



*Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy*

## Public Mental Health amidst COVID-19

### Quantitative Report

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Prepared by  
Rachael Joyce & Larry Ryan

J.1900



RESEARCH  
& INSIGHT

# Research Objectives/Approach

- ❖ The Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP) is the largest Counselling and Psychotherapy organisation in Ireland, representing over 4, 500 members.
- ❖ Behaviour & Attitudes has carried out surveys on the public's mental health on behalf of the IACP in 2013, 2015 and 2016 and 2019.
- ❖ Given the likely impact of the COVID-19 crisis on our mental wellbeing, a short survey was distributed looking at levels of stress, anxiety, depression and loneliness/isolation over a 2-week period.
- ❖ The short survey was distributed online via B&A's online panel and was completed by 1, 046 respondents.
  - The sample was quota controlled for gender, age, social class, region and area of residence.
  - Fieldwork was took place between 8<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020.
  - Previous studies including the 2019 report referenced in the results were carried out face-to-face.
- ❖ B&A have been conducting online qualitative research (digital ethnographies) exploring 'life on lockdown' and some key insights from this have been included at the end of this report.



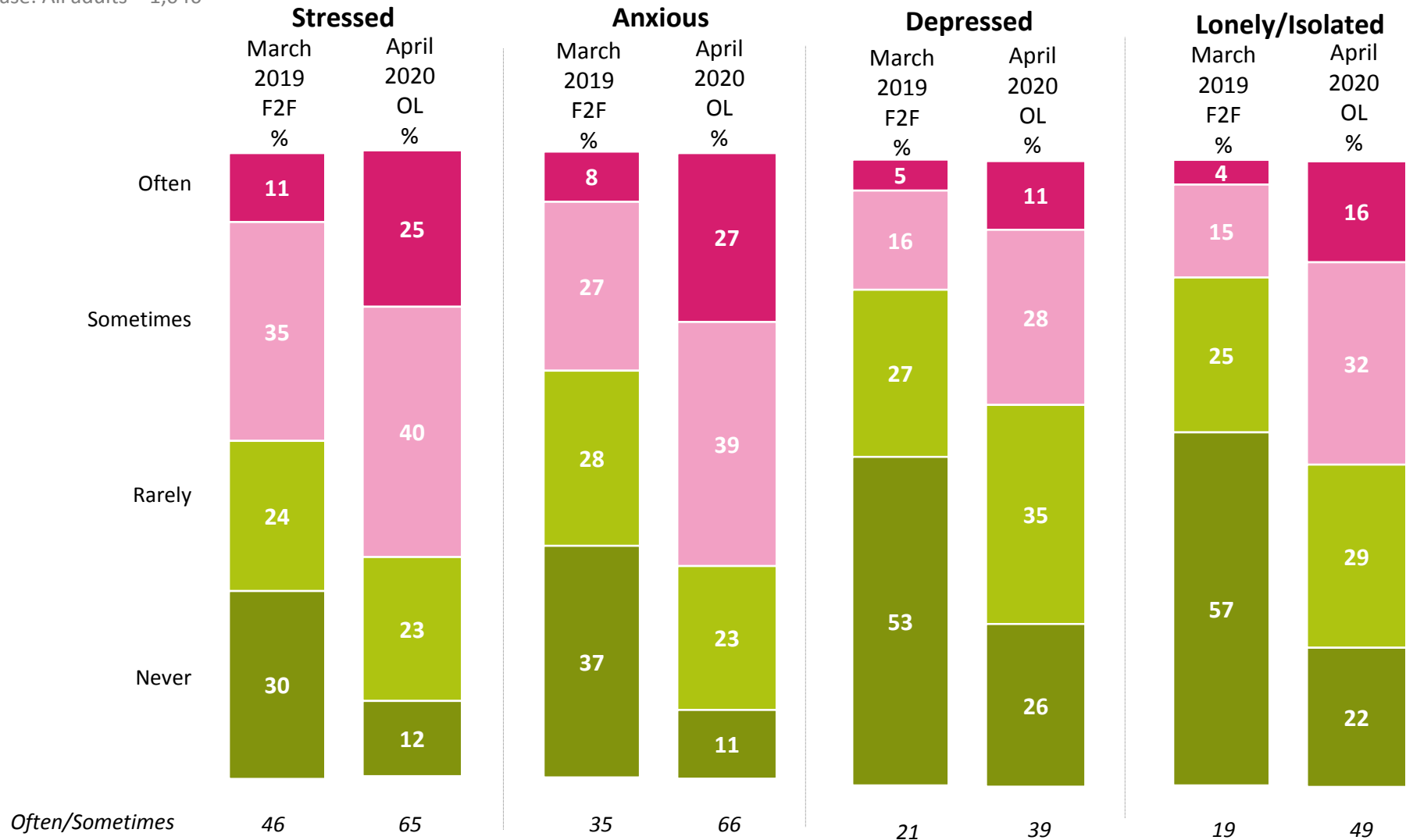


**Results**

# Public Mental Health amidst COVID-19



Base: All adults – 1,046

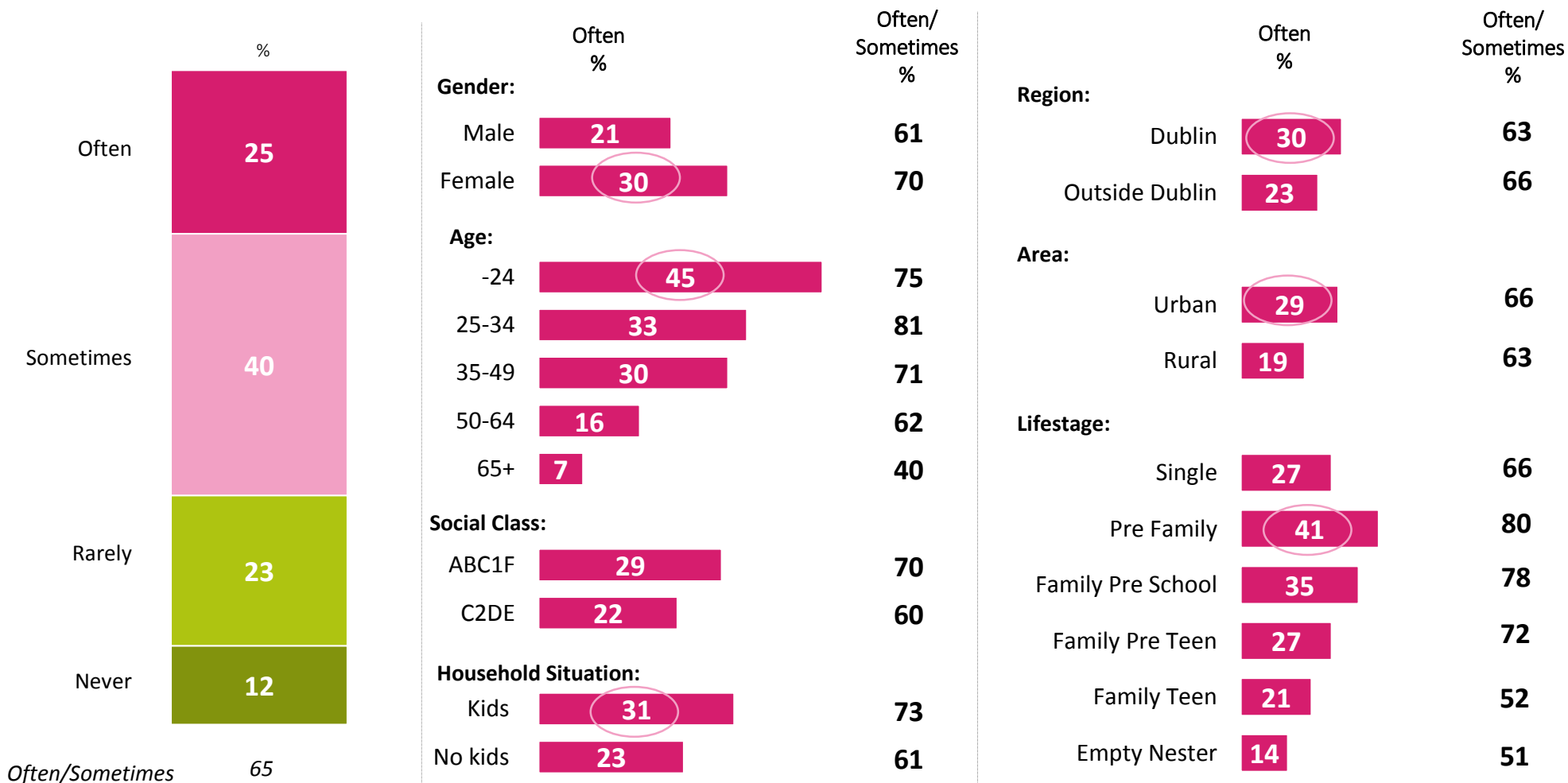


Two thirds of adults say they have felt stressed and anxious at least sometimes over the past two weeks – with a quarter saying they have often felt this way. Almost half have felt lonely or isolated (at least sometimes).



# Feeling stressed x demographics

Base: All adults – 1,046

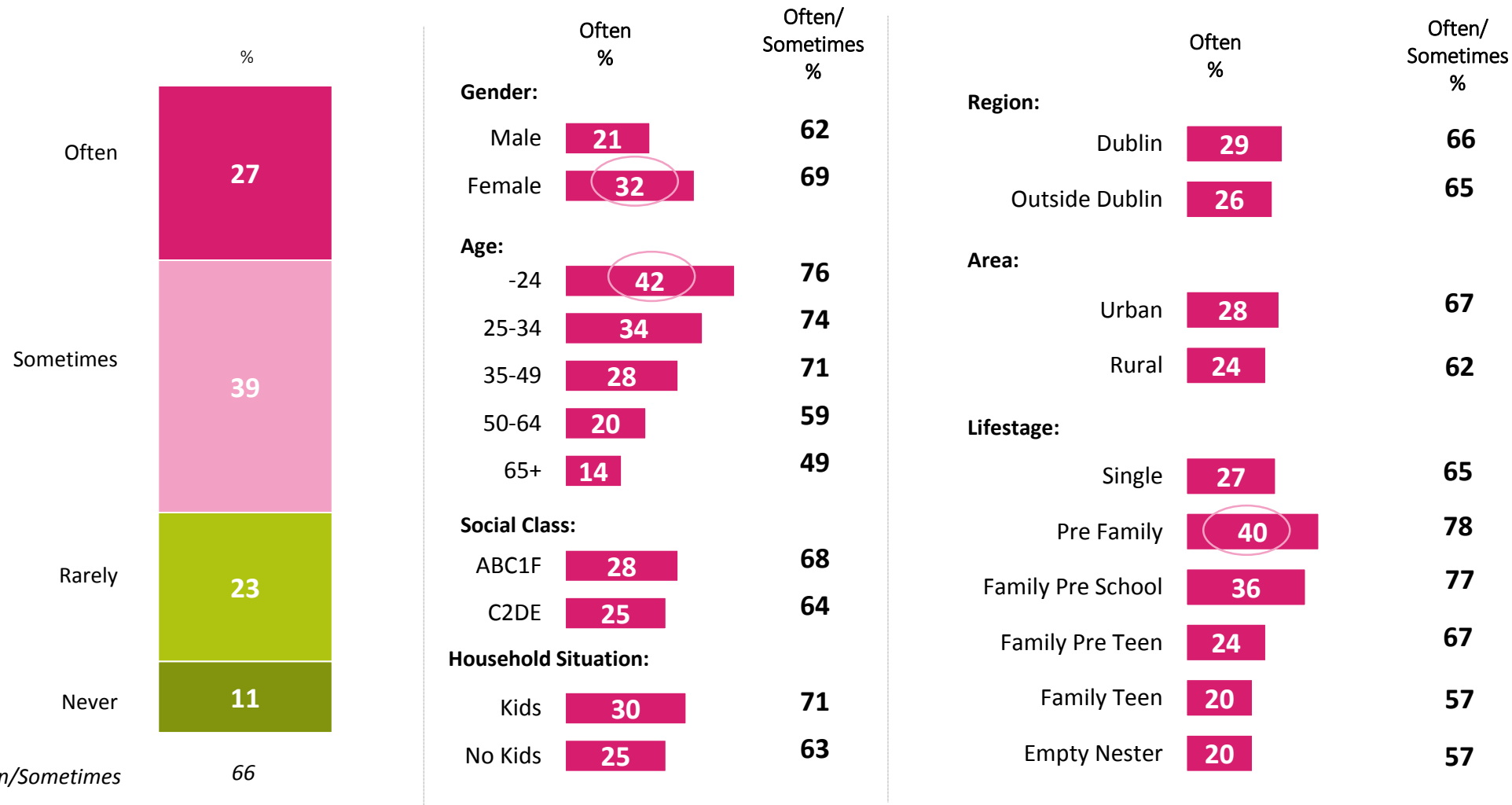


**Women, those aged under 25, those with kids (adult or child) living at home, Dublin/urban dwellers and those at the pre-family life-stage are more likely to say they have often felt stressed over the past two weeks.**



# Feeling anxious x demographics

Base: All adults – 1,046

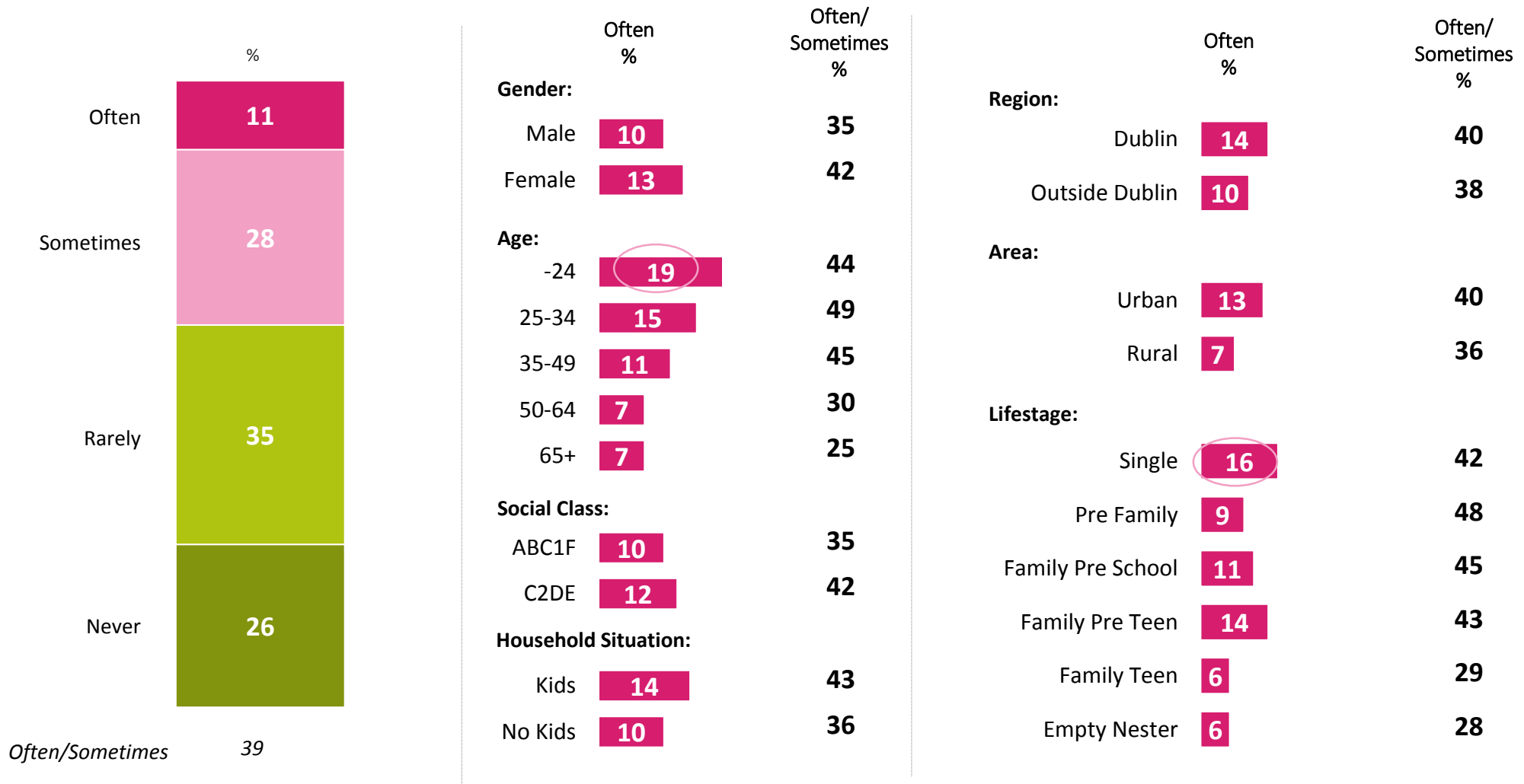


Women, those aged under 25 and those at the pre-family life-stage are more likely to say they have often felt anxious over the past two weeks.



# Feeling depressed x demographics

Base: All adults – 1,046



**Those under 25 and at the single life-stage are more likely to say they have often felt depressed over the past two weeks.**

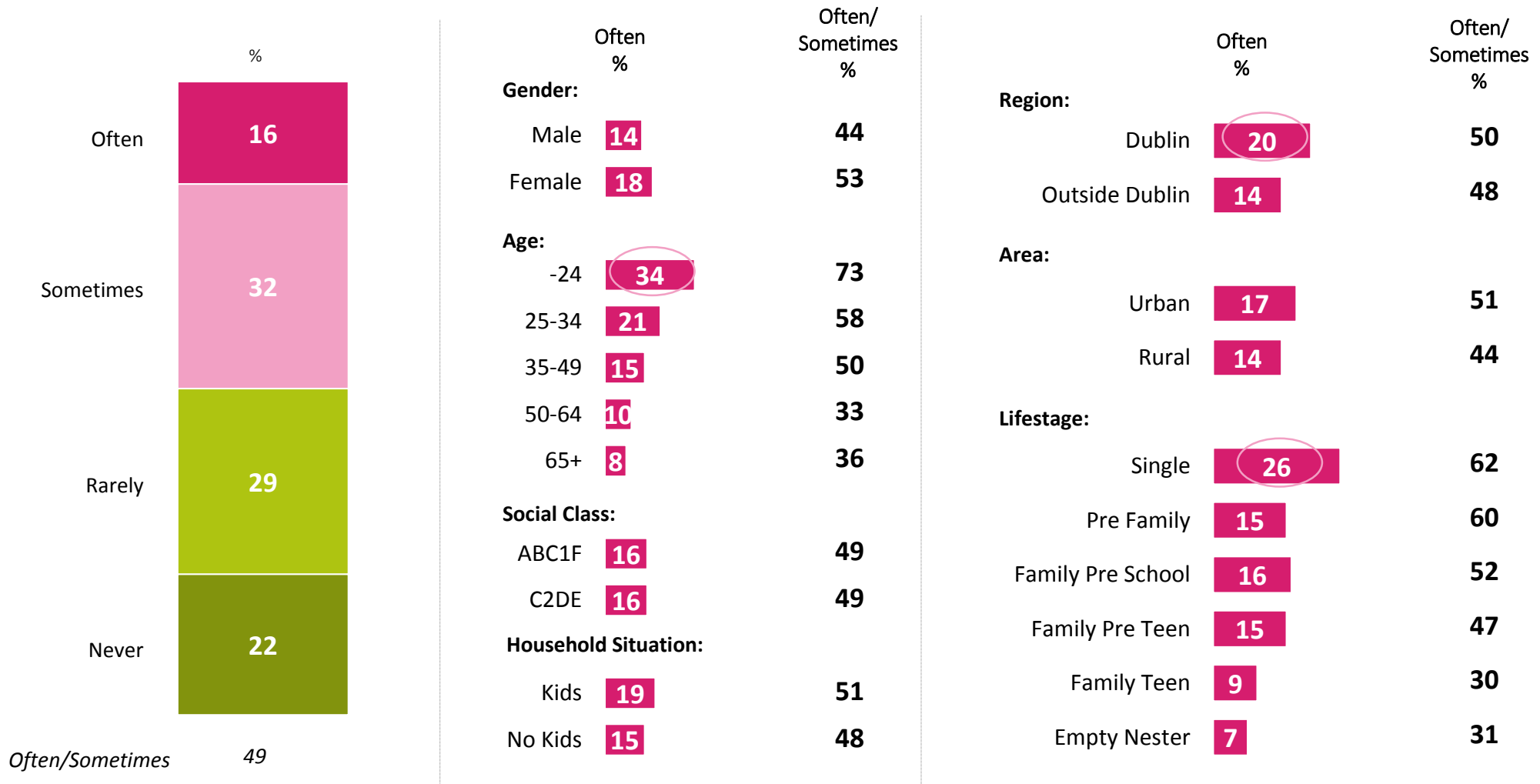




# Feeling lonely/isolated x demographics



Base: All adults – 1,046



Those under 25, Dublin dwellers and those at the single life-stage are more likely to say they have felt lonely/isolated over the past two weeks.





**Two thirds of adults say they have felt stressed and anxious at least sometimes over the past two weeks – with a quarter saying they have often felt this way. Almost half have felt lonely or isolated (at least sometimes).**

## **Often feeling STRESSED**

- 25% of all adults
- 30% of women
- 45% of under 25s
- 31% of those with kids living at home
- 30% of Dubliners
- 29% of urban dwellers
- 41% of pre-family

## **Often feeling ANXIOUS**

- 27% of all adults
- 32% of women
- 42% of under 25s
- 40% of pre-family

## **Often feeling DEPRESSED**

- 11% of all adults
- 19% of under 25s
- 16% of single

## **Often feeling LONELY/ISOLATED**

- 16% of all adults
- 34% of under 25s
- 20% of Dublin
- 26% of single

**Those under 25 appear to be struggling most within the current context – with almost half often feeling stressed (45%), over 2 in 5 anxious (42%), just under a fifth depressed (19%) and over a third often feeling lonely or isolated (34%).**



## B&A's COVID-19 Qualitative Research - Digital Ethnography

# 'Life on Lockdown' – Week 1



## Leo the Leader



- There's positivity about how our political leaders are handling the crisis, which contrasts well with response from the US/UK. Varadkar's statesman like style and skill set are hugely comforting in these times.
- The Irish people are confident that the government are doing 'everything they can' to handle this crisis. However, the more concerning thought is how much impact will their actions really have? When the people in power are powerless. What then?

## Technology to the fore



- Having spent the last few years struggling with the hold technology has on us, it's suddenly become the key thing sustaining us. **If we had to live through a pandemic, we're glad we're doing it in 2020.**
- From connectivity, to remote working, to information, to entertainment technology has been central to our ability to cope. **WhatsApp, Netflix, YouTube, Instagram and Facebook are starting to feel like vital services** on a par with water and electricity.
- However, there's still a need to monitor usage and ensure technology is being used for its most affirmative functions. **Technology's positive power to connect and comfort** will be one of the biggest things we take from this crisis. When this is over, can we harness this good, while containing its more problematic aspects?

## The power of routine



- As our lives are turned upside down, we're searching for **new routines** to help us order our days.
- This is proving rather difficult at the minute, as the situation changes day to day. The daily walk to our favourite coffee shop for a takeaway just got curtailed as the shops shut.
- But we are **putting new structures in place**. Set times for home schooling, couples tag teaming WFH with toddler wrangling, PE class at 9am, home cocktail hours (strictly observed).
- Anything that helps us establish these routines have been much welcomed (**thank you Joe Wicks**).

# 'Life on Lockdown' – Week 1

## Hello from the trenches



- We're still in the **early stages** of this crisis and reeling from the speed with which our reality has changed. In the main, **we're holding up better than we would have anticipated**.
- The additional restrictions have been a blow, **but we've been more resourceful, more pro-active, more supportive of each other, more resilient** than perhaps we thought we would be.
- However **mood management is a challenge**. There are low points through the day (often first thing in the morning and waiting for the Covid-19 'numbers' in the evening). 'Waves of emotion' threaten to overwhelm us at various points.
- Sustaining our **mental health in the longer term** will be very difficult, especially as the situation deteriorates.
- We're **clinging fiercely to the things that will keep us on track**. Exercise, getting outside, our gardens (for those lucky enough to have them), escapist entertainment, chats with loved ones.

## Anger management



- There's a **lot of anger** under the surface, looking for a channel.
- At the minute those not practicing social distancing are a (legitimate) target for this anger.
- As the crisis progresses, it's safe to say that **anyone not behaving responsibly (including brands and big companies) will be judged harshly for it**.
- The Coronavirus itself is a difficult one. A virus is a strange enemy to have; faceless, unresponsive, inhuman. Our anger is irrelevant to it.
- The explosion of memes that are pinging through WhatsApp groups as we speak are an interesting way of dealing with the issue. They are our way of breaking the tension, neutralising the impact. **The virus might attack our bodies, but it will never overcome our spirit** if we keep finding ways of poking fun at it and its impact.

# 'Life on Lockdown' – Week 2

## Reality bites



- As the novelty of the first few weeks of home schooling and working fade, we're coming to terms with **our new reality**.
- At the start of this crisis, we comforted ourselves with what we would do when **'this is all over'**.
- It's dawning on us that we may not return to life as we knew it for **a long, long time**. This is our new 'normal' for now, though 'normal' feels like a strange word to use.
- Presumably this phase of lock down will come to an end at some point. **What's not clear is what follows**, the stages we'll have to go through to ease ourselves back into regular life, the inevitable stops and starts along the way. We suspect that even those at the highest levels of government and health service are **feeling their way in the dark**.
- We're **waiting in trepidation for 'the surge'**. However, we don't know if we'll recognise 'the surge' when it comes or what happens after it. Will there be more than one surge? Who knows?
- We've never had less visibility on the future in our lives.

## The mounting cost



- As the death figures grow, the **economic implications** of the Covid-19 crisis are also becoming clearer and clearer.
- Many felt the economic impact this week, being either laid off or having salaries/hours cut.
- For many more, it's obvious that trouble is brewing.
- And this makes the **uncertain timeline even more difficult to deal with**. We can't imagine the economy recovering until we get back to some kind of normality. In the meantime, we still have rent to pay and families to feed.
- Those dealing with job losses are also struggling with the **sudden lack of activity and purpose** in their lives. While some can channel their energies into family, caring or volunteering, these aren't options for everyone and many of us are mourning the very sudden **loss of the satisfaction** that work can bring us.
- With the world on lockdown, it's hard to know what to do to fill that gap.



# 'Life on Lockdown' – Week 2

## Silent assassins



- One of the hardest things to cope with in this pandemic is that **anyone, even ourselves, could be agents of destruction**, spreading the virus unwittingly.
- This realisation has made our normally open and friendly nation **more fearful of strangers**. Our 'free floating' anxiety is being channelled in this direction. As we queue to do our shopping, the usual banter and pleasantries are less in evidence. Instead, we keep our eyes down, stay silent, on high alert for signs and symptoms from others.
- When it comes to our loved ones, it **goes against all our instincts to keep our distance**, particularly when they're vulnerable and sick.
- We're **struggling to bear the thought of people dying alone**. Being denied a 'proper' funeral, such a fundamental feature of Irish society.
- The worst thing about this disease is how it distances us from our **basic human instincts**.

## Deepening personal bonds



- On a more positive note, the crisis has brought us **emotionally closer** to the people who matter.
- Despite the challenges of working and schooling from home, many families are enjoying spending more time together. Many flatmates are growing closer.
- A lot of us have connected with old friends online. We're spending a lot of time on calls with those we love but are separated from.
- **Bonding rituals (digital and within households) are proliferating**. Family dinners, movie nights, virtual drinks nights, pub quizzes, dance parties, weekend brunches and games evenings.
- On the one hand, there's little to talk about as our day-to-day lives have become so monotonous. On the other, the lack of 'action' and the charged situation has **facilitated our opening up**.
- We're talking about our fears, feelings and emotions. **We're connecting on a deeper level**. And that's giving us strength that's helping us through.

# 'Life on Lockdown' – Week 2

## The weekly shop



- As one of our few permitted, out-of-the-house activities, the weekly grocery shop has become **surprisingly important** in our lives.
- The experience has become strange and alien since the introduction of new distancing guidelines, but many of us still look forward to it **as a link with our 'old lives' and habits.**
- With everyone at home and very little else to spend discretionary income on, we're buying a lot more. **Extra treats are finding their way into the basket** – biscuits, chocolate, gin, wine and beer all namechecked.
- The grocery brands (including convenience) are all seen to be doing a **fantastic job under very testing circumstances.** We've been impressed with the speed at which they've implemented stricter controls, the care they're taking of their frontline staff, their calm approach to keeping shelves stacked and supply chains going.
- **Lidl, Aldi and Tesco** stand out in particular, in terms of the speed, efficiency and thoroughness with which it has responded to changing requirements.
- In normal times, we don't notice the supermarkets' vital role in keeping us fed. But we're realising that keeping supply chains functioning isn't necessarily an easy task right now.
- Lidl's 'Look after yourselves, and we'll look after the shelves' line gives us exactly the kind of reassurance we're looking for. **Our appreciation for this sector has shot right up.**



# 'Life on Lockdown' – Week 3

## Ground hog day



- We are about a month in now and as the novelty and adrenaline of the situation wears off, we are realising how **burnt out** we have become by it all.
- It is not exactly surprising. The **worry and stress** of the situation is with us constantly. We are not sleeping well. Some of us have a **huge amount on our plates** (working on the front line or juggling full time work with full time childcare). But those of us who have been laid off or furloughed are also **finding it draining** as time hangs heavy and lethargy takes over.
- The announcement last Friday that we would be in lockdown until at least 5<sup>th</sup> May was hardly surprising, but it certainly did not lift the mood. As this **never ending groundhog day** grinds on and on, we are wondering what will be left of us by the end of it. Assuming there is an end.
- The **arrival of the sun** saved us from going over the edge entirely. For now.

## Social networks



- Easter came and went, the **second big celebration** after Paddy's day that has been radically impacted by the crisis.
- Yet again, we surprised ourselves with our **ability to make the best of it**. There was a lot of chocolate, there were elaborate dinners, there was craft, there were (more limited than usual) egg hunts.
- But our **human need for family, friends and community** around us hits us forcefully in the gut at times like this.
- Lockdown conditions are particularly tough for people **living on their own**. Zoom and WhatsApp, while lifelines at the minute, are **very poor substitutes** for gathering round the table with the people we love.
- The desire to **connect with wider community** is **finding expression** in many ways. From shining a light for healthcare workers and the sick, to clapping front line workers, to displaying pictures in our windows to cheer the kids up. It is all we can do.

# 'Life on Lockdown' – Week 3

## News blackout



- While many individual presenters are doing a good job in covering the crisis, we are **reaching our limits** of being able to deal with the coverage.
- It is the **same, grim story**, told day after day. There is nothing to lighten the mood. We don't even have sport as a distraction.
- Many of us have now **limited our exposure to the news** (once a day) or tuned out from it entirely.
- Instead we are looking for **content that distracts, comforts, cheers**. We are turning to classic comedies, old favourites, crazy escapism (all hail Tiger King). We would love more classic sports matches.
- There is a lot of **re-watching (and re-reading)** going on. Our favourite movies, series that remind us of simpler times (Friends, Gilmore Girls, ER). Here we find comfort and solace, predictability, old friends. Perhaps most crucially, we know how they end!

## Bending and breaking



- Most of us have been good about obeying the rules so far, but the **Irish spirit of rebellion** is bubbling up under the surface.
- We are seeing **varying degrees** of this. There was some flagrant flouting at the weekend, with family visiting and beach trips done on the quiet.
- Others are contemplating how they can **bend the rules** rather than break them, by 'happening' upon friends and family in the park for example.
- There is a **spirit of self-preservation** about this. Balancing our need to contain the virus with our need to maintain our sanity.
- Rightly or wrongly, we are doing our own individual cost benefit analysis to determine **how far we should go**.

## Nourish & nurture



- This is **not the global crisis we expected to live through**. The catastrophe movies we grew up with told us that when humanity was under threat, we would be fleeing the enemy, fighting for our lives, charging through forests and industrial wasteland.
- We never imagined our best weapon to be **staying at home, watching Netflix**.
- Which plays havoc with our **fight or flight response**. It also makes us feel somewhat inadequate. Those of us not on the front line wish we could be doing more.
- It is interesting that we have filled the gap with **nurturing behaviours**. We are cooking and baking (or we would be if we could get flour and eggs), we are tending to our houses and gardens. Our living spaces have never been better cared for.
- This cherishing of ourselves and our environments is promoting **self sufficiency**, it is also **an act of love** in the face of danger. But it is surprising to find this experience more *Little House on the Prairie* than *Apocalypse Now*.

# 'Life on Lockdown' – Week 4



- Though days and dates mean nothing to us right now, the **5<sup>th</sup> of May is the exception, etched on our brains.**
- While we know there are no guarantees, **we are keen for *some* relaxation** of restrictions, however limited.
- There's a psychological eagerness **to feel that we're making progress**, that there's an exit strategy to be implemented, even if it takes a very long time to be rolled out in full.
- Having adjusted to the 'new normal' of lockdown, we know that this will not be a return to pre-Covid life but **'new normal 2.0'.**
- We're wondering what this phase will be like. How will social distancing be achieved in our offices, schools, our public transport? Will there be more lockdowns in the future if the virus flairs up again (what's being termed as **'the hammer and the dance'**)?
- But many of us are yearning for some return to business as usual. Even if small scale and temporary. **Venturing 3km from our homes has never looked so exciting.**

## Finding flaws



- While the overall sentiment is still relatively positive, we're **becoming more critical** of the government's actions as time goes on.
- Failure to anticipate how Covid-19 would **ravage nursing homes** was a major error with devastating consequences.
- **Backlogs in testing** and recording death figures are making it difficult to interpret the data, which is one of the most important tools in our arsenal for managing response
- The more cynical / anti-Fine Gael among us see Varadkar's return to medicine as a **PR stunt** rather than a genuine and useful action.
- Luckily for government approval ratings, the political establishment in the US/UK have made multiple errors and mismanaged the crisis on an infinitely more serious scale, so the **Irish look good by comparison.**
- But increasingly, we're **holding ourselves to higher expectations** and comparing ourselves to countries like Germany, New Zealand. There's zero room for complacency.

# 'Life on Lockdown' – Week 4

## Economic outlook



- Meanwhile, the **economic prognosis is looking grim.**
- The numbers **already claiming social welfare are horrifying**, predictions of the longer-term impact on employment and GDP even more so.
- The actual effects of this on people's lives hasn't hit yet. Short term payment schemes and mortgage holidays are minimising the impact. There's very little to spend money on during lock down, **so we aren't feeling the pinch.**
- But there's no doubt its coming. We're struggling to understand **what the projections mean for the ordinary person.** How much worse will depression feel compared to recession? Will the fact that it's global be a positive thing (in that there'll be a collaborative effort to stimulate recovery) or negative?
- After the devastating recession of 2008, the squandered recovery of the last decade, there's already huge concern that the ordinary person will be made to shoulder the worst of the consequences ... again. Last time we saved the banks at the expense of everyone else. **This time, the growing feeling is that they owe us.**

## Inner resourcefulness



- The last recession **changed our buying habits** quite significantly and this crisis promises to do the same.
- It's early days, but we're already seeing shifts in consumer behaviour.
- **Supporting local is the new buying Irish.** We're aware of how shockingly vulnerable local enterprise is at the minute. We don't want to lose our cafes, restaurants, producers and small shops, so we're doing our best to support them.
- We've been impressed at how **nimble and resourceful small business has been** in reacting to the crisis, connecting with customers and keeping trade going, no matter what it takes. Whether that's switching to takeaway, selling wholesale stock, developing their online offering, supporting the vulnerable and the front line.
- With non-food shopping no longer an option, we're getting to grips with **practices that our grandparents have long advocated.** Reusing. Making do and mending. Informal swapping and sharing (toys, tools, DVD collections).
- The last recession made 'savviness' a badge of honour, this time **'resourcefulness' looks like an emerging virtue.**

# 'Life on Lockdown' – Week 4

## The milestones of life



- In the early days of the crisis, we didn't grasp quite how long our lives would be impacted. As we cancelled immediate plans, we presumed we'd reschedule in the near future.
- But now it's apparent that **the whole summer (at least) will be put on hold because of Covid-19**. And that's hugely disruptive to the rituals, milestones and celebrations of our lives.
- **Whole year groups will be missing out on their rights of passage.** Bidding farewell to their primary school friends as they head off to secondary. The rituals of the Junior and the Leaving Cert. Post Leaving Cert holidays to Ibiza.
- And that's before we get into the **cancelled festival circuit**, birthdays, weddings, holidays of a lifetime. Newborns that won't be held by doting grandparents until they're past that magical stage.
- While we know there are bigger things to worry about right now, there's something **terribly sad about the rituals that will be denied to us** and memories that will end up radically different to the ones we expected. **These are times we'll never get back.**



# Thank you.



RESEARCH  
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*Milltown House  
Mount Saint Annes  
Milltown, Dublin 6 - D06 Y822  
+353 1 205 7500 | [www.banda.ie](http://www.banda.ie)*

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