwilling, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7: Very willing

*******Page Break*******

Which of the following two scenarios would you prefer?

- You get an increase in income (after tax) of €1000 per year and the prices of everything go up by 10 per cent (one-tenth) over the next year.
- You get an increase in income (after tax) of €500 per year and the prices of everything stay the same over the next year.

*******Page Break*******

Say that you need to choose between two price plans for a pay TV service. Which of the following would you choose?

- You will be billed monthly. The weekly cost works out at €1.75
- You will be billed monthly. The yearly cost works out at €85

*******Page Break*******

Before you finish the survey, it would be very helpful if you let us know whether you experienced any difficulty during your participation.

Important: This page must be completed to submit the survey and receive your payment

Please tell us if anything was unclear or any of the questions were difficult to answer

[Open text box]

Is there any reason why your data may not be usable for analysis? Note that your response to this question will not affect your payment.

[Open Text box]

Make sure to hit the 'Next' button below so that your survey is submitted and so you can receive your payment

*******Page Break*******

Finally, see below contact details for some support services that may be relevant

Make sure to hit the 'Next' button below when you are finished reading so that your survey is submitted and so you can receive your payment

St Vincent de Paul

Poverty support

svp.ie

Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS)

Advice on dealing with debts

mabs.ie

Threshold

Advice and advocacy on housing problems

threshold.ie

Samaritans

Emotional support if feeling distressed or suicidal

samaritans.org

HSE

General mental health support

www2.hse.ie/mental-health/services-support/supports-services/

Phone: 1800 111 888

Call Tanya

Helpline for Ukrainians living in Ireland who are experiencing distress or difficulties due the impact of the war.

Phone: 0818 452178

For a full list of social welfare payments to which you may be entitled, visit:

www.citizensinformation.ie/en/social-welfare/social-welfare-payments/

Make sure to hit the 'Next' button below so that your survey is submitted and so you can receive your payment