



**Survey on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and 'lock-down' measures on the mental and emotional wellbeing and physical health of Bracknell Forest residents**

During the week 27<sup>th</sup> April to 3<sup>rd</sup> May, the sixth week of the 'lock-down' implemented by Government, Healthwatch Bracknell Forest ran a short survey asking local residents to assess the impact of COVID-19 and the social distancing measures on their mental and emotional wellbeing and their physical health.

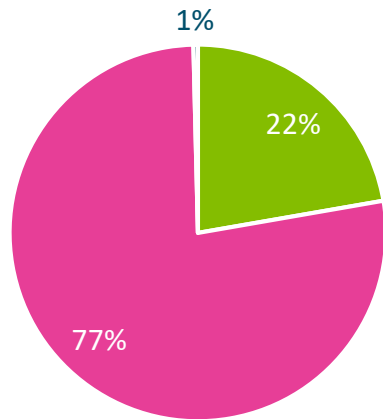
The survey was promoted on the organisation's website, social media channels, the community response volunteers, people contacting the community response hub for help and support and via other community partner organisations.

Healthwatch Bracknell Forest is also hosting the community response hub helpline so has been able to add anecdotal evidence received during conversations with local residents to provide additional information to support and explain survey findings.

777 residents of Bracknell Forest provided full responses to the survey.

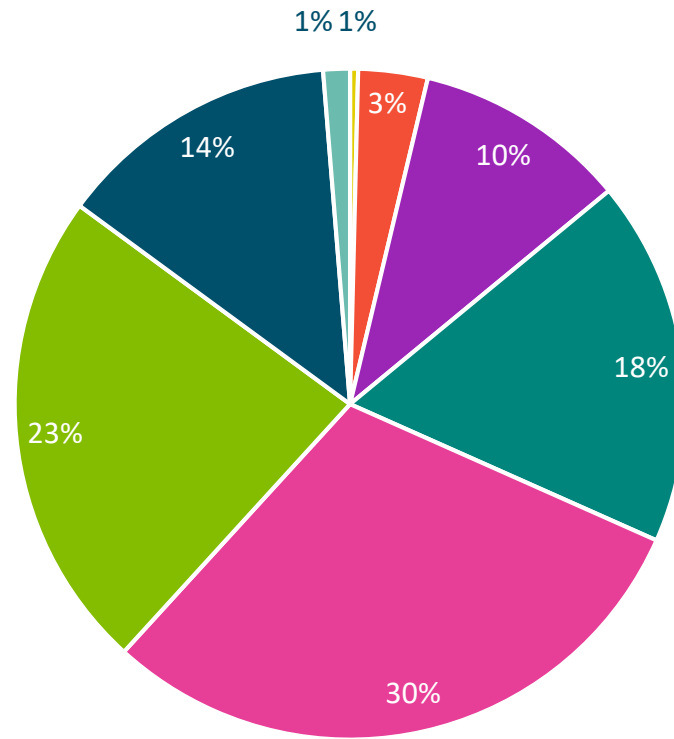
# Demographic information of people completing the survey

## Gender



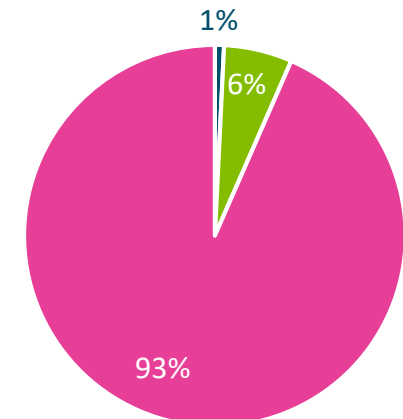
■ Male ■ Female ■ Other/self described

## Age



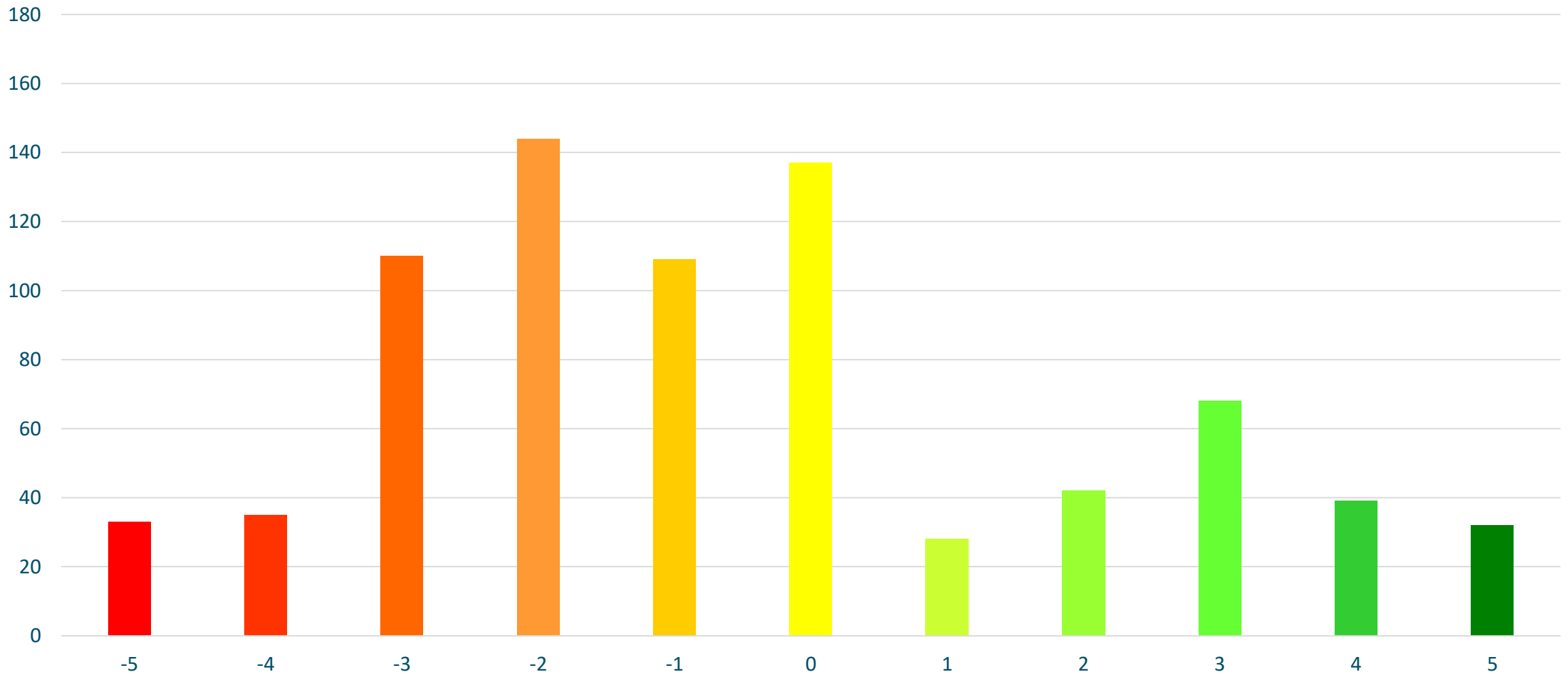
■ Under 18 ■ 18-24 ■ 25-34 ■ 35-44  
■ 45-54 ■ 55-64 ■ 65-74 ■ 75+

## COVID-19 status



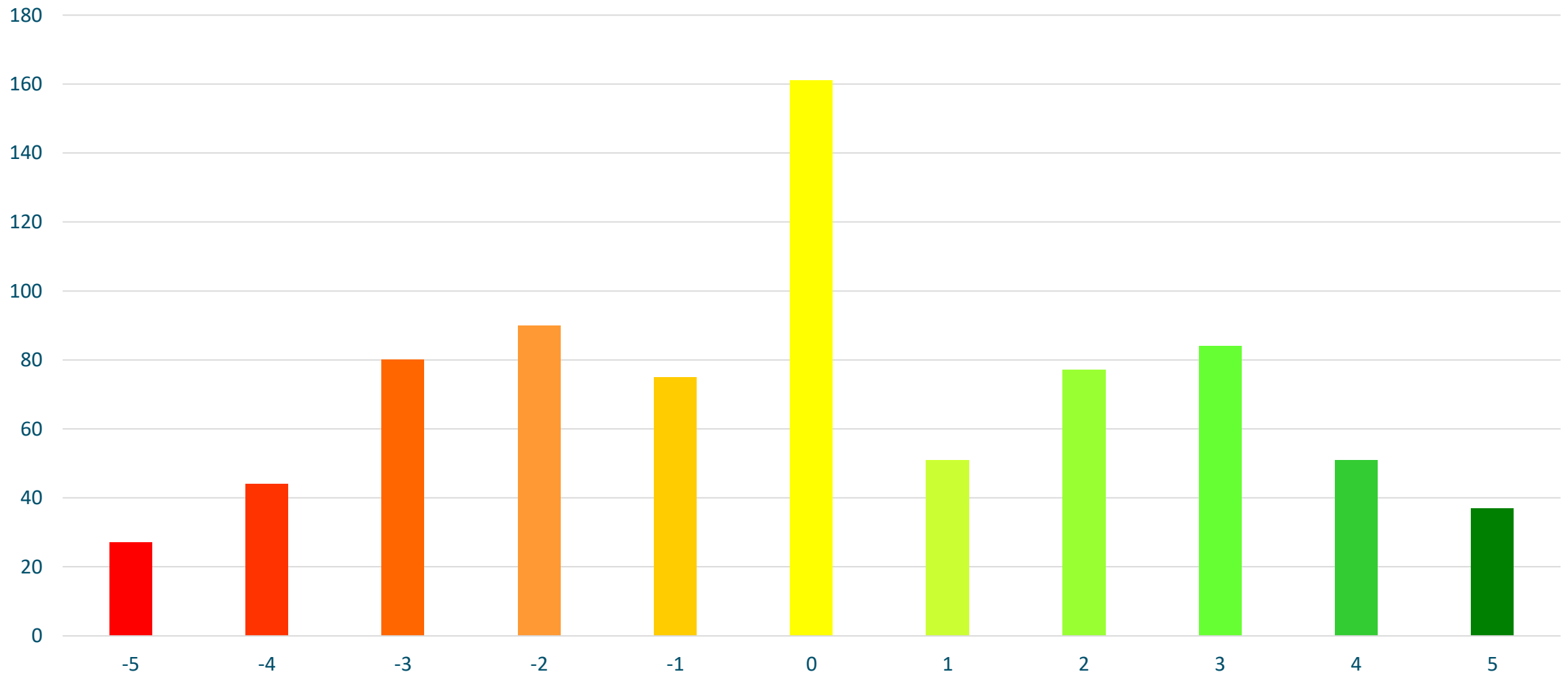
■ Self-isolating (has, or someone in household has, covid-19 symptoms)  
■ Shielding (Identified as clinically extremely vulnerable)  
■ Social distancing (everyone else)

## Impact on mental and emotional wellbeing



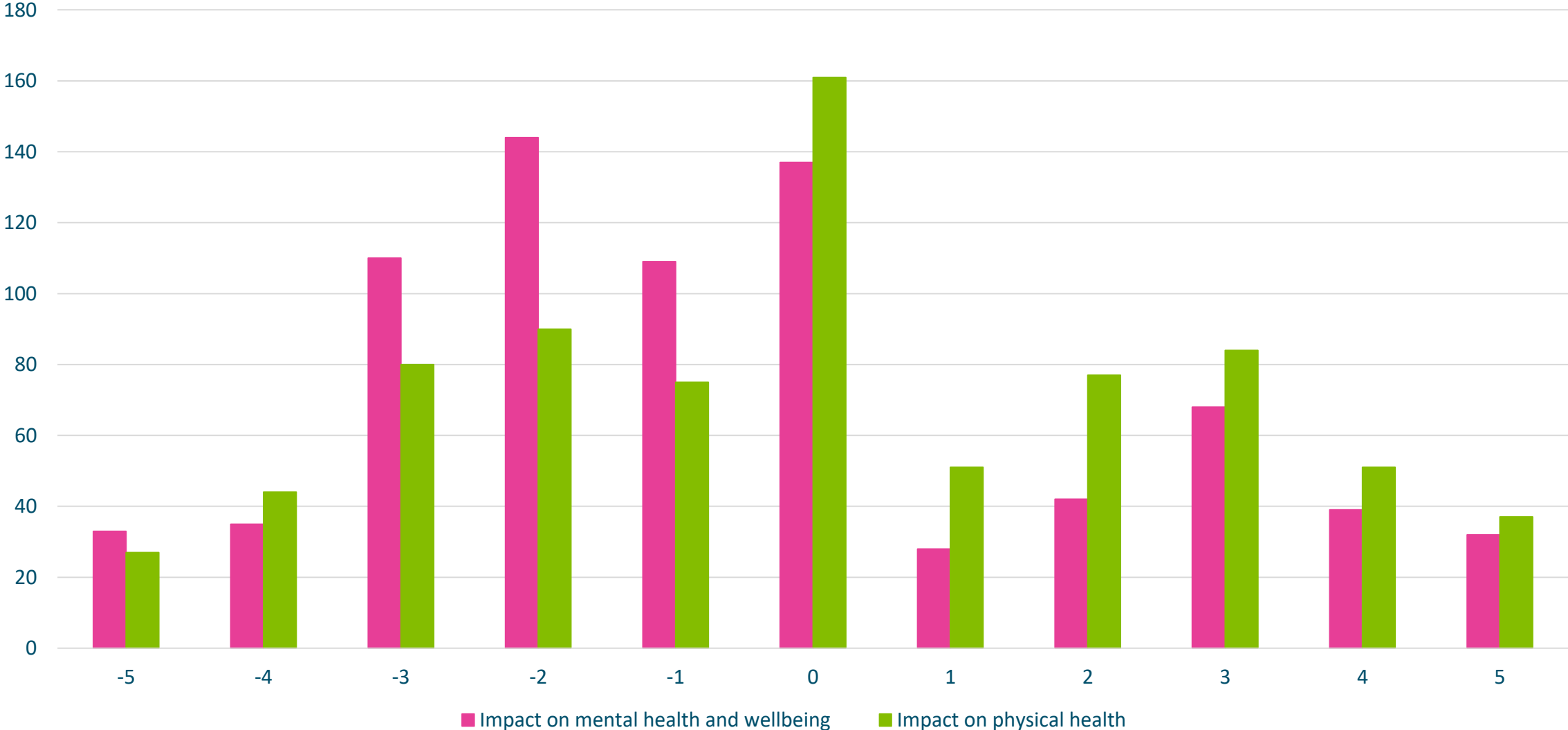
Respondents were asked to score their current mental and emotional wellbeing in comparison to at the start of the official extreme social distancing measures (lockdown) implemented on 23<sup>rd</sup> March (0 indicates no change)

## Impact on physical health

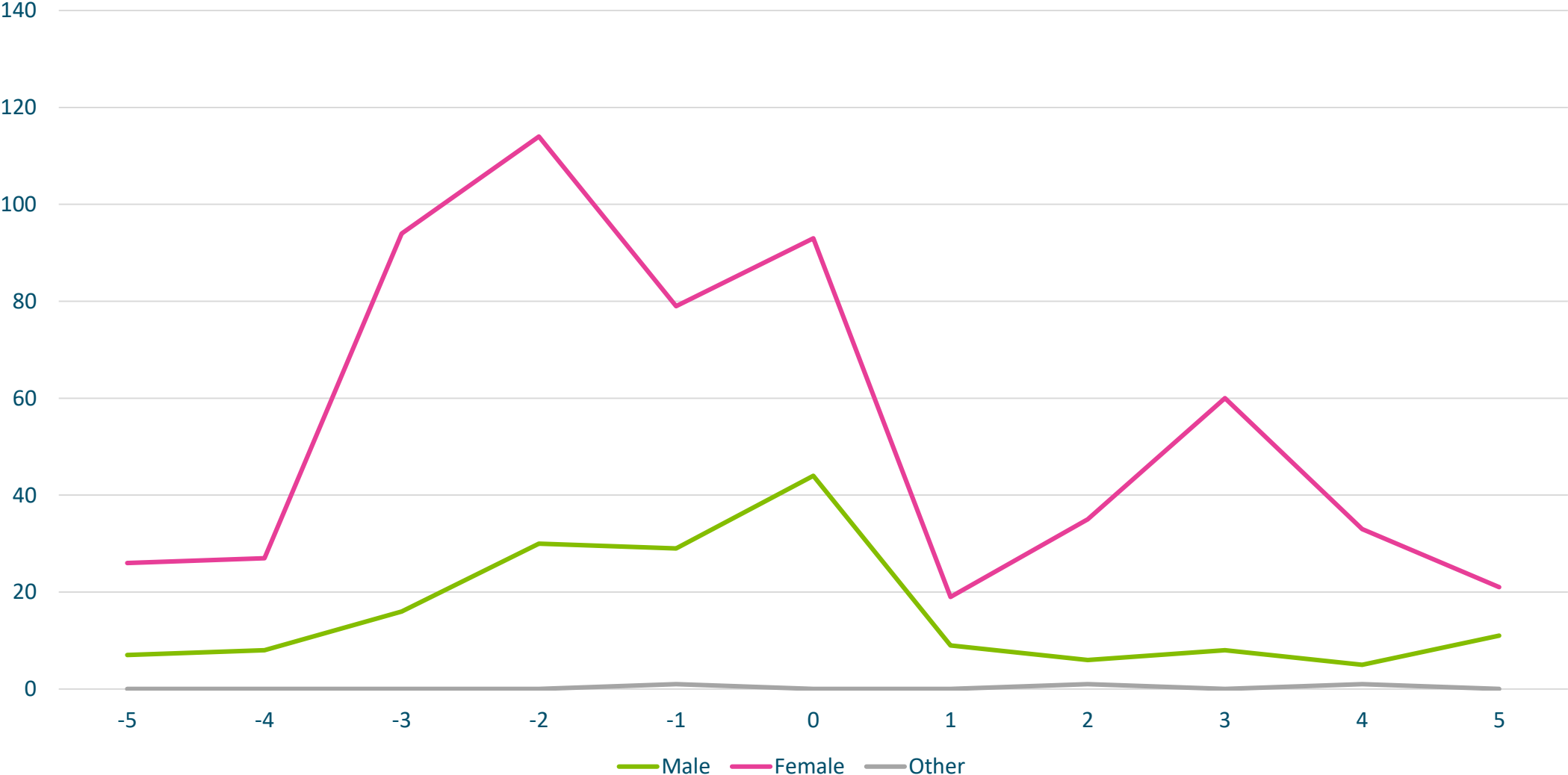


Respondents were asked to score their current physical health in comparison to at the start of the official extreme social distancing measures (lockdown) implemented on 23<sup>rd</sup> March (0 indicates no change)

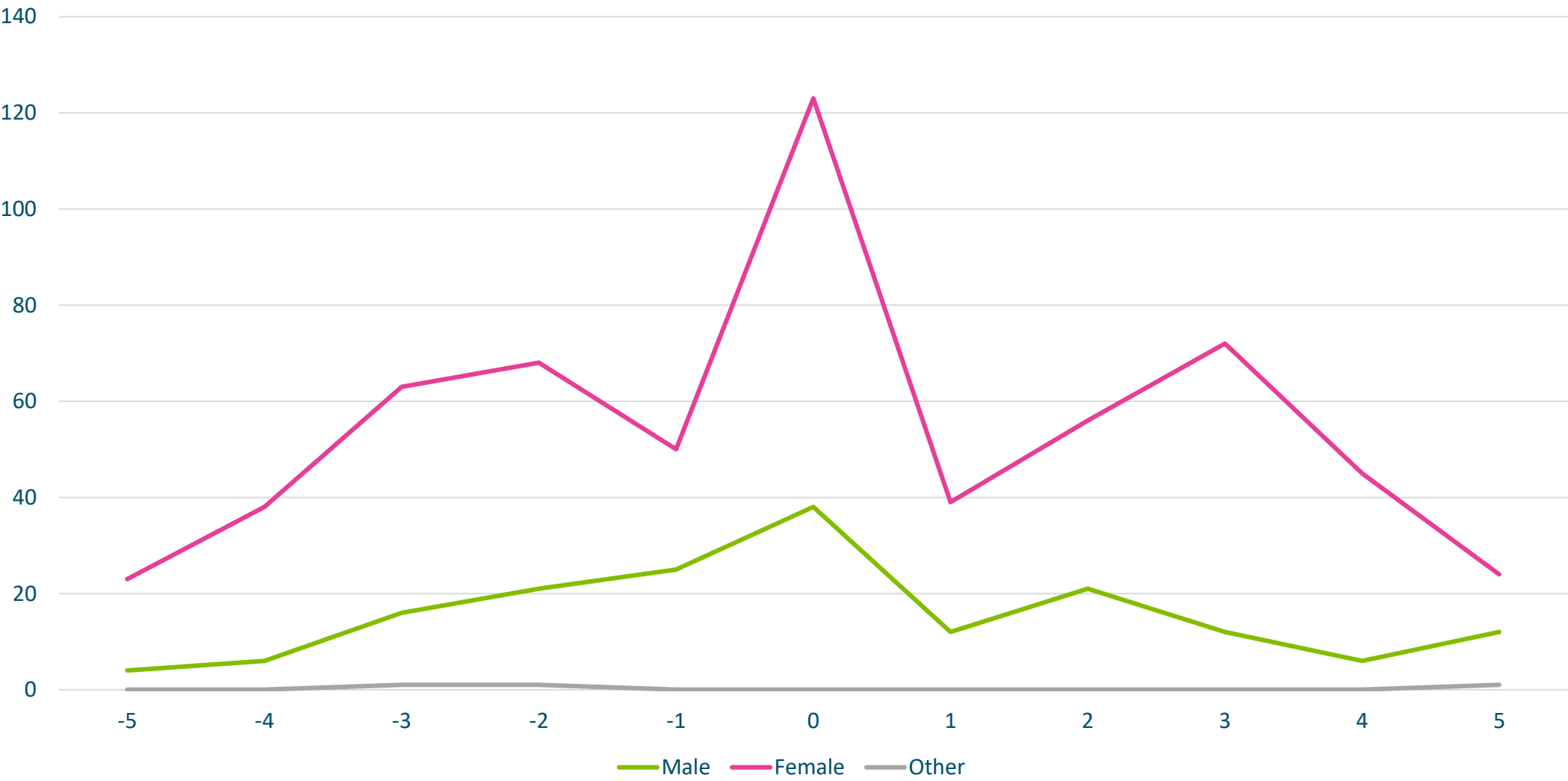
# Impact on mental and emotional wellbeing and impact on physical health presented together



# Impact on mental and emotional wellbeing shown by gender

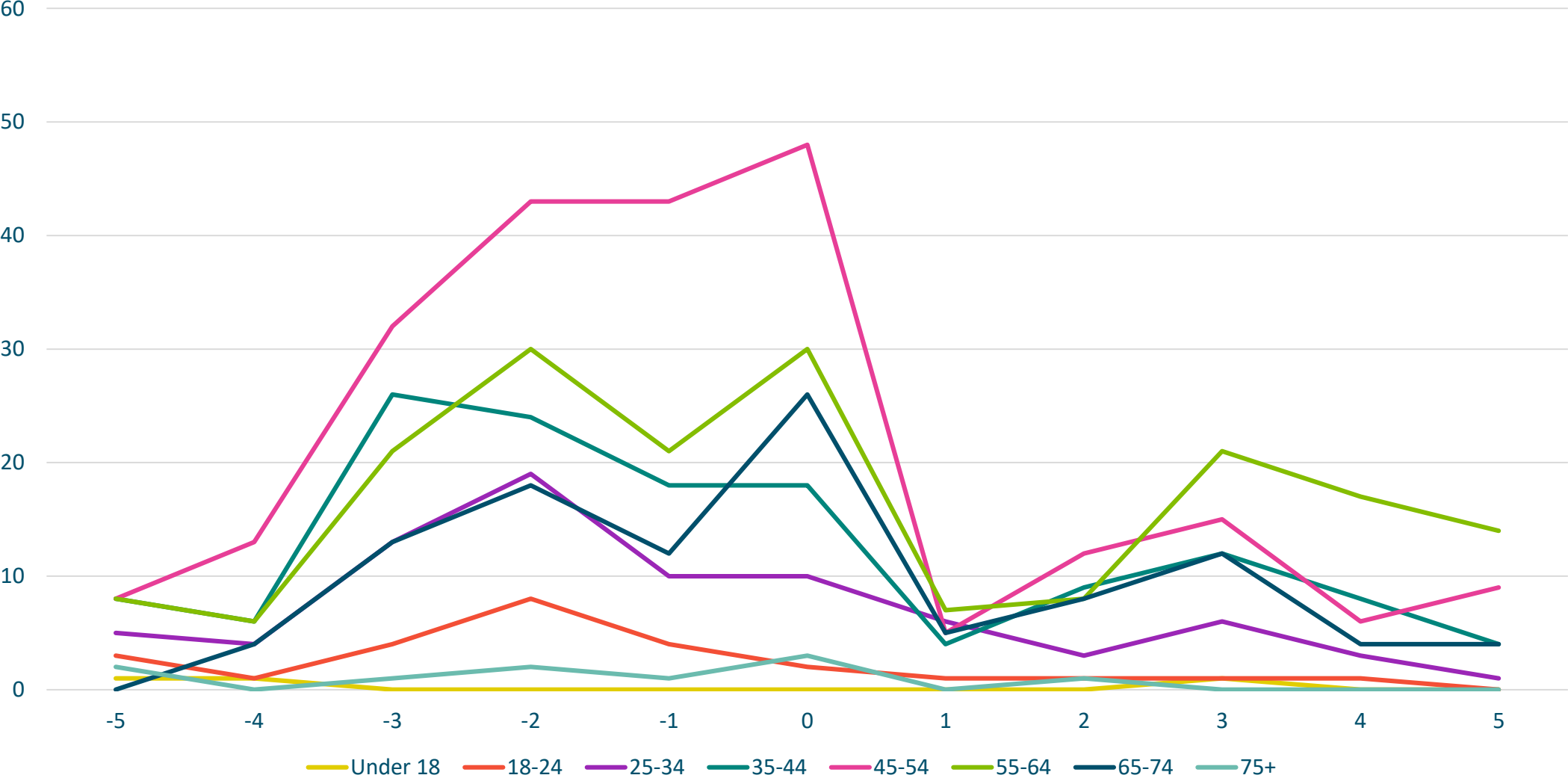


# Impact on physical health shown by gender

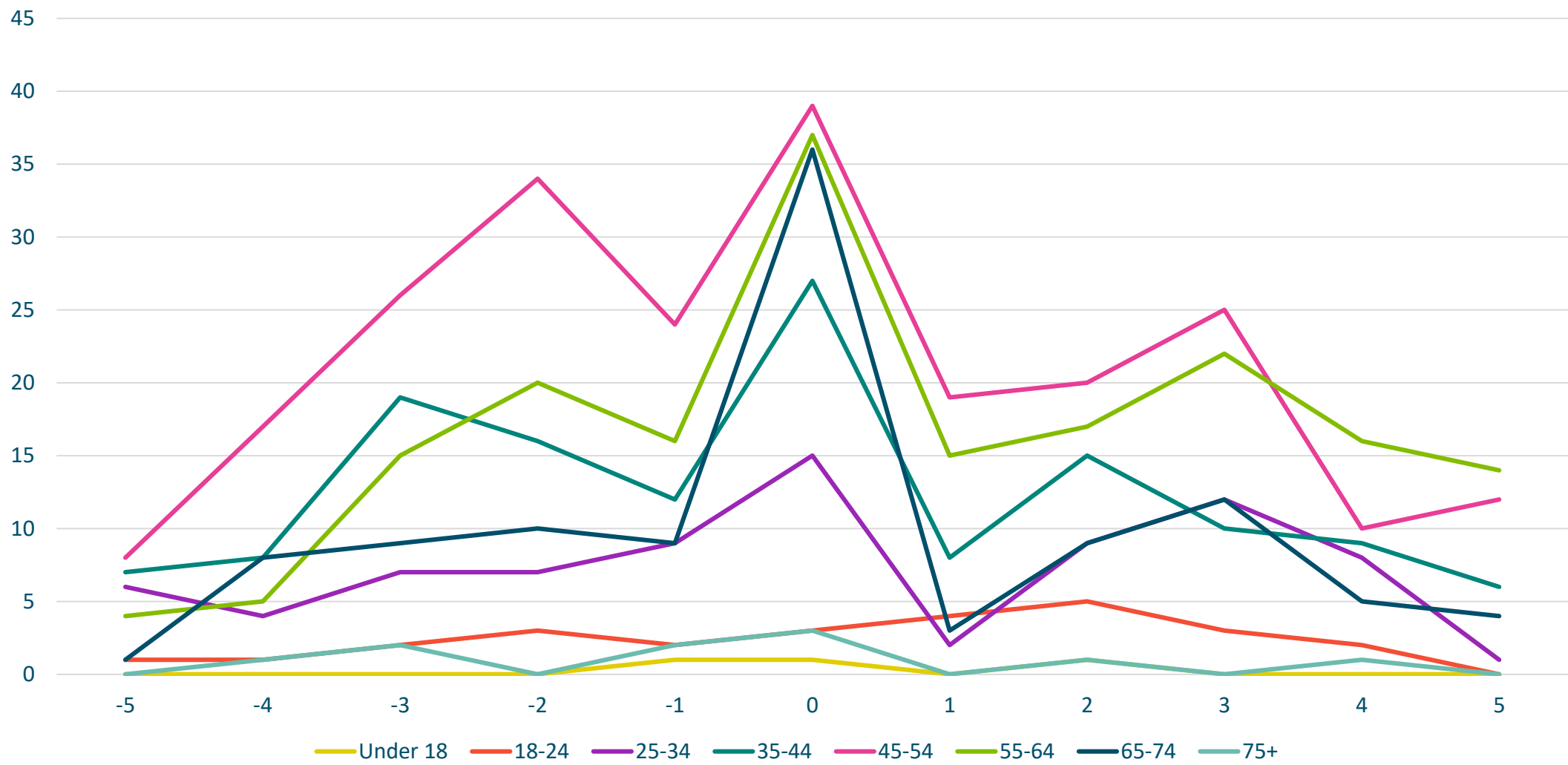




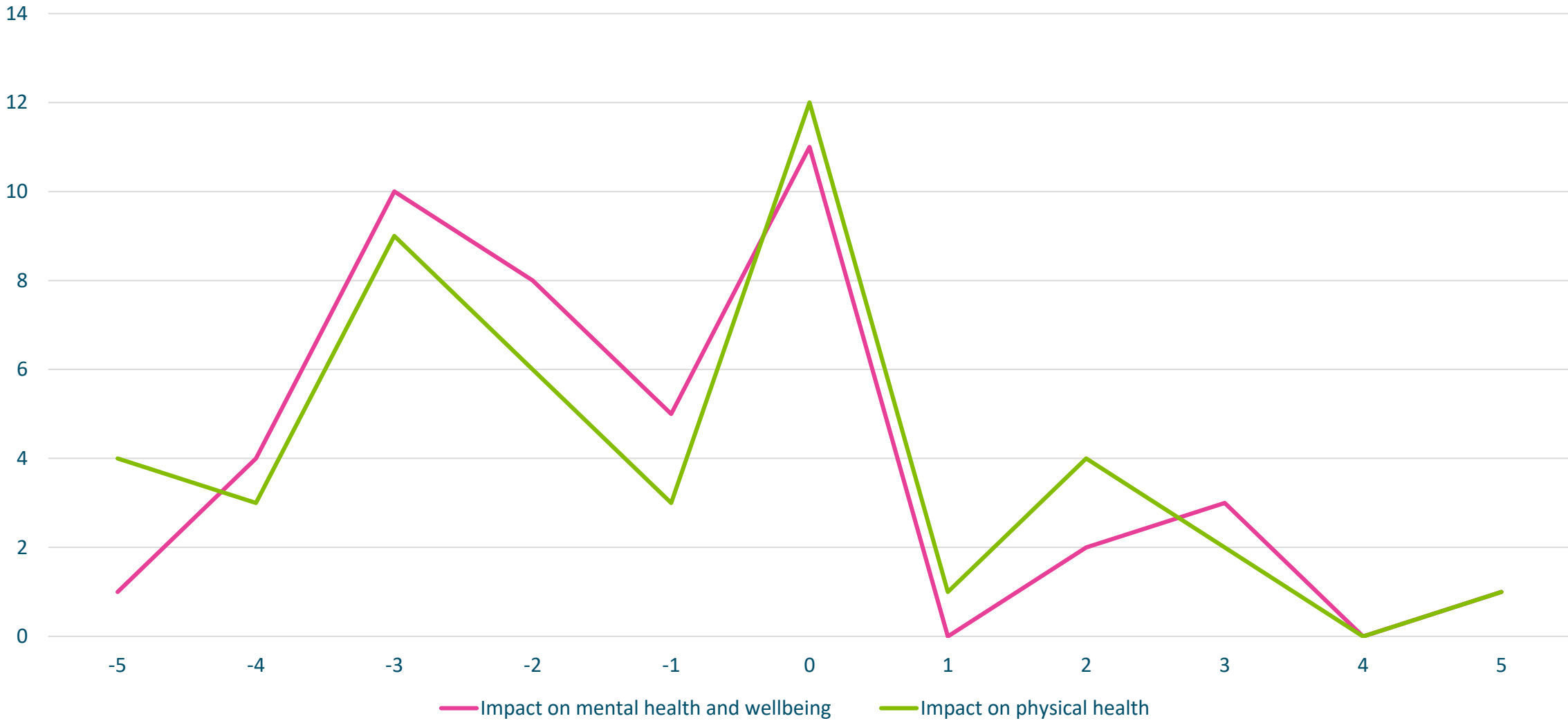
# Impact on mental and emotional wellbeing shown by age



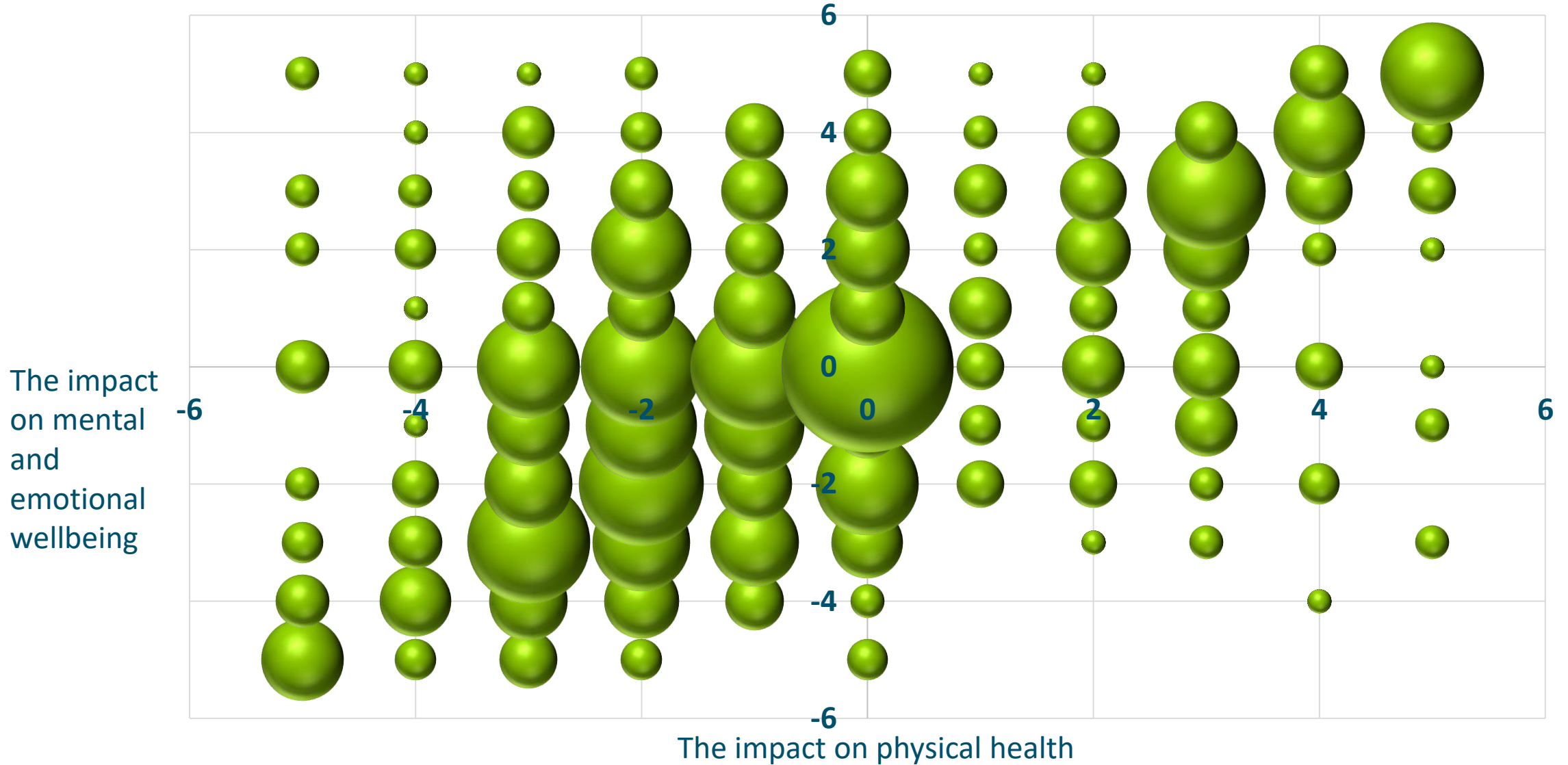
# Impact on physical health shown by age



# The impact on people who are 'shielding' – those identified as extremely clinically vulnerable by the NHS and who have been advised to stay in completely for at least 12 weeks.



# The relationship between impact on mental and emotional wellbeing and the impact on physical health



## Summary of survey findings

- 17.63% of people reported no impact, negative or positive, on their mental and emotional wellbeing
- 20.72% of people reported no impact, negative or positive, on their physical health; this is also the highest frequency score for impact on physical health
- Included in the above were people reporting no impact, negative or positive, on either their mental and emotional wellbeing or physical health – 6.82%
- Over half the people who responded to the survey, 55.47%, reported a negative impact on their mental and emotional wellbeing
- The highest frequency score for impact on mental and emotional wellbeing was -2, with 18.53% of people scoring this to describe the impact
- 40.67% of people who responded to the survey, reported a negative impact on their physical health
- 1.54% of people scored themselves with the most negative impact (-5) on both mental and emotional wellbeing and physical health and 2.45% scored themselves with the most positive impact (5)
- The 5 highest frequency related scores were: 0 : 0 (6.82%), -1 : 0 (3.73%), -2 : -2 (3.60%), -3 : -3 (3.48%), -2 : 0 (3.35%) *First score relates to mental and emotional wellbeing, second score relates to physical health*

## Anecdotal evidence; helping to explain the impact on mental and emotional wellbeing and the impact on physical health

Healthwatch Bracknell Forest is one of the partners providing the community response to COVID-19. As part of this response it hosts the telephone hub. The hub has received and made thousands of calls to date. Many of these calls do not result in a practical task for the network of volunteers but involve the provision of information, advice and signposting (a core function of a local Healthwatch service), reassurance and sometimes just a listening ear.

### Factors impacting on mental and emotional wellbeing (negatively)

We have spoken to many people, including those who are fit and well, who are very anxious about the virus and fear catching it. We have also seen this have a major impact on people with existing mental health issues.

Concerns about money and job security and impact on benefits (not being able to sign on or actively search for a job) is also a major concern; although this has somewhat abated since the government put in place schemes such as the coronavirus job retention scheme (furlough).

Home schooling has also caused stress and anxiety for some parents (mainly mothers) along with the practicalities of food-shopping and essential journeys. Again, this has been raised mainly by mothers. Some of these are single parents but others have told us that their partners are still working.

Being confined with members of the household/family with little respite has been causing stress and we have had to signpost one person to domestic abuse support services.

Unpaid carers (including carers of disabled children) have told us that things are difficult particularly when sources of usual respite and schooling are not available. Currently day centres, specialist schools and activities for older people and people with disabilities are closed and some family carers have cancelled their professional carers and planned respite in local care homes due to fears of transmission of the virus. Caring for people with dementia and other conditions that impact on mental cognition and understanding is proving challenging for many; limited understanding, daily routines disrupted, behaviour that challenges are all reasons shared with us. Where people do not have access to a garden – particularly those shielding or those caring/parenting, this has been shared with us as having a negative impact on people's mental health.

Separation from extended family and friends is causing a negative impact on mental and emotional wellbeing for many. Although technology has enabled many to stay in touch not everyone has access or the knowledge to use. Many have told us it does not really replace physical contact (grandparents and parents living in different households in particular have told us this) and for some, family and friends also were a source of crucial help and support – particularly for those with disabilities, children or caring responsibilities. One older person we have supported regularly, who lived during WW2, said she felt the social isolation she was currently experiencing made this time, for her, worse than the war as then the threat of the blitz, although significant, did not stop communities from socialising and coming together to give each other company and support.

Some anxieties have been around concern about what support may be available and also about the information and advice surrounding both the virus and the lockdown restrictions. Although there is an official system of support for people who are shielding, the set up and administration of this is carried out centrally and local support – the community response hub, local authority and health services – have limited influence over this.

Government guidelines about social distancing and essential travel are open to interpretation and this has caused anxiety and concern about potentially breaking these guidelines; in some cases this anxiety has been extreme.

Patients with long-term conditions, particularly those who need life-sustaining treatment, have in some cases expressed concern how they can continue to access these safely and, in some instances, we have been told of some treatments (such as palliative chemotherapy) being postponed or cancelled. As well as a negative impact on physical health this has obviously had a negative impact on mental and emotional wellbeing. We have however received positive feedback on local palliative and end of life care provided by both outreach teams and hospices.

The final significant area causing negative impact on mental and emotional health is around support for people identified as high risk but not shielding; people over 70, people with disabilities and conditions not covered by the extremely clinically vulnerable list and families of these people. Many of their existing arrangements enabling them to live as independently as possible have suddenly stopped; online shopping deliveries, care that is not essential and social and support activities.



### Factors impacting on mental and emotional wellbeing (positively)

Not everyone is impacted in the same way. Not working, home schooling, spending time with family (household only) have also all been mentioned to us as having a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing. Being able to work at home and not having to commute has overwhelmingly been seen as positive rather than negative. Relief from societal pressures, particularly in respect of work and parenting, has enabled people to relax and not feel guilty or pressured taking time out for hobbies, relaxation, family time and exercise.

Once people, particularly the shielded and those at risk in other ways, are aware there is a strong local support system, as well as the formal support from Government, this has provided reassurance and negated concerns and fears.

Volunteering has had a positive impact on people's mental and emotional wellbeing. It enables people to feel empowered in a situation they have little control of. People are enjoying the sense of community. Even those unable to volunteer with the community response, due to constrictions on availability or because of their risk factors or circumstances in relation to the virus, have found ways to contribute; scrub hubs, befriending, crocheting and knitting bears, clapping for carers and drawing rainbows.

### Factors impacting on physical health (negatively)

Concern about catching the virus have prevented some people from exercising outside of the home. Concern about the 2 metre distancing rule in relation to jogging and cycling have been raised by some people. People walking dogs off lead, despite this being against current guidelines, has also put some people, particularly parents of young children, off outdoor exercising.

Some regular users of leisure facilities and players of team sports have reported lower levels of activity than usual.

Opportunities to get fit and take exercise can also be difficult for people with disabilities, unpaid family carers and parents.

Unhealthy eating habits, such as snacking, and an increase in home baking (also evidenced by lack of flour and eggs available in local supermarkets) has also been mentioned by people we have spoken to.

### Factors impacting on physical health (positively)

Many people have told us that they are exercising more. The reasons given include: more time available, opportunity to spend time with household members and, with exercise being one of the few reasons to be outside of the home, increased motivation.

## Recommendations for local organisations providing information and support

- For local organisations to work together providing accessible information containing consistent messages based on current Government and NHS advice. This should include
  - online sessions and services demonstrating activities such as yoga and keep fit – especially sessions adapted for older people and people with disabilities
  - online sessions and services that promote mental and emotional wellbeing
- Healthwatch Bracknell Forest to share unmet health and social care needs and issues with commissioners and providers
- Make sure that the community response is resilient and adaptive to future changes in government advice and guidelines
- Statutory partners to work with SIGNAL4Carers and other voluntary organisations to provide additional support for unpaid, family carers and plan for future respite and activities so they can be implemented as soon as guidelines changes.
- To repeat the survey during week 12 of the lockdown and social distancing restrictions (currently the last week for 'shielded' people).