

Emotional Wellbeing in a Pandemic

An Amárach Report

April 2020

Introduction

How is the COVID-19 coronavirus crisis affecting the mental health of Irish people? To help answer that question, we have updated a pioneering study first conducted in February 2019*.

The original study was based on a powerful, holistic model for mental health (both wellbeing and ill-health) known as 'Human Givens'.

In this special Amárach report, we have revisited the Human Givens framework to measure the current state of mental health in Ireland, using last year's study as a benchmark to show how well – or badly – we are doing in the midst of the coronavirus health crisis.

Our results are based on a survey of 1,000 adults throughout the Republic of Ireland in the second week of April 2020, enabling direct comparisons with the February 2019 survey.

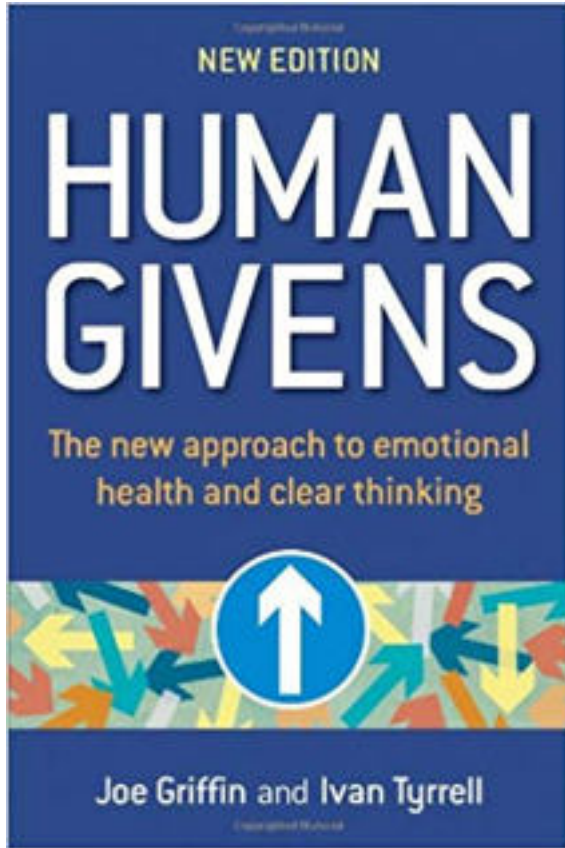
* <https://www.slideshare.net/amarach/mental-health-and-emotional-wellbeing-in-ireland-2019>

Executive Summary

- Our **quality of sleep** as a nation has deteriorated during the COVID-19 lockdown: about half of adults (49%) say their quality of sleep is poor at present, up from 40% early last year.
- The biggest decline in meeting our psychological needs during the pandemic has been in our need for '**Intimacy**' provided by the emotional support of friends and love ones: 47% of 18-24s say this need is unmet at the moment.
- There has also been a sharp decline in the psychological level of '**Security**' experienced currently: a third of adults say their need for a safe environment free from fear is unmet right now.
- People feel less of a sense of '**Community**' at present (35% unmet), and of '**Privacy**' (23% unmet, up from 12% last year).
- Just over 1 in 4 feeling their sense of '**Meaning**' is unmet (19% in early 2019): again 18-24s are the most affected age group in this regard.
- However, it is important to stress that, while the deterioration in the nation's mental wellbeing is very real, *on balance more people continue to have their psychological needs met than not met* in the midst of the pandemic, which points to a high level of **psychological resilience** that should help us recover quickly when the crisis ends.

About Human Givens

Human Givens



The Human Givens framework was developed during the 1990s by Joe Griffin from Ireland and Ivan Tyrrell from England, in collaboration with other colleagues.

Human Givens* refers to the innate psychological needs and mental resources that are programmed into our biology from conception, and that are separate from our physical needs (for food etc).

Just as we suffer when our physical needs go unmet, so also do we suffer when our psychological needs go unmet.

People whose emotional needs are met in a balanced way do not suffer mental health problems; while those who experience mental health problems tend to have one or more psychological needs that are yet unmet.

* <https://www.hgi.org.uk/human-givens/introduction/what-are-human-givens>

Psychological Needs

There is widespread agreement as to the nature of our emotional needs – the essential ones for our mental health are:



- **Security:** a safe environment which allows us to develop fully
- **Attention:** both receiving and giving
- **Autonomy** and control: having freedom to make our own choices
- **Intimacy:** to be accepted totally by others, “warts 'n' all”
- **Community:** a sense of belonging
- **Privacy:** giving time and space to reflect and consolidate experience
- **Status:** recognition within social groupings
- **Competence:** creating a sense of achievement
- **Meaning** and purpose: stretching us beyond our concerns with self, including religion, creativity, politics and so on

Another key factor in our emotional wellbeing is our **quality of sleep**: so we have updated a measure of sleep quality in this study as well.

Measuring Human Givens

In order to measure the state of 'human givens' in the Irish population, Amárach surveyed a representative sample of 1,000 adults in February 2019 and again in April 2020.

We used a modified version of the *Emotional Needs Audit* (ENA)* developed by the Human Givens Institute, to measure the degree to which key psychological needs are being met in the Irish population.

Note that the ENA etc is designed for one-to-one collaboration between therapists and patients, so we have had to modify the language used in our survey as the context is entirely different, while retaining the purpose of the HGI questionnaires to measure emotional wellbeing.

You can see a copy of the questionnaire in the appendix.

* <https://www.hgi.org.uk/resources/emotional-needs-audit-ena>

Psychological Needs

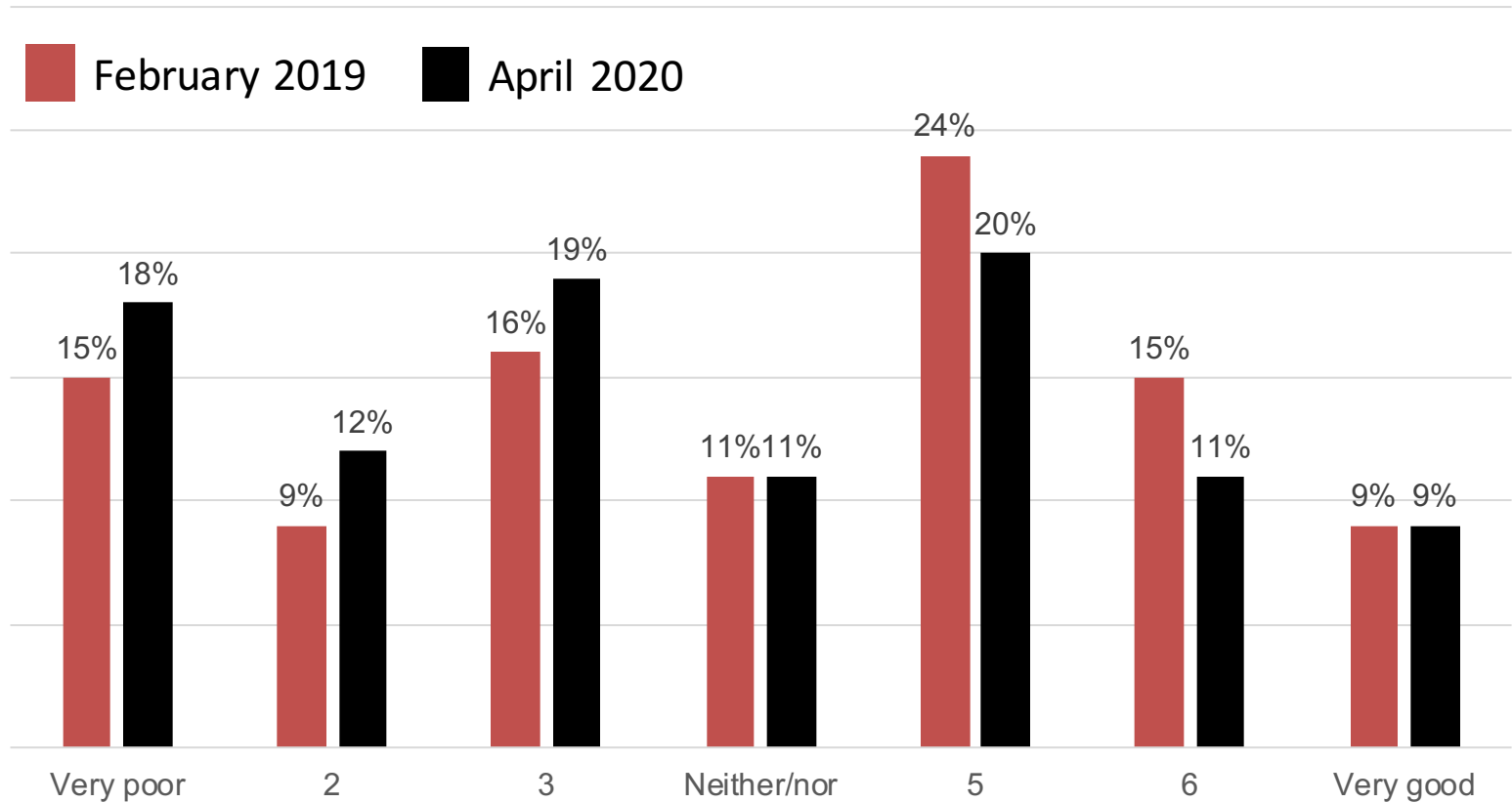
A Good Night's Sleep



Though not a core psychological need, sleep is a very important physiological need: in the absence of which our mental health can be quite vulnerable. Despite the absence of work-related pressures such as commuting and business meetings, we find that about half the Irish population are experiencing poor sleep at the moment, up from 40% last year: though men and over 55s tend to have the best sleep quality at present...

Sleep: 2019 vs 2020

Half of us are sleeping badly during the pandemic, which means we find it harder to cope with psychological and emotional pressures during our waking hours:



Poor Sleep Quality 1+2+3	% Poor 02/19	% Poor 04/20
Total	40%	49%
Male	35%	44%
Female	45%	54%
18-24	40%	52%
25-34	44%	50%
35-44	46%	54%
45-54	46%	50%
55+	31%	43%

Q. How would you rate the typical quality of your sleep, on a scale of 1 to 7 (where 1 means very poor and you often wake up tired, and 7 means very good and you usually wake up refreshed)

Meeting Our Psychological Needs

If we are not sleeping so well, what is the impact on our psychological needs, mental health and emotional wellbeing?

In the rest of this section we look at the degree to which each of the nine core psychological needs is being met across the Irish population: contrasting February 2019 with April 2020.

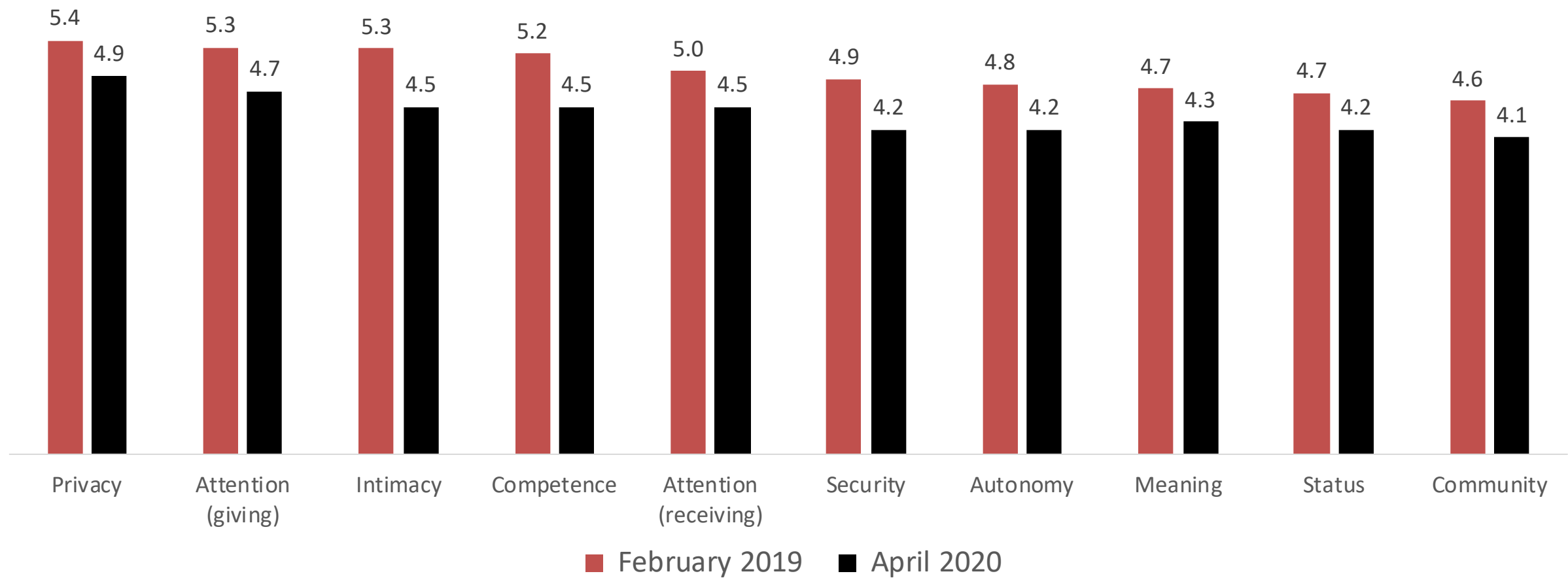
In defining each of the psychological needs, we have drawn on the free ebook: *'Human Givens – The Essentials'* by Julia Welstead* as our guide.

* <https://www.hgi.org.uk/free-ebook>

We can tell right away looking at the average scores for each of the core psychological needs that there has been a sharp decline in mental wellbeing in Ireland during the coronavirus crisis...

Ranking Needs

The biggest falls in average scores for the total adult population have been in those for ‘Intimacy’, ‘Competence’ and ‘Security’ – but all others score significantly lower as well:



Q. Rate, in your judgement, how well the following emotional needs are being met in your life now, on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means not met at all, and 7 means being very well met.

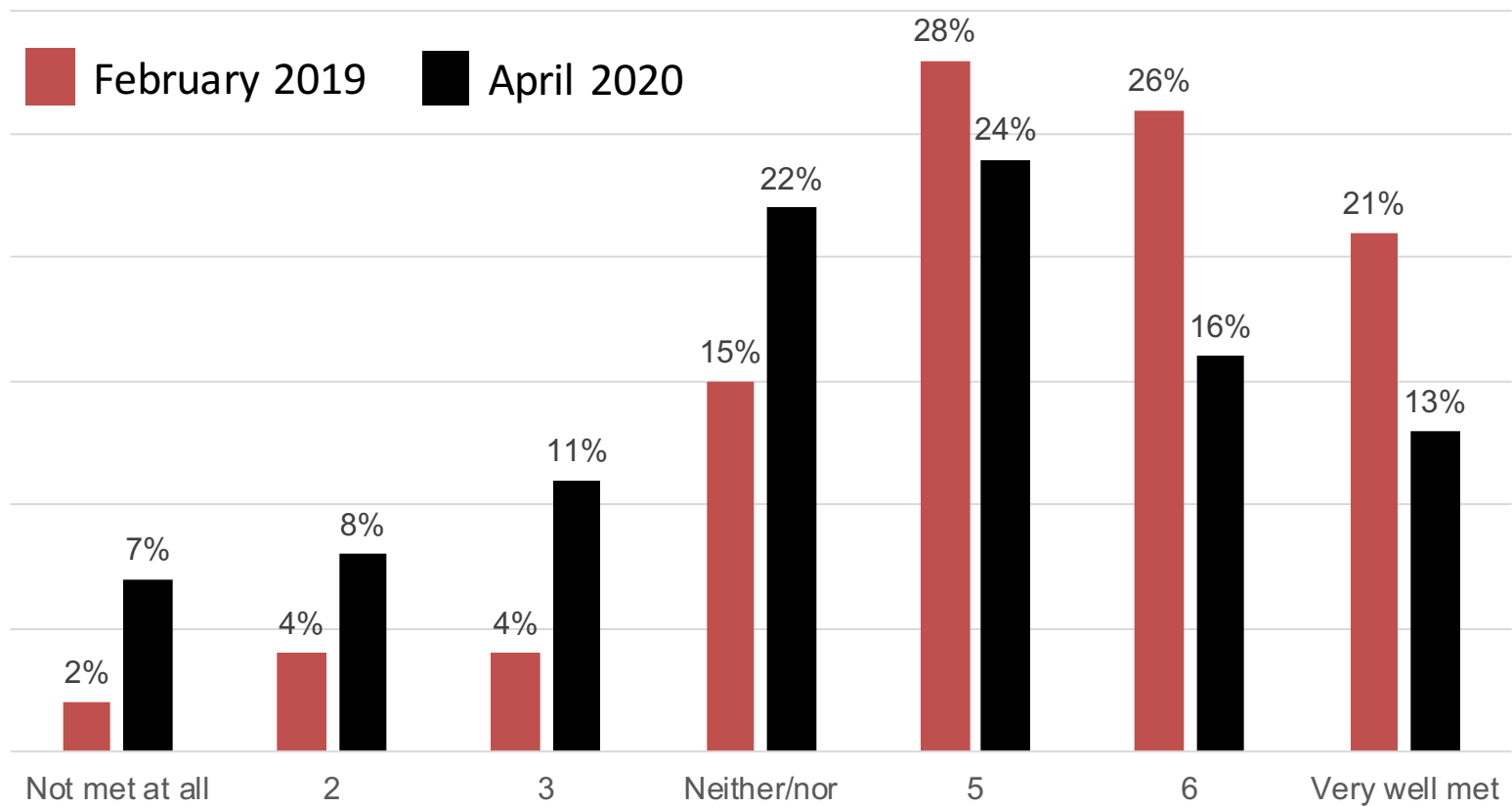
Psychological Need: Intimacy



In an age of social distancing, our need for intimacy and the emotional connection it brings is under severe stress: 'unmet' levels have trebled for some groups (e.g.: women), while the overall level of unmet need for intimacy has risen dramatically from 10% of all adults to 26%...

Intimacy: 2019 vs 2020

‘An emotional connection to others through friendships and loving relationships. We all need at least one person who accepts us for who we are, ‘warts and all’, who is biased in our favour and will support and defend us’:



Need Not Met 1+2+3	% Not Met 02/19	% Not Met 04/20
Total	10%	26%
Male	9%	19%
Female	11%	32%
18-24	17%	47%
25-34	9%	33%
35-44	15%	26%
45-54	10%	20%
55+	5%	17%

Q. Rate, in your judgement, how well the following emotional needs are being met in your life now: **feeling an emotional connection to others** - on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means not met at all, and 7 means being very well met.

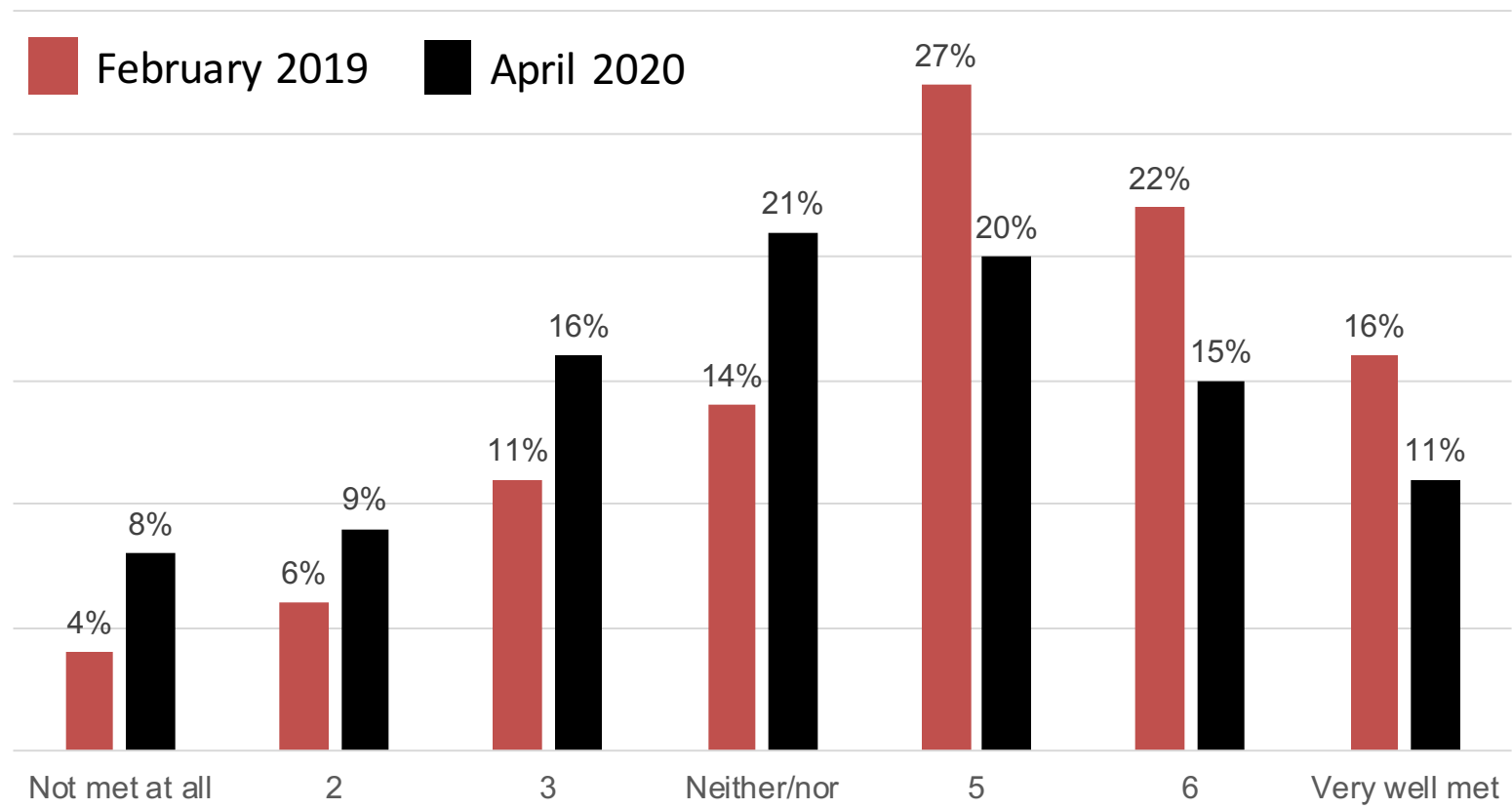
Psychological Need: Security



Perhaps one of the biggest psychological blows from the coronavirus crisis has been the extent to which so many people no longer feel secure in their environment, with 33% saying this need is 'unmet' (up from 21% just 14 months ago): highest for women & 25-34s...

Security: 2019 vs 2020

‘A safe environment that allows us to live without undue fear, develop fully and have space to grow’:



Need Not Met 1+2+3	% Not Met 02/19	% Not Met 04/20
Total	21%	33%
Male	16%	29%
Female	25%	37%
18-24	26%	29%
25-34	26%	50%
35-44	25%	38%
45-54	23%	34%
55+	11%	21%

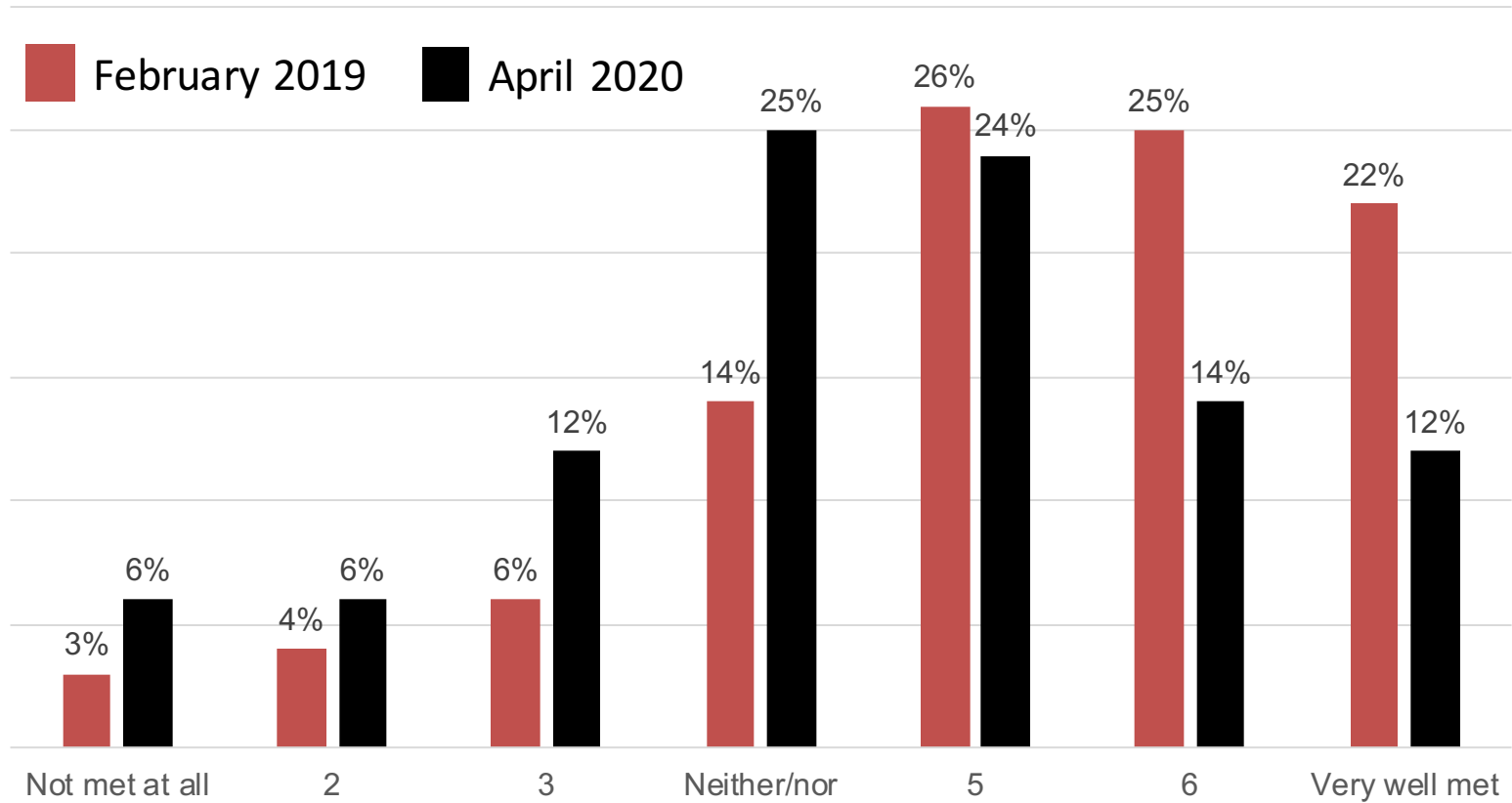
Psychological Need: Competence



While the coronavirus crisis is an opportunity for some to develop new skills (especially for future employability), many feel that their need for competence and a sense of mastery has suffered as those with unmet needs have increased from 13% of all adults to 25%: here there has been a widening in the gap between men and women...

Competence: 2019 vs 2020

‘A sense of your own competence and abilities, knowledge and skills’:



Need Not Met 1+2+3	% Not Met 02/19	% Not Met 04/20
Total	13%	25%
Male	10%	19%
Female	15%	30%
18-24	15%	46%
25-34	20%	29%
35-44	15%	27%
45-54	15%	20%
55+	5%	16%

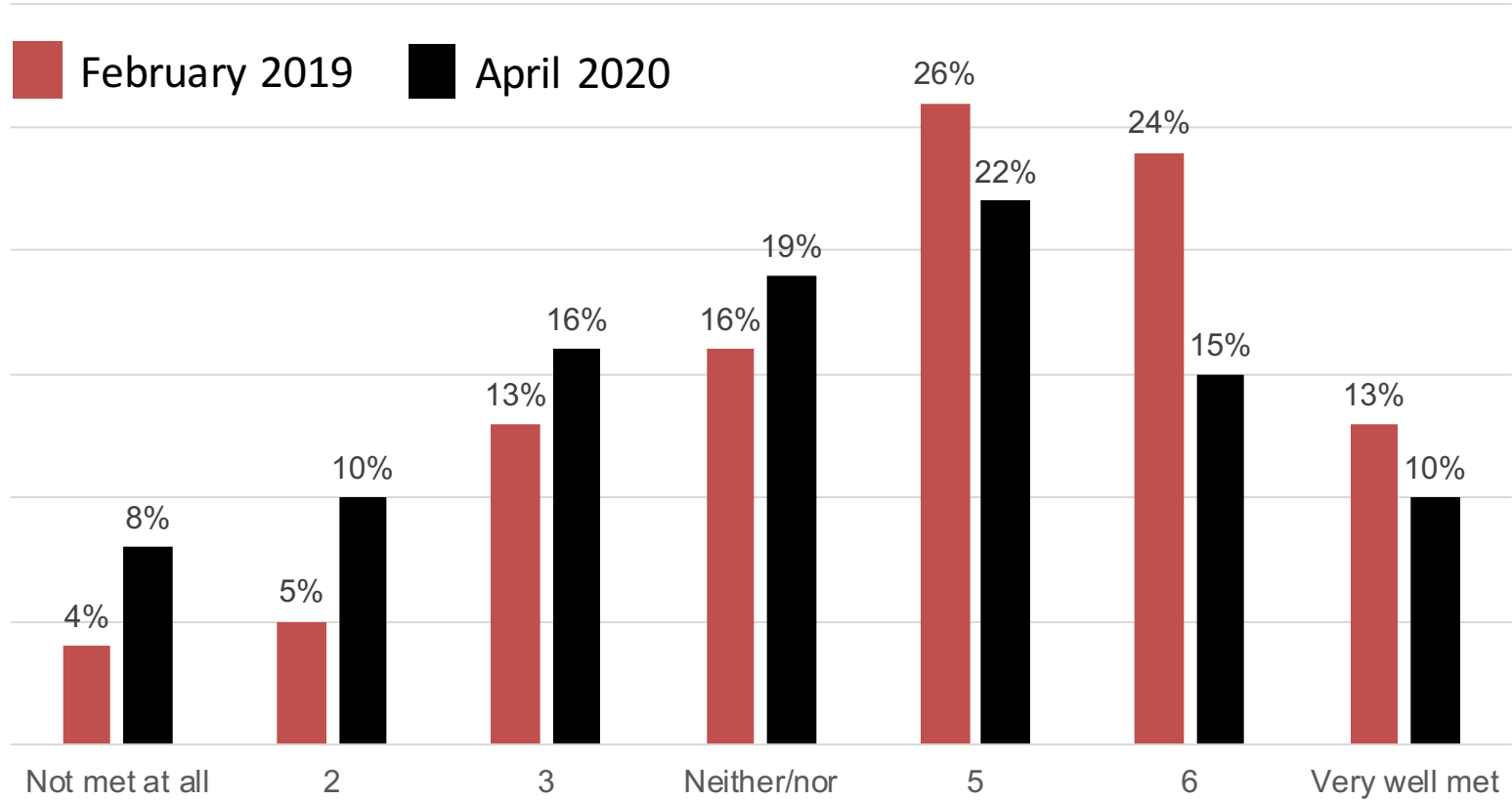
Psychological Need: Autonomy



With so much changing so quickly (number of infections, job losses, business closures) it is harder for people they are in control of their lives: with Ireland's 18-24s feeling least in control at the moment...

Autonomy: 2019 vs 2020

‘A sense of control over what happens to you, the freedom to make your own decisions and choices, feeling in charge of yourself’:



Need Not Met 1+2+3	% Not Met 02/19	% Not Met 04/20
Total	21%	34%
Male	16%	27%
Female	26%	41%
18-24	34%	47%
25-34	34%	42%
35-44	24%	33%
45-54	18%	30%
55+	10%	28%

Q. Rate, in your judgement, how well the following emotional needs are being met in your life now: **feeling in control of your life most of the time** - on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means not met at all, and 7 means being very well met.

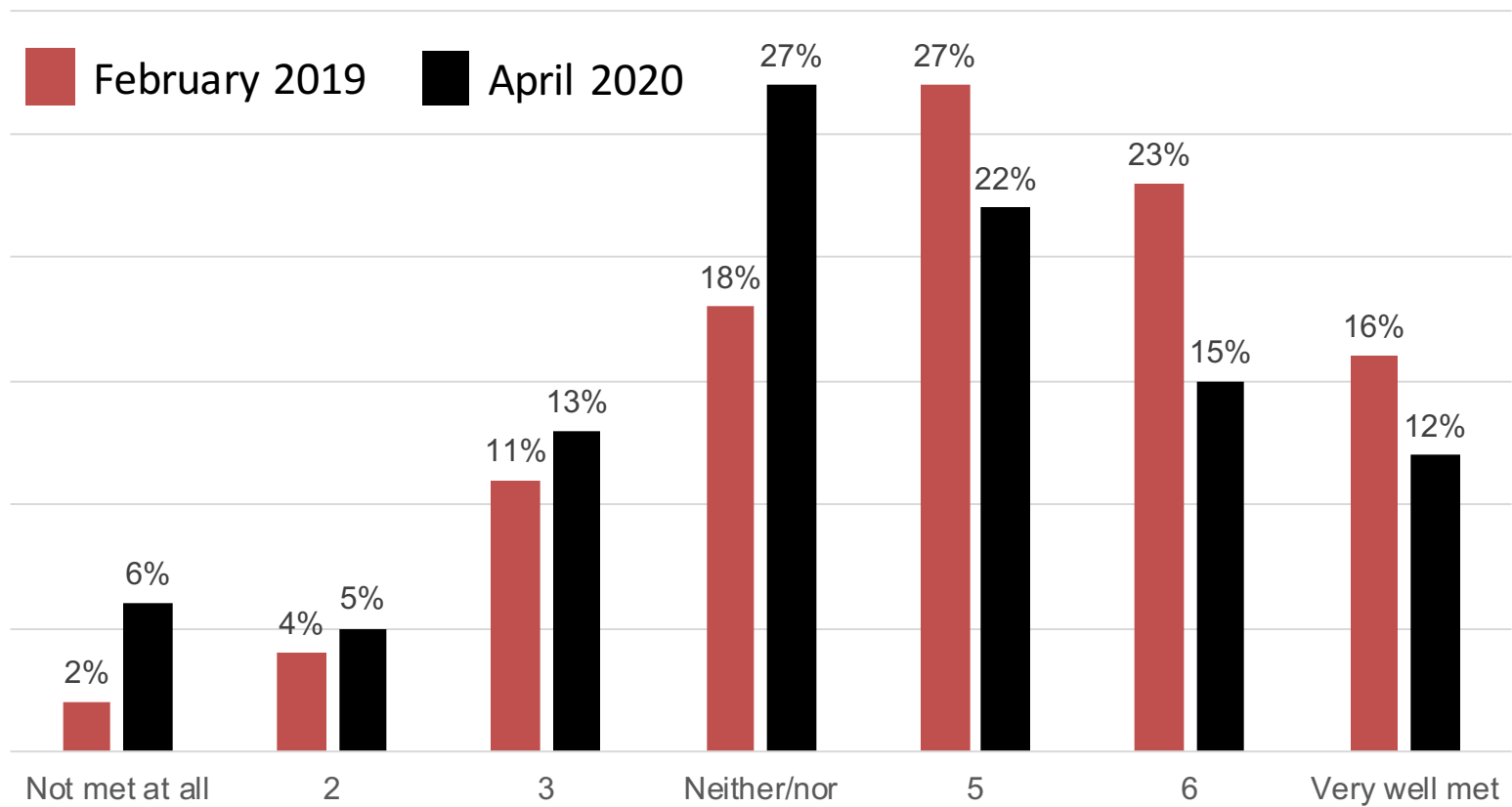
Psychological Need: Receiving Attention



At a time we are in 'lockdown', some have met their needs to receive attention through digital technologies, though 1 in 4 say their need to receive attention is unmet currently: the gap has actually widened between men & women in the past 14 months...

Receiving Attention: 2019 vs 2020

‘The giving and receiving of attention are both vital forms of nutrition that fuel our development. Paying attention to each other forms part of our group bond as a gregarious species and helps us maintain a shared sense of reality’:



Need Not Met 1+2+3	% Not Met 02/19	% Not Met 04/20
Total	17%	24%
Male	13%	18%
Female	21%	30%
18-24	23%	38%
25-34	19%	25%
35-44	20%	30%
45-54	18%	23%
55+	10%	17%

Q. Rate, in your judgement, how well the following emotional needs are being met in your life now: **feeling you receive enough attention from others** - on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means not met at all, and 7 means being very well met.

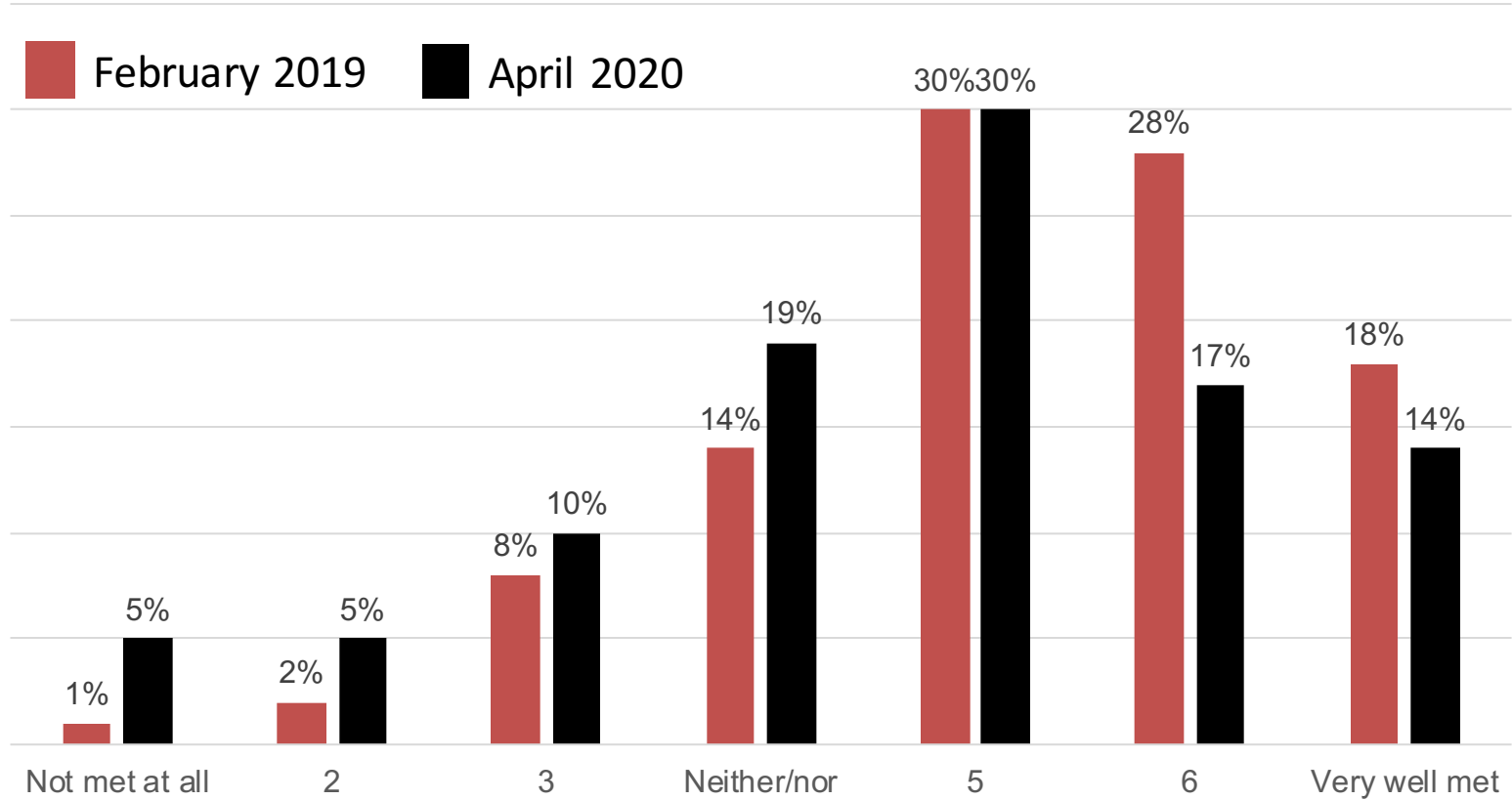
Psychological Need: Giving Attention



It is easy in a crisis to become self-concerned, but attending to others maintains the bonds of family and community: those who say this need is 'unmet' has doubled during the pandemic from 10% to 20%: and again is particularly high for 18-24s...

Giving Attention: 2019 vs 2020

‘The giving and receiving of attention are both vital forms of nutrition that fuel our development. Paying attention to each other forms part of our group bond as a gregarious species and helps us maintain a shared sense of reality’:



Need Not Met 1+2+3	% Not Met 02/19	% Not Met 04/20
Total	10%	20%
Male	10%	16%
Female	10%	24%
18-24	12%	39%
25-34	10%	25%
35-44	17%	18%
45-54	11%	16%
55+	5%	14%

Q. Rate, in your judgement, how well the following emotional needs are being met in your life now: **feeling you give enough attention from others** - on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means not met at all, and 7 means being very well met.

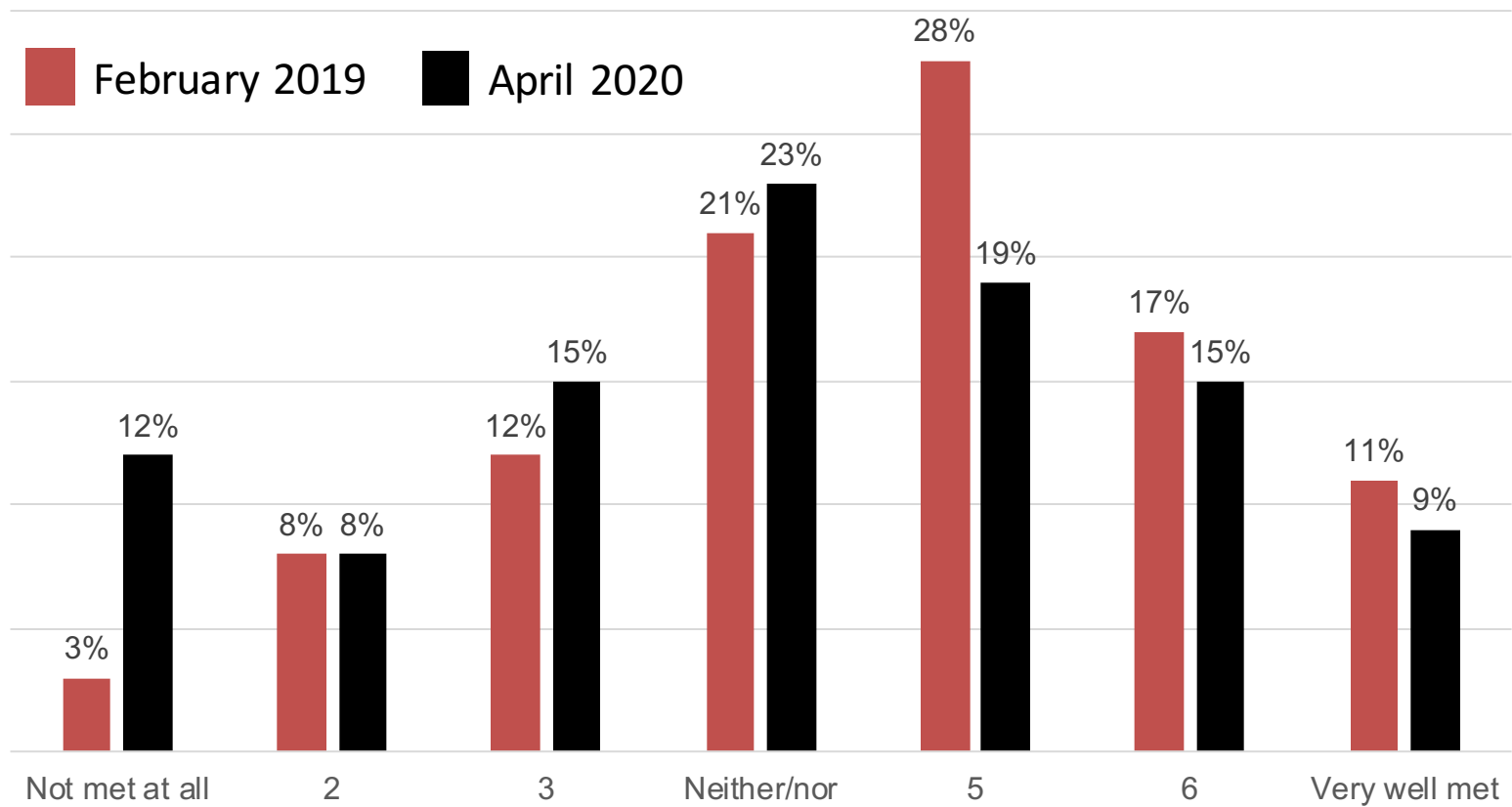
Psychological Need: Community



While we are all experiencing the same crisis as our family, friends and neighbours, the absence of physical connection has affected our sense of community: with those for whom the need is unmet rising from a quarter to a third of all adults: once again, women and young people feel the ‘loss’ more intensely than others...

Community: 2019 vs 2020

‘A connection to people outside your immediate family, through work, hobbies, sport, geographical and cultural communities’:



Need Not Met 1+2+3	% Not Met 02/19	% Not Met 04/20
Total	23%	35%
Male	19%	31%
Female	27%	38%
18-24	31%	47%
25-34	33%	41%
35-44	25%	40%
45-54	25%	30%
55+	11%	26%

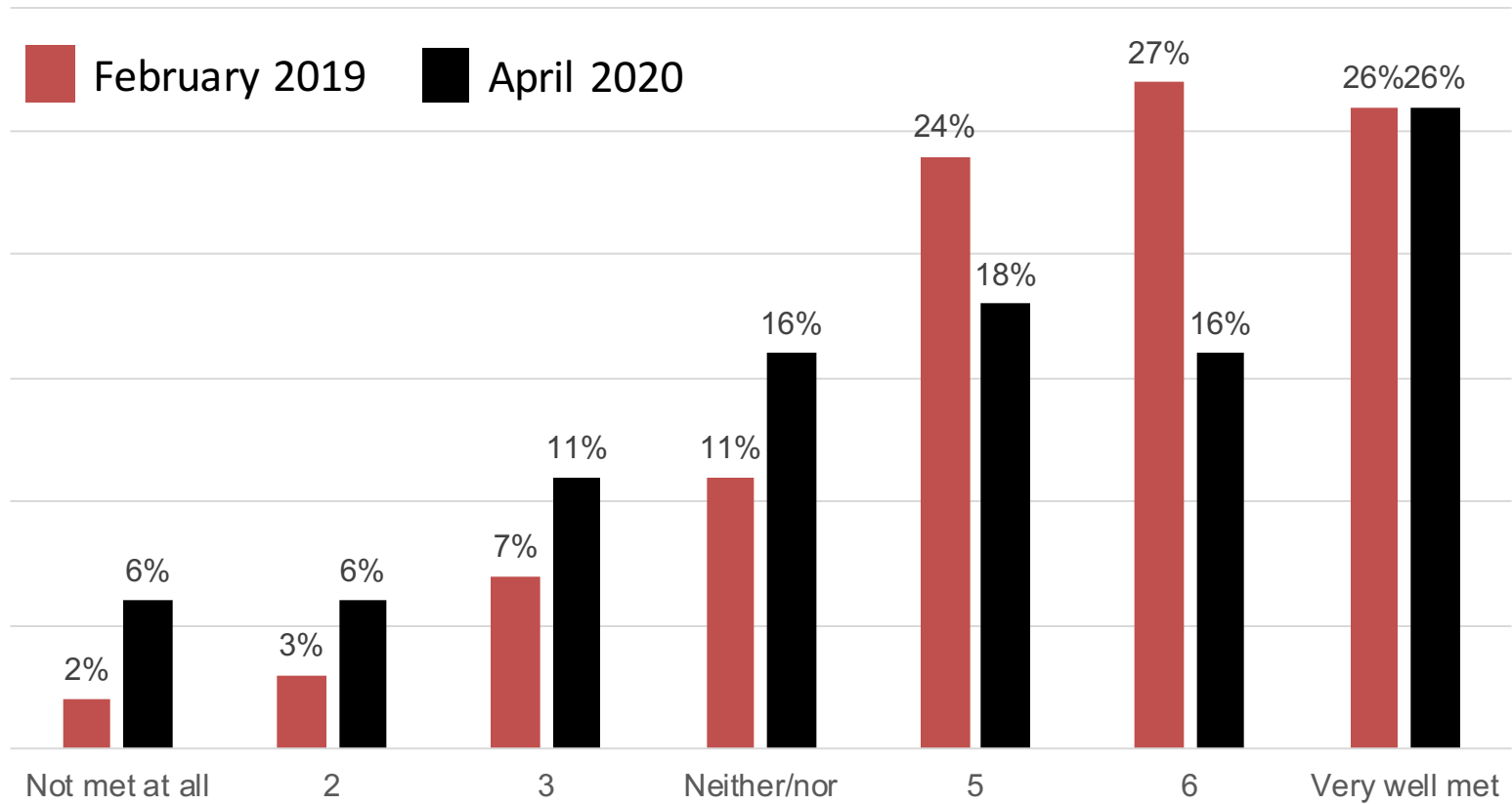
Psychological Need: Privacy



Being forced to 'shelter in place' often means households with more people at home all at once for longer than is ever the case normally – the percent of adults feeling their need for privacy is unmet has doubled to 23% during the crisis, particularly for women...

Privacy: 2019 vs 2020

‘A feeling you have enough time and space to reflect on, learn from, and consolidate your experiences’:



Need Not Met 1+2+3	% Not Met 02/19	% Not Met 04/20
Total	12%	23%
Male	10%	17%
Female	15%	29%
18-24	14%	37%
25-34	18%	34%
35-44	15%	27%
45-54	11%	20%
55+	7%	11%

Q. Rate, in your judgement, how well the following emotional needs are being met in your life now: **feeling you can obtain privacy when you need to** - on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means not met at all, and 7 means being very well met.

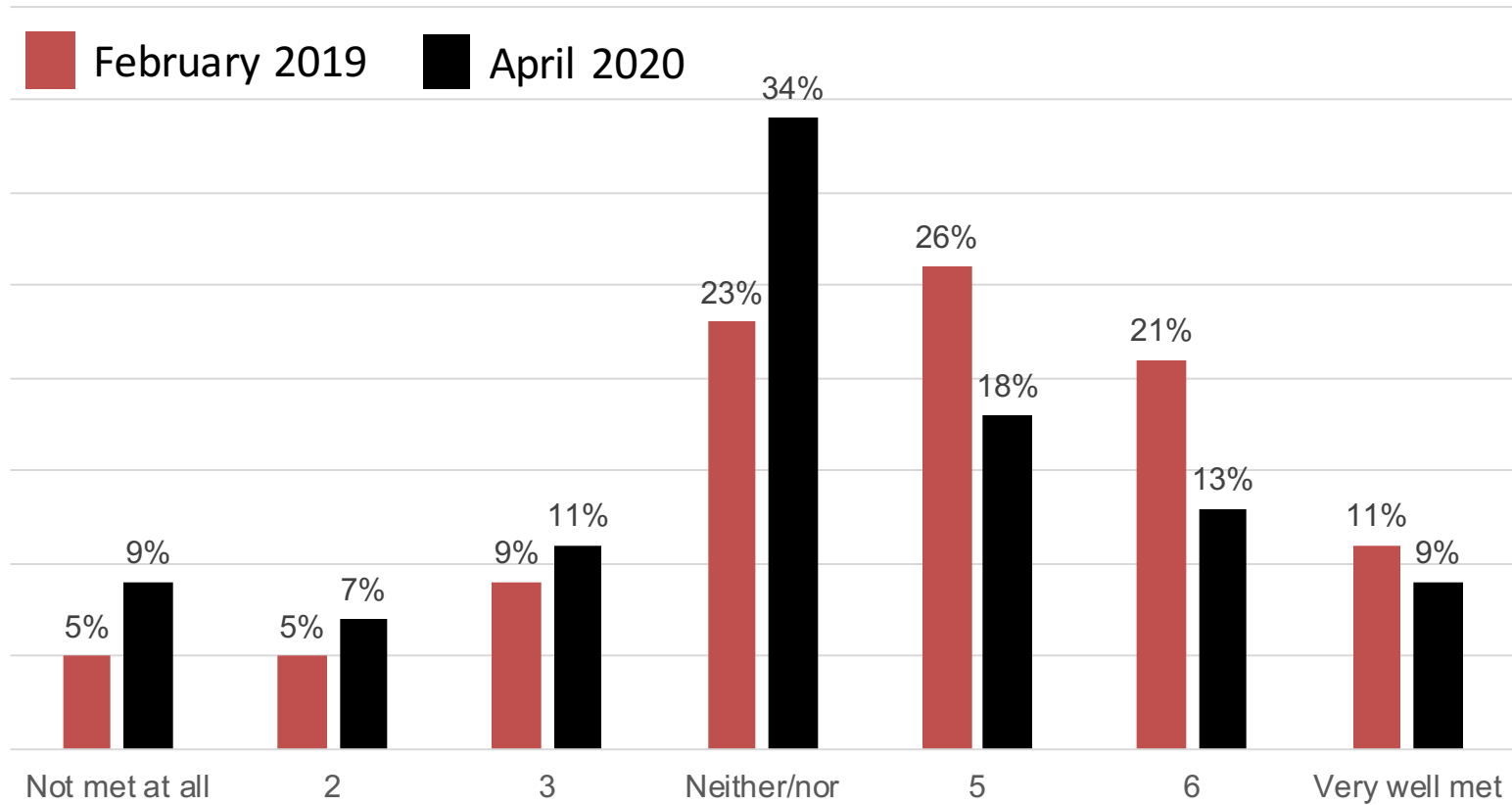
Psychological Need: Status



For many, their sense of status and self-worth is tied up in the things they do away from home (work etc), so the 'lockdown' has caused more to feel their need for status is unmet: while the gap between men and women in this instance has narrowed (though both have seen an increase in the percent with unmet status needs)...

Status: 2019 vs 2020

‘A sense that you are accepted, valued and have status within the groups to which you belong (work, family, town, sporting etc); being respected for who you are and what you can do’:



Need Not Met 1+2+3	% Not Met 02/19	% Not Met 04/20
Total	19%	26%
Male	14%	22%
Female	24%	31%
18-24	32%	38%
25-34	23%	33%
35-44	19%	28%
45-54	23%	22%
55+	10%	20%

Q. Rate, in your judgement, how well the following emotional needs are being met in your life now: **feeling you have status that is acknowledged by others** - on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means not met at all, and 7 means being very well met.

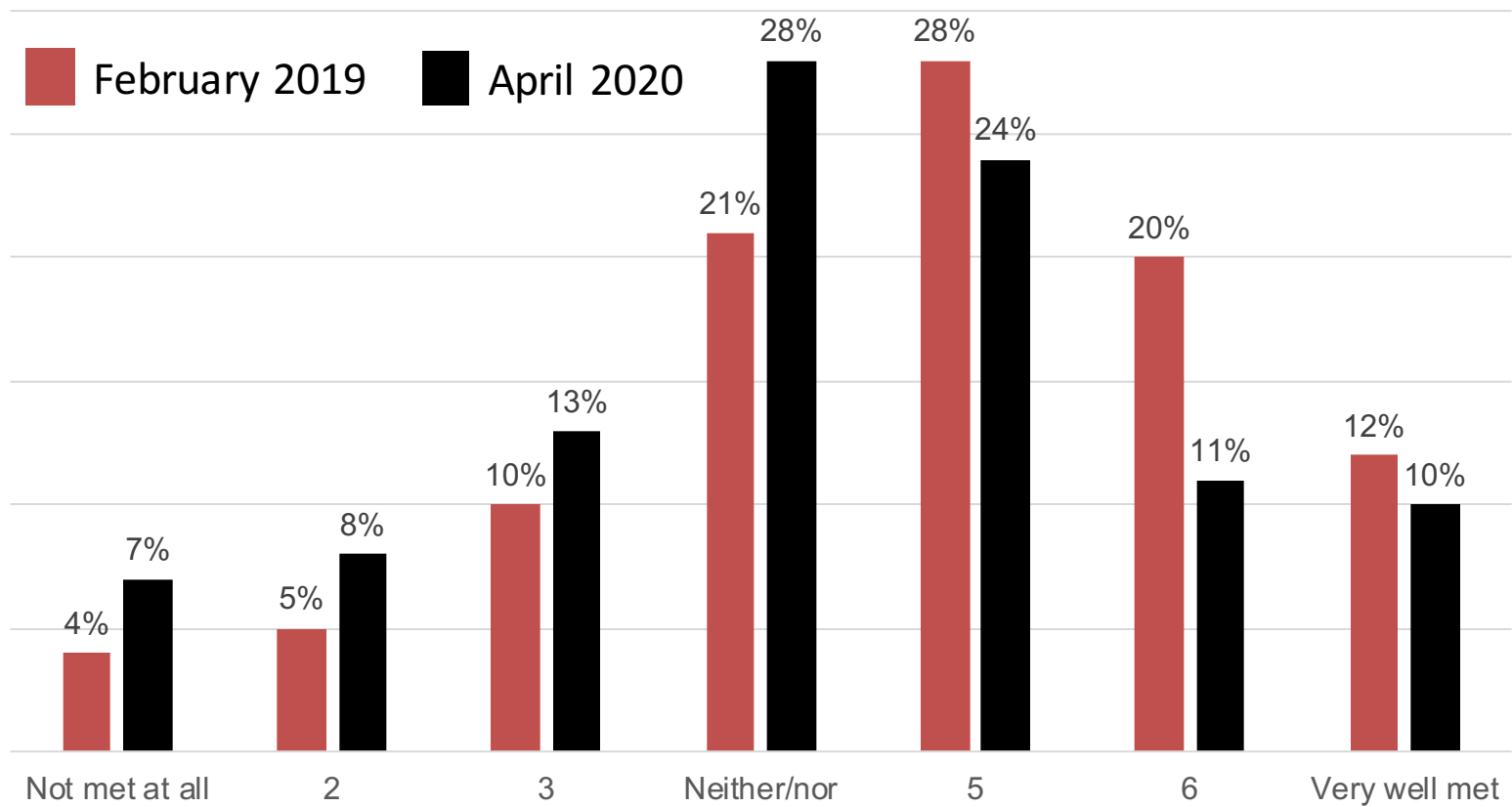
Psychological Need: Meaning



The last of the psychological needs is that relating to meaning or purpose in peoples' lives: something that many find difficult to sustain in the 'limbo' of the lockdown: the percent for whom their need for meaning is unmet at present stands at 28% vs 19% just 14 months ago: again it is women and young people who tend to bear the brunt of this 'loss'...

Meaning: 2019 vs 2020

‘A feeling which comes from being stretched, mentally or physically, and having purpose in what we do, being helpful within our communities, or being connected to ideas or beliefs greater than ourselves’:



Need Not Met 1+2+3	% Not Met 02/19	% Not Met 04/20
Total	19%	28%
Male	17%	23%
Female	21%	32%
18-24	28%	38%
25-34	23%	32%
35-44	22%	32%
45-54	17%	24%
55+	11%	21%

Q. Rate, in your judgement, how well the following emotional needs are being met in your life now: **feeling mentally and/or physically stretched in ways which give you a sense that life is meaningful** - on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means not met at all, and 7 means being very well met.

Conclusions

Psychological Needs in a Pandemic

This is just a snapshot of Ireland's mental health in the midst of a pandemic, and it should be noted that many of the mental health 'inequalities' we are seeing during the crisis were there even in 'normal' times back in 2019.

While some of the psychological trends we are seeing may prove to be (hopefully) short lived, there is no doubt that the longer the coronavirus crisis goes on – alongside the measures to contain it – the more likely it is that some of the trends and inequalities we have measured will become more difficult to reverse when it is over.

However, it should also be stressed that while we have focused on measuring the deterioration in the nation's mental and emotional wellbeing during the COVID-19 crisis, *there are still more people having their psychological needs met than not met even in the current, difficult circumstances*: pointing to a high level of psychological resilience in the general population.

Therefore the sooner the pandemic ends the more likely it is that this reservoir of resilience will help the nation recover from the collective trauma we are all living through at present.

Additional Resources

Mental health support services:

- Aware: <https://www.aware.ie/>
- Jigsaw: <https://www.jigsaw.ie/>

Human Givens Institute: <https://www.hgi.org.uk/>

Dublin Human Givens Centre: <http://dublinhumangivens.ie/>

Appendix: Questionnaire

Survey Questionnaire

Human Givens

Q1. Rate, in your judgement, how well the following emotional needs are being met in your life now, on a scale of one to seven (where 1 means not met at all, and 7 means being very well met):

Statements	1 Not met at all	2	3	4 Neither /Nor	5	6	7 Very well met
Feeling secure in all major areas of your life (such as your home, work, environment)							
Feeling you receive enough attention from others							
Feeling you give enough attention to others							
Feeling in control of your life most of the time							
Feeling you are connected to some part of a wider community							
Feeling you can obtain privacy when you need to							
Feeling an emotional connection to others							
Feeling you have status that is acknowledged by others							
Achieving things and feeling competent in at least one major area of your life							
Feeling mentally and/or physically stretched in ways which give you a sense that life is meaningful							

Q2. How would you rate the typical quality of your sleep, on a scale of one to seven (where 1 means very poor and you often wake up tired, and 7 means very good and you usually wake up refreshed): 1...7

Very poor, I often wake up tired	1
	2
	3
Neither / Nor	4
	5
	6
Very good, I usually wake up refreshed	7

e. info@amarach.com
t. 01 410 5200
w. www.amarach.com
b. www.amarach.com/blog
tw. twitter.com/AmarachResearch