



# The impact of Covid-19 and other events

July 2022



InSites Consulting



# Background

Since March 2020, Yorkshire Water customers have been under increased pressure because of the Covid-19 pandemic, whether that be physically, mentally, financially, or emotionally. Although the lockdown is now over and the virus is not as threatening as it was before, new issues are still impacting customer's lives including Cost of living, Climate change, and the war in Ukraine.

Yorkshire Water wish to understand how customers are currently feeling in a post-Covid climate, what are the key issues affecting them and what their outlook is for the future.

## Objectives

Specifically the research aims to understand...

- What level of impact have the following had on customers and how much of an impact do they think they may have in future: Covid-19, Cost of living, Climate change, War in Ukraine
- Has anything become more or less important to customers? E.g. Work, family, social time etc
- How has water usage been affected or look likely to be affected in future?

## Methodology

We conducted this research in two stages:

### **Online discussion**

n=152 took part  
15<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> June 2022

Findings from the discussion were then used to write an online survey

### **Online survey**

n=227 took part  
24<sup>th</sup> June – 5<sup>th</sup> July 2022





# Key insights

## Impact of recent and current events on customers

- Covid has undoubtedly been a major event for people, but as the pandemic eases, the cost of living crisis has taken over as the main concern
- Global events such as the war in Ukraine, food/fuel shortages and rising costs are adding to concerns, and frustrations with the government mean there's little reassurance to ease these worries

## Priorities and outlook for the future

- Overall, people are feeling nervous and negative about the future, primarily due to uncertainty about what is going to happen.
- Customers are primarily concerned about the Cost of Living Crisis (84% concerned/worried) and linked to this, their financial situation (47% concerned/worried). There's a sense that things won't get better any time soon
- The uncertainty about the future of the war in Ukraine is causing concern for 82%, and three quarters (73%) are worried about the associated supply shortages of fuel and food
- Many remain mindful of the environment and climate change; something that was brought to the fore during lockdown when the reversal of human impact on nature was evident
- But, most feel they have other more important things on their minds at the moment – the Cost of Living is impacting the ability to make sustainable choices for many, even if they want to.

## Trust in organisations

- The overwhelming sense of distrust and frustration with the government is adding to customers' concerns, as they look for support and feel they are left with nothing.
- And this distrust is being passed onto other organisations and large companies associated, as customers are left sceptical over who really has their best interests at heart.
- Sentiment toward Yorkshire Water is not negative on balance, but extra reassurances will be needed so that customers know they can rely on Yorkshire Water to do the best thing for them.

## Water usage & the environment

- Just over a third (38%) are using less water now than they did pre-covid, and a similar proportion (35%) feel they'll use less water in the future
- Climate change is claimed to be a bigger motivator to saving water, but for others, it's having to take a back seat as they struggle to get by day-to-day



# Recommendations

## Be there for customers

- They're going through a tough time, and uncertainty over the future is only going to make this worse
- With financial situations being the biggest cause for concern, ensure customers are aware of any financial assistance schemes they may be eligible for
- Whilst almost all have felt the impact of the Cost of Living Crisis, it's clear the extent of this varies, with some remaining relatively positive about their finances for the time being. For Yorkshire Water, it's important to acknowledge individual circumstances of customers and reflect this in communications, offering clear support for those who may need it, but without making assumptions.
- Customers feel positive about Yorkshire Water – seen as being trustworthy and doing the right thing for customers on the whole. Continue to send this message, and maintain transparency about what you're doing and why.

## Sensitivity when communicating any price rises

- Where price rises or additional costs are unavoidable, ensure they're communicated clearly, and with clear evidence for why they're needed, and the benefits to customers/the environment.
- Evidence any investment being made by Yorkshire Water so it's not all seen as driving profit.

## Use cost savings as motivation to save water, with climate change an added benefit

- Whilst Climate change is high on the agenda for Yorkshire Water, it needs to be approached carefully with customers – leading with messaging around saving costs will likely motivate those most in need more, but if they can feel better about the environment at the same time, then that's a bonus.
- Reassurance on advances being made by Yorkshire Water, without having to be the responsibility of the customer, will also help demonstrate a sense of shared responsibility

## Continue to demonstrate progress in the areas that matter most

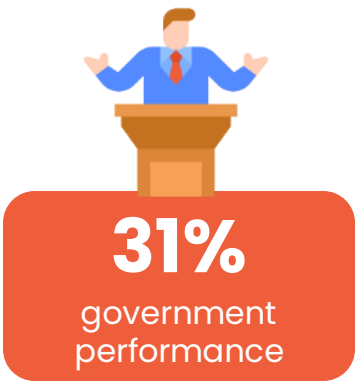
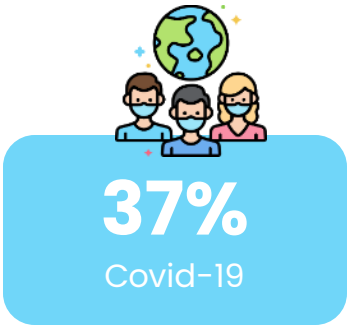
Customers want Yorkshire Water to focus on the following areas in coming years

- Infrastructure: Repairing leaks/maintaining infrastructure; ensuring raw sewage doesn't end up in the waterways
- Billing: Keeping bills affordable and providing financial help where needed
- Education: Raising awareness around reducing water usage; develop technology to help
- Responsive: Good customer service; listen and act on feedback

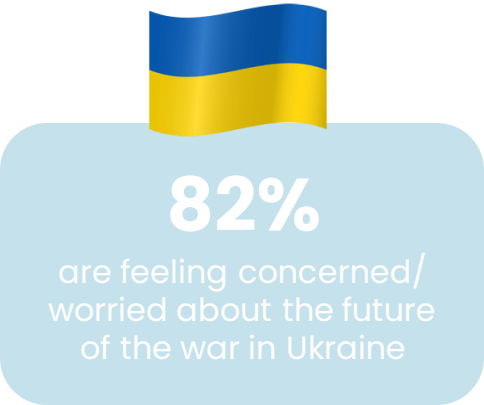
# A customer snapshot...



What's had a significant impact over the past year...



What's on their mind now?



Impact on Water



## The impact of world events

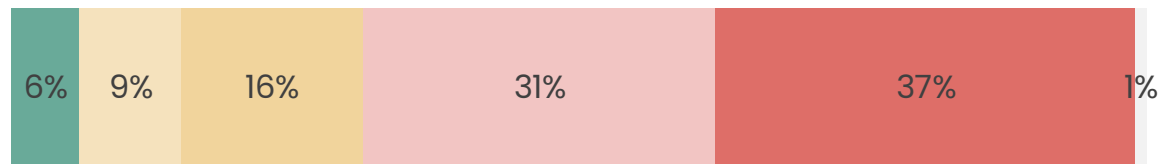


# Covid was, undeniably, a huge event for people

And whilst many feel positive that Covid has passed, there are some lasting effects

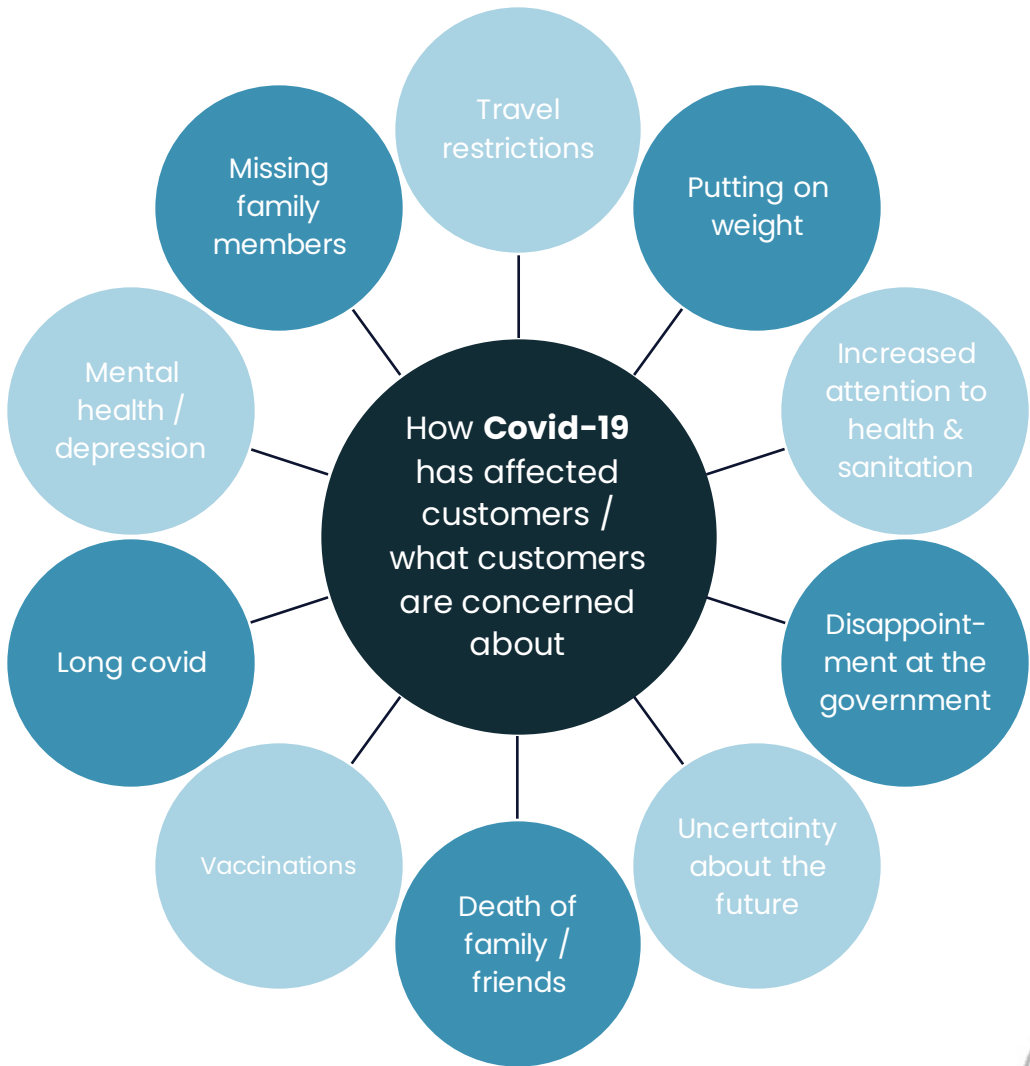


The extent of the impact that Covid-19 has had on customers



- No impact at all
- Minor impact
- Small but noticeable impact
- Noticeable impact
- Significant impact
- Don't know

Vulnerable customers are more likely to say a significant impact (47%) compared to non-vulnerable customers (29%).



Q1: To what extent have the following areas had an impact on you (whether that be physically, emotionally, financially) over the last few years? (Base: 227)  
Discussion 1) How has this affected you? Think about physically, emotionally, financially, over the short term and over the long term...?  
Discussion 2) What are you most concerned about when it comes to the pandemic and the recovery from it, both now and in the future?



*Covid 19 hit us as a family hard even though no-one actually came down with it until very late in the day when my daughter caught it – probably at school. She said it felt like a bad cold but the worst bit was the self isolation.*

*My wife's business barely survived the various lockdowns and is still struggling to re-establish.*

*The constant rule changes by this inept government, probably made mostly with a hangover after the party the night before, certainly didn't help.*

*Travel restrictions were the other big impact as most of our family lives abroad and we couldn't visit them or have them visit us.*

*I'm no longer concerned, not sure I ever was, about the medical side of Covid. I am concerned about the wider economic and social effects that are only now starting to come to fruition. For instance the huge increase in mental illness, the damage to kids' education, and the damage to small businesses.*

*I think it has changed society and I don't think we will ever change back. "*

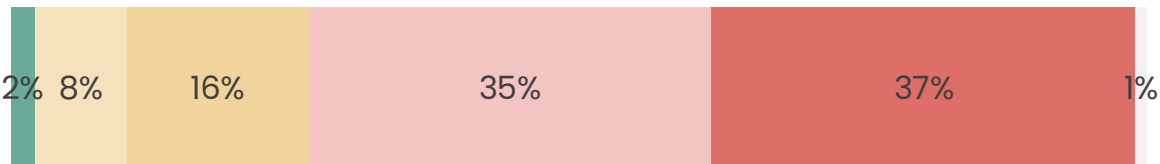


# But now, the Cost of Living Crisis is a bigger concern and priority for customers

And whilst still quite a recent change for most, almost all have noticed the impact to some extent



The extent of the impact that the CoL crisis has had on customers



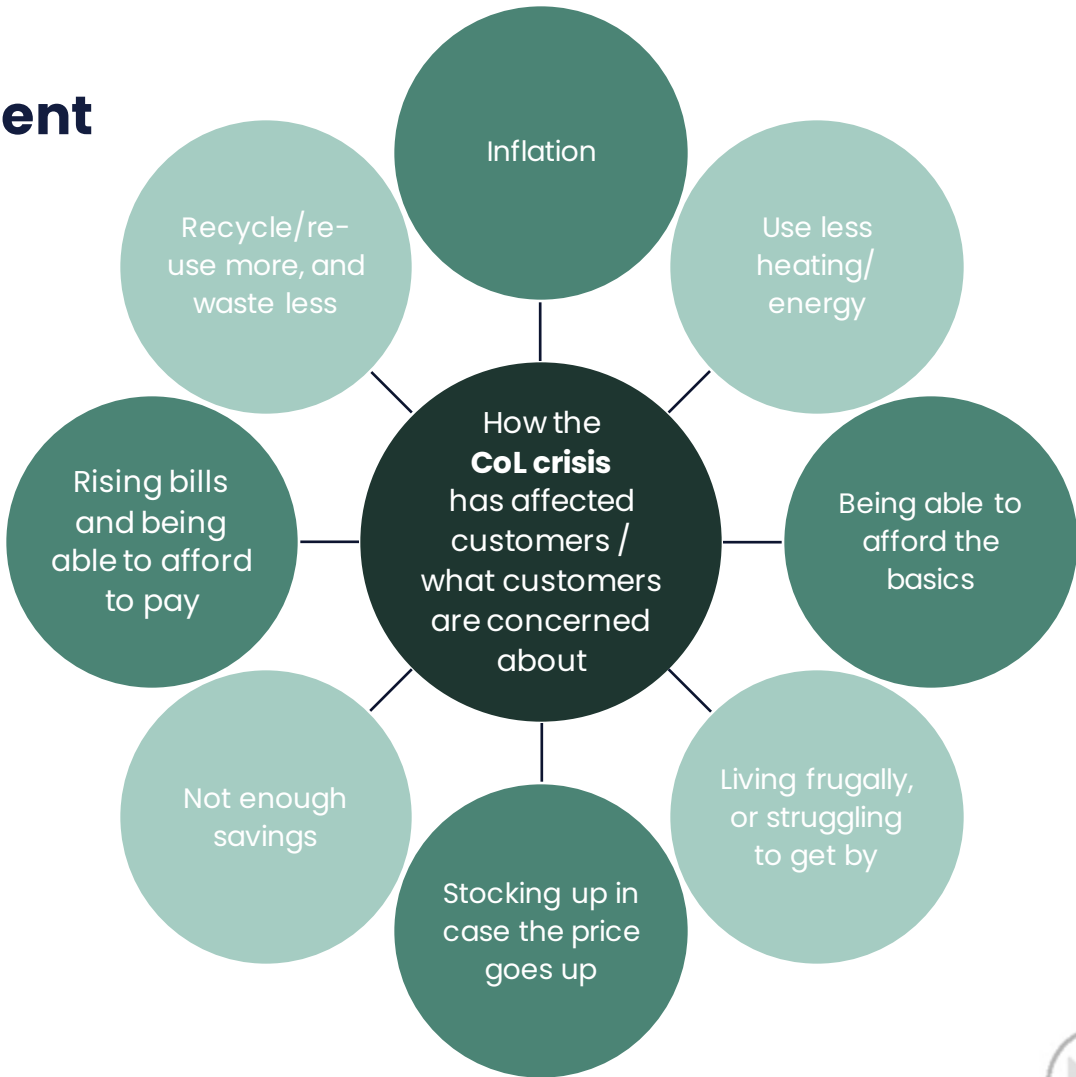
- No impact at all
- Minor impact
- Small but noticeable impact
- Noticeable impact
- Significant impact
- Don't know



Females are more likely to say a significant impact (43%) compared to males (26%).

Vulnerable customers are more likely to say a significant impact (45%) compared to non-vulnerable customers (24%).

The same proportion say they were significantly impacted by Covid-19.



Q1: To what extent have the following areas had an impact on you (whether that be physically, emotionally, financially) over the last few years? (Base: 227)

Discussion 1) How has this affected you? Think about physically, emotionally, financially, over the short term and over the long term...?

Discussion 2) What are you most concerned about when it comes to the increased cost of living, both now and in the future?

*In the beginning, I was managing. The weekly shop didn't seem to go up that much and all my bills were paid, but with a little less for treats, and I could afford to go out if I was invited.*

*Now, we are looking at the price of everything (we did before, but didn't buy as many own brand stuff) and really have to be strict with buying only what we need.*

*Emotionally, I worry that we won't have enough money to cover everything, this month I have had a struggle to pay the rent in full once all the DD's have been taken and shopping done.*

*I'm concerned that I will fall behind with bills and start getting demands for payment, causing more stress I can do without. I dread an emergency, like something big breaking down, my washing machine is 9 years old, if that goes (touch wood) I'd be scuppered.*

*I worry that I won't be able to put petrol in the car full stop; as it stands, the £30 a month I have always put in, now gets me to half a tank where it always got me a full tank before the price rises. I need that car to get me to hospital and doctor appointments.*

*I worry that cooking from scratch, using fresh ingredients, will become harder and our health will suffer.*

*I can't see things improving any time soon. "*

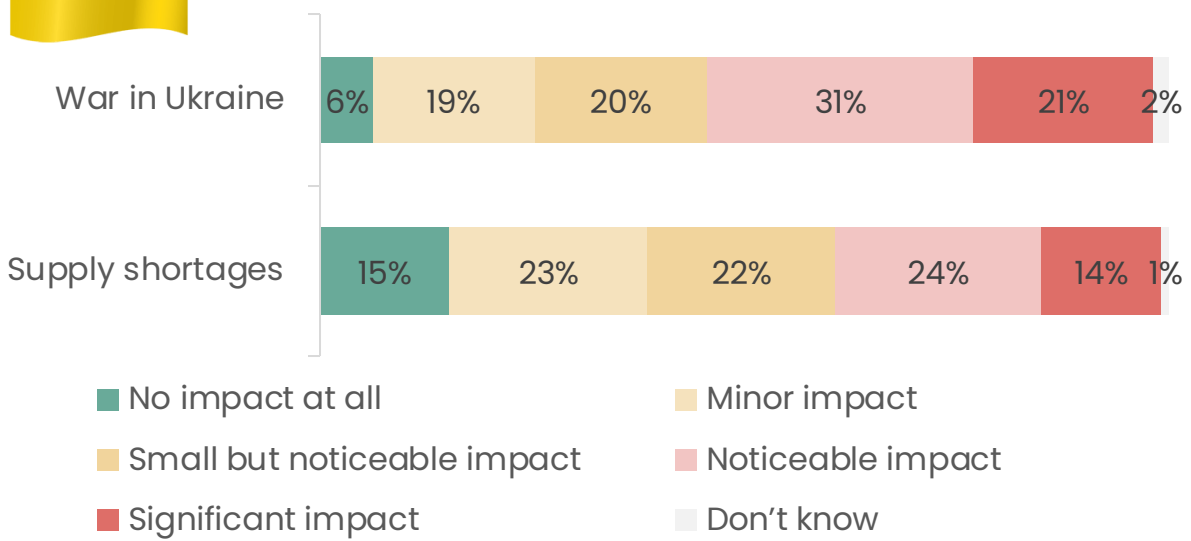
# The war in Ukraine is worrying, mainly because of the uncertainty of the future



Associated shortages of food and fuel, and rising costs, all feed in to the concern over the cost and logistics of everyday living



**The extent of the impact that the war in Ukraine has had on customers**



No significant differences between those who say a significant impact.



Q1: To what extent have the following areas had an impact on you (whether that be physically, emotionally, financially) over the last few years? (Base: 227)  
Discussion 1) How has this affected you? Think about physically, emotionally, financially, over the short term and over the long term...?  
Discussion 2) What are you most concerned about when it comes to the war in Ukraine, both now and in the future?





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*I have been emotionally wobbly since this started, both out of empathy for the people of Ukraine and fear that it might escalate into world war three. I follow the news and have heard every episode of Ukrainecast."*

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*I'm shocked and horrified that Russia invaded Ukraine. As well as feeling helpless to do anything about the war, and appalled at the deaths and human injury and distress, I'm horrified at the physical destruction and ecological devastation happening."*

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*Emotionally, I cry when watching the news, it's so very sad to see what is happening there. All those lives lost and people struggling. I wish it were able to crush Putin.  
The worry for me and my family is that if he takes over Ukraine where will he try next? My deepest concern is that all this can lead to another world war. We are seeing a world wide shortage of food stuffs i.e. grain and of course petrol prices are soaring which has a knock on effect.  
I really worry about the future of Ukraine, and our own and our children's future."*

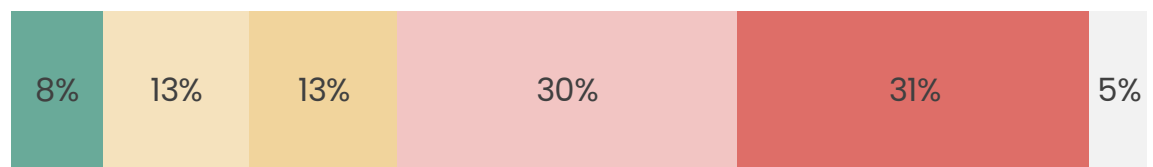
# Overall, people want to turn to the government for help



But whilst the government ought to be a source of reassurance for the big issues, there's an overwhelming feeling of frustration at the lack of help & incompetence



**The extent of the impact that government performance has had on customers**



- No impact at all
- Small but noticeable impact
- Significant impact
- Minor impact
- Noticeable impact
- Don't know

Customers aged 55+ are more likely to say a significant impact (35%) compared to 35-54 year olds (21%).

Vulnerable customers are more likely to say a significant impact (43%) compared to non-vulnerable customers (22%).

### Key insight

These frustrations ultimately lead to a lack of trust, which can extend beyond government, to local authorities, policy makers and linked organisations. Whilst Yorkshire Water are currently trusted, take care when communicating new policies that come at a cost to the customer.



*"I worry for people who have to choose heating over eating and this Government should be doing far more about that. The fact that, yet again, they do nothing effective, angers me. I know they will say that it's external factors that they can't control but a lot of it does seem to be down to their idiot past decisions one of which, without wishing to be controversial, begins with a B and ends with a T and, for which, I personally will NEVER forgive them."*

*"I'm more concerned about the failure of our government to tackle issues in the care system and NHS, and the increasing poverty of lower-paid people."*

*"I'm mostly concerned with how the government (not my government) are treating us. They do not have our best interests at heart."*

*"I do not feel positive about the future as I think the current corrupt government will only make things worse and make life harder for the common man as they have no regard for anyone other than their own greed."*





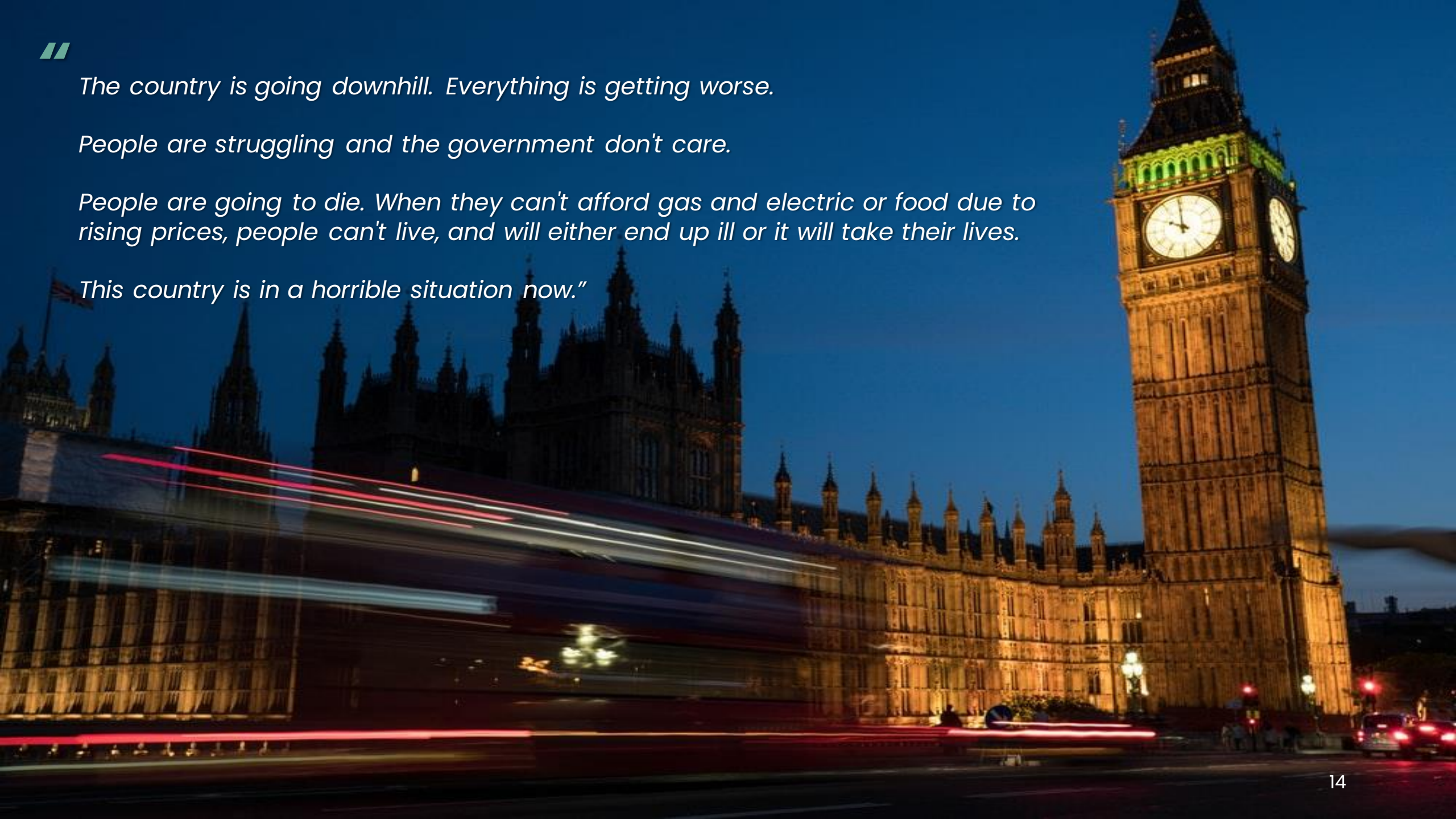
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*The country is going downhill. Everything is getting worse.*

*People are struggling and the government don't care.*

*People are going to die. When they can't afford gas and electric or food due to rising prices, people can't live, and will either end up ill or it will take their lives.*

*This country is in a horrible situation now."*





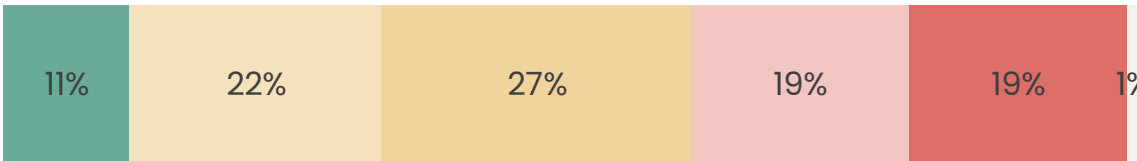
# Climate change is an increasing concern for customers, but impact is less immediate than other issues



And with everything else on customers' minds, some have to make difficult choices for less sustainable options



The extent of the impact that climate change has had on customers



- No impact at all
- Minor impact
- Small but noticeable impact
- Noticeable impact
- Significant impact
- Don't know

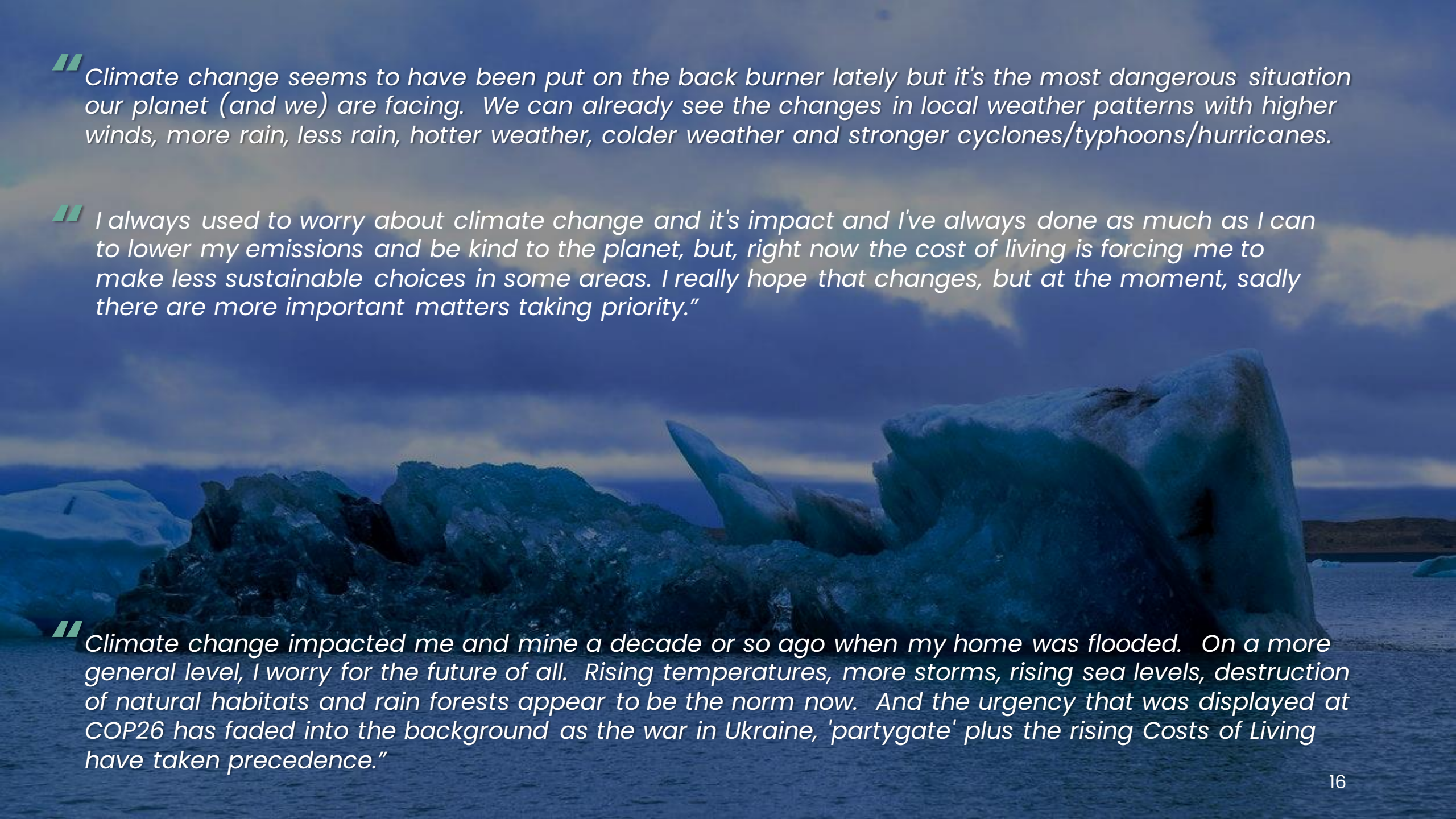
Customers with children under 18 at home are more likely to say a significant impact (37%) compared to those who don't (18%).

### Key insight

Whilst not all customers will be in a position to be as sustainable as they may like, it can help to reassure when they are making a change i.e. *Save water to save on your bills, and you will also be doing your bit for the environment*



Q1: To what extent have the following areas had an impact on you (whether that be physically, emotionally, financially) over the last few years? (Base: 227)  
Discussion 1) How has this affected you? Think about physically, emotionally, financially, over the short term and over the long term...?  
Discussion 2) What are you most concerned about when it comes to climate change, both now and in the future?

A large, jagged ice floe floats in the ocean under a cloudy sky. The ice is a deep blue color, with sharp edges and a rough, textured surface. The sky is a mix of blue and white clouds, and the water is a dark blue. The overall mood is somber and reflective.

*“Climate change seems to have been put on the back burner lately but it's the most dangerous situation our planet (and we) are facing. We can already see the changes in local weather patterns with higher winds, more rain, less rain, hotter weather, colder weather and stronger cyclones/typhoons/hurricanes.*

*“I always used to worry about climate change and its impact and I've always done as much as I can to lower my emissions and be kind to the planet, but, right now the cost of living is forcing me to make less sustainable choices in some areas. I really hope that changes, but at the moment, sadly there are more important matters taking priority.”*

*“Climate change impacted me and mine a decade or so ago when my home was flooded. On a more general level, I worry for the future of all. Rising temperatures, more storms, rising sea levels, destruction of natural habitats and rain forests appear to be the norm now. And the urgency that was displayed at COP26 has faded into the background as the war in Ukraine, 'partygate' plus the rising Costs of Living have taken precedence.”*



**Customers'  
personal  
priorities and  
the future**



# Customers undoubtedly prioritise family, with work coming bottom of the priority list

But since the pandemic, there's been a significant increase in the prioritisation of money

How customers prioritise the different areas of their lives



Family



Physical health/fitness



Work



Environment



Money



Mental health



Hygiene/cleanliness





Hobbies



Social life

% ranking....

Top priority pre-covid	57%	14%	4%	6%	5%	4%	4%	3%	2%
Top priority now	51%	15%	4%	5%	10% 	6%	5%	3%	1%
Bottom priority pre-covid	3%	4%	45%	11%	5%	6%	7%	10%	8%
Bottom priority now	2%	15% 	49%	12%	5%	4%	5%	11%	11%



Denotes a significant increase in priority since pre-covid

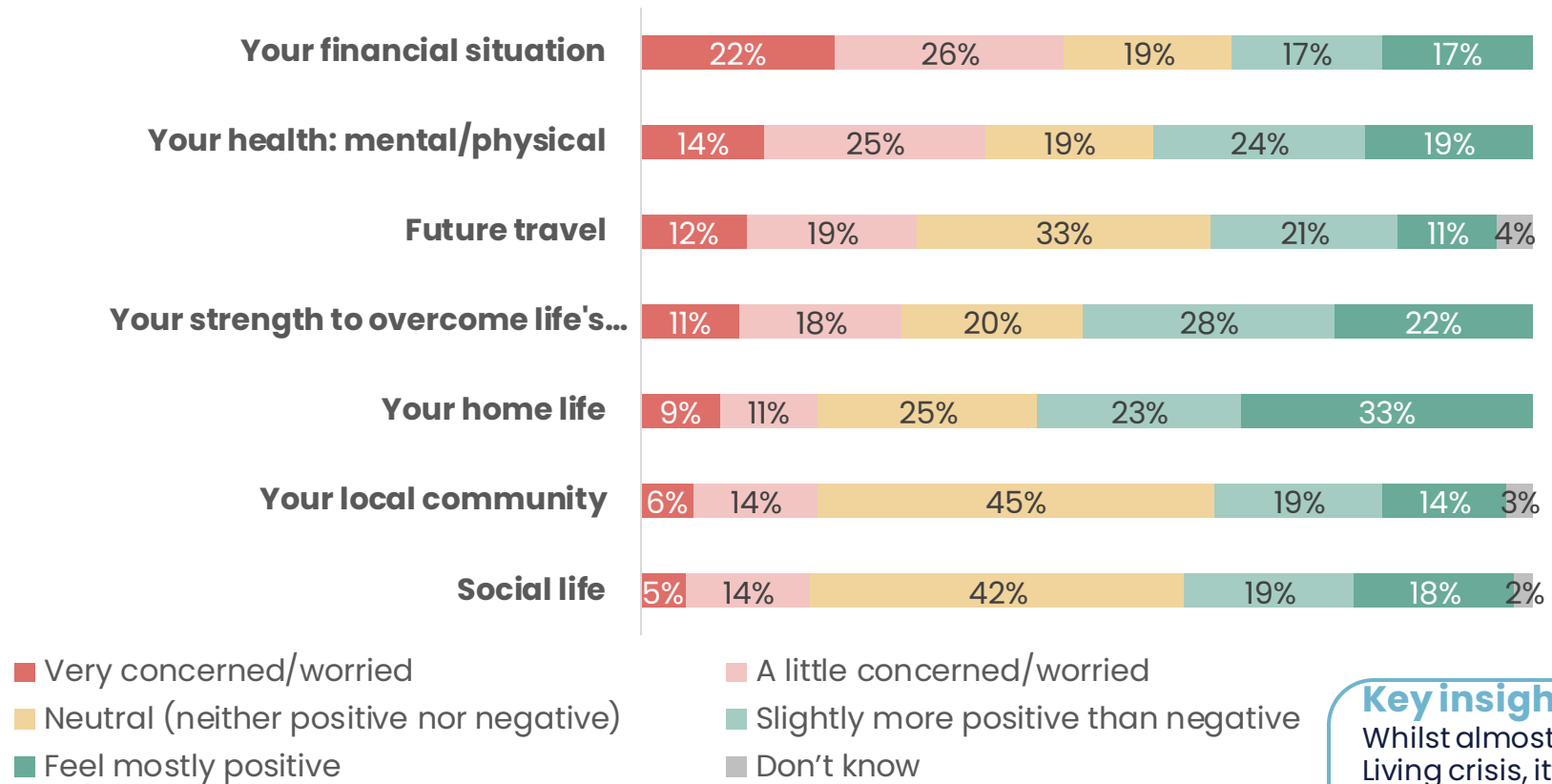
Q2: Thinking back to pre-Covid (a few years ago), please place these aspects in the order that you prioritised them? (Base: 227)

Q3: And now please repeat this task, placing them in the order of priority they are to you now. (We'd like to understand if anything has changed in importance) (Base: 227)

# Looking to the future, customers are most concerned about their financial situation



## Feelings towards different aspects of life in the future



*"We are concerned and starting to panic a bit. It is difficult for us to reduce outgoings as most of it is outside our control and set to rise. We were sensible and lived within our means but now, through no fault of our own, we may struggle to maintain our standard of living."*

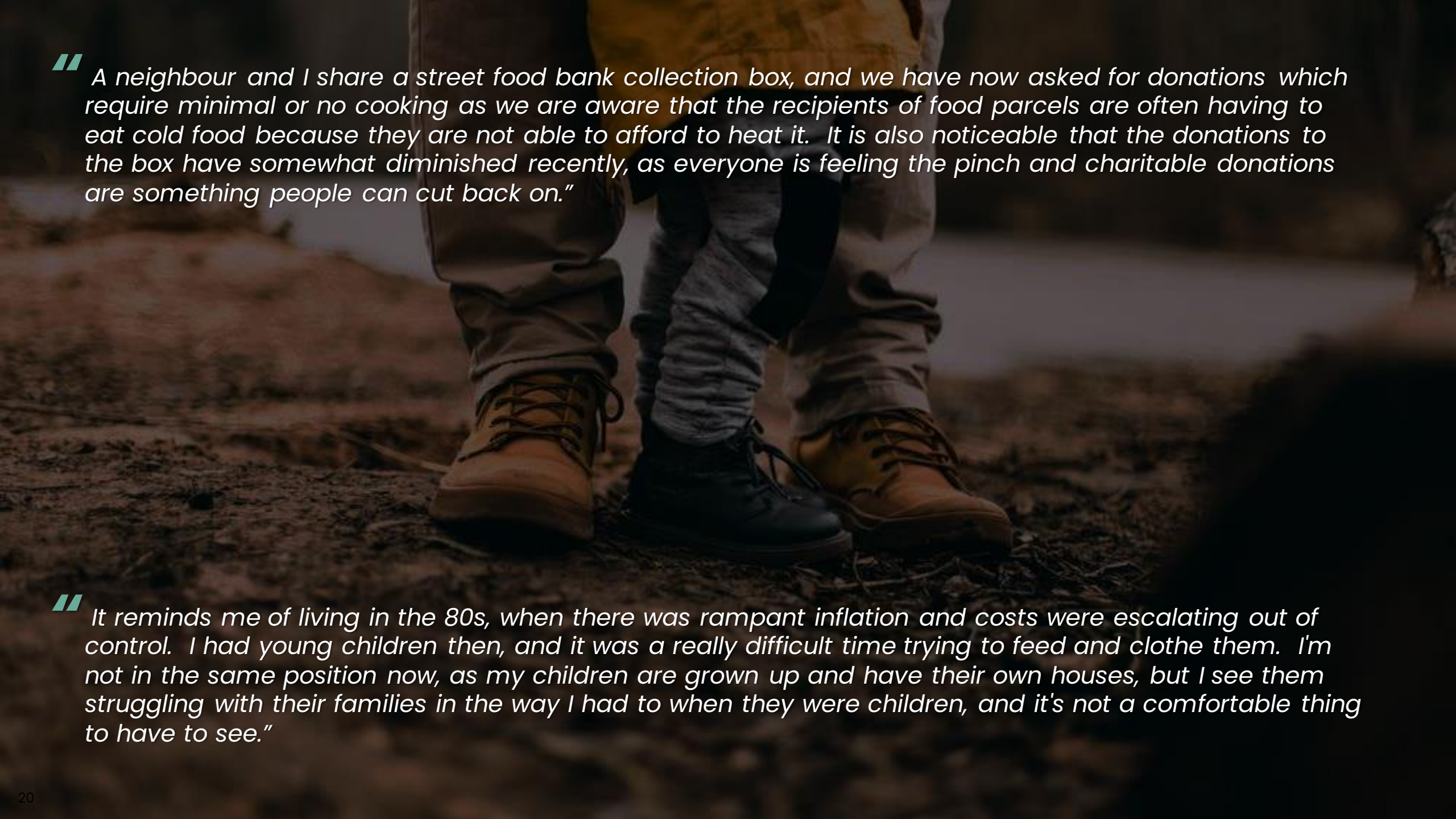
*"It has made me more conscious of what I am spending and whether I really need things. I worry about friends and families that were struggling before this and how they are going to cope, especially the fuel costs. I am worried for the future and the uncertainty of how long it is going to be before it starts to come down. Will I have enough savings go help me through?"*

### Key insight

Whilst almost all have felt the impact of the Cost of Living crisis, it's clear the extent of this varies, with some remaining relatively positive about their finances. For Yorkshire Water, it's important to acknowledge individual circumstances of customers and reflect this in communications, offering clear support for those who may need it, and giving a choice.

Q7: Thinking about the future again, which of the following best describes how you're feeling about each of these aspects of your life? (Base: 227)



A photograph of a person's legs and feet, wearing tan cargo pants and brown lace-up boots, standing on a dirt path. The person is holding a yellow bag. The background is a blurred natural setting with a body of water and trees.

*“ A neighbour and I share a street food bank collection box, and we have now asked for donations which require minimal or no cooking as we are aware that the recipients of food parcels are often having to eat cold food because they are not able to afford to heat it. It is also noticeable that the donations to the box have somewhat diminished recently, as everyone is feeling the pinch and charitable donations are something people can cut back on.”*

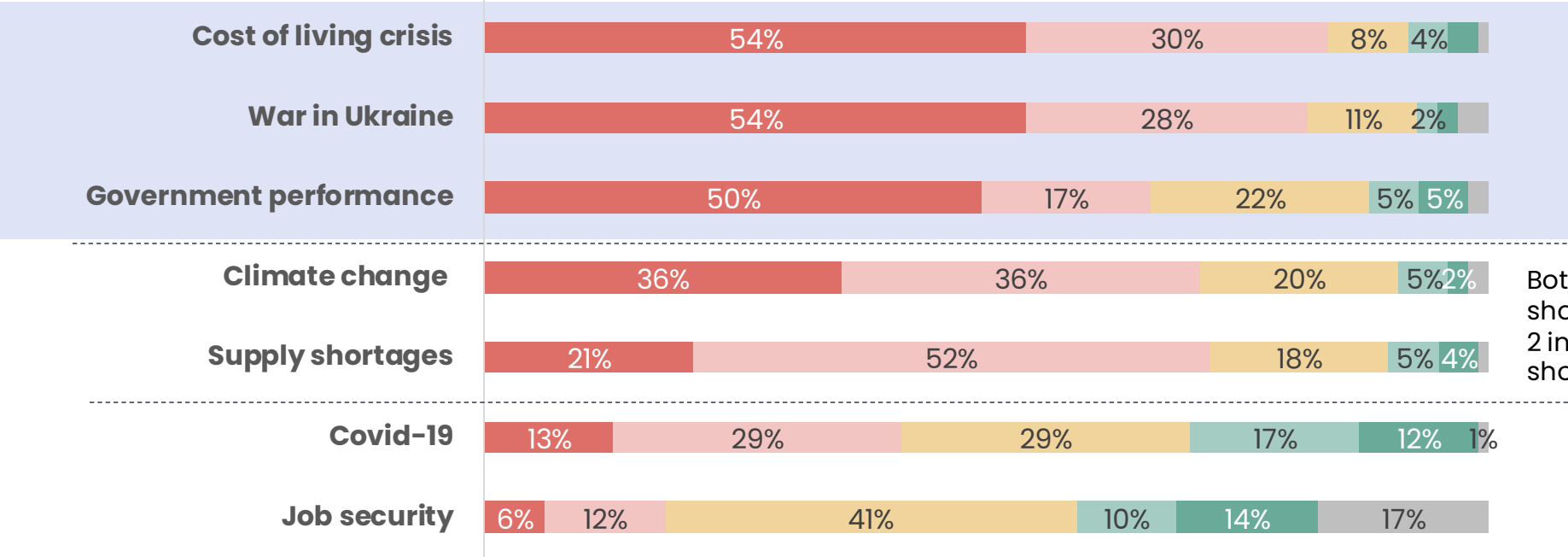
*“ It reminds me of living in the 80s, when there was rampant inflation and costs were escalating out of control. I had young children then, and it was a really difficult time trying to feed and clothe them. I'm not in the same position now, as my children are grown up and have their own houses, but I see them struggling with their families in the way I had to when they were children, and it's not a comfortable thing to have to see.”*



# With so many unknowns, customers are struggling to see positives in the future



Feelings towards different aspects of life in the future



It's hard for customers to see past the current situation with CoL and Ukraine; government would usually provide some of this reassurance, but doubts over performance are further adding to people's concerns.

Both climate change and supply shortages are still a concern for over 2 in 3, but strength of sentiment shows they're a lower priority.

- Very concerned/worried

Neutral (neither positive nor negative)

Feel mostly positive
- A little concerned/worried

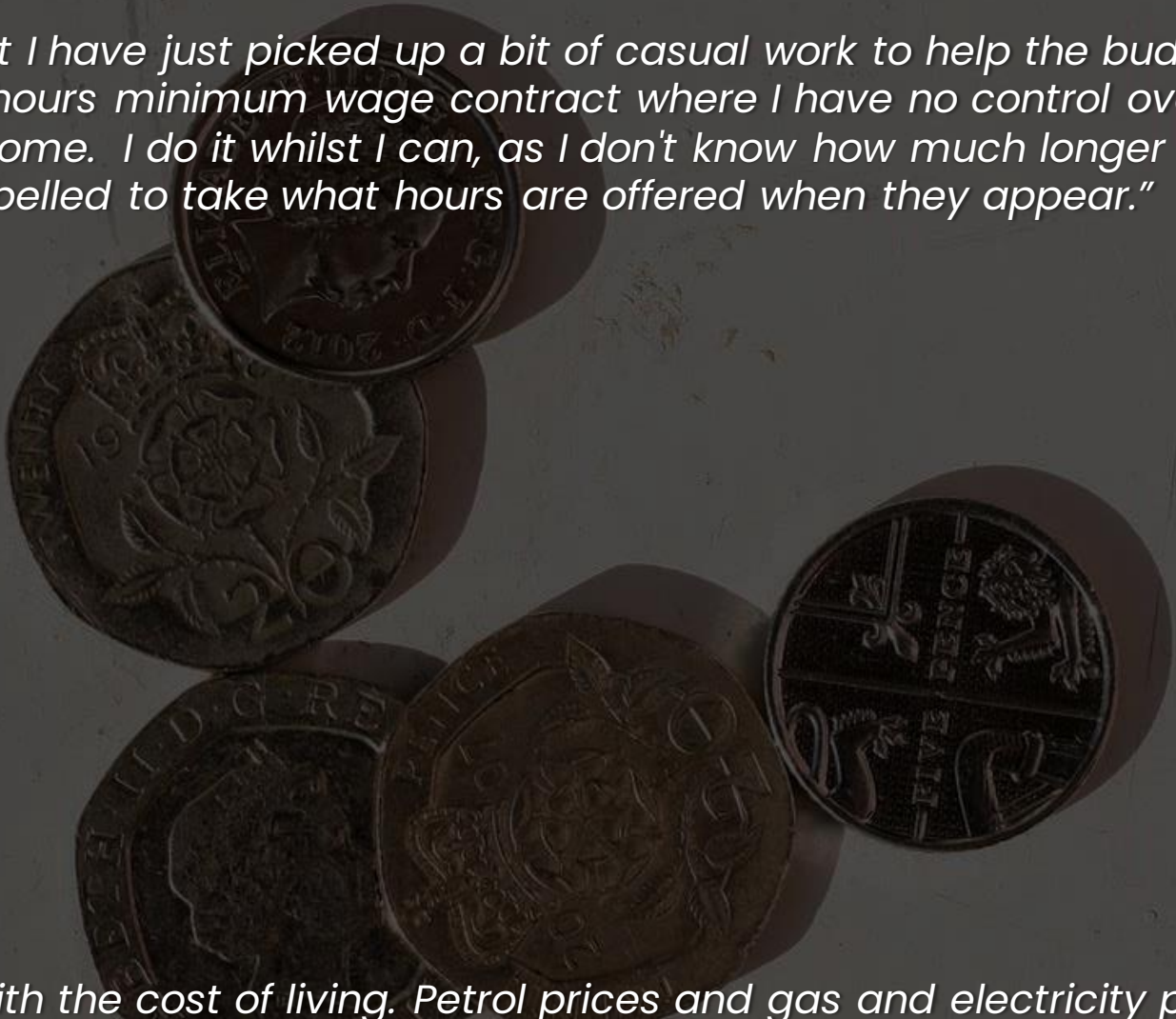
Slightly more positive than negative

Don't know

### Key insight

Whilst Climate change is high on the agenda for Yorkshire Water, it needs to be approached carefully with customers – reassurance on positive actions being taken will be gratefully received, but customers may not have the head space or resources to be making many proactive changes themselves at this time.

Q8: And still thinking about the future, how do you feel about the following? (Base: 227)

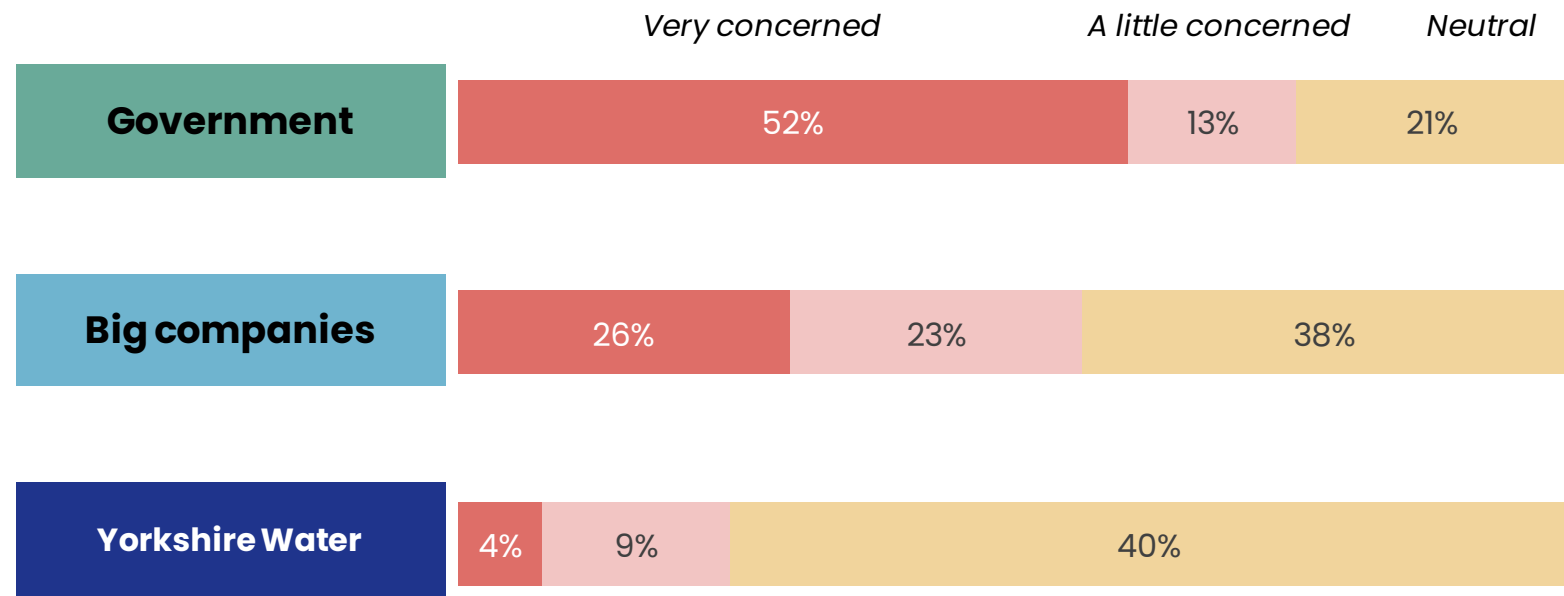


*"I'm retired, and in my 70s, but I have just picked up a bit of casual work to help the budget out. That is an experience, being on a zero hours minimum wage contract where I have no control over how much work I am offered, or when it will come. I do it whilst I can, as I don't know how much longer I'll be fit and well enough to work, so feel compelled to take what hours are offered when they appear."*

*"I'm really feeling the pinch with the cost of living. Petrol prices and gas and electricity prices are crippling. I'm really struggling at the moment, just managing to get by. This cannot be maintained, something has to be done to reduce costs for the common man."*

# Trust in Government has taken a hit, and this extends to other corporations

Views on trustworthiness of...



*"I worry about this for my children's future. Currently big business and politicians seem to put profit before environment – selling the future of the human race for a fast buck now."*

*"At the moment things are not looking great. Although I am not a politically minded person I despair at this present government and it's so called leader. They have no idea about everyday people's lives and seemingly go from one disaster to another and worse is the fact they tell lies and so cannot be trusted. If this is the best we have then things can only get worse."*

Key insight

Distrust in Government can spread to other organisations and businesses, as customers are left sceptical over who really has their best interests at heart. Whilst sentiment toward Yorkshire Water is not negative on balance, extra reassurances may be required when communicating Government driven policies or changes; caution is also needed with any price rises to provide justification and evidence on any benefits.



Q8: And still thinking about the future, how do you feel about the following? (Base: 227)



A close-up photograph of a person's hands being washed under a stream of water from a faucet. The hands are covered in white soap suds. The background is a blurred kitchen sink and faucet.

## **Impact on Yorkshire Water**

# Around 1 in 3 are consciously trying to use less water, with climate change now a bigger contributing factor

## Current water usage



**38%** of people are already using less water than pre-covid

- 14% a lot less
- 24% a little less
- 53% no change
- 9% more

### Reasons for using less...

- Concern for the environment/planet
- More conscious about impact on bills
- More aware of usage due to being at home

*\*See slide notes for those using more*

**Usage has reversed a lot since May 21, when 32%\*\* claimed to be using more water as a result of the pandemic. Climate change is now a bigger motivator to saving.**

Those who are already using less water now compared to pre-covid are also more likely to say they expect to use less water at home in the future (66%) – this group are committed to the environment and doing their bit.

## Predicted future water usage



**35%** of people anticipate they'll use less water at home over the next year or so

- 5% a lot less
- 30% a little less
- 58% no change
- 4% more

### Top tips for cutting back...

- Less baths more showers and shorter showers
- Not running water for as long: turning taps off when cleaning teeth; putting plug in when washing hands; not rinsing of pots etc before placing in the dishwasher
- Less washing up
- Use less water to water garden.
- Collecting rain or wastewater for watering houseplants or garden
- More efficient use of laundry and dishwashing machines.
- Giving more attention to water usage and educating family to be frugal.

### Key insight

There's appetite to save more to keep costs down, so consider leading with this message, with climate change secondary motivator. Yorkshire Water should continue to provide tips and advice on saving water to keep bills down, and highlight the benefits this can also have on the environment.

Q9: Thinking back to a few years ago, which of the following best applies to your water usage at home now compared to then? (Base: 227)

Q12: And thinking about the future, in the next year or so, which of the following best applies to you? (Base: 227)

Q13: How do you think you may be using water differently?

# Alongside managing costs, there are some key areas customers would like to see Yorkshire Water focus on



## Infrastructure

- ✓ Repairing leaks and maintaining infrastructure
- ✓ Ensure raw sewage doesn't end up in waterways
- ✓ Flood risk management
- ✓ Build new reservoirs and store water for potential droughts



## Billing

- ✓ Keep bills affordable for customers
- ✓ Provide financial help where needed



## Education

- ✓ Continue to encourage customers to use less water, educate them as to why it is important to do so, as well as find new ways to boost incentives to do so
- ✓ Continue to share water saving/reducing tips with customers
- ✓ Develop new technology to enable households to save and reuse more grey water within the home (e.g. bath water)



## Responsive

- ✓ Continue to be a fair, trustworthy company which provides a high quality service to customers
- ✓ Continue to ask customers their views
- ✓ Being a voice in the local community, play a big role in charity, help other countries with no access to clean water.

*"I hope Yorkshire Water continues to flourish and always keeps the customer in the forefront of everything they do! Reducing leaks Upgrading infrastructure Innovative ideas to reduce usage and better usage of grey water Economies to keep prices reasonable."*

*"Maintaining a continuous and reliable supply of high quality drinking water, eradicating all forms of water pollution, fixing all leaks to conserve water, building more reservoirs to ensure constant supply, behaving in an environmentally friendly manner, providing excellent value for money, providing excellent customer service, making sure that everyone has access to good, clean water at all times, regardless of their ability to pay."*





## About your community

With over 2,000 members, Your Water is an online research resource giving you easy access to consumers

The community offers a wide range of conventional and innovative research techniques and approaches.

Our aim is to approach every project with fresh thinking and apply methodologies that we believe will get you tangible, actionable results.

## Any questions?

### **Donna Hildreth**

Head of Insight

[Donna.Hildreth@yorkshirewater.co.uk](mailto:Donna.Hildreth@yorkshirewater.co.uk)

### **Naveed Majid**

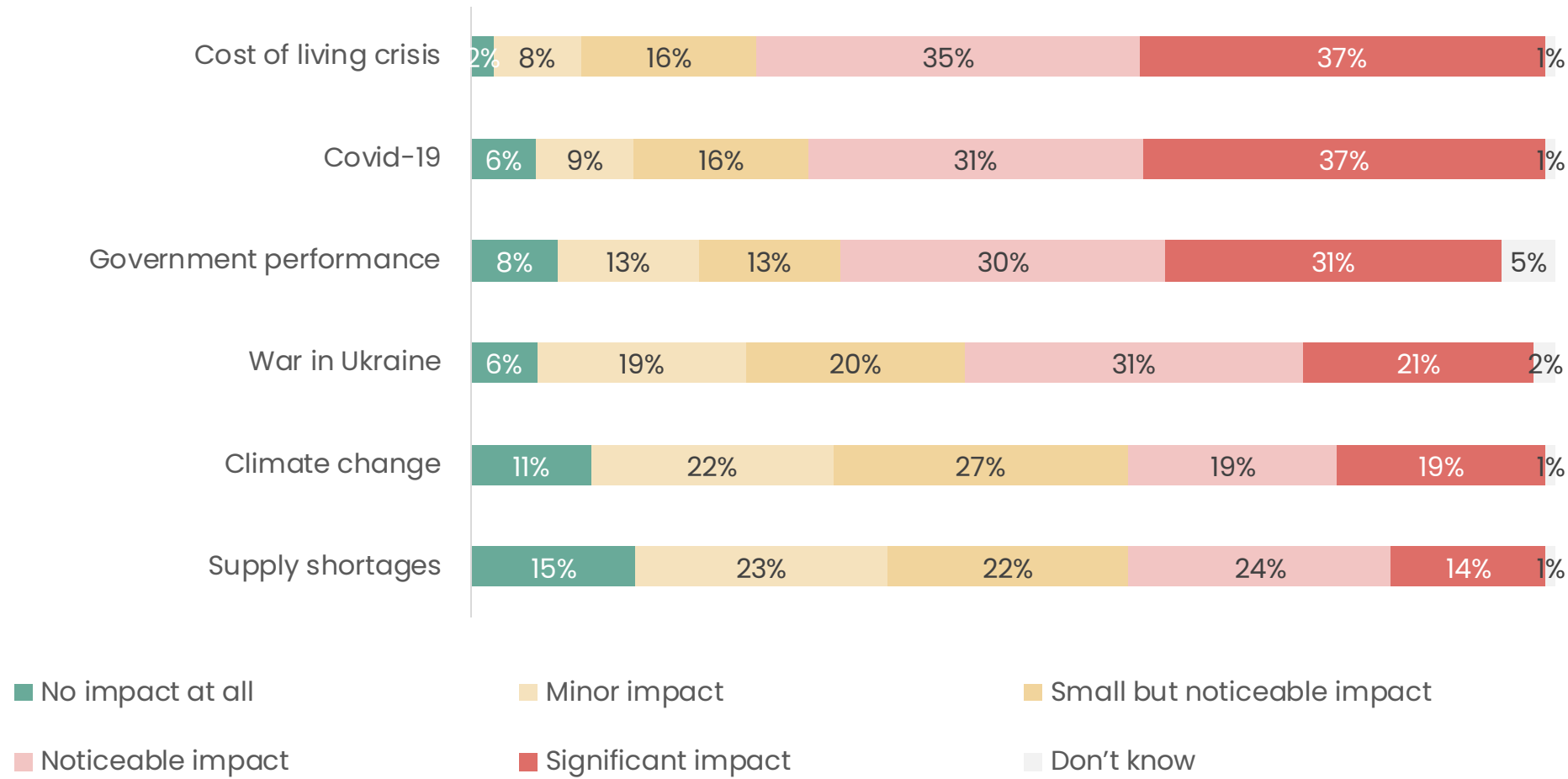
Customer Insight Analyst

[Naveed.Majid@yorkshirewater.co.uk](mailto:Naveed.Majid@yorkshirewater.co.uk)

# Appendix



# Comparing the extent of the impact of different events on customers' lives



Q1: To what extent have the following areas had an impact on you (whether that be physically, emotionally, financially) over the last few years? (Base: 227)

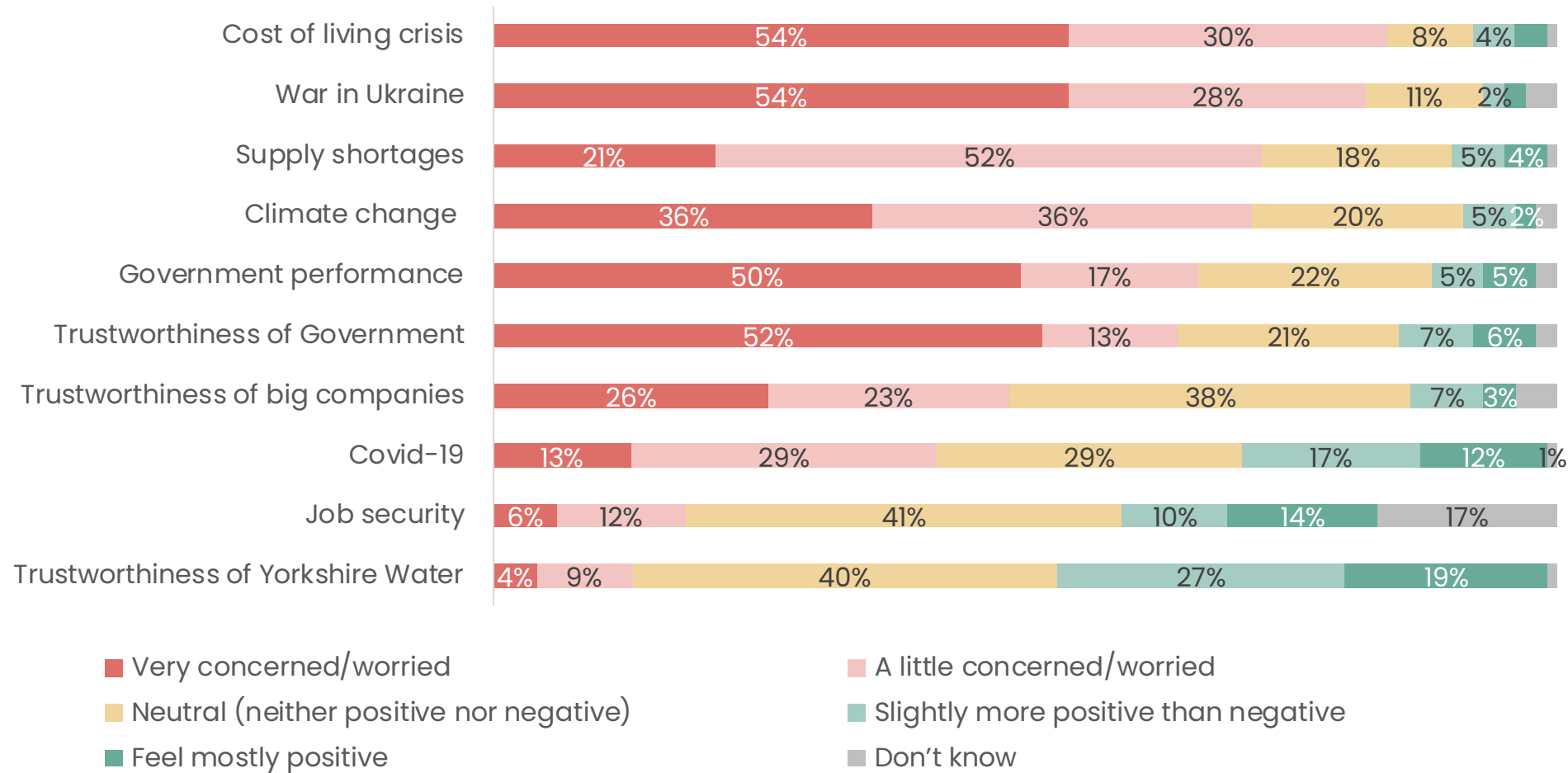




# Concern for the future – inc. trust in organisations



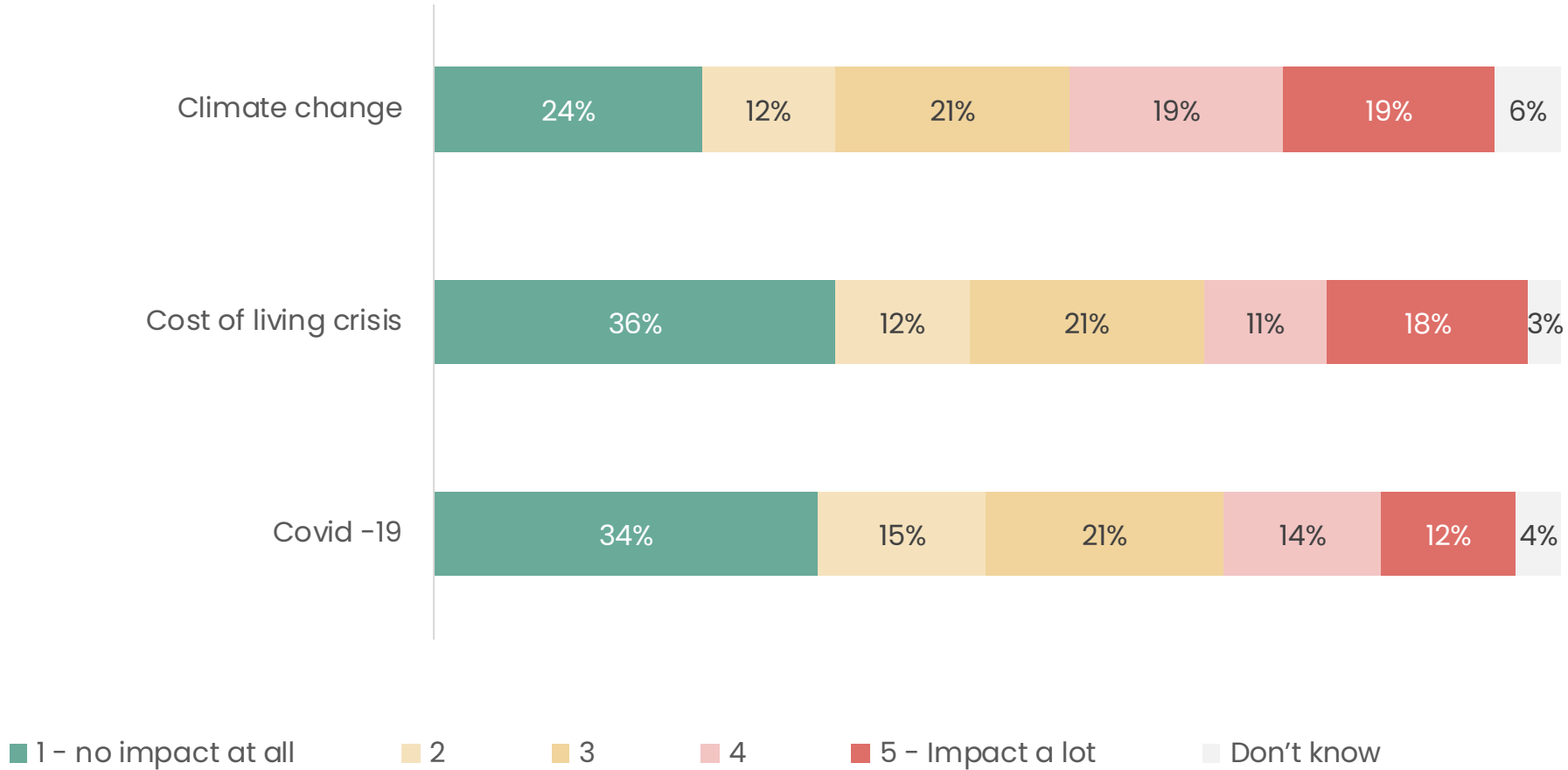
## Feelings towards different aspects of life in the future



Q8: And still thinking about the future, how do you feel about the following? (Base: 227)



# How particular events have impacted daily water usage

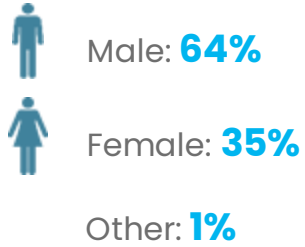


Q14: Looking at these options below, how much do you think these issues have impacted your daily water usage? (Base: 227)

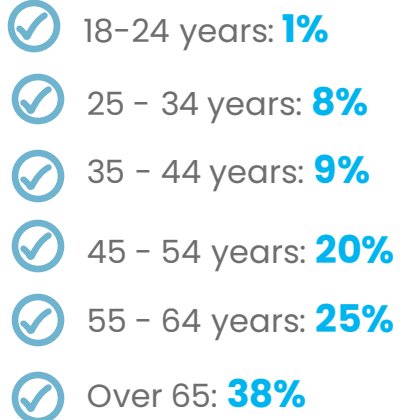


# Sample Profile – Discussion (n=152)

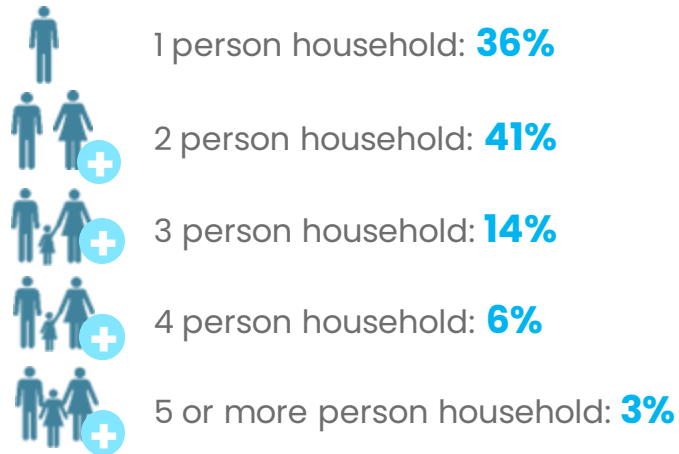
## GENDER



## AGE



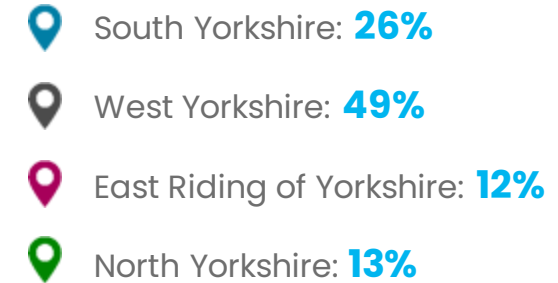
## HOUSEHOLD SIZE



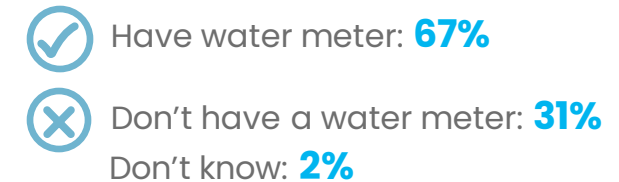
## SEG



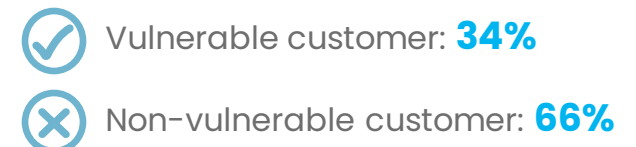
## AREA OF YORKSHIRE



## WATER METER



## VULNERABILITY





# Sample Profile – Survey (n=227)

## GENDER



Male: **40%**



Female: **60%**

## AGE



18–24 years: **0%**



25 – 34 years: **10%**



35 – 44 years: **9%**



45 – 54 years: **20%**



55 – 64 years: **25%**



Over 65: **35%**

## HOUSEHOLD SIZE



1 person household: **31%**



2 person household: **42%**



3 person household: **15%**



4 person household: **8%**



5 or more person household: **4%**

## SEG



ABC1: **65%**



C2DE: **35%**

## AREA OF YORKSHIRE



South Yorkshire: **27%**



West Yorkshire: **48%**



East Riding of Yorkshire: **15%**



North Yorkshire: **10%**

## WATER METER



Have water meter: **68%**



Don't have a water meter: **30%**  
Don't know: **2%**

## VULNERABILITY



Vulnerable customer: **40%**



Non-vulnerable customer: **60%**