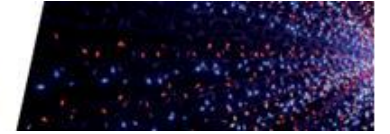


## Teaching, learning and personal tutoring: A virtual mini-conference

11 September 2020



**Student mental health support needs and academic  
performance during the COVID-19 outbreak**

Lucian Milasan and Edward Griffin

Even as studies were showing increases in symptoms of [depression](#) and in [suicide](#) among adolescents since 2010, some researchers called the concerns overblown and claimed there simply isn't enough good data to reach that conclusion.

The idea that there's an [epidemic](#) in anxiety or depression among youth "is simply a myth," psychiatrist Richard Friedman [wrote in The New York Times last year](#). Others suggested young people were simply [more willing to get help](#) when they needed it. Or perhaps counseling centers' outreach efforts were becoming more effective.

But [a new analysis of a large representative survey](#) reinforces what I – [and others](#) – have been saying: The [epidemic](#) is all too real. In fact, the increase in mental health issues among teens and young adults is nothing short of staggering.

### An [epidemic](#) of anguish

One of the best ways to find out if mental health issues have increased is to talk to a representative sample of the general population, not just those who seek help. [The National Survey on Drug Use and Health](#), administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, has done just that.

## Repeat freshers' week to combat first-year loneliness 'epidemic' fuelling student mental health crisis, says report

**Exclusives:** One-off Freshers' Week no longer enough amid rising mental health concerns, study says

**Examiner** **Bobby** Education Correspondent | @Examiner\_Bobby | Wednesday 23 September 2015 13:01



Experts and researchers use terms like "[epidemic](#)" and "crisis" to characterize the mental health challenges currently facing American college students.

Statistics back up these claims. According to 2018 and 2019 [student surveys](#) from the American College Health Association (ACHA), about 60% of respondents felt "overwhelming" anxiety, while 40% experienced depression so severe they had difficulty functioning. A 2019 Pennsylvania State University study noted that demand for campus mental health services [spiked by 30-40%](#) during a period that saw only a 5% increase in enrollment.



Mood disturbances represent only some of the prevalent mental health issues experienced by college students. Others include serious problems like suicide, eating disorders, and addiction. Mental health professionals stress the importance of talking about such issues, but students tend to consider these stresses a normal part of college life. In other cases, they may lack the time, energy, will, and/or money to seek the support they need. This guide contains information to help students identify potential mental health issues and locate valuable community resources.

## Students Are Facing An Epidemic Of Mental Illness

A vice-chancellor has warned that the number of suicides in universities is at a record high.



## The College Student Mental Health Crisis

Today's college students are suffering from an epidemic of mental illnesses.

Posted Feb 15, 2014



It is neither an exaggeration nor is it alarmist to claim that there is a mental health crisis today facing America's college students.

Evidence suggests that this group has greater levels of stress and psychopathology than any time in the nation's history. The dawning recognition of the crisis is spurring conferences ([see here](#)) and [official reports](#) in an attempt to get a handle on the scope of the problem. It is a reality we should all be aware of because the ramifications are difficult to overstate.

# Presentation overview

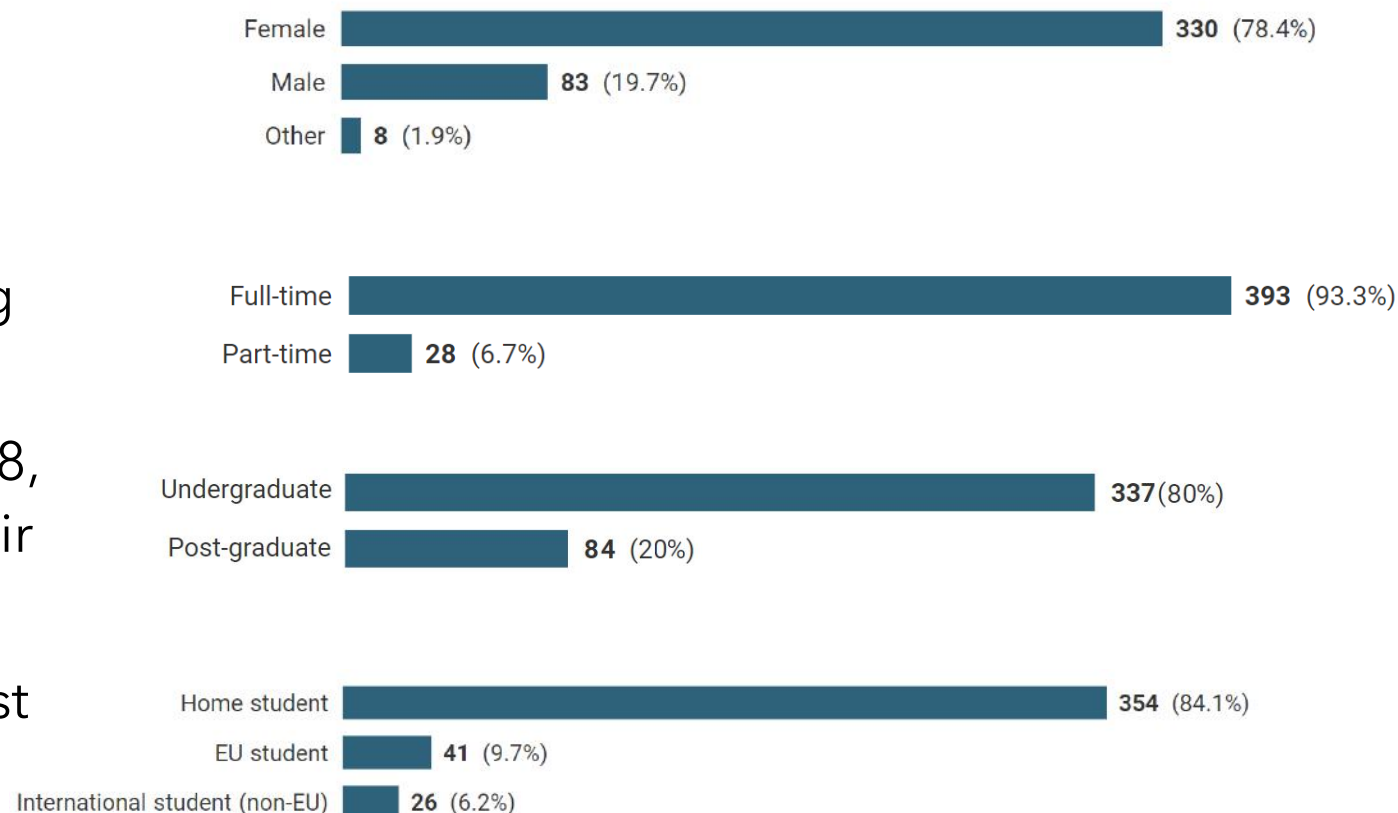
- Study aim
- Methods
- Results (1): statistical analysis
- Results (2): thematic analysis
- Key points

# Study aim

- **To explore the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the mental health of UK-based students**
  - To map student mental health challenges
  - To investigate students' coping mechanisms
  - To explore students' perceived levels of wellbeing and academic support received from their universities

## Participants

- 421 students completed survey between 4<sup>th</sup> - 26<sup>th</sup> June, 2020, during UK lockdown period.
- Age range 17 - 62 years (*Mean* = 24.8, *SD* = 8.25), with six not declaring their age.
- Various ethnic backgrounds, but most White British (72.7%).



<b>Ethnicity (n = 421)</b>	<b>N =</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>White (British)</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>(72.7%)</b>
<b>Any other white background</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>(13.1%)</b>
<b>Asian or Asian British (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi)</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>(4.3%)</b>
<b>Any other Asian background</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>(1.7%)</b>
<b>White (Irish)</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>(1.7%)</b>
<b>Mixed (White and Asian)</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>(1.4%)</b>
<b>Other ethnic group</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>(1.4%)</b>
<b>Black of Black British (African)</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>(0.7%)</b>
<b>Mixed (White and Black African)</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>(0.7%)</b>
<b>Any other mixed background</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>(0.5%)</b>
<b>Black or Black British</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>(0.2%)</b>
<b>Mixed (White and Black Caribbean)</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>(0.2%)</b>
<b>Any other Black groups</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(0.0%)</b>
<b><i>I'd rather not answer</i></b>	<b>6</b>	<b>(1.4%)</b>

# Methods (2)

## Design and Analysis

- Two-phase mixed-methods approach
- Phase 1: quantitative survey data analysis employing descriptive & inferential statistics.
- Phase 2: qualitative analysis of the open-ended questionnaire data, employing thematic analysis.

## Materials

- A purposely designed questionnaire utilising 66 qualitative, quantitative and mixed-response questions.
- 4 binary questions, (1 with open-ended option), 11 categorical questions (7 with open-ended options), 38 (5-point) Likert-type questions, 12 open-ended questions.
- Questionnaire delivered using 'Online Surveys', analysed with SPSS and Atlas

# Results (1)

## Quantitative descriptive analysis

University Region ( <i>n</i> = 420)	<i>N</i> =	%
East Midlands	106	(25.2)
Scotland	77	(18.3)
Yorkshire & The Humber	41	(9.7)
South West	35	(8.3)
North West	34	(8.1)
West Midlands	34	(8.1)
London	31	(7.4)
North East	17	(4.0)
Wales	15	(3.6)
South East	13	(3.1)
East of England	10	(2.4)

Covid-19 Status	<i>N</i> =	%
No diagnosis / no symptoms	336	(79.8)
No diagnosis / experienced symptoms	63	(15.0)
Current diagnosis of Covid-19	8	(1.9)
Previous diagnosis of Covid-19 (recovered)	8	(1.9)
Other	6	(1.4)
<i>Suspected</i>	2	
<i>Shielding</i>	1	
<i>Asymptomatic carrier</i>	1	



# Results (1)

## Mental health and disability

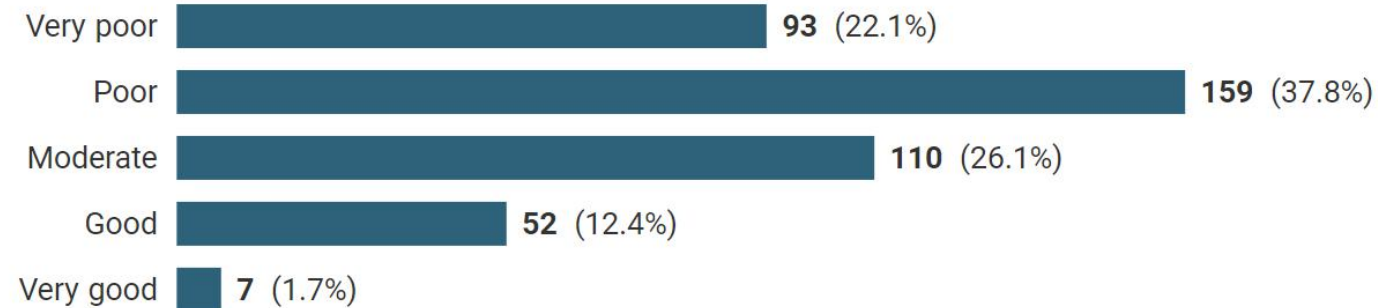
Physical, Mental Health and/or Learning Disabilities	N =	%
No Disability	230	(54.0)
Mental Health Disability	153	(36.3)
Cognitive or Learning Difference	47	(11.2)
Physical Health Disability	31	(7.4)
Other ( <i>qualitative responses</i> )	4	(1.0)
<i>Neurological Disability</i>		(0.3)
<i>Autism Spectrum Disorder</i>	1	(0.3)
<i>Unilateral Hearing Loss</i>	1	(0.3)
<i>Endometriosis</i>	1	(0.3)

Mental Health Status	N =	%
No Diagnosed Mental Illness	178	(42.3)
Anxiety	188	(44.7)
Depression	156	(37.1)
PTSD	37	(8.8)
Eating Disorder	33	(7.8)
OCD	28	(6.7)
Personality Disorder	24	(5.7)
Psychosis/Schizophrenia	4	(1.0)
Other ( <i>qualitative responses</i> )	18	(4.3)
<i>ADHD/Asperger's Syndrome</i>	1	
<i>Pseudo Psychotic Hallucinations</i>	1	
<i>EUPD Traits</i>	1	
<i>Endometriosis</i>	1	
<i>Panic Attacks/disorder</i>	3	
<i>Social Anxiety</i>	1	
<i>PMDD</i>	1	
<i>Autism</i>	2	
<i>Social phobia, insomnia, somatic symptom</i>	1	
<i>Non-serious/non-diagnosed mental health condition (anxiety)</i>	2	
<i>Health Anxiety</i>	1	
<i>Body Dysmorphia</i>	1	
<i>Specific Phobia</i>	1	
<i>Trichotillomania</i>	1	

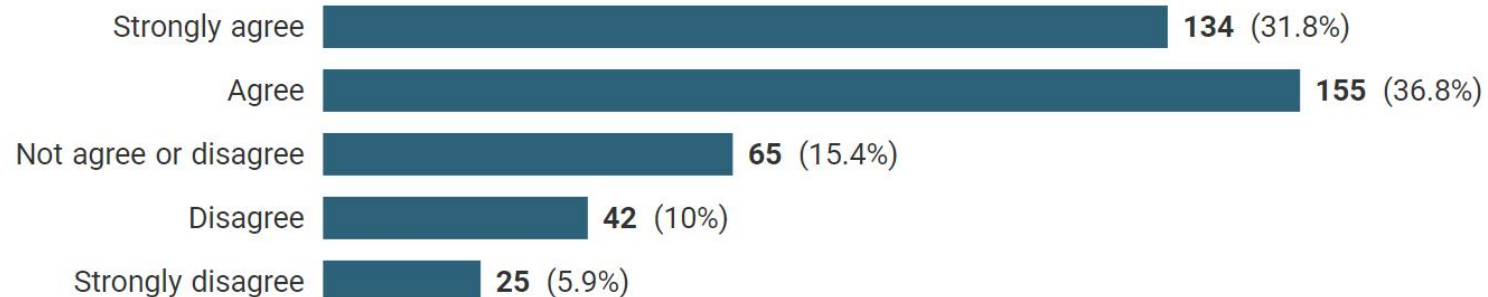
# Results (1)

## Psychological health during Covid-19

How would you generally describe your psychological health during the COVID-19 restriction period?



My psychological well-being has deteriorated during the COVID-19 situation.



# Results (1)

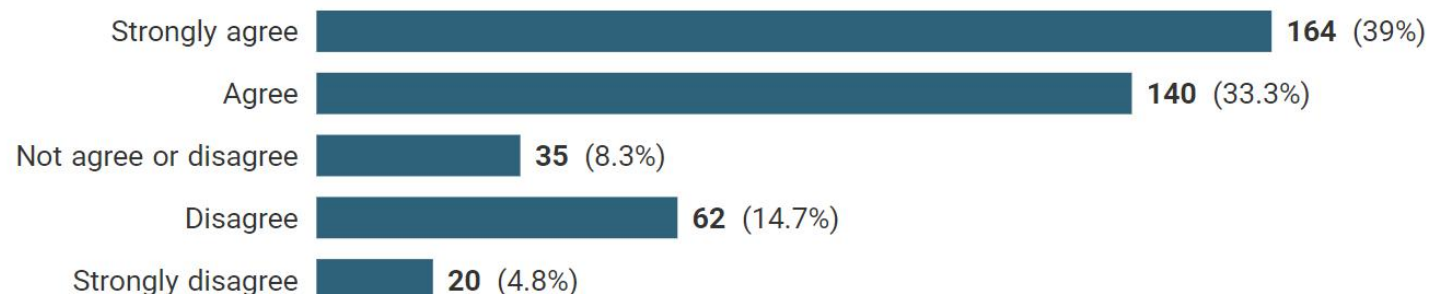
## Psychological health during Covid-19

- No significant difference between males and females.
  - However, a higher percentage of males ( $n = 49, 59.0\%$ ) reported no diagnosed MH condition than females ( $n = 128, 38.7\%$ ).
- Small positive correlation between age and Psychological Health ( $R = .101, N = 415, p = .039, \text{two-tailed}$ ).
- No significant differences between White British students and students from BAME backgrounds
- International students reported significantly better psychological health than EU and home students.

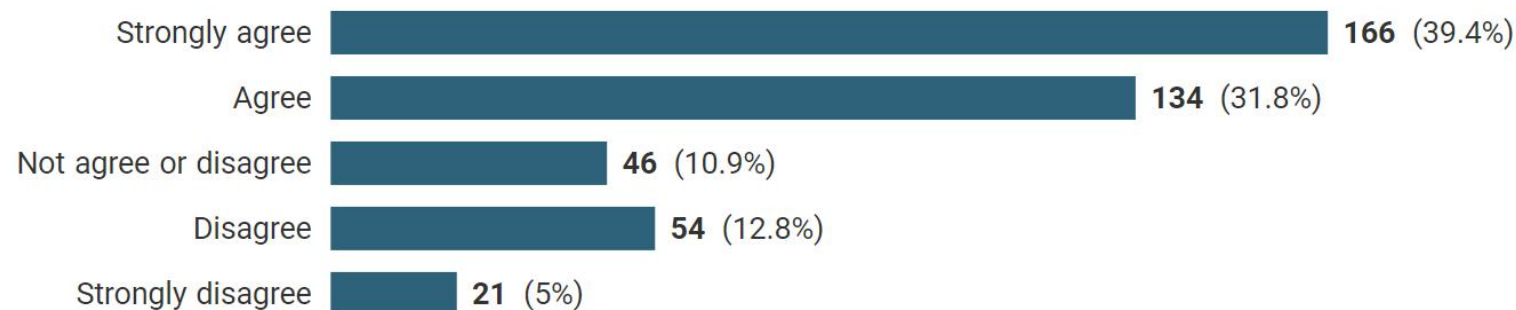
# Results (1)

## Psychological health during Covid-19

I have been experiencing **low mood** for a considerable period of time (for example, more than 2 weeks).



I have been **worrying excessively** for a considerable period of time (for example, more than 2 weeks).



# Results (1)

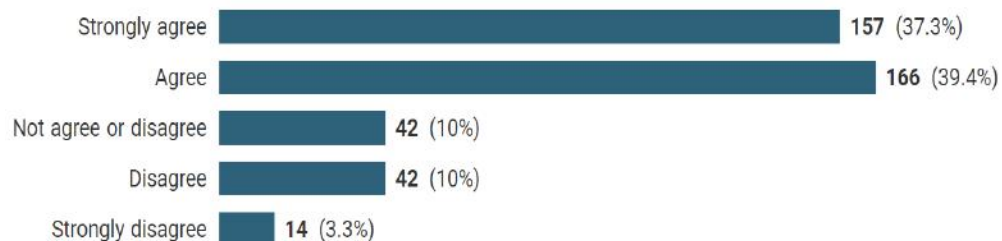
## Psychological health during Covid-19

- Students generally reported high levels of agreement with items pertaining to depression, anxiety and stress during the lockdown period.
- Strong agreement that social isolation associated with lockdown had a negative impact on mental health.
- Social media also appeared to have a negative impact.
- Students were concerned about their future and about the economy
- There was a moderate level of concern about physical health (Covid related)

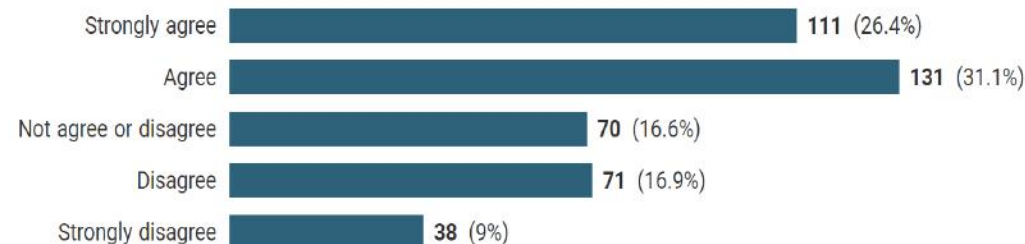
# Results (1)

## Psychological health during Covid-19

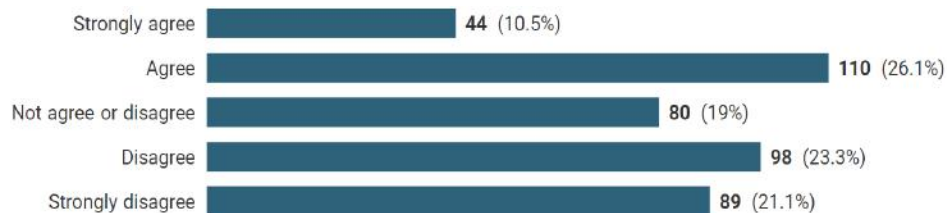
The social isolation during the COVID-19 restriction period affected my mental health.



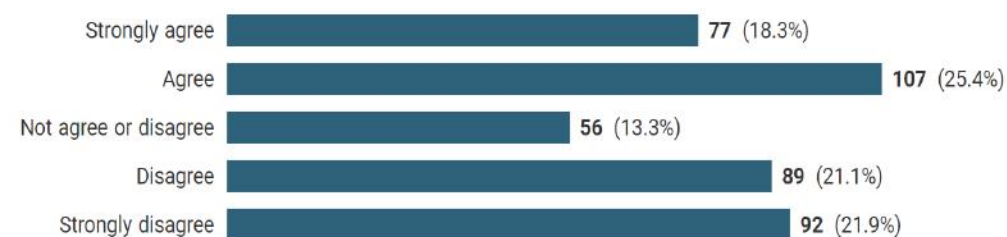
Social media had a negative effect on my mental health during the COVID-19 restriction period.



Practical challenges have caused me psychological distress during the COVID-19 period.



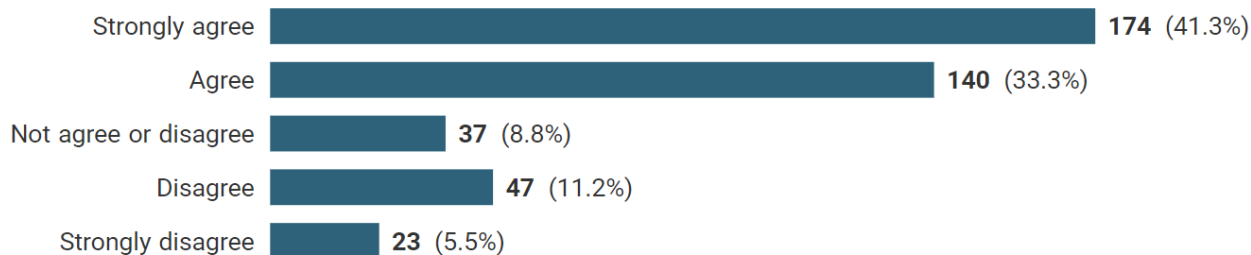
Financial difficulties have caused me psychological distress during the COVID-19 period.



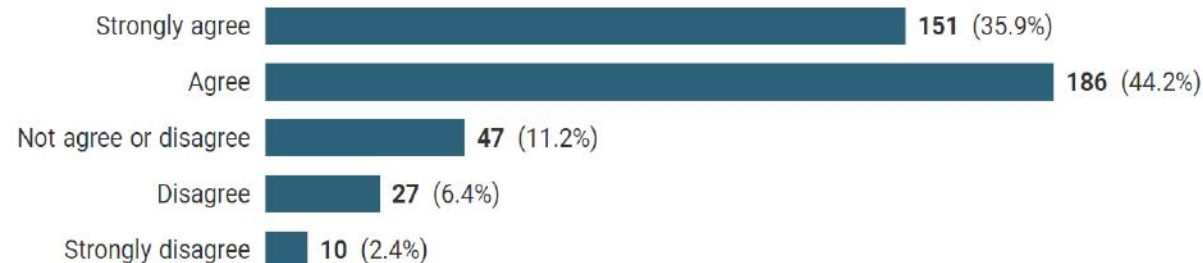
# Results (1)

## Psychological health during Covid-19

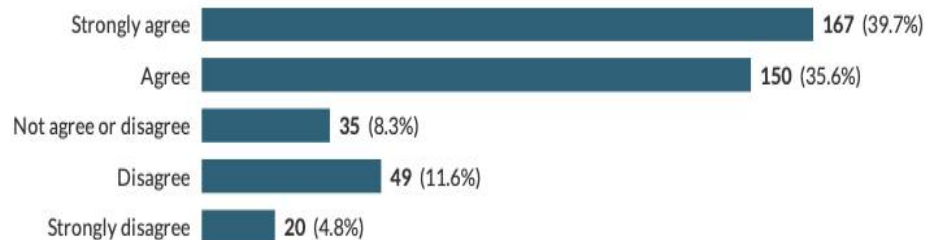
I am worried about my future career.



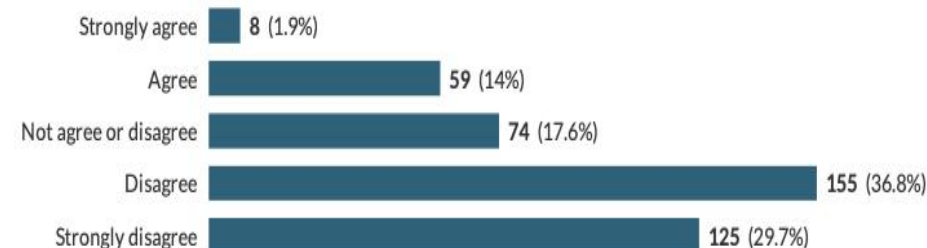
I am worried about the future of the economy.



I am worried about the lockdown being relaxed too soon.



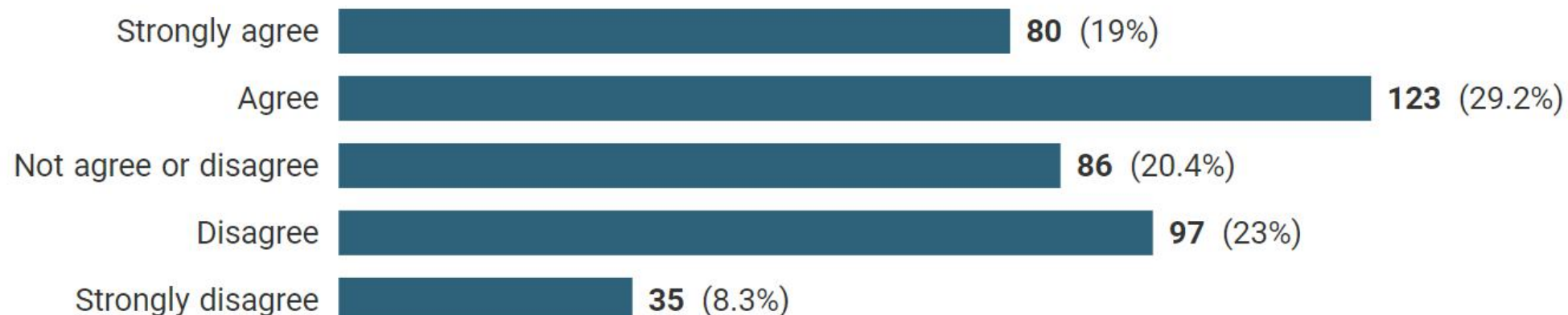
The UK Government will protect us from this pandemic.



# Results (1)

## Psychological health during Covid-19

I am worried about returning to university.

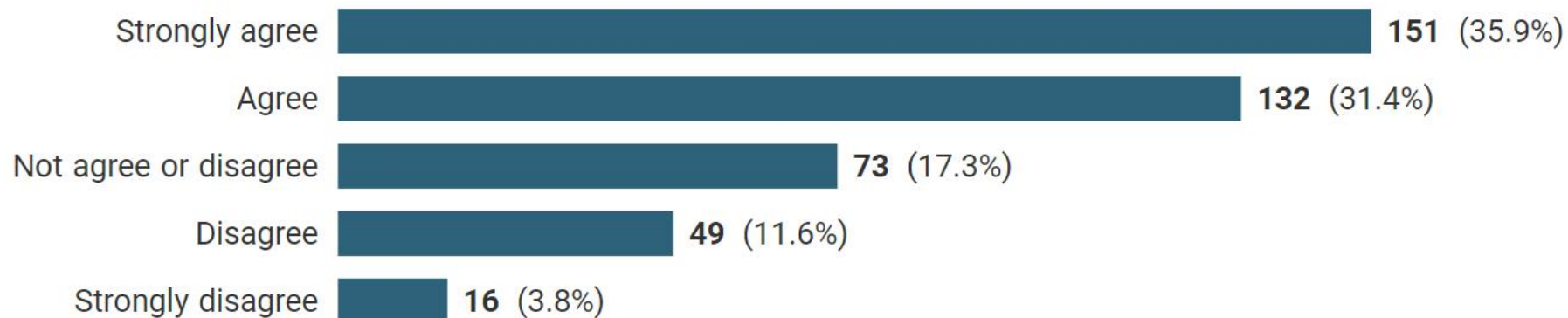




# Results (1)

## Mental health impact on academic performance

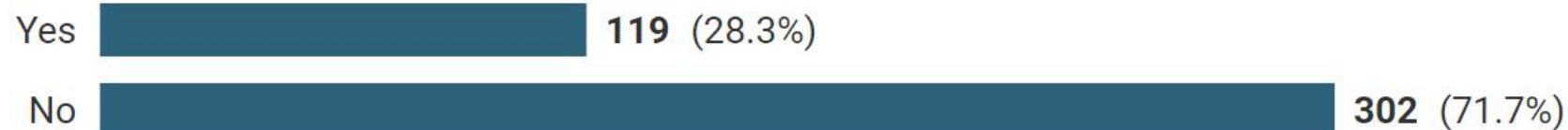
My mental health difficulties had a negative effect on my academic performance during the COVID-19 restriction period.



# Results (1)

## Mental health support from universities

Have you requested any support in relation to your wellbeing from your university during the COVID-19 restriction period?



Do you consider that the overall support you received from your university met your needs in relation to your mental health during the COVID-19 crisis?



# Results (1)

## Mental health support from universities

Approximately a quarter of participants ( $n = 119$ ; 28.3%) requested University support in relation to their well-being during the Covid-19 lockdown period.

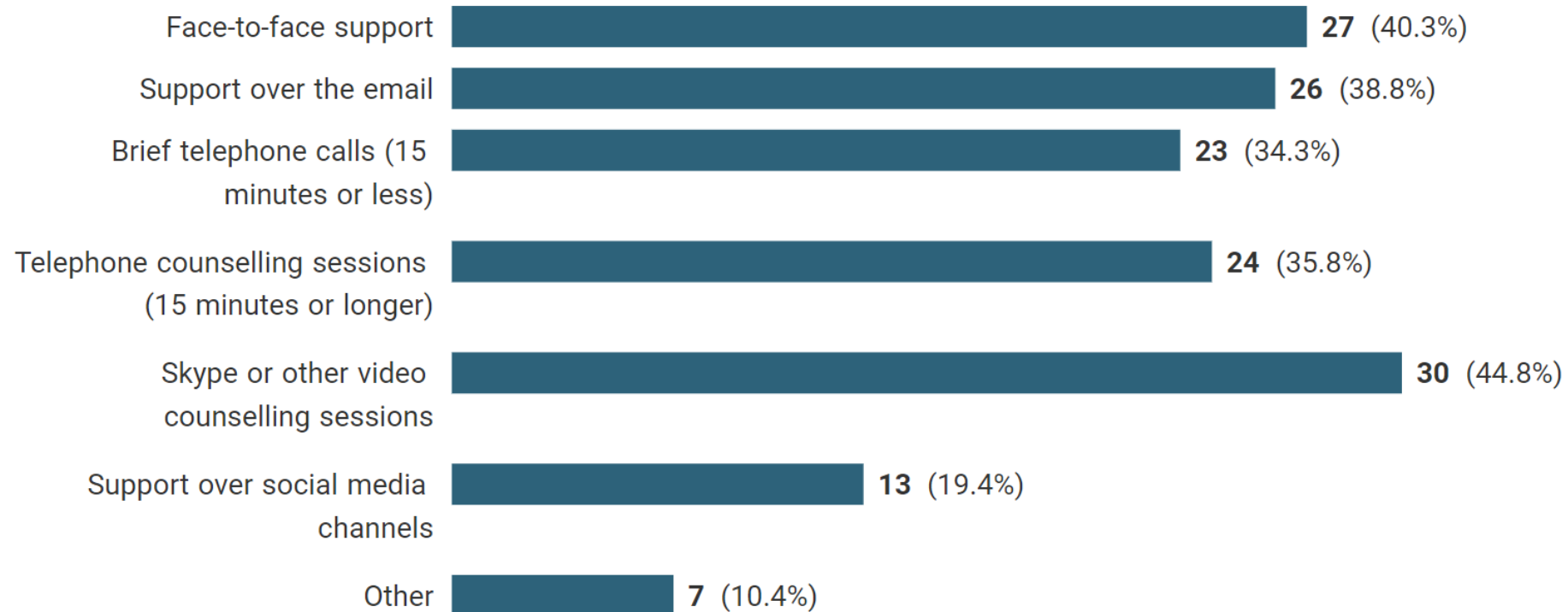
For those who requested support, a series of support options were presented to participants for which they rated their helpfulness on a five-point scale (1 = very unhelpful; 5 = very helpful).

	<b>N</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Face-to-face support	27	92	1	5	3.00	1.387
Support over the email	107	12	1	5	3.33	1.330
Brief telephone calls (15 minutes or less)	56	62	1	5	3.38	1.315
Telephone counselling sessions (15 minutes or longer)	51	68	1	5	3.76	1.159
Skype/video calls	53	65	1	5	3.81	1.161
Telephone DSA (Disabled Students' Allowance) support	20	99	1	5	3.40	1.231
Skype/video DSA (Disabled Students' Allowance) support	23	96	1	5	3.57	1.161
Social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook)	61	58	1	5	2.97	1.316

# Results (1)

## Mental health support from universities

What type of mental health support from your university would you have found helpful? Please select as many answers that apply to you.



# Results (2)

## Thematic analysis

- COVID-19 challenges and benefits to student mental health
- COVID-19 challenges and benefits to academic performance
- Students' perception of support received from universities
- Recommendations for universities regarding managing student mental health during the pandemic

# Results (2)

## COVID-19 challenges to student mental health



# Results (2)

## COVID-19 challenges to student mental health

- **isolation and loneliness**

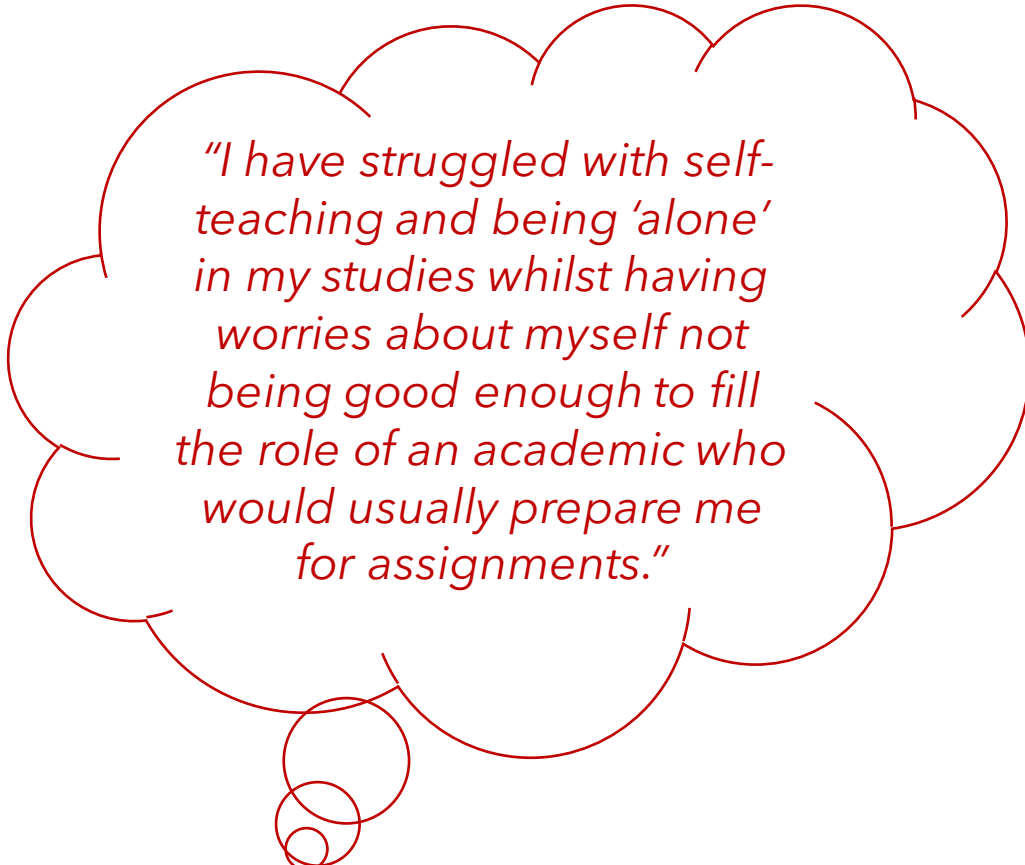


*"I'm an international student living alone in the university accommodation (all other flat mates left). Being alone for a long period made me cry, get panic attacks, overeat, and feel hopeless."*

# Results (2)

## COVID-19 challenges to student mental health

- **isolation and loneliness**



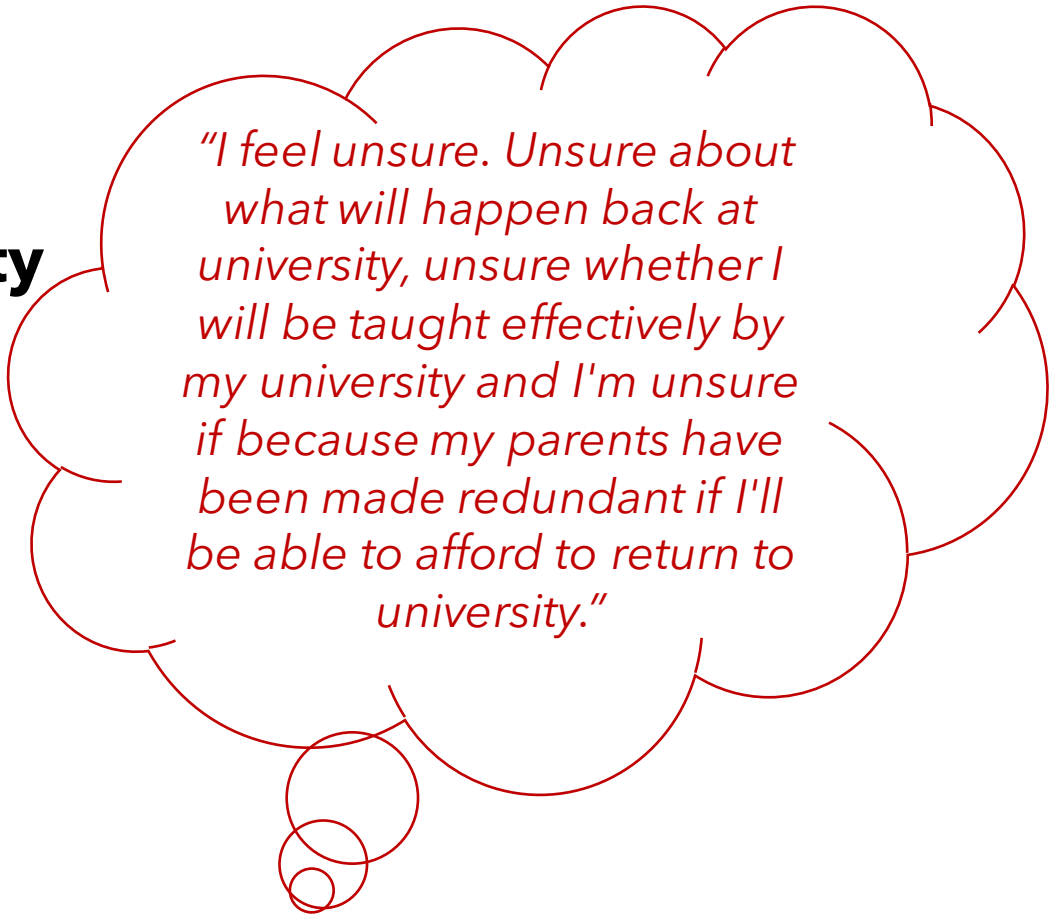
*"I have struggled with self-teaching and being 'alone' in my studies whilst having worries about myself not being good enough to fill the role of an academic who would usually prepare me for assignments."*



# Results (2)

## COVID-19 challenges to student mental health

- isolation and loneliness
- **dealing with change and uncertainty**




*"I feel unsure. Unsure about what will happen back at university, unsure whether I will be taught effectively by my university and I'm unsure if because my parents have been made redundant if I'll be able to afford to return to university."*

# Results (2)

## COVID-19 challenges to student mental health

- isolation and loneliness
- dealing with change and uncertainty
- **battling through academia**

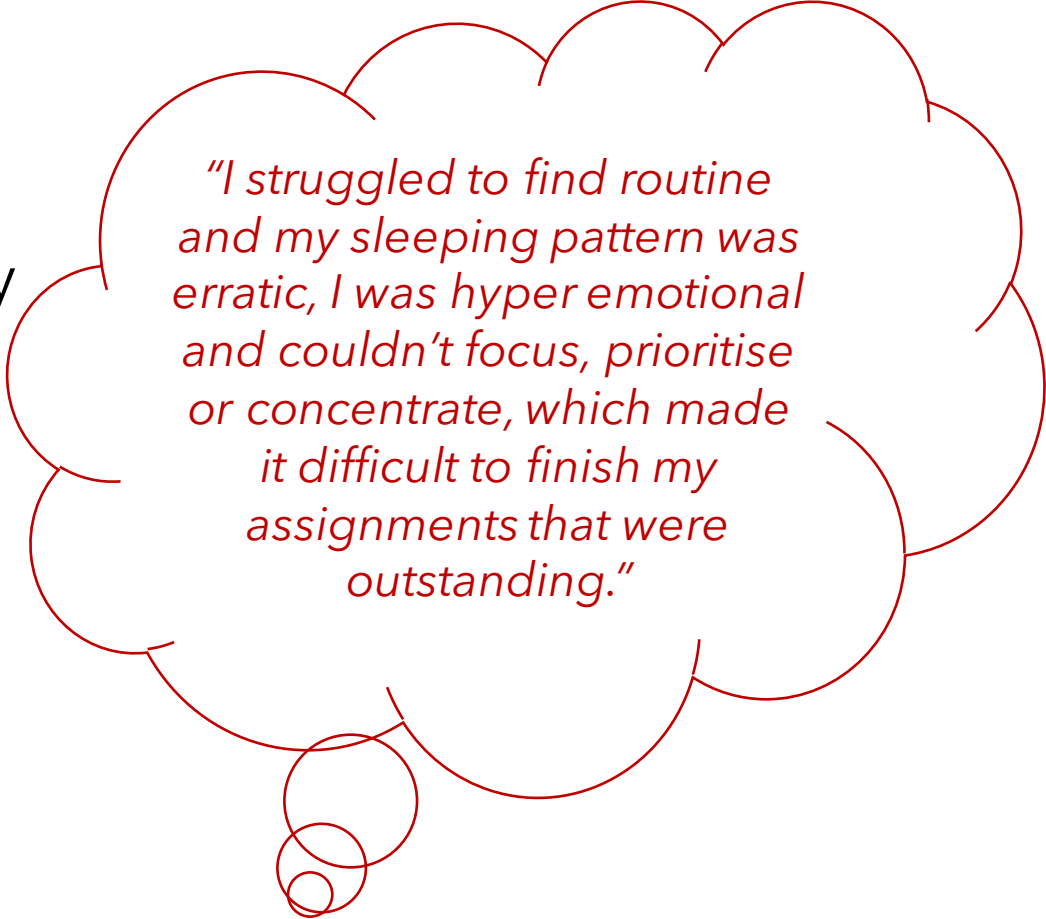


*"The way that my university still expected second year students to complete all assessments was something that caused me stress, as the lack of support from teaching staff and classmates made it more difficult."*

# Results (2)

## COVID-19 challenges to student mental health

- isolation and loneliness
- dealing with change and uncertainty
- **battling through academia**

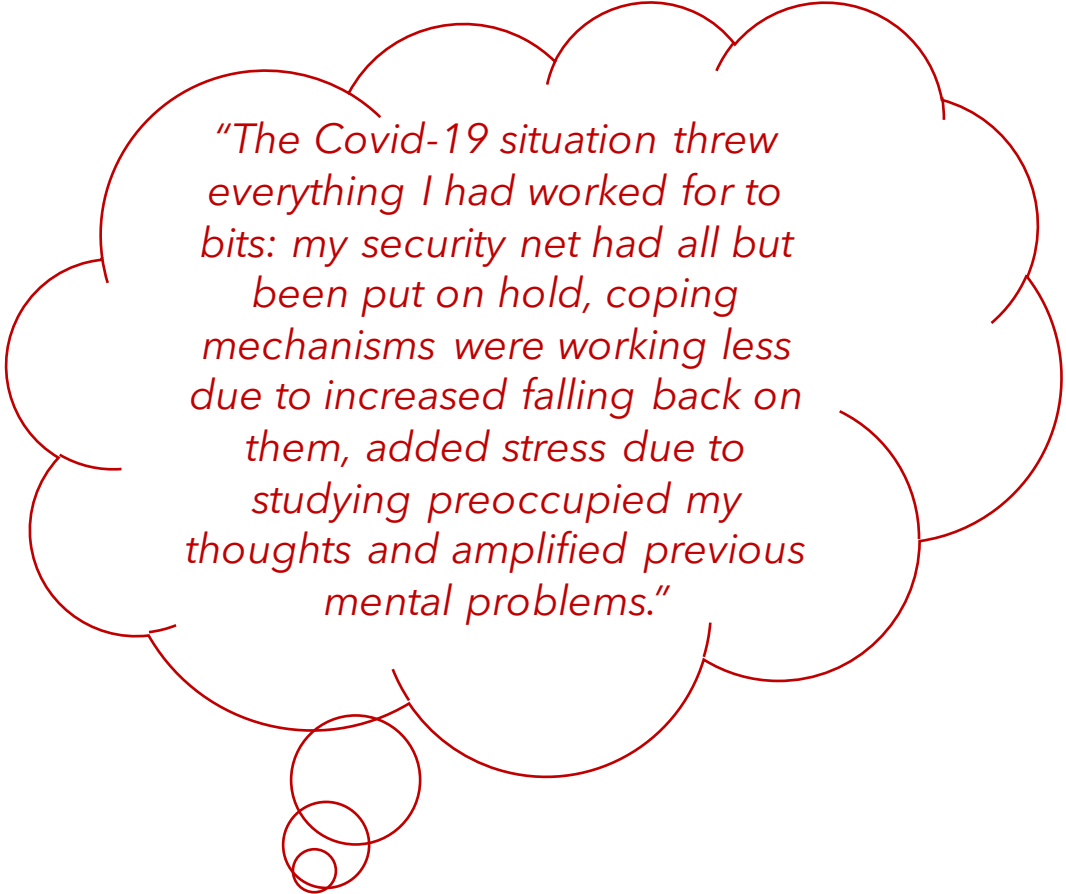


*"I struggled to find routine and my sleeping pattern was erratic, I was hyper emotional and couldn't focus, prioritise or concentrate, which made it difficult to finish my assignments that were outstanding."*

# Results (2)

## COVID-19 challenges to student mental health

- isolation and loneliness
- dealing with change and uncertainty
- battling through academia
- **distancing from support networks and coping mechanisms**

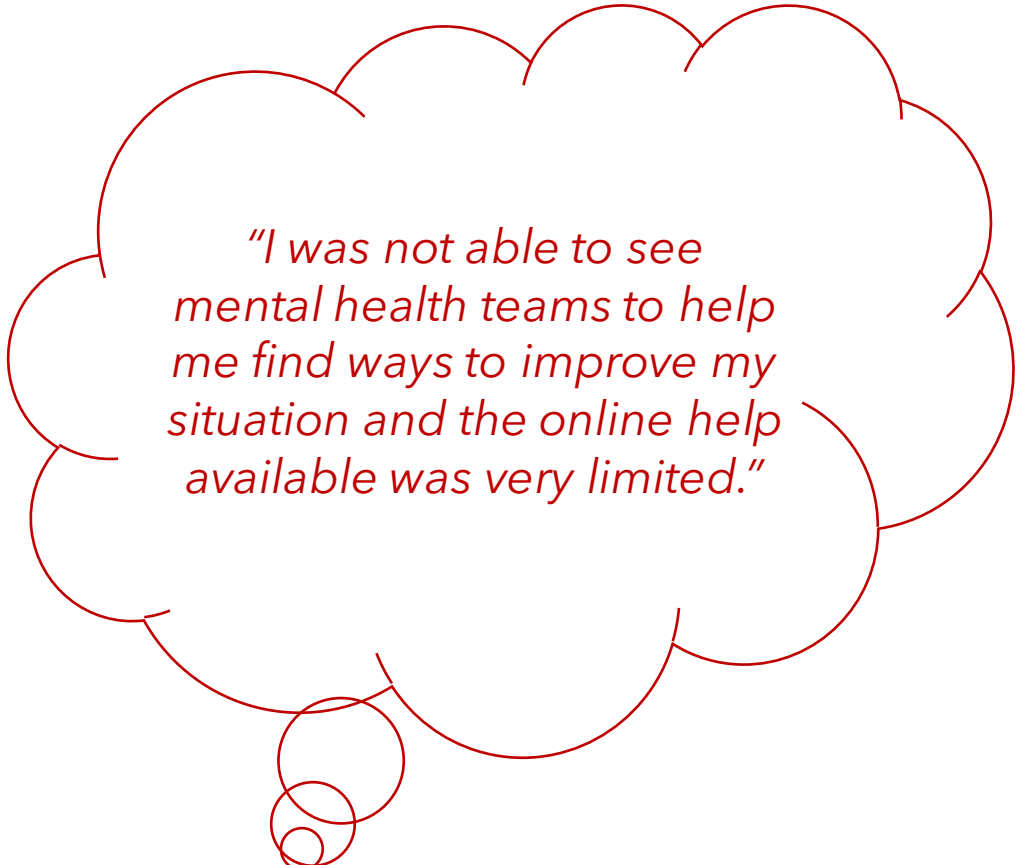


*"The Covid-19 situation threw everything I had worked for to bits: my security net had all but been put on hold, coping mechanisms were working less due to increased falling back on them, added stress due to studying preoccupied my thoughts and amplified previous mental problems."*

# Results (2)

## COVID-19 challenges to student mental health

- isolation and loneliness
- dealing with change and uncertainty
- battling through academia
- **distancing from support networks and coping mechanisms**

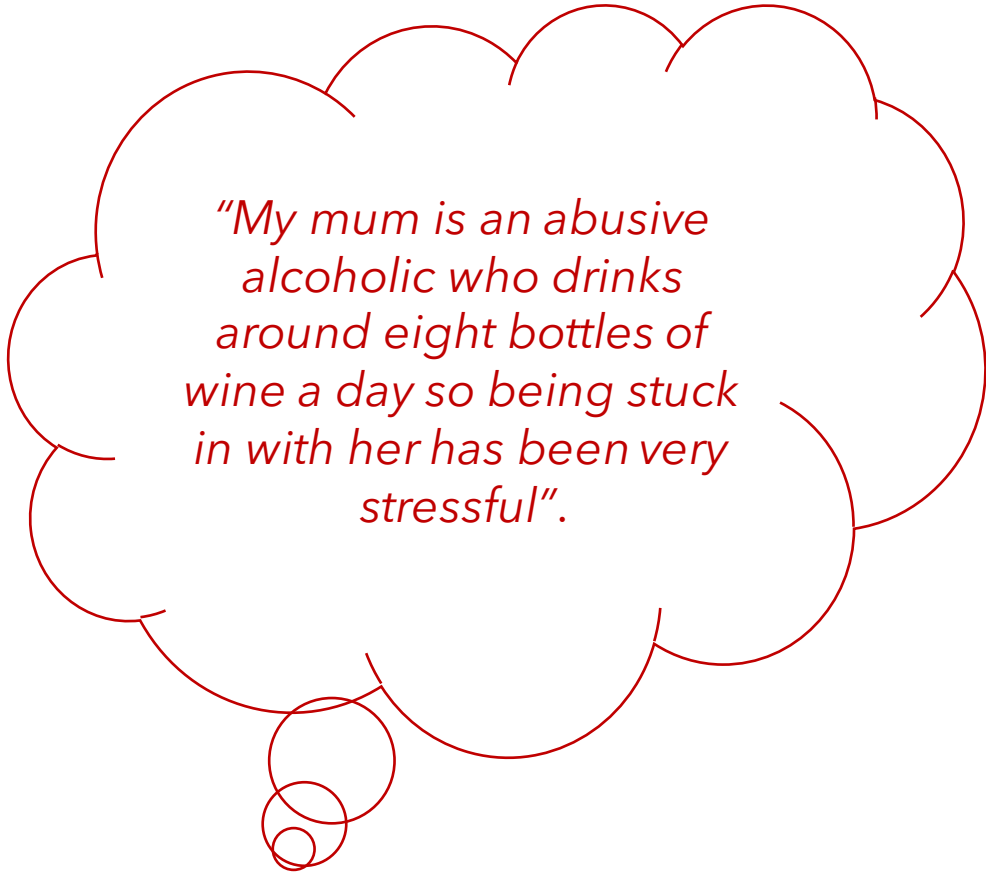


*"I was not able to see mental health teams to help me find ways to improve my situation and the online help available was very limited."*

# Results (2)

## COVID-19 challenges to student mental health

- isolation and loneliness
- dealing with change and uncertainty
- battling through academia
- distancing from support networks and coping mechanisms
- **feeling “stuck”**

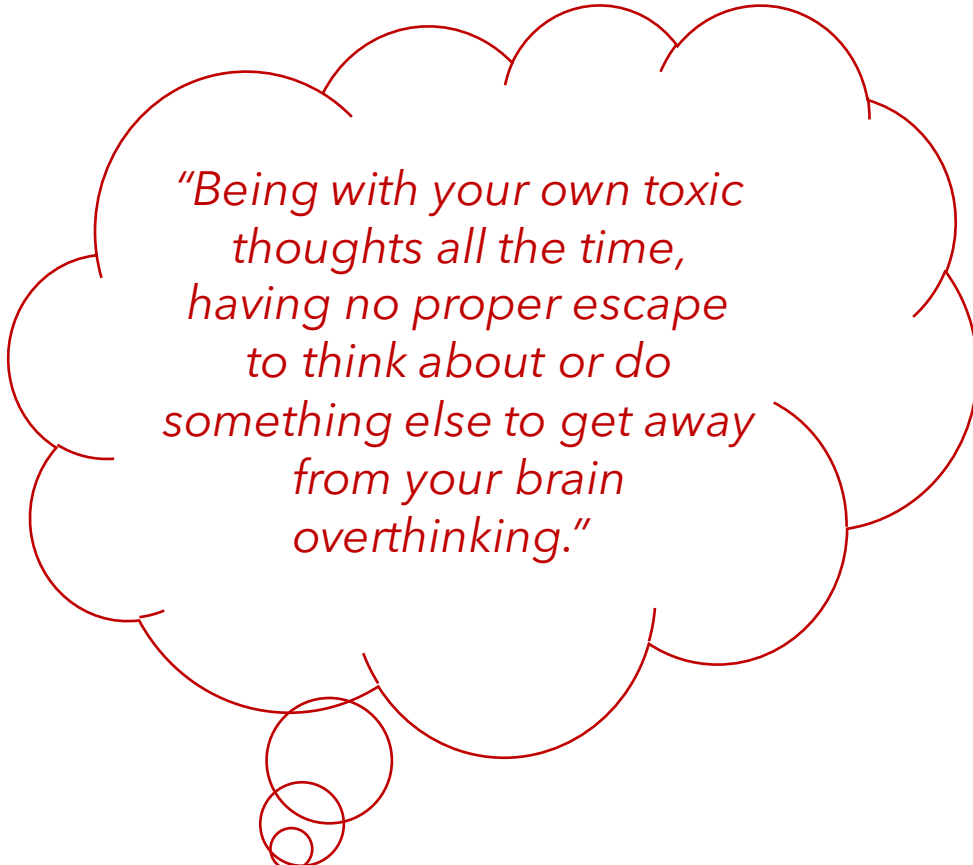


*“My mum is an abusive alcoholic who drinks around eight bottles of wine a day so being stuck in with her has been very stressful”.*

# Results (2)

## COVID-19 challenges to student mental health

- isolation and loneliness
- dealing with change and uncertainty
- battling through academia
- distancing from support networks and coping mechanisms
- **feeling “stuck”**



*“Being with your own toxic thoughts all the time, having no proper escape to think about or do something else to get away from your brain overthinking.”*

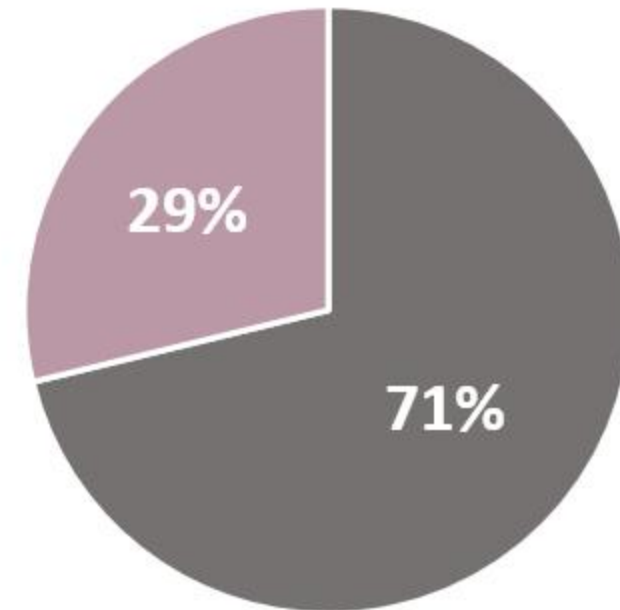
# Results (2)

## COVID-19 benefits to student mental health



# Results (2)

## COVID-19 benefits to student mental health

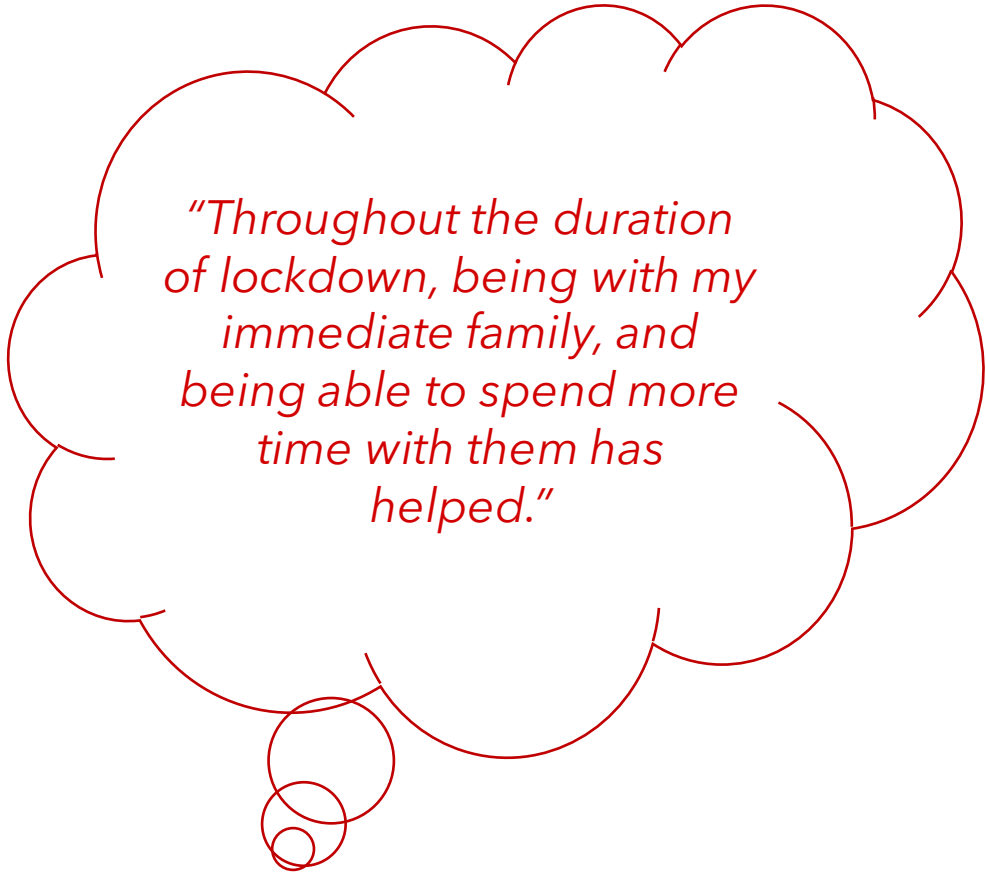


■ Challenges ■ Benefits

# Results (2)

## COVID-19 benefits to student mental health

- **(dis)connections**

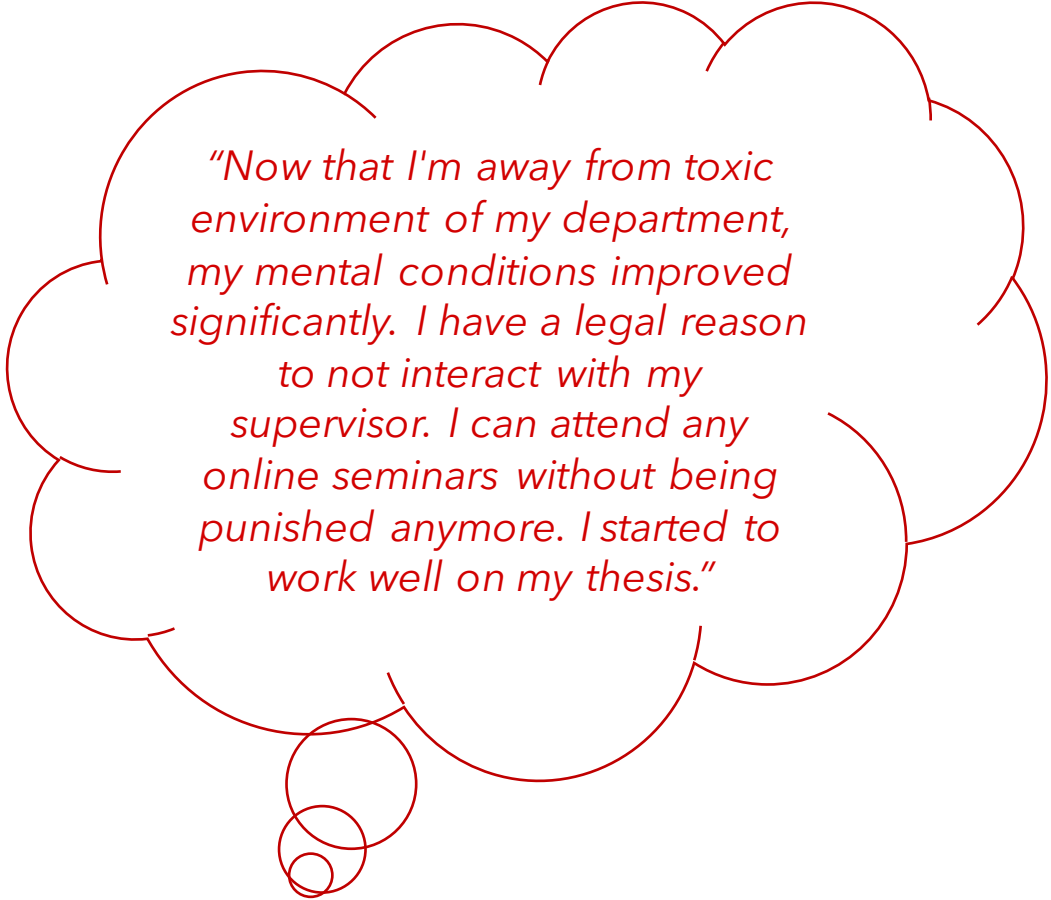


*"Throughout the duration of lockdown, being with my immediate family, and being able to spend more time with them has helped."*

# Results (2)

## COVID-19 benefits to student mental health

- **(dis)connections**



*"Now that I'm away from toxic environment of my department, my mental conditions improved significantly. I have a legal reason to not interact with my supervisor. I can attend any online seminars without being punished anymore. I started to work well on my thesis."*

# Results (2)

## COVID-19 benefits to student mental health

- (dis)connections
- **reflection and resilience building**

*"It [the lockdown] has allowed me time to take a break from my life and think about who and what I want to be."*

*"I have learned to have resilience during the isolation period."*

*"I have become more self-aware and looked after my health more than ever."*

# Results (2)

## COVID-19 benefits to student mental health

- (dis)connections
- reflection and resilience building
- **normalised life-styles**

*"The way I sort of live now anyway has become more normal."*

*"Being at home has actually been good for me with a slower pace of life."*

*"During lockdown, I have been able to sleep more and eat better. I have also not been exposed to my usual sources of stress (commuting, not having time for assignments, work)."*

# Results (2)

## COVID-19 benefits to student mental health

- (dis)connections
- reflection and resilience building
- normalised life-styles
- **renewed routines**

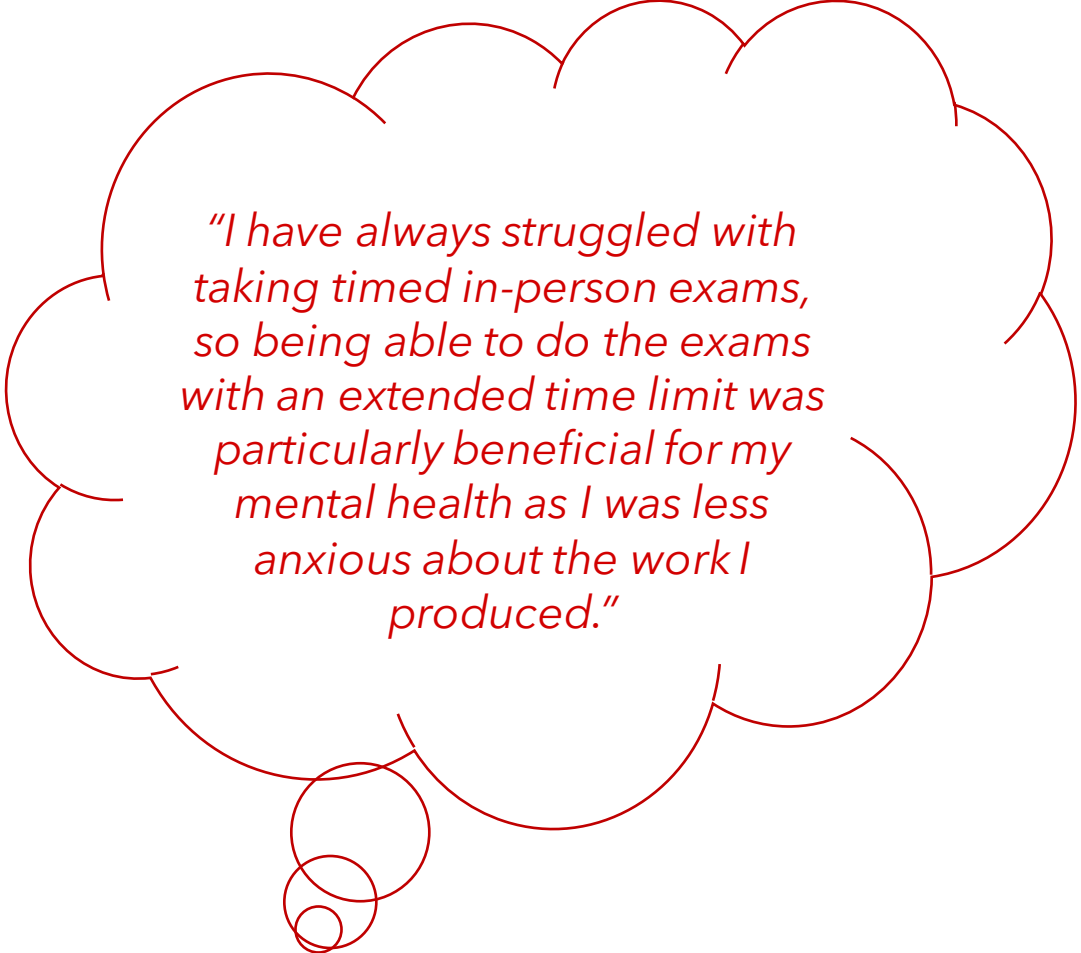
*"It's given me time to do what I enjoy. Plus I think I'm more active now as have actually been working out more since I have time."*

*"Have also been able to spend more time doing relaxing activities such as baking and painting that I wouldn't usually have enough time to do in normal circumstances."*

# Results (2)

## COVID-19 benefits to student mental health

- (dis)connections
- reflection and resilience building
- normalised life-styles
- renewed routines
- **accessibility**



*"I have always struggled with taking timed in-person exams, so being able to do the exams with an extended time limit was particularly beneficial for my mental health as I was less anxious about the work I produced."*

# Results (2)

## COVID-19 challenges to academic performance



# Results (2)

## COVID-19 challenges to academic performance

- **motivation and concentration meltdown**

*"I've been feeling extremely foggy/clouded when I attempted to complete my university work. Reading and cognition is extremely difficult and takes me many more hours to complete one lecture than it usually would. As well as this, my motivation and lack of drive has completely gone, as everything feels very hopeless and pointless."*

# Results (2)

## COVID-19 challenges to academic performance

- motivation and concentration meltdown
- **disrupted plans and routines**

*"Two modules were cancelled and my dissertation was postponed, so had to go part-time which had a negative mental impact."*

*"I also missed out on vital work placements for my degree that would have potentially led to an amazing job opportunity, and also helped me gain essential skills for the career I will be pursuing once I have finished my degree."*

# Results (2)

## COVID-19 challenges to academic performance

- motivation and concentration meltdown
- disrupted plans and routines
- **displacement**

*"Returning to an unstable living situation negatively impacted my exam performance."*

*"Working and living in the same space has also made it harder to really switch on/off from academic work."*

*"I have ADHD and have access to a special room in the library to help me concentrate. I have struggled to get much work done at all at home."*

# Results (2)

## COVID-19 challenges to academic performance

- motivation and concentration meltdown
- disrupted plans and routines
- displacement
- **online learning does not fit all**

*"Online teaching has been my biggest challenge - I do not have the most appropriate workspace at home and it has been hard for me to stay engaged and feel involved when class was on."*

*"Also, with suffering from social anxiety, I was unable to join lectures using zoom."*

*"I have dyslexia and struggle to work purely from written resources, I need to be able to talk things through with people to process them properly."*

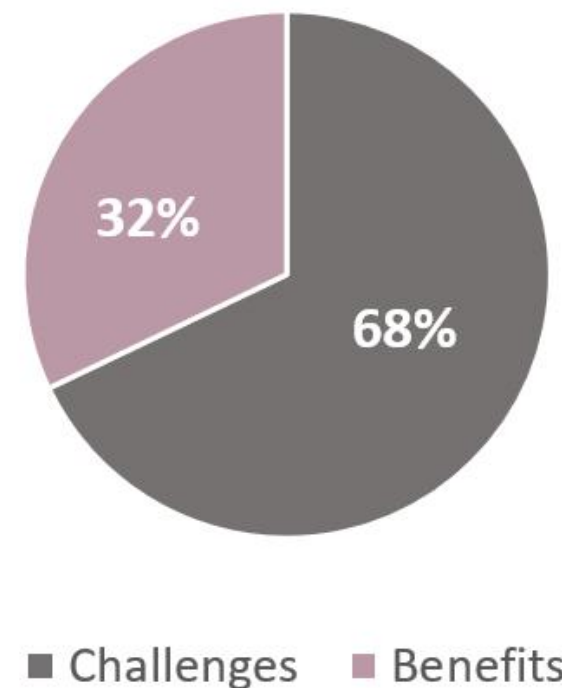
# Results (2)

## COVID-19 benefits to academic performance

# Results (2)

## COVID-19 benefits to academic performance

- time is study (at own pace)
- no distractions but study
- the joy of online learning
- more study adjustments, less stress



# Results (2)

## Perception of support received from universities - positives

- **continuity and consistency**

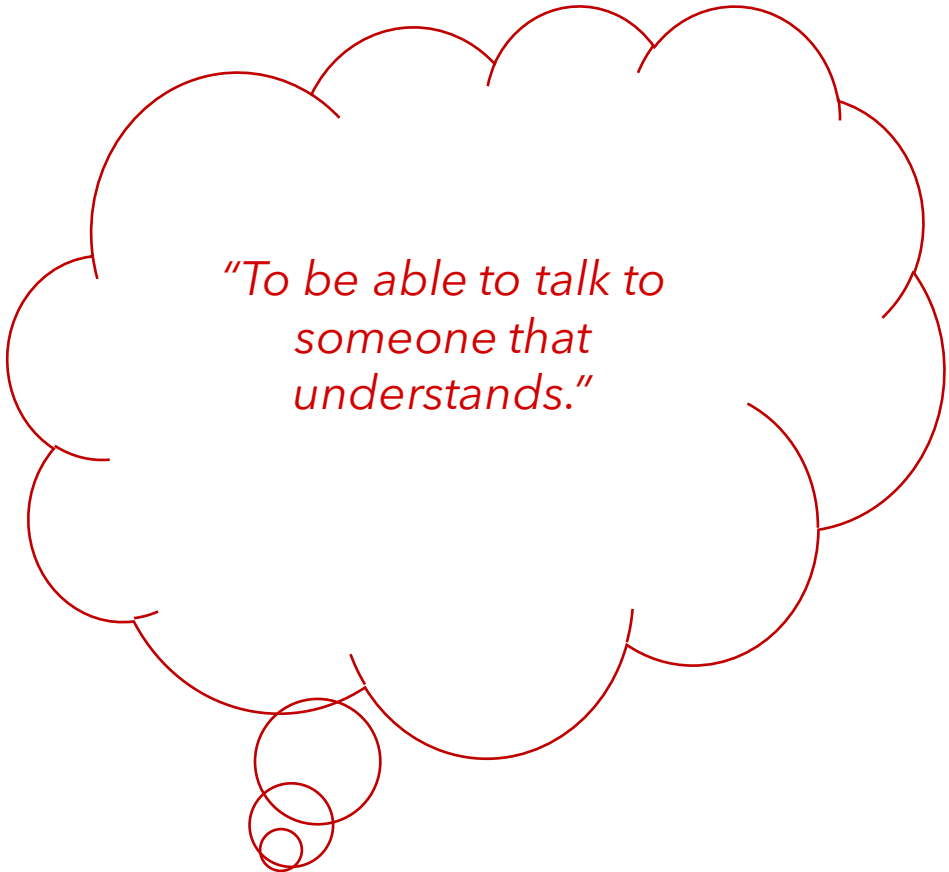
*"I was able to continue with the current members of staff I saw prior to the COVID period."*

*"Speaking to people who knew me before COVID so they can see what has changed, and don't just put it down to COVID."*

# Results (2)

## Perception of support received from universities - positives

- continuity and consistency
- **understanding**



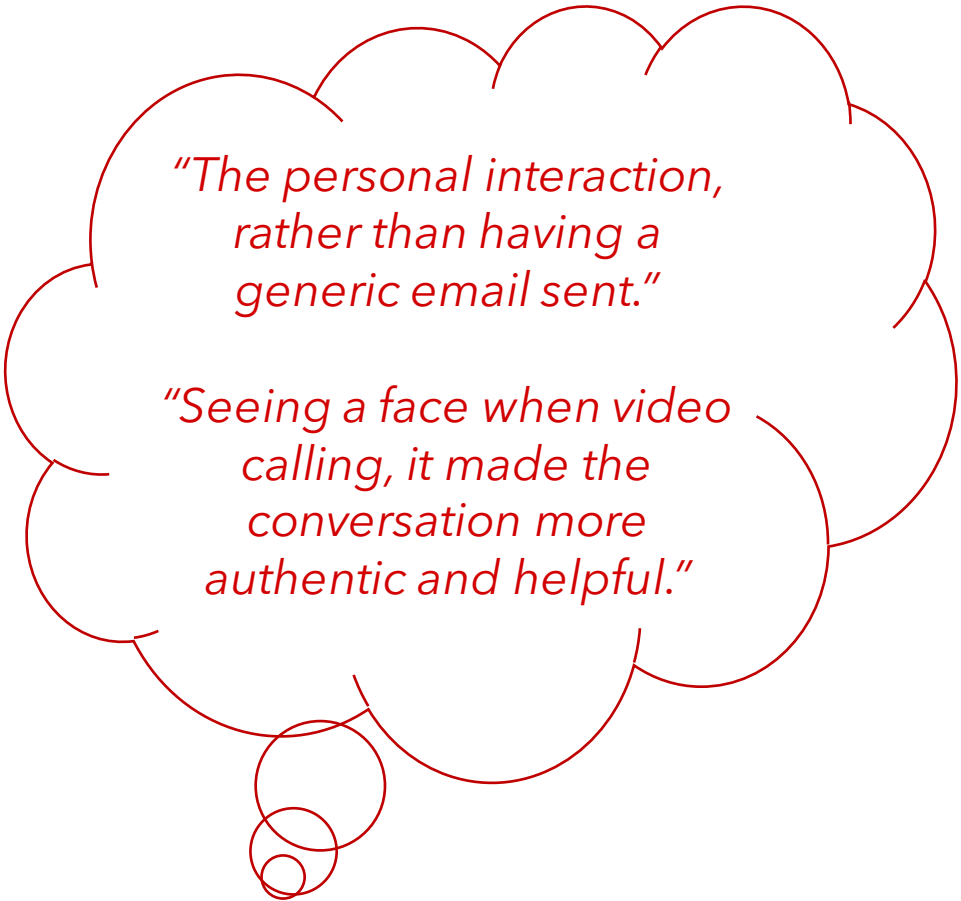
*"To be able to talk to  
someone that  
understands."*



# Results (2)

## Perception of support received from universities - positives

- continuity and consistency
- understanding
- **individuality**



*"The personal interaction, rather than having a generic email sent."*

*"Seeing a face when video calling, it made the conversation more authentic and helpful."*

# Results (2)

## Perception of support received from universities - positives

- continuity and consistency
- understanding
- individuality
- **accessibility, availability, and adaptability**

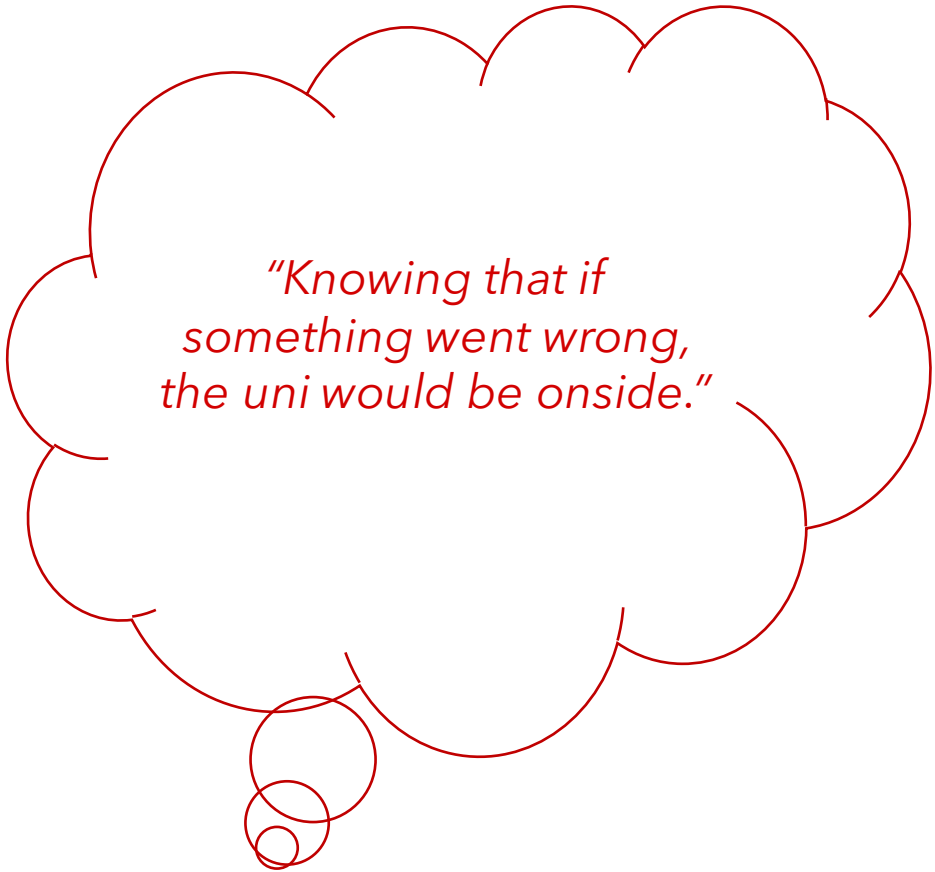


*"[Support services] adapting really quickly to the COVID situation, and then extending their services through the summer to support people further."*

# Results (2)

## Perception of support received from universities - positives

- continuity and consistency
- understanding
- individuality
- accessibility, availability, and adaptability
- **university as a "safety net"**



*"Knowing that if something went wrong, the uni would be onside."*

# Results (2)

## Perception of support received from universities - negatives

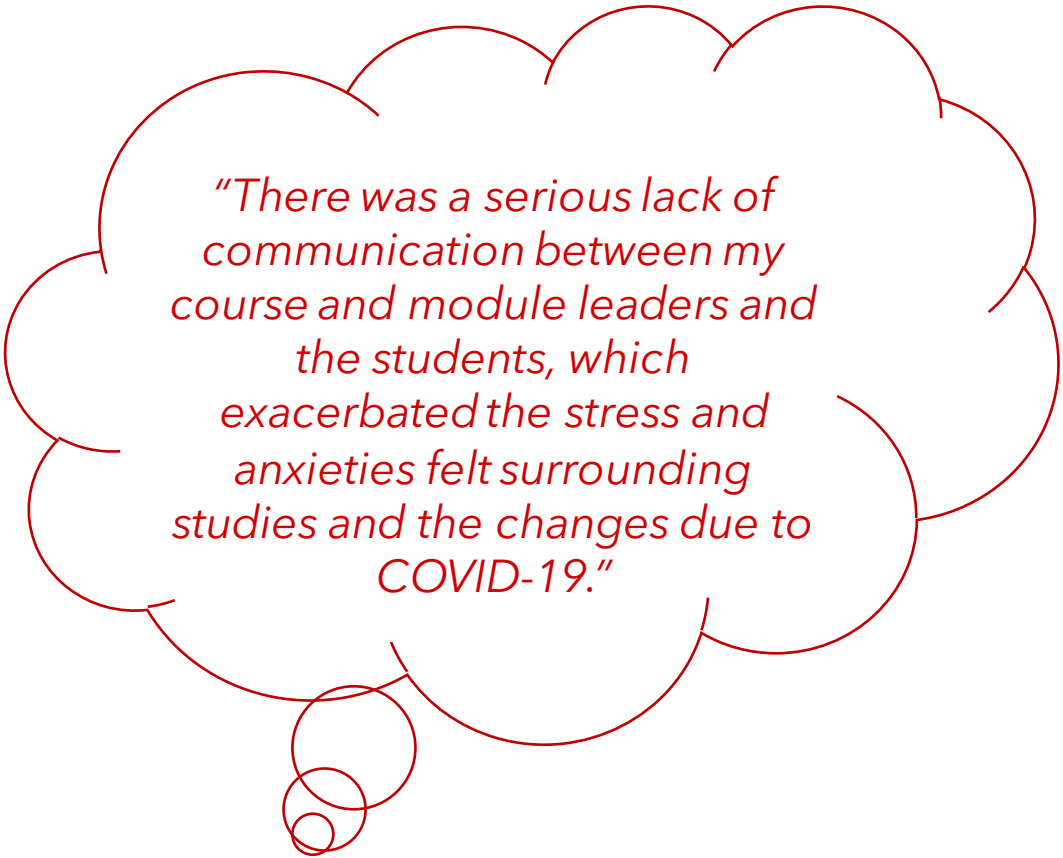
- **lack of responsiveness and timeliness**

*"I reached out once during a dark dark evening to my uni counsellor who I had seen before, to arrange an appointment and I still haven't seen them. The university and many support staff especially my tutor is well aware of the struggles I face (diagnosed and things that have happened to me) yet I've received no emails in support."*

# Results (2)

## Perception of support received from universities - negatives

- lack of responsiveness and timeliness
- **blurred communication**



*"There was a serious lack of communication between my course and module leaders and the students, which exacerbated the stress and anxieties felt surrounding studies and the changes due to COVID-19."*

# Results (2)

## Perception of support received from universities - negatives

- lack of responsiveness and timeliness
- blurred communication
- **lack of reasonable adjustments**

*"No reassurance to provisions for students with disabilities were made outside of DSA and DSA can't provide support that needs addressing during the pandemic."*

*"All the online technology was not usable by me as I have specialist DSA equipment that I could not use."*

# Results (2)

## Perception of support received from universities - negatives

- lack of responsiveness and timeliness
- blurred communication
- lack of reasonable adjustments
- **support as a box-ticking exercise**

*"The admin and logistics focus of the university services has made me feel like my problems are not important to discuss as they just need to tick boxes and gather information for databases instead."*

*"Seen as a statistic by the department and not an individual."*

## Recommendations for universities regarding managing student mental health during the COVID-19 outbreak

### Accessibility of support services & resources:

- facilitate the online transition of support services
- increase capacity of support staff
- increase service responsiveness from initial response to follow-up
- reduce waiting times for accessing support
- acknowledge the difficulties with accessing support remotely / preference for certain technology for online support
- increase the quality of online services (from generic resources to meeting individual needs)
- ensure continuity in providing support
- cultural competencies in support staff



### Recommendations for universities regarding managing student mental health during the COVID-19 outbreak

- Timeliness & clarity in providing information and communicating
- Personalised communication
- Reaching out
- Leniency
- Restoring a sense of community

# Key points

- 2 in 3 students reported poor/very poor mental health during the COVID-19 outbreak with low mood (depression) and excessive worry (anxiety) as the main types of distress.
- The academic performance of 2 in 3 students was profoundly affected by the COVID-19 situation: decline in concentration and motivation, difficulties with adjusting to online learning, lack of study-friendly spaces, and social and academic withdrawal.
- Potentially increasing numbers of students with mental health problems with more complex needs will request wellbeing and academic support from universities in the new academic year.
- High expectations from students that tutors act as mental health advisers, and wellbeing services seen as crisis points - the boundaries between mental health and academic support are blurry
- The need of restoring a sense of student community along with developing individual approaches to mental health

# Thank you!

[Lucian.Milasan@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:Lucian.Milasan@dmu.ac.uk)  
[Egriffin@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:Egriffin@dmu.ac.uk)

Faculty of Health & Life Sciences  
School of Nursing & Midwifery (Mental Health Division)

# Q & A

[Lucian.Milasan@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:Lucian.Milasan@dmu.ac.uk)  
[Egriffin@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:Egriffin@dmu.ac.uk)

Faculty of Health & Life Sciences  
School of Nursing & Midwifery (Mental Health Division)