



2025 BlueSky Youth Mental Health Survey

Perspectives on Mental Health from
California's Young People

Blue Shield of California is an independent member of the Blue Shield Association. Children Now is independent of Blue Shield of California and is contracted by Blue Shield to design and implement a youth mental health survey.



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Introduction

Blue Shield of California—in partnership with Children Now—set out to take the temperature of California Gen Z youth and their mental health. We surveyed 750 youth age 14-25 from a diverse range of backgrounds and communities across the state.

The results are both concerning and hopeful. The vast majority of youth {94%} are struggling with their mental health, citing a range of socio-economic and political stressors. Housing insecurity and the price of groceries, as well as gun violence, climate change, and discrimination top their concerns.

However, the majority of youth are also hopeful about the future and taking action on their mental health and on issues they care about as a way to cope. Though stigma can still be a barrier in seeking professional help, the majority talk to friends about what they are going through. They also connect with peers on social media.

To address the unprecedented challenges youth are facing, decision makers across government, health care, and the nonprofit sectors must partner with parents, teachers, and youth leaders. Together we must develop actionable strategies to improve youth mental health support systems, including increasing access to professional services; expanding peer-to-peer support, education, and advocacy; and fostering a more empathetic culture.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Numbers at a glance

Vast majority of youth struggle with mental health

94% of Gen Z youth experience mental health challenges in an average month.

1/3 rate their mental health as "fair" or "poor," with stress and anxiety cited as top challenges.

98% of youth who report poor mental health, are youth of color, and 25% are LGBTQ+ youth.

Numerous socio-economic issues impact youth mental health

87% cite housing affordability as a key stressor.

85% cite gun violence.

84% cite the cost of groceries.

81% cite discrimination against immigrants.

78% cite climate change.

78% cite racism.

75% cite gender inequality.

73% cite getting a good job.

67% cite discrimination against LGBTQ+ people

Youth cope by taking positive action

63% remain optimistic for the future and are engaging in efforts to protect their mental health and advocate for change.

69% have talked to a friend about their mental health, highlighting the importance of peer supports.

99% of youth concerned with climate change are taking pro-climate actions.

Self-care

77% enjoy music/entertainment.

62% engage in hobbies.

55% exercise.

41% go outdoors.

Social media is both positive and negative

56% spend four or more hours a day on social media.

87% say it helps them stay connected to others.

63% report it as their main news source.

84% say misinformation is a stressor.

72% report it contributes to negative body image.

1 in 3 experience cyberbullying.

Stigma is a barrier to care

35% report embarrassment as a top barrier to accessing professional care. Even among those who did receive care, embarrassment is a common theme.

23% say they could not afford mental health care.

21% say they didn't know where to find help.

Methodology



Dates

April–June 2025



Mode

Online survey



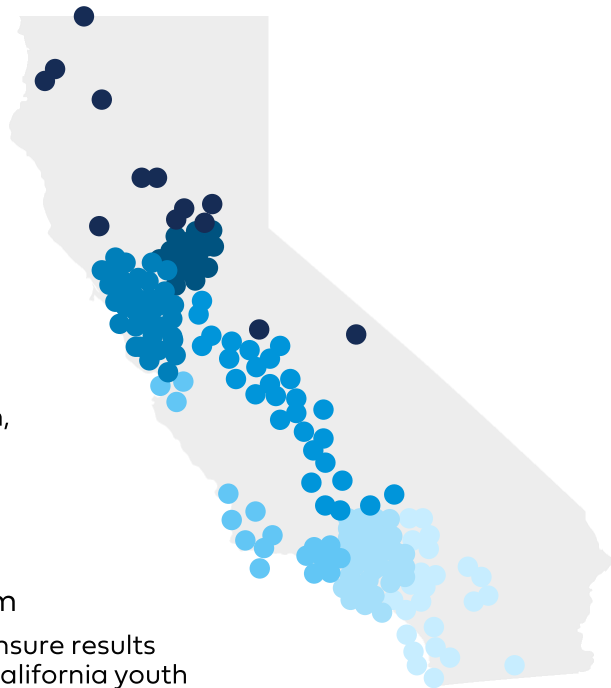
Sample

750 California youth,
aged 14–25



Weighting system

Data weighted to ensure results
are projectable to California youth
population



The research was conducted on behalf of Blue Shield of California by Children Now, a leading nonpartisan, California-based research and policy organization.

750 California youth aged 14–25 were surveyed online between April and June 2025. Participants represented a variety of socio-economic backgrounds from urban, suburban, and rural communities. Survey questions spanned mental health challenges, contributing factors, and how youth access support.

Survey respondents were provided a \$25 gift card upon completion as well as mental health resources if needed.

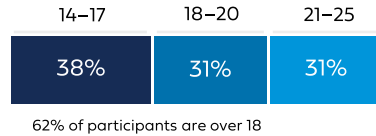
Data was weighted by region, race/ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation to align with general population demographics. Percentages may not add to 100% due to weighting and/or rounding.

To recruit participants, Children Now partnered with youth-serving agencies across the state who shared with their youth networks and partner organizations. This approach helped to ensure a diverse sampling across age groups, regions, and socio-economic backgrounds.

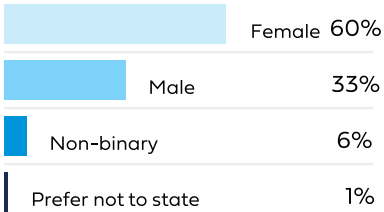
*Polls are subject to error—including but not limited to—coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments.

Survey participant demographics

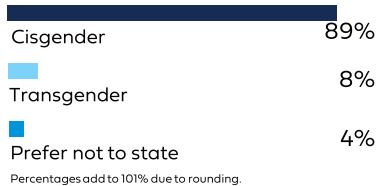
Age



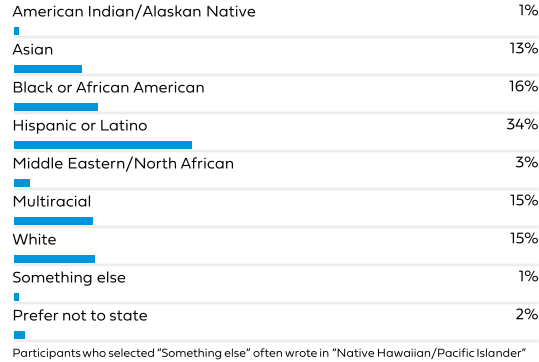
Gender



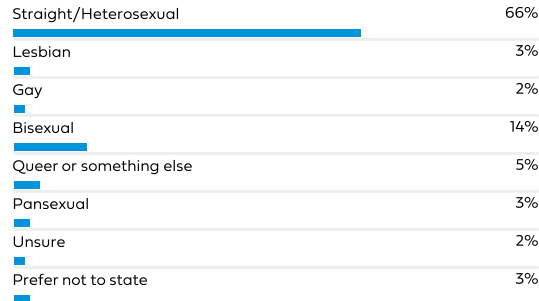
Gender identity



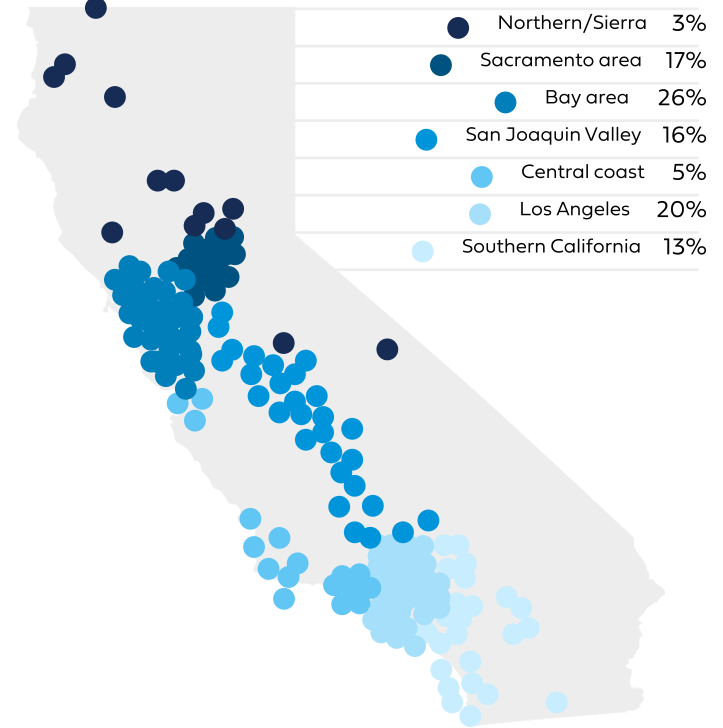
Race/ethnicity



Sexual identity



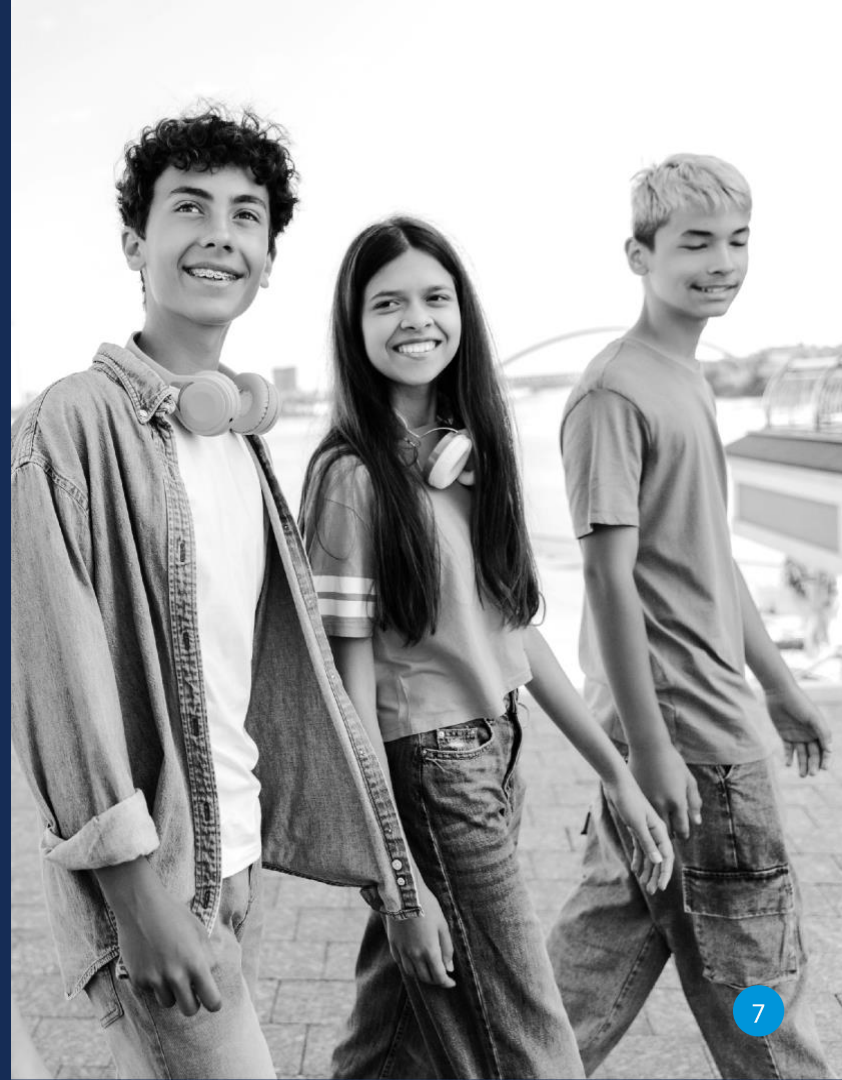
Region





Key Findings

Blue Shield of California is an independent member of the BlueShield Association. Children Now is independent of Blue Shield of California and is contracted by Blue Shield to design and implement a youth mental health survey.

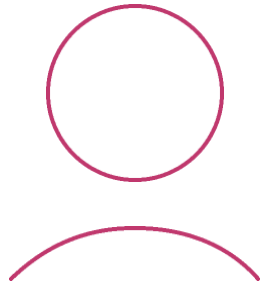


The vast majority of Gen Z youth report experiencing regular mental health challenges



94%

of youth report frequent mental health challenges.



The number of California youth reporting mental health challenges has increased from 87% when compared to a similar 2023 BlueSky Youth Mental Health survey by Harris Poll.

1/3

of respondents rate their overall mental health as "fair" or "poor" with stress and anxiety cited as top challenges.

98%

of those who report their mental health was poor are youth of color.

25%

of those who report their mental health was poor are LGBTQ+.

Base: All qualified respondents. N= 750. Question: (1) Which of the following mental health challenges, if any, do you experience in an average month? Please select all that apply. (2) How would you describe your overall mental health today?

Numerous socio-economic issues impact youth mental health



Economic concerns affect mental health for vast majority of youth:

87% cite housing affordability.

84% cite the price of groceries.

73% cite finding a good job.



Safety tops the youth worry list as school and other mass shootings proliferate:

85% report gun violence as a top stressor.



Discrimination is a persistent stressor across racial/gender/regional lines:

78% of all respondents are concerned with racism. (82% of youth of color and 67% of white youth).

67% cite concerns of discrimination against LGBTQ+ people.

81% cite concerns about discrimination against immigrants.



Climate change and natural disasters are having deep impacts on mental health:

78% of youth cite worries about climate change.

75% cite stress from natural disasters.

Youth express their concerns about personal & socio-economic issues

"Rent has increased exponentially...The chance of home ownership appears completely unrealistic even with a stable job. At times I wonder what would happen if I lost it—how quickly I could end up on the streets. It is hard to be psychologically safe or hopeful when the foundation of crude security—a decent and safe place to live—seems so precarious. Pressure like that mounts up and becomes fatigue. It's hard to concentrate, hard to plan for the future, and hard to feel like anything is under my control."

18-20 year-old

"Gun violence: I fear for my life as there have been school shootings near my school."

18-20 year-old

"Everything to do with immigration has impacted my mental health...I haven't been able to focus in school."

14-17 year old

"Inequality, climate change, and injustice often leave me feeling anxious, overwhelmed, and helpless...Constant bad news takes a toll on my mental health, making it hard to stay hopeful. At times, it affects my sleep and motivation, though taking action or connecting with others helps me cope."

14-17 year-old

"The constant barrage of news about climate change leaves me feeling anxious and helpless. I worry about the future of the planet and the legacy we're leaving behind, which often leads to sleepless nights and a pervasive sense of doom."

18-20 year-old

"My family has began isolating and going out less often, even for groceries. We're also starting to go hungry because of the [cost] of groceries and the inability to afford anything. These have significantly impacted my mental health and safety."

21-25 year-old

"I worry I will witness the world falling apart with natural disasters that wipe [away] humanity."

14-17 year-old

"I worry about whether I'll ever be able to afford groceries, get a job, or move out."

14-17 year old

Youth cope by taking action

Despite challenges, California youth remain optimistic for the future (63%), advocate on issues they care about, and engage in activities to improve their mental health.



69% Talk to friends

The majority of respondents talk to friends about their mental health.

37% identify a friend as the most helpful source of support—more than parents, romantic partners, or professionals.

These findings underscore the importance of Peer-Peer Support programs and Mental Health First Aid.



77% Use music/entertainment as self-care

An overwhelming majority report that listening to music, watching movies, and playing games bolsters their mental health.



The majority get active

The majority enjoy activities to support their mental well-being:

62% enjoy a hobby

55% play a sport

41% spend time outdoors

3 out of 4 youth experience climate anxiety

99% of those who cite climate anxiety engaged in pro-climate action.



75%

concerned with
natural disasters

78%

concerned with
climate change

99%

almost all of the youth who are concerned with climate change or natural disasters engaged in at least one pro-climate action in the past year such as reducing plastic or energy use, picking up litter, or using public transit.

Questions: (1) How concerned are you with each of the following social/political issues? Base: All qualified respondents. N=750. (2) Which of the following activities have you done in the past year? Please select all that apply. Base: Were concerned by climate change and/or natural disasters. N=638

Social media has both positive and negative effects on youth mental health



56% say they spend 4+ hours a day on social media.

63% say social media is their primary source of news and information.

42% say social media is helpful to their mental health.

31% say social media is harmful to their mental health.

Majority of youth report positive impacts of social media on their mental health



87% cite social connections

They report moderate to significant positive impact of having meaningful connections to family, friends, and “people like them.”



97% cite fun and entertainment.

96% cite learning new things.

96% cite being informed.

Base: All qualified respondents. N=750

Question: How much of a positive impact do each of the following aspects of social media have on your life?

Nearly one third of youth report negative impacts of social media on their mental health



84% say "misinformation" is a harmful impact of social media.

72% say social media has negative impacts on their body image.

1 in 3 youth report experiencing cyberbullying.



Youth talk about social media

"It's just hard trying to balance staying aware while also protecting my mental health...Sometimes just scrolling through Instagram or TikTok, I'll come across something that instantly makes me feel anxious or overwhelmed...[The] feeling of helplessness can last for days or even weeks, and I end up just feeling mentally exhausted. I start overthinking everything and feel anxious during school or when I'm trying to sleep. But at the same time, I don't want to completely ignore what's going on, because I care and want to stay informed."

14-17 year-old

"Body image issues [arise]...I find myself comparing myself to other girls, how they look, or how others live their lives."

18-20-year-old

"Social media can sometimes be of a positive and negative influence on mental health depending on what you see and hear. You can see a lot of violence but also a lot of good deeds as well"

21-25 year-old

Stigma is a barrier to mental health care



35%

of youth who wanted professional mental health care but didn't receive it cite embarrassment as the reason.

48%

of the youth who obtained professional mental health care cite embarrassment as an initial barrier to care.

Question: (1) If you wanted to receive professional mental health care (like from therapists or doctors), but didn't, what was standing in your way? Base: Did not select that they had talked to 1) professional counselor or therapist, 2) doctor, psychiatrist, or other medical practitioner, and 3) wellness coach. N=519. (2) What obstacles, if any, have you experienced in receiving, or trying to receive, professional mental health care (like from therapists or doctors)? Please select all that apply. Base: Selected that they had talked to 1) professional counselor or therapist, 2) doctor, psychiatrist, or other medical practitioner, or 3) wellness coach. N=231.



42% of Los Angeles youth report fair or poor mental health, compared to 30% statewide

Los Angeles communities have faced recent devastating wildfires, along with immigration and affordability pressures.

85%

of LA youth say climate change is affecting their mental health.

79%

of LA youth say natural disasters are impacting their mental health.

90%

cite the cost of housing as negatively impacting their mental health.

85%

of LA youth cite discrimination against immigrants as a persistent stressor impacting their mental health.



Base: All qualified respondents. N=750.

Question (1): How would you describe your overall mental health today? Base: All qualified respondents. N=750. (2) How concerned are you with each of the following social/political issues?

Urban and rural youth differ on mental health care preferences:

While most youth prefer face-to-face mental health care, rural youth are more likely than urban youth to select phone and text as alternatives. This could be because rural youth have to travel further for in-person care. Rural youth are also less likely than urban youth to select video care. Their preferences may be due to more limitations in broadband access in rural communities.

Rural youth		Urban youth	
	In-person (56%)		In-person (62%)
	Phone (24%)		Phone (8%)
	Text (14%)		Text (7%)
	Video (5%)		Video (22%)



Call to Action

Blue Shield of California is an independent member of the Blue Shield Association. Children Now is independent of Blue Shield of California and is contracted by Blue Shield to design and implement a youth mental health survey.



Join us in supporting youth mental health

The survey is a project of Blue Shield of California's BlueSky youth mental health initiative, a multi-year effort to promote emotional well-being for young people across California. Since 2019, BlueSky has supported over 25,000 youth and educators through on-campus and online mental health services, educator training, and youth-driven advocacy programs.

Blue Shield of California's BlueSky youth mental health initiative continues to collaborate with the California Department of Education and nonprofit organizations like Children Now to improve the health and well-being for all California youth.

BlueSky's primary goals



IMPROVE ACCESS to high-quality mental health counseling and support.



DEVELOP AWARENESS about youth mental health, training adults to recognize needs and provide appropriate support.



GROW ADVOCACY among youth to educate and engage their peers to utilize resources that support their own mental health.

This survey presents a concerning snapshot of the state of California's youth mental health. Our young people are facing unprecedented challenges, and they are managing their mental health the best way they know how. However, government, health care systems, and youth-serving nonprofit organizations must partner with parents, teachers, and youth leaders to better address the needs of youth. Together, we must create actionable strategies to increase access to youth mental health care; peer-to-peer support, education, and advocacy; and foster a kinder, more empathetic culture.

Resources & partners



[BlueSky](#) - Blue Shield of California's Youth Mental Health Initiative

[Children Now](#) – California-based nonpartisan research and policy organization

[California Mental Health Resources for Youth](#)

BlueSky partners engage young people, parents, and educators to address youth mental health needs. The programs we have supported include:

- The [California Department of Education](#) Youth Mental Health First Aid training for public school educators.
- [Climate Mental Health Network](#) develops and provides resources and programs, informed by research, to empower youth, parents, and educators, and clinicians to normalize conversations about climate emotions and provide coping strategies.
- [Directing Change](#) engages young people throughout California to learn about suicide prevention and mental health and then educate their peers through creative filmmaking.
- Mental Health California's [Brother Be Well](#) offers a multimedia platform for boys and men of color, blending awareness, innovation, education, and healing pathways to reduce disparities, disrupt prolonged suffering, and improve health and mental wellness. They also are offering a new "Into the Classroom" mental wellness curriculum for CA middle and high school youth. You can access it [here](#).
- NAMI California's [On Campus](#) clubs raise mental health awareness, educate the campus community, and reduce stigma in schools through peer-led activities, education, and advocacy.
- [Wellness Together](#) partners with K-12 school districts and colleges to provide turn-key mental health services for students, families, and educators. Check out their online [Wellness Education Lab](#) Practical and Empowering Mental Health Trainings for youth and adults.



Detailed Findings

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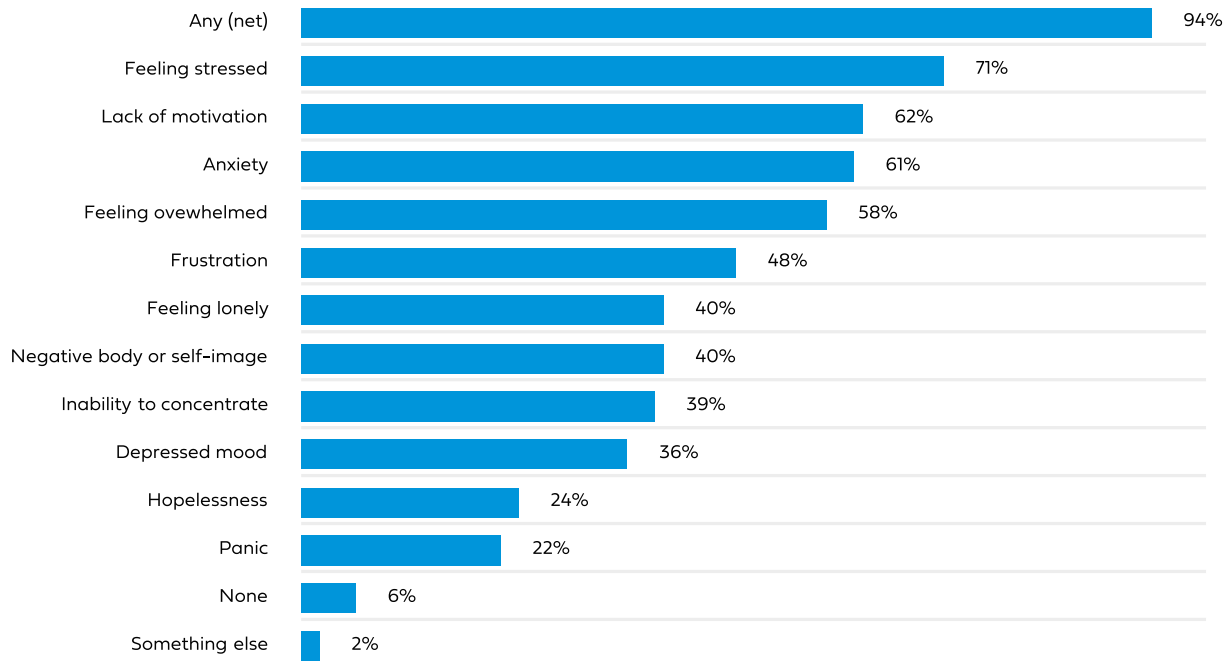
SECTION 1

Youth reflect on their mental health



Mental health challenges

Which of the following mental health challenges, if any, do you experience in an average month? Please select all that apply.

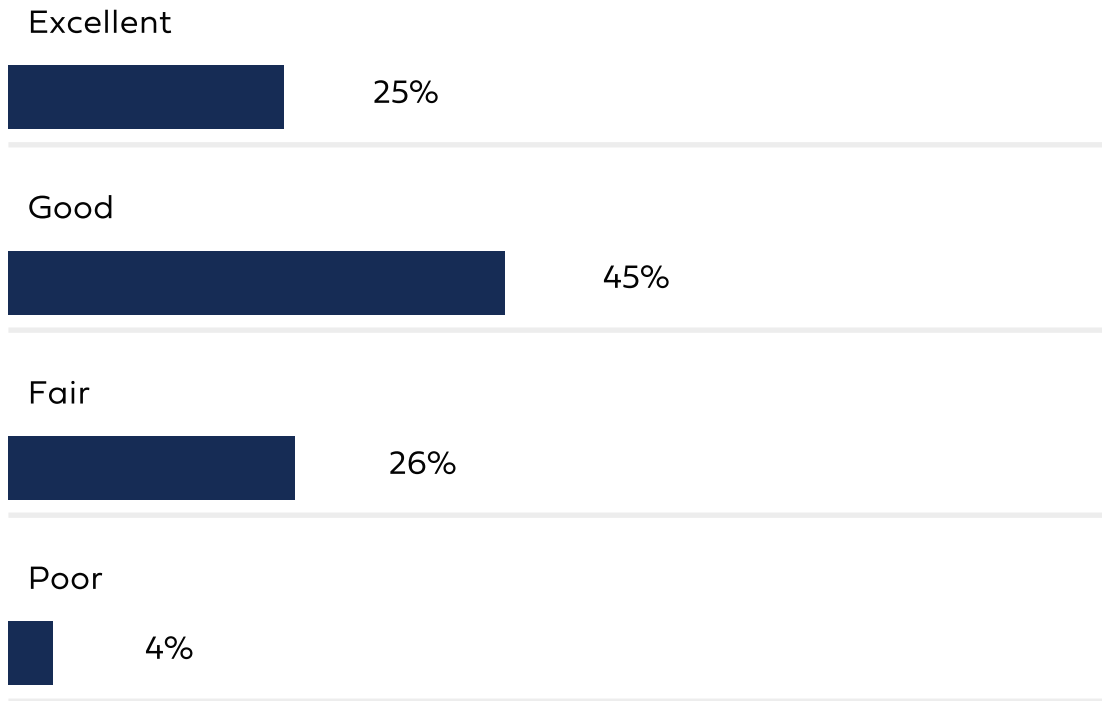


Base: All qualified respondents. N=750.

Question: Which of the following mental health challenges, if any, do you experience in an average month? Please select all that apply.

Overall mental health

How would you describe your overall mental health today?



Of the respondents who say poor, 98% are youth of color and 25% are LGBTQ+ youth

Base: All qualified respondents. N=750.

Question: How would you describe your overall mental health today?

Concerns about the future

What do you most strongly feel when you think about the future?

63%

Very/slightly optimistic

12%

Neither optimistic nor worried

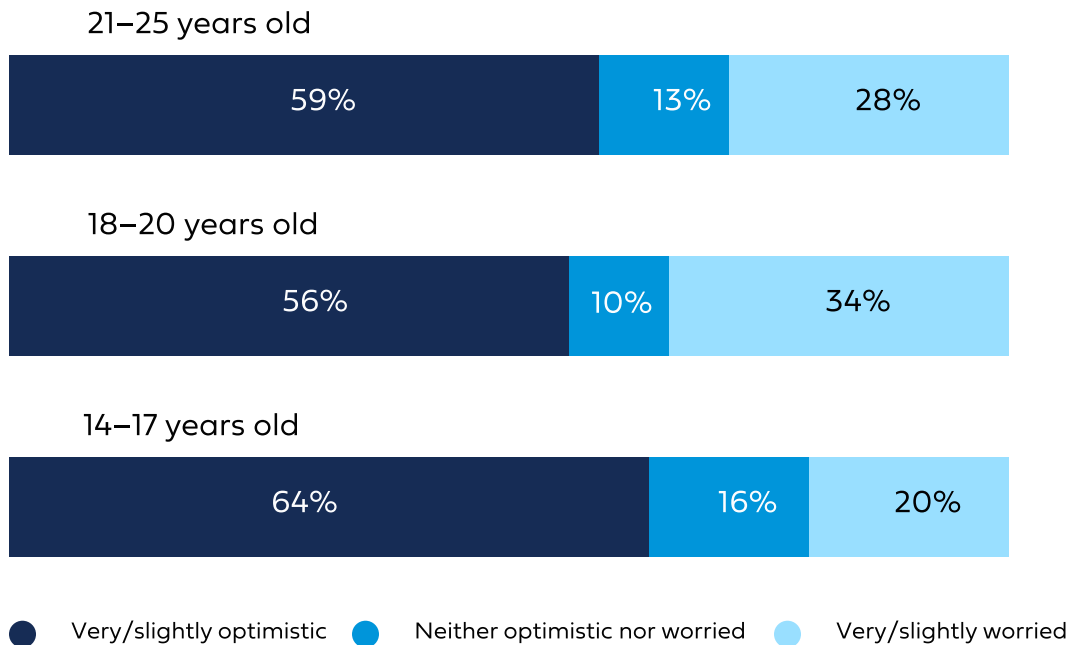
25%

Very/slightly worried

Base: All qualified respondents. N=749 (Two didn't respond).
Question: What do you most strongly feel when you think about the future?

Concerns about the future (continued)

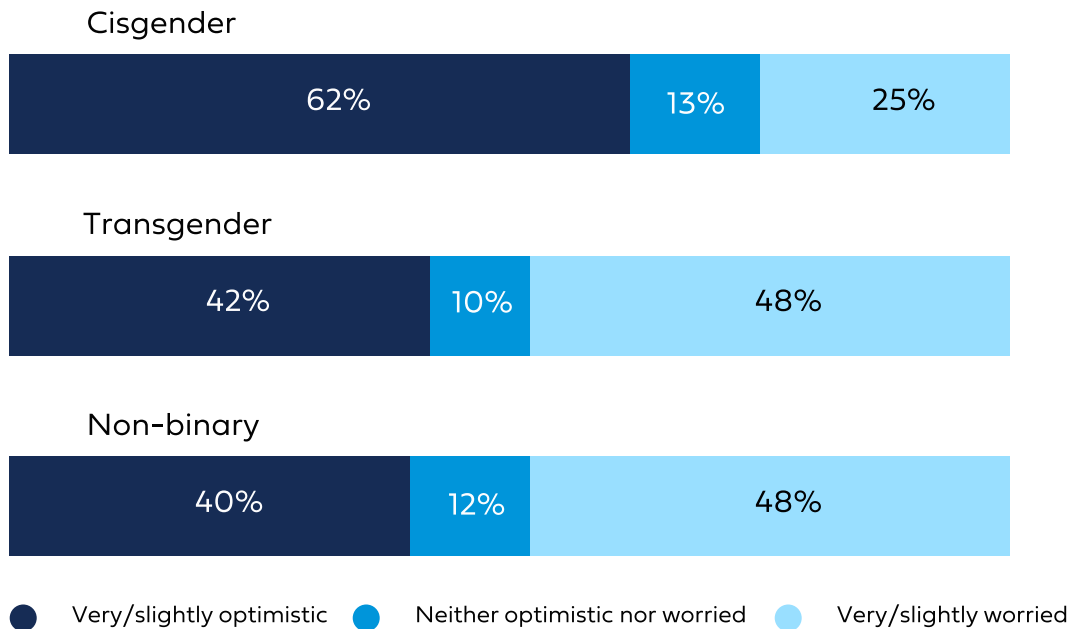
What do you most strongly feel when you think about the future?



Base: All qualified respondents. N=748 (Two didn't respond).
Question: What do you most strongly feel when you think about the future?

Concerns about the future (continued)

What do you most strongly feel when you think about the future?



Base: All qualified respondents. N=748 (Two didn't respond).
Question: What do you most strongly feel when you think about the future?

Change in mental health

When looking back on your overall mental health over the past year, have you noticed a change?

Significantly better

28%

Slightly better

40%

Have not noticed a change

9%

Slightly worse

19%

Significantly worse

4%

Base: All qualified respondents. N=750.

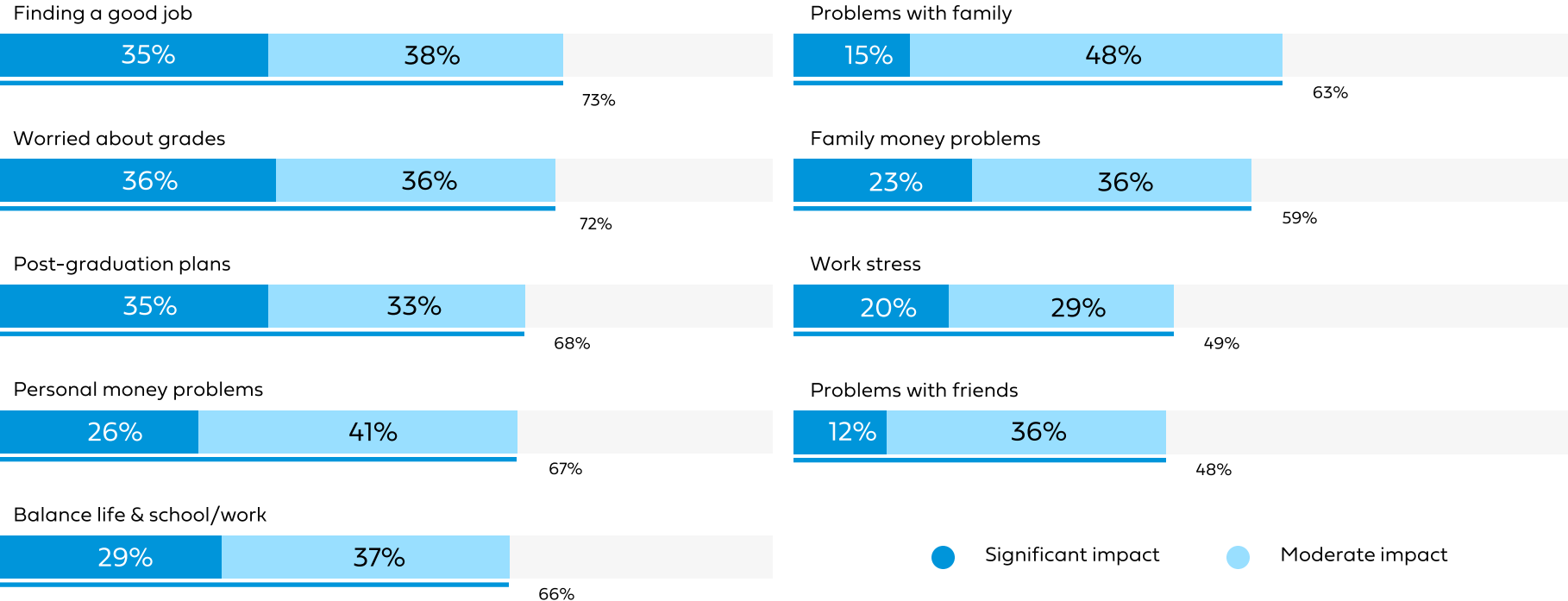
Question: When looking back on your overall mental health over the past year, have you noticed a change?

Personal and socio-economic concerns



Top personal concerns that impact mental health

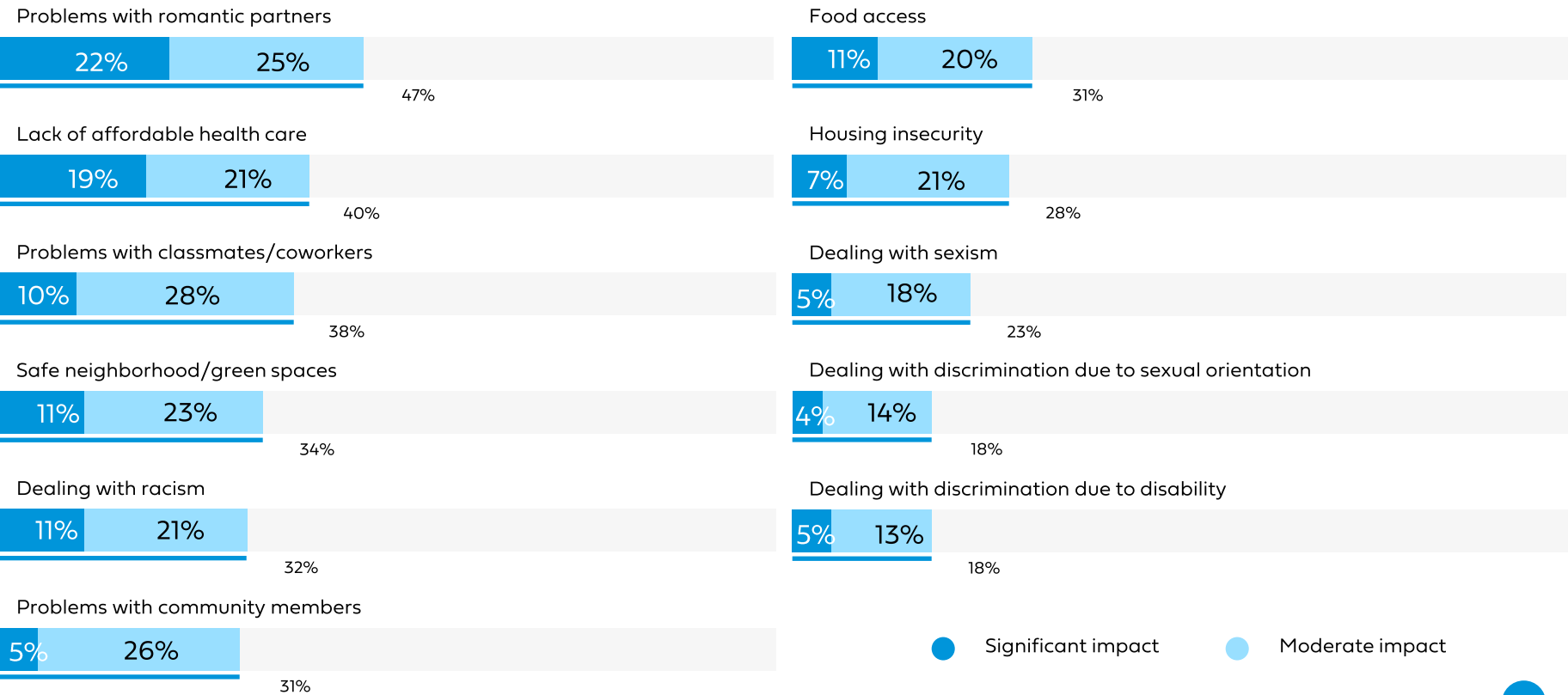
How much have these issues negatively impacted your mental health in the past year?



Base: All qualified respondents. N=750.
Question: How much have these issues negatively impacted your mental health in the past year?

Top personal concerns that impact mental health (continued)

How much have these issues negatively impacted your mental health in the past year?



Youth respondents are very concerned about a range of socio-economic issues

How concerned are you with each of the following social/political issues?

Housing affordability



Gun violence



Tariffs



Cost of groceries



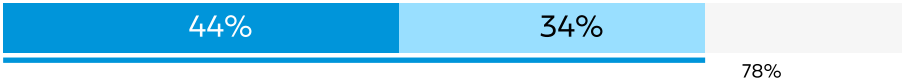
Discrimination against immigrants



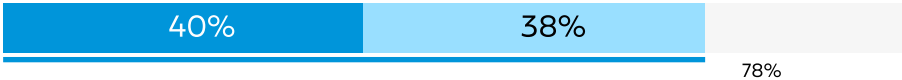
Health care affordability



Climate change



Racism



Social media restrictions/bans



● Very concerned ● Mildly concerned

Base: All qualified respondents. N=750.
Question: How concerned are you with each of the following social/political issues?

Youth express their concerns about socio-economic issues

"Gun violence has made me feel unsafe walking around alone at night. Climate change makes me concerned about how we'll live many years from now, and immigration makes me concerned about how I'll see my family."

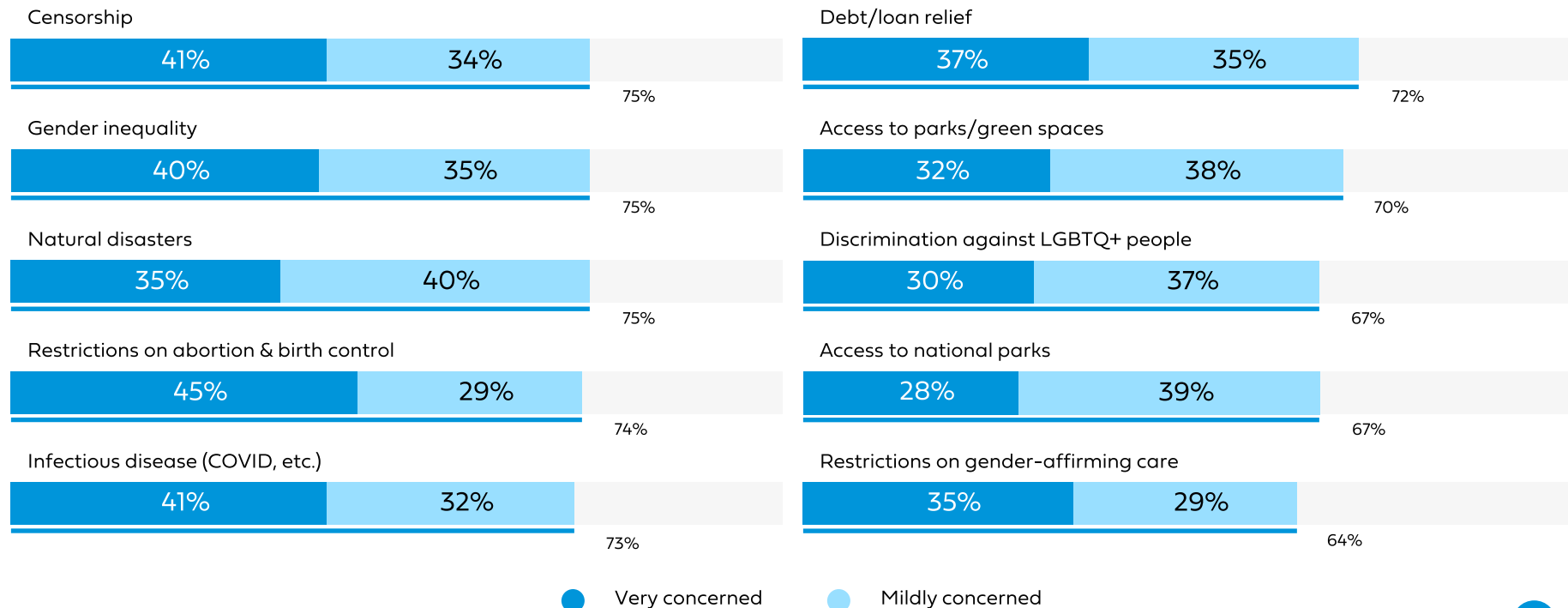
21-25 year-old

"I am most concerned about affordable housing and being able to sustain your living because it has affected my loved ones and I take it into great consideration."

21-25 year-old

Youth respondents are very concerned about a range of socio-economic issues (continued)

How concerned are you with each of the following social/political issues?

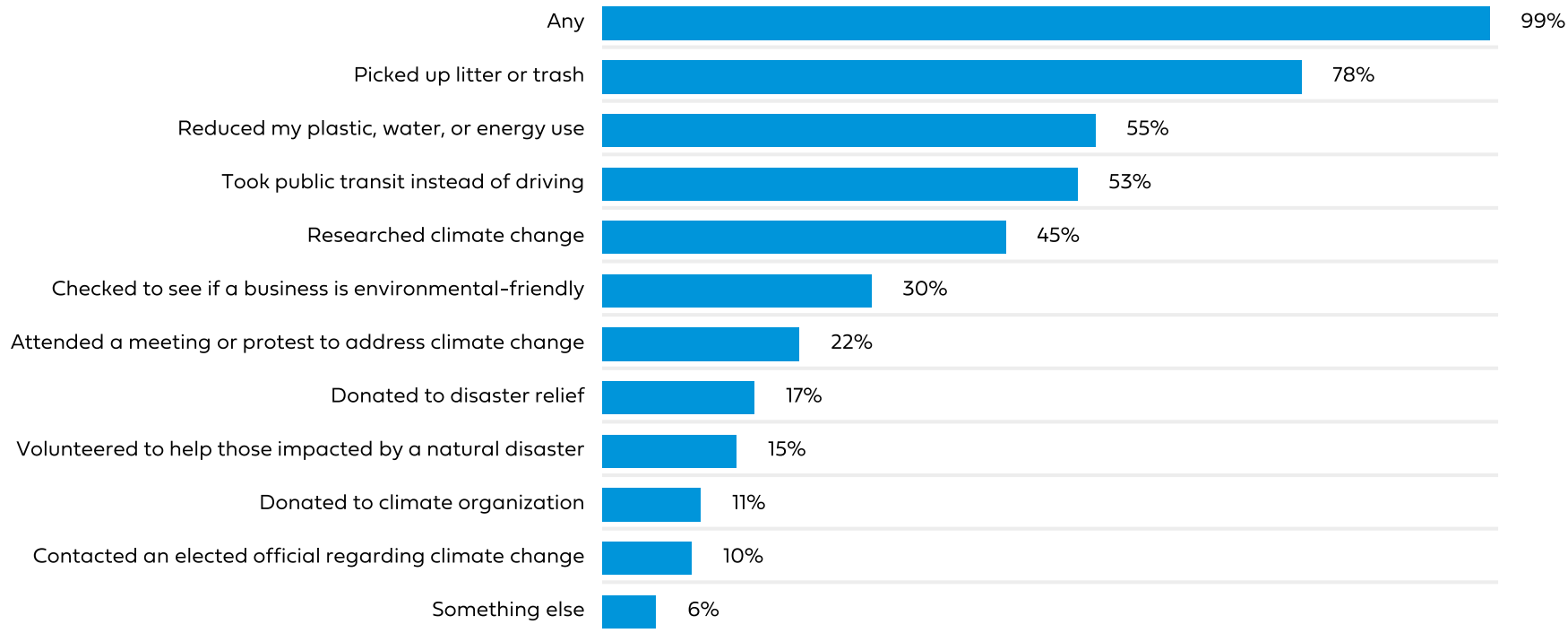


Base: All qualified respondents. N=750.

Question: How concerned are you with each of the following social/political issues?

99% of respondents who cite concern for climate change or natural disasters took pro-climate action

Which of the following activities have you done in the past year?



Base: Concerned with climate change or natural disasters. N=638.

Question: Which of the following activities have you done in the past year? Please select all that apply.

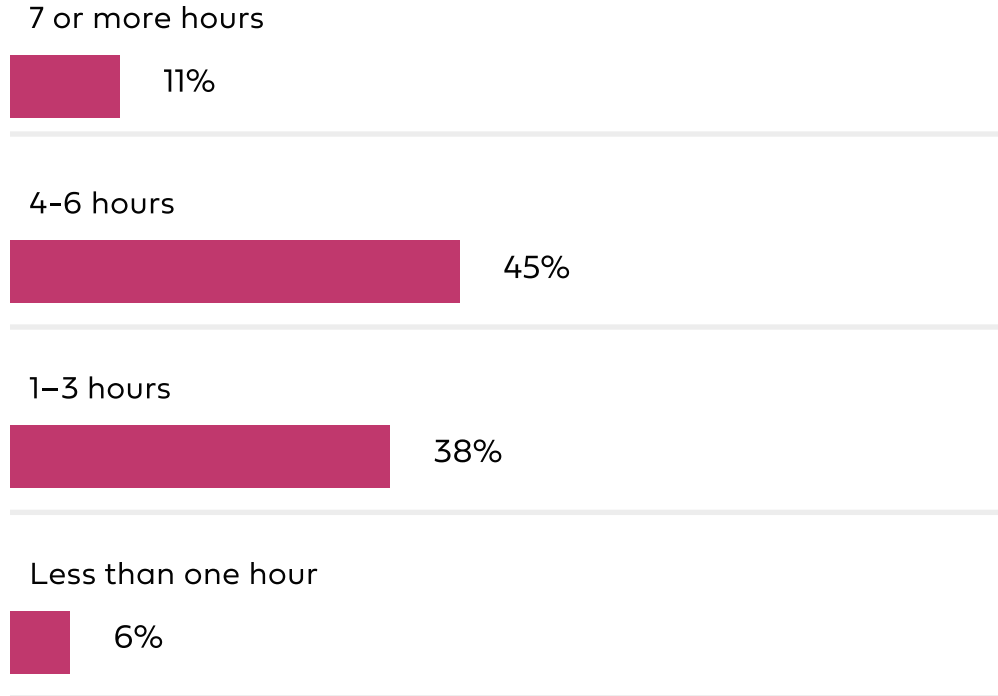
SECTION 3

The role social media plays in youth mental health



Reported hours of social media per day

How much time would you estimate that you spend on social media each day?



56% of respondents report spending more than 4 hours on social media per day.

Base: All qualified respondents. N=750.

Question: How much time would you estimate that you spend on social media each day?

Source of news

Where are you most likely to get your news?



63% Social media posts

18% Online news sites

10% Word of mouth

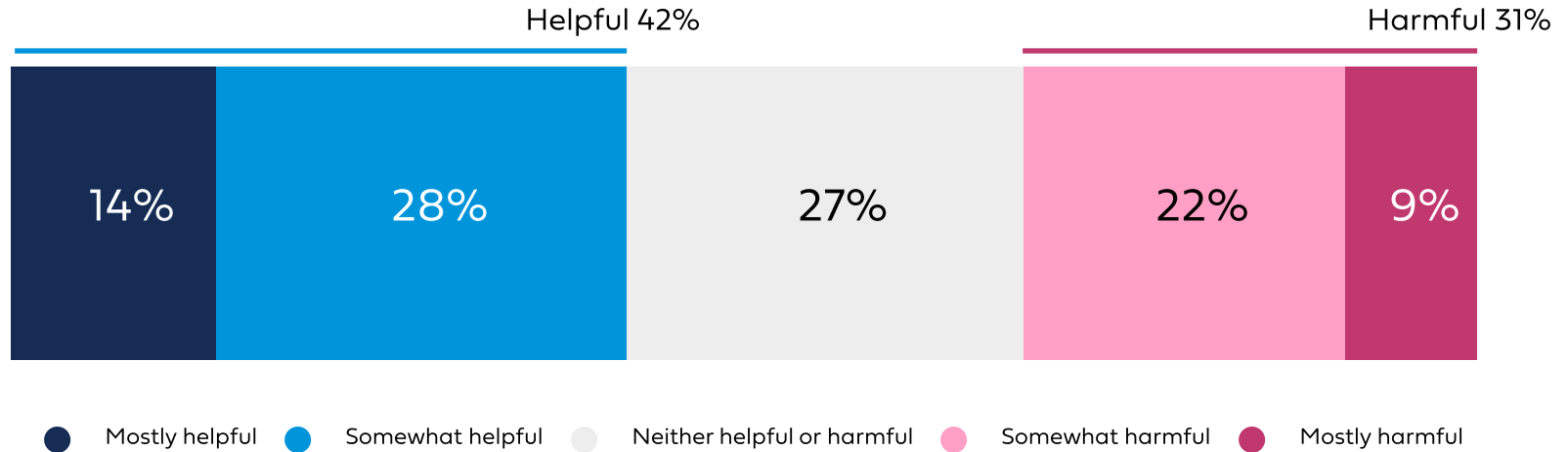
6% TV news

3% Newspapers



Beliefs about social media

Do you find social media to be more helpful or harmful to your emotions and mental health?

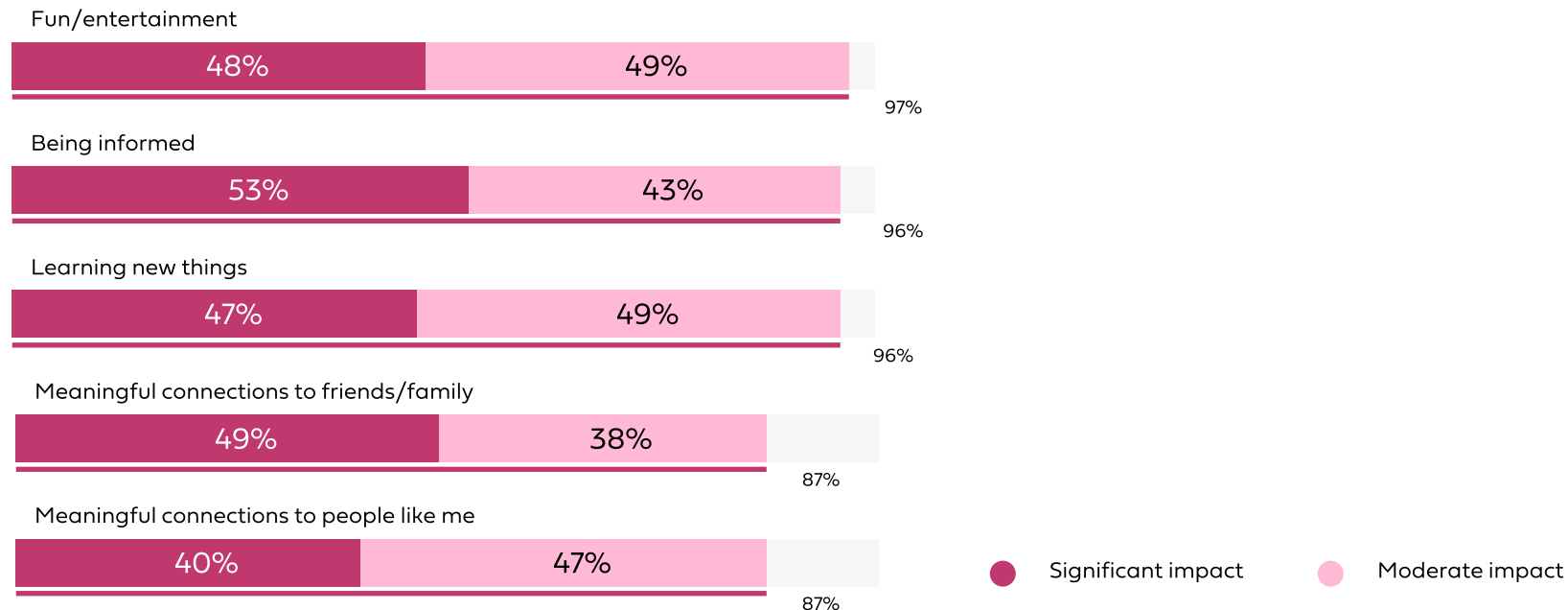


Base: All qualified respondents. N=750.

Question: Do you find social media to be more helpful or harmful to your emotions and mental health?

Positive impacts of social media

How much of a positive impact do each of the following aspects of social media have on your life?



Base: All qualified respondents. N=750.

Question: Do you find social media to be more helpful or harmful to your emotions and mental health?

Negative impacts of social media

How much of a negative impact do each of the following aspects of social media have on your life?



Misinformation



Pressure to be a certain way



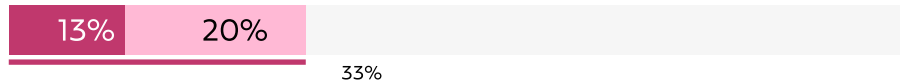
Body image



Social media dependency



Cyberbullying

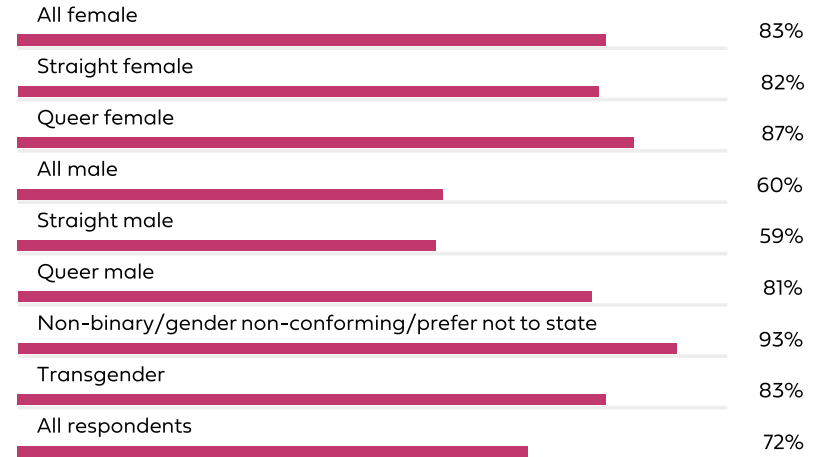


Significant impact



Moderate impact

Percent of respondents who reported negative impact of social media on body image, by gender identity group

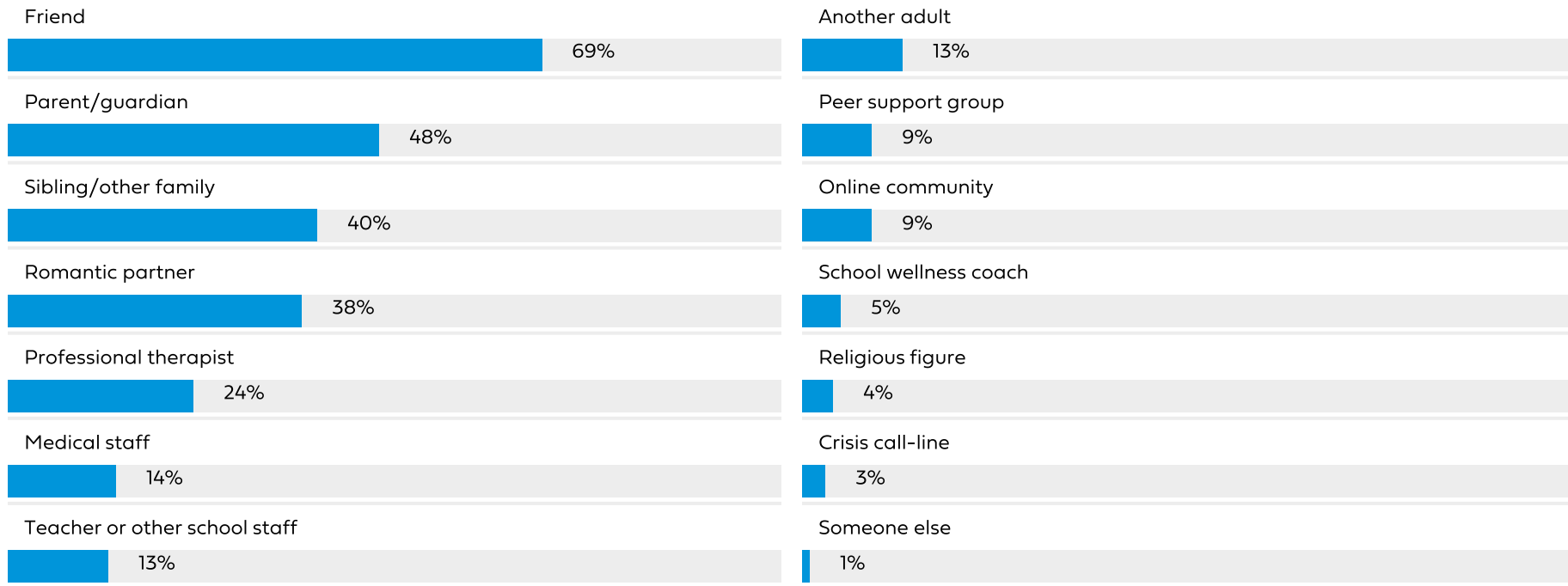


How youth are addressing their mental health



Who youth talk to about mental health

In the past year, which of the following people or groups, if any, did you talk to about your emotions/mental health? Please select all that apply.



Base: All qualified respondents. N=750.

Question: In the past year, which of the following people or groups, if any, did you talk to about your emotions/mental health? Please select all that apply.

Who youth find most helpful when talking about their mental health

From your previously-selected choices, which of the following people or groups was the most helpful to talk to about your emotions/mental health?

Friend

37%

Romantic partner

18%

Parent/guardian

14%

Professional counselor or therapist

12%

Sibling or other family member

8%

Teacher or other school staff

2%

Doctor, psychiatrist, or other medical practitioner

2%

Peer support group

2%

Online community

1%

Religious figure

1%

Wellness coach at school

1%

Another trusted adult

1%

Crisis call-line/text support

< 1%

Base: Did not select no one and selected at least 2 choices. N=554.

Question: From your previously-selected choices, which of the following people or groups was the most helpful to talk to about your emotions/mental health?

Self-care

In the past year, which self-care methods have you used to address your emotions/mental health?

Entertainment (listening to music, watching movies, playing games, etc.)



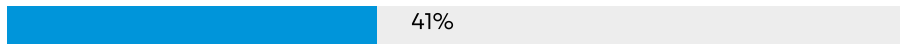
Enjoying a hobby



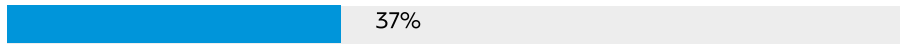
Exercise or practicing a sport



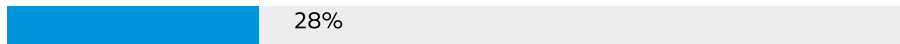
Enjoying outdoor spaces (walking at the park, going to the beach, etc.)



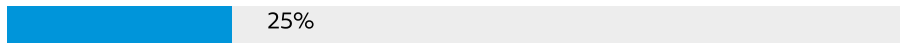
Praying



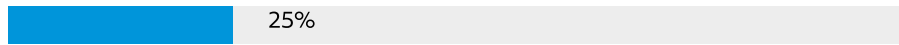
Creating art (paintings, music, etc.)



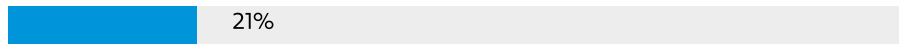
Journaling



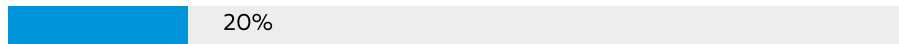
Inspirational content (books, social media, etc.)



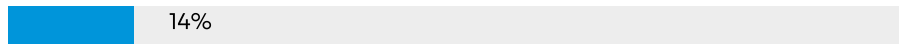
Meditation



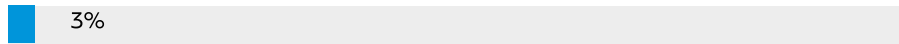
Volunteering or dedicating my time to an important cause



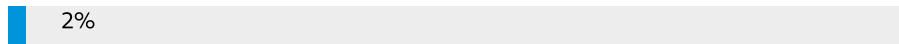
Self-help/mental health apps



Something else (write-in)



None



Base: All qualified respondents. N=750.

Question: In the past year, which self-care methods have you used to address your emotions/mental health?

Self-care (continued)

From your previously-selected choices, which of the following self-care methods was the most helpful in addressing your emotions/mental health?

Entertainment (listening to music, watching movies, playing games, etc.)

32%

Exercise or practicing a sport

21%

Praying

13%

Enjoying a hobby

10%

Enjoying outdoor spaces (walking at the park, going to the beach, etc.)

9%

Creating art (paintings, music, etc.)

5%

Journaling

3%

Meditation

2%

Inspirational content (books, social media, etc.)

2%

Volunteering or dedicating my time to an important cause

1%

Self-help/mental health apps

1%

Something else (write-in)

1%

Obstacles to mental health care for those who did NOT get care

If you wanted to receive professional mental health care (like from therapists or doctors), but didn't, what was standing in your way?

Embarrassed

35%

Non-applicable—didn't want to

29%

Cannot afford

23%

Don't know where to find help

21%

Couldn't find a therapist to relate to me

15%

Could not trust a provider

14%

Did not believe I could be helped

9%

No transportation

8%

Couldn't find someone who speaks my language

7%

Something else

6%

Parent won't allow it

3%

No internet/telephone access

1%

Obstacles to mental health care for those who DID get care

What obstacles, if any, have you experienced in receiving, or trying to receive, professional mental health care (like from therapists or doctors)?

Embarrassed

48%

Didn't believe I could be helped

33%

MH care is expensive

31%

Provider couldn't relate to my identity

28%

Did not trust providers

25%

Didn't know where to find care

25%

Transportation issues

19%

Not applicable—no obstacles

10%

Something else

9%

No internet/telephone access

7%

Parent discouraged me

5%

No provider spoke my language

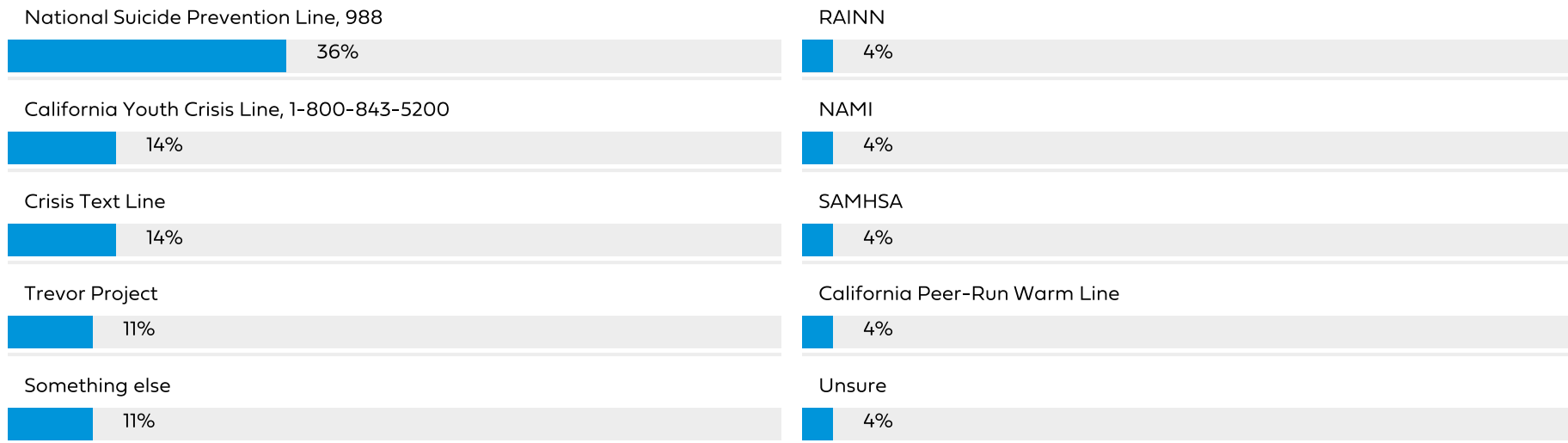
5%

Base: Selected that they had talked to 1) professional counselor or therapist, 2) doctor, psychiatrist, or other medical practitioner, or 3) wellness coach. N=231.

Question: What obstacles, if any, have you experienced in receiving, or trying to receive, professional mental health care (like from therapists or doctors)? Please select all that apply.

Mental health resources used by youth

You selected that you used a crisis call-line/text support as a resource.
Which did you reach out to? Please select all that apply.



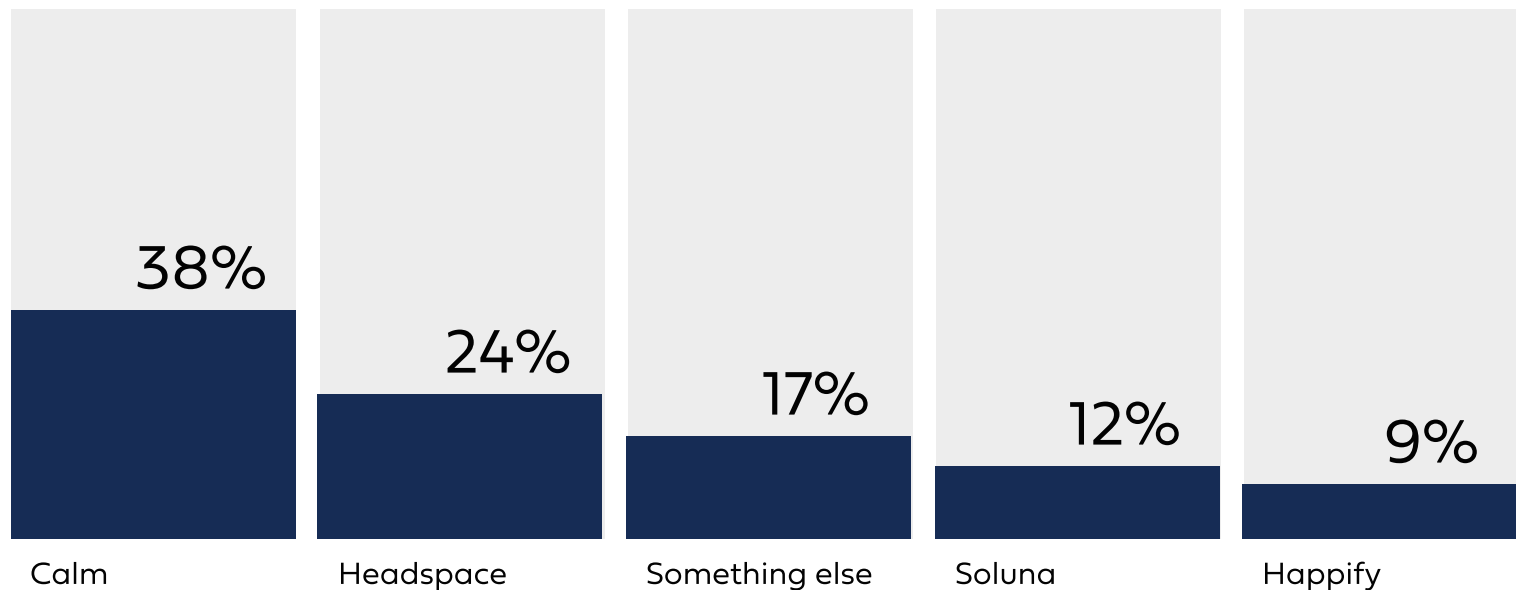
Base: Used crisis call-line/text support. N=19.

Question: You selected that you used a crisis call-line/text support as a resource. Which did you reach out to? Please select all that apply.

Self-help/mental health apps used (by respondents who used any such apps)

You selected that you used self-help/mental health apps as a resource.

Which ones did you use? Please select all that apply.



Base: Used self-help apps. N=102.

Question: You selected that you used self-help/mental health apps as a resource. Which ones did you use? Please select all that apply.

How youth prefer to receive mental health care

What is your most preferred way to receive professional mental health care (like from therapists or doctors)?



In person

62%



Phone

9%



Video

21%



Text

8%

Base: Selected that they had talked to 1) professional counselor or therapist, 2) doctor, psychiatrist, or other medical practitioner, or 3) wellness coach. N=231.
Question: What is your most preferred way to receive professional mental health care (like from therapists or doctors)?



Contact us

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