



Lockdown Survey May 2020

How people are coping during
lockdown including factors which may
help or hinder one's mental Health

The Healthy Work Company



Take control of your well-being during the lockdown through adopting the right positive mindset and careful planning of your free time

The lockdown has had wide-ranging effects on people's well-being – over half the population report their mental health levels to have changed since the lockdown came into force. We find that the crucial factors which may increase your chances of flourishing during the lockdown encompass your mindset, use of your free time and selective use of news and social media. Those who are being grateful and savouring life report a more positive lockdown experience, as do those taking up new hobbies, monitoring their alcohol consumption and taking time to slow down. After the lockdown, people are looking for flexibility in how and where they work, and to be healthier, more sociable and more cost conscious.

What is this study, and why have we conducted it now?

The most notable observations from people's early lockdown experiences were the extremes from one person to the next. We heard of the struggles to balance home-schooling with endless work video conferences, the challenges of not being able to spend time with or look after loved ones, not to mention the worries of people and their loved ones catching the virus itself. But we were also hearing so many positive experiences; the time freed up for hobbies and DIY that have been on the 'to do' list for months or years, the flexibility afforded by our employers to work to a schedule that suits us, the quiet country walks enjoyed with less pollution in the air, and the wonderful moments between mums and dads and their children as parents are at home so much more.

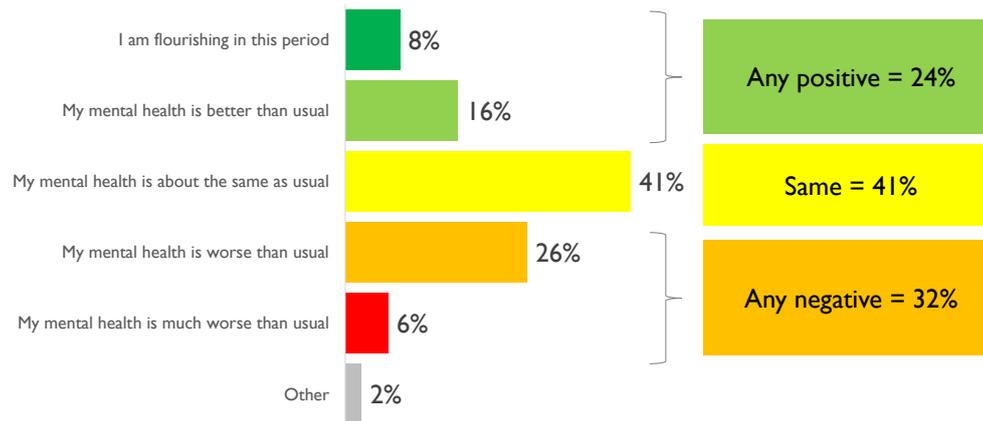
In May 2020, the Healthy Work Company set out to understand to levels of well-being and mental health during these uncertain times. With the aid of an online questionnaire, we collected the opinions of 648 UK residents between 5th and 12th May, courtesy of our professional and personal networks. The sample covers a balance of genders and a wide range of ages and geographies. We are now delighted to release the findings that quantify how people are coping during lockdown, with a view to highlighting the factors which may help or hinder one's mental health.

Overview of findings

Almost 1 in 4 report a positive improvement in mental health during this period.

Overall, we see 8% of our survey sample are flourishing, with a further 16% reporting their mental health is better than usual. 41% feel 'about the same' as usual. A further 1 in 3 (32%) report a decline or negative movement in their mental health.

Thinking about the time you have been in lockdown, knowing that we all have good days and bad days, how would you rate your overall happiness and life satisfaction compared to before lockdown?



Overall, we found demographics or circumstances seem to make much less difference on mental health levels during this period compared to one’s mindset or actions. The demographic groups most likely to flourishing in this period include females and respondents over 45 years of age, but there is little variance in the proportion flourishing compared to the total sample. For instance, amongst the sub-groups with highest levels of well-being, females and 45 – 54 year olds, 9% are flourishing. This is just 1% above the total sample figure.

In terms of living circumstances, those living alone report being most likely to flourish (11%) but conversely are also more likely to experience a negative movement in their mental health (39% experience a negative effect of lockdown). This suggests the lockdown has been quite a polarising experience for those living alone. Interestingly we see no overall effect of the presence of children in the household on adult’s mental health during lockdown. Whilst we hear many anecdotal positive and negative experiences, the data suggests no statistical differences between the well-being of parents and those without children.

Even within demographic groups we see such extremes:

“The feeling that the world is on a halt, eased and simplified our lives. I feel calm, stress-free and my creativity has expanded. I am truly enjoying quality time with the family. In particular with the kids, I am getting to play and imagine as ever before,” Female, 35-44, with children living in London.

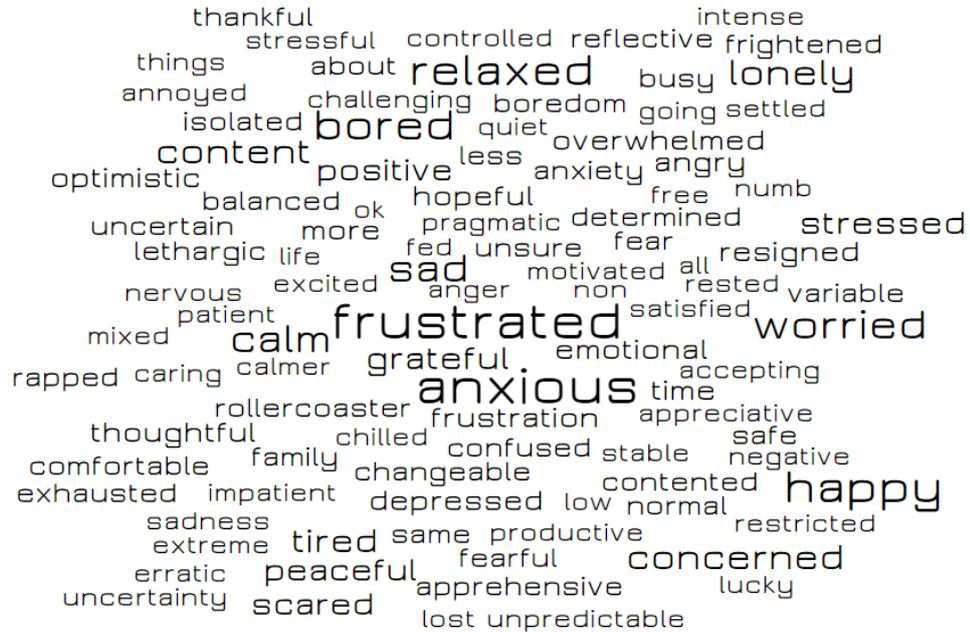
“I am caring for two young children full time since a week before lockdown, with no childcare or external support. It’s tough for all. No time to rest, and hardly any time for myself,” Female, 35-44, with children living in London.

Throughout this report we are looking for ways different groups of people are increasing their chances of flourishing (8% for our total sample) or having any positive impact on their mental health (24%) whilst also decreasing chances of suffering negative impact on their mental health (32%). We stress that correlation is not causation, and from this study we are not able to identify whether an action led to a change in mental health, or whether it was the change in mental health itself that led to the action.

The spectrum of emotions experienced is extreme.

Here we see the emotions participants used to describe their lockdown experience (where the bigger the word = the greater number of mentions of that emotion). It is impossible to summarise the lockdown as one single entity, as the emotions span such a wide-reaching spectrum. Whilst frustration and feelings of anxiousness come through most strongly, there are many positives that people are taking from the experience such as happiness, relaxation, peacefulness and gratefulness.

If you had to describe your emotions during lockdown in three words, which words would you use?



It is only when we separate those who are flourishing from those experiencing negative impact on their mental health that a clearer picture emerges.

If you had to describe your emotions during lockdown in three words, which words would you use?

Those who are flourishing (n=51)



Those whose mental health has suffered (n=210)



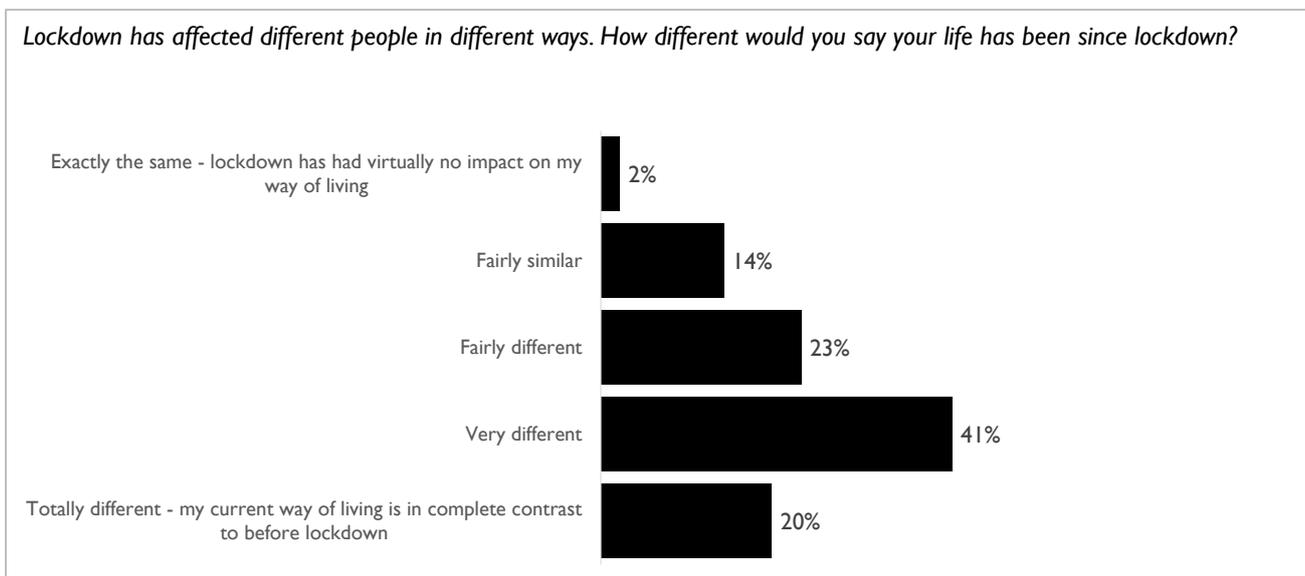
This is further expanded when we quantify people’s emotions. Many (41%) agree their mental health has been more extreme, with very good days but also very bad days, we see almost as many disagreeing (37%) and reporting more stable mental health. So not only is well-being varying from person to person, for many people it is varying from day to day.

“Ups and downs. Mostly flourishing but having a couple of days every so often where I’m a bit all over the place.” Female, 25-34

“Weekdays the same, weekends worse,” Male 45-54

The impact on people’s lives brought about by the lockdown cannot be underestimated, with almost 2 in 3 reporting a big change in their lives

Just 2% told us that the lockdown has had no impact, compared to 20% reporting that their way of living is now ‘totally different’. Whilst we see those experiencing a ‘totally different’ way of living are most likely to suffer a negative impact on their mental health, we still see 5% of this group flourishing. The data on pre-determined factors such as demographics and change in way of living are far from black and white at explaining the impact of the lockdown on people’s mental health.



We sought to go deeper to understand the factors that are in our control that can lead to a more positive lockdown experience.

Factors which may improve flourishing

There are certain mindsets around ‘gratitude’ and ‘savouring’ that appear to link to a positive impact on mental health during lockdown

1 in 3 (33%) strongly agree that “I have felt a greater sense of gratitude for my life than usual” and amongst this group, 14% are thriving. A similar proportion strongly agree that “I have savoured things such as walks, sunsets, food more than I usually do”, with 12% of this group flourishing. Just over 1 in 4 (27%) have enjoyed family time more than usual, and 14% of this group are flourishing. Whilst all being relatively small uplifts in mental health, practicing feels of gratitude and savouring may offer simple changes to one’s outlook and help bring some positivity to levels of well-being.

Furthermore, using one’s free time to slow down, become more spiritual / in tune with nature and (re)connect with one’s partner may also offer marginal gains to happiness levels

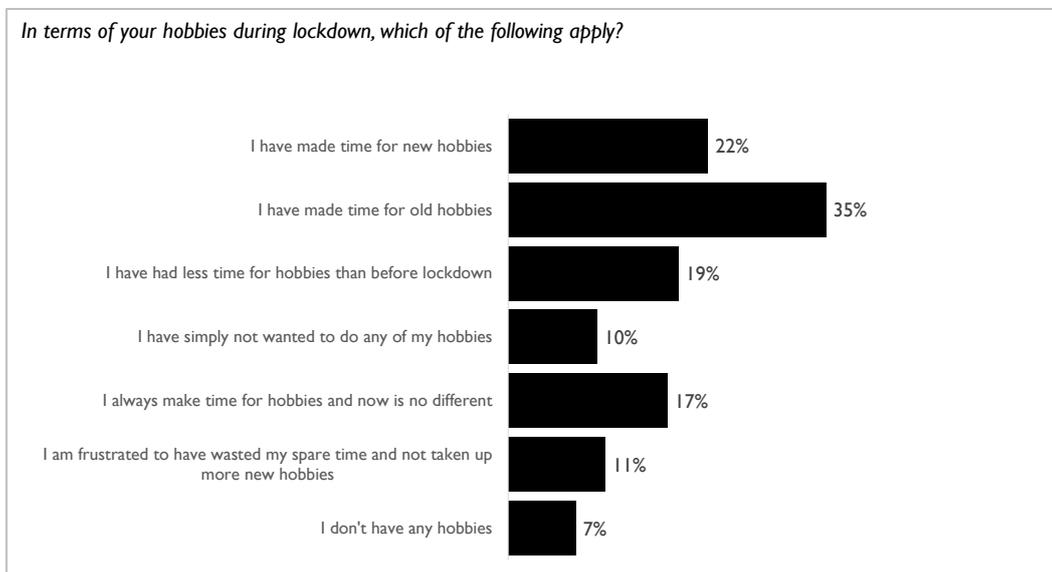
We see some people having a lot more spare time on their hands (43% agree) whereas many others report being busier. The main benefits of this free time have been to save money and carry out DIY/maintenance. However, these activities don’t appear to have been crucial factors in helping people flourish, with well-being levels no greater than the total sample. However, analysing the more niche activities, we see increased levels of flourishing amongst those who slow down and enjoy things a little more, get to know their partner better and those who become more spiritual / in tune with nature.

Those experiencing more ‘authentic’ communication with others are more likely to be flourishing

Almost 1 in 3 (32%) report that their communication with friends, family, neighbours, and colleagues has become more open and honest during lockdown. This is also the group who are most likely to be thriving, with 33% experiencing a positive shift in their mental health. 11% of this group who experience more ‘authentic’ communication are flourishing.

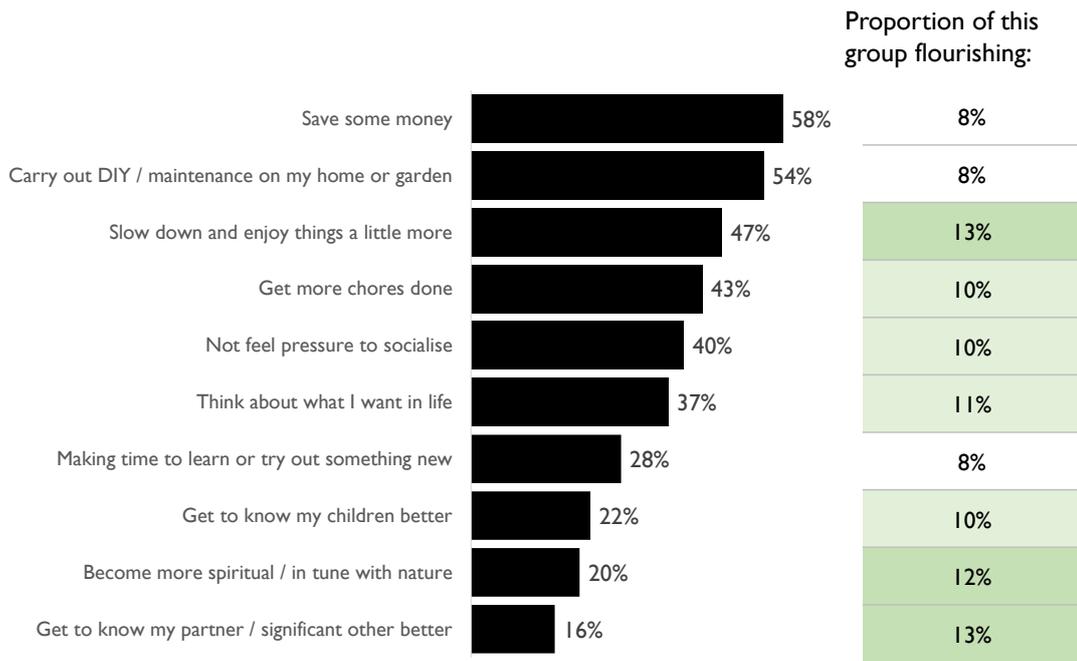
More than 1 in 3 (35%) are making time for old hobbies, but it is finding new hobbies that point to the greatest positive impact on mental health

During the lockdown, more than 1 in 3 are making time for old hobbies, with almost 1 in 4 have made time for new hobbies.



Whilst those making time for old hobbies report positive well-being (11% are flourishing, with 30% reporting a positive movement in their mental health), it is people making time for *new* hobbies that appears to have the most positive impact (15% flourishing, 41% show positive impact of the lockdown on their mental health). This is further supported by those reporting frustration at *not* using their spare time for new hobbies, amongst whom over half (52%) report a negative impact of the lockdown on their mental health.

Some people have found the lockdown has freed up their time for doing things they wouldn't normally have time for. Which of the following, if any, have you found more time for?



“Enjoying a slower pace of life,” Female, 45-54.

“Take time to sit and laugh with my family. Be grateful for my life,” Female, 35-44.

Regular exercise, video calls with friends/family, and finding ways to have a laugh top this list of positive things we can do during the lockdown

Those doing more light exercise than before lockdown are more likely to be experiencing positive mental health benefits. The biggest extremes however are amongst those who've stopped or started light exercise as a result of the lockdown. Amongst those who have started light exercise, 10% are flourishing. However, for the small proportion who have stopped light exercise, 40% are experiencing a negative impact on their mental health, and no-one in this group was found to be flourishing.

As we move from socialising in restaurants, cafes, pubs and bars, many people have found video calls the best way to stay in touch with friends and family. Whilst the majority (73%) were already making use of video calling, it is those who have just started this activity who are most likely to be thriving (13% report they are flourishing), as they find new ways to connect with loved ones.

“Talking with family and remembering good times, focus on positives and memories,” Male 55-64.

“I have regular video chats with friends and family, we often make light of situations and have a good laugh together. My partner and I often come up with silly little games to keep ourselves amused for a while, and my two cats are an endless source of entertainment,” Female 25-34.

“Games over video calls. Watching comedies,” Male, 18-24.

News and social media – nuanced picture

Our engagement with the news is nuanced – it works for some...but not others

There is a fascinating relationship between the extent to which we follow the news and our mental health. The most positive levels of mental health are experienced by those who don't follow the news at all. Whilst representing a small group of just 4% of our sample, we see 14% of them are flourishing. We also find nearly 1 in 4 (23%) of our sample consume less news or have stopped consumer news during the lockdown. They are the next most positive group with 9% of them flourishing. However, we also see some of those who have stopped following the news reporting a very *negative* impact of the lockdown on their mental health, and we hypothesise that their decision to stop following the news is precisely due to the nature of the news during these times. Those consuming *more* news are more likely to report that their mental health is much worse than usual.

“Fake news poisons the mind,” Male, 18-24.

“Too much negative news,” Male, 55-64.

“It's the same pandemic stories and media are lighting the fire of peoples' anxieties. There are few cheerful stories at a time when we need them the most,” Female, 55-64.

“Want to make sure I am getting accurate information, not hysterical content / conspiracy theories,” Female 25-34.

“If you read/watch/believe it all you'd drive yourself to distraction and anxiety,” Female, 45-54.

Likewise, we have a fraught relationship with social media and mental health during this period

Use of social media is widespread amongst our sample, with 93% reporting to use at least one channel in this period. Those using it *less* in this period are more likely to report a positive impact of the lockdown on their mental health (29%) compared to those consuming it *more* (23%). However, unlike following the news, the solution here *isn't* to avoid social media, as those who don't use any social media are least likely to be flourishing (5%, vs 8% amongst users).

We develop the hypothesis that social media is a double-edged sword at this time – avoid it and you lack contact with those around you but consume too much and it can lead to a decline in mental health. This lack of consensus is supported by feedback from social media users, with 40% reporting that it is ‘helpful’ but a further 18% saying it is ‘unhelpful’.

“Useful to keep in touch with friends, but you can't escape news stories and negativity. I don't always want exposure to that,” Female, 45-54.

“People on social media have been posting articles and links helping people in my industry, and sharing resources for the community,” Male, 25-34.

“It's been useful for staying in touch with friends and family but some of the rubbish that is posted is irritating,” Female, 35-44.

“While it's useful for keeping up with the news and staying in touch with friends and family, it's also rife with mad conspiracy theories and fake news - I've deleted Facebook since lockdown,” Female 25-34.

“It's good for keeping in touch with friends and finding some light-hearted distractions from the pandemic. However, there's still a lot of toxic content and trolls,” Male 18-24.

We learned that the nation is being more selective with their social media consumption in this period. Over 1 in 3 (36%) social media users report being more selecting with the people and brands they follow, with just 12% becoming more open-minded.

In terms of how selectivity of social media consumption may affect mental health levels, we see both extremes being most likely to thrive. Those who are most open (13% report flourishing) and those who are most selective (12% report flourishing) report the strongest mental health. This leaves those who don't have a clear approach to social media as struggling the most with their mental health. Perhaps it is this lack of control which is most critical in this period.

We're finding more time to be healthy and cook more, with 2 in 5 doing more cooking from scratch

With 90% of our sample already cooking from scratch before lockdown, we see this activity is one which has increased most during lockdown with 2 in 5 (40%) now cooking from scratch more. Whilst slightly more common amongst those with children, we see a large increase across all sub-groups here. We see those with a positive shift in their mental health most likely to increase their cooking from scratch (52% are doing more since lockdown began), and it has also increased amongst those who report a lower well-being during lockdown with 1 in 3 (33%) cooking more.

Negative impacts on mental health

We're drinking more alcohol and having more regular treats through the day...but these aren't conducive to improving our mental health

1 in 3 (33%) tell us they are consuming more alcohol and almost 1/2 (44%) are enjoying more treats through the day, like biscuits or sweets. However, neither appears to support an improvement in well-being in this period. Amongst those drinking more alcohol, 40% report a negative shift in their mental health, and for those consuming

more treats, this figure is 36%. Again, we cannot determine cause and effect here, but the data suggests that alcohol and treats are not making us happier on the whole.

Lockdown has been much harder on those who had a pre-existing mental health condition

Presence of mental health struggles prior to lockdown tends increase the chances of mental health levels reducing further during the lockdown. 44% of those with pre-existing conditions report that the lockdown experience has had a negative impact on their mental health, versus just 25% for those without a pre-existing condition.

“I suffer with anxiety, depression, and dissociation. My struggle is somewhat different now”, anonymous.

However, we do find that some people who struggled with their mental health before the lockdown are thriving, with 7% reporting that they are flourishing. A history of mental health issues doesn't give a foregone conclusion that the lockdown will be a negative experience.

Catching the virus doubles the chances of mental health becoming ‘much worse’. But many of these individuals are still flourishing

10% of those catching the virus itself report their mental health levels have been much worse than usual, which is twice as high as those who haven't caught the virus. However, we see the same proportion (8%) of people flourishing during this period whether they have caught the virus or not.

“[Catching Covid-19]...made my anxiety go off the charts and I did not consider myself mentally well when suffering from the physical illness of CVI9,” anonymous.

Again, having Covid-19 isn't a foregone conclusion that the lockdown will be a negative experience.

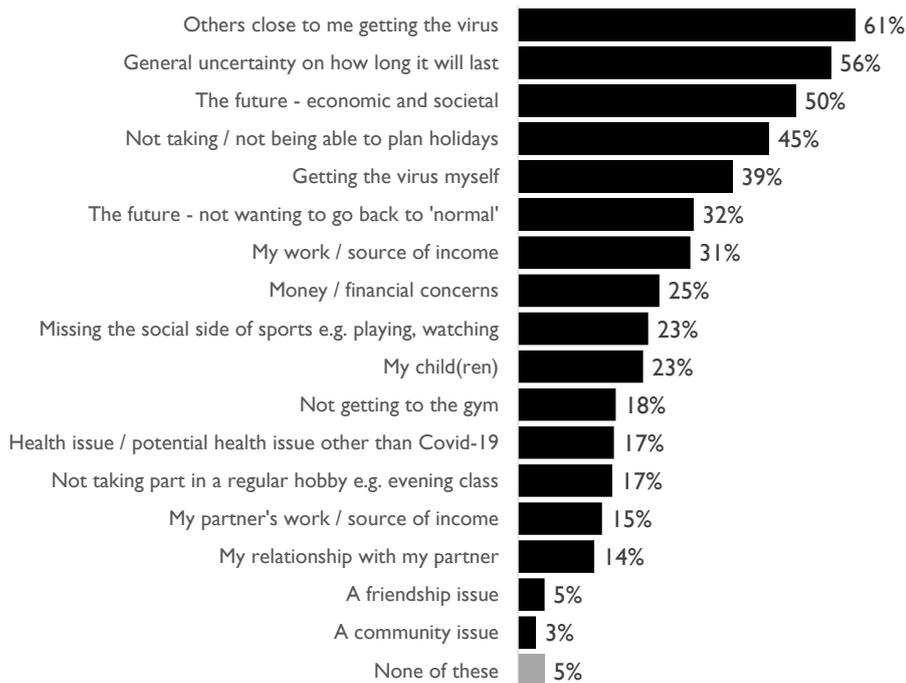
Concern for others and uncertainty about the future top the list of worries during the lockdown

The concern for loved ones catching the virus during this period tops the list of worries. Respondents report fear for elderly relatives who they cannot see and may have had support from others restricted.

“I have worried significantly about my parents, who are elderly and sometimes struggle to cope. I get stressed worrying about them normally, let alone in lockdown,” Male, 25-34.

“Anxiety for elderly relatives and their practical needs,” Female 45-54.

Which of the following, if any, have caused you significant worry (i.e. more than just a few days) during the lockdown period?



Additionally, a broad sense of uncertainty prevails as a major worry around how long the lockdown will last. The specific concern around uncertainty extends to the economic and societal outlook, planning of holidays, plus income and financial concerns.

Whilst not the felt by the majority, the most impactful worries are relationship with partner, financial concerns and missing out on regular hobbies.

By analysing the data in more depth, we can explore the mental health levels of those experiencing each of the worries mentioned above. 14% report a worry around their relationship with their partner, and amongst this group over half (58%) report have lower mental health levels during the lockdown period. Whilst we cannot separate cause and effect here, it is clear that a challenging relationship with one's partner may exacerbate any negative mental health and vice versa. Just 2% of those with worries about their relationship with their partner are flourishing at this time.

Additionally, we see strong negative impact on mental health for those with financial concerns (51% say their mental health is worse than usual) and those missing out on regular hobbies (49%)

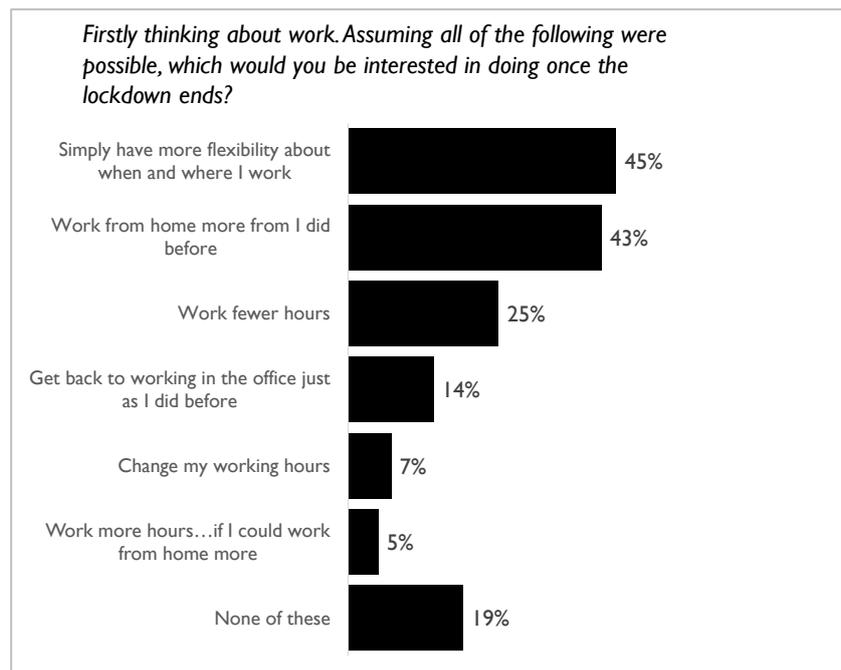
Many report positive improvements to their sleep, but overall we're sleeping less well

1 in 5 (21%) report that their sleep has improved during lockdown. The most common reason for this improvement is the later starts afforded by not having to commute to work. Other reasons for improvements to sleep include having less stress, life being simpler now and having more spare time for exercise. Those suffering worse sleep during this period (38%) mention disruption to normal routines, more time to allow worries to develop into anxious thoughts and vivid dreams.

We see a strong relationship between sleep effectiveness and overall levels of mental health. Amongst those flourishing 39% are sleeping better, almost twice the number of the total sample. Just 10% of those flourishing are sleeping worse. Amongst those suffer a decline in their well-being during lockdown, almost 2 in 3 (61%) are sleeping worse.

Looking to the Future

When lockdown ends, workers are looking to gain more flexibility and/or work from home more



Outside of work, people are looking to be healthier, spend less and be more sociable.

And in relation to your life / lifestyle, which of the following would you consider trying to do or maintain once the lockdown ends?

