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Back2Normal

Loss and grief after the COVID-19 pandemic

Module 1.1. Back to Normal: Life skills for health and well-being

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What is LOSS?

COVID-19 killed more than 6.4 million people worldwide. All survivors experienced multiple losses.



Types of loss

END-OF-LIFE EXPERIENCE

The end-of-life experience with COVID-19 may be particularly difficult for survivors. Family involvement at the end of life is beneficial for patients and families.

1. Troubled deaths: guilt, anger and unanswered questions

- Difficulties getting through to staff or talking directly to patient
- Difficulty getting answers or information about the patient
- Misinformation/conflicting information given about patient and policies
- Unhelpful or insensitive attitudes of staff
- Lack of involvement in care decisions
- Perceived poor patient care and suffering
- Limited visits/time with loved one, including PPE concerns or frustrations
- Myself or other family unable to visit/say goodbye
- Difficulty processing/accepting death
- Feelings of guilt, emptiness, anger relating to death
- Mental health problems and trauma

Types of loss

END-OF-LIFE EXPERIENCE

Some family members of COVID-19 victims were in isolation after testing positive themselves; some delayed the memorial service or held a virtual funeral via Zoom. For a lot of people this was very distressing.

2. Mourning, memorialisation and death administration

- Unable to prepare the body and say final goodbye
- Restricted funeral size
- Unable to attend the funeral
- Absent or constrained service features (e.g singing, flowers, locked cemetery)
- No wake or collective celebration of life
- Being physically alone before, during and after funerals
- Restrictions on visiting cemetery/spreading ashes/other memorialisation activities
- Feelings of sadness, regret and guilt relating to restrictions/unable to give the send-off deserved
- Restricted practices making it hard to find closure and begin to grieve
- Role of funeral homes and directors
- Experiences of online and recorded services
- Positive funeral experience (e.g. intimate, less pressure)
- Difficulties, stress and distress sorting out practical affairs

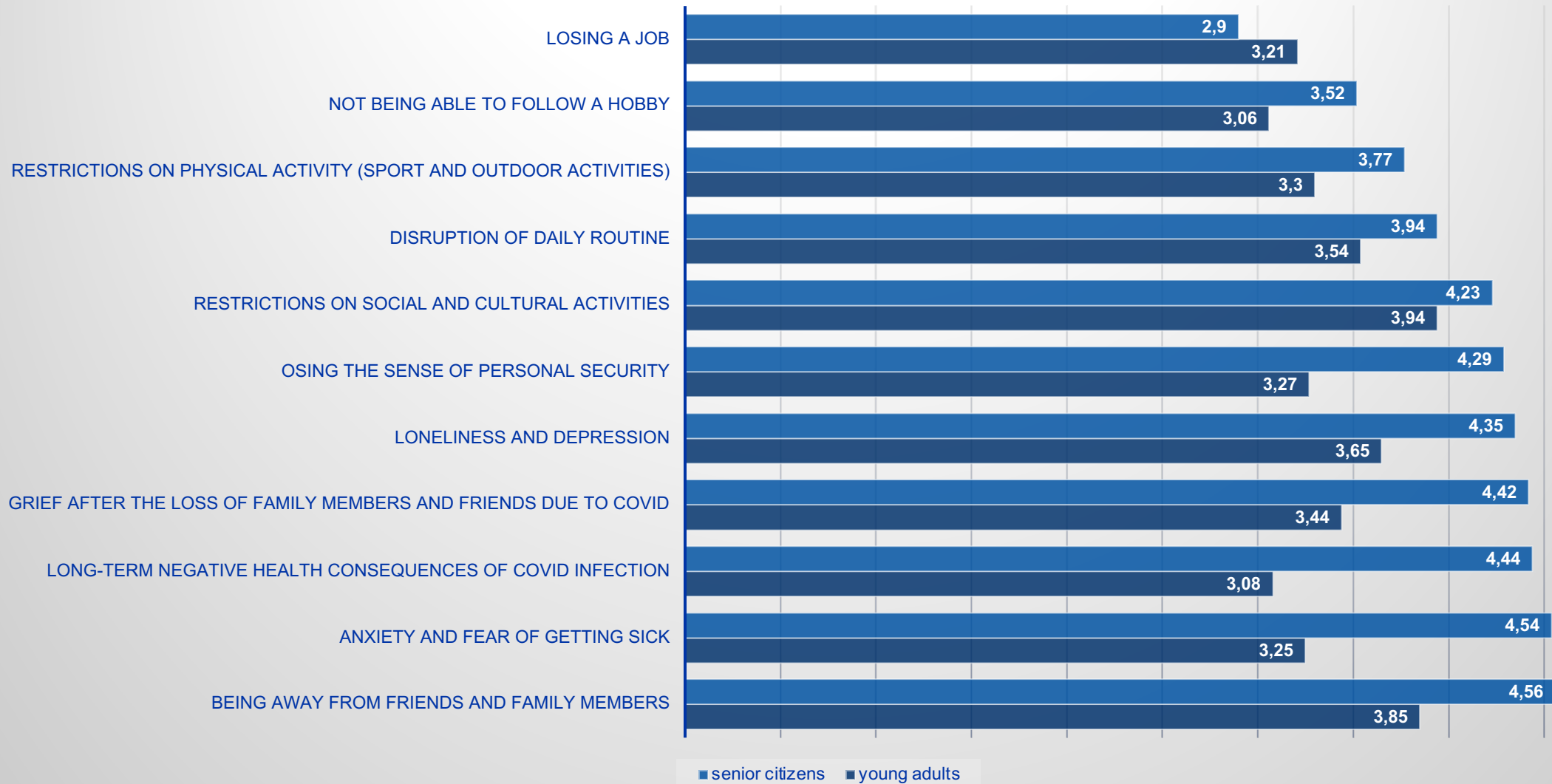
Types of loss

OTHER TYPES OF LOSS

Many of unique moments—graduations, proms, meeting a newborn grandchild, supporting a loved one during sickness, a child's kindergarten year—are lost forever. People may also struggle with feeling like their government, workplace, or family did not do enough to protect them or their communities.



Types of losses after COVID-19



Mean rating on the 5-point scale from 1=not important to 5=extremely important. Source: **Back2Normal** survey

What is grief?

Grief is a normal response to loss during or after a disaster or other traumatic event. Common grief reactions include:

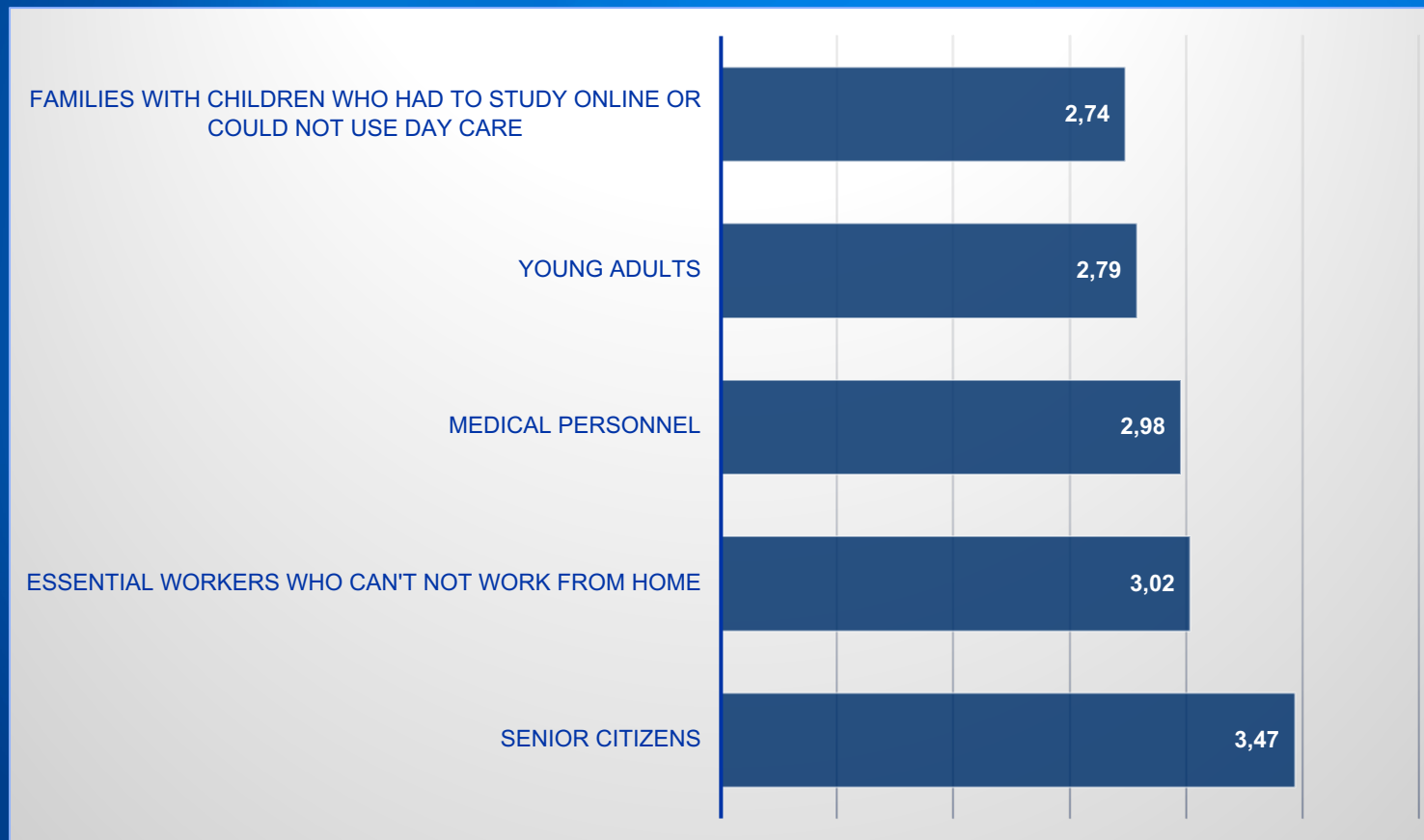
- ▶ **Shock, disbelief, or denial**
- ▶ **Anxiety**
- ▶ **Distress**
- ▶ **Anger**
- ▶ **Periods of sadness**
- ▶ **Loss of sleep and loss of appetite**

Why grief during Corona is different?

4. Grieving and coping (alone and with others)

- Isolated from support networks at end of life and during early bereavement
- Unable to support others grieving
- Missing physical contact and comfort from close others-difficulties communicating and expressing feelings
- Feelings of loneliness and isolation, included lack of empathy and understanding relating to pandemic context
- Lack of social contact/opportunities for collective grieving making it harder to come to terms with loss
- Restrictions making it hard to cope and find new meaning and purpose
- Lack of time and space to grieve
- Benefits to grieving in isolation and reduced contact

Who suffered most from COVID-19?



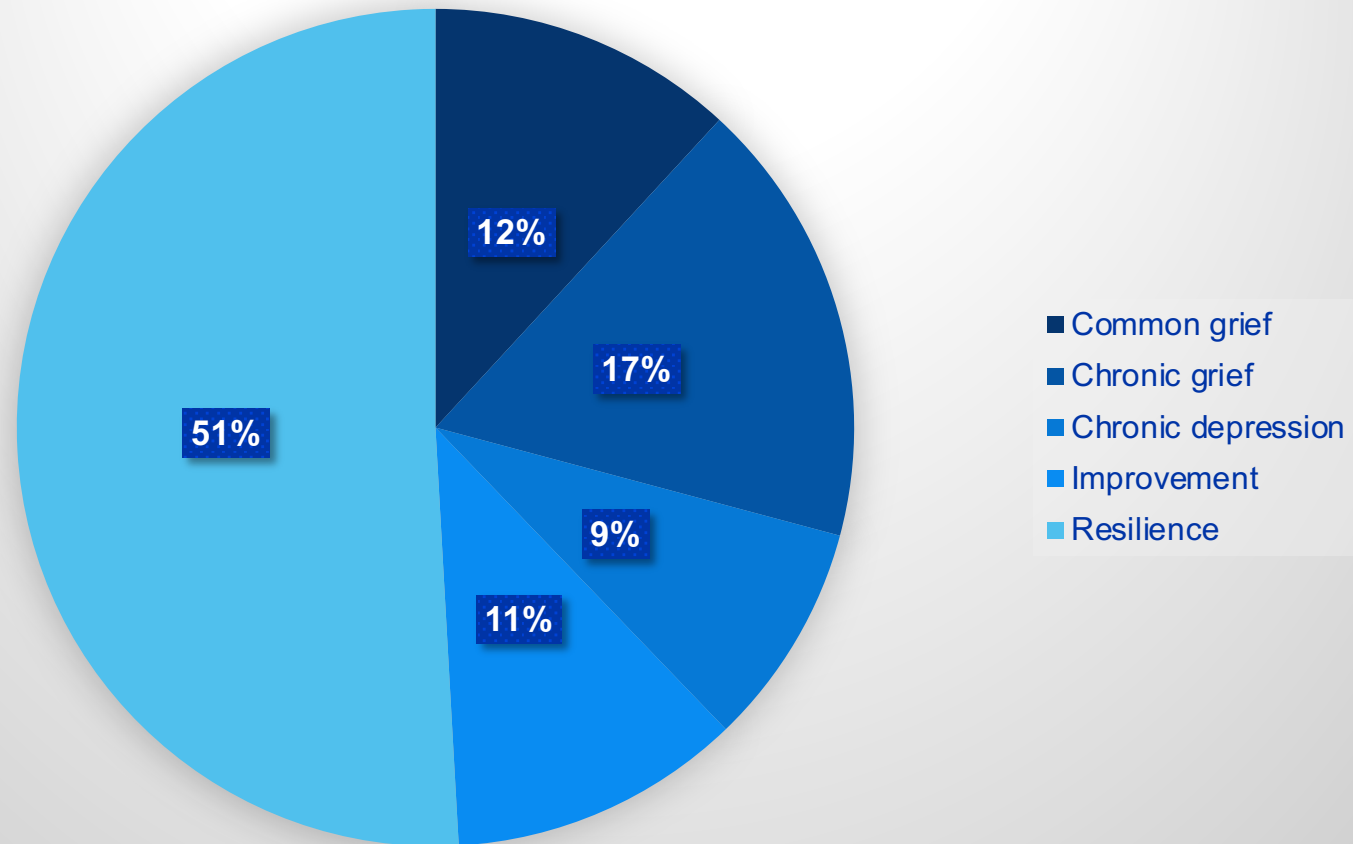
Social groups that were affected the most from the negative consequences of COVID-19 (mean rating on the 5-point scale from 1= suffered the least to 5=suffered the most)

Source: **Back2Normal** survey

Patterns of grief

- ▶ *Common grief:* grief reaction lasts from 6 to 12 months, a person is back to normal after 18-month point of bereavement
- ▶ *Chronic grief:* People show grief reactions after 18 months of bereavement
- ▶ *Chronic depression.* People were suffering from depression before the loss and showed no change at both 6 and 18 months of bereavement
- ▶ *Improvement during bereavement:* People suffered from depression before the loss but showed improved functioning at both 6 and 18 months of bereavement
- ▶ *Resilience:* People showed no change at both 6 or 18 months of bereavement

Patterns of grief



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Chronic grief

GRIEF RISK:

- **G**uilt
- **R**egret
- **I**solation
- **E**xperienced multiple losses or other stressors
- **F**inancial hardship
- **R**elationship dependency or challenges with the deceased
- **I**ndividual history of mental health challenges or trauma
- **S**uddenness or distressing circumstances of death
- **K**inship type: with closer relationships linked to more risk

When to reach out for help

- ▶ You need to go back to school or work and have a hard time concentrating.
- ▶ You're the sole or main guardian for someone else.
- ▶ You're experiencing physical discomfort or pain.
- ▶ You're skipping meals or medications because you don't feel like getting up or doing anything.
- ▶ Your emotions are increasing in intensity and frequency instead of lessening over time.
- ▶ You've thought about hurting others or yourself.



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