

Impact of Covid-19 on life of residents of Sri Lanka

Based on an online survey in Sri Lanka

APRIL 2021

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has been one of the most abrupt shocks for the global economy. It has impacted the lives of millions of people in some way. The impact of Covid-19 on the mobility sector is universal. The pandemic has forced us to alter the way we use public spaces and public transport. Travel needs, travel choices and commuter behavior has changed drastically to mitigate the effects of Covid-19 and adhere to government's norms of physical distancing. Findings from different parts of the world highlight the negative effects of the pandemic; financial losses, restrained mobility, increase in domestic violence and reduced overall well-being. The situation in Sri Lanka is similar. With the government imposing nationwide lockdown in the country in March 2020, millions of people were forced to stay indoors. This impacted those engaged in the informal economy deeply. As the cities started to reopen in June 2020, it was important to understand how people use and experience public spaces and public transport.

As part of the Sri Lanka Metro Colombo Transformation project, Safetipin in collaboration with The World Bank, conducted an online survey to understand the impact of Covid-19 on the life of residents in Sri Lanka. The survey captures the differences in travel pattern, mobility choices and overall well-being of the respondents due to Covid-19.

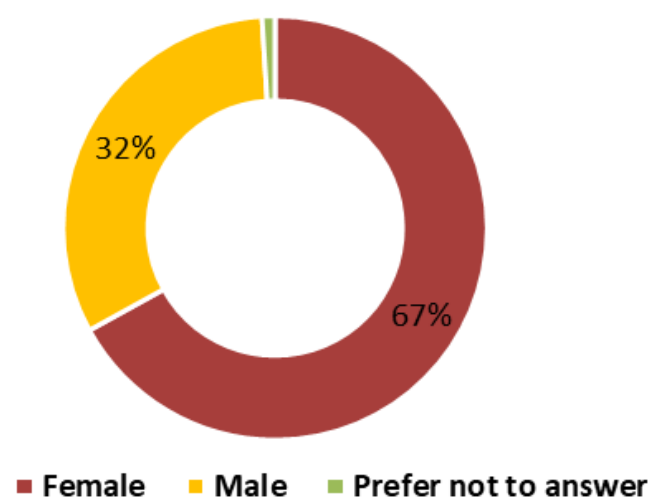
The survey was divided into three sections: before the lockdown (before Mar 2020), after the lockdown (June-Nov 2020) and extended lockdown (Dec 2020-Jan 2021). **The survey** was conducted and shared through electronic mail and social media platforms. It was live from **December 2020 to January 2021**, and was available in three languages; English, Sinhala and Tamil. A total of **306 responses** were collected from residents all over the country. In light of the pandemic situation in Sri Lanka, the survey responses were collected online only. As a result, the survey excludes respondents without access to internet and social media.

The report presents an overview of the key findings and outcomes of the survey. The results and analysis of this survey provide an understanding of the travel trends and concerns of the residents of Sri Lanka post the Covid-19 lockdown.

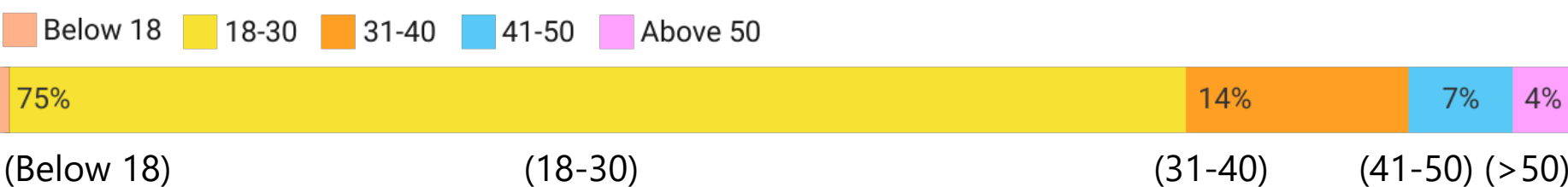
The first section of the survey included questions on socio-economic profile of the respondents such as age, gender, occupation, area of residence and vehicular ownership. The second and third section focused on capturing the travel choice and travel pattern of the respondents before and after the lockdown. The next section was focused on understanding the impact of Covid-19 on the overall well-being of the respondents. The last section of the survey aimed to capture the impact of Covid-19 related guidelines on respondent's use of public transport.

Respondents' Profile

Gender



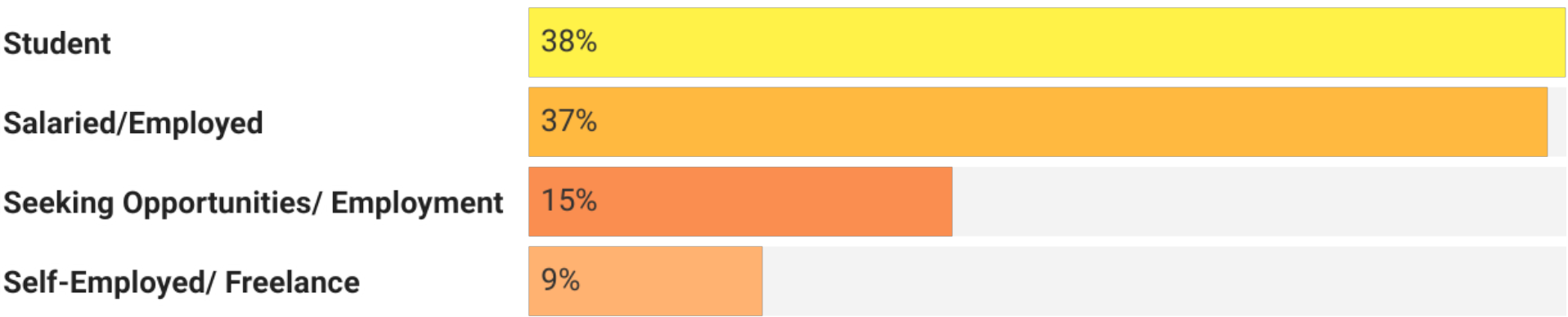
Age Group (in years)



67% of the survey respondents were females and 32% were males. 1% did not specify their gender.

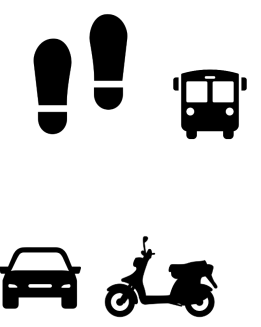
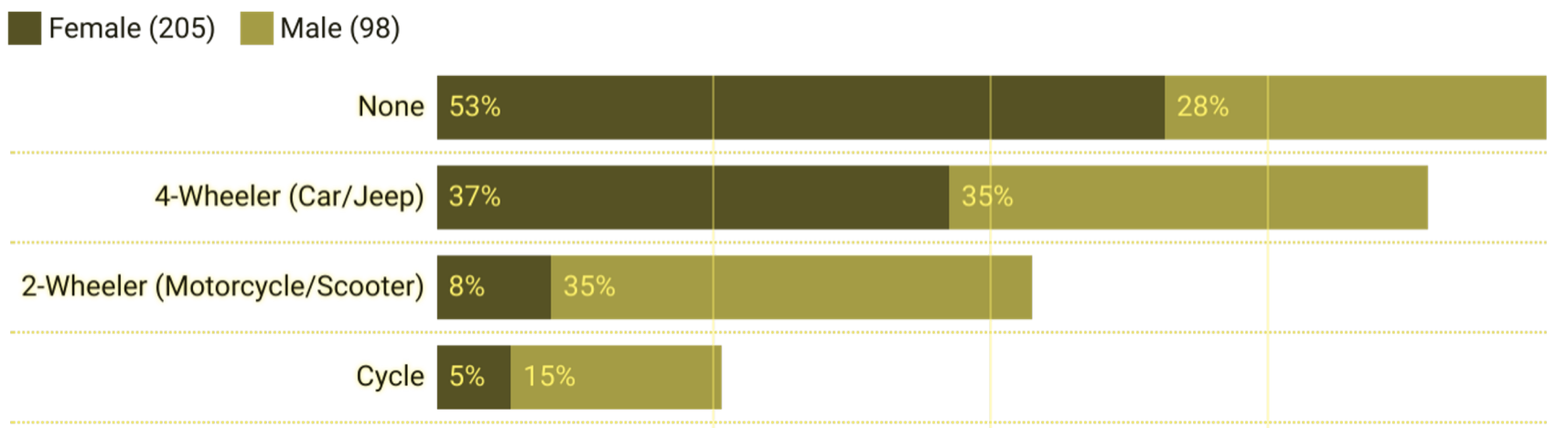
The respondents were from varied age groups with 18-30 years being the highest group comprising of 75 percent followed by 14% respondents in the age group of 31-40 years.

Occupation



38% of the survey respondents were students and 37% were salaried/employed. Between male and female respondents, more males (40%) reported being employed than females (36%).

Vehicle Ownership



- 53% women as compared to 28% men do not own any vehicle indicating their dependence on some mode of public transport or other non-motorized modes such as walking and cycling.
- 4-wheeler ownership is similar among men and women. However, more men (25%) as compared to women (8%) reported owning a 2-wheeler.

Travel Pattern of the Respondents

Most Frequent Transport Modes

Before Lockdown

Females



Walk-60%



3W-48%



Personal 4W- 47%



Bus-46%

Males



Walk- 75%



Bus-49%



Personal 2W-39%



3W-38%

After Lockdown

Females



Personal 4W- 37%



Walk- 34%



3W-21%



Cab/Taxi-14%

Males



Walk-53%



Personal 2W-32%



Personal 4W-28%

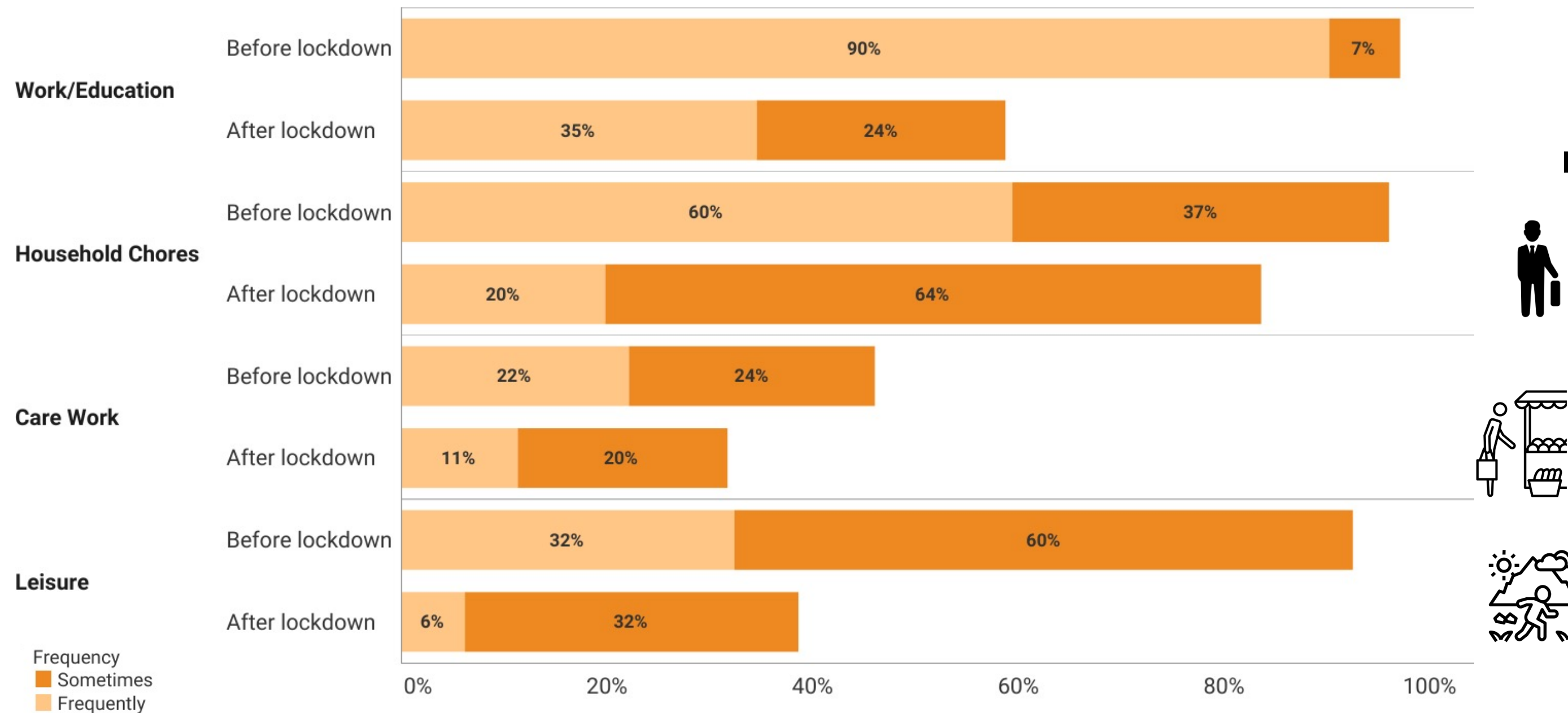


Cycle- 20%

- Walking was the most frequent mode of transport for both male as well as female respondents before the lockdown. However, post lockdown, personal 4 wheelers was most commonly used by female respondents.
- The use of buses has decreased significantly after the lockdown (from 46% to 9% for females, from 49% to 10% for males).

Travel Pattern of the Respondents

Travel for various purposes



Decrease in travel after the lockdown



- Maximum decrease in Work/Education related travel



- Monthly travel increased for Work/Education and Household chores after the lockdown

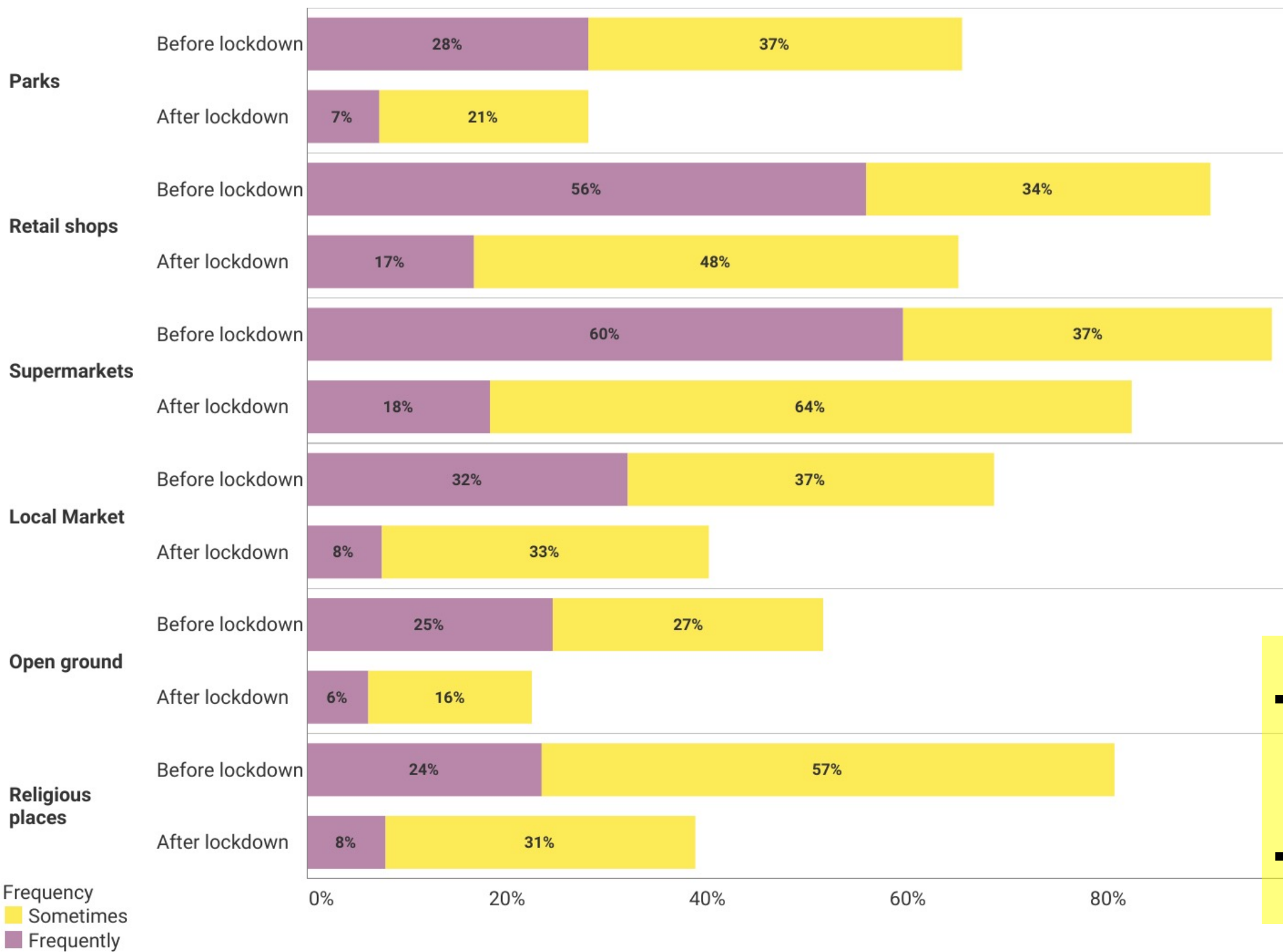


- Travel for Leisure decreased for both men and women.

Frequently: Daily or 1-3 days a week
Sometimes: 1-3 times a month

Public Space Usage of the Respondents

At Neighborhood Level



Decrease in use of all neighborhood level public spaces after the lockdown



- Men frequented public spaces more than women both before as well as after the lockdown

- 40% men visited parks as compared to 22% women.

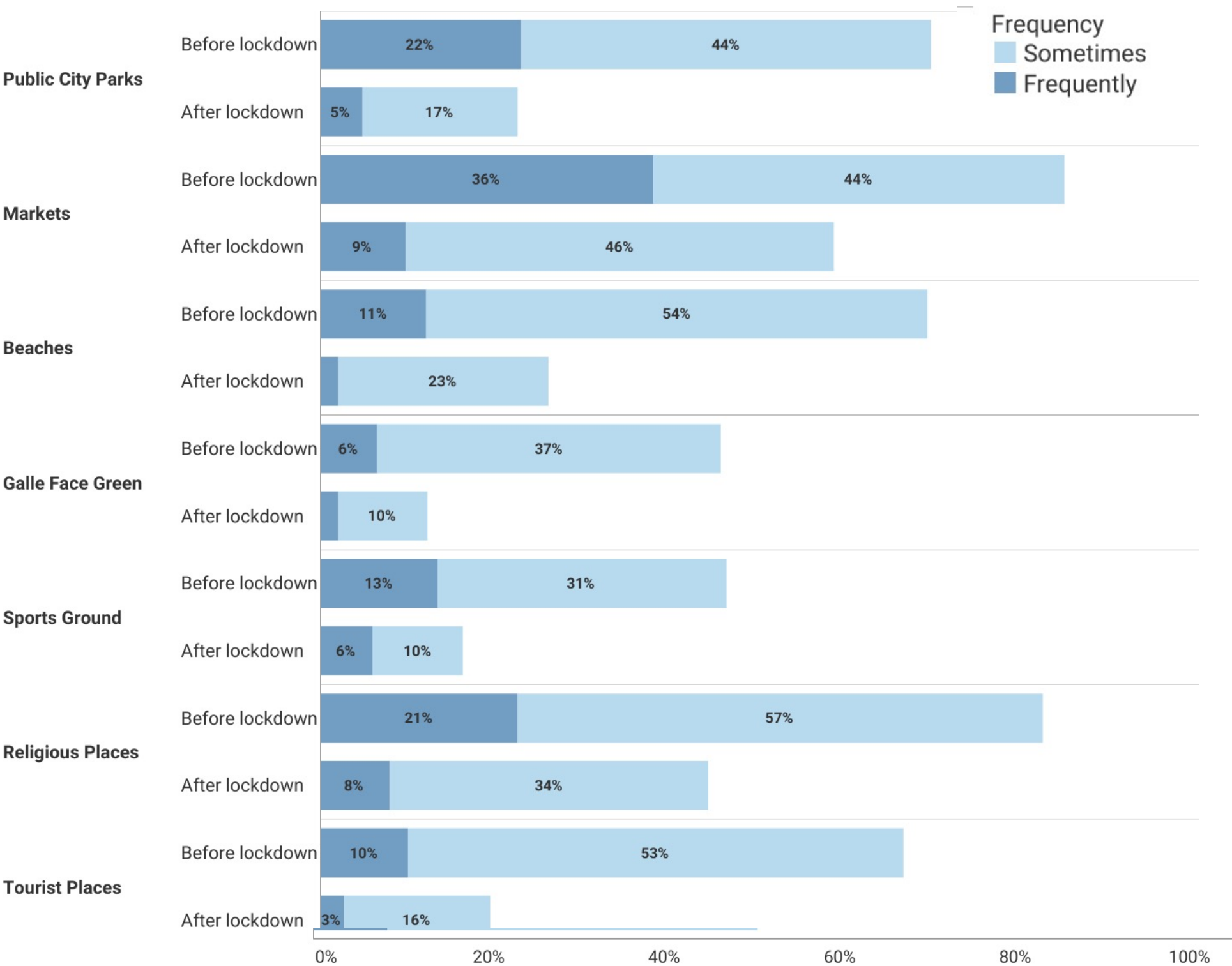
- Similar trend for other public spaces except for supermarkets (60% women, 59% men)

- Post lockdown, monthly visits (1-3 times a month) to retail shops and supermarkets increased considerably for both men as well as women.

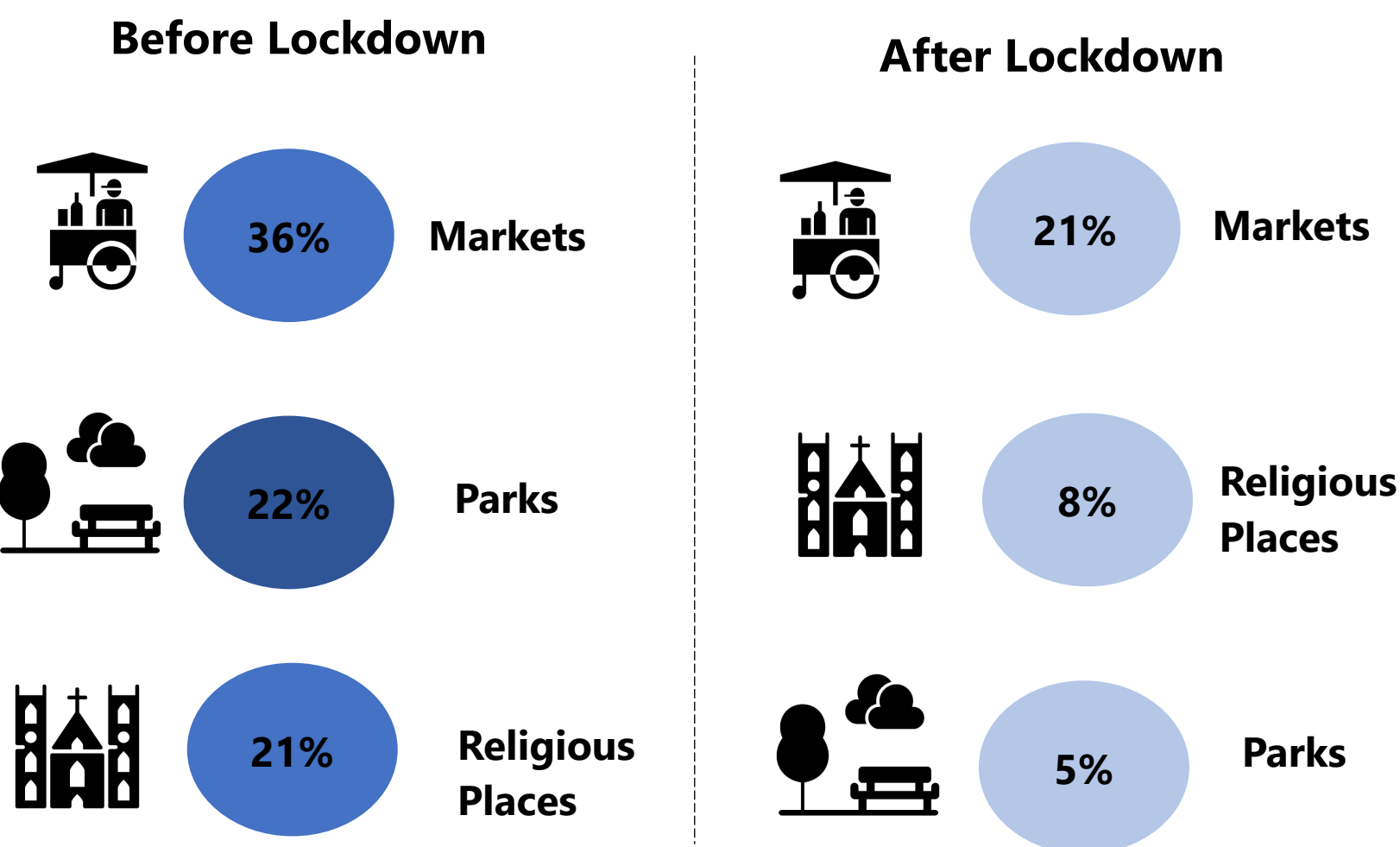
- One of the reasons for this could be unavailability of online delivery service at the respondent's location.

Public Space Usage of the Respondents

At City Level



Most frequently visited public spaces

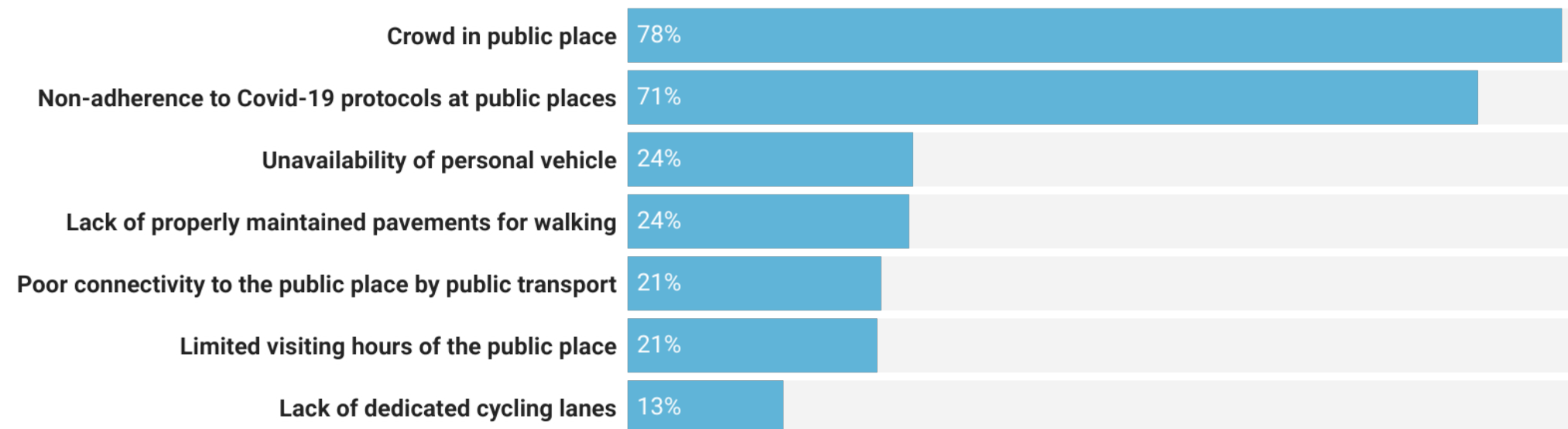


Markets (36%) followed by city parks (22%) and religious places (21%) were the most frequently visited public spaces before the lockdown. Post lockdown, the same categories of public spaces remained the most frequently visited public spaces.

The next section discusses the key concerns of the respondents in using public spaces and public transport.

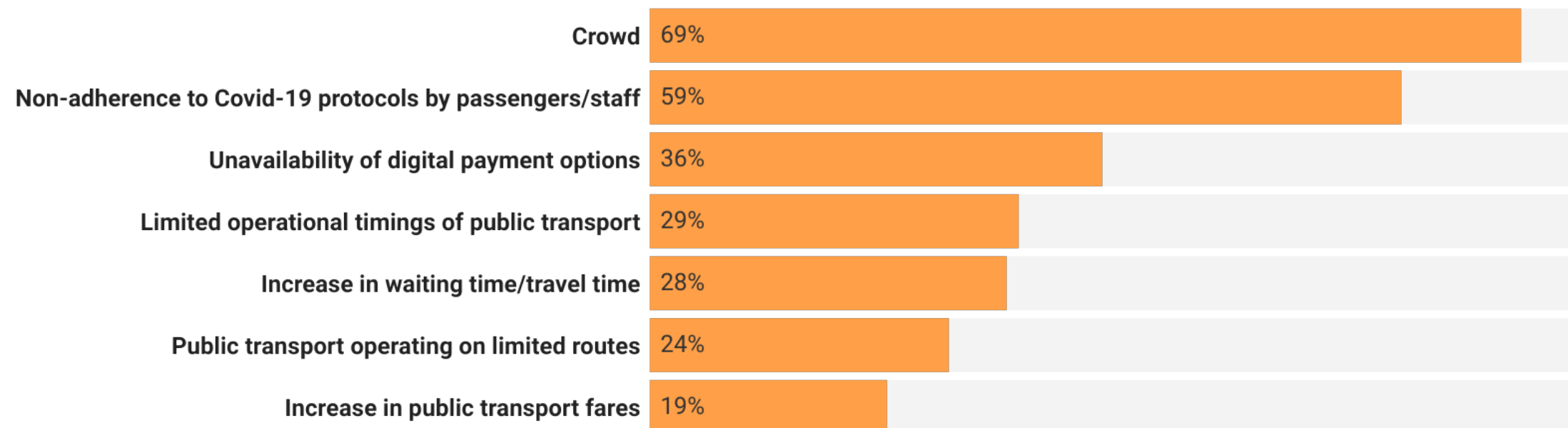
Concerns in Using Public Spaces and Public Transport

Concerns in using public spaces



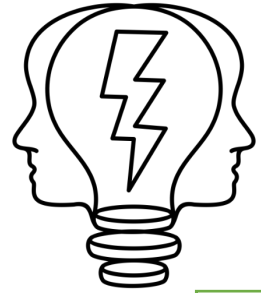
- 36% respondents highlighted unavailability of digital payment options as a concern in using public transport. However, this was a bigger concern for those not owning a vehicle (40%).
- Limited operations timings of public transport (29%), increase in waiting time/travel time (28%) and public transport operating on limited routes (24%) were other common concerns.
- As compared to females, more males reported increase in waiting time/travel time, public transport fares and limited operations of public transport as a concern in using public transport.

Concerns in using public transport



- In the context of Covid-19, presence of large number of persons in public spaces and public transport and non-adherence to Covid-19 protocols at public spaces and by public transport users and operators were cited as the most important concern by all respondents.
- Unavailability of personal vehicle (24%) and lack of walking and cycling infrastructure (24% and 13% respectively) were other important concerns for not using public spaces.
- More men as compared to women reported poor connectivity to the public space by public transport (28% men and 19% women) and limited visiting hours of the public space (31% men and 16% women) as concerns while visiting a public space.

Impact of Covid-19 on Well-Being

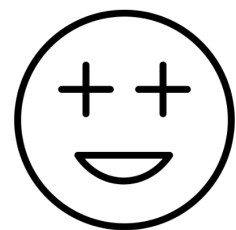
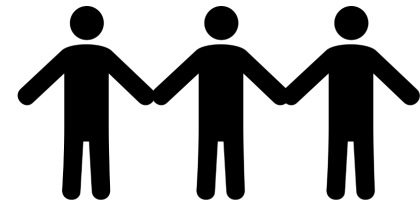
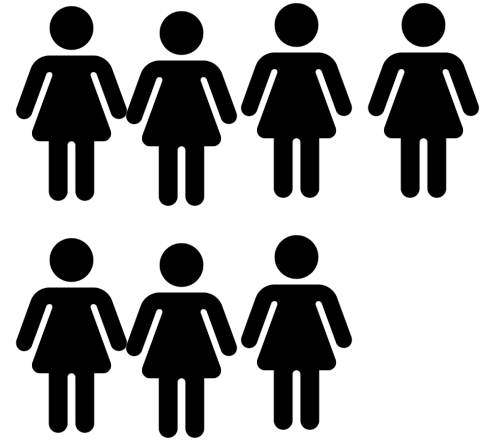


24 % respondents reported some form of physical or mental stress

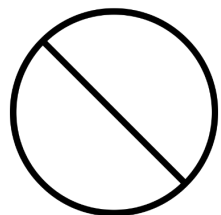
Of which 73% were females



Compared to 27% males



7 % respondents were positively impacted. Better work and fitness levels. Got serious about health, spent quality time with family at home.



21 % said Covid-19 had no impact on their overall well-being



10% respondents (60% women and 40% men) felt isolated and disconnected due to WFH, online learning and lack of socializing.



20% respondents (Females (18%), males (25%)) faced deductions in salaries.
14% women and 17% men reported losing their jobs due to Covid-19

My mental health took a rapid dive. Had to start seeing a therapist



Was doing a small start up which got shut during Covid-19.



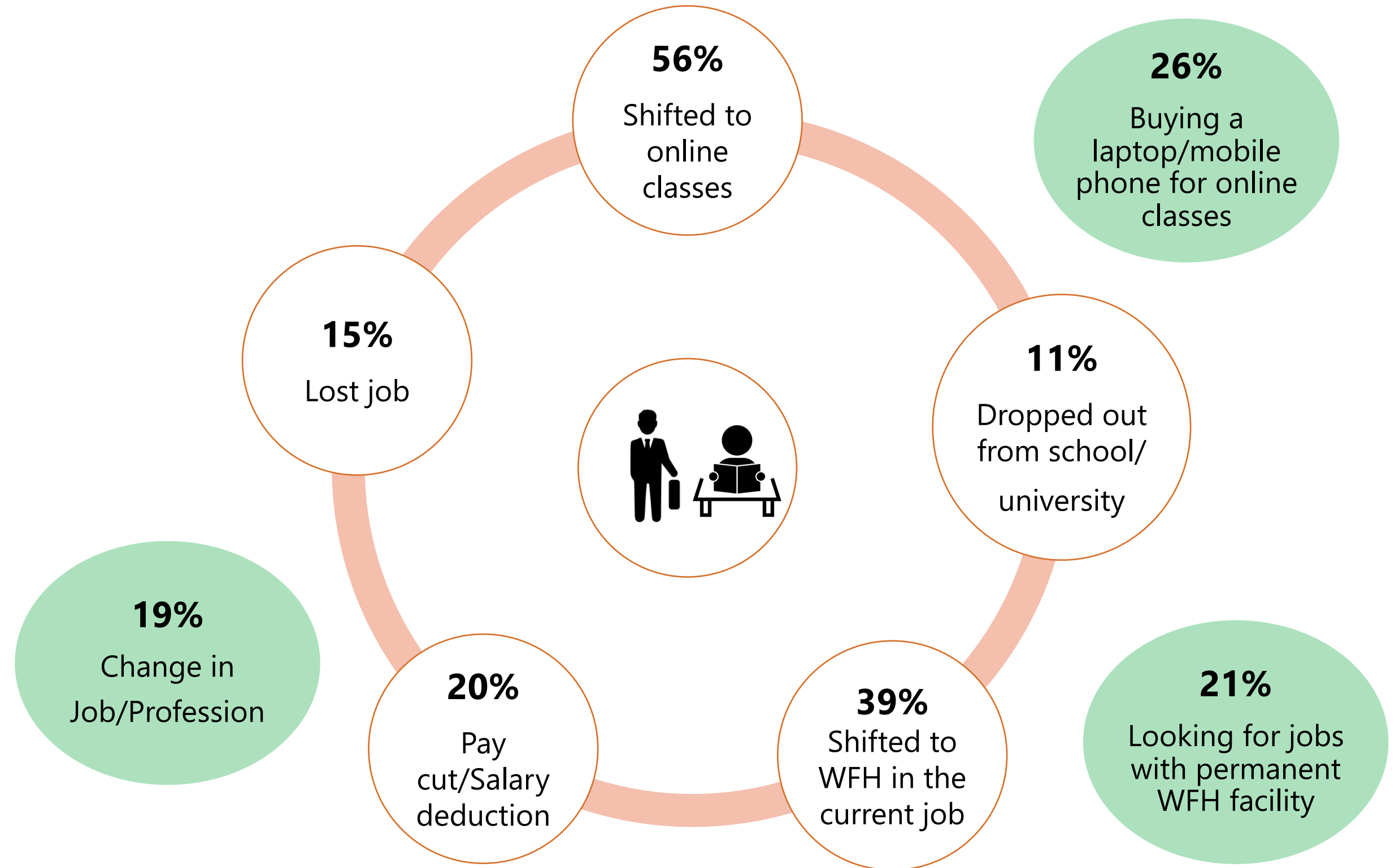
Impact of Covid-19 on Work and Education

The illustration shows the impact of Covid-19 on work and education of the respondents and the changes made or being considered by the respondents due to the ongoing pandemic.

- Due to the new normal of working and learning from home, 26% of the total respondents are considering buying a laptop or a mobile.
- While 21% of the respondents reported looking for a job with permanent WFH facility, 19% said that they had either changed or are considering a job change.

The findings from the previous sections of the report highlight that there is a fear among residents to use public spaces and public transport.

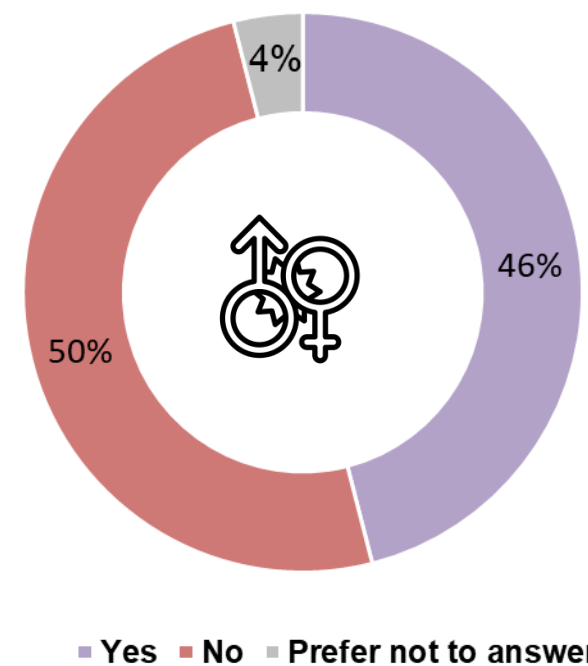
61% of the total respondents said that they have stopped or avoid using public transport after the lockdown. **As an alternate to public transport, 7% respondents are considering buying a cycle and 5% respondents plan to buy a 2-wheeler or 4-wheeler.**



Impact of Covid-19 on Perception of Safety

Sexual harassment in public spaces and public transport

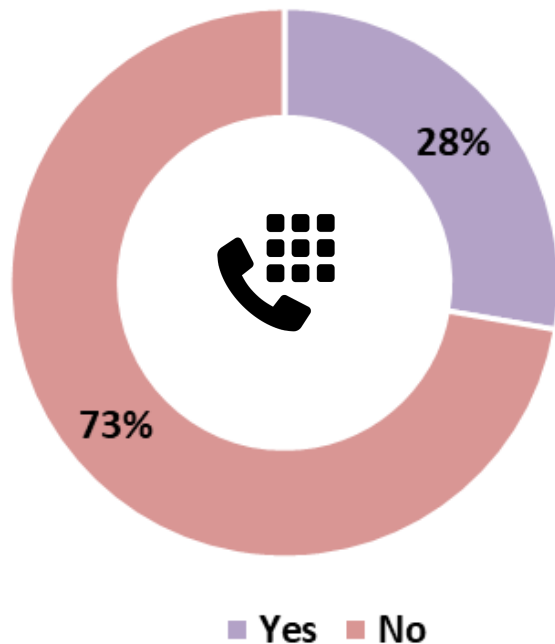
Sexual harassment faced by the respondents



46% of the total respondents said "Yes".

Of those respondents, **93% were women** as compared to **only 6% men** indicating high levels of sexual harassment faced by women in public spaces and public transport in Sri Lanka.

Respondent's awareness of the helpline numbers



28% of the total survey respondents said that they were aware of a helpline number.

Of those respondents, 68% were women and 30% were men (2% respondents did not specify their gender). The respondents are aware about organizations such as Women in Need (WIN) and UN Women Sri Lanka. Police helpline numbers were also mentioned by a few respondents.

Change in sexual harassment instances in public spaces and public transport post the lockdown

"I don't think there is any reduction in SH cases. Verbal abuse is always there though there are physical limitations due to Covid-19."

"I guess it has decreased as the allowed number of passengers in buses are now less."

20% of the respondents felt that there could be a **decrease in sexual harassment cases** in public spaces as well as public transport since few people are stepping out of their homes after the lockdown.

Some respondents also felt that due to safety measures such as wearing a face mask, cases of sexual harassment could have reduced.

12% respondents said that the cases of verbal and visual sexual harassment have increased both in public spaces and public transport as it is now difficult to identify the perpetrators.

Extended Lockdown: Dec 2020-Jan 2021

The survey questionnaire was finalized during the course of second wave of Covid-19 cases in Sri Lanka (Nov 2020). To prevent the spread of the virus, a second lockdown was imposed by the government in certain localities in Sri Lanka. Additionally, few guidelines and precautionary measures were also released by the government. The questions in this section aim to understand the impact of these guidelines on respondent's use of public transport.

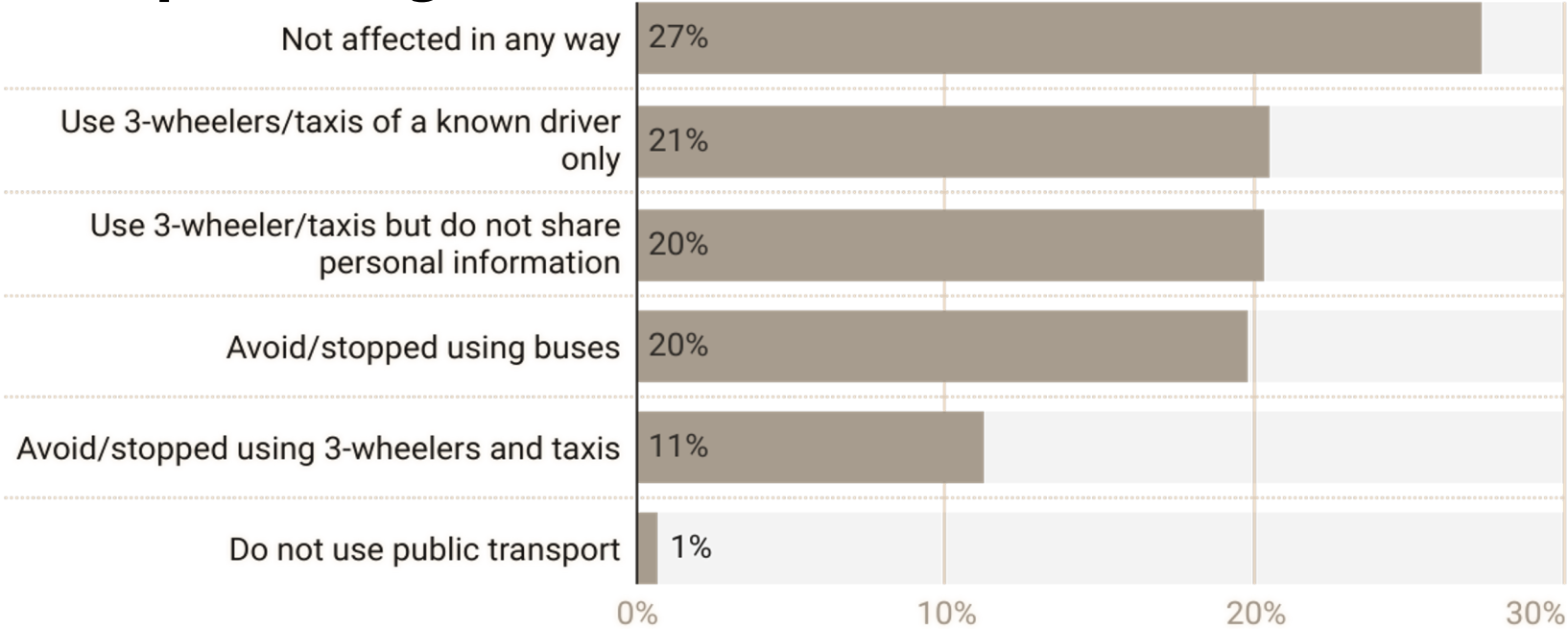
Respondent's comfort in sharing contact numbers with the taxi/3-wheeler drivers

- **49 %** of the respondents said that they were not comfortable in sharing their personal details with the drivers.
- **30%** respondents said that they were comfortable in sharing details with a known driver.
- Some respondents reported facing issues after sharing their contact details with the drivers. The drivers would unnecessarily call them at late night hours. A small number of respondents reported getting marketing and promotional calls from the taxi companies

"The driver is calling me unnecessarily at late night hours."

"I received pornographic images on WhatsApp from unknown numbers after sharing my contact number.."

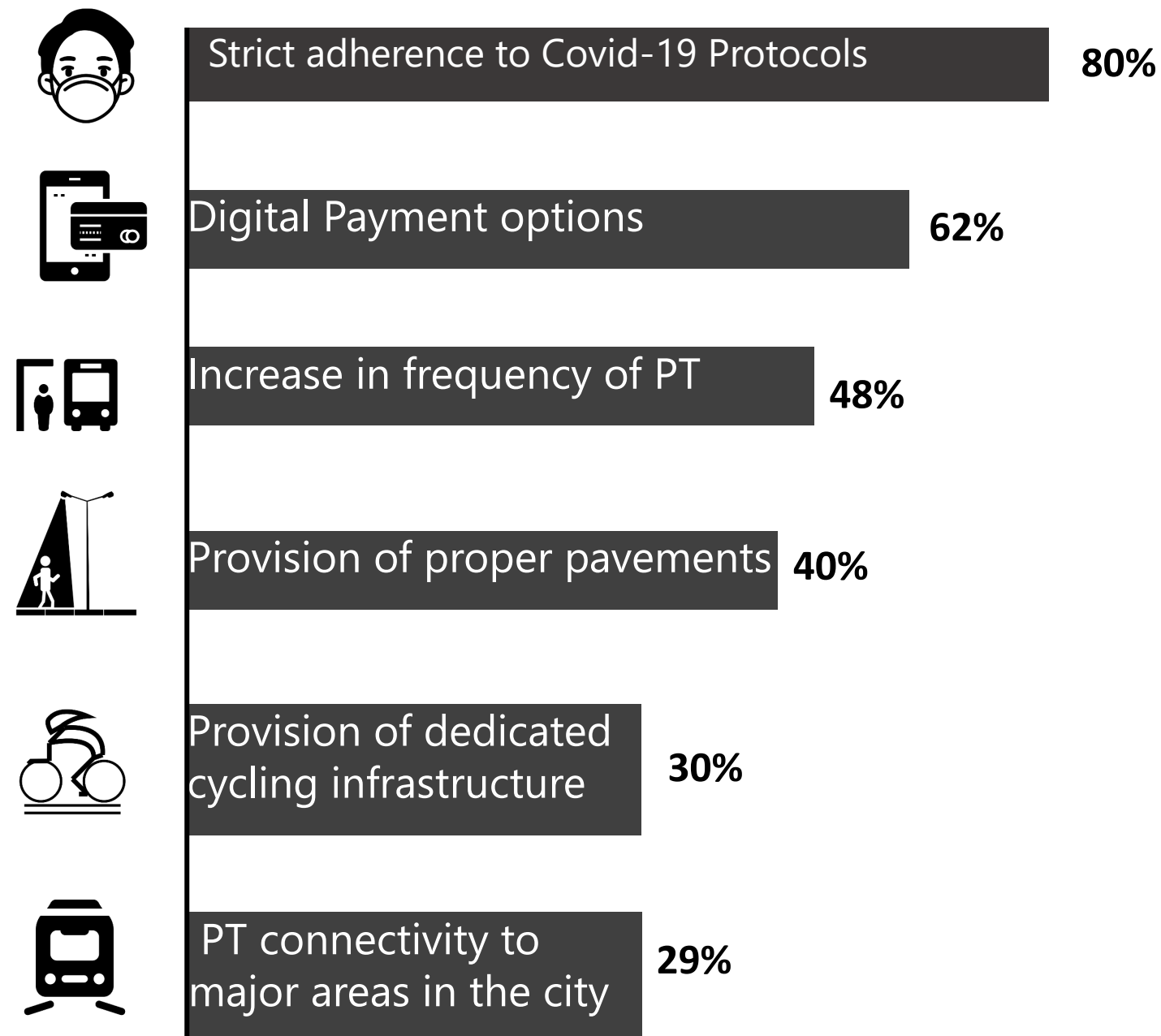
Impact of Covid-19 related guidelines on public transport usage



- 20 % of the respondents have either stopped or avoid using buses. It is important to note that more females (31%) as compared to males (20%) are avoiding using buses.
- 11% of the total respondents said that they have stopped or avoid using three 3-wheeler and taxis. The trend was similar among males (17%) and females (15%).
- Equal sample distribution from males as well as females (21% each) reported using 3-wheeler or taxi of a known driver only. However, more females (31%) as compared to males (22%) reported not sharing their personal details with the drivers. This could most likely be due to the fear of sexual harassment from the drivers.

Building a new normal to promote sustainable mobility

What will encourage people to step out and use public spaces and public transport ?



The pandemic has significantly impacted the mobility sector across the globe. While cities have started to re-open, it is clear that in the short to medium term physical distancing will continue to be a norm. The survey suggests that mode choices will probably be altered post Covid-19 with a marked shift away from public transport to personal modes or non-motorized modes at least in the short term. A significant proportion of respondents (both male as well as female) who earlier used to commute by walking or using buses may switch to individual vehicles or other private transport modes.

As cities begin to reopen, rebuilding public trust in public transport systems and services is essential. While adherence to safety related protocols (such as wearing a face mask, using hand sanitizer, physical distancing) is essential, availability of digital payment options, provision of well-maintained walking and cycling infrastructure are imperative to encourage the use of public spaces and public transport.

As Sri Lanka moves towards a phased unlock, the urban mobility can progress towards a more desirable new normal where streets are for all, congestion and pollution is less, public transport is safe and non-motorized transport is used extensively. The pandemic is an opportunity for the policy makers and city authorities to take charge and carefully monitor the needs of its residents. Periodic assessments and regular data collection to understand mode choices and travel needs of the residents will be significant to understand the trends that develop post pandemic. This will help the decision-makers to respond with favorable policies for commuters and offer them alternatives that are financially viable and promote sustainable mobility.



For more details, contact us

www.safetipin.com

info@safetipin.com | [+91-124-4033075](tel:+911244033075)