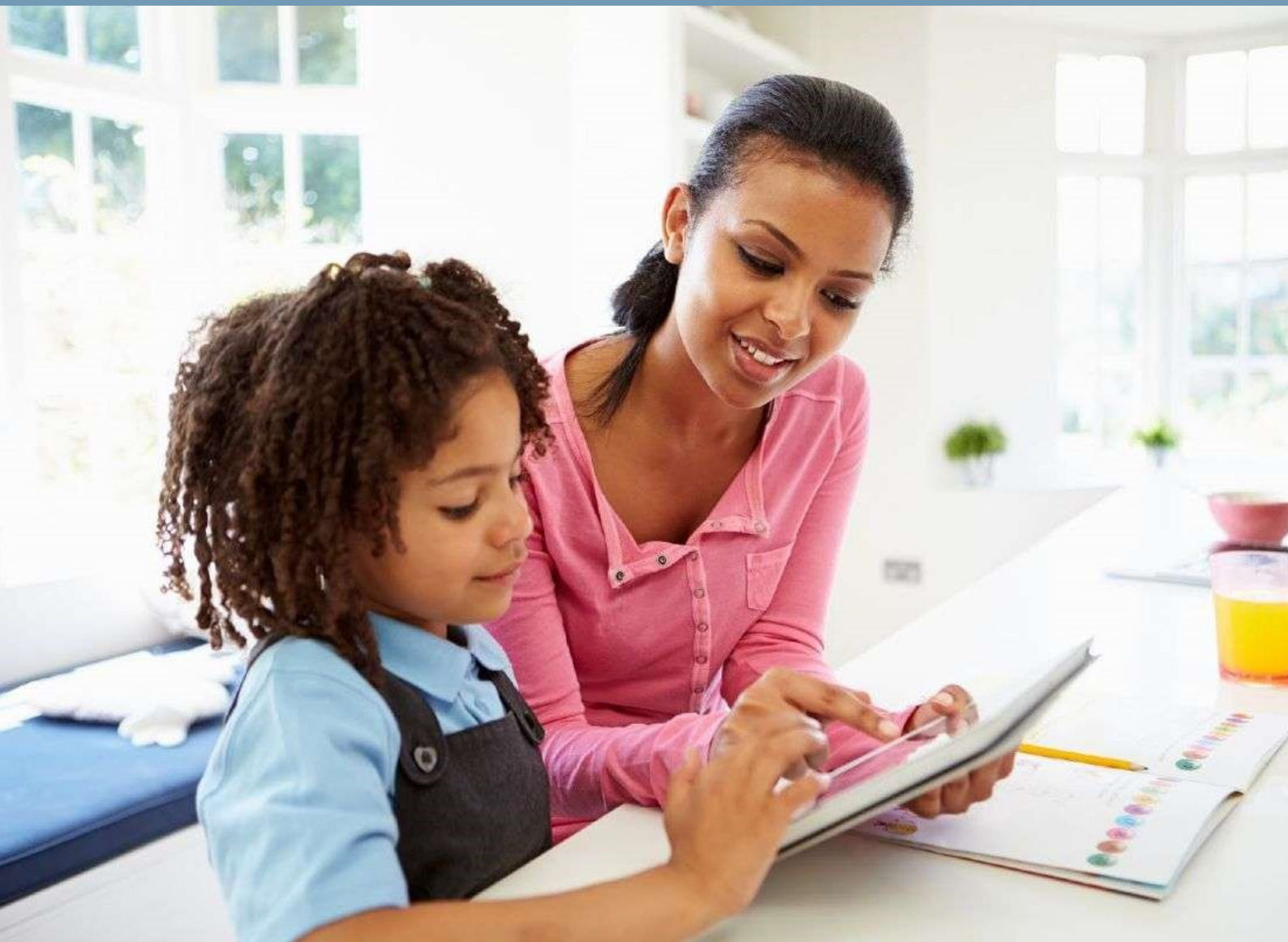


Emotional Wellbeing of Children and Young People Report 2021

A report by Healthwatch Lewisham



June 2021

“For some issues I feel it would be useful to be anonymous to get some help, especially if there is stigma around the topic, but for face to face counselling you can’t remain anonymous.”

Young Lewisham resident

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1. Acknowledgments

Healthwatch Lewisham and our Youth Board members would like to thank the 44 young people who took part in our Children and Young People Emotional Wellbeing Survey. Your experiences will help local services to understand the issues young people face and to help influence the design of services.

We would like to acknowledge the Youth Board themselves; Simi Musa, Nike Ajijola, Sam Jarada, Noura Zampalegre, Kaoutar Marki and Meryem Mustafa for their efforts co-producing the project. As well as staff members - Marzena Zoladz, Mathew Shaw and Raiyan Nassor.

We would like to thank the Lewisham CYP Joint Commissioning Team for their information and support. As well as Lewisham College, Lewisham Learning, South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust, Carers Lewisham, Young Lewisham Project, the Young Mayors Team, Lewisham Local, Parent ENGage CIC Network and Lewisham Safeguarding Partnership in supporting us with this project.

2. Background

Set up in January 2019, the Youth Board is our key mechanism for engaging with young people and understanding their experiences and views of health and social care services. The purpose of the Youth Board is to represent the voices of young people in Lewisham and enable their voices to be heard by and influence local services and commissioners.

Our young people previously have taken part in a variety of different projects including a [‘15 Steps Challenge’](#) at Downham Sexual Health Clinic where they used the quality assurance tool to highlight areas of good practice and areas for improvement.

Mental health is a key priority for our members who have raised awareness through discussions on radio shows and as part of the ‘Quaran-Teen’ Instagram series, which was a platform during the first wave of the pandemic to discuss topics which mattered to them. They also supported the creation of a film to showcase findings from our [‘Making Sense of Mental Health 2018-19’](#) study which focused on young people’s mental health knowledge and experiences.

In January 2021, we developed an online questionnaire to understand the experiences of children and young people in Lewisham in relation to their emotional wellbeing. We recognised that the pandemic has had a significant

impact on our local population, but in particular on our young residents who have experienced exam cancellations and reduced physical contact due to social distancing and infection control measures which caused education to be delivered remotely throughout most of the pandemic.

The purpose of the project was to identify and understand three key aspects:

- The emotional wellbeing needs of children and young people in the London Borough of Lewisham.
- Young people's preferred ways of accessing services to support their emotional needs.
- To understand their awareness of, or experiences, with the emotional wellbeing service that Kooth provides in Lewisham.

3. Methodology

In Autumn 2020, we engaged with the Lewisham CYP Commissioner to understand local priorities and commissioning intentions. Our Youth Board used the information to choose a research topic which they felt matters to young people and can influence the delivery of local services.

Kooth has been available in Lewisham since 2017 and was commissioned for the whole of south east London in 2019. The service offers all children and young people aged 11-19 (or up to the age of 25 for care leavers or young people with additional needs) access to free, anonymous mental health support. This includes self-help materials, mood tracking, online journaling, goal setting tools and a moderated online community of peers.

Following the Care Act 2014 statutory guidance, defining co-production as *“when groups of people get together to influence the way that services are designed, commissioned and delivered”* we worked closely with the Youth Board to ensure that young people were involved in every step of the research. This included choosing the subject area, influencing the design of our online questionnaire and engaging with local organisations.

We collected views through digital engagement via an online questionnaire from January to April which was open to all young people who live in the London Borough of Lewisham and were between the ages of 11-25.

The survey consisted of 17 questions which were a mixture of quantitative and qualitative, participants were able to provide further details about their experiences through free text comments.

We promoted the questionnaire through our website, social media and via a network of local contacts across the health and care and voluntary sectors. Schools and colleges also supported in promoting the survey to their students.

All feedback was anonymous.

4. Limitations

Our research project took place during January- March 2021 which coincided with the second wave of the Coronavirus pandemic in the United Kingdom. Engagement had to be completed virtually in order to follow Government guidelines issued to protect the general public.

As a result, we were unable to use our traditional methodology of engaging face-to-face with young people in Lewisham and instead needed to adapt our strategy to work closer with our existing networks of service providers, community and voluntary sector organisations to promote our survey to the young people they support and provide services for.

The lack of face-to-face engagement somewhat impacted on our ability to reach and engage with a wide proportion of young people, especially through schools and colleges.

5. Emotional wellbeing needs of CYP in Lewisham

This first section of our online questionnaire focused on understanding the emotional wellbeing needs of children and young people in Lewisham. This section breaks down the findings from the responses of the 44 young people who participated.

Q1. Have you at any point felt you would benefit from support and help around feeling low or depressed, stress, anxiety, friendship concerns, worrying, lack of sleep, bullying, relationship issues, self-harm, relationships with food, body image, identity, or sexuality?"

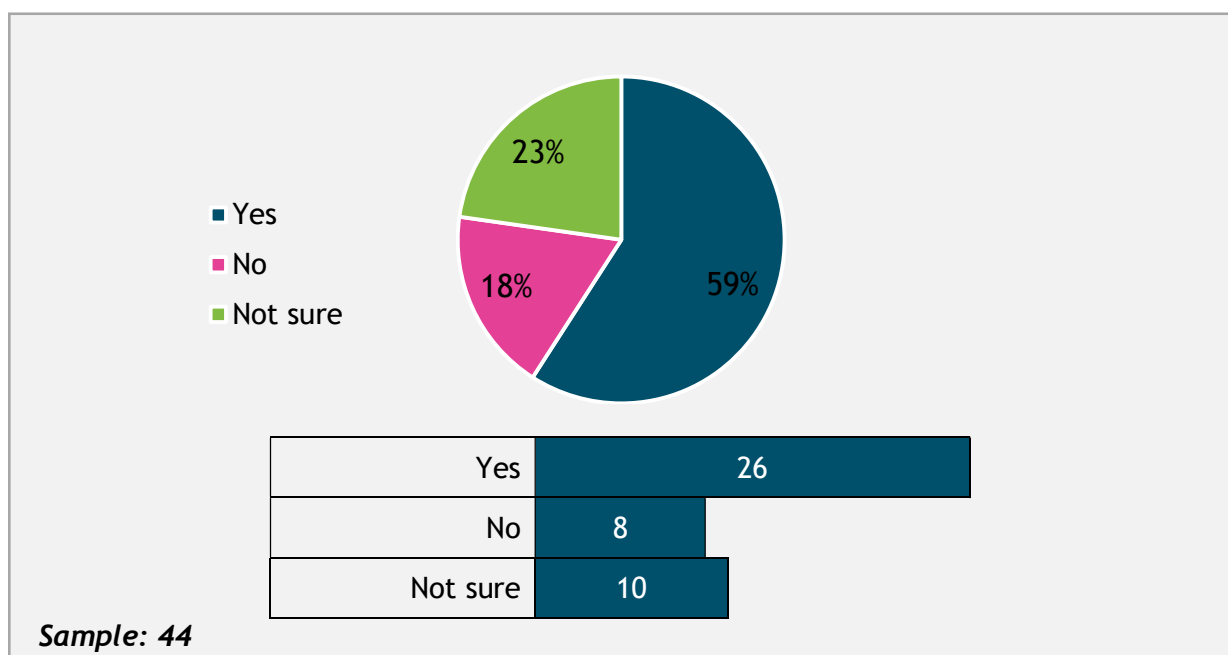


Figure 1

Figure 1 shows that the majority (**59%**) of young people felt they would have benefitted from support to help manage their feelings and emotions at certain points in their lives. Whilst **18%** of participants felt it hasn't been necessary and **23%** were not sure of whether they have needed a form of support to manage their wellbeing.

We then asked young people whether they have ever used any support services to help manage their emotions.

Q2. Have you ever used any support services to help manage your emotions?

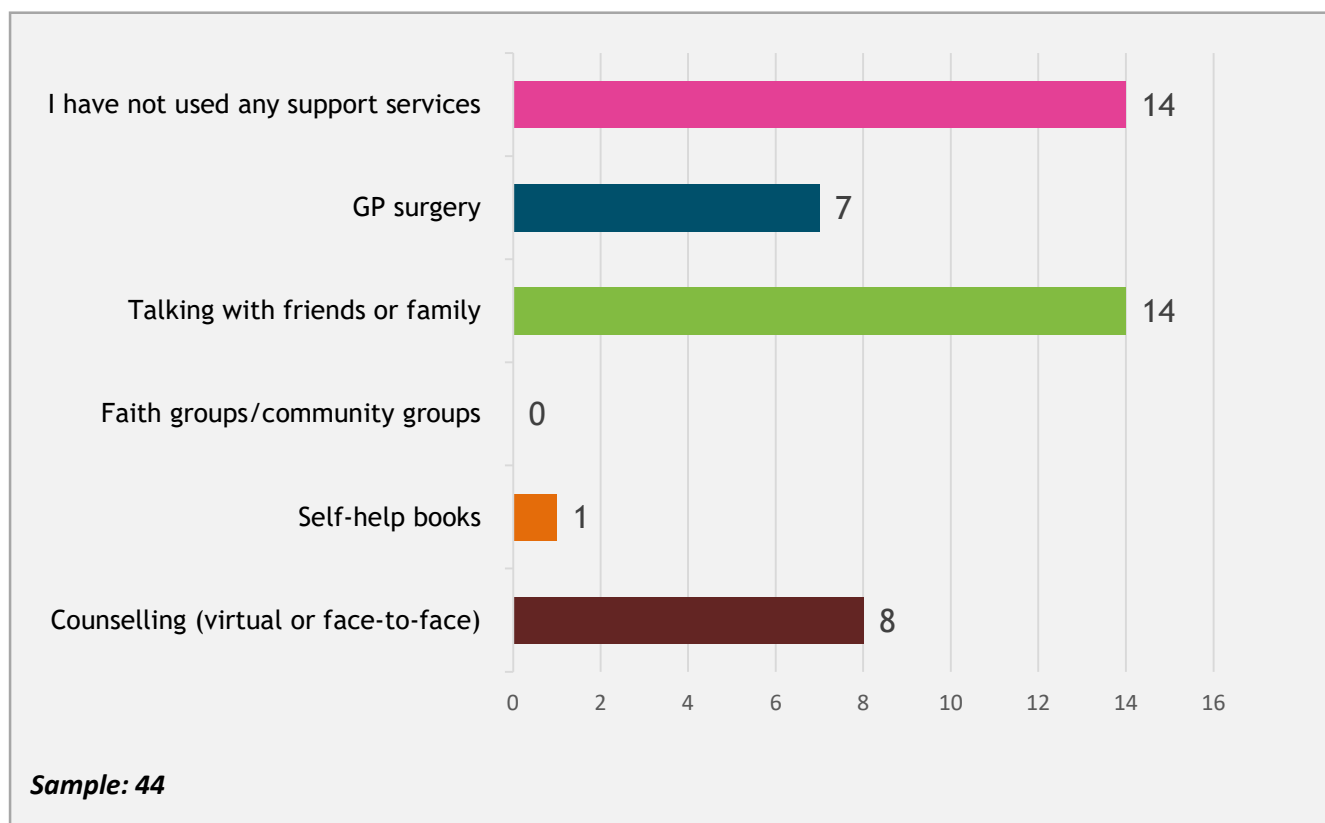


Figure 2

We found that the majority of participants (**68%**) had sought some form of support for their mental health. The most common support mechanism was for young people to discuss their issues or concerns with their friends and family.

18% of young people had used counselling services, either face-to-face or virtually, to support their emotional wellbeing. **16%** of young people also accessed their GP practice to talk about their mental health.

Interestingly, while **41%** of the young people who took part identified themselves as being religious, none of them had sought out support from faith groups.

The least common method of support was self-help books (**2%**). **32%** of participants had not accessed any mental health support at the time of the survey.

6. Preferred methods of accessing services

The second focus of our project was to understand how children and young people would like to access services for their emotional wellbeing. This section provides a breakdown of our findings.

We asked young people for their preferred ways of using service, including both face-to-face and digital methods.

Q3. If you have or were to access support for your emotional wellbeing, how would you like to use/communicate with the service?

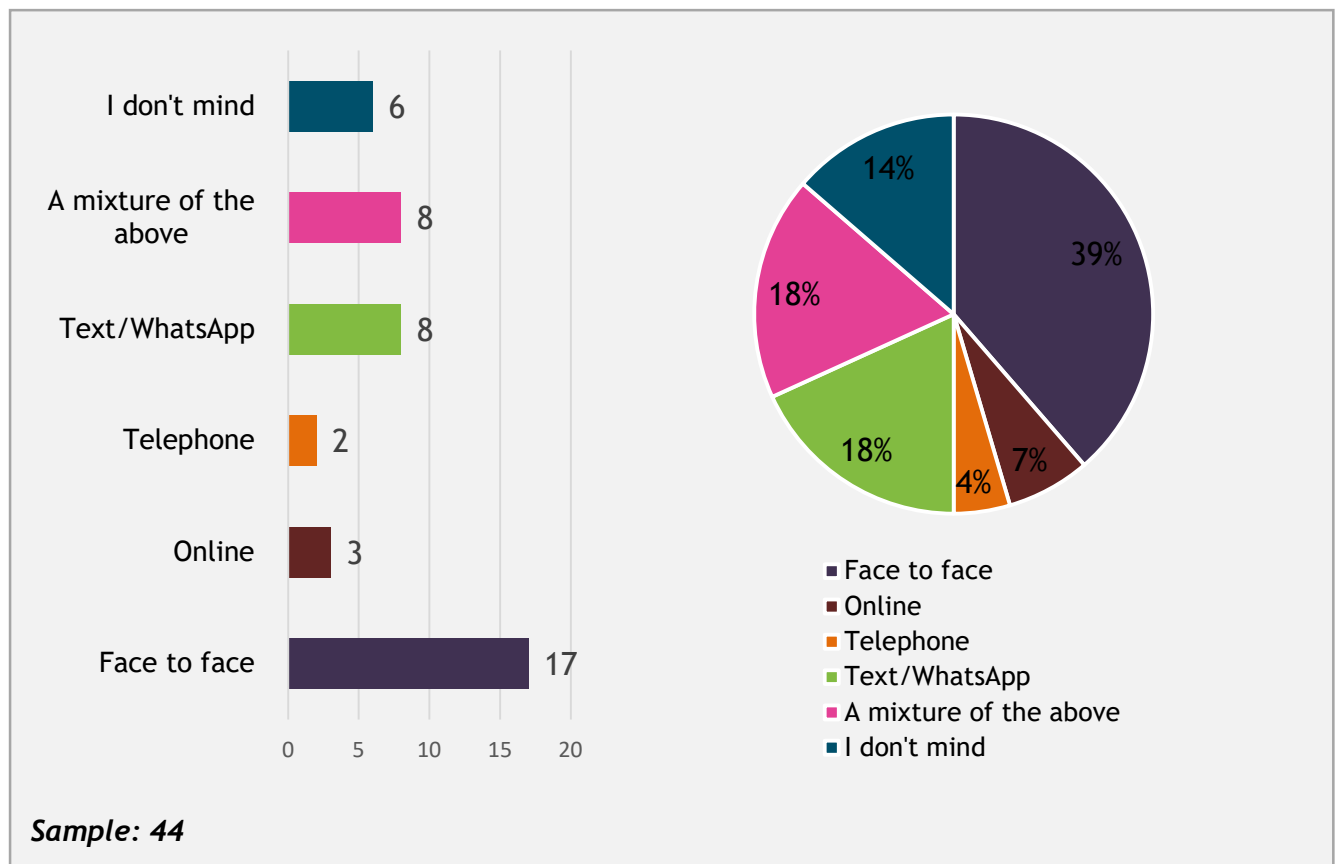


Figure 3

Figure 3 shows that of those interviewed, the preferred way of engaging with emotional wellbeing services (**39%**) was through face-to-face communication.

However, it is also evident that services need to offer a wide and varied access offer as **18%** of respondents would prefer to primarily communicate through text messaging or WhatsApp. Furthermore, **18%** would value a mixture of online and physical approaches to support.

Access just through online or telephone methods were less popular amongst the young people, making up **7%** and **4%** of the total responses respectively.

As part of the survey, we provided a free text box for respondents to tell us a little more about why these were their preferred methods. Below are some written responses from young people.

Selected Comments

“It is easier on the phone, just voices, and not having to look at someone for a long period of time, not that I don't like looking at my school counsellor it is just more comfortable for me.”

“Face to face could be nerve wracking but would be more personal and feel meaningful. Texting might be helpful to communicate something important in the moment.”

“Face to face so that it can be private and removed from my home environment.”

“I find it easier to get my words out and point across when I have more time to type.”

“I don't mind as long as I still get the help needed.”

- Some people consider face-to-face support to be more personal, allowing them to build a genuine connection with their counsellor/the person supporting them. They also felt they were able to express their emotions more freely and that it provided a private environment away from their home life.
- Some young people saw the benefits of both face-to face and a variety of online methods. They valued having different options available to them; as they explained that their needs can differ depending on the circumstance and sensitivity of the issues.
- Those who preferred Text/WhatsApp said that they found it easier when they weren't facing a real person. Communicating through this method gave them more time to formulate their thoughts and that brief interactions were what they needed at that time.
- Similarly, those who preferred either telephone or online methods discussed feeling more comfortable accessing support when they didn't have to speak with somebody face-to-face, removing the anxieties that social interaction brings for some young people.

The comments further endorse the idea that there is not a one size fits all model for supporting young people with their mental health. Services must have the flexibility to offer programmes which reflect individual preferences and needs.

Q4. Would you prefer to remain anonymous when accessing support for your emotional wellbeing?

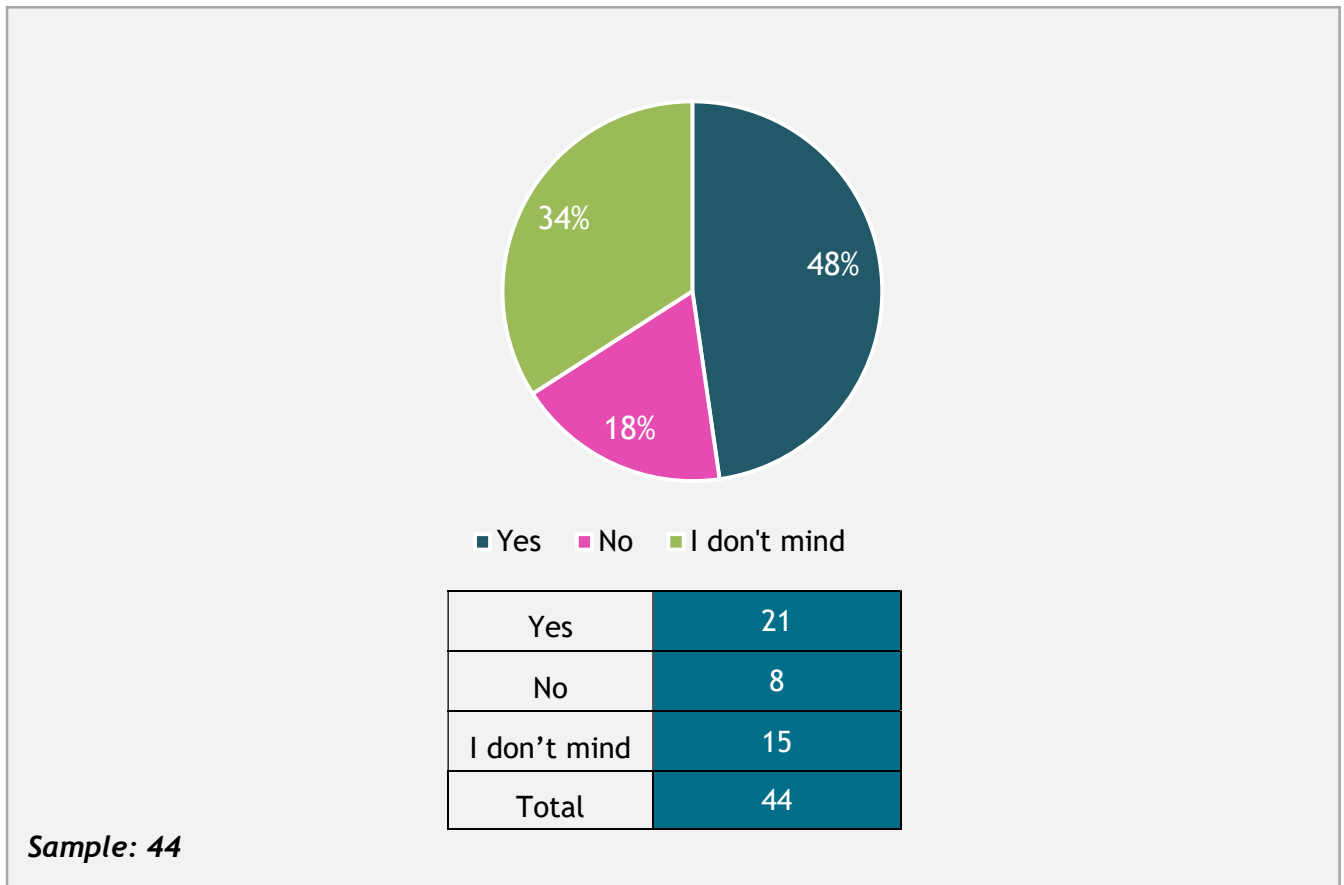


Figure 4

48% of young people preferred to remain anonymous when accessing support, whereas **18%** did not and **34%** didn't mind.

We provided a free text box for young people to expand on their answer, 20 respondents left comments.

Selected Comments

Prefer to be anonymous:

"I might feel more comfortable and secure in the fact it would be confidential"

"I would prefer to be anonymous because I don't want everyone to know my business."

"I wouldn't be worried about judgement and would be able to be more honest."

Prefer to not be anonymous:

“If I’m accessing support, I would like for them to know it’s me so they know who they’re talking to and they can put what I’m saying to a face so that they fully understand who I am.”

“It shouldn’t matter.”

I don’t mind:

“For some issues I feel it would be useful to be anonymous to get some help, especially if there is a stigma around the topic but for private face to face counselling you can’t remain anonymous.”

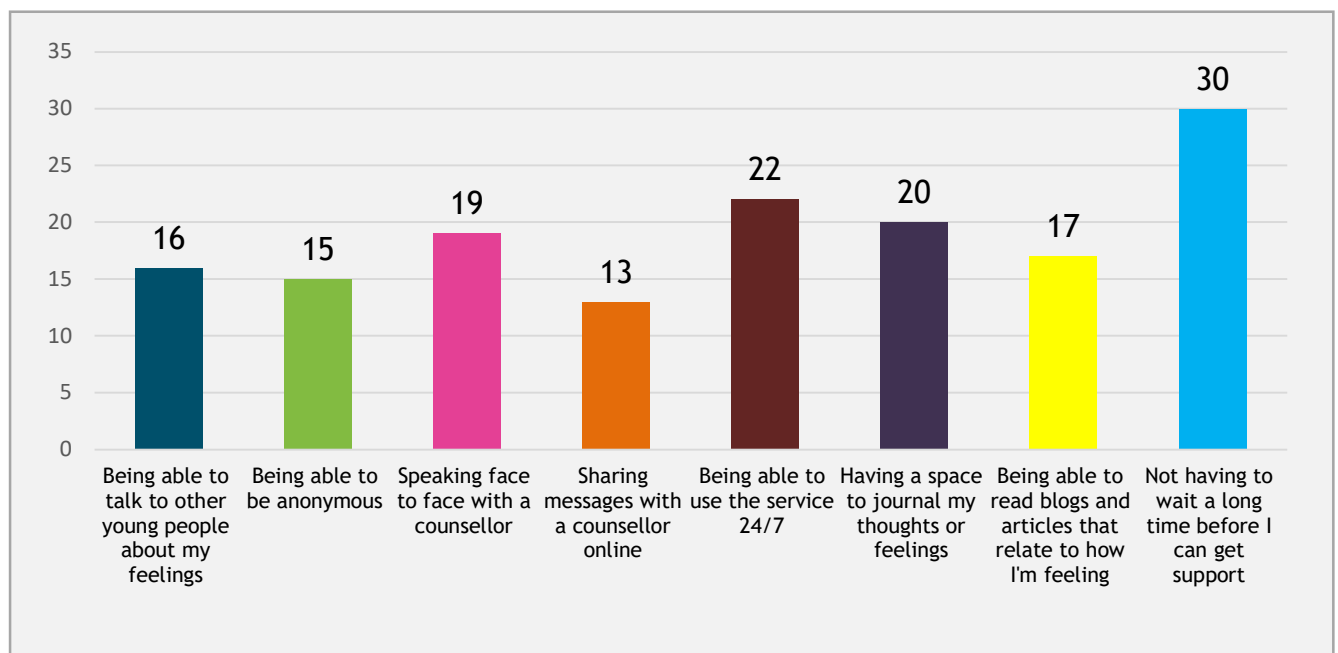
“It depends on what I’m talking about really.”

“It can go to my health records if I need support again in future.”

Our survey also looked to understand what mattered most to young people when using emotional wellbeing and mental health services.

Q5. What is the most important thing to you when using services for your emotional wellbeing?

We asked respondents to choose four options which applied most to how they feel. The table below shows the breakdown of responses.



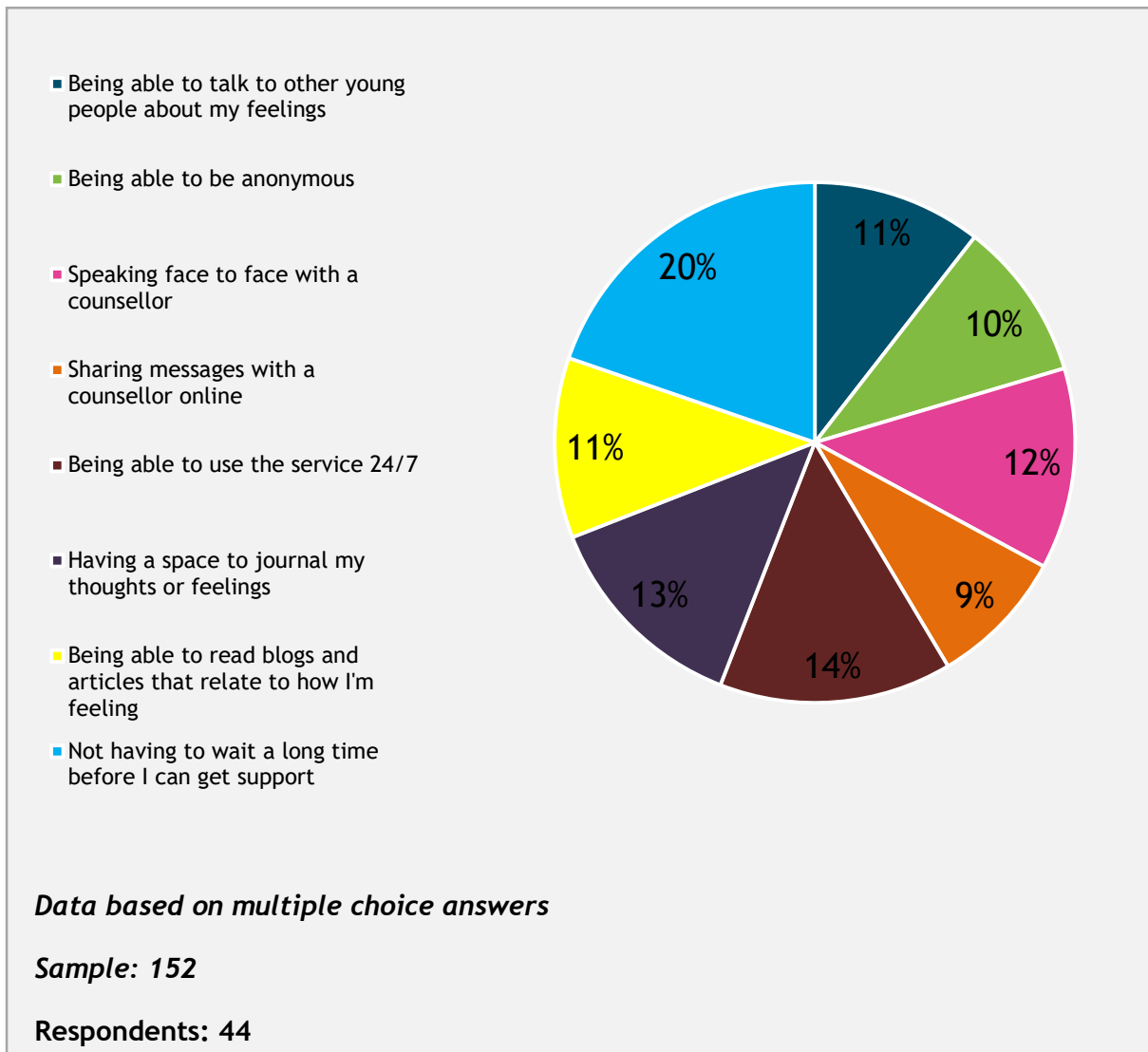


Figure 5

The response to this question was varied, with a number of different factors being important to young people. However, Figure 5 shows that it is essential for there to be short waiting times (20%) when requiring mental health support.

Furthermore, young people also valued services being readily available and accessible, with the ability to use services 24/7 (14%) being a crucial factor to them.

Having a space to journal thoughts/feelings (13%) and speaking face-to-face with a counsellor (12%) were also considered important for the respondents.

7. Awareness of and experiences with Kooth

The third focus of this project was to understand to what extent young Lewisham residents were aware of, or had used, Kooth’s emotional well-being service which operates across the borough and south east London.

To understand their awareness of the service we asked them:

Q6. How much do you know about Kooth?	44 respondents
I know a lot about Kooth, how it can help and what services are offered	5%
I know a little about Kooth, how it can help and what services are offered	16%
I know of Kooth but I don’t know how it can help or what services are offered	11%
I have never heard of Kooth	68%

Figure 6

Of the 44 young people who responded to this question, most had either not heard of Kooth (68%) or only knew a little about the services available. (16%). 5 respondents had heard about Kooth through school.

Whilst 32% of the respondents had varying levels of awareness about the service, only 1 person had used Kooth.

Q7. Have you ever used Kooth?

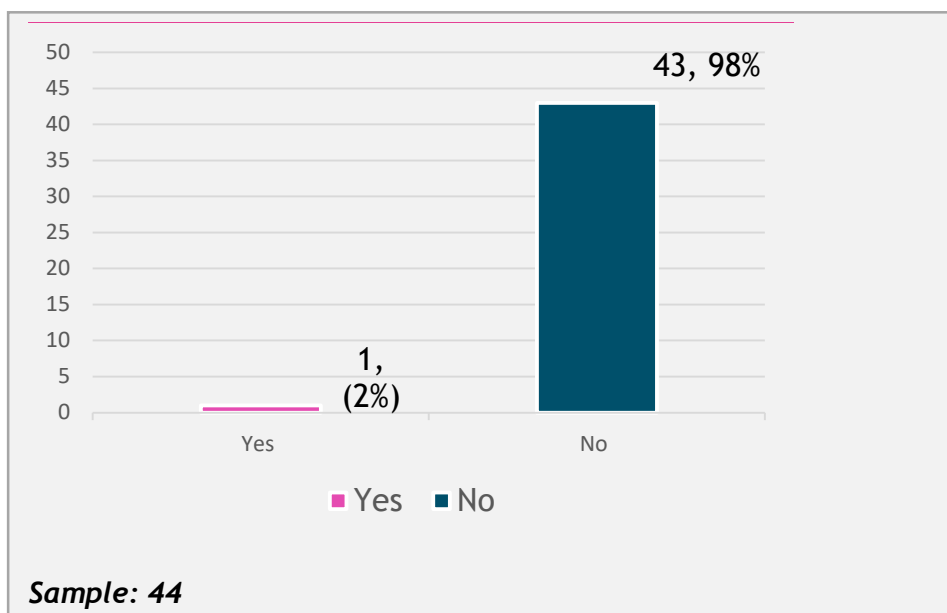


Figure 7

We asked the remaining 43 respondents why they hadn't chosen to use Kooth.

Q8. If you answered no, why haven't you used Kooth?

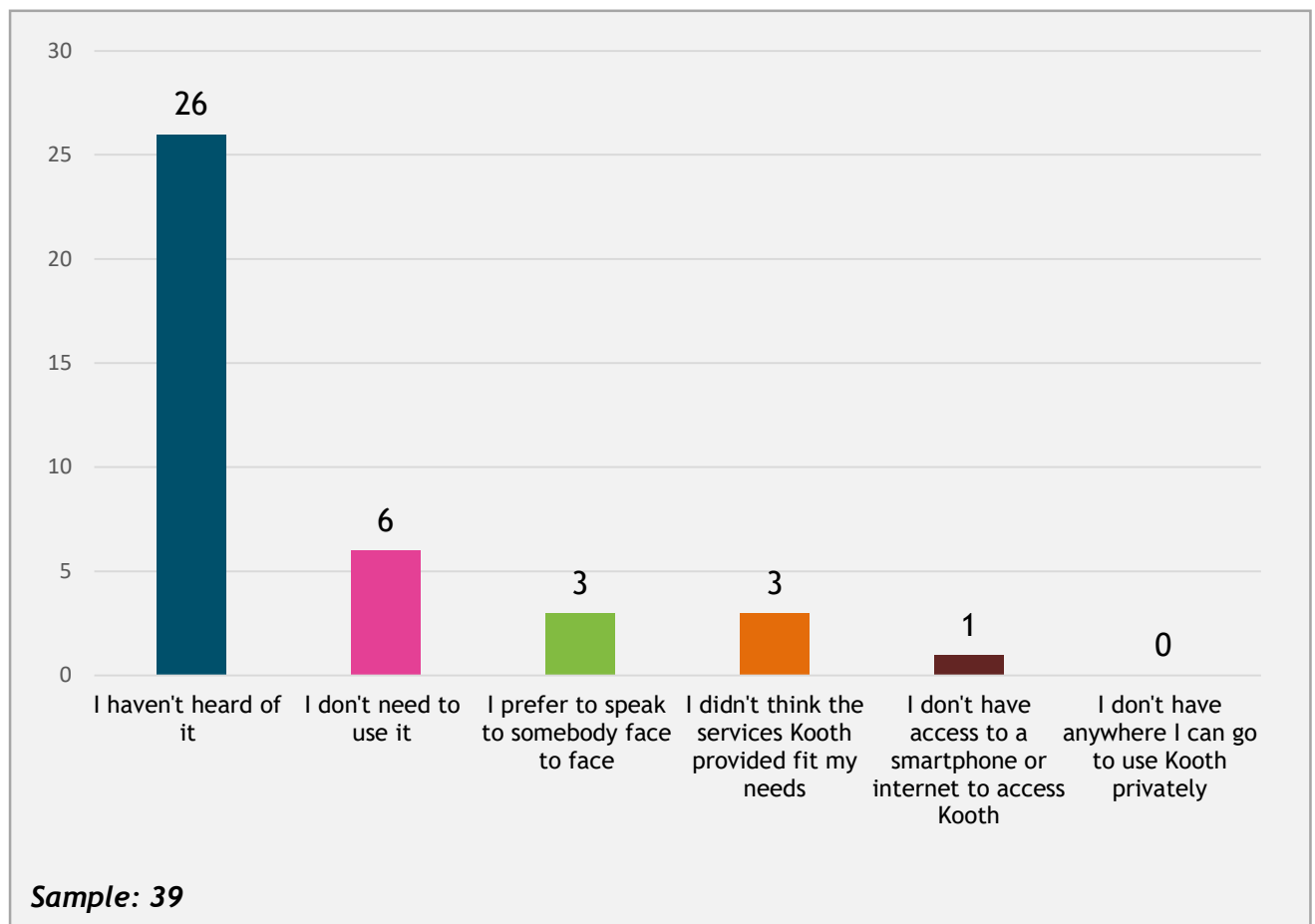


Figure 8

As expected, the majority of young people hadn't used Kooth because they had not previously been aware of the service until taking part in the engagement exercise. (67%).

Some young people felt that they did not need to use the service (15%) or felt that it did not suit their needs (18%).

Selected Comments

"I don't think my issues are severe."

"I don't know what Kooth is."

"It never really got so bad that I needed to use it."

"Seems childish."

We also wanted to understand whether the respondents had used other mental health services.

Q9. Have you ever used any other mental health or emotional wellbeing service to support your emotions?

Of the 44 young people who responded, 12 respondents had and 32 hadn't.

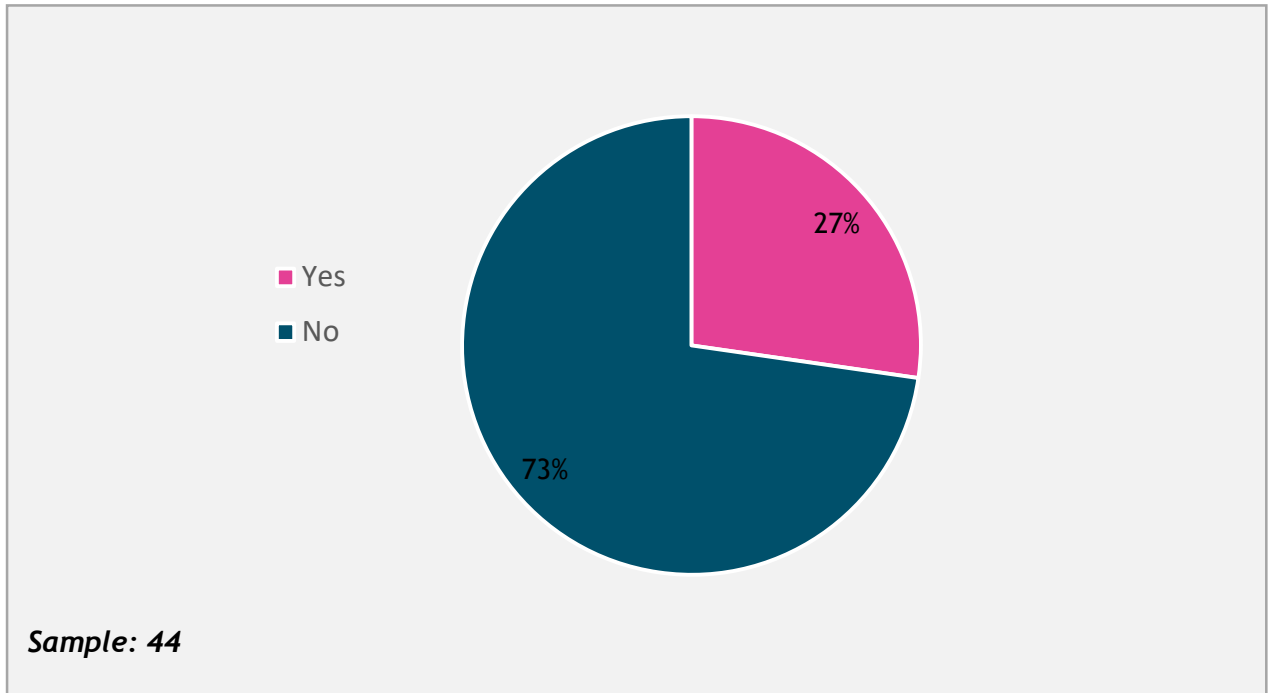


Figure 5

The majority of respondents had either used counselling either through their school or externally. Several people had been referred to CAMHS. Interestingly, more young people had accessed the Headspace app when compared to Kooth.

Our organisation also wanted to understand more about how young people would like to hear about, and be made aware of, the services that Kooth provides in Lewisham.

Q10. If you wanted more information about Kooth, what is your preferred way of receiving it?

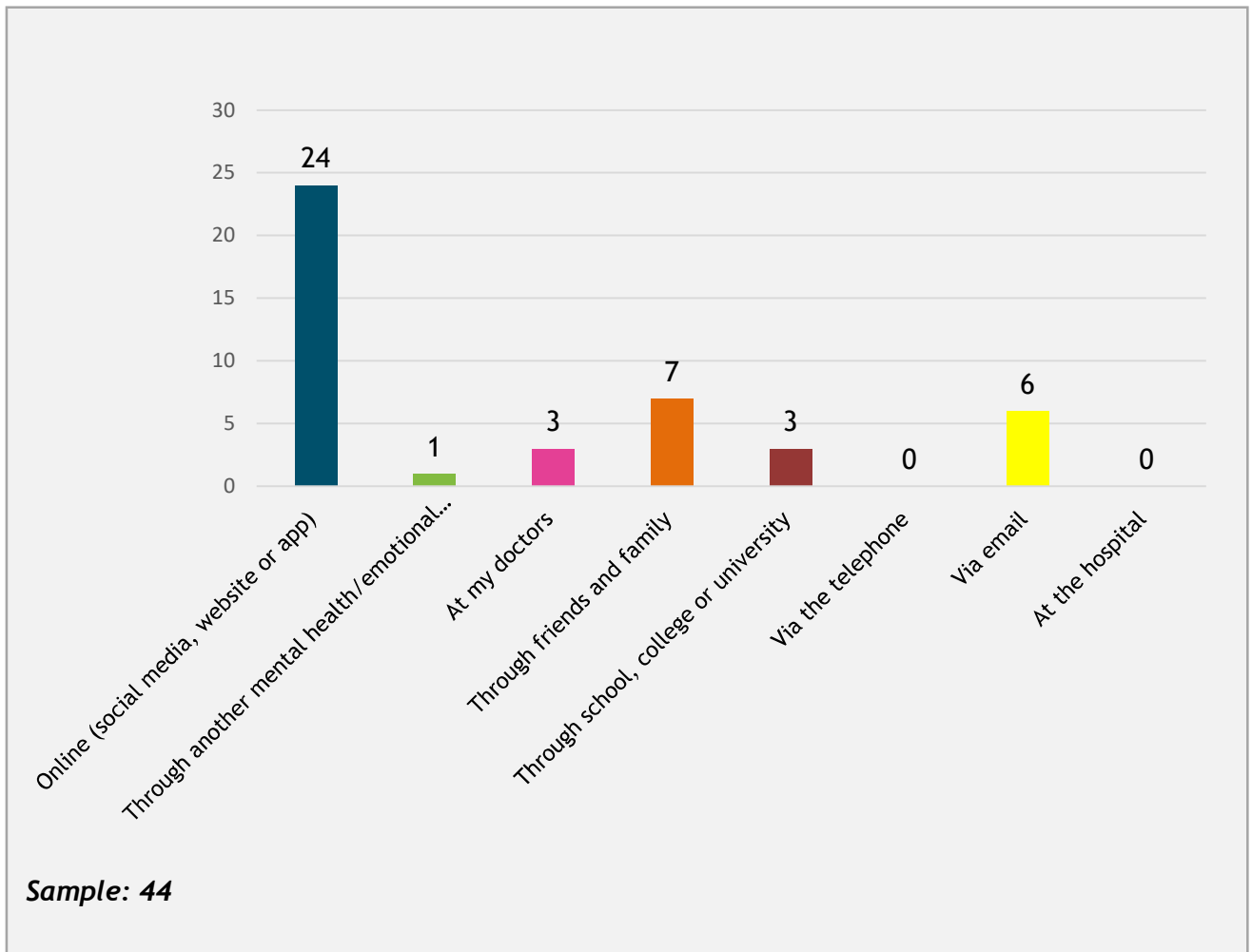


Figure 6

Figure 10 shows that the majority (**55%**) of young people who we engaged with would prefer to find out about mental health services through online methods such as social media, websites or apps).

Some people also valued receiving this information through family and friends (**16%**) or email respectively (**14%**).

8. Conclusion

Through the different engagement mechanisms, we were able to understand the experiences of 44 young people when it came to their mental health and emotional wellbeing.

Below is a breakdown of our main findings.

- **59%** of the young people we reached felt they would benefit support for their emotional wellbeing with **23%** being unsure if they would need help
- For **39%** of respondents, the preferred way of engaging with emotional wellbeing services was through face-to-face communication
- We found that the majority of participants (**68%**) had sought some form of support for their mental health. The most common support mechanism was for young people to discuss their issues or concerns with their friends and family
- **68%** of young people were not familiar with the Kooth service, whilst **32%** of young people had varying levels of awareness about the provider and what services it offers
- Of the young people who had never used Kooth, **67%** gave the reason that they hadn't heard of it, whereas **18%** of young people felt that Kooth in some way did not fit their needs or requirements
- The majority of young people either preferred to remain anonymous (**48%**) or didn't mind (**34%**) when accessing services for their mental health and emotional wellbeing. This suggests that Kooth's option for anonymity is an appealing option amongst young people
- **55%** of young people would like to hear more about mental health support services via online methods such as social media, websites or apps. **16%** would also like to hear more information about services via their friends and family connections
- The two most important aspects to young people when accessing services were short waiting times and being able to use a service 24/7.

9. Recommendations

Based on the analysis of feedback, we made the following recommendations on children's emotional wellbeing needs, their preferred ways of accessing services, and the delivery of Kooth in Lewisham.

Recommendations

1. A significant amount of young people (**57%**), when asked how they would like to hear more information about Kooth, said that online methods was their preferred method. Another popular method amongst young people was through friends and family (**17%**).

Recommendation 1: Kooth should prioritise promoting their service through social media and explore the use of platforms such as Snapchat and Tik-Tok which attract a younger audience. The service should also consider creating promotional materials aimed at family members and friends to raise awareness about their service offer if the materials haven't already been developed.

2. Awareness of Kooth amongst the respondents was limited. **68%** had not heard about Kooth but did feel like they would benefit from some support managing their emotional wellbeing.

Recommendation 1: Kooth provides an important preventative service for young people with the provision of emotional wellbeing support in the community which can help to prevent the onset of severe mental illness. 31% of the young people we engaged with had used other services to support their mental health but only one person had engaged with Kooth. The young people had used services such as CAMHS, GP practices, school counsellors and out of school therapists. Kooth should continue to build stronger relationships with these services as a mechanism to spread awareness and reach young people who are choosing to seek support for their mental health.

3. The two most important factors to young people when accessing support services were short waiting times and services being accessible 24/7.

Recommendation: These two factors are already embedded within Kooth's service offer. Whilst most young people we spoke to had not used the service, it's clear that the service could fit their needs and requirements. It's important that Kooth continues to provide quick access times, otherwise this could deter young people who are seeking support. Promotional materials for the service should highlight the ease and accessibility to encourage further uptake from young residents.

4. The young people saw the benefits of both face-to face and a variety of online methods. They valued having different options available to them as they explained that their needs can differ depending on the circumstance and sensitivity of the issues.

Recommendation: The feedback we have received from the young people is that there is not a one size fits all model for supporting them with their mental health. Services must have the flexibility to offer programmes which reflect individual preferences and needs.

10. Distribution and Comment

This report is available to the public and is shared with our statutory and community partners. Accessible formats are available.

If you have any comments on this report or wish to share your views and experiences, please contact us.

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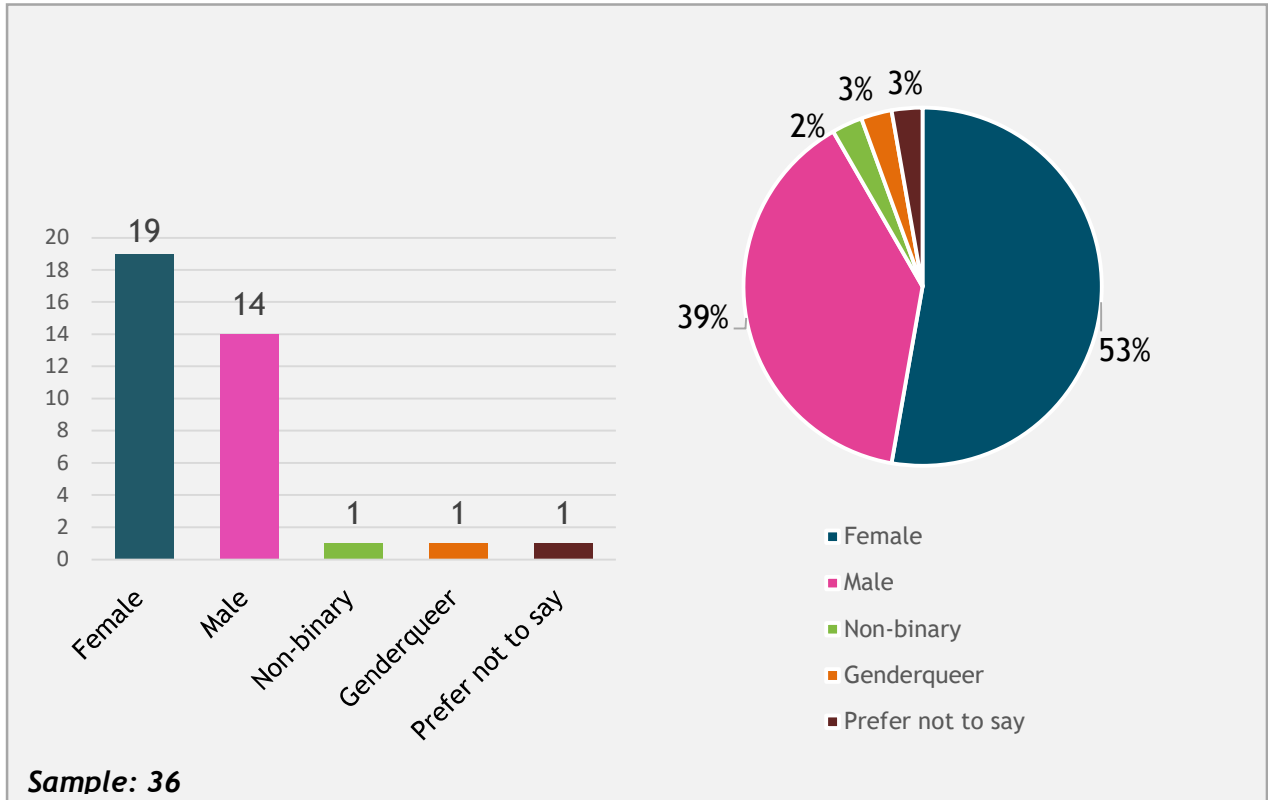
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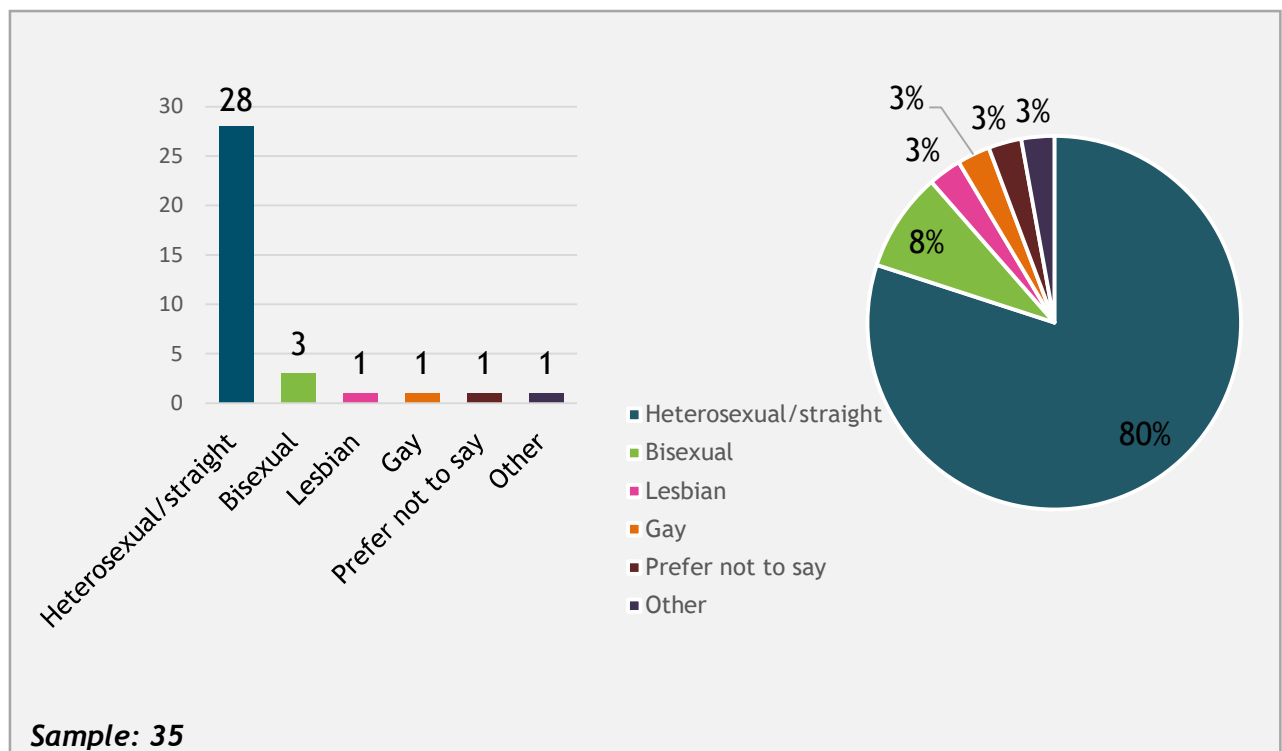
Annex - Demographics

The stated demographics of the young people who took part are as follows.

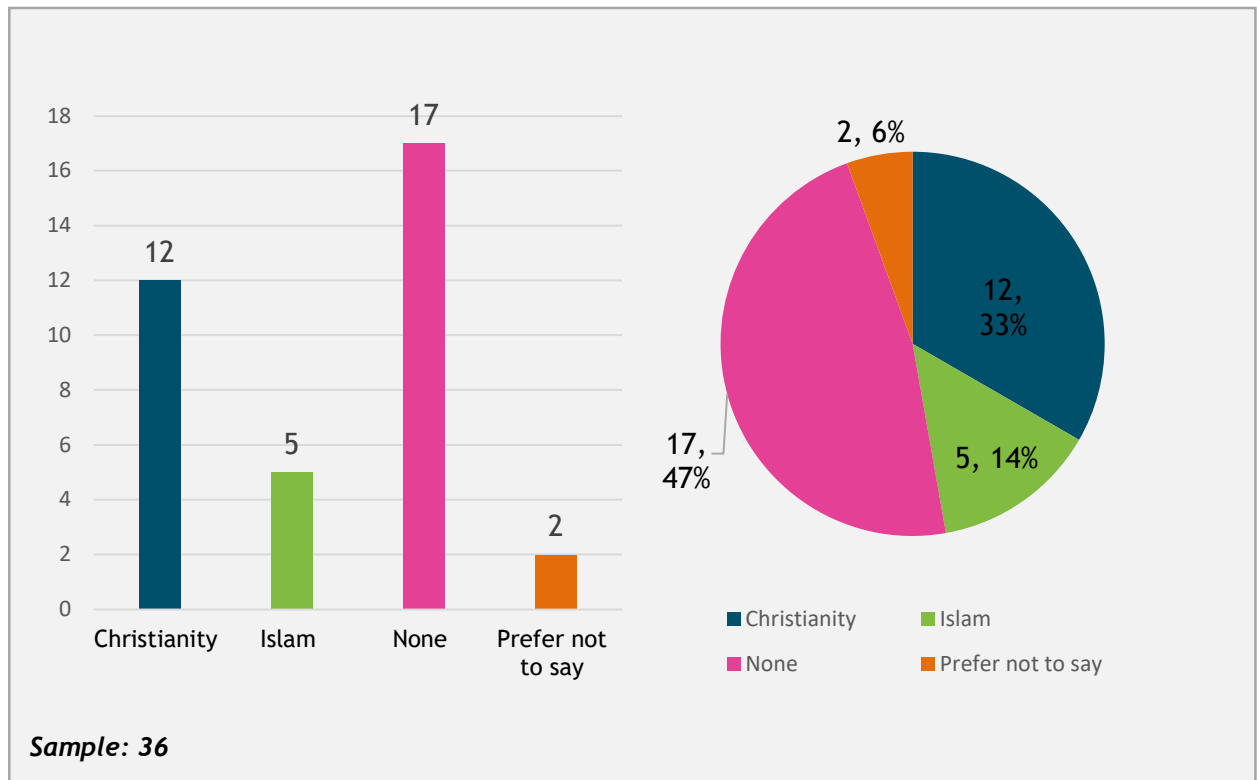
How would you describe your gender?



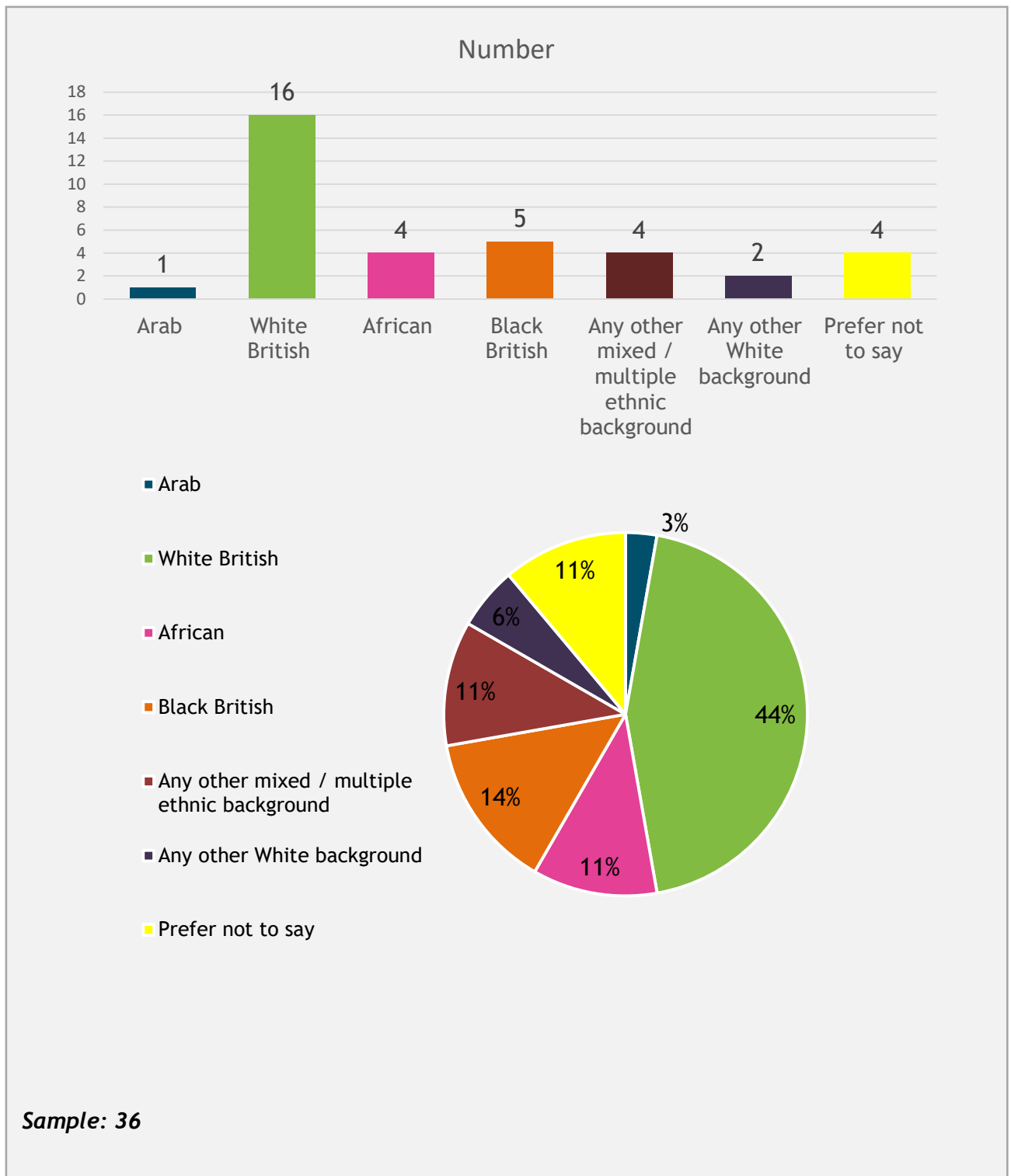
How would you describe your sexuality?



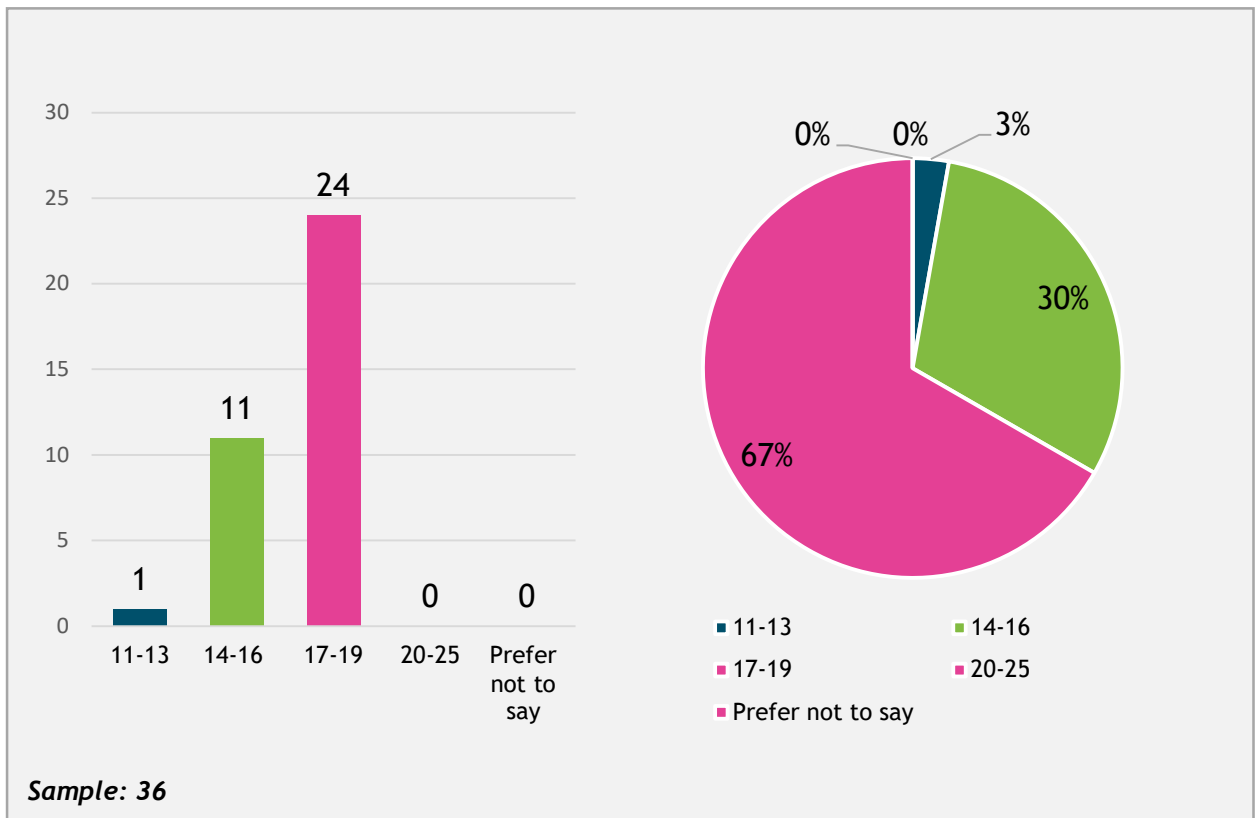
Religion



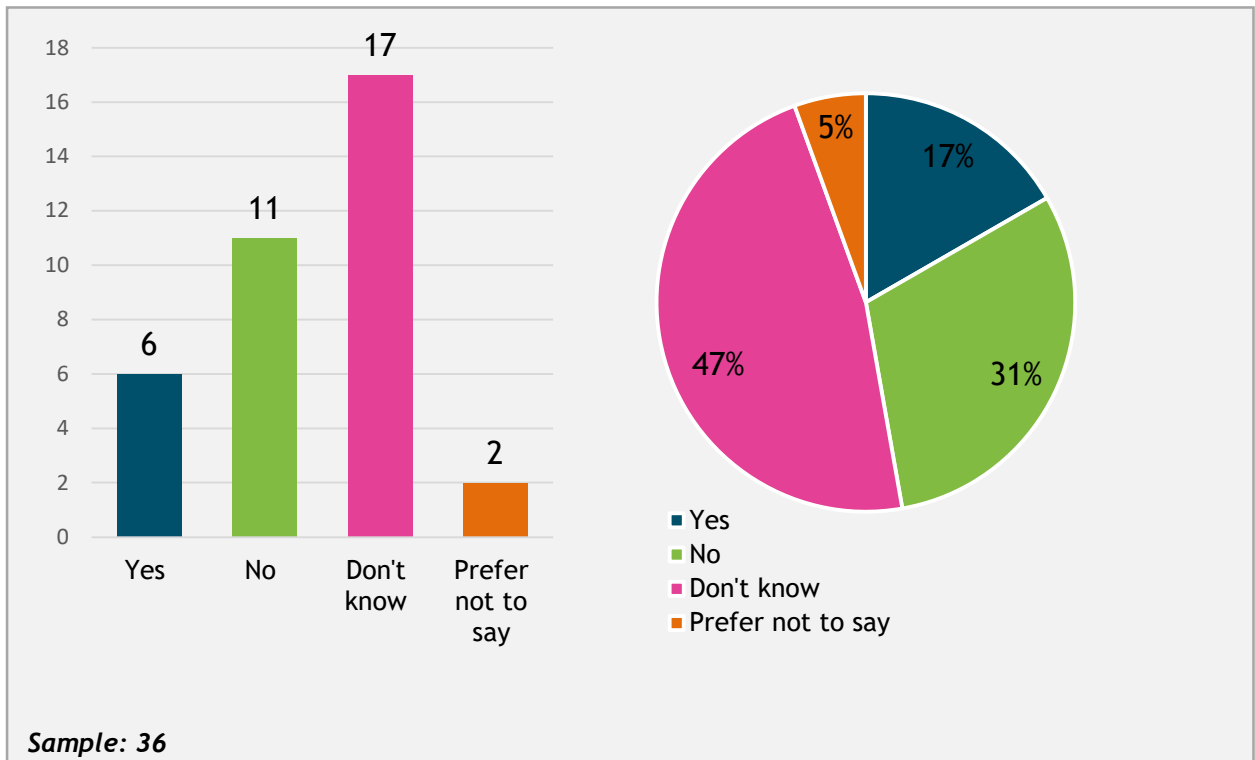
Please select your ethnic background:



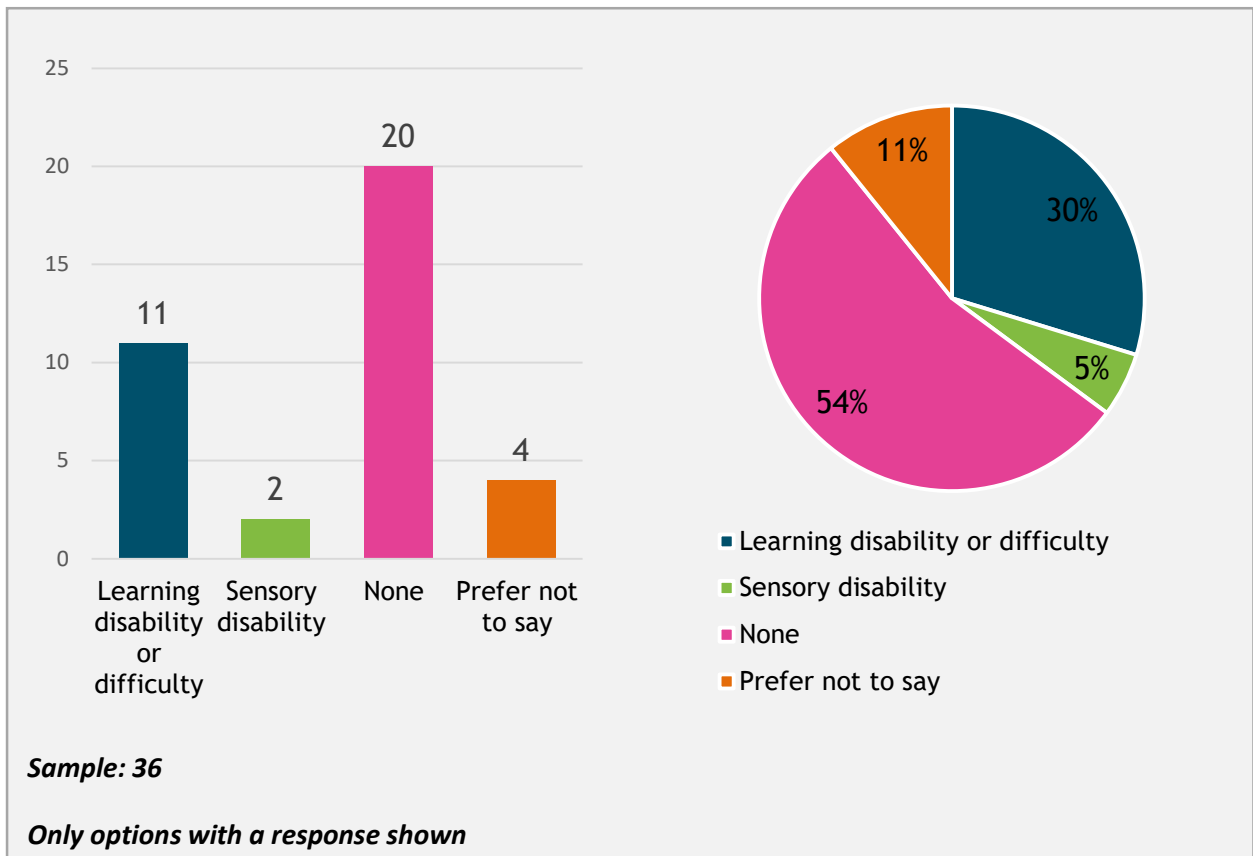
How old are you?



Do you have a mental health condition?



Do you consider yourself to have any of the following?



Do you look after or care for somebody at home who need support?

