

Social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth in the Post School Education and Training (PSET) Sector in South Africa



“There is no doubt in my mind that we will prevail. This is because South Africans have come together like never before to wage the struggle against this virus, together.”

- President Cyril Ramaphosa, 31 March 2020

CONTEXT – YOUTH AND COVID-19

- While many believe that exposure to COVID-19 affects mostly the elderly, youth are not impervious to the novel coronavirus.
- However, young people in many countries have been complacent about the COVID-19 warnings, due to communication about the elderly being more susceptible (UNFPA, 2020a).
- Young people exposed to COVID-19 are as likely as old people to become infected and contagious. The youth need to follow national guidelines for screening, testing, containment practices and social distancing (UNFPA, 2020b).
- In addition, young people's formal education, where they have access to it, has been severely impacted by the pandemic (UNFPA, 2020b).
- Education, social support mechanisms and access to health services need to be maintained with parents and/or guardians playing a key role (UNFPA, 2020ab). This action also placed both the learners and their educators under conditions not previously encountered and therefore ill prepared for, whereby remote forms of instruction were the only tools available.
- Prolonged periods of closures and movement restrictions may lead to additional emotional unrest and anxieties (UNFPA, 2020b).

HIGHLIGHTS

- 40% of PSET students moved back home during the lockdown
- Frequently accessed sources of information on COVID-19 accessed by students were government sources, news websites/apps and social media. Knowledge of COVID-19 symptoms and prevention was high.
- 53% thought they were at low risk of contracting COVID-19 and 15% perceived themselves as high risk
- 41% were not able to purchase their own food during lockdown, of which 10% relied on food donations and 15% went hungry on some days
- 42% thought they would be able to cope with their workload after lockdown, with older students being more confident than younger ones
- Over 80% of students at Universities and Universities of Technology received institutional support in the form of data bundles, data-free access to websites, and accessing online learning platforms
- 38% of TVET college students reported that their colleges offered virtual learning
- Half the students reported difficulty communicating with their institutions during lockdown, with more difficulty reported among TVET students

STUDY DESIGN

Study population

- Young people between the ages of 18- 35 years of age who are either in some form of educational training or enrolled in a tertiary institution in all nine provinces in South Africa

Data collection period

- The survey was conducted from 18 June - 18 September 2020

Ethical approval

- Study approval was obtained from the HSRCs Research Ethics Committee (REC 5/03/20).

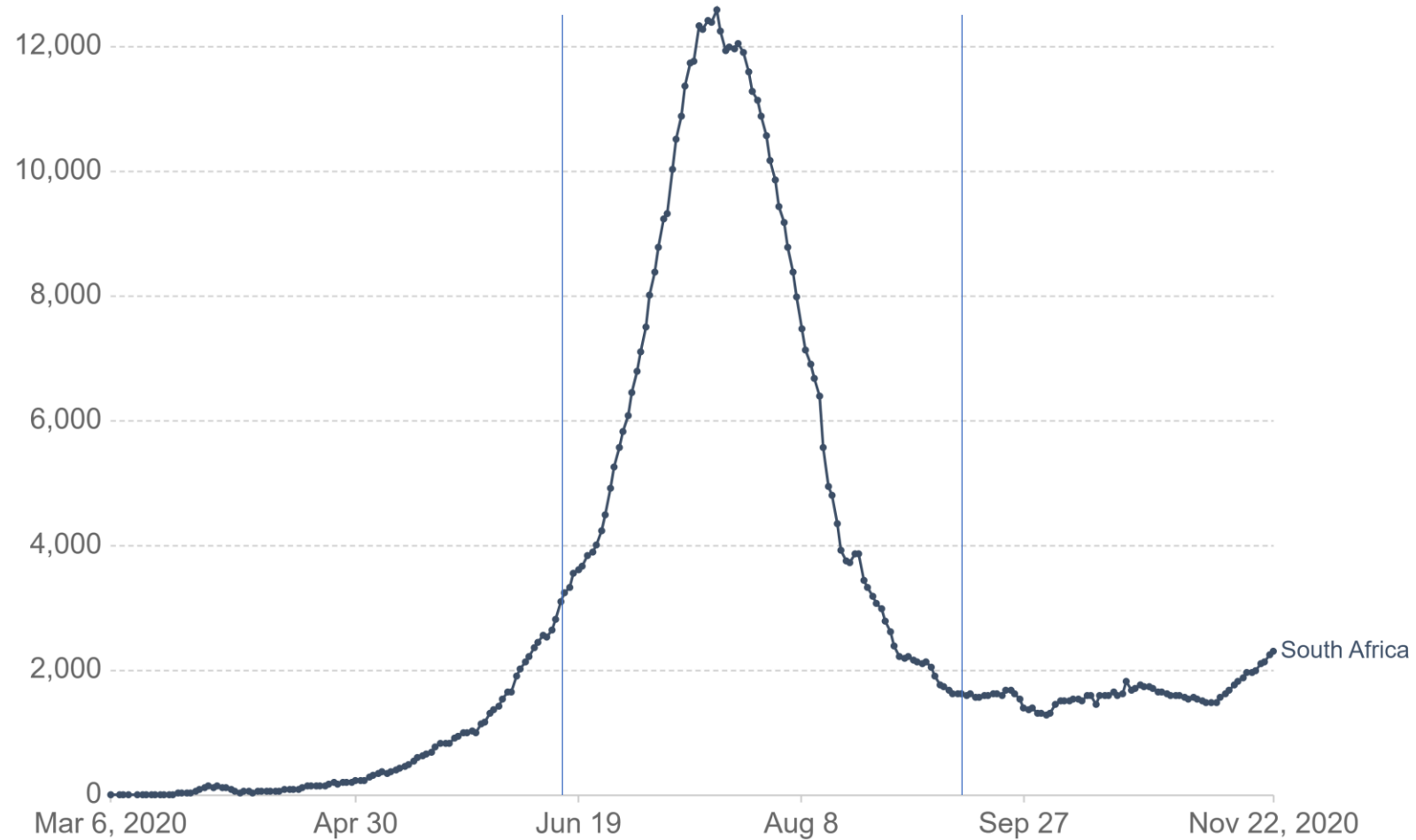
Data collection

- Youth were invited to participate in the online survey hosted on the BINU data free platform:
<https://hsrc.datafree.co/r/CovidYouth>

CONDUCTED AT THE PEAK OF EPIDEMIC – 18 JUNE – 18 SEPTEMBER 2020

Daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases

Shown is the rolling 7-day average. The number of confirmed cases is lower than the number of actual cases; the main reason for that is limited testing.



Source: European CDC – Situation Update Worldwide – Last updated 22 November, 10:06 (London time)

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THEMES INVESTIGATED

Demographic characteristics

Socio-economic conditions during lockdown

Knowledge of COVID-19 and Sources of information on COVID-19

Risk perceptions

Opinions on government response

Impact of COVID-19 on learning and institutional support during lockdown

Well-being, mental health and social support

Substance use

Exposure to violence

The questionnaire comprised 58 close-ended questions



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DATA ANALYSIS

- The data were exported from the online platform into MS Excel and processed and analysed in Stata 15.0.
- Estimates are benchmarked (weighted) using Statistic's South Africa's estimates of the youth population aged 18-35 who are attending educational institutions by sex, population group, age and province that they reside in. These estimates were sourced from Statistics SA Quarterly Labour Force Survey for Quarter 4 2019. The benchmarking of estimates increases generalizability to the national population of PSET youth.



DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS



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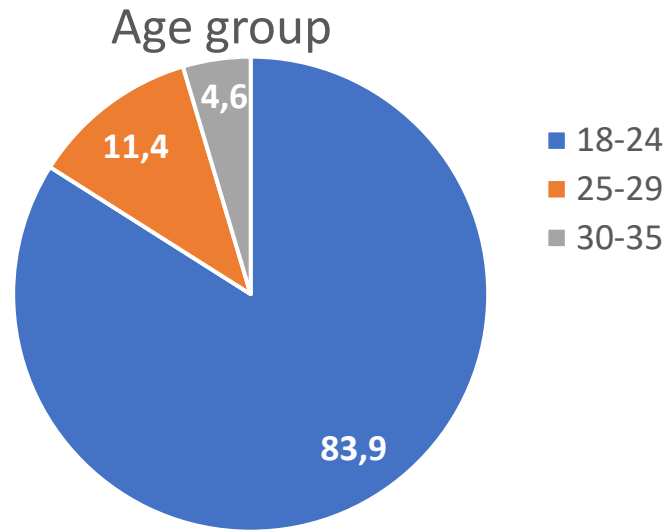


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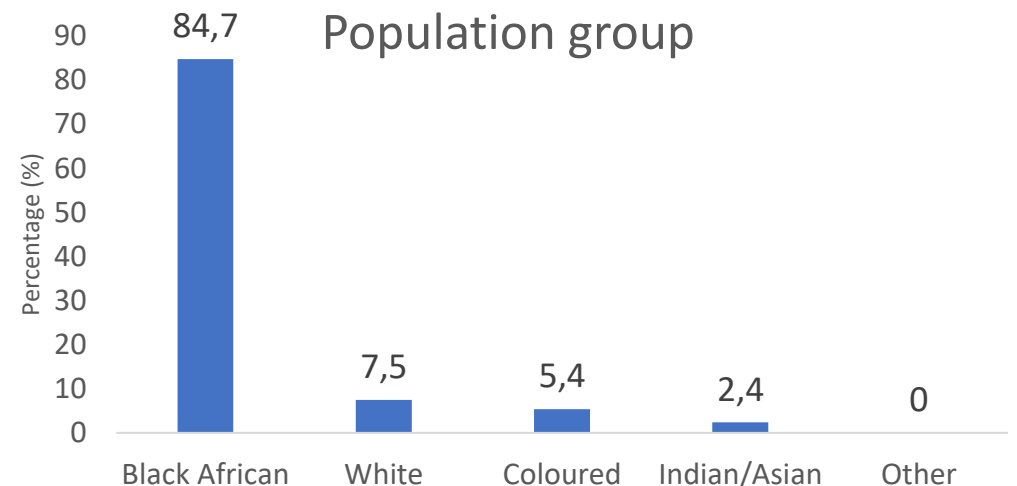
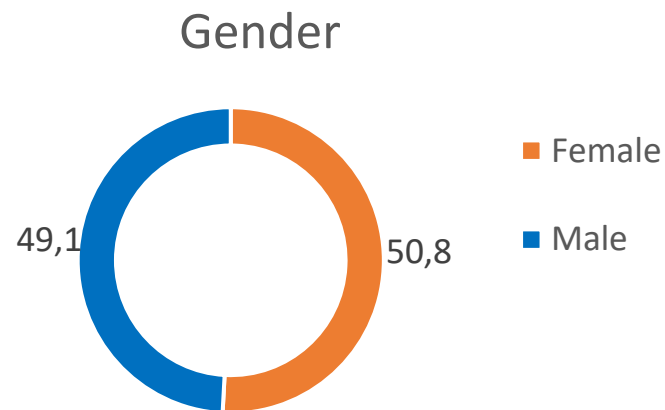
DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE BY SEX, AGE & POPULATION GROUP



A total of 13 119 youth responded to the survey questions.

50.8% of the sample were female, [95% CI 49.8-51.9]

The majority were aged 18-24 years, while 11.4% were 25-29 years and 4.6% were 30-35 years old.

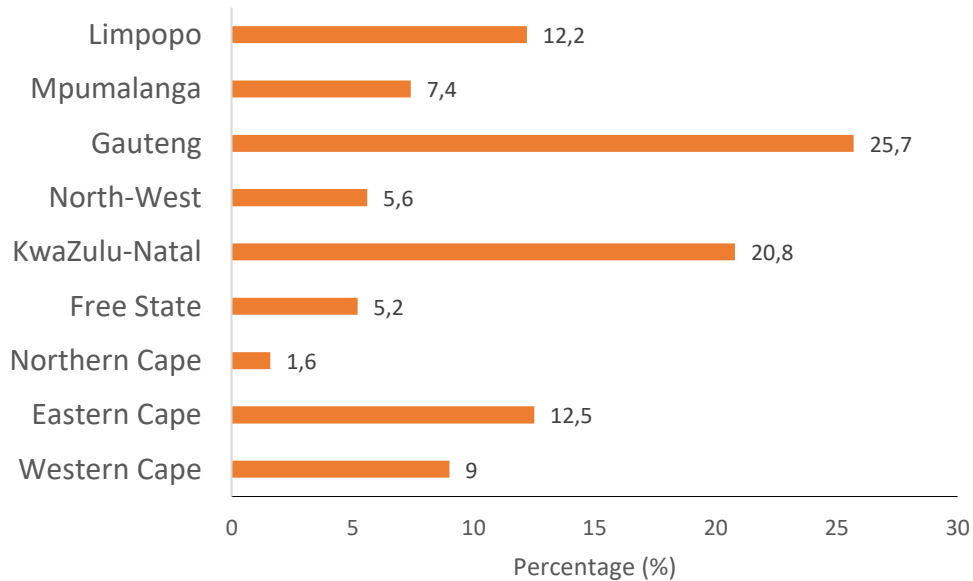


DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE BY PROVINCE AND LOCALITY TYPE

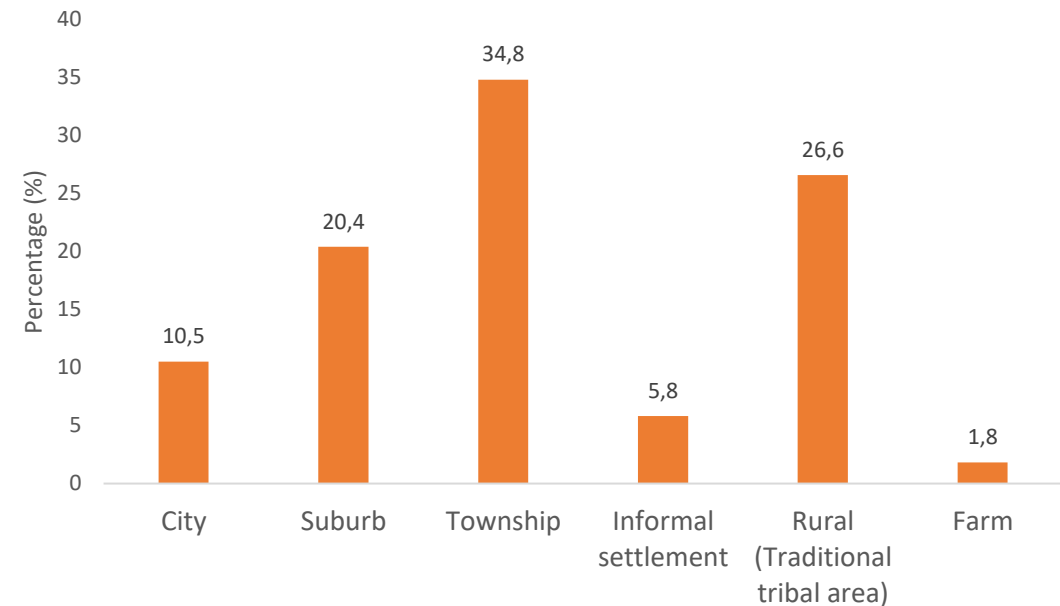
- 25.7% were studying in Gauteng
- 20.8% were studying in KwaZulu-Natal & 12.5% in the Eastern Cape
- the lowest proportion (1.6%) of participants studied in the Northern Cape

- About 28% lived in rural and farm localities [95% CI 33.8-35.8]
- Over a third lived in townships
- About 30% lived in urban localities (suburb, city)
- Nearly 6% lived in informal settlements

What province are your studying in?



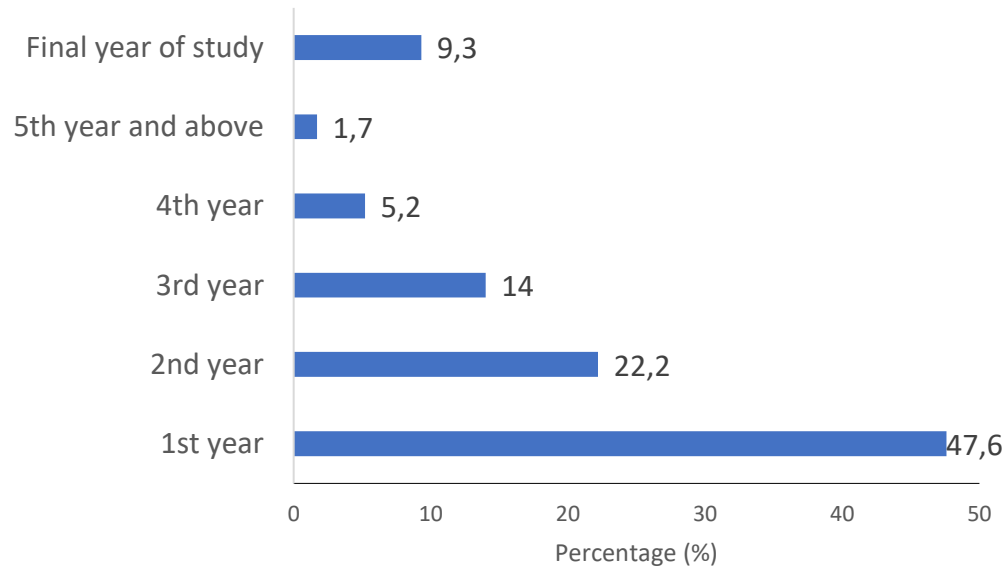
What community do you reside in?



DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE BY YEAR OF STUDY AND TYPE OF INSTITUTION

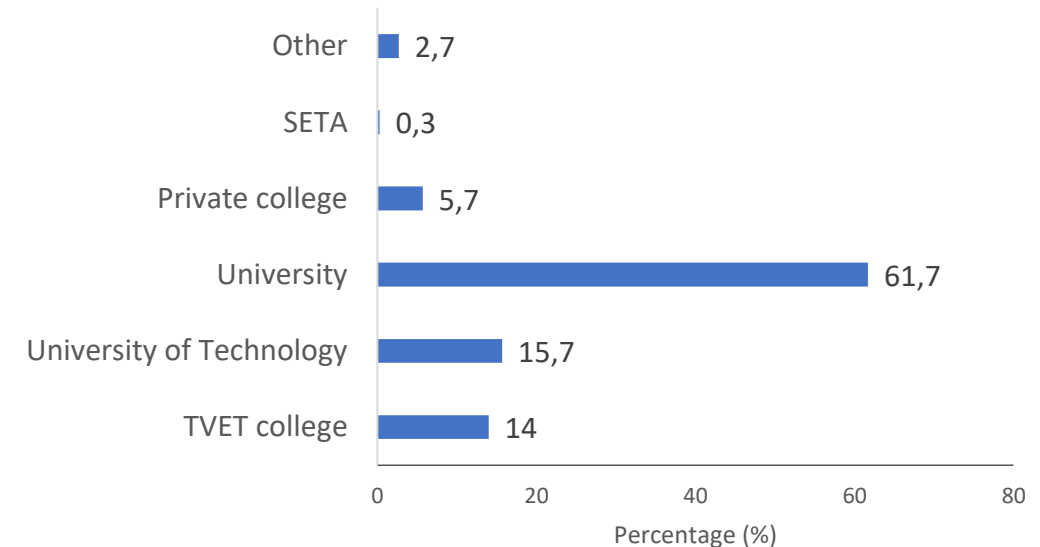
Year of study

Over 45% were in their first year of study, 22.2% were in second year and 14.0% were in third year. Over 9% were at final year of study



Institution enrolled at:

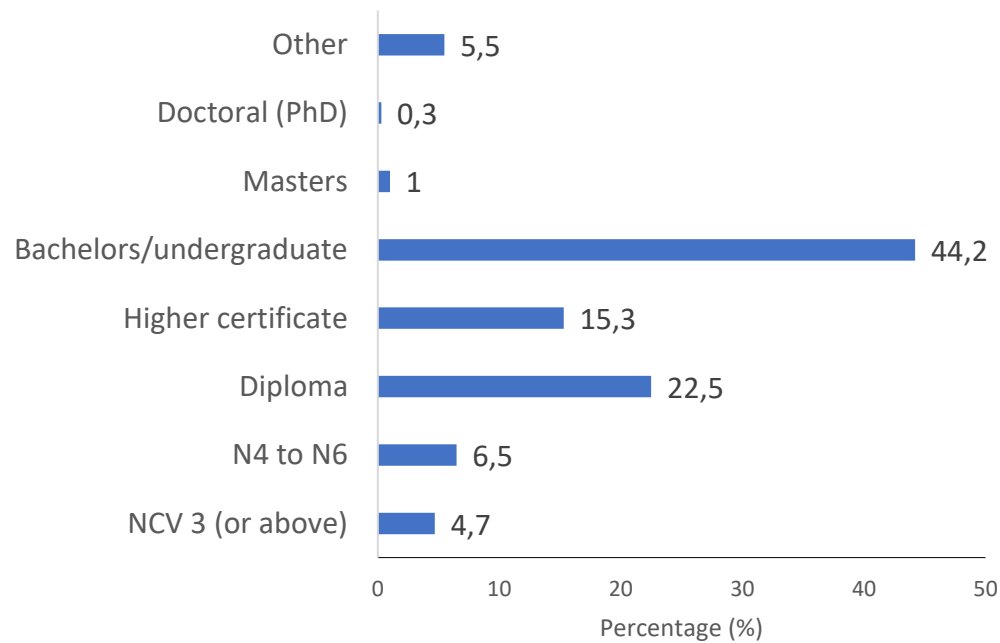
Youth in University comprised 61.7% of the sample, youth in a University of Technology were 15.7% and youth in a TVET college were 14.0%.



DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE BY LEVEL AND AREA OF STUDY

Level of study:

Approximately 44% were at bachelors/undergrad level of study, 22.5% were at diploma level and 15.3% were at higher certificate level. Nearly 6% classified themselves as at “other level of study”.

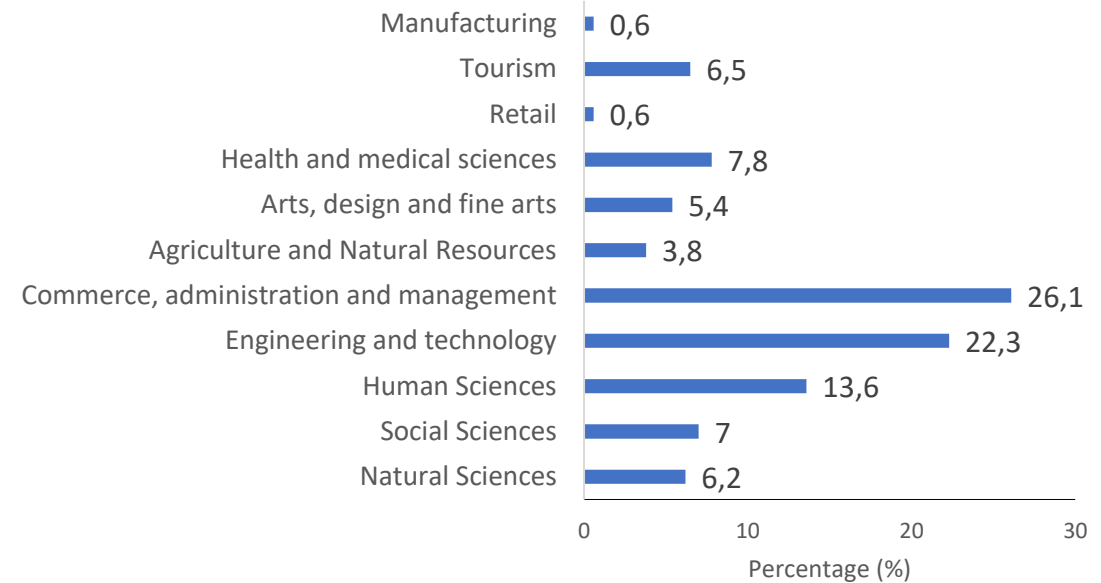


Focus Area of study:

26.1% studied in commerce, admin and management

22.3% studied in engineering and technology

13.6% studied in health sciences



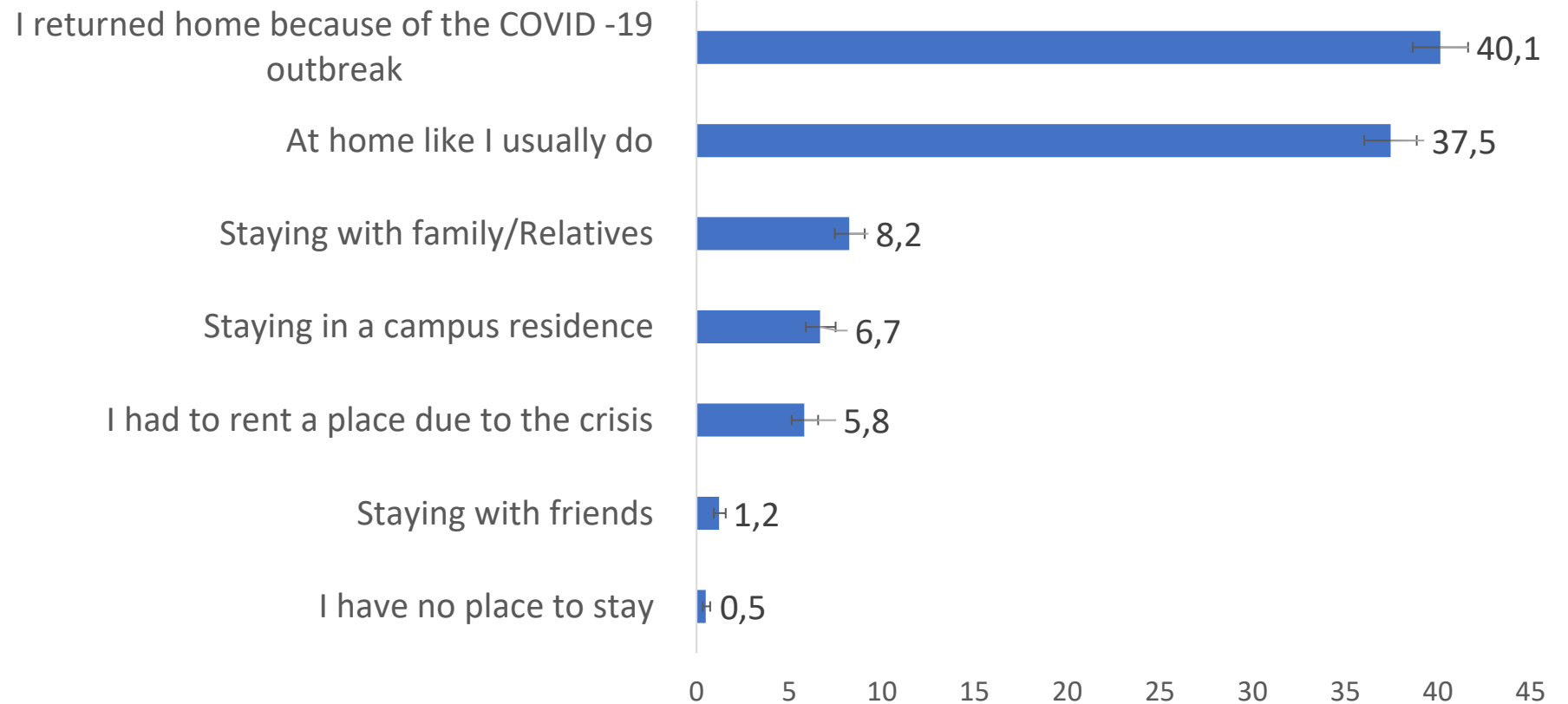


SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS DURING LOCKDOWN

- Living situation
- Space to study
- Food security
- Access to healthcare

PLACE OF STAY DURING LOCKDOWN

About two fifths of the students (40.1%) reported that they returned to their home because of the COVID-19 outbreak. Around 37.5% reported that were staying at home as usual during lockdown. Less than 1% reported that they had no place to stay during lockdown.



RESOURCES DURING LOCKDOWN

Study space

- About half of the students (49.9%) reported that they had a suitable place to study during lockdown
- 20.8% had a suitable place to study only some of the time, while 29.3% of the students who had no suitable place to study during lockdown.

Electricity

- While the majority (78.6% [77.4-79.8]) of the students had regular access to electricity during lockdown, 5.7% [5.1-6.5]) did not have access to electricity.

Income

- Almost half of the students (49.7% [48.1-51.3]) reported that their mother had a paying job, followed by 34.2% [32.7-35.7] who reported that their father had a paying job.



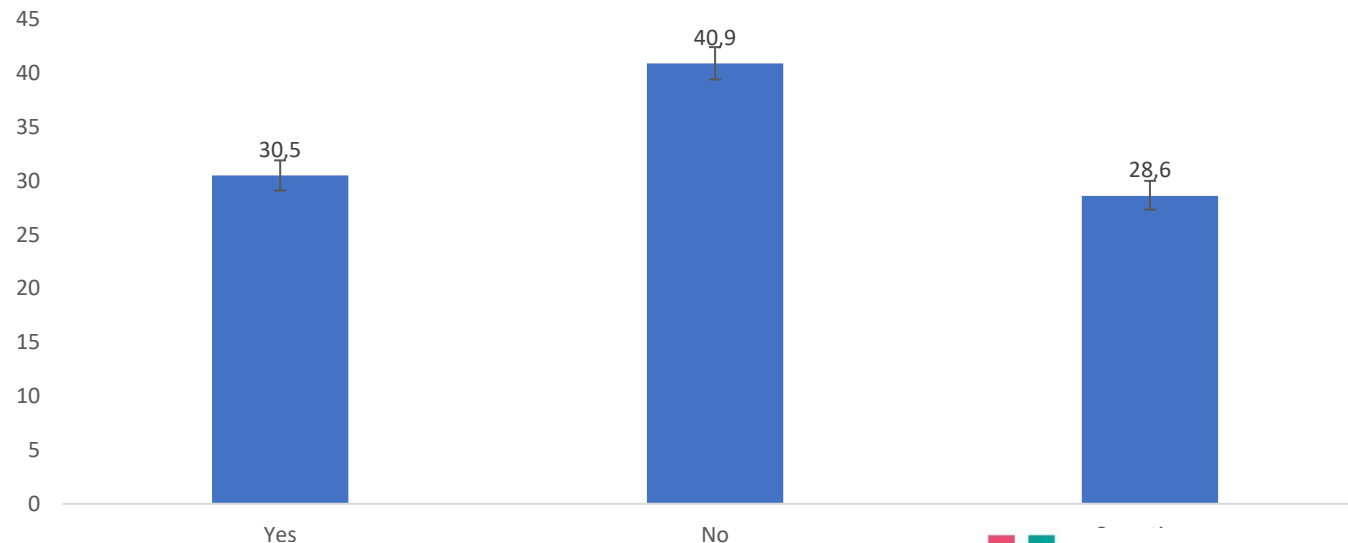
FOOD SECURITY

The majority (79.3%)(95% CI 78.1-80.5) said their family provides their food or sometimes (13.4%) (95% CI 12.4-14.5) provides their food.

Two fifths of PSET (40.9%, 95% CI 39.4-42.4) indicated they were not able to purchase their own food during lockdown

A further 28.6% (95% CI 27.3-30.0) said they were able to buy their own food sometimes.

Been able to buy own food over the past 30 days



Food security: among those who were NOT able to buy their own food over the past 30 days

Reliance on food donations (N=2680):

- Nearly 10% indicated they relied on food donations and food parcels (95% CI 8.6-11.4).
- A further 14.9% said they relied on food donations and food parcels *sometimes* (95% CI 13.3-16.7).

Reliance on financial donations (N=2679):

- Just over 10% relied on financial donations to buy food (95% CI 8.8-11.7).
- A further 11.1% relied on financial donations to buy food *sometimes* (95% CI 9.6-12.7).


Do not always have food and go hungry on some days (N=2683):

- In total 14.8 said they do not always have food and go hungry on some days (95% CI 13.2-16.7) .
- A further 14.9% said they *sometimes* do not always have food and go hungry on some days (95% CI 13.3-16.7).

Had to rely on food given to them by people I know (N=2674):

- 10.9 % said they had to rely on food given to them by people they know (95% CI 9.5-12.5) .
- 14.5% % said they *sometimes* had to rely on food given to them by people they know (95% CI 12.9-16.3)





Food security: Which statement best reflects your food situation over the past 30 days?

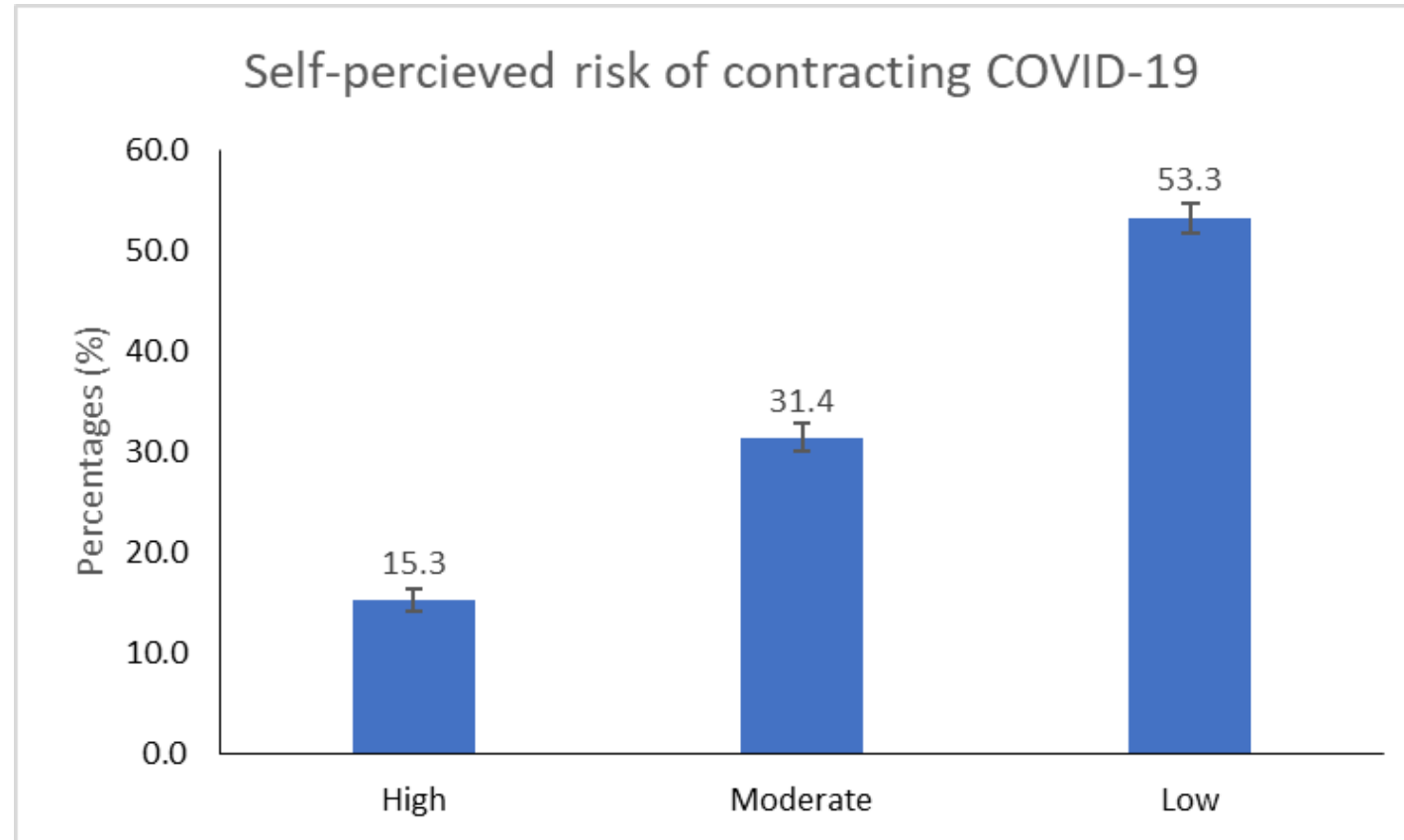
Ate less preferred foods(N=6601):

- 36.1% said they ate less preferred foods (95% CI 34.6-37.6).
- A further 23.9% said they ate less preferred foods *sometimes* (95% CI 22.6-25.2).

Spent a whole day without eating (N=6569):

- 12.6% spent a whole day without eating (95% CI 11.6-13.7).
- 16.9% *sometime* spent a whole day without eating (95% CI 15.8-18.1).

SELF-PERCEIVED RISK OF CONTRACTING COVID-19



Just over half of the youth reported low self-perceived risk of contracting COVID-19

Of those with low risk perception, over 70% attributed it to their staying at home, self isolating, wearing a mask and being generally healthy.

Of those with high risk perception, 40% attributed it to having an underlying medical condition and 48% to their home environment placing them at risk.



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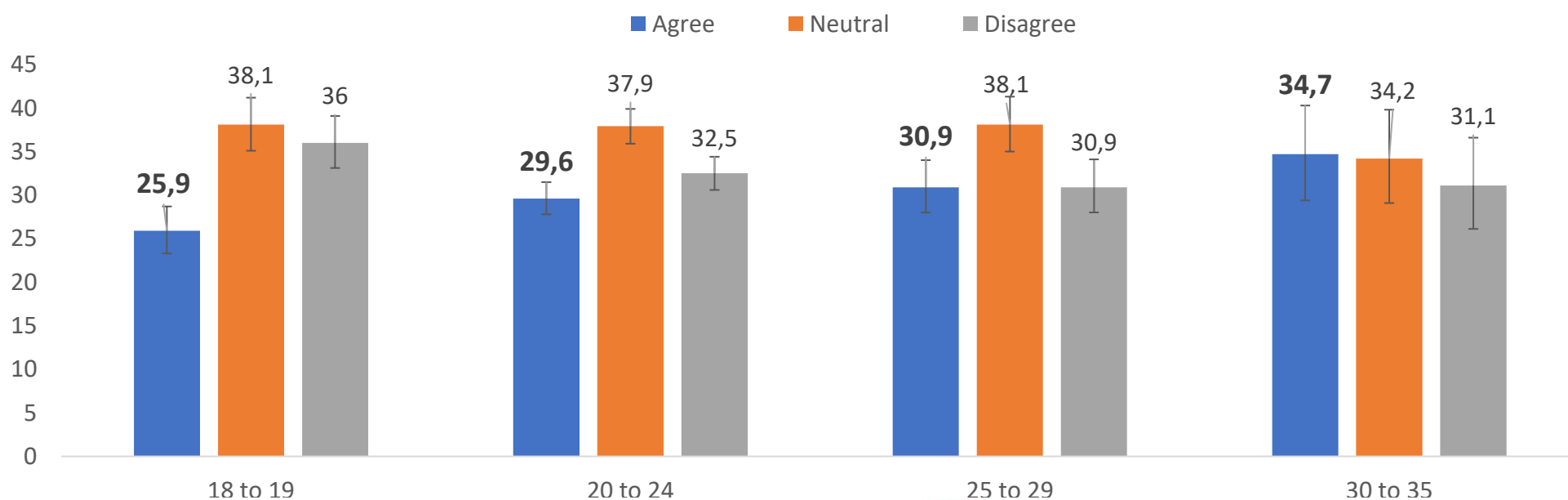


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SOUTH AFRICA'S MANAGEMENT OF THE SOCIAL & ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19

Below a third of the students (29.1% [27.7-30.5]) agreed that South Africa was managing the social and economic impact of COVID 19 better than other countries, 38% were unsure about this statement and 33% disagreed.

Significantly more older students (30 to 35 years old) (34.7%) than younger students (18 to 19 years old) (25.9%) agreed that South Africa was managing the social and economic impact of COVID 19 better than other countries ($p = 0.03$).



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IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EDUCATION AND LEARNING



SUPPORT CHALLENGES & INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT



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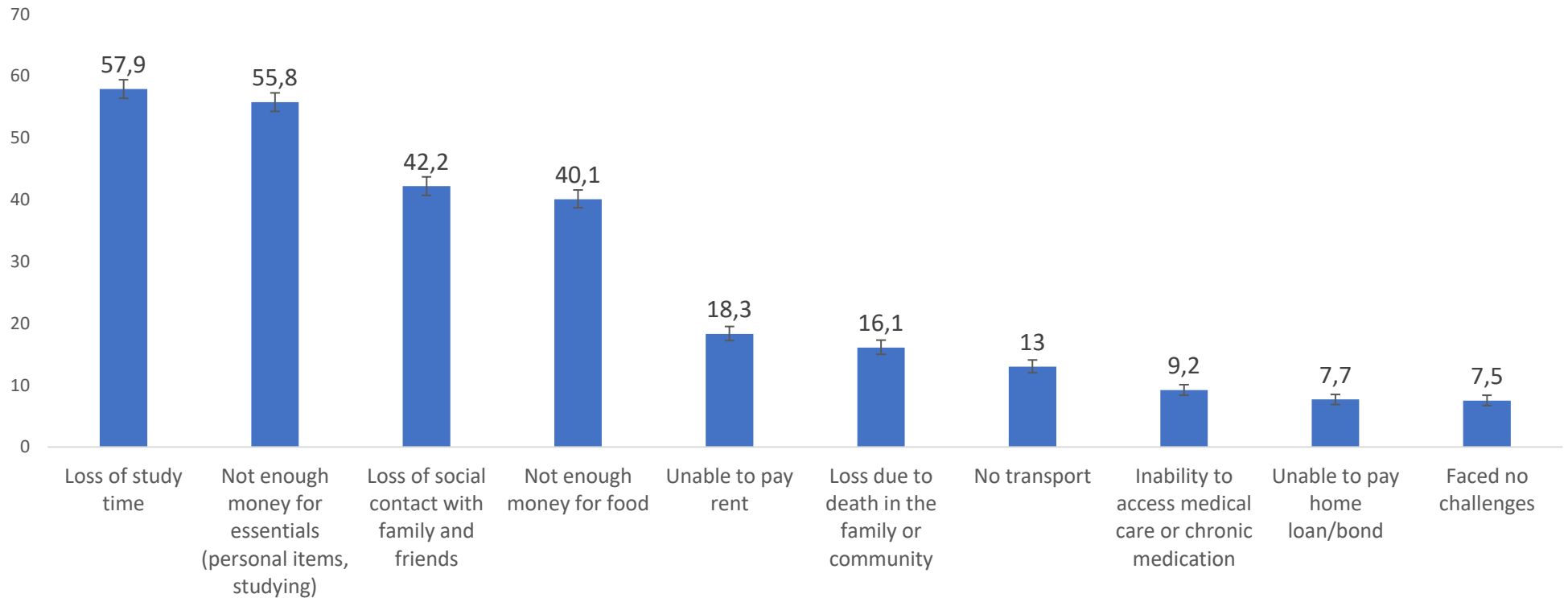
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MAIN CHALLENGES FACED WITH THE OUTBREAK OF CORONAVIRUS

The main challenges experienced by students during lockdown were loss of study time (57.9%), not having enough money for essential personal items for studying (55.8%), loss of social contact (42.2%) and not having enough money for food (40.1%).

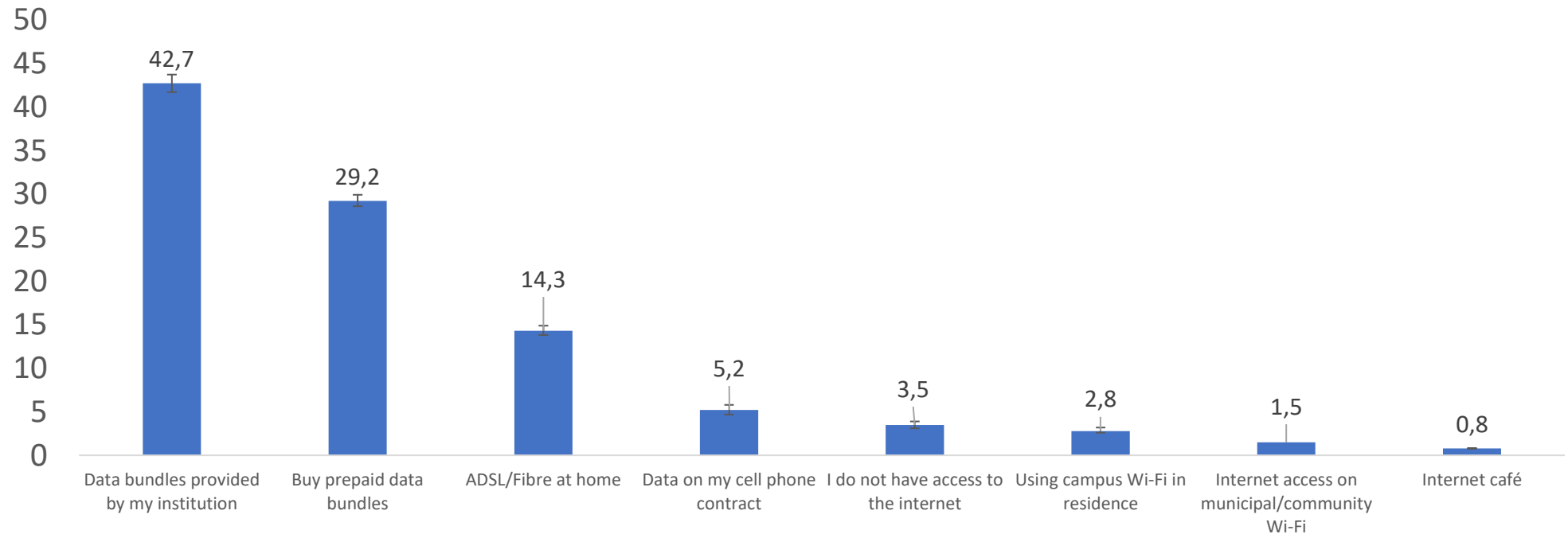


ACCESS TO INTERNET DURING LOCKDOWN

42.7% said they accessed the internet using data bundles provided by their institution and 29.2% accessed the internet by prepaid data bundles (N= 6817).

3.5% said they did not have access to the internet, with 15% of TVET college students having no access to the internet.

How do you access the internet during lockdown?



CAPACITY TO CONDUCT VIRTUAL LEARNING BY INSTITUTION TYPE

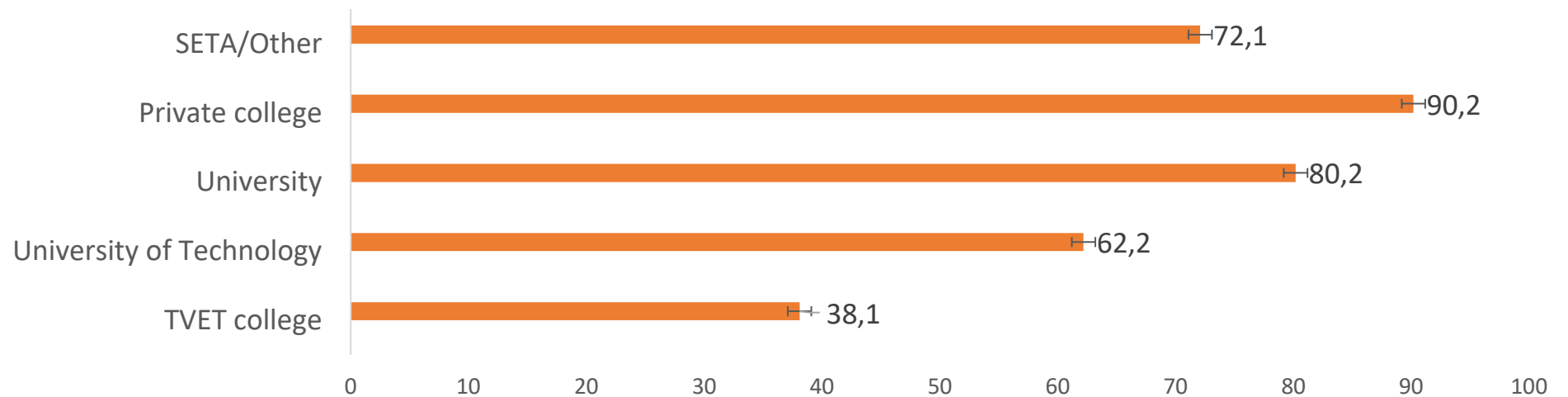
Students reported if their institution provided virtual learning.

Over 90% of students at private colleges and 80% of university students reported that their institutions provided virtual learning.

Significantly fewer (38.1%, $p < 0.001$) TVET students indicated that their institution provided the capacity to conduct virtual learning.

Overall 66% rated their institution's e-learning portal during lockdown as good or excellent, and 23.4% thought their institution's e-learning portal was of poor quality (N= 6805).

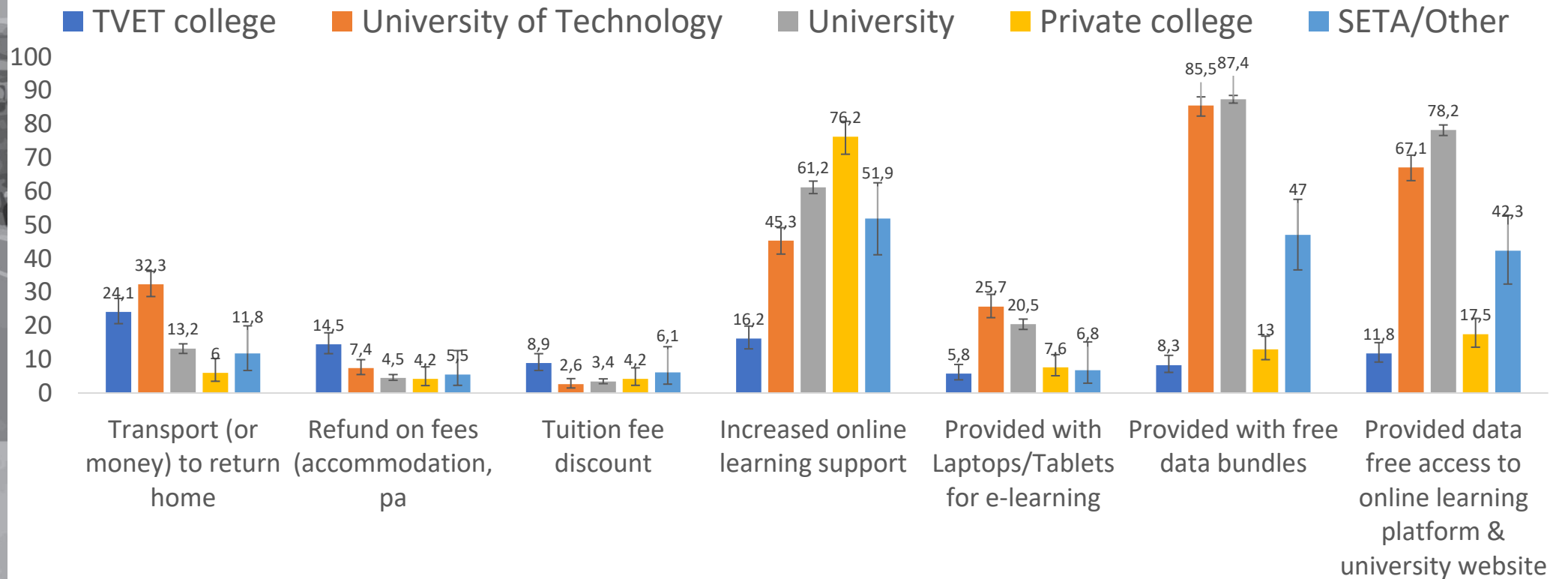
Percentage who reported that virtual learning was provided by their institution



SUPPORT RECEIVED FROM INSTITUTION

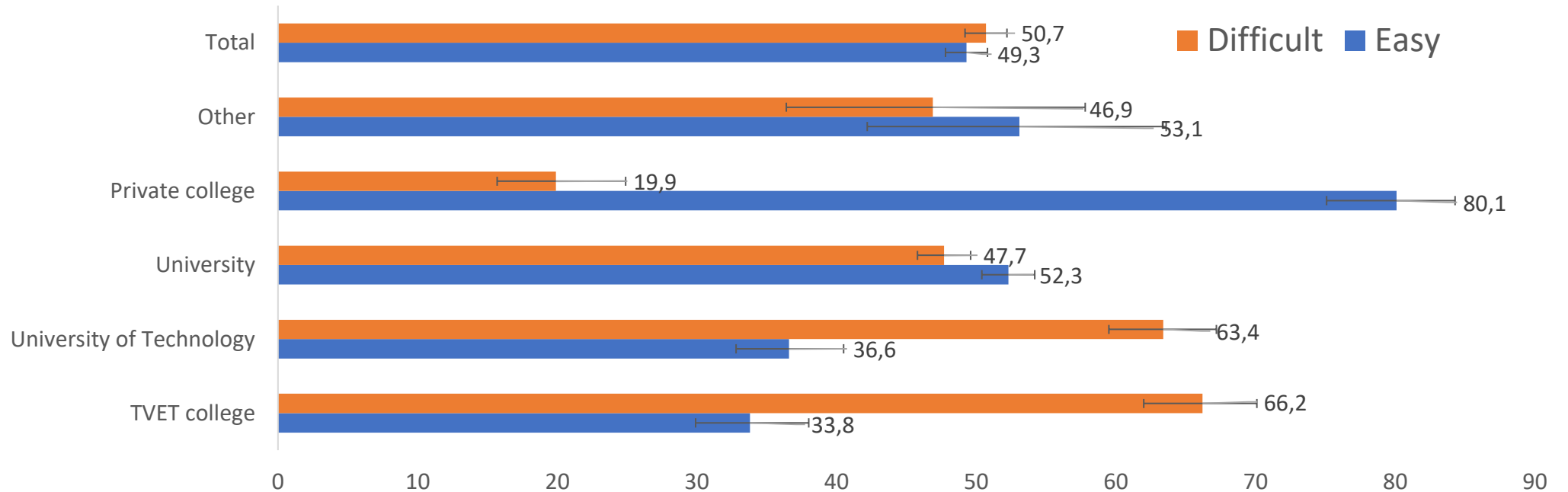
Students received the most support from their institutions in the areas of online learning, provision of data free bundles and data free access to the online learning platform and the university website.

6-24% of students received transport support to return home during lockdown and 5-15% received refunds on fees or accommodation expenses. Significantly more TVET and University of Technology students received transport to return home and fee refunds.



COMMUNICATING WITH THE INSTITUTION DURING LOCKDOWN

Almost two thirds of students (66.2%) from TVET colleges found it difficult to communicate with their institutions, followed by those in university of technology with 63.7%. Most private college students found it easy to communicate with their colleges.

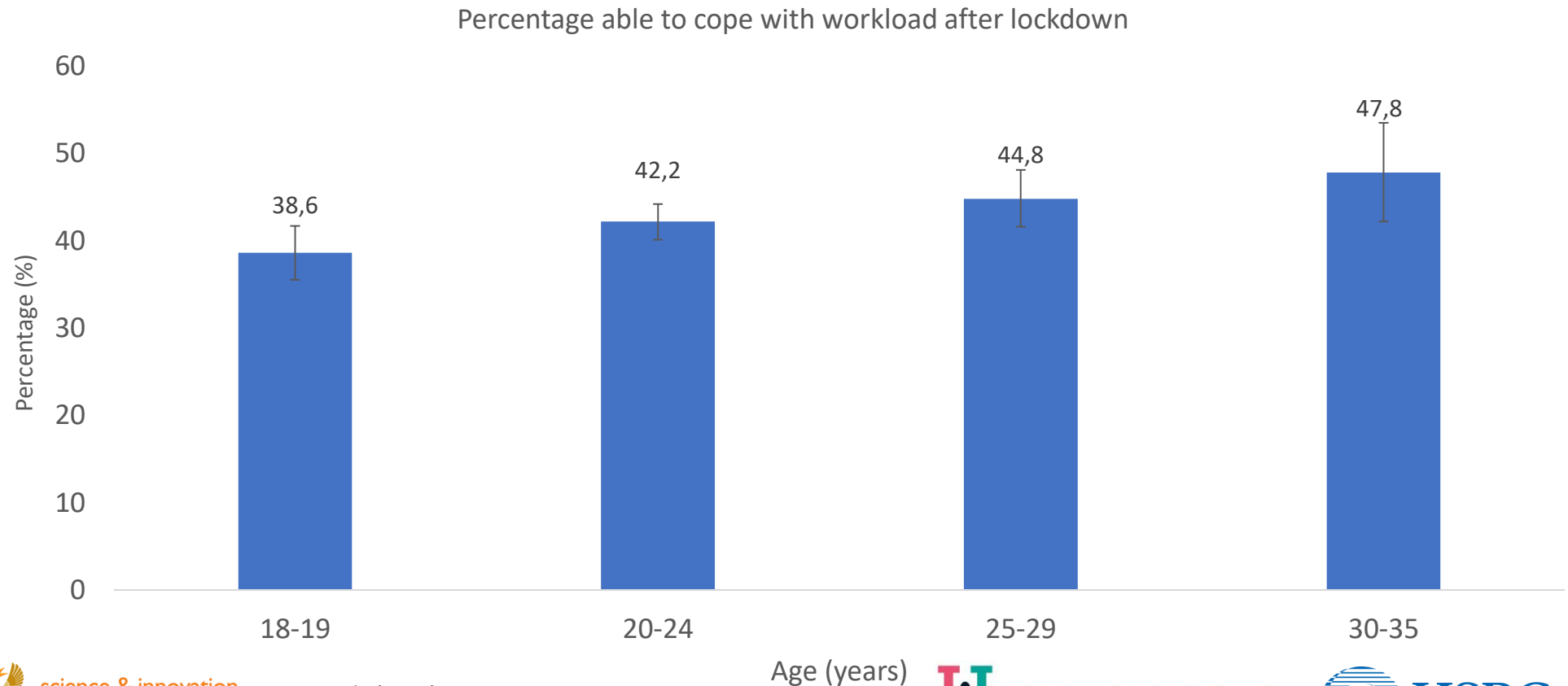


Most students found it easy (66.6%) to communicate with their lecturers during lockdown
39% found it easy to communicate with IT support services at their institution while 21% found it difficult
31.1% and 24.2% indicating difficulty communicating with library services and admin support staff respectively

ABLE TO COPE WITH WORKLOAD AFTER LOCKDOWN

Overall 41.8% (95% CI 40.4-43.3) of students indicated they would be able to cope with the workload post lockdown. A further 19.4% (95% CI 18.3-20.6) said they would not cope whilst 38.7% (95% CI 37.3-40.2) said they unsure (N=6796).

When stratified by age group, fewer 18-19 year olds (38.6%) indicating an ability to cope with the workload after lockdown than older students.





MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT



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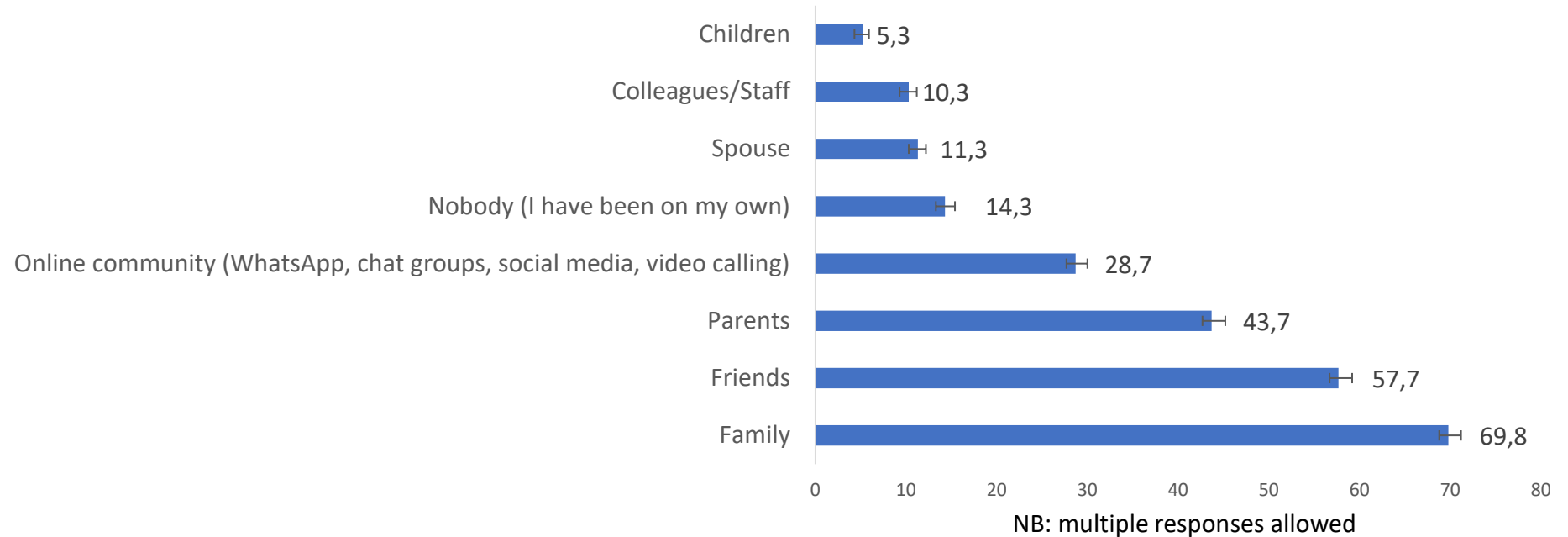


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SOURCES OF HELPFUL SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

The main sources of social and emotional support reported by students during the lockdown were from family (69.8%), friends (57.7%) and parents (43.7%).

Source of helpful social & emotional support



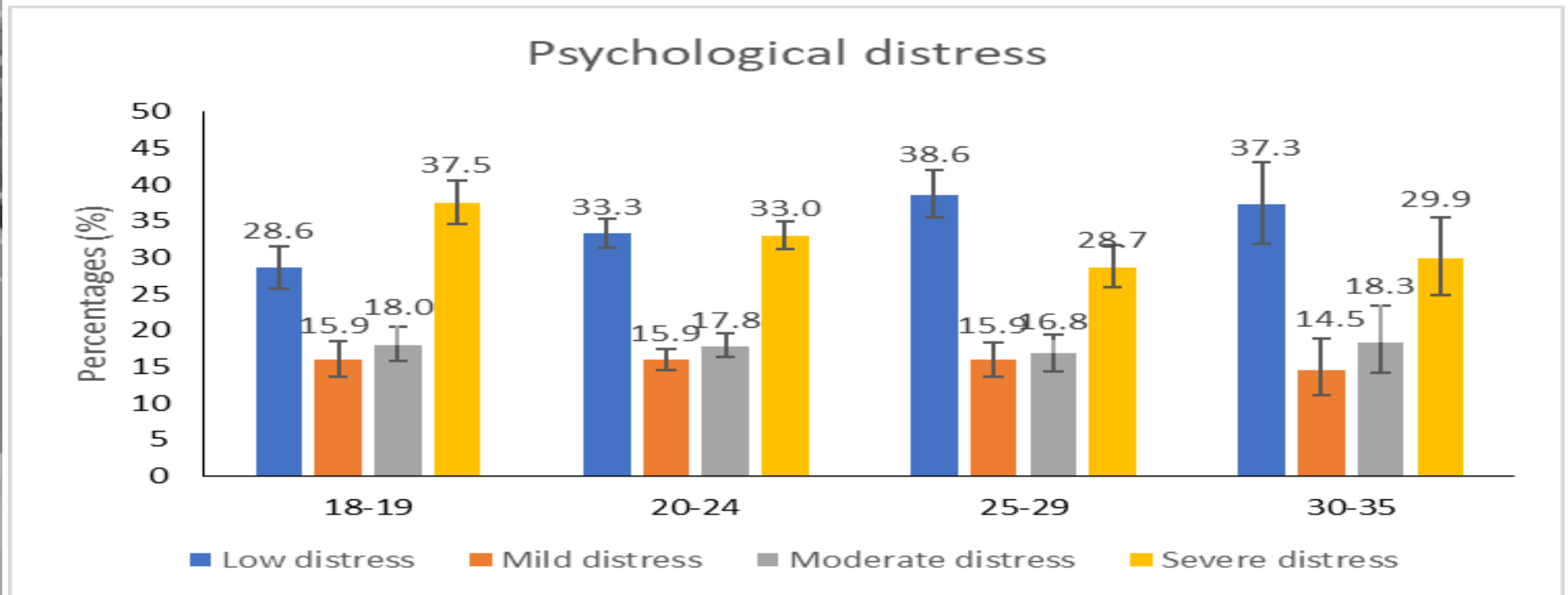
The majority (78.9%, 95% CI: 77.6-80.1) felt that students should get routine counselling support during the pandemic, with more females than males reporting this (N=6761).



PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS

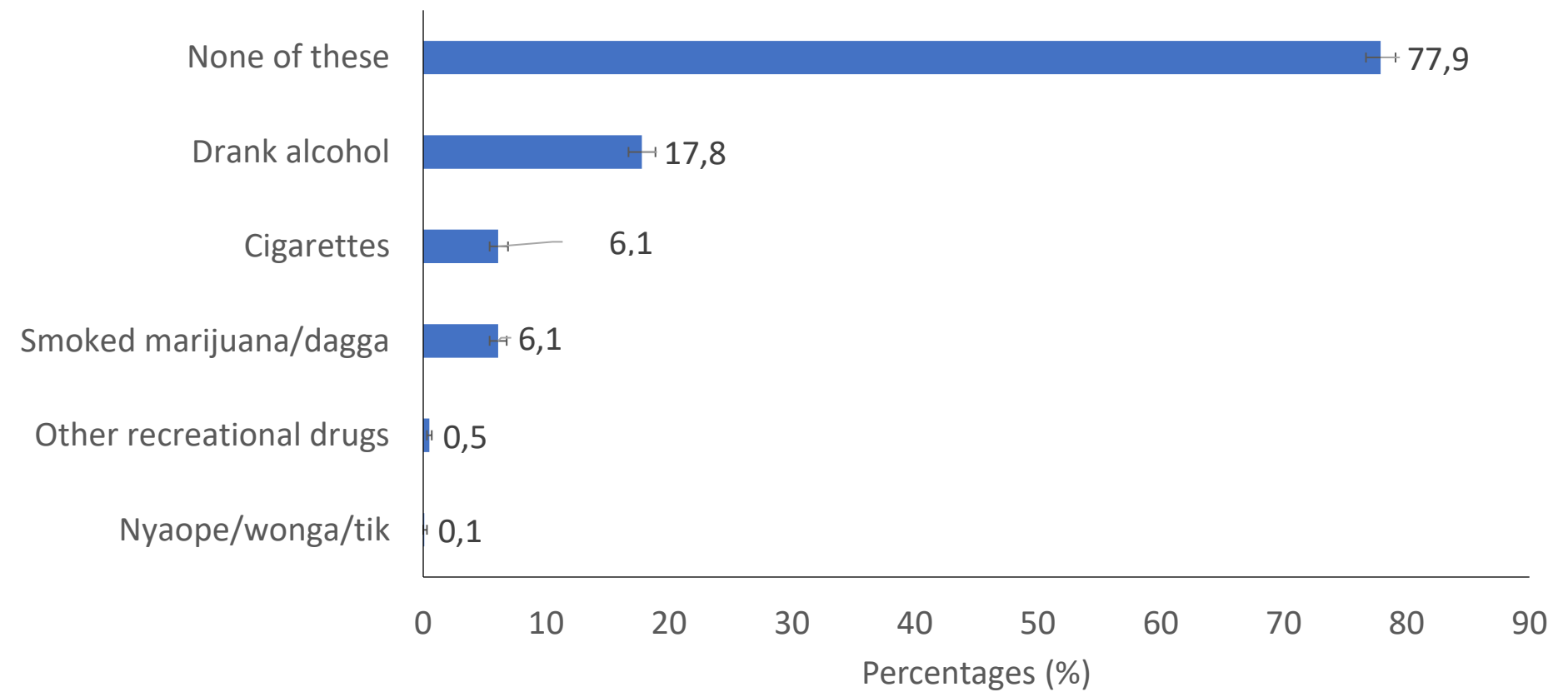
Psychological distress was measured by the Kessler-10, a 10-items scale measuring current non-specific distress. Over 65% of students experienced mild to severe psychological distress.

A higher proportion of 18-19 year olds reported severe psychological distress (37.5%) than 25-29 year olds (28.7%) and 30-35 year olds (29.9%). Psychological distress was more prevalent among female than male students, and in those with high self-perceived risk of becoming infected with COVID-19.



SUBSTANCE USE IN THE PAST 30 DAYS

Over three quarters (78%) of the students reported that they did not use any substances during the past month. 17.8% (95% CI: 16.7-18.9) reported drinking alcohol, 6% smoked cigarettes, 6% smoked dagga and <1 used other drugs (recreational drugs, nyaope, whoonga, tik).





GENDER BASED VIOLENCE



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PHYSICAL ATTACKS

- In total 21.2% (95% CI 20.1-22.5) of students said they experienced any one of more of 9 options of physical attacks in their households or on campus (N=6771).
- 23.2% of females (95% CI 21.8-24.6) said they experienced physical attacks in their households or on campus compared to 19.1% of males (95% CI 17.2-21.2)

Frequency of physical attacks among those who experienced any form of these physical attacks (n=1481):

- 25.4% (95% CI 22.8-28.2) said it happened more frequently during lockdown.
- 22.3% (95% CI 19.9-25.0) said it happened the same amount as before.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Phase 1

Institutional
Support

Communication

Health and
Wellbeing

Phase 2- Impact Study of HIGHER HEALTH Interventions on COVID-19 across Universities, TVETs and CETs:

On Staff Support:
Management, Academics
and Frontline

On Student Councils, Peer
Educators, Student
Governing Bodies &
General Students

COMMUNICATION

- Effective communication with students when off campus must be prioritized.
- Communication strategy improvements with clear implementable plans
 - Communication should be motivational, timely, regular, factual and non-sensational i.e. lessons can be taken from WHO briefings and include Q&A for members of the public
 - Communication must identify fake information
 - A mechanism on a platform accessible to all healthcare workers i.e. an information hub that provides data, scientific evidence and information pertaining to evolving information about the new pandemic
 - Consolidated clinical information should be synthesized and disseminated by NDOH structures for all healthcare workers (reliable sources of information)



INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

- Make data bundles accessible to all students studying remotely and enable virtual learning platforms
- Support for campus environments by:
 - Ensuring sufficient infrastructure/spaces for infection control
 - Clear protocols for screening and referring students with symptoms
- Motivational communication material to encourage and enforce preventive behaviours (mask wearing, distancing) among students across all institutions of higher learning.
- Create campus wide awareness for the need to promote healthy behaviours i.e. stop smoking, reduce/stop alcohol consumption and unsafe social gatherings

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

- Pro-active health and wellbeing programmes should be developed and implemented across all institutions nationally
 - Core curriculums should be adapted to include psychosocial components that would assist maintaining and promoting health and wellbeing
 - The programme must be tailored and targeted for all levels of study from first years to post graduate
 - A multi-disciplinary support mechanism for acute situational counselling and debriefing sessions, coping strategies for all levels of study should be implemented

THANK YOU

- Thanks are due not only to HSRC and HIGHER HEALTH, but also to key partners in implementing the survey
- Thank you to influencers and media personalities for encouraging participation of the survey and recording public health messaging
- Thank you to the Department of Science and Innovation and the Department of Health for support and strategic direction
- Thank you to all our youth for participating in this study.