



# DISRUPTED TRANSITIONS? YOUNG ADULTS AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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VENUE

ONLINE

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# BACKGROUND

- COVID-19 pandemic was a major shock to social, economic and educational lives of young adults
- Occurred at a time when major life transitions are taking place:
  - Further/higher education to work
  - Moving out of family home
  - Forming relationships
- Much of the (early) evidence on the effects of pandemic on young people focused on younger children and families (Darmody *et al.*, 2020)
  - GUI Cohort '98 special COVID-19 survey (carried out in December 2020) aimed to fill this gap

# GUI COVID-19 SURVEYS

- Short web-based survey with a short window for completion in December 2020 (coincided with pre-Christmas 2020 easing of restrictions)
- Cohort '98
  - Most respondents were 22 years of age at the time of the survey
  - Response rate of 33 per cent (n=2,277)
  - Data reweighted to account for attrition
- Data collected on experience during the pandemic:
  - Disruption to employment, education and social activities
  - Health behaviours and wellbeing
  - Changes to financial situation, living arrangements
  - COVID-19 (infection, sources of information, *etc.*)

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

## ■ Job Loss

- Which groups of young adults were more likely to experience job loss?
- What were the consequences of job loss for their wellbeing?

## ■ Disruption to education and social activities

- How did the pandemic impact on young adults' educational experiences?
- How did the pandemic-related restrictions impact on contact with friends and family and on involvement in structured sports and cultural activities?

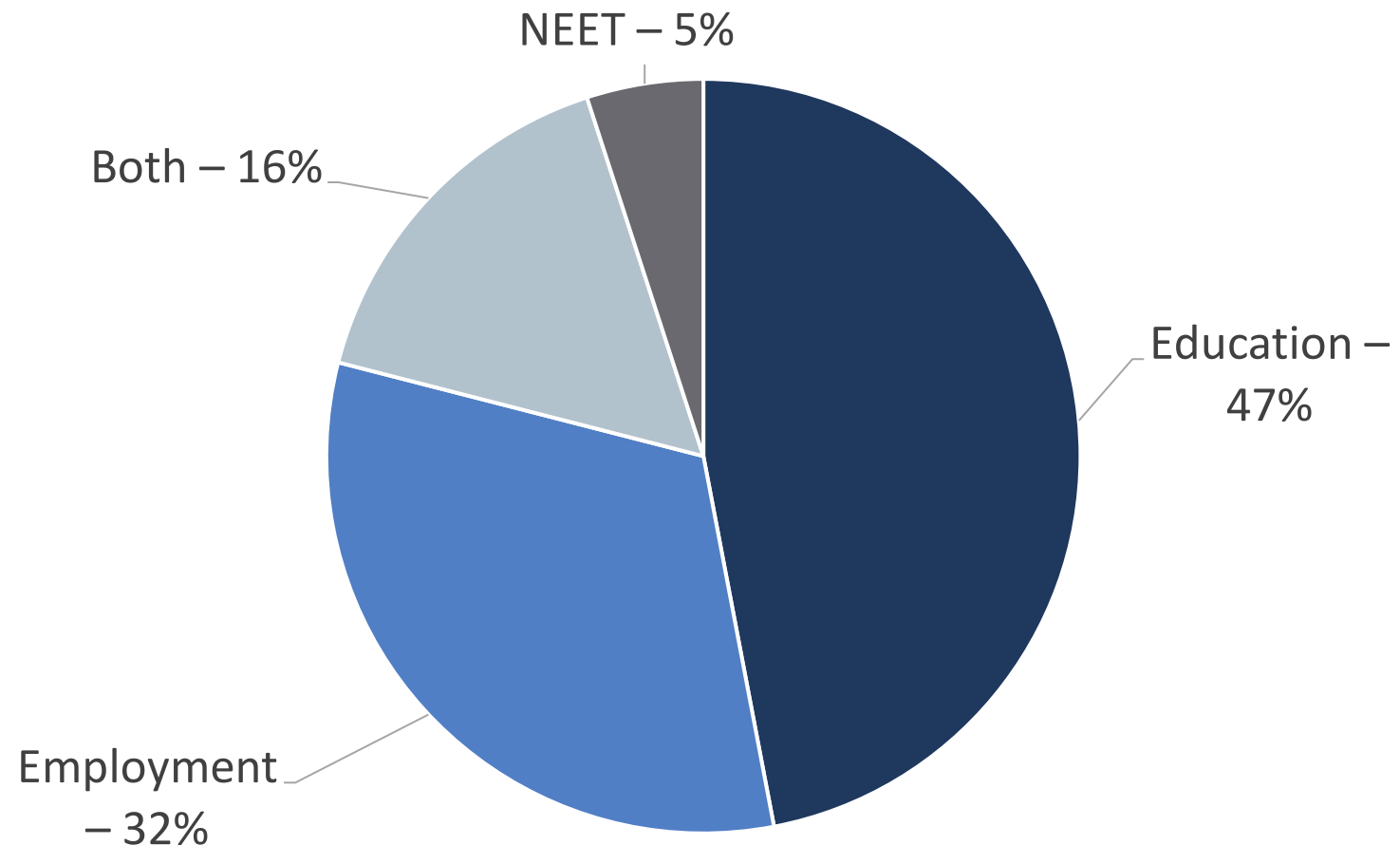
## ■ Impact on mental health and wellbeing

- Which groups of young adults experienced an increase in depressive symptoms between the ages of 20 and 22 years of age?
- What aspects of the pandemic experience had the greatest impact on the prevalence of depressive symptoms? What protective and risk factors were evident?

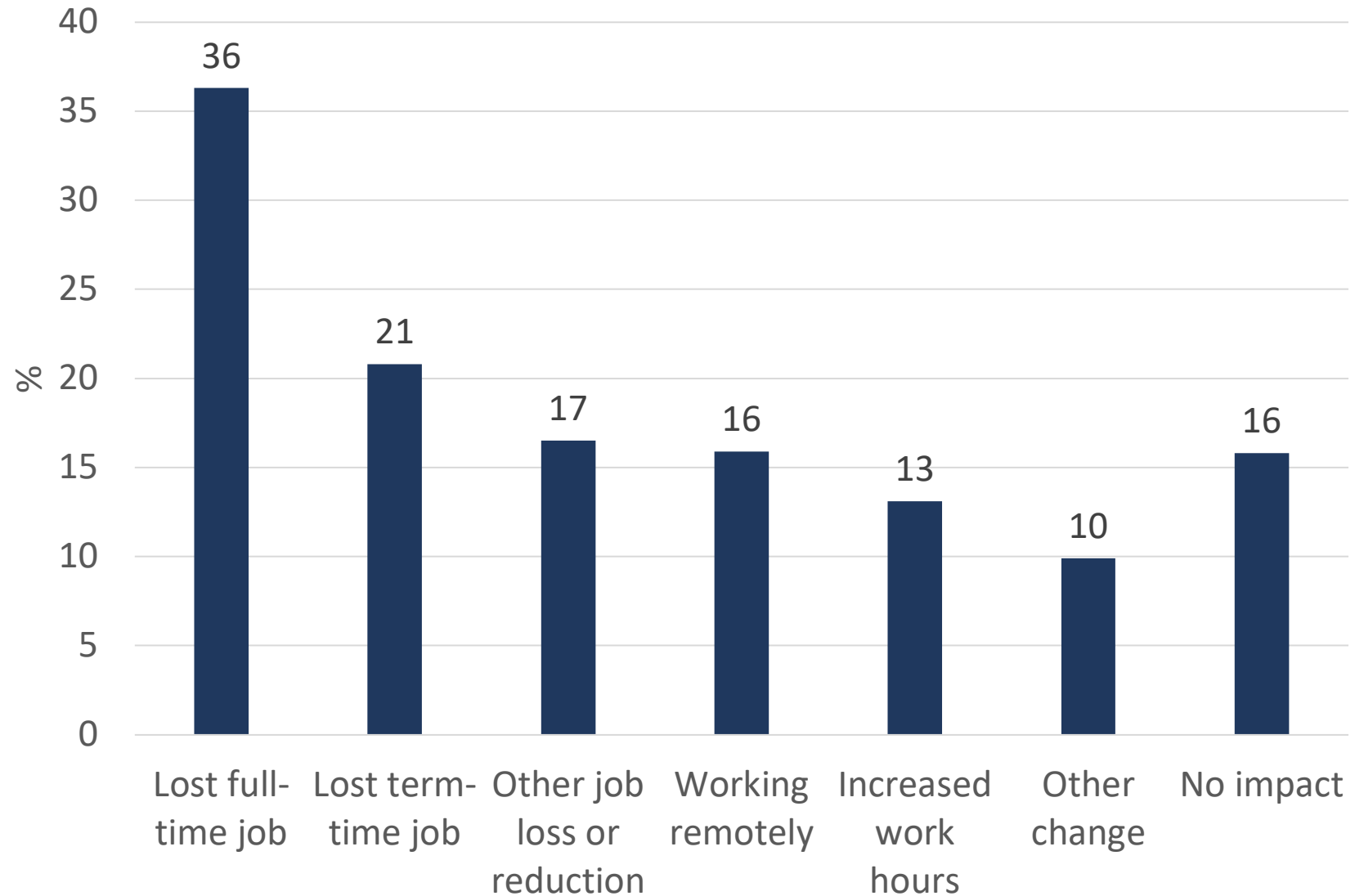
# JOB LOSS

## STATUS PRIOR TO PANDEMIC (FEBRUARY 2020)

- GUI COVID-19 survey allows us to distinguish different types of job loss (main job vs. term-time job)
- In February 2020:



# TYPES OF DISRUPTION TO EMPLOYMENT



## FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH JOB LOSS

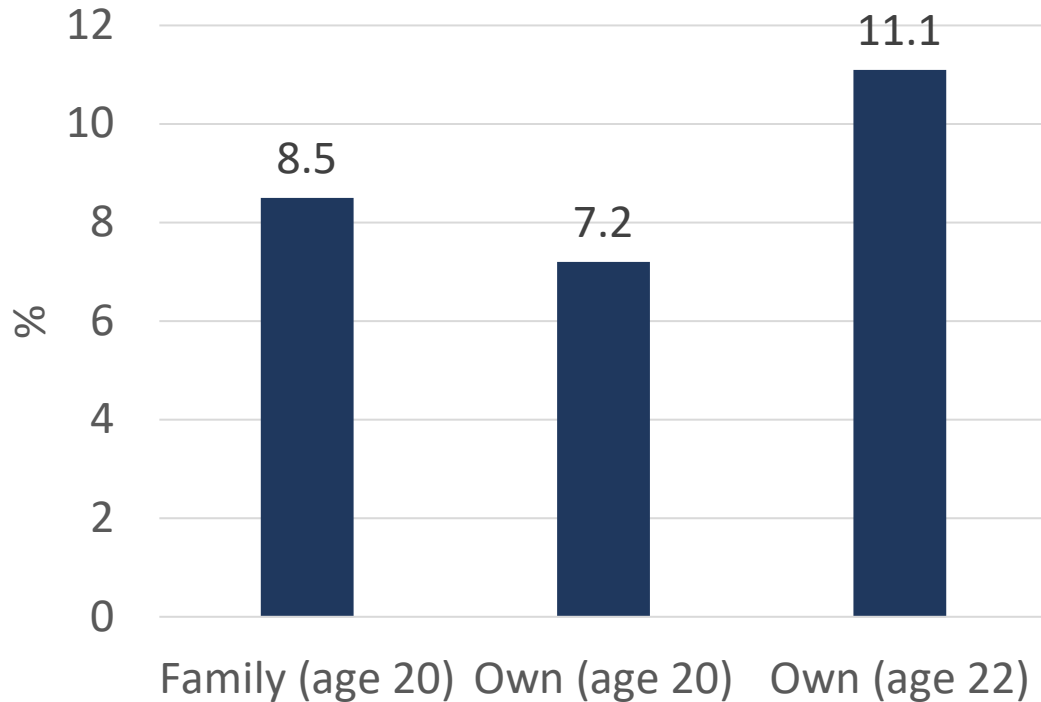
- Of those working in February 2020, two-thirds were working ‘full-time’ (i.e., work was their main activity), while one-third were combining work with study (i.e., term-time job)
  - Just over 40 per cent of with a main job reporting losing their job, vs. nearly 60 per cent of those with a term-time job

	Loss of main job	Loss of term-time job
Male	-	-ve
Family SES	-	-
Lone parent family	+ve	-
Urban	-ve	-ve
LC points	-ve	-ve
Skilled manual job at 20	+ve	-

Models also control for migrant status, chronic illness/disability, family financial strain at 20 years of age, perceived job security at 20 years of age



# FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH FINANCIAL STRAIN



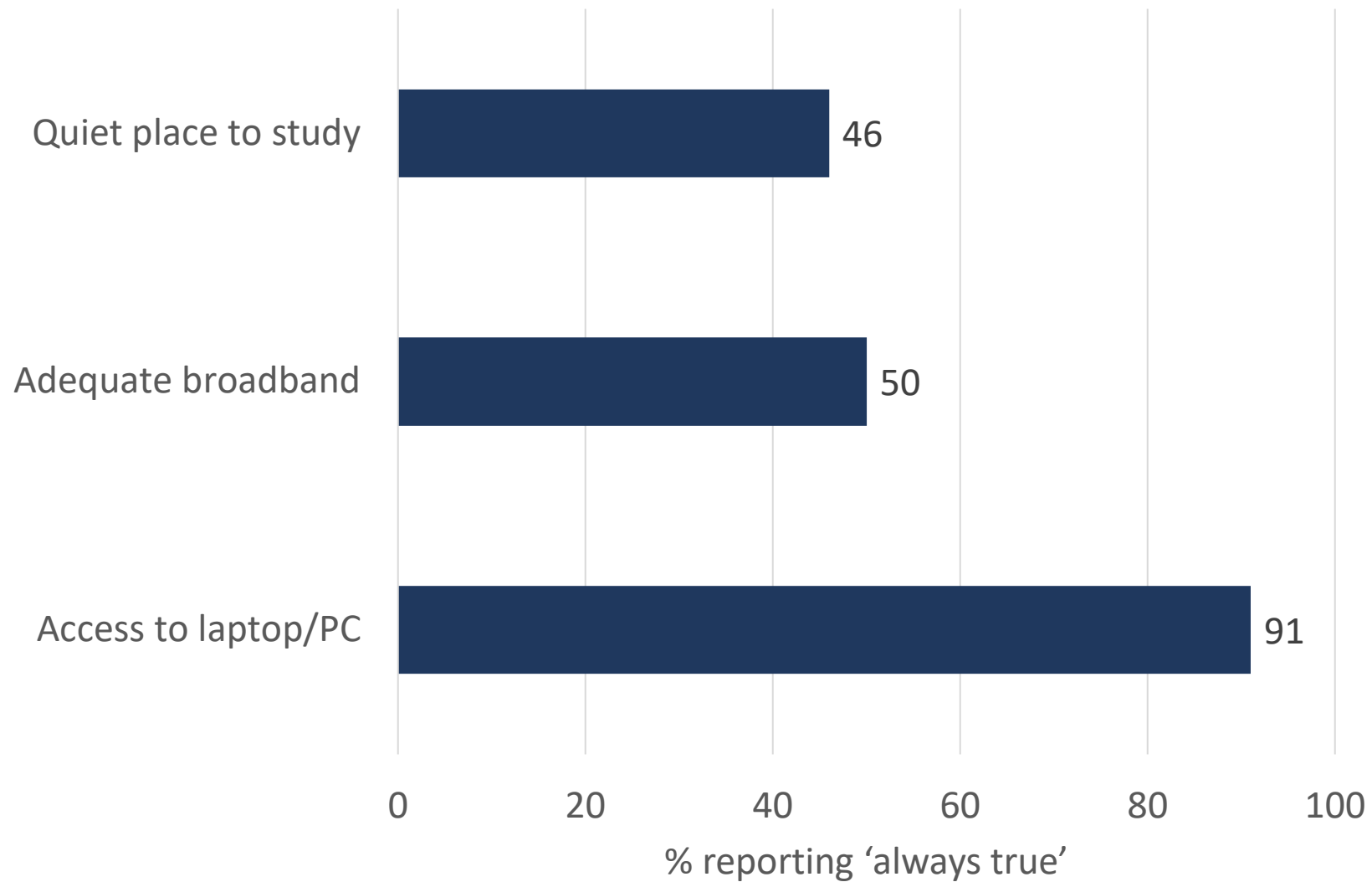
- Models show that financial strain at age 22 was greater for:
  - Females
  - Those from lower SES backgrounds
  - Those from lone parent families
  - Those from migrant backgrounds
  - Those who experienced financial strain at age 20
  - NEET
  - Those who were working in February 2020 and lost their main job
  - Those not in receipt of PUP

# DISRUPTION TO EDUCATION

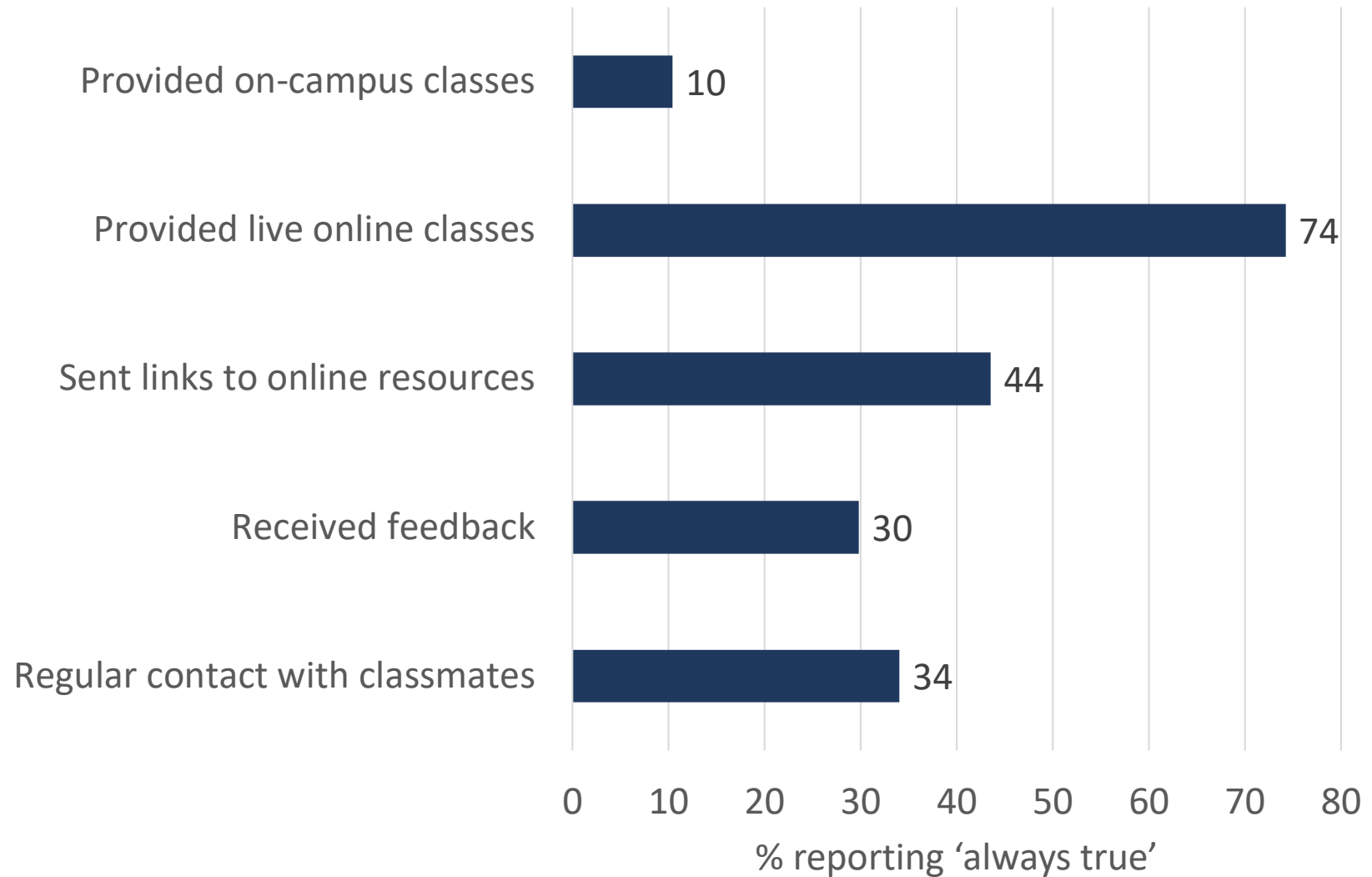
# DISRUPTION TO EDUCATION

- Relatively little research on effects of disruption to further/higher education
- Nearly two-thirds of cohort were either in full-time education, or combining work and study
- At time of survey, higher education institutions were continuing to provide remote learning
- Survey asked about:
  - conditions for learning (e.g., broadband, quiet place to study)
  - contact with educational institution (e.g., provision of live/online classes)
  - learning experience (e.g., difficulty studying)

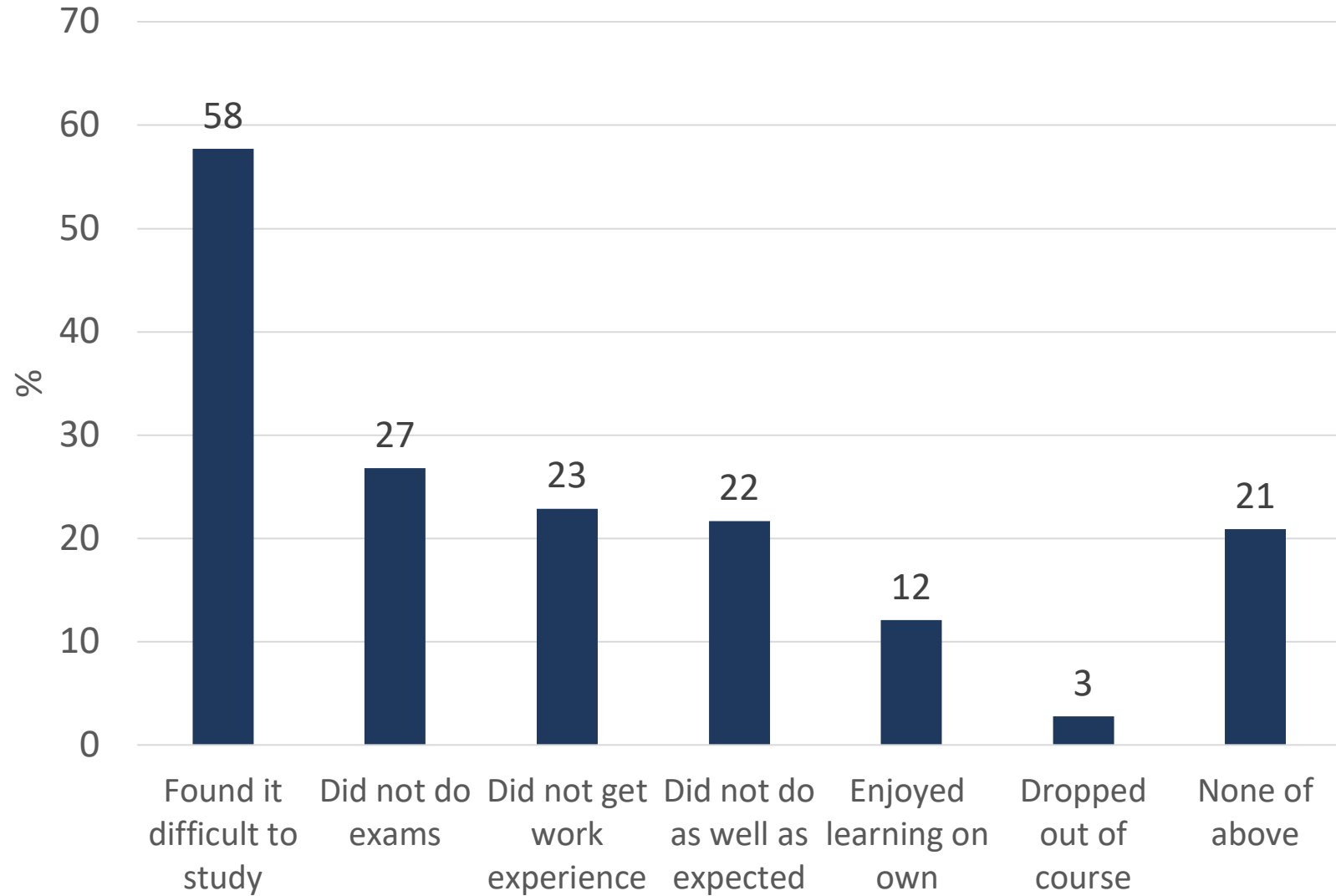
# HOME CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING



# PROVISION BY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

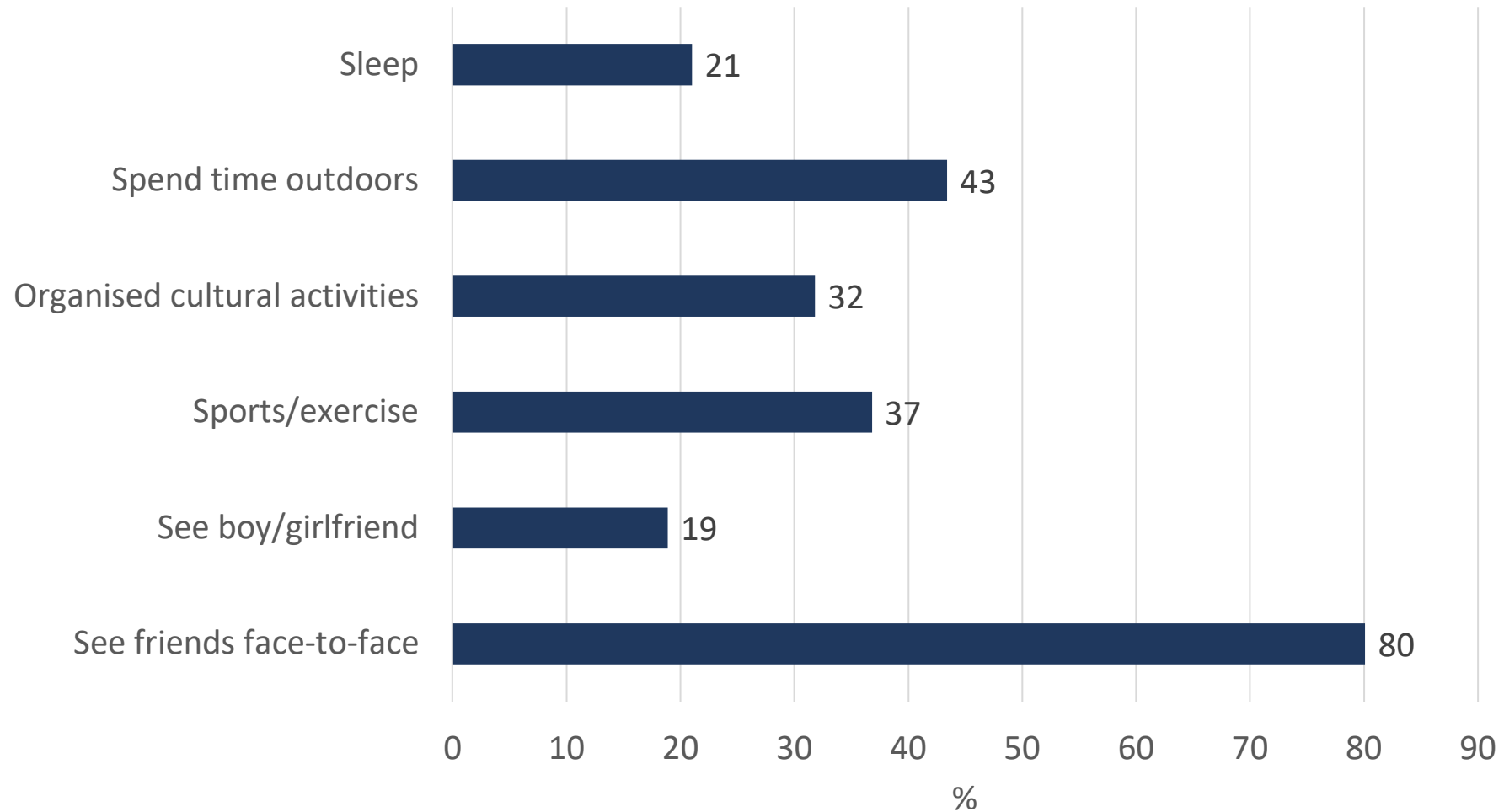


# LEARNING EXPERIENCE



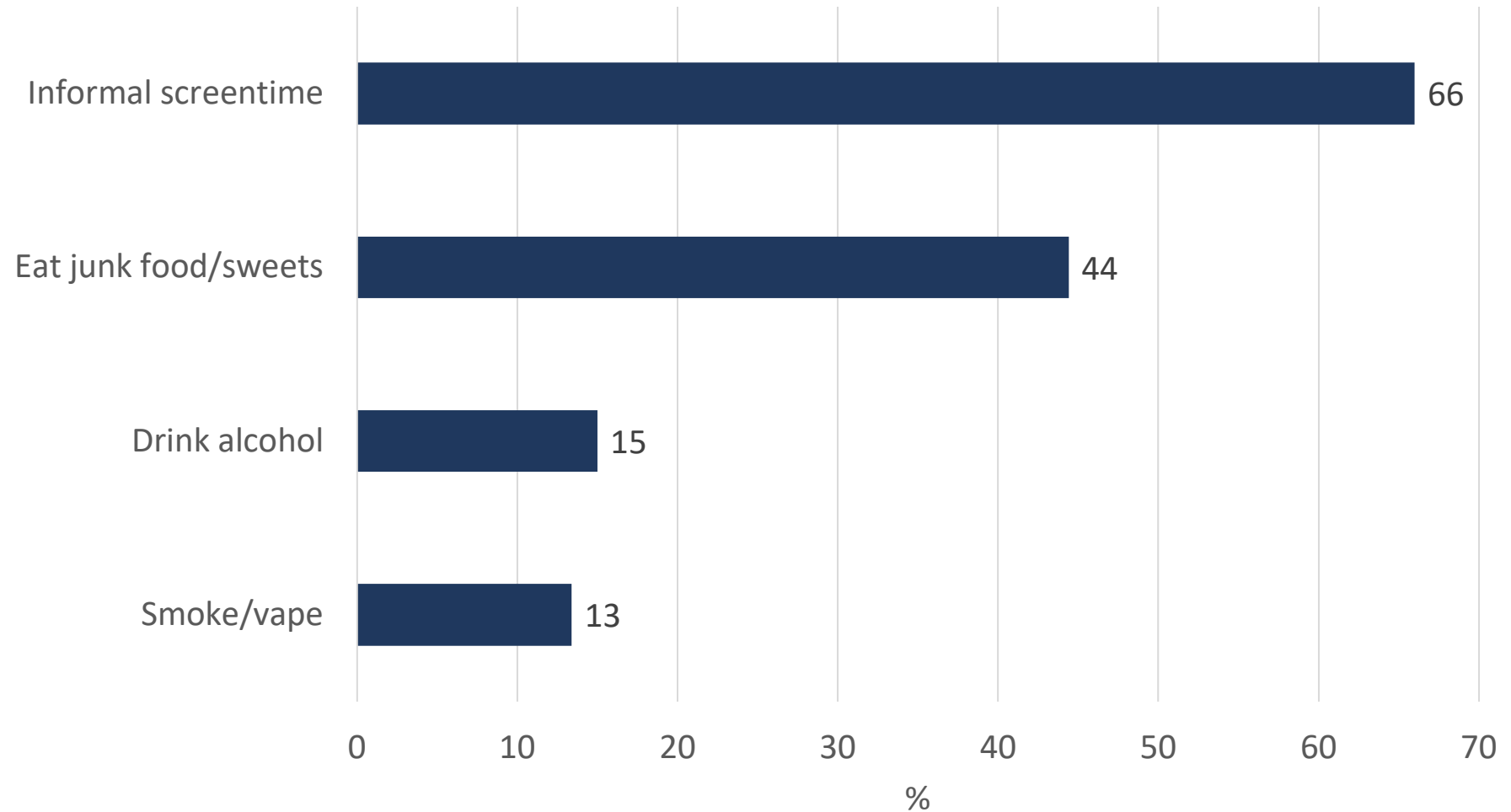
# DISRUPTION TO DAY-TO-DAY ACTIVITIES

# DOING THESE ACTIVITIES LESS (%)



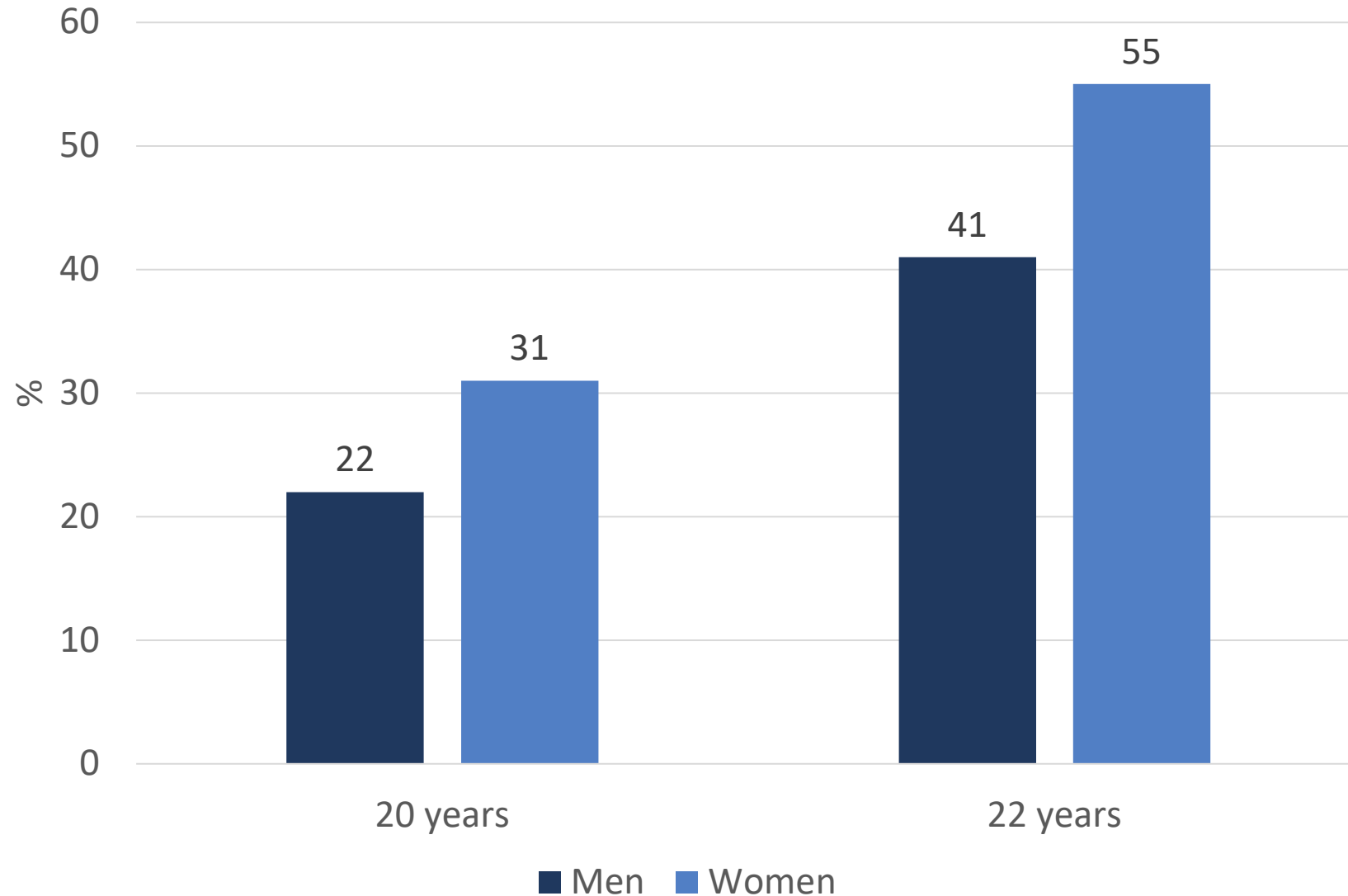


# DOING THESE ACTIVITIES MORE (%)



# IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH OF 22-YEAR-OLDS

# % OVER THE DEPRESSION THRESHOLD (CES-D SCALE)



# BACKGROUND FACTORS, PANDEMIC EXPERIENCES AND DEPRESSION

Male	Female
Family under financial strain (at 20)	Family under financial strain (at 20)
Urban	Urban
NEET or dual status prior to pandemic	NEET or dual status prior to pandemic
<b>Lost main job</b>	<b>Remote working (protective)</b>
<b>Difficulty studying</b>	<b>Difficulty studying</b>
Depressed at 20	Depressed at 20

# FAMILY AND PEER FACTORS AT 20 AND DEPRESSION

Male	Female
Can rely on friends (protective)	Can rely on friends (+)
Talked to boy/girlfriend about personal feelings (protective)	
	Less face-to-face contact with friends
Less contact with boy/girlfriend	Less contact with boy/girlfriend
	How well get on with family (protective)
	Talk to father about personal feelings (protective)

# SOCIAL ACTIVITIES, RISKY BEHAVIOURS AND DEPRESSION

Male	Female
Team sports at 20 (protective)	
Less time on sports during pandemic	
Less time outdoors	Less time outdoors
Drinking more	Drinking more
Sleeping less	Sleeping less
	Eating more junk food/sweets
More informal screentime	More informal screentime (p<.10)
Avoidance coping strategies at 20 (taking to the bed; drinking)	Avoidance coping strategies at 20 (taking to the bed)
Self-esteem (protective)	Self-esteem (protective)

## CONCLUSIONS

- High prevalence of depressive symptoms during the pandemic, especially among women and those who were already vulnerable (family financial strain, NEET)
- Associated with disruptions to education, employment and social activities
- Different effects of risk and protective factors by gender
- Importance of pandemic employment supports for this cohort

## IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

- Variable access to learning resources and institutional support for students highlight the importance of accelerated rollout of high-quality broadband, and support for institutions in incorporating remote/hybrid learning, feedback and assessment into existing courses
- Loss of face-to-face contact with friends was not compensated for by online contact – implications for remote/hybrid studying and working
- Risk that young adults won't reengage in sports and cultural activities after pandemic disruption – importance of policy efforts to encourage involvement
- Potential for broader health promotion (focusing on reducing drinking, smoking and unhealthy diet) to have a positive spill-over effect on mental health difficulties
- Pandemic has lengthened already long waiting lists for mental health services in Ireland – potential scarring effects for young adults; urgency of supports given level of mental health difficulties