



An Roinn Sláinte  
Department of Health

# COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

**Exploring the Experience & Impact of Covid-19 by  
Lifestage**

Department of Health

# Methodology, sample and fieldwork date

2 x weekly focus groups; 6 participants per group *[gender split, 4 x Lifestages from pre-family adults to retirees, regional spread, urban/rural split]*

2 x Telephone in-depth-interviews with 70+ year olds cocooning *[gender split, regional spread, urban/rural split]*

Mixed : B1C1C2

*Fieldwork period: 12<sup>th</sup> March – 9<sup>th</sup> June 2020*



# Overall narrative of response to Covid-19 in Ireland is framed positively

## 6 key factors frame this narrative

**1** The worst did not come to pass because Ireland prepared and acted correctly

At the outset the majority braced for impact.

The fear of the omnipresent threat of this virus was intense & creating a huge motivating force to keep the virus at bay, out of homes and families.

**2** Ireland had strong unified leaders that navigated the country through crisis

The unprecedented nature of the virus called for strong leadership from the outset to help society navigate through this experience.

As the crisis unfolded across the world the need for strong leadership became increasingly apparent. In Ireland the response of the US and the UK caused concern and further galvanised the Irish people behind political and health care leaders.

**3** The people of Ireland were united under a common goal

Collectively Ireland was on a mission to Flatten the Curve.

The continuous re-enforcement of this mission lived beyond the comms and was embodied in the attitude of the Irish people.

**4** Communication provided continuous clarity & confidence

Information became a source of power over the virus.

Ireland switched over multiple media sources for a period and focus solely on key health and political figures.

The clarity, consistency and transparency of information both on behaviours for individuals and of the virus itself provided confidence and support.

**5** Ireland was led by Healthcare Experts

Politics as we know it was left aside and the focus placed on adhering to the expert and evidence based advice from the Chief Medical Officer.

This advice did not carry any agenda beyond the public health of the citizens of Ireland.

**6** Ireland acted early

The majority believe that Ireland acted early and decisively.

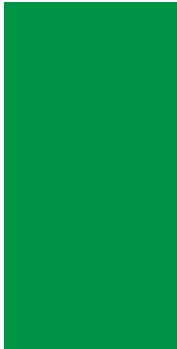
# 4 issues are identified

Italians allowed enter Ireland following the cancellation of the rugby game

Lack of guidance or enforcement of self-isolation of Cheltenham racegoers on return to Ireland

Perceived delay in response to the specific needs of nursing homes / residential care units

Lack of action in relation to members of the Travelling community entering Ireland or travelling within Ireland



# 3 key areas of concern as Ireland eases restrictions

1

## *Management of Irelands borders*

Majority believe that a significant threat remains from people entering the country



2

## *Lack of enforcement of regulations*

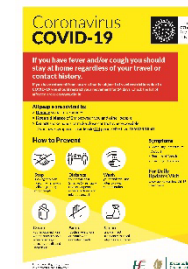
Majority continue to support and want to see behaviours i.e. social distancing or the 2M rule as it is described in public indoor spaces implemented. However, there is a concern that private businesses will become complacent if enforcement is not made mandatory or if measures for continued support and / or inspection are not in place



3

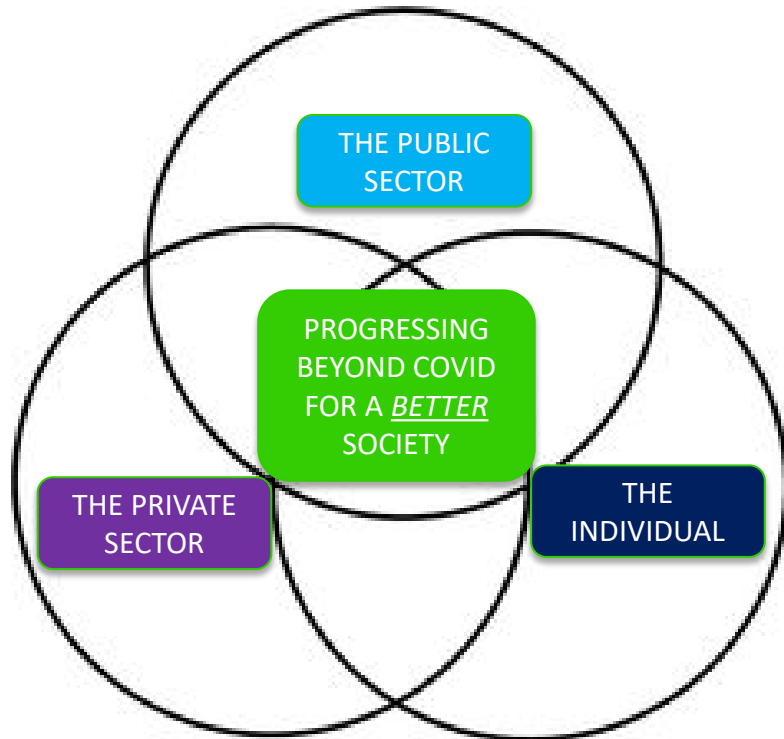
## *Fear of a Growing Lack of vigilance particular by teenagers and young adults*

Many fear complacency in the future if the perceived threat of the virus continues to subside. Majority believe that in the most part this will be non-deliberate complacency. However, there is real concern that older teenagers and young adults will deliberately breach guidelines in relation specifically in relation to social distancing.



# Managing risk and navigating the future requires collaboration

To maintain the progress that has been made there is a belief that public sector, private sector and the individual must truly collaborate



Whilst there is unity there is also clear delineation of roles

## ROLE OF: DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH / NPHET

### **PUBLIC HEALTH ONLY**

An expectation that the public role may become less visible but that the expert advice and guidance will be sustained so that the virus can be monitored and watched closely on an on-going basis

## ROLE OF: AN TAOISEACH / OTHER GOVERNMENT

Leading the charge on economic recovery and making clear and decisive decisions on issues beyond public health only that may impact on the course of the virus

# Responsibility in relation to key areas of concern

## 1. Management of Ireland's borders



## 2. Enforcement of regulations



## 3. Fear of a Growing Lack of vigilance particular by teenagers and young adults



### RESPONSIBILITY OF & KEY MESSAGE

#### GOVERNMENT / AN TAOISEACH

1. Political decision, **guided by public health advice**  
***Message: The commitment and vigilance of the authorities is not stepping back. Difficult decisions will be taken. Ireland will not follow the lead of other countries but make tailored decision that are right for the country.***

#### DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH / NPHET

1. On-going communication needs with the private sector –  
***Message: Society is working together to create the right solutions***
2. On-going need for enforcement / checks on premises to be in place  
***Message: The commitment and vigilance of the authorities is not stepping back***

#### DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH / NPHET

1. On-going communication needs –  
***Message: Behaviours are more not less important now***
2. Clarify if the behaviour of teenagers and young adults needs to be address and if so how: ***Message: The commitment and vigilance of the authorities is not stepping back***
3. On-going need for advice on behaviours based on expert evidence



# Understanding the impact and experience of Covid-19 Across the Population



# Despite the challenges many aspects of life have benefited through Covid

<u>Individual</u>	<u>Family</u>	<u>Environment</u>
Fewer Expectations (Slower Pace of Life, less social pressure)	Reconnection & Time with Family	Global Environment Benefits (reduced travel the primary driver)
Appreciation (Health & Possessions)	Children Learning Life Skills	Nature and Locality
Fewer but More Meaningful Social Connections	Back to Basics in the Home (cooking, mealtimes, activities)	Consumption Culture Re-evaluated
Work / Life Balance		
Improved Habits (Cooking, Exercising)		

# Hope for a catalyst for positive change in people's day-to-day lives

Many do not want life to simply revert back to the way things used to be, they do not want to re-enter the 'rat race'

A desire for this period to offer a **CATALYST FOR POSITIVE CHANGE IN PEOPLE'S DAY-TO-DAY LIVES**

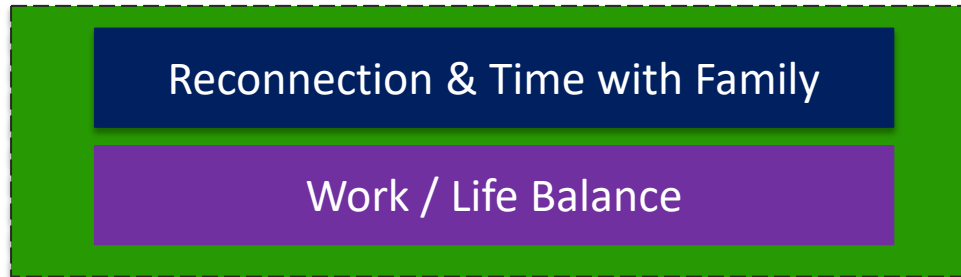


There was definitely a lot of social pressure I think to have this and be there. It was keeping up with the Jones. And it was pressure and stress. I'd like not to go back to that.

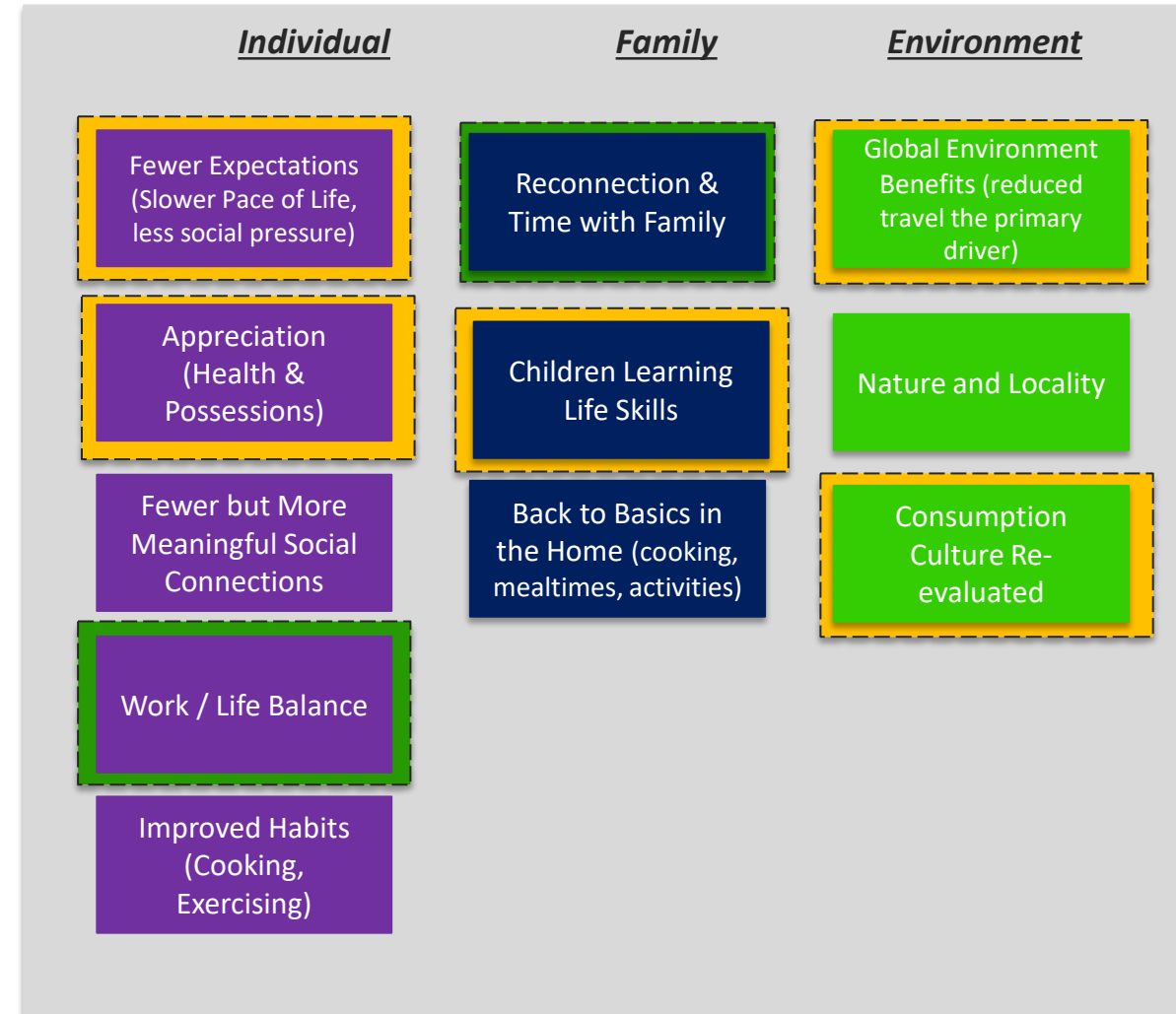
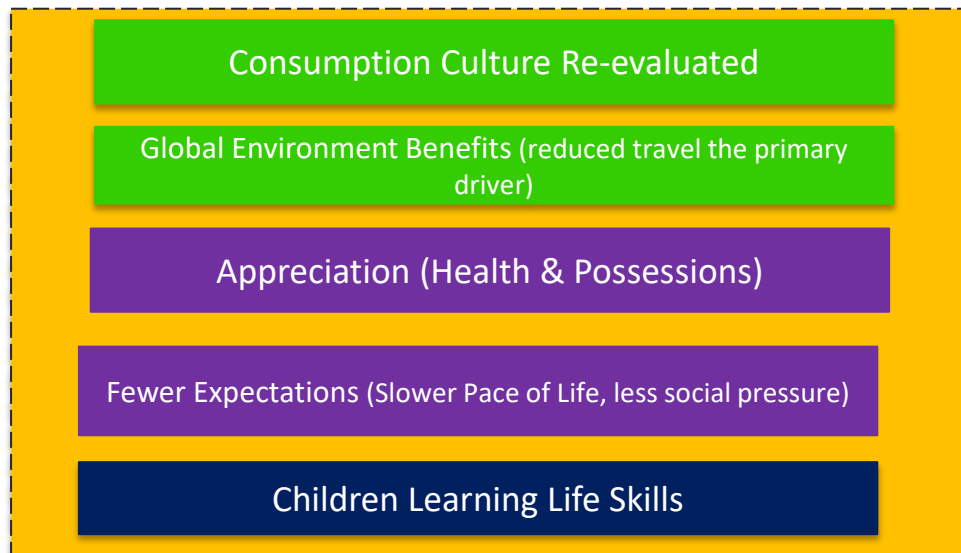
Just the bit of exercise, the going out for walks together, looking at the plants, the trees whatever. I've appreciated that time and I would like to hope that we'd hold on to the importance of time together so that we're not just running out the door against each other again

# Real connection with family and work / life balance priorities to maintain

## PRIORITY MUST KEEP POSITIVE HABITS / BEHAVIOURS



## SECONDARY PRIORITY TO MAINTAIN



# Good weather seen as a significant benefit during this period

- Many cite the good weather as being as positive enabler during this period
- It has facilitated gardening and outdoor activities which are seen as crucial to overall mental health and well-being
- Some, reported feeling down on rainy days where they were confined to the home and could find only limited distraction



It's meant we've been able to get out and about. It's meant you don't feel dreary. That you're not as terribly confined.

# While there have been positives, the future feels negative and daunting for many

## Expectations Post-Covid Crisis

### A Grieving Country

Not just those who lost people due to Covid but those who could mourn during this period in the Irish way.

### Unequal Ireland

Perception that due to restrictions (limits on travel, and in restaurants the cost of socialising and travel will increase significantly) and the economic recession there will be deep inequality

### Educational Imbalance

Concern that changes to how lessons are thought and how the school year is structured that there will be inequality. Weaker children, children who need support and disadvantaged children will suffer.

### Mental Anguish

Perception that the stress of the economic recession, the impact of lack of socialising, lack of sport, increased isolation for some due to WFH and lack of purpose due to losing employment will put many under significant mental strain

# The experience of Covid-19 varied across the population

## 8 key variables shaped the experience of individuals and households

1	Vulnerable Person or Household (70+ or underlying condition)	VS	Non-Vulnerable Person or Household (U70 or no known conditions)
2	Frontline / Essential Worker Household	VS	Non - Frontline / Essential Worker Household
3	Urban	VS	Rural
4	Parent of A Young families (Dependent U12)	VS	Parents of Older families (Children with lower dependencies)
5	Families with adults / children with special needs	VS	Households without adults / children with special needs
6	Extended Family Outside of a 5km / 20km radius	VS	Extended Family within of a 5km / 20km radius
7	Not Working due to Covid-19	VS	Currently in Employment
8	Living Alone	VS	Living with others

# These 8 variables impacted on risk perception and emotional wellbeing

## Risk Perception

The degree to which people felt it was likely they would contract the virus or that the virus would have a significant negative impact on their health or the health of a close family member.

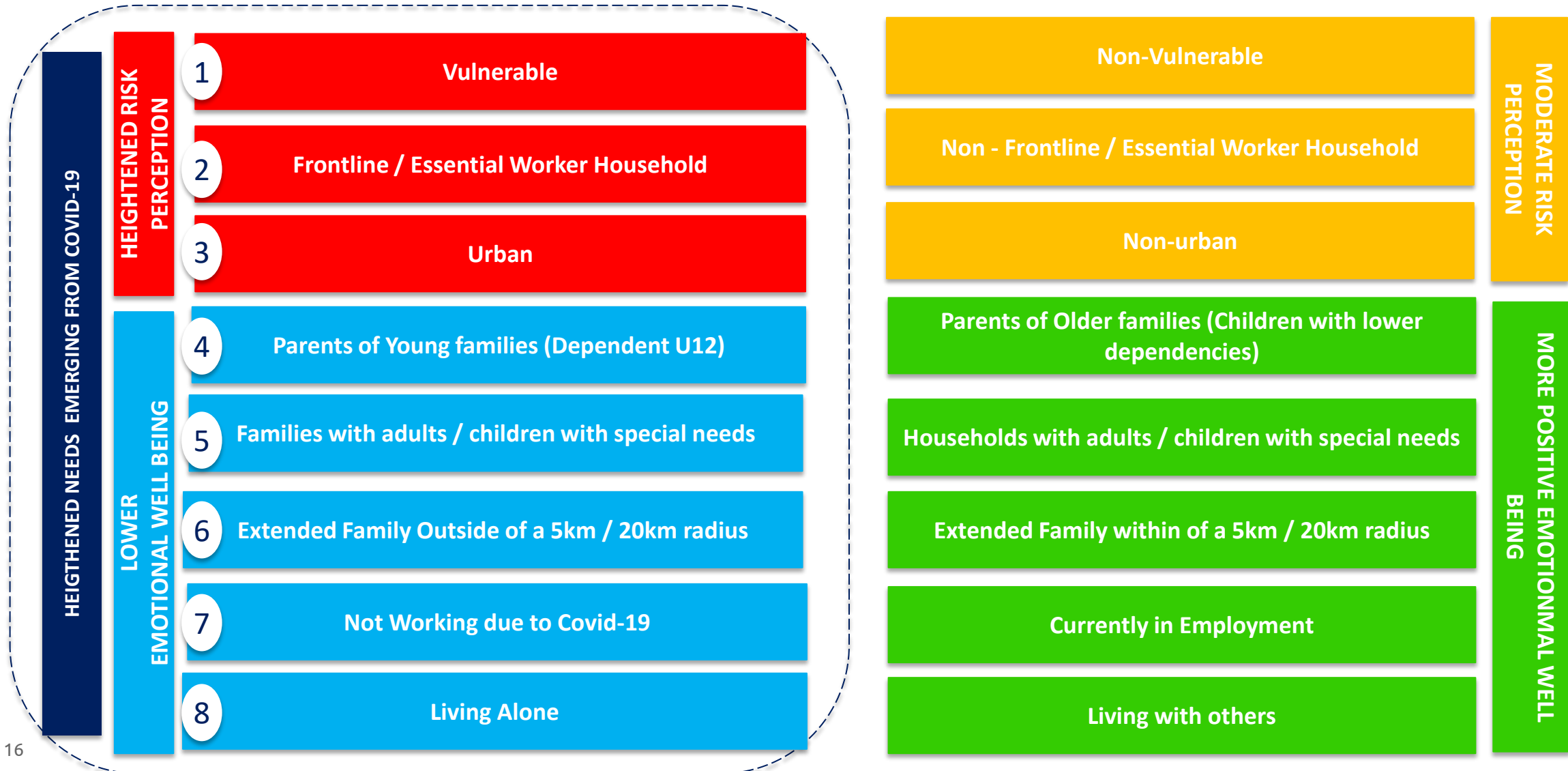
## Emotional Wellbeing

The degree to which people felt negative emotions such as loneliness, isolation and / or detachment from family / friend or society.

***Higher risk perception may result in lower overall emotional wellbeing.  
However, low emotional wellbeing is always a result of high risk perception.***

# Those emerging from this period with high risk perceptions and low emotional wellbeing will need support into the future

## 8 key variables shaping the experience of individuals and households





# Experience and on-going communication needs

PERCEPTIONS DUE TO  
HEIGHTENED  
RISK PERCEPTION

1

## Vulnerable (Age or underlying condition)

- The threat of serious illness or death felt really real and imminent at times for this cohort
- Continue to be extremely cautious and fearful
- Heightened mistrust of others in particular younger cohorts
- Will be hesitant to return to full social and economic engagement
- Medical settings continue to cause worry and stress – going on a needs must basis only
- A vaccination required before the sense of threat has truly subsided

2

## Frontline / Essential Worker Household

- The threat of contracting the virus extremely frightening
- Feared the guilt of passing the virus to a loved one particularly a vulnerable person
- Anxiety now reducing
- Continue to be diligent and cautious
- Believe *workplaces have a significant role to play in providing the necessary equipment and enforcement*
- Nervous of complacency in the general public
- Likely to re-engage with socially and economically

3

## Urban

- The threat of contracting the virus felt more severe in densely populated urban areas
- Perceived greater dependency of public services and amenities and therefore a higher level of exposure
- Heightened mistrust of others
- Nervous of complacency in the general public
- Likely to re-engage with socially and economically

ON-GOING  
COMMUNICATION OR  
OTHER NEEDS

## HIGH COMMUNICATION NEEDS GOING FORWARD

- Need on-going reassurance in relation to the threat of the virus – expert, evidence based, facts
- Need on-going clarity in relation to the right behaviours
- Want to see re-enforcement of regulations (PARTICULARLY IN MEDICAL SETTINGS, IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT, IN RETAIL OR LEISURE SPACES) in order to feel confidence and safe to re-engage in social and economic life
- Existing public health communication assets will play an important role going forward for these audiences who want to see high visibility to prevent against complacency.

# Experience and on-going intervention and communication needs

LOWER  
EMOTIONAL WELL BEING

4

## Parents of Young families (Dependent U12)

- Balancing the demands of WFH, home-schooling and managing the home has been extremely challenging for parents
- The new demands placed on the home have led to earlier mornings and later evenings – tiring
- Aspirations for a healthier active lifestyles are not being met – disappointment and the expectations of others causing negative feelings of self-blame
- Tensions and flashpoints in relationships
- Anxiety in relation to how the household dynamic will need to evolve again when childcare facilities and schools re-open
- Exercise, in particular walking, a really important outlet

5

## Families with adults / children with special needs

- Significant concerns that, due to lack of interventions or supports, the individuals overall well-being will deteriorate (speech, physical abilities, cognitive abilities)
- Anxiety in relation to the viability of services in the future
- Considerable stress and exhaustion on parents who are dependent on services to support the adult/child's needs

There was tension of course. My job is as important as his. So there were tensions around who was prioritising what on what days...some days work suffered, some days the kids just sat and watched t.v., they suffered. It was hard but we have to balance

I'm petrified that we've just taken a massive step back...I'm afraid that we won't regain that progress.

6

## Extended Family Outside of a 5km / 20km radius

- Feelings of isolation and detachment
- The disruption of relationships between mothers and daughters who depend on each other practically but also emotionally very challenging
- Young mothers with dependent kids missed the connection, support and comradery of parents / siblings
- Disruption of the relationship between grandchildren and grandparents upsetting for both parties

That relationship is very important to me. I didn't realise it was. There's been a void and a gap in my days and my time that I found really hard

ON-GOING  
COMMUNICATION OR  
OTHER NEEDS

## Communications & Interventions Required

- Parents: Early communication on what is likely to happen in relation to childcare and schools so that plans can be made and life adjusted
- Families with special needs: Communication on services, additional support services desired to close gaps which have emerged
- General emotional well-being among many in these 3 cohorts has dropped over this period. A return to the 'new normal' way of living will help many overcome current issues but an opportunity exist to play an active and meaningful role in people's lives by communicating / providing the well-being tools and information needed to support rebuilding of emotional well-being
- Advice on well-being must be; **Simple, practical, achievable, communicated in a way that is credible for 'someone like me', framed positively, building confidence and knowledge.**

# Experience and on-going intervention and communication needs

LOWER  
EMOTIONAL WELL BEING

7

## Not Working due to Covid-19

- For many this was a first experience of unemployment – a position many hadn't anticipated finding themselves in
- Covid-19 payment helped minimise some financial concerns
- However, the future outlook is uncertain or very negative for many which is hugely concerning
- Feelings of anxiety and worry
- Negative impact on personal relationships
- Hiding negatives from small children

### SUB GROUP: Not Working No Kids

- Boredom, lack of purpose / meaning for those not working and without the distraction of family life or young children

8

## Living Alone

- A very challenging time for people living on their own
- Days felt long and isolating
- Digital connection did not satisfy the emotional needs
- Difficult to fill time meaningfully – boredom, snacking, high screen time
- Good intentions but dips in motivation leading to going off track and some sense of failure and disappointment

Somewhere in the mist of all of it I was definitely the lowest I have ever been.

It was all stripped back. And it was like ok I'm not as resilient as I thought I was.

There was an expectation that with all this time you should be coming out with a side hustle. I mean that didn't happen for me. I was barely holding the hold thing together.

ON-GOING COMMUNICATION  
OR OTHER NEEDS

### Communications & Interventions Required

- General emotional well-being among many in these 3 cohorts has dropped over this period. A return to the 'new normal' way of living will help many overcome current issues but an opportunity exists to play an active and meaningful role in people's lives by communicating / providing the well-being tools and information needed to support in the rebuilding of emotional well-being
- Advice how to manage stress, anxiety and depression is required; **Simple, practical, achievable, communicated in a way that is credible for 'someone like me', framed positively, building confidence and knowledge.**
- Guidance on services for mental health
- Guidance for financial support services
- Communication from Government acknowledging the significant needs that have been created

# Gender impacted but did not determine how the overall experience was shaped

## Many Households Reverted Back to Traditional Gender Roles (Particularly in Older and Non-Urban Households)

- Male occupant of the household elected to take part in high risk activities i.e. shopping at height of the crisis
- Men re-engaged with DIY and gardening
- Took on gendered jobs such as ensuring the upkeep of the car etc.
- As men took on these roles more traditional household roles were allocated to females

## A lower reported perception of risk amongst males

- Outside vulnerable households males reported feeling less risk, fear and anxiety than females

I miss the GAA terribly. That was my world really.

I'm part of the men's shed and I loved it. But I can see that group falling away a bit.

## Older men not maintaining relationships or connections

- Females, particularly older females, have a greater dependency on close friendship groups for discussion and connection – these groups play a really important role. Females stayed in touch with friends through digital but long for full reconnection with groups.
- Males, particularly older males, use sport as a really important outlet. It's absence has created a significant void. Older men have not been maintaining connection and have potential to become isolated.

## Communications & Interventions with specific consideration to gender;

- At a high-level messaging must remain consistent
- However, consideration for interventions may be required to support men in socialising, particularly as sport continues to be curtailed. Older men 45+ and men in rural areas need specific attention as they may not prioritise emotional needs
- If complacency in behaviours due to a lower risk perception becomes evident in males, tailored communication may be required

# Macro role of communication remains consistent across lifestage

Role of communication (today) as Ireland eases restriction

1. Stay Informed
2. Maintain Safety
3. Navigate A New World

New Role  
(separate from comms emerging)

Enforcement