



Covid-19 Social Study

Results Release 3

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Executive summary

Background

This report provides data from Week 3 of the UK COVID-Mind Study run by University College London: a panel study of over 55,000 respondents focusing on the psychological and social experiences of adults living in the UK during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In this THIRD report, we focus on psychological responses to the first two weeks of government measures requiring people to stay at home. We present simple descriptive results on the experiences of adults in the UK who are not keyworkers and are therefore being asked to stay at home. Measures include:

1. Reported compliance with government guidelines and confidence in the government
2. Mental health including depression, anxiety and stress
3. Self-harm and abuse including suicidal thoughts, self-harm and both psychological and physical abuse
4. Psychological and social wellbeing including life satisfaction and loneliness

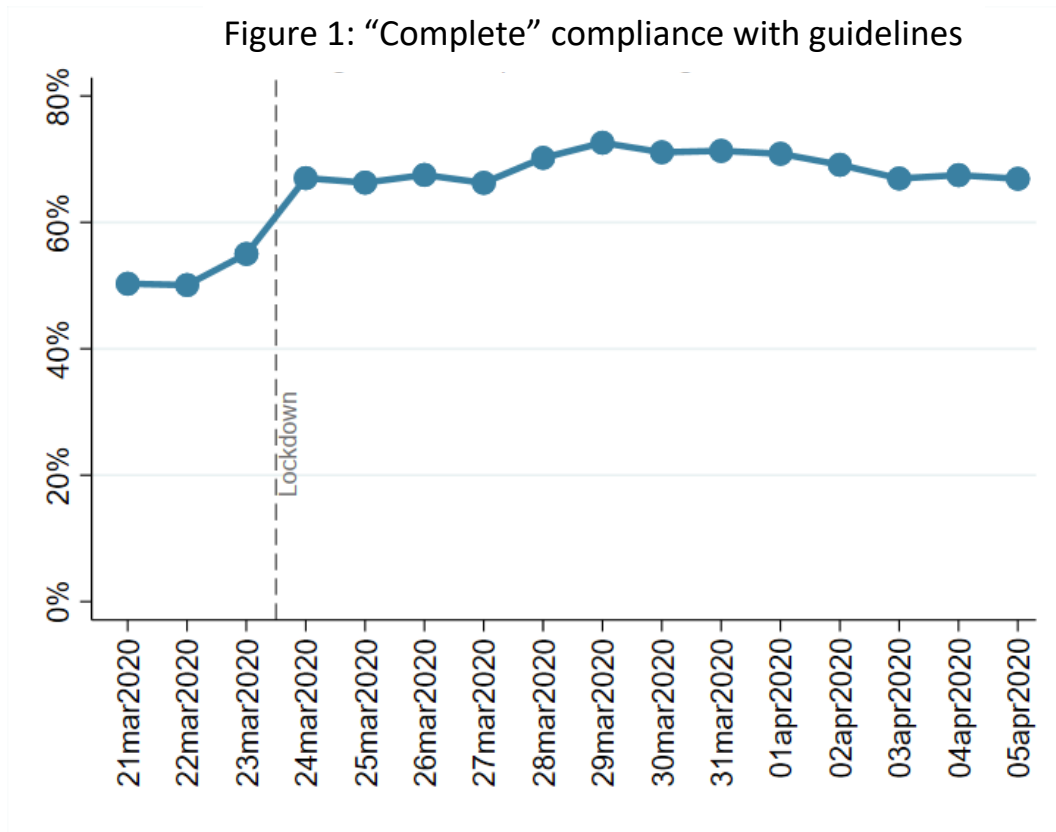
This study is not representative of the UK population but instead was designed to have good stratification across a wide range of socio-demographic factors enabling meaningful subgroup analyses to understand the experience of Covid-19 for different groups within society. Data are weighted using auxiliary weights to the national census and Office for National Statistics (ONS) data. Full methods and demographics for the sample included in this report are reported in the Appendix. The study is still recruiting.

Findings

- Compliance with government advice has increased since lockdown was announced. It has been lower in younger adults and highest in those aged 60+. Over 98% of respondents report overall compliance; only 0.1% report ignoring guidelines completely.
- Confidence in government has increased since the lockdown was announced, and has stayed relatively stable since. Confidence has varied with age, with lowest confidence amongst younger adults.
- There has been a slight increase in depression over the past 2 weeks, but fortunately a slight decrease in anxiety levels.
- Stress relating to Covid-19 (both catching Covid-19 and becoming seriously ill from Covid-19) has decreased since lockdown began and has stabilised in the last week. Encouragingly, stressors relating to finance and food have decreased over the past fortnight.
- Levels of suicidal thoughts have been relatively stable during the last fortnight. They have been higher amongst younger people, those living alone, those with a lower household income, and people with a diagnosed mental health condition.
- It is too early to interpret data on any potential changes in self-harm and abuse levels, but graphs for the whole sample are shown and sub-group analyses will be provided from the next report.
- Notably, life satisfaction has been gradually increasing in the last 2 weeks. It has been more volatile amongst younger adults (those aged 18-29) and people living alone.
- Loneliness levels have been relatively stable since lockdown started, even amongst high-risk groups. However, it has been overall higher amongst younger adults, those living alone, with lower household income levels, and with a diagnosed mental health condition.

1. Compliance and confidence

1.1 Compliance with guidelines



FINDINGS

Respondents were asked to what extent they are following the recommendations from government such as social distancing and staying at home, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (completely). Figure 1 shows the percentage of people who followed the recommendations "completely" (with a score of 7). "Complete" compliance has increased since lockdown was announced and has stayed relatively stable to date. It has been lower in younger adults (those aged 18-29) and highest in those aged 60+ (see Figs 2). There has been little difference in compliance by living arrangement, household income, or mental health diagnosis (see Figs 2).

However, it should be noted that these graphs show self-reported "complete" compliance: a perfect score of 7 out of 7. When we look at scores of 5-7 out of 7, it becomes clear that compliance overall is very high, with over 98% of respondents scoring in this group. Only 0.1% of respondents reported not complying at all with the guidelines.

Figure 2a Compliance by age groups

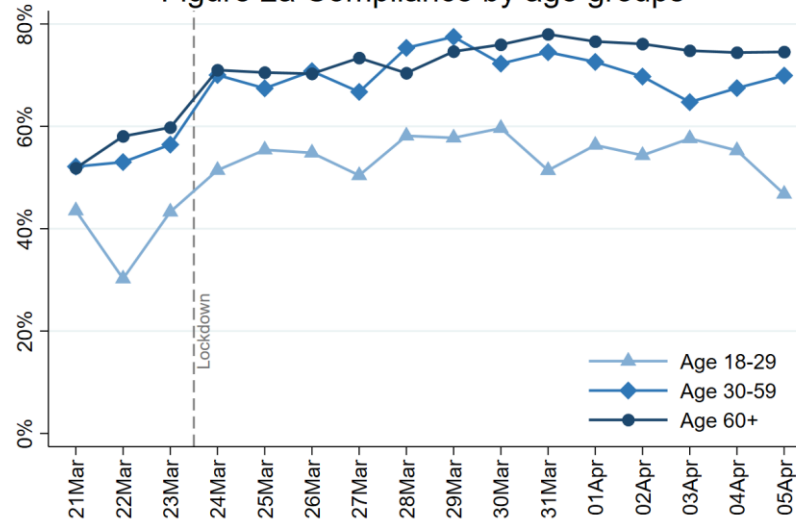


Figure 2b Compliance by living arrangement

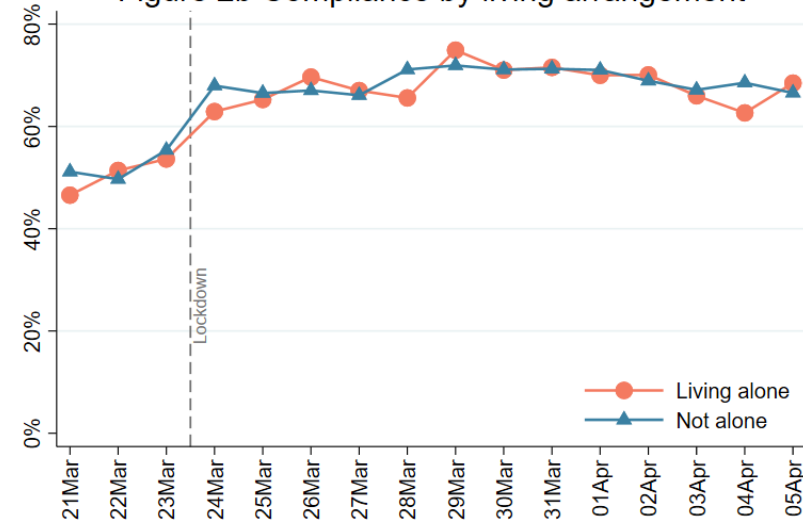


Figure 2c Compliance by household income

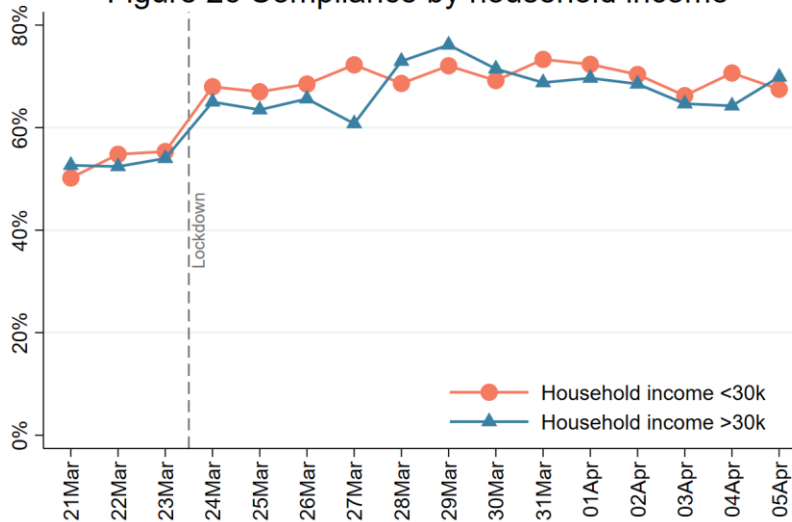
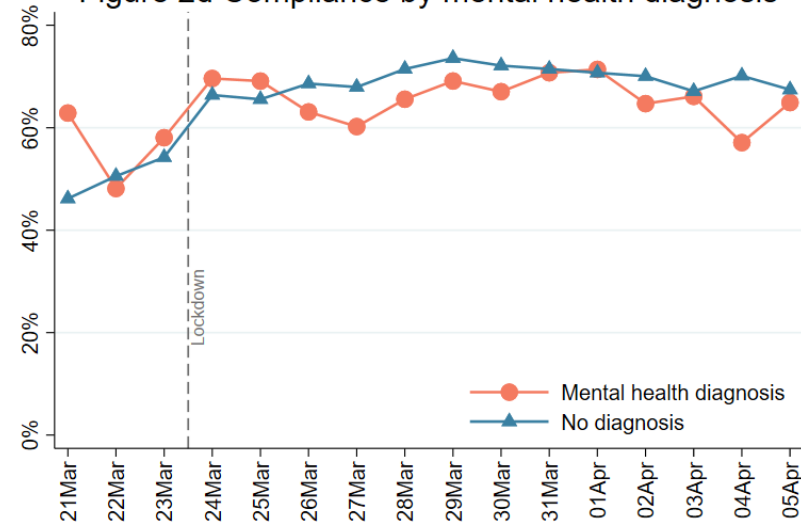
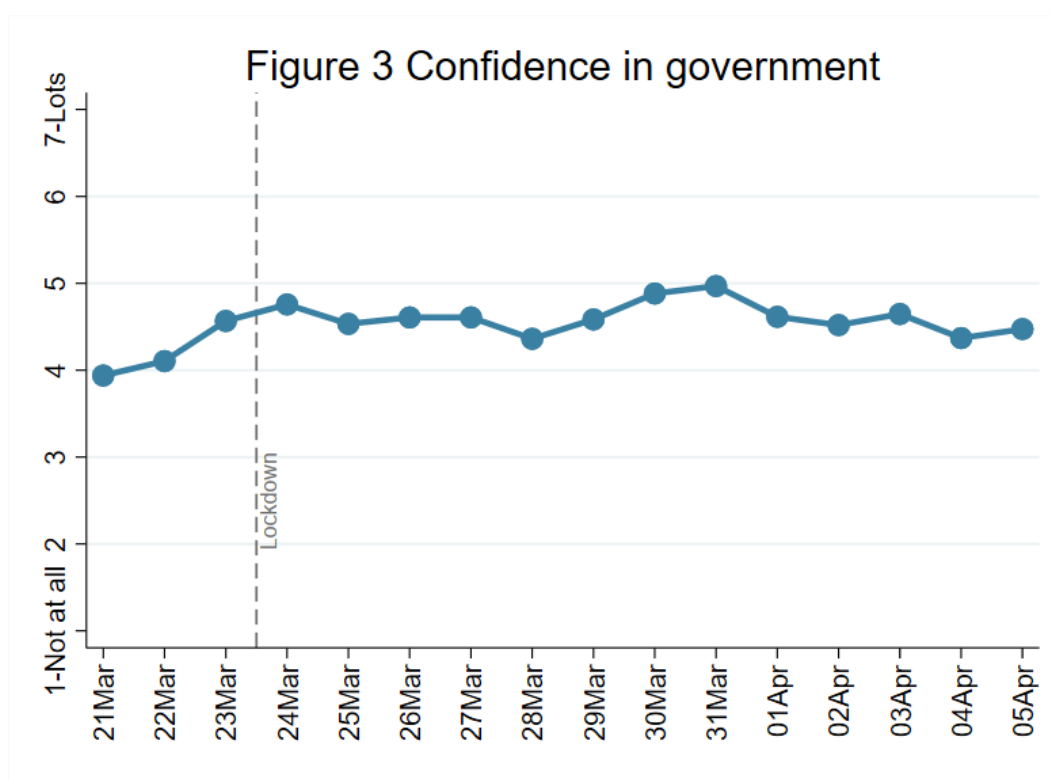


Figure 2d Compliance by mental health diagnosis



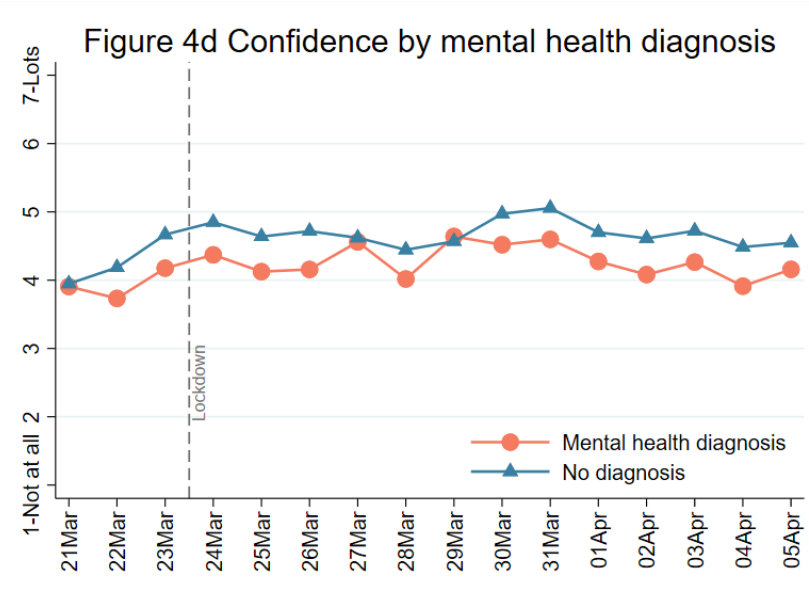
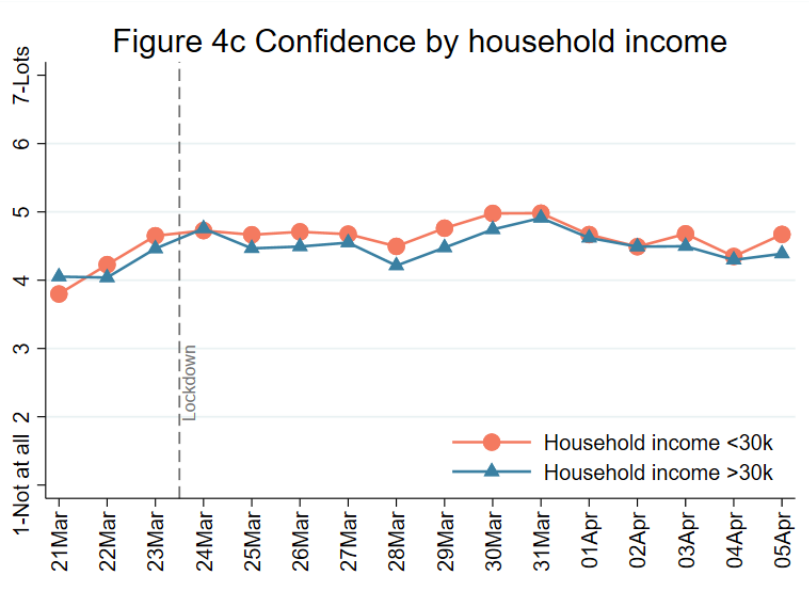
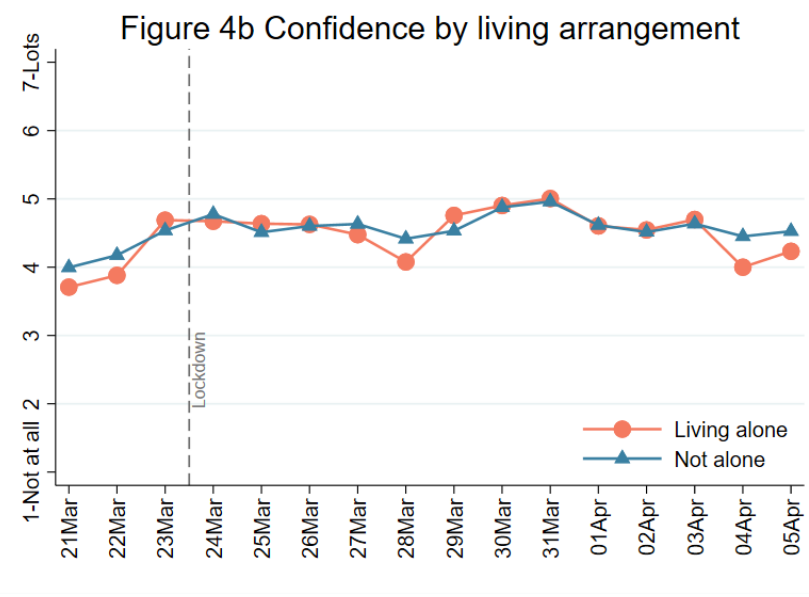
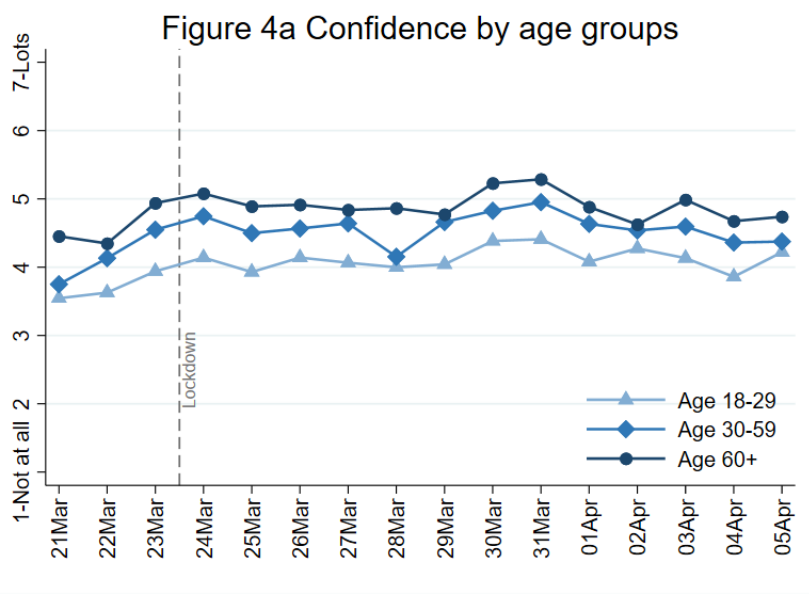
1.2 Confidence in Government (England)



FINDINGS

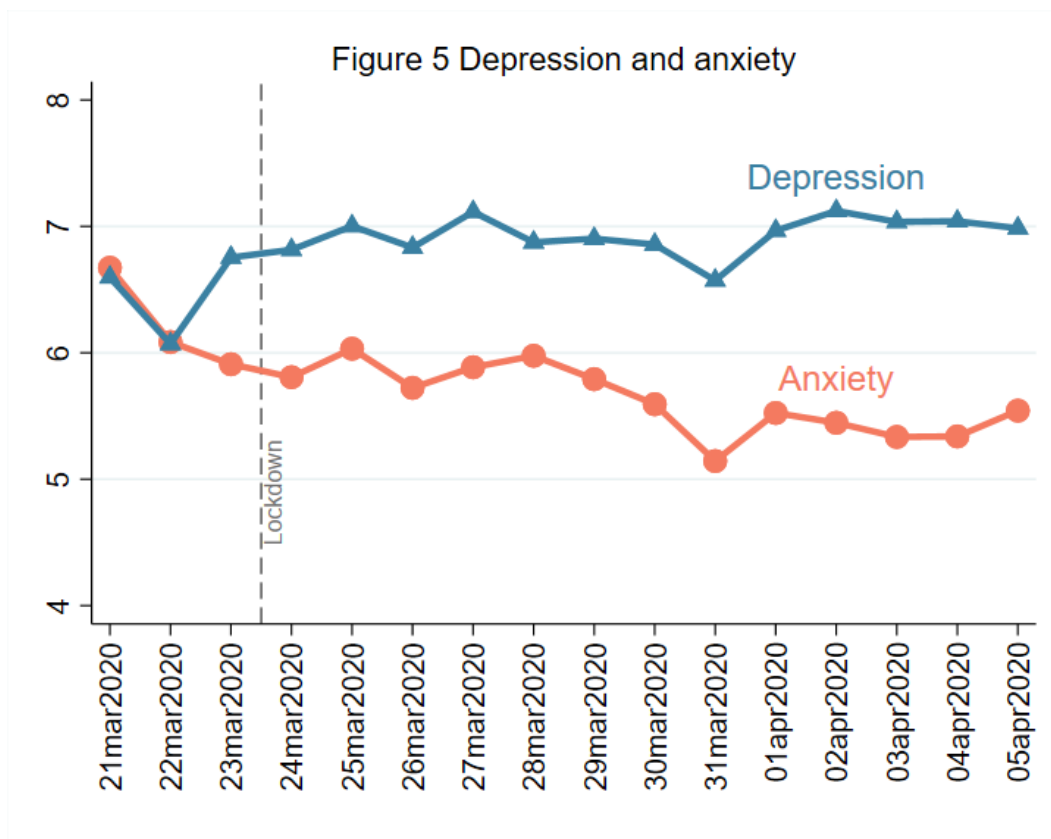
Respondents were asked how much confidence they had in the government to handle the Covid-19 epidemic from 1 (not at all) to 7 (lots). We restrict our analyses here to respondents living in England.

Results show that confidence in government has increased since the lockdown was announced, and has stayed relatively stable since. Confidence has varied with age, with lowest confidence levels amongst younger adults. It has been slightly lower overall in people with an existing diagnosed mental health condition. However, there appears to be no difference by living arrangement or household income.



2. Mental Health

2.1 Depression and anxiety



FINDINGS

Respondents were asked about depression levels during the past week using the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9); a standard instrument for diagnosing depression in primary care. There are 9 items with 4-point responses ranging from “not at all” to “nearly every day”, with higher overall scores indicating more depressive symptoms. Scores of higher than 10 can indicate major depression. Respondents were asked about anxiety levels during the past week using Generalised Anxiety Disorder assessment (GAD-7); a well-validated tool used to screen and diagnose generalised anxiety disorder in clinical practice and research. There are 7 items with 4-point responses ranging from “not at all” to “nearly every day”, with higher overall scores indicating more symptoms of anxiety. Categorical scales suggest that scores of higher than 5 are mild, higher than 10 are moderate, and higher than 15 are severe.

Results suggests that there has been a slight increase in depression over the past 2 weeks, but a slight decrease in anxiety levels. Both depression and anxiety levels have been higher in younger adults, those living alone, those with lower household income, and those with an existing mental health diagnosis. As anticipated, people with an existing mental health diagnosis have levels above the threshold indicative of clinical depression and anxiety.

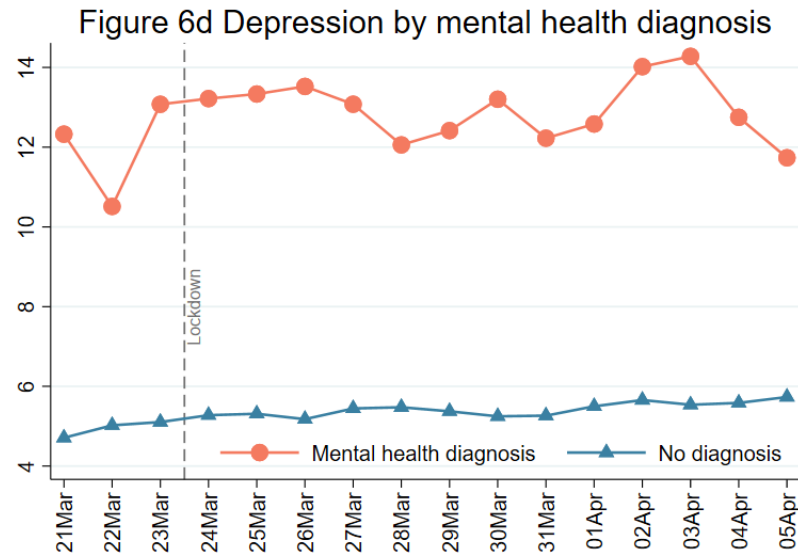
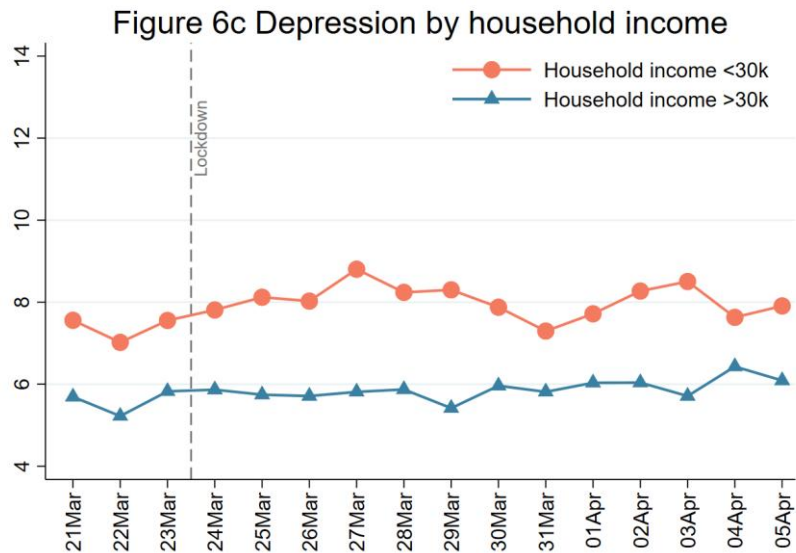
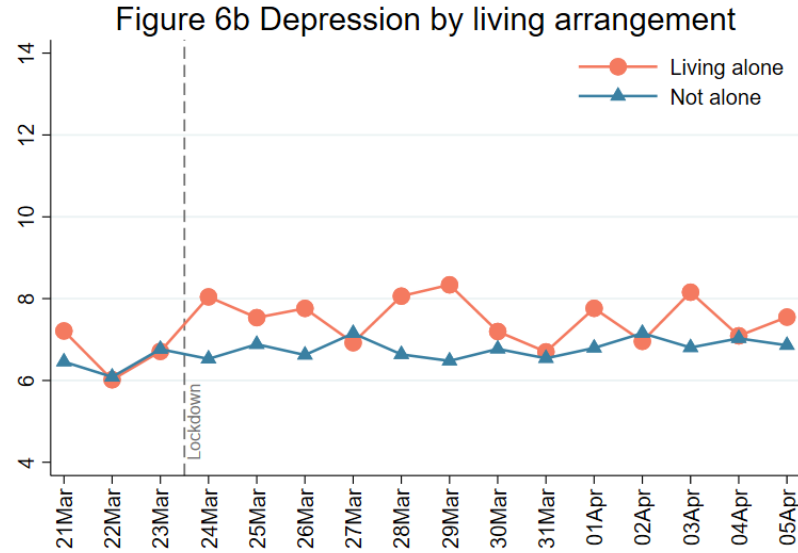
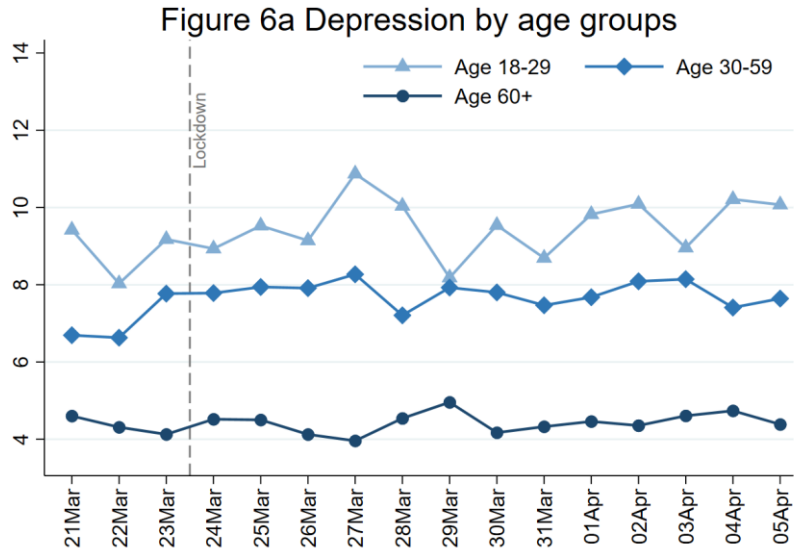


Figure 7a Anxiety by age groups

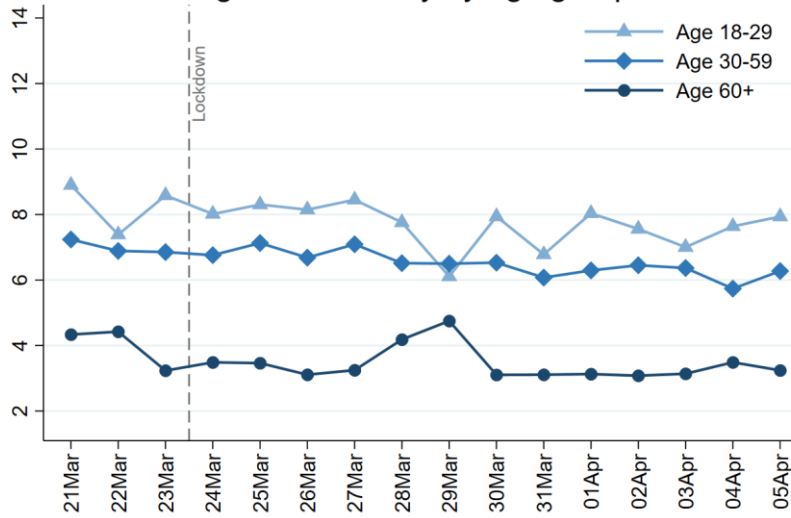


Figure 7b Anxiety by living arrangement

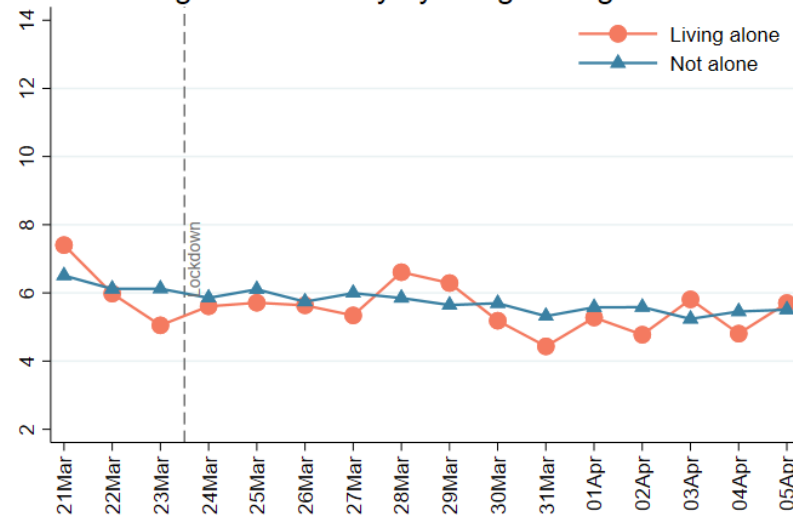


Figure 7c Anxiety by household income

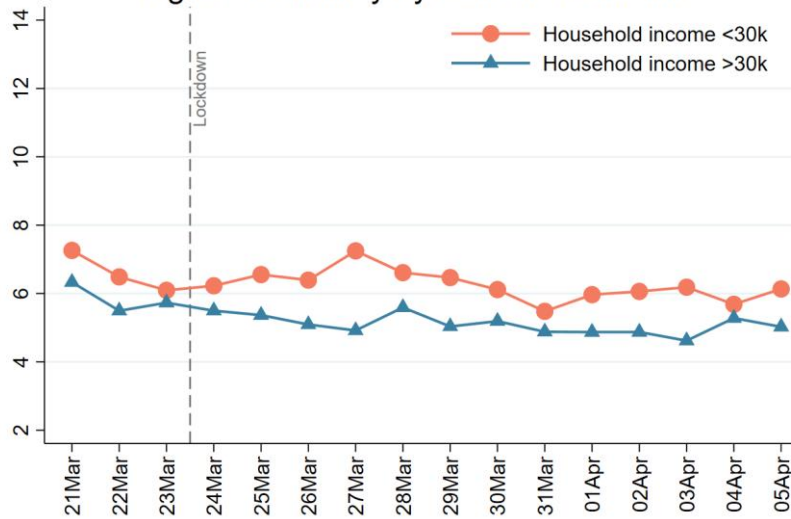
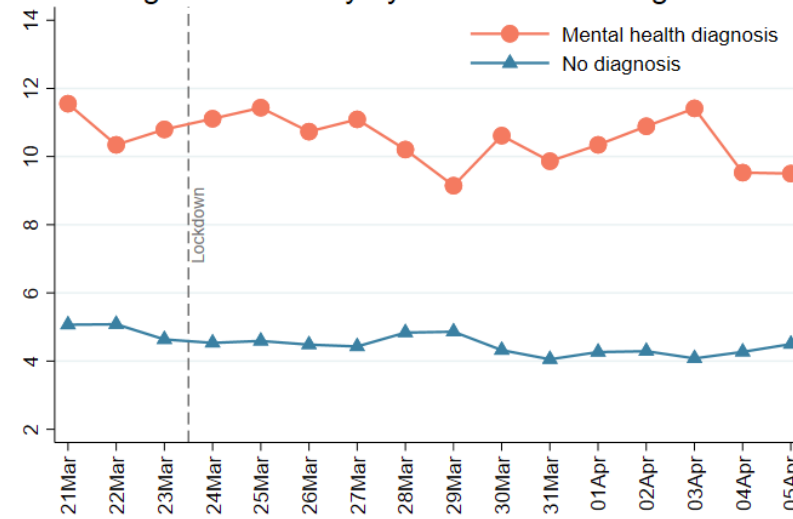
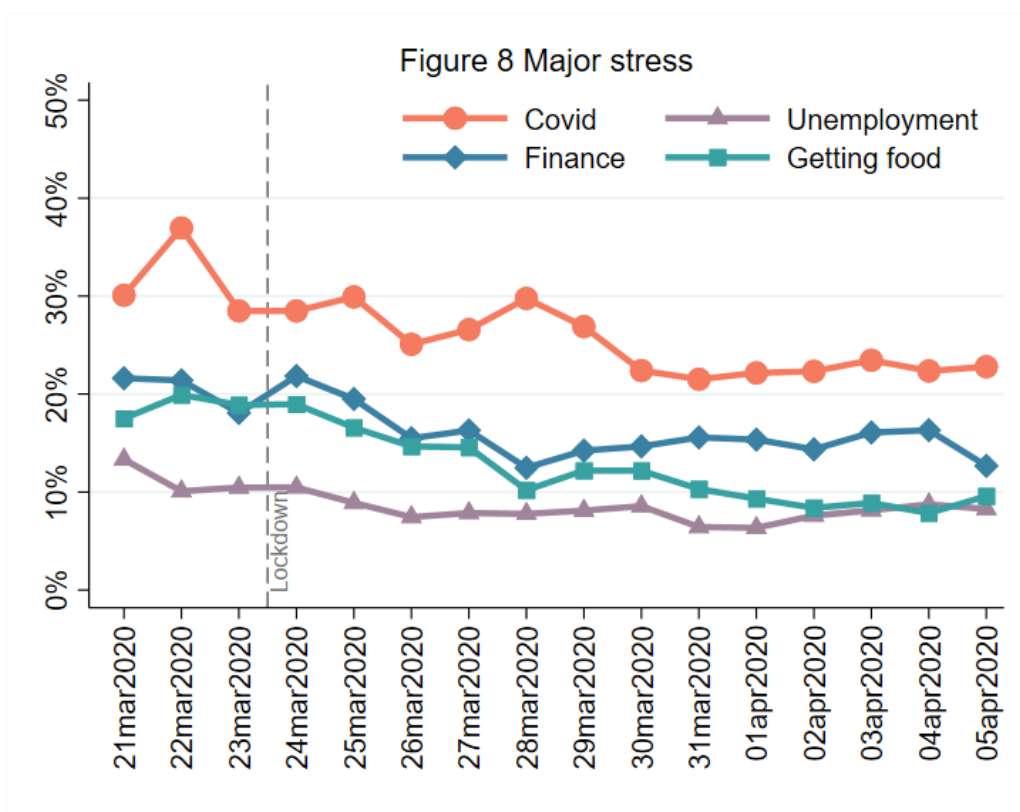


Figure 7d Anxiety by mental health diagnosis



2.2 Stress



FINDINGS

We asked participants to report which factors were causing them major stress in the last week, which was defined as stress that was constantly on their mind or kept them awake at night. Stress relating to Covid-19 (both catching Covid-19 and becoming seriously ill from Covid-19) has decreased since lockdown began and has stabilised in the last week. This stress is still being reported by a greater number of people than stresses relating to finance, unemployment, or accessing food. Stressors relating to finance and food have decreased over the past fortnight.

Stress relating to Covid-19 has been highest amongst those aged 30-59, but has been declining in all groups. It has been a more volatile worry amongst people living alone. It is a greater worry amongst people with a lower household income and people with a diagnosed mental health condition. Stress relating to unemployment has been much greater amongst people under the age of 60 and people with a diagnosed mental health condition, but has been little different amongst people based on living status or household income. When comparing this to stress relating to finance, the pattern is the same, with the exception of household income, where finance has been a greater worry amongst people with an annual household income of <£30,000. Stress relating to accessing food has been similar across age groups, but has been higher amongst people living alone, with lower household incomes, and with a diagnosed mental health condition. Nevertheless, it has been decreasing quite steeply in all groups.

Figure 9a Covid-19 stress by age groups

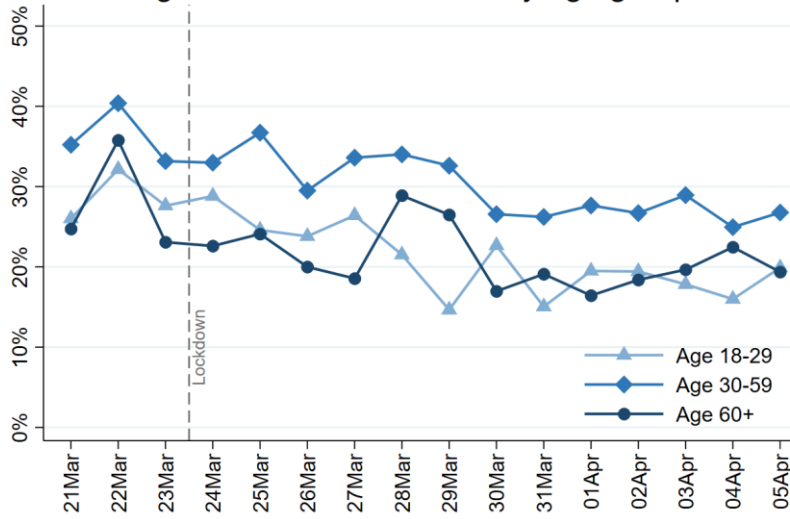


Figure 9b Covid-19 stress by living arrangement

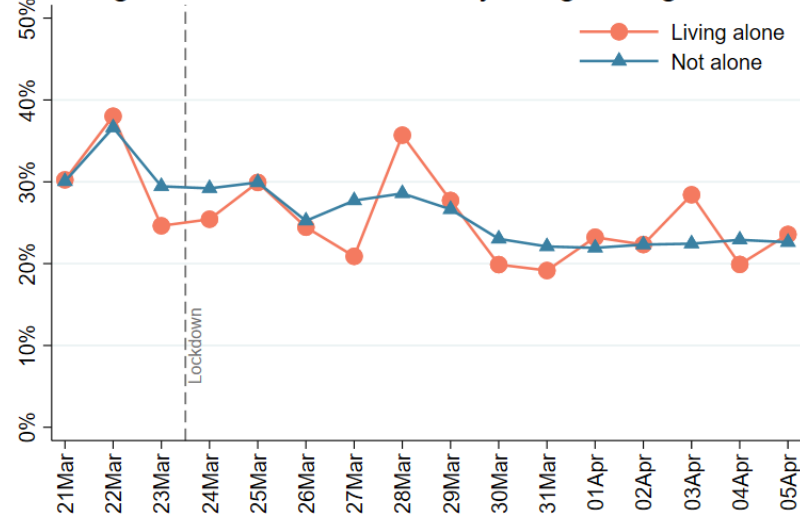


Figure 9c Covid-19 stress by household income

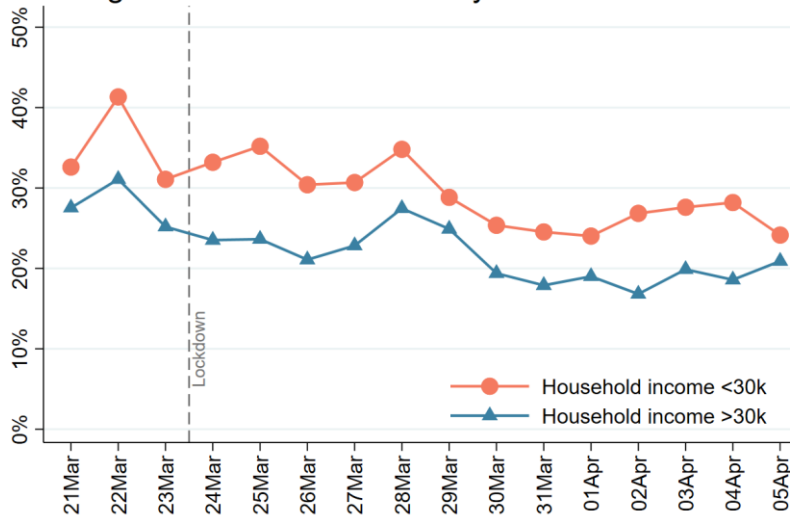


Figure 9d Covid-19 stress by mental health diagnosis

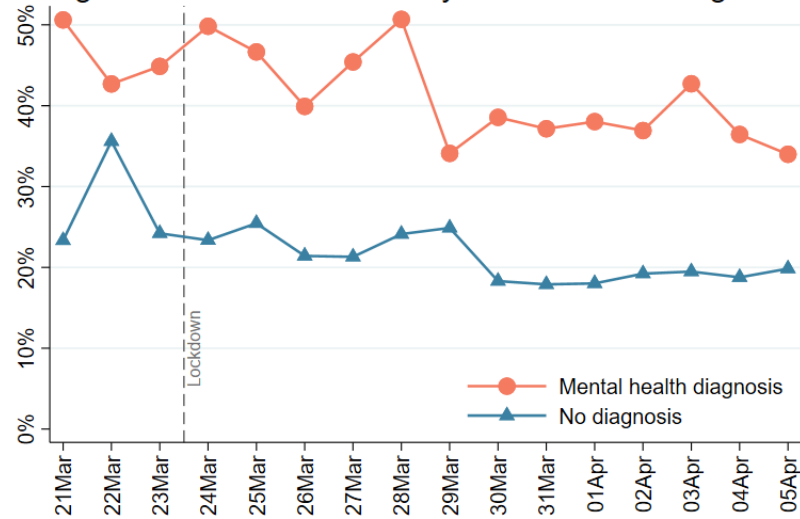


Figure 10a Unemployment stress by age groups

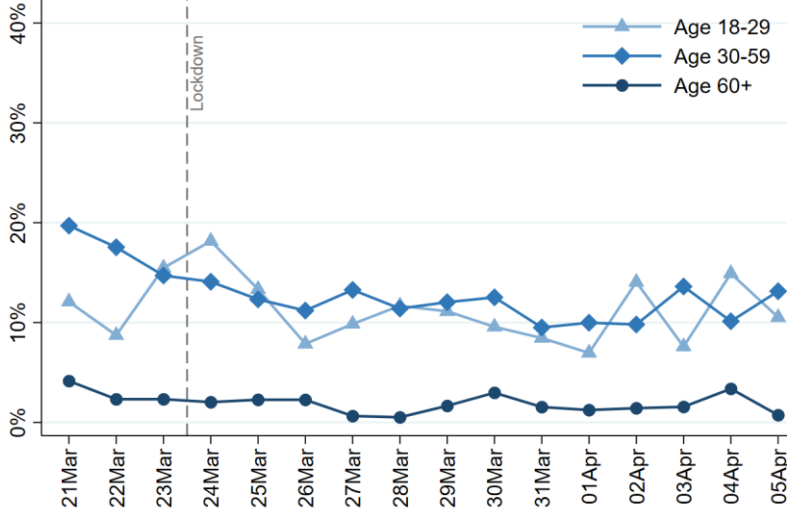


Figure 10b Unemployment stress by living arrangement

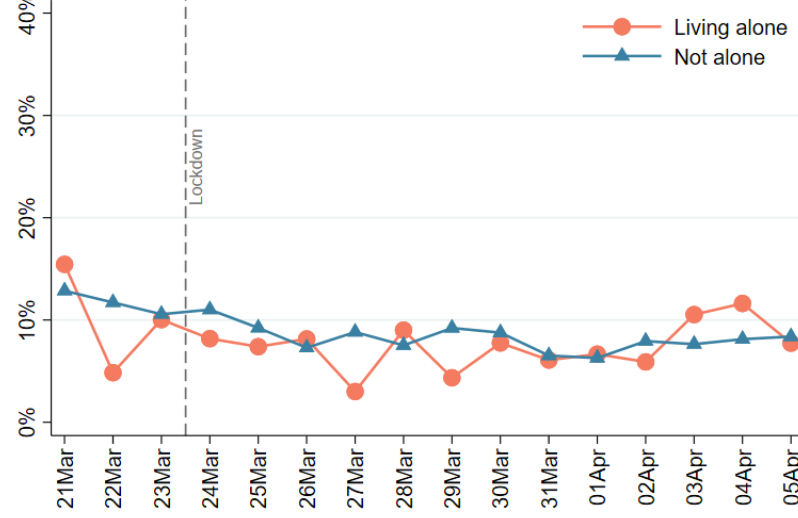


Figure 10c Unemployment stress by household income

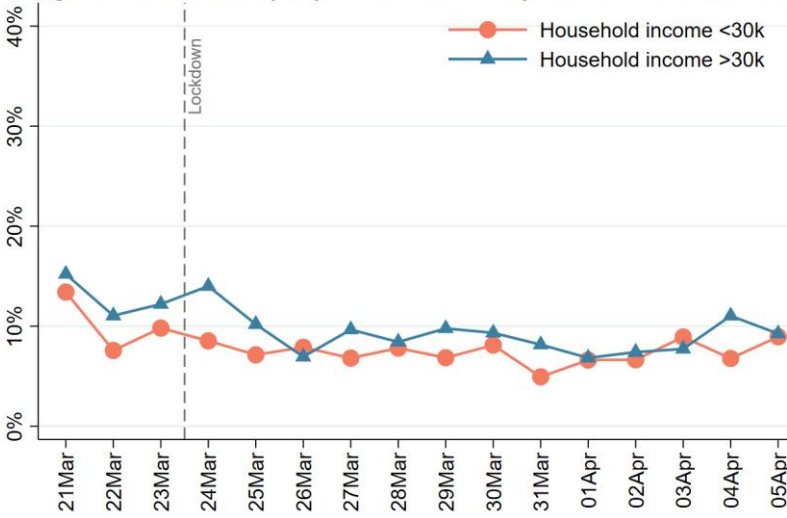


Figure 10d Unemployment by mental health diagnosis

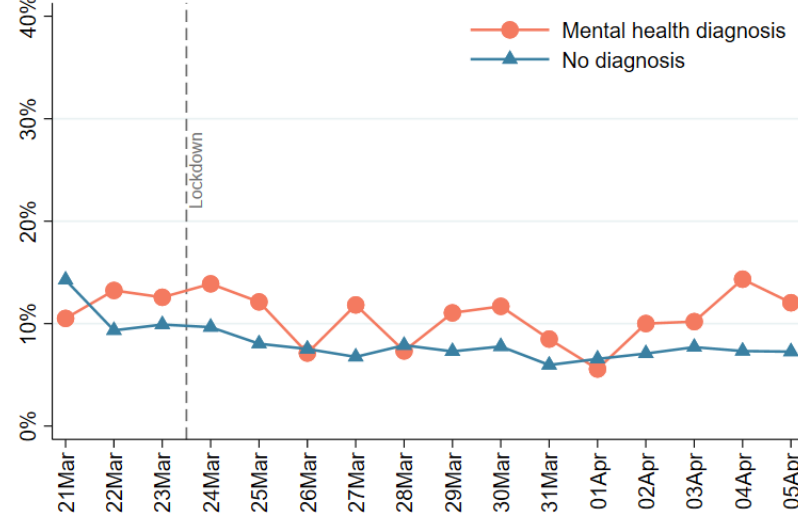


Figure 11a Financial stress by age groups

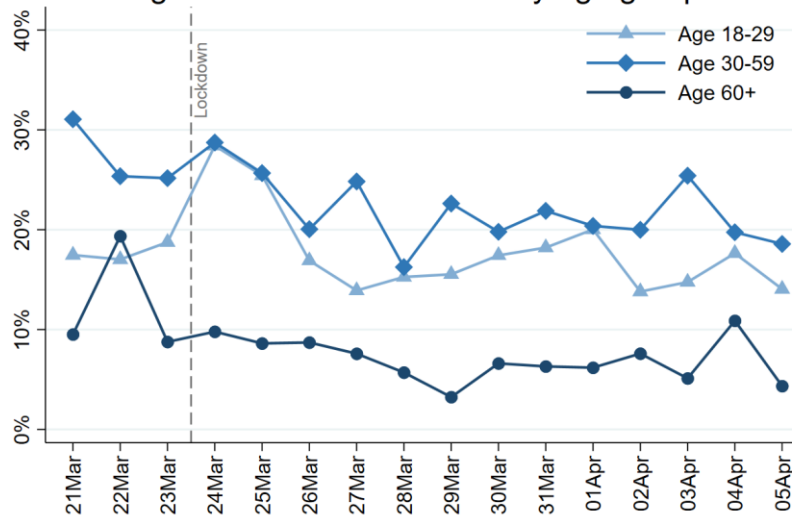


Figure 11b Financial stress by living arrangement

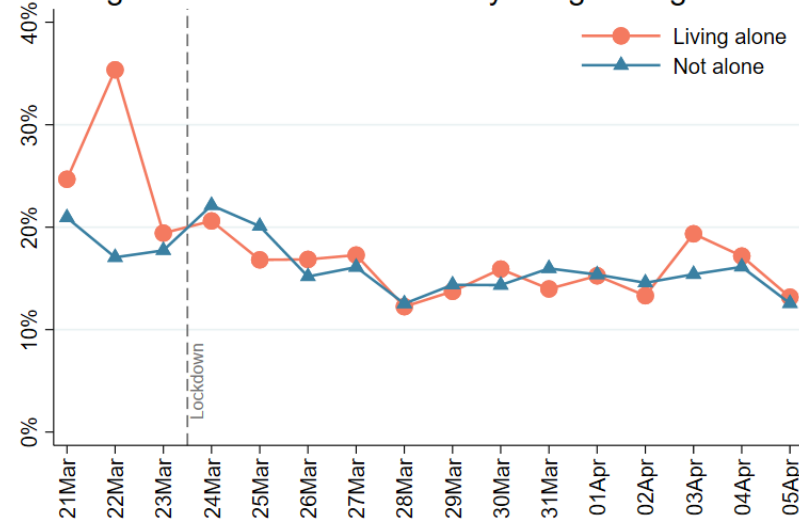


Figure 11c Financial stress by household income

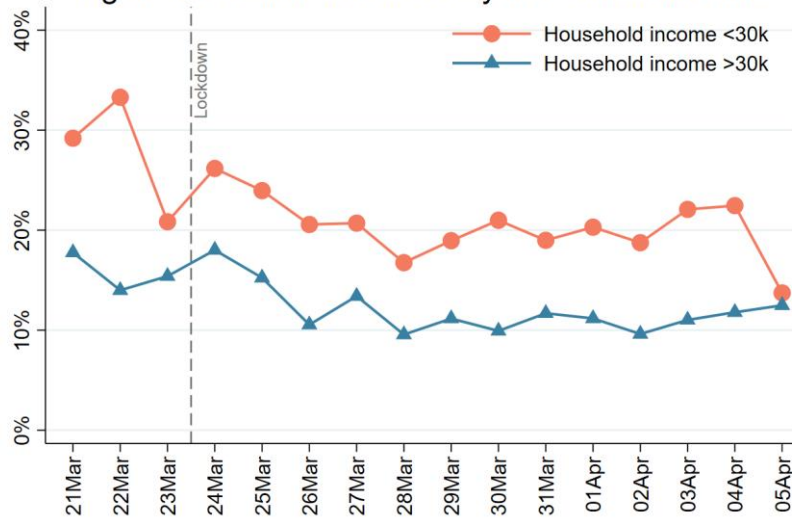


Figure 11d Financial stress by mental health diagnosis

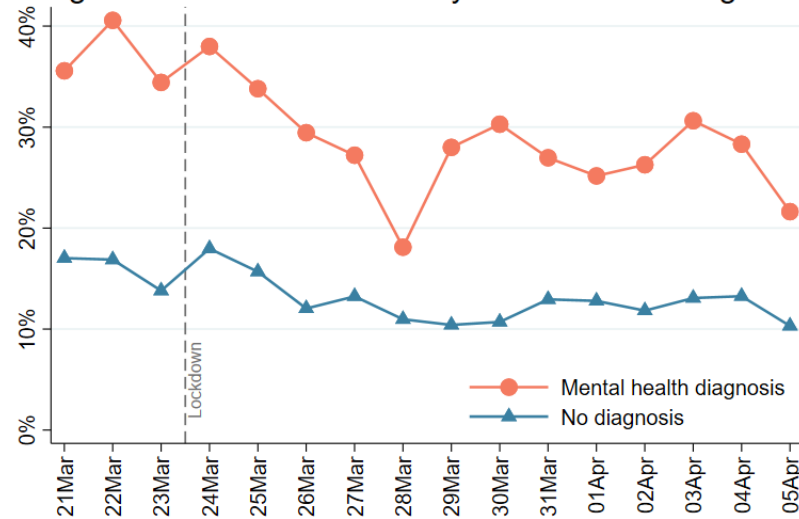


Figure 12a Food stress by age groups

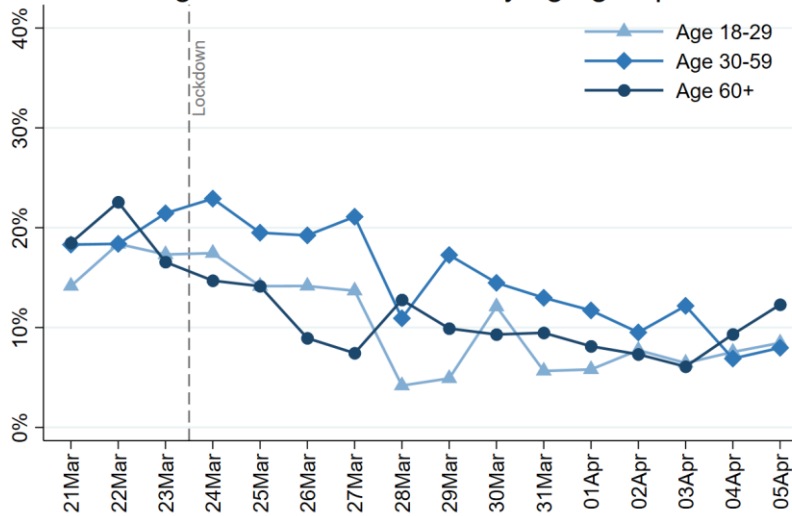


Figure 12b Food stress by living arrangement

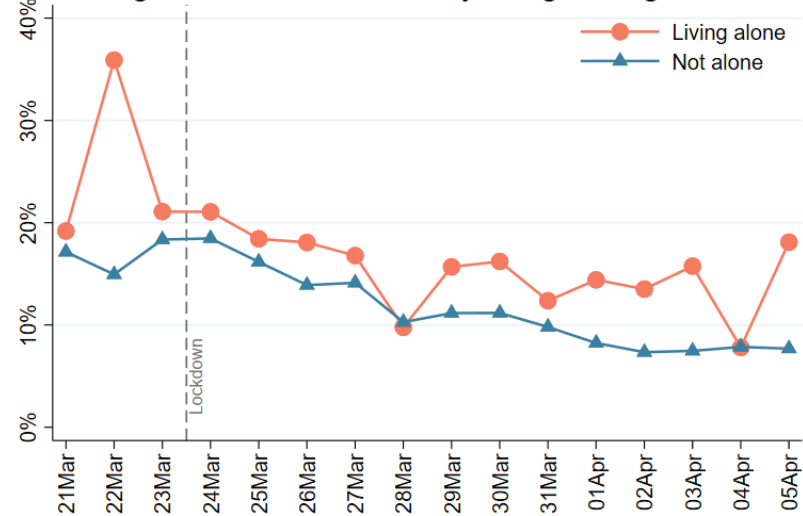


Figure 12c Food stress by household income

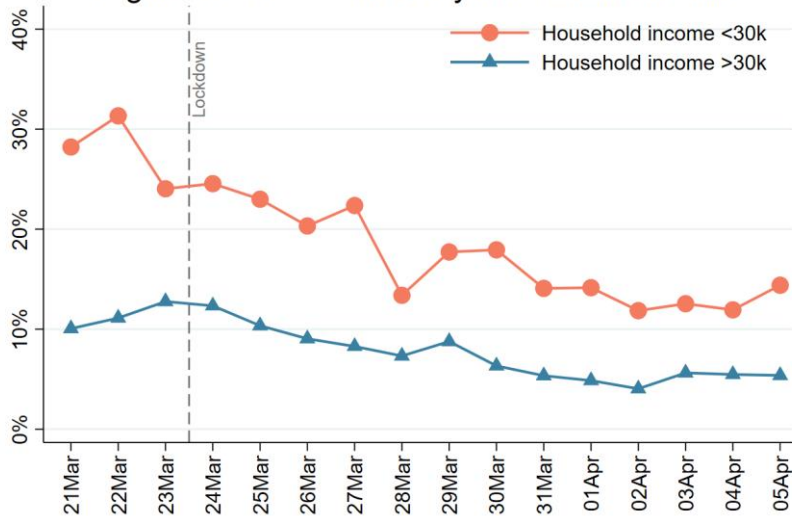
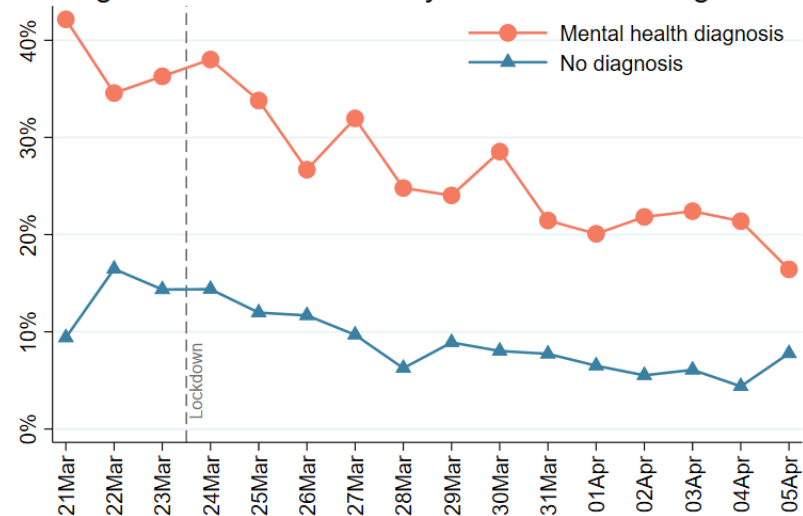
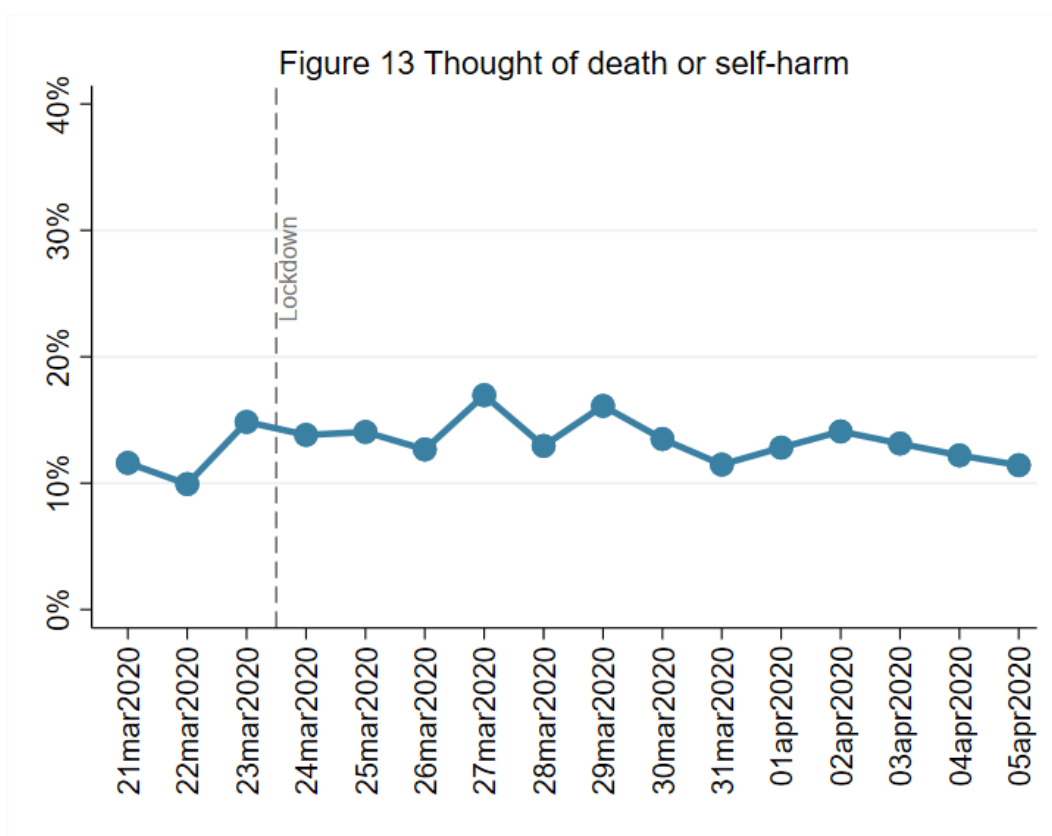


Figure 12d Food stress by mental health diagnosis



3. Self-harm and abuse

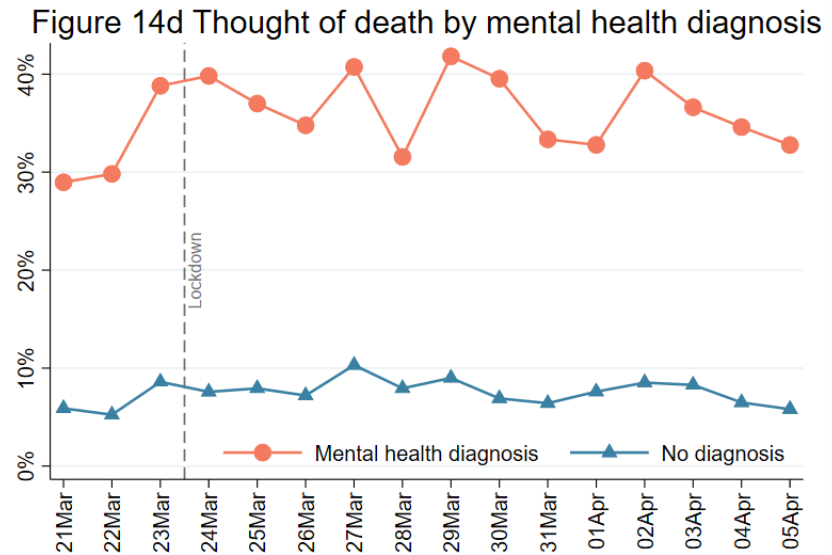
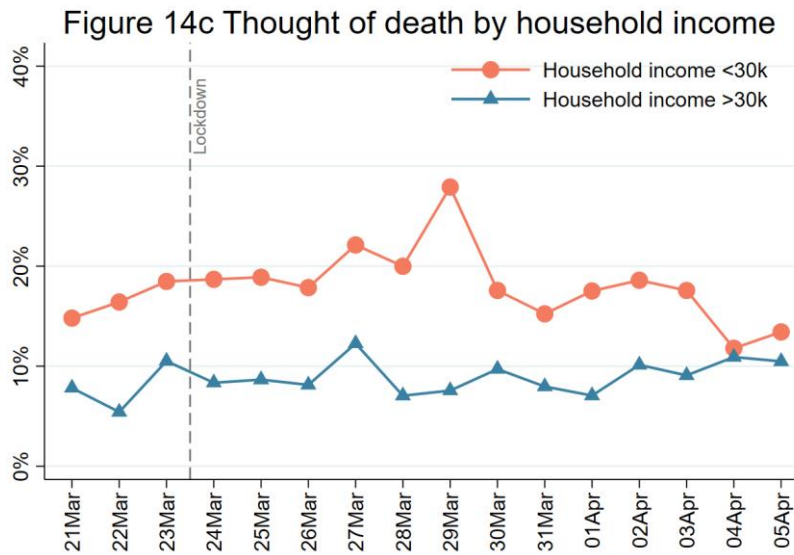
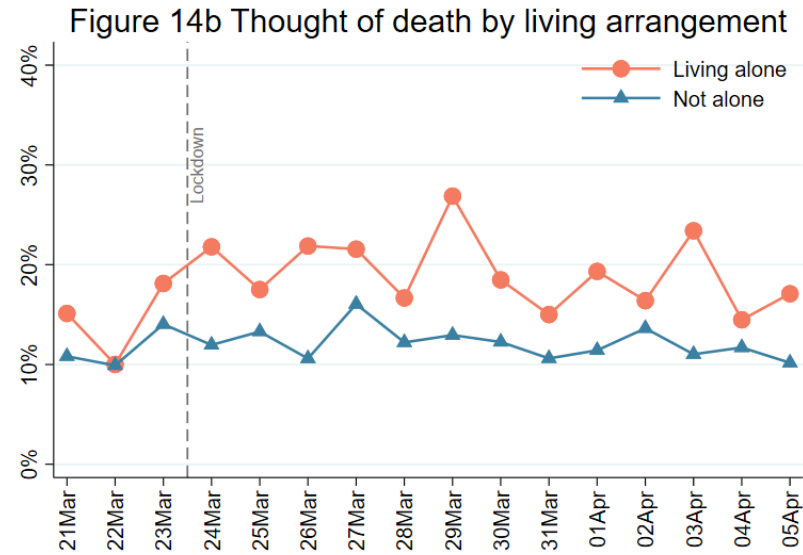
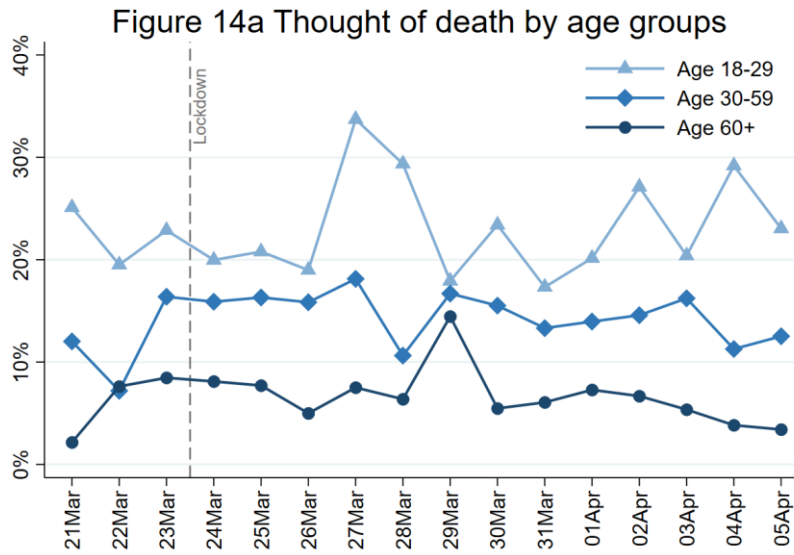
3.1 Thought of death or self-harm



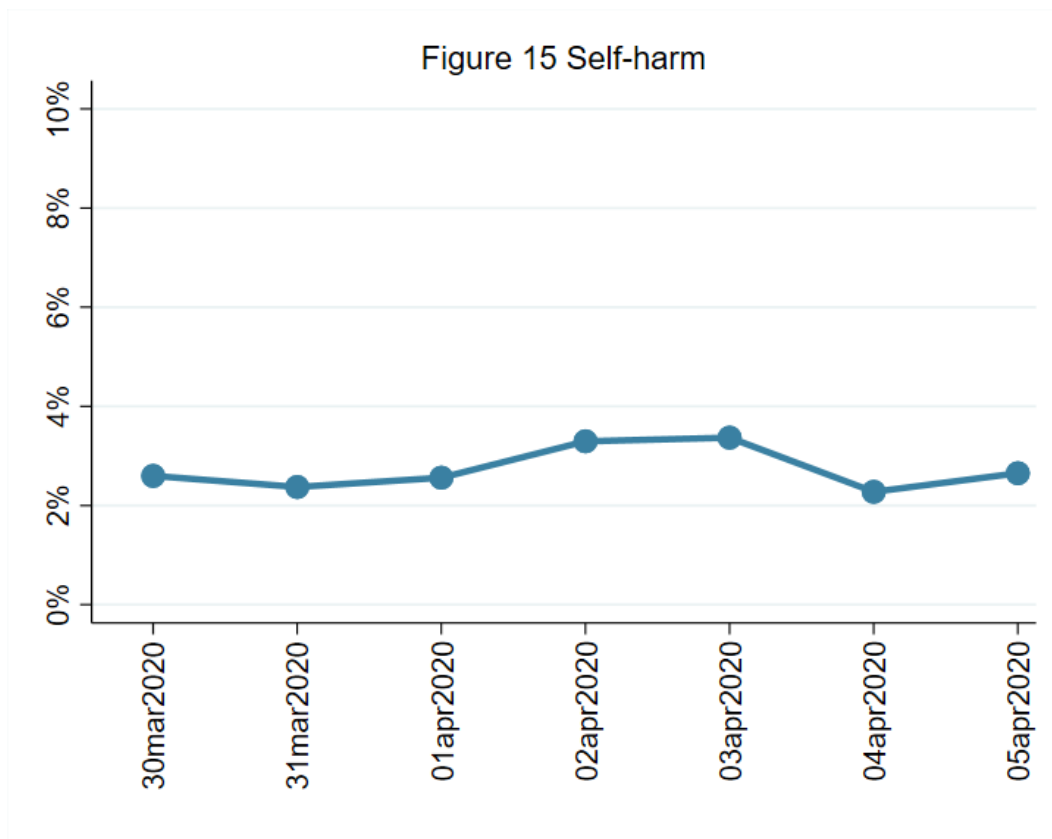
FINDINGS

Suicidal thoughts are measured using a specific item within the PHQ-9 that asks whether, in the last week, someone has had “thoughts that you would be better off dead or of hurting yourself in some way”. Responses are on a 4-point scale ranging from “not at all” to “nearly every day”. We focused on any response that indicated having such thoughts.

Percentages of people having thoughts of death or self-harm have been relatively stable during the last fortnight. They have been higher amongst younger people, those living alone, those with a lower household income, and people with a diagnosed mental health condition. Thoughts have also been more volatile amongst these groups.



3.2 Self-harm

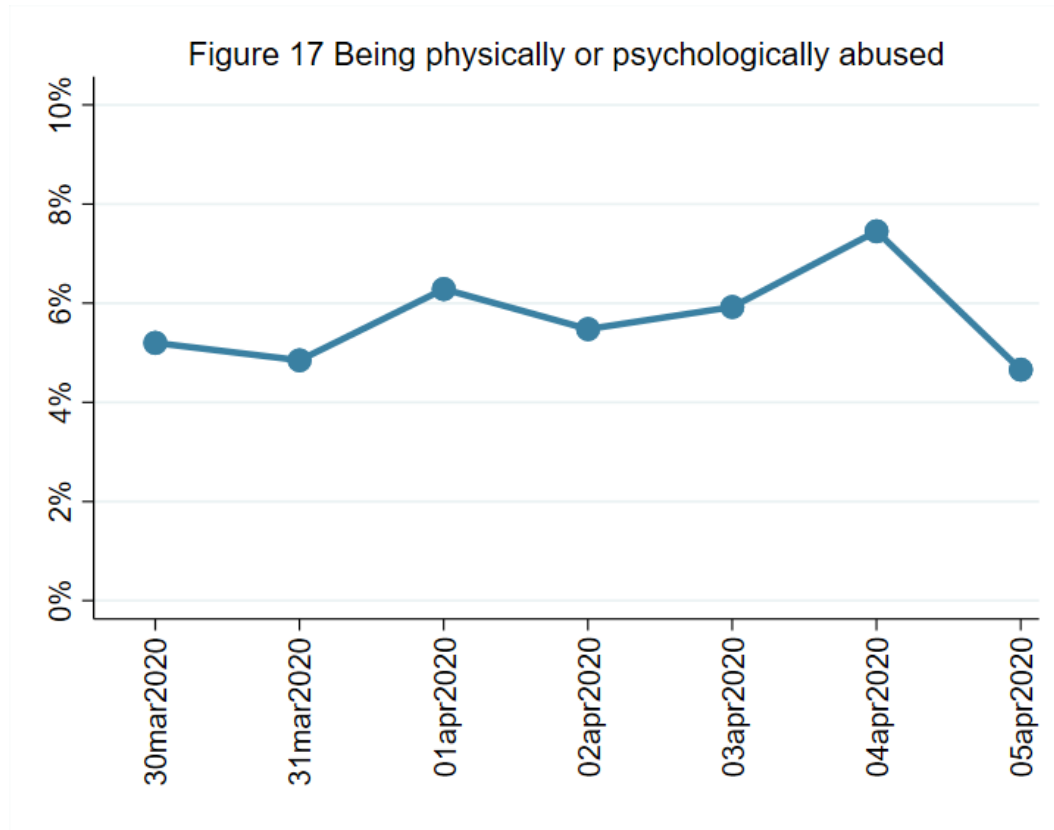


FINDINGS

Self-harm was assessed using a question that asks whether someone in the last week has been “self-harming or deliberately hurting yourself”. Responses are on a 4-point scale ranging from “not at all” to “nearly every day”. We focused on any response that indicated any self-harming. Self-harm data are only available for the last week onwards.

So far, interpretation of a trend is challenging. Further interpretation and sub-group analyses on self-harm (Figures 16) will be presented from Report 4 onwards.

3.2 Abuse



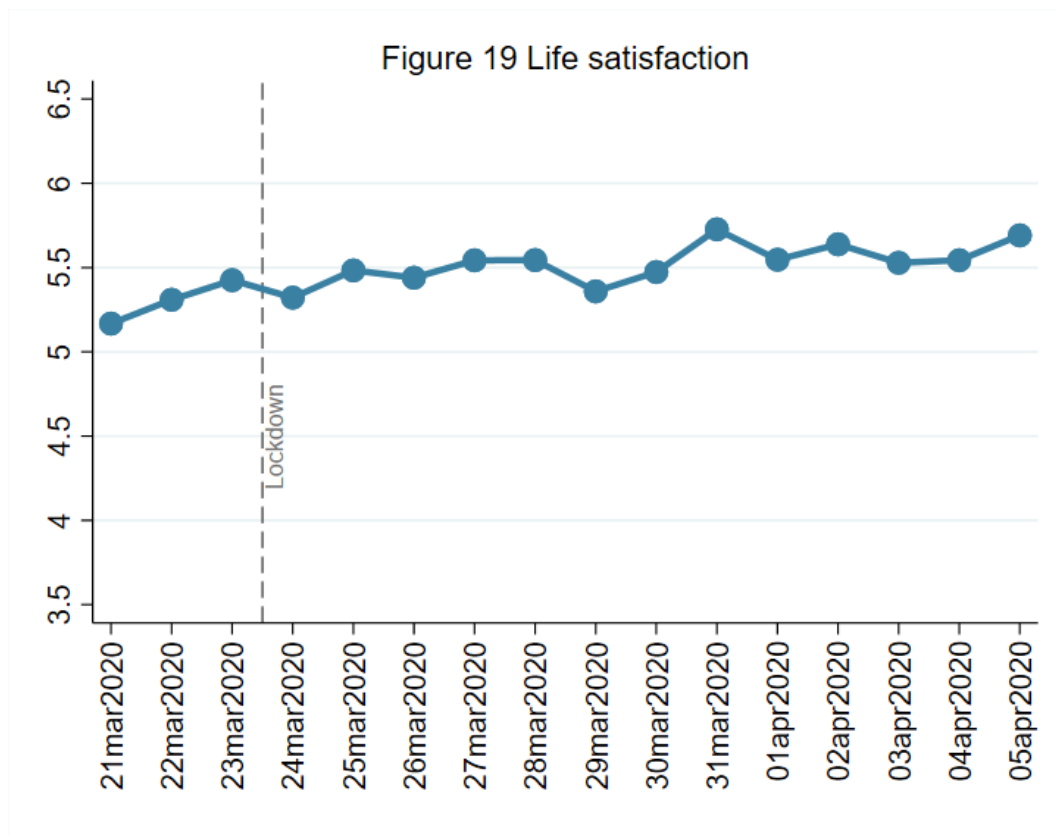
FINDINGS

Abuse was measured using two questions that ask if someone has experienced in the last week “being physically harmed or hurt by someone else” or “being bullied, controlled, intimidated, or psychologically hurt by someone else”. Responses are on a 4-point scale ranging from “not at all” to “nearly every day”. We focused on any response on either item that indicated any experience of abuse. Abuse data are only available for the last week onwards.

So far, interpretation of a trend is challenging. Further interpretation and sub-group analyses on self-harm (Figures 18) will be presented from Report 4 onwards.

4. General well-being

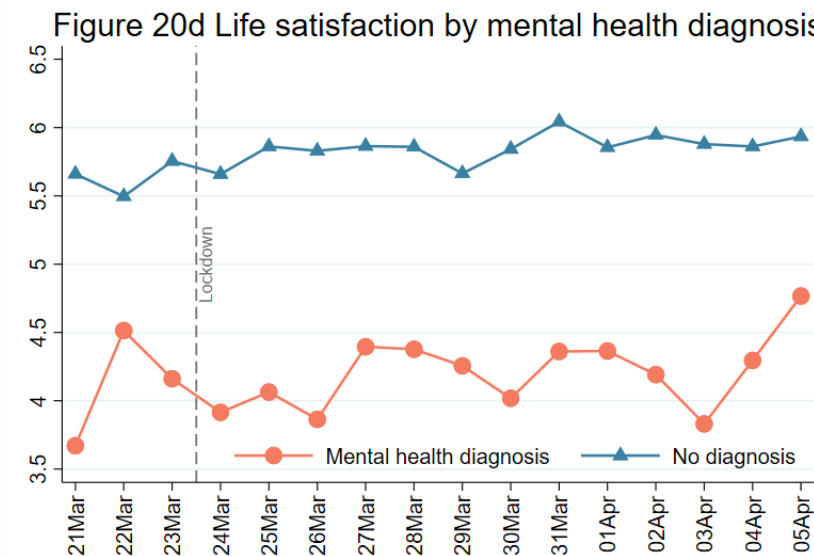
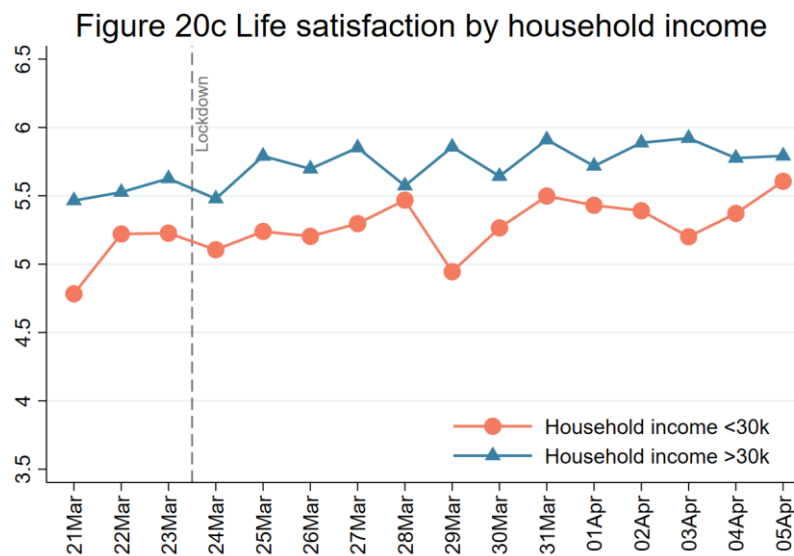
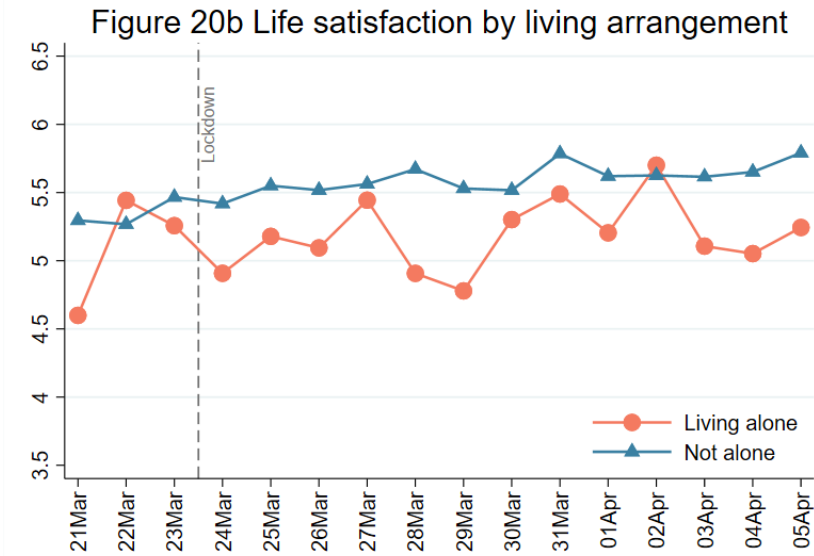
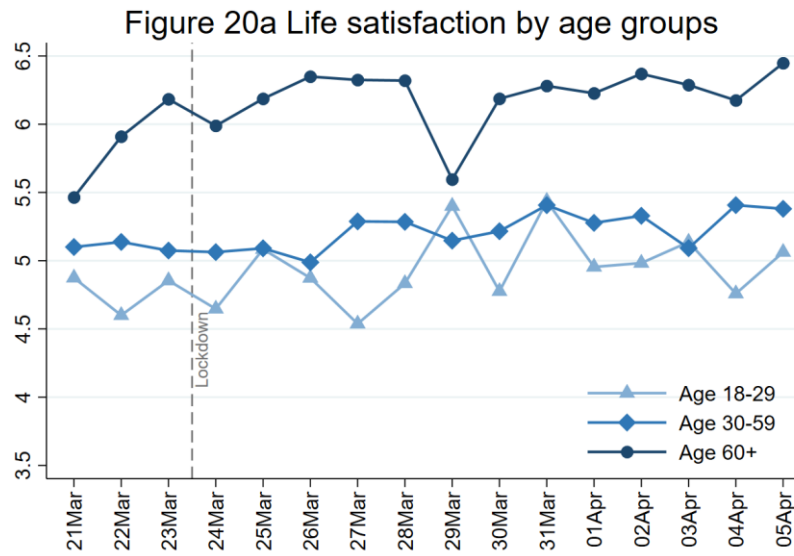
4.1 Life Satisfaction



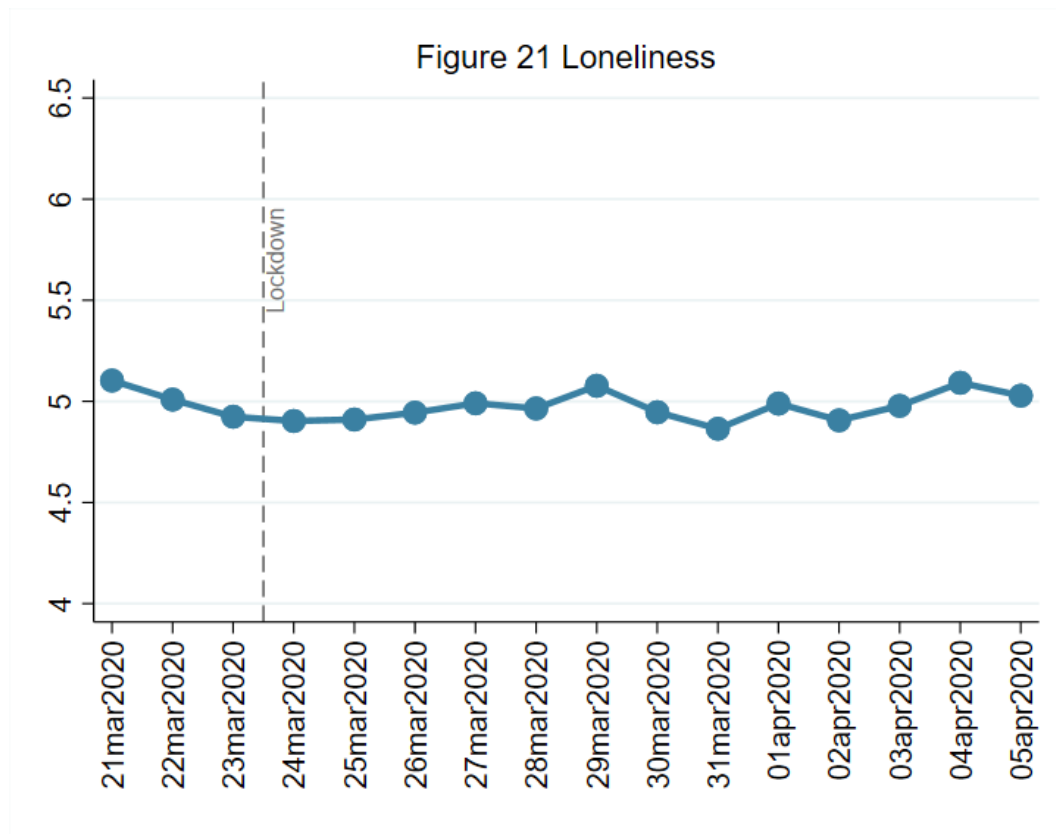
FINDINGS

Respondents were asked to rate their life satisfaction during the past week using the ONS wellbeing scale, which asks respondents about how satisfied they are with their life, using a scale from 0 (not at all) to 10 (completely).

Life satisfaction has been gradually increasing in the last 2 weeks. It has been more volatile amongst younger adults (those aged 18-29) and people living alone but the same small general increase is visible across most groups. Only those with an existing mental health diagnosis have shown less evidence of an increase, although most recent data suggests there may be improvements showing that remain to be confirmed with more data are available.



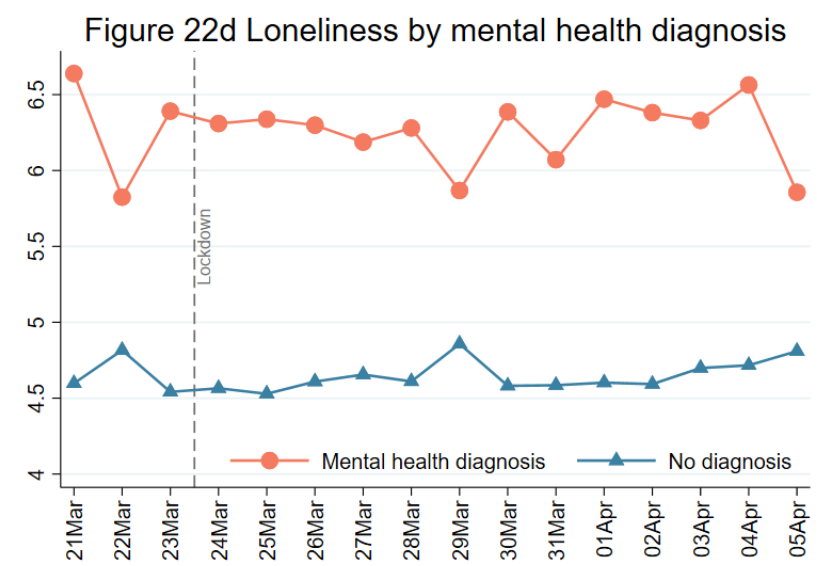
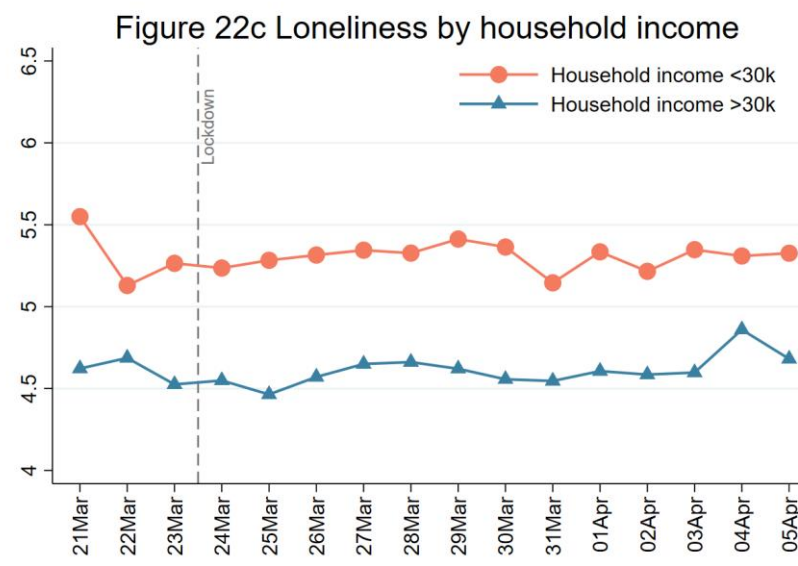
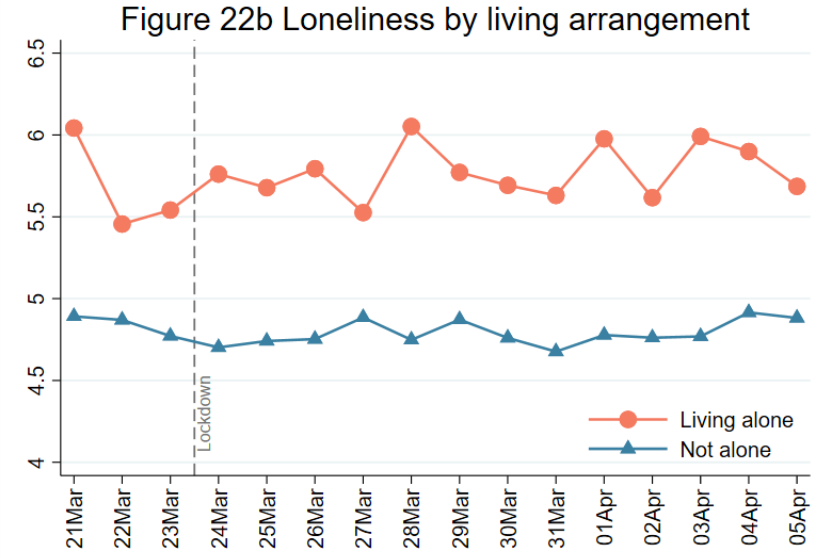
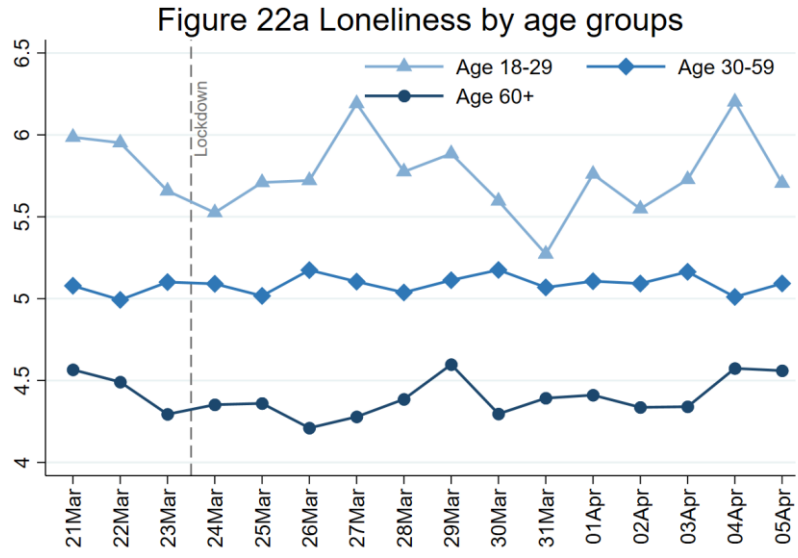
4.2 Loneliness



FINDINGS

Respondents were asked about levels of loneliness during the past week using the 3-item UCLA-3 Loneliness, a short form of the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (UCLA-R). Each item is rated with a 4-point rating scale, ranging from “never” to “always”, with higher scores indicating greater loneliness.

Loneliness levels have been higher amongst younger adults, those living alone, those with lower household income levels, and those with an existing diagnosed mental health condition. However, there has not been much evidence to date of a change in these levels over the lockdown period or the days preceding.



Appendix

Methods

The Covid-19 Social Study is a panel study of the psychological and social experiences of adults in the UK during the outbreak of the novel coronavirus run by University College London. To date, over 55,000 people have participated in the study, providing baseline socio-demographic and health data as well as answering questions on their mental health and wellbeing, the factors causing them stress, their levels of social interaction and loneliness, their adherence to and trust in government recommendations, and how they are spending their time. The study does not aim to be representative of the UK population, but instead to have good representation across all major socio-demographic groups. The study sample has therefore been recruited through a variety of channels including through the media, through targeted advertising by online advertising companies offering pro-bono support to ensure this stratification, and through partnerships with organisations representing vulnerable groups, enabling meaningful subgroup analyses.

Specifically, in the analyses presented here we included adults in the UK who were not designated as keyworkers and who therefore are requested to stay at home by the government. We used new cross-sectional data from individuals as they entered the study and also included weekly longitudinal data as participants received their routine follow-up. In this report, we treated the data as repeated cross-sectional data collected daily from the 21st of March to the 5th of April (the latest data available). Aiming at a representative sample of the population for each sub-dataset, we weighted the data for each day to the proportions of age group, gender and educational level on the basis of ONS population estimates and Annual population Survey (2018).

The study is focusing specifically on the following questions:

1. What are the psychosocial experiences of people in isolation?
2. How do trajectories of mental health and loneliness change over time for people in isolation?
3. Which groups are greater risk of experiencing adverse effects of isolation than others?
4. How are individuals' health behaviours being affected?
5. Which activities help to buffer against the potential adverse effects of isolation?

The study has full ethical and data protection approval and is fully GDPR compliant. For further information or to request specific analyses, please contact Dr Daisy Fancourt d.fancourt@ucl.ac.uk.

To participate, visit: www.covid19study.org. For the study website, visit www.MARCHNetwork.org

Demographics of respondents included in this report

NB In this report, we only included respondents who were not keyworkers.

Table A1 Demographics of participants in the pooled raw data (unweighted)

	Number of observations	%
Age		
18-29	4,579	10.0
30-59	28,810	58.7
60+	14,323	31.3
Gender		
Men	12,185	26.8
Women	33,288	73.2
Living alone		
No	36,910	80.7
Yes	8,802	19.3
Annual household income		
>30k	25,049	60.7
<30k	16,213	39.3
Any diagnosed mental health conditions		
No	37,082	81.1
Yes	8,630	18.9